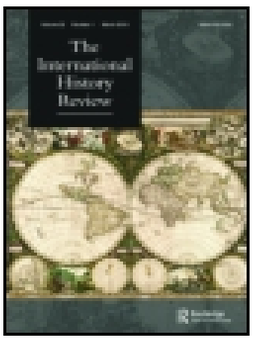

The International History Review

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rinh20

Travels in Diplomacy: V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and G.S. Bajpai in 1921–1922

Vineet Thakur

To cite this article: Vineet Thakur (2021): Travels in Diplomacy: V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and G.S. Bajpai in 1921–1922, The International History Review, DOI: 10.1080/07075332.2021.1907438

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2021.1907438

Published online: 16 Apr 2021.

THE INTERNATIONAL HISTORY REVIEW
https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2021.1907438

Travels in Diplomacy: V.S. Srinivasa Sastri and G.S. Bajpai in 1921–1922

Vineet Thakur

Institute for History, Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

In April 1921, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri was appointed as India's representative to the Imperial Conference in London. His secretary was a young Indian Civil Service officer, G.S. Bajpai. Over the course of the next two years, the two Indians travelled together as India's diplomatic representatives to London, Geneva, Washington, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The young Bajpai and his 'chief' developed a loving bond that was to remain strong for the rest of their lives. These travels, as I will show, were very crucial to the making of India's pre-eminent diplomat in the interwar years, Sastri, and the country's foremost foreign policy bureaucrat at independence, Bajpai. But the afterlives of these journeys were also to manifest beyond their personal/political lives. These two years were formative to the making of Indian diplomacy in general and to India's response on the questions of race and the commonwealth in particular. This essay will follow Sastri and Bajpai as they travel together as 'diplomats' and map the ways in which they came to 'learn' the conduct, expectations and execution of diplomacy.

KEYWORDS

Indian Diplomatic History; V.S. Srinivasa Sastri; G.S. Bajpai; Commonwealth

Introduction

In the sweltering, moist April heat of Poona in 1921, Valangaiman Sankaranarayana Srinivasa Sastri, a prominent Indian liberal leader, was delivering a speech at the Deccan Sabha. Seated in the audience was a 29-year old civil servant, Girija Shankar Bajpai.[1] The young bureaucrat had been plucked from the United Provinces, and assigned to Sastri as his private secretary for the Imperial Conference scheduled to be held that summer in London.[2]

Lord Chelmsford, the outgoing Viceroy, had chosen Sastri as a delegate, largely on account of the latter's reputation as 'the Silver-Tongued Orator'.[3] That afternoon in Poona, Bajpai found out for himself the measure of Sastri's oratory. He informed his family friend and another prominent liberal leader, Tej Bahadur Sapru, that the latter's praises on his moderate colleague's 'mastery of diction, beauty of manner, mellifluousness and charm of utterance' barely did him justice. Sastri's style of 'restrained phrase and invincible logic' was far superior to the ornate and impassioned manner of delivering speeches of even veteran rhetoricians.[4] In this glowing review, Bajpai prognosticated further on what Sastri's oratory meant for their upcoming tour.

Oratorical performances were key to any diplomatic success. However, Bajpai noted, the logic of what made a great speech in diplomacy had measurably changed. The stirring of passions,

CONTACT Vineet Thakur v.thakur@hum.leidenuniv.nl Institute for History, Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands

the signature move of all great orators of pre-World War era, was slowly disappearing. In the new scientific age, where matters of war and peace were resolved over arguments held to public accountability, rather than privately arrived through cunning, reason triumphed over passion. The arguments and speeches, reproduced in newspapers across the world and catalyzing public perceptions and mood, required reasoned, rational arguments which could slid through early excitements into long memory. Consequently, public discourse was increasingly framed by an appeal to logic, rather than to passion. Sastri, Bajpai surmised, appealed to the new age of public speaking and was 'destined to triumph' at the imperial conference. [5]

Over the next 18 months, the two Indians traveled together to the United Kingdom, Switzerland, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada on official tours. They were the first Indians to travel so widely in quasi-diplomatic capacity as representatives of the Indian government. And, in these journeys, while Bajpai's prognosis on his elder colleague held true, the tour was also important for generating a shift in the developing praxis of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth, as we will discuss, was both a political form as well as an ideational aspiration. As a political form, the Commonwealth was merely an advance over the movements for an 'organic unity' of the empire, which explicitly endorsed white supremacy. However, in aspirational terms, the Commonwealth paid affirmative nods to a limited multi-racial polity. It fell on a non-white diplomat like Sastri, with Bajpai in tow, to navigate the wedge that separated the politics and the aspiration; and maneuver the nascent Indian diplomatic practice in directions which were to shape India's diplomacy in the decades to follow.

The first section of this essay will contextualise these travels within the contours of an emerging order. Indian diplomacy, of which this tour becomes the inaugurating move, emerges in the developing relationship between the transformation of India's internal struggle and the transformation of the commonwealth/international context. In the second section, we will follow Sastri and Bajpai across the world, witnessing how the two experienced, learnt and conducted the task of diplomacy. The third section on the afterlives of this tour will attempt to explore the ways in which these tours help us to think through the continuities of Indian diplomacy from colonial to postcolonial times.

Indian diplomacy and the Inter-War world

Conventional accounts of international society alert us to its expansion after the First World War. The incorporation into the League of Nations of countries from Latin America, Asia and Africa as equal members indicated a move towards democratization of the international society. The new egalitarianism was inscribed through Woodrow Wilson's impressive call for self-determination which encouraged the colonized populations to hope for quick routes to independence. But as several critical works have shown, Wilson was doubly quick to undermine than to proclaim the same ideal. His idea of self-determination was deeply circumscribed, racialized and counter-revolutionary.[6] Indeed, it served not to advance but to further restrict the sovereign claims of non-western nations. As Adom Getachew argues in the case of Ethiopia and Liberia, the League of Nations imposed 'burdened sovereignty' on these otherwise independent countries, as the sovereign rights of these countries were further curtailed. She calls it 'mandation by other means'.[7]

For India, however, the experience was somewhat the opposite. India became a member of the League (and subsequently of several other international organizations), which was a consequence of India's recognition as an equal member, alongside the self-governing dominions at the Imperial War Conference of 1917. Importantly however, India was not granted a self-governing status internally. The Montford Reforms of 1919 acknowledged 'responsible government' as the aim of reforms, but against the expectations of Indian leaders did not grant India self-government. More so, the reforms also did not confirm a timeline as to when India could expect

to achieve self-government. So, what motivated India's elevation to the high table of diplomacy, without fulfilling the fundamental criterion of self-determination or self-governance?

The answer lies in the transforming landscape of the British Empire itself. During the First World War, as Britain found itself relying greatly on its dominions and India for support, the calls for imperial decentralization became increasingly vociferous. Consequently, the post-War empire was reimagined as a 'Commonwealth'. Ideas for what the Commonwealth meant differed from dominion premiers like Jan Smuts to imperial constitutionalists like Lionel Curtis, [8] but essentially all of them sought some form of decentralization as well as a recognition of the equality of its self-governing constituents. The empire was hierarchical in its imagination of political organization, which the Commonwealth sought to recraft as a network of affinities between political communities, centering around certain core ideals.[9] This new conception of the British Commonwealth of Nations was also required to be sufficiently different from other empires, federations and commonwealths (America, for instance) of the time, as well as from earlier iterations of the imperial ideals such as Greater Britain, Imperial Federation and the Organic Union.

Lionel Curtis's was perhaps the most sketched out ideal of the Commonwealth.[10] Although his scheme made a range of analytical and empirical observations about the transformation of the Empire into a Commonwealth, two key ideas stood out. The foundations of the British Commonwealth, he argued, were not contractual but sacramental. In other words, the Commonwealth was a political community joined not by a transactional social contract between its constituents and the Sovereign – as political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Rousseau would argue – but rather a sacramental bond. An innate sense of duty towards each other, represented in the Sovereign, joined the political communities. Each political constituent cared for the other, and took on concomitant responsibilities for the welfare of others and the political community as a whole. Consequently, the political institutions within the Commonwealth were designed to uphold the duty of other-regarding welfare. The basis of the autonomous political units coming together in the British Commonwealth was neither a matter of expedience nor of self-interest, but of care for the interests of the others in the political community.[11]

This other-regarding duty came with an important caveat – it could only be undertaken by those who were mature and responsible enough to carry its burden. In other words, immature (read: non-white, colonized) political communities which could not be given the responsibility of governing themselves, let alone making decisions for others, were ideally excluded from the governing functions. However, the only way to cultivate the sense of duty, Curtis argued, was to practice it. Indeed, the best way to develop the sense of duty among the less advanced constituents was to introduce them, in measured fashion, to these responsibilities. Indeed, he would argue that the very purpose of this Commonwealth was twofold: to raise those who were yet unable to share this duty within the Commonwealth, and to continuously expand its reach outwards to bind the whole of humanity.

In this Christianity-inspired sacramental conceptualisation, Curtis allowed for the possibility of non-white populations becoming part of the Commonwealth.[12] So, for instance, if India – the 'most advanced' among the colonies – is to be eventually raised to a fully self-governing member of the Commonwealth, it was imperative that India be included in imperial decision-making.[13]

Making India an equal participant with some Indians as representatives would acknowledge not only India's advance under the British rule, but also serve the pedagogic function of training Indians to participate in imperial matters. Importantly, India's inclusion would also demonstrate that the sole criterion for inclusion into the high table was political advance and not racial distinction, Curtis argued. This was an indication to other non-white members that the 'standards of civilization' within the empire entertained the future possibility of their inclusion.

Regardless of Curtis's specious conceptual spin, the reasons for India's inclusion were also pressing. As imperial decision-makers were often reminded, with 75 per cent of its population,

India was what made the empire an Empire.[14] The country had contributed immensely to the war effort and that support had been secured during the war with promises for greater equality in the post-War era. Having fought alongside the British in the War, Indians had asserted their claims to equality. India had shown, as Indian leaders and even the government of India argued, that it was no more a dependent of, but partner in the Empire. Indian leaders demanded the removal of the 'badge of inferiority' and to be raised 'in the scale of nations'.[15] The uprising in Ireland and the revolution in Russia which had bolstered Indian revolutionaries also increased the salience of the primarily moderate Indian leadership who could be placated with reforms and imperial equality.

Another key concern, perhaps the most important consideration in India's elevation, was the inevitability of the notoriously racist white dominions having a say in imperial governance and consequently matters relating to Indian affairs. As Sastri wrote in an important pamphlet, this would make India a 'household drudge' of the empire, and a 'humiliation' that Indians would not brook.[16]

While granting 'self-government', as Indians had demanded, was out of question – although a reform scheme promising a move towards responsible government were introduced – equal representation at the imperial table to British-ruled India was easier to yield for the British government.[17] Preceding the Montford reforms, India was included as an equal member of the British Empire at the Imperial War Conference of 1917. This implied a juridical equality with the white dominions as far as imperial politics was concerned, and subsequently at the international level.

This disparity between India's international and internal status made India an international anomaly, as several scholars have pointed out.[18] A sovereign country that strives for international legitimacy is not entirely uncommon, but a colony with international status is rare and indeed anomalous. However, several Indian nationalists saw this quasi-international status for a non-self-governing colony as an empty gesture. Indian nationalists, including Nehru, were dismissive and thought of India's international equality as a farce.[19] India may have been an equal member of the international society in juridical terms, but substantively not so much because it was the British Raj and their interests, and not Indians, who were represented.

However, the binary of juridical versus substantive presence misses the complex ways in which the international and the domestic intermingled. First, juridical international status was seen as an important, non-retractable, signal from the British Empire towards the actual grant of dominion status to India. In other words, the grant of dominion-like equality at the international level implied a guarantee of Britain's commitment towards speedy reforms. This was one of the reasons why Indian liberals, for instance, remained convinced that even though the Montford reforms fell considerably short of self-government, a dominion status was an inevitability.[20] Indian grievances, when placed in the context of Britain's troubles in Ireland and the announcement of the Irish Free State in December 1921, confirmed to the Indian liberals the British government's reluctance to pursue any militarily costly option even for India.

Furthermore, diplomatic equality, beyond being a status-gaining exercise and a commitment move towards internal reforms, also granted an important voice to the country in shaping anti-racial policies in the empire. On the issues of racial discrimination, especially when it came to the discrimination against Indians overseas, Indian diplomats exercised considerable agency in influencing empire-wide discourse and policies. Having gained a seat at the high table seat alongside the dominions, Indians used platforms such as the imperial conference to marshal the emerging idea of the Commonwealth to their advantage.

Third, the juridical versus substantive divide, while conveniently sidetracking the contributions of inter-war Indian liberals, also misses on the story of the emergence of Indian diplomacy. Sastri-Bajpai tour, which we turn to now, was an early iteration of Indian diplomacy, which helped not only to lay the foundations of the Indian diplomatic practice but also, for years to come shaped India's position on key aspects of post-independence foreign policy, such as on

race and the commonwealth. Crucially, the key Indian diplomat in this period, Sastri, embodies the form and content of the origins of diplomacy.

The journeys

London and Geneva

On 16 April 1921, Sastri and Bajpai left Bombay for London on the *SS Kaiser-e-Hind*.[21] Sastri was already scheduled to proceed to London as a member of the Railways Committee, when the Viceroy asked him to stay on longer for the Imperial Conference, planned to start in mid-June. Sastri's choice as India's representative was crucial, and in that Bajpai's remark about his public speaking was not wide of the mark. As an observer was to recount at the end of the 1920s, the First World War saw the rise of the 'scholar-statesman' (sic). The War had been thrust upon the world by short-sighted politicians, who often clad themselves in military attire. It was now left to the 'scholar-statesman' with 'his high character, his liberal culture, and persuasive force and humane sympathies' to lead the world back to peace. Woodrow Wilson in America, Tomas Garrigue Masaryk in Bohemia, Herbert A.L. Fisher and Arthur Balfour in England, Gustav Stresemann in Germany, Aristide Briand in France, Benedetto Croce in Italy, among others, had furnished 'a lofty direction and a beneficial purpose' to public life. No wonder, the scholar was 'raised to exalted positions of power and prestige'. Sastri, with his 'profound knowledge of men and things, a wide experience of public life, a remarkable intellectuality and moral eminence, a rare gift of speech, and above all, a high character, and an inspiring personal example' belonged to the same group of scholar-politicians.[22]

However, Sastri's appointment as India's representative was not merely because of his scholarly disposition and forceful oratory. The Gandhi-led nationalist movement had galvanized itself into a strong political force with mass support. After briefly accepting the 1919 Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, the Congress had rejected them to demand *swaraj* (self-government) and gone on to launch a non-cooperation movement. Sastri, in contrast, had not only been a crucial supporter of the Montford reforms, but had also contributed to their drafting. Although by no means an uncritical supporter of the government, Sastri, like his mentor Gopal Krishna Gokhale, followed the path of constitutional politics. The two Gokhale protegees, Sastri and Gandhi, represented the two emerging poles of non-violent politics in India. With Gandhi's fame on the rise even abroad – he was now regularly compared with Jesus Christ, for instance[23]– the British government were interested in projecting Sastri as India's counter-voice to Gandhi.

Sastri, the diplomat, could also be projected as a living tribute to the success of the civilizing mission. He was a native leader who was not a puppet of the government, neither was he overtly keen to appear as a 'brown saheb'. He had indeed made his name through speeches which were highly critical of the government. Someone who could meld the sagely disposition of an oriental intellectual with the openness of a western mind, who could quote from Burke to Valmiki with equal ease, and despite critiques of colonialism accepted the advances it brought, was an ideal representative of India as well as the British rule. The purpose of colonialism is sometimes prematurely considered to be the making of 'mimic men'. However, quite contrarily, it is in shaping the native into an ideal product of the intermixture of colonial-colonized cultural interface – blending their exotic charm with a hospitable cheeriness – where colonialism finds its *raison d'être*.[24]

However, the rituals of diplomacy also demand an outgoing, social personality, one that Sastri lacked. Travelling together on the ship, Bajpai observed Sastri from a closed, personal space: the latter's shyness and reticence, and inclination to avoid social occasions, was a troubling trait for a diplomat. Bajpai wrote, that '[i]n the circles in which [Sastri] will soon have to mingle social charm counts for as much as intellectual power or political sagacity'.[25] This is also where the

younger Indian saw his opportunity. His efforts at 'humanising' Sastri, started at the ship itself; as he pushed Sastri to attend social gatherings.

When the two landed in London, the Imperial Conference was still two months away. The main issue at the Imperial Conference was going to be the Anglo-Japanese Treaty and the future constitution of the British Empire, or the now preferred term, the British Commonwealth. From India's point of view however, the key issue was the racial ill-treatment of Indians across the British dominions, especially in South Africa. Sastri had identified securing the rights of overseas Indians as his main mission and accordingly prepared a resolution for the Imperial Conference.

Sastri and Bajpai conducted a series of discussions with the India Office on the issue. India Office, who Bajpai described 'an extra-cautious body of men who are apologetic even when claiming what is no more than due to India',[26] insisted on toning down the language of the resolution. But Sastri was determined not to let the issue get diluted at the hands of the India Office mandarins. He did a series of interviews and speeches on the issue of overseas Indians to create enough noise to make it harder for the dominions as well as the agenda drafters to ignore. Bajpai dragooned a reluctant Sastri into several social functions which offered opportunities for 'making informal but very useful political discussions'[27]. They managed to successfully place the issue on the agenda, although it could only find an entry at the bottom end of the pecking order.

By the time the Conference started in mid-June, the Indian delegation had done considerable background work. The main opposition to the Indian position was expected to come from the South African Prime Minister, Jan Smuts. Against someone of Smuts' stature, the Indian delegation needed every opportunity to cajole, caress and persuade other delegations as well as the London political elite. Bajpai also arranged a series of meetings for Sastri with the dominion prime ministers, including with Smuts. These meetings proved helpful to assess the barometer of opposition. Sastri and Bajpai had cultivated networks in the London elite and social networks, and through them attempted to influence public opinion, scoped out the possibilities of compromise with Smuts as well as with other dominion prime ministers.

Sastri's speeches at the conference, pushing for the rights of Indians, were both memorable and substantive.[28] Acknowledging the right of the dominions to frame their policies with regard to the composition of their populations, he asserted India's equal status and consequently the right of Indian subjects to enjoy the same rights as every other imperial subject, irrespective of where they were in the empire.

Importantly, what he demanded was not the same rights as whites on the basis of human rights, but a form of sovereign equality within the Commonwealth. Hence, this was a matter of juridical equality not abstract justice. His placing of the argument on the basis of sovereign equality and not explicitly on racial equality, which would have antagonized the white dominions, left his opponents with little argumentative critique. Even Smuts agreed on the matter of principle, but expressed his inability to sign on the resolution citing South Africa's 'exceptional' circumstances. Eventually, the doggedness of Edwin Montagu, the Secretary of State for India, and Sastri on the issue paid off as Indians were able to pass a resolution asserting the equality of Indians in the Empire. South Africa had abstained from – importantly, not opposed – the resolution, which signified how successful the Indian delegation had been.[29]

For Bajpai, as he acknowledged in a letter, the Conference was a tremendous learning experience. He noted how Smuts, even though representing a small country, was imperious in all discussions of the Empire. In contrast, Indians spoke only on the issues that were relevant to India. Bajpai wrote that Indians needed to learn from Smuts. The latter's propensity to speak on everything, contrasted against the reluctance of Indians, raised the profile of his country in the imperial scheme of things. As both Sastri and Bajpai found out in the proceedings of the Conference, despite a clearly good case, Smuts was hard to beat because of the support he got from people like Churchill at the Imperial Conference. Even someone like William M. Hughes, the Australian

Prime Minister who held grudges against the South African prime minister, prevaricated several times on the question of equal rights to the Indians.

From London, Sastri and Bajpai were dispatched to Geneva to represent India at the second League of Nations Assembly. At the Assembly, Sastri made another striking speech, where he counselled the Assembly – being the more democratic forum than the Council – to take more initiative. The Assembly was representative of the 'citizens of the world' and hence it was 'bound to act in the interests of all the others' and not merely the strongest powers. He also called for democratization of the functioning of the League Secretariat.[30] India paid nearly 5 per cent to the League's expenses, and yet had only 1 representative in its secretariat. This contrasted sharply with 138 from Britain, 73 from France and 13 from America which wasn't even part of the League. Towards the end of the speech, to the great annoyance of the British delegation, he called out the fellow empire delegation member South Africa for racial discrimination. Speaking on behalf of the non-white people of the world, he said that the South African colour policy, if also applied to its mandate in South West Africa, would mean that 'we are worse off under the trustees of the League than we were under the Germans'.[31]

The speech was a sensation, hailed by one and all as the most impressive in that year. The British delegation as well as South Africa's delegates were displeased that Sastri had raised an internal issue of the British Commonwealth at an international platform. However, Sastri held that at the League the Indian delegation was not subordinate to the British delegation and the criticism of South Africa was justified.[32]

In the Committees, Sastri faced the seasoned Chinese diplomat, Wellington Koo, on the question of opium. Koo, who doubled as the President of the League's Council that year, had introduced a resolution which prohibited the illicit production, manufacture and trade in opium. But he had also influenced the Council to set aside a recommendation from the advisory report to appeal to the Chinese authorities to take concrete steps to curtail opium production. In effect, as Bajpai wrote, Koo wanted the world to shut its eyes to the irregularities in the production of opium in China, while embarking on a 'holy and humanitarian crusade against its use' in every other country.[33] Sastri objected that this was a convenient sidestepping of rules. If the League deliberately overlooked China's failures to live up to its own promises, it would be failing in its duties. Koo 'negotiated, bullied and threatened us with constitutional difficulties' wrote Sastri. But Sastri remained firm and convinced the sub-committee to go against the Council's President. The final report asked the Chinese government to take appropriate measures to combat the smuggling of opium. Sastri's strong response made quite an impression – a French delegate commented that Sastri was 'a great orator, with knives'.[34] He was ably aided by Bajpai in disseminating India's position, eventually giving India a crucial diplomatic victory over China.[35] Bajpai noted that the League served as 'a valuable field for international advertisement' and Sastri's popularity at the League convinced him that India ought to make more of such platforms.[36] The more Indians spoke on these platforms and the more issues they spoke on, the more the country's stature would rise.

Washington

As soon as they returned from Geneva to London, Sastri was appointed as India's plenipotentiary for the Washington Naval Conference. He insisted on taking Bajpai along. The Conference was convened by the recently-elected American president William Harding to discuss two broad themes – disarmament and the new order emerging in the pacific with the rise of two major powers, the US and Japan. Harding's initiative was partly inspired by the desire to reinsert America into global affairs after the disastrous League of Nations policy of his predecessor Woodrow Wilson, which had been voted down in the Senate – Harding being one of the voters against it. Harding's approach to world peace was disarmament rather than the creation of

toothless international institutions. The Conference itself had stimulated varying reactions. *The Washington Times* sought comments from three leading minds of the time: the writers H.G. Wells and George Barnard Shaw and the inventor-cum-businessman Thomas Edison. Shaw was the most pessimistic. Refusing an invitation to come to Washington, he declared the Conference a sham with little hope of any lasting peace. Edison concurred that permanent and complete disarmament, as the Conference aimed, was hardly a possibility. Wells was more optimistic, and had travelled to Washington to report on the Conference. The Conference would either be 'a turning point in human affairs', or would be 'one of the last failures' before the 'disasters and destruction that gather our race', he wrote.[37]

Both Sastri and Bajpai witnessed the American Secretary of State, Charles E. Hughes, make a historic bull-in-a-china-shop speech on 12 November 1921, where he proposed to massively cut down on the naval capacity of each country. The British soldier-turned-correspondent Charles Repington, who coined the term First World War, noted that at the end of his half hour speech, Hughes had consigned a total of 1,874,043 tonnes to scrap, considerably more than 'all the admirals of the world have destroyed in a cycle of centuries.'[38]

Observing from the main table sitting diagonally across from Hughes, Sastri was highly impressed with the approach taken by the American delegation. To his audience back in India, he called Hughes' speech a 'capital stroke' which presented a 'cut and dried proposal'.[39] He noticed that the public opinion had been worked up in such a manner that any opposition to American proposals was sure to invite the opprobrium of the masses. The negotiating parties had been caught by surprise and pushed into a corner. The main question had been 'decided beyond recall' and only the details were left to be debated, Sastri wrote to his brother.[40] With this, the old diplomacy of 'euphemisms and concealments, … periphrasis and indirectness, its mystifications and long-drawn delays' was dead, 'long live the new', wrote Sastri.[41] On behalf of India, Sastri signed the treaties in Washington.

For India, the value of this conference was less substantial and more symbolic. Sastri was sent as India's plenipotentiary, and this was the first time an Indian delegate would have the sole power to sign international treaties on India's behalf. However, this came with a rider. The British feared that at the Conference, if things did not go their way, the Japanese would introduce a resolution on race just as they had done at the League of Nations. Sastri, a known critic of racism within the Empire, would vote with Japan. Hence, even with plenipotentiary powers, Sastri was asked to regularly consult with the Secretary of State, Edwin Montagu, in London. Bajpai sent weekly reports to India Office from Washington.

Nonetheless, to Sastri, the participation of India as an autonomous actor was a striking proof of international equality, especially with the white dominions. This meant, he emphasized in his speeches, that a full dominion status was not too far. In the weeks of the Conference, Britain was also negotiating with the Irish leaders, and the accord which was eventually reached in December 1921 was a sign that an autonomous status for India was also in the offing. Asserting his own independence from the British delegation, Sastri warned the British that if India was not granted a dominion status in near future an Ireland-like situation was likely. [42] In the conference per se, India had nothing substantial to contribute to the discussions on the matters of disarmament.

Although frustrated at the irrelevance of India at such gatherings, Bajpai was benefitting from the Conference as a student of diplomacy – his third international conference in a row. To Tej Bahdur Sapru he wrote:

> … I am gathering experience in Washington. I meet interesting people every day and see how foreign policy is fashioned. … Nothing of much interest to India has yet come up. I doubt very much whether it ever will. Our presence here is more valuable as affording a training in diplomatic methods and as constituting a recognition of India's right to participate in important international conferences … [43]

The Washington Conference was also, however, indicative of the shift of the epicenter of global power from Europe to America. Bajpai was convinced that India ought to have a consular, if

not diplomatic, representation in important world capitals, but most importantly in Washington. The dominions already had them, and so should India. But this was not just a matter of 'sentimental rivalry' or symbolic claim. Hundreds of Indian students came to the US, and almost all of them were:

> … in the clutches of Irish Americans. Their political outlook is distorted. They magnify India's grievances in their own minds and then paint them in the most lurid colours before Americans where the prejudice against Great Britain is as intense as their ignorance of India is profound. Without any effective counter-propaganda, anything that these young "patriots" say is easily swallowed and rapidly digested.[44]

Two decades later, Bajpai would return to Washington as India's first Agent General to the United States where one of his primary duties was to counter the nationalist view against British rule in India. He wrote articles in the American press criticizing the nationalists. In one of the articles, he cryptically called his future boss Nehru 'the Hamlet of Indian politics'.[45]

The dominions

Sastri and Bajpai returned to India in March 1922, just after Gandhi's arrest following his suspension of the non-cooperation movement. Sastri and Bajpai were to proceed again in two months on a tour of the three dominions – Australia, New Zealand and Canada – which now attracted strong nationalist critique.

Many argued that with several leaders including Gandhi in jail, a leader of Sastri's stature was needed in the country in this crucial phase.[46] Indian radicals called him 'a self-seeking unjust agent of a tyrannical alien government' who had continued to participate in government committees and delegations during the non-cooperation movement.[47] Sastri basked in the glory of a 'pretentious diplomatic coup', while being entirely disconnected with the wishes of the people.[48] *Bombay Chronicle* editorialised that Sastri pleaded for the just and humane treatment of the nationals of every other country except his own.[49] A sympathetic writer noted 'a miasma of hatred, bigotry, suspicion and slander' against Sastri in the nationalist press. He was called 'the Esau of Indian politics … who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage'.[50] Even the more sympathetic avenues like the *Indian Social Reformer* questioned Sastri's 'political reverie' in assuming that a tour to the dominions would affect any change.[51]

Remarkably however, it was left to Gandhi and his close followers like Banarasi Das Chaturvedi and Henry Polak to defend Sastri publicly.[52] Gandhi stated that his and Sastri's love for each other wasn't lessened a bit, even when the latter thought Gandhi was 'leading India down to the abyss'.[53] Chaturvedi wrote in the Lucknow paper, *Leader*, that it was a pity that no Indian leader of prominence went to the dominions to see the condition of Indians overseas, and those who go were weakened by ill-informed critiques of intolerant friends.[54] Polak critiqued those who argued that India could only help overseas Indians if the country had *swaraj*. He reminded them that Japan was an independent country, and yet could not ensure the equal treatment of its citizens.[55]

Thus, the stakes on the success of Sastri's mission were even higher. Bajpai, was anxious for him: 'I … hope [Sastri] would achieve some measure of success in his mission. Soft words alone will not satisfy our people or silence his critics. … We ought not to return empty handed', he wrote.[56] To his own daughter Sastri wrote:[57]

> … I maintain that this mission cannot be delayed. Its reaction, if rightly guided, on India's advance, is considerable. It can only be estimated by those who have the imagination to see the subtle ways in which political action is controlled by the convergent currents of thought from different parts of the Empire. The Washington Conference is a triumph of the world's public opinion. More and more every day in the future, England's policy will be moulded by American and Dominion sentiment. If Lajpatrai says it, people call it wisdom, if I say it, they call it selfish.

From June to September 1922, Sastri and Bajpai travelled across the three white dominions of Australia, New Zealand and Canada. They covered all the provinces except Tasmania in Australia

in over a month of travel. They spent four weeks across the north and south islands in New Zealand.[58] In Canada, while much of their political concerns were limited to British Columbia, they also spent considerable time in Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal. This tour had been arranged to canvas support among the lawmakers in the dominions for pro-Indian legislations in local parliaments. However, the tour also had a broader public diplomacy mandate. Sastri was expected to create a broader sympathy for the Indian cause among the dominion publics.[59]

Steeped in what Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds call, the 'religion of whiteness', the white publics in the dominions were notoriously prejudiced, which meant that Sastri's was an already impossible task.[60] However, Sastri's mission was limited in the sense that he did not appeal against the anti-Asian immigration measures which had been considerably hardened for non-whites, but to push for the political and civic rights of those Indians who were already legally inside these dominions. These included not only the question of franchise for Indians in most cases, but also other issues such as old age pensions.

Sastri's recent performances in London, Geneva and Washington had raised expectations in the dominions. An Australian publication referred to him as 'our first great racial ambassador' who 'moves in an orbit that transcends the conventional limits of international diplomacy'.[61] Beyond the immediate task of 'seek[ing] our understanding and cooperation', Sastri's mission was significant with a view towards 'forg[ing] some tangible and material links in the bonds which … will ultimately unite in amity the Eastern and Western civilisations'.[62] Most analysts viewed him in relation to Gandhi. While Gandhi led a movement against British rule in India, Sastri, they unfailingly noted, was pro-Empire. As a columnist in *Victoria Daily Times* emphasized, Sastri was different from the 'fanatical types' like 'Gandhi and his associates'. His 'personal accomplishments, provide[d] … an assurance that there is potential material upon which to build India's case for autonomy'. Moderate both in temperament and political views, Sastri was 'an exact type to whom the British government thinks India must look for its ultimate liberty'.[63]

His public speeches were greatly anticipated and much successful. In them, he pleaded for India's equality in the empire, not as a concession but as a matter of right. It was incumbent upon the dominions, including Australia, to provide equal rights to the Indians already resident in their countries.[64] In Melbourne, he asserted: 'We … ask you for nothing but equality. You dare not, you cannot, and I know, you will not, deny it.'[65]

His tone was even shriller in Canada:

> Neither Britain nor any Dominion can afford to play bully with India any longer, and we in India, let me tell you once for all, are determined to be bullied no longer. If we are going to be equal partners with the rest of the Empire in the maintenance of peace, we will contribute what we can to its might, strength and majesty, for we have a contribution to make to the world, and we are prepared and willing to make it under the Union Jack, if the Union Jack is going to bring us the maintenance of self-respect, and our own sense of honour. Otherwise, much as we should regret it we must seek our political salvation outside of this great political organization.[66]

Sastri's speeches evinced varying reactions among his target audiences. One *West Australian* reader called him the 'Lloyd George of India', [67] while the newspaper hailed him for his 'memorable eloquence'.[68] *The Chronicle* called him 'one of the most remarkable personalities in India and in the wider sphere of world politics.'[69] Another listener in Adelaide noted that '[h]e asks very little, simply for his countrymen to be allowed a vote. Why should we not grant it? No just objection can exist.'[70] The Australian premier, William Hughes, affirmed that India's case had 'gained in weight by the eloquence and reasonableness with which it had been urged'.[71] In the New Zealand Parliament, his speech was hailed as 'the most perfect example of public speaking heard for many years in the Parliament building'. [72] In Canada, *The Vancouver Sun* noted his 'world fame as an able statesman'.[73] Leon Ladner, the Conservative Party representative from Vancouver, wrote that the speech had an important effect on public opinion in the notoriously anti-Indian British Columbia. The success of his speech could be gauged from the fact, he wrote privately to former premier Arthur Meighen, that none of the anti-Asian organisations and

complainants had criticized Sastri, even though his speech was published verbatim in most of the newspapers.[74] His meetings were well attended and enthusiastically reported. Bajpai cabled the India Office that 'by his eloquence, sanity and moderation' Sastri had created a great impression.[75]

However, these rousing receptions and high praise came wrapped in a patronizing stereotypes as well as cautionary warnings. One writer, A.G. Stephens, argued that Sastri's fame came not from a objectively impressive command over the English language, but the wonder that an Indian could speak so well. Sastri could not compare with 'Cobbett's standard of eloquence', but it was his brown skin that made his listeners wonder – "how the dickens it got there".'[76] Sastri was manifestly an exception, whose conduct ought not be seen as an argument for granting rights to Indians.

This argument of Sastri's exceptionalism, repeated in all the dominions, generated three sorts of arguments. The first argument, which Sastri himself endorsed was that through his personality Sastri was able to show India's higher culture to the dominion publics, a side they had not yet seen. The argument had strongly casteist connotations: the immigrants to the dominions, most of whom were engaged in either trade or labour, came from allegedly lower castes in India. More visits by high cultured and caste Indians will give a better impression of Indians to the dominions.

Sastri himself noted in his report, that '[t]he average citizen of a Dominion still regards India as a land of mixed poverty and splendour, barbaric in outlook and aspiration as well as in magnificence. He has had no opportunity of meeting Indians in refinement and culture, without which it is impossible to dissipate the phantom of superiority born of an imperial appreciation of Indian capacity'. [77]

The second argument, used by white opinion makers in the dominions, summoned Sastri's exceptionalism to argue that it should not blind the dominion leaders to the average Indian who was unlike Sastri. One conservative politician in Canada argued that 90% of Indians in Canada were 'low caste Hindus, filthy morally and physically, and extremely ignorant with respect to our political ideals', and he had personally not known a single Indian of 'the Sastri type who obviously are truly British'. Precisely the fact that Sastri was an exception should be enough indication of why more Indians could not be allowed in. Witholding political and civic rights from Indians, conservative leaders argued, disincentivized their immigration into Canada.

The third reaction was an acknowledgement of Sastri's strong arguments, but placing the question of Indian in the dominions within the larger context of immigration politics. If Indians were granted political rights as British subjects, this would then have to be extended to other naturalized British subjects of East Asian origin in these dominions, such as the Japanese and the Chinese. A Canadian newspaper editorialized that the granting of franchise to Indians would result in 'a thin edge of the wedge', i.e. something that may be unimportant in itself like a small hole in the dyke of Whites Dominions. It had the potential to burst open a large hole for making political rights imminent for other Asian migrants.[78] Furthermore, others emphasized that the real target was South Africa where Indians were in larger numbers.[79] An *Evening Star* writer cautioned against Sastri's 'stirring appeals to abstract justice', arguing that New Zealand may afford to take a lenient stance on Indians, but in situations such as in Natal in South Africa where Indians outnumbered whites by almost 36 percent it was unreasonable to ask whites to grant equal rights to Indians. Urging New Zealanders not to fall 'under the spell of the charmer', the writer noted that Sastri, a man of high culture and impeccable standards, was indeed an exception to Indians in general, in particular to those who emigrated to other parts of the Empire.[80]

These reactions allow us to tease out what appears to be an important coincident, but requires deeper reflections: Indian diplomacy emerges exactly at the moment at which Indian emigration of labour, in the form of indenture as well as for other working class professions, is legally barred. Between 1913 to 1922, India passes several legislations, banning emigration of labour.[81] The new overseas Indian, in the dominions as well as in Kenya, whose rights Indian

diplomats are primarily fighting for in an empire where political rights are still largely based on property rights, is the mostly *savarna*, propertied Indian, who in professional terms could be identified as the trader and the soldier. The Indian is no more the '*coolie*', the derogatory term used for Indians. Sastri (and Bajpai), as the cultured upper caste Indian, is not just the representative but also the embodiment of the new Indian the dominions could expect. The debate in the dominions then is not whether the overseas Indian could be granted rights, but whether the overseas Indian does indeed match Sastri's standard. As a diplomat, Sastri becomes the model 'sankritised' Indian and the putative subject of those rights.[82]

Sastri's mission had varying degrees of success in the three dominions. The Australian and New Zealand governments granted some legislative concessions. The Australian Prime Minister wrote to Sastri: 'You have brought within the range of practical politics a reform but for your visit would have been most improbable, if not impossible, of achievement'.[83] It took two more years for Indians to be granted franchise at the dominion level, although by then Hughes was already out of power. Queensland granted the franchise to Indians in 1930, and Western Australia in 1934.[84] In New Zealand, the disabilities faced by Indians were minimal. Indians had only two specific complaints: they were excluded from receiving old-age pensions, and they had difficulty in securing employment. In the case of the former, no Indian resident in New Zealand was old enough to be considered eligible for the Old Age Pensions Act (and this was to remain so for many years). Since it was not a pressing matter, the New Zealand government informed Sastri that no amendments were proposed. Discriminations against Indians on social security were eventually removed in the late 1930s.[85] With regard to the employment of Indians, Sastri observed that the while there was societal prejudice against Indians (although much less prevalent than Australia), the government as such took a stronger stance against discrimination faced by Indians in employment schemes.[86] The New Zealand government also agreed to relax two specific provisions on the New Zealand Immigrations Restrictions Act of 1920, which were restrictive towards Indians. In Canada, Sastri received promises of concessions and noted a 'a softening of prejudice'. Bajpai was also of the view that they had been 'successful beyond expectation.'[87] But both overestimated their efforts. Indians in British Columbia were only able to gain franchise in 1947.

But, as Sastri emphasized, the more significant aspect of his tour was that this was the first instance when India had sent an accredited representative to directly negotiate with the dominions on matters of mutual interest. India could now rightfully claim an international identity, which in turn had an enormous constitutional significance. By establishing India's international credentials, the case for granting dominion status as well as self-government to India had been considerably strengthened.

British policies had become increasingly susceptible to pressures from America and the dominions, as apparent in the recent grant of Dominion Status to Ireland. The case for dominion status for India was strengthened if the publics in the broader white world were sympathetic to India, he argued.[88] With regard to the rights of Indians in the dominions, although he did not expect immediate results, he believed that considerable groundwork had been done to create awareness about the issues faced by Indians in the white dominions. [89] The political education of white publics and leaders, which he thought was his main mission, would contribute to better relations with Indians in the dominions.

Afterlives

The Indian Social Reformer carried a critical but sympathetic assessment of Sastri's dominion tour.

> Mr. Sastry (sic.) writes: "I am not hopeful of immediate results; but of the ultimate success of continued efforts I have little doubt." There is a good deal too much of such "vacant chaff well-meant for grain" in this report. Mr. Sastry must have been conscious of it, as he finds it necessary to lay stress on the educational values of his tour. We do not doubt it. Failures are often of more educative value than success.[90]

It is unreasonable to expect a wholesale change in dominion policy from one tour, and Sastri tempers his own aims in the report by emphasizing its educative value. Without going into whether this must be qualify as a success or a failure, we can turn to the important gestures one can make about tracing potential future trajectories of the Sastri-Bajpai tour.

Bajpai's letters provide an indication of the formative influence of this tour, not least on his convictions about spreading India's diplomatic footprint. The Commonwealth as an idea had a significant hold on him for the rest of his career, including during his years as Nehru's chief foreign policy mandarin after independence. As the recently deceased K.S. Bajpai – himself an exceptional diplomat for India – noted in an oral interview about his father, the Commonwealth had come to be 'an article of faith' for G.S. Bajpai. Despite its contradictions on race, Bajpai had an innate regard for the Commonwealth as fundamentally informed by enlightenment values. Bajpai's early tour of the dominions had played a crucial role in his lifelong commitment to the ideal. He went on to play a most crucial role in India remaining within the Commonwealth, and not taking the Irish route out of it. K.S. Bajpai specifically noted the deep influence these early tours and the networks his father mingled in had on the senior Bajpai's, and consequently India's, willingness to remain within the Commonwealth.[91]

Eventually the Commonwealth that Nehru, Bajpai and India acceded to was the one which Sastri had played an important role in shaping. Sastri realized that the empire needed new clothes, and that imperial enthusiasts were looking towards the Commonwealth as being the replacement term but had an awkward relationship with racial equality. The Commonwealth as an ideal was accommodative, to some extent, to include non-white members in schemes of imperial governance. But it elided any discussions on racial inequality which caused the hierarchy in the first place, assuming the hierarchy to be inscribed by social Darwinian ideas of civilizational progress.

Sastri is entrepreneurial in his negotiation of the race-question within the Commonwealth ideal. It is important to recognize that he does not make it an issue of human right. Aware of the excessive sensitivities of the dominions with regard to their sovereign claims within the British Commonwealth, he couches India's claims with twin logics of a commonwealth equality within and a difference from without. In other words, he argues that India was a sovereign equal within the commonwealth which meant that Indians across the empire would need to be given exactly the same treatment as other Europeans. But, to the objections that white dominions had with regard to opening the racial dyke for the Japanese and Chinese, he would argue that the Indian claims to equality as a member of the commonwealth cannot be compared against simultaneous claims of the Japanese and the Chinese who were not members of the Commonwealth. Focusing on sovereign equality also allows him escape the obvious contradiction of his racial equality with regard to others within the empire, such as the Africans. Africans could not claim for rights because they or their nations did not yet have a semblance of sovereign equality.

This claim of sovereign equality within the commonwealth has important consequences for India's subsequent diplomatic positions. A few years after this tour, Sastri and Bajpai were in Cape Town as part of a delegation to negotiate a bilateral agreement with South Africa. Known as the Cape Town Agreement of 1927, the Agreement was the first ever bilateral agreement within the empire/commonwealth without any involvement of Britain. The Agreement came soon after the Balfour declaration of 1926 which established that the United Kingdom and the dominions were 'equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs'.[92] Even though India was not included in the Declaration because it was not a self-governing dominion, the Cape Town Agreement became the first agreement that embodied and affirmed the principle of sovereign equality within the Commonwealth that Sastri had asserted in his tour.[93]

However, the Commonwealth was also shaped by Sastri's ideals in other important ways. The popularization of the idea of British Commonwealth could be credited for a large part to the Round Table (especially Curtis) and Jan Smuts. However, Sastri was able to masterfully point to

the inconsistencies of the ideal of the British Commonwealth and its racialized practice, without dismissing the whole ideal. Sastri responded to the mainstream interpretations of the Commonwealth ideal through a sustained rational, rather than just rhetorical, critique of their arguments. In the process, he articulated a vision for the British Commonwealth that might not be profoundly original, but was strikingly nuanced as well as novel in the setting of an imperial conference and the dominion tour. As Hugh Tinker argues, Sastri's Commonwealth was eventually also more enduring than Curtis's or Smuts', as a coloured commonwealth replaced a white commonwealth.[94] Indeed, his authorial claims on conceptualizing the British Commonwealth are as strong as those of Curtis and Smuts.

The issue of racial discrimination against Indians obviously came to assume increasing importance from this point onwards. Racial equality was a key aspect of post-independence foreign policy. At the United Nations in 1946, India raised the issue of racial discrimination against South African Indians for the first time, and played a crucial role in delegitimizing racial discrimination in the post-Second World War world order. [95] Sastri and Bajpai's tour was not only an important precursor to this history, but crucially also shaped the terms of India's diplomacy.[96] What is often missed in post-independence histories of India's efforts against racial discrimination is that until 1962 – when the anti-apartheid resolution made racism specifically a matter of human rights – India's opposition against racism used the sovereign equality argument. India had argued that racial discrimination against Indians contravened India's sovereign agreement with South Africa in 1927. In other words, the right to equal treatment was due to South African Indians because the South African government had consented to it in a bilateral commonwealth agreement, and South Africa's reneging on the agreement was a potential cause of conflict.[97]

In conclusion, we can only flag two other points which need greater elaboration in full scale studies of their own. First, in placing the origins of Indian diplomacy in this crucial moment of transformation from the identity of the overseas Indian, we become more attentive to the caste-inflections of Indian diplomacy. And second, at a time when Indian diplomacy is on an overdrive in justifying a citizenship amendment bill, that classifies potential citizens on the basis of religion, and combined with a National Register of Citizens discriminates against Muslim minorities already living in the country, it goes against on its own rich history of fight against discrimination and support for passive resistance against registration certificates by Indians overseas.

Notes

1. Son of a prominent Allahabad lawyer and later judge, Bajpai was something of a young prodigy. He had topped almost every exam from primary school in Allahabad to Oxford. In the supremely competitive Indian Civil Service Exam, he did not just secure the top position, but lumbered it with a 100-mark lead over the next in rank. Although he wasn't yet to know it, his ongoing rise within the ICS was spectacularly fast. He joined the service in 1914 and by 1926, he would go to on to become the youngest Secretary ever in the history of the ICS. No ICS – British or India – had ever risen in the hierarchy so quickly. In another few years, he would become a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, and eventually independent India's first secretary general of external affairs.

   See, 'Indian Information Index, January–June 1941', Volume 8, New Delhi: Bureau of Public Information, Government of India, p. 300. For an extended discussion on Bajpai's pre-independence role, see Amit Das Gupta, *The Indian Civil Service and Indian Foreign Policy, 1912–1961* (London: Routledge, 2020).
2. Apart from Sastri, the Indian delegation would include the Secretary of State Edwin Montagu and the Maharao of Kutch Khengarji III.
3. Stanley Reed, the editor of *The Times of India*, was the first one to address Sastri with this epithet. see, Sastri to Ramaswami, 3 September 1919, V.S. Srinivasa Sastri Papers, Ist Instalment (henceforth VSS Papers I), Subject File 4, f. 98, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi (henceforth NMML).
4. Bajpai to Sapru, 19 April 1921, IOR Neg 4986 - The Sapru Correspondence: Letters to and from Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru (1872–1949), 1st series, Reel 1 (A–G), B.6, f. 14–16, Indian Office and Records & Private Papeers, British Library (henceforth IOR&PP).
5. Bajpai to Sapru, 19 April 1921.

6. Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (London: Oxford University Press, 2015); Frank Nickovich, *The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy since 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Trygve Throntveit, 'The Fable of Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination', *Diplomatic History*, xxxv (2011), 445–481; Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 242–243; Rayford W. Logan, 'The Operation of the Mandate System in Africa', *The Journal of Negro History*, xiii (1928), 423–477; Arno Mayer, *Wilson vs. Lenin: Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917–1918* (New York: Meridian Books, 1967), Carolien Stolte, 'Uniting the Oppressed Peoples of the East: Revolutionary Internationalism in an Asian Inflection', in Mohammad Ali Raza, Franziska Roy and Benjamin Zachariah (eds.) *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World View 1917-1938* (Los-Angeles: Sage, 2015), 47–58; Brett Reilly, 'The Myth of the Wilsonian Moment', Wilson Centre Blog, 17 June 2019, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/the-myth-the-wilsonian-moment, accessed 10 October 2019; Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019); Daniel Gorman, *The emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
7. Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*. Further on the complicated politics of sovereignty and citizenship in the imperial context, see Lauren Benton, 'From International Law to Imperial Constitutions: The Problem of Quasi-Sovereignty,1870–1900,' *Law and History Review,* xxvi (2008), 595–619; Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Sukanya Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010); Daniel Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship and the Question of Belonging* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Itty Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014); Stephen Legg, 'An international anomaly? Sovereignty, the League of Nations, and India's princely geographies', *Journal of Historical Geography*, xliii (2014), 96–110; Ian Copland, *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire 1917–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Priya Naik, 'The case of the 'other India' and Indian IR scholarship', *Third World Quarterly*, xxxv (2014), 1496–1508.
8. Others included Alfred Zimmern and Richard Jebb.
9. For Smuts these ideals were physically inscribed in the person of the sovereign. See, Deborah Lavin, 'Lionel Curtis and the idea of Commonwealth', in Frederick Madden and D.K. Fieldhouse (eds.) *Oxford and the idea of Commonwealth* (London: Oxford University Press, 1989), 97–121; M.S. Donnely, 'J.W. Dafoe and Lionel Curtis – Two concepts of the Commonwealth', *Political Studies*, viii (1960), 170–182.
10. Lionel Curtis, *The Problem of the Commonwealth* (London: Macmillan, 1915).
11. Curtis first elaborated this within the meetings of the Round Table movement. See, MSS Eur 136/10, f. 50–60, IOR&PP.
12. Gerald Studdert-Kennedy, "Political Science and political theology: Lionel Curtis, Federalism and India", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xxiv (1996), 197–217.
13. S.R. Mehrotra, 'Imperial Federation and India, 1868–1917', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics,* i (1961), 29–40.
14. William Marris, 'India and the English', *The Round Table*, i (1910), 41–57.
15. Citation removed for peer review
16. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, *Self-Government for India: Under the British Flag* (Allahabad: Servants of India Society, 1916), 7.
17. For a range of views from Indian leaders on the question of reforms, see G.A. Natesan (eds.) *The Indian Demands* (Madras: G.A. Natesan & Co., 1917).
18. T. T. Poulose, "India as an Anomalous International Person (1919–1947)," *British Yearbook of International Law* xxxiv (1970): 201, Pradeep Barua, 'Strategies and Doctrines of Imperial Defence: Britain and India, 1919–45,' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xxv (1997), 240–266; Sneh Mahajan, *Foreign Policy of Colonial India, 1900-1947* (New Delhi, Routledge, 2018); T. A. Keenleyside, 'The Indian Nationalist Movement and the League of Nations: Prologue to the United Nations', *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, xxxix (1983), 281–98; Hugh Tinker, *Separate and Unequal: India and the Indians in the British Commonwealth, 1920-1950* (Queensland, University of Queensland Press, 1976); Joseph McQuade, 'Beyond an Imperial Foreign Policy?: India at the League of Nations, 1919–1946,' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xlviii (2020), 263–295; Maria Framke, 'India's freedom and the League of Nations: public debates 1919–1933', Matthias Zachmann (eds.) *Asia after Versailles: Asian Perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference and the Post-War World, 1919–1933* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017); Legg, 'An International Anomaly'.
19. McQuade, 'Beyond an Imperial Foreign Policy?', 264.

20. Indians had demanded 'self-government' – implying a transfer of power to Indians. 'Responsible government' implied rule through mandate of a wider electorate.
21. They were accompanied by another civil servant, Geoffrey Corbett.
22. L.S. Subramania, 'The Rt. Hon. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri', *India Review,* xxx (1929), 106–108. For some of Sastri's published writings and speeches, more specifically related to his liberalism, see: *Self-Government for India: Under the British Flag* (Allahabad: Servants of India Society, 1916); *Congress-League Scheme: An Exposition* (Poona: Poona: Aryabhushan Press, 1917); *Speeches and Writings of the Right Honourable V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, Vol. 1*, G.A. Natesan (ed.) (Madras: G. Natesan and Co, 1924); *The Rights and Duties of the Indian Citizen* (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1927); *The Other Harmony: A Selection from the Writings and Speeches of the Right Hon. V.S. Srinivasa Sastrii,* T.N. Jagadisan (ed.), 2nd ed. (Madras: S. Viswanathan, 1949); *Letters of The Rt. Hon. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri*, T.N. Jagadisan (ed.) (Madras: Rochhouse, 1946).
23. In America, for instance, several clergymen likened Gandhi to Jesus Christ, see 'Conditions in India described', The *Caledion-Record (Vermont)*, 14 September 1922, p. 1, 4; 'Likens Gandhi to Christ', *The Los Angeles Times*, 29 July 1922, p. 29; P.W. Wilson, '"The Things that are Caeser's"', *The New York Times*, 9 April 1922, p. 62.
24. Importantly, this duality is also quite ingrained in the performance of Sastri's caste identity. The sociologist M.S.S. Pandian characterizes this as typical of Tamil Brahmins: colonialism forced them to play the dual albeit contradictory roles of appearing both authentic and modern. See, M.S.S. Pandian, *Brahmin and Non- Brahmin: Geneologies of Tamil Political Present* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007).
25. Bajpai to Sapru, 28 April 1921, IOR Neg 4986, b.7, f. 17–19
26. Bajpai to Sapru, 9 June 1921, IOR Neg 4986, b 12, f. 31–32
27. Bajpai to Sapru, 15 June 1921, IOR Neg 4986, b 13, f. 33–34
28. 'E—Nineteenth 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, July 8, 1921, at 11 a.m.', The Imperial Conference 1921, A1, A1/35, SAB, National Archives, Pretoria.
29. For a discussion on this, see Vineet Thakur, Liberal, 'Liminal and Lost: India's first diplomats and the narrative of foreign policy', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 45(2017), 232–258.
30. V.S. Sastri, 'Speech at the League of Nations', In G.A. Natesan (ed.) *Speeches and Writings of Rt. Hon. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri* (Madras: G. Natesan and Co, 1924), 195–204
31. Sastri, 'Speech at the League of Nations', 204.
32. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, 'Aspects of my life', VSS Papers I, S. No 82, f. 43–44.
33. Bajpai to Sapru, 16 September 1921, IOR Neg 4986, B 21, f 51–53.
34. Sastri to Sankaran, 16 September 1921, VSS Papers I, Subject File 5, f 99.
35. *Report of the Delegates of India to the Second Session of the Assembly of the League of Nations* (Delhi: Superintendent Government Printing, 1922).
36. Bajpai to Sapru, 22 September 1921, IOR Neg 4986, b 22, f. 53–54
37. 'Wells and Edison fear Greed and Bias will menace parley', *The Washington Times*, 6 November 1921, 1
38. Charles Repington, *After the War; London–Paris–Rome–Athens–Prague–Vienna–Budapest–Bucharest–Berlin–Sofia–Coblenz–New York–Washington; a Diary* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1922), 432; Thomas Bailey, *A Diplomatic History of American People*, Tenth Edition (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1980), 640
39. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, 'Impressions of America', *The Servant of India*, v. (27 April 1922), 150–151.
40. Sastri to Ramaswami, 17 November 1921, VSS Papers I, Subject File 5, f. 114.
41. Sastri, 'Impressions of America', 150–151.
42. 'Says India will speak as Co-Equal Partner in 10 Years', *The Baltimore Sun*, 14 December 1921, 9; Also, 'Predicts Dominion rule in India soon', *The Washington Post*, 14 December 1921, 8; 'Predicts India will win autonomy', *The New York Times*, 14 December 1921, 12; 'India really in the Conference', *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 15 December 1921, 6.
43. Bajpai to Sapru, 17 November 1921, IOR Neg 4986, b 21, f. 61–62.
44. Bajpai to Sapru, 17 November 1921.
45. M. Jeffrey Brenner, *Structure of Decision: Indian Foreign Policy Bureaucracy* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1983), 79.
46. 'The Servant in a temper', *Indian Social Reformer*, xxxiii (23 April 1922), 579–580
47. *The Indian Sociologist: An Organ of Freedom, and of Political, Social and Religious reform,* xiii (August 1922), 2, In Syud Hossain Papers, Periodicals, S.No. 3, NMML.
48. Whip, 'From the Desk', *Hindustan Review*, xliv (September 1921), 7.
49. 'Notes of the Day', *Bombay Chronicle*, 13 October 1921.
50. A. Aravauda Aiyagar, 'Our Indian Visitor: The Rt. Hon. V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, a character sketch', *Daily News* (Perth), 1 June 1922, p. 3
51. 'The World's Public Opinion', *The Servant of India*, v (13 April 19220, 122
52. Banarasi Das Chaturvedi to Srinivasa Sastri, 6 October 1922, Correspondence: Banarasi Das Chaturvedi, VSS Papers I, NMML; Polak, 'Mr. Sastri and his mission'.
53. M.K. Gandhi, 'The Simla Visit', *The Tribune*, 1 June 1921, 5.

54. Reproduced in, Benarasi Das Chaturvedi, 'Mr. Sastri's tour', *The Servant of India*, v (5 May 1922), 203.
55. H.S.L Polak, 'Equal status: The Next step', *The Servant of India*, v *18 May 1922), 184–185.
56. Bajpai to Sapru, 31 May 1922, IOR Neg 4986.
57. Sastri to Rukmini, 13 March 1922, Correspondence: Rukmini, VS Srinivasa Sastri Papers, IInd Instalment, NMML.
58. V.S. Srininasa Sastri, *Report by the Right Hon'ble V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, P.C., regarding his deputation to the Dominions of Australia, New Zealand and Canada* (Simla: Government Central Press, 1923), 7.
59. 'Brief of Instructions for the Right Honourable Srinivasa Sastri', IOR/L/E/7/1242, F.No. 2547, IOR&PP, BL.
60. Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.
61. A.D. Ellis, 'Srinivasa Sastri: A Racial Ambassador; visit to Australia', *Argus* (Melbourne), 27 May 1922, 6.
62. Ellis, 'Srinivasa Sastri', 6.
63. Ellis, 'Srinivasa Sastri', 6.
64. 'Srinivasa Sastri welcomed to Melbourne; interesting interview, patience and resignation India's national character', *Ballarat Star* (Victoria), 12 June 1922, 3.
65. 'Indians' status. Appeal for Equality. Mr. Sastri in Melbourne', *Brisbane Courier*, 13 June 1922, 10.
66. Sastri, 'Speech at the Reform Club, Montreal, 1922', in Natesan (ed.), *Speeches and Writings*, 300. Sastri made similarly blunt statements elsewhere too. See, 'Status of Indians. Sastri in Canada', *Brisbane Courier*, 12 September 1922, p. 7.
67. 'Mr. Sastri's visit. To the Editor', *West Australian* (Perth), 13 June 1922, 10.
68. 'India's delegate. Mr. Sastri's Visit. Stirring Speeches', *West Australian* (Perth), 3 June 1922, 8.
69. 'The Right Hon. V.S. Sastri: A Distinguished Indian. Visit to Adelaide', *Chronicle* (Adelaide), 10 June 1922, 42.
70. 'Mr. Sastri', *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 8 June 1922, 12.
71. 'Mr. Sastri's Visit', *Queenslander* (Brisbane), 1 July 1922, 9.
72. 'Full Status', *Evening Star*, 12 July 1922, 3.
73. 'Race and Creed no barrier, says Sastri', *The Vancouver Sun*, 17 August 1922, 1.
74. Ladner to Meighen, 19 September 1922, MG26-I. Volume/box number: 98. Copied container number: C-3455, f. 056205-056206, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (henceforth, LAC).
75. 'G.S. Bajpai to J.C. Walton, 7 June 1922', MSS Eur D. 545/1, IOR&PP, BL.
76. Stephens, 'Indians in Australia', 2; also see, 'A Distinguished Visitor', *Manawatu Daily Times*, 13 July 1922, 4.
77. Sastri, *Report*, p. 12–13.
78. For these discussions, see, Meighen Correspondence, C-3455, f. 056187-056217, LAC.
79. 'What is the Sastri move?', *Daily Standard* (Brisbane), 21 June 1922, 4.
80. 'Indians and the Empire', *The New Zealand Herald*, 19 July 1922, 8; 'Mr. Sastri's Mission', *The Evening Star*, 11 July 1922, 4.
81. Ashutosh Kumar, *Coolies of the Empire: Indentured Indians in the Sugar Colonies, 1830–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Neleish Bose (eds.), *South Asia Migrations in Global History: Labour, Laws and Wayward Lives* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020)
82. For more on indenture and its relationship with state-making and foreign policymaking, see, Radhika Mongia, *Indian Migration and Empire: A Colonial Genealogy of the Modern State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); Radhika Singha, 'The Great War and a "proper" passport for the colony: border crossing in British India, c. 1882– 1922', *Indian Economic and Social History*, l (2013), 289– 315; Kalathmika Natarajan, 'Entangled Citizens, Undesirable Migrants: The Imprint of Empire and Afterlives of Indenture in Indian Diplomacy (1947–1962)' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Copenhagen); Latha Varadarajan, *The Domestics Abroad: Diasporas in International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Abraham, *How India became territorial*.
83. Sastri, *Report*, 4.
84. Dorothy Evelyn Walker, 'Srinivasa Sastri and his Dominion tour of 1922, MA Thesis, University of London, 1976', MSS EUR Photo EUR 299, IOR&PP, 26. Also see, Margaret Allen, 'I am a British subject': Indians in Australia claiming their rights, 1880–1940', *History Australia*, xv (2018), 499–518
85. Walker, 'Srinivasa Sastri', 26.
86. Sastri, 'Report', 8.
87. 'Bajpai to J.S. Walton, 17 September 1922', IOR/L/E7/1242, F. No. 2547, IOR&PP, BL.
88. For a criticism on Sastri's this assertion, see: 'India and the Empire', *Indian Social Reformer*, xxxii (9 April 19220, 545–546.
89. 'The Indians. Claim for Equal Status. Mr. Srinivasa Sastri speaks of his tour of the Dominions', *Tweed Daily* (Murwillumbah), 16 December 1922, 5; 'India and Empire. Mr. Sastri's Mission', *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 27 December 1922, 2.
90. 'Mr. Sastry's report on his deputation', *The Indian Social Reformer*, xxxii (10 March 1922), 443–445.
91. 'Interview with K.Shankar Bajpai by Chris Moffat', 8 May 2015, available online at https://commonwealthoralhistories.org/2015/interview-with-k-shankar-bajpai/, accessed 28 September 2020.
92. The text of the Balfour Declaration is available at: https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/cth11_doc_1926.pdf, accessed 19 March 2021.

93. For a diplomatic history of the Cape Town Agreement see, Vineet Thakur and Sasikumar Sundaram, 'India, South Africa, and the Cape Town Agreement: A Diplomatic History', *Indian Politics & Policy*, ii (2019), 3–25.
94. See, Hugh Tinker, 'Colour and Colonization', *The Round Table*, lx (1970), 405–406.
95. Raphaëlle Khan, 'Between Ambitions and Caution: India, Human Rights, and Self-Determination at the United Nations', in A. Dirk Moses, Marco Duranti and Roland Burke (eds.) *Decolonization, Self-Determination, and the rise of global human rights politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 207–235.
96. Vineet Thakur, *Jan Smuts and the Indian Question* (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press, 2018).
97. See, Commonwealth Relations Department, 'Indian Question in South Africa'. External Affairs, Overseas Section I, F. 69-25/46, 1946, National Archives, New Delhi; Commonwealth Relations Department, 'Presentation of the case of Indians in South Africa before the United Nations'. Commonwealth Relations Department, MEA, AFR I, F. 14 (25) PWR/46, 1946, National Archives, New Delhi. Lorna Lloyd, 'A Most Auspicious Beginning: The 1946 United Nations General Assembly and the Question of the Treatment of Indians in South Africa,' *Review of International Studies*, 16, 2 (1990): 131–153.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the two anonymous reviewers, Avinash Paliwal and Pallavi Raghavan for their generous feedback.

Notes on contributor

Vineet Thakur is University Lecturer in History and International Relations at Leiden University. His research focuses on IR's disciplinary history and the diplomatic histories of India and South Africa.

Funding

This work was supported by Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences; Gratama Stichting Foundation and the LUF Grant.