

**SOCIAL REPRESENTATION ON INTER-CASTE  
MARRIAGE: NORTH INDIA AND NORTH-EASTERN  
STATE OF MANIPUR**

**Nishi Misra\***

**Nancy Raj Kumari\*\***

**ABSTRACT**

The study was conducted to investigate the concept of inter caste marriages in North Indian states and North- Eastern state of Manipur (Manipuri- Meitei). The sample size of this study was 60 college students, 30 from North India and 30 Manipuri- Meiteis. Their age ranged from 19 to 26 years. An open-ended questionnaire for assessing social representation on inter-caste marriages was circulated among the college students. The questionnaire was followed by Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale-III (FACES-III). The results of this study revealed that the families of North Indians were more adaptive and highly cohesive as compared to Manipuri-Meiteis. When it comes to marriage they tend to keep their family and society as their first priority. However, for the Manipuri- Meitei participants, no general pattern of cohesiveness or adaptability was observed in their families. Thus, their views on inter caste marriages was in accordance with the way they had been brought up by their family.

Key Words: Inter Caste Marriage, North India, North-East India, Family Cohesion, Adaptability

\* Defence Institute of Psychological Research, Defence R&D Organisation, Delhi, India

\*\* Department of Psychology, Delhi University, Delhi, India

## Introduction

Social representations provide an instrument to cope with and classify new phenomena and changes in phenomena that are already known. In the process of social representation, two concepts, anchoring and objectification are seen as central. Anchoring in this context means 'to anchor strange ideas, to reduce them to ordinary categories and images, to set them in a familiar context'. The second process is objectification of ideas and process, which means 'to turn something abstract into something almost concrete, to transfer what is in the mind to something existing in the physical world'.

### **Inter caste Marriage in North India: An Overview**

For years, the different societies of India, especially Hindu society have been divided on the basis of caste system and religion. The problem of caste system was so deeply rooted that it took years for the Indians to come out of that idea. Restriction of marriage was and is also one of the basic features of the caste. Not only inter-caste marriages were banned and prohibited but even inter-varna marriages too were discouraged by the Hindu scriptures and its ancient, medieval and modern philosophy. However with time, things changed and inter caste marriage also became a part of the society. Marriage are regarded as the most important social custom and hence are viewed as the best means to remove the barrier of caste system. Though we see inter caste marriages in Indian society today, they are a part of the city culture. The rural parts of the country still have a long way to go.

### **Historical Perspective on marriage tradition in north eastern state of Manipur (particularly in Manipuri Meitei)**

Manipuri Meitei marriage system is very ancient and is believed to have started before 300-400 B.C. From the beginning of the modern civilization, engaged or arranged marriage has been very popular. However, marriage by capture and elopement were also in vogue. In marriage by elopement, the boy and the girl (who are in love for some time) stays together away from families for a night which is known as "*nupi chenba*" (meaning eloping the girl with intention of getting married). Next day morning, the boy's family is informed by his friends or himself about the eloping and then the father of the boy and some elders goes to the girl's place in traditional dress to inform about the elopement of the girl which is known as "*haidokpa*"

(means to reveal). Thereafter, the two families fix the date of marriage after consulting the astrologers if they agree that the boy and girl should get married. If the girl's family disown then the boy's family manage the wedding on their own without the family of the girl.

In arranged marriage, before the marriage, parents of the boy go to meet parents of the girl. This starting approach is termed 'hainaba'. The horoscopes are tallied and if both the parents agree then the next date for the meeting is fixed. On the next meeting, called 'yathang thanaga', the consent is given by the girl's parents. The next stage is 'waroipotpuba' and the groom's family members bring food and the contract is finally sealed. Finally the engagement is declared amongst the friends and relatives, this is called 'heijapot'. Friends and relatives from the boy's side then go to the girl's parents with food, fruits and presents. The girl's parents also invite their friends and relatives. The marriage is fixed by the Brahmin.

Recently the process of modernization, democratization and development has brought lots of positive changes in Indian society. Sindagikar, Fatima and Nusrath (2013) studied the spatial patterns and determinants of inter-caste and inter religious marriages in India. The study used the data of third round of National Family Health Survey 2005-06, having sample size of 43,102 ever married couples. It was found that about 10 percent of the total marriages in India took place between different castes while only 2.1 percent marriages were inter-religious.

Researches have found a positive relationship between family cohesion and social-competence which is likely to affect the mindset of youth, especially in the field of inter-caste marriage. The relation between positive parenting, family cohesion and child social competence was examined among Latino families (predominantly from Mexico) who were recent immigrants to the United States. Leidy, Guerra & Toro (2010) conducted a mixed method study, including both pre and post-test self-reported surveys (9-months interval) qualitative data from focus groups. A total of 282 parents and 282 children (ages 9-12) participated in the survey study. Results at post-test follow up indicated that family cohesion predicted improvements in child social problem-solving skills and social self-efficacy and positive parenting predicted improvements in child social efficacy.

Tsamparli & Tsibidaki (2009) conducted a study to compare the adaptability and cohesion between 30 Greek families raising a child with a severe disability and 30 families with

children without disability. The study constituted a qualitative survey with quantitative comparative elements. Data were collected using the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES-III, Olson 1986) and semi-structured interviews. The findings suggest that there was no statistically significant difference between parents of both research groups on cohesion, adaptability dimensions of family functioning, family type and in how they wished their family functioning within the categories of these two dimensions. Both groups of parents estimate and wish their family to function in the 'healthy zone' according to the revised editions of the Olson Circumplex Model (Olson 1991).

The basic assumption of this study was that caste has been an important socio-psychological phenomenon in many spheres of Indian social life. The issue of inter caste marriages has always been controversial. In India, it is generally believed that marriages are only possible in the same community and caste. In some States and community in North India, inter caste marriage is regarded as a taboo while people in North East India do not hold such a strict view.

The study was undertaken to understand the social representation on the concept of inter caste marriage in North Eastern state of Manipur (particularly Manipuri- Meitei) and northern states of India and to study the differences in family cohesion and adaptability pattern in both these regions.

The hypotheses formulated in this study were:

1. Families of North Eastern States of Manipur (Manipuri- Meitei) will be more adaptive and will have high level of cohesiveness compared to North Indian families.
2. There will be gender differences in both North Indian and Manipuri- Meitei students on the social representation for inter- caste marriages.

## Methodology

### Sample

Sixty college students (Male=25, Females=35) participated in the study. The age of the student ranged from 19 to 26 years.

30 students were from Northern states of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh Uttarakhand, Delhi, Bihar & Rajasthan) of India and 30 were from North-Eastern States of Manipur ( Manipuri-Meitei).

### Instruments

#### 1. Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale FACES(III)

FACE-III is an assessment based on the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems (Olson, Sprenkle & Russel, 1979). Circumplex Model measures three ranges of family functioning: balance (moderately balanced/balanced), mid-range and extreme. It has 40-items paper-and-pencil scales, which estimate the real and ideal type of family functioning. Each item has 5-point response option. FACES-III is designed to be given twice. One form asks each member to describe the family; the other asks how each member would like the family to be.

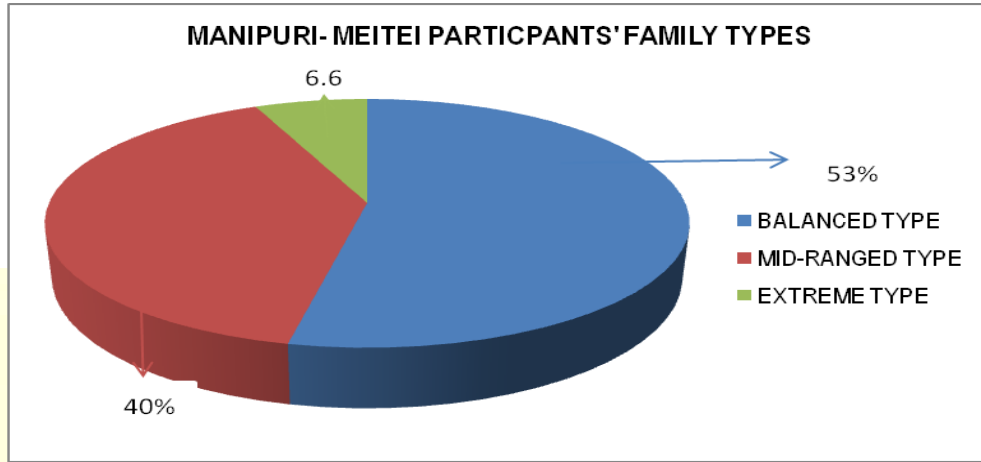
There are four levels of family cohesion: connected, separated, very connected/enmeshed or disengaged. There are four levels of family adaptation: flexible, structured, rigid or chaotic. This creates 16 possible family systems: four balanced on dimensions, four extreme on both dimensions, and eight on mid-range. A family can be described according to the combination of two dimensions categories (e.g. flexible separated or rigidly disengaged). Established norms indicate that high scores on the two dimensions refer to balance types of families, moderate scores to mid-range types and low scores to extreme types of families.

#### 2. Open-ended questionnaire for assessing views on Inter caste marriages (devised by self).

### Procedure

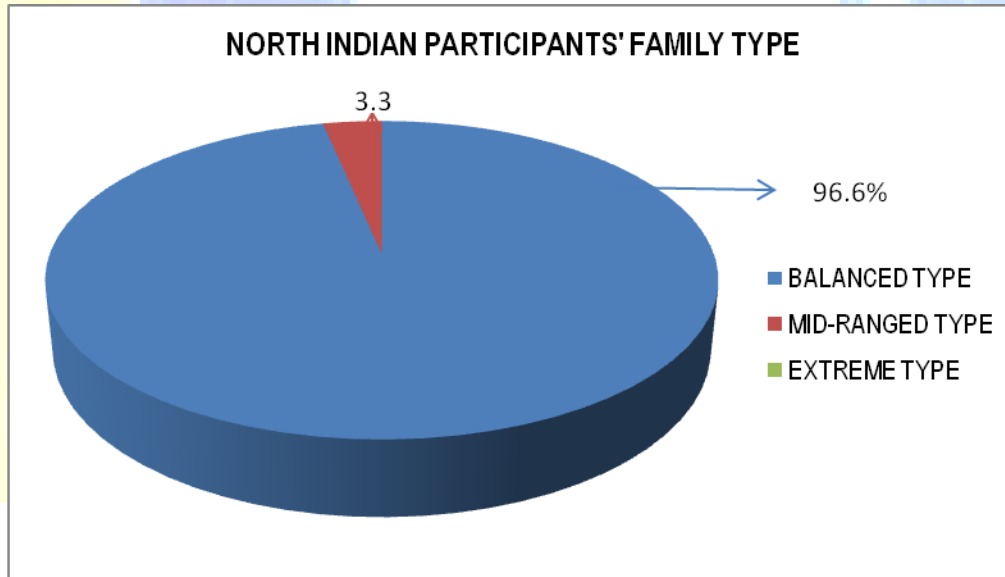
The questionnaire along with Family adaptability and cohesion evaluation scales were distributed and administered among Manipuri- Meitei students of North Eastern State of Manipur and North Indian college students. For the questionnaire, participants were given an opportunity to present their opinions freely on the questions provided. This was followed by the administration of FACES(III). No fixed time limit was given for the scale. The responses given by the participants on the open-ended questionnaire were analysed qualitatively and the responses of the students on FACE (III) were scored and analysed quantitatively.

### Results



**Figure 1:** Representing the types of families of Manipuri-Meitei participants

The above figure shows that 53% of the Manipuri Meitei participants' family were balanced in nature, 40% of them had a mid-ranged type of family and 6.6% of the participants had an extreme type of family.



**Figure 2:** Representing the types of family for the North Indian participants

It can be seen that 96.6% of the participants had balanced type of family where as 3.3% of them had mid- ranged type of family. None of the participants had an extreme type of family.

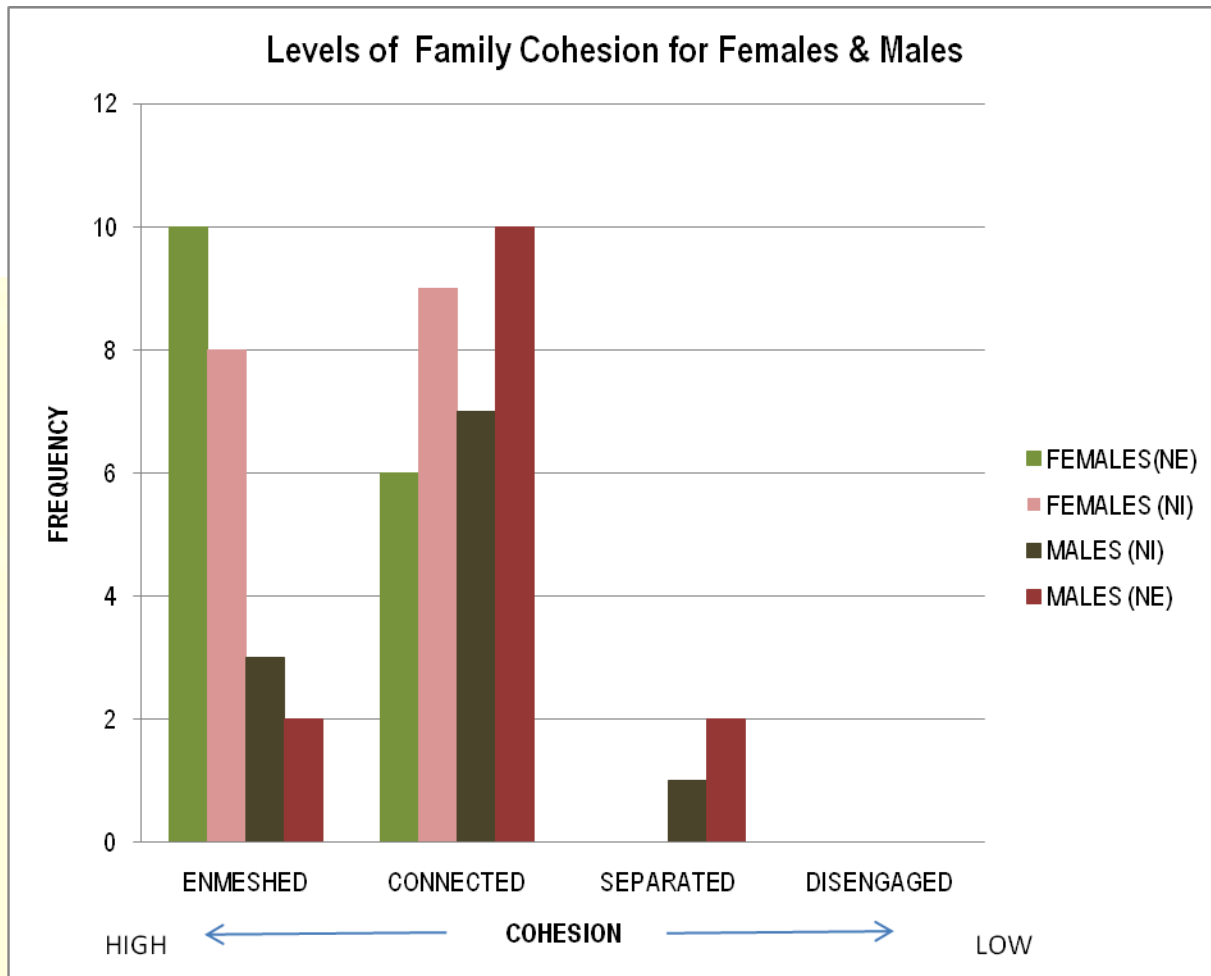


Figure 3: Representing levels of family cohesiveness for females and males in North Eastern State of Manipur and North India (NE=North East, NI=North India).

The above graph depicts the level of family cohesion of male and female participants of North Indian and Manipuri- Meitei families. More number of North Indian & Manipuri- Meitei families were found to be enmeshed and connected. Gender differences revealed that the families of female participants were more enmeshed than male participants' families. Families of Manipuri- Meitei males tended to be more connected when compared with families of North Indian males. As compared to males in general, none of the females said that their family was separated or disengaged.

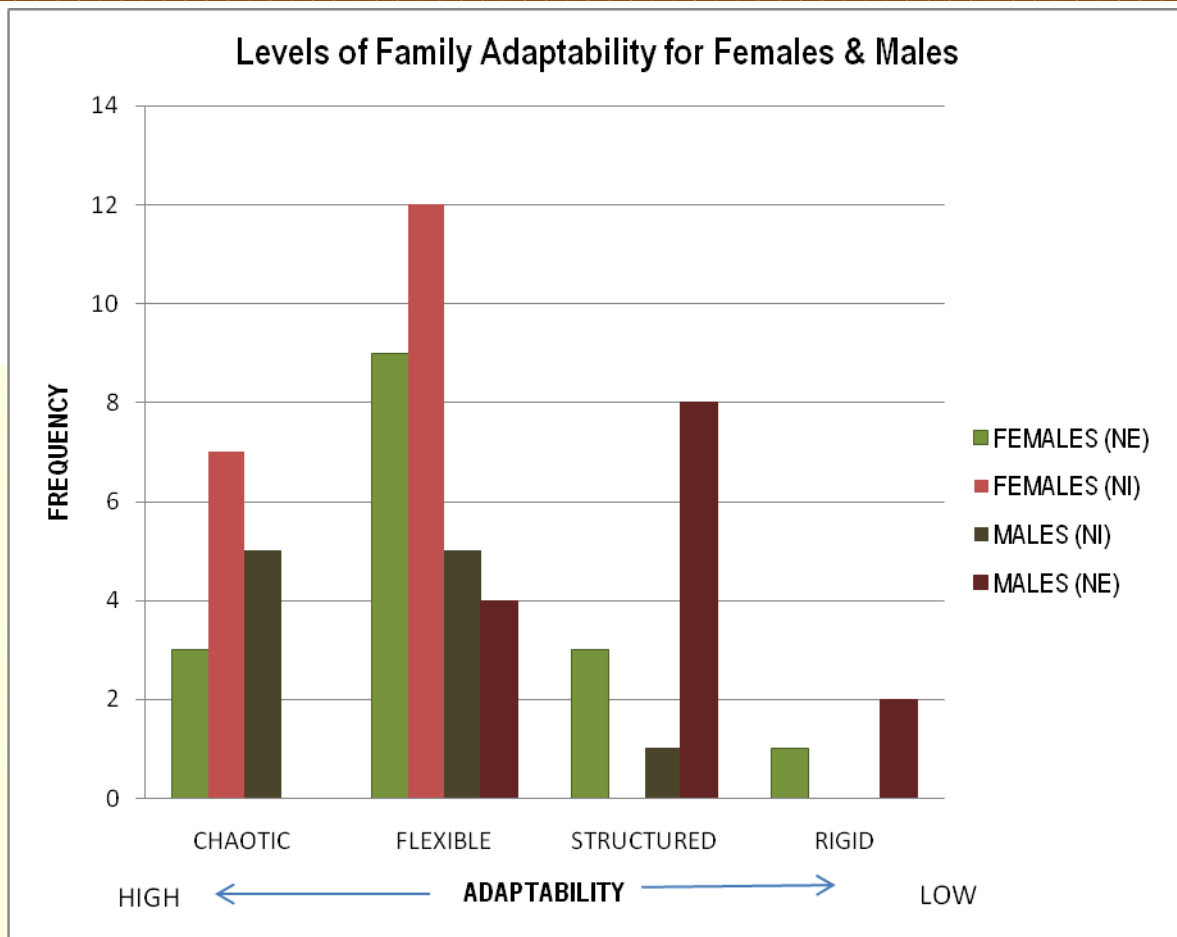


Figure 4: Representing levels of Family adaptability for females and males in both North Eastern State of Manipur and North India

The above graph depicts the adaptability level of families of North Indian and Manipuri- Meitei participants. Families of female participants for both North Indian and Manipuri- Meitei were reported as chaotic and flexible i.e. more adaptable. None of the families of North Indian female students were found to be structured or rigid. Families of male participants from North India were reported as more adaptable as compared to families of North Eastern males.



**Table I:** Thematic analysis of the views of North Indian participants towards Inter-caste marriage

THEMES	SUB-THEMES	FEMALES %	MALES %
I. Views on inter caste Marriage	(a) Inter caste marriage should be encouraged	a. Yes: 94.7% Neutral:5.2%	a. Yes- 90.9% Neutral- 9%
	(b) A way to remove caste system	b. 26.30%	b. 27.20%
II. Seen/experience inter-caste marriage and their reaction	(a)Seen or experienced inter -caste marriage	a. Yes- 68.4% No- 31.5%	a. Yes- 81.8% No- 18%
	(b) Positive reaction towards it	b. 57%	b.81.80%
III. People's reaction towards inter-caste marriage in their state	(a)Against or opposed to inter-caste marriage	a. 42%	a. 36.30%
	(b) Reaction towards inter- caste marriage by the people	b. Positive- 21% Negative-36.8% Neutral-10.5%	b.Positive-27% Negative- 36% Neutral- 27.2%
IV. Relatives and society's views	(a) Reaction by their relatives and society	a. Negative-47% Positive- 10.5% Others- 36.8%	a. Negative- 36% Positive- 36% Others-27%
	(b) A change in people's mind set due to education and time	b.26%	b. 36%
V. Steps taken by family members for marriage through elopement	(a) Couples are searched by the family members and separated	a. 31.50%	a. 54%
	(b) Disowned by family members	b. 15.70%	b. 0
VI. A chance to have an inter-caste marriage and their family's reaction	(a) Go for it	a. 94.70%	a. 100%
	(b)Positive reaction from family	b. 84%	b. 63.60%

**Table II:** Thematic analysis of the views of Manipuri Meitei participants towards Inter-caste marriage

THEMES	SUB-THEMES	FEMALES %	MALES %
I. Views on inter caste Marriage	(a) Inter-caste marriage should be encouraged (b) Promotes equality among people (c) Caste should not be a barrier as it brings different cultures and traditions together	a. Yes: 93 % No:6.2% b. 18.70% c. 68%	a. Yes:64% No: 28.5% b. 28.50% c. 35.7%
II. Seen/experience inter-caste marriage and their reaction	(a) Seen or experienced inter-caste marriage (b) Positive reactions (c) Negative reactions	a. 100% b. 81.20% c. 0%	a. 92.80% b. 64% c. 14%
III. People's reaction towards inter-caste marriage in their state	(a) Accept Inter-caste marriage (b) Depends on education and how orthodox a family is	a. Yes: 68.7% No: 25 % Neutral: 12.5% b. 18.70%	a. Yes: 71% No: 21.4% Neutral: 7% b. 21.40%
IV. Relatives and society's views	(a) Approval or acceptance of inter-caste marriage and elopement through marriage (b) Give support and freedom to take decisions	a. Yes: 87.5% No: 0% Neutral: 12.5% b. 50.0%	a. Yes: 57% No: 0% Neutral: 42.8% b. 28.50%
V. Steps taken by family members for marriage through elopement	(a) Families have normal reaction (b) Marriage date fixed by consent of girl's father	a. 100% b. 62.50%	a. 100% b. 35.70%
VI. A chance to have an inter-caste marriage and their family's reaction	(a) A chance to marry another caste (b) Supportive family	a. Yes: 93% No: 6.25% b. 93.7%	a. Yes: 57% No: 42.8% b. 57%

Table 1 and 2 provides the thematic analysis of the qualitative data along with the percentages. It can be seen that above 90% male and female participants of North Indian states encourage inter-caste marriages whereas 93% female and 64% male participants encourage it from Manipuri- Meitei. Out of 30 Manipuri- Meiteis, 68% females and 35.7% males give their view that caste should not be a barrier as it brings different cultures and traditions together. 26.3% and 27% of North Indian female and male participants suggested inter caste marriage as a way to remove caste system. Regarding whether any of them had ever seen or experienced inter-caste marriages, out of 30 Manipuri- Meitei participants, 100% females and 92.8% males had seen or experienced it. For the North Indian participants, 68% of females and 81.8 % of males reported of having seen it. 93.7% Manipuri- Meitei females and 57% males gave a positive reaction whereas 57% of females and 81.8% of males of North Indian states gave a positive reaction towards inter caste marriages.

Amongst 30 North Indian participants, 42% females and 36% males suggested that people of their state opposed inter caste marriages and reported that they never had a positive reaction towards it. For the Manipuri- Meitei participants, 68.7% females and 71.4% males responded that people of their state accepted inter- caste marriages. 18% females and 21.4% male Manipuri- Meitei participants believe that their reactions depended on how educated and orthodox their family was. 87.5% females and 57% male Manipuri- Meitei participants responded that society and relatives approve elopement through marriage as well as inter-caste marriage. However, 47% females and 36% male North Indian participants' responses were rather negative.

Participants revealed the step taken up by family members for marriage through elopement as well. 31.5 % of North Indian females and 54.5% of males responded that the couples were searched by families as well as by police and if found, they were separated. For Manipuri- Meitei participants, both males and females responded that family had a normal reaction. 62% females and 35.7% males Manipuri- Meitei participants revealed that by the consent from the girl's father, date of the marriage was fixed.

When the participants were asked given a chance would they go for inter caste marriage, out of 60 participants, 90% females responded positively. 100% North Indian males gave positive responses whereas 57% Manipuri- Meitei male participants gave positive responses.

93.7% of female and 57% of male Manipuri- Meitei participant believed that their family would support them as compared to 84% of female and 63% of male North Indian participants.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to understand how the concept of inter caste marriages is represented by youth of Northern states and North Eastern state of India. Firstly, the open-ended questionnaire were analysed qualitatively and the family adaptability and cohesiveness scale was scored and analysed quantitatively.

The thematic analyses as depicted in Tables I & II show that the male participants of North India are more warm, caring and supportive as compared to female participants. Since, the positive reactions of male participants (in terms of percentage) are higher than that of female participants. The female Manipuri- Meitei participants tended to be more open minded, ready to experience and appreciate others tradition and culture as compared to male participants. Since, the positive reaction of female (in terms of percentage) tends to be higher than that of male participants.

Thus, the second hypothesis which states that there will be gender differences in both North Indian and Manipuri- Meitei students on the social representation for inter- caste marriages is validated.

It can be observe from Figure1 and 2 that the all North Indian participants have high level of cohesion and high levels of adaptability except for one male participant who had low cohesion and high adaptability. It is expected that they have much time to spend together with their families. As a result, all the North Indian participants fall under balance type of family except for one male who falls under mid- range type of family. Another explanation is that time spent with family is only one of the factors that facilitates family cohesion. It also encourages communication between family members and enhances the understanding among them. Therefore, a warm, caring, supportive family environment is built.

Zabrie & McCormick (2001) suggested that leisure time that family spends together offers chances for family members to interact with each other and facilitates family development. With the development of a highly cohesive and adaptable foundation in family, there is high understanding and warmth among family members, even though time spent together reduces, and it will not have a big effect on family cohesion and adaptability.

For the 30 Manipuri- Meitei participants, it can be seen that 12 females had high level of cohesion and high level of adaptability, which means they fall under balanced type of family. Another 4 females have high cohesion and low adaptability which means, they have fallen under mid-range type of family. For males, it can be observed that 4 males have high level of cohesion and adaptability which means they are under balanced type of family, 8 males fell under mid ranged type of family since they had a high level of cohesion and low level of adaptability. And 2 males had low level of cohesion and adaptability showing that they fell under extreme type of family. Thus, the first hypothesis that families of North- Eastern State of Manipur (Manipuri- Meitei) will be more adaptive and have high level of cohesiveness as compared to North Indians was not validated.

This study provides evidence that positive perceptions of family and social relationships may contribute to psychological adjustment. However, it is important to note that the family environment is a shared environment, since individuals share genes, experiences and beliefs and they are exposed to how parents express affection and relation of hierarchy among others.

A final explanation of this study is that the North Indian participants are strongly knitted to their family in other words they are more collective in nature. They are very much dependent and close to one another. And they are more adaptable as well as more cohesive. In addition when it comes to marriage, they are more concerned about their family than themselves and their idea behind their marriage culture has been carved by the society since they were born. Whereas for the Manipuri- Meitei participants, it can be seen that family of every participant is different. So, when it comes to marriage, they become liberal and enjoy the colours of different cultures.

One major limitation of the study was that the sample size was small. The differences in culture, traditions and value system might have influenced the responses of the participants. However, the qualitative data of the study reveals that there is interest in the involvement of inter-caste

marriage in all the participants. They have a positive inclination for inter-caste marriage. Future studies can systematically explore inter-caste relations, including patterns of habitation, marriage and see how much of difference in one's family and society system and how people are bound with them for lifetime and the wake of rising literacy and its impact on their beliefs.

## References

- Guerra, N.G., Leidy, M. S., Toro, I.R. (2010). Positive parenting, family cohesion and child social competence among immigrant Latino families. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24(3), 252-260.
- Leidy, M.S., Guerra, N.G. and Rosa I. (2010). Positive Parenting, Family Cohesion, and Child Social Competence Among Immigrant Latino Families. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24 (3), 252-260.
- Olson D.H., Sprenkle, D.H., Russell CS. (1979). Circumplex model of marital and family system: I. Cohesion and adaptability dimensions, family types, and clinical applications. *Family Process*, 18 (1), 3-28.
- Olson, D. H. (1991). Three-dimensional (3-D) Circumplex model and revised scoring of FACES. *Family Process*, 30, 74-79.
- Sindagikar, S., Fatima, & Nusrath. (2013). Inter-religious and inter caste marriages in India. *Golden Research Thoughts*, 2(10), 1.
- Tsamparli, A., Tsibidaki, A. (2009). Adaptability and cohesion of Greek families: Raising a child with a severe disability on the island of Rhodes. *Journal of Family Studies*, 15, 245-259.
- Zabriskie, R. B., & McCormick, B. P. (2001). The Influences of Family Leisure Patterns on Perceptions of Family Functioning. *Family Relations*, 50(3), 281-289.