ASIAN ETHNICITY
https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2019.1608156

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

ARTICLE

'Think imperially': Indian journalists' goodwill visits to White Australia, 1927 and 1947

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ABSTRACT

Academic research on the White Australia Policy has spanned the history of Asian migration and policy-making initiatives in Australia. However, the role of popular transnational media images and stories of the past that inform the socio-cultural understanding of Australia–India cross-cultural relations has been under evaluated. In this paper, using unexplored archival material from popular newspaper reports and columns, I will examine the 'goodwill visits' of two Indian journalists, K. K. Lalkaka and Sir R. Srinivasa Sarma, to Australia in 1927 and 1947. By assessing the role of these two journalists, this paper will highlight transnational issues such as migration, ethnicity, race, class and trade between the two countries. Borrowing from Vineet Thakur's research highlighting the role of first diplomats in the pre-independence era India, this article will contribute to the field of history in Indian diplomatic studies and historiography of Australian–Indian cross-cultural relations.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 25 October 2018
Accepted 12 April 2019

KEYWORDS
White Australia Policy; British Empire; immigration; journalists and public opinion; diplomatic history; India–Australia relations

Introduction

A significant body of academic research on the *Immigration Restriction Act of 1901* or the White Australia Policy (WAP), unofficially in practice since the 1850s, has spanned the history of Asian migration and policy-making initiatives in Australia.[1] Scholars such as De Lepervanche, Walker, Ward, Goldsworthy, Allen, Lowe, Meadows, Maclean and Sarwal in their research have also focused on the impact of the British Empire and WAP on early Australia–India relations.[2] According to Lyndon Megarrity, WAP was the most influential factor that dominated government policy formation and creation of perception in and about Australia.[3] This Act prohibited anyone under a contract or agreement to perform manual labour from entering Australia and included a dictation test to assess skill in English (and a second language) of non-white persons. Attorney General Alfred Deakin justified this policy on the grounds of his strong belief that Australians should fear the Japanese and Chinese, not for their bad qualities but for their good ones.[4] Post-1901, Indian and Australian intellectuals, policy makers, journalists and diplomats made compelling arguments for productive collaborations between the two countries

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especially in the fields of education, training and information exchange.[5] With the prevailing ethos of equal rights among citizens of the British Empire, rising nationalism and the subsequent decline of the British Raj, Indian elites wanted to engage with Australia at the same level.[6] However, owing to the existence of WAP, this engagement from the Australian side barely met the expectations of the Indian elite. This was further strengthened by, as indicated earlier, strict immigration restrictions that furthered feelings of anti-colonialism amongst Indians.[7]

The Australian settler colonies––the white man's club––and India had a very different relationship to the British Empire.[8] This was often reflected in press stories and columns related to the inter-relations between the two colonies and the treatment meted to Indians in Australia. In this paper, using unexplored archival material from popular newspaper reports and columns, I focus on the pre-1947 visits to Australia by the two senior Indian journalists––K. K. Lalkaka and Sir R. Srinivasa Sarma––who reported against the grain of recurring public concern over the ethnic or racial element of WAP. These Indian journalists, with their Eurocentric lenses, overlooked the contemporary foreign policy narrative of the moderate leaders, especially their opposition to imperialism and racism worldwide, and pointed to a rosy future of Australia–India relations within the Empire.[9] These visits are also important in context of Reba Chaudhuri's assertion that on the one hand there were editors involved in Indian national awakening and social reform movements, on the other hand, there were some others, especially in Bombay and Madras, who were 'anxious to earn official recognition and to enjoy official favour'.[10] In the case of the protagonists of this paper, with British government and Indian business elites' favour and preferential treatment, led to the goodwill tours that ranged from a couple of weeks to months. These also involved a visit to the major historical and political centres, in addition to meeting and delivering lectures to like-minded opinion makers and lobbyists in Australia.

In analysing these goodwill visits, I pick up the theme of travellers' observations on threads of similarity and difference across outposts of the Empire.[11] The case of Lalkaka and Sir Sarma, inspite of not being an official representative of the views of majority Indians, provides insights into the connotations of being colonised elite men of Empire. These two visitors were chosen to represent the Indian elite and act as their mercantile middlemen, purely on the basis of their oratory and political skills. In their role as self-styled diplomats or opinion makers, they differ significantly from India's first formal diplomats such as S. P. Sinha, V. Srinivasa Sastri and T. B. Sapru. Vineet Thakur highlights how these three Liberals not only campaigned for the Indian cause by emphasising 'racial equality, justice and predominance of the rights of people over the rights of states' as key elements in India's developing foreign policy discourse at the Imperial Conferences but also helped in forming a discourse around Indian foreign policy.[12] In the light of this background, by assessing the role of Lalkaka and Sir Sarma, this paper will highlight transnational issues such as migration, ethnicity, race, class and trade between the two countries. Borrowing from Thakur's research and highlighting the role of first diplomats in the pre-independence era India, this article will contribute to the field of history in Indian diplomatic studies and historiography of Australian–Indian cross-cultural relations.

The landscape of empire: race and representation

In writing about the role of perceptions in Australia–India relations, scholars have highlighted a shared (sometimes fractured) history that underpins Australia–India relations in all spheres.[13] Australian scholars have mostly focused on Australians gazing upon India.[14] However, the other side of the coin, the building of early Indian perceptions of Australia has largely been neglected in this discourse.[15] Margaret Allen in her work has highlighted what educated and colonised Indian men, such as Otim Singh, Nunda Lall Doss and Sher Mahomed, visiting Australia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century felt about a colony of the same imperial power and the contemporary social, economic and imperial policies.[16] In the wake of Australia's Federation and the signal importance given to the WAP, Indian opinion makers (moderate and nationalist leaders) acknowledged that Australians were, at worst, racially antagonistic and, at best, indifferent to Indians. This was despite the fact that wealthy and elite Indians identified with Australians on the common grounds of the British Empire––language, law, trade and army.[17] The latter group believed that because of their social status in the Empire, they can best present India's viewpoint in Australia.

For Indians, Sir Christopher Bayly writes: 'Australia was a political icon, but it was a flawed one'.[18] He argues that moderate Indians saw the WAP as 'bastions of racial prejudice' towards people of colour.[19] Many Indians, from the 1880s onwards, in various parts of the Empire, including Australia, used their status as 'British subjects' to protest and fight for greater immigration rights from the federal and state governments.[20] A similar sentiment was also well-expressed in the example of an unnamed editor of a leading moderate Indian vernacular (Hindi language) newspaper based in Allahabad. The editor demonstrated his concern for the treatment of Indians in the Commonwealth, particularly Australia, when the Duke of Connaught and Strathearn read out King George V's message on the opening of the first Central Legislative Assembly in British India (February 1921). He noted:

> I am an Indian gentleman and a British subject, yet I cannot go to Australia. Do you call that British justice? An Australian is able to come to India and establish great trade agencies at the ports, yet an Indian is forbidden similar privileges in Australia. Unless the embargo is relaxed when we obtain self-government, which is undoubtedly coming, we shall forbid Australians to come to India. I expect the question to be pressed at an early date in the legislature.[21]

This question becomes relevant when looked from the point of view of both developing nationalist fervour and emerging press in India. After the First World War, when Indian nationalist movement got divisive, with one group following Mahatma Gandhi and other Bal Gangadhar Tilak, newspapers were used to generate a favourable public opinion for key issues. Under the editorship of Annie Besant, *New India* promoted the Home Rule agitation while V. Srinivasa Sastri's *Servant of India* weekly looked for a solution to India's problems from 'a liberal nationalist viewpoint'.[22] A number of political weeklies and newspapers in the Hindi language such as Shivaprasad Gupta's *Aj* also covered news about Indians living abroad. After the Kamagata Maru incident of 1914, where the immigrants on-board were suspected to be part of a seditious plan or an international conspiracy against the British, the Ghadar Party started agitating among the Indians, principally among Sikhs and Punjabis, in North America. Their point of the protest was questioning the colonial rhetoric of justice under which Indians

should have been treated as citizens of the Empire.[23] The group, through its mouthpiece political newspapers, the *Hindustan Ghadar*, protested against the anti-Indian immigration laws and demanded equal rights from the governments in Britain, America, Canada and Australia.[24] The coverage of world events in the Australian newspapers and access to political newspapers produced in India and outside India by nationalist leaders, gained momentum and Indians living in Australia became aware of Indian and diasporic leaders' struggles against immigration discrimination laws.[25]

In the early 1920s, the coverage of news related to WAP and the treatment meted out to Indians in Australia alienated the national leaders who favoured equal partnership, racial equality and cooperation amongst people of Commonwealth nations. These leaders believed––'Indian lives and honour being held as admired British lives and honour'.[26] Increasing political pressure from Indian nationalists and advice from British loyalists in 1922, saw the British Government of India send V. Srinivasa Sastri, as a member of the Council of State and Viceregal Council, on a delegation to Australia to investigate the conditions of Indians living there.[27] In 1921, at the Imperial Conference, Sastri has proposed a Resolution on Equality of Citizenship in the British Dominions.[28] As the President of the Servants of India Society, Sastri observed some discontent amongst Indians in Australia regarding their right to vote.[29] Clause 4 of the *Commonwealth Franchise Act of 1902* barred the 'coloured races' and 'aboriginal natives' of Australia, Asia, Africa or the Islands of the Pacific except New Zealand to vote in Australia. Sastri toured Australia, met representatives of the Indian community and pressed the government to try and provide for Indians in Australia 'equal rights' similar to white Australians.[30] He did not discuss the WAP in detail but made it clear to the Australian journalists that 'theoretically' minded Indians feel that it doesn't maintain the 'intimacy' and 'solidarity' of the British Empire.[31] An impact of Sastri's visit was seen when due to the many efforts and pleas of Indians, the Government of Australia passed the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* in 1924–1925 enlarging the franchise to include British Indians' right to vote in federal elections.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the idea of the British Commonwealth of Nations that developed from the Imperial Conferences (from 1887 onwards) created a serious divide amongst leaders of the Indian National Congress (INC). During this period, the influence of communist ideas also began to spread slowly using newspaper as a means to promote labour and peasant movement in India.[32] Some leaders, popular amongst the educated middle class, saw this as a ripe and beneficial opportunity for Indians to gain a dominion status as communist influence in India would not be desirable for Britain and its allies. However, many young leaders of the party, such as Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, who though educated in England favoured socialism, became highly critical of the reach and methods of the older leadership. This approach was in line with INC's demand for *purna swaraj* (complete independence) made in the 1929 Lahore session under Nehru's leadership.[33]

Educated Indians who visited Australia felt that Australian fears of mass immigration of Indians were unfounded. What worried them, as S. K. Datta, a visiting Indian doctor to Australia, observed in his farewell speech to Australian journalists, was the principle behind the WAP. Datta said:

> What most educated class of India questions is the principle of the White Australia Policy? With an awakening political consciousness, we Indians cannot coincide the British

> Empire's wide conception of the Brotherhood of the Empire on one hand, and your Australian edict shutting out colored races on the other. … Empire principles must be honored, and it is from a reciprocal policy that India and Australia will benefit.[34]

The sharp comments made by the unnamed moderate Indian journalist, in the early 1920s, also reverberated in Australia. Mr Alexander Poynton, the Australian Minister for Home and Territories immediately declared that the statements made by the journalist were 'unfounded', 'singularly ill-informed' and 'erroneous'.[35] He added that the Indian journalists, students and merchants are 'free to come' to Australia when they please 'to establish trade activities for the purpose of promoting trade between the Commonwealth and India'.[36] Poynton further noted that this was possible because at the end of Imperial War Conference held in 1918, the principle of reciprocity was reaffirmed––it was agreed by participating countries that British subjects residing in any British country could enter freely any other British country with their wife and children.[37] He highlighted:

> As far as back as 1905, an arrangement was made by with the Government of India, which referred to the admission of Indian tourists and merchants. It was then provided that if the Indians in question had passports from their Governments certifying to their status they could be admitted to Australia without question. In the case of a merchant who desired to remain here for an indefinite period, there was a provision that he should apply each year for a renewal of his exemption. Although that arrangement has been in force so long, very little advantage has been taken of it by Indians, either tourists or merchants, and a very great many people in India appear to be quite ignorant that any such agreement existed.[38]

The questioning of the WAP in India became so recurrent that it became an issue of public concern in Australia. Indian press played an important role in this primarily through spreading of nationalist ideologies and providing a platform for grievances against any kind of policy. As S. Ganeshram notes: 'A foreign plant engrafted on Indian soil, the press underwent a radical transformation in its growth and slowly became an organ of public opinion'.[39] These concerns related to anti-Indian immigration policies were also reported widely in Australian newspapers.[40] The press in Australia noted that the Indian Government has proposed to 'seek the removal of any disabilities imposed on Indians by the Australian immigration laws'.[41] In 1947, Mr Banerjee, the Secretary of the Commonwealth Relations Department in newly independent India, made a statement in the Indian Council of State:

> Cancellation of 'White Australia' policy had not been made a condition for establishing diplomatic relations between India and Australia because it was hoped that the establishment of such relations might eventually facilitate the removal of anti-Indian discrimination by amicable negotiations.[42]

He also informed the audience that the Indian High Commissioner in Canberra had been asked to supply a detailed report on this matter.[43]

The WAP was also questioned by far-sighted Australian leaders. Comparing the WAP to the 'corrupted and debased' ideas of Adolf Hitler, especially 'the master race', Reginald Dixon of the Communist Party of Australia proposed, citing the example of Canada, a quota system of immigration from Asian countries without insulting the enslaved peoples.[44] He further noted that the industrialization of these under-developed parts of the world will create a vast market for goods of all kinds as at that time, Indians

were working on a 15 years' plan, involving the expenditure of 10–15,000 millions of pounds.[45] However, there were still many Australian policy makers and journalists who did not think much of this prospective thinking. According to an editorial published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, this was an outrageous suggestion:

> It is doubtful, in fact, whether the Indian Government would seriously press a claim so at variance with Australia's established policy, and so contrary to the right of every sovereign nation to determine the character of its own population.[46]

Further, a large section of Australian media, by 1947, remained of the opinion that good relations between Australia and the new government of India must be based on 'a clear understanding that no basic change can be expected in the immigration policy which has preserved this country as a field for White settlement'.[47] Earlier, in 1944, it was made clear to R. G. Casey, then newly appointed Governor of Bengal, by Indian pressmen and politicians that as a fellow colonial and representative from a country that proclaims racial discrimination based on the colour of skin, he should not act as British Governor General of Bengal. Casey recalled of his humiliation in his memoir:

> I could not have had a worse press before I arrived. They protested to high heaven against an Australian being sent to govern them. How are they to endure the humiliation of a governor from a country that prohibits Indians from entering it?[48]

This was the tetchy ground on which journalists and politicians in India and Australia jousted. Somewhat remarkably, then this representational landscape also included some Indian journalists who toured Australia on goodwill visits and tried to present a more sanguine picture of Australia for Indians through their columns and opinion pieces, even allowing for the WAP to exist for a certain kind of Indian immigrants to Australia.

K. K. Lalkaka and Sir R. Srinivasa Sarma in White Australia

Referring to the need for a patriotic spirit in relation to the Empire in Australasia, Mr K. K. Lalkaka, MBE, a self-styled cultural diplomat of Parsee (Parsi) community, on his second visit to Australia (October 1928) noted that Australia should 'think imperially' about its future in Asia. He observed:

> Australia and New Zealand must in time to come be the centre of the world's activities and this implies great responsibilities on the colonies. For instance, they cannot afford to be prodigal and every one of us should think imperially.[49]

Lalkaka, who had served as a Captain in the Wiltshire Regiment in the First World War, was a Parsee financier, philanthropist and a journalist from Bombay. He published opinions and columns in mostly English newspapers and principal quarterly reviews. He was best known in Australia for his articles published in the *Indian Empire Review, Asiatic Review* and *The Times of India*. Lalkaka's articles argued that Parsees are part of the white race––'gifted with a genius for colonisation, as evident in the prosperous entitlements they have established in the Far East, Aden, Africa and London'––and visualised greater chances for Parsees in settling down in Australia.[50] He argued that ever since the Parsees fled Muslim persecution in Iran 1,000 years ago, they had recreated themselves as the most educated, cultured and respected community––with a long list of legal, literary and

business luminaries––in India.[51] Even while maintaining their linguistic, sartorial, religious and cultural identity, Parsees did not fail to recognize themselves as an intrinsic part of India. During India's freedom struggle Parsee leaders such as Dadabhai Naroji, Shavaksha Hormasji Jhabvala and Madam Bhicaji Cama, made significant contributions as Indians. On the other hand, there were some Parsees, like Lalkaka, who feared that with rising political ambitions of Indians along with Hindu and Muslim nationalism, affluent Parsees' westernised ways and education would be seen with distrust.[52] So, it was best for Parsees to migrate to Anglo-Saxon nations such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand where they would be welcomed for their European ways.

Lalkaka made five trips to Australia and as a result of these goodwill visits, came to 'sympathise' with the WAP.[53] Although he himself did not settle in Australia, Lalkaka wrote profusely in Indian press to clarify misconceptions regarding immigration restrictions on settling down of Parsees in Australia. In 1930, as the Great Depression was taking hold in Australian cities, he noted:

> From my own personal experience of nearly four years, based upon my long sojourns in these Dominions, I have no hesitation in assuring Parsees that if any of them were to go and settle there, a right royal welcome awaits them in the South … Despite her present difficulties, Australia is sound, and within the next two years, she is bound to get completely free from her present economic and industrial troubles. She has a wonderful latent power of recuperation.[54]

Lalkaka felt confident that Parsee youth with money and English education would be welcomed and they would soon be able to find many avenues in Australia, especially in occupations related to trading. He observed:

> For Parsee import and export firms, there are excellent opportunities to export to these Dominions hides, spices, high-grade Indian cotton textiles, and curios. At the same time they can import into India Australian fruit, preserves, wines, and tallow, and Australian as well as New Zealand dairy products, meats, and timbers.[55]

Reflecting on what opportunities await Parsees in Southern Dominions, Lalkaka elaborated:

> … there is absolutely nothing to stop them from buying land and properties. Only in Australia is there a White Australia policy which merely concerns Asiatic labor and it does not operate as a handicap to any British subject, irrespective of color or creed, who goes there in pursuit of business, education, or technical vocationary training. … There is a sprinkling of Indians already settled in the Dominions. They are all the happier, for having done so among a freedom loving people and in places blessed with the most ideal climate in the world.[56]

According to him, if all went well in this migration story, then the world would see a 'thriving and happy little Parsee colony in Australia' that could develop in the course of a decade or so with growing Parsee population and appreciation for Commonwealth amongst Parsees.[57] Three years earlier, on his return from a holiday in Australia with his wife, Lalkaka had remarked:

> Australia meant to us some place full of associations. And it is but human we should feel like this because the Australian has a genius for making a stranger feel at home. The friendly gesture made to us by the fine people of this country has awakened a responsive chord within us, and we reciprocate it with all our heart. The great stride your young nation has made

> within the short space of a century must evoke in us a sense of wonder, coming as we do from the slow-moving East, where one often seems to lose all count of time.[58]

He found Australians 'genius and genial' and was 'amused' by the progress Australia had made within the short span of a century. He hoped that the mutual relationship between Australia and India should grow. He added uncomfortably that if Australia was opened to Indian migrants, 'the men who would settle here would not truly represent India's best'.[59] He further added that these new migrant would not 'assist in the maintenance of Australia's high standard of living'.[60] For Lalkaka, the 'best type' of Indian migrant was a proxy for the upper caste and English-educated elite as opposed to the low caste coolie hawker and labourer.[61]

During his three months Australian holiday in 1927, Lalkaka was not only 'sympathetic' but also full of praise for WAP, which he termed as 'one of the most important traditions of the nation' that had helped in the taming of Australia's vast lands'.[62] He strongly believed that a breakdown in the WAP would endanger the relationship, especially between the educated classes of both the countries. He, therefore, averred that it 'should be retained at all costs' as a 'biological necessity' to maintain the status quo:

> Between the educated classes of India and of Australia, a very fine relationship exists, and if your White Australia policy breaks down this will be endangered. That sounds like a paradox, but it is, I feel, very true. The first coloured race to come to Australia if the policy were to lapse would certainly be the Indians, and the Indians who would come would not be the type that would maintain a good relationship. The cultured Indian has always a good position in his own country. I believe that people of certain other types, living among cultured Australians, would quickly produce national prejudices which would be fatal to the present relations between the two countries.[63]

Expressing a deep admiration for Australia, Lalkaka further asserted:

> Australia is a young country with little tradition and past regrets. To a native of India, this is the most striking feature of the nation, and I felt wistful as I compared conditions here with those in my country. Australia appears to be building up a tradition of her own, and a tradition which will be helpful rather than a hindrance. I am sorry that I have not the time to remain here longer to make a more intensive study of the country and the people.[64]

Throughout his tour, Lalkaka commended the 'genial, care-free and genuinely hospitable nature' of Australians. He told journalists that he and his wife were carrying 'pleasant memories' of their time spent in 'the land of promise––the land of Southern Cross'.[65]

For Australian journalists, Lalkaka's arguments about Australia were nothing less than 'revelations'. An Australian journalist commented: 'Blessed with youth, and a singularly keen power of insight, he is, to use his own words, taking his first firm steps in life'.[66] Lalkaka soon came to be known as a great supporter of the British Empire and the potential progress of Australia. During his second visit (October 1928), he was invited by the Launceston Fifty Thousand League (Tasmania). This was a non-political organisation established to boost Launceston's population to 50,000. From 1926–1954, the League also promoted various activities to boost tourism and sponsor new settlers.[67] In his address to members of the League, Lalkaka mentioned that in India, Australians were referred to as 'uncut diamonds' and proclaimed that he would tell his countrymen that 'the finest of the world's mankind was to be found in Australia'.[68] He further observed:

> Anyone who comes to Australia cannot help liking it and its people. I have never met a finer lot of people and there is nothing to be said about its resources. A visitor to the country cannot help but realise its great potentialities. It has undoubtedly a great future. Australia is the sixth nation. It has as a guide, the experiences of other nations, and it cannot help but go ahead.[69]

In the 1930s, as the freedom struggle was gaining momentum in India and Britain was fast withdrawing indigenous wealth and capital, Lalkaka visited Australia for the third time with a very strong desire to make Australia his new home. In a lecture at the Millions Club, Lalkaka, who thought of himself as an interpreter of British imperialism, noted:

> Anyone who knows the East realises that at least within living memory, the Indian is incapable of governing himself. If Great Britain relaxes her hold, India will at once lapse into chaos, and some other foreign Power will step in. The Indian has always respected a firm ruler, and he will continue to do so. As it is today, the country is going bankrupt, financially, morally, mentally, and physically.[70]

He did not settle in Australia due to personal reasons and returned to India. By his fifth visit in 1934, Lalkaka had greater and deeper understanding of Australian policies and economy. He told Australian journalists frankly that he saw three major faults in Australians. First, Australia was too 'democratic' a country: 'You licence car drivers and plumbers in Australia. So why not licence politicians and make them pass an examination?'[71] This was a very strong reflection on unqualified politicians who have 'sunk in public estimation' yet continued to play a role in the migration policies and the process of nation-building without any serious contribution except 'a rare speech.'[72] As he strongly believed in the aristocratic rule, too much faith in democracy was not the solution but the cause of maladjustments and troubles.[73] Second, Australians had very 'limited interest' and a 'parochial outlook' on world's history because of their geographical isolation: 'Remember that China once was obsessed with the idea that her people were the only ones who mattered, and that China was the centre of the world. The parochial outlook of Australians may develop on similar lines and lead to a decline'.[74] And third, he listed Australians' 'dislike of work'. He did not elaborate much on his third observation but it must have been a general reflection on Australian work culture and undue prominence of certain occupations. An Australian journalist joked that Lalkaka, though right on the first two comments could have been on a clearer ground on his third observation if he had used the expression: 'dislike work in uncongenial conditions'.[75]

According to Lalkaka, although there were many problems facing both nations, Australia's problems were the outcome of her 'own laudable ambition' to stay White. On the issue of WAP, he again suggested that a new immigration scheme to allow the right sort of non-Europeans into Australia could also help keep White Australia. He added:

> There was a need for readjustment of the wage scale and for a more comprehensive immigration scheme from the Empire and India, which need not conflict with the White Australia policy. Such a scheme would give scope to the right kind of non-European subjects of the Empire to join in creative co-operation.[76]

By 'the right kind of non-European subjects of the Empire', Lalkaka meant that Australian politicians and policy-makers should not just look at the 'whiteness' of skin but 'whiteness' of heart. So, allowing 'brown sahibs' would be more viable for

Australia's economic and sociological growth, keeping in mind the potential for future trade with the Eastern countries. Kevin Burley notes that 'after Europe, the countries of the east were the next most important outlet for Australian exports although not the next most important source of imports'.[77] He writes that during the 1930s, the trade with eastern countries 'accounted for as much as one-fifth of Australia's external trade'.[78] According to Burley, the exports from Australia to India mainly consisted of wool and silver bullion. India exported the bulk of the bags, hessian and jute required for the bagged exports of ore, wheat and flour in Australia. In the early 1920s, this trade accounted for 55% to 60% of the total, by 1938–1939 the proportion had risen to 80%. Except for the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, the character of the Australian trade with India was without any major commercial difficulty but for many Indian traders, it was very much limited in nature.[79]

After Lalkaka, Sir R. Srinivasa Sarma, an opinion leader and popularly known in his hometown as 'BBC Sarma', came to Australia as a self-appointed 'Goodwill Ambassador' in 1946–1947. His trip to Australia was sponsored by a group of Indian businessmen and nobles with an aim to impress upon opinion-makers and trade lobbyists, the idea of focussing on Australia–India trade. Sir Sarma had served in various capacities at newspapers and agencies like *Bengalee, New India, New Empire, The Times* and the Reuters. In 1934, with the possibility of a compromise between the British government and nationalists in India, he also started a weekly newspaper, *The Whip*. During the home rule agitation by INC, Sir Sarma argued in favour of the government's view.[80] Chandrika Kaul notes that the British government in India realised the power and influence the press would exert. Keeping in mind such transformation, the government 'responded by trying to influence the shape of press coverage'.[81] She adds that the British government strived to influence the flow of news to London and also a favourable interpretation of official policy by the Indian press.[82] The result of this policy was that some leading journalists and editors supported the Empire and published about the achievements of British in India in return for favours. The government officials, on the behest of Governor Sir John Anderson, awarded Sir Sarma, an Empire loyalist, with a knighthood. The first and only Indian journalist to be knighted by the King (Edward VIII) in England. On hearing the news, Sir Sarma's contemporary journalist J. N. Sahni, writing in the *National Call*, furiously said:

> In my view, knighthood and journalism hardly go well together, and it is, therefore that you do not find, even in England, the editors of the best English newspapers, who have worked their way up in the profession, accepting any title. But, considering that many veteran journalists in India have cherished such distinction, and have not received it, there is special merit in Sir Srinivasa's achievement in the relative.[83]

From 1929 to 1938, Sir Sarma was also nominated to the Central Legislature (Delhi) and in 1943, as a representative of the British government, he visited the USA and met with President Roosevelt to contribute to the war effort. After independence, in 1952, he also contested the General Elections from Thanjavur constituency but lost closely to R. Venkataraman of the INC. This defeat resulted in Sir Sarma semi-quitting Indian politics and retiring first in Calcutta and then settling down in his English manor-style home in Mavur in Tamil Nadu.

Sahni notes that on account of his transactions with British and Indian businessmen and the assets he owned, Sir Sarma definitely had a 'chequered career'.[84] Sahni further

observed: 'With Sir Srinivasa Sarma's politics I have no sympathy. In fact, I am sorry that a person so talented, so resourceful and so dynamic, should have chosen to be on the wrong side of the fence'.[85] For most of his life and even after his death Sir Sarma was a mystery man in India––locally known as the 'Mystery Man of Mavur'.[86] In India, Sir Sarma was known to be someone who was not only an eloquent orator in English but also had deep knowledge of the region, customs, language and business. N. Perumal observed in *The Echo* that Sir Sarma though 'an artiste' had 'a shrewd business instinct in him'.[87] Apart from publishing opinions and columns in reputable publications, Sir Sarma was also involved in many business ventures especially in Bengal. For a brief time, he was employed as the Manager of G.D. Birla's Garden Reach Jute Mills earning a lavish Rs. 5,000 a month.[88] An avid traveller, his previous known goodwill missions have been to England, the USA, the Middle East, Italy, Turkey, Egypt, and South America to promote Britain's war effort. With his kind of established network and friends at high places, Sahni observed, that Sir Sarma was best suited to play the role of an Indian middle-man or a native insider: 'The number of celebrities he has met during these foreign trips is greater than what any of his Indian or European colleagues can claim'.[89]

Sir Sarma had used his journalistic connections and political beliefs in the past to 'form a bridge' between the British and the Indian princes and businessmen.[90] Indian businessmen who were always eager to invest and import goods from Australia felt that he was best suited to lead this goodwill visit. Because of the ongoing industrial disputes after the Second World War––a series of strikes in coal mining, electricity production, stevedoring, and rail transport––business was at a standstill in Australia. Sir Sarma noted:

> Because of the present industrial disputes, it does not look as though Australia will be able to export any goods for some time to come, despite the markets waiting in India. … unless Australian goods were exported to India and other countries future trade opportunities would be lost, with a consequent reduction in Australia's standard of living, which is among the highest in the world. At least five per cent or 10 per cent, of Australia's goods, should be earmarked for token exports so that when she is in a position to resume her export trade overseas the markets would know what to expect from Australia … .[91]

His plan was to engage Australian businessmen and journalists to foster collaboration between the two countries regarding joint-ventures and trade prospects. Sir Sarma was described in an Australian newspaper as 'a moderate in politics and an ultra-progressive in journalism, with American unconventionality'.[92]

Sir Sarma, who as noted earlier had travelled vastly, openly criticised Australia for not being a 'land of comfort'.[93] He was furious at the quality of service provided in hotels: 'Why! I can order breakfast at any time in hotels throughout the world', he said, 'but if I am not ready by 8 a.m. here I miss my breakfast'.[94] And when one of his hosts told him that it was because of a shortage of labour in Australia, Sir Sarma seized the opportunity to criticise the WAP. According to him, this policy was 'a misnomer' and had caused much ill-feeling in India. He observed:

> … the time had now come when in the interests of Australia her migration policy should be examined and revised. The future of Australia depended on her productive capacity and increasing exportable surplus. To effect this it would be necessary to bring many more people out to Australia, which could accommodate, at least 20 million inhabitants.[95]

For Sir Sarma, like Lalkaka, Australia's future and living standard of its people depended very closely on 'capturing the Eastern markets'.[96]

By 1947, other journalists lobbied and tried best to persuade their Australian counterparts to understand the fact that the term 'White Australia' was read as a term of 'offence' by the educated Indians.[97] Indian educated upper-class resented and objected to being excluded because of skin colour or compartmentalised with labourers from Indian villages.[98] Sir Sarma was of the opinion it would be best if Australia explained the 'economic basis of the policy' which would be more comprehensible to Indians and racial discrimination in Australia could continue under WAP as long as it did not 'look' racial towards all Indians.[99] An Australian journalist taking a cue from Sir Sarma noted:

> It must be Australia's business to explain as widely possible the underlying purposes of our immigration laws. They are not founded in racial prejudices or antipathy but in a desire to maintain a homogenous population, to protect our standards of living, and avoid such clashes of colour as have occurred in South Africa and America.[100]

At the time, Australian journalists and opinion makers agreed with Sir Sarma that Australia's economic future lay in Asian markets and for 'Australia to survive and prosper', the 'gates' of Australia had to be systematically opened to 'other' migrants to 'help develop and defend the Commonwealth'.[101] However, they also argued that for such a change to happen, and for Australia to dismantle the WAP, criticism and pressure from Asia had to be minimised first.

Soon after independence, a very subtle criticism of WAP, and any policy in the world that continued racial imperialism on the grounds of colour came from India's first Prime Minister Nehru. As the key architect of India's foreign policy, he urged Australians that India and Australia should share, cooperate and stand together for 'ending of the political domination or economic exploitation of one nation or group of another'.[102] In 1949, Nehru again sought to critique WAP by pointing to the fact that how such a policy was only justifiable in the short term with an economic basis and not a racial one. But he also 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'.[103] Nehru, without directly interfering in Australian affairs, concluded his obvious criticism of WAP with the assertion that Australia should not discriminate in any form against the rights of Indians living in the country.[104]

Conclusion

In the light of earlier discussion, how should one look at the visits of Lalkaka and Sir Sarma? These two can be seen as amongst the Liberal voices speaking on behalf of some Indian business elites but not putting forward India's national viewpoint in Australia. As opposed to Sinha, Sastri and Sapru, through their initiatives and official status, helped in constructing 'a new moral' and foreign policy discourse of India at the international level.[105] Lalkaka and Sir Sarma's views reflect those of paid lobbyists trying to influence key decisions and policies to solicit favours and gain exclusive rights for elite Indians. Their views may have been applauded in Australia but they did not create any immediate significant difference or impact in Australian foreign policy initiatives. A key outcome, however, of their 'goodwill visits' to Australia was highlighting the role of journalists in creating public opinion and opening-up cross-cultural diplomacy channels. As the colonial-era racial perceptions began

to fade away in the 1950s, this was followed with the process of dismantling WAP in stages by several successive Australian governments.[106] Although, these two opinion makers can be seen as providing what Thakur has argued to be 'the common ground from which both the colonial and the anti-colonial responses could be harmonised' in the pre-independence foreign policy narrative, they were not of the same stature as India's official diplomats fighting against racial prejudice and equality for all.[107]

Post-independence, Indian journalists often visited Australia as 'guests' of the Australian Government mainly to spread awareness about India in Australia and create positive opinions about Australia in India.[108] As noted earlier, Australia was referred to in Indian press as a 'white men's club', eager to promote membership in other white countries.[109] But elite and wealthy Indians, like Lalkaka, Sir Sarma and their audiences, had only minutest reservations about the WAP and those too, were primarily in economic terms. Their views on WAP, often framed in upper-caste and class examples, were a total break from the ongoing nationalist discourse and nascent anti-racist foreign policy initiatives of other Indian leaders.[110] In the context of Empire, their views were similar to the contemporary Asian journalists' arguments who accepted the need for WAP but refused to consider themselves in the 'coloured' category.[111] Their only point of resentment was the common treatment meted out to upper-class (caste) educated, cultured and skilled Indians alongside backward (and low caste) peasants and labourers while processing paperwork for securing entry into Australia.[112]

In this paper, I have drawn on the case studies of these two Indian journalists' interpretation of WAP, to show how while 'the white man's club' was a central issue in early Australian–Indian relations, it did not dominate to the exclusion of other forms of 'club' that Australians and Indians might join. As the cases of Lalkaka and Sir Sarma in Australia demonstrate, inherent in the notion of a club was an inclusive/exclusive binary––some are in and others are out. So, in the minds of these journalists, there persisted a potential for imperially known 'clubs' to take shape flexibly along Indian-defined lines of class, caste and religion. Rather than remaining amorphously known for their views on immigration, some Indians tried to know and represent Australia in other terms, with both the familiarity and the preparedness to cirticise it, that come with being members of a common club.

In conclusion, Lalkaka and Sir Sarma were both of the view that in time the mutual relationship and understanding between India and Australia would grow, with Australia respecting educated and wealthy Indian elites. However, they were certain that such aligned relationship could exist only by Australia's obliteration of its indifferent attitude and a deeper understanding of Australia's connections with India. They also believed that 'thinking imperially' about their inter-relation would also pave a way for a mutually beneficial relationship that would also ensure economic and political equality as part of the British Empire.

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion on WAP, see Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920*, 1923; Yarwood, "The 'White Australia' Policy," 1962; Rivett, *Australia and the Non-white Migrant*, 1975; Brawley, *The White Peril*, 1995; Walker, *Anxious Nation*, 1999; and Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, 2005.
2. For a detailed discussion on Australia–India relations, see De Lepervanche, *Indians in a White Australia*, 1984; Walker, *Anxious Nation*, 1999; Walker, "National Narratives,"

2002; Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace*, 2001; Goldsworthy, *Losing the Blanket*, 2002; Allen, "'Innocents Abroad' and 'Prohibited Immigrants,'" 2005; Allen, "'A Fine Type of Hindoo' meets 'the Australian Type,'" 2008; Allen, "Observing Australia as the 'Member of an Alien and Conquered Race,'" 2009a; Allen, "Otim Singh in White Australia," 2009b; Allen, "Shadow Letters and the Karnana Letter," 2011; Allen, "Identifying Sher Mohamad," 2013; Allen, "No More Loyal Subjects," 2017; Allen, "I am a British Subject," 2018; Lowe, "The Historical Roots of Public Diplomacy and Their Significance for Australia and India," 2013b; Meadows, "He No Doubt Felt Insulted," 2013; Maclean, "Examinations, Access, and Inequity within the Empire," 2015; and Sarwal, "A Kangaroo and Bradman," 2018.

3. Megarrity, "Regional Goodwill, Sensibly Priced," 105.
4. Alfred Deakin cited in Clancy, *Culture and Customs of Australia*, 12.
5. Sarwal, "A Kangaroo and Bradman," 2018.
6. Allen, "I am a British Subject," 2018.
7. For a discussion on immigration restrictions, see Allen, "'Innocents Abroad' and 'Prohibited Immigrants,'" 2005; Maclean, "Examinations, Access, and Inequity within the Empire," 2015; and Frost, "Imperial Citizenship or Else," 2018.
8. For a discussion on the idea of white man's club, see Ahmed, "India's Membership of the Commonwealth – Nehru's Role," 1991; Walker, *Anxious Nation*, 1999; and Broinowski, *About Face*, 2003.
9. For a discussion on development of Indian foreign policy, see Chacko, Indian Foreign Policy, 2013; Davis, "A Shared History?" 2015; and Thakur, "Liberal, Liminal and Lost," 2017.
10. Chaudhuri, "The Story of the Indian Press," 291.
11. Refer to Lowe, David. "Journalists and the Stirring of Australian Public Diplomacy", 2013a; and Sarwal, "A Kangaroo and Bradman," 2018.
12. Thakur, "Liberal, Liminal and Lost," 232–3.
13. Davis, "A Shared History?" 849–69.
14. Refer to Hosking and Sarwal, *Wanderings in India*, 2012; Walker and Sobocinska, *Australia's Asia*, 2012; Walker, "National Narratives," 2002; Walker, *Experiencing Turbulence*, 2013; and Sobocinska, *Visiting the Neighbours*, 2014.
15. See De Lepervanche, *Indians in a White Australia*, 1984; and Maclean, "India in Australia," 2012.
16. For detailed discussion on Singh, Doss and Mahomed, see Allen, "Observing Australia as the 'Member of an Alien and Conquered Race,'" 2009a; Allen, "Otim Singh in White Australia," 2009b; and Allen, "Identifying Sher Mohamad," 2013.
17. For detailed discussion, see Walker, *Anxious Nation*, 1999; Broinowski, *About Face*, 2003; and Allen, "Shadow Letters and the Karnana Letter," 2011.
18. Bayly, "India and Australia," 21.
19. Ibid.
20. For a discussion on British subjects and citizenship, see Allen, "I am a British Subject," 4–6; and Frost, "Imperial Citizenship or Else," 2018.
21. "Exclusion of Indians: Reprisals against Australia," *The Argus*, 17 February 1921, 7.
22. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, 211; Also see Raman, "The Indian Press Act of 1910," 1999.
23. Kaur, "The Komagata Maru in History and Literary Narrative," 151–65.
24. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, 1948.
25. Allen shows that Indians in Australia also wrote their grievances related to equal rights to the Australian press and to the nationalist press in India, such as Young India and The Indian Review. See Allen, "I am a British Subject," 2, 18.
26. "Claim for Racial Equality," *The Argus*, 17 February 1921, 7.
27. Sastri was a moderate nationalist and a member of the Indian National Congress from 1908 to 1922. He was opposed to the idea of non-cooperation and resigned from the INC to join as a founding member of the Indian Liberal Party. See Ramanan, *V. S. Srinivasa Sastri*, 2007.
28. Thakur, "Liberal, Liminal and Lost," 242–7.
29. "Indians in Australia should have a Vote," *The Argus*, 2 June 1922, 8.

30. "India's Case," *The Register*, 9 June 1922, 7.
31. "India's Claims," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 June 1922, 9.
32. Barns, *The Indian Press*, 1940.
33. The All India Home Rule League and the All India Muslim League had been advocating a dominion status for India within the British Empire as granted to Australia. On the other hand, senior Congress leader such as Hasrat Mohani, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Sri Aurobindo and Bipin Chandra Pal have been advocating the idea of complete independence from the Empire since 1921. See Möller and Schierenbeck. *Political Leadership, Nascent Statehood and Democracy*, 62–4.
34. "Indians and White Australia," *Worker*, 25 October 1923, 14.
35. "Compliant Unfounded," *The Argus*, 17 February 1921, 7.
36. Ibid.
37. "Indian Immigrants," *Recorder*, 18 February 1921, 3.
38. "Compliant Unfounded," *The Argus*, 17 February 1921, 7.
39. Ganeshram, *Pathways to Nationalism*, 17.
40. See note 6 above.
41. "White but Not Empty," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 February 1947, 2.
42. Ibid.
43. "Immigration of Indians," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 February 1947, 1
44. Dixon, *Immigration and the 'White Australia' Policy*, 1945.
45. Ibid.
46. See note 41 above.
47. Ibid.
48. R. G. Casey cited in Broinowski, *About Face*, 93.
49. "Think Imperially," *Examiner*, 8 October 1928, 3.
50. "Parsees as Colonists," *The Advertiser*, 1 November 1930, 14; Refer also to Lalkaka's articles "Future of Parsees," *Times of India*, October 1930a; and "Indians and British," *Barrier Miner*, 4 November 1930b, 3.
51. See Hinnells, *The Zoroastrian Diaspora*, 2005.
52. Varshney, "Contested Meanings," 1993.
53. "Indian Visitors," *Recorder*, 6 May 1927, 1.
54. "Parsees as Colonists," *The Advertiser*, 1 November 1930, 14.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. See note 53 above.
60. "Indians Unsuitable," *Northern Star*, 6 May 1927, 5.
61. This argument is very similar to the critique of Apartheid in South Africa where in 1949 an Indian diplomat named B. N. Rau advocated a casteist solution. See Thakur, "When India Proposed a Casteist Solution to South Africa's Racist Problem," 2016.
62. "White Australia," *Advocate*, 6 May 1927, 5.
63. "White Australia Praised as Great Tradition," *The Argus*, 8 June 1927, 20.
64. Ibid.
65. "Parsee Visitor in Adelaide," *The Register*, 10 June 1927, 9.
66. Ibid.
67. Harris, "Selling Tasmania," 1993.
68. "50,000 League Weekly Luncheon," *Examiner*, 9 October 1928, 12.
69. "50,000 League," *Mercury*, 9 October 1928, 10.
70. "Problem of India," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 March 1930, 10.
71. "Australians Dislike Work," *Recorder*, 22 June 1934, 1.
72. "Plumbers and Politicians," *Recorder*, 23 June 1934, 2.
73. "Government of India," *The Daily News*, 26 June 1934, 4.
74. See note 71 above.

75. Ibid.
76. "Indian Journalist," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 May 1934, 10.
77. Burley, *British Shipping and Australia 1920-1939*, 133.
78. Ibid., 134.
79. Ibid.
80. Sundaram, "From Agraharam to Buckingham Palace," 5.
81. Kaul, *Reporting the Raj*, 258.
82. Ibid.
83. Sahni, "Opinion," 4.
84. J. N. Sahni cited in Muthiah, "Mystery Man still Mysterious," 2005.
85. See note 83 above.
86. For a brief discussion on Sir Sarma's life, see Muthiah, "Mystery Man still Mysterious," *The Hindu*, 14 November 2005; and Perumal, "The Creator of Mavur Legend," 2005.
87. Perumal, "The Creator of Mavur Legend," 2005.
88. Muthiah, *Madras Miscellany*, 2011.
89. See note 83 above.
90. Muthiah, "Mystery Man still Mysterious," 2005.
91. "Markets Waiting in India for Australian Goods," *Cairns Post*, 14 January 1947, 1.
92. "Indian Journalist on Goodwill Tour," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 December 1946, 4.
93. "Canberra Commentary," *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 24 January 1947, 4.
94. Ibid.
95. See note 91 above.
96. See note 93 above.
97. Sarwal, "A Kangaroo and Bradman," 2018.
98. Thakur, "When India Proposed a Casteist Solution to South Africa's Racist Problem," 2016.
99. Ibid.
100. See note 41 above.
101. Ibid.
102. Cited in Davis, "A Shared History?" 860.
103. Ibid., 858.
104. Ibid.
105. Thakur, "Liberal, Liminal and Lost," 2017.
106. On the process of dismantling of WAP, see Fitzgerald, "Who Cares What They Think?" 15–40; Sobocinska, *Visiting the Neighbours*, 95–96; and Tavan, *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia*, 2005.
107. Thakur, "Liberal, Liminal and Lost," 234–5.
108. Sarwal, "A Kangaroo and Bradman," 2018.
109. The idea of a 'Commonwealth club' of some sort which might transcend the more transactional features of members of the Empire dealing with each other. See Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience*, 1969; and Moore, *Making the New Commonwealth*, 1987.
110. For a detailed discussion on ongoing nationalist and anti-racist foreign policy discourse, see Chacko, *Indian Foreign Policy*, 2013; Bhagavan, *The Peacemakers*, 2015; Thakur, "When India Proposed a Casteist Solution to South Africa's Racist Problem," 2016; and Thakur, "Liberal, Liminal and Lost," 2017.
111. Refer to Walker, *Anxious Nation*, 1999; and Broinowski, *About Face*, 2003.
112. See De Lepervanche, *Indians in a White Australia*, 1984; Broinowski, *About Face*, 2003.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the editor and the two anonymous reviewers of *Asian Ethnicity* for their valuable feedback and insightful comments that greatly helped in shaping the final piece.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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