

Liberal, Liminal and Lost: India's First Diplomats and the Narrative of Foreign Policy

Abstract

Indian historiography has largely overlooked the contribution of Indian Liberals in the pre-independence era. It is worse in Indian diplomatic history where studies on pre-independence are few and far between. Responding to this double excision, this article traces the emergence of a new Indian narrative of foreign policy around the issues of equality and justice in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. Anchoring their argumentativeness in diplomatic finesse, Indian Liberals such as Satyendra Prasanno Sinha, VS Srinivasa Sastri and Tej Bahadur Sapru relentlessly campaigned for racial equality and predominance of the rights of people over the rights of states at the Imperial Conferences. In articulation of these views, South Africa, a country where ideas about the status of Indians and Indian civilisation were most contested, emerged as the singular foreign policy 'other' around which India's foreign policy narrative was constructed.

Keywords: Indian historiography, foreign policy, Jan Smuts, Indian diplomats, Liberals

Introduction

Indian history, the historian Ramachandra Guha complains in his magisterial *India after Gandhi*, stops at independence.¹ For students of diplomatic history in India, this is a problem in reverse. With Jawaharlal Nehru being both the author and the authority, diplomatic history in India begins with independence.² This notion of the absence of diplomatic history in pre-independence India, to implant our concerns on Guha's, not only excises the sterling role of some diplomats but also misplaces the origins and influences of Indian diplomacy. In calling some of the protagonists of this tale (that we will soon meet) 'India's First Diplomats', I attempt to open up the field of history in Indian diplomatic studies. This claim of being 'the first' is not necessarily a claim for the origins to arrogantly seal the debate. On the contrary, it is an attempt to reset the understandings of the periods and protagonists of Indian diplomatic history and by setting it up in a provocative fashion invite interpretations that wrestle for alternative beginnings.

The premise of the article is the following: modern India's diplomatic history predates independence by at least three decades. India entered the emerging international system at the end of the First World War as a 'quasi-international' actor, via the British Commonwealth.³ While Britain still dominated Indian foreign policy thinking, the demands for indigenising foreign policy from India (and the British anxiety to make the Indian representations look 'authentic') helped insert some Indian faces into British India's diplomatic delegations. Indian contingents now invariably included a representative of the Princely States and another member chosen from a group of Indian Liberals, who occupied the liminal space between the government and the nationalists. Structurally constrained by their position within the British Empire and unable to agree with the extreme agentic demands of the Indian nationalists, the Liberals exercised their agency in ingenious ways from this position of liminality. In doing so, they not only redefined the foreign policy of British India but also set its agenda on important matters, such as the question of overseas Indians. As the prime articulators of India's national viewpoint at the international level, these Liberals engineered a new narrative of Indian foreign policy which emphasized racial equality, justice and predominance of the rights of people over the rights of states - a legacy that was continued, at least, in the initial years of post-independence Indian foreign policy.

In the pages that follow, I will narrate how Satyendra Prasanno Sinha (1863-1928), Valangaiman Sankaranarayana Srinivasa Sastri (1869-1946) and Tej Bahadur Sapru (1875-1949) constructed a new moral discourse of Indian foreign policy. Significantly, they did this by exposing the ambivalent moralism of General Jan Smuts, arguably one of the most eminent figures in the history of the Empire. But before we go on to tell this story, let us briefly discuss the alliteration in my title - Liberal, Liminal and Lost.

Why have the liminal voices of the liberals been lost?

The excision of the narratives of the colonial era from Indian diplomatic history is unjustifiable. Yet, an exercise in shadow boxing would perhaps question the 'Indian' element in the colonial narrative of foreign policy. Further, it would seem disingenuous to trace the colonial antecedents of Nehruvian foreign policy, when Nehru did indeed give a decidedly anti-colonial thrust to his

foreign policy. However, the binaries that the former arguments seeks to reinforce (Indian – British; colonial – anti-colonial) may not serve as helpful organizing categories, as much of what happened between the two world wars in Indian foreign policy lay between and betwixt these categories. Likewise, by depriving Nehru’s foreign policy of its context and its legacy, we may actually be doing a disservice to him. By singularly identifying him as the fount of Indian foreign policy, Nehru is oftentimes blamed for all the problems besetting it, just as he receives accolades from other quarters.⁴

The reluctance of scholars to engage with pre-independence foreign policy narratives has meant that our sources for British India’s foreign policy are the historians of the Empire, who expectedly come with Eurocentric lenses. In surveying this period, scholars such as Robert Blyth and Thomas Metcalf have focused on pre-First World War period.⁵ For them, post-war India became inward looking with little agency in foreign policy decision making. Up until the War, India acted as a sub-imperial node within the Empire from where much of the eastern part of the Empire was controlled. Among other things, the Great War brought home the realisation in England that conflicts could no more be localised. Consequently, they argue, decision-making on foreign policy was centralised to Whitehall. The rise of a strong nationalist movement in India from 1919 onwards also contributed to India’s inward turn.

Such Britain-centric views have precluded these historians from noticing another significant trend which developed in the post-war period. Alongside strong demands for some form of Home Rule, Indians also demanded a strong imprint in defining foreign policy of the colonial state. The most important foreign policy issue from the Indian perspective was the treatment of Indians overseas, especially within the Empire. Intertwined with questions about national identity and national pride, this became the most crucial foreign policy issue on which Indians not only demanded a voice but also defined India’s response. As India gained a ‘quasi-international’ status post-WWI, Indians used this opportunity to raise issues about racial equality and advanced strong arguments about the rights of individuals against the rights of states in international politics. In significant ways, they created a foundation on which Nehru’s foreign policy was able to build upon. Independent India’s first and most spectacular post-independence foreign policy success – isolation of South Africa at the UN, which as Manu Bhagwan⁶ has

argued contributed immensely towards the adoption of the Declaration of Human Rights – drew on years of long and acrimonious debates Indians had already had with South Africans on international platforms. In fact, General Smuts – cornered as he was by Indian diplomacy in the late 1940s, exposing his *Janus*-faced internationalism – may only have felt a sense of déjà vu. He had faced a similar onslaught in the Imperial Conferences just after the First World War from the Indian Liberals. As India's first diplomats, the Indian Liberals in subtle yet profound ways engineered a new foreign policy discourse helping pre-figure, what later became, the basic principles of Indian foreign policy. Placed in a liminal space between the colonial and the anti-colonial, the Liberals, often derided as advertising agents of the British by the nationalists⁷, had to maneuver and open up a space for dialogue and minimise confrontation between the nationalists and the British. With regard to the question of Indians overseas, they provided the common ground from which both the colonial and the anti-colonial responses could be harmonised. Unfortunately, their contributions have not been recognised.

Indian historiography has generally been unkind to the Liberals. Being somewhat antithetical of both the leftist and the nationalist traditions of historic writing in India, the Liberals post-Gokhale have found relatively little mention in the anti-colonial narrative. After the arrival of Gandhi on the national scene, the Liberals were considered 'a body of sycophants and self-seekers'.⁸ Preferring graduated constitutional reforms over, what were deemed, more revolutionary Gandhian methods for India's emancipation, they have been associated with the appeasement of colonialism in post-independence history writing.⁹ Ironically, until about 1919 Gandhi too was an ardent supporter to the Empire, something that he valued even more than non-violence. As late as 1918, he had chosen to depart from his life-long insistence on non-violence in favour of Indians arming themselves in the cause of the Empire. In a public manifesto in 1918, he admonished the British for keeping India without arms and making Indians effeminate. Nevertheless, as a citizen of the Empire, he said, 'I have faith in the virtues of the English nation, and that is why I advise you to join the Army. I know the English have done great harm to India, but I believe it to be beneficial to live with that nation. Comparing vices and virtues, I find that the virtues are great'.¹⁰ Keeping Gandhi's own views in mind, it is quite disconcerting that national historiography has chosen to write very little about the Indian Liberals. For leftist

historians, the Liberals were bourgeoisie intellectuals who perpetuated both class and colonial rule, and consequently they have little to offer on the Liberals.

Reaching the Civilisational Pedestal

The First World War crystallised the ideas of nationhood unlike any other previous event in world history. India also saw emergence of a new spirit of national consciousness as the war in Europe fuelled the nostalgia for an Indian nation. The Indian contribution of the war effort had convinced Indian nationalists that the country had finally proved its worth as a nation. At the end of the War, India was the second biggest contributor to it. In the four years between 1914 and 1918, India went on to contribute 552,000 combatants, 391,000 non-combatants and incurred 106,594 casualties. Apart from this, India also contributed about 1,750,000 animals. The total expenditure incurred by the Indian government on account of war was £24,700,000 and total cash contributions from India (rulers, princes, private bodies, and people) were £2,524,500.¹¹ These great contributions were acknowledged even in Britain. As early as November 1914, just a few months into the War, Sir Charles Roberts, speaking on behalf of the Secretary of State for India, asserted in the House of Commons that India should ‘occupy a place in our free Empire worthy alike of her ancient civilisation and thought of the valour of her fighting races and of the patriotism of her sons’. Continuing further, he said, ‘She now claims to be not a mere dependent of, but partner in, the Empire’.¹²

The acknowledgement of India’s nationhood was also important for Indian nationalists for another reason. The nation, as it was understood in Europe, was the highest manifestation of colonially constructed notions of masculinity. In Charles Tilly’s famous dictum ‘war made the state and the state made war’, however, it was also more than that.¹³ War is more than a functional necessity for the idea of a nation. In the lore of nationhood, great nations become so only after going through their rites of circumcision in war, and coming out bloodied but manly on the other side. Each nation has tales of war, valour and bravery at the centre of its own imagination. For India, this was of particular importance because it had been deprived of its own tales of bravery by its construction as feminine by British colonialism.¹⁴

World War I was thus India’s moment of reclamation of her masculinity, nationhood and civilisation. As we have pointed out, the vitality of this moment could be gauged from the fact

that even Mahatma Gandhi chose to depart from his life-long insistence on non-violence in favour of Indians arming themselves for the imperial cause. More than a decade earlier, Indian forces had been forced to see the conflict from the sidelines as non-combatants during the Boer War. This was in contrast to other Imperial Wars such as in Egypt and Sudan where Indian soldiers had fought. In a war where the bond of 'the Union with the Colonies was sealed with blood' (given that Australian, New Zealand and Canadian troops participated from the British side), the Indian blood had been deemed too polluted for a 'white man's war'. Deprived of the opportunity to disprove their effeminacy to the whites during the Boer War, the Indians had now fought in the First World War with and against European soldiers and done remarkably well, so much so that General Smuts himself had lauded the courage of the Indian troops under him that fought against the Germans.¹⁵ Encouraged by this, in the Imperial Legislative Assembly in India, some Indian members felt that India had finally stepped up to the pedestal of nationhood with some vengeance.

Consequently, in September 1915, Mohammad Shafi, who later became a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, introduced a resolution for separate representation of India in the Imperial Conferences.¹⁶ The resolution received enthusiastic support. Comparing the salience of India with other Dominions, Asad Ali argued that India generated more than three and a half times the revenue of Canada, four times that of Australia, four and a half times that of South Africa and more than seven times the revenue generated by New Zealand.¹⁷ Surendranath Banerjea, later the founder of National Liberal Federation of India, arguing that the Empire could no more disregard India's claim for representation, demanded that the representatives be Indian.¹⁸ Summing up India's claims, one member M.B. Dadbhoy asked: 'Will the Imperial Government... be reluctant to remove once and for all our badge of inferiority and to raise us in the scale of nations?'¹⁹ The argument was unmistakably strong and heeded to by London.

Consequently, in the next gathering of the members of the Empire in 1917, India was invited to participate as equal member. The three member delegation constituted, for the first time, two Indians: Sir Satyendra Sinha and the Maharaja of Bikaner. Furthermore, this Imperial War Conference²⁰ passed a resolution necessitating steps to secure the assent of various governments so that India should be fully represented at all Imperial Conferences.²¹ While acknowledging the British Dominions as 'autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth',

the Conference also recognised India, at the strong insistence of Sinha, as ‘an important part of the same’.²² Sinha was also able to insert India’s name in the line which read ‘...recognise the right of the Dominions and India to an adequate view in foreign policy and foreign relations.’²³ With these additions, India’s status as a quasi-international actor were established and it was from there on able to participate as a full member in the Imperial Conferences, Paris Peace Conference, League of nations and all other international organisations.

This recognition however came with the begrudged acknowledgement that these Conferences were, in the words of the historian Mark Mazower, ‘at once a product of racial anxiety and national prestige ... internationalism as White pride’.²⁴ He claims that Britain and the white Dominions did not fear the threat from Germany so much as ‘the restless masses of Asia and Africa whose sheer numbers made them question their power to civilise the world’.²⁵ India’s entry as a partner into this enterprise seemed an attempt to douse the fire of nationalism that was coming of age at the time. However, it was unlikely that the white members would in any way allow the Indians to alter their racial bond of whiteness and privilege. It was as if the white Dominions were expecting India to act like an ornamental appendage to the Commonwealth. For Indian representatives, however, there was no imperial issue more important than the question of racial relations with regard to the treatment of Indians overseas, especially in South Africa. Hence, in as much Indian diplomats wanted to raise the issue of racial treatment of Indians in the Dominions, they faced a monumental task of making the deaf hear.

Helpfully, however, understandings of race and civilization were being somewhat redefined during this period. While for most part of the nineteenth century, race and civilisation were intertwined categories. Rise of Japan in the late nineteenth century and its impressive victory over Russia in 1905, however, raised debates about whether, what were deemed, racially inferior people could be civilisationally advanced. Indeed, the first Universal Races Congress in 1911 had asked its participants to define the conceptions of race and civilisation and asked their attitude towards the suggestion that ‘so far at least as intellectual and moral aptitudes are concerned, we ought to speak of civilisations where we now speak of races?’²⁶

The Japanese victory, WEB Du Bois rejoiced, had broken ‘the foolish magic of the word ‘white’’.²⁷ For him and many others, it had sparked a movement of coloured solidarity. These

celebrations were certainly premature. The Japanese, while emphasising their civilizational parity with the West, also simultaneously stressed on their difference from other supposedly inferior coloured races.²⁸ Similarly, Indian national leaders – including Gandhi – while critical of racial hierarchy employed by the Europeans against Indians, were more than eager to differentiate between Indians and Africans on the scale of civilization. Hence, the Japanese, Indians (and also the Chinese) employed the category of civilisation, rather than race, to denote hierarchy. By engineering this divorce between race and civilization, they hoped to achieve parity with Europe while keeping Africans at the bottom of the hierarchy.

The white nations, it seemed, were also willing to acknowledge this distinction between race and civilisation, at least in the sphere of the more ethical international politics as against domestic politics. Gerrit W. Long argues that by the first decade of the twentieth century, ‘standard of civilisation’ took an explicitly juridical character where civilised, semi-civilised and uncivilized states were legally defined.²⁹ Japan – and later India and China – were included in the concert of civilized powers. Race was reduced to being a matter of domestic politics while civilisation was used as a category of international exclusion. Consequently, while the diplomats of countries like Japan, India and China were admitted to international gatherings as ‘civilised’ equals, the same diplomats could be subjected to racial discrimination and deprived of their basic civil rights if they visited ‘white’ countries. This perverse arrangement was officially acknowledged at the Paris Peace Conference where Japan’s resolution for racial equality was turned down despite being voted in favour by a majority of 11 amongst 19.³⁰

The treatment of Indians overseas was one of the central foreign policy issues in the early twentieth century. Since its inception in 1885, the Indian National Congress had consistently taken up the issue of Indians abroad. After the War, as the country was finding a new national character, the treatment of Indians abroad became an even more important issue. How could, the argument ran, India claim to be a self-respecting nation when its people were ill-treated in other countries? Gandhi’s entry into national politics, following his South African struggles, also helped to elevate the issue in the national psyche. His close advisors like CF Andrews and later Jawaharlal Nehru argued that the treatment of Indians in the Dominions showed that there was no hope of justice for Indians within the Empire and, thus, there was a need to seek models

of independence outside of the British Empire. The loyalists to the Empire, predominantly the Indian Liberals, were faced with the task of asserting that justice could be attained within the Empire.³¹ For some time, Liberals such as Gokhale even flirted with the idea of seeking a colony for Indians in German East Africa.³² However, mostly they limited their demands to seeking justice for Indians in the dominions and colonies.³³

This was the context in which Indian diplomats first began to challenge racial discrimination against Indians within the Empire. Helped by sympathetic Englishmen like Secretary of State Edwin Montagu and Viceroys Chelmsford and Reading, Indian diplomats like Sinha, Sastri and Sapru relentlessly targeted the wedge between race and civilisation in order to protect the rights of Indians overseas and, in a significant way, demolish the racial argument.

Satyendra Sinha: 'No room for Indians in the Empire'

On the last day of the 1917 Imperial War Conference, Indian representative Satyendra Sinha moved a resolution calling for reciprocity between India and the Dominions with regard to the question of immigration. The Resolution was intended to address racial discrimination that Indians faced across the Empire, but more particularly it was targeted against South Africa where Indians faced most repressive racial laws. Although it was a mild resolution as it did not lay out what 'reciprocity' would mean: but the fact that the principle of reciprocity between the Dominions and India, implying a parity of rights between Indians and other citizens of the Empire, was put on table was a considerable effort. Anticipating that the Dominions would oppose a more stringent resolution, Sinha followed an approach of graduated, escalated engagement. He added a long Memorandum to the Resolution that listed the principal grievances of Indians in the Dominions. Most of these grievances were directed at South Africa. The Indian traders, he apprised the Conference, were refused trading licenses arbitrarily and soon the Indian community would 'become impoverished and be reduced to industrial helotry'. While the Indians were closer to being granted franchise in India, they were refused parliamentary franchise in South Africa and only some enjoyed municipality franchise in Natal and Cape Colony. In Transvaal, the Indians were denied the right to own fixed property and attempts were

being made to deny even the right to indirect ownership of fixed property. These and other racially discriminatory laws in South Africa, Sinha argued, were unjust for citizens of the Empire. His argument ran that Indians may be colonised in India but in other parts of the Empire they were British citizens and must be treated so because India was now equal to the other Dominions in the Empire.

Unexpectedly, Sinha received a positive response from all quarters and the Resolution was unanimously passed. However, most heartening to Sinha was the response from the person he had chosen to target, General Smuts who was in no mood to sully his image as a great visionary of the Empire. For his service to the Empire, Smuts had just been offered the chief command of Palestine (which he would reject) and his first proposals for the League of Nations had been discussed at the meeting on the previous day. In replying to Sinha, Smuts declared that the Indian problem in South Africa was not a question of race but a matter of fear of the white population.³⁴ Being a 'white population on a black continent', he asserted, the whites were always fearful of any foreign non-white influx and hence 'adopted an attitude which sometimes ... has assumed an outward form...of intolerance'.³⁵ Referring to his pact with Gandhi in 1914, he assured Sinha that a settlement had been reached with the Indians in the past and the little fear that remained against Indians would evaporate as soon as the whites were assured of no more immigration inflow.³⁶ With this conciliatory speech, Smuts reassured Sinha whose 'unbroken faith in British character, fair play and justice' had been vindicated, for the time being.³⁷

Sinha returned next year to the Imperial Conference as India's representative.³⁸ By this time, Smuts' last year promises were proving to be illusory. Indian immigration to South Africa had stopped in 1913 by a law and the percentage of Indians to Europeans in the Union was dropping, and yet there was no sign of the relaxation of racial laws against Indians. On the contrary, plans were afoot to tighten the segregation laws even further in Natal. Further, there was no attempt by any of the Dominions, South Africa in particular, to implement the reciprocity resolution. This time Sinha hoped to clearly lay out the meaning of 'reciprocity', but his attempts to make the Dominions accountable to equal civil and political rights to Indians, as granted to

other immigrants, were stifled by the Indian Office which had prefaced the meat of Sinha's resolution with an acknowledgement of the right of each Dominion to determine the composition of its population through restrictions on immigration. Nevertheless, Sinha put forward his resolution where the principle of Reciprocity implied: a) the Indian government can enact same laws governing other citizens of the British Empire as imposed on Indians in these countries; b) the rights of visit would be embodied in a passport issued by the domicile country and a visa issued by the visiting country; and c) that such rights would not extend for a temporary residency for labour and permanent settlement. The permanent Indian residents in the other countries would be allowed to bring one wife and her children.

The proposed resolution while acknowledging Reciprocity, which the Dominion governments had agreed to look into in 1917, called for the removal of the forms of disabilities which Indians faced in the Dominions. Aware that the Dominions might circle around this question by unscrupulously applying the principle of sovereignty while paying lip service to intra-Commonwealth reciprocity, Sinha made an impassioned speech to the Conference requesting the members to discuss the issue 'not in any petty huckstering spirit of reciprocity ... [or] militant animosity and retaliation but on those broad principles of justice and equality which are now more than ever the guiding principles of the British Empire'.³⁹ In presenting this Resolution, Sinha argued that the 'feeling of soreness' caused by the general discriminatory attitude of the Dominions against India has impeded the fostering of a sense of citizenship of the Empire amongst Indians. Admitting that some of the problems were due to lack of communication, he proposed installing an Indian Agent at Pretoria who could act as a conveyer belt of grievances from the Indian population to the Union government. He hoped that the 'peaceful and statesmanlike' solution offered by Smuts in 1917 could be implemented without difficulty now as there was no more continuing immigration from India.⁴⁰

The text of the Resolution, considerably neutered, was positively received by all the Dominions and it was passed. The South African representative, the Minister for Railways and Harbours, Henry Burton, praised Sinha for his 'reasonable and moderate attitude', called the Indians in South Africa 'good, law-abiding, quite citizens' and assured that it was South Africa's 'duty to see...they are treated like human beings'. Although the Indian complaints, he felt, were

‘somewhat exaggerated’, he promised to give the ‘most sympathetic consideration’ to the concerns of the Indian delegation.⁴¹

Sinha returned from the Conference considerably assured that he had gone as far as possible in pushing the Dominions, especially South Africa, towards equal treatment of Indians. Gandhi however ridiculed the Resolution, saying it was ‘like a giant telling a dwarf that the latter is free to give blow for blow’.⁴²

Gandhi’s assessment proved closer to the reality than Sinha’s. South Africa did not care if India could apply the same restrictions on South Africans as it did on Indians because there were hardly any South Africans in India. Soon after the Conference, the anti-Asiatic movement in South Africa picked up steam with the ending of the War. In March 1919, the Union Parliament appointed a Select Committee to enquire into some recent legal judgments on the property and license rights of Indians in the country. While respecting the rights of the those Indians who owned businesses and trading licenses before the Gandhi-Smuts Agreement in June 1914, the Committee ruled that the issuing of trading licenses to Indians should be stopped and the land-owning disabilities of Indians should be extended so as to bar Asians from owning companies. Thus, the South African government passed the restrictive Asiatics (Land and Trading Amendments) (Transvaal) Act in early 1919. A disappointed and furious Sinha wrote, ‘[t]o me it is clear that there is no room for Indians in the British Empire itself. If we were able to retaliate, I would prohibit by legislation all forms of intercourse with South Africa’.⁴³

In India, the Asiatics Act received considerable attention and opposition; not surprisingly there were calls for a Royal Veto. A deputation of Indian liberals, in England for discussions on constitutional reforms, met the Secretary of State, Edwin Montagu, and submitted a Memorandum opposing the South African legislation. Tej Bahadur Sapru advocated retaliatory measures against the South African government even if they were unlikely to bear significant results.⁴⁴

The British Indian government also protested these measures. Fortunately, the Viceroy, Viscount Chelmsford (whose father had commanded the British forces during the Anglo-Zulu Wars) and the Secretary of State, Edwin Montagu, were both sympathetic to Indian concerns. Montagu, in fact, felt so deeply about the issue that he took it up most vociferously at the level of

the British government. As a retaliatory measure, the Indian Government even declared that no South African company would be given mining concessions in Burma.⁴⁵ This led to a frantic exchange of cables between London, Shimla and Pretoria. In response, the South African government promised to appoint a Commission to look into the Indian question in the Union. However, the nominal head of the South African Government, Governor General Lord Buxton was convinced that this was merely a time wasting measure by his government. Sardonicly, he wrote to London that this proposed commission had postponed the 'evil day' but it was unlikely to remove the prospect of further legislation which would be 'restrictive rather than remedial in effect'.⁴⁶ Montagu's efforts succeeded in South Africa agreeing to welcome an Indian representation to the Commission. While initially the South African government reciprocated positively to the suggestion that one of the members of the delegation be Indian; but soon it turned against this idea. Ironically, it was General Smuts – seen as pro-Indian in his stance and who had now ascended to the position of Prime Minister after the sudden death of Louis Botha – who opposed this idea. And the man he stopped from visiting South Africa was the person who took on Smuts two years later at the next Imperial Conference, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri.⁴⁷ Nominating Sastri for this conference, the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, had allegedly said: 'If he (Sastri) opens his mouth, and speaks two sentences in the conference, everybody would have the surprise of their lives and listen to him with wonder'.⁴⁸

V.S. Srinivasa Sastri: 'Still hopes for us within the Empire'

The 1921 Imperial Conference opened on 20 June 1921 in London. On the list of issues to be discussed were the Anglo-Japanese alliance, naval, military and air defence, matters relating to convening a Constitutional Conference, inter-imperial communications by land, sea and air, overseas settlement, civil aviation, reparations, statistical bureau, shipping and patents. The Indian resolution, drafted by Sastri, on the position of Indians in other parts of the Empire was on the agenda. From the outset, Sastri mounted a remarkable verbal assault on General Smuts.

A Cambridge trained lawyer and successful Boer General, General Jan Christian Smuts was one of the most respected international figures of his times.⁴⁹ He fought both with and against the British and drew accolades for both his military leadership and diplomacy. Straddling between the two worlds – colonial and anti-colonial, he drew on the contradictions to present a

very cosmopolitan bearing. Presenting an anti-colonial front, he could call the Irish question ‘a stain upon the Empire’; while at the same time he could comfortably mask his racism as cultural relativism thereby justifying South Africa’s internal colonialism. For WEB Du Bois, he was ‘the world’s greatest protagonist of the white race’, who could express ‘bluntly, and yet not without finesse, what a powerful host of white folk believe but do not plainly say in Melbourne, New Orleans, San Francisco, Hong Kong, Berlin and London.’⁵⁰

Speaking on the second day of the Conference, Smuts referred to the glowing ideals of the League of Nations which embodied ‘the most deeply-felt longings of the human race for a better life’.⁵¹ He exhorted the Empire to back these ideals for ‘it may make the foundation of the new international system’ for lasting peace.⁵² Taking this as a point of entry into the debate, Sastri, in his opening speech, reminded Smuts that peace was dependent upon ‘a stable and unalterable relationship between communities – based on honourable equality and recognition of equality of justice’.⁵³ The ‘confederation of races’, as the British Prime Minister had called the Empire, was dependent upon equal citizenship and that this ideal was ‘incongruous with the inequality of races’.⁵⁴ In realisation of these very ideals, Sastri stated, the Indian delegation had presented a Resolution to the Conference on the basis of which ‘the whole position must be judged (sic)’.⁵⁵ This Resolution had asked for the acknowledgement that there was ‘incongruity between position of India as an equal member of the British Empire and the existence of disabilities upon British Indians lawfully domiciled in some parts of the Empire’.⁵⁶ Consequently, the Resolution recommended ‘the adoption of a policy of removing any disabilities under which such Indians are placed, and ... merging them into the general body of citizens in whatever part of the Empire they may be lawfully domiciled’.⁵⁷ Cleverly, Sastri had placed the Resolution as a natural culmination of Smuts’ idea of the Empire.

The work of the Conference continued for another two weeks until the Indian question was taken up. Smuts was trying to postpone the matter as far as possible. Suspecting this, Montagu repeatedly insisted that Sastri should raise the issue. Sastri had intervened a few times during the first fortnight and finally succeeded in arranging for a discussion for 8 July. Seeing that no further postponement was possible, Smuts suggested referring the question to a special committee and he received a ready support from his friend and admirer, Winston Churchill. As it

would appear in the coming days, this was not the only time when Churchill's sympathies were required in the defence of Smuts.⁵⁸

Formally presenting his resolution on 8 July, Sastri delivered an eloquent speech which not only established him as the 'Empire's Silver Tongue Orator' (as his colleague Sir Thomas Smart called him)⁵⁹ but also presented a new moral perspective on the question of rights of people versus rights of states. The Reciprocity Resolution of 1918, he argued was based on two principles – the rights of Dominions to manage their population and the right of the Indians to be treated equally within the Empire. The former, a principle of self-preservation, was an inferior principle to the latter, which was rooted in justice and equality.⁶⁰ Very discreetly but with absolute certainty, he proceeded to make racial equality a principle on which the future of India within the Empire was dependent. In doing this, he made the question of Indians in South Africa a question of the very survival of the Empire. Having established the absolute necessity of racial equality as a cornerstone, he drew a distinction between principle and practice. Given the anti-Indian sentiment in white-ruled South Africa, he recognised General Smuts's limitations in granting political and civil liberties to Indians in South Africa, but argued that the acceptance of the principle of equality did not make it a necessity for the governments to grant civil liberties immediately, or in a limited time frame.⁶¹ All that must be agreed upon was that this was the correct thing to do and that it must be done when the opportunity arose. '[I]n such complicated affairs', he said, 'it is often necessary to proclaim an ideal'.⁶² For India, 'If we accept this principle and lay it down, although it may be a very elementary principle, we tell the Dominions which violate it today, that they must set their house in order, that they must at the earliest opportunity begin the process of conforming to this principle. This is the value that India attached to this declaration.'⁶³ To Sastri, it was a workable compromise between principle and practice. He concluded, hyperbolically:

Today when I came here, my role is not that of an impatient critic of the Administration. My role is still that of a patient man, who says "I have borne so long, let me know that you are thinking of the remedy, that you are not making the situation worse for me, but that you have resolutely made up your minds that these grievances shall be no more. Establish your *bona fides*." I am sorry to say that even that elementary, that first fact in the situation, the *bona fides* of one Dominion, have still to be established. It is late; I fear it is very late; but I hope it is not too late. ...Let me be enabled therefore by your good

offices, to go and tell my countrymen that there are still hopes for us within this British Empire, in this Empire where we wish to live in confraternity with other peoples, that there is room, and honourable room for us.⁶⁴

The speech was very well received, including by the British Prime Minister who was sympathetic to the Indian resolution. Sastri had in effect had also given Smuts an honourable way out. But the latter prevaricated. His response a week later was devoid of his high idealism and sounding a pale shadow of himself, he said: '[t]he whole basis of our political system in South Africa rests on inequality and on recognising fundamental differences which exist in the structure of our population'.⁶⁵ Although previously, he had alluded to economic fears of the white minority as a cause of segregation, he was now forced to admit to the reality of racial inequality by saying that the 'colour question [is]...the bedrock of our constitution'.⁶⁶ No South African government, he argued, could go against this prevailing view by granting political equality to Indians. If the Resolution was passed, he went on, it would make it even more difficult for Indians in South Africa, who otherwise enjoyed relatively better economic status. In his view, economic prosperity without political rights was the best compromise to the Indian question.

This response infuriated Montagu who argued that Indians and Europeans were both settler communities in South Africa. Hence, if at all the question of Indians was to be dealt with separately, it had to be dealt with the questions of Europeans and not Africans.⁶⁷ For his part, Sastri linked Smuts's position to the message that the Empire was sending to Indians worldwide. He stated:

I must state, Mr. Chairman, that the statement brings before us the position of enormous danger to the Empire, and to the principles on which the Empire is built. India, cannot be told either directly or indirectly, that she is never to be the equal of any white community. You cannot tell her that hope for peace another week (sic).⁶⁸

Smuts retorted, '[n]o one had done more for India in this Conference for her position in the Dominion than I have done'.⁶⁹ This prompted another Indian representative, the Maharaj of Cutch to ask Smuts, if keeping South Africa aside, Smuts had to speak as an individual and as a statesman of the Empire, would he accept the principle? So, would Smuts the statesman be any different from Smuts the white South African? Two years earlier, Lloyd George had asked Smuts

a similar question when Smuts had opposed the Paris Peace Treaty on the pretext that it was too harsh on Germans as they were ‘being treated as we would not treat a kaffir nation’. Piqued, Lloyd George had asked him if he was ready to forgo South Africa’s claims on South-West Africa in the spirit of justice. Smuts had responded this way: ‘[i]n this great business [of peace] South-West Africa is a dust compared to the burdens now hanging over the civilised world’.⁷⁰ So, the Maharaja of Cutch’s question had basically pushed Smuts to consider if the practical politics of South Africa was once again ‘a dust’ compared to the demands for justice to which he was personally committed. This time around, however, Smuts failed to rise to the challenge. Aware of the backlash that he could face back home, he evaded any further exchange by saying: ‘there is no point exploring a road which I am sure will take us nowhere’..⁷¹

This showdown between Shastri and Smuts also provided an opportunity for others to expose the latter’s discordant idealism. In a letter to his son, written two days after he introduced his Resolution, Shastri narrated a dinner conversation at the British Prime Minister’s house:

Then the P.M. [Lloyd George] said my speech gladdened the hearts of the British Cabinet Ministers, for I arraigned General Smuts, who used on every occasion to preach the Sermon on the Mount with a sanctimonious air. They were very sore about it and told each other. ‘Serves him right. Where is his justice now and equality and tenderness to oppressed nationalities?’⁷²

More than any other, it gladdened the heart of Australian Prime Minister William Hughes. During the Paris Peace Conference, when the Japanese proposal for racial equality was turned down, Hughes had been made to look the ‘fall guy’ allowing Smuts ‘to play the suave international statesman’.⁷³ Hughes found his opportunity now. Supporting the Indian resolution, albeit with a few changes, he stated: ‘[t]he position of South Africa cannot be supported from the standpoint of justice. ...I cannot for the life of me see how it is compatible with our frequent declaration of the principle which govern this Empire’.⁷⁴ He recalled Smuts’s idealism with regard to the Irish question and exhorted ‘may it not fairly be said that the policy of the Union of South Africa towards the Indian population falls within the same category?’⁷⁵ William Massey, the Prime Minister of New

Zealand, argued that South Africa was making a 'mistake'.⁷⁶ Were it not for Churchill's sympathetic interventions in favour of Smuts,⁷⁷ Smuts seemed to have been isolated completely.⁷⁸

Eventually, the Resolution that was finally adopted stated that it was 'desirable that the rights of such Indians in the dominions to citizenship should be recognised'. But, it omitted reference to adopting a policy in this regard.⁷⁹ Despite its watered-down terms, this was a remarkable diplomatic victory for India. In India's diplomatic history, this was the first time when India's concerns had been recognised over the concerns of a white Dominion at a resolution at an Imperial Conference. Furthermore, the white racial bonhomie within the Empire was breached with the first ever resolution was passed without unanimity. The Prime Ministers of the Dominions, except Smuts, invited Sastri to visit their countries to address their populations and create a favourable impression in order to pass legislations in favour of civil liberties for Indian immigrants.⁸⁰

From London, Sastri went to Geneva to attend the Second Session of the Assembly of the League of Nations as India's delegate. On a platform that had been conceived by Smuts himself, Sastri once again raised his objections to South Africa's racist treatment of Indians. Speaking in 'slow sentences with their faultless phrasing',⁸¹ Sastri reframed the cosmopolitanism of the League saying that the Assembly was 'bound to act in the interests of all of the others; that we are cosmopolitan reality, that we are the citizens of the world, and not merely the limited countries which we happen to represent'.⁸² He then called upon the League to review its mandate policy with regard to the claims on German West Africa by South Africa. The latter's policies, he argued, would mean that Indians living in German West Africa 'would be worse off under the trustees of the League [South Africa] than ... under the Germans'.⁸³ By raising the issue of South Africa's racism, Sastri had internationalised an issue that, until then, had been considered an issue internal to the Empire. This move upset the British delegation but Sastri held that the Indian delegation was not subordinate to the British delegation.⁸⁴

Sastri received wide applaud for his speech. One observer, H. Wilson Harris, the President of the International Association of Journalists, hailed him as the best speaker in the Assembly and commented: '[i]t will be hard for the League to find a higher watchword'.⁸⁵ From Geneva, Sastri continued his diplomatic tour-de-force and joined the British Empire's delegation for the Washington Naval Conference and afterwards went on a tour of the Dominions. Back in South Africa, Smuts, meanwhile, now took the issue of Indians seriously and felt that the problem of Indians in South Africa 'might even shake the foundations of the Empire'.⁸⁶ The only workable solution, he thought, was their return to India, or to some other colony like British Guyana or the Malay states. His government now planned to introduce the Class Areas Bill, a far more restrictive legislation on compulsory segregation of Indians in urban areas. In 1921 he seemed somewhat sympathetic to the principle of equality within the Empire even if highlighting South Africa's special case. At the next Imperial Conference in 1923 he challenged the 1921 Resolution and asked for it to be withdrawn. This hardening of his position had partly been prompted by Sastri's continued criticism of South Africa's racism during his dominion tour as well as on the question of Kenya.⁸⁷ At the 1923 Conference, however, Smuts faced a new adversary who, according to Smuts's biographer, proved 'far more formidable than Sastri'.⁸⁸ This was Tej Bahadur Sapru.

Tej Bahadur Sapru: 'Fighting for a place in the House ...not stable'

At the Imperial Conference of 1923, Indian representation constituted the Secretary of State, Lord Peel, the Maharaja of Alwar and Tej Bahadur Sapru. Sapru was a distinguished lawyer, member of the Liberal party and had served in the Viceroy's Executive Council. In the spirit of a lawyer preparing for his case, Sapru landed in London four months in advance to work on the issues at hand for the Conference. In these four months from July to October, Sapru made a number of influential acquaintances, secured positive press for the Indian case, and eventually met all the Dominion Prime Ministers. As he wrote to Lord Reading: "...I had left nothing undone that might influence the Press and public opinion in my favour, and in many instances, the statesmen I addressed capitulated at once".⁸⁹ The leaders of Newfoundland, Irish Free State, Canada and Australia pledged him support while the New Zealand Prime Minister promised him support if Sapru made a good case.⁹⁰ In the words of Smuts's biographer, Sapru 'annexed...which hitherto had been Smuts's territory'.⁹¹

However, in these efforts, at least initially, he received little support from the India Office. Only 5 days before the Conference did Lord Peel give him an appointment, where Sapru felt Peel views's towards him were 'one of suspicion, verging on distrust'.⁹² Nevertheless, Sapru conveyed to Peel that the 1921 Resolution was nothing but a 'pious hope' without concrete proposals and suggested an Imperial Committee of Enquiry. In the following meetings, Sapru felt Peel was unresponsive towards him because the latter was worried that Sapru would take the credit for these efforts. Only after Sapru told Peel that he was happy for anyone to advance this proposal as long as it was put on the table did Peel begin to warm towards Sapru.⁹³

Sapru first met Smuts two day after the conference started, on 3 October, for a cordial lunch. Sapru felt Smuts was also trying to drive a wedge between Sapru and his colleagues but sympathising with Gandhi (who was then in jail) and supporting self-government for India. Sapru, however, quickly drew him to the issue and the meeting ended with a typical Smuts assurance that, in Sapru's words, 'he would be faithful to me if I was faithful to him'.⁹⁴ What Smuts did not tell Sapru was that he was bringing a counter-proposal to Sapru's in the conference, pushing for quashing the 1921 Resolution. On 18 October, Smuts his proposal which revealed a new position. In 1921, he had argued that inequality was the foundation of South Africa. This time he elevated this into a moral position by arguing that there was 'no equality of British citizenship throughout the Empire'.⁹⁵ Throughout the Empire, the reasoning ran, different people enjoyed different political rights, while some had no rights at all. Consequently, the demands for equal rights within the Empire were founded on no logical basis. Furthermore, the nature of the Empire had significantly changed in the past few years. It was now 'a smaller League Nations ... not a unitary state but a partnership of equal states'.⁹⁶ As a result, the 1921 resolution, because it drew its mandate from a unitary conception of Empire, was a 'profound mistake'.⁹⁷

Sapru met Smuts again on 20 October. Contrary to their previous meeting, Smuts was in a combative mood and refused to make any concessions to his position which excluded from franchise all people of the Empire residing in another country. Sapru replied that Smuts's stance would lead to war between the two countries. Sapru repeated his warning three days later. Sapru

may have been speaking in metaphors, for both Sapru and Smuts knew that as long as India was in British hands this was not possible.⁹⁸ But the projection of war as *fait accompli* reflected Sapru's insistence on how grave the issue was for India.

The battle was taken up on 24 October. After Lord Peel introduced India's stand, Sapru delivered a 107 minute long, well-prepared speech. Speaking with a lawyer's eye for well-crafted arguments, Sapru began with a note of allegiance to the Empire and then proceeded to list India's grievances as a 'loyal member'. Fair treatment of Indians abroad was a matter of '*izzat*' (honour) for Indians, and it echoed with demands for equality within the country.⁹⁹ India, he argued, was undergoing a profound transformation where the masses and classes were beginning to speak in a single voice of nationalism; moreover, the question of equality within the Empire was an issue on which '320 million Indians' of all hues and opinions spoke with a single voice.¹⁰⁰ 'Any inequality of Indian nationals enters like Iron into our soul'¹⁰¹ and in his plea to the Conference, he stated that 'as a subject of King George', he was 'fighting for a place in the household', and would no longer 'be content with a place in his stables'.¹⁰² Assuring the Dominions that there will be further immigration from India, he stated that he was the strongest opponent of any further immigration from India.¹⁰³ He pointed out that in passing the 1921 resolution all the Dominions except South Africa had accepted a just position in addressing the question of Indian disabilities. He suggested that each Dominion and colony under the Empire, where Indians were resident, constitute a committee that will confer with a committee from India to explore avenues for how the equality resolution of 1921 could be implemented.¹⁰⁴

Turning to General Smuts, Sapru began by pointing out that he had stood up for 'peace to all the world' and 'stood as a protector of minorities'.¹⁰⁵ Yet, this imperial statesman, he said, did not realise that his colour policy was putting the whites and coloured people against each other not just in South Africa but across the world. 'I tell him frankly', Sapru said, 'if the Indian problem in South Africa is allowed to fester much longer, it will pass ... beyond the bounds of a domestic issue and become a foreign policy issue of such gravity that upon it the unity of the Empire may founder irretrievably'.¹⁰⁶ Sapru dismissed Smuts's view on the Empire as a 'new League of Nations'. The League, he pointed out, did not have a common sovereign; the Empire did. Given these different positions, the question of constitutional rights will naturally also be

tackled differently in the Empire from the League. In any case, he suggested, if one agreed to Smuts's interpretation, even the League was bound by its own resolutions while Smuts was asking the Conference to consider its own resolution as a 'scrap of paper'.¹⁰⁷ Finally, he said, he did not want to take a 'legal position' as the Conference was a gathering of statesmen, not legal minds. Legal matters, he said, were subservient to prudence and statesmanship.¹⁰⁸

Smuts's response came five days later. The Indian, he said, was not 'inferior to us because of his colour or any other ground – he may be superior; it is the case of a small civilisation, a small community finding itself in danger of being overwhelmed by a much older and more powerful civilisation'.¹⁰⁹ The moot point here, for him, was economic. If Indians were to be given the franchise, it would also have to be extended to the Africans and the white community which was in minority would be swamped.

This was a curious position that Smuts maintained for much of his life. However, if the question was economic and Smuts was only worried about being swamped by the Africans, on what basis had he placed Indians and Africans in the same category? Clearly, as a community, Indians were also, like the whites, a minority. Why not, as Montagu had suggested in the 1921 conference, put Indians and Whites in the same category as they both were settlers? The previous year at the League of Nations, the South African representative and classicist scholar, Gilbert Murray, while discussing South Africa's resolution on the protection of minorities had made a distinction between the question of minorities and the question of being at different stages of civilization.¹¹⁰ Curiously, this was closer to the Indian position than Smuts's argument. Indians also alluded to the different stages of civilisation argument, but only suggested that Indians were civilisationally at par with Europeans. The discrimination against Africans, by this logic, was also justified, but on the basis of their civilisational inferiority, not racial difference.¹¹¹ Since Smuts repeatedly argued that India was 'a much older and powerful civilisation', his economic argument only served as an apology for racism.

The final assault on Smuts came with a question that hit at the core of his argument as well as his politics. In his rebuttal, Sapru asked Smuts: what if Irish nationals, before the 1921 freedom, had been settled in South Africa, would they receive political rights?¹¹² Weren't

political rights tied to colour then, since white immigrants were easily able to secure political rights in South Africa?

By now, Smuts had already been cornered and Sapru had brilliantly isolated Smuts and South Africa.¹¹³ The Resolution of 1921 stood and none of the Prime Ministers accepted Smuts's proposal.¹¹⁴ Soon, Smuts went out of power and a new more conservative government was formed in South Africa. The issue, however, had already been internationalized in the limited sense of the Empire and it remained no more possible for South Africa to project it as merely a domestic issue.

Conclusion

Three years after these events, in December 1926, an Indian delegation landed in South Africa. In the next few days, they engaged in discussions with the South African government and in early 1927, an agreement was achieved on the Indian question in South Africa. This was the first ever bilateral agreement within the Empire in which Britain was not involved. Called the Cape Town Agreement, it was widely applauded in India as well as South Africa. Gandhi called it an 'honorable compromise'.¹¹⁵ Sarojini Naidu called it a 'memorable performance'.¹¹⁶ Although led by Mohammad Habibullah, the star performer in the Indian delegation was V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, a man blocked twice earlier by Smuts from visiting South Africa. It also crystallised a suggestion that Sinha had offered in 1918, namely the appointment of an Indian Agent in South Africa. At the request of Gandhi and the Indian government, Sastri became the first Indian Agent in South Africa. The designation of the Indian representative was upgraded to Agent-General in 1936 and eventually to High Commissioner in 1941. This diplomatic office remained the primary mode of conversation among the two governments and the South African Indians until 1954.

Interestingly, just about the time this Agreement was signed, Jawaharlal Nehru was undergoing his own initiation into foreign policy at the Congress of the Oppressed Nationalities in Brussels. Soon thereafter, the Indian National Congress became active about issues of foreign policy, opening its own Foreign Policy Department in 1936. This marked the handing over the

baton from the Liberals to the Nationalists as the former were no more the only prominent voices speaking for India abroad.

How must one read the contribution of these Liberals? In the immediate sense, as Keith Hancock has argued these interventions did nothing except damaging South Africa's vanity.¹¹⁷ Likewise, the 1927 Agreement, although a diplomatic success story, did not create a significant difference in the lives of South African Indians.¹¹⁸

Yet, more generally, these interventions did create an atmosphere where South Africa could no more look at the issue of Indians overseas as a domestic issue. Furthermore, in the broader realm of imperial politics, they helped bring up the issue of race which until then was hidden in the underbelly of imperial politics. Although their articulation of race needs to be skeptically viewed through the civilisation-race dichotomy, but by making 'race' obvious and setting it up against the idea of the Empire, they did expose the racial politics within the Empire.

Crucially however, this was the inaugural moment of modern Indian diplomacy, a moment when Indians – given the opportunity to articulate and shape foreign policy – contributed to shaping the contours of Indian foreign policy. Importantly, these diplomats built this new discourse of Indian foreign policy around the issues of racial equality and civil rights.

Notes

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1. Guha, *India after Gandhi*.
 2. Rarely have attempts been made to look at pre-independence foreign policy. And those that do – such as Bimla Prasad's and Iqbal Singh's works, end up reinforcing the idea that although the Indian National Congress had a tradition of foreign policy, its content and form from 1927 onwards was mostly shaped by Nehru. See, Prasad, *The Origins of Indian foreign policy* and Singh, *Between Two Fires*. For the foreign policy resolutions of the Congress before Independence, see Rajkumar, *The Background of India's Foreign Policy*.

Besides this, there are scattered chapters on pre-independence foreign policy which are helpful. See, for instance, Heimsath and Mansingh, "Indian Foreign Relations in the Inter-War Period"; Keenleyside, "Diplomatic Apprenticeship"; and Thakur, "The Colonial Origins of Indian Foreign Policymaking".
 3. Poullose, "India as an Anomalous International Person (1919-1947)".

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4. This is especially true of an Indian foreign policy making elite which no more identifies with the postcolonial legacy of Indian foreign policy. See, Singh, "What Constitutes National Security in a Changing World Order and Pant, "Introduction".
 5. Blyth, *The Empire of the Raj*, Metcalf, *Imperial Connections* and Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*. The only exception is Hugh Tinker's (cited above) extremely well researched study, *Separate and Unequal*. However, he has also chosen to speak from the vantage point of British bureaucrats rather than Indians. Sneh Mahajan's recent work is also important in this regard. However, she takes India as an element in British foreign policy rather than India as an agent in making its own foreign policy. See, Mahajan, *British Foreign Policy*.
 6. Bhagavan, *The Peacemakers*.
 7. This comment was made on VS Srinivasa Sastri by the Eastern African Indian National Congress. See *Democrat*, "RT Hon. Mr. Sastri: England's Adverstising Agent".
 8. Buch, *Rise and Growth of Indian Liberalism*, p. 302. Quoted in Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, p.3.
 9. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, p. 3.
 10. *Indian Opinion*, "Mr. Gandhi on War Recruiting", p. 148.
 11. The Indian Annual Register, "Despatch of the Commander in Chief Sir Charles Munro", pp. 146-148.
 12. The Imperial War Conference 1917, "Resolution on the Representation of India in the Imperial Conference", p. 3.
 13. Tilly, *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, p. 42.
 14. For more on the construction of Indian as feminine, see Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*; Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*.
 15. Joshi, *The Tyranny of Colour*, p. 96.
 16. The Imperial Conference until then was a gathering of the Prime Ministers of all the self-governing Dominions of the Empire. Based on an idea of 'Imperial Federation' first proposed by New Zealand in 1852, the first Colonial Conference was organised in 1887 in the year of the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria. The Secretary of State for India attended this meeting, but India was absent in the subsequent meetings of 1897 and 1902. In 1907, India was represented by James Mackay, in the absence of Lord Morley, Secretary of State for India. In 1911, when the conference was re-christened 'Imperial Conference', India's presence was marked by the Secretary of State. However, in all these conferences, India was only present but was not a member of the conference.
 17. The Imperial War Conference 1917, "Resolution on the Representation of India in the Imperial Conference", p. 16.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
 19. The Imperial War Conference 1917, "Resolution on the Representation of India in the Imperial Conference", p. 14.
 20. This was technically not an 'Imperial Conference' and was called Imperial War conference, partly because India could not have been a part of the Imperial Conference without a resolution to that effect having been passed by the Conference.

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21. The Imperial War Conference 1917, "Resolution VII: Representation of India at Future Imperial Conferences", p. 4
 22. The Imperial War Conference 1917, "Resolution IX: Constitution of the Empire", p. 5.
 23. Ibid.
 24. Mazower, *Governing the World*, p. 132.
 25. Ibid.
 26. See, "Papers on the Inter-Racial Problems, communicated to the first Universal Races Congress, held at the University of London, July 26-29, 1911", available at http://archive.org/stream/papersoninterrac00univiala/papersoninterrac00univiala_djvu.txt, accessed 29 September 2014.
 27. Kearney, *African American Views of the Japanese: Solidarity or Sedition*, p. 19. For a history of Indian-African American coloured solidarity in the twentieth century, see Slate, *Coloured Cosmopolitanism*.
 28. The coloured solidarity was more imagined than real when the Japanese themselves were asking for immigration restrictions being waved off in Australia on account of Japan's advanced civilisation and difference from other coloured nationals.
 29. Long, *The Standard of Civilisation*.
 30. Macmillan, *Peacemakers*, pp. 315-330.
 31. Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, p. 35-36; and Mesthrie, *From Sastri to Deshmukh*, p. 48
 32. An idea that was assiduously championed by Aga Khan and a British official Theodore Morrison. For more on this, see Blyth, *The Empire of the Raj*.
 33. The National Liberal Federation was formed in 1918, after the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms were spurned by Congress. The moderates, including SN Benerjea, Satyendra Sinha, RP Paranjape, Tej Bahadur Sapru and VS Srinivasa Sastri, who supported these reforms formed the National Liberal Federation.
 34. The Imperial War Conference 1917, "Reciprocity of Treatment between India and the Self-Governing Dominions", pp. 117-120
 35. Ibid.
 36. Ibid.
 37. Sinha, *Speeches and Writings*, p. xx.
 38. Sinha had been the first Indian to become a member of the Viceroy's Executive, a former President of the Indian National Congress, and in 1919, he was made the Under-Secretary of State for India and was admitted to the House of Lords (the first ever Indian in both the cases).
 39. Indian Annual Register 1919, "India in the Imperial War Conference: Immigration Problems, p. 70.
 40. Ibid.

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41. Ibid., p. 77-78.
 42. Quoted in Pachai, *The International Aspects*, p. 81.
 43. Quoted in Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, p. 31.
 44. Indian Annual Register 1920, "Indians in South Africa: Deputation to the Secretary of State", p. 333-334.
 45. Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, p. 32.
 46. Lord Buxton quoted in "Confidential and Immediate, Asiatic Department, Letter No. 4442/19, dated 26 July 1919", GG, Vol. 907, Reference No 15/967, SAB, National Archives, Pretoria.
 47. For these conversations, see GG, Vol 907, SAB, National Archives, Pretoria.
 48. Quoted in Sastri, "English Translation of Srinivasa Sastri's autobiography", p. 20. This biography was written as a series of articles on some aspects of his life to a Tamil weekly, *Swadesamitran*.
 49. He was the original author of the Woodrow Wilson peace plan (and later the Preamble to the UN) and brokered the peace agreement between the British and the Irish nationals. He so impressed Woodrow Wilson's delegation at the Paris Peace Conference that they wanted him to be Britain's ambassador to the United States. See, Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Colour* , p. 308.
 50. Du Bois, "Worlds of Colour".
 51. The Imperial Conference 1921, "E – Second meeting, p. 9.
 52. Ibid., p. 10.
 53. Ibid.
 54. Ibid.
 55. Ibid., p. 17.
 56. The Imperial Conference 1921, "E – Nineteenth Meeting", p. 6.
 57. Ibid.
 58. Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, op. cit., p. 47.
 59. Jagadisan, *Letters of The Right Honourable V.S. Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 71.
 60. Imperial Conference 1921, "E – Nineteenth Meeting", p. 2.
 61. There was another point that Sastri did not make at the conference but believed strongly in. In a letter he wrote to his Secretary later, he argued that General Smuts's fears about granting political rights to Indians were merely theoretical. Indians abroad were "politically passive" people and even where they had political rights such as Mauritius and British Guyana, they have not exercised them for any political domination. While political rights will help Indians seek remedy against oppression, they will never challenge white hegemony. See, "Sastri to Rao, letter dated 27 October 1926", Correspondence with VSS Sastri, PK Kondana Rao Papers, NMML, New Delhi.
 62. The Imperial Conference 1921, "E – Nineteenth Meeting", p. 6.

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63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., p. 7.
65. The Imperial Conference 1921, “E (S.C.) – Fourth Meeting; Stenographic Notes of a meeting of the representatives of the United Kingdom, the Dominions and India, at 10 Downing Street, S.W. on Friday, June 15, 1921, at 11 a.m.” A1, A1/35, SAB, National Archives, Pretoria..
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid., p. 6.
68. Ibid., p. 8.
69. Ibid.
70. Smuts, Jan Christian Smuts, pp. 229-230
71. The Imperial Conference 1921, “E (S.C.) – Fourth Meeting”, p. 9.
72. Jagadisan, *Letters of Srinivasa Sastri*, op. cit., p.77.
73. Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Colour Line*, p. 302.
74. The Imperial Conference 1921, “E (S.C.) – Fourth Meeting”, p. 10.
75. Ibid., p. 11.
76. Ibid., p. 13.
77. Tinker argues that Churchill had a life-long admiration for the Smuts whom he considered “a superhuman leader and thinker”. Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, p. 47.
78. The Imperial Conference 1921, “E (S.C.) – Fourth Meeting”, op. cit., pp. 15-20.
79. The text of the resolution can be found in Andrews, *Documents Related to the New Asiatic Bill*, p. 20.
80. Sastri later acknowledged that Smuts could have scuttled the agreement by insisting on the unanimity of the Empire. Yet, he only registered South Africa’s dissent not as a general principle but “in view of the exceptional circumstances of the greater part of the Union”. See, Sastri, “Africa or India”, p. 64.
81. H. Wilson quoted in Rao, *The Right Honourable VS Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 109.
82. Sastri, *Speeches and Writings*, pp. 341-342.
83. Ibid., 345.
84. Sastri, *Autobiography*, pp. 43-44.
85. Quoted in Rao, *The Right Honourable VS Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 109; also see Sastri, “Autobiography”, p. 75.
86. Tinker, *Separate and Unequal*, p. 53.

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87. Sastri had been arguing that there were two ideas of Empire in strong contestation. The British ideal of fairness and justice and the Boer ideal of inequality and racism, and the latter was now being exported to Kenya by Smuts See, Sastri, *Speeches and Writings*, p. 63.
88. Hancock, *Smuts: Fields of Force*, p. 147.
- Sastri's speeches from 1922 onwards were laced with criticisms of the Empire, especially with regard to the Kenya Question. The new Viceroy, Lord Reading was not well disposed towards him unlike Chelmsford (who had sent Sastri as India's representative, despite Sastri's criticisms of his government's atrocities in Punjab in 1920). In a banquet at the Viceroyal Lodge in Shimla, given in the honour of Sastri before departing for his Dominion tour in 1922, Sastri had critiqued the government. He said: "We never have seen in this country such a wreck of hope and faith in the government of the day" (Sastri, *Speeches and Writings*, op. cit., p. 54). According to Kondana Rao, Sastri's biographer, this had displeased Reading, who overlooked Sastri to appoint Sapru (Rao, *The Right Honourable VS Srinivasa Sastri*, p. 155).
89. "Letter from Sir Tej Bahadur to Lord Reading, Private and Confidential, SS Macedonia, November 1928", Correspondence of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru.
90. Ibid.
91. Hancock, *Smuts: Fields of Force*, p. 148.
92. "Letter from Sir Tej Bahadur to Lord Reading, Private and Confidential, SS Macedonia, November 1928" op. cit.
93. "Sapru to Reading, Letter on 10 October 1928, Carlton Hotel", Correspondence of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru.
94. Ibid.
95. The Imperial Conference 1923, "The Position of the Indians in the British Empire", p. 139.
96. Ibid.
97. Ibid.
98. See Sapru's letters to Lord Reading on 17 October and 23 October 1928, in Correspondence of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru. Also, Hancock, *Smuts: Fields of Force*, p. 148.
99. The Imperial Conference 1923, "Statement by Tej Bahadur Sapru", p. 73.
100. Ibid., p. 74.
101. Ibid.
102. Ibid., p. 72
103. Ibid., p. 81.
104. Ibid., p. 82.
105. Ibid., p. 83. Perhaps, Sapru alluding to the 1922 resolution at the League of Nations for the protection of minorities that Smuts-led South Africa had proposed.

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106. Ibid., p. 84.
 107. Ibid., p. 85
 108. Ibid., p. 85.
 109. The Imperial Conference 1923, "Statement by General Smuts", Ibid., p. 114.
 110. In supporting the South African resolution on the minorities, the Indian representative, the Maharajah of Nawanagar, had reminded South Africa, "the declared champions of the rights of the minorities", that "charity may well begin at home". See, "Extracts from the debates in the League of Nations, Third Assembly 1922 on the Resolution regarding protection of minorities", in RM Deshmukh Papers, F. 49, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.
 111. For instance, in a speech for moving the resolution in the Council of State on 5 March 1923, on the rights and the status of Indians in Kenya, he stated: "With regard to the natives of Africa, Sir, as I have said in the Council already, I will not try to raise feelings. The natives of Africa are, as everybody knows, not quite civilised. They are advancing by leaps and bounds. Great efforts are necessary to pull them up along the line of evolution" (In VSS Sastri papers, Writings and Speeches, S. No. 23). Gandhi's views on the natives are also too well known.
 112. The Imperial Conference 1923 "Statement by Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru", p. 122.
 113. Hancock, *Smuts: Fields of Force*, p. 149
 114. Interestingly, Irish Free State (of which General Smuts was one of the leading champions) while accepting that General Smuts had internal problems, took the view that Indian citizens would not be able to secure such rights till the time they do not achieve self-government. See, The Imperial Conference 1923, pp. 118-119.
 115. *Indian Opinion*, No. 12, pp. 85-86.
 116. *Indian Opinion*, No. 15, p. 105-106.
 117. Hancock, *Smuts: Fields of Force*, p. 455.
 118. See, Mesthrie, *From Sastri to Deshmukh*.

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