EDITORIAL

Culture is communication and communication is culture according to Edward T. Hall, a noted cultural anthropologist. The interaction of these two factors has led to cultural communication, which is an important vehicle for the transmission of tradition, beliefs, values and ideals. Interpersonal communication has played a dominant role in influencing intercultural interaction and exchange. Today, with the tremendous growth and expansion of the mass media, it would be no exaggeration to state that we live in a culture determined and dictated by the extensive use and influence of mass communication processes.

Interpersonal communication is vital for persuasion at various levels whereas the mass media are important in dissemination of information and creating widespread awareness among vast audiences. Keeping in mind the functional nature of interpersonal and mass communication, intercultural communication is a direct encounter between individuals at a more fundamental level since it involves religious, ethnic, racial, linguistic and other sub-cultural characteristics. Though cultural pluralism is a widespread global phenomenon in present times, it faces the conflicting pull towards the vortex of mass culture. But intercultural communication encounters have been mainly conceived as interaction between individuals and groups of people with different cultural backgrounds by the scholars who have focussed their attention in the area of the intercultural communication in the present volume.

As a field of academic study, debate and research, intercultural communication is significant in its problem solving approach and conflict resolution among individuals with diverse cultural traditions who must coexist and cooperate in national development at the regional level and world peace at the global level. Many of the human conflicts and social crises in various societies can be attributed to a lack of intercultural dialogue and understanding. Weak intercultural ties spurred by political reasons may have been responsible for the collapse of the erstwhile Soviet Union and the Yugoslavian Republic. Religion has in many cases been the single largest factor contributing to a culture of violence and hatred. Inter-religious dialogue that can be studied within

the ambit of intercultural communication must direct fresh approaches or revision their strategies to relinquish their absolute, competitive claims and enter into a new era of co-operation and harmony.

Language has a determining influence in promoting cross-cultural understanding and intercultural accommodation. Sub-cultural linguistic aspirations within the context of a common religious context can also lead to the formation of separate national entities. Linguistic conflict gave rise to the state of Bangladesh despite the Islamic tie between West and East Pakistan. The Bangali language was the emotional and cultural vehicle of expression of the people of the East Pakistan, which later emerged as Bangladesh. The question of multicultural identity is also rooted in intercultural contact and living.

Political democracy, which in a great measure is a legacy of cultural democracy, has been fairly successful in preserving and appreciating cultural diversity as in the case of India and America. Many societies have nurtured the tradition of free and unrestricted intercultural exchange in order to enrich their lives by fostering mutual respect and peace. But, of late, several countries are under severe strain from a lack of cross-cultural and inter-cultural communication and adaptation. Human hardships in the form large scale evacuation and displacement due to civil wars and unrest, political refugees, groups experiencing religious persecution have led them all to face the intercultural problem of culture shock. Intercultural communication competence has thus emerged as an important skill to be developed in the process of socialization.

The opening paper in this issue by Franz-Joseph Eilers elucidates the meaning of intercultural communication and its possible success through prior knowledge of non-verbal communication, language as a message system, the connotative meaning of words, social relationships, values and worldview, religion and communication networks through which these are communicated in any culture. In an analysis of the cultural communication encounter of St. Thomas Christians with the Hindus in Kerala, Dr. A. Mathias Mundadan presents the state of Kerala society before the 16th century in the symbiotic social-cultural context in

which the bulk of the Christian community lived and grew until the arrival of the Portuguese in India and their adaptation in terms of daily life activities, education, occupation and other aspects of social life. According to him despite the restrictions imposed by the Synod of Diamper there emerged a unique communal harmony and spirit of tolerance which in the context of intercultural communication is regarded as a typical Indian contribution to the Christian vision.

In his paper on the Muslim encounter with Hindus in the Indian subcontinent, in the context of Islamism and Islamization, Dr. David Emmanuel Singh outlines Mawdudi's integrative ideology of Islamism applied to the Muslim majority and minority states in an attempt to counter the effects of plurality bred by modern western secularism (where Muslims were a majority) and enable the coexistence of plurality, practices and beliefs, where Muslim converts where in a minority. Dr. Sebastiano D'Ambra examines the evolution of a culture of dialogue in the Philippines between the Muslims and Christians in an exceptional case in the history of Islamization where a Muslim majority has become a minority with most of the Filipinos today being Christians.

The reform of theological education in Africa forms the focal theme of Dr. E. M. Uka's paper. According to him Missionary theology long dominated by western theology is in need of a more contextual approach and a new style of education in Africa to respond to the problem and needs of the indigenous community. The last paper in this issue by Dr. Kiran Ramachandran Nair provides an explanation of the factors that influenced intercultural communication and various theoretical frameworks for the study of and research in intercultural communication. The paper ends with a discussion of the practical implications of intercultural communication for the smooth transformation of societies on the path of the industrialisation and modernisation.

The papers presented here give an interesting account of the intercultural communication experiences of the major religious groups in different parts of the world and their accommodation to the culture of each other. Despite some highly encouraging trends, during periods of

history when advanced means of communication were absent in intercultural communication, a lot of scope exists for improvement in the modern times characterised by a revolution in information and communication technology. The human spirit is in urgent need of cross-cultural and intercultural communication and accommodation for ushering in a climate of mutual trust and peace in social relations.

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Guest Editor