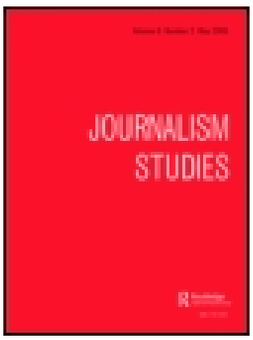

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"A KANGAROO AND BRADMAN" Indian journalists' visit to Australia under the Colombo Plan, 1950–1957

Amit Sarwal

Academic research on White Australia Policy and the Colombo Plan has spanned across the history of Asian migration, policy-making initiatives and Australia–India relations. But the role of popular transnational media images and stories that informs the sociocultural understanding of these relations has been under evaluated. In this article, using newspaper reports and notes of the tours, I highlight the building of popular perceptions under the Colombo Plan (1950–1957). By focusing on Indian journalists and editors, E. P. W. da Costa, J. N. Sahni, Frank Moraes, and Durga Das, this article contributes to the historiography of Australian–Indian relations. As these culture exchanges created a dialogue between the two countries that still influences the public opinion. The article concludes that journalists from both India and Australia sought to play a key role in image-making process and wanted a fresh start in relationship––politically, economically, sociologically and technologically.

KEYWORDS Colombo Plan; cross-cultural relations; India–Australia relations; media-broker diplomacy; public diplomacy; White Australia policy

Introduction

Academic research on White Australia Policy (Willard 1923; Yarwood 1962; Rivett 1975; Brawley 1995; Walker 1999; Tavan 2005) and the Colombo Plan (Auletta 2000; Lowe 2002, 2010, 2015; Megarrity 2005, 2007) has spanned the history of Asian migration and policy-making initiatives in Australia. Australian scholars such as Ward (2001), Goldsworthy (2002), De Lepervanche (1984, 2013), Allen (2005, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2017), Walker (1999), Lowe (2013b) and Maclean (2015) in their works have also focused on the impact of the British Empire and White Australia Policy[1] on Australia–India relations, particularly early Indian migrants in Australia. Post-1901, some Australian intellectuals, policy-makers and diplomats made compelling arguments for productive collaborations between Australia and India, especially in the fields of education, information exchange and training. With the prevailing ethos of equal rights among citizens of the British Empire, rising nationalism and the subsequent decline of the British Raj, elite Indians (educated and rich) wanted to engage with Australia at the same level. But this engagement was barely at the level of expectations of Indian intellectuals and elite. This was mainly due to the existence of White Australia Policy, which according to Lyndon Megarrity was the "most influential factor" that dominated government policy formation and creation of perception in and about Australia (Megarrity 2007, 105). This policy aggregated with the popular transnational media images and stories also informed the sociocultural understanding of the relations between Australia and India.

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In the 1950s, under the successful initiation of the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific (commonly called the Colombo Plan), Australia opened up avenues for Asian students, administrators and opinion makers. The Consultative Committee agreed that for the plan to succeed in a post-colonial world, dissemination of information through media and relationship with press-men, or in other terms, media-broker diplomacy was very important. Under this plan, prominent Indian journalists and editors were invited on goodwill visits as guests of Australia. From 1950 to 1957, some prominent names included: E. P. W. da Costa (*Eastern Economist*, 1950), Frank Moraes (the *Times of India*, 1950), J. N. Sahni (*National Call*, 1951), Ralph Mendoca (1955), Durga Das (*Hindustan Times*, 1957), Dr K. Shridharani (*Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 1957), A. K. Gupta (*Hindustan Standard*, 1957) and R. Sriman (*The Times of India*, 1957). These visits soon became a regular feature and the role of journalists in creating public opinion and opening up public and cross-cultural diplomacy channels began to attract more attention in both Australia and India (Lowe 2013a). Bernard Cecil Cohen has clarified the duality of a journalist's work, especially during such visits—a neutral reporter and/or an active participant in the home or host government policy-making process (Cohen 1963, 19–20; Cull 2006).

As early images, impressions and perceptions remain enduringly influential, by analysing the journey of these early Indian journalists in Australia, I will investigate the potential for journalists of the Commonwealth to work as public and cultural diplomats between the two countries. In writing about Australian perceptions of India, scholars have highlighted Australia's help in technical assistance and capital aid to India under the Colombo Plan (Lowe 2013a). But, the other side of the coin, the building of early Indian perceptions of Australia, has often been neglected in this discourse (Maclean 2012). Furthermore, in analysing perceptions of each other, most of the work thus far has focused on Australians gazing upon India (see Hosking and Sarwal 2012; Walker and Sobocinska 2012; Walker 2013; Sobocinska 2014). With this as background, using Australian and Indian newspaper reports and notes of the 1950s tours published by E. P. W. da Costa, J. N. Sahni, Frank Moraes and Durga Das, I would highlight building of popular perceptions. By focusing on these early Indian journalists' visits to Australia, this article will contribute to the historiography of Australian–Indian relations as these culture exchanges created a dialogue between the two countries that still influences public and media opinion.

The Colombo Plan

According to Sisir Gupta, the Colombo Plan was "the first concrete attempt to organise some kind of regionalism in the economic sphere" (Gupta 1964, 73). It was also recognized as a finest example of Australia's soft power initiatives in a multipolar Asia (Dawkins and Kelly 2003; Lowe 2010). The Hon. Peter Varghese, former High Commissioner of Australia to India (2009–2012), notes that "in policy terms, perhaps its greatest contribution was in helping to change attitudes within Australia to questions of race and region" (Australian Education International 2010, 18–19). The Plan was not only the key to advancing Australia's foreign policy and development agendas in Asia but also occupied an important place in creating a pan Asian dialogue with Australia playing a constructive role (DFAT 2005).

Australia and India were both part of the British Empire and as a result shared political, economic and sporting ties. Post World War II, the Australian government under Prime

Minister Ben Chifley supported the independence of India. The key reason to do so was to stop the menace of communism taking Australia via India and through the Indonesian archipelago (Day 2001). From Australia's viewpoint, according to Australia's then External Affairs Minister Percy Spender, the Plan (or as highlighted in the Australian media as "Spender's Plan") was a vital "human endeavour" (*Morning Bulletin*, 3 January 1951). It was not only needed to maintain and promote "both economic and political stability" but also assist "in preparing the way for a large-scale attack against poverty, social unrest and extremist ideologies" (*Morning Bulletin*, 3 January 1951). So, Spender showed almost a personal interest in instigating the Plan and in January 1950 told the following to journalists attending the Commonwealth Conference on Foreign Affairs (Colombo, Sri Lanka):

> My country is devoted to the cause of peace. We are living today under the shadow of an approaching storm. Whether the storm will break or pass is yet to be seen. In any case there is a great urgency to deal with the problem facing Foreign Ministers. Time is not running in our favour. (*The Advertiser*, 16 January 1950)

The argument developed and conceived at the 1950 conference in favour of Australia's support to this plan was that poverty and Cold War will breed Communism (Singh 1964).[2] Therefore, a direct technical and economic assistance programme can help newly independent countries such as India increase its production, alleviate poverty and minimize the threat of Communists.

From 1950 to 1955, India, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, Cambodia, South Vietnam, the United States, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Japan played an active role as member countries. However, some policy-makers in both Australia and developing countries criticized this Plan. While Australian parliamentarians felt that the money could be well spent on local ex-servicemen or poor, South Asian leaders saw the Plan as a back door entry for British imperialism. This would increase their dependency on the Commonwealth, as it offered no solution to economic problems of the newly independent states (Blackton 1951, 31; Garrett 1953, 8). In Australia, India and Sri Lanka were seen as strategically important countries in the region and keeping the bureaucracy pleased and, most importantly, working on the Commonwealth's model and structures––social, political and economic––an urgent need. Senator Wordsworth from Tasmania noted during the budget session in parliament that he supported the Plan but felt that it was only "theoretically" sound and "practically" a "totally unnecessary" one as 75 per cent of the direct aid money was being used for rearmament by India and Pakistan to settle the Kashmir issue (*The Mercury*, 25 October 1951).

No doubt, the Plan was a "defensive response" from Australia to its own anxieties within the Asian region (Walker 1999; Oakman 2004; Tavan 2005, 278). Australia, all alone amongst newly independent Asian countries, was face to face with its regional or Asian future. The challenges of decolonization and Cold War prompted Australia to choose strategically and work towards protecting its short- and long-term national and international interests in the region by inviting students, administrators and journalists who can play leadership roles back home and also work as a counteroffensive mechanism against communism with their modern Western knowledge. According to the present Prime Minister of Australia, Malcolm Turnbull, the "formal relationship" with India for many Australians only began in the 1950s––"when Robert Menzies became the first Australian leader to visit independent India" (Turnbull 2017). Menzies visited India and met with

his counterpart Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to support India's admission as a Republic to the Commonwealth Nations. But the moderate Indian politicians and bureaucrats were angry with Australia's White Australia Policy and saw it as a racist country. On the other hand, in a broadcast over All India Radio, Menzies said: "We must learn to think together and to act together. India, Pakistan, Great Britain, Australia, and all the nations of the Commonwealth must fit themselves for friendship based on common interests and mutual understanding" (Staff Correspondent 1950, 3). To strengthen this mutual friendship and exchange information under the Colombo Plan, Indian journalists and editors were sponsored to visit on short-term visits to Australia.

Indian Journalists' Visits

Prominent journalists and editors representing the major national newspapers from South and South-east Asia, notably India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Indonesia were invited to visit Australia. These tours, ranging from a couple of weeks to two months, involved a visit to major historical, political and agricultural centres of Australia. As the plan, apart from a humanitarian programme, also had a political and cultural agenda to cover the selected journalists represented mostly English dallies of the newly independent nations.

One of the first Indian journalists to visit Australia post-independence was E. P. W. da Costa. He was the editor of the *Eastern Economist* and a leading authority on the economy and trade of South-East Asia. Da Costa was also India's first pollster and the founder of the Indian Institute of Public Opinion that in the 1960s pioneered election surveys both pre-poll and post-poll. Da Costa was an advocate of free market economy and opposed Congress Government's quota-permit system.[3] India's former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh remembered him as someone known for his "deep insights" into socio-economic issues and important national and international matters (Guha 2005; Dixon 2006). Da Costa was a staunch anti-Communist and believed that Australia could take a "grand lead" in Asia by taking strong action against communists (*The West Australian*, 10 May 1950). According to him, as a result of this move, there would be a profound "closer feeling" between peoples of India and Australia that would act as a "great change" and build a "bond of goodwill" between Australia and India which were on "a threshold of a new era" (*The West Australian*, 10 May 1950). Speaking on the occasion of a welcome party thrown by Lord Mayor Mr J. Totterdell, MLA, Da Costa emphasized the need for "complimentary trade" practices. He told Australian journalists: "India would look to Australia for a lead in building up its democratic and liberty-loving principles, for Australia, had known liberty for many more years than India" (*The West Australian*, 10 May 1950). Most of Da Costa's ideas were echoed by Lord Mayor and Sir Hal Colebatch, who noted that visits by such eminent journalists from India, if continued, would create a stronger feeling between the two countries. Sir Colebatch added: "nothing was needed more towards mutual interest than for people of different countries to get a sound knowledge of each other" (*The West Australian*, 10 May 1950).

The second journalist to visit Australia was J. N. Sahni, a veteran nationalist-newspaper editor. He visited Australia as part of an international press delegation to cover the special Jubilee opening of the Australian Federal Parliament in June 1951. In Australia, he was best remembered as the "last man to interview Mr Chifley" and probably "the last to get his autograph" (*The Argus*, 30 May 1951). Sahni told journalists:

> I met Mr Chifley by appointment in the afternoon. It was the thirteenth of June. Earlier in the day I had met a large number of Senators and Ministers of the Commonwealth Cabinet. It was my last interview of the day. It was his last interview for all time! (*The Argus*, 30 May 1951)

In his book, *Across Twentieth Parallel: A Narrative Study of the Countries of South-east Asia and Australia* (1952), Sahni noted that in his two-hour-long interview (13 June 1951) with Chifley while he wanted to discuss Australian affairs and views on the future of Australia–India relations, Chifley thought it would be better if Sahni saw Australia and its people first and then discuss his impressions with him at the end of the month before leaving for India (Sahni 1952, 13). Chifley, a great aficionado of smoking pipe, noticed that Sahni was carrying a pipe in his pocket so he manoeuvred the discussion to India, pipe smoking and yoga. Chifley requested Sahni to smoke his pipe and on knowing that Sahni forgot his packet of tobacco; Chifley promptly gave him a packet of Australian tobacco to try and comment on its taste. On Sahni's request, Chifley also autographed the tobacco packet with these parting words: "Oh, Sahni! I forgot to put the date under my autograph. You had better have that" (*The Argus*, 30 May 1951). Sahni fondly remembered him in his book:

> As I sat there talking to him, smoking our respective pipes, sharing tobacco from a common carton, helpfully offered by my host, I little realized that this man, who combined the toughness of a bricklayer, with the vision and dynamic urge of a great architect of his nation's destiny, was conveying through me his last message. (Sahni 1952, 13)

Sahni's interview was built around dozens of other subjects and ended with Chifley's serious comment, and a personal wish, that India should remain "neutral in the event of a war" and show "the way to preserving peace" (Sahni 1952, 13). Chifley said:

> But war or peace, we on this side of Asia, from Bombay to Sydney, could do a lot for mutual development, and for helping each other in distress. We should rationalise our economies on the basis of greater interdependence and mutual help. (Sahni 1952, 14)

A few hours later after Sahni's departure, Chifley died of a sudden heart attack––the result of over-work, smoking and poor health. Prime Minister Menzies cancelled the Jubilee Ball at King's Hall in Parliament House and said: "I don't want to try to talk about him now because, although we were political opponents, he was a friend of mine and yours, and a fine Australian" (*The Canberra Times*, 14 June 1951). Sahni left for Melbourne the next day and in hurry forgot Chifley's autographed packet in his room at Havelock House in Canberra. A porter found it and deposited it with a member of the Prime Minister's department who kept it in safekeeping after noticing the autograph. Once the news of autographed tobacco packet reached Menzies, he made sure that Sahni got his "last gift" from Chifley (*The Canberra Times*, 21 June 1951).

On the question of India and the Commonwealth, like many journalists and leaders of India of that time, Sahni also made it clear to his Australian counterparts that India was in Commonwealth out of "choice" and not "compulsion" (*The Advertiser*, 22 June 1951). For Sahni, Australian politicians' knowledge of India and its affairs, particularly in opinion makers such as Casey, had become "rusty" and old. He attributed this to a neglecting and indifferent attitude towards India, creation of political interest in South-east Asia and

an ongoing obsession with White Australia policy (Sahni 1952, 19). He further observed that it seems Australia's foreign policy:

> … revolves around the pivotal desire of a small population of a particular extraction, to safeguard its rich inheritance of a large rich fertile insular continent, against racial infiltration, economic competition and outright invasion by certain Pacific Powers. It is trying to achieve this by creating a European vested interest in its future immigration, by close alliance with the north American countries, by creating Asiatic buffers between itself and sources of potential danger, and by working through Britain to build up for itself the moral and material support of the Commonwealth. (Sahni 1952, 19)

Sahni, in very strong words, told Australian pressmen that even if Australia lifts the White Australia Policy, India would not send any cheap labourers or skilled professionals, like doctors, technicians or engineers, to settle here, as India needs it more for nation building: "Now that we are free, we are not entirely proud of the migrants whom we sent out before" (*The Courier-Mail*, 5 July 1951). Sahni was confident that skilled Indians will consciously choose India over any foreign country. For him, a fine example of this was America's quota system where, under it, only 40 Indians settled in the last five years. Furthermore, Sahni believed that in the coming 10–15 years, Australians would feel the deep impact of the process of nationalism in East Asia. He noted: "The free nations of Asia would grow and whatever Australia did it could not isolate itself from the east's influence, just as India could not isolate herself from the west" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 July 1951). Comparing India and Australia's outlook towards communism in Asia and the region, Sahni declared that "India and Australia, two nations with a similar objective outlook, should work together towards world peace" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 July 1951).

On his return to India, Sahni wrote some articles where he summed up his impressions of his Australian tour. These recollections, later published in his book, highlighted the importance of countries below the twentieth parallel in international politics. He was well-versed in contemporary studies produced by well-known scholars and journalists but their epicentre being Europe or the United States, Sahni observed that the countries below the twentieth parallel are becoming increasingly vital to international diplomacy (Sahni 1952, vi). He notes in his book that the stability of Australian policy related to the South-east Asian region would inevitably depend on a close understanding with India. Although this fact was known to a majority of Australian policy-makers, others "in high places have been slow to reconcile themselves to its obvious racial implications" (Sahni 1952, 19). Sahni's sole purpose in publishing his views in a book form was, firstly, to create a narrative study from an "Asiatic view point", and secondly to place before the reader "a correct and impartial appraisement" of the political and economic problems faced by newly independent nations (Sahni 1952, vi–vii). He writes:

> For nearly 200 years white immigrants entering variously as convicts émigrés, refugees from religious persecution, hopeful pioneers in search of adventure, or desperately intent on the last gamble of their lives, have been building up, what has now assumed, the vast proportions of a very modernised and dynamic human family. And yet the hand of man has influenced only a small part of the great continent. Among the colonies and dominions founded through the adventures of British sea-hawks, Australia is perhaps the only one with an almost "all white" imported population. (Sahni 1952, 3–4)

Sahni saw years of "assiduous struggle, experiment and research" along with hard work that Australian pioneers have put in to create farms, pastures, cultivations, orchards, vinery, and architectural designs and motifs that he thought in the course of time would be "characterised as essentially Australian" (Sahni 1952, 4). In his chapter, titled "Platypus and Coca-Cola", Sahni highlights Platypus, Kangaroo, Koala bear and Merino sheep. He writes that the bush and desolate dry desert that "typify the continent of Australia" have lived through the ages giving Australia "its individuality and its character" (Sahni 1952, 3). Sahni narrates a very amusing experience regarding lack of awareness about India amongst Australians. During his stay in Melbourne, his chauffeur asked him about Delhi:

> He said he had only heard of one city from a cousin who had been to India, during the war, namely, Calcutta. I replied with repressed modesty that some of the Indian cities were fairly large remarking, "If you come to think of it, between Delhi and Calcutta, you almost have the population of Australia." He thought I had made a mistake, and politely suggested, "You mean Melbourne, Sir, you said Australia." His face registered a genuine shock when I repeated that I had meant Australia and not Melbourne. (Sahni 1952, 6)

With respect to the average Australians, he notes that they do not believe in learning, are "tough but not rough … frank without being brazen, hospitable without being pretentious, civil but not formal, polite but not always courteous, religious but not ostentatious in piety" (Sahni 1952, 7–8). He also observed that Australians were very "sensitive" towards "family trees, culture, and tradition" (Sahni 1952, 7–8). According to Sahni, this was a sign of "a strange inferiority complex" in the very nature of Australians, a result of the history of their settlement and White Australia policy (Sahni 1952, 7–8).

Sahni declared that this policy was "a complex for the Australians" and because of it, an Australian "sings the British National Anthem at more places than the English" (Sahni 1952, 8). It is because of this reason that an Australian "feels flattered when you tell him how very English he is" (Sahni 1952, 8). Sahni observed that although "Australia is looking east-wards but for Australia USA is the East" (Sahni 1952, 8). For him this was evident:

> … not only from the Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola signs, chromium fitted milk and snack bars, the "New Look" worn by the women, chewing gum, and loafer shoes, the craze of samba and Jitterbug, but also by the growing rush of town life, the turn to labour saving mechanical devices, the assimilation of mixed people, and a trend towards mass production. (Sahni 1952, 8–9)

This Americanization was clear in the younger generation. Sahni writes that old Australians do not like it when you tell them that the younger generation are developing according to an unmistakable American pattern or the truth that "Australia is Americanising rapidly" (Sahni 1952, 8). Furthermore, the "new look" Australian women, according to Sahni, "holds a dominant position in the contemporary Australian society" (Sahni 1952, 9). But are not as dominant as their American counterparts:

> They do not have the same influence as in America. Man here is still the head of the family. While women dress smartly, make up is not so elaborate or common. Women help men in the fields and on the farms. They work in factories and offices. They occupy high positions as Mayors and Justices of the Peace. A few even sit in Parliament. (Sahni 1952, 9)

Sahni felt that the absence of "class differences" and average living standard being quite good have resulted in an "extraordinary informality in Australian social life" (*The Mail*, 1 December 1951). Sahni saw this "closing-up of class standards in a compact population" as a "problem" because it has made certain professions "unpopular"––like "a shoe-shine shop". He writes:

> On one occasion I walked end to end through Pitt Street in Sydney in search of a shoe-shine shop, or a shoe shiner. None exist in Australia except in the larger hotels, and the shine they give your shoes is just a grudging brushing up. (Sahni 1952, 10)

So, for Sahni,

> Apart from the high wages, an Indian is bound to be disappointed if he expects the same politeness from the average Australian worker as he might expect in India. Indeed his first impression is likely to be that the average Australian is rough and a little crude. (Sahni 1952, 10)

Finally, after travelling in most of the major cities of Australia, he saw that although "religion played an important part in an Australian's life" (Sahni 1952, 11) but going to Church was just a means to attain good "status" in community and a "good reception" in heaven (Sahni 1952, 11).

Another influential journalist to visit Australia was Frank Moraes. He was then editor of *Times of India* and a well-known name in Australian journalist circles because of his popular "Mother India" columns that were reprinted in the *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane). Frank's son and writer, Dom Moraes, in his book *My Son's Father* (1968), recollects this visit to Australia in 1950. This was Frank's first trip to Australia with his family. Dom notes:

> I was on a ship, with my parents. We were going to Australia. It was my father's first leave since he had started to edit the Times of India, and, since he had never been to Australia, he had chosen it for our holiday. I knew nothing about Australia except that from it came cricketers, kangaroos, and the duck billed platypus, but the idea of travel pleased me. (Moraes 1968, 57)

Dom, as a nervous child in a strange country, felt that everyone was "tremendously friendly". He notes:

> I was puzzled when taxi drivers called my father "mate," told him all about their lives, and invited him into bars for "a brace of ice colds," but it was obviously well meant, though I myself objected to being called "nipper". (Moraes 1968, 59)

Dom kept a journal of the trip mixed with prose and verse. He notes that on a cane plantation in Queensland (near Mackay and Toowoomba), a strange incident happened:

> At one plantation, as we were inspecting a dully rustling canefield, a small black man in dungarees shuffled up and asked my father for a cigarette. The overseer waved him impatiently away. "Don't take any notice of him," he advised my father. "He's one of the abos, Abo Charlie, scrounges all he can get".
>
> But the small man shuffled closer, and said to my father, "You from India, eh? I too. I from Jhelum side, bloody fine country that. You gotta cigarette?"

> My father said in incredulous tones, "He's an Indian".
>
> "Is he, by Christ," said the overseer. "Never knew that".
>
> It turned out that Charlie (his real name was Chauhan) had come to Australia before the Great War as a camel driver. When the utility of camels in the Australian desert ended, he hadn't enough money to return home. He had made a living through casual labour for thirty years, had married an Australian wife, and had several children. His one regret was that he could not get his wife to cook Punjabi food.
>
> He was terrible: he begged my father for cigarettes, for whisky, for money to buy them with. The overseer looked disapprovingly on, but eventually my father presented Charlie with a pound. He took it with a lifting of his clasped hands to his forehead in thanks, which after forty years in Australia was still purely Indian. (Moraes 1968, 59)

Frank interviewed and quizzed W. M. Hughes, former Prime Minister, regarding the strange support to White Australia Policy by the Labour Party than from the Liberals under Menzies. Frank observed:

> The Strange thing about the white Australia policy is that it draws stronger support from the Labour Party than from Menzies Liberals, who approximate to the British Tories. There is something in the contention that its main motivation is economic and has less to do with epidermis. (Moraes 1958, 163)

Hughes in all frankness told Frank Moraes that White Australia policy has nothing to do with colour but control over one's home.

> I support it on the principle that each man's home is his castle. Colour isn't involved in the question and there's no colour complex inside Australia. … But each country, like each man, has a right to order its own domain. One must do things with the least offence and the most good. Bad manners are the unforgivable sin. (Moraes 1958, 163)

On the same question, former Prime Minister Chifley replied that the reason for the White Australia policy was economic.

> We have Kanakas in Queensland and there were Chinese in the gold rush. The Indians in Fiji resort to business more than to labour, like the Maltese here. WE can't afford to lower our living standards. In Australia once you are accepted as a citizen you are equal, no matter what the colour of your skin. The Labour party does not want a slave system here. The Liberals, more particularly the Country party, would like cheap labour but they dare not say so publicly. (Moraes 1958, 163)

Hughes and Chifley both unconvincingly defended the White Australia policy and confronted him with India's caste system, which although an unjustifiable comparison deeply embarrassed Moraes. On this issue, Frank Moraes felt, like many other educated Indians, that division by colour was an artificial frontier and there was no need for a White Australia policy. He observed that the British Commonwealth, "despite its internal differences", can act as a remarkable example of "democratic co-existence" (Moraes 1958, 166). He further adds:

> With Asia resurgent it seems not only anomalous but dangerous to proclaim a White Australia policy in underpopulated countries existing on the fringe of overpopulated Asian lands. This is not to preach the policy of the Open Door but to advocate creed of tempered wisdom which, recognising the realities of the situation, will permit a freer intermingling of the world's peoples on a basis of equality. (F. Moraes 1958, 166)

He observed that Australia, which is deficient in population and has complicated defence, is in no position to regard Asians as "some lesser breed outside the law" (Moraes 1958, 167). Because by doing so, it imperils not only its own position but that of the free world. Frank believed that Australia needs immigrants from Asia and their strength would result in "a closer co-operation and association between the free peoples of the world, whether white, black, brown or yellow" (Moraes 1958, 167).

Frank notes that in Australia since the wages are fairly regulated, so a particular class of Indians can be permitted by the government to settle and work permanently to their own advantage. Educated South Asians possess the same tools––language, Western science and technology––and therefore can help in the economic advancement of Australia, which is, with the end of colonialism, competing with the United States, Russia and China. He writes: "Moreover there seems no good reason why non-white doctors, lawyers and other professionals, who are duly qualified, should not be allowed into the country on quota basis such as the United States permits" (Moraes 1958, 164). Finally, Moraes praised the work of the Australian High Commissioner in India, Mr R. Gollan, who was working hard to "know" India better and also make India "Australia-minded" for smoother inter-democratic relations and a peaceful coexistence in the region (*The Advertiser*, 21 January 1950; Moraes 1958, 166).

In 1957, Australian government organized a goodwill visit of pressman from "non-SEATO" countries. This delegation included, Durga Das,[4] Chief Editor of *The Hindustan Times*. Das wrote a number of articles in the Editor's Note-book column about his visit to Australia. Prior to this, he had completed a hundred days' world tour and the last phase included a visit to Australia along with a team of Indian journalists. For Das, the very fact that such a delegation from postcolonial nations was invited by Australia reflected its desire "to be better understood by the people of Asia" (Das 1958, 68). Although, for Das it was quite fascinating to see that Australia, which has perpetually lived "a self-satisfied and self-contained existence" in the "fear" of the people in the North, shares almost the same geographical distance with Delhi as England, Japan or Outer Mongolia but is still an Asian region. Das noted that Australia's fate was linked with that of Asia and it could play an important role given "imaginative leadership" (Das 1958, 69). He further observes that the problems Australians were facing, like many other Asian counterparts, were of "finding successors to the present leadership", i.e. Mr Menzies, the Liberal Prime Minister, and Mr Evatt, the Labor leader (Das 1958, 67). Like the dynamic Indian Prime Minister Nehru, all these Asian politicians were a "product of a particular climate" and it would be difficult to fit in their shoes (Das 1958, 67). Das, like Da Costa and Sahni, was pleasantly surprised by the "broadmindedness" of Australian people and lack of either class-conscious or colour-conscious. He writes that this can be because of:

> … the founding fathers (the inhabitants of the criminal settlements and the poorer Scots who came in search of fortune) made up their mind to create a society in which class and privilege would be tabooed. It was no doubt to be a white man's settlement, but the

> atmosphere in which the average Australian has grown up has made him tolerant of others who have a different colour or race. (Das 1958, 69)

To prove this particular attitude of Australians, Das interviewed a number of Asian students studying under the Colombo Plan. From his conversations, he observed:

> No greater proof of this is needed than a talk with Asian students, over two thousand of whom, mostly from Malaya, Singapore and Indonesia, are receiving training under the Colombo Plan or on their own. They are treated as equals by their Australian colleagues and tolerated by the people as a whole. There are, of course, incidents of rudeness and of colour prejudice, but these are exceptions rather than the rule, and such incidents are condemned as misbehaviour. (Das 1958, 69)

He was convinced that the way Australian people treat their international exchange and Colombo Plan students could easily help them "make friends with the Asians" and also "work with them in the cause of peace and human progress" (Das 1958, 69). However, he questioned the role of Australian politicians and pressmen in such a development.

He was of the opinion that Australian politicians and press were obstacles in the way of such a cooperative development. These two entities had "inherited the complexes and inhibitions of their imperial brothers" and will take time to outgrow them (Das 1958, 69). He also observed that the Australian people as a rule do not have much respect for politicians (considered "opportunist") and Press (which just sells "crime and sex"). The attitude of politicians and press towards Asia, for Das, was the fault of Australian people. He writes:

> Since all peoples get the Government and the Press they deserve the fault basically lies with the mental laziness of the people, who feel satisfied with their wages and standard of living and bother little about what politicians and the Press do. (Das 1958, 72)

Das notes that on his arrival in Sydney, he was stuck by a very interesting fact about Australia's outlook towards its Asian neighbours.

> One of the first sights in Australia after we arrived in Sydney was of a large map of the world on the wall of the entrance hall of Hotel Australia. It displayed clocks showing the time in Rome, Paris, London, New York, Los Angeles and Sydney. This struck me as of deeper significance than merely a convenience for the patrons of the hotel. It seemed to symbolize the mental outlook of the people of Australia. How time ran in Asia and Africa was a matter of indifference to Sydney, for life in Australia is not integrated to anything that happens in these continents. (Das 1958, 70)

Looking at these clocks and the map, he asked a perennial rhetorical question––"Gazing at the map I wondered how long it would take for electric clocks to be installed in the hotel lobby adding Tokyo and Delhi to the world capitals" (Das 1958, 70). Similarly, he found that India did not figure even in world's tourist centres at hotels and counters of Qantas. He notes that most hotels stated that they book travel for Britain, America, Japan, Pacific Islands, New Guinea and South Africa: "We looked in vain in the coffee lounge at Sydney airport for pictorial representation of Indian life and scenes among the pictures adorning walls" (Das 1958, 84).

To Das, most Australians seemed unaware of the potential charm of India as a tourist destination. He notes that reasons for the above absence of interest in India as a tourist

destination could be Australians' annual trip to the "motherland" (Britain) and increasing American influence. He observed:

> Asia and Asians do not make news in Australia the way Britain and Britons do or America and Americans do. This is natural considering that Australians are mainly of British stock and that two million Americans stationed in Australia during the last war made a powerful impact on the life of the country. (Das 1958, 73)

The second reason was an astonishing lack of awareness in Australian Press related to India. Das and other members of the Indian delegation were surprised at the "astounding dearth of news from India" (Das 1958, 73). Even the election of Dr Rajendra Prasad as the President of India went unnoticed and unreported in the Australian Press. Similarly, on another occasion at a racecourse in Sydney, two educated gentlemen were unable to identify a typical India dress popularized by Mahatma Gandhi:

> Two Australians took a bet over a drink at the Sydney race-course as to whether one of our colleagues (who wore a Gandhi cap, *kurta and dhoti*) was putting on Indian or Turkish dress. As one of them approached me I told him it was an Indian costume. … The gentleman who lost the bet said he had thought that an Indian must have a turban. When I told him that my colleague was wearing a Gandhi cap it did not register. That was a measure of the ignorance of an average Australian of India and things Indian. (Das 1958, 84)

The only grace for Das was that the Australian counterparts during meetings apologetically realized it as a grave shortcoming in Australia–India relations. During discussions, they also sincerely acknowledged to "remove the deficiency" with positive news and more hospitality to Indian journalists as was reciprocated by Government of India and Press (Das 1958, 84).

R. G. Casey told the Indian delegates that the Australian Government was open to ideas and suggestions on how such visits in "future can be made fruitful" (Das 1958, 73). Das, like Sahni, notes that Casey, although a forbearer of the thought that Australia's future lies in better relations with Asia, was however confined in his approach:

> … at present to exchanging goodwill missions and trade delegations and providing increasing opportunities to students from countries of South-East Asia to receive education and technical training in Australia. He probably thinks that the students will cultivate for Australia the kind of love and respect Anglicized Indians developed for the British way of life and institutions. That also explains the extra-ordinary importance attached by Australians generally to the Colombo Plan, and that is perhaps the reason why the Australian-Asian Association has been formed. (Das 1958, 70)

Outside the Government, Casey's enthusiasm and ideas were treated as a joke, especially by Labor leaders. Das notes that a leading opposition leader on a serious note told him that Menzies and Liberal Party are "imperialist" and Australia's friendship with Asia is possible only under Labor Government, as it is the only party in Australia which stands for Australia and not Great Britain or the United States. In addition, according to this leader, the Labor leaders understand Jawaharlal Nehru's policy as well. The opposition leader concluded: "Mr Casey takes instructions on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from London and on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from Washington. He spends Sundays carrying them out" (Das 1958, 71).

On completion of his tour, Das felt that "Australia have no longer a closed mind on their relationship with the Asians" (Das 1958, 67). Das notes the fact that: "the tour attracted increasing attention as it proceeded, and that by the time it ended everything the Press delegates did or said made news" (Das 1958, 67). However, it did not detract the attention of Indian delegates from the fact that Australian Press had a "positive lack of interest" in India and was not at all Asia-centred as it would like the Indian Press to be Australia-centred in their approach.

> Indeed, the indifference of newspapers in Australia to matters Indian and Asian has led our publicity officials and diplomats staff to resort to addressing audiences in schools and public institutions with a view to dispelling ignorance about our country. (Das 1958, 74)

Das, impressed by Australians technological advancement, particularly in iron and steel works or car manufacturing units, and experiments in setting-up the gigantic atomic energy projects and hydro-electric projects, like the Snowy Mountains Scheme, whose primary purpose was to generate electric power, felt that it would attract more investments and employments and other Asian countries can also profitably follow Australia's example (Das 1958, 83).

In India, Australia was recognized as an outpost of excellence in cricket. Indian journalists got a chance to meet and discuss India–Australia sporting ties with none other than Australian cricket legend Don Bradman. One of the journalists, A. K. Gupta from *Hindustan Standard*, light-heartedly remarked that their tour was like a sacred pilgrimage to Australia––"Our visit to Australia is now successful as we have seen a Kangaroo and Bradman" (Gupta 1957, 8). In the 1950s, for Das, Da Costa, Sahni, Moraes and other Indian journalists, Australia was at the crossroads on political, economic and sociocultural fronts with Asia. And all eminent Indian journalists strongly believed that it was Australia that perhaps best held the key to the economic progress, political stability, peace and progress in this region (Das 1958, 71–76).

Conclusion

The Colombo Plan was not just a foreign aid diplomacy project but an important step in minimising the threat of Communism that was knocking on Australia's door. Both sides felt that there was a lack of active information exchange system and a need to respond to the growing public opinion. Therefore, more work was needed to be done to overcome the failure to communicate effectively by creating a media-broker diplomacy channel. Hunter Wade, then Director of Colombo Plan Bureau, speaking at the first national meeting of information officers in 1958, noted the importance of information exchange as integral part of national and regional development (Colombo Plan Bureau 1958, 60). To balance the visits of Asian journalists, in December 1958, two Australian journalists, Osmar White and James Fitzpatrick, were selected by the Australian Department of External Affairs for a six months tour of the Colombo Plan nations starting from Pakistan and ending in South-east Asia (Lowe 2013a, 97). The Australian print and radio output covered the human experience of both the Indian and Australian journalists' visits. The impact of such publicity was particularly directed towards youth, unions, churches and politicians to further justify Australia's involvement in such a grand plan. Australian journalists sought to play a key role in image making and therefore highlighted both positive and negative experiences of their potential allies in Asia with a "genuine desire to promote better understanding by

broadening their news coverage" in a time period that was highly Asia-conscious (Das 1958, 73). In India, the newspaper commentaries surrounding the journalists' visit to Australia revolved around two major issues. First, the need for foreign aid in South Asian region to help improve the technical expertise and living standards of its people. And second, a constant reminder that Australia's future is interlinked with that of Asia. Most journalist implored Australia that to achieve these goals and respect amongst the newly independent nations, Australia must pull its weight in the region as an Asian country. In conclusion, Indian journalists fully aware of Australia's historical relations with India, felt that in future, people-to-people diplomacy can work and Australia honestly wanted to start a fresh relationship––politically, economically, sociologically and technologically––with its newly independent and democratic Asian neighbours.

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NOTES

1. The White Australia Policy, officially released as the *Immigration Restriction Act* 1901, was based on a similar legislation that was passed in South Africa and was strengthened by minor additions till the Second World War. Between 1949 and 1973, it was dismantled in stages by several successive Australian governments. The Act prohibited people based on colour from entering Australia and also included a dictation test to assess skill in English (and a second language) for non-white persons. Then Attorney General Alfred Deakin, who drafted the legislation, justified it on the grounds that Australians should fear the Asians not for their bad qualities but for their good ones––"It is their inexhaustible energy, their power of applying themselves to new tasks, their endurance and low standard of living that make them such competitors" (cited in Clancy 2004, 12).
2. L. P. Singh, in his book *The Colombo Plan: Some Political Aspects* (1964), has highlighted how it was Sardar K. M. Pannikar, India's Ambassador to China (1948–1952), who actually formulated an idea of a similar plan. Sardar Pannikar circulated a memorandum related to it amongst the diplomats from Commonwealth countries, such as Sir Frank Keith Officer, Australian Ambassador to China (1948–1949) who discussed this idea with Percy Spender.
3. For his pioneering work, he was invited to become a formal member of Gallup International in 1957 and in 1967, he was elected as the first Asian president of the World Association of Public Opinion Research.

4. A Commemorative Stamp, valued at Rs 5, was released in honour of Durga Das by India Post in 1967. He was considered a legendary journalist of India and played an active role in the Indian national movement.

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