

“Behind the white curtain”: Indian students and researchers in Australia, 1901–1950

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Abstract

Purpose – Academic scholarship on the White Australia Policy (WAP) has highlighted the history of Asian migration, early perceptions and policy-making initiatives. Prominent scholars have also pointed out the impact of the British Empire and WAP on Australia–India relations and early Indian migrants in Australia. Drawing on the debate concerning international students in Australia, our purpose in this article is to recover the role of Indian students in the story of Australian–Indian connections.

Design/methodology/approach – The article aims to highlight the reasons behind the involvement of the Australian government in the provision of scholarships and fellowships to Indian students and researchers at Australian universities during the period of WAP. To achieve this, it uses contemporary Australian newspaper reports to explore the popular representations of sponsored Indian students and researchers in Australia from 1901 to 1950.

Findings – The article concludes that the prevalence of this racially discriminatory immigration policy created a dissatisfaction among Indians, and some Australian sources of agitation, that helped chip away at the Australian government’s admission policies and the gradual demise of WAP.

Originality/value – This article contributes to the historiography and the effects of colonialism on Australian–Indian relations and debates on policy formation based on ideas of whiteness.

Keywords Whiteness, White Australia Policy, India, British subjects, Scholarships

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The now significant body of academic scholarship on the White Australia Policy (henceforth WAP) – Willard (1923), Nairn (1956), Yarwood (1962), Walker (1999 and 2019) and Tavan (2005) – has spanned across the history of Asian migration and policy-making initiatives in Australia. Prominent Australian scholars such as Ward (2001), Goldsworthy (2002), De Lepervanche (1984 and 2013), Allen (2005, 2008, 2009a, b, 2011, 2013 and 2017), Walker (1999), Lowe (2013), and Maclean (2015 and 2020) in their research have also focused on the impact of the British Empire and the WAP on Australia–India relations and early Indian migrants in Australia.

Recent work on Australian–Indian cultural encounters, literary depictions and on Australia and India through a more pan-Asian lens has revealed more complexity than simply dogged administration of the WAP (Sengupta, 2012; Walker, 2019; Sobocinska, 2014). Kane Collins has reminded us that, amidst the strong political consensus on the desirability of racially restrictive immigration in the early years of Australia’s federation, there were also thoughtful critics from business, Christian faith and other perspectives (Collins, 2009). This article adds to this line of interrogation of the WAP through the experiences of Indian

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students in Australia during the first 50 years of the WAP. It shows that the educational lens is effective in revealing activists for change, both Indian and Australian, while also adding to our understanding of how different interpretations of imperial responsibility played out in the broader Australia–India relationship, and how Indian students quietly gathered attention and support in ways that foreshadowed the experiences of subsequent students arriving under the Colombo Plan.

Kama Maclean has shown in rich detail how the triangular Britain–Australia–India relationship prior to India’s independence exposed imperial fault-lines in the form of differing ideas and policies towards imperial evolution and progress. Her study also strengthens suggestions that small groups mobilised to promote stronger Australian–Indian connections laid the groundwork that could be picked up later by bigger reformist groups and political parties demanding change to Australia’s restrictive immigration policy (Maclean, 2020). Recovering the role of Indian students in this story is also important, as they tend to only “appear” with the dawning of the Colombo Plan era from 1951. As Lyndon Megarrity has argued, WAP was “the most influential factor dominating overseas student policy formation” (2007, p. 105). To add to this, Nado Aveling has argued that this policy based on certain ideas of “whiteness”, not only enshrined racial discrimination by restricting non-European immigration but it also attempted to create a unified “white Australia” (2004, p. 60). Post-1901, some Australian intellectuals and diplomats made compelling arguments for productive collaborations between Australian and India, especially in education 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, educated and rich Indians wanted to engage with Australia within similar positions of privilege and power (Sarwal, 2019).

Drawing also on Oakman (2002 and 2004), Burke (2013) and Lowe and Kent’s (2019) contribution to the debate on international students in Australia, our purpose in this article is to highlight the reasons behind the involvement of the Australian government in the provision of scholarships and fellowships to Indian students and researchers during the period of WAP. Using contemporary Australian newspaper reports and by exploring popular representations of sponsored Indian university-level students and researchers in Australian media, from 1901 to 1950, this article will provide a historical account of their experiences in Australia in the first half of the 20th century. In doing so, it contributes to the historiography and effects of colonialism on Australian–Indian relations in the context of the British Empire and WAP. Our starting point in this paper is the recognition that the WAP, a policy contradictory in nature, as the name itself suggests was a product of ideas of whiteness or whiteness as the norm based in “historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced” locations globally (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 6; see also Guess, 2006). We find that its prevalence as racially discriminatory immigration policy and differential educational opportunities led to dissatisfaction among educated Indians (and Asians) and some Australians. This did not result in immediate policy change, but in the context of increasing reporting by religious figures and journalists travelling between the two countries, it foregrounded the Indian student in broader debates. In turn, this exposure could be drawn on by activists calling for changes to the Australian government’s university admission policies and the gradual chipping away at the WAP in the post-war decades.

Prohibited immigrants, 1900–1920: the case of Mool Chand

Nicola Rollock has pointed to the belief in racism as “endemic” which is embedded in particular social construction of white identity, the “others”, and language of whiteness as a normal part of the way in which most Western societies function (2012, p. 83). In the case of Australia, from 1901, the year of federation and initiation of the *Immigration Restriction Act (IRA 1901)*, till 1947, the year India gained independence, WAP institutionalised this process

of racism to maintain white race privileges by limiting non-British immigration to maintain a homogeneous population. Since the 1850s, according to N. B. Nairn, the WAP was present in “embryonic form in the Australian ethos” (1956, p. 21). Post-1880s, this was linked with “the growth of the idea of nationhood on the British model” and “the economic development of the continent” (1956, p. 16). In 1901, the WAP was introduced as a legislative and administrative measure to severely restrict non-white immigration (Palfreeman, 1974; Tavan, 2004). During the 1901 debate on the passage of WAP, John Christian Watson, the leader of the Australian Labor Party, expressed his concerns about “the possibility and probability of racial contamination” (1901, p. 4633). The British government even sent despatches to the government of Queensland objecting to legislation based on race as it contradicted its commitment to non-discrimination towards the subjects of the Empire (Willard, 1923, p. 120). However, as Nairn notes, all members of the parliament agreed, “Asians and other unwanted immigrants should be excluded from Australia” on similar grounds (1956, p. 29). Those who “philosophically”, not morally, opposed this idea on the grounds that it could affect Australia’s relations with Britain also “did not vote against the essence of the Bill” (1956, p. 29). Prime Minister Edmund Barton warned the Parliament:

It is not a desirable thing in our legislation to make discriminations which will complicate the foreign relations of the Empire. It would be of untold evil and harm to us—and likely to lead to troubles even rivalling those which the future may bring forth to us from these causes. (1901, p. 3503)

Tavan points out that from 1901 to 1945, the WAP “enjoyed almost unquestioned popular support” because of the deeply held belief of “national identity founded upon racial and cultural homogeneity” (2004, p. 111). The governments of China, Japan and British India, protested against this discriminatory exclusion based on the choice of a European language for the 50-word dictation test.

Under the WAP, affected by cultural perceptions of the superiority of the White race, the Australian government’s focus and interest was more on humanitarian aid projects in the region than on providing educational scholarships or permitting private full fee-paying Indian students to enter Australia (see Willard, 1923; Yarwood, 1962; Megarrity, 2007; Burke, 2013; Lowe and Kent, 2019). On the other hand, during the same time period, the senates of major universities and technical institutions in Australia started contemplating ways to boost Australia’s profile in Asia by awarding quotas to non-white students and researchers. But subsequent Australian governments, from Barton (1901–1903) to Chifley (1945–1949), did not submit to this and also discouraged any such ideas on the grounds that: (1) it would cause an influx of Asian students – the yellow peril – which would result in a threat to the Australian way of life, labour wages and standards of living (see Nairn, 1956; Walker, 1999) and (2) admitting “coloured students” in Australian universities would not benefit Australia’s domestic or international interests in any way – unless these students can pay equivalent fees and maintain themselves without looking for employment and permanent residency in Australia (Megarrity, 2005, p. 3).

During the late-1900s, there was a growing interest among rich Indians and intellectuals to experience Australia. In 1912, an Anglo-Indian student was denied a passage from Calcutta to Australia by the shipping company on the grounds that the Australian government won’t allow him to land anyway – as it had already done the same last year with another Anglo-Indian student. This unnamed student wished to attend an agriculture college in Queensland for a year. While the university had no problems in accepting him as a student, the Australian government’s permission never materialised (*Barrier Miner*, 17 July 1912). With such conditions in front of them, most Indian parents and students preferred universities in the United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA) and European countries. The entry of non-whites, especially students, in Australia was further made difficult by asking them to take prior written permission from the local and Australian governments before booking

their passage. On arrival permission was only meant for Whites and in all other cases people were considered “aliens” and deported by the same ship, making the company bear the transport charges (Bashford and Gilchrist, 2012; Maclean, 2015). By contrast, American and European universities offered comprehensive facilities and offered not just an attractive destination to study but also to settle down (Megarrity, 2007, p. 89). After the successful completion of study from the UK or Europe, a return to India as “brown sahibs” or joining the prestigious Indian Civil Services (ICS) was seen as rewarding. The term “brown sahibs” was used by the British to refer to Empire loyalists, found mainly in the three presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. They were mostly anglicised Indian men, who usually belonged to a higher social stratum and loyally imitated Western, typically English, lifestyle, language, culture and thinking (Gohain, 1984). But these were, in the eyes of most, exceptions. Kama Maclean points out that even “imperial-minded Australians” understood and respected the stringent recruitment mechanisms of the ICS that was largely a domain of white men (2015, p. 12).

In 1904, the Australian government relaxed the administration of the IRA to allow “Indian merchants, students, and tourists” to enter the Commonwealth temporarily (Davies, 1968, pp. 96–97). According to Palfreeman, this relaxation was inevitable as by now almost 47,000 non-Europeans were living in Australia and through them Australia’s trade contact with Asia was growing (1974, p. 345). People in these categories were often allowed to remain in Australia for up to 12 months (in rare cases seven years) with the condition that they must hold a valid passport issued by the government of India. Under this Act, only the Minister was empowered to grant a “certificate of exemption” from the dictation test. These were usually given to someone who would work in a local business of “community value”. The effect of the 1904 reforms was minimal in encouraging Indian students, as the maximum 12-month stay was hardly a good match with university study. The Minister could also cancel a certificate of exemption and declare an immigrant prohibited along with an order of deportation, as we note in our case study of Mool Chand below, if the person violated the conditions of his entry (Palfreeman, 1974, p. 345).

The case of Mool Chand

An Indian man, Mool Chand, obtained permission to enter Western Australia from Lahore as a former “Indian Civil Servant” or as a “student”. Major Australian newspapers refer to Mool Chand as an “Indian student” (*The Daily News*, 21 September 1905). It is not clear if he was an officer of the ICS or just a “babu” (clerk) or a student preparing for the ICS. The “List of Indian Members of the Indian Civil Service” does not have an entry on Mool Chand, which makes his claim as an ICS dubious. He was given only a six months’ Certificate of Exemption from the Dictation Test (CEDT) by the authorities in Freemantle. The CEDT was an important document of the Australian government’s assimilation policy and often worked like a passport (with two photographs and a handprint). It provided certain privileges to non-Europeans such as freedom of movement for business purposes and applying for an extension of stay once the CEDT expired. In relation to the CEDT, Margaret Allen notes the curious case of three Indian doctors who arrived in Perth in August 1905. The doctors had all the proper documents but were shocked to note that in their ship’s record they were listed as “prohibited immigrants”. This was in sharp contrast to the welcome they had received in England or what Australian doctors received on visiting India (Allen, 2005, pp. 123–124; see also Maclean, 2015).

Overall, Mool Chand was “an experienced man of Empire”, who had earlier served as a civil servant on the railways in India, Uganda and British North Borneo. This explained his claim to be part of the prestigious ICS (Allen, 2005). However, it was later found out by Australian authorities that Mool Chand had overstayed his visa as a student and was illegally

employed by another Indian, Messer Inder Singh, in his shop. After detailed inquiries by the local police, he was adjudged “a prohibited immigrant” under the *IRA 1901* and on 24 July 1905, orders were issued for his immediate deportation from Australia. The local newspapers reported that two plainclothes constables located Mool Chand at Inder Singh’s residence in South Freemantle and kept him under surveillance. On 25 July 1905, Mool Chand was delivered a letter requesting him to appear before the Collector of Customs in person the same day. Mool Chand immediately complied with the request as he had no idea of what was to befall him. From the Collector of Customs office, Mool Chand was unceremoniously deported without his luggage and belongings on *RMS Orontes*, which was on its way to London from Freemantle, to Colombo and from there on another ship to Madras (NAA: A5522, M18, Barcode: 242,176, Re Mool Chand, pp. 3–9).

Onboard, the ship Mool Chand told his plight to European passengers who in sympathy offered him some money to buy clothes and food. As soon as he set down in Madras, Mool Chand, with monetary help from his friends, started legal proceedings against the Australian government and customs officials. In September 1905, he employed the services of Cecil John Reginald Le Mesurier, an orientalist and a barrister of the Western Australian Supreme Court (Powell, 2010). Given the history of Le Mesurier’s actions and litigations against the colonial government in Ceylon, it was not surprising that he picked up Mool Chand’s case. As an orientalist (converted to Islam), Le Mesurier was always on the lookout for ideological crusades and unfortunate men who needed help against the colonial government. He would have enjoyed making Mool Chand’s case a public sensation by stirring up debate and embarrassing the Australian government (Powell, 2010).

Mool Chand, through Le Mesurier, officially filed a case against the Western Australian government and Clayton Turner Mason, the Collector of Customs, claiming £10,000 in damages against assault, false imprisonment and illegal deportation. Another writ for £10,000 compensation was filed against the Federal authorities, particularly Alfred Deakin, then Prime Minister of Australia and also the Minister for External Affairs, for issuing the deportation order. Le Mesurier’s Notice of Action (dated 2 September 1905) to Crown Solicitor and Acting Attorney Journal read:

I do hereby as the solicitor for and on behalf of Mool Chand of Fremantle in Western Australia, give you notice that the said Mool Chand will at or soon after the expiration of one calendar month from the time of your being served with this Notice cause a Writ of Summons to be sued out of the Supreme Court of Western Australia against The Honourable Alfred Deakin, Minister for External Affairs, and Clayton Turner Mason, Collector of Customs of Western Australia, at the suit of the said Mool Chand, and proceed thereupon according to law. For that they the said The Honourable Alfred Deakin, and Clayton Turner Mason on or about 25th day of July, 1905, at Fremantle in the State of Western Australia assaulted the said Mool Chand, and caused him to be imprisoned on board the steamship “Orontes”, and unlawfully and against his will caused him to be deported from the State of Western Australia to the damage of the said Mool Chand of Ten thousand pounds, which he claims. (NAA: A5522, M18, Barcode: 242176, Re Mool Chand, p. 48)

On 28 September 1905, the Crown Solicitor, Western Australia, quoted the telegram (dated July 21, 1905) from the Secretary, Department of External Affairs: “Prime Minister directs that Mool Chand be deported forthwith. This department will bear expense. Please take necessary action” (NAA: A5522, M18, Barcode: 242,176, Re Mool Chand, p. 35). In response (28 September 1905), the Crown Solicitor, Commonwealth of Australia, advised the Secretary, Attorney General’s Department to make all efforts to not involve the Prime Minister. He argued that Mool Chand should be legally allowed to only challenge his department:

As Mool Chand was deported on the advice of the Crown Solicitor of the State I suggest that he should be allowed to defend any action against the Collector of Customs, Mr Mason to whom he would be if in private practice I think be responsible.

As I cannot anticipate what defence he would rely on judging by the advice apparently given to the Collector and as the Hon The Prime Minister's Defence is entirely different I suggest that Messrs Stone and Burt be asked to act on his behalf. I think if this is done they might see the Solicitors and by explaining that Mr Deakin did not take any illegal step or order – avoid the necessity of defence at all. (NAA: A5522, M18, Barcode: 242176, Re Mool Chand, p. 41)

So, on the advice of Deakin's Perth attorney's Messrs Stone and Burt, and his lawyer Le Mesurier, Mool Chand dropped the case against the Prime Minister. Mool Chand was told that Deakin did not personally issue the order. His department sent the telegram only after the Western Australian government informed his office regarding "the expiration of exemption certificate" (NAA: A5522, M18, Barcode: 242,176, Re Mool Chand, p. 32). It appears from the correspondence between Crown Solicitor and Secretary, Department of External Affairs that there was some miscommunication with the Western Australian government. Deakin's office assumed that the Western Australian government had gained a conviction against Mool Chand and therefore issued an order in the name of the Prime Minister, which Deakin signed.

The Crown Solicitor also wrote a letter to the Secretary, Department of the Attorney General's office highlighting the "considerable importance in the administration of the Act" (NAA: A5522, M18, Barcode: 242,176, Re Mool Chand, p. 13). Although no direct action could have been taken against the Prime Minister, it was clear from the blame game and correspondences that *IRA 1901* and deportations made under it were questionable. As expected, Mool Chand's case was dismissed by the judge because he was not on a valid visa or a resident of any state in Australia at the time of his deportation. Mool Chand's case also found its way into the Indian press, which raised the question of mutual reciprocity within the British Empire: "It is surprising that white men think that they may come to our country to make money in various ways, but that we ought not to go to their places. The Government of England is not capable of putting down this piece of injustice" (*Sasilekha*, 21 November 1905; [Maclean, 2015](#), p. 11). Appeals of this nature to a sense of justice/injustice, whether aimed directly at Australian authorities or indirectly via London, fell flat in Australia because the form of liberalism prevailing there was "racialised liberalism" ([Chacko and Davis, 2015](#); [Maclean, 2020](#)).

The case of Mool Chand (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, October 12, 1905) – "the deported Indian student" (*The Daily News*, 21 September 1905), "a deported Hindoo" (*Sunday Times*, 10 September 1905) or "a deported Afghan" (*The Register*, 8 May 1906) as it was reported sensationally in Australian newspapers – was the first such case of its kind involving an Indian in Australia. The only other case with which it could be compared to was of *Ah Toy* vs. *Musgrove*, Supreme Court of Victoria, Melbourne, October 1888. Ah Toy was refused permission to land on Australian soil and he pursued a case against the government of Victoria on the grounds that as a citizen of the British colony there had been an infringement of his legal right. Mool Chand's case reflected the deep-rooted fears in Australians (particularly journalists and policymakers minds) involving the risks in inviting educated Indians on student visas (*Western Mail*, 9 September 1905). Throughout 1900–1920, there was recurring anxiety and debate that the educated "Asiatics" would easily pass the dictation test (in English, French or German) and settle in Australia ([Megarrity, 2007](#), p. 90). Maintaining the purity of the white race and national survival was particularly a delicate subject for Australian politicians. Alfred Deakin, in one of his speeches, even mentioned that the "coloured races" which live surrounding Australia were "inclined to invade our shores" (1901, p. 4804). They, under the impressions provided by popular fictional invasion narratives, feared that these educated "Asiatics" would marry white women and create "evil" and "genius" half-breeds who would destroy Australia (for a detailed discussion on racialised thinking, see [Walker, 1999](#); [Rolls, 2005](#); [Carey, 2009](#)).

Christian mission and the Australian universities, 1920–1930

Reverend Charles Freer Andrews, an Anglican educational Christian missionary and social reformer in India, was among those who supported the admission of Indian students in Australia. Being a close friend of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, he also identified with the cause of India's independence and education of the poor. In 1917, Rev. Andrews came on a goodwill mission with a proposal of an educational scheme sponsored by the Australian government. Under Andrews' scheme, Indian students pursuing sciences and medicine would have benefited by studying at Australian universities. Andrews observed that such a scheme would "break down the extreme bitterness which exists in India against Australia on account of the exclusion policy the Commonwealth has adopted" (*Chronicle*, 22 December 1917). Some Australian university senates welcomed the idea in principle but this scheme was not even considered by the Australian government.

In 1921, the University of Western Australia (UWA) became the first Australian university to pass a resolution inviting applications from India students, provided they pay fees (£40 per annum) comparable to other Australian university students. It is not clear how much UWA's scheme was influenced by Rev. Andrews' proposal. The University Senate observed: "It would be a bad thing for the university to close its doors and say it was going to draw a colour line. He did not think that such students would come here in any numbers" (*The Register*, 20 April 1921). As the question of entering Australia was a matter between the Australian Federal government and Indian students, most members of the UWA Senate committee felt that "coloured" students from India would not come here in large numbers but "it would be better not to give them a blank denial" (*The Register*, 20 April 1921).

Insistence on exclusion based on skin colour and ethnicity under WAP had put Australia in an awkward position in India. Most elite Indians thought of themselves as British subjects and wanted equal rights according to the liberal sense of justice that was mediated by race in its Australian expression (Maclean, 2015; Sarwal, 2019). The point was 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. (*The Argus*, 17 February 1921)

The treatment meted out to Indians in the Commonwealth was fast alienating the moderates in India who favoured equal partnership, racial equality and cooperation amongst people of Commonwealth nations. The moderates believed in "Indian lives and honour being held as admired British lives and honour" (*The Argus*, 17 February 1921). In 1922, the government of India sent V. Srinivasa Sastri P.C., as a member of the Council of State and Viceregal Council, on a delegation to Australia to investigate the conditions of Indians living here. Sastri was a highly respectable British Indian administrator, educator, orator and an independence activist. At the time, some Indians resident in Australia were able to vote at the state level, but none enjoyed franchise at the federal level. As Clause 4 of the Commonwealth Franchise Act, 1902 barred the "coloured races" and "aboriginal natives" of Australia, Asia, Africa or the Islands of the Pacific except New Zealand. Sastri noted discontent amongst Indians in Australia regarding their right to vote, and pressed the Australian government to try and provide "for Indians in Australia equal rights to those given to Australians" (*The Argus*, 2 June 1922; *The Register*, 9 June 1922). While he did not discuss the WAP and issues of Indian

students in detail, he made it clear to the Australian journalists that “theoretically” minded Indians feel that it did not maintain the “intimacy” and “solidarity” of the British Empire (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 June 1922). Due to his efforts and pleas by others, 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 as well (and in the following year they also gained access to pensions).

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). The main objective behind the foundation of the INC in 1885 was obtaining a greater share in government for “educated Indians” and initiating a political dialogue with the British Raj (Bevir, 2003). Up to 1917, many moderate leaders, and especially the educated middle class, saw it as a beneficial opportunity for Indians to gain “colonial self-government” under the British Commonwealth. Other young leaders of the party, from 1915 onwards, including Jawaharlal Nehru, who although Western-educated, were highly critical of the reach and methods of the older leadership and distrustfully considered the idea of a “British Commonwealth” as “ridiculous and humiliating” (Ahmed, 1991, p. 43; Gopal, 1981, p. 352). As Maclean points out, the elaboration of what dominionhood meant during this time actually turned some Indian nationalists in a more radical direction. The more that they saw dominionhood being defined in terms of “white dominion”, the less likely it appealed (Maclean, 2020, pp. 149–163). Nehru’s approach was thus in line with Mahatma Gandhi’s and INC’s demand for *Purna Swaraj* (complete independence) made in the 1929 Lahore session. With the new emerging leadership and seeing the deteriorating economic condition in India, many former moderates also changed their stance towards British policies and the Commonwealth.

Educated Indians who visited Australia believed that Australian fears of the mass immigration of Indians were unfounded. What worries them, as a visiting Indian doctor to Australia, S.K. Datta, observed in his farewell speech to Australian journalists (25 October 1923), was the principle behind WAP. Dr Datta noted:

What [annoys] most educated class of India 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 honoured, and it is from a reciprocal policy that India and Australia will benefit. (*Worker*, 25 October 1923)

Rev. Andrews, who also believed in similar views about Indian interest, returned to Australia again in 1936 with his earlier proposal and appeals of doubling-up of efforts to “cement the relationship between Australia and India” (*The Argus*, 7 September 1936). A scheme very similar to Andrews’s proposal regarding the intake of Indian students was discussed at the University of Melbourne. It is pertinent to note here that the views of the university’s governing councils or senates may not be the views of professors or other employees. In 1936, Professor Bailey, then acting Vice-Chancellor of the university, suggested that through such a plan it would be able: (1) to attract Indians students who usually prefer to go to England; (2) to “strengthen the position of India within the Empire”; and (3) also “correct the effects of the isolation and antipathy which the White Australia policy might create in the minds of educated Indians” (*Examiner*, 14 September 1936). Andrews gave examples of Chinese students on scholarships in the USA and suggested that Australian government and universities should invite “some of the poorest and most brilliant Indian students” to study here (*Examiner*, 14 September 1936). The result of such an exchange, according to Andrews, would be “kindly impressions of Australia” in India (*Examiner*, 14 September 1936).

In 1937, because of many more such efforts by Andrews, the University Senate committees and the Australian government, which was then under Joseph Lyons, the tenth

Prime Minister of Australia, finally approved the entry of Indian students to Australia on a quota basis and for a 12-month study period. The government suggested some more criteria, such as the minimum age (19 years and above), educational qualification for enrolment (same standard as Australian universities), accommodation (definite arrangements for stay), employment (not undertaking any remunerative employment), etc. The first Indian student to arrive in Australia under this quota system was A.L. Channarajurs of Mysore. Channarajurs came to undertake a sheep and wool course at East Sydney Technical College in 1937. He was followed, in 1939, by S.M. Thacore (Thakur), a 28-year-old post-graduate of Lucknow University. Before coming to Australia, Thacore taught for eight years at the Lucknow Christian College. Thacore, son of a late Methodist minister, was given a free place to study agricultural economics out of 60 other Indian applicants. He not only studied, but also visited the eastern states during the long vacations of his two-year course and attended the annual conference of the Australian Student Christian Movement (ASCM). This was done with the support of the ASCM at St George's College of the University of Western Australia (*The Daily News*, 21 February 1939).

Education as humanitarian aid, 1940s onwards

Post-World War II, in addition to the number of applications by Indian students to study in Australia, the requests from the Australian Student Christian Movement allowing for the intake of a large number of Indian students increased (Megarrity, 2007, pp. 89–90). This was also a result of authorities in the UK, USA and Europe who were finding it extremely difficult to allow the entry of Asian students in their already over-crowded universities (Megarrity, 2005). While most opinion-makers and governing elites in Australia were still against the intake of students from India, particularly dark-skinned Anglo-Indians, Sir Ian Clunies Ross, the architect of Australia's scientific boom, advocated for acceptance and variety in Australia's migrant population. In 1943, Ross proposed the induction of Indian and Chinese students through post-war scholarships (*News*, 30 December 1943). In 1945, Sir Iven Mackay, the first High Commissioner for Australia to India, in his reports both during and after the war to the University Senate, also argued for an intake of a large number of brilliant Indian students as he felt that they "were likely to come to Australia, particularly to study science and engineering" (*The West Australian*, 18 April 1945).

In 1945, the Australian government invited, under its Commonwealth Technical Assistance Scheme (CTAS), 18 Indian students to study nursing, and the following year eight students to study advance geological techniques along with three others to study agriculture and wool technology. These sponsored students were also expected to study the Australian way of life and various business methods. Writing in praise of the CTAS supported by the Australian government, Peter Russo, an Australian journalist, commentator and educator, observed: "No doubt these visitors will be able to extract enough from our plans and methods to make their term worthwhile" (*The Argus*, 30 January 1945). For Russo, this scheme showed both "initiative and enthusiasm", and reflected the shifting nature of power from Europe to Asia. He further added:

These knowledgeable and experienced Asians are here to learn but it is worth remembering that they also have much to teach. Although we may still have the edge on parts of Asia in gadgets and organisation, our understanding of the general complex of Asian countries remains at the kindergarten level. There would not be one of these Asian visitors who is not familiar with, say Aesop's Fables, the great Greek legends, and other symbolic ingredients of western civilisation. (*The Argus*, 30 January 1945)

In a letter to the Department of External Affairs, Mackay also highlighted that a constant refusal to entertain educated Indians learned in Western thought and ways, would not go

down well with the Indian government and public alike. Mackay advised: “the resentment felt by Indians because of their non-admission to Australia is likely to be considerably lessened if the generous attitude is adopted in the admission of tourists, students and merchants” (Megarrity, 2005, p. 33). Similar letters and reports were sent from other parts of Asia, making the Australian government think harder about pragmatic responses and strategies to invite Asian students (see Walker, 1999, 2019).

In 1947, Arvind Gore, son of Dr V. V. Gore, private secretary to the Indian High Commissioner to Australia, Sir Raghunath Paranjpye, was admitted by the Australian government as a cadet at the Royal Military College, Duntroon. It was of significance as the Australian government looked keen to offer Indian students places and training in a variety of fields, especially those who would return and contribute towards the growing relationship between the two countries. By the end of 1947, there were still only 300 non-European students studying in Australia (Megarrity, 2005, p. 33). In 1948, as part of a global plan of the government of India to make itself better known among the nations, a goodwill mission and sponsorship program was initiated with the help of partner countries, where 600 Indian scholars and researchers were awarded a one-year scholarship of £400 to study in Australia, USA, UK, Russia and South Africa. During the same year, a diplomatic mission led by William MacMahon Ball reached Southeast and East Asia with the “promise of educational, technical and medical assistance” (Waters, 1994, p. 351). In 1948, the Australian government decided to provide a small number of scholarships for students of Southeast Asian countries to study at Australian universities (Waters, 1994, p. 352). Ball’s goodwill visit inspired an ambivalent response from the emerging elites in these countries who saw a contradiction in Australia’s stance to establish friendship with the shadow of the White Australia policy looming large upon it. But, even if it was a case of decidedly partial progress, the slowly increased flow of Indians made a difference.

For examples, from 1948 to 1949, Dr K. Kirpal Singh (professor of horticulture), S.N. Gupta (exchange staff at Ogilvie High School, Hobart), Dr S.K. Krishna (Director, Forest Products Research and the Forest Research Institute), V.P. Sondhi (Deputy Director, Geological Survey of India), Lt. Col. M.L. Ahuja (Director, Central Research Institute) and Dr B.P. Pal (Joint Director, Indian Agricultural Research Institute) were some influential Indian researchers who were sponsored to visit Australia. The purpose of their visits was to exchange ideas with their Australian counterparts in the fields of horticulture, education, scientific, agricultural, medical and geological research. These visitors studied Australian industry practices and ways to introduce structured cooperative organisation in India (*The West Australian*, 18 March 1948). Some of these researchers also gave public addresses on India’s social life, religions, industry practices, need for more exchanges between India and Australia, and other related subjects to local social bodies and schools (*The Mercury*, 25 August 1948). Such visits and exchanges of ideas were an example of what Lowe and Kent have called “vernacular internationalism”, broadening community understanding of India while laying some foundations for future science and trade relations between India and Australia (2019, p. 482). Scholars such as Daniel Oakman have agreed that Australian contact with Asian students and researchers was mutually beneficial and raised doubts about the fairness and benefit of the WAP (2002, pp. 93–94).

Conclusion

With the enactment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, de-colonisation gaining momentum in Africa and Asia, and questioning of race relations, policymakers in India looked at Australia and other parts of the white world for equality and collaboration. Gwenda Tavan (2005) has shown that from the 1950s onwards pressure on Australian governments by well-known diplomats, antiracist activists, and academics determined to

promote a better understanding of Asian societies to gradually transform and abolish policies such as the WAP that were based in the antiquated race norms. Maclean has shown that religious figures, internationalists, humanitarians, communists, journalists, and others began, from the mid-1940s, to form friendship associations between Australia and India, including branches of the Australia–India Association. The small but growing number of Indian students proved active members, too (Maclean, 2020, pp. 213–231). Adding to this, Megarrity points to the largely positive acceptance of Asian and Indian students by the Australian public that made the Australian government cautiously but steadily commit to non-white overseas students intake (2007, p. 104). After the Second World War, taking a cue from countries such as Canada and the United States of America, Australia focused on changing education and immigration policies and invested heavily in research (Hawkins, 1989; Tavan, 2013; Forsyth, 2017). By 1950, around 18 Indian students were studying and researching in various Australian universities and institutes under the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) scheme financed by the Australian government. As India was an important air and sea traffic centre on the route between Australia and Britain, H. R. Gollan, then High Commissioner for Australia to India, found such fellowships offered to Indian students in addition to the export of surplus wheat an invaluable measure of Australian goodwill (*The Daily News*, 20 September 1950).

The Australian shift from humanitarian aid to international student scholarships and exchange under the Colombo Plan logic of regional development and decolonisation occurred in the wake of racially framed, often criticised, but learning experiences with Indian students. The shift was an investment in cultural understanding for Australia. Although not entirely based in a broader commitment to race equality, Australia’s international education program was largely premised on the notion of foreign aid, realising the potential of education, helping its newly independent neighbours, and its power to change perceptions. These scholarships and fellowships opened-up avenues not just for more Indian students but also for internationalisation of Australia’s universities and its education programs.

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