CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

The emergence of Inida as a sovereign independent state on August 15, 1947 and the position of the United States of America as a major world power after the second World War are two important events that facilitated contact between the two countries and their people. However, due to restrictive immigration policies of the United States government with regard to eastern hemisphere countries, the number of Indians in the United States was very small. In 1965 the United States immigration laws were liberalized and a large number of Indians have migrated to the United States since then. In their process of adjustment to the new environment do the perceptions of Indians in the United States of America about Indians undergo change? Where do the Indians stand on a social distance scale with reference to native-born Americans? The present study is directed to investigate this twofold problem.
Historical Background of the Problem

Contacts between diverse people have been an integral part of the life of man since the dawn of history. These have been of various sorts—economic, social, political, cultural, educational, and recreational.

In this century rapid means of transportation and communication have brought the far-flung parts of the world much closer together and in spite of bickerings and differences, mostly political in nature, there exists today a greater sense of dependence of one country on another than was the case a few centuries ago. No nation, today can afford to live in isolation.

Until World War II contacts between India and the United States were slight and scattered (Rosinger, 1950). India was mostly known to the United States through the missionaries, the tourists and the British. None of them depicted India correctly to the Western eye. Barring a few scholars who had delved deep into ancient Indian thought and literature, American people at large had very distorted notions about India and the Indians. To a majority of Americans, India was a dark continent infested with tigers and mosquitoes and people living a backward and superstitious life bowed down by an inexplicable society and dominated by the caste system. It was a mysterious land, inhabited by Yogis who sat on beds of nails, ate fire, charmed snakes and
did the rope trick (Singh H., 1949).

Among foreign countries, Britain, then the ruling power, received the chief attention of Indians. Indians who had any feelings about the United States may have thought of it in one or more ways: as an extremely rich, modern country; as a strange country of materialism, sky-scrapers and high divorce rates; as a country which had once been colonial and had fought successfully for independence; as a country comprising people of many religions, national origins, and races, sometimes harmonizing, sometimes conflicting; as a predominantly "white" country practicing widespread discrimination against Negroes; and as a country whose history proved what could be done by a people after breaking the bonds of foreign rule (Rosinger, 1950).

During the second World War, India and the United States came into closer diplomatic contact than ever before. Indian officials and businessmen visited the United States in increasing numbers; and millions of Indians met, saw or heard of American troops in India. The economic power and high standard of living implicit in the American equipment and the pay of the American forces made a tremendous impression on Indians. President Roosevelt's designation of India as a country whose defense was essential to the United States, underlined the need for more direct relations between India and America. Toward the end of the war, the United States
started a cultural cooperation program for the Near and Middle East, including India (Rosingher, 1950).

The United States immigration policies however, were discriminatory with regard to Asiatic countries. They weighed heavily in favor of natives of western hemisphere countries since they could enter the United States without numerical restriction (Gordon & Rosenfield, 1966). In the post war period, the United States at last repealed its discriminatory laws prohibiting the permanent immigration or naturalization of Indians. The Supreme court had held in 1922 that Indians were not eligible to citizenship, and the quota of 100 annually established for India under the Immigration Act of 1924 was limited to non-Indians (for example, English and French persons) born in India and eligible to become American citizens. After the repeal of Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, pressure developed for the abolition of the ban on Indians. Finally, in June 1946, with President Roosevelt's backing, Congress passed the India Immigration and Naturalization Bill, which became law when President Truman signed it on July 2 of the same year. At the time of the legislation of 1946 there were roughly 4,000 Indian nationals in the United States, consisting mostly of farmers on the Pacific coast, with small communities in New York City and Detroit (Rosingher, 1950).

Implementation of the law consisted in admitting 100
natives of India into the United States each year for permanent residence (Lowenstein, 1970). Considering the fact that people from western hemisphere countries could be admitted into the United States by thousands each year for permanent residence, the quota of 100 for India was negligible. Despite bills for major revision of the law at each session of the Congress, the law continued to remain discriminatory for people from the Asia-Pacific triangle.

President John F. Kennedy championed the cause of the improvement of immigration policies in order to eliminate discrimination in the immigration laws. He said that the use of a national origins system is without basis in either logic or reason since it neither satisfies a national need nor accomplishes an international purpose. He further said that in an age of interdependence among nations such a system is an anachronism, for it discriminates among applicants for admission into the United States on the basis of accident of birth (Kennedy, 1964).

After President Kennedy's death, his proposals for reform of immigration laws were adopted and pressed by President Johnson. His efforts finally bore fruit in 1965, which abolished the national origins quota system. The new law established numerical limitations in a worldwide frame of reference effective from July 1, 1968 (Gordon & Rosenfield, 1966). Accordingly, all potential immigrants were dealt with
on a first come first served basis. As reported in the New York Times (1970), the new law allocated a ceiling of 20,000 immigrant visas for each country of Europe, Asia and Africa. Over and above this ceiling there was an eastern hemisphere allotment set aside for professionals, those of "exceptional ability" in science and arts, and unskilled workers in short supply. At the same time, a "Family Unity" policy was adopted which gave priority to relatives of United States residents seeking immigration visas.

The most obvious and expected impact of the liberalization of the immigration laws with regard to India was reflected in the increased immigration from India to the United States. According to the 1971 Annual Report of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (1971) in the year 1965, the number of Indians admitted into the United States under various categories were as follows: Immigrants- 582 (p. 54); Non-immigrants- 15,554 (p. 55); Temporary visitors- 7,277 (p. 56). As versus this, the figures of 1971 are as follows: Immigrants- 14,310 (p. 54); Non-immigrants- 35,904 (p. 55); Temporary visitors- 18,401 (p. 56). The total number of Indians in the United States who reported their address to the United States Immigration authorities in accordance with the alien address program is 56,725 (p. 94). The total number of Indians who have become naturalized citizens of the United States so far is 453 (p. 110).
Prior to India's independence, the Indian population in the United States consisted mostly of students, visitors and unskilled workers. The Indian students in the United States were considerably fewer in number as compared with those in Britain. To study in America was to risk being hard put to it to get a suitable appointment in the administration, in the foreign-owned firms, or in the colleges and universities controlled by the government, since American degrees were not considered equivalent to British degrees. Following Indian independence, the official policy of discrimination against American-trained Indians was abolished. Between 100 and 200 students were in American schools prior to World War II; and in 1953-1954 there were 1,486 (Useem & Useem, 1955).

Among a small number of distinguished visitors to the United States was Swami Vivekananda in the last decade of the 19th century. His visit marked the origin of a small native-American Vedanta movement. Around this movement developed rapidly a periphery of spiritualists, astrologers, clairvoyants, and magicians whose activities helped deepen the old stereotypes about the "mysterious East" (Stern, 1956).

It was not until the liberalization of the United States Immigration laws in 1965 that more Indians have been in the United States and more Americans have met more Indians than ever before in the history of the two peoples. Immigration
of recent years is not limited to students, visitors, unskilled workers and diplomats. A large section of the immigrants are professionals such as medical doctors, engineers, teachers etc. This type of migration has created quite a bit of concern regarding "Brain Drain" in both the countries (VanDerkroef, 1968). Unlike migration in the past, people have migrated with families and friends. The motivating factor for migration seems to be better economic opportunities. Some of those who came as single individuals married American girls or boys. However, the number of such inter-marriages is very small. The most recent trend has been to take a trip to India in order to marry an Indian girl.

Now it is no longer a novelty to see an Indian in the United States. They are seen in almost all the states. However, their concentration is greater in big cities like New York and in the metropolitan areas. Like the earlier European immigrants to the United States, there seems a fairly marked tendency to cluster among Indians. In some instances nearly twenty-five to fifty families live in the same complex or neighborhood.

Besides several student organizations on college campuses, there are over fifty social and cultural organizations of Indians in the United States; some are formed to provide assistance in the handling of the problems encountered by newcomers to an unfamiliar country and culture. Newcomers go
through a series of adjustments, new experiences, endless decisions on daily living. To describe in the terminology of Useem and Useem (1967) the Indian community in the United States seems similar to the Indo-American third culture or the Binational Third Culture in India, excepting the fact that the migration of Indians to the United States is considerably greater in number and more or less on a permanent basis.

As mentioned before there is not only a tendency of Indians toward residential concentration but in some instances such concentration is around homogeneous lines; such as Gujarathis preferring Gujarathis, Maharashtrians preferring Maharashtrians, Sindhis preferring Sindhis as neighbors. There are regular programs some of them meeting the needs of a broad spectrum of the Indian population. Such programs are celebrations of Dussera, Divali, Holi, Indian Independence and Republic days, various art exhibits, movies, dances, Bhajanas, lectures, seminars etc. Some programs are along regional and linguistic lines following a pattern in India. These are conducted by a Gujarathi or Maharashtra Mandal etc.

There are several newspapers in circulation among Indians covering a wide range of topics from politics to sports. These papers are meant to keep the Indians informed about news from India and also India abroad.
A new association named the "Association of Indians in America" was formed, transforming the image of Indians from a student community to an immigrant community. The objective of this association is to establish a dialogue with the community so that the Indian immigrants can be a part of the mainstream of American life, maintaining at the same time their own identity (India Abroad, 1972).

In addition to all the formalized activities arranged by various organizations there are considerable informal get-togethers between Indians.

Thus Indians in the United States seem to be trying to reaffirm their identification with the home country through the various activities mentioned in the preceding pages. Simultaneously, as immigrants they also seem to be trying to reach certain adjustments in a society that is different from their own in its history, religion, philosophy, all kinds of scientific and technological advancement, standard of living and code of behavior. Obviously almost every Indian comes in contact with a great many Americans from the day he lands in the United States. He interacts with Americans in a variety of situations. This gives rise to questions: Have his perceptions about Indians changed as a result of a comparative view? At what social distance does an Indian stand in the mind of a native-born American? The
present study is undertaken in an effort to answer these questions.

Hypotheses

The following three hypotheses provide direction to this study:

1. Perceptions of Indians residing in the United States of America about Indians in India undergo change.

2. Changes in the perceptions of Indians in the United States of America about Indians in India depend upon their length of residence in the United States of America.

3. Perceptions of native-born Americans about Indians undergo change affecting social distance Americans feel about Indians.

Justification

This study should have important theoretical as well as practical implications.

Theoretically, it should contribute to "The Developmental Research" in the sense that it is concerned with the changes that occur in an individual in the process of adjustment to the new culture.

From a practical point of view the fact that the Indian community in the United States is trying to become a part of
the American mainstream in recent years, the results of such studies should give a correct estimate of American perceptions about Indians and the rank order or the social distance at which Indians are held at present. Such a knowledge should reveal the degree of acceptance of Indians by Americans. This knowledge in turn should contribute to devising ways and means of increasing the sense of mutual understanding, good will and cooperation between them.

In this age of greatly accelerated travel and communication and in the light of the pressing need to reduce intercultural misunderstanding, the importance of the study of perceptions about Indians is evident. If peoples of the world are to learn to live together in peace they need to know about themselves and about others.

Most studies reported to date on the effects of Indo-American contacts were conducted on the student population who were temporarily sojourning in the United States for educational purposes. While studies conducted on the student population have contributed a great deal to the changes in self-attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and other psychological dimensions, it is hard to generalize from such studies about a cross-section of Indian people in the United States. Hence the present study is the first of its kind.
The Schema

This study involves three groups: (1) Indians in India (2) Indians in the United States of America and (3) Native-born Americans.

Perceptions of Indians in the United States of America are compared with the perceptions of Indians in India on the one hand and the perceptions of Native-born Americans on the other.

The significance of the time dimension or the length of residence of the Indians in the United States and changes in their perceptions are further investigated.

Perceptions of Native-born Americans about Indians and the social distance they feel about Indians at the present time are compared with the findings in the past literature.

Definition or Description of the Terms Used

Adjustment. Adjustment is a condition of harmonious relation of an individual to his environment wherein he is able to obtain satisfaction for most of his needs and to meet fairly well the demands, physical and mental, put upon him (English & English, 1958).

Culture. The culture refers to social legacy distinct from the biological legacy (Leiris, 1965). It is a historically derived way of thinking and behaving acquired by its members through teaching or imitation and more or less
common to them all. It is a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society.

**Indians.** Natives of the Republic of India and not the aboriginal people known as American Indians in the United States.

**Native-born Americans.** Native born citizens of the United States and not naturalized citizens. Throughout the study, the terms "native-born American" and "American" are used interchangeably and so also the terms "United States of America" and "America".

**Perception.** The term perception is usually applied to the way one comes to know the world or the way one experiences the world of objects and events (Weintraub & Walker, 1969). In this study it especially refers to the appraisals an individual makes of himself or others.

**Social Distance.** Social distance refers to the degrees and grades of understanding and feeling that persons experience regarding each other (Bogardus, 1925a, 1925b).