



INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR ETHNO-RELIGIOUS MEDIATION

"Fostering a culture of peace among ethnic and religious groups"

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MEDIATION ACADEMY

Specialized Mediation Training The Mediation of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts

Mediation Project

Mediation Case Study (Sample case developed by Hayley Rose Glaholt, Fall 2017)

Proposed Case Study: Muslim-Buddhist Intermarriage in Ladakh

What Happened? Historical Background to the Conflict

Ms. Stanzin Saldon (now Shifah Agha) is a Buddhist woman from Leh, Ladakh, a city that is predominantly Buddhist. Mr. Murtaza Agha is a Muslim man from Kargil, Ladakh, a city that is predominantly Shia Muslim.

Shifah and Murtaza met in 2010 at a camp in Kargil. They were introduced by Murtaza's brother. They communicated for years, and Shifah's interest in Islam began growing. In 2015, Shifah was in a car accident. She realized she was in love with Murtaza, and she proposed to him.

In April 2016, Shifah officially converted to Islam, and took the name "Shifah" (changed from the Buddhist "Stanzin"). In June/July of 2016, they asked Murtaza's uncle to perform a marriage ceremony for them in secret. He did, and eventually Murtaza's family found out. They were displeased, but upon meeting Shifah they accepted her into the family.

News of the marriage soon spread to Shifah's Buddhist family in Leh, and they were

extremely angry about the marriage, and about the fact that she had married a (Muslim) man without their consent. She visited them in December 2016, and the meeting became emotional and violent. Shifah's family took her to Buddhist priests as a means of changing her mind, and they wanted the marriage to be annulled. In the past, some Muslim-Buddhist marriages in the region had been annulled due to a long-standing agreement between the communities not to intermarry.

In July 2017, the couple decided to have their marriage registered in court so that it could not be annulled. Shifah told her family this in September 2017. They responded by going to the police. Further, the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA) issued an ultimatum to Muslim-dominated Kargil, imploring them to return Shifah to Leh. In September 2017, the couple had a Muslim wedding in Kargil, and Murtaza's family was present. None of Shifah's family was present.

The LBA has now decided to approach India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, to ask the government to address what they feel is a growing problem in Ladakh: Buddhist women being tricked into converting to Islam via marriage. They feel that the state government of Jammu and Kashmir has continuously ignored this problem, and that in so doing, the government is trying to rid the area of Buddhists.

Each Other's Stories – How Each Person Understands the Situation and Why

Party 1: Shifah and Murtaza

Their Story - We are in love and we should be free to marry each other without problems.

Position: *We will not get divorced and Shifah will not convert back to Buddhism, or return to Leh.*

Interests:

Safety/Security: I (Shifah) feel safe with and comforted by Murtaza's family. I felt threatened by my own family when I visited, and I was scared when you took me to the Buddhist priest. The commotion over our marriage has made it difficult to live our lives quietly, and we are always being harassed by journalists and the public. Violence has broken out between Buddhists and Muslims as a result of our marriage, and there is a general feeling of danger. I need to feel that this violence and tension is finished.

Physiological: As a married couple, we have built a home together and we rely on each other for our physiological needs: housing, income, etc. We know that Murtaza's family would support us if anything bad happened, and we want that to continue.

Belongingness: I (Shifah) feel accepted by the Muslim community and by Murtaza's family. I feel rejected by the Buddhist community and by my own family, because they have reacted so badly to this marriage and did not come to my wedding. I need to feel like I am still loved by my family and by the Buddhist community in Leh.

Self-Esteem/Respect: We are adults and we are free to make our own decisions. You should trust us to make decisions that are right for ourselves. Muslims and Buddhists should be able to rely on each other and support each other. We need to feel that our decision to marry is respected, and that our love is also respected. I (Shifah) also need to feel that my decision to convert to Islam was well thought out and was my own decision, not that I was forced into it.

Business Growth/Profit/Self-Actualization: We hope that our marriage can create a bridge between Muslim and Buddhist families, and help connect our two cities.

Party 2: Shifah's Buddhist Family

Their Story - Your marriage is an affront to our religion, traditions, and family. It should be

annulled.

Position: *You should leave each other and Shifah should come back to Leh, and return to Buddhism. She was tricked into this.*

Interests:

Safety/Security: We feel threatened by Muslims when we are in Kargil, and we wish that Muslims would leave our city (Leh). Violence has broken out because of your marriage, and an annulment would calm people down. We need to know that this tension will be resolved.

Physiological: Our duty as your family is to provide for you (Shifah), and you have rebuked us by not asking our permission for this marriage. We need to feel that you acknowledge our role as your parents, and that all we have given to you is appreciated.

Belongingness: The Buddhist community needs to stay together, and it has been ruptured. It is shameful for us to see our neighbors knowing that you have left our faith and community. We need to feel that we are accepted by the Buddhist community, and we want them to know that we raised a good Buddhist daughter.

Self-Esteem/Respect: As our daughter, you ought to have asked for our permission to marry. We have passed our faith and traditions down to you, but you have rejected that by converting to Islam and cutting us out of your life. You have disrespected us, and we need to feel that you understand that and that you are sorry for doing that.

Business Growth/Profit/Self-Actualization: Muslims are becoming more powerful in our region, and Buddhists must stick together for political and economic reasons. We can't have factions or dissent. Your marriage and conversion make a larger statement about how Buddhists are treated in our region. Other Buddhist women have been tricked into marrying Muslims, and our women

are being stolen. Our religion is dying out. We need to know that this will not happen again, and that our Buddhist community will remain strong.