

Psychological Perspectives on Social Issues and Human Development

[Selected papers from the Proceeding of 15th Annual Convention of National Academy of Psychology (NAOP) India]

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5 Indian Immigrants' Perception of the French People

Looking Forward to Better Intercultural Relationships

Jyoti Verma

This qualitative data based chapter is part of a larger project on aculturative experiences of a sample of Indian immigrants in Paris which aimed at arriving at a worldview of the dominant host culture represented in the respondents' perceptions, beliefs, experiences and observations. It is contended that the immigrants' worldview of the host culture takes shape as they interface critical issues of everyday life and meet the expectations and challenges offered by the country of settlement. However, the present chapter shall deal my with the Indian immigrants' perception of the French people and their experiences from their respective work life and educational evironment. The objective at this point is to derive some insights from the represented narratives for developing better intercultural relations between the two interfacing cultural groups.

The Conceptual Frame

migrants are the group of people who come together with other pups voluntarily or because they have migrated to a new location to mobility), and some of whom are permanently settled in new society (Berry, 1997). Rhee et al. (1996) observe that populations that are in cultural transition are particularly interesting because they may experience changes in their political, economic, rigious, social and linguistic systems besides that in their social lationships with new relationships requiring redefinition of in-group and out-group and assigning different significance to ethnicity. Additionally, psychological changes may occur including shifts in attitudes, values, behaviour and life style.

It is contended that during the acculturation process a continuous effort is made by the immigrant groups to feel at ease and become functional in a new culture, experience social acceptability and equality and acquire material, social and psychological well-being. In this context a relevant question seems to be, 'at which level is navigation for better intercultural relations most important'? That is, should it be at the level of adapting to the values, norms and customs of the host culture group, at the level of understanding the host group in all its uniqueness, or at the level of choosing a particular acculturation strategy which is considered most advantageous for adapting amicably in the new culture? Therefore, asking the questions as to 'how people navigate between two cultures and whether they ignore, blend or transcend the conflicts between them' has practical implications. Similarly, any intercultural relations issue must look into the impressions of both the interfacing groups. In particular, one must address to the ethnic group's perceptions of and experiences with the host group and the impact these impressions have on their adaptation. The present researcher's interest in the acculturation process in general and intercultural relationship at this point led her to address to some questions of the following nature:

> How do the immigrants perceive the host country in terms of its system and culture?

> What are the immigrants' impressions of and experiences

with the people of the host group?

 Whether the immigrants find the system and the people of the new country helpful in their adaptive efforts, feel accepted, welcome and treated equally?

 Whether the immigrants' adaptive effort and acculturative experiences are particularly hard and stressful due to discriminatory attitudes and practices of the host group? In other words, any concern for improving intercultural relationship is likely to address to the 'sunshine spots' and the dark areas' of acculturative experiences of the immigrants with the purpose of understanding as to what might have gone wrong and what could possibly be the appropriate alternative for developing worthwhile and functional bonds? This is an important concern because imigration is a reality of the present day world which has become highly penetrable and extremely well connected for those who wish to shift and change their geographical locations for all kinds of reasons and purpose. The interest behind studying intercultural issues remains looking for the antecedents and the determinants of better intercultural relationships and a fair understanding of the ongoing relationship between the culturally different groups. However, it is desirable to study these issues from the point of view of the host culture as well.

Intercultural Relations Issue

Intercultural relations between immigrants and hosts are most often nequal. It is contended that cultural characteristics that accompany individuals into the acculturation process is necessary, partly for anderstanding where the person is coming from and in part to establish cultural features for comparison with the society of settlement as basis for establishing cultural distance. Furthermore, zs a consequence of pervasive ethnocentric bias in intercultural relations, there is inbuilt ethnic tension between the immigrant and the host acculturation orientations. In line with the social dentity theory, both sides will be inclined to favour the in-group culture over the culture of an out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In view of their dominant group position, the host community will demand some degree of adaptation from immigrant minorities, while their acceptance of culture maintenance will vary, depending on whether they perceive the minority culture as a 'threat' to group dominance (Bobo & Hutching, 1987; Montreuil & Bourhis, 2001).

Conversely, the minority status of the immigrants is associated

with heightened ethnic self-identification which reinforces culture maintenance and at the same time, immigrant attitudes towards cross-cultural adaptation will vary depending upon whether they perceive the dominant culture as a 'threat' to group survival (Berry et al., 1977). Some have shown, however, that on both sides ethnocentrism and perceived threat will decline with increasing levels of education (Scheepers, Verbeck & Coenders, 2001).

Objectives

As already mentioned the descriptive data of the study was generated through a long interview. The specific objectives for this chapter are:

 To present some positive perceptions of the French system/ society as reported by a sample of Indian ethnic group members living in Paris,

2. To present the major problems suggested by the immigrants in adaptation with the host culture,

3. To present some experiences from the work life and educational institutions of the respondents, and

4. To present some suggestions for better relational outcomes.

METHOD

Sample

The sample comprised of 28 adults of Indian origin both males (16) and females (12) between the age range of 25 to 58 years. Fifty per cent of the women out of the total number of 12, were not working at the moment. All the respondents were at least Graduates with the exception of two (cases # 2, 8) who had only completed high school. The respondents came from a number of Indian states namely, Gujarat, Punjab, Bengal, Pondichery, Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Delhi, Kashmir, Orissa and Rajasthan. The sample was a

heterogeneous one as regards to the occupations of the respondents and included students, personnel in jobs and business persons. There were at least two performing artists, one textile designer and a psychiatrist besides, two Indian Embassy staff and a highly qualified aeronautical engineer.

Years spent in the host country	1–5	6–10	11–15	16–20	2125	26–30	31–35	
No. of respondents	7	9	3	5	ls:197	9h(1 0)	2	28

Instruments

The Guiding Questions (Interview Schedule)

A list comprising of 18 guiding questions aimed at addressing to the contextual factors motivating migration and to get an impression of the acculturation experiences of the respondents was used. Accordingly, the respondents where requested to tell about their major aspirations and how far they have been realized, how they perceived the French culture and its people, what were the major hurdles faced during the adaptation process and what was good and nice in the host country. Further, they were asked to tell as to how did they find the job environment and in what ways the country of origin (India) still mattered to them. This chapter includes observations only against some selected questions for meeting its specific objectives.

The Questions

- 1. What is/are the major hurdle/s in adapting to the French society/culture?
- 2. What is that you like very much in this society?
- 3. Do you find French people friendly, unfriendly or indifferent towards immigrants?
- 4. Do you find your French co-workers/seniors/juniors helpful and cordial?

5. Do you think that the French co-workers/seniors/juniors keep a distance from you because you are not French?

OBSERVATIONS

1. Positive Perception of the French Society

Many good things were perceived in the French culture and its people. First, no one ever said that he/she repented her/his decision to come to France. It was mentioned invariably, that the system functioned very well and was more or less free of corruption. Every one agreed that France was a beautiful country; Paris was delightful and with a wonderful transport system and it was very convenient to travel in France. Aditionally, France had an excellent social security system which made each and every French citizen socially secure in this country. The "genuine moral freedom" of the French society was appreciated very well. For example, in Roshani's (# 16) opinion, France was completely secular, it was non-religious, intellectual, and Church was not behind religious, Calvinism". She also believed that meritorious and capable could go anywhere. Yesudas (#6) was fascinated by his new found freedom in France and Namrata (#9) felt "like a free bird." At least a couple of women believed (#9, 17), that women were much more protected and secure in France.

Strong nationalist feelings and the pride that French people took in their culture and heritage, were perceived as most remarkable features in the French character while their love for museums, concerts, art exhibition and fashion, was seen as unprecedented. French were perceived as intelligent, original and creative people with fine taste and good aesthetic sense. Their being possessive about the French language was justified as expression of their strong nationalist feelings and passion for preserving their cultural heritage. Even the popular tradition of eating out in restaurants and visiting cafe and bars, had a role in the continuation of a social life style which had the French signature.

One respondent appreciated that the French culture had a unique quality of maintaining a balance between the old and the new. It was amazing that there was 500 years old Louvre museum and an ultra-modern structure in front of it. France was not madly capitalist or very superstitious. In fact, the old and the new attitudes could survive in France side by side (# 9). Almost everyone seemed to agree with Dr. Preetpal (# 24) who observed that, France was a modern, successful country. The technology, the business and the system on the whole worked efficiently, there was huge achievement in different spheres and there was lot to like and respect in each field over here.

Barring a few exceptions, it was expressed that French people liked Indians, were interested in them and did not perceive them as threatening (# 16). India was perceived as a culturally strong country because of its performing arts, food, clothes and fashion fads that became popular in Paris. The young textile designer (# 9), Hariharan Iyer from the Indian Embassy (# 20) and Sanyukta Panda (# 23, who taught Indian cooking, Hindi language, and sold Indian accessories to her French acquaintances) had first hand information in support of the above observations. The two young performing artists (# 6, 27) admitted that, they had received enough affection and respect from the French art lovers and the general feeling was that Indians did not face much discrimination or came across racist attitude against their community (# 22). At least four respondents were full of praise for the French people and found them friendly, dependable and trustworthy (# 6, 10, 11, 23). These positive perceptions certainly offer hope and scope for developing good intercultural relationship between the French and the ethnic minority group of India.

2. Barriers in Developing Better Intercultural Relationships

(a) The Language Barrier

It appeared that the major hurdle in adaptation of the immigrants

was two faceted. First, not knowing the language and second, a somewhat negative perception of the French people. In most of the cases, not knowing the language instantly created an "out group" feeling towards the immigrant groups by the host group. It was repeatedly mentioned that knowledge of French language was the very basic requirement for adaptation. Those who did not know the language and had recently arrived in Paris, looked for friends who could speak English and tried to get in touch with Indian people by joining Indian Associations. Often the students looked for accommodation at Maison de L'inde (#1) to remain in a familiar environment. It appeared that French were very possessive about their language because any compromise with the language was perceived as a step towards culture dilution. The immigrants generally felt that not knowing the language created an invisible 'close door' stopping possibilities for further interactions literally, and otherwise.

Some Examples from the Narratives

One of the respondents (# 14) made the following analysis: "what was commonly perceived in the French character as shutting up from others, could be a defence mechanism used by the French and since they were not very good in the English language, they did not want to express themselves in English". Talking of the greatest hurdle in adjusting to the French society, a mother of two small kids (# 26) narrated an incident about a "racist" doctor. Krishnavenu (# 12) observed that knowing the French language was not enough but one had to be an expert, for having a real impact on the other. Another person (# 5) said, "I might not say that they (French) are frigid but they are arrogant, not helpful nor friendly if you do not know their language. I cannot communicate in French and French do not accept this". It appeared that language was the real visa for entering France and without the same, efforts meant for developing closeness with the French people were likely to suffer. It was very common for the non-French speaking settlers to join French language schools as soon as they could.

(b) Immigrants' Perception of the Host Group: Examples from the Narratives

A film maker contended that often Indians were "unable to see what they did not saw." That is, they did not notice what the French liked and what they disliked. Furthermore, unfamiliarity with the norms, expectations, preferences, and life style of the people of the dominant group, was likely to lead to unfair perceptions and wrong conclusions, about them and their culture. Barring a few exceptions (# 6, 8, 10, 11, 17, 18, 23), in almost all the narratives, there was mention of the unfriendliness of the French people or their being closed to the outsiders. However, all such narratives had scope for alternative interpretations. Further, the immigrants' expectations from the dominant cultural group were likely to be guided by their own cultural orientation and, therefore, could lead to biased perception of the latter and setbacks in interpersonal relationships. Meenakshi (# 25) looked for Indian friends to help her in urgency because she realised that it was not the practice of the French people to "just drop in" at their neighbours place, or take the initiative for knowing the people around them.

She noticed that "nobody would come in to know or meet you just by pressing the doorbell". Vasundhara (# 7) was surprised that no one said 'hello' and felt like a stranger. Rani Mukherjee (# 2) found it difficult to make friends, while a number of respondents felt that French were formal, cold, uninvolved (meaning indifferent) and non-interfering in the lives of those around. Similarly, a "perceptible lack of warmth" was often marked as the cultural feature of the French society (# 3, 9 and 14). A young student (# 1) wanted to say that French were strong nationalists, and extreme people. They were either accepting or non-accepting, and there was no "in-between" for them while another young woman (# 9) remarked that French individualism was worse than the American individualism.

Some attitudes and gestures of the dominant group were perceived as discriminatory or seemingly racist. In the present sample of immigrants, at least two felt discriminated and marginalized (# 4, 8) while, there were a few more, who wanted to say that the non-French were not likely to reach top positions in jobs (# 5, 12, 14). Some were frank enough to say that there was racism in France which was perhaps, practiced in a subtle way. According to a recently arrived young student (# 3), French were not fond of people from other cultures who wanted to settle down in France or had lived under the French colonies. Therefore, one might come across racist attitude and expressions on trivial matters against such settlers. She observed further that French were not integrated even with the Indian groups who had been here for many years now and did not consider them to be part of the main stream.

Surject (# 22) believed that, "there were groups of French elite or bourgeois who were strict and unaccepting of others. However, towards the Indians, they had an open mind and not a negative attitude in particular." On the other hand, it appeared that French had some prejudice against the Algerians and the Moroccans. One respondent serving in the French Government's job (# 4), observed that French wanted to be in the dominating position and said, "French consider themselves as givers, providers, they look down upon you, and they do not look upon you as you were doing some service. They consider others as takers." It appeared that at least for the three cases (# 4, 8, and 12), adaptation apparently did not improve the "fit" between the individuals and their environment and there was some indication of resistance against the system which found vent in the negative feelings expressed in their respective narratives.

3. Representations from Work Life and Educational Institutions

The employed respondents had the general feeling that work facilities were good in France. Nevertheless, the respondents expected something like more salary, recognition, more personally fixed target realization and opportunity to grow from their respective jobs. What follow is the respondents' perceptions of and experiences from work life under the headings of:

- Job satisfaction and perceived discrimination at work,
- Importance of French degrees and diplomas, and
- Relationship with colleagues.

(a) Job Satisfaction and Perceived Discrimination at Work

Apparently at least a couple of immigrants (#4, 12) were not particularly happy in their jobs. For example, the 45 years old accountant of a British company Krishnavenu (#12) had to say, "Before you come to a foreign land you have dreams but after you are there you are struck by the reality and the only possibility is compromise." Krishnavenu's personal opinion was that a decent guy with marginal intelligence should not choose a life like this. This man experienced little job satisfaction followed by a nagging feeling that by working hard one could have made it here or even in India. Unfortunately, he could come to this conclusion only after having walked the bumpy path to 'economic independence' in a foreign country. Moreover, the desired economic independence for this man did not come without a price. The cost included coming to join his wife's home in France contrary to what usually happened in India, leaving behind his near and dear ones and not being able to find a lot of job satisfaction. Further in his opinion, non-French could be paid marginally lesser than the French (as this was sometimes decided at the concerned company's policy level) but this could be perceived as the reason for feeling exploited by the non-French.

Krishnavenu believed that French society was not totally non-hierarchical. People maintained differences in their status and this seemed to be true in medium size companies. People preferred to do their own jobs and did not interfere with others' businesses. There was a sense of compartmentalization, people kept to themselves and there was less of human interaction. He added, "We can live as Indians but cannot perhaps be treated like French. If you have a French visa that is not enough reason for a rapport. In the office there is nothing to relate at the personal level."

Krishnavenu was somewhat bitter about all this and said that there were no alternatives but to accept what you have. However, he realized that India could have been bad too and for sure the physical

working environment was good in France.

The Indian Embassy staff Hariharan Iyer (# 20) when asked whether he experienced job satisfaction, quipped "not really." He explained that job satisfaction was affected because "every three years the system changes at the Embassy and each new management has different expectations and different way of functioning." Similarly, Aparna Mahadevan (# 17) another office staff of the Indian Embassy who had worked for a fairly long period of time in this job and was earning enough, did not experience much job satisfaction. She admitted though, that job facilities were good in France in general and some companies offered a lot of fringe benefits to its employees.

Suneet Siddharth (# 5), the thirty-one years old male MBA who worked for UNESCO, considered UNESCO's job as nice as it was open to all the nationals. Though Suneet had some good experiences, he did not find his present job 100 per cent satisfying or "stimulating" enough but still "OK". Further, jobs were not easily available to the non-French persons and it was difficult for others to rise to the top. He observed that if you were perceived as "threatening" somehow by the people of the dominant group, (especially at the higher levels) then you could have difficulty.

The only psychoanalyst and psychiatrist in the present sample Dr. Preetpal Rajhans (# 24) was earning enough but was worried about his future. Since he started late, his security benefits were not going to be the best ones. He explained that to get the maximum benefit of the social security system in France one has to begin working as soon as 18 years of age.

Narratives suggesting Discrimination at Work

Aniket Pundit a company employee (# 21) pointed out that foreigners normally cannot reach the highest positions in offices

or jobs in European countries. Moreover, non-European Union member countries were not likely to get employment easily in France. Similarly, Suneet (# 5) had observed, "In all over Europe it is difficult for people from other cultures to rise and be in high and very responsible positions... in France for example, one cannot get ahead of the French nationals. There might be very few exceptional cases in Europe when the non-dominant group's persons were placed at higher positions." On the contrary, mechanical engineer Mr. Sharma (#14) working in a multinational company observed that French were open to "racial integration" while racial intermixing was not popular in the United Kingdom or for that matter in Italy or in Germany.

Pradeep (# 4) a 45 years old male came to France in the year 1975 and worked in the French Government's job. He was a special case in the sense that he felt particularly unhappy in his present job situation. His suggested adaptive strategy was marginalization and it appeared to be linked to his job experiences, feeling of despair grounded in the observation that foreigners cannot reach the top, and his failure to be in the profession of his choice. Pradeep said, "You may be required to give up your values and become French. If you can ask questions, if you do not feel inferior than this may not be acceptable." There was something about Pradeep's general elusiveness and unwillingness to elaborate what he said and perhaps, one could see that there was fear of being punished (as a member of the non-dominant group) for being honest and vocal.

Pradeep observed that at the lower levels in the office you could get along well with the other colleagues and there was no problem. At the higher levels, however, there could be discrimination. He believed that being a person from another culture created hurdles for reaching the top positions in a job and perceived this as some form of discrimination against the outsiders. He nursed some hard feelings and observed, "French want to be in the dominating position, and even if you have the qualification and competence they would like to put you dowr."

The experiences of a small businessman Chiman Shah (# 8)

gave some vivid account of the discrimination experienced by a self-employed petty businessman due to the colour of his skin. However, this was the lone case which perhaps cannot be generalized. Chiman Shah was a 50 years old male who earned his living by raising a stall at the local 'marche' for selling small plastic articles and goods, toys and accessories used by women. He generally dealt with Chinese traders for buying his goods in whole sale and his relationship with the Chinese traders was more contractual but mutually respectful. Chiman Shah had limited contact with French people but his impression was that French first bought things from white skinned (French) businessman.

He observed, "Sometimes they would not like to acknowledge your presence, respond to you or talk to you." The white customers and shopkeepers would push his cart with foot which he found very disrespectful. He added that occasionally he got very angry with the French and told them that they were "inhuman devils". He reiterated, "French are not helpful to the outsiders and reserved their human touch for their own people. They do not like coloured skin people and in general maintained distance." Nevertheless, for practical reasons Chiman Shah wanted to choose France if he had to select a country to come back to.

A middle aged businessman Mr. Pankaj Patel (#15) believed that if people perceived racism it was perhaps, at the higher levels. That is, you or your children may not be able to get the highest positions in the jobs and the French would have this privilege. At the higher administrative levels you might be discriminated but not openly or in general. Mr. Patel wanted to say that if there was racism in France it was not obvious but quite "subtle". Vasundhara (#7) a 39 years old non-working female shared something from her husband's experience at his job. Her husband worked with French people and she tried to give vent to his feelings by saying, "French people always kept a distance. They could make you feel like a stranger. They are not racist people but could make you feel small. They are subtle in their ways to suggest their racist attitude". At times her husband was in conflict with his co-workers or seniors.

On the other hand, there was belief in equality in this society in the sense that one could reach one's seniors or boss and discuss things with him/her. However, people will not go out of way to help you.

Mr. Rituraj Sharma (# 14) a well placed mechanical engineer employed in a multinational company observed that French were open to "racial integration". Racial intermixing was not popular in United Kingdom or for that matter in Italy. In France, however, there was evidence for marriages between blacks and whites. There was racism in Germany too, however, one cannot deny a subtle undercurrent of racism in France but there was some mixing as well. Language student Rani felt that (# 3) French do keep a distance from people of other cultures or groups.

(b) Importance of French Degrees and Diplomas

According to middle aged successful aeronautical engineer Mr. Diwakar Saxena (#10), the prospective job seeker's original degree was not treated at par with the French degree. He observed, "The French degree gets more respect. It was not like in England or in the USA where qualifications from Anglo-Saxon countries may be treated as equal". Mr. Saxena also sensed some competition between different educational institutions and alumni groups who helped their own members to study and speak exactly like them. Krishnavenu (#12) had argued too that, "Knowing French language was not enough and one had to be an expert in the language. To be recognized as competent, you have to have French degree and diploma. You may be very capable but that does not help without having French degree and qualifications. Here Anglo-Saxon people could have difficulty. Integration was faster in UK or in the USA than what we find in France."

Another case in point was Dr. Rajhans (#24) who had the MBBS degree but his basic degree was not recognised and he had to get the necessary qualifications again in England and France. This was the greatest hurdle faced by him and due to this he started

off late in his profession. He believed that this made his integration more difficult and also delayed his professional success.

(c) Relationship with Colleagues

It would not be fair to conclude that all the respondents experienced discrimination or felt the absence of cordial relationship at their work place. In fact, it was frequently mentioned that the French colleagues, seniors and juniors did not maintain distance from their non-French colleagues (# 5, 9 and 10). Dr. Preetpal (# 24) occasionally met colleagues from the same profession in conferences and found them nice. The two members of the Indian Embassy Hariharan Iyer (# 20) and Aparna Mahadevan (# 17) felt that their French counterparts at the Embassy liked Indian colleagues and were friendly and helpful. Roshni (# 16) a research assistant shared similar feelings and Aditi (# 13) a school teacher, found her colleagues nice, friendly and cordial. Udayan Yesudas (# 6) a young male Carnatic music singer found his colleagues and team mates emotionally supportive. He had to say, "At times I was broken, depressed, but they were my strength. They were curious and wanted to know how I felt." He came across important persons at the concerts from the fields of judiciary, labour, films, literature and painting, etc. but did not find them "keeping distance" from him.

For 30 years old Parveen Sultana (# 19) a part-time school teacher, her two male colleagues were good, helpful and treated her well. Parveen could communicate with them and they did not mind sharing information with her. Sanyukta Panda (# 23), 56 years old female baby sitter had many good words to say for her French employers. She had arrived in France in the year 1980 and the French couple who employed her as a baby sitter trusted her well. Her employer worked as Air-France crew and occasionally had to leave their children with her for a day or two. In that case, Sanyukta stayed at their home and even cooked simple Indian food (khichari) for the kids and tried to speak in Bangla with them. On the other hand, the kids loved her too. Sanyukta's relationship with her employer's family had grown into an intimate one over

time and she felt close to her employer's family. Businessman Mr. Pankaj Patel (# 15) employed French people for running his shop and found them helpful, cordial and nice.

Mr. Diwakar (# 10), however, wanted to point out that since hierarchy was prominent in France, therefore, French expected homogeneity with little apprehension. Suneet (# 5) was in UNESCO's job and the nature of his job did not give much scope for maintaining distance. Nevertheless, Suneet felt that one come across some "strong personalities". In company employee Aniket Pundit's (# 21) opinion, "You cannot put pressure on them (i.e., colleagues). You have to be careful about what you say. Labour laws were strict in France." Responding to the question 'whether co-workers and seniors maintained distance,' Aniket had to say that "distance depends, and it is up to you. I can go out to them. It could be different from person to person. If I want to talk to somebody I can." Similarly, Vineet a young job trainee found his French colleagues helpful and in fact more helpful and cordial than the Indian co-workers. He added, however, that good coworker relationship also depended on the person concerned and could differ from person to person.

Jasvinder Singh (# 2) a 39 years old male chef of an Indian restaurant had arrived in Paris in 1983. Having moved little among the French group his observations were limited. Nevertheless, he had to say, "French people are not sacrificing, and they keep work relationship this, however, is good in the sense that you do not feel the pressure on you from their side (bojh nahi parta). In sum, French are not involved in you."

4. Some Suggestions for Developing Understanding and better Intercultural Relations

(a) Building on the Positive Perceptions

Efforts towards developing positive intercultural relations must begin by building on the positive perceptions of the respective cultural groups. For example, in the narratives barring a few exceptions it was expressed that French people liked Indians, were interested in them and did not perceive them as threatening. Similarly, India was perceived as a culturally strong country (due to its performing arts, food, clothes and fashion) and despite the impression that the French were apparently less friendly people they were seen as dependable and trustworthy and colleagues at work place cordial and accepting. It is argued that positive impressions of the host country and its people often help in locating the ground for developing good relations and bonds of friendship and must be focused upon.

Furthermore, the impression of the French society as "genuinely freedom loving", secular, non-religious and intellectual, opens up a whole vista for creative ideas and projects (Indo-French) and experimenting with the possibilities of developing better intercultural ties. Many Indian performing artists, designers and technical experts, who had made future and fortune in France for themselves individually, had an advantage over others for doing much towards strengthening of the Indo-French ties by introducing their country of origin powerfully to the culture sensitive French

society.

Secondly, a genuinely appreciative stance for the striking qualities of the French character can always be taken by the ethnic groups as an inspiration for developing strong nationalist feelings, pride in one's culture and heritage and love for the country of origin instead of interpreting the seemingly 'Frencho-centric' ways of the host for categorizing them as unfriendly, closed and snob people. The unique quality of the French in maintaining a balance between the old and the new could be another point for learning and identification. France was perceived as a modern, successful country with huge successes in the fields of technology and business to name only two. The host culture's success story could be used as inspiration and translated into collaborative efforts by the Indian ethnic groups towards lasting international and intercultural relationships.

(b) Getting above One's Own Needs and Values for a Better Understanding of the Host Group

It may be argued that the immigrants' perception was not always fair but nevertheless true because it was grounded in their acculturative experiences. However, for a fair inter-cultural understanding it seems important that both the groups were willing to keep aside their own cultural standards for perceiving and evaluating the other culture and its people. Indians are known to be relationship oriented people; having strong social and affiliation needs (J. B. P. Sinha & Verma, 1987; Verma, 1992b). They prefer to seek help and social support from others, have concern for others' evaluation and would like to utilize interpersonal contacts. Consequently, they wish to relate with others at a personal level. However, they must realize that this may not be the 'need' or the 'cultural preference' of the host group and, therefore, eagerness towards making contact with the host group or spontaneous moves towards building friendship may not be reciprocated. It may be said that a large group of relationship oriented Indians were likely to misunderstand the reserve, formal, non-hypocritical, strongly nationalist, and straight forward attitude and expressions of the French people as unwelcoming, threatening, closed and unfriendly towards the non-French groups. Nevertheless, it is better to rely and initiate efforts for better intercultural relations with the belief that French were interested in Indians and remember that for knowing the French closely it was important to take the first step and learn their language.

(c) Realizing the Importance of the Time Factor for Better Understanding of the Host Group

Observations suggested that the time factor was important for a better understanding of the host culture and the immigrant groups need to realize this. Having long and intense experience of living in the host culture facilitated the development of sensitivity and competence to examine one's own acculturation experiences through the right and relevant perspective. This would help in realizing that the French life style was different than one's own in many respects but that did not make it wrong or deplorable. The narratives seemed to impress that the immigrants, who had lived in France for long, had developed the capability of looking beyond the manifest French ways and preferences. They could see that French people were not hypocrites or artificial people, but were genuine and straightforward; who did not pretend, and opened up only after the other person took the initiative to move towards them.

In general, the Indian immigrants carried an impression that French people were indifferent and unfriendly towards them. This impression too could undergo change and revision with the passage of time. Krishna who had lived in France since the late 60s had to say, "to integrate well, you have to have certain assets so that the French become willing to come to you...the prerequisite is to have a similar standard of living more or less at par with the French. People like to move in if you have that. Consequently, if you are receptive and begin to take their values, and entertain them, they come and try to mix with you".

(d) Realizing the Diversity in the Host Group

One group of respondents wanted to make a distinction between French people who were rich, snobs, lived in exclusive areas of Paris, belonged to a special age group, and were not ready to integrate with the outsiders, and those, who lived in the outskirts of Paris (or were non-Parisians), and had been exposed to other cultures. The latter group was perceived as willing to learn about other cultures and cultural groups and seemed to be more open to the outsiders. The realization that some French group of people are likely to hold relatively extreme negative attitudes and beliefs towards the minority groups due to their own whims and reasons (which should not be generalized) might help in becoming more tolerant towards such view points and opinions.

(e) Host Group need to put a Check on its Discriminatory Attitude and Practices

Finally, the subtle and sometimes obvious experiences of discrimination at work place could play a prominent role in the sustenance of hard feelings towards the French employers and colleagues. This issue has to be attended and dealt with caution and sensitivity when thinking of developing better intercultural relations. Certain discriminatory attitudes and beliefs showing disregard for human dignity (especially as suggested by the petty businessman) have to be contained because they can close doors that open in the direction of better inter-cultural ties. Here the major responsibility lies with the dominant cultural group. And lastly, if the host group leave some space for developing affinity, and possibilities for emotional bonds even in formal relations, things can improve for better and get the ball rolling.

CONCLUSION

The Indian immigrants perceived a number of positive qualities in the French system along with certain admirable characteristic in the French people. The respondents invariably agreed that French system functioned very well and was more or less free of corruption. France had excellent social security system while the "genuine moral freedom" of the French society was praiseworthy. Strong nationalist feelings, and the pride that French people took in their culture and heritage, were perceived as the most remarkable features in the French character. French were perceived as intelligent, original and creative people with fine taste and good aesthetic sense. Their being possessive about the French language was justified as expression of their strong nationalist feelings and passion for preserving their cultural heritage. French culture was exemplary for maintaining a unique balance between the old and the new. Almost every one agreed that France was a modern, successful, technologically savvy country and there were huge achievements in different spheres of French and a fair number of respondents found the French as

dependable and trustworthy people.

Regarding the hurdles in adaptation, the number one hurdle was stated as "not knowing the French language". Further, besides being perceived as culturally conscious, aesthetically oriented, nationalists and straight forward, Parisians were perceived as closed people. Some believed that there was subtle discrimination against outsiders and the non-French could not reach the top positions in jobs. Suggestions for improving intercultural relations include: (a) building upon the positive impressions and perceptions held about the host group; (b) going beyond one's own culture specific needs and values for perceiving the host culture and its people in a balanced way; (c) realizing that time was needed to develop a desired level of sensitivity and competence for understanding the host's ways and preferences; (d) having tolerance for the extreme views held against the ethnic groups by some segments of the host population; and (e) sincere and definite efforts to be made by the host group who ought to give up being unduly insensitive, unreasonable or unfair towards the ethnic minority groups.

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