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A Shared History?: Postcolonial Identity and India-Australia Relations, 1947–1954

Alexander E. Davis

ABSTRACT

This article challenges the validity of recent suggestions that shared history underpins India-Australia relations through an historical analysis of little-known diplomats who worked for the Indian High Commission in Australia and the Australian High Commission in India immediately after Indian independence. Based on largely unexplored archival material from India, Australia, and Canada, it argues that Australia's racialized identity, as expressed through the White Australia policy, thoroughly shaped Indian perceptions of Australia. While Indian policy makers never officially voiced their distaste for White Australia, Indian diplomats put their efforts into reshaping the image of India in Australia through travel and personal contacts as part of an effort to educate Australia about India. Likewise, Australia's colonial identity led it to see India and Indian foreign policy as "irrational" due to its emphasis on racial discrimination and decolonization. It is argued that, far from underpinning the relationship, colonial histories and subsequent postcolonial identities have played an important role in fracturing India-Australia relations.

KEYWORDS: India-Australia relations, postcolonialism in international relations, diplomatic history, identity and foreign policy

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Introduction: Colonial History as Shared History?

Recent efforts to create a new and deeper relationship between India and Australia have narrated the relationship in particular ways. We are told India and Australia share history,¹ values,² region (the “Indo-Pacific”),³ and a “natural” partnership.⁴ Recently deposed Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott went as far as to argue for the benefits given to India through its colonization, emphasizing India’s Westminster system of government and the English language as the primary evidence.⁵ Similarly, Foreign Minister Julie Bishop has argued that India and Australia understand one another “instinctively.”⁶

The idea that shared history underpins India-Australia relations was at its strongest when Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to address a joint sitting of Australia’s Parliament in November 2014. When introducing Modi, Abbott stated that “Australians admired the way India won independence—not by rejecting the values learned from Britain, but by appealing to them; not by fighting the colonisers, but by working on their conscience.”⁷ Modi suggested also that India is linked to Australia “by the great Indian Ocean; by our connected history and our many shared inheritances—and, even more by our deeply interlinked destinies.”⁸ This type of discourse goes beyond asserting shared interests and a shared identity, to claim that India and Australia have always shared an identity. Modi’s choice of example, tying India and Australia together through colonial history, though, was telling: “More than 150 years ago, an Australian novelist and lawyer John Lang fought the legal battle for a brave Indian freedom fighter, the Queen of Jhansi, Rani Laxmi Bai against the British East India Company in India’s first War of Independence.”⁹

¹ Craig Emerson, “Old Friends and New Partners,” *Science Technology Innovation: Australia and India*, Australia-India Institute Task Force Report (Melbourne: Australia India Institute, 6 May 2014) at <http://www.aii.unimelb.edu.au/sites/default/files/LOW%20RES%20INNOV%20REPORT.pdf>.

² Andrew Robb, “Australia-India Roundtable Dialogue” (speech, Melbourne, 6 February 2014), http://trademinister.gov.au/speeches/2014/ar_sp_140206.html.

³ Australian Department of Defence, “Defence White Paper, 2013,” http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper2013/docs/WP_2013_web.pdf.

⁴ Stephen Smith, “Ministerial Statement on the Australia-India Relationship” (speech, Canberra, 9 February 2010), http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2010/100209_australia_india.html.

⁵ Tony Abbott, *Battlelines* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2011), 158–161.

⁶ Julie Bishop, “Address to Liberal Friends of India Launch” (speech, Sydney, 13 April 2013), <http://juliebishop.com.au/address-to-liberal-friends-of-india-launch/>.

⁷ Tony Abbott, “Address to Parliament, House of Representatives” (speech, Canberra, 18 November 2014) <http://www.liberal.org.au/latest-news/2014/11/18/prime-minister-address-parliament-house-representatives-parliament-house>.

⁸ Narendra Modi, “Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Address to the Joint Session of the Australian Parliament,” (speech, Canberra, 18 November 2014) <http://www.narendramodi.in/prime-minister-narendra-modis-address-to-the-joint-session-of-the-australian-parliament>.

⁹ Modi, “Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Address.”

Where Abbott had cited various battles to protect British colonial interests such as Gallipoli, Tobruk, Singapore, and El Alamein,¹⁰ Modi cited a lone Australian lawyer defending a “freedom fighter” after India’s “First War of Independence.” This comment undermined Abbott’s assertion that India fought its colonizers solely by appealing to their values and revealed a very different vision of this supposed shared history.¹¹ Clearly, while both leaders argue that there is a shared history between India and Australia, these histories have very different meanings. Given India’s centrality to the shifting nature of contemporary international politics in the Asia-Pacific, it is essential to critically consider how likely this new attempt at creating a deeper partnership will be.

In this article, I consider the claim that shared history underpins India-Australia relations by looking at the identity politics in the relationship immediately after Indian independence. Rather than solely re-examining the great men and the big moments of India-Australia relations, I focus on the perceptions of Other at play in the day-to-day diplomatic missions between these two states. Although these two institutions were the most intimate site of India-Australia relations, little has been written on either of them, particularly the Indian High Commission in Canberra. I primarily analyze archival documents, many of which have not been previously examined. Due to the scarcity of Indian archival material, this is bolstered when necessary with diplomats’ personal narratives, newspaper coverage, and reference to Prime Ministers Nehru, Chifley, and Menzies. This analysis is tied to the ambivalent place India and Australia held in one another’s identities, in which colonial histories both connected and separated the two states. As will be seen, Australian diplomats tended to view India’s foreign policy as needlessly concerned by postcolonial issues, whereas Indian diplomats tended to perceive Australia as engaging in Cold War *realpolitik* on the basis of racialized fears. The dynamics of the relationship, in which both sides failed to understand one another, made it almost impossible for a close relationship to be built. I argue on this basis that shared colonial histories and subsequent postcolonial identities have actually been divisive in India-Australia relations. This allows for a reinterpretation of India-Australia relations as well as a new perspective on the ways in which India’s postcolonial identity continues to shape its contemporary foreign policy.

Understanding India-Australia Relations

India-Australia relations present a paradox for mainstream international relations (IR) theories. Liberal theorists have argued that the growth in the

¹⁰ Abbott, “Address to Parliament.”

¹¹ On this point, see Priya Chacko and Alexander E. Davis, “The Natural/Neglected Relationship: Liberalism, Identity and India-Australia Relations,” *The Pacific Review* (forthcoming 2016).

relationship is natural, as the two are both liberal democracies.¹² And yet, India and Australia have long been democracies, and this has not produced a close relationship. What little realist analysis has been done, however, has been just as problematic. Andrea Benvenuti has emphasized the Cold War as keeping these two states apart,¹³ but without consulting Indian archival sources. Benvenuti's evidence shows that Australian diplomats largely perceived the relationship as being held back by Cold War politics.¹⁴ Nihal Kurrupu argues that the Cold War was central to the failure of India-Australia relations. He acknowledges postcolonial issues were a factor, but primarily suggests that the relationship was held back by a Cold War split in which India was driven by "idealism" and that Australia had embraced the "realist orthodoxy" of the period.¹⁵ Contemporary strategic thought echoes this, with Medcalf and Raja-Mohan attributing India's and Australia's mediocre relationship solely to the Cold War.¹⁶ As will be seen, however, analysis of Indian archival sources reveals that Indian diplomats were as concerned with postcolonial issues as they were with geopolitical ones. Emphasizing the Cold War as the central factor silences and delegitimizes India's efforts to create a postracial world order after its independence.¹⁷ In the case of the India-Australia relationship, then, the realist emphasis on geopolitics has proven misleading as it silences important non-military aspects of Indian foreign policy.

How then, are we to understand the relationship? An answer lies in a new stream of thought on Indian foreign policy, which emphasizes India's colonial history and its postcolonial identity. Postcolonial theory offers not only an important critique of Western IR theory, as will be discussed below, but also a useful means for analyzing state identity. Priya Chacko has considered the Nehruvian ideational project of creating a more ethical modernity as a foundational narrative of Indian foreign policy.¹⁸ Nehru's emphasis on non-alignment and peaceful co-existence defined India's postcolonial identity.

¹² See for example Ramesh Thakur, "Natural Allies a World Apart," *Canberra Times*, 25 February 2013 <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/comment/natural-allies-a-world-apart-20130224-2ezr9.html>.

¹³ Andrea Benvenuti, "Difficult Partners: Indo-Australian Relations at the Height of the Cold War, 1949–1964," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 57, no. 1 (2011): 53–67.

¹⁴ Benvenuti, "Difficult Partners."

¹⁵ Nihal H. Kurrupu, *Non-Alignment and Peace Versus Military Alignment and War* (Delhi: Academic Foundation, 2004).

¹⁶ Rory Medcalf and C. Raja Mohan, "Responding to Indo-Pacific Rivalry: Australia, India and Middle Power Coalitions," *Lowy Institute* (Sydney: Lowy Institute for International Policy, August 2014) http://www.lowyinstitute.org/files/responding_to_indo-pacific_rivalry_0.pdf.

¹⁷ Manu Bhagavan, *The Peacemakers: India and the Quest for One World* (Delhi: Harper Collins India, 2012). IR theory has generally neglected decolonization, and, for Nicholas Guillhot, early realist theory intentionally removed it as an issue from IR's agenda. See Nicholas Guillhot, "Imperial Realism: Post-War IR Theory and Decolonisation," *The International History Review* 36, no. 4 (2014): 698–720.

¹⁸ Priya Chacko, *Indian Foreign Policy: The Politics of Postcolonial Identity from 1947 to 2004* (London: Routledge, 2013).

Chacko further argues that the founding Nehruvian discourse of Indian foreign policy has remained central, even in the post-1991 liberal era of Indian politics as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) could not fully escape it in their time in power from 1998 to 2004.¹⁹ Within this literature, India's identity is seen as inseparable from its foreign policy and its geopolitics.

India's foreign policy has been guided by its opposition to imperialism, Afro-Asian and later global southern solidarity and non-alignment. In the contemporary setting, this same identity can be seen in India's recent calls for a "polycentric" world order, most noticeable in a recent India-Russia joint statement,²⁰ its continued resistance to the hierarchical order of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the forum between major developing states Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (known as BRICS) and its joining of anti-Western coalitions at the World Trade Organization (WTO).²¹

It is important to remember that during the Nehru years India and Australia disagreed over many important geopolitical issues, such as the formation of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and conflicts in Suez, Vietnam, and Korea and the broader Cold War. These are doubtless important causes that fractured the relationship. Still, in each case, India's anti-colonial identity can be seen as underpinning its political position. The frailties of the India-Australia relationship were caused not just by a clash of ideologies, a clash of personalities, or simply Cold War geopolitics, although all are important. From a constructivist perspective, all these geopolitical disputes were underpinned by state identity.

Emphasizing historically constructed identities allows us to take a new perspective on the ways in which shared histories have shaped the relationship. Colonial histories led to postcolonial identities, which continue to shape foreign policies long after independence. Australia gained a sense of security from its connection to Britain and its alliance with the US (its great and powerful friends). Indians, however, were subjugated and discriminated against. This clash can still be seen in Abbott's and Modi's statements to the Australian parliament. Both looked back to the colonial period, but drew very different lessons. The nature of the past might be that its influence becomes less and less tangible, yet this certainly does not mean that it does not matter. Rather, as Gwenda Tavan suggests with regards to the White Australia policy, history dies a long, slow death.²²

¹⁹ Chacko, *Indian Foreign Policy*, 165–195. For other examples, see Itty Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb: Science, Secrecy and the Postcolonial State* (Delhi: South Asia Books, 1999) and Latha Varadarajan, "Constructivism, Identity and Neoliberal (in)security," *Review of International Studies* 30, no. 3 (2004): 319–341.

²⁰ Priya Chacko, "Why India doesn't support Western sanctions on Russia," *East Asia Forum* 6 May 2014, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/05/06/why-india-doesnt-support-western-sanctions-on-russia>.

²¹ Amrita Narlikar, "Is India a Responsible Great Power?" *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 9 (2011): 1607–1621.

²² Gwenda Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2005).

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I draw also on postcolonial approaches to IR. This is a small but growing set of work in IR which has sought to critique the Eurocentric construction of IR theory while also seeking to show how colonial histories have shaped broader international politics.²³ Postcolonialism has also led scholars to seek theories more accommodating of difference than traditional theories of liberalism and realism. Constructivism in IR has also helped in this process through its emphasis on historically constructed identities.²⁴ For L.H.M. Ling, postcolonialism fits comfortably with a constructivist approach. Simply speaking, I deploy, as Ling has succinctly summarized, a “constructivist method of studying IR,” coupled with “[p]ostcolonialism’s interpretation of world politics.”²⁵

The Historiography of India-Australia Relations

There have been few studies of the India-Australia relationship influenced by IR theory, and none influenced by postcolonialism or constructivism.²⁶ Some important historical work, however, has been performed. In a wide-ranging contribution, Meg Gurry emphasizes Chifley’s support for decolonization, Indian independence, and India’s joining of the Commonwealth as suggesting a positive relationship could have developed.²⁷ Following the fall of Chifley, she emphasizes Menzies’ and Nehru’s difficult personal relationship, and the way in which their different world views limited the relationship.²⁸ Elsewhere, she suggests that the White Australia policy might still shape the two countries’ relationship, as shown by the Indian media’s response to attacks on Indian students in Australia in 2008.²⁹

Christopher Waters and David Goldsworthy have considered postcolonial issues in the context of Australia’s relationship with Asia as a whole, rather than specifically discussing India (or another state).³⁰ David Walker has analyzed Australia’s anxieties over its proximity to Asia and how this shaped

²³ John M. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); L.H.M. Ling, *Postcolonial International Relations, Conquest and Desire between Asia and the West* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

²⁴ Ted Hopf, “The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory,” *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998): 171–200.

²⁵ Ling, *Postcolonial International Relations*, 61.

²⁶ Meg Gurry, *Australia and India: Mapping the Journey, 1944–2014* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2015); Eric Meadows, “‘He No Doubt Felt Insulted’: The White Australia Policy and Australia’s Relations with India, 1944–1964,” in *Australia and the World: A Festschrift for Neville Meaney*, eds. Joan Beaumont and Matt Jordan (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2013), 81–98.

²⁷ Gurry, *Australia and India*, 11–37.

²⁸ Gurry, *Australia and India*, 38–73.

²⁹ Meg Gurry, “India, the New Centre of Gravity: Australia-India Relations under the Howard Government,” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 35, no. 2 (2012): 304.

³⁰ Christopher Waters, “After decolonization: Australia and the emergence of the non-aligned movement in Asia, 1954–55,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 12, no. 2 (2001): 153–174; D. Goldsworthy, *Losing the Blanket: Australia and the End of Britain’s Empire* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002).

Australia's development.³¹ While this reveals Australia's struggles with engaging Asia, it has left an important gap, as it does not consider Indian (or other Asian) perceptions of Australia.

Diplomatic historian Eric Meadows has examined the question of whether or not the White Australia policy shaped India-Australia relations, using the tools of an empirical historian. He concludes that the policy "cannot be said to have affected [the relationship] in any significant way."³² This conclusion is due partly to the lack of surviving and available sources from Indian diplomats, in comparison with the wealth of detail available at the National Archives of Australia (NAA). Meadows' conclusive and titular quote comes not from an Indian diplomat, but an Australian one. However, when we depart from seeing White Australia as a set of immigration policies but instead view it as a part of Australia's racialized identity, we arrive at very different conclusions.

The need to bring more Indian voices to the story of India-Australia relations, however, makes purely empirical analysis problematic. The volume of sources at the National Archives of India (NAI) is far smaller than at the NAA. Although some material has now been declassified, this is only a tiny percentage of what was produced.³³ Based on my searches through the indexes produced in the 1940s and 1950s, only approximately 10 percent of what was produced has been kept and declassified. Due to these difficulties, it will likely never be possible for the empirical record of Indian diplomacy to match that of Australia's. As a balanced empirical account is impossible, we must look for alternatives. In this case, examining the available source material for identity is a more productive method than reading it empirically, as it enables us to bring Indian voices to the fore without being overwhelmed by the greater availability of Australian material. As such, I examine the perceptions of Other of three Indian high commissioners to Australia: Rangunath Paranjpye, Daya Singh Bedi, and Kodandera Cariappa. I complement this with a brief analysis of the Australia High Commission under Iven Mackay and Herbert Gollan.³⁴ In particular, however, I offer a reinterpretation of Crocker's time in India, where he served as Australia's high commissioner in Delhi from 1952 to 1955.

In selecting these little-known diplomats, I am also influenced by a recent trend in studies of India's international history that seeks to de-emphasize the "great man" of Indian foreign policy, Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru's contribution

³¹ David Walker, *Anxious nation: Australia and the rise of Asia, 1850–1939* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1999); Christopher Waters, "After decolonization," 153–174; D. Goldsworthy, *Losing the Blanket*.

³² Meadows, "He No Doubt felt Insulted" 81–98.

³³ For a full list of which files are declassified by the MEA, see: <http://www.idsa.in/resources/ListofdeclassifiedfilesoftheMinistryofExternalAffairsfrom19031972.html>, accessed 5 November 2014.

³⁴ Although he uses a different method of reading source material, this period is covered well by Meadows, "He No Doubt felt Insulted," 83–89.

was no doubt indispensable, but is insufficient for a full understanding of Indian diplomacy. Manu Bhagavan and Vineet Thakur have both recently suggested that India's creative efforts to make peace and to reshape international politics have been understudied by diplomatic historians.³⁵ Aside from seeking peace, India also resisted racial discrimination and fought for decolonization through its foreign policy. This lack of analysis has been furthered by IR's tendency to eschew archival research (particularly in India) in favour of theorizing. Nehru's relative silence on "White Australia" has led to a lack of examination of Australia's racialized identity as shaping India-Australia relations. Examination of the Indian diplomats working in Australia, however, reveals a very different situation.

Treating Australian identity as postcolonial is unusual in IR.³⁶ Australia had control over its own foreign policy after World War Two for the first time, which it used to ally itself more closely with the US instead of the UK. Still, its foreign policy identity was firmly rooted in conceptions of itself as a White British settler-colony.³⁷ As Soares has shown, Ben Chifley pursued an independent and creative vision of Australian foreign policy until his electoral defeat in 1949. Under Chifley's leadership, Australia supported Indian independence and went on to support its position within the Commonwealth as a republic. Similarly, India's positive response to the MacMahon Ball mission of 1948 and the lock-step response of India and Australia to quelling Dutch aggression in Indonesia in 1949 suggested that this creative narrative, in which Australia was part of Asia, could bring about a more productive relationship between the two states.³⁸ However, Menzies, who was in power from 1949 to 1966, was far more careful and regarded Asia as threatening, rather than presenting opportunities, and famously regarded himself as "British to the bootstraps."³⁹ Although it was contested, as Menzies was in power for much of the period examined here, this identity had the more profound influence over foreign policy. Australia's postcolonial ambivalence in this period, then, can be seen in a debate over the extent to which Australia was "European" or "part of Asia." Despite India's, and Nehru's, own ambivalences with Englishness and colonialism, it is clear that Nehruvian foreign policy sought to resist the continuation of colonial hierarchy and

³⁵ Bhagavan, *The Peacemakers*; Vineet Thakur, "India's Diplomatic Entrepreneurism: Revisiting India's Role in the Korean Crisis, 1950–1952" *China Report* 49, no. 273 (2013): 273–298.

³⁶ Alexander E. Davis, "Rethinking Australia's International Colonial Past: Identity, Foreign Policy and India in the Australian Colonial Imagination," *The Flinders Journal of History and Politics* 29 (2013): 70–96.

³⁷ Srdjan Vucetic, *The Anglosphere: A Genealogy of a Racialized Identity in International Relations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

³⁸ For discussion of Dutch-Indonesia aggression, see Gurry, *Australia and India*, 28–32; Julie Soares, "Engaging with Asia: The Chifley Government and the New Delhi Conferences of 1947 and 1949," *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 57, no. 4 (2011): 495–510.

³⁹ Soares, "Engaging with Asia."

racial discrimination in global politics. The White Australia policy was one such example.

Differences in Australian identity can further be seen through different perceptions of India's position in the Commonwealth. Whereas Menzies wished for a unified, "white" Commonwealth, Chifley (as did Nehru) saw advantages in a multi-racial, open forum for the discussion of international ideas. While Chifley supported India's membership as a republic, Menzies as opposition leader argued passionately against India joining as a republic, stating that "[t]o people like myself, it will remain completely mysterious as to how a nation can become a Republic by abolishing the Crown and the allegiance to the Crown, and at the same time retain a full membership of a united Commonwealth, which is and must be basically a Crown Commonwealth."⁴⁰

Similarly, Menzies argued against Indian independence, believing Indians had not shown a "real ... capacity for self-government," whereas Chifley was supportive.⁴¹ This reveals not just differences of opinion between Menzies and Chifley, but different understandings of Australian identity, in which Chifley saw Australia's future in Asian engagement while Menzies took a more cautious approach. The support of both men for the White Australia policy, however, ultimately suggests both visions of Australian identity were racialized.

Jawaharlal Nehru's Official Silence and White Australia

After independence, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Indian High Commission in Australia debated whether or not it was appropriate to keep track of Australia's immigration policy. It was concluded that, while it was not their place to complain, it was within their remit to report on the policy.⁴² Although it is certainly significant that India did not raise official concern over Australia's restrictive immigration tactics, we can draw a useful comparison here with Canada. Canada and India did negotiate over the ending of Canada's restrictions on Indian migration, and did so openly. This official discussion was based on hints from Canadian diplomats in 1947 that Canada would be open to doing so in order to remove the matter as a roadblock to close relations. As a result, Girija Shankar Bajpai, secretary general of the MEA, relayed to a Canadian diplomat, John Kearney, that he believed it would be impossible for India to remain part of the Commonwealth

⁴⁰ Robert Menzies, quoted at "India's Status: 'Mystery', says Menzies," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Friday 29 April 1949, 1.

⁴¹ Menzies, quoted in Gurry, *Australia and India*, 40.

⁴² National Archives India (NAI), "White Australia Policy," Progs., Nos. 269-IANZ, 1949; NAI, "Immigration policy regarding Australia High Court's decision referred to in the fortnightly report of H.E. the H.C. for India in Australia dt. 31.3.49 Request for," Progs., Nos. 291-I.A.N.Z, 1949.

as a dominion. It might be possible, however, to remain as a republic, although there were many political roadblocks. Or, as Kearney reported their meeting back to Ottawa: "There are certain obstacles which if not removed, might make even this latter arrangement impossible, the chief of which is the immigration policy of some of the other Commonwealth nations, more particularly Australia and Canada."⁴³

Canada eventually agreed to accept 150 Indian immigrants per year.⁴⁴ This choice removed a significant impediment to building closer relations with India. Ultimately, however, the miniscule size of the quota and its administration irritated some sections of the Indian MEA.⁴⁵ Clearly then, the Indian position on non-interference with white-settler colonial states practising discrimination was not set in stone. It could have been changed had Australia hinted, like Canada, that it would not be offended by such discussions.

This silence aside, there was one occasion when Nehru publicly commented on the White Australia policy. When asked in 1949 if he thought there was a place for a "White Australia in Asia?"⁴⁶ he responded that Australia could justify the policy in the short term, provided it was only done on an economic, not racial, basis. He added that in the long term "it is difficult to see in the world today how far it is possible to keep a vast continent undeveloped."⁴⁷ He went on to say that "Australia should not discriminate against the rights and privileges of Asians living there."⁴⁸ Nehru had only lightly attacked the policy, but the critique was obvious: the policy had been justified on racial grounds, as wealthy people of Asian backgrounds were not allowed to emigrate while poor Europeans were. The naming of the policy as "White Australia" and the refusal to take any Asian migrants whatsoever obviously implied that the policy was discriminatory on the basis of colour. As the Australian high commissioner to India, Mackay had argued for the introduction of a quota system. He believed the policy had been based on race, as "there [is] no other way to explain why Australia would refuse to take ... a small number of Westernized Indian professionals."⁴⁹

⁴³ John D. Kearney, "Dispatch to Ministry for External Affairs," 27 May 1948, at Library and Archives Canada, RG26-A-1-c, file 127, part 1, 2.

⁴⁴ This point was made to the Canadians by Ramji R. Saksena, a more strongly anti-colonial diplomat. See Ramji R. Saksena to Laval Fortier, 6 July 1953, at Library and Archives Canada, RG26-A-1-c, vol. 127, part. 2, no. 152-HC/53, 2.

⁴⁵ Saksena took issue with several administrative matters to do with the quota system. See Ramji R. Saksena to Harris, 2 February 1953 at Library and Archives Canada, RG26-A-1-c, vol. 127, part 2, no. 16-HC/53, 1-5.

⁴⁶ AAP journalist quoted at *Cairns Post*, 24 January 1949, 1.

⁴⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru, quoted at "Nehru Warns Us that Racial Policies are Out," *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 25 January 1949, at NAI, "White Policy of Australia," file no. 208(2) – I.A.N.Z., 19.

⁴⁸ Nehru, "Racial Policies are Out," 19.

⁴⁹ Iven Mackay to H.V. Evatt, "Dispatch 52/46," 22 December 1946, in W. J. Hudson and Wendy Way, eds., *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy*, vol. 10, July- December 1946 (Canberra: Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 1993), 534.

Australia's External Affairs Minister Herb "Doc" Evatt was pressed as to whether or not Nehru's comments on the White Australia policy had received negative press coverage. Evatt replied in parliament, as was reported back to Delhi: "So far from the Prime Minister of India has criticized the White Australia Policy, he supports it. That is my reading of Mr. Nehru's statement and I think that is quite clear."⁵⁰ Evatt's comment rests on a reading of the White Australia policy as being based on economics, not race, and intended to protect Australia's budding egalitarian society. Evatt's comments were attacked in the Indian press. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta wondered at Evatt's logic: "if it was a telepathic process - the Australian minister's mind actioned on the mind of the distant Indian Prime Minister through emotional influence and he perceived that his precious policy found an echo in the mind of Pandit Nehru."⁵¹

The Search Light newspaper, of Patna, similarly mocked the argument, stating that "[o]ne cannot help rubbing one's eyes in amazement at the statement of Dr. Evatt."⁵² *The Free Press Journal* of Bombay argued that "not even Pandit Nehru can protest against every act of racial imperialism that is perpetuated in the world, today." Nehru's decision to not actively fight the policy, the newspaper stated, did not indicate support.⁵³

In order to understand the official silence, we can look at Nehru's policy of Panchsheel, or the five principles of peaceful coexistence. The concept was further extended into ten principles at the 1955 Afro-Asia conference in Bandung, and largely became the basis for the Non-Aligned Movement. Kurrupu has suggested that the White Australia policy was offensive to a non-aligned nation, and points out that after its dismantling by Harold Holt and Gough Whitlam, Whitlam was able to improve the two countries' relationship while working with Indira Gandhi.⁵⁴ India's non-aligned stance, however, was ambivalent towards the White Australia policy. On the one hand, non-alignment was framed as opposition to imperialism worldwide. As a result, very little was said openly by diplomats, though it featured in much of their private communication and shaped India's approach of using their diplomatic presence for the purpose of educating Australia. Non-alignment, however, also targeted non-interference in domestic affairs. When outlining India's position on racial discrimination in 1949, Nehru argued that India was committed to two policies, the first being that "each country should be free. There should be no colonial exploitation"; the second that "the world must recognise that there must be no racial discrimination."⁵⁵ As

⁵⁰ "Telegram from Hicomind, Canberra to Foreign, New Delhi," 15 February 1949 at NAI, "White Policy of Australia," 27.

⁵¹ Anon, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, Calcutta, 14 February 1949 at NAI, "White Policy of Australia," 28.

⁵² Anon, *Search Light*, Patna, 13 February 1949 at NAI, "White Policy of Australia," 29.

⁵³ Anon, *Free Press Journal*, Bombay, 11 February 1949, at NAI, "White Policy of Australia," 32.

⁵⁴ Kurrupu, *Non-Alignment and Peace*, 197-241.

⁵⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru, "Colonial Exploitation and Racial Discrimination," *Selected works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, vol. 11 (New Delhi: JNMF, 1991), 401.

a result, India did not interfere directly, even though the policy offended India's strong dislike of racial discrimination. Rather, they were tactful in achieving their goals. When referring to South Africa's presence in the Commonwealth, Nehru commented in the *Rajya Sabha* that "many of us laid stress on the incompatibility of any country being in the Commonwealth which followed racial policies."⁵⁶

Nehru's comments on India's opposition to colonialism, initially referencing events in South Africa, turned to problems of racialism throughout world affairs more broadly. His statement perfectly summarizes his personal approach to White Australia:

The problem of racialism and racial separation may become more dangerous than any other problem that the world has to face... They hurt us. Simply because we cannot do anything effective, and we do not want to cheapen ourselves by mere shouting, we remain quiet. But the thing has gone deep down into our minds and hearts. We feel it strongly.⁵⁷

Nehru clearly opposed racial discrimination worldwide. He saw, however, his ability to effect change was limited, and was unwilling to cheapen himself by "mere shouting." Instead, Nehru and India saved its most vocal condemnations for South Africa.⁵⁸ But this silence should not be interpreted as a lack of interest in opposing racial discrimination elsewhere.

Nehru's ideational project, however, had a similarly ambivalent relationship with his Englishness and the empire. Even though he opposed British rule in India, Nehru was frequently described as an Anglophile in reminiscences on his life.⁵⁹ He famously (reportedly) once described himself as the "last Englishman to rule India." His thought was inflected by British liberalism, but was also influenced by Indian nationalism and thinkers such as Marx, Tagore, and Gandhi.⁶⁰ In 1948, Nehru emphasized what Australia and India shared, stating in a message to Australia that "[w]e stand, as I believe Australia does, for democratic freedom, for human rights and for the ending of the political domination or economic exploitation of one nation or group of another. We should cooperate, therefore, for the extension of freedom, equality and social justice."⁶¹

⁵⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru, "South Africa Leaves the Commonwealth," in *Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches*, vol. 4, September 1957-April 1963 (New Delhi: JNMF, 1964), 339.

⁵⁷ Nehru, "India and World Affairs," 314.

⁵⁸ Bhagavan, *The Peacemakers*.

⁵⁹ For example, Shashi Tharoor, *Nehru: the Invention of India* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 124.

⁶⁰ See Priya Chacko, "The Internationalist Nationalist: pursuing an ethical modernity with Jawaharlal Nehru," in *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity*, ed. Robbie Shilliam (New York: Routledge, 2011), 178-196.

⁶¹ Jawaharlal Nehru, "Message to Australia," 19 March 1948 in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Second Series, vol. 5 (New Delhi: JNMF, 1987), 547.

The colonial connection did not have to be negative for India-Australia relations, should Australia have abandoned its racial policies. At Bandung in 1955 Nehru stated “I would like Australia and New Zealand to come nearer to Asia. I would welcome them because I do not want what we say or do to be based on racial prejudices. We have had enough of this racialism elsewhere.”⁶² Here, by evoking British values of freedom and democracy, Nehru sought to critique the racial discrimination practiced by Australia. And therein lies the ambivalence: colonialism connected Australia and India but simultaneously kept them separate. Whereas previously these values had been restricted to white imperial Britons, Nehru used them to attack racism elsewhere.

Indian Perceptions of Australia, from Chifley to Menzies

In order to move past Nehru’s silence, I examine senior diplomats who managed diplomatic relations on a day-to-day basis. The first Indian high commissioner to Australia was Ragunath Paranjpye, appointed by the British India government. Paranjpye served only during the Chifley government, from 1944 to 1947. Archival material is limited, but in his memoirs, he recalls that for him, “there were no intricate political questions between the countries” during his time in Australia.⁶³ For Paranjpye, “the main function of the High Commissioner and his Office was to make India better known to Australia.”⁶⁴ This being the case, the main struggle for Paranjpye was the White Australia policy, concerning which he wrote that “naturally this causes a great deal of heart-burning and resentment among non-white people,” and particularly offended Indians.⁶⁵

He emphasized also that, while this was offensive to India, it was not India’s place to attack Australian domestic policy. He believed that changing this policy would require “a change of public opinion in the country concerned, and this can best be brought about by a better understanding among different nations.”⁶⁶ Thus, education about India was his focus, so he travelled Australia to dispel stereotypes about Indians. This became an important approach for other senior Indian diplomats in Australia. Paranjpye saw Australia’s stereotypical views on Indians as holding back the relationship.

Daya Singh Bedi, India’s second high commissioner to Australia, served during the transition from Chifley to Menzies. For Bedi, Australia’s positioning within Asia was limited by the vocal and extreme rhetoric of

⁶² Jawaharlal Nehru, “Asia and Africa Awake,” in *Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speeches*, vol. 3, March 1953–1957 (Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1958).

⁶³ Ragunath P. Paranjpye, *Eighty-Four Not Out* (Delhi: National Book Trust, 1961), 131.

⁶⁴ Paranjpye, *Eighty-Four Not Out*, 131.

⁶⁵ Paranjpye, *Eighty-Four Not Out*, 131.

Chifley's immigration minister, Arthur Calwell, whose more bombastic statements received considerable negative press coverage in India.⁶⁷ Bedi commented to New Delhi that policy shifts were likely with the defeat of the Chifley government and the incoming Menzies administration. He noted that "[t]he present government is likely to depart considerably from the international policy of 'rugged individualism' followed by Dr. Evatt," concluding that Australia would "go in for a closer association between London, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand and the United States of America ... In fact, their foreign policy will ... be dictated by London and they are all out to have the friendliest of relations with the United States of America."⁶⁸

Bedi expected the departure of Calwell as immigration minister to improve relations, however, as he was, according to Bedi, "not only unpopular abroad but became so in his own country."⁶⁹ He went so far as to express the hope that with Calwell's departure "the international atmosphere in the Pacific Area will improve."⁷⁰

Bedi's commentary on Menzies was hopeful, stating that the Menzies government had "great regard for India" and that it had the belief that "if India and Australia understood each other better, they could do a lot of good in South East Asia."⁷¹ However, despite these pleasantries, there was a sense that Australia would move quickly towards closer alignment with the US and the UK, as opposed to Chifley's efforts in attending the Asia conferences of 1947 and 1949. He remarked that "this government is more concerned regarding Asiatic countries than European because of the communist danger."⁷² For Bedi, it was not so much the Cold War that kept Australia and India apart, but Australia's obsession with it. This is an interesting counterpoint to Crocker, who similarly believed that the Indian obsession with racial discrimination held back the relationship. These earliest Indian diplomats in Australia appreciated Chifley's approach, even though they also found Calwell's aggressive rhetoric to be concerning. They were equally concerned that Menzies would take Australia even further away from engagement with Asia.

Like Paranjpye, Bedi was keen to raise the profile of India in Australia by travelling. He reported the following to the MEA on a visit to Queensland: "although there is no racial discrimination, particularly in the common man, there is that racial prejudice which is inherent in the white man and it will

⁶⁶ Paranjpye, *Eighty-Four Not Out*, 131.

⁶⁷ For a collection of multiple articles in the Indian press, see National Archives Australia, A1838: 169/10/8/3/1 "India – Relations with Australia – Migration to Australia – Asiatics."

⁶⁸ Daya Singh Bedi to Y.D. Gundevia, 31 December 1949 at NAL, "Australia's Attitude Towards India," 105 I.A.N.Z. 50, 16.

⁶⁹ Bedi to Gundevia, 16.

⁷⁰ Bedi to Gundevia, 16.

⁷¹ Bedi to Gundevia, 16.

⁷² Bedi to Gundevia, 16.

take time before that is finally eradicated.”⁷³ This led him to argue that “they will be inclined to adhere to the tradition of following in the wake of the British and to an extent the United States of America,” as Australia was “very much concerned to save [its] “white democracy” in the southern hemisphere.”⁷⁴ These first two Indian diplomats to Australia both perceived Australia’s close ties with the US and the UK and Australia’s racial prejudices as stifling its ability to engage with India.

Walter Crocker and the Indian “Preoccupation” with Race Discrimination

Given that Nehru and his early diplomats tended towards viewing Australia as a racist, fearful colonial outpost in need of education regarding India, it becomes crucial to consider how Australian diplomats and leaders viewed India. Menzies stated in his memoirs that India was too confusing a place for any “occidental” to understand: a classic colonial stereotype.⁷⁵ As Crocker noted, Menzies showed no interest in India when he was there. Menzies did not want to see the sights and did not ask any questions.⁷⁶ His lack of interest is telling in itself, but richer and as yet unexplored material is found in Crocker’s despatches during his many years as the high commissioner.

Australia’s first high commissioner to India was General Iven Mackay. Mackay was sent to India in 1943, and predominantly dealt with military matters until the end of World War Two. He retired from the military in 1946 but completed his term as high commissioner, primarily promoting trade and allowing Indian students to study in Australia.⁷⁷ Herbert Gollan replaced Mackay in 1948. Gollan was similarly focused on trade, having served as Australia’s trade commissioner under Mackay.⁷⁸ Throughout their time in India, both men repeatedly argued for allowing a small number of Indians to immigrate to Australia.⁷⁹

Crocker replaced Gollan in 1952. He had formerly served as a colonial administrator in Nigeria, after fighting in World War Two with the British army. He went on to be the high commissioner to India twice, from 1952 to 1955 and again from 1958 to 1962. Crocker’s role in India and elsewhere has generally received considerable praise in Australian scholarship. James Cotton has considered Crocker’s role as a scholar-diplomat, as he went on

⁷³ Daya Singh Bedi, “Annual Report from Australia–1950,” at NAI, “Annual Report from Australia,” file no. 3 (3) R&I, 6–7.

⁷⁴ Bedi, “Annual Report,” 6–7.

⁷⁵ Robert Menzies, *Afternoon Light: Some Memoirs of Men and Events* (Adelaide: Penguin Books, 1969), 92.

⁷⁶ Meg Gurry, “Leadership and Bilateral Relations: Menzies and Nehru, Australia and India, 1949–1964,” *Pacific Affairs* 65, no. 4 (1992–1993): 513.

⁷⁷ Jeffrey Grey, “Mackay, Sir Iven Giffard (1882–1966),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography* 15 (2000), <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mackay-sir-iven-giffard-10977>.

⁷⁸ “Mr H.R. Gollan in Transit,” *The Straits Times*, 27 October 1948, 9.

⁷⁹ Meadows, “He No Doubt felt Insulted,” 83–89.

to become Australia's first IR professor, taking up a post at the Australian National University.⁸⁰ Crocker was fascinated with India and particularly Nehru, of whom he published what is generally taken to be a sound and insightful biography.⁸¹ Nehru reportedly said of Crocker that he was "a good man with clever ideas, unlike the Government he serves."⁸² In his foreword to a recent edition, Ramachandra Guha argued that Crocker's was the strongest short portrait of Nehru ever to be written.⁸³ It was not without controversy in India, however, with one review calling it "misleading, superficial, unoriginal, condescending and patronizing."⁸⁴

Crocker, Gollan, and Mackay all advocated allowing a token number of Indians into Australia, as Canada had done, so as to remove an impediment to the relationship.⁸⁵ Crocker's public material was respectful. His private despatches, however, were tinged with racial stereotypes. Australia had hoped India might be a useful ally in the Cold War, given India's British-derived governmental structures and Commonwealth ties. In 1952, however, Crocker authored a report on "Indian feelings on race relations," which suggested India's "preoccupation"⁸⁶ with race in international affairs might make communism attractive to Indians. Crocker found that India's opposition to any forms of racism made it difficult to work with as an ally in international politics because it predisposes them "as it predisposes American negroes, to see some good in communism just because communism (or so they believe) abolishes race differences."⁸⁷ Crocker's frustration with Indian foreign policy reappeared in his second term as high commissioner, leading him to describe Indians as "irrational" and "unteachable" over Australia's position in New Guinea.⁸⁸ The assumption here, just as is the case in much contemporary IR theory, is that racial discrimination is not real IR, and the focus should be on hard power matters such as the Cold War.

In 1953, Crocker sent a dispatch considering the threat of communism in India. He argued that an emerging ethos in India that poverty, famine, drought, and disease were no longer an acceptable part of life turned Indians towards communism.⁸⁹ The report went on to say that "poverty (as

⁸⁰ James Cotton, *The Australian School of International Relations* (Canberra: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 209–236.

⁸¹ Walter Crocker, *Nehru: A Contemporary's Estimate* (New Delhi: Random House India, 2012).

⁸² Jawaharlal Nehru, quoted in Ramachandra Guha, "Foreword," in Crocker, *Nehru*, ix.

⁸³ Guha, "Foreword," xv.

⁸⁴ Guha, "Foreword," xi.

⁸⁵ Meg Gurry and Gwenda Tavan, "Too Soft and Long-Haired? The Department of External Affairs and the White Australia Policy, 1946–66," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 59, 1 (2004): 133–134.

⁸⁶ Walter Crocker, "Indian Feelings on Race Relations" (1952) at NAA, A462: 618/2/6 "India-International relations policy."

⁸⁷ Walter Crocker, "Indian Feelings on Race Relations."

⁸⁸ Walter Crocker, "India's attitude to Australian New Guinea," (1961) at NAA, A452 1961/3163.

⁸⁹ Walter Crocker, "The Long-Term Prospects for Communism in India," (1953) at NAA, A462: 211/1/25: "Communism in India," 1.

distinguished from starvation) is no longer considered an ideal but an evil.”⁹⁰ Indeed, colonial stereotypes pervade nearly all descriptions of the Indian people in Crocker’s language, such as the colonial tropes of native effeminacy and irrationality. They are based at least partly on perceptions of race: the “new” India was prone to violence and “mob intervention.”⁹¹ There was a new “proneness to violence,” Crocker argued, that was “more significant as it refers to a people who by tradition, and perhaps by nature, have been both gentle and resigned.”⁹² An increase in violence in India, of course, reflected the chaos in which Partition had left India. The connection between Partition and communal violence is not made here.

He further mocked the Indian approach to their colonization by the British by referring to education: “Nehru and his fellow nationalists ... it was a terrible thing that under the wicked British only 15 per cent of the population was literate.”⁹³ As a result of this policy, states in India were burdened with trying to raise the literacy rate, which was not easy. Seeming to take some delight in the difficulties in modernizing India, particularly following Nehru’s criticism of the British for failing to educate Indians, Crocker’s use of the term “wicked” suggests that the Indians did not recognize the good that the British had done for them through their colonization.

The report was more hopeful with regard to the Indian peasantry. He believed that they would not follow communism and argued that “the Indian [peasant] has a strong strain of religion” and prefers “to be left alone and to doze in the sun” as long as they are “given two meals a day.”⁹⁴ The Indian religious traditions, however, were also considered threatening: “the Indians are ... religious by nature; yet they are losing their old Hindu religion. Communism could supply a religion in place of it.”⁹⁵ The implications here are somewhat paradoxical: Indians are “naturally” religious, but are simultaneously losing their Hindu religion. Crocker wished the relationship between India and Australia to move forward and believed that an immigration agreement would assist this. Clearly, though, the difference of perception in world affairs was not just a matter of geopolitics. Whereas Crocker saw communism as virulent and inherently threatening, India’s non-alignment and tendency towards socialist economics and *swadeshi* (self-sufficiency) placed it on a different path.⁹⁶ This led Crocker to argue that the Indians’ anti-colonial thinking blinded India to geopolitical realities. The disagreement over the Cold War, then, as outlined by Benveunti, Mohan, and Medcalf, was not just geopolitical but also ideational.

⁹⁰ Crocker, “Prospects for Communism,” 1.

⁹¹ Crocker, “Prospects for Communism,” 1.

⁹² Crocker, “Prospects for Communism,” 1.

⁹³ Crocker, “Prospects for Communism,” 5.

⁹⁴ Crocker, “Prospects for Communism,” 7.

⁹⁵ Crocker, “Prospects for Communism,” 11.

⁹⁶ Varadarajan, “Neoliberal (In)security.”

General Cariappa and the White Australia Policy

India's third high commissioner to Australia was General Kodandera M. Cariappa, who served from 1953 to 1956. He was a decorated general when he was pulled from a brief retirement at the request of Nehru. He was not known for having a diplomat's temperament, but he was deeply respected across India and deeply idealistic towards the Commonwealth.

Cariappa became best known in Australia, however, for his comments in opposition to the White Australia policy. While David Walker has provided an excellent historical account of this event, I seek to consider it in the context of the perceptions of Other at play in the relationship.⁹⁷ Cariappa gave a speech in Brisbane arguing that it was bad for Australia's broader relationship with India and with Asia. He was quoted as saying in the *Courier Mail* "what you people are doing is driving the people of India and Pakistan away from the British Commonwealth and into the arms of Communism."⁹⁸ Cariappa wrote to Nehru, requesting to be sent home. Ratan K. Nehru, cousin of Jawaharlal and foreign secretary of the MEA, responded that "I have shown your letter to the PM. This was just a storm in a tea cup and shows how jittery the Australians are about their immigration policy."⁹⁹

Cariappa's comments were widely attacked in the Australian press. An editorial in *The Argus* expressed the hope that the intensity of the debate would die down so that the matter could be discussed without "wanting to fling off our coats and punch General Cariappa and other critics on the nose."¹⁰⁰ In an effort to end the controversy, Cariappa clarified his position by trying to appeal to Commonwealth and military solidarity in an interview with *Reveille* (an official publication of the Australian Returned Services League).¹⁰¹ His argument was focused on the Commonwealth, which, as an Indian Army general, he held in high regard. He wrote that "Indians have shared in battles and shed their blood in protecting this precious heritage."¹⁰² For Cariappa, this meant that Indians "should not be denied a natural equality with other immigrants from countries of the British Commonwealth."¹⁰³

⁹⁷ For a strong historical account based on Cariappa's papers, see David Walker, "General Cariappa encounters 'White Australia': Australia, India and the Commonwealth in the 1950s," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34, 3 (2006): 389–406.

⁹⁸ My emphasis. In his papers, General Cariappa has written "I did not say this" after this comment. Though I cannot confirm this, I find it highly unlikely that Cariappa would have made this comment. Kodandera M. Cariappa, quoted in *The Courier-Mail*, June 23 1954, at NAI, General Cariappa Private Papers, part 1, group 47, no. 2.

⁹⁹ Ratan K. Nehru to Kodandera M. Cariappa, 7 July 1954 at NAI, General Cariappa Private Papers, Group 23, part 1, no. 40b, 265.

¹⁰⁰ "White, or 'Off-White' – It's Vital Now," in *The Argus* (Melbourne), 2 July 1954 at NAI, General Cariappa Private Papers, part 1, group 47, no. 1.

¹⁰¹ Kodandera M. Cariappa, "Report of Interview with Reveille" (1954) at NAI, General Cariappa Private Papers, Group 23, part 1, no. 43, 276–277.

¹⁰² Cariappa, "Interview with Reveille," 276–277.

¹⁰³ Cariappa, "Interview with Reveille," 276–277.

His argument was also tied, perhaps due to its intended audience, to World War Two solidarity, as the offence to Indian servicemen is heightened as “tens of thousands of Germans and Italians have been encouraged to emigrate to Australia.”¹⁰⁴ Here, Cariappa sought to evoke the colonial link between India and Australia, just as Modi and Abbott were to do in 2014, to create change in Australia. In Cariappa’s case, this did not prove successful.

Following the negative press commentary, Cariappa wrote to N. Ragunath Pillai, the secretary general of the MEA. His comments revealed his perception of Australia’s anxiety about the world. He stated first that Indians were not treated well in Australia, and were not given the rights that they should have as citizens: “Having met a number of Indian settlers here and in New Zealand ... I cannot help the feeling that the people of this country, although they profess to be very democratic, simple friendly and all that, have a very poor opinion of Asians in regard to our standards of living and so on.”¹⁰⁵

He further wrote that he had tried to use the Commonwealth as a means of shifting opinions on Indians, because he was always told that “if we took you ... what about the Chinese and the Japanese?”¹⁰⁶ He concluded: “This is the way they think. They are scared stiff of Asians over-running their country if they relaxed their Immigration policy!”¹⁰⁷ Here, the ideational clash between India and Australia becomes clearer: Indian diplomats saw Australians as needlessly anxious about Asia, while the Australians saw the Indians as needlessly obsessed with racial discrimination. Feeling unable to leave, at it would be seen as a firing, Cariappa switched his mission in Australia to changing the Australian people’s mind with regard to Indians and Asia in general. Cariappa eventually settled on the same plan as Paranjpye and Bedi: to travel throughout Australia so as to personally disrupt Australia’s stereotypical vision of Indians.

Cariappa further expressed his irritation at Australia’s obsession with its economic and racial fears, though this time it was with regards to the standards of living rather than the immigration policy. He complained in his annual report of 1954: “in everything they say or do, I frequently hear, to the extent of being tired of hearing, such expressions as ‘we must maintain our high standards of living and therefore we must have only such people living with us who have our high standards.’”¹⁰⁸ He continued: “I have often asked Australians what exactly this means. ... no one has given me a satisfactory answer.”¹⁰⁹ Cariappa wrote without the diplomatic niceties of Paranjpye and

¹⁰⁴ Cariappa, “Interview with Reveille,” 276–277.

¹⁰⁵ Kodandera M. Cariappa to N. Ragunath Pillai, 7 July 1954 at NAI, General Cariappa Private Papers, group nine, part II, no. 17.

¹⁰⁶ Cariappa to Pillai, 1.

¹⁰⁷ Cariappa to Pillai, 2.

¹⁰⁸ Kodandera M. Cariappa, “Annual Political Report for the year 1954,” at NAI, “Reports for 1954 in Respect of Australia,” file no. 3 (31) R&I /55 (s), 2.

¹⁰⁹ Cariappa, “Report for the year 1954,” 3.

Bedi. Australia, he added, “seems to be obsessed with the fear that Communism is almost at her door-steps and her security, therefore, is very gravely in danger.”¹¹⁰ These comments show a deep sense of frustration with Australia’s perception of the world. Idealistic as he was about the Commonwealth, Australia’s anxieties about Asia and Asian immigration led him to question these beliefs.

Cariappa completed his full term as high commissioner. He was generous in his farewell message to Australia, stating that he would miss the country and had enjoyed his many travels there. He again aimed to disrupt stereotypes: “India is not the land of snakes, mosquitoes, beggars and rope-tricksters only, as some imagine it to be, as Australia is not merely a land of Kangaroos and Koala Bears.”¹¹¹

Cariappa’s comments on the White Australia policy were considered in the Australian MEA, but not raised officially with India. Crocker kept track of the matter without lodging an official protest. He avoided speaking with R.K. Nehru regarding the issue, believing him to be “fanatical about colour, race, etc.”¹¹² Crocker did, however, discuss the matter with the Commonwealth Secretary Subimal Dutt, who reportedly told him that India had “no interest in Australian immigration policy.”¹¹³ Crocker concluded that Cariappa’s “standing with the powers-that-be here is weak” and that the MEA believed him to “have failed in Australia ... due to his vanity.” Furthermore, he suggested that Dutt “obviously thinks that Cariappa is not all there” in his failure to follow the government line.¹¹⁴ Crocker believed that Cariappa’s actions had damaged India-Australia relations, as well as the cause (which Crocker himself supported) of changing Australia’s immigration policy. Furthermore, Crocker wished that Cariappa would “keep silent” as he had “no understanding of the basic forces and factors in Australian life.”¹¹⁵ Given that Cariappa stayed on in Australia, and travelled much of the country generating considerable press coverage, Crocker misread the intentions of the MEA. From the Australian press and Cariappa disagreeing over what was originally said, to Crocker’s thinking that Cariappa would be sent back to India, this affair is another example of India and Australia misunderstanding one another. Cariappa’s perception of Australia as overly fearful and the Australian press perceiving Cariappa as hypersensitive and meddling portray a very tense relationship between these two former colonies. The history of

¹¹⁰ Cariappa, “Report for the year 1954,” 1.

¹¹¹ Kodandera M. Cariappa, “A Message to Australians by General K. M. Cariappa, on the Eve of his Departure from Australia to India,” 15 April 1956 at NAI, General Cariappa Private Papers, part 1, group 47, no. 55A, 310–311.

¹¹² Walter Crocker, “Minute,” 12 July 1954 at University of Adelaide Barr-Smith Library Special Collections (BSL), Crocker Papers, series 10, V2.2, 1.

¹¹³ Crocker, “Minute.”

¹¹⁴ Walter Crocker to Secretary, Department External Affairs, Canberra, 2 September 1954 at BSL, Crocker Papers, Series 10, V2.2.

¹¹⁵ Crocker, “Minute,” 2.

India-Australia relations in this period is not one of shared history, but one of consistent ideational conflict, misunderstanding, and misperception.

Conclusion: Shared History and India-Australia Relations

A re-examination of the relationship of India and Australia from an ideational perspective reveals a very different picture. Even though Australia and India were historically entangled through the British Empire, colonial histories and their subsequent postcolonial identities have clearly been divisive in India-Australia relations. Both sides had ideational ambivalences towards one another on the basis of their colonial connections. This poor relationship was certainly not inevitable. At this formative stage, however, the relationship was undermined repeatedly through different understandings about the nature of the postcolonial world. Colonial histories, and the identities they created, led to consistent misunderstandings. Although it would be wrong to say there was no shared history, it is misleading in the extreme to argue that this colonial history has been positive in the India-Australia relationship.

The relationship between India and Australia now appears to be growing, after Modi's visit to Australia and the much-vaunted nuclear deal. And yet, as seen in the media furores over attacks on Indian students in Australia and the "Khobragade affair" in the US, India's relationship with these post-imperial powers can still rapidly devolve into accusations of Western racism and Indian hyper-sensitivity.¹¹⁶ Just as they did after the Cold War, India and Australia still disagree fundamentally on many crucial global issues. India continues to support Iran, maintains close ties with Russia, resists the NPT, will not join the Trans-Pacific Partnership and looks to BRICS for solidarity with the "global south," while openly seeking a "polycentric" world order. These positions all echo India's postcolonial identity, as seen in the early Cold War period. Australia has undoubtedly moved closer to Asia, long ago dismantled the White Australia policy and become a far more open and multicultural society since the period examined here. And yet, it maintains its links to the US and the UK and is broadly supportive of US hegemony over world order. Changing this aspect of India-Australia relations requires more than just the political will displayed by Narendra Modi and Tony Abbott. Rather, for the relationship to move forward, there needs to be a shift in the ways in which India and Australia imagine world politics. Without this, India and Australia will continue to misunderstand one another regardless of how much desire there is to engage.

The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia, May 2015

¹¹⁶ Only twenty-three attacks are now estimated to have been racially motivated. See: Anon, "Only 23 of 152 Oz attacks racist, Ministry tells LS," 25 February 2010 at <http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/only-23-of-152-oz-attacks-racist-ministry-tells-ls/584247/>.