

5 Colonial Subjects as Hegemonic Actors

V. S. Srinivasa Sastri's 1922 Public Diplomacy Tour of British Dominion Territories

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Introduction

Colin Alexander's definition of public diplomacy in this volume emphasizes three aspects. First, it is a political act carried out by, or at the behest of, organized actors, mostly states. Second, it is directed at foreign publics in the form of communication. And third, the intent behind these acts is strategic. My contribution in this book is primarily a case study which builds on the analytical leeway Alexander's definition provides. However, I also attempt to push the definition in a direction in which 'public diplomacy' is seldom considered. Instead of viewing public diplomacy as an organic composition of the act, the form and the intent, the case study here makes a case for seeing public diplomacy as an assemblage where meanings are negotiated in the myriad ways in which the act(or), the form and the intent interact.

In this chapter, I look at a forgotten slice of history from India's diplomatic past – the dominion tour of Valangaiman Sankaranarayana Srinivasa Sastri in 1922. The tour was undertaken with the purpose of convincing Dominion governments and their publics of the need to grant equal rights to their resident Indians. The revealing of this pre-independence instance of British Indian public diplomacy is a useful exercise in and of itself, considering how little we know about Indian diplomacy during colonial rule (see Thakur, 2017). However, allying with Alexander's chapter on British public diplomacy on colonial India and Sarah Graham's on the Indian National Congress in this book, I would also argue that public diplomacy offers us greater conceptual scope to think about colonial forms of diplomacy. Consequently, a discussion of Sastri's role as a public diplomat within a colonial setting provides a useful anecdote to the debates within this book about public diplomacy's relationship with hegemony and counter-hegemony and the various individuals who have committed their careers to the pursuit of either of those ends. Through the figure of Sastri, this chapter explores the fractured personality of the 'native diplomat' who, I argue, is a transversal being; a 'subject' who becomes, momentarily, a 'citizen' of the world.

A prominent Indian liberal leader during the inter-war period, Sastri emerged as a trusted diplomat in the 1920s. He first represented India's colonial regime at the Imperial Conference and at the League of Nations in 1921. Soon after he was designated as India's plenipotentiary to the Washington Naval Conference of 1921–1922. The tour of some of Britain's Dominion territories that is the focus of this chapter followed his time in the United States. He would go on to play an instrumental role in the Cape Town Agreement between India and South Africa in 1926–1927 and would become India's first agent to South Africa between 1927 and 1929.

Sastri's politics were complex. As Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan (2017: 134) notes, it reveals the 'vexed compatibility of reform and revolution, civility and catastrophe' within hegemonic and counter-hegemonic thought. Sastri was not a revolutionary – and history remembers him as a 'camp follower of the British'. For many, that charge is justified, given – as will be seen in this chapter – that he was an enthusiastic supporter of the empire/commonwealth. Perhaps such a position is inexcusable for those with more of a revolutionary spirit. However, as Srinivasan reminds us, this practice of reform and civility in politics 'constituted a calculated, even visionary' response to colonialism that created fertile ground for seeding constitutional politics in India.

The choice of Sastri as a diplomat of a colonial regime thus reveals a lot about the depth of the power dynamics of usurper and usurped within the colonial experience. It was in producing native leaders – who were manifestly original but sufficiently compliant – that colonialism recycled its own validity. Original leaders often cannot remain compliant for long unless they invoke a range of coping mechanisms to blind themselves as to their role within the exploitative system. Shaping the native into an ideal product of the intermixture of colonial-colonized cultural interface – blending their exotic charm with a hospitable cheeriness – is where colonialism finds its *raison d'être*. A native diplomat, like Sastri, was chosen because they were an ode to colonialism, a living tribute to the success of the civilizing mission.¹

Contrastingly, the civilizing mission is also a self-negating idea. The more 'civilizing' that occurs the less the need for the mission itself. Ergo, colonialism's *raison d'être* can, and must, always remain a promise – the eternal promised land – with only a limited few having found access to it. The exceptional few are the ones who are ready to be paraded globally to provide colonialism with the moral authority and legitimacy that it so craves at least in part because the true extent of its exploitative core is only thinly veiled beneath the surface.

This hegemonic hybridity – where the native agency is imbricated within the very logic of the colonial structure – is revealing of the simultaneous empowering as well as emaciating of the 'native diplomat'. Sastri, as we'll see in the course of this chapter, plays the part: he utilizes,

rather than contests, the logic of imperial rule to justify and push for the equal treatment for Indians in the Empire. While this hybridity allows him to project his own personality as the embodiment of the cultured, right-deserving, Indian and thus appeal for the equality of Indians across the British Commonwealth, but he is also simultaneously trapped in his own exceptionalism. For he is cast as exceptional to his own people and in many ways his actions are defamatory to those people, his culture and himself.

Seen this way, here is thus a rooted ambivalence in colonial public diplomacy. Sastri represents the government of India, but only because his moral authority exceeds his government's. He is sent to educate the foreign publics and to convince them of the merit of the rights of Indians. However, the success of his communications is also a potential justification for the failure of his mission. In this case, colonial public diplomacy has no linear tales to tell. Operating in a sphere of contradictions – hegemony and counter-hegemony, exceptional-normal, public-colonial – colonial public diplomacy can only be understood through unravelling the constellation of its three component parts – the act(or), the form and the intent.

This chapter is based on archival research conducted in India, the United Kingdom and Canada. In regard to the information provided on Australia and New Zealand, the author has relied on the online archives of various local and national newspapers in circulation in 1922.

Background and Preparation for Sastri's Public Diplomacy Tour

London's hegemony within its Empire began to wane during the early years of the twentieth century and, with the extensive costs of World War I then brought to bear, the metropole had little choice but to allow the Dominion governments' greater influence over their own imperial governance. Between 1901 (the establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia) and the end of World War I, the Dominions had progressively asserted more control over their domestic policies. Increasingly then, racial segregation and overt discrimination based on racial lines, became a key area of contest wherein Britain, which had insisted on non-racial ways of exclusion (for example, education tests and property qualifications), was diverging from its Dominion governments who backed explicitly white supremacist legislation.

Indeed, from the 1890s, Asian immigration became one of the most contentious issues between Britain and its white settler frontiers (Atkinson, 2017; Lake and Reynolds, 2012). Opinion leaders in the dominions around this time talked in sub-human terms of a coming 'deluge' of 'swarming' Asian migrants and of the 'pollution' of the 'racial purity' of the white-ruled settler colonies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South

Africa. As Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds argue, W. E. B. Du Bois's historic reference to the emerging 'colour line' at the start of the twentieth century primarily pointed towards the relentless efforts in the Anglo-Saxon world to close off their borders to non-white immigration (Lake and Reynolds, 2012: 1).² The Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed in 1901 in order to secure a 'White Australia', while Canada, New Zealand and South Africa also made strenuous efforts to limit and debar the entry of Asians (Japanese, Chinese and Indians) around the same time. These policies, it should be noted, were in addition to the appalling treatment laden upon the native communities of these territories.

Britain as the imperial power, however, saw these exclusionary and outright racist stances through a different political lens. Compelled by a combination of anti-racist consciousness within some echelons of British society; the colonial experience in India during the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century vis-à-vis the rising tide of nationalism, home rule and eventually campaigns for independence; and its interests elsewhere including its treaties with China and Japan, the British government posited against imposing explicitly racial barriers on social opportunity, employment and travel. Instead, it pushed for alternative and seemingly non-racial criteria such as education tests and property requirements that would filter undesirables (Atkinson, 2017). To this end, the likelihood that a smattering of non-whites would fulfil the exclusionary criteria could usefully be evidenced by the establishment in response to any criticism that this was a pretence to more acute racist views.³

At the Imperial Conference of 1918, Satyendra Sinha, an Indian representative to the Conference, introduced a resolution that called for reciprocity between India and the Dominions in regards the question of equal treatment of each other's immigrants. The India Office in London, wary of a strong response from the Dominions, immediately added an acknowledgement of the right of the Dominions to determine the composition of their population through restriction on immigration. This dilution of the original resolution meant that the Dominions were able to retain sovereignty over the question of new arrivals to their territories, while also being encouraged to offer better protections to those already resident within their domain (Gorman, 2012: 115).

However, by the time of the next Imperial Conference three years later, the Dominions had either done nothing or had actually imposed more restrictive conditions. In early 1919, the South African government passed the Asiatic (Land and Trading Amendments) (Transvaal) Act, imposing further restrictions on Indians from owning companies. The same year New Zealand passed its Immigration Restrictions Amendment Act, which also contravened the 1918 resolution, and in the Canadian province of British Columbia, which hosted around 90 per cent of the Indian population resident in Canada, a measure introduced in the legislative assembly to confer votes on those Asians who

had served with the Canadian forces during World War I was defeated. Indeed, with increased urgency, white supremacist governments from across the Anglophone world were imposing harsher restrictions on non-whites. Lothrop Stoddard, the widely popular American white supremacist author of the time, wrote in his most notably work, *The Rising Tide of Colour*, that: 'nothing was more striking than the instinctive and instantaneous solidarity which binds together Australians and Afrikanders, Californians and Canadians, into a "sacred Union" at the mere whisper of Asiatic immigration' (Stoddard, 1923: 281).

With British interests elsewhere, Sastri, as India's representative to the 1921 Imperial Conference, brought a resolution that urged the Dominions to live up to the promise of the 1918 resolution. Sastri was able to convince the premiers of some Dominion territories (notably South Africa dissented) to pass a non-binding resolution that called for steps towards the improvement of the rights of resident Indians.⁴ Moreover, each of the Dominion premiers made Sastri aware of the strong domestic opposition that they would face to the resolution, particularly if they were to take any more formal measures. Sastri's thus proposed that the Dominion premiers invite an Indian delegation that would encourage progress within the debate on the rights of Indians. This suggestion was readily accepted by all Dominion premiers, except South Africa's Jan Smuts.

The Silver-Tongued Orator of the Empire

Sastri's (1922) tour of the Dominions was funded by the British Indian government and Sastri travelled as India's representative following formal invite by each territory. There had been some debate as to whether he should be invited in a personal capacity (Australia initially insisted on this) or in official capacity as an Indian representative, but it was made clear to each Dominion that it would be the latter. His mandate from the Indian government was to, 'assist respective Governments to give practical effect to the resolution of the Imperial Conference of 1921' (India Office Records, 1922a). Beyond being tasked with canvassing lawmakers or finding out about the condition of Indians, Sastri's tour included the public diplomacy mandate to educate Dominion publics about India and to create a broader sympathy for the Indian cause (India Office Records, 1922a). After several rounds of discussions between Sastri, the India Office in London and the Indian government, it was decided that Sastri would go on a single-member mission, with a young civil servant, G. S. Bajpai, as his secretary.

Acclaimed as the 'silver-tongued orator of the Empire', Sastri's eloquence was more subtle than powerful but his delivery – measured, moderate and meticulous – held an unbending charm over his audience who became 'willing captives to measured strains of his verbal music' (Anjaneyulu, no date). Previous speeches that he had made in London,

Cambridge, Geneva, New York and Washington had all been well-received and he manufactured a great deal of respect from international peers and the news media. However, it was not just his delivery that made him an able 'native'. He was a self-confessed imperialist and, thus, the content and argument contained within those speeches was also attractive to many of those who came to listen, for it offered the confirmation of self-righteousness that usurpers, conscious or sub-conscious and colonial or otherwise, so often crave.

Sastri in Australia and New Zealand

The Australian journalist, A. D. Ellis (1922: 6), introduced Sastri to his readers in the *Antipodes* a few days before his arrival on 1 June 1922 as 'our first great racial ambassador' who 'moves in an orbit that transcends the conventional limits of international diplomacy'. Sastri's visit to the Dominions, Ellis continued, might have an immediate purpose, of 'interpret(ing) the aspirations of his fellow-countrymen, to seek our understanding and cooperation' but this was tenaciously pursued in order to 'forge some tangible and material links in the bonds which ... will ultimately unite in amity the Eastern and Western civilisations' (Ellis, 1922: 6). Tasked with 'increasing the understanding and co-operation existing between diverse racial elements of the Empire', Sastri's mission was of the greatest significance to the British peoples (Ellis, 1922: 6). Adelaide's local newspaper, *The Chronicle* (1922: 42), called Sastri 'one of the most remarkable personalities in India and in the wider sphere of world politics'. Whereas the Australian and New Zealand Press were particularly impressed by Sastri's work for the Servants of India Society (of which he was the President), which required him to live in poverty; his 'self-abnegation' and a sense of 'patriotic self-sacrifice' was held as a high virtue, especially, they emphasized, coming from a 'coloured man' (*West Gippsland Gazette*, 1922: 2).

Between 2 June and 6 July 1922, Sastri visited all of Australia's provinces, except Tasmania. In his month-long packed schedule that took him to Perth, Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, he made several speeches to the provincial and Federal parliamentarians, elitist clubs and the general public, gave interviews to the press, and met politicians from different political parties as well as Indian residents. This pattern was repeated in New Zealand, where he spent two weeks on the north island (Sastri, 1923: 7).

His speeches broadly iterated two points to which the speech at Perth in Western Australia provides a first class examples (see Sastri, 1924a). First, he emphasized the existence of the new doctrine of the British Commonwealth of Nations. This new Commonwealth which emerged after World War I, he argued, was 'no longer based on domination, on conquest or on exploitation, but ... on ideas of brotherhood, of equality

and of absolute and even-handed justice all around' (Sastri, 1924a: 257). Second, in this new Commonwealth, India had 'acquired a place of undisputed equality ... which has not been won by force of arms exerted by brother against brother, but which has been won by honourable participation in the risks, perils and sacrifices of the Great War' (Sastri, 1924a: 258). Both required that the indignities and disabilities that Indians faced in various parts of the Empire, 'sometimes by law, sometimes by rules and regulations having the force of law; but very often by prejudices', be removed (Sastri, 1924a: 259). In the 'kinship of spirit', he appealed for the Dominions to grant equal rights to Indians (Sastri, 1924a: 267).

However, Sastri also pointed out that it was in his audiences' self-interests to adapt to the Indian cause. Appeals to morality and justice aside, he also argued that the physical existence of the Empire was at stake. The Indian nationalists led by Gandhi et al., Sastri argued, had emphasized the ill-treatment of Indians as 'outcasts, bearers of burdens; never, never sharers of privilege' across the Empire and used that as a reason for seeking India's separation (Sastri, 1924a: 254–265). Sastri urged his audience to see the rights of Indians within their domain as a chance to undermine the nationalist movement. In so doing, Sastri placed himself in direct opposition to the counter-hegemonic movement of some of his countrymen. It is one of Sastri's most unashamedly pro-hegemonic utterances in all his speeches on the tour wherein he provided his audience with advice on defeating the Indian nationalist movement.

Sastri's reception in the Antipodes was a mix of patronizing amazement and stupefying awe. Hailed for his 'memorable eloquence', one West Australian (1922: 10) reader called him the 'Lloyd George of India', while another listener wrote to The Advertiser (1922: 12) in Adelaide noting 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'. His performances were applauded even by the Australian Prime Minister of the time, William Hughes, noting that India's case had 'gained in weight by the eloquence and reasonableness with which it had been urged' (cited in The Queenslander, 1922: 9). In the New Zealand parliament Sastri's speech was hailed as 'the most perfect example of public speaking heard for many years in the parliament building' with William Massey, the New Zealand prime minister, in a fit of exuberance while calling for three cheers for the guest, exclaiming, 'Three hearty cheers for our fellow citizen – don't forget, our fellow citizen' (cited in the Evening Star, 1922a: 3). Being a 'citizen' was deemed an honour for Sastri but perhaps it was also a subtle reminder that he was not actually a citizen.

In contrast, those more critical of Sastri's speeches questioned how much of these praises were because of the colour of his skin. An Australian correspondent in the New Zealand Herald (1922: 5) attributed Sastri's appeal to his 'oriental impassiveness'. Another writer, A. G. Stephens (1922: 2), writing in the *Northern Champion* in New South Wales, argued

that Sastri's was impressive only because his speech comes as 'a surprise to plain citizens not accustomed (mildly to phrase it) to pay high respect to a brown skin and a turban'. Stephens (1922) would continue by saying that they see 'suddenly a power of mind, a command of language, and a fluency of utterance, rarely met among English public speakers, and exhibit the traditional perplexity regarding the pearl in the oyster – they wonder how the dickens it got there'.

Sastri had arrived in Australia amidst a public debate in the country about the feasibility of maintaining the 'White Australia' policy, especially in the tropical parts of Northern Australia, and his audiences anxiously awaited how he would approach this topic (see Daily Mail, 1922: 6). Henry Barwell, South Australia's Premier, had publicly advocated bringing coloured labour into tropical Australia. Supporters of Barwell pointed to the failure of 'White Australia' to develop the north, while the opponents, especially the Australian Labour Party, warned about the dangers of turning Australia into South Africa's Natal province – where the Indian population had swelled to about 140,000 people after over 5 decades of indenture.⁵ One Barwell supporter, Matthew Cranston (1922: 4), argued that India could provide Australia not only labour but also, evidenced by Sastri's own bearing, 'men of the highest culture'.

Sastri, mindful that 'an overwhelming majority' of Australians considered White Australia 'sacrosanct', was careful not step on too many toes over the issue and so daintily avoided raising the matter in his speeches (Sastri, 1923: 5). However, in Melbourne, when an interviewer probed him further, he was no longer able to evade the matter. He was forthright that in principle Indians did not regard White Australia as consistent with the integrity and ethos of the British Empire. A subject of the Empire should be able to travel freely within it and be able to develop themselves to the best of their capability. The White Australia policy went against that imperial code. However, he added, his mission was not meant to question it. In response to the anxieties over Indian emigration to the Dominions, India had passed the Indian Emigration Act in March 1922 which now forbid indenture emigration to other countries. India had thus lived up to its commitments made under the 1918 and 1921 Imperial Conference resolutions. It was now incumbent upon the Dominions, including Australia, to provide equal rights to the Indians already resident in their countries (Sastri, cited in The Ballarat Star, 1922: 3). His tone was sterner on 13 June at the Victorian branch of the Royal Colonial Institute in Melbourne where he concluded: 'We ... ask you for nothing but equality. You dare not, you cannot, and I know, you will not, deny it' (cited in The Brisbane Courier, 1922a: 10).

Critics in India, including H. S. L. Polak (1922: 194), accused him of sacrificing Indians at the altar of White Australia. While in Australia, the Labour Party suspected him of attempting to 'white ant' (subvert from within) the principle of White Australia (Daily Telegraph, 1922b: 8;

Sastri, 1923: 4). The Labour Party feared, as Sastri's Secretary Bajpai wrote to the India Office in London, 'somewhere, in the dim distance, the spectre of an Indian invasion of Australia' (India Office Records, 1922b). To assuage their fears, Sastri addressed a Labour meeting in Melbourne's Trade Hall Council and also met Labour leaders there informally. In public, Labour leaders, while showing solidarity with the Indian workers in their struggle for home rule, questioned Sastri's concerns over citizenship rights for a few Indians in Australia, especially when he could devote energies to doing the much more important work of raising the abject levels of poverty in India (see *The Argus*, 1922: 11; *Daily Telegraph*, 1922a: 6). In an article provocatively entitled 'What is the Sastri Move?' (*Daily Standard*, 1922: 4) a Labour sympathizer berated the 'lengthy capitalist press notices' for loudly and perhaps disingenuously heralding Sastri's visit. These critics saw Sastri's mission as an assault against transnational white solidarity. Australia and New Zealand were only a warm-up though according to the article. The real targets were Canada and South Africa where Indians were in larger numbers.

An *Evening Star* (1922b: 4) writer cautioned against Sastri's 'stirring appeals to abstract justice', arguing that New Zealand could afford to take a lenient stance on Indians but in places like Natal in South Africa where Indians outnumbered the whites by almost 36 per cent 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 implied that, while Sastri may be a man of high culture and impeccable standards, the vast majority of Indians (and particular to those who emigrated to other parts of the Empire) were not. An anonymous writer in *Adelaide's The Advertiser* (1922: 12) claimed that Sastri's assertions of the equality of Indians in the Empire under the term 'British Commonwealth of Nations' were 'manifestly ridiculous'. India was not a nation, but a territory of divided people on the basis of religion, culture, foods, class and caste; and thus did not deserve equal consideration within the Empire. He warned that Sastri, whose 'religious faith has biased and warped his character', had a concealed motive of inducing Australia to abandon its 'White Australia' policy. A. G. Stephens (1922: 2), in perhaps some of the most explicitly racist language seen on the issue urged that 'High policy counsels us to keep European blood pure. Rightly we may dread the extension of Eurasian life in Australia. After electoral rights come human right; and it is good to block the smallest leaks in our racial dyke against the tide of overwhelming Asia'.

Curiously, the frantic nature of these calls for transnational white solidarity also indicated how effective Sastri's 'rhetoric' had been. Sastri generally received an enthusiastic response; his meetings were well attended and eagerly reported. Bajpai cabled the India Office that 'by his eloquence, sanity and moderation' Sastri had created a great impression (India Office Records, 1922b). In private, even Labour leaders seemed more sympathetic.

But this was also largely because, as Sastri (1923: 12) acknowledged in his report, he was seen as an exception to Indians in general.

Although almost every leader in Australia, including from the publicly stubborn Labour Party, gave him positive assurances during personal counsel, the results were not entirely immediate in the domain of public rhetoric let alone legislation. Notably, the Labour Government in Queensland had removed restrictions on Indians working on banana plantations in Queensland, which was a significant concession – but that was all. Prime Minister Hughes, who had somewhat of a reputation for being opposed to Asian immigration, was also very sympathetic to Sastri's appeals. He told Sastri: '[y]ou have achieved wonders, and in my opinion have removed for all time those prejudices which formerly prevented the administration of our countrymen resident in Australia to the enjoyment of full rights of citizenship' (cited in *The Brisbane Courier*, 1922c: 7). Sastri was aware that Hughes faced several domestic challenges; he had low approval ratings but he believed that there was now wider support across the Australian political spectrum for further enfranchisement of Indians towards citizenship and wider rights. Hughes wrote to Sastri that: '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' (cited in Sastri, 1923: 4). It took two more years for Indians to be granted franchise at the Dominion level in Australia, although by then Hughes was already out of power. Queensland granted the franchise to Indians in 1930 and Western Australia in 1934 (Allen, 2018).

In New Zealand, Sastri gathered that the total number of Indians was small (around 550–600) and the problems faced by them 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 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 considered a pressing matter the New Zealand Government informed Sastri that no amendments were proposed. With regards to employment of Indians, Sastri (1923: 8) observed that while there was societal prejudice against Indians (although much less prevalent than Australia), the government took a stronger stance against discrimination faced by Indians in employment schemes. 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. Sastri and Bajpai left New Zealand quite satisfied and in general pleased with their efforts.

Sastri in Canada

Arriving in Victoria, British Columbia, in early August, Sastri and Bajpai sensed a completely different mood from the Antipodes. The Pacific

Coast of the United States and Canada had been the hotbed of anti-Asian immigration sentiment since late nineteenth century. In Australia and New Zealand the public mood against Asians was mostly against the Japanese and the Chinese. However, in Canada the anti-immigrant sentiment was equally strong against Indians and particularly in British Columbia where the majority of Indians lived. There were only about 1200 Indians but this population had reduced substantially from its pre-war strength of about 6000 mostly because of the severe restrictions on bringing wives and children after the conflict (Sastri, 1924c: 443). The Asian Exclusion League, a white supremacist organization which originated in California but which had also opened a branch in British Columbia and which had stoked some of the civil unrest behind riots in Vancouver in 1907, had recently brought together several church leaders, trade unionists, business people and veterans of the War to issue a call for prevention of all Asian immigration. To make matters more hostile, of the Indian diasporic communities in the White Dominions, the Indians in Canada were also the most radical (Lal, 1979).

Canada's Prime Minister, W. L. MacKenzie King, had only been in the incumbent for a little over 6 months when Sastri landed in British Colombia. King was considerably less sympathetic to the Indian cause than his predecessor, Arthur Meighen, who Sastri knew well and would surely have helped to optimize the tour. King's PhD thesis, completed at Harvard in 1909, had been on 'Oriental Immigration to Canada' and he had authored a report in 1908 which strongly opposed Asian immigration and emphatically proposed to keep Canada white (see Hutchinson, 1953). Even if he could be convinced to change his views, his government was running on a slender majority (118 out of 235) and was adverse to risk. It seemed therefore improbable that he would antagonize The Asian Exclusion League and the strongly anti-immigration parliamentarians of British Columbia (*The Australian*, 1922: 3).

On arrival Sastri (1923: 6) was given a 'mere suggestion', but in reality 'a grave hint', on behalf of the Prime Minister, that he should not make any public speeches. Sastri was displeased at such a 'gag', believing that upholding it would constitute a dereliction of his mission and an affront to the Indian government that was his sponsor. His mission was primarily about generating public sympathy for the rights of Indians, which he could not do without speaking in public (Sastri, 1923: 6). As a way out, Sastri proposed to consult the premier of British Columbia, John Oliver, on the matter, since it was British Columbia where any trouble was expected.

Sastri met Oliver and his Cabinet, who heard him 'with astonishment and pleasure' and eventually consented to Sastri speaking in public (Sastri, 1923: 6). However, unlike Australia and New Zealand where he attempted to influence provincial governments first, in Canada Sastri had to primarily aim at the Dominion government to enfranchise Indians. His chances of seeking relief from a strongly anti-Asian legislative assembly

in British Columbia were practically nil, and accordingly he declared that he had abandoned the hope for a legislative action enfranchising Indians in the province (cited in *The Press*, 1922: 7).

Furthermore, unlike Australia and Canada, the Indian community in British Columbia also 'proved to be difficult of access and reluctant to help' in furthering Sastri's mission. The influence of radical organizations and publications from the American West Coast was a factor in shaping the Sikh opinion there. Sikh leaders passed a resolution in Vancouver that Sastri should not be approached by any member in Canada. Eventually, however, Sastri was able to secure information from them on an undertaking that he would not make any representation to the Canadian government in their name, but only in the name of the Government of India (Sastri, 1923: 7).

Sastri (1923: 6) by his own account had a difficult meeting with the Sikh Community in a Gurudwara in Victoria, the only occasion where he addressed Indians. For over two and a half hours, Sastri was heckled, 'lectured on the error of [his] ways', and asked to return to India. He returned 'a sadder and wiser man' and blamed this on the 'protracted and bitter struggle of Sikhs in Canada' with emigration. Especially the memories of the Komagata Maru incident of 1914 when Indians aboard a Japanese steamship had been refused entry to Canada upon arrival at Vancouver and had been forced to return to Calcutta (Sastri, 1923: 7). Despite not stating it in his report and short of a crisis of self, the meeting with the Sikhs appears to have caused Sastri to undertake a degree of introspection around the narrative of his mission and the wider affiliations that he held dear.

Sastri addressed several public gatherings and discussed the franchise question with representatives of labour organizations. The *Vancouver Sun* (1922a: 1) noted his 'world fame as an able statesman'. But his speeches were distinctively shriller from those in the Antipodes. Following his experiences in British Columbia, at the Reform Club in Montreal, Sastri started his remarks in an unusually combative manner and, to some extent, demonstrated a shift in his ideology:

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.... Otherwise, much as we should regret it, we must seek our political salvation outside of this great political organization.

(cited in *The Brisbane Courier*, 1922b: 7)

The narrative displayed here was, in fact, not that dissimilar to the position of the Indian nationalists that he had castigated earlier in his tour.

Indian nationalists only made full independence their goal at the end of the 1920s (see Sarah Graham's chapter in this book). The *Montreal Gazette* noted that Sastri was 'nothing if not frank and blunt in telling of the terms under which India is willing to remain within the Empire' (cited in Sastri, 1924b). The more sympathetic press praised him. The *Vancouver Sun* (1922b: 4) called his speech 'captivating in its boldness, disarming in its consummate tact' which evoked 'a storm of approval'. His appeal to the duty of 'higher imperialism' was 'one of the loftiest that has been made' and 'humanity demand[ed] that the East Indians in British Columbia be given the franchise'. Leon Ladner (1922), the Conservative Party representative from Vancouver, wrote that the speech had an important effect on public opinion in British Columbia. The success of the speech could be gauged from the fact, he wrote, that none of the anti-Asian organizations and complainants had criticized Sastri, even though his speech was published verbatim in most of the newspapers.

In his farewell speech in Canada, he argued that franchise of Indians may not be that important from the perspective of material changes, but as a matter of principle of equality on which the British Empire must now craft its new form. He added 'in the first place it will teach the people of Canada, who require that little education, that they have no right to take away the rights of citizenship from fellow-citizens within the Empire' (Sastri, 1924c: 317).

The distinct shift in Sastri's tone and position during his time in Canada was unmistakable. Towards the end of his tour Sastri (1923: 7) had a rather combative meeting with MacKenzie King where he refuted the points the Canadian Premier made about the difficulties of granting franchise to Indians. King had argued that the government only had a majority in one house of the parliament and thus could not ensure the success of a measure to enfranchise Indians. Sastri pointed out that from the opposition, the United Farmer's Party had voted with the Government on all progressive measures, so they were quite unlikely to oppose the move especially since the party did not have a big presence in British Columbia. King then took refuge under the policy and tradition of the Liberal Party to not go against the provincial government in matters of franchise. Again, Sastri pointed to precedents which went against King's argument. Finally, King attempted to disassociate Canada from the 1921 resolution by saying that Meighen's support of the 1921 Resolution was made in his personal capacity and he did not bind the Canadian Government or parliament to it. Sastri left the meeting quite clear that King had been evasive and quite simply did not want to give Indians more rights.

Nevertheless, Sastri got assurances from other members of the Liberal Party and with J. S. Walton of the franchise committee 'even going so far as say that he would bring in a bill next session and force King's hand' (see India Office Records, 1922b). These signs, Sastri wrote in his

confidential report, pointed to 'a softening of prejudice and a broadening of prejudice'. Seeing his primary task to be of 'political education', he stated: '[i]n British Columbia, I am not hopeful of immediate results; but of the ultimate success of continued endeavors I have no doubt'. Bajpai was also of the view that they had been 'successful beyond expectation'.

However, Sastri overestimated his efforts in Canada. Indians in British Columbia were only able to gain franchise in Canada in 1947. At the Imperial Conference of 1923, Mackenzie King, who had otherwise assured Sastri that the Indian franchise was desirable, argued that Sastri's speeches had a counter effect of organizing 'the forces that were opposed to granting the franchise to Indians' (Rao, 1963: 126). However, the Canadian Prime Minister was not the only one to complain. At the end of the year 1922, Lord Reading underhandedly recommended removing Sastri's name from the list of honourees for the year (see India Office Records, 1922c). Sastri's criticisms of the British government in Canada, Reading argued, were only the beginning of what could be expected. 'I'm rather expecting much more of this from him', he wrote to Peel. Although sly, he was quite prophetic. In the summer of 1923, incensed at the British settlement in Kenya and the great injustice done to Indians in the country, Sastri was 'roused to incandescent indignation' which 'drove him for once in his life to advocate retaliation and Non-cooperation, irrespective of consequences' (Rao, 1963: 143). In less than a year, the critic of Gandhi's non-cooperation had ironically come to advocate non-cooperation with the British on Kenya (see Hughes, 2006; Sastri, 1924d: 197).

Conclusion

Sastri left Canada on 22 September 1922, his 53rd birthday. Although Canada had proven to be much more difficult than Australia and New Zealand in terms of hostility to his public diplomacy mandate, he was satisfied overall at his own performance. The Australian and New Zealand governments had granted some legislative concessions and been most amiable to him and even Canada had promised to consider his requests positively. However, as he emphasized himself, the more significant aspect of his tour was that this was the first instance when India had directly negotiated with Dominions on matters of mutual interest through accredited representatives. Although far from anti-imperial India could now claim a quasi-independent international diplomatic identity separate from London. This would have constitutional significance in later years and would also develop and familiarize others with what would become a foreign policy pillar of Nehruvian morality in independent India.

More important for the context of this book though, Sastri's tour is noteworthy for its colonial and hegemonic hybridity. On the one hand it represents one of the few instances of a colonial subject advocating for

the rights of his fellow compatriots. However, on the other there is little doubt that the tour is also affirming of the colonial relationship and the power dynamics within it. Sastri enacts his public diplomacy not just as a representative of British India but indeed champions the idea of the British Commonwealth. Nevertheless, the tour also represented a voyage of self-reflection for Sastri in which he was taken to the brink of his own pro-imperial volitions. Indeed, his timely return to India ultimately preserved any more fundamental crisis of self, ideology or identity. Therefore, perhaps it can be said that Sastri's tour represents a movement from the public diplomacy's centre to its frontiers and back again, both ideologically and geographically. Furthermore, for Sastri himself the tour was a voyage into the moral and egocentric self. It tested him and his political positions and at times he wavered towards the advocacy of a more revolutionary path despite his self-interests lying elsewhere. Ultimately, his commitment to reform, civility and dialogue was retained though.

Finally, it is interesting that in arguing for granting equal treatment to Indians, Sastri did not include other non-whites living under such regimes. Conspicuous by its absence is a discussion of Aboriginal rights in Australia, Maori rights in New Zealand or First Nation rights in Canada. The right he is pushing for is actually sovereign equality for Indians not racial equality for humankind. Indeed, he treads a careful line of self-censorship in each of the Dominions that he travels to. This is especially evident surrounding the White Australia policy though. To this end, Sastri's tour ultimately only occurred by virtue of his support for the hegemonic status quo and even then he was kept under close supervision, albeit from a far. These anxious discussions in London and Delhi about Sastri as he began to waver in Canada thus confirm the extent to which public diplomacy is used by hegemonic actors for the protection or advancement of their interests; a vehicle towards power rather than any tendency towards virtuosity or the upholding of moral principle no matter how virtuous the narrative may seem.

Notes

1. Another example is Apartheid South Africa parading diplomats from the so-called TBVC states – Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei.
2. See also Sarah Graham's chapter in this volume concerning Du Bois and the 'colour line'.
3. The extent to which racist views remained institutionalized within the British government in London and in the British government of India should not be underestimated. Throughout this period and into the postcolonial era of mass migration from the former colonies to Britain, explicitly racist views about non-whites were prevalent among the British political classes. Indeed, racial prejudices remain in some parts of the British political establishment – certain hostilities towards migration within the current Home Office, for example.

4. The resolution made no mention of improved rights for natives and thus ought not to be thought of as a piece of anti-racist legislation at any fundamental level.
5. Natal was one of the four provinces in South Africa. The others being: Transvaal, Orange Free State and the Cape.

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