

Impressions from afar

By Ram Nandan P. Singh

I was busy securing my passport and necessary paraphernalia for my trip to the United States. What clothes I would need, gifts I needed to buy, people I would have to visit before I left—these and lots of other ideas occupied my mind. As the final days approached I went to my village home. The old, the young—most of whom had not even visited a big town—thronged around me. I could see excitement written on their faces. Going to the United States was to them like going to the moon. They had vague ideas of how great, wealthy and fascinating this country is. America was located exactly on the other side of the globe. The elders warned me, "Do not get lost with the *mem sahebs* (the white ladies)."

I touched my father's feet in great reverence. Mother was visibly moved. I could see tears trickling down her eyes. Finally she said, "Go well, do well and return well." The Air India plane roared up into the air, with my mind heavily occupied with thoughts of those behind and uncertainty of events ahead. The plane touched Bombay and hours later I was quite a way through my journey to the fabulous United States.

On the plane, I recollected some of the hasty orientations given by the American personnel in India. The country with its great ideals of democracy, free enterprise, and great technological advances. The colleges in the U.S.A., I was told, were like banks "where you can cash your earned credits" just like you cash your money. This seemed very pleasant, for in India if the continuity in your college work was broken or the institution changed, that meant wastage of the entire effort. I was also told that American women had more freedom; "the hands that rock the cradle rule the United States."

Finally, as I landed at the New York Air Terminal, I saw the land was all white (I had never seen a snowfall before). Greeted by pretty looking girls who wore badges labeled "American Friends for Foreign Students," I passed through the exhausting ordeal of the customs officials and was taken to a

hotel. I looked around the hotel room, which was automatically heated. In London even in good hotels you have to drop a coin to get an hour or so of heating. But food was not served in the hotel.

I went around to see the U.N. and the Empire State Building. What fascinated me most during my stay was this inscription on a wall opposite the United Nations Building: "They shall beat their swords into plough shares and spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not raise swords against nations and they shall not know of war any more."

As I mixed with fellow foreign students, I felt comfortable. After all, they had the same problems as I had—the homesickness, the sandwich sickness and the cold sickness.

As days passed, the spectacular phase slowly came to an end, as I attended classes, visited stores and met people. Here everything was in a sort of hurry, people were busy. Courses were condensed to finish within a semester, and added to all these was the system of "pop quizzes" and term papers. I must, however, add that the Student Union was so attractive with television, magazines and easy chairs.

I went into a store and to my utter surprise, the gate opened automatically and closed by itself. Very much excited I asked an American friend as to what this magic could have been. He told me this worked on the principle of photo-electric cells. There were two lights on each side of the gate and, as I passed, explained my friend, I broke the light beams and so the circuit was broken and thus the gate opened. I immediately wrote to my younger brother, then a junior in a science college, about it and how it worked.

In and out of class I met curious and smiling young Americans. They were all very eager to know. It is a truism that Americans have developed a fine sense of humor, actually have developed it as a national character. This, it seems to me, helps them in easing the tension and avoiding conflicts. Surely a lesson for others to learn.



I would suggest that foreign students, instead of being shy and withdrawn, should actively associate with the American boys and girls and treat them with a smile and warmth.—Mahn Je Kim, Korea; Ph.D. candidate in economics.



Since I came to this country I became an ardent fan of major league baseball games and football. Last year I was one of the loyal fans of Mizzou football team, though I was deeply hurt when they lost a game to K. U.—Oscar L. Cross, Mexico.

The people of Columbia opened their doors for foreign students (have also opened their closet doors when needed). In many of these situations one gets a great boosting of his or her ego. One feels wanted and even honored. How strange it looks, but people wearing different clothes, speaking different languages and professing different creeds respond with equal friendliness and strive for noble ideas with equal force. In this and in many other ways I found a familiar and uniform pattern in the adjustment process of a foreign student (I still like this name and think it is very appropriate, at least for administrative purposes). I feel the University of Missouri truly represents a miniature world laboratory.

I strongly believe that considerable progress has been made in breaking up educational and cultural barriers and, with the exceptions of a few maladjusted individuals, the international exchange has functioned very well. Generally speaking, most of the students do honest labor and try their best to learn the skills and knowledge given them by the host country. However, there are a great deal of lighter sidelights. One, for instance, was when I overheard a foreign student, a girl, complain the other day: "People are always asking me 'Is Argentina the capital of Brazil, or Brazil the capital of Argentina?'"

As I prepare to leave, several ideas come to mind. Someone had rightly said, "If you stay at a new place longer than a year you are used to it." The lovely familiar campus surroundings, even small pebbles, were so familiar and friendly. The teachers, the friends were all so cordial; it seems terrible to leave them. Then also the uncertainty of home environment, the surprise of newcomers, the changed expectations of friends (due to my sojourn abroad) and the fact that even children in my family and others would have grown up—these create tensions in the mind. What will it be like to be back home after a couple of years in the United States? Almost everything would have changed a lot. But I have to be prepared for the change.



I have been in this country for about three years. Since I came from a British colony (Fiji Islands) I did not encounter any difficulty in language. However, when I first came to Missouri, one of the girls asked me to have a "date;" I was so much confused, that I said it was the 12th of September. Another incident, after having a cup of coffee in a cafe, I paid the cashier, who said "Thank you, come back." Then I returned back, astonished, only to learn that this was an American gesture.—Shiv Shanker, Fiji Islands (Br.)



One thing that impressed me in America is the ability of the American women in doing efficient and rather hard work, in their homes, offices, also in the other fields. Still they appear to enjoy their life well. The Americans in general respect the dignity of labor. I have seen here a minister of the church who did not hesitate to take up a janitor's job. Certainly this is a lesson to the people of my country.—Mrs. Amminy Chaco, India.



It is suggested that the American people should encourage more students from abroad, especially from the Far East and the Middle East, to come and further their education. I think this is the only approach toward peace and understanding.—Joseph G. Uy, Manila, Philippines (Department of Physics).



Ram Nandan P. Singh, India, the author of the foregoing article, is a candidate for a doctor's degree in rural sociology at the University.

The average American individual is very nice and inquisitive. When I came here the difficult job was to adapt to food without spices, absence of rice and, of course, to the language. Let me add however, people often ask me, "Is Arab the same as Israel?"—Hashim A. Dabbas, Amman, Jordan; Ph.D. candidate in political science.

