

THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF COSMOPOLITAN ELITES

HIERARCHY, DIVERSITY, AND INDIAN DIPLOMATS IN
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

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Abstract

This is a thesis about belonging. With the analytical sensibilities of reflexive sociology, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, it examines how Indian diplomats have sought to navigate the hierarchies of international society, re-enacting colonial “standards of civilization” as they perform the role of confident cosmopolitans, at home in the world.

The chapters cohere around an analysis of the Indian diplomatic *cleft habitus*, suspended between two radically different conceptions of international society that stand in tension with one another: one, a caricature-like notion of a white, European-dominated society paralleling classic English School notions of a homogenous club; two, a postcolonial international society founded on diversity, difference, and the symbolic representation of the global subaltern. Both imageries come with their own social codes of belonging, imbibed through the cleft habitus.

The thesis argues that membership in international society involves a recurring set of behaviours and dispositions aimed at finding recognition (membership in international society is about rehearsed, continuous cultural belonging). These behaviours not only reflect imbalances of power between states, but also reveal which groups within a nation and its diplomatic service find acceptance as legitimate insiders in diplomatic circles (membership in international society is tied to domestic hierarchies). Indian diplomatic performances of belonging reproduce, contest, and legitimate a particular set of international as well as domestic hierarchies, prominent among them race, class, gender, and caste.

The chapters analyse the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus through its colonial origins (Chapter 2), demographic implications (Chapter 3), pedagogical imperatives (Chapter 4), outward projection (Chapter 5), and the double challenge posed to its performance and ideals by the emergence of a “post-Western” world and a Hindu nationalist India (Chapter 6). This analysis builds on 85 interviews with Indian diplomats, ministers, and academics, as well as on archival research at the Nehru Memorial Library and the National Archives of India, conducted in New Delhi and Bangalore in 2019.

The thesis concludes that understanding the much-debated challenge to our so-called liberal international order requires a critical reading of the ways in which its cosmopolitan creed has reproduced many of the same social hierarchies it claims to reject. In fact, attempts at imbibing “actually existing cosmopolitanism” often stand in the way of respecting pluralism and diversity.

List of abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CSE	Civil Service Examination
FSI	Foreign Service Institute
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
ICS	Indian Civil Service
IFS	Indian Foreign Service
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
IIM	Indian Institute of Management
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPS	Indian Police Service
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs
NAI	National Archives of India
NMML	Nehru Memorial Library and Museum
OBC	Other Backward Classes
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UPSC	Union Public Service Commission

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IMAGINED INTERNATIONAL SOCIETIES

International societies do not naturally emerge out of a set of power differentials like a logically sound solution to a fixed equation. Much as Benedict Anderson said of domestic communities, international societies, too, are imagined: they are constructed imageries of a joint community and culture which the imaginers see themselves as part of.¹ “Imagined” does not mean fragile – in fact, social constructions of international society often outlast significant historical shifts in the underlying structures, living a sort of cultural afterlife. Yet, critically, “imagined” does not mean ethereal either. Instead, imageries of international society tie themselves to national pecking orders, politics, and structures: they reflect, legitimate, and normalize not only particular global orders but also domestic hierarchies. They contain social codes for belonging: who gets to be an insider in what kind of international society, on whose terms, and with which kinds of domestic audiences and participants in mind.

With the analytical sensibilities of reflexive sociology, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, this thesis examines how Indian diplomats have sought to belong in international society, navigating its hierarchies, and re-enacting a colonial “standard of civilization” as they perform the role of confident cosmopolitans, at home in the world. A sociological approach to the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) helps illuminate why some cultural aspects of international society are so sticky, resisting change even in the face of systemic power transitions and shifts in the underlying material order – and answers this animating puzzle not in the register of, say, the “cultural turn” in IR, but by rooting cultural conceptions in their social contexts and hierarchies. A sociological sensibility allows us to have a more embodied discussion about why, despite the classic English School² concern that decolonization would splinter international society into unmanageable diversity,³ such expressions of diversity have in fact emerged to coexist alongside a deep, historically rooted, and socially expressed desire to conform to the colonial standards of European international society. However marginalized Indian diplomats have often been in a racialized, unequal world, many of them have historically, as members of India’s dominant classes, sought to reproduce hierarchies of class, caste, or gender within the Foreign Service itself. This complex set of hierarchies underpins the ambivalence of the elite status of Indian diplomats, reflecting both a postcolonial ethic of egalitarianism and an investment in many old hierarchies.

The thesis revisits what it takes to be a member of international society. Barry Buzan has argued that, in the wake of decolonization, ‘questions of membership in, and conditions of entry to,

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

² The English School, emerging out of a post-war British effort to rethink the study of IR through a combination of norms, institutions, and power politics, contended that despite the anarchy of the international system, there exists an international society, or a society of states, founded on shared conventions and values, as well as mutual recognition. The School studies the evolution of this international society through its core institutions (such as diplomacy and international law), as well as its “expansion” into the non-European world. Critiques of the School are provided throughout this chapter. For foundational texts, see e.g. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977); Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

³ T. Dunne, *Inventing International Society: A History of the English School* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 188.

international society largely disappeared'.⁴ This argument assumes that entry into international society is a one-off occurrence performed by a unitary state actor as its sovereignty is formally recognized by other members of the Westphalian club. By contrast, this thesis offers a Bourdieusian reading which argues that membership in international society is, in fact, a continuous, and domestically contested, performance of belonging. Seeking membership involves a recurring set of behaviours and dispositions aimed at finding recognition (membership in international society is about rehearsed cultural belonging). Furthermore, these behaviours not only divide the world along national lines, but also reveal which groups within a nation, a culture, or diplomatic service get to be recognized as legitimate insiders in diplomatic circles (membership in international society is tied to domestic hierarchies).

The chapters cohere around an analysis of the Indian diplomatic *cleft habitus*, suspended between two radically different conceptions of international society that stand in tension with one another: one, a caricature-like notion of a white, European-dominated society paralleling classic English School notions of a homogenous club; two, a postcolonial international society founded on diversity, difference, and the symbolic representation of a global subaltern.⁵ Both these imageries come with their own social codes of belonging, their own set of rules, ideals, and appropriate modes of thought and being, imbibed through the cleft habitus. Or, in the language of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu: they are fields, with their respective forms of desirable habitus and capital. In each, Indian diplomats face a different status in terms of their fit and place: in the imagery of European international society, Indians have represented something akin to what Iver Neumann, discussing the importance of boundary-making for the construction of international society, has called the 'constitutive outside of international society'⁶ – a latecomer trying to fit in, by its very presence demarcating the limits of what the rules of this society allow and valorise. Yet in the imagery of a postcolonial international society, India was a founding member, not only because it gained independence relatively early in 1947, but because of its pioneering of Third Worldist diplomacy, Non-Aligned advocacy, and the powerful rejection of imperialism and racism in its diplomatic discourse.

Indian diplomats' complex reading of their own place in these two different visions of international society animates how they behave, argue, carry themselves, and conceive of their work as diplomats. The performance of the diplomatic cleft habitus regulates, constrains, and enables them in different ways – and empowers and disempowers different kinds of diplomats within the Service. At home, the felt imperatives imposed by the habitus have shaped how different constituencies of the Foreign Service have justified its recruitment patterns, pedagogical practices, diplomatic ideals, and internal hierarchies. Out in the world, the habitus has borne its imprint on how Indian diplomats have sought to navigate the so-called liberal international order, whose struggles they have chosen to champion, how they have thought of big categories like hierarchy

⁴ Barry Buzan, 'The "Standard of Civilisation" as an English School Concept', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 42, no. 3 (June 2014): 585.

⁵ "Subaltern", a term originally developed by Antonio Gramsci, refers to a position of subordination, be it in terms of caste, class, gender, race, language, or culture. In the context of Subaltern Studies, a South Asian historiographical project with its roots in the 1980s, the emphasis on the subaltern sought to critique and dislodge the elitist bias of much of South Asian historical writing, and to draw out "subaltern" perspectives instead. Cognizant of Gayatri Spivak's admonition against using the term too laxly, it is used here not so much as an analytical tool as much as a rhetorical device, intended to capture the sense among Indian diplomats that they ought to be a "voice for the voiceless". This is, in itself, a deeply ironic move, suggesting that Spivak's famous question, "Can the subaltern speak?", is here answered in the negative, as a diplomatic elite is called to speak on the behalf of the subaltern. See e.g. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Gary Nelson and Lawrence Crossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 271–313; Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁶ Iver B. Neumann, 'Entry into International Society Reconceptualised: The Case of Russia', *Review of International Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011): 472.

or status, and in which ways they have seen themselves as either marginalized or buoyed in the cosmopolitan club of diplomats.

By problematizing the idea that each diplomatic corps plays to a more or less unitary understanding of international society, we are pushed beyond some binary heuristics that are popular in the study of places like India. This is not “International Relations (IR) from below”, in the sense of pitting colonial powers or incumbent nations against a subjugated or marginalized “rest”.⁷ In the coming pages, the great battles are not fought simply between “West” and “non-West”, nations of “haves” and “have-nots”.⁸ They are just as crucially fought inside individual states and their diplomatic services, where, as in India, different understandings of international society have spawned different prescriptions for what diplomacy ought to be. National lines of difference matter, but so do lines of, say, class, gender, or education. The thesis also introduces a further line of difference into the study of Indian IR, which hitherto has been absent: caste.

Instead of rooting the analysis in grand ideological debates or sweeping systemic shifts, this thesis takes its cue from Bourdieu’s fascination with the subtle everyday practices and forms of distinction that sustain social orders. It builds its arguments, primarily, on the back of 85 interviews conducted with former and serving Indian diplomats, ministers, and academics, in New Delhi and Bangalore, as well as on archival research at the Nehru Memorial Library and the National Archives of India, New Delhi, between February and June 2019. In the spirit of Bourdieu’s “reflexive sociology” (the philosophy and methods of which Chapter 1 discusses), this thesis considers interviews not as pieces of forensic evidence, sanitized through attempts at analytical de-personification, but as what we might think of as “autoethnographies”: ‘commentaries and analysis by informants on their own sociocultural milieu’,⁹ whose inbuilt biases and partial perspectives are not a problem, but a source of considerable insight.

What makes the case of the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus so interesting is precisely the futility of trying to pin down some ontological “essence” of the international societies it feels itself compelled by, just as there is no national “essence” that underpins the roles and performances of Indian diplomats. Indian diplomacy is born out of deep hybridity, and the status of Indian diplomats has always been an ambivalent one. Grown out of the remnants of empire, the Foreign Service has been marked by its postcoloniality and marginalization in world affairs, while at the same time assuming the mantle of leader of the Third World.¹⁰ Compounding this complexity, its diplomats are now having to contend with India being talked of as a rising power. At home, the nation has long been held together by a secular, socialist creed that honours India’s vast internal diversity,

⁷ David Blaney and Naeem Inayatullah, ‘International Relations from Below’, in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 163–74.

⁸ The thesis uses the vocabulary of “the West” in full recognition of its many epistemological inadequacies, political implications, and theoretical as well as empirical blind spots – mostly, perhaps, because it is a term repeatedly used by Indian diplomats themselves. It is nonetheless important to remain alive to the ways in which discourses of “the West” have built themselves up in naturalized opposition to an often undifferentiated “rest” or “Other”. In fact, it is precisely these processes of naturalization that this thesis itself examines. For a critical reading of “the West” as an analytical category, see e.g. Stuart Hall, ‘The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power (1996)’, in *Race and Racialization: Essential Readings*, ed. Tania Das Gupta et al., 2nd edition (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2018), 85–93.

⁹ Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Locating Bourdieu* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 130.

¹⁰ I use the (rightly) contested term “Third World” partly because the numerology brings it into cultural contrast with the “First World” that defined European international society, partly because, as originally coined by the French anthropologist Alfred Sauvy, it bore reference to the “third estate” of the disenfranchised and oppressed, and partly because it functions as a kind of metonym for the various forms of solidarity forged by Indian diplomats across the postcolonial world, through the Non-Aligned Movement, and throughout what would later, in a more technocratic register, come to be called the “Global South”. The chapters also discuss the empirical and ideational limits of the “Third World” for the Indian Foreign Service itself. For terminological evaluations, see e.g. Leslie Wolf-Phillips, ‘Why “Third World”? Origin, Definition and Usage’, *Third World Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1987): 1311–27.

although this management has historically been a task performed by a remarkably homogenous elite. All this paradoxical management is, in turn, now jeopardised by the ascendancy of majoritarian Hindu nationalism. Hybridity and tensions mark the Indian diplomatic habitus throughout. This is most obviously the case, perhaps, in Chapter 6, which explores how the original management of the cleft habitus is fraying, as both the traditionally European conventions of diplomacy and the postcolonial challenge to them are met with the twin challenge of a “post-Western” world after the end of the Cold War, and the consolidation of ethnocentrism after the election of the Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014.

These processes of fraying also open up wider debates about diversity and difference in international society in the 21st century. Ultimately, questions of belonging also force us to consider what and whom we are willing to sacrifice or marginalize in order to ensure that we ourselves belong. There are various ways in which actors might self-sensor their supposed difference in order to be seen as equal members of international society – or police those around them in order to have the collective as a whole be more acceptable, more knowable, more recognizably “cosmopolitan” and comfortably similar in the gaze of others. Having considered these impulses in various spheres of Indian diplomatic life, the thesis concludes that understanding the much-debated challenge to our so-called liberal international order requires a critical reading of the ways in which its supposed cosmopolitanism has reproduced many of the same social hierarchies it claims to reject. In the everyday practices and doxic ideals of the Indian Foreign Service, a commitment to actually existing cosmopolitanism has often been understood to require a rejection of diversity and difference.

Whose international society?

Despite the ubiquitous allusions to international society, this is not an “English School” thesis per se, in the way that it would feel itself bound by the theoretical canon or internal debates of the School. Its interests and vocabulary are more immediately congruent with the sociological works of Pierre Bourdieu.¹¹ And yet, the debates that a Bourdieusian sensibility kindles touch upon themes that also emerge out of English School thinking. It is useful, therefore, to situate some of the more minute Bourdieusian analysis of the coming chapters in a bigger frame of international society.

For all the language of universality, international society, as it came to be understood in the 19th century, was more accurately understood as a ‘European family of civilized nations’.¹² The classical field of diplomacy, shaped by traditions and precedents born in Renaissance Europe, was founded on an ‘aristocratic etiquette for world ordering’.¹³ Indeed, early European diplomatic elites were bound together by a certain cultural cohesion nurtured by the homogenous backgrounds of the ‘aristocratic international’.¹⁴ The roots of international society were aristocratic, if not exactly international.¹⁵ In fact, the aristocratic air of classical diplomacy even survived the gradual

¹¹ This also means that when the thesis employs terminology like “pluralism” and “solidarity”, it is not drawing on the very specific theoretical divide between “pluralist” and “solidarist” English School theorists.

¹² Andrew Hurrell, *On Global Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 41.

¹³ William A. Callahan, ‘Nationalising International Theory: Race, Class and the English School’, *Global Society* 18, no. 4 (October 2004): 305.

¹⁴ Christer Jönsson and Martin Hall, *Essence of Diplomacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 131.

¹⁵ A note on the Eurocentrism of such narrations is, however, in order. For while even Indian diplomatic memory seems to trace the origins of modern diplomacy to Europe, such aristocratic conventions could also have found indigenous roots. Kautilya’s seminal work on Indian statecraft, the Arthashastra, already decreed in about the 2nd

replacement of aristocrats with career professionals, since culturally the latter became ‘aristocratic by absorption’.¹⁶

The imagery of this (less than) international society was underwritten by a “standard of civilization” that saw only European powers as meeting the cultural and political requirements of belonging to a society of sovereign states.¹⁷ Without ever daring to discuss the processes of colonization in open terms, this English School narrative paralleled Norbert Elias’ study of how the evolution of aristocratic manners in the 18th and 19th centuries divided European societies into civilized and barbarian constituencies, and how this class divide was then transported outwards, to divide the world between civilized European insiders and non-European barbarian Others.¹⁸

Therefore, the exercise of world ordering reflected particular imaginations of class, but the “standards of civilization” that emerged from this imagery also differentiated the supposedly superior European club of “international” society from the colonies and other subordinate entities outside it. In the European imagination, “civilization” never appeared in the plural, standing instead in singular opposition to the alleged savagery outside.¹⁹ The “expansion” of international society, then, was an “expansion” of what Watson once called a ‘shared aristocratic outlook’ of European elites.²⁰ This standard legitimated the notion that the barbarian, backward societies outside Europe were, rightfully, colonies governed by Europe, having not satisfied its conditions for admission into the European club. The question of membership, therefore, immediately arises: who is seen as part of international society, who as a barbarian outside its civilizational gates?

Not unlike the civilizational thinking of the 19th century, classical English School writing, emanating from an inescapably European angle in the wake of decolonization, assumed that the existence of an international society was predicated on shared values. As Martin Wight argued, ‘a states-system presupposes a common culture’.²¹ This common culture could be predicated on vast value systems – Christianity, Europe, Western civilization – or it could be understood to rely on a shared transnational culture nurtured by a specialized class of diplomatic elites.²² The latter brings into focus why diplomacy matters: its shared practices and language make it possible for members of international society to communicate within a more or less coherent institutional and cultural framework, which also serves a symbolic purpose in testifying to the very existence of a common international society.²³

The classic English School understanding was that decolonization marked the end of the standard of civilization and the new possibility of cultural chaos. ‘With the right of independence and sovereign equality becoming almost unconditional’, as Buzan has already been cited as arguing, ‘questions of membership in, and conditions of entry to, international society largely disappeared’.²⁴ The scholarly focus moved toward anticipating and analysing the possible

century BCE that envoys should be ‘born of high family’. Kautilya, *The Arthashastra* (New Delhi: Penguin Classics India, 2000), 98.

¹⁶ Robert J. Moore, *Third World Diplomats in Dialogue with the First World: The New Diplomacy* (London: Macmillan, 1985), 16; In fact, European diplomats would even frequently be bequeathed titles of nobility upon reaching a certain bureaucratic rank. See Iver B. Neumann, ‘The Body of the Diplomat’, *European Journal of International Relations* 14, no. 4 (2008): 678.

¹⁷ Buzan, ‘The “Standard of Civilization”’.

¹⁸ Callahan, ‘Nationalising International Theory’, 316; Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process (Vol. 1: The History of Manners)* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).

¹⁹ Callahan, ‘Nationalising International Theory’, 315.

²⁰ Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1992), 250.

²¹ Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977), 46.

²² Hurrell, *On Global Order*, 40.

²³ Hurrell, 37.

²⁴ Buzan, ‘The “Standard of Civilization”’, 585.

consequences of the large systemic changes brought about by decolonization, the tripling of states recognised as members of international society, and the challenge to the cohesion of international society and the diplomatic culture underpinning it. This, Buzan argues further, ‘moved Wight’s question about the relationship between cultural cohesion and international society to centre stage’.²⁵ It was with some alarm that English School theorists observed how ‘Third World struggles’ seemed to be replacing the standard of civilization with an ‘idea of a plurality of civilizations that face one another as equals’.²⁶ A club whose defining cultural features were premised on the exclusion of large parts of the world would surely crack under the weight of their inclusion, Bull feared.²⁷ At the core of this deeply problematic and racially charged debate was the question: ‘when one process (formal imperialism) ends, what happens to the other (International Society)?’²⁸

In some very apparent ways, Bull’s anticipation of a postcolonial “revolt against the West” came to be. It became one of the dominant imageries of international society for Indian diplomats, too, to understand the new order as fundamentally anti-imperial, post-Western, and emphatically Third Worldist. This new international society had to confront the legacy of centuries of colonial subjugation – much in the same way that English School theorists themselves had to contend with how their evasive, euphemistic language around an “expansion of international society” had neutralized colonization as some sort of benign project of assimilation. International society had been produced precisely through an uneven encounter with non-European “others”, not by “expanding” like a world-historical bulldozer into a cultural vacuum.²⁹ The new order, therefore, needed to contend with struggles for racial equality, cultural liberation, economic justice, and recognition of the diversity that now defined the enlarged society of states.³⁰ It was to be an international society premised on the democratisation of global governance, reflective of Third World solidarity, constructed against the image of everything that had come before. This suggested a cultural restructuring: a brave new international society that had outgrown the old, born out of decolonization and its radical potential. In the post-Cold War period, this conception would be challenged by the rise of emerging powers, India among them, and a broader sense of a shift to a post-Western world – as well as, since 2014, the rise to national power of a Hindu nationalist government whose conceptions of international society once again pose new ideals for the diplomatic habitus.

And yet, what is striking is not the anticipated triumph of the new, but the unanticipated persistence of the old. The expectation of a large shift significantly underestimated the stickiness of internalized international social orders, and the cultural grammar that expresses them. Decolonization was supposed to transform the basic tenets of international society, but social orders are slow to adjust, and even harder, it seems, to unlearn. Thus, while there is a strand of Indian diplomatic thought and behaviour that suggests Indian diplomats came to see international society as a postcolonial field that ought by its own logic recognize Indian difference, a pungent counterpoint lingered: an image of international society not unlike the image that Indian bureaucrats under the British Raj had imbibed.

²⁵ Buzan, 585.

²⁶ Linklater, ‘Process Sociology’, 49.

²⁷ Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 31–32.

²⁸ Callahan, ‘Nationalising International Theory’, 310.

²⁹ Barry Buzan and Richard Little, ‘The Historical Expansion of International Society’, *Guide to the English School in International Studies*, 2014, 59–74; Callahan, ‘Nationalising International Theory’; Gerrit W Gong, *The Standard of "Civilization" in International Society* (Clarendon Press Oxford, 1984); Hurrell, *On Global Order*; Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³⁰ Hurrell, 47.

This is where a reflexive sociological approach diverges from the English School. The pluralists among the English School actually accepted diversity as a foundational element of the new international society, allowing differences in cultural, national, moral, and religious convictions to be seen not as barbarian deviation or unenlightened irrationality but as features of an inclusive international society.³¹ However, it seems a point to be proven rather than assumed that shared institutions and understandings of diplomacy in this pluralistic international society have, in fact, enabled a managed expression of difference. For pluralism is not only about official governing principles like self-government, or normative principles such as liberalism. The lived reproductions of international society are performed by diplomats, who embody and reveal its everyday hypocrisies and disciplining effects. A close study of such diplomats shows how it is precisely the cultural grammar of the supposedly pluralistic international society that regulates, censors, and shapes the self-expression of Indian diplomats and the kind of Indian difference they feel capable of representing. For English School pluralists, a central accomplishment of the new, formally decolonial international society was that a certain “civility” guided diplomatic relations even between former colonizers and those they had colonized.³² This civility, however, has only been made possible by postcolonial diplomats sustaining aspects of the old international society, along with its colonial codes of “civility”.

A Bourdieusian focus also comes at the question of a standard of civilization in a somewhat different way. Seeking to ground a new generation of English School theories in a more meaningful engagement with colonial legacies, critical English School theorists have studied new avatars of the old “standards of civilization”, finding them in ideological inventions like the international human rights regime or the Bretton Woods idioms of “good governance”, which now sustain a new civilized–barbarian divide.³³ What the case of Indian diplomats makes apparent is that the most resilient re-enactment of a standard of civilization in postcolonial international society might not have to do with explicit policy regimes or even happen by Western fiat. Instead, the standard of civilization, in an evolved, perhaps attenuated form, is also a question of embodied habitus and practices in the diplomatic everyday – perpetuated by Indian diplomats in their relations amongst each other.

Hierarchical societies with Bourdieu

What did the expectation of a radical cultural shift into a postcolonial international society miss, and why? Reading international society through its hierarchies and manners – instead of its high principles or explicit institutions – allows us to consider the way in which its everyday exclusions and cultural conventions have shaped Indian diplomacy in ways that might escape a more historical or political analysis. In interviews, diplomats repeatedly emphasized the importance of ‘having a kind of manner’ or ‘quality’, an unspecified air that surrounded the best diplomats but could not be captured in a laundry list of characteristics³⁴ – in other words, a certain kind of habitus. After Independence in 1947, what confronted Indian diplomats was a tortured duality of two imageries of international society – one born out of colonial hierarchies and the other out of postcolonial

³¹ Hurrell, 47.

³² Robert H. Jackson, *The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States* (Oxford: University Press, 2000).

³³ Buzan, “The “Standard of Civilization””; Jack Donnelly, ‘Human Rights: A New Standard of Civilization?’, *International Affairs* 74, no. 1 (1998): 1–23; David P Fidler, ‘The Return of the Standard of Civilization’, *Chicago Journal of International Law* 2, no. 1 (2001): 137–57; Gerrit W Gong, *The ‘Standard of Civilization’ in International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

³⁴ Interview 9, March 2019; Interview 39, April 2019.

reordering. Therefore, what emerged was a very particular kind of habitus: a cleft habitus, perched between old, elitist “worldliness” and postcolonial “authenticity”.

The notion of a cleft habitus is a Bourdieusian invention. Although he originally used it in reference to class relations in France, a similar duality was present in his work on colonialism. Writing about elites in colonized societies, Bourdieu spoke of a “cultural sabir”: ‘cast between two worlds’ but effectively ‘rejected by both’, leading ‘a sort of double inner life’ that encouraged ‘either an attitude of uneasy overidentification or one of rebellious negativism’.³⁵

Here, it matters that the Indian Foreign Service was founded not only by the nationalist Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (himself a product of Harrow and Cambridge), but also by former Indian officials of the British Raj’s Indian Civil Service (ICS).³⁶ Neither diplomatic histories about a new Foreign Service founded in 1946 nor political theories on Indian nationalist thought capture just how torn such Indians, however nationalistic, were about this brand-new world. It was, after all, telling them that all the ideals, manners, and behaviours they had painstakingly adopted under colonial rule – often at some cost to their sense of pride and belonging as Indians – might now be illegitimate. Their political support for a postcolonial India coexisted with an embodied, habitual reverence for many of the manners, skills, and values of the Raj. For these Indians, seemingly small acts like learning to eat with a fork were performative requests for recognition – a ritual the British Raj introduced for ICS training, perpetuated in the training of IFS officers to this day. This torn duality, in Bourdieusian language, was expressed in their cleft habitus.

And yet, it is right at the start that we must also depart from some specifics of Bourdieu’s conceptualization. This reappropriation also signals a particular relationship to Bourdieu: his work is used not so much to determine the analysis as much as to give conceptual inspiration to open up new avenues to explore the terrain of Indian diplomacy. The analysis plays off of Bourdieu, thinking both with and beyond him – sometimes even against him. For Bourdieu, a cleft habitus was always the painful product of a transition incomplete: it spoke of an individual yet to make an adjustment into a new order. The coming chapters take the cleft to represent a tension, too, but acknowledge more hybridity, instabilities, and complexity in how notions of the Self are sustained than Bourdieu, ever the structuralist, might have. And although the chapters often speak in the language of a duality, this is not the duality of what Homi Bhabha called ‘colonial nonsense’, ordering the world into chaos/civility, emotion/reason, and so forth.³⁷ Rather, both imageries of international society come with their own rationalities, emotions, and codes of conduct.

For what happened in India was not a “solution” of this cleft habitus at Independence, or a completed transition from one international society to another, but rather the cleft’s institutionalization into postcolonial structures and processes. The tension between the two imageries of international society has characterized Indian diplomatic recruitment, training, and culture for much of India’s postcolonial history. As it has evolved, the cleft habitus has settled itself from a deeply personal dilemma of Indian colonial officers into an intangible ideal for postcolonial diplomats: an Indian diplomat capable of meeting classical expectations of an eloquent, Oxbridge-educated, well-read gentleman while actually representing and embodying Third World difference and Indian diversity.

Even if Bourdieu may not have considered the possibility of a cleft habitus remaining unsolved, or even becoming institutionalized as an ideal, his theoretical premises still help us make sense of

³⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Algerians* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 144.

³⁶ Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India’s Foreign Policy: Determinants, Institutions, Processes, and Personalities* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1970), 78.

³⁷ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994) (Routledge, 2004), 177.

the stickiness of aspects of European international society in particular. This stickiness is the product of both subconscious embodiment and social hierarchy. Firstly, the diplomatic cleft habitus can sustain its own complexity partly because it is rarely spelled out rationally. Bourdieu was right to locate the persistence of ostensibly old structures of domination in the face of political change in the habitus, which was the product of long, structurally embedded and embodied processes of socialization, and as such was often beyond the reach of the ‘weapon of consciousness’.³⁸ Yet, secondly, what a Bourdieusian emphasis on social hierarchies gives us is also an appreciation of a space like the Indian Foreign Service as a scene of social struggle. Those who match certain elite markers associated with the Indian upper-classes, higher castes, and Anglophile liberal arts graduates can leverage their compatibility with classical aspects of the diplomatic habitus against those who do not. The strange continued existence of the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus, then, is a product both of often subconsciously carried colonial legacies and of the social investment of dominant groups in leveraging their own compatibility with “worldly” elite markers of distinction.

This kind of interpretive shift is what happens when we sociologize the study of international society. A sociological examination of the Indian Foreign Service makes it possible to understand why and how certain imageries and conventions of international society endure, and how they are reproduced not only by dominant states but by dominant diplomats of non-dominant nations. Bourdieu’s theoretical universe gives us a way of looking beyond, underneath, and right through concepts we have grown accustomed to analyzing in a historical or political mode. A study of the manners, social codes, networks, and practices of the Indian Foreign Service can give us something diplomatic history, for example, cannot. It lets us interrogate social logics that never make it into the annals of diplomatic history, since such histories tend to reproduce dominant narratives that artificially flatten or hide the contestations and marginalizations that happen alongside. It also asks questions that diplomatic historians may not find worthwhile. Indeed, as Chapter 1 discusses, much can be learned by studying a field’s doxa – that which is so commonsensical as to become naturalized as an obvious way of being. Much of the Service’s caste relations, and their perceived importance for India’s place in international society, function this way, for example. The Bourdieusian emphasis on habitus also considers the embodied nature of diplomatic cultures, finding in quotidian gestures a wealth of material that would never enter the analytical vision of a diplomatic historian sketching the broad contours of world-historical developments. And yet it is precisely in studying the self-narrated dispositions, beliefs and tastes of diplomats, and the social hierarchies into which they order themselves, that so much is revealed about international society, too.

A sociological approach also allows us to take concepts of political theory and ask how they are actually understood, contested, and reproduced in the everyday of diplomatic life – with the result that many of the categories we have engaged as analytical priors or ethical axioms look very different from what our theories may have led us to assume. In a Bourdieusian treatment of the world, the very concepts through which we understand social orders are indelibly embedded in a set of social hierarchies that give them meaning. An example is the notion of cosmopolitanism – an ethic of international equality and tolerance which mainstream Western political theory has intuitively ‘understood to have a positive valence and progressive implications.’³⁹ Yet in the world of Indian diplomats, cosmopolitanism is both an international ideal with deeply problematic Westerncentric features (Chapter 5) and, perhaps more prominently, a domestic marker of social distinction and class status for dominant diplomats inside the Foreign Service (Chapter 3). These

³⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 39.

³⁹ Thomas Bender, ‘The Cosmopolitan Experience and Its Uses’, in *Cosmopolitanisms*, ed. Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta (New York: University Press, 2017), 116.

different registers of reading the concept only make sense when interrogated against the backdrop of the various social hierarchies – both international and Indian – that structure its use.

As a consequence, what a Bourdieusian lens produces is not a “true” depiction of international society and its “essence”, were we so bold as to make such grand ontological statements. At the same time, it was remarkable during interviews (in which no Bourdieusian terminology was explicitly used in questions) just how closely the Service’s dominant groups, in particular, hued their conceptions of international society to an almost caricatured Bourdieusian world of etiquette, elites, and status signalling. Insofar as these conceptions reflected a particular memory of the colonial experience, and so also a particular imagining of the West, or Europe, one is reminded of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s meditation on the mental creation of “Europe”, which has always been a joint exercise involving Indian elites themselves:

I was aware that there were and still are many Europes, real, historical, and fantasized. Perhaps the boundaries between them are porous. My concern, however, was the Europe that has historically haunted debates on modernity in India. This Europe was made in the image of a colonizing power and [...] the making of such a Europe was not an act of Europeans alone. This Europe was, in the sense in which Lévi-Strauss once used the word, a founding “myth” for emancipatory thought and movements in India.⁴⁰

And if the notion of Europe is collectively imagined, so are notions of India. The case of Indian diplomacy, therefore, also points toward the explanatory limits of “national culture” and the empirical blind spots of any “national habitus” predicated on it. Indian diplomacy is not a natural derivative of Indian national culture at large, and any attempt at framing the conversation in these terms risks reproducing nationalistic, even nativist, tropes.⁴¹ During interviews, the dominant group of liberal upper-caste diplomats repeatedly distinguished the India they hoped to embody from Indian society as they actually saw it, elevated above its rough edges, supposedly more regressive social attitudes, and prevalent forms of oppression. This tension between diplomatic elites and the people is particularly fraught, since it has historically been a crucial performative counterbalance for Indian diplomats to stand not on the side of international elites but the Indian masses and, even more ambitiously, the poor and downtrodden of the entire Third World. A “national habitus” can never be given or fixed, only approximated through purposeful socialization: as Chapter 4 discusses, one prevalent critique has been that the upper echelons of the Foreign Service have, if anything, been insufficiently “Indian”, and therefore in need of being taught proper Indianness during diplomatic training.

Indeed, the perils of the “national type” in IR lie not only in promoting cultural stereotypes, but in uncritically allowing certain actors to speak for the nation. In Pouliot’s analysis of NATO-Russian diplomacy, the “Russian habitus” is something which captures how ‘diplomats and state representatives come to embody the state in practice’, but something is lost in concluding, as he does, that ‘there typically exists a body of dispositions that similarly characterizes members due to their shared history’.⁴² Of course, diplomats of a country are bound together by some common institutions, histories, and experiences. Expecting them to ‘embody the state in practice’, however, is an epistemic move which greatly simplifies the work of a sociologist for whom the habitus was deeply social and always hierarchically embedded. It assumes a straightforwardly knowable and unitary diplomatic essence, uncontested and presumably equally shaped and performed by all members of the Russian diplomatic corps. Yet our analysis of a so-called national habitus will

⁴⁰ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), xiv.

⁴¹ N. C. Behera, ‘Re-Imagining IR in India’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 7, no. 3 (21 May 2007): 359.

⁴² Vincent Pouliot, *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russian Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 87–88.

always depend on who within a culture is asked and considered, and how their social positioning conditions their interpretation.⁴³ National characteristics are difficult to disentangle from domestic lines that traverse, say, class, gender, or education.

For how a culture is conceived and presented is, as Bourdieu recognized, a question of who within has social power and who is seen as embodying the correct habitus.⁴⁴ In the case of Indian Foreign Service officers, one has traditionally dealt with a ‘relatively small group of political and bureaucratic elites living in close physical, social, and institutional proximity to one another’.⁴⁵ Instead of a “national type”, we encounter an “IFS type”: ‘elite, English-speaking, Anglicised and urbane’.⁴⁶ It is not only that this “type” fails to meaningfully represent some “national habitus”. It also does not speak for all of the Indian Foreign Service – it merely culturally dominates it. In fact, insofar as habitus is a mechanism of exclusion, the way this elite section of the Service carries itself happens precisely in opposition to some of the “lesser” diplomats of the Service. Our understanding of the diplomatic habitus, then, depends crucially on who within the diplomatic corps is given a voice.

Such questions of voice and hierarchy make it necessary to expand the conventional sociological lexicon of class and gender to fit the social context of India in particular. It is here that the thesis introduces and develops caste as a relevant category of social analysis for the study of Indian diplomats. An omnipresent axiom in Indian anthropology and sociology, caste presents itself as the polar opposite in Indian IR: a loud absence and telling omission. The word itself rarely appears in mainstream works, while the thorough *Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy* safely relegates caste to a chapter on colonial-era military organisation.⁴⁷ Even in critical works of IR dedicated to dismantling its Eurocentric and statist biases, with words like race, class, and gender emblazoned in the titles, caste remains neglected.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, more mainstream works by Western scholars that do mention caste tend to do so in introductory sections that lay out India’s peculiar idiosyncrasies, and often essentialize caste, along with exotic notions like karma, as a semi-mythical, ancient drag on rational modernity.⁴⁹ Yet caste is not a religious doctrine to be banished by rational thought or a secular creed – if this were so, it would arguably have disappeared by now. Rather, caste is a social concept and category of identity with enormous implications for Indian cultural, social, economic, and political relations. Understanding caste in the context of the Indian Foreign Service matters because caste-based hierarchies, perceptions, notions of diplomatic representation, and even recruitment practices have fundamentally shaped the sociology of the Service.

⁴³ Mallavarapu makes this point in reference to the sociological cleavages in the debate about India’s rise: Siddharth Mallavarapu, ‘Globalization and the Cultural Grammar of “Great Power” Aspiration’, *International Studies* 44, no. 2 (2007): 98.

⁴⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁴⁵ Vipin Narang and Paul Staniland, ‘Institutions and Worldviews in Indian Foreign Security Policy’, *India Review* 11, no. 2 (April 2012): 80.

⁴⁶ Kate Sullivan, ‘Exceptionalism in Indian Diplomacy: The Origins of India’s Moral Leadership Aspirations’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 37, no. 4 (2014): 646.

⁴⁷ David M. Malone, C. Raja Mohan, and Srinath Raghavan, *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁴⁸ See e.g. Geeta Chowdhry and Sheila Nair, *Power, Postcolonialism and International Relations: Reading Race, Gender and Class* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁴⁹ Stephen P. Cohen, *India: Emerging Power* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 120–23; Andrew Latham, ‘Constructing National Security: Culture and Identity in Indian Arms Control and Disarmament Practice’, *Contemporary Security Policy* 19, no. 1 (1998): 147; George Tanham, ‘Indian Strategic Culture’, *The Washington Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1992): 130–31.

Some analytical boundary-making

While it may sound recklessly expansive in its analytical ambitions, this thesis does have its deliberate limits, as well as involuntary limitations – some of them, no doubt, engendered by the breadth of things it seeks to cover. As far as theory and method are concerned, Chapter 1 will offer a critical evaluation of sources and silences, and the empirical and epistemological limits of the thesis. What follows here is an exercise in analytical justifications about the routes not taken and the subjects not included or only partially imbibed.

Although one is tempted to blame word limits for just how much historical and sociological context can reasonably be provided to embed the primary material at every turn, there are also inevitable blind spots to an aspiring IR scholar “doing sociology” in a complex space like India. The thesis is neither the work of a trained sociologist nor that of a South Asianist, and as such runs the perennial risk of coming across to readers from these traditions as insufficiently grounded in the various literatures, conventions, and structures that govern those fields. The study of caste, by way of example, is itself an immensely multifarious endeavour, and one which this thesis therefore seeks to make only very qualified, theme-specific claims on. Similarly, bringing in the weight of colonial historiography or Indian social relations while trying to make broader claims about Indian diplomacy, or indeed diplomacy and international relations at large, often permits only passing reference to topics that elsewhere have merited entire theses and research paradigms of their own.

The analytical focus is set by the Bourdieusian emphasis on habitus, always grounded in social hierarchies. This is therefore no postcolonial Indian rendition of the British “official mind” – ‘largely free from undue external influence and guided by its own memories, traditions and values’⁵⁰ – that ran the imperial operation from Whitehall.⁵¹ In fact, the analysis ahead does the very opposite of drawing the diplomatic elite as an entity with hermetically sealed technocratic traditions – it recognizes Indian diplomats as actors with complex positions in various hierarchies of class, caste, gender, and education that cut across Indian and international society alike. This is also why they are not treated as an “epistemic community” tied together by shared expert knowledge,⁵² or a “community of practice” developing a shared repertoire of explicit competences.⁵³

The Bourdieusian grounding in intersecting hierarchies and embedded performances also distinguishes this work from other sociologically-minded studies of Indian diplomacy, notably Kate Sullivan de Estrada’s careful analysis of the development of great-power-thinking among Indian foreign-policy elites,⁵⁴ Méliissa Levaillant’s historical-institutionalist examination of the Foreign Service’s organizational practices and management styles,⁵⁵ or Deepak Datta-Ray’s poststructuralist analysis which, rather puzzlingly, concludes that Indian diplomats ‘make for the

⁵⁰ J. Darwin, ‘Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion’, *English Historical Review* 112, no. 447 (1997): 625.

⁵¹ Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London ; New York: Macmillan : St Martin’s Press, 1961).

⁵² Emanuel Adler and Peter M Haas, ‘Conclusion: Epistemic Communities, World Order, and the Creation of a Reflective Research Program’, *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992): 367–90.

⁵³ Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁵⁴ Kate Sullivan de Estrada, *The Evolution of India’s Great Power Identity - Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy* (The Australian National University, 2011); Kate Sullivan de Estrada, *Rising Power, Hidden Transcripts: India’s Agency as a Rising Power (Unpublished Manuscript)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, n.d.).

⁵⁵ Méliissa Levaillant, ‘The Contribution of Neo-Institutionalism to the Analysis of India’s Diplomacy in the Making’, in *Theorizing Indian Foreign Policy*, ed. Mischa Hansel, Raphaëlle Khan, and Méliissa Levaillant (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2017), 160–81.

antithesis of modernity'.⁵⁶ There has also been commentary on Indian diplomatic style, characterized in most accounts by intense status consciousness, intellectualized moralism, and a tendency to argue from self-evident entitlement or rights rather than acquired capabilities.⁵⁷ Out of these various analytical tendencies, the sociological emphasis of Sullivan de Estrada probably comes closest to the project at hand, although her decision not to query the internal sociological divides of the Service makes for a very different analytical focus.

Since the lived experiences of Indian diplomats are on display, it is worth emphasizing that this thesis queries social processes of inclusion and exclusion for the specific goal of understanding the construction, reproduction, and contestation of the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus. Forms of hierarchization in a space like the Indian Foreign Service manifest themselves in various ways, many of which bear on the conduct of diplomacy but some of it which are primarily felt as personal indignities. The chapters consider a number of ways in which hierarchies of, for example, caste, class, and gender produce the Indian diplomatic habitus, often allowing a cascade of anecdotes to point toward larger patterns. However, this is not an exhaustive Human Resources report about all the possible ways in which sexism, casteism, classism, or other forms of discrimination play themselves out in the lives of officers (although there would arguably have been enough interview material from many generous, brave diplomats for such an account, too).

This is also, specifically, an analysis of the career diplomats of the IFS, not of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). While the MEA is the ministerial institution mandated to manage India's foreign policy, the IFS is the body of career diplomats whose officers mostly run the MEA.⁵⁸ The Foreign Secretary who runs the IFS is an administrative head, while the Foreign Minister in charge of the MEA is a political one (although both positions are, in fact, politically appointed). The Foreign Secretary is always a career diplomat and the IFS itself only encompasses individuals who enter through a centralized examination, undergo joint training, and rise through the ranks in accordance with their examination performance, seniority, and perceived talent. These socializing practices make it more meaningful to study IFS officers specifically, instead of stretching the analysis to involve lateral hires, seconded officers from other civil services, and consultants, all of whom are also found at the MEA. So strong is the sense of superiority and insularity, in fact, that a more junior IFS officer will usually chair a meeting if a non-IFS officer is formally their senior, one recently retired officer recalled.⁵⁹

The focus on career diplomats of the IFS – also known as IFS(A) – similarly excludes officers of the IFS(B), a clerical branch whose members work as stenographers and assistants, and are also not shaped by the elite recruitment, training, working practices, and camaraderie of the diplomatic rank IFS(A). Their outsider status and lack of elite vetting and training have created what one millennial IFS(A) officer called 'another kind of caste system', within which trained diplomats largely keep to themselves instead of socializing with IFS(B) officers.⁶⁰ This is a long-held divide, once captured by Foreign Secretary T.N. Kaul (1968–1972): 'The most glaring division between

⁵⁶ Deep K. Datta-Ray, *The Making of Indian Diplomacy: A Critique of Eurocentrism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 31.

⁵⁷ Manu Bhagavan, 'India and the United Nations, or Things Fall Apart', in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, ed. David M. Malone, C. Raja Mohan, and Srinath Raghavan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015), 605; Cohen, *India*, 23; David M. Malone, *Does the Elephant Dance? Contemporary Indian Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 271; Amrita Narlikar, 'Peculiar Chauvinism or Strategic Calculation? Explaining the Negotiating Strategy of a Rising India', *International Affairs* 82, no. 1 (2006): 66; Amrita Narlikar and Aruna Narlikar, *Bargaining with a Rising India: Lessons from the Mahabharata* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 71; Sullivan, 'Exceptionalism in Indian Diplomacy'.

⁵⁸ MEA, 'Indian Foreign Service: A Backgrounder', accessed 6 August 2020, <https://www.mea.gov.in/indian-foreign-service.htm>.

⁵⁹ Interview 55, May 2019.

⁶⁰ Interview 82, May 2019.

‘A’ and ‘B’ grades was even more prevalent in our Missions abroad where the two lived in two separate and water-tight compartments, as in the Indian Railways’.⁶¹ It has therefore been with open dismay that the elite IFS(A) corps has observed the trend, accelerating over the past decade as India struggles with its small officer corps, of IFS(B) officers attaining diplomatic rank, on occasion even making Ambassador.⁶²

In fact, a crucial component of the declinist narrative of old-school diplomats fearing the end of an age of enlightened diplomatic elites is precisely the fact that supposedly inferior, untrained, and less culturally suitable Indians from the Home Services and the IFS(B) are slowly making their way up the ranks at the MEA. Focusing on the core elite diplomatic cadres of IFS(A) makes it possible to trace shared organizational practises, philosophies and procedures, while also saying something about the exclusionary cultural processes of habitus construction itself.

Finally, having already established in which ways the analysis touches upon themes of the English School without itself representing a piece of English School writing, something similar might be said for the postcolonial research paradigm. For a meaningful analysis of colonial legacies and imageries, it is imperative to imbibe the postcolonial credo, articulated by Dipesh Chakrabarty, to ‘provincialize Europe’, that is: ‘to find out how and in what sense European ideas that were universal were also, at one and the same time, drawn from very particular intellectual and historical traditions that could not claim any universal validity’, and in so doing, ask about the continued ‘silent and everyday presence of European thought in Indian life and practices’.⁶³ If colonial structures matter and linger, we must interrogate which kind of political imaginations structure interpretations of Europe, who is allowed to imagine this Europe, and how these imageries meet the postcolonial revolt designed, often, as its antithesis.

Yet a traditionally postcolonial sensibility has a way of behaving toward hierarchies that would obscure much of what this thesis will explore.⁶⁴ Firstly, there is a sense in much of postcolonial literature that the only ethical or workable response to the hierarchies of colonial order is to revolt, reject, or unlearn *in toto*⁶⁵ – hence Partha Chatterjee’s question: ‘Can nationalist thought produce a discourse of order while daring to negate the very foundations of a system of knowledge that has conquered the world?’⁶⁶ Such an absolutist project reflects neither the realities nor the ambitions of how Indian diplomats have sought to navigate the space between colonial vestiges and postcolonial structures. Indian diplomats are, by profession, embedded in international orders directly implicated in colonial histories, but what is more, they have also often found it necessary, convenient, or even desirable to signal fluency in the mores of this old world. This, after all, is the very mechanism that sustains the diplomatic cleft habitus. Secondly, the postcolonial sensibility picks up on patterns of domination in a very particular place: in the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, the Western and the non-Western.⁶⁷ This is not always a productive instinct. There is a wealth of relevant hierarchies and cultural expressions that do not organize

⁶¹ ‘Ministry of External Affairs and the Foreign Service’, manuscript, T.N. Kaul, undated, page 6. Miscellaneous Articles by T. N. Kaul. Speeches/Writings by Him, S. No. 141. T. N. Kaul Individual Papers, NMML.

⁶² Telegraph India, ‘Steno Envoy Sparks “Caste War”’, 9 June 2012, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/steno-envoy-sparks-caste-war/cid/410209>.

⁶³ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, xiii.

⁶⁴ For a broader critical reading of how postcolonial theory analyses hierarchies and structures, see Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook, ‘After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34, no. 1 (1992): 141–67.

⁶⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘Legacies of Bandung: Decolonisation and the Politics of Culture’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 46 (2005): 4812–18.

⁶⁶ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books, 1986), 42.

⁶⁷ Important exceptions exist. For example, Spivak discusses the internal domination techniques of postcolonial elites in: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular’, *Postcolonial Studies* 8, no. 4 (2005): 475–86.

themselves into national or imperial wholes. As Sankaran Krishna notes, even if postcolonial work sometimes moves beyond the colonial dichotomy to questions of gender or class, hierarchies that usually escape the lived experience of Indian postcolonial scholars themselves are rarely discussed: 'Postcolonial studies, in its many variants, have remained perhaps excessively focused on the East–West encounter framed with a nationalist cartography, and inadequately sensitive to the encounter between, on the one hand, upper-caste elites, and, on the other, tribals and Dalits, within the Indian society itself.'⁶⁸ With its emphasis on the porosity of colonial binaries and its preoccupation with caste and other internal hierarchies, this will be a work which engages postcolonial readings but often moves around and past their core analytical concerns.

Outline

The coming chapters analyse the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus from their own angle: its analytical anatomy, genealogy, institutionalization and demographic implications, reproduction and pedagogies, outward projection, and, ultimately, its gradual fraying. In their own way, each chapter offers a piece of a puzzle to the same set of animating questions: how have Indian diplomats sought to reproduce, shape, or contest imageries of international society, and what has this meant for their performances of belonging? How has it been possible for a colonial-era “standard of civilization” to continue underpinning the Indian diplomatic habitus, even as the Indian Foreign Service has sought to nurture a postcolonial international society, founded precisely as the antithesis of everything that European international society represented? What emerges out of these inquiries is not only a deeper understanding of the oft-ridiculed and seemingly paradoxical behaviour of Indian diplomats, but also a commentary on the limits of actually existing cosmopolitanism, and the codes of belonging that often make cosmopolitanism not an emancipatory project but a programme of exclusions.

Chapter 1 sets out a Bourdieusian lexicon with which to understand how India's diplomatic cleft habitus is constructed and the conditions in which it is reproduced and contested. It considers which critiques of Bourdieu's work require particular attention for Bourdieu to open up important debates on Indian diplomacy instead of closing them off. It discusses what existing Bourdieusian IR has looked like, where Bourdieu fits in some of IR's standard debates, and in which way the Bourdieu that comes through in this thesis might differ from the Bourdieu who has framed other works of Bourdieusian IR. The chapter also considers how to develop caste into a Bourdieusian category of analysis. Finally, the chapter considers the twin question of methodology and positionality, outlining how the thesis will make sense of the primary material and how it will contextualize and interpret the hierarchies that all of this material itself is embedded in.

Chapter 2 traces the genealogy of the cleft habitus; that is, it considers the origin story of how a first rendition of the cleft was born out of an unequal colonial relationship which once shaped the experience of Indian officers of the Indian Civil Service (ICS). This involves examining the fraught relationship that these elite officers had both to their colonial employers and their colonized compatriots, as the officers navigated hierarchies of class and race under the British Raj. The chapter then considers the first steps in how the cleft evolved from a personally felt, transitory paradox in the lives of Indian ICS officers into an institutionalized cleft habitus for the postcolonial IFS. This, in turn, involves a discussion of the tensions that emerged in the very first years of

⁶⁸ Sankaran Krishna, 'Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Destitution: Law, Race, and Human Security', *Alternatives* 40, no. 2 (2015): 2.

Independence, as Indian diplomats grappled with colonial legacies and postcolonial commitments in constructing their Foreign Service.

Chapter 3 considers the ways in which patterns of recruitment for the IFS have played to the felt demands and ideals of the diplomatic habitus. After Independence, the clashing commitments of either side of the cleft habitus made themselves known in the debate on entry: the elite-internationalist constituency of ICS veterans argued for an exclusive Service that would recruit only among the socioeconomic and cultural elites of India, while the egalitarian commitments of postcolonial Nehruvian socialism necessitated the creation of an inclusive Service that would that keep the postcolonial promise of inclusion and empowerment. The chapter does a close, critical reading of the so-called “democratization” of the IFS, as the officer pool began to more accurately reflect the Indian polity from about the early 1980s onwards. The gradual opening of a tight-knit Service once dominated by a narrow elite of upper-caste, upper-class, male, urban, Anglophile, liberal arts graduates has been deeply contentious. It has also revealed the disciplining force of different imageries of international society, as debates about selection and exclusion repeatedly appeal to questions of who can “correctly” represent India and what a cosmopolitan diplomat looks like.

Chapter 4 concerns the making of the Indian diplomat: what kind of pedagogies produce the ideal officer? How are aspects of the cleft habitus learned during training? The pedagogies of the cleft habitus are structured around producing diplomats who are capable of holding their own both on the literary cocktail circuit and at a Non-Aligned conference. With the diversifying profile of diplomatic cadres, outlined in Chapter 3, the pedagogical emphasis, too, has shifted: a Service once concerned with constraining the overt Europeanized, elite character of its cadres is now worried that the more representative batches are, in fact, “too authentic” in their vernacular Indianness. Socialization is not solely a structured, top-down endeavour: the chapter also discusses ways in which self-ascribed outsiders, such as women and lower-caste recruits, have learned to mimic the more dominant officers of the Service.

Chapter 5 is about the outward corollaries of the diplomatic cleft habitus, as Indian diplomats have sought to perform their belonging both in a European international society and a postcolonial international society founded as its antithesis. Imageries of international society are analytically present in each chapter as structuring and legitimating forces, but in this chapter, the world outside becomes the primary focus. This is not a chapter on foreign policy, and also considers diplomacy with the specific intent of illuminating the outer contours of the cleft habitus that can be seen from outside India. The chapter sketches out some of the ways in which the need to perform and embody the correct diplomatic habitus has reflected itself in the way in which Indian diplomats show up abroad, how they make arguments at international negotiation tables, and the global struggles they have waged and evaded. It considers the ambivalent elite status of Indian diplomats abroad, and how this ambivalence underpins how they think of cosmopolitanism as an international imperative. The chapter also interrogates Indian diplomacy around questions of race and caste, suggesting that there are sociologically grounded limits to India’s diplomatic solidarity with the global subaltern.

Chapter 6 finds the cleft habitus fraying. Always an unstable compromise, the management of the cleft habitus is becoming increasingly untenable under pressures from both outside and inside. The first part of the chapter considers the fraying occasioned by the dawn of a “post-Western” world, in which India is being talked of not as an outside challenger or champion of the Third World, but as a “rising power” in its own right. This ongoing transformation in the global power constellation makes the imagery of European international society look ever more out of place, but has, so the chapter argues, done less to fracture the imagery of postcolonial international society than realist IR theorists have hoped to convince the world it has. The second part discusses

the challenge to the cleft habitus posed by the election of the Hindu nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014. The Hindutva vision rejects both the foreign-born cosmopolitanism of the Service's old elites and the postcolonial commitment to diversity at home and abroad. We are years, if not decades, away from being able to say with any kind of authority what the ethnonationalist turn does to the Indian diplomatic habitus – but it is possible to interrogate some of its first sketches, which have already begun being debated, internalized, and contested inside the Foreign Service.

The Conclusion suggests that reading Indian diplomats through a Bourdieusian lens allows us not only to understand the seeming paradoxes of Indian diplomacy, but also to open up a wider set of questions about diversity and difference in a 21st century international society. It considers the dangers both of a diplomatic habitus premised on isolationist “authenticity” and the notion that a diplomatic habitus ought to be drained of all idiosyncrasy or difference. It also asks whether some notion of the cosmopolitan ideal can – or ought to – be salvaged, and how it might be reimagined for an international society that genuinely reflects difference.

1. THEORIZING HIERARCHIES AND STUDYING SILENCES

He tried to keep on the right side of power, tried to be loyal to so many things that he himself couldn't tell which one of his selves was the authentic, if any.¹

An accidental Bourdieusian, the iconic Indian Ambassador K. M. Panikkar acknowledged in 1960 that '[i]n India, more than in most countries, national culture had been the monopoly of the higher classes'.² Indian diplomacy has reflected a similar monopoly, as upper-class, upper-caste Anglophone elites have shaped how India engages with the world. Culture and hierarchy are not separate analytical registers – instead, they must be studied together.

This is also the premise of Pierre Bourdieu's diagnosis, put most succinctly in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*.³ Against a runaway poststructuralism invested in the possibilities of deconstruction, Bourdieu believed that practices and ideals are tied to social position, while also being acts of social positioning themselves. Social orders and cultural conventions are maintained neither through constant physical coercion nor by ideological fiat; they are sustained through the subtle perpetuation of certain practices, the valorization of certain tastes and worldviews over others, and the quiet assimilation of society into structures that reflect the preferences and perceptions of dominant groups. In this way, dominant groups shape the very categories in which a society comes to speak of itself. This is not token authority over semantics: it is a 'worldmaking power', allowing some actors to set the 'legitimate vision of the social world and of its divisions'.⁴ In so doing, this power will 'reproduce and reinforce the power relations that constitute the structure of social space'.⁵

This chapter outlines what a Bourdieusian reading of the Indian Foreign Service can tell us about the hierarchies and practices that shape how Indian diplomats navigate international society. It prepares the ground for discussions on the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus: the embodied and ideational sense of self of Indian diplomats, suspended between an imagery of old-school European international society and an alternative, postcolonial vision of international society.

¹ Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2006), 148.

² K. M. Panikkar, *Common Sense about India* (London: Macmillan, New York, 1960), 162.

³ Bourdieu, *Distinction*.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, 'What Makes a Social Class? On the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 32, no. 1 (1987): 13.

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power', *Sociological Theory* 7, no. 1 (1989): 21.

Bourdieu's work is not "applied" in a didactic sense – Indian diplomats are not a Bourdieusian case study, nor do they need to be fitted one-to-one into his entire theoretical rubric. Rather, Bourdieusian vocabulary and core theoretical tenets offer a language in which to talk about socialization, belonging, hierarchies, and recognition in an embodied and socially embedded way.

The chapter begins by outlining what a Bourdieusian analytical sensibility to the world involves, which criticisms and reworkings of Bourdieu must be considered, and where, in relation to IR, his claims on rationality, social construction, culture, identities, and power sit. Next, the chapter elaborates on how the Bourdieusian lexicon can be used to understand Indian diplomats, and how to introduce caste into this analytical universe. Finally, a discussion on the methodological imperatives of "reflexive sociology" follows: which epistemic commitments underpin the analysis, what kind of knowledge is retrievable from different kinds of source material, and how are we to make sense of the power imbalances that influence not only Indian diplomats, but the academic work done on them?

1.1. The Bourdieusian sensibility

1.1.1. The lexicon

Instead of pure abstraction, for Bourdieu, 'theorization is the pleasure of understanding everyday practices'.⁶ Discourse analysts subsist on deconstructed text; constructivists work with vast value systems. Bourdieusians, by contrast, concern themselves with the everyday dispositions, practices, and principles that underpin social orders, subtly marginalizing some while rewarding others. It is these seemingly commonsensical moves that legitimate forms of differentiation, notably between 'the groups which produce the principles and the groups against which they are produced'.⁷ As such, even seemingly abstract definitions have social consequences, as the conversations about "merit" or "social graces" inside the Indian Foreign Service will show. Bourdieu grew an extensive conceptual vocabulary to capture how these social orders operate.

Habitus is the largely preconscious embodiment of dispositions that make up the individual. These dispositions – tastes, thoughts, bodily postures, and ways of being – are socially produced, being 'the result of the internalization of external structures'.⁸ Habitus 'is not something natural, inborn: being a product of history, that is of social experience and education, it may be changed by history, that is by new experiences, education or training (which implies that aspects of what remains unconscious in habitus be made at least partially conscious and explicit)'.⁹ Bourdieu once explained habitus as the sum of 'the mental structures through which [individuals] apprehend the social world'.¹⁰ But habitus – as 'the social made body' – also has a corporeal dimension, expressing

⁶ Didier Bigo, 'Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations: Ower of Practices, Practices of Power', *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 3 (September 2011): 232.

⁷ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 481.

⁸ Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 18.

⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, 'Habitus', in *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, ed. Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 29.

¹⁰ Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power', 18.

itself in the way the body is carried and presented.¹¹ It approximates what old-guard Indian diplomats repeatedly referred to as proper ways of “carrying oneself”.

A dominant habitus signals belonging in a social order’s elite. It serves an exclusionary purpose, denoting that which does and does not belong. It ‘marks, produces, and organizes a distinction between those whose tastes are regarded as “noble” because they have been organized and legitimated by the education system, and those whose tastes, lacking such markers of nobility, are accorded a more lowly status’.¹² Bourdieu denaturalized the idea of dispositions: what we think are personal preferences, worldviews or mere “matters of taste” are often inculcated through social position. It is telling that Bourdieu was conceptually indebted not only to Marcel Mauss’ bodily notions of habitus but to Norbert Elias¹³ psychological thinking on the “civilizing process”, which Elias saw as a historical evolution of the manners that distinguished a “civilized” person at a given moment in history¹⁴ – a colonial assumption which sometimes appears to underpin the thinking of Indian diplomats, too. Habitus marks the boundaries of legitimate culture and the “correct” aesthetics, opinions, and tastes. This does not mean that the exclusionary sorting of tastes is a conscious exercise – indeed, Bourdieu rejected interpretations that likened his thinking with Veblen’s theories of conspicuous consumption, in which individuals approach status signaling as a sort of rational choice.¹⁵

Crucial for the study of Indian diplomats is the caveat that habitus need not be thought of as a unitary whole. As somebody of ‘low social origin’ planted into the highbrow world of French boarding schools and academia, Bourdieu conceptualized his own social awkwardness into the *cleft habitus* – ‘inhabited by tensions and contradictions’.¹⁶ Socially heterogeneous situations can produce internally divided, torn habituses – a crucial insight elaborated upon in the second part of this chapter.

Capital appears in ‘three fundamental guises’: economic, social, and cultural capital are each sociological currencies in which individuals trade to establish and maintain their place in a hierarchy.¹⁷ Capital is a resource individuals accumulate and seek to capitalize on – a ‘profit of distinction’ accrues to its holder.¹⁸ The distribution of different forms of capital within a community ‘represents the immanent structure of the social world’.¹⁹

Just as tangible economic capital is inheritable, cultural and social capital also pass down generations. Yet while economic capital comes closest to the standard intuition that capital is about resources mobilized for personal gain, social and cultural capital – where our focus lies – operate in subtler ways. Since rare forms of capital are valued most, capital is a primary force in the reproduction and entrenchment of status hierarchies over time. Against the prevalent narrative that liberal, post-industrial societies had guaranteed equality of opportunity through education and

¹¹ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Invitation*, 127.

¹² Tony Bennett, ‘Introduction to the Routledge Classics Edition’, in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, by Pierre Bourdieu (Routledge, 2010), xix–xx.

¹³ Elias, *The Civilizing Process*; Norbert Elias, *The Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996).

¹⁴ Reed-Danahay, *Locating Bourdieu*, 104.

¹⁵ Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Invitation*, 129.

¹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Sketch for a Self-Analysis*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 100.

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital (1986)’, in *Cultural Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Imre Szeman and Timothy Kaposy (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 82.

¹⁸ Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, ‘Symbolic Capital and Social Classes’, *Journal of Classical Sociology* 13, no. 2 (2013): 297.

¹⁹ Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital (1986)’, 81.

democracy, Bourdieu showed that elites perpetuate their dominant position by putting their cultural and social capital to use.²⁰ It is precisely the inequalities of capital that guarantee its worth.

Cultural capital is about intangible assets like skills, manners, knowledge, competences, and style.²¹ It expresses itself in a familiarity with spheres of dominant culture, and thus also in a certain social confidence. It can be imbibed from home or learned in more formal settings outside it. In this way, cultural capital relates to and is institutionalized through education, held in the form of credentials and certificates, but also through the dispositions the educational environment imparts. The stamp of elite schooling, for example, endows its holder not only with a degree certificate but also with the embodied cultural capital that comes with personifying a certain “type” – behaving and talking like someone who attended an elite institution.

Different forms of capital are often mutually reinforcing, and so cultural capital allows its holder to acquire *social capital*. Bourdieu defined the term as ‘the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition’.²² Think of classic Old Boys’ Clubs that bind generations of privately educated men together as they monopolize the upper echelons of politics, bureaucracy, or business – or, in the case of Indian diplomats, the networks that elite schools like Delhi University’s iconic St Stephen’s College breed.

A **field** is a hierarchically ordered, relatively autonomous space in which a set of actors operate and struggle for power.²³ Each field is defined by the kind of habitus and capital that are considered desirable within it.²⁴ Across different spheres of their lives, actors occupy a variety of fields, all of which reflect different kinds of power relations. A field’s implicit rules may escape outsiders – ‘within a field, people fight to the death over things that are imperceptible to those who find themselves in the next room’, as Bourdieu described.²⁵ As an analytical device, the concept ‘allows for the methodological autonomization of a space of activity defined in relational terms, provided that this autonomization is historically and sociologically grounded’.²⁶ This leaves plenty of room for interpretation – as Jackson wryly notes, Bourdieu is rarely caught explaining the concept exactly the same way twice.²⁷

Unlike “epistemic communities” tied together by shared expert knowledge,²⁸ fields are ‘highly agonistic universes, where the only thing that actors unwittingly share is the urge to accumulate the same capital’.²⁹ Bourdieu even calls fields a ‘locus of struggle’.³⁰ Consequently, fields are settled to varying degrees, depending on the level of consensus around the appropriate kinds of habitus

²⁰ Bourdieu, 81,83.

²¹ Bourdieu, 82–84.

²² Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Invitation*, 119.

²³ Nikko Kauppi, ‘Transnational Social Fields’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. Thomas Medvetz and Jeffrey J. Sallaz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 186.

²⁴ Antonin Cohen, ‘Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. Thomas Medvetz and Jeffrey J. Sallaz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 202–4.

²⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *On the State: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1989-1992*, trans. David Fernbach (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 318.

²⁶ Gisèle Sapiro, ‘Field Theory from a Transnational Perspective’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. Thomas Medvetz and Jeffrey J. Sallaz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 161.

²⁷ Peter Jackson, ‘Pierre Bourdieu, the “Cultural Turn” and the Practice of International History’, *Review of International Studies* 34, no. 1 (2008): 167.

²⁸ Adler and Haas, ‘Conclusion: Epistemic Communities, World Order, and the Creation of a Reflective Research Program’.

²⁹ Médéric Martin-Mazé, ‘Returning Struggles to the Practice Turn: How Were Bourdieu and Boltanski Lost in (Some) Translations and What to Do about It?’, *International Political Sociology* 11, no. 2 (1 June 2017): 210.

³⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Specificity of the Scientific Field and the Social Conditions of the Progress of Reason’, *Information (International Social Science Council)* 14, no. 6 (1975): 19–20.

and capital.³¹ Individuals exposed to even the most unified practices and institutions react to them differently – creative reconfigurations, ironic detachment, an uncritical embrace.³² Those who do not embody the dominant habitus may cultivate a ‘resignation to the inevitable’ and in so doing end up underwriting structures that disadvantage them.³³ Alternatively, they might seek to join the dominant group by acquiring the expected habitus. They can also rebel: should the dominated seek to join the dominant group without striving after the dominant markers of distinction, they have put in play the very principles by which the field operates.³⁴ In fact, most fields at some point become battlegrounds for struggles ‘between the heirs and the pretenders’³⁵ – not least, as Chapter 6 shows, in the world of Indian diplomats.

1.1.2. Course corrections

Although hierarchies were at the heart of Bourdieu’s analysis, he has been criticized for missing the variety of ways in which they express themselves. Bennett’s foreword in *Distinction* concedes that, in his prioritization of class, Bourdieu failed to provide a proper analysis of categories like race or gender.³⁶ It is also possible to approach hierarchies from the other end. The traditional approach to studying control over resources and capital analyses unequal power from the perspective of those who hold it.³⁷ Yet some scholars have turned Bourdieu on his head, studying not those who hold the capital and fit the dominant habitus, but those who do not. This section outlines some of these critiques and course corrections, which will implicitly colour the analysis put forward in the empirical chapters.

While Bourdieu has been accused of betraying an imperial gaze or ignoring race,³⁸ he actually developed extensive analyses on the social logics of colonialism, anti-colonial liberation, and racism, some of which Chapter 2 references.³⁹ The new works reconsidering Bourdieu push further, however, arguing that our understandings of capital and habitus are inherently racialized, often mirroring explicitly Western or white preconceptions.⁴⁰ Similarly, postcolonial Bourdieusians have studied the colonial porousness of supposedly national fields, insisting that colonial and transnational flows be considered at the core of any “national” field.⁴¹ Bourdieu’s approach to

³¹ George Steinmetz, ‘Bourdieuian Field Theory and the Reorientation of Historical Sociology’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Pierre Bourdieu*, ed. Thomas Medvetz and Jeffrey J. Sallaz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 611.

³² Alan Patten, ‘Rethinking Culture: The Social Lineage Account’, *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 4 (November 2011): 742.

³³ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 373.

³⁴ Steinmetz, ‘Bourdieuian Field Theory’, 612.

³⁵ Bourdieu quoted in Bigo, ‘Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations’, 240.

³⁶ Bennett, ‘Introduction’, xxii.

³⁷ Shamus Khan, ‘The Sociology of Elites’, *Annual Review of Sociology* 38, no. 1 (2012): 362.

³⁸ Raewyn Connell, *Southern Theory: Social Science and the Global Dynamics of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 41–43; Anthony Free, ‘The Anthropology of Pierre Bourdieu: A Reconsideration’, *Critique of Anthropology* 16, no. 4 (1996): 408; Edward Said, ‘Representing the Colonized: Anthropology’s Interlocutors’, *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (1989): 223.

³⁹ See e.g. Bourdieu, *The Algerians*; Pierre Bourdieu and Abdelmalek Sayad, ‘Colonial Rule and Cultural Sabir’, *Ethnography* 5, no. 4 (2004): 445–86; Julian Go, ‘Decolonizing Bourdieu: Colonial and Postcolonial Theory in Pierre Bourdieu’s Early Work’, *Sociological Theory* 31, no. 1 (March 2013): 49–74; Jane E. Goodman and Paul A. Silverstein, *Bourdieu in Algeria: Colonial Politics, Ethnographic Practices, Theoretical Developments*, France Overseas (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

⁴⁰ See e.g. Diane Reay et al., ‘Choices of Degree or Degrees of Choice? Class, “Race” and the Higher Education Choice Process’, *Sociology* 35, no. 4 (2001): 855–74; Derron Wallace, ‘Reading “Race” in Bourdieu? Examining Black Cultural Capital among Black Caribbean Youth in South London’, *Sociology* 51, no. 5 (2017): 907–23.

⁴¹ Julian Go, ‘Global Fields and Imperial Forms: Field Theory and the British and American Empires’, *Sociological Theory* 26, no. 3 (2008): 201–29; Steinmetz, ‘Bourdieuian Field Theory’; Sapiro, ‘Field Theory’, 169.

gender, too, requires reconsideration. Criticised by feminist sociologists for his silence,⁴² gender did in fact feature at various turns in some seminal works, with *Masculine Domination* entirely dedicated to gender dynamics.⁴³ Yet Bourdieu also spoke of a ‘sexually characterised habitus’,⁴⁴ focusing on mothers and homemakers as repositories of familial cultural capital.⁴⁵ As Kraiss notes, this essentialism is particularly striking against the “epistemological vigilance” Bourdieu preached (‘Apparently it is difficult even for critical male social scientists to reflect upon their own masculine position’).⁴⁶ Feminist sociologists developing Bourdieu’s work further emphasize that social constructions rather than biology shape the habitus, that unequal distributions of capital often observe gender lines, and that women must also be studied within traditionally male-dominated fields.⁴⁷

This brings us to the broader challenge of marginality in Bourdieu: how should scholars write not about the dominant (whose cultural capital ensures that they are heard) but the dominated? If his fellow sociologists sometimes protested that Bourdieu was better at explaining why social hierarchies endure than how they might change,⁴⁸ this is surely also down to his treatment of those at their bottom. At times – again, against Bourdieu’s explicit commitment to reflexive sociology – this social determinism obfuscates the existing agency of the marginalized, making it difficult to imagine alternative social orders.⁴⁹ Non-dominant groups do not lack cultural knowledge per se – rather, their forms of it are not valued by traditional institutions (or scholars).⁵⁰ Furthermore, it is not only that different forms of capital can go unrecognized, but also that similar markers of capital are recognized differently depending on their carrier. One’s social position, gender, race, and class influence not only the capital one is likely to possess, but also the way this capital is interpreted by others.⁵¹

These critical re-evaluations are crucial for studying the Indian Foreign Service, whose overlapping hierarchies of class, caste, gender, and education – intertwined with the racialized and material hierarchies of international society – have so far been analyzed from the perspective of the dominant alone. Race and colonialism, most explicitly discussed in Chapters 2 and 5, matter because of the imprint of colonialism on the diplomatic habitus, the particular dynamics of India’s anti-racist diplomacy, and the complex ways in which Indian diplomats have sought to navigate

⁴² Terry Lovell, ‘Thinking Feminism with and against Bourdieu’, *Feminist Theory* 1, no. 1 (2000): 11–32; Beverley Skeggs, ‘Context and Background: Pierre Bourdieu’s Analysis of Class, Gender and Sexuality’, *The Sociological Review* 52, no. 2 (2004): 19–33.

⁴³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Bourdieu, *Distinction*; Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1990); Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*.

⁴⁴ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 3.

⁴⁵ Veronique Mottier, ‘Masculine Domination: Gender and Power in Bourdieu’s Writings’, *Feminist Theory* 3, no. 3 (2002): 351.

⁴⁶ Beate Kraiss, ‘Gender, Sociological Theory and Bourdieu’s Sociology of Practice’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 6 (November 2006): 124.

⁴⁷ See also Lisa Adkins, ‘Reflexivity: Freedom or Habit of Gender?’, *The Sociological Review* 52, no. 2 (2004): 191–210; Toril Moi, ‘Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu’s Sociology of Culture’, *New Literary History* 22, no. 4 (1991): 1017–49.

⁴⁸ Richard Jenkins, ‘Pierre Bourdieu and the Reproduction of Determinism’, *Sociology* 16, no. 2 (1982): 270–81; Scott Lash, ‘Pierre Bourdieu: Cultural Economy and Social Change’, in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Edward LiPuma, and Moishe Postone (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 193–211.

⁴⁹ John R. Hall, ‘The Capital(s) of Cultures: A Nonholistic Approach to Status Situations, Class, Gender, and Ethnicity’, in *Cultivating Differences: Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*, ed. Michèle Lamont and Marcel Fournier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Kerry Woodward, *The Relevance of Bourdieu’s Concepts for Studying the Intersections of Poverty, Race, and Culture*, ed. Thomas Medvetz and Jeffrey J. Sallaz, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁵⁰ Tara J. Yosso, ‘Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth’, *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 8, no. 1 (March 2005): 76.

⁵¹ See e.g. Annette Lareau and Erin McNamara Horvat, ‘Moments of Social Inclusion and Exclusion Race, Class, and Cultural Capital in Family-School Relationships’, *Sociology of Education* 72, no. 1 (1999): 37–53.

their racialized status in diplomatic circles. Gender dynamics are discussed primarily in Chapters 3–4, both in demographic terms and insofar as the diplomatic habitus itself has always been gendered. All chapters consider the power imbalances that produce the standard accounts about Indian diplomatic priorities and ideals, in the process unearthing marginalized or dissenting voices. These are important not merely as ideational counterpoints, but because they make apparent the social rootedness of the ostensibly objective accounts we know so well. The broader methodological challenge (discussed in the final part of this chapter) is to situate elite utterances in their appropriate social and argumentative contexts.

1.1.3. International Relations with Bourdieu

Bourdieu is not an obvious guide into International Relations – in fact, he virtually ignored the discipline.⁵² He recognized that internationalism featured in the distinction strategies of national elites, but his frugal hypothesizing on transnational fields came late, some of it published posthumously.⁵³ For about two decades, IR scholars have nonetheless sought inspiration from Bourdieu for studies on, among other things, international security, political economy, and international law.⁵⁴ Diplomacy also took a Bourdieusian turn. For example, Iver Neumann has studied the production of gender and class identities in the Norwegian Foreign Ministry,⁵⁵ Rebecca Adler-Nissen has analyzed international diplomacy as an emerging ‘meta-field’,⁵⁶ while various “practice theorists” have developed micro-analyses of diplomatic behaviour.⁵⁷ While Bourdieusian IR has covered considerable theoretical and conceptual ground, the empirics have overwhelmingly confined themselves to Europe.⁵⁸ Apart from the thesis at hand, no Bourdieusian work on Indian diplomacy exists to date.

Bourdieu sits awkwardly in IR’s theoretical conversations, perched between the chairs of rationalism and materialism on the one hand and constructivism on the other. Unlike the former, he cares about norms and beliefs but unlike the latter, insists on grounding them in social power relations. He would have understood the realist urge to talk about “interests” but would have seen them as empty signifiers requiring explanation, not as explanations themselves. Bourdieu would not have seen a neo-realist world of anarchy, but a historically constituted, hierarchical one, structured around evolving forms of capital and habitus.⁵⁹ Moravcsik’s liberal

⁵² Cohen, ‘Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations’, 200.

⁵³ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Foreword’, in *Dealing in Virtue: International Commercial Arbitration and the Construction of a Transnational Legal Order*, ed. Yves Dezalay and Bryant G. Garth (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Cohen, ‘Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations’, 200.

⁵⁴ See e.g. Trine Villumsen Berling, ‘Bourdieu, International Relations, and European Security’, *Theory and Society* 41, no. 5 (2012): 451–78; Yves Dezalay and Bryant G. Garth, *Dealing in Virtue: International Commercial Arbitration and the Construction of a Transnational Legal Order* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, *Symbolic Power in the World Trade Organization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Anna Leander, ‘Do We Really Need Reflexivity in IPE? Bourdieu’s Two Reasons for Answering Affirmatively’, *Review of International Political Economy* 9, no. 4 (2002): 601–9.

⁵⁵ Neumann, ‘The Body of the Diplomat’.

⁵⁶ Rebecca Adler-Nissen, ‘On a Field Trip with Bourdieu’, *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2011): 327–30.

⁵⁷ Pouliot, *International Security in Practice*; Vincent Pouliot and Jérémie Cornut, ‘Practice Theory and the Study of Diplomacy: A Research Agenda’, *Cooperation and Conflict* 50, no. 3 (2015): 297–315; Ole Jacob Sending, Vincent Pouliot, and Iver B. Neumann, ‘The Future of Diplomacy: Changing Practices, Evolving Relationships’, *International Journal* 66, no. 3 (2011): 527–542.

⁵⁸ Breaking with this trend, Nair has developed a superb Bourdieu-inspired account of face-saving in ASEAN. Deepak Nair, ‘Saving Face in Diplomacy: A Political Sociology of Face-to-Face Interactions in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations’, *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 3 (2019): 672–97.

⁵⁹ Cohen, ‘Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations’, 224–25.

intergovernmentalism⁶⁰ and Allison and Zelikow's governmental politics model⁶¹ would have been impugned for their rationalism, in the place of which Bourdieu would have seen competing elites abiding by the internal logics – “rational” or not – of their fields.⁶²

But if IR scholars have used Bourdieu to discredit rational choice theories,⁶³ he is no unconditional ally of constructivists either. He would have rejected Wendt's social theory which omits ‘the power struggles, strategies of distinction, symbolic violence of “consensus,” and multiple tactics of agents through a detailed empirical analysis of a specific social universe’.⁶⁴ Indeed, as Bigo suggests,⁶⁵ Bourdieu might even have rejected Mérand and Pouliot's attempts to marry his work with a “soft” constructivism.⁶⁶ Mercifully unaware of IR's theoretical turf wars, Bourdieu called his own work ‘constructivist structuralism’ or ‘structuralist constructivism’:

By structuralism, or structuralist, I mean that there exists in the social world, and not only in symbolic systems (language, myths etc.), objective structures, independent of the consciousness or the will of agents, which are capable of orienting or constraining practices and representations. By constructivism I mean that there is a social genesis to both schemes of perception, thought and action on the one hand, and social structures on the other.⁶⁷

In this way, Bourdieu also allows for a more considered study of the importance of diplomacy. Neumann has lamented that Bull in particular seemed to consider diplomacy an epiphenomenon, reflective of international society but not constitutive of it.⁶⁸ In a Bourdieusian reading, understandings of international society inform how diplomats behave within it, but their behaviour also plays to a particular reading, and in so doing shapes, reproduces, or contests the contours of international society. Diplomats are both consumers and producers of international society, so to speak.

Bourdieu's thinking also contradicts aspects of IR's “cultural turn”,⁶⁹ which often portrays cultures as free-standing structures, untainted by power relations and material circumstance.⁷⁰ With inflationary definitions, “culture” devours all of the human condition so that it ‘becomes difficult to conceive of any significant aspect of social life that is not culture’.⁷¹ Without meaningful definitional bounds, the concept becomes analytically toothless. Bourdieu gives the cultural turn a sharp set of teeth. “Habitus” gives a fuller and yet more specific conceptual framework in which to situate culture. “Fields” force explicitly justified social boundaries to the sphere in which cultural

⁶⁰ Andrew Moravcsik, ‘Preferences and Power in the European Community: A Liberal Intergovernmentalist Approach’, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 31, no. 4 (1993): 473–524.

⁶¹ Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).

⁶² Cohen, ‘Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations’, 224.

⁶³ Trine Villumsen Berling, ‘Knowledges’, in *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR*, ed. Rebecca Adler-Nissen (London: Routledge, 2012); Didier Bigo and Mikael Madsen, ‘Introduction to Symposium “A Different Reading of the International”: Pierre Bourdieu and International Studies’, *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 3 (1 September 2011): 219–24; For a standalone pioneer bringing Bourdieu into IR much earlier, see Richard K. Ashley, ‘The Poverty of Neorealism’, *International Organization* 38, no. 2 (1984): 225–286.

⁶⁴ Bigo, ‘Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations’, 234.

⁶⁵ Bigo, 234.

⁶⁶ Bigo, 234; Bigo is commenting on a French article: Frédéric Mérand and Vincent Pouliot, ‘Le Monde de Pierre Bourdieu : Éléments Pour Une Théorie Sociale Des Relations Internationales’, *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 41, no. 3 (n.d.): 603–25.

⁶⁷ Bourdieu, ‘Social Space and Symbolic Power’, 14.

⁶⁸ Iver B. Neumann, ‘The English School on Diplomacy: Scholarly Promise Unfulfilled’, *International Relations* 17, no. 3 (September 2003): 350.

⁶⁹ For an introduction to this ‘turn’, see Morten Valbjørn, ‘Before, during and after the Cultural Turn: A “Baedeker” to IR's Cultural Journey’, *International Review of Sociology* 18, no. 1 (2008): 55–82.

⁷⁰ Frank Ninkovich, ‘No Post-Mortems for Postmodernism, Please’, *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 3 (1998): 451–66.

⁷¹ Jackson, ‘Pierre Bourdieu, the “Cultural Turn” and the Practice of International History’, 160.

influences are said to apply. “Capital” captures that which is valorized within cultures, while also asking how this valorization reflects and reproduces social hierarchies.

Bourdieu, therefore, allows us to think about power, culture, and identity in tandem. Symbolic struggles over the legitimate definition of culture are a dimension of the broader struggles for dominance.⁷² There is no “essence” of power; it can only be understood in reference to fields, capital, and habitus, making it relational and always socially rooted.⁷³ For Bourdieu, a fundamental prerogative of dominant classes is their power to articulate their own identity, while a group lower down a hierarchy is ‘forced to shape its own subjectivity from its objectification’ by the more dominant.⁷⁴ Therefore, identities and power must also be considered together. Identities express positionality, and as such, taking them seriously requires taking seriously the social conditions that produce and enable them. Culture matters, but it matters within unequal societies shaped by those with the cultural resources to define it. An analysis of unequal power structures does not preclude an analysis of culture – it necessitates one.

This thesis differs in four ways from the most prevalent modes of Bourdieusian IR. Firstly, the concept of habitus – in particular a diplomatic one – has received less attention than Bourdieu’s other concepts.⁷⁵ Secondly, this thesis is also inspired by post-Bourdieuian work which elevates those at the margins. Thirdly, it introduces a new category, caste, into the Bourdieusian fold. Fourthly, the analysis emphasizes antagonism over consensus throughout. As Martin-Máze observes, what often gets lost in translation from Bourdieu into IR is a quintessentially Bourdieusian sense of struggle: an analysis not of polite disputes between diplomatic equals or policy disagreements among professionals, but of the symbolic violence that underpins social relations.⁷⁶ In much of the work on transnational fields or elites, there is a certain expectation of equality and unity of purpose, perhaps owing to the elite technocratic nature of the groups being studied. This expectation crowds out Bourdieu’s preoccupation with the doxic (re)production of hierarchies. Indian diplomats are caught in a maze of internal and international hierarchies – caste, class, gender, race, nationality – even if this struggle is often invisible to dominant actors and those who study the world through them. These fault lines are central to understanding how Indian diplomats operate, socialize their juniors, and encounter diplomatic colleagues around international negotiating tables.

⁷² Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 86.

⁷³ Stefano Guzzini, ‘Power: Bourdieu’s Field Analysis of Relational Capital, Misrecognition and Domination’, in *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR*, ed. Rebecca Adler-Nissen (London: Routledge, 2012), 80.

⁷⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Bachelors’ Ball: The Crisis of Peasant Society in Béarn* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 198.

⁷⁵ Neumann, ‘The English School on Diplomacy’, 364; Dylan M H Loh, ‘Institutional Habitus, State Identity, and China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs’, *International Studies Review* 51, no. September (2019): 2.

⁷⁶ Martin-Mazé, ‘Returning Struggles to the Practice Turn’, 203.

1.2. Bourdieu in South Block

1.2.1. Situating the diplomatic cleft habitus

Analyzing local elites in colonized countries, Bourdieu had a term for carriers of a cleft habitus created under colonialism's unequal power relations: the *cultural sabir*, occupying an 'ambiguous location between two social conditions',⁷⁷ caught between 'two mutually alienating universes' of colonizer and colonized.⁷⁸ The cleft was born out of the sabir's anxious attempts at reconciling this 'duality of social regulations'.⁷⁹ In India, however, this cleft habitus was not, as Bourdieu's transitory understanding of the term might have implied, "solved" at Independence, nor did the underlying tension expire. Instead, it was institutionalized into the structures, recruiting and training practices, and ideals of the postcolonial Foreign Service. For much of the existence of an independent India, the diplomats in South Block⁸⁰ have thus sought to navigate the codes of two imagined transnational fields: that of old, European international society and that of a postcolonial international society ostensibly envisioned as its negation.

The imagery of European international society is a colonial legacy sustained by Indian attempts at imbibing the manners and ideals of a deeply racialized international society 'defined by elite white men'.⁸¹ This definition ruled out any possibility of "Indian civilization" on par with a European equal: to join international society was to join civilization, and to join civilization was to imbibe a European system of symbols, etiquette, and manners.⁸² Bourdieu's claim that matters of taste and demeanour are fundamental to the constitution of a dominant habitus is borne out most clearly in this classical, colonial imagery of international society, which emphasized etiquette, eloquence, protocol, sound judgement, and questions of tact and comportment.⁸³ It was a field in the most explicit of Bourdieusian terms: 'a small society with its own rules of conduct, its own courtesies and what is more, its own prejudices and exclusions'.⁸⁴ In this club, the 'aristocratic tradition brings to the cult of power – to be found in every nation state – the discipline of good taste'.⁸⁵ This international society, in other words, was 'society according to Jane Austen rather than according to Max Weber'.⁸⁶ Vijayalakshmi Pandit, as India's Ambassador to Russia in 1948, gave it a Dickensian slant, too:

Opportunities for meeting people of the country are few – such meetings, I am told, are not encouraged and one lives in the rather restricted diplomatic circle meeting the same people all the time. [...] There is a series of dinners, dances and luncheon parties each one vying in elegance

⁷⁷ Bourdieu, *Sketch*, 56–57.

⁷⁸ Bourdieu and Sayad, 'Colonial Rule and Cultural Sabir', 164.

⁷⁹ Bourdieu's French expression translated in Go, 'Decolonizing Bourdieu', 59.

⁸⁰ I sometimes refer to the Foreign Service by this colloquial metonym, which alludes to the original and main building in which the MEA and the diplomats of the IFS work in Central Delhi

⁸¹ Callahan, 'Nationalising International Theory', 318.

⁸² Elias, *The Civilizing Process*.

⁸³ Neumann, 'The Body of the Diplomat', 674; Jackson, 'Pierre Bourdieu, the "Cultural Turn" and the Practice of International History', 169.

⁸⁴ S.L. Roy, *Diplomacy* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1984), 142.

⁸⁵ Moore, *Third World Diplomats*, 17.

⁸⁶ Callahan, 'Nationalising International Theory', 318.

with the last. Large quantities are served and as one eats one pities the poor Russians, whose Govt: gives them practically nothing to eat.⁸⁷

By contrast, the imagery of postcolonial international society was something Indian diplomats themselves were one of the first producers and founding members of. This was postcoloniality in the making, reflective of the newfound “authenticity” that colonial order had once suppressed. In India, it was also Nehruvian in nature: secular, Third Worldist, internationalist, solidarist, and fiercely invested in democratizing international society. Yet what one finds both in archival elaborations and in conversation with Indian diplomats is that the former, imbibed as it was through arduous historical processes of colonial subjugation, seems to have much clearer prescriptions and precedents for the diplomatic habitus than the somewhat amorphous cultural prescriptions that came with the postcolonial project.

In India, the ensuing “correct” diplomatic cleft habitus, embodying both sides, has been most successfully performed by the “St Stephen’s type” which dominates the cultural hierarchy of the Foreign Service. This cohort, made up of left-leaning liberal arts graduates of the prestigious St Stephen’s College of Delhi University, has traditionally managed to perform the classical markers of Anglophone elitism, while also espousing explicitly Nehruvian, Third Worldist worldviews. Its existence has been made possible by a coming together of various hierarchies of class, caste, gender, and education, as the products of this elite School are usually also products of upper-class families, English schooling, and mostly upper-caste spaces. Bourdieu’s point about the convertibility of capital is amply manifest: graduates depart St Stephen’s not only with an official qualification but the air of somebody who has attended the College (cultural capital) and the connections that go with it (social capital).

Here, too, the dominant habitus functions as a mechanism of exclusion. The critical work on Bourdieu becomes relevant as the chapters ahead consider the role of marginalized identities, racialized and gendered readings of diplomatic work, and the power dynamics that create dominant narratives about Indian diplomats, their Service, and the world. Even the same forms of cultural capital are often interpreted differently depending on their carrier: one tribal officer from outside Delhi’s elite circles – but with flowery, impeccable English – was bewildered that anybody considered him worth interviewing, especially by comparison to his Stephanian superior who had nominated him for an interview, because ‘the people that you have talked to, they are all so polished’, whereas he was ‘rougher’.⁸⁸ As Bourdieu observed, those who are not perceived as embodying the dominant habitus are consigned to situating themselves in relation to it.⁸⁹

The coming chapters study the complex interplay between the two sides of the cleft – and how they are played off against each other or used to justify the Service’s internal hierarchies as structural necessities. The ideals of the cleft habitus underpin debates about entry regulations and cadre management, guide the pedagogies of diplomatic training and the socialization of diplomats, and govern much of the thinking around what kind of diplomats India values and hopes to elevate into the highest positions. Bourdieusian vocabulary accompanies this analysis throughout. At the same time, his rather static and sometimes narrow understanding of the habitus, which emphasized class and only allowed for a cleft as a condition of transition from one habitus to another, would not do justice to the deep ambivalence and hybridity of the Indian diplomatic habitus, whose

⁸⁷ Vijayalakshmi Pandit, ‘Letter to G.S. Bajpai’, 5 February 1948, ‘1947-1951: Correspondence of V.L. Pandit (as Indian Ambassador to USSR) with G.S. Bajpai - Secretary General, MEA, regarding official matters’. SF/55, Vijayalakshmi Pandit papers, NMML.

⁸⁸ Interview 77, May 2019.

⁸⁹ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 98.

tensions are never “solved” but rather managed. Some creative reconfigurations will therefore occur – beginning with the introduction of an additional category of analysis.

1.2.2. Developing caste into a Bourdieusian category

Reflecting on the wider relevance of the analysis offered in *Distinction*, Bourdieu conceded that many features of his argument pertained to the socio-cultural currents of 1960s France.⁹⁰ As discussed, Bourdieusian IR, too, has overwhelmingly focused on Europe. It is therefore missing a crucial subcontinental category: caste.

The caste system is not a self-evident, uncontested whole.⁹¹ The modern place of caste in Indian society is intensely debated among scholars and citizens alike, who disagree both on its salience and the appropriate methods for redress.⁹² The oeuvre of minute anthropological case studies cautions against undue generalizations, as status rankings among castes and sub-castes shift over time and space, shaping cultural, political, social, and religious practices in a myriad of ways.⁹³ What follows, therefore, is an introduction of caste as a sociopolitical category, and then an elaboration of the Bourdieusian bounds within which this thesis will analyze caste, making specific claims pertaining to caste relations within the Indian Foreign Service.

In its South Asian garb, caste is a form of social stratification characterized by the hereditary transmission of an entire lifestyle, including status in a hierarchy, occupation, and forms of social interaction and exclusion.⁹⁴ While thousands of endogamous groups called *jatis* exist across India, a rough four-tier *varna* system catches the various subgroups in one overarching scheme of hierarchy: Brahmins (ritual experts and priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (traders) and Shudras (workers and cultivators).⁹⁵ Outside the varna fold were the Untouchables (referred to in this thesis as the Scheduled Castes or Dalits), who performed “polluting” duties for caste Hindus. The caste system originally drew its legitimacy from ancient Hindu legal scriptures like the Manusmriti (2nd–3rd century BCE), which prescribed a caste hierarchy based on notions of purity and pollution.⁹⁶ From the late 19th century, the caste system took on more formalistic traits, as Brahminical elites collaborated with British colonial officials to draw up census data and anthropological work which simplified caste relations, gave them legal standing in colonial law, and codified the dominance of Brahmins.⁹⁷ Even as the British ostensibly abhorred the caste

⁹⁰ Bennett, ‘Introduction’, xxi.

⁹¹ Arjun Appadurai, ‘Is Homo Hierarchicus?’, *American Ethnologist* 13, no. 4 (1986): 753.

⁹² André Béteille, ‘The Peculiar Tenacity of Caste’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 13 (March 2012): 41–48; Satish Deshpande and Mary E John, ‘The Politics of Not Counting Caste’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 45, no. 25 (2010): 39–42; Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 286–88; Rajni Kothari, ‘Rise of the Dalits and the Renewed Debate on Caste’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 29, no. 26 (June 1994): 1589–94.

⁹³ Dipankar Gupta, *Interrogating Caste: Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000); Lucia Michelutti, “‘We (Yadavs) Are a Caste of Politicians’: Caste and Modern Politics in a North Indian Town”, *Contribution to Indian Sociology* 38, no. 1–2 (2004): 43–71; M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); Divya Vaid, ‘Caste in Contemporary India: Flexibility and Persistence’, *Annual Review of Sociology* 40, no. 1 (2014): 391–410.

⁹⁴ John Scott and Gordon Marshall, ‘Caste’, in *A Dictionary of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 64.

⁹⁵ Romila Thapar, *Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), 63.

⁹⁶ Surinder S Jodhka, ‘Ascriptive Hierarchies: Caste and Its Reproduction in Contemporary India’, *Current Sociology* 64, no. 2 (2015): 1–2; Frank de Zwart, ‘The Logic of Affirmative Action: Caste, Class and Quotas in India’, *Acta Sociologica* 43, no. 3 (2000): 235–249.

⁹⁷ Ram Bhagat, ‘Census and Caste Enumeration: British Legacy and Contemporary Practice in India’, *Genus* 62, no. 2 (2006): 121–24; Dirks, *Castes of Mind*; Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 119.

system, the colonial machinery itself became intertwined with the upper castes, as some Brahmin families came to be regarded as “civil service families”, suitable for the ICS by descent and cultural compatibility with British bureaucratic norms.⁹⁸

In 1950, the Indian Constitution intervened in radical ways in the caste constellations of the newly sovereign nation, banning the practice of Untouchability in Article 17 and making caste one of the illegal forms of discrimination outlined in Article 15.⁹⁹ Articles 16(4) and 335 put India on a path to rectifying historical inequities by instituting the world’s largest programme of affirmative action, known in India as the reservations system. Reservations, which the Foreign Service is also bound by, guarantee representation in public and educational institutions to the previously most marginalized communities.¹⁰⁰ The system foresaw 15% reservations for the Scheduled Castes (SCs – Dalits) and 7.5% reservations for the Scheduled Tribes (STs – indigenous peoples, or Adivasis).¹⁰¹ For all its radical potential, Christopher Jaffrelot has suggested that the reason Indian elites accepted reservations so dutifully was that they in fact did little to threaten the core of Indian power structures, especially since the quotas often went unfilled for lack of candidates or interest in upholding constitutional provisions.¹⁰² Until the 1980s, only low-level menial positions across the national bureaucracy consistently met their reservation targets, arguably defeating their very purpose. This seems in line with anecdotes from the Foreign Service – one faintly amused diplomat, speaking of the 1950s, did not ‘think we worried too much about quotas’.¹⁰³

Although the iconic Dalit campaigner and lawyer B.R. Ambedkar had requested caste-based reservations to be observed for only a decade, and the Foreign Service still considered them a ‘short-term measure’ in the mid-1960s,¹⁰⁴ they not only continue until this day but have been expanded. A fiercer public response followed the so-called Mandal agenda, when the Indian Government, in accordance with recommendations of the 1980 Mandal Commission Report, implemented reservations for the “Other Backward Classes” (OBCs) in 1992.¹⁰⁵ Comprising marginalized sub-castes of Shudras, OBCs were assessed to constitute 52% of the Indian population, but given the legal limit of 50% for reservations, almost half of which was already in use, the figure for OBC reservations was fixed at 27%.¹⁰⁶ Controversially, the new reservations included historically marginalized but now politically dominant communities like the Yadavs of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and the land-owning Kalingas of Andhra Pradesh.¹⁰⁷ The changes met

⁹⁸ L. Shanthakumari Sunder, *Values and Influence of Religion in Public Administration* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2011), 237; C. A. Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad, 1880-1920* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

⁹⁹ Gautam Bhatia, ‘Horizontal Discrimination and Article 15(2) of the Indian Constitution: A Transformative Approach’, *Asian Journal of Comparative Law* 11, no. 1 (2016): 87–109.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Appendixes V and VI with All Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Eligible for Reservations Listed by State. Union Public Service Commission Notice No. F/5/49/540EP, 12 February 1955, ‘Recruitment of candidates for the Indian Foreign Service on the results of the competitive examination held by the UPSC in 1954’. FSP/55, Part I, NAI.

¹⁰¹ Christophe Jaffrelot, ‘The Impact of Affirmative Action in India: More Political than Socioeconomic’, *India Review* 5, no. 2 (2005): 182.

¹⁰² Jaffrelot, 177.

¹⁰³ Interview 18, April 2019.

¹⁰⁴ K.P. Saksena (Research Assistant, MEA), ‘Memo: Draft Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Religious Intolerance’, 18 September 1964, ‘Draft Declaration on the Elimination of all forms of Religious Intolerance’, F/UI/151/62, NAI.

¹⁰⁵ K. C. Suri, ‘Competing Interests, Social Conflict and the Politics of Caste Reservations in India’, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 1, no. 2 (1995): 238.

¹⁰⁶ Jaffrelot, ‘Affirmative Action’, 182.

¹⁰⁷ To address the question of economically deprived upper-caste groups, the Indian Government in 2019 introduced a further category, “Economically Weak Sections” (EWS) into the reservations scheme, at 10% of seats, thus for the first time breaching the 50% ceiling for the percentage of reserved seats among all available positions. See ‘Modi Government Approves 10% Reservation for Economically Weak among Upper Caste’, *The Times of*

with nation-wide, violent upper-caste protests¹⁰⁸ – although, once again, only about half these seats have been filled across Government Services.¹⁰⁹

Against profound economic and political change in the over 70 years of independence – and many more years of liberal prognoses about its imminent demise – caste remains ‘a reality that shapes opportunity structures, status differences and cultural values in contemporary India’.¹¹⁰ Even as the textbook description of a system for ritual and occupational hierarchizing has become all but obsolete in the urban mainstream, the supposed decline of caste has coincided with rising rates of backlash and atrocities against lower-caste Hindus asserting their claims to equality.¹¹¹ More insidiously, caste has survived by adaptation, expressing itself through systemic, resilient forms of socioeconomic inequality, institutionalized imbalances of power and privilege, and cultural attitudes across society.¹¹² Writing in *The Discovery of India* in 1946, future Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was convinced that ‘[c]onditions of life have changed and thought-patterns are changing so much that it seems impossible for the caste system to endure’.¹¹³ Much like the Fukuyaman “end of history”, the eschatological prognosis for an end of caste put far too much faith in the triumph of liberalism, democracy and secularism, falsely assuming that their logics were inimical to caste.

Caste and class (a more traditional Bourdieusian category) ‘resemble each other in some respects and differ in others’,¹¹⁴ but the perhaps most salient difference lies in the question of mobility: while it is theoretically possible for a person to change class, caste is a “closed system of stratification” – a birth-based marker fixed for life.¹¹⁵ While upper-caste Indians find themselves overwhelmingly among the highly-educated professional classes and lower-caste Indians in lower-class occupations, there does exist, for example, a small “Dalit bourgeoisie”.¹¹⁶ At the same time, such Dalits tend to work in reserved positions in Government, where they are pejoratively referred to as the “creamy layer” of the oppressed, and are rarely received as equals by upper-caste colleagues. Caste therefore conditions not only the likelihood of finding oneself high up on the class ladder, but also the likelihood that one is accepted there upon arrival.

Bourdieu was convinced that identities must always be rooted back into material and social conditions; caste is a case in point. It has sorted itself into enormously tangible institutions, from state organs, labour relations, and marriage conventions to civil society organizing and political

India, accessed 7 January 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/union-cabinet-approves-10-reservation-for-economically-weaker-sections/articleshow/67418734.cms>.

¹⁰⁸ Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, *Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism* (Calcutta: Samya, 2012), 66; Suri, ‘Competing Interests’, 235–38.

¹⁰⁹ The Times of India, ‘20 Years after Mandal, Less than 12% OBCs in Central Govt Jobs’, The Times of India, 26 December 2015, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/20-years-after-Mandal-less-than-12-OBCs-in-central-govt-jobs/articleshow/50328073.cms>.

¹¹⁰ Jodhka, ‘Ascriptive Hierarchies’, 2.

¹¹¹ Smriti Sharma, ‘Caste-Based Crimes and Economic Status: Evidence from India’, *Journal of Comparative Economics* 43, no. 1 (1 February 2015): 204–26; Anand Teltumbde, *The Persistence of Caste: The Khairlanji Murders and India’s Hidden Apartheid* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2010).

¹¹² S. R. Charsley and G. K. Karanth, *Challenging Untouchability: Dalit Initiative and Experience from Karnataka* (New Delhi: Sage, 1998); Dipankar Gupta, ‘Caste and Politics: Identity over System’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34, no. 21 (2005): 409–27; Clarinda Still, ed., *Dalits in Neoliberal India: Mobility or Marginalisation?* (London: Routledge, 2015).

¹¹³ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India (1946)* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2004), 264.

¹¹⁴ André Béteille, *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 187.

¹¹⁵ Gupta, *Interrogating Caste*; Henri Stern, ‘Power in Modern India: Caste or Class? An Approach and Case Study’, *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 13, no. 1 (1979): 67.

¹¹⁶ D. Shyam Babu, ‘Caste and Class among the Dalits’, in *Dalit Studies*, ed. Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 244–46.

parties.¹¹⁷ This is why it is imperative that caste not be reduced to a “state of mind” to be banished by an upbeat attitude (as many liberal upper-caste interviewees seemed prone to do). An aspirational Dalit cannot inventively imagine themselves out of structural inequality any more than a progressive Brahmin can claim to live in a casteless reality.

Yet just as caste fits in with the attentiveness to hierarchies in Bourdieusian thinking, it is also at home in a Bourdieusian world of subtle expressions, distinction, and capital. As one self-ascribed caste-blind Brahmin diplomat argued, caste was now also about ‘a value system, education, linguistic abilities’¹¹⁸ – a more expansive understanding of the place of caste in modern life that many such caste-blind officers shared.¹¹⁹ On rare occasions, Bourdieu is even explicitly evoked by sociologists of caste. Jodhka has analyzed Indian variations of Bourdieusian ‘cultural capital’, such as fluency in English, ‘acquired through one’s caste and class habitus’.¹²⁰ Echoing the vocabulary of one Dalit interviewee trained in the social sciences, Jodhka also considers caste through Bourdieu’s notion of ‘symbolic violence’, perpetuated not through force but social convention.¹²¹

The inclusion of caste into a study of Indian diplomats involves reckoning with the upper-caste construction of the diplomatic habitus and the largely Brahminical origins of the Indian Foreign Service (Chapter 2), analyzing the demographic changes in caste relations and the role of reservations over the decades (Chapter 3), evaluating the role of caste in the socialization and training of probationers (Chapter 4), and examining how caste underpins the diplomatic elite’s conceptions of international society (Chapters 5–6). In these investigations, caste and class are both distinct and intertwined. As one rather undiplomatic officer from a 1960s batch contended, bad officers ‘generally came from poorer backgrounds’, and since ‘caste inequalities are very closely tied with economic inequalities’, caste, too, often works in the Service as a proxy for who might fit the dominant habitus.¹²² At the same time, bitter debates such as those around the “creamy layer” or the relationship between caste and race (Chapters 3–5) are examples of why caste and class cannot be considered analogous categories, and why caste hierarchies matter on their own terms.

A study of caste relations in the Foreign Service may reflect wider trends in Indian society, and certainly reproduces the prevalent dynamic of upper-caste cultural dominance in the face of lower-caste demographic dominance. Yet the Foreign Service is also a historically relatively progressive space in which caste has been a taboo, manifesting itself not so much, or at least decreasingly so, in outright discrimination as in subtle cultural marginalization. As Dalit diplomats and those sympathetic to their situation repeatedly emphasized, most upper-caste officers – fiercely anti-casteist in their political principles – rarely acknowledge the subtler prejudices they hold.¹²³ Even those who welcome reservations tend to view social justice and world-class diplomacy as mutually

¹¹⁷ Christophe Jaffrelot, ‘The Politics of Caste Identities’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Indian Culture*, ed. Vasudha Dalmia and Rashmi Sadana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 80–98; Tridip Ray, Arka Roy Chaudhuri, and Komal Sahai, ‘Whose Education Matters? An Analysis of Inter-Caste Marriages in India’, *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 176 (2020): 619–33; Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, ‘The Political Role of India’s Caste Associations’, *Pacific Affairs* 85, no. 2 (2012): 5–22; Suryakant Waghmore, ‘Community, Not Humanity: Caste Associations and Hindu Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary Mumbai’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 42, no. 2 (2019): 375–393.

¹¹⁸ Interview 43, April 2019.

¹¹⁹ Interview 17, March 2019; Interview 22, April 2019; Interview 35, April 2019; Interview 57, May 2019; Interview 61, May 2019.

¹²⁰ Jodhka, ‘Ascriptive Hierarchies’, 9.

¹²¹ Jodhka, 3.

¹²² Interview 30, April 2019.

¹²³ Interview 45, April 2019; Interview 49, May 2019; Interview 54, May 2019; Interview 71, May 2019; Interview 75, May 2019; Interview 85, May 2019.

exclusive goals, so that ‘there will be a price to pay’ for the upliftment of lower castes, as one retired upper-caste officer warned.¹²⁴

To understand the ideational and social backdrop against which caste operates in the comparatively progressive Foreign Service, we must understand how the Nehruvian, liberal upper castes – members of which constitute the traditionally dominant group of the Service – have historically ordered caste into their universe of social meaning. The postcolonial Nehruvian era, between 1947 and 1964, was shaped by a culturally homogenous upper-caste elite that – distinguishing itself by an overt commitment to a secular, inclusive India – could ‘render invisible its own ascriptive markers’ of privilege.¹²⁵ By the time Nehru’s Congress Party took power in 1947, the influence of caste had turned from a political commonplace to an international embarrassment: ‘We isolate ourselves in castes, with the result that it is a unique Indian habit which does not prevail anywhere else in the world’, Nehru despaired in a speech in the Lok Sabha on 17th September 1953.¹²⁶ Caste had become a phenomenon to be hidden and hushed, in particular from the rest of international society, of which the liberals were keen to become equal, respected members.

The manner in which liberal upper-caste elites have delegitimized debates around caste as “communal” and “divisive” is a prime example of what Bourdieu meant regarding the symbolic power of the dominant to define the social world. Among these elites, the opposition to caste discrimination manifested itself not so much in anti-casteist campaigning as in a careful omission of caste from political discussion.¹²⁷ This, in other words, was also a very particular kind of elite secularism. Indeed, it is imperative for understanding the chapters ahead to also understand that secularism in India is not what it is, or tries to be, in Europe. At the risk of stretching the patience of a reader expecting to read about caste, a word on the word secularism itself is, therefore, strictly necessary.

As Rajeev Bhargava, one of the canonical writers on Indian secularism, notes, ‘[i]deals are rarely if ever and never simply transplanted from one cultural context to another’ – instead, ‘[t]hey invariably adapt, sometimes so creatively to suit their new habitat that they seem unrecognizable’.¹²⁸ Indian secularism was never about divorcing religion from politics out right, in ways that the French concept of *laïcité* might have demanded. Instead of shrinking the space for the sacred in public life, Indian secularism, crucially against the backdrop of Partition, has been about ‘the recognition and acceptance of difference’, so that ‘the question of secularism has been posed as a question of pluralism, or of tolerance between diverse religious and cultural communities’.¹²⁹ Against Gandhi’s religiosity, Nehru himself held a ‘lifelong aversion to religion as practised by common people’, as T.N. Madan has argued, and what emerged was a constitutional compromise – not a banishment of a force that could hardly be legislated out of existence, but a ‘secular state in terms of religious pluralism’.¹³⁰ Seen by the Hindu right as a pseudo-concept which stigmatizes

¹²⁴ Interview 12, March 2019; The same argument was also made in: Interview 1, February 2019; Interview 3, March 2019; Interview 7, March 2019; Interview 9; Interview 16, March 2019; Interview 18; Interview 19, April 2019; Interview 23, April 2019; Interview 24, April 2019; Interview 31, April 2019; Interview 35; Interview 36, April 2019; Interview 56, May 2019; Interview 57; Interview 69, May 2019; Interview 70, May 2019; Interview 85.

¹²⁵ Satish Deshpande, *Contemporary India: A Sociological View* (New Delhi: Viking, 2004), 71.

¹²⁶ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speeches, Vol. 3: 1953-1957* (New Delhi: Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of the Government of India, 1958), 244.

¹²⁷ Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Shudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy* (1996) (Calcutta: Samya, 2002), 49.

¹²⁸ Rajeev Bhargava, ‘The Distinctiveness of Indian Secularism’, in *Indian Political Thought: A Reader*, ed. Aakash Singh and Silika Mohapatra (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 99.

¹²⁹ Gyanendra Pandey, ‘The Secular State and the Limits of Dialogue’, in *The Crisis of Secularism in India*, ed. Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan (Duke University Press, 2007), 157.

¹³⁰ T. N. Madan, ‘Whither Indian Secularism?’, *Modern Asian Studies* 27, no. 3 (1993): 683.

the Hindu majority while pandering to religious minorities, most infamously Muslims,¹³¹ Indian secularism has also been criticised by scholars from the left, by the likes of Ashis Nandy and Partha Chatterjee, for its participation in a flawed modernist project of reason.¹³² What will concern us here and across the pages to come is a different set of problems: one, the relationship between upper-caste liberal secularism and the question of continued caste discrimination, and two, the expressions of Indian diversity in the name of this still casteist secularism.

This, for now, brings us right back to the question of caste discourses in upper-caste liberal spaces. For the Indian secular creed which sought to distance itself from religion also allowed the upper castes to distance themselves from – instead of meaningfully addressing – the question of caste.¹³³ In fact, the liberal intelligentsia embodied by politicians like Nehru did its utmost to convince religious communities that in political life, the individual was the basic unit of the nation, with communal affinities suspended in favour of a common, unified “Indianness”.¹³⁴ The silence on caste not only allowed for the secular elites governing India to remain firmly brahminic in social make-up, it also permitted the state itself to be ‘rendered brahminic in the name of secularism’.¹³⁵ Liberal castelessness won one of the most crucial ‘struggles about the meaning of the social world’, as Bourdieu would have it.¹³⁶ It is against this social arrangement that the claims about castelessness, secularism, and the cultural capital of the upper castes should be read in the coming chapters.

As an example of the quiet relevance of caste to understanding Indian diplomats, consider the deeply Bourdieusian implications of the reservations system. Concepts produce groups – for as Bourdieu would have it: ‘What is at stake in the struggles about the meaning of the social world is power over the classificatory schemes and systems which are the basis of the representations of the groups and therefore of their mobilization and demobilization’.¹³⁷ As such, even seemingly sterile words like “merit” have social baggage and consequences.¹³⁸ In the joint entry examinations for the all-India Government Services that all civil service aspirants take, reservations function by intervening in the manner in which candidates are chosen off the “general merit list”, which reflects the ranking of each candidate’s aggregate marks in a national tally. If the initial list of successful candidates recommended for appointment falls short of the requisite proportion of lower-caste and Adivasi candidates, the reservations are filled by descending lower down the ranks until the quotas are met.¹³⁹ With the division of candidates into the “general merit list” of mostly upper-caste candidates and a stigmatized “reservations list” of lower castes and tribal groups, the selection system has called forth a parallel class of diplomats, whose ranking in one examination marks them out as “reserved types” for the rest of their careers.¹⁴⁰

¹³¹ Nana Deshmukh, *Our Secularism Needs Rethinking* (New Delhi: Deen Dayal Research Institute, 1990).

¹³² Partha Chatterjee, ‘Secularism and Toleration’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 29, no. 28 (1994): 1768–77; Ashis Nandy, ‘An Anti-Secularist Manifesto’, *India International Centre Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1995): 35–64.

¹³³ Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2006), 14.

¹³⁴ Christophe Jaffrelot, *Religion, Caste and Politics in India* (London: Hurst, 2011), 5.

¹³⁵ Shepherd, *Buffalo Nationalism*, 79.

¹³⁶ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 481.

¹³⁷ Bourdieu, 481.

¹³⁸ This loaded term has animated debate in the Service from the earliest years: P.N. Haksar, ‘Memo’, 6 January 1961, ‘1960-61: Official papers relating to Shri P.N. Haksar’s appointment as High Commissioner for India, Nigeria’, SF/6, P.N. Haksar papers, NMML; Eric Gonsalves, ‘Memo’, 23 January 1961, ‘Review of the Indian Foreign Service’, FSP(I)/MC/3/61, NAI.

¹³⁹ V.H. Coelho (MEA), ‘Memo Attached to a Letter from R.K. Nehru to K.P.S. Menon, 9 December 1961’, 7 December 1961, Individual Correspondence, K.P.S. Menon Papers, NMML.

¹⁴⁰ Interview 54; Interview 75; Interview 71.

The inference that those on a general merit list have merit while those outside it do not produces a culture within which the largely upper-caste general-category diplomats can legitimize their dominance within the Service as an impartial reflection of their intrinsic capabilities. Given the narrow margins by which candidates outdo each other in the exam and the strong element of luck that diplomats associated with the entry process,¹⁴¹ as well as the reminder from one retired officer that ‘you can have academic merit and be a mediocre diplomat’,¹⁴² the faith in this strict bifurcation seems empirically fragile. Yet it serves to rationalize a caste order which otherwise looks backward and regressive to the Service’s dominant upper-caste constituencies. The language of merit also obscures the cultural capital endowed on certain diplomats through elite schooling or the social capital accrued as a result of being born into a “civil service family”.

Indeed, reservations lend the elite Indian Foreign Service a rather peculiar social complexion. The Service is culturally dominated by historically homogenous elites, but a significant proportion of its membership is made up of historically marginalized and socioeconomically disadvantaged Indians who may embark on their diplomatic careers entirely unfamiliar with the cultural conventions of an elite space like the Foreign Service. It is no coincidence or personal failure, therefore, if lower-caste Indians are rarely seen as fully imbibing the dominant diplomatic habitus. A Bourdieusian reading of caste relations in the Foreign Service makes sense of these asymmetries of cultural power and the ways in which they feed into constructions of habitus and imageries of international society.

1.3. Positionality and method

1.3.1. Sources and silences

The primary source material for this thesis, gathered between February and June 2019, comes in two forms: written and spoken. The former includes original archival work in New Delhi, in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library’s (NMML) restricted archival section as well as with the declassified MEA files held at the Indian National Archives (NAI). These include diplomatic cables, employment figures and policy outlines, budgetary documents, external and internal responses to Parliamentary Questions and queries from external interest groups, as well as letters by career diplomats and political leaders. Outside the archives, the written material also includes autobiographical writing from Indian diplomats held at the Nehru Memorial Library and Oxford University’s Bodleian Libraries.

The spoken material stems from 85 interviews conducted in New Delhi and Bangalore, primarily with serving and retired IFS officers but also a handful of ministers, academics and policy experts, as well as a BJP-party affiliate working in foreign affairs. These anonymous in-person interviews lasted about an hour on average but ranged from the rare 40-minute interview to several conversations that stretched over three to five hours. They were transcribed by hand and, apart from a few cases where interviewees requested otherwise, were also saved on a phone’s voice recorder.

¹⁴¹ Interview 22; Interview 44, April 2019; Interview 60, May 2019; Interview 66, May 2019; Interview 71.

¹⁴² Interview 38, April 2019.

The epistemological status of the source material is less of a ‘fraught matter’ than those demanding analytical objectivity might commonly protest.¹⁴³ They do not serve to provide “external validity” per se: they offer valuable insight not despite their subjective and situational nature, but because of it. This is as true of the historical utterances unearthed from the archives as it is of contemporary discourse. The anonymity of the interviews allowed for (often unexpectedly) frank conversations, and as such the interviews often provided more insight on contested topics than the archival or autobiographical record. Yet since we are concerned with intersubjectively held beliefs and conceptions, it does not necessarily matter whether individuals expressed deeply held convictions or convenient heuristics. After all, reactions to intersubjective “truths” can range from ‘a deeper internalization of dominant notions to a more cynical or pragmatic conformity’, suggesting considerable elasticity in how individuals convey or conceal their relationship to dominant narratives.¹⁴⁴

The question, rather, is whose subjectivities are canonized – and thus rendered “objective”. Who is allowed to narrate themselves, who is narrated by others? Whose account of a topic is seen as commonsensical, whose as politically motivated or biased? In other words, whose identity and worldviews have come to be seen as axiomatic?

Consider first the genre of autobiographical writing, which often covers a wide range of topics relevant for this thesis – diplomatic training, the Service’s history, the changing demographics of the cadres, Indian diplomatic culture, the implicit valorizations of what an ideal diplomat looks like, and where the social and cultural fault lines within the Service may lie. The autobiographical corpus traces back to diplomats originally brought up in the ICS – India’s first Foreign Secretary, K.P.S. Menon (1948–1952), in *Many Worlds Revisited: An Autobiography*, reflects both on his career in the IFS and his prior life within colonial bureaucracy.¹⁴⁵ Menon began a tradition of writing autobiographies from the perspective of a former Foreign Secretary that a great many of his successors, several of whom this thesis cites, have continued.¹⁴⁶ One does not need to become Foreign Secretary to author diplomatic memoirs, of course – Ambassador B.K. Nehru’s *Nice Guys Finish Last*, for example, is every bit as candid as the unorthodox title intimates.¹⁴⁷ Occasionally, works that are not explicitly autobiographical feature, too – examples are Foreign Secretary J.N. Dixit’s *Indian Foreign Service: History and Challenge*, arguably the most academically minded and comprehensive account of the IFS,¹⁴⁸ and Ambassador Kishan Rana’s prolific writings on diplomatic processes and reforms.¹⁴⁹

There are interpretative shortcomings to diplomatic memoirs in general: their easily exaggerated defining-the-era claims often build on descriptive detail around “the art of negotiation” rather than critical dissection of the context, and are framed to manipulate the tenor in which one’s career is

¹⁴³ Philip H. J. Davies, ‘Spies as Informants: Triangulation and the Interpretation of Elite Interview Data in the Study of the Intelligence and Security Services’, *Politics* 21, no. 1 (2001): 77.

¹⁴⁴ Eagleton-Pierce, *Symbolic Power*, 53.

¹⁴⁵ K.P.S. Menon, *Many Worlds Revisited: An Autobiography* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1981).

¹⁴⁶ Rajeshwar Dayal, *A Life of Our Times* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1998); J. N. Dixit, *My South Block Years: Memoirs of a Foreign Secretary* (New Delhi: UBS Publishers, 1996); Muchkund Dubey, *India’s Foreign Policy: Coping with the Changing World* (New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2016); Subimal Dutt, *With Nehru in the Foreign Office* (Calcutta: South Asia Books, 1977); Y. D. Gundevia, *Outside the Archives* (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1984); Triloki Nath Kaul, *Ambassadors Need Not Lie: Some Aspects of India’s Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Lancer International, 1988); Maharaja Krishna Rasgotra, *A Life in Diplomacy* (Gurgaon: Penguin/Viking, 2016).

¹⁴⁷ Braj Kumar Nehru, *Nice Guys Finish Second: Memoirs* (New Delhi: Viking, 1997).

¹⁴⁸ J. N. Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service: History and Challenge* (Delhi: Konark Publishers, 2005).

¹⁴⁹ See e.g. Kishan S. Rana, *Inside Diplomacy* (New Delhi: Manas, 2000); Kishan S. Rana, *The 21st Century Ambassador: Plenipotentiary to Chief Executive* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

consecrated into the annals of diplomatic history.¹⁵⁰ Indian memoirs, too, are not only written with public perception and political sensitivities in mind, but are also officially censored – a ministerial memo from 7th December 1961 confirmed that K.P.S. Menon had received prime-ministerial permission to publish *The Flying Troika*, provided he amended the manuscript's commentary on Vijayalakshmi Pandit, IFS Officers' Conduct Rules, and some unhelpfully sharp comments on the Eisenhower-Dulles administration.¹⁵¹

There is, however, a further pertinent shortcoming to the Indian canon of diplomatic autobiography: it reflects and reinforces the power imbalances within the IFS. In fact, a note on this canon quickly becomes a miniature exercise in sociological hypothesizing in its own right. Autobiography seems to be a genre reserved for usually upper-class, almost exclusively upper-caste men. The only autobiography by a female diplomat is from Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Nehru's sister and political appointee, who never joined the Service itself.¹⁵² Female diplomats have authored books on Indian foreign policy – former Foreign Secretary Nirupama Menon Rao (2009–2011) is working on a book on Indo–China relations¹⁵³ and former Ambassador to the EU Bhaswati Mukherjee wrote on Indo-EU relations in 2018¹⁵⁴ – but they have abstained from autobiography.¹⁵⁵

Accounts from the openly expressed perspectives of reservation recruits are also missing entirely – not merely because of their underrepresentation in the Service's upper echelons, but presumably also the stigma of lower-caste origins. We can envision what such accounts may have looked like, if they in any way approximated the rare 1997 memoir *An Untouchable in the IAS*, in which Balwant Singh of the 1959 batch catalogues his five years of failing to 'adjust' to life in the IAS – which Singh calls a 'sanctuary' for the upper castes, hostile to Dalits as 'unwelcome intruders'.¹⁵⁶ All in all, the Indian Foreign Service is narrated and projected outward from the vantage point of those privileged enough to claim "not to see" gender, caste, or class in how their Service operates.

The archives sometimes close gaps in this narration. Some of the NMML's material in particular is candid and self-critical, presumably because much of the correspondence was never intended for public consumption. At the NAI, there are also scattered descriptive records on the entry of women and reservation recruits into the Service in the first four decades – something which, even in the archives, can still not be said for representatives of religious minorities, presumably because of the secular imperative to disregard the question of religious affiliation altogether. Sometimes the most telling section of an argument is its casually thrown-in subordinate clause, the most profound part of an utterance its implicit underlying assumption, and the loudest matter a peculiar absence of certain themes where one would expect them to be addressed. At the same time, although personal correspondence often provides colourful details, some of the ministerial material is also impersonal to a fault, perhaps even more so on contentious issues, like India's decades-long efforts at excluding caste from the United Nations (UN) anti-discrimination agenda (Chapter 5). Ashok Kapur's lament on the impossibility of studying Indian diplomats –

¹⁵⁰ Christer Jönsson and Martin Hall, *Essence of Diplomacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 8–9; Sending, Pouliot, and Neumann, 'The Future of Diplomacy', 530.

¹⁵¹ V.H. Coelho (MEA), 'Memo Attached to a Letter from R.K. Nehru to K.P.S. Menon, 9 December 1961', 7 December 1961, Individual Correspondence, K.P.S. Menon Papers, NMML.

¹⁵² Vijayalakshmi Pandit, *The Scope of H* *Interview 78, May 2019; Also Interview 46, May 2019. appiness: A Personal Memoir* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979).

¹⁵³ Nirupama Menon Rao, 'About', Nirupama Menon Rao, accessed 12 August 2020, <https://www.nirupamamenonrao.net/>.

¹⁵⁴ Bhaswati Mukherjee, *India and the EU: An Insider's View* (New Delhi: Vij Books, 2018).

¹⁵⁵ A future exception might become former Ambassador Madhu Bhaduri, whose unpublished diaries may be published in their English format in the coming years.

¹⁵⁶ Balwant Singh, *An Untouchable in the I.A.S.* (Saharanpur: B. Singh, 1997), 9.

‘unfortunately the attitudes that really deserve analysis cannot be documented’¹⁵⁷ – can perhaps not be entirely remedied in the archives. Yet face to face, much more comes to light.

1.3.2. Interviews as autoethnographies

The 85 interviews conducted for this thesis can be thought of as what Deborah Reed-Danahay, commenting on Bourdieu’s methodology, calls *autoethnographies*: ‘commentaries and analysis by informants on their own sociocultural milieus’.¹⁵⁸ Confounding critiques of Bourdieu as a hardened structuralist, these autoethnographies are fundamental to the analysis, not ‘mere stylish embellishments’.¹⁵⁹

Bourdieu held strong convictions on interviews and the forms of reflexive sociology that should accompany them. He was sceptical of the fieldwork traditions of anthropology, deriding ‘the lover of exoticism who gives priority to picturesque differences’.¹⁶⁰ Instead of long periods of immersion in communities to uncover some sort of “essence”, he preferred open-ended or semi-structured interviews.¹⁶¹ During these, he would ‘register the real differences that separate both structures and dispositions (the habitus), the principle of which must be sought not in the peculiarities of some national character – or “soul” – but in the particularities of different collective histories’.¹⁶² Indeed, attempts at locating some sort of cultural authenticity not only downplay the complexity of social structures but also bury underneath a veneer of unity the social hierarchies that order the unity into its unequal parts.

The interviews that inform this thesis are anonymous, but not positionless. Technical anonymity gave space for diplomats to express what they certainly would not have otherwise, while making all interviewees anonymous (instead of only anonymizing upon request) ensured that no one rendition would hold more gravitas simply because it was, for example, attributable to a publicly renowned individual. Yet even without a name, this thesis still records ‘a position, a past, and identity’, as Bourdieusian-inspired work must.¹⁶³ It has omitted some anecdotes and rare combinations of social markers that are so specific as to render the officer’s identity obvious, but it does retain pieces of identity pertinent to the arguments being made. Seniority, education, class, familial background, gender, caste, or religion all feature at various points. Much of the research on elite institutions in IR has functioned on an implicit equation of confidentiality with obscurity, ‘to the point that elementary social characteristics of the agents too often disappear, at least to the reader, behind anonymity’.¹⁶⁴ This, of course, would render a Bourdieusian analysis all but impossible, since it by necessity divorces worldviews and habitus from the socioeconomic positions that underpin them. Social context, not names, is a *sine qua non* for interpreting the interviews.

Indeed, often the challenge is to gauge less ‘what interviewees talk about than what they talk from – the stock of unspoken assumptions and tacit know-how that ought to be presumed in order to

¹⁵⁷ Ashok Kapur quoted in Shashi Tharoor, *Reasons of State: Political Development and India’s Foreign Policy under Indira Gandhi, 1966-1977* (New Delhi: Vikas PubHouse, 1982), vii.

¹⁵⁸ Reed-Danahay, *Locating Bourdieu*, 130.

¹⁵⁹ Anna Leander, ‘The Promises, Problems, and Potentials of a Bourdieu-Inspired Staging of International Relations’, *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 3 (2011): 298.

¹⁶⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998), 2.

¹⁶¹ Reed-Danahay, *Locating Bourdieu*, 129.

¹⁶² Bourdieu, *Practical Reason*, 3.

¹⁶³ Leander, ‘Promises, Problems, and Potentials’, 299.

¹⁶⁴ Cohen, ‘Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations’, 222.

say what is being said'.¹⁶⁵ For Bourdieu, it matters who the person behind the quote is, and where they stand in the social structures around them. Understanding an utterance involves more than grasping the meaning of its words: '[A]nyone issuing a serious utterance will always be doing something as well as saying something', as Skinner, too, once rightly observed.¹⁶⁶ This also means that interview material must be triangulated against both primary sources and secondary literature on Indian society, the Foreign Service, and international diplomacy.

The very process of negotiating access to interviewees was embedded in a myriad of social structures and conventions. Securing appointments with high-level officers and sought-after ministers or thinkers is undeniably and undeservedly abetted by affiliation to a prominent British university – and to Balliol College in particular, which (as Chapter 2 discusses) held a special meaning to elderly diplomats, entangling the interview process itself in the colonial legacies being studied. Yet generally, the interviews occurred through a process of snowballing, helped in particular by two internal dynamics of the Service. Firstly, the principle of batch solidarity (*camaraderie* between officers of the same annual intake) meant that interviewees could confidently recommend and nominate their peers as the next interviewee, as declining would be considered bad form. Secondly, adherence to bureaucratic hierarchy (even if arguably less rigid than in the Home Services) ensured that seniors could request their juniors to grant interviews – even in the case of one retired officer recommending another.

As a result, the very principles by which snowballing operated merit some sociological observation: who recommended whom as an interviewee, as somebody worthy of being spoken to? Which types of diplomats socialize with one another, and how do they situate themselves in the hierarchies of their Service? As one Additional-Secretary sardonically noted, 'like begets like' – there was a certain 'typology' that emerged from taking recommendations from some of the most prominent diplomats.¹⁶⁷ This could mean only encountering diplomats who fit the dominant habitus: 'people will keep pointing you to people who are articulate', one elite-schooled Under-Secretary remarked, thus creating a process of snowballing that 'perpetuates certain social biases'.¹⁶⁸ This meant that a focused counterbalancing of snowballing effects was required, including explicitly requesting interviewee recommendations from social groups underrepresented in the snowballing suggestions – women, lower-caste diplomats, people without a liberal arts education, officers from outside the metropolitan centres, those with unconventional biographies for an IFS officer.

Interviews were the richest, most striking source of knowledge gathered over the course of fieldwork in New Delhi. Anonymity relaxed the boundaries of acceptable speech far beyond those that seemed to govern written material. One retired Dalit officer noted that most diplomats from marginalized backgrounds had learned never to articulate their alienation in the Service – 'they just cope with this social arrogance'.¹⁶⁹ What was striking, then, was the impatience with which officers from all kinds of backgrounds peeled back taboos. A lively, ongoing debate around the reservations system, for example, came into sharp view, even if it is mostly marked by its absence in written sources. Sometimes, diplomats also ended up using telling expressions, making side comments, or reacting to certain topics in ways that spoke to the issues even if no grand declarations were made.

¹⁶⁵ Vincent Pouliot, 'Methodology: Putting Practice Theory into Practice', in *Bourdieu in International Relations: Rethinking Key Concepts in IR*, ed. Rebecca Adler-Nissen (London: Routledge, 2012), 51.

¹⁶⁶ Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume 1, Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 106.

¹⁶⁷ Interview 7.

¹⁶⁸ Interview 59, May 2019.

¹⁶⁹ Interview 54.

This does not mean that interviews were an unobstructed window into the souls of diplomats, of course. Taboos come in degrees. While women were lavishly generous in their recounting of life as a female diplomat, questions relating to religious identity were either diplomatically diverted or answered by emphasizing that religion had never been an issue in the Service (at least, that is, until the election of a Hindu nationalist Prime Minister in 2014).¹⁷⁰ This was most obviously the case with Muslim officers, but also extended to the reticence of many Sikh and Christian diplomats in thinking of themselves as religious minorities inside the Service. Some feared that critical comments on the more representative batches would be seen as ‘casteist or classist’ (something nobody wanted to be seen as).¹⁷¹ Although the vast majority of general-category officers volunteered that their upper-caste colleagues harboured ‘a very strong sense of resentment’¹⁷² toward reserved-category officers (who felt it¹⁷³), they all declared themselves free of such baggage. One young Dalit officer drew an unpopular analogy: ‘it’s like racism – since it’s now taboo and not kosher to say certain things out loud any more’, it has become harder to discern where his colleagues stand.¹⁷⁴ ‘With caste, with gender, it’s all the same: it’s there, just subtle’, an upper-caste female colleague expanded.¹⁷⁵ Opinions withheld are one thing – yet many attitudes and assumptions do not offer themselves up as conscious opinions to be purposefully shared or guarded in the first place.

This brings us to the question of reflexivity – both on the part of those being studied and on the part of those studying them. For Bourdieu, this involved a sort of “socioanalysis” that considered the social order within which interviewees made their comments, all the while acknowledging the place of the researcher in this order, too.¹⁷⁶

An interviewee’s positionality, for Bourdieu, comes out on a spectrum of self-reflexivity. On one end is a *discourse of familiarity*, which ‘leaves unsaid all that goes without saying’.¹⁷⁷ We might think of these givens as the ideational consensus that underwrites the field. For the interviewee, much of what fascinates the interviewer is not even worthy of the question being posed. Yet it is precisely the unquestioned that is often most revealing. Classic thinkers on diplomacy repeatedly offer claims such as ‘common sense is the essence of diplomacy’.¹⁷⁸ Bourdieu called this *doxa* – ‘all that which is taken for granted’,¹⁷⁹ representing ‘a particular point of view, the point of view of the dominant, which presents and imposes itself as a universal point of view’.¹⁸⁰ The dominant are often oblivious to the historical struggles that have produced the current consensus they preside over. Thus, it is precisely the commonsensical nature of many popular assumptions that make them paramount for the maintenance of systems of power.

At the other end of the spectrum, an *outsider-oriented discourse* involves ‘learned reconstruction of the native world’.¹⁸¹ Interviewees ‘produce a discourse’ for the researcher, self-theorizing their utterances as a kind of interpretive courtesy – or, one might add, as an instrument for controlling the narrative. Yet since people rarely follow plain rules in their behaviour or overt principles in

¹⁷⁰ Interview 3; Interview 7; Interview 9; Interview 20, April 2019; Interview 25, April 2019; Interview 26, April 2019; Interview 72, May 2019; Interview 74, May 2019.

¹⁷¹ Interview 33, April 2019.

¹⁷² Interview 7; Similar sentiments were also expressed in Interview 41, April 2019; Interview 19; Interview 45.

¹⁷³ Interview 54; Interview 67, May 2019; Interview 71; Interview 75.

¹⁷⁴ Interview 71.

¹⁷⁵ Interview 63, May 2019.

¹⁷⁶ Bourdieu, *Outline*, 18.

¹⁷⁷ Bourdieu, 18.

¹⁷⁸ Harold Nicolson, *Diplomacy*, 3d ed. (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1963), 20.

¹⁷⁹ Bourdieu, *Outline*, 166.

¹⁸⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field’, trans. Samar Farage and Loïc Wacquant, *Sociological Theory* 12, no. 1 (1994): 15.

¹⁸¹ Bourdieu, *Outline*, 18.

their thinking, interviewees are forcing a structured rationalization upon themselves *ex post facto*.¹⁸² There is, consequently, a certain affectation to articulating embodied knowledge: ‘As soon as he [*sic*] reflects on his practice, adopting a quasi-theoretical posture’, Bourdieu forewarns, ‘the agent loses any chance of expressing the truth of his practice’.¹⁸³ This concern with overintellectualization is perhaps doubly heightened in the presence of India’s well-read diplomats. Diplomats are, by profession, experts at framing their utterances with foreign audiences in mind. It emerged that Indian diplomats were particularly discerning consumers of the academic work done on themselves (work which might structure their own rationalizations). Four interviewees even expressed doubts about being interviewed after their experience of speaking with two well-known academics whose subsequent publications they felt had misrepresented diplomatic thinking within the Service.¹⁸⁴

This relation to the researcher is why self-reflexivity must run both ways. Bourdieu believed that epistemological reflections on the researcher’s own position in the social world are imperative.¹⁸⁵ Seven years studying Indian foreign policy, diplomacy, and society can provide an academic basis against which the encounter made sense, but it could not erase the distances of position and lived experience that defined the encounter.

To some interviewees, a young European woman studying Indian diplomats seemed to come across as harmless, perhaps even culturally innocent or politically naïve. This meant, on the one hand, some pejorative assumptions about how much I knew or understood – occasioning some long, unprompted elaborations on, for example, Indian diplomatic history. On the other, it also meant that diplomats felt at ease to expound on sensitive topics in ways they may not have with interviewers of another gender, ethnicity, or cultural background. Being European, while also perhaps associated with a certain safe ignorance, also brought its own kind of baggage. Officers might have been mindful, for example, of presenting themselves in a manner that accorded with their own imageries of European international society, which I might have been expected to share, or making arguments a European could stereotypically be presumed to want to hear, perhaps about India’s commitment to diversity or equality. Yet to insist that such commitments can only be performative or insincere would be both deeply cynical and, in assuming that most things orient themselves around Europe and Europeans, in itself reproduce the very hierarchies this thesis seeks to query.

Sometimes, interviewees also saw closeness instead of distance. Some diplomats – liberal arts graduates, Oxbridge alumni, culturally mobile millennials – drew me into their fold, assuming agreement on a range of issues and speaking presumptively of “people like us”. How various interviewees situated me in their narratives of the world spoke to where they saw themselves in it – those emphasising a shared kind of elite education, for example, usually spoke from a dominant habitus they compared to less accomplished colleagues, while many female diplomats sensed they were sharing experiences of womanhood that might be intuitively familiar to their interviewer. These assumptions were sometimes accurate, sometimes mistaken. What they always underscored was the impossibility of extracting oneself out of the equation. If it matters what interviewees ‘talk about’ and ‘talk from’,¹⁸⁶ it also matters who they are talking *to*. The coming chapters note some occasions on which the relationship between interviewee and interviewer most obviously seems to have shaped the tone and content of conversation. However, insofar as the over 80 interviewees with their diverse backgrounds would have approached the encounter in very different ways, we

¹⁸² Reed-Danahay, *Locating Bourdieu*, 131.

¹⁸³ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 91.

¹⁸⁴ Interview 1; Interview 6, March 2019; Interview 12; Interview 59.

¹⁸⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Craft of Sociology: Epistemological Preliminaries* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991), 250.

¹⁸⁶ Pouliot, ‘Methodology’, 51.

can at least be assured that no one big, single bias skewed all conversations in equal measure – rather, they were delightfully partial and deeply socially situated in a myriad of ways.

What might not come through in the analysis is the overwhelming magnanimity, offered alongside endless cups of chai, which characterized most interviews. However individual readers might feel about this piece of work, it was written from a place of great regard for Indian diplomats, many of whom work with tremendous creativity and resolve in the face of the vast inequalities that structure Indian society and the world at large.

Conclusion

This chapter thought ‘with Bourdieu [...] beyond Bourdieu, and against him’¹⁸⁷ to lay the theoretical and methodological groundwork for the chapters ahead. It introduced a conceptual backbone which sustains the various intersecting identities and positionalities that structure the social world, placing them into a Bourdieusian scaffolding of habitus, capital, and fields. It discussed where Bourdieu fits in IR and where this thesis fits in Bourdieusian IR. The chapter then discussed how to bring Bourdieu into a non-European analytical context: it sketched out the contours of the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus and developed caste as a Bourdieusian concept. Finally, it discussed why the social hierarchies and subtle distinctions that underpin Bourdieusian analysis also matter in a methodological context, laying out the written and spoken forms of primary source gathered in New Delhi, as well as discussing the imperatives of reflexive sociology.

Diplomacy, as a somewhat arcane profession built on social codes, seems intuitively Bourdieusian in its subtlety and elitism. Yet it is in fact Bourdieu’s persistent grounding of manners and habits in unequal social orders that allows us to understand the web of hierarchies that gives birth to the habitus of Indian diplomats. The coming chapters examine how the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus came into being, what the changing nature of the cadres has done to the performance of the habitus, how these cadres have been socialized and trained into imbibing the cleft habitus, and how the behavioural and ideational demands of this habitus have underlain Indian diplomacy and the outward projection of Indianness in international society.

¹⁸⁷ Just as Bourdieu himself, sceptical of academic idolatry, suggested – see Bourdieu and Wacquant, *Invitation*, xiv.

2. BALLIOL AND BANDUNG

We pretended to be real, to be learning, to be preparing ourselves for life, we mimic men of the New World, one unknown corner of it, with all its reminders of the corruption that came so quickly to the new.¹

On 10th July 1835, Lord Macaulay presented his *Minute on Indian Education* in the British Parliament, sketching out the anatomy of a future colonized elite, ‘Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, opinions, morals and intellect’.² Some rendition of this elite came into being in the Indian members of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) – the colonial-era elite administrative cadre of around a thousand men that once governed over a quarter of the world’s population.³ Yet by the time some former Indian members of this elite Service were summoned to establish the Indian Foreign Service in the run-up to Independence in 1947, the colonial project had produced an elite adrift – not Macaulay’s band of British loyalists but a group marked by its deep ambivalence toward both their imperial masters and Indian compatriots. Theirs was a cleft habitus, ‘inhabited by tensions and contradictions’,⁴ of what Bourdieu and Sayed, speaking of elites in colonized countries, called the *cultural sabir*:⁵ ‘cast between two worlds’ but, in leading ‘a sort of double inner life’, in the end effectively ‘rejected by both’.⁶ What Bourdieu called the cultural sabir, in India was once ridiculed as the *brown sahib* – a nationalist tag for Indians willing to ‘act the sedulous ape to his white bosses’, as Ambassador Vijayalakshmi Pandit once mocked.⁷ The brown sahib was the caricatured consummation of Macaulay’s vision: he had been schooled to ‘think British, feel British, act British, and buy British’,⁸ and yet was never truly part of the fraternity of gentlemen he was expected to mimic.

This chapter argues that the fraught battle over the correct way of being an ideal worldly bureaucrat, once mostly waged inside the heads of Indian officers under the British Raj, did not cease at Independence, but was, rather, institutionalized. What once was a tortured individual balancing act became a shared guiding ideal: a new diplomatic cleft habitus for the postcolonial Foreign Service. Under colonialism, the cleft had been suspended between a very real empire and a hypothetical independent India. Now, it straddled the phantom existence of empire and a very real postcolonial international society struggling to abide by its radical promise. For the British Raj had given its chosen Indian elites not only employment or status, but also a worldview: an image of international society narrated from the perspective of European power. Closely hued to the

¹ V. S. Naipaul, *The Mimic Men* (1967) (London: Picador, 2011), 157.

² Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay, ‘Minute on Indian Education (1835)’, in *Archives of Empire, Volume I: From the East India Company to the Suez Canal*, ed. Mia Carter and Barbara Harlow (Duke University Press, 2003), 237.

³ Arthur S. Lall, *The Emergence of Modern India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 18.

⁴ Bourdieu, ‘Social Space and Symbolic Power’, 100.

⁵ Bourdieu and Sayad, ‘Colonial Rule and Cultural Sabir’.

⁶ Bourdieu, *The Algerians*, 144.

⁷ Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, 7–8.

⁸ Tarzie Vittachi, *The Brown Sahib* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1962), 54.

English School images of the aristocratic international and Elias' notions of the civilizing process, this international society had called forth a set of beliefs, dispositions, and manners that the colonial Indian bureaucratic elite had internalized – at least insofar as their ability to work as servants of the Raj required them to. Even in a formally postcolonial order, this vision of the world continued to exist, often rather awkwardly, alongside the radical, anti-imperial, socialist vision of the Indian freedom struggle that had promised not just a postcolonial but an anti-imperial international society.

The task of this first empirical chapter, then, is to study the metamorphosis of a personally felt, private dilemma of Indian colonial officers into an institutionalized cleft habitus for the postcolonial Indian Foreign Service: an officer comfortable in the old conventions of classic, European international society and yet also attuned to the political and cultural demands of postcoloniality. The first part of the chapter studies the anatomy of the original cleft habitus under the British Raj. It locates its origins in the elite educational and bureaucratic conditions of empire and analyses the lived experience and autobiographical narrations of Indian ICS officers as they make their way through training at Oxbridge out into India. In bearing witness to the soul-searching on status, race, and class, which accompanied the production of the ideal-type Indian ICS officer, it argues that the original cleft was created as Anglophone Indian elites sought to imbibe the idealized image of a sophisticated, supposedly cosmopolitan colonial officer all the while seeking to prove their allegiance to a radical anti-imperial project of Indian Independence. The second part of the chapter makes a case for considering this cleft habitus as neither a colonial relic nor a historical anecdote but rather as a first cultural sketch for the hybridity of the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus following Independence. It examines the founding years of the Indian Foreign Service from the vantage point of the two visions of international society that underpinned the Service's construction. On the one hand, there was the continued influence of colonial-era ideals, most obviously embodied by ICS officers who believed the Service should reflect European notions of diplomatic tradecraft, alongside British, but supposedly universal, bureaucratic traditions. On the other, there was an emancipatory project of decolonial restructuring, espoused at least in principle by Jawaharlal Nehru, which spoke for a Service reflective of the radical potential of the decolonial moment, the vast diversity of India once suppressed under the Raj, and the promise of Third World solidarity.

In this way, both imageries of international society also enacted their own politics: one, of elite representation and dominance, the other a performative pro-poor project of shaping both India and international society in the image of its margins. And yet these projects were never neatly separated from each other, nor did the habitus they called into being represent some kind of unmoving totality. The tenor of Bourdieu's arguments suggests that, for him, a cleft habitus was always a problem to be solved one way or the other, a transition to be made, and an inconvenient duality to be restored to a state of homogenous normalcy. By contrast, this chapter considers how the cleft habitus of Indian diplomats evolved to speak to two international societies simultaneously, becoming something akin to a governing ideal, always in tension between the two imageries but capable of living with this hybridity as its own sense of normalcy. Both imageries, in their own complicated ways, were telling the diplomats of a new independent nation where and how to belong in the world.

2.1. The genealogy of a habitus

2.1.1. The institutional origins of the Foreign Service

Although this chapter offers a Bourdieu-inspired perspective on the origins of Indian diplomacy, there are existing readings of decolonization and its limits that are germane to the context in which Bourdieu can be made to work. Most famously perhaps in the pantheon of postcolonial thinking, Ashis Nandy's Foucauldian narration of the psychological damage exacted by British colonialism emphasized the great difficulty with which mindsets imposed under colonial rule are forsaken,⁹ while Partha Chatterjee's work of historical criticism, *Nationalist thought and the colonial world: a derivative discourse*, accused postcolonial elites of perpetuating rationalist logic as a form of epistemic privilege, derived from the British but falsely affiliated with a 'world consciousness'.¹⁰ There have also been many historical works written on the Indian Civil Service,¹¹ some of which this chapter draws on. The colonial origins of the diplomatic machinery, more specifically, have been studied, for example, by Sankar Maitra, who in 1966 wrote a sarcastic critique of the Service's 'obsession with the British model (a fine example of post-colonialism)',¹² by Vineet Thakur and Pallavi Raghavan, who have explored the bureaucratic legacies of the Raj on the organization and policies of the Ministry of External Affairs,¹³ and by Swapna Kona Nayudu, who has done descriptive archival work and interviews on the early years of the Foreign Service.¹⁴

To situate the origin story of the diplomatic cleft habitus, it is helpful to begin with this kind of historical contextualization. For although Hugh Weightman, the last British Foreign Secretary of India, announced the creation of 'an entirely new Service from scratch' in 1946,¹⁵ the Indian Foreign Service he was describing was not a fully postcolonial creature. Its creation was weighted down by diplomatic precedent and convention. Over two centuries, the Secret and Political Department of the Government of India, founded by Warren Hastings in 1784, had developed considerable freedom in its dealings with fellow members of the Commonwealth.¹⁶ By 1827, the Government of India's diplomatic expenditure of almost 500,000 pounds overshadowed every

⁹ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

¹⁰ Nalini Jain, 'Two Sides of the Colonial Coin', *India International Centre Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1988): 128.

¹¹ See e.g. Arudra Burra, 'The Indian Civil Service and the Nationalist Movement: Neutrality, Politics and Continuity', *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 48, no. 4 (2010): 404–32; John Michael Compton, *Indians and the Indian Civil Service, 1853-1879: A Study in National Agitation and Imperial Embarrassment* (London: University of London/Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1967); Clive J Dewey, 'The Education of a Ruling Caste: The Indian Civil Service in the Era of Competitive Examination', *The English Historical Review* 88, no. 347 (1973): 262–85; Charles Chenevix Trench, *Viceroy's Agent* (Jonathan Cape, 1987); David C. Potter, 'The Last of the Indian Civil Service', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 2, no. 1–2 (1979): 19–29.

¹² Sankar N. Maitra, 'Ills of the Indian Foreign Service: A Comment', *Economic and Political Weekly* 1, no. 13 (1966): 550.

¹³ Vineet Thakur, 'The Colonial Origins of Indian Foreign Policy-Making', *Economic and Political Weekly* 49, no. 32 (August 2014): 58–64; Pallavi Raghavan, 'Establishing the Ministry of External Affairs', in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, ed. David Malone, C. Raja Mohan, and Srinath Raghavan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 82–91.

¹⁴ Swapna Kona Nayudu, "'India Looks at the World": Nehru, the Indian Foreign Service & World Diplomacy', *Diplomatica* 2, no. 1 (2020): 100–117.

¹⁵ Hugh Weightman, 'Communique', 30 November 1946, 'Establishment of a separate Indian Foreign Service', FSP/47-2(7), NAI.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Benner, *Structure of Decision: The Indian Foreign Policy Bureaucracy* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1984), 29.

European diplomatic budget, the British Foreign Office's included.¹⁷ In 1920, the British committed to having Indians hold half the posts in the ICS, meaning that a cadre of Indian elites would be socialized into the British administrative system and its ideologies of the world, with some joining the Secret and Political Department itself.¹⁸ By the end of the First World War, India had achieved 'quasi-international status' as the only non-self-governing country in the League of Nations,¹⁹ its delegates drawn from among perceived British sympathizers, colonial officials, and ruling princes.²⁰ Juxtaposed at the 1945 founding conference of the UN in San Francisco were India's official delegation – India's future first Foreign Secretary (1947–1952) K.P.S. Menon included – and the Congress Party's observer mission, led by India's future first Ambassador to the Soviet Union (1947–1949), Vijayalakshmi Pandit. In an ironic turn of history, Independence would push these representatives of empire and anti-imperial organizing together in the Foreign Service. In a way, this presaged the coexistence of the two visions of international society which would come to characterise the Service.

Most extraordinary about the supposed postcoloniality of the new Indian Foreign Service was the number of former colonial officials entrusted with establishing it. For along with the British-educated Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, it was a select group of Indian ICS officers staffing the colonial Political Department and other arms of colonial bureaucracy – upper-class, upper-caste Oxbridge graduates serving the empire – who were called upon to inaugurate the Foreign Service.²¹ Such officers most notably included G.S. Bajpai (first Secretary-General of the MEA), K.P.S. Menon (first Foreign Secretary), N.R. Pillai (second Secretary-General), Badr-ud-Din Tyabji (Ambassador to Belgium and Iran, among others), M.J. Desai (fourth Foreign Secretary) and R.N. Banerjee (later Home Secretary, IAS).²² Another 26 ICS officers were appointed in line with their rank in the colonial cadre,²³ with ties forged under the Raj elevating officers like Subimal Dutt, Bajpai's former subordinate, into the role of Commonwealth Relations Secretary, and later Foreign Secretary.²⁴ A further dozen ICS veterans who never officially joined the Service, Ambassadors to Washington B.R. Sen, L.K. Jha and B.K. Nehru among them, assumed senior positions.²⁵ Colonial officers inducted into Home Services also served in Missions abroad, further tightening the grip of the old ICS on the new IFS.²⁶ The history of Indian diplomacy, therefore, began with an 'ICS generation of men'²⁷ – very literally, in fact, for women were never allowed in colonial bureaucracy.²⁸

ICS officers were joined by about 50 colleagues: eminent recruits from public life, participants in the Congress-led freedom struggle, half a dozen Indian royals, as well as some officials from the British Indian Armed Forces and four members of the dispersed Indian National Army that Bajpai reluctantly accepted at Nehru's insistence.²⁹ Only Bajpai and Menon, having represented India as Agent-Generals in the United States and Kuomintang China, respectively, had diplomatic

¹⁷ Parameswaran N Nair, *The Administration of Foreign Affairs in India with Comparative Reference to Britain* (New Delhi: School of International Studies, 1963), 50.

¹⁸ Lall, *The Emergence of Modern India*, 49.

¹⁹ Charles Herman Heimsath and Surjit Mansingh, *A Diplomatic History of Modern India* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1971), 24; Nair, *The Administration of Foreign Affairs in India with Comparative Reference to Britain*, 37.

²⁰ Thakur, 'The Colonial Origins of Indian Foreign Policy-Making', 61–62.

²¹ 'A Note on Organisation of the Ministry of External Affairs', 26 April 1963, 'Questionnaire of the Institute of Public Administration regarding the Indian Foreign Service', Q (GA)/191/6/63, NAI.

²² Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India's Foreign Policy*, 78; Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, 169.

²³ Rasgotra, *A Life in Diplomacy*, 16.

²⁴ Rasgotra, 16.

²⁵ Rasgotra, 17.

²⁶ Interview 43.

²⁷ M.O. Mathai, *Reminiscences of the Nehru Age* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1978), 193.

²⁸ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 32.

²⁹ Dixit, 89; Rasgotra, *A Life in Diplomacy*, 18.

experience.³⁰ And yet ICS veterans envisioned themselves as working above, more than alongside, these emergency recruits, whose influence was curtailed by ICS officers who ‘did not quite accept them as part of their elite group’.³¹ Bajpai as Agent-General in Washington had been expected to brief against the freedom struggle and in support of the British response to Gandhi’s Quit India Movement in 1942 – ‘in short, to tell a lot of lies about India to unsuspecting Americans on behalf of its wily British masters’, as former Foreign Secretary M.K. Rasgotra laments.³² And yet, ICS officers had more experience running India than those who had most impatiently campaigned for the right to do so. Nehru’s handpicked cadre of celebrities, royalty, and personal connections was easily satirized – one journalistic rendition would later describe a Service of ‘dispossessed princelings, illiterate cavalrymen, and well-connected nitwits’.³³ Against the steady hands of the former ICS, then, it was hard for them to leave much of an imprint on the culture of the Service that was just coming into its own.

Bourdieu reminds us that understanding a habitus requires considering ‘possibilities which did not occur’.³⁴ The Indian Foreign Service would have come to look very different had it been set up by, say, freedom fighters alone. Asked in a private meeting in 1964, the year of his death, about his greatest failure as Prime Minister, the same Nehru who had invited ICS veterans to establish the Foreign Service, and often saw the ideal diplomatic habitus through rather similar eyes, replied: ‘I could not change the administration; it is still a colonial administration’.³⁵ In fact, ICS veterans outlived Nehru himself. The ICS provided India’s first nine Foreign Secretaries,³⁶ and for decades, ‘the entire superstructure was of ICS officers’, with nobody else rising above the Joint-Secretary rank.³⁷ When the Pillai Committee convened in 1966 to prepare their famous report on re-imagining the Foreign Service, both Houses of Parliament expressed their ‘resentment’ at the Committee overwhelmingly consisting of retired ICS officials.³⁸ It was only in 1976, with the appointment of Jagat Mehta, son of ICS-trained Ambassador M.S. Mehta, as Foreign Secretary, that the Foreign Service ceased being led by colonial officers³⁹ – and even then, Mehta turned to his old family friend, K.P.S. Menon, ‘to seek your guidance and claim your blessings’.⁴⁰ One diplomat dated the end of the ICS’s reign only in the 1980s, when the last officers retired⁴¹ – and even upon retirement, many continued to sit on Foreign Service Interview Boards, projecting their conception of the ideal diplomat onto future generations.⁴²

Of course, it was not the former cadres of the ICS who held political sway, as diplomats who joined the Service in the first two decades carefully emphasized in interviews. Executive control over foreign policy was a long-held Viceregal convention, but Nehru’s intimate involvement with

³⁰ ‘Oral History Transcript: K.P.S. Menon’, 1976, 3, Oral Histories, NMML.

³¹ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 159.

³² Rasgotra, *A Life in Diplomacy*, 12.

³³ A description of Indian Foreign Service officers from an article in Seminar magazine in the 1980s, recounted in Interview 43.

³⁴ Bourdieu quoted in Sapiro, ‘Field Theory’, 166.

³⁵ Tarzie Vittachi, ‘Bureaucrats Who Won’t Lie Down’, *The Guardian*, 10 April 1978, 17.

³⁶ Rasgotra, *A Life in Diplomacy*, 16.

³⁷ Interview 43.

³⁸ Lakshmi N. Menon, ‘Response to Follow-up Questions on Q 382 by Mulka Govinda Reddy, Rajya Sabha’, 23 November 1965, ‘Starred question No. II in the Rajya Sabha by Shri M.P. Bhargava regarding Pillai Committee on IFS’, Q/GA/125/51/65, NAI.

³⁹ Rasgotra, *A Life in Diplomacy*, 16.

⁴⁰ Jagat Mehta, ‘Letter to K.P.S. Menon’, 24 February 1976, Individual correspondence, K.P.S. Menon papers, NMML.

⁴¹ Interview 24.

⁴² C. Ganesa Aiyar (Secretary, UPSC), ‘Letter to M.S. Mehta’, 24 December 1958, ‘1958-59: Appointment as one of the examiners for personality for the IAS examination – connected papers and correspondence with the Secretary, UPSC’, SF/45, Mohan Sinha Mehta papers, NMML.

the diplomatic cadres was unparalleled.⁴³ Until 1956, he met each probationer individually⁴⁴ and from then on addressed them annually as a batch.⁴⁵ He would convene even with junior Deputy-Secretaries, and with Joint-Secretaries ‘as a matter of course’ – an impossible thought in the post-Nehruvian Foreign Service.⁴⁶ In the early 1950s, one of the earliest recruits boasted, Nehru knew the names of even the junior-most officers, stopping them at random in the corridors of South Block to keep abreast of their briefs.⁴⁷ However, against popular narratives that paint Nehru as a postcolonial counterbalance to the cultural impulses of the ICS, this chapter considers the ambivalence of social position and cultural preference within both the ICS cadres and Nehru himself. It would hardly have been possible for an old imagery of European international society to survive the transition in personnel from ICS officers to postcolonial recruits, had this imagery not also been imbibed by the supposedly postcolonial bureaucrats and elites themselves.

These are the institutional continuities and colonial entanglements against which the production of the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus occurred. And yet one must consider the academic work that describes them with critical distance. For example, most of the research on the ICS, overwhelmingly by British historians, is marked by the difficulty of studying subjects who were asked to conform to imperial ideals and who often became shallow caricatures in the process. Indian officers end up being narrated not by themselves, as this chapter repeatedly has them do, but rather through an imperial gaze. The work on the colonial origins of the IFS and the MEA is more frequently written from an Indian perspective, and thus perhaps loses some of the imperial detachment, but most of these works, too, differ from the project at hand: ours is not an institutional account in the sense of tracing colonial continuities in organizational practice, bureaucratic structure, or policy implementation.

Rather, what this chapter means when it talks about the institutionalization of the cleft habitus is the manner in which a particular duality of dispositions, manners, worldviews, and positionalities came to characterise the ideal Indian diplomat. With an emphasis on how questions of cultural belonging and imageries of international society shape the construction of the diplomatic cleft habitus, ours is at once a more quotidian and a more deeply social inquiry. It is quotidian in its interest in seemingly small and everyday habits and ideals, and yet deeply social in that it roots the seemingly quotidian in a set of international and Indian hierarchies.

2.1.2. The embodied origins of a dominant habitus

The Indians who joined the ICS occupied a very particular kind of place in the hierarchies of empire: an occupational and socioeconomic elite in many ways, and yet always marginalized in the racial hierarchies that structured European international society. They had come into being as a result of colonization putting in unequal circulation the cultural capital that came with knowing the world in the colonizer’s language, ushering in a ‘rise of an elite of cultural producers in the colonized countries’.⁴⁸ Indian officers of the ICS were a class onto their own in the Bourdieusian sense: as products of similar socioeconomic conditions and social status, they also shared the kinds of ideational dispositions and manners that spoke to their elite nature.⁴⁹ They were, in the words

⁴³ Benner, *Structure of Decision*, 177–80.

⁴⁴ Interview 79, May 2019.

⁴⁵ Interview 9; Interview 20.

⁴⁶ Rana, *Inside Diplomacy*, 252.

⁴⁷ Interview 16.

⁴⁸ Sapiro, ‘Field Theory’, 166.

⁴⁹ Bourdieu, ‘What Makes a Social Class?’, 6.

of a junior who once worked under them, ‘a very privileged, exceptionally small, compact elite’.⁵⁰ In fact, a 1919 Home Department document on ICS recruitment notes that Indian officers tended to be of higher socioeconomic standing than their British counterparts.⁵¹ An established background and British education were practically criteria for even appearing in front of the ICS selection committee.⁵² B.K. Nehru – 1934 ICS batch officer, cousin to Jawaharlal Nehru and Indian Ambassador in the 1950s and 1960s – concluded that the examination curriculum ‘was such that Indians had little chance of competing successfully unless they were rich and had studied at a school in England’, especially before 1922, when a parallel examination to the one in London was launched in India.⁵³ The ICS, known as the best-paid governmental career worldwide, with plenty of status and glamour attached, solidified their already dominant standing.⁵⁴

Colonial administration in India was also deeply Brahminical. Out of the 18 Hindus that entered the Service in 1928, for example, all but four (themselves upper-caste) were Brahmins,⁵⁵ while only one Dalit, known then as a member of the “depressed classes”, ever entered the ICS, in 1940.⁵⁶ In a language that obfuscated the unequal power relations of both the colonial project and Indian caste relations, anthropologists of colonial India came to argue that Brahmins fit the imperial project because of the normative congruence of Brahminical culture and classic British bureaucratic ideals, both of which supposedly valued self-discipline, duty, academic achievement, and individual excellence.⁵⁷ As Western education in district capitals came to be associated with high remuneration and prestigious occupational standing within the colonial apparatus,⁵⁸ ‘modern’ Brahmins began seeing the ICS as a way of marking their status in colonial Indian society.⁵⁹ If the ICS could not ‘escape the hierarchical compulsions’ of its members, as diplomat and Indira Gandhi’s confidante P.N. Haksar would later complain, this was not only because of imperial attitudes but also because ‘the ICS constituted themselves as the Brahmins [*sic*], both literally and symbolically.’⁶⁰ International and domestic hierarchies, therefore, were intertwined from the very beginning, as some of the upper-caste Indian elite sought to leverage their dominant position in India to ameliorate the subordinate standing of Indians in the colonial hierarchies of race and class.

The production of the cleft habitus, then, was only made possible by the social standing and capital that members of the Brahminical elite had, since it allowed them – even if always in a subordinate position – to join the imperial project and witness the world of European international society.⁶¹

⁵⁰ Interview 4, March 2019.

⁵¹ David C. Potter, *India’s Political Administrators: From ICS to LAS* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 116.

⁵² Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 89.

⁵³ B.K. Nehru, ‘The Civil Service in Transition’, 15 October 1999, Article based on a lecture delivered at the India International Centre, New Delhi - ‘Speeches/Writings by him’, SN/50, B.K. Nehru papers, NMML.

⁵⁴ R.C. Dutt, ‘The Civil Service before and after Independence’, in *Memoirs of Old Mandarins of India*, ed. Raj Kumar Nigam (New Delhi: Documentation Centre for Corporate & Business Policy Research, 1965), 58–74; V Isvaran, ‘The Indian Civil Servant’, in *The Civil Servant in India, by Ex-Indian Civil Servants*, ed. Kewalram Laichand Panjabi (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), 247–59; Lall, *The Emergence of Modern India*, 19.

⁵⁵ Tim Holmes Beaglehole, ‘From Rulers to Servants: The ICS and the British Demission of Power in India’, *Modern Asian Studies* 11, no. 2 (1977): 246.

⁵⁶ Potter, *India’s Political Administrators*, 118.

⁵⁷ Potter, 119; Ravindra S Khare, *The Changing Brahmins: Associations and Elites among the Kanya-Kubjas of North India* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970); Milton B. Singer, *Traditional India: Structure and Change* (Philadelphia: American Folklore Society, 1959).

⁵⁸ Pamela Price, ‘Ideology and Ethnicity under British Imperial Rule: “Brahmins”, Lawyers and Kin-Caste Rules in Madras Presidency’, *Modern Asian Studies* 23, no. 1 (1989): 162.

⁵⁹ Adrian C Mayer, ‘Public Service and Individual Merit in a Town of Central India’, in *Culture and Morality: Essays in Honour of Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf*, 1981, 153.

⁶⁰ P.N. Haksar, ‘Commitment: A Dirty Word’, August 1973, Article in Seminar Magazine, ‘Articles by him’, SN/5, P.N. Haksar papers, NMML.

⁶¹ This is not to endorse the historiography of the “Cambridge School”, captured e.g. in Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Its production involved two impulses: on the one hand, the desire and need to imbibe as much of the colonizer's language and habits as possible, and on the other, the rejection and alienation that came with realizing that there would never be an equal place for even the most elite member of Indian society in this international society.

The ICS was deeply intertwined with the elite universities of Oxford and Cambridge,⁶² who were responsible for the (dis)orientation programme that produced the colonial Indian bureaucrat. Future officers were sent to these universities for official training, for a year if they had studied in Britain, for two if not.⁶³ College Masters sat on ICS examination boards and conducted *viva voces*.⁶⁴ By the early 1920s, the ICS syllabus fit the Oxbridge syllabi so closely that 'if a man got a First at Oxford or Cambridge, the ICS was child's play to him', as K.P.S. Menon once boasted.⁶⁵ The Oxford Colleges of Balliol and Christ Church, and at Cambridge Corpus, King's and St John's, educated a disproportionate number of Indian officers.⁶⁶ At Oxford, almost half of Indian students studied at Balliol College, whose Master Benjamin Jowett (1870–1893), an early patron of Oxford's India Institute, envisioned Balliol as a breeding ground for elites irrespective of colour or creed, and offered every candidate who passed the ICS examination a place at the college.⁶⁷ So prominent has Balliol become in the Indian imagination that a Delhiite diplomat in Arundhati Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* could be adequately captured with the sardonic observation that he 'never lost an opportunity to let people know that he was a Balliol man'.⁶⁸

At Oxbridge, Indians occupied a peculiar space between the disciplining impulses of the British Government and the intellectual fancies of university dons, whose liberal canon from Mill's *On Liberty* to Milton's *Areopagitica* read like a dissident's manual.⁶⁹ 'It speaks a lot for the British tradition of freedom and confidence in their society', one officer reminisced, 'that they exposed us, the civil servants of an Empire, to the free and academic atmosphere of a great University, rather than a Government institution'⁷⁰ – although one wonders whether this compliment was offered as a palliative to smooth over the disciplinary character of the imperial project, as the liberal syllabus anticipated a career in service of the decidedly illiberal governing principles of empire. In characteristically bland language, the British themselves saw their bureaucratic ethos – which they sought to impart on future Indian officers – as characterized by notions like integrity, objectivity, loyalty to one's organization, and commitment to public service.⁷¹ Yet the supposedly universal but distinctly British renditions of the values of 'chivalry and ceremony, monarchy and majesty' were in fact, under empire, 'the means by which this vast world was brought together,

Press, 1971). Indeed, it must be possible to consider Indians as fallible historical agents rather than as objects having history done onto them, without somehow suggesting that the self-seeking Indian elites were responsible for the perpetuation of British colonialism.

⁶² While some officers were sent to London or Dublin, the (auto)biographical record almost exclusively discusses Oxbridge.08/10/2020 18:39:00

⁶³ E. N. Mangat Rai, *Commitment, My Style: Career in the Indian Civil Service* (Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1973), 39.

⁶⁴ K.P.S. Menon, 'My Life and Work in the ICS', in *The Civil Servant in India, by Ex-Indian Civil Servants*, ed. Kewalram Laichand Panjabi (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), 29.

⁶⁵ Menon, 29.

⁶⁶ Potter, *India's Political Administrators*, 71.

⁶⁷ Gillian Evison, 'The Orientalist, His Institute and the Empire: The Rise and Subsequent Decline of Oxford University's Indian Institute', *Oxford University Research Archive*, 2004, 5, <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:c49f105d-745a-4583-bd9a-86911b0b6ca8>; Richard Symonds, 'Indians at Oxford before Independence', *Synopsis of a Lecture Delivered at the Oxford Majlis, Trinity Term 1985. Majlis Magazine, Oxford*, 1986, 7.

⁶⁸ Arundhati Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2017), 186.

⁶⁹ Symonds, 'Indians at Oxford', 8.

⁷⁰ Symonds, 10.

⁷¹ Sylvia Horton, 'The Public Service Ethos in the British Civil Service: An Historical Institutional Analysis', *Public Policy and Administration* 21, no. 1 (2006): 31.

interconnected, unified and sacralized'.⁷² The supposedly timeless and universal ideals of worldly governing elites were bound to the temporalities and localities of empire, propagated not only to advance an individual ethic for officers but also to legitimate and glamorize the imperial project.

What came with both the supposed commitment to objectivity and excellence, as well as the attempts at glamorization, was a distinct sense of the exclusivity and superiority of colonial administration. This exclusivity involved the kind of academic superiority that anthropologists of colonial India have so readily identified as a common preoccupation of Brahminical and British elites. A First Class degree classification from Oxbridge was 'the most coveted of all distinctions', explained a proud K.P.S. Menon, the first ever Indian admitted into the Foreign and Political Department, who judged his standing first in the ICS examinations of 1921 a lesser feat than his First from Christ Church.⁷³ Academic excellence was integral to the mythos of the ICS: G.V. Bedekar, of ICS batch 1933, was drawn to the Service because it attracted 'First Class Honours Graduates of universities such as Oxford and Cambridge'.⁷⁴ Indians also regularly outperformed British candidates in the English History and Literature papers of the ICS examination – 'somewhat to the chagrin of the India Office and Government of India'.⁷⁵

Elite education – and the habits that came with it – also allowed upper-class, upper-caste Indians to develop ties of social capital in British high society. M.C. Chagla – a Lincoln College History graduate who served as Ambassador to the US and UK before becoming External Affairs Minister in 1966 – unapologetically celebrated the 'Old Boys ties' that Oxford weaved.⁷⁶ B.K. Nehru, son of an Oxford-educated ICS officer and nephew of Jawaharlal Nehru, had his rejection letter from the London School of Economics overturned by Sir Clive Wigram, Private Secretary to the King, who was sufficiently mortified at the prospect of a Nehru joining the University of Nottingham to arrange his place at the London School of Economics through personal connections – 'a rather early education in the truth that whom you know is more important than what you know', as Nehru put it.⁷⁷ In a perfect encapsulation of the cleft habitus – wrapping up semi-aristocratic conventions and progressive radicalism all in one – Nehru unironically follows this tale of social capital with one of the dearest lessons that his liberal university education gave him: 'my total opposition to hereditary privilege'.⁷⁸

While Indian elites in the British bureaucratic machinery were learning the importance of whom you know, the bond with Indian compatriots was severed. In their bid to 'outdo their British masters' in their Britishness, as one career diplomat of post-Independence India later derided,⁷⁹ Indian officers became involved in the most minute rules of etiquette and applied themselves to polo, hunting, and tennis.⁸⁰ N.R. Pillai, the ICS-trained first Secretary-General of the MEA, conceded that by the time his colleagues took up their posts, they had 'developed habits of thought and speech unfamiliar to the great mass of their countrymen'.⁸¹ The officers' imagery of an "Indian people" was shrouded in homebred exoticism, with future ambassadors describing their alienation

⁷² David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 122.

⁷³ Menon, *Many Worlds*, 29, 61.

⁷⁴ G.V. Bedekar, 'Not Many but Much', in *The Civil Servant in India, by Ex-Indian Civil Servants*, ed. Kewalram Laichand Panjabi (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), 271.

⁷⁵ Symonds, 'Indians at Oxford', 11.

⁷⁶ M.C. Chagla, *Roses in December: An Autobiography*, 9th ed (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1990), 39.

⁷⁷ B.K. Nehru, 'My London School of Economics', 1977, Article, 'Speeches/writings by him', SN/17, B.K. Nehru papers, NMML.

⁷⁸ Nehru.

⁷⁹ Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India's Foreign Policy*, 78.

⁸⁰ Lall, *The Emergence of Modern India*, 19.

⁸¹ N. Raghavan Pillai, 'The Civil Service as a Profession', in *The Civil Servant in India, by Ex-Indian Civil Servants*, ed. Kewalram Laichand Panjabi (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), 24.

from ‘the poverty-stricken, emaciated, ignorant populace of the villages’.⁸² In a 1923 letter to M.C. Chagla about his posting as Assistant Collector in India, K.P.S. Menon – offspring of an aristocratic family in Travancore – found it ‘amusing to watch the honest-village-folk looking up to us as a kind of *Deus Ex Machina*’.⁸³ Officers’ ‘patronising, paternalistic’ temper revealed an unbridgeable distance, an ICS veteran described.⁸⁴ There was a trade-off involved between professional dispassion and closeness to “the people” – the ability to ‘mix freely’ with other Indian.⁸⁵ Serving Indians, it seems, required removing oneself from them.

Any dominant habitus will always signal its Other, but it must do so subtly. Indeed, one of the basic intentions of distinction is ‘to suggest with the fewest “effects” possible the greatest expenditure of time, money, and ingenuity’, so as to display ‘the “natural” self-confidence, ease and authority of someone who feels authorized’.⁸⁶ Elitism must look effortless, if it is to be elitism at all. Indians in British elite institutions were working off of Bourdieu’s claims as though they were stage directions. Oxford, Chagla said of his peers, could ‘stamp them as having imbibed the culture which makes them stand out as different from and superior to those less fortunate persons who did not have the same advantage as themselves’.⁸⁷ A word of advice: ‘There is an air of superiority about Oxford men which non-Oxford men resent, but this superiority must be effortless if it is to be truly in the Oxford style’.⁸⁸ The prime characteristic of an ICS man, K.P.S. Menon announced, was ‘leisurely perfectionism’.⁸⁹

Of course, effortless can be hard work. The rules for acquiring a habitus, and the mere fact of their existence, are always more obvious to outsiders. K.P.S. Menon’s attempts at ‘acquiring the superficial airs and graces of an Oxford man’ required dropping his habit of regularly visiting lectures, since formal tuition was preserved for ‘the weaker brethren’ unlikely to achieve a First.⁹⁰ Christ Church – “the House”, after its Latin name *Aedes Christi* – became a training ground for the effortful striving after the effortless habitus: ‘Merely to live in the House and breathe its atmosphere was an education’, Menon explains.⁹¹ Left unspoken is whether the exercise felt like a privilege well-deserved, an agonized satirization of upper-class belonging, or an imposter’s quiet admission of alienation.

2.1.3. Race, belonging, and the cleft

The Indian efforts at effortless also bring into focus the torn nature of their habitus – that is, the fact of it being a cleft habitus. By the early 1920s, British elite universities were harbouring a band of aristocratically articulate, immaculately dressed Indians, denouncing the very empire they were hoping to serve in the refined lexicon of its academic heartland. For Bourdieu, a cultural sabir was not only ‘cast between two worlds’ but effectively ‘rejected by both’, leading ‘a sort of double inner life’ that encouraged ‘either an attitude of uneasy overidentification or one of rebellious

⁸² Nehru, *Nice Guys Finish Second: Memoirs*, 92.

⁸³ K.P.S. Menon, ‘Letter to M.C. Chagla’, 21 February 1923, Individual Correspondence, M.C. Chagla papers, NMMML.

⁸⁴ H.V.R. Iengar, ‘My Life in the ICS’, in *The Civil Servant in India, by Ex-Indian Civil Servants*, ed. Kewalram Laichand Panjabi (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), 120.

⁸⁵ Isvaran, ‘The Indian Civil Servant’, 248.

⁸⁶ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 380, 250.

⁸⁷ Chagla, *Roses in December*, 28.

⁸⁸ Chagla, 27.

⁸⁹ ‘Oral History Transcript: K.P.S. Menon’, 3.

⁹⁰ Menon, *Many Worlds*, 51.

⁹¹ Menon, 52.

negativism'.⁹² Future ICS elites often attempted both. One Nehru-era diplomat described his ICS superiors as living through a perpetual 'struggle of contradicting ethics',⁹³ although it was not just morality but one's entire sense of self that was on trial. B. K. Nehru describes how

The Indian student in England in the 'thirties was between two worlds. A generation earlier, he had accepted British rule in India as a law of nature. He had been thoroughly brain-washed into believing that English civilization was the supreme culmination of the long development of the human race; his salvation lay in achieving as nearly as he could the manners and the graces and the modes of thought and behaviour of his masters. [...] By the 'thirties the British claim to superiority had been shattered [...] We all resented intensely its continuation against the repeated demonstrated will of the people.⁹⁴

Colonial mimicry awoke a certain frustrated hostility among colonized elites, since colonialism set a dominant habitus but 'made it actually impossible to imitate or equal the European'.⁹⁵ This hierarchy decreed excessive attention on the part of the colonized to the colonizer's 'words or gestures' which 'seem to us most conventional – greeting, shaking hands, smile' but which in the moment become 'signs of recognition'.⁹⁶ The status sensitivities, much like the cleft habitus, were an outcome of the 'inequality in the relations between colonizers and colonized',⁹⁷ which would reflect themselves in the attitudes of ICS officers toward the proper way of conducting diplomacy post-Independence. This is where the typecast of the formerly colonized as somehow oversensitive – perpetuated in Western writing on Indian diplomats to this date⁹⁸ – originates.

Future ICS officers were first stranded, in the language of both B.K. Nehru and Bourdieu, "between two worlds" during their time at Oxbridge. For if cultural capital under colonialism had all the trappings of upper-class Britain, it also bore its racial marks: Macaulay's elite was still "Indian in blood and colour". The British Government's Lytton Committee, studying Indians at British universities in 1921, found racial prejudice to be most pronounced at Oxford and Cambridge, and lay blame for this with 'public school men', 'among whom there existed a certain pride of class which tended to keep them aloof from men of different race as well as a different class'.⁹⁹ For Rajeshwar Dayal, one of the first ICS officers chosen for the IFS after training at Oxford's New College in the early 1930s, this 'snobbishness about "colonials"' was designed to foster 'among the subjects of the British empire, a consciousness of their subject status'.¹⁰⁰ 'Between them and the real Oxford there was a barred door', explained S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, future Prime Minister of Ceylon, of his Indian peers who 'lived a life of their own, an Indian Oxford within Oxford'.¹⁰¹

At the same time, ICS-bound compatriots were never really at home among Indians either. Indian social and political life at Oxbridge centred around the Majlis Society, a club for South Asian students that mimicked the respective University Unions of Oxford and Cambridge.¹⁰² 'Anti-government' and 'highly seditious', Majlis members invited officials like the Earl of Lytton, Under-

⁹² Bourdieu, *The Algerians*, 144.

⁹³ Interview 43.

⁹⁴ Nehru, 'My London School of Economics'.

⁹⁵ Bourdieu, *The Algerians*, 161.

⁹⁶ Bourdieu quoted in Go, 'Decolonizing Bourdieu', 58.

⁹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, Derek Robbins, and Rachel Gomme, 'Colonialism and Ethnography: Foreword to Pierre Bourdieu's "Travail et Travailleurs En Algérie"', *Anthropology Today* 19, no. 2 (2003): 18, note 20.

⁹⁸ See e.g. Cohen, *India*, 21–23.

⁹⁹ Symonds, 'Indians at Oxford', 9.

¹⁰⁰ Dayal, *A Life of Our Times*, 26.

¹⁰¹ S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, 'The Majlis in the Mid-Twenties', *Hilary Term 1986, The Majlis Magazine, Oxford*, 1986, 23.

¹⁰² Symonds, 'Indians at Oxford', 8.

Secretary of State for India, to speak on the future of the Commonwealth,¹⁰³ adjudicated members' moral duties after Gandhi's first campaign of non-cooperation in February 1920¹⁰⁴ and in the mid-1930s received Jawaharlal Nehru himself.¹⁰⁵ Future diplomats of independent India, among them M.C. Chagla, K.M. Panikkar, S.K. Kirpalani, and K.P.S. Menon, thought it best to join and better yet, to serve as President, so as to avoid speculation on one's patriotic credentials.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, Chagla faced opposition to his Presidency, occasioned by his insufficient 'revolutionary rhetoric and bent'.¹⁰⁷ 'We made vehement speeches which we thought patriotic and which the British thought seditious', a proud Menon announced, before yielding that '[a]t the same time, we went on studiously preparing for the ICS'.¹⁰⁸ 'Some of us did not quite distrust the Britisher [*sic*] as much as some others did', Kirpalani – a 1922 History graduate from Oxford's New College who would go on to represent India at the UN – confessed.¹⁰⁹

The problem of the two worlds then followed Indians into the ICS. Some revolutionaries were caught at the *viva voce*. Showing the rather narrow confines of the liberalism Oxbridge paraded in front of future colonial officers, one otherwise promising candidate was promptly awarded 0/300 points for answering a question on British administration and Indian famines by suggesting that the former tended to cause the latter.¹¹⁰ All the principles of Stuart Mill and all the efforts by Indian students to perform the desirable habitus could not disguise this fundamental power asymmetry. For while the language of "two worlds" might suggest some sort of balance between the two, it was not as though Indians could freely travel between them without sanction. Even successful entrants were permanent suspects, on whom confidential reports on "extremist" tendencies were regularly drafted.¹¹¹ Kirpalani, for one, was obliged to sign a covenant denouncing his nationalism before beginning service, having argued against British rule in a mock parliamentary debate as part of his official training.¹¹²

Reconciling mutually contradicting social codes, embedded within unequal relations of power, required drawing up some terms and conditions with one's conscience. One former ICS officer, recalled his disciple from a mid-1960s IFS batch, had sworn to resign if Gandhi was allowed to die during a fast.¹¹³ When B. K. Nehru, half his family in British-administered jails, was queried about his moral dilemma during the *viva voce*, he secured 277/300 marks after explaining that he 'wanted to see for myself whether my being in the ICS would help my people' more than fighting for Independence would, as though loyalties were decided by benthamite arithmetic.¹¹⁴ K.P.S. Menon reasoned that he would 'become better qualified to serve independent India than those who, carried off their feet by the noble call of patriotism, forsook their studies and entered the serious business of life without adequate preparation'.¹¹⁵ Menon admired N.R. Pillai for his 'British' civil

¹⁰³ M.C. Chagla, 'Papers and Correspondence Relating to His Academic Career at School, College and Oxford, 1908-1922', n.d., SN/99, M.C. Chagla papers, NMML.

¹⁰⁴ S. K. Kirpalani, *Fifty Years with the British: Memoirs of an Indian Civil Servant* (Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1993), 55.

¹⁰⁵ 'Oral History Transcript: Apa B. Pant', 1973, 1, Oral Histories, NMML.

¹⁰⁶ Chagla, *Roses in December*, 41–42; Kirpalani, *Fifty Years with the British: Memoirs of an Indian Civil Servant*, 53; Menon, *Many Worlds*, 63; The Oxford Majlis Term Card for Michaelmas Term 1921 suggests that Ambassador M.A. Hussain as well as Foreign Secretaries R.K. Nehru and Subimal Dutt were also members: Chagla, 'Papers and Correspondence Relating to His Academic Career at School, College and Oxford, 1908-1922'.

¹⁰⁷ Chagla, *Roses in December*, 34.

¹⁰⁸ Menon, *Many Worlds*, 54.

¹⁰⁹ Kirpalani, *Fifty Years with the British: Memoirs of an Indian Civil Servant*, 53.

¹¹⁰ Kirpalani, 75.

¹¹¹ C.D. Deshmukh, 'Looking Back on My Service Days', in *The Civil Servant in India, by Ex-Indian Civil Servants*, ed. Kewalram Laichand Panjabi (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1965), 4.

¹¹² Kirpalani, *Fifty Years with the British: Memoirs of an Indian Civil Servant*, 79.

¹¹³ Interview 43.

¹¹⁴ Nehru, 'The Civil Service in Transition'.

¹¹⁵ Menon, *Many Worlds*, 54.

service consciousness, which, faithfully reproducing colonial bureaucratic tropes, accepted that ‘it was the duty of a civil servant to serve the government of the day regardless of its political complexion’.¹¹⁶ And yet, he suspected that there had to be some moral distinction between an Englishman serving a government alien to his politics and an Indian serving a government alien to his people.

This reconciliation was made all the more difficult by the impossibility of escaping the racial divide, even once in India. Dayal despaired at college colleagues who, after Suez, ‘metamorphosed into arrogant stand-offish colonials who imagined that their manifest destiny was to rule over the “lesser” races’.¹¹⁷ In a pointed metaphor about entry, membership, and belonging, K.P.S. Menon found upon his arrival at the North-West Frontier in Peshawar as Under-Secretary to the Chief Commissioner that although his rank should have made him Secretary to the district’s Nathiagali Club, as an Indian he was barred from full membership.¹¹⁸ Of course, capital under colonialism took racialized forms beyond the ICS. The upper-class upset at Gandhi being thrown out of a first-class train compartment in South Africa reflected an analogous betrayal: his English attire and education could never buy him first-class belonging.¹¹⁹ However, in the ICS this racialization evoked not a denunciation of imperial mores but an attempt to embody them more perfectly: Foreign Secretary Subimal Dutt later explained the arrogance of Indian ICS officers as an anxious attempt at levelling with white colleagues.¹²⁰

The ICS thus produced Indians who were both overconfident and uncomfortable in themselves. Predictably, diplomats remembering their ICS superiors during interviews spoke of a ‘superiority complex’,¹²¹ but the complex was in fact more ambivalent than that. Since the status of British ICS officers was ‘equivalent of medieval barons or princelings’,¹²² the ‘appearance of partnership’ with Britons afforded Indian officers a certain status in the eyes of the world, as they ‘revelled in the prestige, comparative affluence, and power that went with the positions they held’ – and yet the ‘reality was very different from the appearance’, Ambassador Arthur Lall, a Balliol History graduate of the 1934 ICS batch, cautions any reader tempted to place Indian officers as equal members of some transnational elite.¹²³ As one diplomat from the early 1960s lamented, his seniors had been ‘trained in the wrong values’,¹²⁴ internalizing the racism which was foundational to the colonial project. One infamous confidential report observed of an Indian officer that he was ‘much too anti-Indian’ to the liking of his British superior officer.¹²⁵ K.P.S. Menon could never quite diagnose this condition:

Perhaps the real handicap from which I and most Indian students suffered was that we had a certain complex, resulting from the unnatural relationship between Great Britain and India, the ruler and the ruled. Whether it was an inferiority complex or a superiority complex I do not know; perhaps it was an inferiority complex which, as it often does, took the form of a superiority complex.¹²⁶

¹¹⁶ Menon quoted in Benner, *Structure of Decision*, 44.

¹¹⁷ Dayal, *A Life of Our Times*, 32.

¹¹⁸ Menon, *Many Worlds*, 89–90.

¹¹⁹ Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana, ‘Dalit Studies: New Perspectives on Indian History and Society’, in *Dalit Studies*, ed. Ramnarayan S. Rawat and K. Satyanarayana (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 2.

¹²⁰ Dutt, *With Nehru in the Foreign Office*, 285.

¹²¹ Interview 43.

¹²² Lall, *The Emergence of Modern India*, 18.

¹²³ Lall, 49.

¹²⁴ Interview 30.

¹²⁵ Haksar, ‘Commitment: A Dirty Word’.

¹²⁶ Menon, *Many Worlds*, 53.

As a social process, Macaulay's project of creating an Indian elite 'English in taste, opinions, morals and intellect' was not dissimilar to the diplomatic expressions of an "expansion of international society" envisioned by the English School, with the mores and principles of colonial powers brought to the colonies to facilitate the process of imperial governing. And, just as the original English School narrative failed to consider the space into which international society "expanded", so, too, the Macaulayan project neglected to consider what might happen in the uneven encounter "between two worlds". What is notable in the autobiographical record of Indian ICS veterans is the curious absence, beyond repeated commitments to Indian Independence presumably intended for postcolonial audiences, of any descriptions of the "Indian" world that existed alongside the colonial, British, foreign one. The British Home Department estimated that nine out of ten Indians in the ICS exhibited 'distinctly Indian religious practices and beliefs, reflecting values and life-styles very different from their European colleagues',¹²⁷ and yet none of them are discussed in the autobiographies. The silences in the sources speak loudly of the imbalances of power and worth that defined the two visions of the world and Indians' place in them. The alienation and anxieties of trying to exist in the spaces between would come to shape the postcolonial production of the diplomatic cleft habitus.

2.2. The postcolonial metamorphosis

2.2.1. The radical potential of a postcolonial order

After Independence, one does find, just as Bull and Watson had suggested, a postcolonial will among Indian diplomatic elites to differentiate India from the former colonizer, if not in taste than certainly in opinions and morals. Realizing this new vision of international society meant a rehearsed rejection of old habits. As Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, a one-time diplomat who left the Foreign Service in 1960 to become its fiercest critic in academia, forewarned:

If India was to play a new and important role in world affairs, if her foreign policy was to have a certain romanticist and idealist vision, if her vibrant nationalism and her powerful intellectual and cultural tradition were to be projected into the international sphere, and if her diplomats were expected to represent such a foreign policy abroad, it was imperative for the political leadership to enthuse and galvanise the administration into modes of thought and action radically different from those which it had been attuned during British rule.¹²⁸

As if to affirm the legacy of the freedom struggle and to legitimate its own role as an authentic representative of postcolonial India, the Foreign Service developed a diplomatic idiom reflective of the emotive anticolonial binaries that had animated nationalist campaigning, moulded to revolve around Third World solidarity, anti-imperialism and the expression of Indian difference. Whatever the outward expressions of cultural assimilation into an old cosmopolitan world of diplomacy, one former Cambridge-educated Foreign Secretary insisted, India had always wanted to 'strike a different path for ourselves'.¹²⁹

As both Prime Minister and Foreign Minister (1947–1964), it was Nehru's political responsibility to bring about this postcolonial diplomatic era. In a broadcast from Delhi on 7th September 1947,

¹²⁷ Potter, *India's Political Administrators*, 117.

¹²⁸ Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India's Foreign Policy*, 261–62.

¹²⁹ Interview 9.

he put the world on notice that India claimed ‘equal and honourable treatment for our people’ as a prerequisite for international cooperation.¹³⁰ At the famous 1955 Conference of Afro-Asian Nations in Bandung, he decreed, with an eye toward the West, that ‘[w]e value the friendship of the great countries, but we can only sit with them as brothers’.¹³¹ This was to be a radical break from the colonial order, and one which not only demanded sovereign equality, but also the recognition of Indian difference and Third World identities not as aberrations but as worthy reflections of the diversity of a new, postcolonial international society.

In interviews, diplomats of successive generations presented Nehru as the antonym of the ICS, thwarting its pro-Western sympathies and chastening its elitism.¹³² Nehru had already decided in the 1930s that ‘no new order can be built in India so long as the spirit of the Indian Civil Service pervades our administration and our public services’, it being ‘essential that the ICS and similar services must disappear completely’.¹³³ Ensuring that his official instructions decreed the very opposite of whatever the ICS might have advised, Nehru took pains to impart his vision for the new international society to diplomatic youngsters, addressing the imperatives of development and democracy, and – in a nation divided into castes, a subcontinent ripped by Partition, and a world recovering from the indignities of colonialism – an understanding of ‘the life of a diplomat as a continuous process of self-education in which pre-conceived notions and prejudices had no place’.¹³⁴ He spoke against ‘slavishly’ following Western diplomatic protocol when representing ‘a poor country where millions live on the verge of starvation’, and cautioned that ‘care should be taken that we do not become an appendage or a junior partner’ of British embassies in countries to which freshly minted Indian diplomats were accredited.¹³⁵ Diplomats were to ‘function as Indians and not as imitations of Englishmen’ and to curb – in Nehru’s exalted English parlance – ‘[a]ny attempt on the part of any member of the staff to behave pompously as if he is very much Anglicized’.¹³⁶ He protested that ‘the old officer complex [...] does not fit in today; nor is it desirable’.¹³⁷ There was no place, in a new postcolonial international society, for habits and dispositions that betrayed the lingering existence of the old.

Nehru sought to signal the dawn of indigenous diplomacy with symbolically significant but concrete changes. The introduction of Nehru jackets and black *sherwanis* at formal functions, to one Oxford-educated liberal arts graduate who served under Nehru, was ‘an indication of how the political leadership wanted the diplomats to develop an identity of their own’, a gradual replacement of suits signifying closure for the colonial habitus.¹³⁸ In a letter from 1950 supposedly about serving alcohol in Indian Missions, complete with Nehru’s well-acquainted etiquette advise of going with sherry before and port after dinner, the Prime Minister expanded:

It was not merely a question of prohibition, but rather a feeling I had that some of our officers abroad live in a mental climate, which is far removed from that of India. I can well understand that they have to follow, to a large extent, the customs of the countries they are in and old established diplomatic conventions; also that they are affected by their environment [...] But we have always

¹³⁰ Nehru 1966, 21

¹³¹ Nehru 1985, 7

¹³² Interview 16; Interview 17; Interview 45.

¹³³ Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1962), 445.

¹³⁴ A.S. Chib, ‘The Making of an Indian Diplomat’, 27 August 1982, Article, ‘Individual correspondence between R.K. Nehru and A.S. Chib’, R.K. Nehru papers, NMML.

¹³⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru, ‘Note for Asaf Ali and K.P.S. Menon’, 22 January 1947, Individual correspondence, K.P.S. Menon papers, NMML.

¹³⁶ Nehru.

¹³⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru, ‘Prime Minister’s Note for the Guidance of Members of the Foreign Service and More Especially, for Those Serving in Our Missions Abroad’, 20 October 1950, FSP/50-11(88), NAI.

¹³⁸ Interview 40, April 2019.

to remain Indians and to remember that an Indian embassy is a bit of India. No individual and no country is respected if he or it tries to ape others [...]

I am not, what might be called, a traditionalist or a person trying to revive the ways of life of a past that is over. I look to the future and I think that we have a great deal to learn from the present-day civilization of the West. I think I have myself learnt much from it and I hope to learn more. But I see no reason to be swept away by any custom or practice of the West, simply because it is popular there, or because it might make me popular there.¹³⁹

The choice between whisky and wine may not have sounded like a classical diplomatic dilemma to a European diplomat, nor might the question of prohibition naturally seem like an occasion for Ministry-wide soul-searching. And yet, K.P.S. Menon thought the letter important enough to circulate to all diplomats at Headquarters, too.¹⁴⁰ For what was on the line were the principles whereby the Indian diplomatic habitus was to be ordered, the customs it would be bound by, and the dispositions it would legitimate and stigmatize. Nehru knew that his was a project of re-education: if the Indian diplomatic habitus was to be moulded into a carrier of Indian postcoloniality, it needed to shed old signs of colonial conditioning.

Moving toward a postcolonial international society required rejecting some neo-imperial diplomatic vocabulary, too. In 1955, Nehru ordered India's Mission in Washington, DC to avoid expressions like "The Free World", "bamboo curtain", and "peace-loving nations" – 'which mean something more than they say', legitimating a Westerncentric reading that quietly assented to the persistent supremacy of Western narratives of world ordering.¹⁴¹ Developing a Third Worldist vision in its stead meant propagating a political division of the world that bowed not to power-political distinctions but to the acuteness of postcolonial disparities. From an old habit of accentuating cultural sameness, India would move toward a diplomatic idiom that forced Western diplomatic counterparts out of any polite illusion of compatible interest. As Foreign Secretary R. K. Nehru (1952–1955) noted in article on the international system:

The conventional method of looking at the international system is by way of uni-polar, bi-polar and multi-polar worlds. Underlying these perceptions is the perception that only the military and industrial power of the nations count in international relations. Looking at it from the developing world, the international system would appear to consist of two strata [the developed and the developing]. Therefore, the international system will have to be considered as a two compartmental system and not as a single system of over 130 actors. [...] There is also a conflict of interest between the developed and the developing worlds as was evident in the three UNCTADS.¹⁴²

Pitting itself against the forced homogeneity of colonial order, the new Foreign Service was also, crucially, supposed to give voice to the heterogeneity of postcolonial societies. The postcolonial compromise on "Indianness", purposefully amorphous and civic rather than religious or ethnic in nature, meant that the India diplomats would represent, at least in spirit, was marked by its diversity. India was a 'multi-racial, multi-linguistic, multi-cultural society', as Nehru's handpicked US Ambassador and ICS veteran M.C. Chagla, born to Muslim parents, never ceased to emphasize – and Nehruvian secularism was not only a 'great philosophical and political ideal' for India, but

¹³⁹ Nehru, 'Prime Minister's Note for the Guidance of Members of the Foreign Service and More Especially, for Those Serving in Our Missions Abroad'.

¹⁴⁰ K.P.S. Menon, 'Note', 7 January 1950, "Prime Minister's note for the guidance of members of the Foreign Service and more especially, for those serving in our missions abroad", FSP/50-11(88), NAI.

¹⁴¹ Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Letter to the Indian Ambassador in the US Washington, DC', 22 April 1955, "Avoidance of offensive terminology – Instructions regarding", F/18(120)-G/55, NAI.

¹⁴² R.K. Nehru, 'Current International System and Indian Approach to It', n.d., Article draft, "Writings/speeches by him", SN/7, R.K. Nehru papers, NMML.

one ‘which one day might be accepted by the whole world’.¹⁴³ Foreign Secretary T.N. Kaul (1968–1972) believed that ‘India represents in a way a mini-world, a multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-racial society different parts of which are at different stages of development – like the world at large’.¹⁴⁴ Domestic political projects and visions of the world were, once again, intertwined: India’s diversity was a living embodiment of the newfound diversity of postcolonial international society.

Even the most status-conscious ICS officers vied to exhibit the progressive practices of the new world – at least on paper. They reminded each other not to treat themselves ‘as a separate class but as members of the society at large’¹⁴⁵ and performatively declared that the ‘upper class approach should now be given up’,¹⁴⁶ so as to realize what Nehru reminded them was ‘our ideal for India, where we want no class distinctions to subsist’.¹⁴⁷ R.K. Nehru, in a conscientious letter to the Prime Minister (and his cousin), in September 1955, admitted that Indian bureaucracy needed changing ‘as it is the product of conditions which are very different from those existing today’.¹⁴⁸ In 1949, a frustrated ICS-trained Ambassador-designate to the Netherlands, M.S. Mehta, dryly noted the ‘strange irony that allegations should emanate from interested quarters about my loyalty towards our National Government, while in the regime of the old Political Department I was consistently accused of being a supporter of the Congress and its radical ideology’.¹⁴⁹ ICS veterans knew that colonial habits went against everything the postcolonial project represented, as Subimal Dutt’s note on administrative reform in the autumn of 1955 shows:

What we are trying to create is a welfare state based on a pattern of society which will be free from our traditional weaknesses, e.g. Privilege, caste, discrimination and inequality. The administrative system that we are using is, by origin, of the colonial type. It was designed to uphold our weaknesses and to help in preserving the established order. In keeping with this order, a class structure was developed among the services [...] I think our approach has been influenced, to some extent, though perhaps unconsciously, by the class structure of the administration.¹⁵⁰

If the overemphasis on British mores was once a performance, so, too, was the attempt at embodying India’s newfound egalitarian, solidarist postcoloniality. In one article draft on the modern diplomat, T.N. Kaul, catching himself, has struck out a condescending ‘our common folk’ and dutifully replaced it with a politically correct ‘many people’.¹⁵¹ In a note from the Indian Embassy in Moscow in August 1965, he instructed that although ‘[w]e were, in the beginning, apt to copy the British and adopt their methods and manners’, now ‘[w]e should, as far as possible,

¹⁴³ M.C. Chagla, “Nehru and Secularism”, 1966, 2, Article in a booklet entitled “A Rose never withers, it lives in remembrance – Nehru’s 2nd Death Anniversary”, “Speeches/writings by him”, F/16, M.C. Chagla papers, NMML.

¹⁴⁴ T.N. Kaul, “Some Thoughts on the Concept and Relevance of Revolution in India”, n.d., Miscellaneous articles, ‘Speeches/writings by him’, SN/141, T.N. Kaul papers, NMML.

¹⁴⁵ T.N. Kaul, ‘Letter to the Foreign Secretary’, 2 September 1955, ‘Official notes’, SF/84, Subimal Dutt papers, NMML.

¹⁴⁶ R.K. Nehru, ‘Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru’, 4 September 1955, ‘Official notes’, SF/84, Subimal Dutt papers, NMML.

¹⁴⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru, ‘(Circular) Letter to Y.D. Gundevia (Indian Ambassador to Switzerland)’, 22 November 1953, ‘Correspondence between Y.D. Gundevia and Jawaharlal Nehru’, Y.D. Gundevia papers, NMML.

¹⁴⁸ Nehru, ‘Letter to Jawaharlal Nehru’.

¹⁴⁹ Mohan Sinha Mehta, ‘Letter to G.S. Bajpai’, 13 January 1949, “1948-49: Correspondence with K.P.S. Menon, G.S. Bajpai regarding his appointment as ambassador to Holland and clarification of his views vis-à-vis Jaya Prakash Narayan”, SF/7, Mohan Sinha Mehta papers, NMML.

¹⁵⁰ Subimal Dutt, ‘Response to Ministry of Home Affairs, Appleby Report’, September 1955, 9–10, ‘Official notes’, SF/84, Subimal Dutt papers, NMML.

¹⁵¹ T.N. Kaul, ‘Diplomacy and Diplomats’, n.d., Incomplete article, ‘Speeches/writings by him’, SN/111, T.N. Kaul papers, NMML.

speak to each other in an Indian language’ – note the audience – ‘especially before foreigners’.¹⁵² The popular tropes about India’s pompous ICS officers, perpetuated by much of the historical record and diplomatic juniors alike, fail to acknowledge the arduous attempts by the most status-conscious ICS veterans to align themselves with what often must have felt like a rather unintuitive process of re-education.

2.2.2. Brave old world

And yet, for all the talk of clean slates and new beginnings, the emerging Indian diplomatic habitus echoed the manners and ideals not only of the Bandung spirit but of the “Balliol man”. Writing with Sayad about the cultural logics of decolonization, Bourdieu abandoned his former notions of romantic revolutionary postcoloniality, arguing that the structuring power of the habitus would ensure that colonial-era ‘manners of behaving and thinking’ would survive decolonization.¹⁵³ And so it was in India, where the Foreign Service had no bureaucratic precedent to fall back on – ‘except’, as one early-1960s recruit noted with some defensiveness, ‘to borrow whatever we could from the British’.¹⁵⁴

While formally severing the bonds to an old imagery of international society, Indian diplomats once employed in the ICS continued to nurture an assemblage of its practices and ideals. T. N. Kaul, 1939 batch ICS officer and Foreign Secretary, knew his kind:

The ‘old hands’ [...] tried to lay down certain conventions and codes of conduct, borrowed mainly from the British. What was lacking was the enthusiasm and elan that a newly independent nation feels on achieving freedom. Old habits die hard and the senior people brought along with them some of their old prejudices and bureaucratic procedures.¹⁵⁵

Doing unto others as the British had done unto them, ICS veterans brought austere bureaucratic hierarchies into the Foreign Service.¹⁵⁶ They continued to draw higher salaries and operate under ICS Rules¹⁵⁷ and signed their letters with colonial queues of ‘Esq., CIE., ICS’.¹⁵⁸ These status sensitivities erupted into an ‘Excellency boom’ in Indian Missions, which Nehru was forced to manage by officially regulating use of the title in 1948.¹⁵⁹ Complaining about the opposition from ICS officers to more cooperative working methods at the Embassy in Moscow in 1950, Ambassador Pandit singled out Prem Krishen, First Secretary, who epitomised ‘the worst kind of

¹⁵² T.N. Kaul, ‘Note’, 11 August 1965, “Circular letters issued by N.R. Pillai Chairman, IFS Committee, B.K. Nehru, Foreign Secretary and other papers relating to ICS/IFS Services matters”, SF/14, T.N. Kaul papers, NMML.

¹⁵³ Bourdieu and Sayad, ‘Colonial Rule and Cultural Sabir’, 471–72.

¹⁵⁴ Interview 30.

¹⁵⁵ Triloki Nath Kaul, ‘New World Economic Order’, n.d., Miscellaneous articles, ‘Speeches/writings by him’, SN/141, T.N. Kaul papers, NMML.

¹⁵⁶ Interview 43; Head of Mission of India, Cairo, ‘Note Responding to Jawaharlal Nehru’s Letter on Prohibition’, 6 December 1950, ‘Prohibition of alcoholic drink in official parties by our missions abroad’, 21(5) – G II/51, NAI.

¹⁵⁷ Interview 18; Interview 74; Interview 79; Jawaharlal Nehru, ‘Letter to the MEA’, 9 September 1955, ‘Official notes’, SF/84, Subimal Dutt papers, NMML.

¹⁵⁸ Many letters from G.S. Bajpai and K.P.S. Menon carried such abbreviations; see also Mohan Sinha Mehta, ‘Letter to K.P.S. Menon’, 14 December 1948, “1948–49: Correspondence with K.P.S. Menon, G.S. Bajpai regarding his appointment as ambassador to Holland and clarification of his views vis-à-vis Jaya Prakash Narayan”, SF/7, Mohan Sinha Mehta papers, NMML.

¹⁵⁹ N. V. Raman, *Indian Diplomatic Service: The First Thirty-Four Years* (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1986), 12.

ICS complex', leading him to assume an 'offensive attitude' towards 'all those who did not belong to the ICS'.¹⁶⁰

Yet the 'tyranny of the ICS', imaginatively derided in a 21-page deposition by Ambassador Dhamija to the 1966 Pillai Committee on IFS reform,¹⁶¹ was not strictly a question of official posts but of culture. IFS officers who advanced to replace their ICS-trained predecessors 'acquired many of the same attitudes to their profession'.¹⁶² Under the influence of their colonially educated superiors, they came to consider themselves 'a class apart, as the elite', 'so cut off from their roots that they sometimes lost their original moorings', a rueful Kaul observed.¹⁶³ As one diplomat confided about his colleagues who joined under Nehru, they became 'more attuned to the ways of functioning of the ICS' than they might have cared to admit.¹⁶⁴ A Cambridge-educated recruit of the early 1960s extended a mischievous apology for the inherited elitism: filling the shoes of ICS officers required 'being a bit of a toff'.¹⁶⁵

The social capital that once tied ICS officers to British high society and bureaucracy now complicated any wholesale departure from the colonial imagination. Amidst the organizational preparations for Independence, British officials once involved in the diplomatic affairs of colonial India pressed their Indian colleagues to 'build on experience in the foreign field gained in the British Commonwealth generally and in India in particular, and to avoid too drastic a change in any direction', as Sir Olaf Caroe, former Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, pressed.¹⁶⁶ Leveraging an unflattering comparison to American diplomats, who were unable to 'compete on level terms with what were regarded as their trained and subtle colleagues' in Britain, Sir Olaf encouraged Indians to forego this fate by 'making use of the traditions and the *esprit de corps*' of British colonial bureaucracy.¹⁶⁷ In a personal letter to Sir Olaf, N.R. Pillai repeated his 'fullest concurrence in all your proposals'.¹⁶⁸ Although objections were raised to the proposal of seconding British diplomats into the Indian Foreign Service,¹⁶⁹ the conversations we might think of as concerning the ideal diplomatic habitus were considerably friendlier. Major A.S.N. Shah, involved in crafting the Foreign Service after a career in the colonial army, suggested that even an Indian Foreign Service 'nationalist in its outlook' would 'need the Foreign Office tradition and high standard of diplomacy', proposing that Indian diplomats be recruited in London and trained at the British Foreign Office.¹⁷⁰ R.N. Banerjee stressed that 'every effort' should be made to retain ICS officials – a curious method for realizing his vision for a 'self-contained', 'entirely new' Service.¹⁷¹ Indian ICS officers had tamed their personal dilemma into a governing standard: colonial

¹⁶⁰ Vijayalakshmi Pandit, 'Letter to G.S. Bajpai', 9 October 1947, '1947-1951: Correspondence of V. L. Pandit (as Indian Ambassador to USSR) with G.S. Bajpai – Secretary General, MEA, regarding official matters', SF/55, Vijayalakshmi Pandit papers, NMML.

¹⁶¹ Dhamija quoted in Tharoor 1982, 171

¹⁶² Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, 171.

¹⁶³ Kaul, 'New World Economic Order'.

¹⁶⁴ Interview 35.

¹⁶⁵ Interview 9.

¹⁶⁶ Olaf Caroe, 'Note: "Indian Representation Abroad"', 1945, 'Establishment of a separate Indian Foreign Service', FSP/47-2(7), NAI.

¹⁶⁷ Caroe.

¹⁶⁸ N. Raghavan Pillai, 'Letter to Olaf Caroe', 27 July 1945, 'Establishment of a separate Indian Foreign Service', FSP/47-2(7), NAI.

¹⁶⁹ H. Dayal, 'Response to Olaf Caroe', 24 November 1945, 'Establishment of a separate Indian Foreign Service', FSP/47-2(7), NAI.

¹⁷⁰ Major A.S.N. Shah, 'Secret Appendix to Notes: "An Indian Diplomatic Service"', n.d., 'Establishment of a separate Indian Foreign Service', FSP/47-2(7), NAI.

¹⁷¹ R.N. Banerjee, 'Confidential Note to Olaf Caroe', 16 February 1946, 'Establishment of a separate Indian Foreign Service', FSP/47-2(7), NAI.

conventions on diplomatic decorum and practice were becoming self-evident, supposedly universal ideals.

ICS fingerprints were all over the emerging notions of what a postcolonial Indian diplomat would look like. The IFS Conduct Rules, governing diplomats' behaviour and duties, were modelled on their ICS equivalent.¹⁷² Internal policies were justified with reference to British Foreign Office precedents on everything from diplomats publishing on foreign affairs¹⁷³ to the role of diplomatic spouses.¹⁷⁴ The ICS officers' 'social graces, manner of conducting themselves' set a standard for the postcolonial Foreign Service, a diplomat who worked under them for two decades argued.¹⁷⁵ The ideal diplomat, T.N. Kaul explained in an article draft replete with allusions to the aristocratic charms of old-world diplomacy, showed 'sophistication in the manner of his [*sic*] presentation'.¹⁷⁶ One junior's highest praise for R.K. Nehru was to paint him as a 'suave, meticulously dressed man with an aristocratic bearing', who 'tended to be rather strict and severe as he believed in maintaining a high standard of discipline and efficiency'.¹⁷⁷ One description of a Head of Mission in Afghanistan in 1948 spoke of a man who 'possessed certain essential qualities that contributed to the success of an envoy': a person 'with refined manners', 'invariably clad in immaculate' clothing, who 'carried himself like a benevolent feudal lord'.¹⁷⁸

In interviews, diplomats who joined the Service after Independence to work under ICS veterans volunteered that they made a 'conscious attempt to emulate them'¹⁷⁹ and that 'the *esprit de corps* began with them embracing us as youngsters to be brought up'.¹⁸⁰ 'There was a code of conduct that the British Civil Service had established', to which newcomers were 'moulded', described a diplomat who joined the Service only a few years into Independence.¹⁸¹ For ICS grandees, diplomacy 'was not just work, it was a lifestyle', as one critical member of an early-1960s batch clarified with a mockingly raised eyebrow – and 'the lifestyle was already defined; it's not like diplomats entering the Service after 1947 could change it'.¹⁸² 'Thomas Babington Macaulay's spirit continued to dominate the [...] work in the Ministry', Dixit, too, wrote, rather bluntly.¹⁸³ Socialization into the postcolonial Foreign Service was, in some ways, socialization into a bygone world.

Postcolonial recruits considered their seniors with a combination of begrudging admiration and disdain. The seniors were credited for knowing 'how to keep up a conversation at the dinner table'¹⁸⁴ and being 'well-read', 'able to take a wider view of things'¹⁸⁵ – and 'they had dash, they had confidence'¹⁸⁶ and 'swagger in their gait'¹⁸⁷ to show for it. One of the first juniors to work under

¹⁷² Interview 16; Interview 48, May 2019.

¹⁷³ 'Extracts of Noting from File No. 117(71)FSP/58 Relating to Publication of a Novel by Shri B. Rajan of the Embassy of India, Vienna', n.d., 'IFS Rules – Question whether Foreign Service officers can be permitted to write and publish books of literary, artistic or scientific character', 21(1) GA/59, NAI.

¹⁷⁴ GA Section (MEA), 'Note', 15 March 1968, 'IFS (PLCA) Rules 1961 – Amendments to – Proposal to allow single women officers to take either of their dependent parents to their station of posting abroad', Q/GA/791468 (Pt. I), NAI.

¹⁷⁵ Interview 39.

¹⁷⁶ Kaul, 'Diplomacy and Diplomats'.

¹⁷⁷ Chib, 'The Making of an Indian Diplomat'.

¹⁷⁸ Raman, *Indian Diplomatic Service*, 11–12.

¹⁷⁹ Interview 28, April 2019.

¹⁸⁰ Interview 16; The same interpretation was offered in Interview 23; Interview 18; Interview 35.

¹⁸¹ Interview 18.

¹⁸² Interview 45.

¹⁸³ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 84.

¹⁸⁴ Interview 43.

¹⁸⁵ Interview 25.

¹⁸⁶ Interview 29, April 2019.

¹⁸⁷ Rasgotra, *A Life in Diplomacy*, 16.

them, implicitly speaking to a plethora of colonial, British upper-class ideals, complimented Pillai as a ‘thorough gentleman’, Bajpai as an ‘excellent speaker’ with ‘thorough control of his pen’, and Menon as a ‘very polite man’.¹⁸⁸ One might be tempted to second-guess the sincerity of the compliments offered, verging as they often seemed to on satire. And yet they were usually offered in a tone which suggested that admitting that there was something admirable about ICS officers signified a personal failure to imbibe an appropriately emancipatory spirit. ‘90% were British stooges’, a diplomat of one of the earliest batches added for effect after some approving comments – it took them time to fully appreciate, after Independence, that ‘they didn’t have to go and do salaams to the whites’.¹⁸⁹

The standard narrative, espoused not only in written accounts of the Foreign Service’s history but by diplomats who witnessed the beginnings of the Service, presents a cultural battle which pitted the old ICS hands against the postcolonial impulses of Nehru. And yet, what made it possible for the cleft habitus to become institutionalized and normalized following Independence was precisely the fact that the reverence for an old conception of international society was not an unfashionable obsession of old colonial officers alone. Nehru himself often seemed more comfortable in its conventions than those of the new world he was arduously creating. Just as his father Motilal, at the age of 60, had ‘turned from flamboyant epicure to ascetic nationalist overnight’, surrendering Anand House, the family mansion, for nationalist campaigning and burning the family’s Western attire,¹⁹⁰ so too there was something rehearsed about Nehru’s pursuit of postcoloniality. An interview question in the late 1970s still asked one candidate to reckon with the statement ‘*voh toh Angrezi hai*’, intimating that Nehru had essentially been an Englishman.¹⁹¹ Living ‘in the lap of luxury and Western-style comfort’, the ‘Nehrus’ Brahmin pride, bolstered by their affluence and education, meant they considered themselves (and were considered) the social equals of the ruling British elite in the country’, as an article on Vijayalakshmi Pandit once described.¹⁹² One diplomatic admirer who worked under Nehru for a decade laconically crowned him ‘the last Englishman to rule India’,¹⁹³ while a less enamoured colleague who joined just before Nehru’s death scoffed that the title of his 1946 opus *The Discovery of India* simply betrayed Nehru’s need to discover the country for himself upon returning from Harrow and Cambridge.¹⁹⁴

Nehru’s politics jarred with those of upper-class imperial Britain, but many of his beliefs about decorum and presentation did not. Unwittingly echoing Sir Olaf, he demanded that his diplomats ‘stand up to the best minds around the world’.¹⁹⁵ His hand-picked envoys, recruited before standardized entry examinations began in 1949, ‘circulated within the closed circle of the Indian community’, representing India as ‘symbols of a decadent past’.¹⁹⁶ One officer who served under him suggested it was ‘Nehru’s bias’ that drew him to pick diplomats from among ‘people with a social presence’ and ‘social sophistication’ – ‘people who felt comfortable abroad’, as the gracious euphemism went.¹⁹⁷ K.P.S. Menon recalled his ‘partiality for people who had been at college with him’ at Cambridge.¹⁹⁸ In fact, most Indians fighting the Raj belonged to the same social circles, often even the same families, as those serving it, as an apologetic R.K. Nehru once offered in self-

¹⁸⁸ Interview 16.

¹⁸⁹ Interview 79.

¹⁹⁰ Sastri Brata, ‘Article on Vijayalakshmi Pandit’, n.d., ‘Speeches/writings by others’, SN/27a, T.N. Kaul papers, NMML.

¹⁹¹ Interview 41.

¹⁹² Brata, ‘Article on Vijayalakshmi Pandit’.

¹⁹³ Interview 79.

¹⁹⁴ Interview 45.

¹⁹⁵ Interview 14, March 2019.

¹⁹⁶ Raman, *Indian Diplomatic Service*, 17.

¹⁹⁷ Interview 9.

¹⁹⁸ ‘Oral History Transcript: K.P.S. Menon’, 2.

defence.¹⁹⁹ Their political resumes diverged at crucial junctions, but their personal biographies – and thus their dispositions, education, language, comportment – did not. It is perhaps for this reason that Nehru’s personal relations with ICS veterans never seemed to suffer from the political disconnect.²⁰⁰

The appreciation for colonially tainted, European upper-class markers of status is also what made Nehru – who purportedly once pronounced Indian royalty a ‘nuisance in the whole freedom struggle’ best ‘finished with’²⁰¹ – to make half a dozen royals diplomats. Despite their diplomatic colleagues’ dim view of their professional and moral virtues,²⁰² Nehru pursued royals because he needed what one senior diplomat who worked with them called ‘social confidence’.²⁰³ They were ‘people with sophistication’, who truly knew the task of ‘representation’²⁰⁴ – not, of course, in any egalitarian sense of representing “the people”, but in the sense of being presentable in the once aristocratic world of diplomacy.

For all the talk of making the Service reflective of India, Nehru not only picked among royalty and cultural elites but also almost exclusively from among the upper castes. To Nehru, the staunch secularist, the fact of the vast majority of his handpicked confidantes being Brahmin might have seemed irrelevant,²⁰⁵ but his comfort around them spoke to a certain elitist insularity,²⁰⁶ and did nothing to dislodge the Brahminical dominance that once characterized the ICS. Nehru’s own line of Kashmiri Pandits was conspicuously well-represented: the Prime Minister’s sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit was one of India’s most prominent diplomats, with ambassadorial postings to the US, Soviet Union, Britain and the UN; his nephew B.K. Nehru served in many of the same positions from the 1960s onwards; R.K. Nehru, a cousin, became Foreign Secretary in 1952.²⁰⁷ And while Nehru condemned all manner of elites in his speeches and writing, his very presence only encouraged young recruits to think of themselves as one – knowing that the MEA was essentially Nehru’s ‘pet, not a normal ministry’²⁰⁸ legitimated a sense of being, in the words of one of Nehru’s many ardent admirers among the early batches, ‘a chosen cadre’.²⁰⁹

Instead of championing some sort of “transition” from a torn cleft habitus into a less conflicted whole, then, it was both former ICS officers and Nehru – as well as the juniors who joined the Service under them – who normalized the ambivalence between the two imageries of international society. What came to animate the Foreign Service was a kind of parochial postcoloniality:

¹⁹⁹ ‘Oral History Transcript: K.P.S. Menon’, 3.

²⁰⁰ ‘Oral History Transcript: R.K. Nehru’, 1971, 7, Oral Histories, NMML.

²⁰¹ ‘Oral History Transcript: Apa B. Pant’, 2.

²⁰² Vijayalakshmi Pandit, ‘Letter to N.R. Pillai (Secretary-General, MEA)’, 18 March 1957, “1955-60: Correspondence of Vijayalakshmi Pandit as Indian High Commissioner to London with P.N. Haksar, N.R. Pillai, R.K. Nehru, M.J. Desai and S. Dutt”, SF/17, Vijayalakshmi Pandit papers, NMML; G.S. Bajpai, ‘Letter to Vijayalakshmi Pandit’, 25 July 1951, ‘1947-1951: Correspondence of V. L. Pandit (as Indian Ambassador to USSR) with G.S. Bajpai – Secretary General, MEA, regarding official matters’, SF/55, Vijayalakshmi Pandit papers, NMML.

²⁰³ Interview 9.

²⁰⁴ Interview 7.

²⁰⁵ Benner, *Structure of Decision*, 186.

²⁰⁶ Referring to learned Brahmins, he even casually addressed his senior diplomats as the ‘pandits of the Ministry’. ‘Oral History Transcript: K.P.S. Menon’, 33.

²⁰⁷ Anne Guthrie, *Madame Ambassador: The Life of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit* (New York: Harcourt, 1962); Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography, Volume 3 (1956-1964)* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975), 207; ‘MEA Press Release’, 22 July 1961, “Appointment of Shri B.K. Nehru as Ambassador to the USA”, F/73(74)–AMS/1961, NAI.

²⁰⁸ Rana, *Inside Diplomacy*, 252.

²⁰⁹ Interview 9; The twin motives of admiration and sense of special status among those who served under Nehru was also a topic in Interview 1; Interview 16; Interview 18; Interview 25; Interview 30; Interview 31; Interview 40; Interview 43; Interview 79.

passionately devoted to representing a decolonized, egalitarian, and diverse India but wary of actually allowing that diversity to be represented within the exclusive Foreign Service itself.

2.2.3. Colonial indignities and postcolonial dignity

It may be tempting to consider the vestiges of colonial imagery in the making of the Foreign Service an exercise in vanity, particularly on the part of veterans of colonial bureaucracy. It did, after all, legitimate the continued dominance of a cadre whose social investment lay in propagating a particular rendition of international society they themselves were uniquely suited to navigate. This interest was often explicit: R.C. Dutt, of the 1937 ICS batch, admitted that the project of his fellow officers ‘was to secure in independent India their own position and that of the class from which they came’.²¹⁰

Yet the anxieties about etiquette and eloquence also spoke to a still unequal international society, in which deviance from an old European script could be costly for those in an already subordinate position, much as there had been social sanctions for deviance from British prescriptions under the Raj. Indeed, reminiscent of some of the performative excesses of Britishness under the ICS, Indian diplomats seem to have felt they needed to overperform what they thought defined the once-European club. The ‘elegance of presentation’ became paramount in diplomatic dispatches – so much so that Dixit, as Under-Secretary on the Bhutan, Tibet and Sikkim Desk, would habitually present six drafts before the Deputy-Secretary approved a letter.²¹¹ What to outsiders may have seemed, in Dixit’s antique vocabulary, ‘antediluvian’ and ‘foppish’, was intended to ensure that Indian representatives lived up to the ‘tact, politeness and social grace’ they believed to define international society.²¹²

For, insofar as international societies are regimes of recognition, presenting a carefully curated diplomatic habitus was about defending the status of the nation. As Vijayalakshmi Pandit, as Ambassador to Russia, relayed back to G.S. Bajpai on 10th June 1949:

It is not so much the frequency of one’s parties but their quality that counts and, rightly or wrongly, one is judged by them as you know. It is important, therefore, that whatever one does should be of a standard consistent with one’s national prestige. It is a pity that one’s prestige should be judged by such standards but that is the Western code.²¹³

This anxiety percolated to practical questions of budgeting and pay scales. In a ministerial note from March 1946, H. Dayal pleaded for salaries and representation allowances to reflect a standard which would ‘ensure that India’s representatives abroad are able to uphold her dignity and not merely reflect the poverty and squalor in which so many of her citizens live, and their emoluments do not differ markedly from those of their opposite numbers in posts under the British Foreign Office or the Deptts. Of External Affairs of the Dominions’.²¹⁴ One respondent captured how seemingly trivial practices ultimately divulged a desire for equal standing:

To present a credible appearance; to be housed and equipped well; and to entertain well; these are nearly as essential to successful representation of one’s country as purely professional efficiency.

²¹⁰ Dutt, ‘The Civil Service’, 65.

²¹¹ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 83–84.

²¹² Dixit, 95.

²¹³ Vijayalakshmi Pandit, ‘Letter to G.S. Bajpai’, 10 June 1949, ‘1947-1951: Correspondence of V. L. Pandit (as Indian Ambassador to USSR) with G.S. Bajpai – Secretary General, MEA, regarding official matters’, SF/55, Vijayalakshmi Pandit papers, NMML.

²¹⁴ H. Dayal, ‘Note’, 17 June 1946, ‘Establishment of a separate Indian Foreign Service’, FSP/47-2(7), NAI.

Quite a lot of a diplomat's work is done in the course of his social contacts and the American crack "don't laugh at that guy there in the striped pants eating cake – he is working" has a lot of truth in it. Even so democratic a country as Soviet Russia which scorned the trimmings of diplomacy in the post-revolution period has recognized this. Members of the Soviet Foreign Service, however hairy about the heel in private life, have now returned to the full paraphernalia of uniform, evening dress etc. And their entertainments and general diplomatic set-up are on a lavish scale. It follows that India's future Foreign Service should be more than just adequately paid [...].²¹⁵

Indeed, the project of pursuing parity in international society began with Indian diplomats feeling able to level with foreign counterparts – intellectually, culturally, educationally. The elaborations on First-Class degrees and Society Presidencies in diplomatic autobiographies are easily pathologized as self-seeking subplots. Yet the Oxbridge stamp endowed the first generation of Indian diplomats with a self-confidence – “effortless superiority” – that proved ‘one of the qualities most needed in the establishment of new States’.²¹⁶ The language of the colonizer had bequeathed the colonized a shared means of communicating throughout much of the world, most notably with former British colonies and Commonwealth nations, but also, especially with the rise of American power, with the wider world. Deprived of material means of persuasion, English established itself as one of the sharpest assets of eloquent Indian diplomats, known abroad for marshalling their arguments in expressive turns of phrase, a gift which diplomats believed held them in good stead in international negotiations.²¹⁷ ICS mentors, one of the very first examination-recruits explained, taught their juniors ‘the psychology of diplomacy’ in postcolonial international society, which involved believing ‘they could stand up to any king’ and remembering that ‘you treat yourself as equal’²¹⁸ – a lesson Indian ICS officers had fought to memorize under profoundly unequal circumstances. In the uncertain international hierarchies of the postcolonial world, one prominent member of the early 1960s batches argued, an Indian diplomat with a ‘superiority complex’ was ‘better than one with a damaged ego’.²¹⁹ It is this somewhat strange justification, whereby the continued dominance of certain elites is justified by a desire to ensure equality abroad, which will accompany the narratives of traditional diplomatic elites in the chapters to come.

Conclusion

This chapter argued that the diplomatic habitus idealized by the Indian Foreign Service can only be understood by understanding the social position and lived experience of Indian elites under the British Raj. It was during the Raj that Indian officers of the ICS first developed a kind of cleft habitus, suspended between the conventions of European international society and the imperatives of anti-imperial agitation and Indian difference. At Independence, this cleft was not “solved”, as Bourdieu might have expected, but rather, took on a new form and became institutionalized. No longer suspended between an existing empire and a theoretical independent India, the postcolonial rendition of the cleft habitus was instead suspended between an old imagery of European international society and a very real postcolonial world. And instead of manifesting itself in a set of internal debates experienced by individual officers as they sought to find their place in the colonial project, the postcolonial cleft habitus became institutionalized as a socially shared ideal for how to exist between two different imageries of international society. The strange

²¹⁵ (Indecipherable signature), ‘Response to Dayal’, 29 April 1946, ‘Establishment of a separate Indian Foreign Service’, FSP/47-2(7), NAI.

²¹⁶ Symonds, ‘Indians at Oxford’, 11.

²¹⁷ Interview 12; Interview 17; Interview 25; Interview 43.

²¹⁸ Interview 16.

²¹⁹ Interview 43.

twin imperatives of being comfortable in the old elite conventions of a white European world while also being a credible voice for an anti-imperial, solidarist international society became the new ‘duality of social regulations’²²⁰ that an ideal Indian diplomat should master. Instead of dividing the Service into British sympathizers and anti-colonial firebrands, this twin imperative was felt – and the cleft habitus valorized – both by former ICS officials and Prime Minister Nehru, who passed it down to the first generations of career diplomats.

These twin beginnings also meant an awkward intermingling of two visions of internationalism. The famous Nehruvian internationalism which spoke of Third World solidarity, racial equality, and global economic justice was, from its very beginnings, intertwined with elite impressions of cosmopolitanism born out of colonialism and the classism that went with it. The compliment offered to ICS elites of being able to “take a wider view of things”²²¹ had, one might argue, become ‘a possibility only because of the existence of empire, that cosmopolitanism could have been inspired or authorized only by the imperial scale’.²²² Or, as Timothy Brennan polemically describes cosmopolitanism: ‘[i]t is a discourse of the universal that is inherently local – a locality that is always surreptitiously imperial’.²²³ One need not define one’s terms as uncompromisingly as Brennan to appreciate the colonial undertones in the descriptions of “worldliness” performed by the effortlessly superior elites that shaped the beginnings of the Indian Foreign Service.

The India that reflected itself outward from the young Foreign Service had little to do with the vast diversity that the postcolonial project had promised to give voice to both at home and in the world. A self-reflective T.N. Kaul once regretted that ‘British rule in India created an artificial sense of administrative unity without taking into consideration the economic, social and cultural variety and richness of the country’.²²⁴ Whatever the postcolonial, solidarist commitments of many of its members, something similar might be said of the conspicuously uninterrupted rule of the elite-educated upper-caste, upper-class men of the early Foreign Service. In a Service marked by the strikingly similar backgrounds of its members, no precedent was set for practicing the much-preached diversity of India and the postcolonial world at large. These tensions of representation are the topic of the next chapter.

²²⁰ Bourdieu’s French expression translated in Go, ‘Decolonizing Bourdieu’, 59.

²²¹ Interview 25.

²²² Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta, ‘Introduction’, in *Cosmopolitanisms*, ed. Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 4.

²²³ T.J. Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 81.

²²⁴ T.N. Kaul, ‘Nationalism and Communalism’, n.d., Speech draft - Miscellaneous articles, ‘Speeches/writings by him’, SN/141, T.N. Kaul papers, NMML.

3. COSMOPOLITAN ELITES AND INTERNAL OTHERS

A cosmopolite is a premature universalist, an imitator of superficial attainments of dominant civilizations, an inhabitant of upper-caste milieus without real contact with the people.¹

Although it was a commitment often more honoured in the breach than the observance, the Indian Foreign Service decreed at its founding that it was to be a Service reflective of the country it represented. For a young postcolonial nation, democratization of the civil services was an end in itself.² India's secular, socialist Constitution of 1950 was an aspirational document: if it was to be translated into principles of governance, its mandate for an equal society needed to rest with a representative body of bureaucrats.³ In a nation weighed down by both ancient and modern imbalances of power, democratization of the elite Services in particular would affirm that 'we not only preach equality and diversity but practise it'.⁴ A representative body of diplomats was to be a reflection of the ideational commitments that came with the imagery of postcolonial international society, and with the rejection of bureaucratic elitism that had characterised the Raj.

Yet if the diversification of diplomatic cadres was a 'natural corollary of a country coming into its own' and 'expanding [its] definition of representation' in the wake of decolonization, as one recently retired Ambassador of Grade I so eloquently chronicled,⁵ this process of becoming has proven fraught. For what matters for the fabric of an institution like the Foreign Service are also

[t]hose secondary characteristics which are often the basis of their social value (prestige or discredit) and which, though absent from the official job description, function as tacit requirements, such as age, sex, social or ethnic origin, overtly or implicitly guiding co-optation choices, from entry into the profession and right through a career, so that members of the corps who lack these traits are excluded or marginalized.⁶

This chapter argues that there has been considerable demographic change within the Foreign Service, at least from the 1980s onwards, but that the story of the Service's "democratization" is, at a deeper level, a narrative of continuity. What is notable is the legitimation of both democratization efforts and defences of elitism in the name of various visions of international society. In the diplomats' own reasoning, democratization was usually something to be realized upon entry, and was adequately evaluated by asking "who has made it *into* the Foreign Service?"

¹ Freedom fighter and socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia quoted in Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (London: Macmillan, 2017), 120.

² Interview 1; Interview 19; Interview 48; Interview 49.

³ Interview 43.

⁴ Interview 11, March 2019; The same claim was made in Interview 1; Interview 21, April 2019.

⁵ Interview 3.

⁶ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 96–97.

This is how the Service's traditional elites in particular have thought about democratization (a term diplomats themselves most frequently used to describe the Service's de-elitification): it is a process whereby the annual intake of new probationers reflects more egalitarian principles and is more representative of India at large.⁷ This process is the subject of the first and second parts of the chapter, the first outlining the exclusive character of the early cadres, and the second discussing how regulatory changes in the early 1980s and the liberalization of the Indian economy in the early 1990s in particular broadened access for hitherto underrepresented groups.

Yet the third part of the chapter argues for the importance of also asking: "Who has made it *in* the Foreign Service?" Although wedded to the notion of a cleft habitus, the traditional elites of the Service have leveraged, in particular, the old imagery of European international society to justify attempts at managing the cadres' diversification. The more "representative" batches have not been promoted in equal measure to their numbers at entry, they rarely find a place in the existing webs of social capital that reproduce old hierarchies, nor has their presence fundamentally altered the ideal of a cosmopolitan diplomat. In fact, cosmopolitanism reveals itself in this chapter as something other than a set of world-embracing principles. Tying cosmopolitanism to hierarchies of caste, class, and background, this chapter considers less 'what interviewees talk about than what they talk from – the stock of unspoken assumptions and tacit know-how that ought to be presumed in order to say what is being said' about cosmopolitanism,⁸ and who gets to be a cosmopolitan in the imageries of international society that the Foreign Service produces.

3.1. Reproducing an elite

3.1.1. The 'cozy club'

With its small and selective ranks, the Foreign Service began life as somewhat of a definition of a *corps d'élite*.⁹ Into the 1960s, only three to ten probationers gained entry each year.¹⁰ The entire Service could fit inside a conference room – as it once did for a meeting in the 1950s.¹¹ Nehru had decreed that nobody below the 15th place in the all-India civil service entry examinations was to enter his pet Service,¹² lending a privileged elite the legitimating cover of officially certified meritocracy. In fact, Service elders fought to suppress cadre numbers out of fear of losing this elitist edge, even as existing positions stood vacant and the Ministry of Finance had sanctioned funds for expansion.¹³ Under such conditions, the Service grew into a strikingly homogenous whole, dominated by upper-caste, upper-class men with elite degrees from a handful of universities and

⁷ Interview 1; Interview 3; Interview 4; Interview 6; Interview 7; Interview 10, March 2019; Interview 11; Interview 12; Interview 16; Interview 18; Interview 19; Interview 20, 2; Interview 23; Interview 24; Interview 30; Interview 36; Interview 37, April 2019; Interview 39; Interview 40; Interview 48; Interview 50, May 2019; Interview 52, May 2019; Interview 57; Interview 58, May 2019; Interview 69.

⁸ Pouliot, 'Methodology', 51.

⁹ J.M. Lobo Prabhu, 'My Work in the ICS', in *The Civil Servant in India, by Ex-Indian Civil Servants*, ed. Kewalram Laichand Panjabi (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1968), 226.

¹⁰ Haksar, 'Memo'; 'Union Public Service Commission Notice No. F5/28/57-E.P, 22 February 1958, "1958-59: Appointment as one of the examiners for Personality for the IAS examination – connected papers and correspondence with the Secretary, UPSC", SF/45, Mohan Sinha Mehta papers, NMML.

¹¹ Interview 79.

¹² 'Oral History Transcript: J.N. Dixit', 2000, 28, Oral Histories, NMML.

¹³ Prem Krishen (Joint-Secretary, MEA), 'Memo', 10 August 1955, "Cadre – Indian Foreign Service – Refixation of cadre on the basis of anticipated requirements for five years", FSP/55- F/1(2), NAI.

families. A socioeconomic study of India's administrative elites from the early 1970s suggested that IFS recruits represented an even narrower constituency than the IAS, the crown jewel of the Home Services.¹⁴ As one self-ascribed outsider who had witnessed this clique since the early 1960s abbreviated: the Service was 'pretty feudal'.¹⁵

In fact, in the words of two Oxford graduates who joined in the early 1960s, 'the earlier UPSC lot were pretty much in the same mould – you couldn't tell the difference' between them and their ICS superiors,¹⁶ who 'had almost similar backgrounds'.¹⁷ The ICS and IFS seemed to recruit overwhelmingly from the same five cities – Delhi, Bombay (Mumbai), Calcutta, Madras (Chennai) and Allahabad.¹⁸ Joining Government was a 'very standard aspiration' for Delhiites in particular,¹⁹ lending the Service its reputation as a dominion of urban elites.²⁰ Its state-wise composition has been so skewed as to spawn Parliamentary Questions in the Lok Sabha, where the metropolitan clustering of diplomats was, in a session in April 1972, debated as a question national concern.²¹

While the batches of the 1950s and 1960s were 'heavily Oxbridge',²² the legacy bearers of elite education in postcolonial India soon became the graduates of Indian missionary colleges like Delhi's St Stephen's, Mumbai's St Xavier's, and the Presidency College in Calcutta.²³ With their dominance came the dominance of the liberal arts: batches through the 1980s were almost exclusively made up of History, Economics, Literature, and Political Science graduates.²⁴ Delhi University contributed the largest number of candidates for the all-India Services²⁵ – St Stephen's, its most iconic college, became a veritable metonym for the meritorious.²⁶ The nine-strong 1960 batch, for example, boasted seven Stephenians.²⁷ Of course, "merit" is a signifier that skates over the inequities of social and cultural capital that made the meritorious thus.²⁸ Convent colleges not only tended to school more privileged sections of Indian society, but, with the vast numbers of Stephenians applying or already in the Foreign Service, civil service aspirants essentially had a 'coaching camp in-house'.²⁹ For a senior diplomat who joined the Service in the early 1980s, diplomacy was a 'default made without too much choice', given his Stephenian social circles.³⁰ Even as their numbers began dwindling towards the new millennium, Stephenians have defined the "St Stephen's type" that colours conversations on the internal hierarchies of the Service to this day.³¹

¹⁴ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 90.

¹⁵ Interview 45.

¹⁶ Interview 37.

¹⁷ Interview 31.

¹⁸ 'Synopsis of IFS Officers', 1952, 'Statement of Services of IFS Officers', FSP/52- F/4(1), NAI; Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 90.

¹⁹ Interview 31.

²⁰ Interview 15, March 2019; Interview 41; Interview 69; Interview 77.

²¹ Surendra Pal Singh (Deputy Minister, MEA), 'Response', 27 April 1972, 'Lok Sabha unstarred question Nro 8723 for 27.4.72 by Shri Bibhuti Mishra regarding recruitment to Foreign Service', F/Q/GA/125-(II)/72, NAI.

²² Interview 43.

²³ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 90.

²⁴ Interview 3; Interview 6; Interview 12; Interview 14; Interview 25; Interview 28; Interview 29.

²⁵ UPSC, "Kothari Report" - "Civil Services Examination: Report of the Committee on Recruitment Policy and Selection Methods", 29 March 1976, 21, https://www.upsc.gov.in/sites/default/files/SI-030-Kothari-Committee-Report-1976_0.pdf.

²⁶ Interview 9; Interview 10; Interview 40; Interview 43; Interview 66; Interview 67.

²⁷ Interview 1.

²⁸ Shamus Khan and Colin Jerolmack, 'Saying Meritocracy and Doing Privilege', *The Sociological Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (February 2013): 9–19.

²⁹ Interview 27, April 2019; Also Interview 36.

³⁰ Interview 19.

³¹ Interview 4; Interview 19; Interview 24; Interview 31; Interview 36; Interview 38; Interview 54.

Diplomacy was also a family affair. Stanley Hoffman once spoke of the ‘largely hereditary castes of diplomats’ who used to run diplomacy in Europe,³² but India’s upper-caste “civil service families” certainly fit the description, too. Most notable perhaps have been the Menons, counting three consecutive generations of Foreign Secretaries to their name, after Shivshankar Menon followed his grandfather K.P.S. Menon’s footsteps in 2006.³³ Yet the Menons were never alone: a 1966 statistic showed that 47% of IFS officials had parents in government positions.³⁴ The Menons were not even the only ones whose family tradition could be traced back to the ICS,³⁵ and one interviewee had held the exact same Ambassadorship as his father before him.³⁶ These diplomats knew that Indian bureaucracy was for ‘our kind of families’³⁷ – that is, the kind of ‘typical middle-class family where everyone is in the civil services’.³⁸ So entrenched were these familial trajectories that one reluctant diplomat was strongarmed by his father into applying in the late 1960s, because unless one appeared on the all-India merit list, ‘people in our circles would assume you took the UPSC exam’ and failed.³⁹

Familial social capital was crucial. Officers from batches between the late 1940s and early 1980s habitually commented upon (or accidentally revealed with depictions of their own experience) just how easily ‘children of known Delhi figures’ obtained stellar marks in entry interviews conducted by family friends.⁴⁰ One exceptionally blunt example is known among older generations as the “Jagat Mehta batches”: under Foreign Secretary Mehta’s instructions, IFS batch sizes were increased for 1974–1978, as Mehta unsuccessfully sought to make a diplomat of his own son, who was allowed to sit the exam in London, unsupervised, more times than national guidelines allowed, with the inflated batch sizes intended to improve his chances.⁴¹ ‘We come from the same kind of families’, was the unhesitating reaction of a retired Delhiite officer to a question about where her Service’s once-famous collegiality originated.⁴²

Even the reservations system could do little to moderate the upper-caste character of the Foreign Service in the first decades. Enshrined in the Constitution, reservations were supposed to push set percentages of Dalits and Adivasis into public bodies through a method of affirmative action which the Foreign Service, too, has been mandated to observe.⁴³ Yet only one Dalit entered the Service throughout the 1950s, and the first Scheduled Tribe officers joined in 1959.⁴⁴ While Dalits made up an unprecedented one-fourth of the 1963 batch, some years none joined.⁴⁵ Unused

³² Stanley Hoffmann, ‘An American Social Science: International Relations (1977)’, *Daedalus* 106, no. 3 (1977): 42.

³³ Economic Times, ‘The IFS Kid Keeps Family Flag Flying’, 16 September 2006, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/the-ifs-kid-keeps-family-flag-flying>.

³⁴ Benner, *Structure of Decision*, 54.

³⁵ Interview 4; Interview 6; Interview 23; Interview 70.

³⁶ Interview 24.

³⁷ Interview 28; Also Interview 21.

³⁸ Interview 42, April 2019.

³⁹ Interview 10.

⁴⁰ Interview 1; Also Interview 6; Interview 12; Interview 35.

⁴¹ Interview 24; Interview 27; Interview 41; Interview 70.

⁴² Interview 81, May 2019.

⁴³ There are also different entry regulations for different categories. While the general number of attempts allowed at the annual exam is six, this limit has been pushed upward to nine for OBC candidates and suspended altogether for SC/ST applicants. Similarly, although the age limit as of 2019 was 32, it was 35 for OBC communities and 37 for SC/ST aspirants. See UPSC, ‘Examination Notice No. 04/2019-CSP’, 19 February 2019, https://upsc.gov.in/sites/default/files/Final_Notice_CSPE_2019_N.pdf.

⁴⁴ ‘Lists of SC/ST Officers with Their Batch Affiliation’, n.d., “Lok Sabha provisional starred question No. 5493: Criteria for posting officers of Scheduled Castes/Tribes in offices of Trade Commissioners and Trade Representatives abroad”, Q/PA II/125/10/78, NAI.

⁴⁵ ‘Statement Showing Recruitment to the Indian Foreign Service during the Years 1962 to 1967 and Percentage of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes among Them’, n.d., “Lok Sabha Starred Question No 23428 from Shri

reserved seats were often brought forward from previous years, although they also lapsed after a while.⁴⁶ Faced with external scrutiny, the Service sought to balance its books by inducting ST/SC probationers originally designated for a Home Service,⁴⁷ sometimes even providing estimates that counted the MEA's overwhelmingly lower-caste peons and chauffeurs as diplomats.⁴⁸

For Brahminical ICS veterans in particular, the very concept of reservations was an affront to the prestige of government service, with Dalit officers 'chosen from competition among themselves', not against better-qualified upper-caste rivals.⁴⁹ When, after almost two decades of unclaimed reservation seats, three SC/ST candidates joined the 21-strong batch of 1966, an incensed article in *Economic and Political Weekly* announced that the constitutional project of empowering the marginalized meant that 'there cannot be an insistence on quality in these recruitments for some time'.⁵⁰ "Democratization", in this reading, was a politically correct euphemism for the impending decline of the Service's upper-caste composition – even if reserved seats would only begin to be regularly filled a decade later.

One and a half paragraphs on the numerical representation of religious minorities in the Service is all that can be strewn together from the (un)available source material. For while reservations have ensured that caste is a bureaucratic category of interest, and the National Archives of India house some early anecdotal findings on the representation of women, there is little by way of public statistics or ministerial dispatches on the question of the Service's religious minorities. And while diplomats were remarkably keen to discuss caste, Hindu officers habitually deflected from conversations on religion, and Muslim officers in particular would rarely engage in conversation about their place or numbers in the Service. This being said, anecdotal evidence suggests that while IFS officers have always been overwhelmingly Hindu, religious minorities have been unevenly represented. Entire decades sometimes passed in the early years without Muslims joining.⁵¹ The 2006 Sachar Committee Report, unique in India for documenting Muslim representation in all-India government services, found that although Muslims represented around 13% of India's population, they made up only 1.8% of the IFS – a strikingly low figure, even by comparison to those for the Indian Administrative Service, or IAS, (3%) and the Indian Police Service, or IPS, (4%).⁵² An undifferentiated figure for all Services in 2018 was 5%, which again presumably hides a much lower percentage for the Foreign Service, as well as much bleaker figures for earlier decades. Intersecting identities made some marginalized officers rarer still: circumstantial commentary suggests that only a couple of Muslim women have ever joined the Service, for example.⁵³

By stark contrast, Sikhs, at less than 2% of the population, are by statistical compulsion overrepresented in any batch which has them, and so it is notable how many have had at least one

Kameshwar Singh – regarding Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Candidates in the Indian Foreign Service”, Q/FSI/125/7/68, NAI.

⁴⁶ “Annual Returns Showing Representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Services under the Central Government (1964)”, F/Q/GA/551/10/65, n.d., 65, NAI.

⁴⁷ Interview 45.

⁴⁸ “Unstarred Question – Lok Sabha – No. 2321 for 15.03.1965 by Shri Naval Prabhakar Regarding Scheduled Castes Employees in Indian Missions Abroad”, F/Q(GA)-125/4/65, July 1968, NAI.

⁴⁹ Prabhu, 'My Work in the ICS', 223; T.N. Kaul feared that reservations would trigger upper-caste brain-drain: T.N. Kaul, 'President's Letter: Reservations – Where Do We Go from Here?', n.d., Miscellaneous articles, 'Speeches/writings by him', SN/141, T.N. Kaul papers, NMML.

⁵⁰ G.S. Bhargava, 'The Ills of the Indian Foreign Service', *Economic and Political Weekly* 1, no. 10 (October 1966): 410.

⁵¹ Interview 7.

⁵² Sanya Dhingra, '5% Muslims among New Civil Services Recruits, Only One in Top 100', ThePrint, 4 August 2020, <https://theprint.in/india/governance/5-muslims-among-new-civil-services-recruits-only-one-in-top-100/474488/>.

⁵³ Interview 57.

member of the Sikh community – one mid-1970s batch had five, pushing their numbers to 25%.⁵⁴ This accords with data for the all-India Services, suggesting that Sikh and Christian minorities are, statistically speaking, overrepresented.⁵⁵ The Service’s few Christians – mostly from South India and the Northeast – seem not to have faced the kind of waves of Othering that Partition in 1947 or Operation Blue Star in 1984 visited on Muslim and Sikh officers, of which most spoke little, but in telling tones and with grave expressions.⁵⁶

For most of its existence, the Foreign Service has also had fewer women than male officers with the surnames Mehta or Menon. The iconic C.B. Muthamma joined the Service in 1949 after standing first in the IFS merit list⁵⁷ (to the dismay of her examiners, who sought to persuade her to pick another Service and awarded her suspiciously low interview marks).⁵⁸ Yet while a document listing female officers and probationers for 1965 shows 15 women having entered the Service since 1948, it marks a third of them as “resigned”.⁵⁹ This curious pattern was a consequence of regulations which asked women to resign upon marriage.⁶⁰ Serving one’s country abroad thus required women to defy deep social conventions,⁶¹ and many promising candidates consequently forsook a diplomatic life altogether, joining a Home Service despite having qualified for the more prestigious IFS.⁶² When the Pillai Committee undertook its famous review of IFS practices in 1966, it concluded that since it was objectively true that marriage intervened in women’s professional duties, the rules were ‘non-discriminatory’.⁶³

Of course, women’s entry into Indian diplomacy was weighted down by external pressures, too. As Additional-Secretary Avtar Singh outlined in 1968, ‘in the context of the existing social structure, it is difficult to expect young Indian women, who are brought up in the traditional Indian way, to come forward enthusiastically without apprehension for some time to come to join the Indian Foreign Service with its liability to serve anywhere in the world’.⁶⁴ Many female diplomats from the 1960s and 1970s batches could testify to conservative social pressures against a globe-trotting, wine-drinking career in diplomacy – consequently, female diplomats were even more frequently products of liberal-minded, upper-middle class households than their male counterparts (making it incongruous to talk of their inclusion as “democratization” per se).⁶⁵

If the Foreign Service resembled ‘a cozy club’,⁶⁶ many diplomats interpreted this as an inevitable consequence of the social inequities of India itself.⁶⁷ In the words of the ICS-educated offspring of a princely state, Ambassador Apa B. Pant, in 1977: ‘Perhaps it is inevitable that the present

⁵⁴ Interview 26.

⁵⁵ Syed Najjullah, ‘Representation of Minorities in Civil Services’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 41, no. 8 (2006): 688.

⁵⁶ Interview 3; Interview 7; Interview 9; Interview 20; Interview 25; Interview 26; Interview 53, May 2019; Interview 72; Interview 74.

⁵⁷ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 50; Nivedita Jayakumar, ‘C B Muthamma: India’s First Woman IFS Officer’, *Feminism In India*, 16 December 2019, <https://feminisminindia.com/2019/12/16/c-b-muthamma-indias-women-ifs-officer/>.

⁵⁸ Nupur Basu, ‘Chonira Muthamma, India’s First Woman Career Diplomat’, *NewsBlaze*, 8 December 2009, https://newsblaze.com/world/south-asia/chonira-muthamma-indias-first-woman-career-diplomat_11341/.

⁵⁹ ‘Lists of Female Diplomats of Different Batches’, n.d., ‘Employment of Women in various Services of the Government – Statistics regarding’, F/Q/PA II/551/6/74, NAI.

⁶⁰ Avtar Singh, ‘Proposal’, 28 August 1968, ‘IFS (PLCA) Rules 1961 – Amendments to – Proposal to allow single women officers to take either of their dependent parents to their station of posting abroad’, F/Q/GA/791468 (Part I), NAI.

⁶¹ Although the US State Department only lifted an identical rule in 1971. See Cynthia H. Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 198.

⁶² Rasgotra, *A Life in Diplomacy*, 128.

⁶³ Rana, *Inside Diplomacy*, 304.

⁶⁴ Singh, ‘Proposal’.

⁶⁵ Interview 15, March 2019; Interview 46.

⁶⁶ Interview 4.

⁶⁷ Interview 30.

structure of our society, and the methods of our education and selection make it inevitable that the middle and upper-middle class elements are more represented in the Indian Foreign Service than other ones'.⁶⁸ Yet there was also a regulatory framework that preserved the Service's privileged elite character until the early 1980s, judiciously curating entry and exclusion in the name of merit.

3.1.2. Selection as exclusion

At Independence, two schools of thought clashed on the question of diplomatic recruitment. Since the character of fields is predicated on selection and exclusion,⁶⁹ this dispute also reveals the duality of international societies that the Service was seeking to belong in. ICS veterans pined after a cadre of classy cosmopolitans fluent in languages, world history and international etiquette;⁷⁰ 'foreign education would be an advantage', one communique casually added.⁷¹ They looked to the ICS⁷² and British Foreign Office⁷³ for guidance, hoping to prevent an imminent decline in standards. In 1947, Secretary-General G.S. Bajpai protested against holding the entry examinations in June on the grounds that it clashed with the Tripos and Schools examinations at Cambridge and Oxford, which would lose the Service 'some good material'.⁷⁴ Out of the 400 candidates initially recommended to the Service, he accepted only around 60, and attracted charges of nepotistic elitism from Parliament and press by establishing his own interview committee which functioned without official criteria or external publicity.⁷⁵ Pillai and Bajpai both lobbied for entry regulations favouring candidates from upper-middle class backgrounds and urban centres, suggesting they would adjust best to diplomatic life.⁷⁶ Women, too, were considered a cultural hazard. Proposing a full ban on women entering the postcolonial Foreign Service, the last British Foreign Secretary of India, Hugh Weightman, found support among ICS veterans who were, to borrow Dixit's euphemism, 'not enthusiastic' at the prospect of female colleagues.⁷⁷ Unspecified Indian values, women's poorer education and the inevitabilities of motherhood were interchangeably cited to make the case against women's entry.⁷⁸ The ideal candidate of ICS officers, in other words, looked an awful lot like 'a result of their respective social background and value systems of colonial India'.⁷⁹

In the end, Nehru's insistence on cadres reflective of the postcolonial commitment to equality and the Indian investment in diversity won over the ICS vision.⁸⁰ As a matter of principle, he wanted to welcome all of India into the Service – '[e]very member of the staff, whether he [*sic*] is a Hindu, a Muslim, a Sikh, Christian, Brahmin, non-Brahmin, Harijan or any other, or whatever State he

⁶⁸ Apa B. Pant, 'Indian Diplomatic Missions Abroad and Their Problems', 11 October 1977, Article, 'Speeches/writings by him', SN/37, Apa B. Pant papers, NMML.

⁶⁹ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 318.

⁷⁰ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 26.

⁷¹ H. Dayal, 'Qualifications to Be Prescribed for New Entrants into the Service', 27 March 1946, 'Establishment of a separate Indian Foreign Service', FSP/47-2(7), NAI.

⁷² Dayal, 'Note'.

⁷³ Hugh Weightman, 'Communique to H. Dayal', n.d., 'Establishment of a separate Indian Foreign Service', FSP/47-2(7), NAI.

⁷⁴ G.S. Bajpai, 'Note', 7 June 1947, "Question of holding combined examination for the Indian Foreign Service and All India Administrative Service in November-December Every Year. Prescription of high minimum mark at the interview for recruitment to the Indian Foreign Service", FSP/47 – 22(11), NAI.

⁷⁵ Rasgotra, *A Life in Diplomacy*, 16–18.

⁷⁶ Benner, *Structure of Decision*, 54; Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 31.

⁷⁷ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 32.

⁷⁸ Dixit, 32.

⁷⁹ Dixit, 31.

⁸⁰ Benner, *Structure of Decision*, 54; Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 20,31.

comes from, must be treated alike', Nehru emphasized in a circular in October 1950.⁸¹ True to his convictions, he also struck out the clause excluding women from the final version of the Foreign Service Rules.⁸² Nehru not only held the 'right of first refusal' in staffing the Service⁸³ but actually interviewed the earliest batches himself,⁸⁴ and it was on his orders that the most outlandish suggestions for maintaining the Service's elitist character were rejected.⁸⁵ The Service settled on an austere list of requirements for potential candidates: a 'good University degree', an 'aptitude' for languages, and 'good character'.⁸⁶

The introduction of standardized entry examinations in 1948 was meant to facilitate the democratization process by allowing for a broader constituency of candidates,⁸⁷ at least in theory. Unlike most foreign ministries worldwide who recruit their diplomats in a dedicated procedure, in India, anybody hoping to become a government bureaucrat applies through a joint all-India examination – organized by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)⁸⁸ – and is allowed to pick a Service of their choosing according to their ranking in the all-India merit list. As a wary G.S. Bajpai lamented in 1951:

We have tied our hands in the matter of selection by depending upon the Union Public Service Commission which, as you know, choose people on the strength of their achievements in a written examination. How many misfits we get into the IFS every year in this manner will become manifest only as time goes on.⁸⁹

And yet Bajpai's misfits were nowhere to be seen. Although the UPSC system was supposed to imprint a 'stronger Indian stamp' on the entry process,⁹⁰ its original procedures, examination subjects, and elective essays were 'pretty much a copy' of the ICS template,⁹¹ veterans of the Service recalled. One could sit the examinations in London until the early 1980s,⁹² and the papers were 'almost identical' to those taught at Oxbridge.⁹³ Long after the British had amended their own recruitment method, India's was 'essentially little different from what was introduced more than a hundred years ago by the British following the recommendations of the Northcote-Trevelyan

⁸¹ File 11 (88) – FSP/50. Prime Minister's note for the guidance of members of the Foreign Service and more especially, for those serving in our missions abroad. Note dated 20th October 1950. NAI.

⁸² Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Response to a Supplementary Question by Begum Aizaz Rasul', 21 November 1947, "Question in the Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) by the Hon'ble Sethi Govinddas in regard to recruitment to the Indian Foreign Service by the F.P.S and the number of persons appointed with Indian Embassies – Nehru's reply, 21st November 1947", FSP/47- F/18(11), NAI.

⁸³ Interview 30.

⁸⁴ Interview 9; 'Oral History Transcript: J.N. Dixit', 28.

⁸⁵ Sensing they were losing the battle, ICS elders even suggested that, in the spirit of the 'increasing tendency in most countries to widen the sector of society from which officers are recruited to the Foreign Service', India might mimic such efforts by establishing a separate branch, known today as IFS(B), so that the lower strata of Indian society could join the Ministry as stenographers and consular assistants, while being kept out of the diplomatic club per se. See T.N. Kaul, 'India's Foreign Service', n.d., Article, 'Speeches/writings by him', SN/16, T.N. Kaul papers, NMML.

⁸⁶ 'Statement Attached to the Summary: "The Creation of an Indian Foreign Service"', n.d., 'Establishment of a separate Indian Foreign Service', FSP/47-2(7), NAI.

⁸⁷ 'Foreign Service Probationers – Confidential Reports', 18 March 1949, "1948-49: Correspondence with K.P.S. Menon, Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations, carried out as Indian Ambassador to the USSR", SF/9, Vijayalakshmi Pandit papers, NMML.

⁸⁸ UPSC, 'Kothari Report', 31.

⁸⁹ G.S. Bajpai, 'Letter to Vijayalakshmi Pandit', 11 May 1951, '1947-1961: Correspondence exchanged by Mrs Pandit with G.S. Bajpai (Secretary-General, MEA, and Commonwealth Relations) in her capacity as India's Ambassador to Moscow and later USA', SF/56, Vijayalakshmi Pandit papers, NMML.

⁹⁰ Interview 9.

⁹¹ Interview 23.

⁹² UPSC, 'Kothari Report', 51.

⁹³ Interview 40.

Report for the British Civil Service and the Macaulay Report for the Indian Civil Service'.⁹⁴ A Stephenian from a civil service family called the UPSC system a 'totally merit-based', 'very democratic examination'⁹⁵ – raising the question: is merit democratically distributed across society? The levers of inclusion and exclusion are often subtler than the narratives of democratization, propagated by diplomatic elites, suggest.

In fact, the entry regulations implicitly excluded most of India from even applying. Speaking to the early Indian conceptions of diplomacy as intimately tied to colonial imageries of international society, English became the only language of examination.⁹⁶ The compulsory papers on English Essay, General English and General Knowledge⁹⁷ presumed mastery of a language that few in India spoke at all.⁹⁸ In some ways, English became a condition of entry because it was perceived as a condition of entry into the cosmopolitan world of diplomacy itself. Yet, since English was a marker of socioeconomic status,⁹⁹ one presumes that omitting the Indian vernacular was also a politically permissible mechanism for perpetuating the elite nature of Indian bureaucracy.

The imperative of eloquence was expressed in the significance of the interview, which for decades carried higher points and minimum thresholds for the Foreign Service than any of its cousin bureaucracies.¹⁰⁰ That the interview was 'like the *viva* at Oxford', as one Oxford History graduate from the early 1960s appreciatively recalled,¹⁰¹ was no collective Freudian slip – K.P.S. Menon, as head of the Board of Interviews 'always kept in mind, as a model, my own interview for the ICS in 1921'.¹⁰² This meant that it favoured articulate generalists with the cultural confidence to argue their way through an impossible range of topics in front of an eminent panel of senior bureaucrats, academics and public figures¹⁰³ – Menon's own interview, after all, had stretched from the political standing of the Maharaja of Travancore to how he might 'solve the Irish problem'.¹⁰⁴ After Independence, probationers would field questions on Kant's categorical imperative, Pakistani elections, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and hydropower development in the state of Karnataka.¹⁰⁵ As one recently retired diplomat politely alluded, this 'gave a certain advantage to certain people from certain colleges'.¹⁰⁶ In a reflection of the diverging depositories of social capital and familiarity with dominant culture, only a few diplomats from outside the Delhiite civil service circles thought the interview tested academic knowledge;¹⁰⁷ others understood that 'they weren't really interested in

⁹⁴ UPSC, 'Kothari Report', 8.

⁹⁵ Interview 39.

⁹⁶ Nehru, 'The Civil Service in Transition'.

⁹⁷ 'Union Public Service Commission Notice No. F/5/49/540EI', 12 February 1955, "Recruitment of candidates for the Indian Foreign Service on the results of the competitive examination held by the UPSC in 1954", Appendix II. F/2(3)–FSP/55, Part I, NAI.

⁹⁸ Today, only about 5-10% of Indians speak English - a figure that faithfully reflects class and educational divides, and would have been lower still when the UPSC guidelines were introduced. Rukmini S, 'In India, Who Speaks in English, and Where?', Livemint, 14 May 2019, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/in-india-who-speaks-in-english-and-where-1557814101428.html>.

⁹⁹ See e.g. Vaidehi Ramanathan, *The English-Vernacular Divide: Postcolonial Language Politics and Practice* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters LTD, 2005).

¹⁰⁰ 'Union Public Service Commission Notice No. F/5/49/540EI'; UPSC, 'Kothari Report', 33; M.K. Narayan (Home Department), 'Response to Suggestions from the Foreign Service', n.d., "Question of holding combined Examination for the Indian Foreign Service and All India Administrative Service in November-December Every Year. Prescription of high minimum mark at the interview for recruitment to the Indian Foreign Service", FSP/47-F/22(11).

¹⁰¹ Interview 37.

¹⁰² Menon, *Many Worlds*, 62.

¹⁰³ Interview 6; Interview 24.

¹⁰⁴ Menon, *Many Worlds*, 62.

¹⁰⁵ Interview 12; Interview 25; Interview 31; Interview 54.

¹⁰⁶ Interview 11.

¹⁰⁷ Interview 38; Interview 54; Interview 58.

testing your knowledge, but rather how you conduct yourself, your poise'.¹⁰⁸ With the ethereal emphasis on 'having a kind of manner',¹⁰⁹ aspirants from elite backgrounds were at an advantage not academically, but because they fit a certain habitus.¹¹⁰

3.2. Democratizing access

In the span of seven decades, the Service has grown to about 940 IFS(A) officers – a modest number by international comparison and given India's size and stature, but unprecedented in the Service's history.¹¹¹ Although it is now possible in some years – to the perpetual horror of seniors – to make it into the Service from around the 200th place on the all-India merit list (or below the 900th, for reservation recruits),¹¹² the Foreign Service has become more competitive statistically speaking: a vanishing 0.01% of UPSC candidates join the IFS.¹¹³ Through this metamorphosis, the Service has gone from ICS veteran Subimal Dutt arguing in 1955 that 'we should get away from the class structure by taking positive steps to develop initiative and other qualities by anyone who shows promise'¹¹⁴ to democratization fatigue – 'maybe we have democratized too much', one guarded Joint-Secretary ventured.¹¹⁵

In the wider, rigorous debate on the civil services, the 'cause of democratization' is usually a question of 'how to make it more representative in the context of regions, caste, and class terms' (gender, here, is conspicuously absent, perhaps since female officers have often come from more elite backgrounds than their male counterparts).¹¹⁶ It unfolds to the extent that a Service once made up of a narrow elite of upper-caste, upper-class, liberal-arts educated urban men has expanded to include wider demographics – most notably along lines of class, caste, education, geographic origin and family background. Albeit insufficient on its own, understanding such changes in entry demographics is valuable for gauging the conditions of the Service's democratization. A now retired officer who followed her parents into government service spoke with some amazement about the incoming 'hoi polloi'.¹¹⁷ Who, to borrow the delightfully uninhibited elitist phrase that presages the analysis in the second part of the chapter, are the "hoi polloi", and how did they make it into the Service?

¹⁰⁸ Interview 12.

¹⁰⁹ Interview 9.

¹¹⁰ Interview 19; Also Interview 75.

¹¹¹ V.K. Singh, 'Reply by Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs', 3 January 2018, 'Strength of diplomats', unstarred question No.2625 in the Lok Sabha, <https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/29300/QUESTION+NO2625+STRENGTH+OF+DIPLOMATS>.

¹¹² Minimum rank by category, 2008-2018, 'All You Need to Know about the Indian Foreign Service (IFS)', Byju's, 2018, <https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/all-you-need-to-know-about-ifs/>.

¹¹³ Sudha Ramachandran, 'The Indian Foreign Service: Worthy of an Emerging Power?', *The Diplomat*, 12 July 2013, <https://thediplomat.com/2013/07/the-indian-foreign-service-worthy-of-an-emerging-power/>.

¹¹⁴ Dutt, 'Response to Ministry of Home Affairs, Appleby Report'.

¹¹⁵ Interview 61.

¹¹⁶ R.K. Barik, 'Social Background of Civil Service: Some Depressing Trends', *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 7 (February 2004): 626.

¹¹⁷ Interview 52.

3.2.1. Regulated and deregulated ambitions

Arguably the two most significant forces in shaping the changing nature of Indian diplomatic cadres occurred in the last two decades of the 20th century: firstly, the regulations governing entry examinations changed in the early 1980s, and secondly, the deregulation of the Indian economy in the early 1990s recast both economic opportunity and the aspirations of a new Indian middle class, in the process shifting the class connotations of government service.

Long-debated amendments to UPSC procedures agreed before the 1980 examinations lifted several barriers to entry, as recommendations set out in the 1976 Kothari Committee Report were implemented by the UPSC, and the existing structure – the Civil Service Examination (CSE) – came into being.¹¹⁸ Noting that ‘[t]here should be a deliberate effort to attract meritorious candidates from weaker sections of the community, and also from areas other than big metropolitan cities’, so as to ‘make the services truly representative of the country’, the Report introduced changes such as the addition of technical subjects like management and engineering as optional papers, the move from essays to multiple-choice questions and “general knowledge”, and the introduction of preliminary exams which would screen candidates for the main examination at new testing centres, more evenly distributed across India.¹¹⁹ The additional papers for applicants into the “superior civil services”, the IAS and IFS, which used to ‘permit recruitment to these services of candidates with better intellectual and other capabilities’, were abolished.¹²⁰

The place of English in governing entry into government service also continued to evolve. The formerly elevated maximum grade for interviews – to which it was thought nearly a fourth of diplomats owed their place in the Foreign Service¹²¹ – was lowered to the standard 300 marks for all Services and the qualifying minimum eliminated.¹²² This contributed to the gradual equalization of language regulations and the loosening of the monopoly of Anglophone elites, begun through a 1967 Parliamentary resolution ordering that some segments of the examination be made available in all of India’s 22 languages.¹²³ Although many products of Hindi Medium Schools now work alongside officers from Anglophone Convent Schools,¹²⁴ these changes, too, must be put in context. As of 2019, the first round of the CSE is only set in English and Hindi, educational inequities and the dearth of preparatory material and coaching classes in regional languages perpetuate the language imbalance, and serving officers struggled to name a single colleague who had cleared the exam in anything but English or Hindi.¹²⁵ Regulatory amendments can remove technical barriers to democratizing the Services, but they cannot eradicate socioeconomic difference.

A socioeconomic shift did, however, begin a decade later. The liberalization of the Indian economy in the early 1990s, coinciding with the Mandal reforms, restructured economic opportunity, recast the cultural landscape of aspiration, and created new class perceptions in its wake.¹²⁶ While what Leela Fernandes calls the “old middle class” associated cultural and economic status with

¹¹⁸ UPSC, ‘Kothari Report’, 27.

¹¹⁹ UPSC, 24,28.

¹²⁰ UPSC, 50.

¹²¹ UPSC, 70.

¹²² UPSC, 63.

¹²³ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 216; UPSC, ‘Kothari Report’, iv.

¹²⁴ Maruthi Tangirala, ‘Language Choice and Life Chances: Evidence from the Civil Services Examination’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 39 (2009): 16–20.

¹²⁵ UPSC, ‘Examination Notice No. 04/2019-CSP’; Interview 78; Interview 63.

¹²⁶ See e.g. Akhil Gupta and Kalyanakrishnan Sivaramakrishnan, eds., *The State in India after Liberalization: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2010); M.N. Panini, ‘The Social Logic of Liberalization’, *Sociological Bulletin* 44, no. 1 (1995): 33–62.

government service, the “new middle class”, reshaped by liberalization, began pursuing careers in multinational corporations, global finance, or international organizations.¹²⁷ This made government service a primary aspiration for classes falling below the new “middle”. Thus, increasing rural representation in government service, too, has often been a story of the uneven rewards of liberalization: the majority of rural recruits are from a few economically disadvantaged states like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where the lack of a thriving private sector has preserved the status of the civil services as ‘the mother of all jobs’.¹²⁸ Government service, in the new lexicon of the Indian middle classes, is not so much for the already privileged, but for less dominant segments of Indian society aspiring to new heights of class status. One urban upper-caste IFS aspirant, educated in International Relations, was told by family friends to reconsider her career plans, since the Service was no longer known in their circles for having ‘people from our kind of families’.¹²⁹

In this changing class landscape, the UPSC acronym has become an emblem of aspiration for the half a million applicants who appear for the preliminary exams each other. In his colourful travelogue of small-town India, Pankaj Mishra conveyed that ‘[i]t was said that the first letters of the English alphabet for young middle-class children in Bihar were not A, B, and C but UPSC’.¹³⁰ In interviews, the products of this new alphabet told of dedicating over half a decade to the exams, resigning their jobs to study full time, and moving halfway across the country to the Delhi colony of Old Rajinder Nagar, taken over by one of the many clusters of coaching centres that epitomise the cottage industry of UPSC aspiration.¹³¹ These applicants are hungrier than their seniors, one of whom declared it undignified for them to be taking the exam up to the allotted six-time maximum, when he himself would never have graced the Interview Board with his presence a second time.¹³²

The changing face of the UPSC aspirant has meant that many land in the IFS because their rank does not afford them their first preference in the Home Services.¹³³ These accidental diplomats are less likely to carry the kind of familial or educational markers that have conventionally predicted a preference for the glamorous IFS. The IAS and IPS in particular hold an immediate kind of authority outside India’s metropolitan heartlands, where exposure to the Government is primarily through District Collectors or police officers wielding power over districts and development blocks – while the IFS confers an intangible status, signalling belonging in an imagined community uprooted from the local context.¹³⁴ A common accusation levelled by the old guard against these bureaucratic upstarts was that their original preference for the entrapments of power in the Home Services reflected a new, materialistic generation – an unbecoming sign of a post-Gandhian era.¹³⁵ Yet what it also reflected was a different class background – one in which societal power had not been inherited but needed to be earned.

¹²⁷ Leela Fernandes, ‘Restructuring the New Middle Class in Liberalizing India’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 20, no. 1 (2000): 92; Also Interview 1; Interview 2, February 2019; Interview 16; Interview 27; Interview 33; Interview 44; Interview 50.

¹²⁸ Vijay Jung Thapa, ‘Enter the New Babu’, *India Today*, 1 January 2001, <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/nation/story/20010101-new-civil-service-recruits-undergo-serious-phase-of-transition-role-definition-776063-2001-01-01>.

¹²⁹ Interview 84, June 2019.

¹³⁰ Pankaj Mishra, *Butter Chicken in Ludhiana: Travels in Small-Town India* (Pan Macmillan, 2006), 245.

¹³¹ Interview 66; Interview 72; Interview 77; Interview 83, May 2019.

¹³² Interview 28.

¹³³ Interview 7; Interview 24; Interview 33; Interview 36; Interview 38; Interview 58; Interview 59; Interview 63; Interview 68, May 2019; Interview 72; Interview 73, May 2019; Interview 77; Interview 83.

¹³⁴ Interview 7; Interview 29; Interview 44; Interview 49; Interview 58; Interview 72.

¹³⁵ Interview 1; Interview 10; Interview 16; Interview 52; Interview 70.

It is not only the villages or the working classes, however, who have made their presence felt.¹³⁶ With the introduction of technical papers and multiple-choice questions in the early 1980s, liberal arts graduates began finding themselves in the minority of batches dominated by engineers, scientists, and management graduates from the IITs (Indian Institutes of Technology) and IIMs (Indian Institutes of Management).¹³⁷ By the 1990s, civil service intake from engineering and technical backgrounds hit an average of 60% of incoming IFS cadres,¹³⁸ and by the new millennium, the IITs at Kanpur and Delhi were producing the largest number of civil servants.¹³⁹ In fact, if the Service is filling with engineers, this, too, is because when ‘you try and be socially mobile’, it is engineering that Indian parents choose for you, as one rising star from the millennial batches explained¹⁴⁰ – even if these “aspirational” spaces, too, have their hierarchical dynamics, not least around caste.¹⁴¹ This, as we will see, creates its own kind of cultural clash inside the Service.

3.2.2. The second sex, caste quotas, and creamy layers

Although no programmes were devised to bolster their presence, women have also increased their numbers inside the Service. The march toward parity has been meandering: the 1977 and the 1990 batches, for example, had no women at all.¹⁴² Women have been hovering just below the 20% mark of Foreign Service officers for almost a decade now, having begun the new millennium at 13%.¹⁴³ In the decade since 2009, the number of female officers jumped from 94 to 176, according to internal documents cited by a diplomat who had recently reviewed them.¹⁴⁴ One milestone was the perfectly gender-balanced 18-strong 2008 batch,¹⁴⁵ which has been followed by batches whose female intake has stayed between one third to half.¹⁴⁶

The lower castes have entered with greater government support. It was not until the 1970s – when the UPSC was looking to commission sociologists to explain the lingering caste gap in exam performance¹⁴⁷ – that the records indicate a regularization of the reservations system.¹⁴⁸ Yet the Mandal reforms, inducting OBC communities into the reservations system, raised the proportion of reserved seats from 22.5% to half – angering the upper castes, for whom the deprivation among OBC communities was incommensurate with the further damage done to “pure merit”, and some

¹³⁶ Interview 6; Interview 7; Interview 12; Interview 25; Interview 54.

¹³⁷ Interview 44; Interview 56; Interview 57; Interview 58; Interview 60; Interview 71; Interview 72; Interview 80, May 2019.

¹³⁸ Barik, ‘Social Background of Civil Service’, 626.

¹³⁹ Rana, *Inside Diplomacy*, 280.

¹⁴⁰ Interview 60.

¹⁴¹ Ajantha Subramanian, *The Caste of Merit: Engineering Education in India* (Harvard University Press, 2019).

¹⁴² Interview 26; Interview 36; Interview 42; Interview 49; Interview 51, May 2019; Interview 54; Interview 57; Interview 58; Interview 61; Interview 70.

¹⁴³ Kishan S. Rana, *The Contemporary Embassy: Paths to Diplomatic Excellence* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 124–25; V. Sudarshan, ‘Mama MEA’, *Outlook Magazine*, 1 March 2004, <http://magazine.outlookindia.com/story/mama-mea/223122>; Interview 82.

¹⁴⁴ Interview 82.

¹⁴⁵ Interview 59.

¹⁴⁶ Interview 63; Interview 80; Interview 82.

¹⁴⁷ UPSC, ‘Kothari Report’, 26.

¹⁴⁸ ‘Annual Returns Showing the Total Number of Govt. Servants and Number of Scheduled Castes/Tribes amongst Them as on 1-1-67’, n.d., F/Q/FSI/558/5/68, NAI; N.C. Banerjee (MEA), ‘Letter on Enforcement of Reservations to P.L. Gupta (Ministry of Home Affairs)’, 27 December 1969, “Instructions and orders regarding requirements of and reservations orders etc for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Services”, F/Q/GA/551/27/68, NAI.

Dalits, who saw them as accomplices in enforcing caste hierarchies, especially in the villages.¹⁴⁹ At the same time, reservations have yet to reach constitutionally-mandated proportions. Since it is possible for reservation-designated aspirants to make it onto the general-merit list, too, they should in fact constitute more than the prescribed minimum of 50% of officers. The latest data, however, encompassing not all officers but only those posted to Indian Missions abroad in 2018, showed upper-caste diplomats still comprising 62% of the cadre.¹⁵⁰

Despite this continued upper-caste dominance, the injustice that most reliably animated upper-caste officers during interviews was the matter of the “creamy layer”:¹⁵¹ members of historically marginalized communities who have lived through a generation or two of relative privilege, and whose entry into the Services on reservations, so the indictment, distorts their very purpose.¹⁵² Those branded by colleagues as members of this upper crust of the marginalized, primarily Dalits, insisted that some elite exposure was necessary, since otherwise ‘people of my background don’t even know that there exists this creature called the Foreign Service officer’.¹⁵³ Reservations were never about social or economic deprivation – instead, ‘reservations are about representation’.¹⁵⁴ The ambivalent status of “creamy layer” diplomats, explored later in the chapter, is emblematic of both the social hierarchies and the cultural expectations that go into producing the diplomatic habitus.

3.3. Hierarchies of capital

“Democratization” can mean many things, or it can mean very little. Although it ‘brings in a different perspective’, an OBC recruit of a late-2000s batch from a village weighed in, he was not convinced that perspectives like his mattered to those socialized into not considering them.¹⁵⁵ Even the doubling of reserved seats in the 1990s had, in the words of a general-category colleague, produced ‘very little of a sense of overhaul’.¹⁵⁶ In 2015, one young anonymous OBC officer spoke to *The Hindu* about the difficulties of advancing in the Service without the social connections that ‘those from elite families have’, and awareness of the ‘etiquette’ they all seemed to know.¹⁵⁷ As Bourdieu noted, ‘[a] group’s presence or absence in the official classification depends on its capacity to get itself recognized, to get itself noticed and admitted, and so to win a place in the social order’.¹⁵⁸ Against demographic change, some features have presented themselves as forces

¹⁴⁹ Interview 9; Interview 43; Interview 58; Interview 56; Interview 61; Interview 75.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 3053 on IFS Officers Belonging to SC/ST and OBC Categories, by Pratap Singh Bajwa, Answered by V.K. Singh (Minister of State, MEA)’, 22 March 2018, <https://mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/29716/QUESTION+NO3062+FUNDING+FOR+SOUTH+ASIAN+UNIVERSITY>.

¹⁵¹ An Indian Supreme Court judgement in 1992 directed the government to exclude the “creamy layer” from incoming OBC reservations. Based on the criteria recommended by the Justice Prasad Commission, the government defined this group as the offspring of Class I and II bureaucrats in federal and provincial services, military personnel of colonel rank or above, officers in public sector organizations, as well as industrialists, traders and individuals with annual incomes above Rs. 100 000. No such exclusions existed when the SC/ST reservations were created in the 1950 Indian Constitution. See Suri, ‘Competing Interests’, 245.

¹⁵² Interview 1; Interview 2; Interview 3; Interview 5, March 2019; Interview 12; Interview 18; Interview 19; Interview 20; Interview 25; Interview 27; Interview 28; Interview 36; Interview 43; Interview 46; Interview 49; Interview 52; Interview 58; Interview 70; Interview 85.

¹⁵³ Interview 75; Also Interview 67.

¹⁵⁴ Interview 75.

¹⁵⁵ Interview 78; The same argument was made from the perspective of a 1960s batcher: Interview 46.

¹⁵⁶ Interview 66.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Top IFS Posts Still out of Bounds for SCs, STs’, *The Hindu*, 5 December 2015, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/top-ifs-posts-still-out-of-bounds-for-scs-sts/article7950262.ece>.

¹⁵⁸ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 483.

for cultural continuity: senior positions rarely reflect the Service's changing nature of cadres, social capital perpetuates existing hierarchies, and the ideal habitus of the Indian diplomat appears to have changed but little.

3.3.1. Making it

Beyond asking who makes it *into* the Indian Foreign Service, understanding the social dynamics of Indian diplomatic cadres also requires understanding who makes it *in* the Service – which kinds of officers advance to senior, sought-after positions. As the new decade began in 2020, the previous, current and incoming Foreign Secretaries were all Stephanian men.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, as one retired senior Ambassador explained, as though offering an assurance, “democratization” is mostly a question of entry figures – over the first few years to a decade, unsuitable officers are ‘sifted’ out.¹⁶⁰ While there is little publicly available, collated information on this process of sifting, it has, at the very least, influenced the career trajectories of reservation recruits and women.

The hierarchical disposition of the Service reflects itself in the striking rank consciousness officers exhibit, not only in terms of their seniority, but performance in entry examinations for the Service, which are invested with much meaning. In interviews, elderly officers in particular would recall their batch mates in rank order of their UPSC examination results, referring to colleagues who had performed best over half a century ago as “toppers” when speaking of them.¹⁶¹ One Additional-Secretary complained of the ‘obsession’ with examination rank which still defined so much of one’s career from language choice to promotions, noting that ‘in our interaction we don’t notice it, but when a decision goes against us, we invoke our rank’.¹⁶² A high-achiever of the late-1990s batches mentioned that seating arrangements during ministerial meetings are still organized by examination rank.¹⁶³ Because of reservations, this hierarchization has an institutionalised caste element: a millennial Dalit spoke of his embarrassment during training, as probationers were seated for lectures and ordered to stand in line in accordance with their all-India rank – thus also repeatedly “outing” the tail end of SC/ST reservation recruits in a very corporeal manner.¹⁶⁴

The lower castes and Adivasis have not seized an equivalent share of prestigious postings or finance-controlling positions – a grievance thrown in the Ministry’s face by Parliament and various Committees every few years.¹⁶⁵ A 2015 inquiry found that although SC/ST/OBC officers represented almost a third of diplomats, they were fewer than a fifth among Ambassadors, High

¹⁵⁹ ‘Some Distinguished Alumni’, St Stephen’s College, accessed 20 August 2020, <https://www.ststephens.edu/notable-alumni/>.

¹⁶⁰ Interview 3.

¹⁶¹ Interview 31; Interview 35; Interview 37; Interview 40.

¹⁶² Interview 70.

¹⁶³ Interview 83.

¹⁶⁴ Interview 71.

¹⁶⁵ “Unstarred Question – Lok Sabha – No. 2321 for 15.03.1965 by Shri Naval Prabhakar Regarding Scheduled Castes Employees in Indian Missions Abroad”, F/Q(GA)-125/4/65; “Parliament Questions: Information Regarding Members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes in the IFS”, F/Q/FSI/125/2/68, Part II, February 1968, NAI; “Lok Sabha Starred Question No 23428 from Shri Kameshwar Singh – Regarding Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Candidates in the Indian Foreign Service”, F/Q/FSI/125/7/68, July 1968, NAI; “Representation of Scheduled Castes in IFS – IFI Section”, F/Q/FSI/551/10/68, October 1968, NAI; “Lok Sabha Starred Question No. 5382 by Shri D.R. Parmar Regarding Indian Diplomats Belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Due for Answer on 31.7.1968”, F/Q/FSI/125/11/68, July 1968, NAI; “Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 8723 for 27.04.1972 by Shri Bibhuti Mishra Regarding Recruitment to Foreign Service”, F/Q/GA/125(II)/72, 1972, NAI; “Lok Sabha Provisional Starred Question No 5493 Regarding “Criteria for Posting Officers of Scheduled Castes/Tribes in Offices of Trade Commissioners and Trade Representatives Abroad”, F/Q/PA II/125/10/78, October 1978, NAI.

Commissioners or Permanent Representatives.¹⁶⁶ Even many of these ambassadorships, one retired Dalit diplomat claimed, are repeat appointments to ‘inconsequential postings’, while Missions to P-5 countries¹⁶⁷ and the neighbourhood are run by ‘the ruling elite of the Foreign Service’.¹⁶⁸ The senior-most Secretary ranks are still inhabited by ‘blue-blooded Brahmins’, a serving Dalit diplomat agreed.¹⁶⁹

These imbalances are partly an administrative consequence of the separate merit lists around which many of the Service’s practices cohere. It has tended to be batch-toppers who make Foreign Secretaries, and one’s rank at entry matters throughout one’s entire career.¹⁷⁰ The higher maximum age afforded to reservation-recruits also matters, since joining the Service late also means progressing less far by retirement.¹⁷¹ Languages are allotted according to rank, so that batch toppers from the general merit list can pick career-promoting UN languages like Chinese or French to study during training.¹⁷² In this way, seemingly neutral practices like language allocations institutionalize caste discrepancies. And yet, although it reflected both thousands of years of caste segregation (Chapter 1) and colonial legacies (Chapter 2), the upper-caste character of the Foreign Service often seemed entirely naturalized and neutralized to many inside it. ‘The country is overwhelmingly run by Brahmins’, a Muslim diplomat shrugged,¹⁷³ so it was only to be expected, as an apologetic Brahmin officer deduced, that there would be a ‘Brahminical civil service elite’, too.¹⁷⁴

Women, too, are more present in entry statistics than in senior positions. Only Muthamma’s 1970 ambassadorial appointment to Hungary ended a rule barring a woman from ambassadorial ranks ‘in case she leaked the state secrets’ to an unsuspecting husband.¹⁷⁵ In a scolding Supreme Court ruling following Muthamma’s decision to take the MEA to court in 1979 after she failed to make Foreign Secretary, Judge Krishna Iyer ordered the Service ‘to remove the stain of sex discrimination, without waiting for ad hoc inspiration from writ petitions or gender charity’ by striking down Articles 8(2) and 18(4) of the 1961 Indian Foreign Service Rules on marriage, which had made career progress all but impossible for women.¹⁷⁶ Since future Foreign Secretary Jagat Mehta’s wife had been forced to resign, the Service had in fact been making exceptions to its own rules.¹⁷⁷ Yet women still required permission to marry until the early 1980s, needing to provide a draft resignation letter that the Service held onto in case the weight of domestic life rendered women, as this logic would have it, poor diplomats.¹⁷⁸

Three ground-breaking appointments marked a shift in the 21st century, as Chokila Iyer (2001–2002), Nirupama Menon Rao (2009–2011), and Sujatha Singh (2013–2015) made Foreign Secretaries – and Iyer, an ST officer, became the first Foreign Secretary from a reserved-category

¹⁶⁶ ‘Top IFS Posts Still out of Bounds for SCs, STs’.

¹⁶⁷ P-5 refers to the permanent members of the UN Security Council: the US, China, the UK, France, and Russia

¹⁶⁸ Interview 54.

¹⁶⁹ Interview 75.

¹⁷⁰ Interview 43; Interview 45.

¹⁷¹ Interview 7; Interview 77.

¹⁷² Interview 75; Interview 77.

¹⁷³ Interview 7.

¹⁷⁴ Interview 43.

¹⁷⁵ Basu, ‘Chonira Muthamma, India’s First Woman Career Diplomat’.

¹⁷⁶ Supreme Court of India, ‘C. B. Muthamma v. Union of India and Others (AIR 1868)’, 17 September 1979, <http://www.judis.nic.in/supremecourt/qrydisp.aspx?filename=4724>.

¹⁷⁷ Interview 5.

¹⁷⁸ Interview 5; Interview 15, March 2019; ‘Article 8(2). The Indian Foreign Service (Conduct and Discipline) Rules, 1961’, 1965, ‘Tendency among All-Indian Service Officers to approach Ministers, MPs and other prominent public personalities regarding Service matters’, Q(GA)/793(5)/65, NAI.

background.¹⁷⁹ Breaking important ground on strategic postings, Meera Shankar (2009–2011) and Nirupama Menon Rao (2011–2013) became Ambassadors to the US in succession¹⁸⁰ – although the complaints about ‘feminist domination in the Indian Mission in Washington’, echoing official complaints to Foreign Secretary Muchkund Dubey by men of the Foreign Service Association in the 1980s,¹⁸¹ bears testimony to the creative reinterpretations of gender parity that develop when women ascend historically male hierarchies.

The type of posts women tend to receive also matter for how far they progress. Much as upper-caste diplomats, asked about caste, began talking of the “creamy layer”, so the most common male response to questions about gender equality among Indian diplomats involved “soft postings”: women moving ‘from A post to plus-A post’, that is, from one lucrative, comfortable posting to another.¹⁸² One of the more notable office intrigues of the late 1970s was the infamous circular letter from Foreign Secretary Jagat Mehta (whose wife had resigned the Service upon marrying him), reprimanding women officers for unfairly exploiting their gender identity to gain good postings by appealing to their family arrangements – an intrigue matched by the circular’s abashed retraction after an outcry over its selective empirical evidence.¹⁸³ In interviews, women noted that posting favours had always been an art perfected by well-connected men¹⁸⁴ and offered counterexamples, from women posted in Tripoli during the evacuations of Indian nationals around 2011 to three consecutive women serving in Cote D’Ivoire during the civil wars of the new millennium.¹⁸⁵

And yet it does seem that women are overrepresented in “cultural diplomacy” positions and other sites considered to belong on the softer edges of diplomacy – an imbalance sustained by gendered readings of diplomacy which most women in the Service abhorred, and which, far from benefitting them, often impedes career progress.¹⁸⁶ To this day, those who volunteer for difficult, dangerous placements, wanting acknowledgement as ‘serious officers’¹⁸⁷ in the career-defining first 10–15 years,¹⁸⁸ are rejected – as one Under-Secretary exclaimed – for ‘the most ridiculous reasons’.¹⁸⁹ Without such prestigious “hard postings”, obtaining senior-most positions becomes hard, too.

Ranking orders and senior positions are one way of assessing the cultural fallout – or lack thereof – of the Service’s democratization. Yet focusing on them alone can hide cultural imbalances that persist either way. A now retired diplomat who reached the upper echelons after ranking very high among his batch could never shake the sense of being an outsider, because the all-India merit rankings only conferred status on those who entered with the correct habitus: ‘frankly, one felt

¹⁷⁹ Sagarika Ghose, ‘At Home on Foreign Affairs’, Outlook Magazine, 15 January 2001, <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/at-home-on-foreign-affairs/210681>; ‘Lists of SC/ST Officers with Their Batch Affiliation’; HT Foreign Bureau, ‘Nirupama Is New Foreign Secretary’, Hindustan Times, 1 July 2009, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/nirupama-is-new-foreign-secretary>; Ashok Tuteja, ‘Seniority Prevails, Sujatha Singh Is New Foreign Secy’, The Tribune, 2 July 2013, <https://www.tribuneindia.com/2013/20130703/main6.htm>.

¹⁸⁰ ‘Nirupama Rao Named India’s next Ambassador to U.S.’, The Hindu, 16 July 2011, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Nirupama-Rao-named-Indias-quos-next-ambassador-to-U.S./article13745784.ece>.

¹⁸¹ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 217; Interview 49.

¹⁸² Interview 49; The same complaint was made in Interview 1; Interview 12; Interview 29; Interview 31; Interview 49.

¹⁸³ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 217.

¹⁸⁴ Interview 5; Interview 15, March 2019; Interview 34, April 2019; Interview 42.

¹⁸⁵ Interview 15, March 2019; Interview 57; Interview 80; Interview 81.

¹⁸⁶ Interview 42; Interview 57.

¹⁸⁷ Interview 57.

¹⁸⁸ Interview 63; Interview 80; Interview 82.

¹⁸⁹ Interview 59.

disadvantaged, even if one had taken the same elite exam’, and excelled at it.¹⁹⁰ As Bourdieu would have it, initial cultural capital still matters after a supposed process of equalization, ‘as one finds whenever social origin distinguishes individuals whose qualifications are identical’.¹⁹¹ It also predicted whom one would end up knowing inside the Service – an essential benefit in a Service that functions on what one jaded officer called the ‘you-know-whom’s logic’.¹⁹²

3.3.2. The segregation of social capital

In his 2013 autobiography, Ambassador P.L. Bhandari rejoiced in the conveniences of Indian diplomacy several decades into Independence and across Missions around the world: ‘wherever you went, you met people who knew the people you knew’.¹⁹³ Or, in Bourdieu’s lexicon: you had social capital. This was not, however, a universal condition. Rather, it was another reflection of the Service’s power imbalances.

For the offspring of the well-connected, a ‘closed-door network’ nurtured those who ‘went to the Gymkhana Club to meet their fathers’ friends’, receiving generational wisdom on bureaucratic life and position openings, remembered one disillusioned 1970s-batcher.¹⁹⁴ A colleague who joined later into the decade observed his better-connected peers navigate processes like language allotments by befriending ‘the right people in the Ministry’, after their Delhiite civil service families had ‘fed them with background information’.¹⁹⁵ Since Stephenians were seen as practically ruling Indian bureaucracy,¹⁹⁶ it was also common for them to elaborate on the diplomats, politicians, academics, and celebrities they counted among their friends, many of whom they already knew from the Shakespeare Society or debating classes at “the College”.¹⁹⁷ Even as the hold of the ‘Oxford–Cambridge– St Stephen’s– Doon School clique’¹⁹⁸ has waned, along with the social capital that comes from familial ties, it will take decades before the generational churn lessens their power in the Service’s culture-defining senior layers. For now, inherited social capital matters: as one contract agent of the Ministry phrased it, he had never ‘seen anybody whose father was in the IFS who got posted to Malawi’.¹⁹⁹

Social capital within the Foreign Service has also always had a caste. With all the liberal taboos surrounding caste in a space like the Foreign Service, one does not query the caste underpinnings of social capital by asking diplomats to describe outright networks – although one retired Christian diplomat redefined some key diplomatic terms by explaining that the ‘*esprit de corps* means Brahmins want to help each other’²⁰⁰ and a Dalit diplomat spoke at length about discreet but ‘socially segregated’ networks along caste lines.²⁰¹ Indeed, many Dalits explicitly contrasted their experience with the more overt expressions of caste in the Home Services: some celebrated the fact that the Foreign Service, unlike the IAS, at least had no openly-paraded ‘caste constituencies’,²⁰² while

¹⁹⁰ Interview 74; The same argument was made by another high-ranking official: Interview 45.

¹⁹¹ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 99.

¹⁹² Interview 24.

¹⁹³ P. L. Bhandari, *How Not to Be a Diplomat: Adventures in the Indian Foreign Service Post-Independence* (London: The Quince Tree, 2013), 1.

¹⁹⁴ Interview 14.

¹⁹⁵ Interview 41.

¹⁹⁶ Interview 79.

¹⁹⁷ Interview 27; Interview 33; Interview 69; Interview 81; Interview 85.

¹⁹⁸ Interview 43.

¹⁹⁹ Interview 2.

²⁰⁰ Interview 25.

²⁰¹ Interview 54.

²⁰² Interview 54.

others admired the IAS for having staff to support ST/SC officers and lauded those state cadres with organized caste associations that fend against discrimination in Government employment.²⁰³

Instead, to gauge the caste of social capital, one allows diplomats to freely describe their batches, colleagues, friends and favourite diplomats. One striking feature that emerged from this exercise was the practice among some diplomats from the 1950s–1970s batches to entirely exclude reserved-category entrants from headcounts when recalling their batch. Diplomats who just moments before had eloquently outlined the moral case for reservations gave peculiarly small batch sizes and, upon a suggestion that the size seemed smaller than the respective ministerial documents indicated, only then added reserved-category colleagues to their tally.²⁰⁴ It was as if these lower-caste diplomats were not really there, at least not in the social imagination of some upper-caste peers. One diplomat who joined in the 1960s batted off a question about officers' caste identities with the visibly offended retort that 'I didn't look at it from that perspective', only to then turn pensive: 'It's funny... I never had any colleagues [from reserved categories]... I had very little to do with them'.²⁰⁵ A member of an adjacent batch spoke at length about batch solidarity even beyond retirement, before clarifying that he had no contact with colleagues from outside the general merit list.²⁰⁶ Those who insisted that they were well-acquainted with lower-caste diplomats would, across different batches, usually mention the one and same individual diplomat.²⁰⁷ Social capital in the Foreign Service was less blind to caste than the principles its officers claimed to uphold.

Finally, even if Bourdieu might not have thought of social capital as gendered, Indian female diplomats certainly have. 'It's the class example of an Old Boy's Club', declared one diplomat from the millennial batches who had spent a decade navigating the intricacies of a system where many vacancies at Headquarters are never openly advertised and even men from rural backgrounds had begun finding their way around the hierarchies by 'help[ing] each other out' amongst themselves.²⁰⁸ Traditionally, many diplomatic bonding practices have shut out women by social convention, be it hot baths in Japan or drinks at the Gymkhana Club in Delhi.²⁰⁹ And while female diplomats were expected to join the wives at diplomatic dinners, their male colleagues would talk politics and grow closer with their superiors²¹⁰ – a convention that already infuriated Ambassador Pandit in the 1940s²¹¹ but seems to have taken the better part of the 20th century for the Service to abandon.²¹²

3.3.3. Representability as belonging

Bourdieu held that 'in rapidly changing societies, habitus changes constantly, continuously, within the limits inherent in its original structure',²¹³ but inside the Foreign Service, the limits of the original structure seem to have constrained much of the change that one might have expected in the wake of demographic change. As other Ministries were moving 'down to earth', a 1970s batcher recalled partly laughing, partly scoffing, the Foreign Service was stacked with Secretaries

²⁰³ Interview 75.

²⁰⁴ Interview 7; Interview 31; Interview 35; Interview 39.

²⁰⁵ Interview 31.

²⁰⁶ Interview 43.

²⁰⁷ Interview 7; Interview 35; Interview 36; Interview 43.

²⁰⁸ Interview 59; Also Interview 15, March 2019; Interview 42; Interview 63; Interview 82.

²⁰⁹ Interview 15, March 2019; Interview 42.

²¹⁰ Interview 15, March 2019; Interview 21.

²¹¹ Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, 251.

²¹² Interview 15, March 2019.

²¹³ Bourdieu, 'Habitus', 31.

in ‘three-piece suits with cigars’.²¹⁴ An ‘elitist style, based on the initial circumstances of the very early profile of the Service’ was still predominant, as Ambassador Rana observed in the new millennium.²¹⁵ Even with the changing nature of incoming cadres and the world transforming around them, Indian diplomats both serving and retired gave little indication in interviews that much had changed about the ideal Indian diplomat.²¹⁶

The image of an Anglophone, upper-caste, presentable, well-dressed, eloquent male liberal arts graduate was an often subconscious benchmark even for those who did not fit it, and continues to dominate the line-up of Foreign Secretaries.²¹⁷ Stephenians were described as ‘the cultural reference group’²¹⁸ (one Stephanian of a 1960s batch went as far as suggesting that the IFS ‘represents the ethos of St Stephen’s’²¹⁹). As a Dalit officer with a science background noted when talking about the superficiality of change in the Service: ‘I think subconsciously many still want to be like them’.²²⁰ And indeed, even those who declared the elitist reverence for Stephenians *passé* sometimes went on to name specific Stephenians as examples of the ideal diplomat.²²¹

The domestic processes of inclusion were inconsistent with an old imagery of international society premised on an implicit standard of civilization expressed through the diplomatic habitus. Diplomacy was an inherently elitist endeavour, poorly suited for the kind of “democratization” the Service had been pressurised to undergo, a former Foreign Secretary from the early 21st century argued in a defensive tone – ‘in my time, “elite” wasn’t a bad word’.²²² For, in the innocuous words of a retired Stephanian multilateralist: ‘you cannot be a person who is not presentable’ abroad.²²³ International diplomacy had its own exclusions and standards, and the Indian Foreign Service was supposedly merely abiding by them. Some things you ‘cannot sacrifice for the sake of democratization’, as one recently retired diplomat emphasized, echoing a much-repeated philosophy which many, perhaps most, senior interviewees professed: democratization is also decline.²²⁴ The inward-facing project of creating a “representative” Service clashed with the outward-facing project of producing a “representable” one.

Representability criteria were seen as excluding reservation-recruits, for example, from the elite class of diplomats. The problem is the ‘suitability’ of reservation recruits for an international career, one former Foreign Secretary carefully emphasized in order to make the point that there were no political objections against lower-caste diplomats²²⁵ – just sociological ones. Both renouncers and defenders of reservation recruits believed they could be identified merely by observing their manner, dress, tastes, speech, and writing.²²⁶ One officer of a 1960s batch even suggested that although the Home Services should observe reservations on moral grounds, it was in the nature of diplomatic work (rather than Indian social attitudes) that those of marginalized lower-caste backgrounds ought not to become diplomats.²²⁷

²¹⁴ Interview 49.

²¹⁵ Rana, *Inside Diplomacy*, 37.

²¹⁶ Interview 7; Interview 12; Interview 19; Interview 41; Interview 59.

²¹⁷ Interview 59; Interview 57; Interview 75.

²¹⁸ Interview 43.

²¹⁹ Interview 23.

²²⁰ Interview 75.

²²¹ Interview 27; Interview 80; Interview 83; Interview 85.

²²² Interview 6.

²²³ Interview 23.

²²⁴ Interview 3; Also Interview 2; Interview 10; Interview 16; Interview 28; Interview 41; Interview 63; Interview 69; Rana, *Inside Diplomacy*, 284.

²²⁵ Interview 9.

²²⁶ Interview 7; Interview 22; Interview 24; Interview 35; Interview 63; Interview 70.

²²⁷ Interview 35.

It was also the imagery of international diplomacy conducted in prose and cultural anecdotes that made so many traditional diplomats suspicious of their colleagues from the hard sciences and engineering, who, in the folklore of the Service's liberal arts graduates, 'see the world in very binary terms',²²⁸ and are not 'able to articulate ideas' or grasp 'broader concepts' like their liberal arts peers.²²⁹ Liberal arts graduates, at every level of seniority, pre-emptively mourned after the Service's hallmark eloquence and breadth of historical and political awareness, threatened by the takeover of top posts by engineers and scientists.²³⁰ Although some of these distinctions appeared overdrawn, it might be noted that the only officer to turn down an interview upon hearing what the thesis sought to accomplish was a brash young officer from a top engineering college who struggled to see the purpose in something as woolly, advising quantitative methods instead – an uninvited suggestion which perhaps did speak to a rather binary, dry disposition.

Many women in the Service also sensed that the male officer remained an unacknowledged standard bearer of the technically gender-neutral diplomatic habitus. Bourdieu noted that most visions of social order owed their persistent androcentrism to gendered readings rendered commonsensical: 'the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it'.²³¹ This was also the case with the Foreign Service, where the repeated, subconscious use of "he", "men", and "good guys" in reference to the generic diplomat in archival texts and interviews with men of all generations suggested an unintentional but chronic masculinization of the diplomatic habitus.²³² 'If you ask people to name three officers they admire', one late-2000s recruit challenged her interviewer, 'see how many of them name a single woman'.²³³ None were named.

Most women interviewed were also convinced that it was gender stereotypes that were keeping them from being taken seriously, and avoided cultural diplomacy postings precisely in order to escape a feminized typecast.²³⁴ Yet when female diplomats performed some of the traits traditionally associated with the unofficially gendered habitus of a diplomat, there was also social punishment. Men seemed uncomfortable with authoritative women as their superiors,²³⁵ and gendered 'double-standards' in annual evaluations and daily work meant women were penalized for the "bossy" outspokenness applauded in men as "decisive", female officers described.²³⁶ Male officers from the 1960s batches insisted that C.B. Muthamma, India's first female career diplomat, 'could have been a little less brazen'.²³⁷ A diplomat of 'high intellectual capacities' possessing a 'profound awareness of India's national interests', Dixit admits that her not becoming Foreign Secretary — a post she 'from every logical point of view' deserved, not least for having topped the entry exam – betrayed a discomfort among her superiors with the notion of an outspoken woman elevated to Grade I.²³⁸ One Additional-Secretary gave voice to what young female officers had named 'the stereotype of the cranky single lady',²³⁹ lamenting that female diplomats tended to

²²⁸ Interview 33.

²²⁹ Interview 28.

²³⁰ Interview 52; Interview 57.

²³¹ Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 9.

²³² As a brief selection: Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Response', 21 November 1947, 'Question No. 220 in the Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) by the Hon'ble Sethi Govinddas in regard to recruitment to the Indian Foreign Service by the F.P.S and the number of persons appointed with Indian Embassies', FSP/47-F/18(11), NAI; Haksar, 'Memo'; Interview 14; Interview 16; Interview 37; Interview 72; Interview 85.

²³³ Interview 59.

²³⁴ Interview 34; Interview 42; Interview 63; Interview 80; Interview 81; Interview 82.

²³⁵ Interview 15, March 2019; Interview 34.

²³⁶ Interview 5; Interview 15, March 2019; Interview 34; Interview 42.

²³⁷ Interview 1; Also Interview 31.

²³⁸ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 50.

²³⁹ Interview 59; Interview 63.

become ‘anti-personal’, incapable of using ‘the entire range of their capabilities’ over the decades.²⁴⁰ This, to the extent that it had any meaning at all, would presumably have reflected female officers’ attempts at abiding by an unofficially masculinized habitus, while downplaying overt displays of emotion, which were bound to be interpreted through a gendered lens. In other words, being a female diplomat often meant thinking three impossible things before breakfast: she should fit a gender-neutral habitus, she should seek to abide by the male-signified markers of the not-really-gender-neutral habitus, but at the same time, she ought to keep some stereotypically feminine traits lest she be marked as anti-personal and hence, again, a lesser diplomat.

3.3.4. The cosmopolitans and their Others

The strongest social divider that ranked officers against a set ideal was the question of who among the officers got to count themselves as cosmopolitan. During interviews, no moment drew out as many beaming eyes, poised smiles, and declarations of conviction as the question: “Would you describe yourself as a cosmopolitan?” Most diplomats, otherwise careful to weigh up their responses, enlisted themselves as committed cosmopolitans with a hasty self-evidence.²⁴¹ Only a single diplomat rejected the concept entirely, tying it to the ‘leftist, internationalist ideology’ which he considered the Service shackled by.²⁴² The more introspective elaborations that followed the initial endorsement in other interviews tell a story of the intermingling hierarchies that make up both international society and the Indian Foreign Service. They begin to decipher the ways in which actually existing cosmopolitanism, as it has been perceived and lived out in the Foreign Service, is about policing the boundaries of elite belonging.

One might perhaps think of cosmopolitanism as a matter of tradecraft: a diplomat was expected to be a cosmopolitan by definition. Some officers offered this reading,²⁴³ yet some noted that the emphasis on cosmopolitanism actually felt like a peculiarly Indian accent on diplomatic conduct. ‘The Japanese are less cosmopolitan than the Indian diplomats’, one Additional-Secretary evaluated,²⁴⁴ while a recruit from a late 2000s batch hesitated: ‘I would love to say “yes, you have to be a cosmopolitan to do well”’, but then, ‘you have these boorish Chinese people’ – diplomats who ‘drink their wine with ice’.²⁴⁵

The argument about the boorish Chinese with their iced beverages is not trivial. It lays bare a deeper tension in the very notion of cosmopolitanism, as it is actually used and understood around South Block: it signalled much more – or less – than an internationalist commitment. It was a term of distinction which carried undeclared baggage: class, caste, educational privilege, family background. Cosmopolitanism, for all its world-embracing ethics, was not available to just anybody.

In fact, the notion that cosmopolitanism was an expression of one’s place in a social hierarchy was so deeply engrained that one Hindi-speaking Joint-Secretary from rural India felt the need to qualify that he may not appear cosmopolitan but identified as one nonetheless, ‘opinion-wise’.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁰ Interview 70.

²⁴¹ Interview 7; Interview 27; Interview 37; Interview 57; Interview 59; Interview 63; Interview 42; Interview 48; Interview 55; Interview 69; Interview 70; Interview 82.

²⁴² Interview 39.

²⁴³ Interview 6; Interview 7; Interview 45; Interview 57; Interview 68; Interview 80.

²⁴⁴ Interview 70.

²⁴⁵ Interview 59.

²⁴⁶ Interview 58.

Some began the account of their cosmopolitanism by describing their lifestyle.²⁴⁷ This is perhaps why Bourdieu considered ‘cosmopolitan capital’ an element of the hierarchies that order social groups, and why he thought it important to study the relationships between “global fields” and “local elite schools”, which produced national elites that often resembled each other more than they resembled their compatriots.²⁴⁸ The cosmopolitanism of the Indian Foreign Service was rooted in myths of the rooted and the rootless – Bourdieu himself indulged in this language, describing elite schools as breeding grounds for ‘a group cut off from its local ties’²⁴⁹ – although in interviews, an urban background and thus a very specific socio-geography was repeatedly and prominently raised as a quintessential qualifier for a cosmopolitan.²⁵⁰

In classic Bourdieusian fashion, cosmopolitanism was also matter of taste. ‘Culturally, your tastes were international, probably because the English language led you there’, an instinctive outsider from the mid-1970s batches appraised.²⁵¹ ‘I like *foie gras* better than chicken curry’ was the explanation of one Francophile officer to what made her a cosmopolitan,²⁵² while a contemporary tied it to the importance of knowing one’s wines.²⁵³ One retired diplomat subscribed to the *Financial Times* Weekend edition – ‘that’s my reading, the word cosmopolitanism comes up [...] so I’m very comfortable when you ask me about cosmopolitanism’.²⁵⁴

Cosmopolitanism had its own code: it required knowledge of cultural references and ‘an understanding of where people are coming from when they say things’, one millennial recruit felt, after half a decade deciphering this code among his more privileged colleagues.²⁵⁵ It was aspirational – more established officers adjudicated on who qualified as cosmopolitan, while many who were still adjusting to the elite lifestyle of diplomacy worried about their assessments.²⁵⁶ Even cosmopolitans’ professed values – inclusion, tolerance, respect for difference – had a class edge to them: ‘Yes, I am a cosmopolitan because I don’t want to live like middle-class Indians with their prejudices’, an upper-class Mumbaikar of the 1970s batches exclaimed.²⁵⁷ In these narrations, uses, and abuses of cosmopolitanism, the notion of being a cosmopolitan becomes a socially grounded ‘badge of privilege’.²⁵⁸ Instead of an ethic or political commitment, it presents itself, as Craig Calhoun has it, as ‘a term of self-congratulation’ and ‘a compliment for the suave and debonair’.²⁵⁹

To the extent that these readings had an international dimension, they signaled an internationalization of social and cultural class. ‘Irrespective of a person’s nationality, I get along with people who have a certain educational background and the same social references’, was one Under-Secretary’s explanation of her cosmopolitanism.²⁶⁰ Drawing in her interviewer, a Deputy-Secretary concluded that one way of thinking about cosmopolitanism was that ‘you and I probably

²⁴⁷ Interview 37; Interview 73.

²⁴⁸ Bourdieu in Cohen, ‘Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations’, 229.

²⁴⁹ Bourdieu in Cohen, 229; Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996).

²⁵⁰ Interview 7; Interview 28; Interview 33; Interview 37; Interview 42; Interview 49; Interview 55; Interview 57; Interview 61; Interview 65, May 2019; Interview 66; Interview 68; Interview 72; Interview 73; Interview 77; Interview 80; Interview 83.

²⁵¹ Interview 74.

²⁵² Interview 81.

²⁵³ Interview 42.

²⁵⁴ Interview 7.

²⁵⁵ Interview 65.

²⁵⁶ Interview 55; Interview 46; Interview 52; Interview 72; Interview 76, May 2019; Interview 78.

²⁵⁷ Interview 41.

²⁵⁸ Robbins and Horta, ‘Introduction’, 2017, 3.

²⁵⁹ Craig Calhoun, ‘A Cosmopolitanism of Connections’, in *Cosmopolitanisms*, ed. Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta (New York: NYU Press, 2017), 192.

²⁶⁰ Interview 59.

share more' with one another than she did with most Indians, presumably because of an elite education, although the point remained unspecified.²⁶¹ The notion of comfortability anywhere in the world was a comfortability among 'people like us, people from certain families', as a retired diplomat clarified, also inviting his interviewer into an unspecified band of insiders, only knowing about her that she was a European with an Oxford degree.²⁶² It was in these depictions not only of themselves but of what they assumed to make their interviewer a cosmopolitan that much was revealed about the rules of belonging to the cosmopolitan clan.

And in quintessentially Bourdieusian vocabulary, many seemed to define cosmopolitanism as a portable effortlessness of sorts, suggesting that a true cosmopolitan is 'comfortable' or 'at ease' anywhere,²⁶³ or speaking of themselves as 'at home in the world'.²⁶⁴ One is reminded of Bourdieu's remarks about 'the "natural" self-confidence, ease and authority of someone who feels authorized'.²⁶⁵ In this way, the practices of actually existing cosmopolitanism often came to 'enact the very parochialism they decry'.²⁶⁶

These impressions of a worldly diplomat made surprising insiders of some communities otherwise marginalized in Indian society. The highest praise from upper-caste Hindu officers was preserved for the tribals of Northeast India who have traditionally dominated the Service's ST quota, many of whom had attended the prestigious St Paul's Boarding School in Darjeeling, or even St Stephen's for college.²⁶⁷ With their Anglophone education and 'beautiful English',²⁶⁸ upper-caste Hindu officers celebrated these officers as 'well-groomed'²⁶⁹ and 'very presentable'²⁷⁰ – and the crowning compliment: they were often 'more cosmopolitan in their outlook than many others'.²⁷¹ These Adivasi communities, many older diplomats approvingly explained, were 'not the archetype tribal you think about'²⁷² – evoking exoticized memories of destitute communities during district training, perhaps. No such welcome was extended to the tribal communities from states like Jharkhand or Odisha, who, in the frank self-evidence pronounced by one Hindu officers, were 'not so readily suitable to the outside world'.²⁷³ Unlike the "creamy layer" of Dalits, who were held responsible for degrading the very principle of affirmative action, 'the elite of the Northeast'²⁷⁴ were never singled out for a similar charge. At the same time, even many critics of the much-maligned community of "creamy layer" Dalits admitted that it was better, for outward representation, to have lower-caste diplomats who had 'already been socialized into the cosmopolitan, urban world' upon entering the Service.²⁷⁵

A similar appreciation traditionally extended to the Service's few Muslim officers. Although Nehru was famously particular about ensuring appropriately senior rank to the Muslims who entered as emergency recruits,²⁷⁶ he had lamented the scarcity of 'suitable Muslims' after entry regulations

²⁶¹ Interview 63.

²⁶² Interview 7.

²⁶³ Interview 37; Interview 40; Interview 48; Interview 52.

²⁶⁴ Interview 57.

²⁶⁵ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 250.

²⁶⁶ Pratap Bhanu Mehta, 'Cosmopolitanism and the Circle of Reason', *Political Theory* 28, no. 5 (2000): 633.

²⁶⁷ Interview 7; Interview 18; Interview 20; Interview 22; Interview 27; Interview 31; Interview 43.

²⁶⁸ TA/7. Also EG/18; MA/71; MSA/43

²⁶⁹ Interview 35.

²⁷⁰ Interview 22.

²⁷¹ Interview 27.

²⁷² Interview 27.

²⁷³ Interview 22.

²⁷⁴ Interview 7.

²⁷⁵ Interview 22; Also Interview 41; Interview 75.

²⁷⁶ Dutt, *With Nehru in the Foreign Office*, 18, 42.

were formalized,²⁷⁷ not least because much of the Muslim elite, which he probably would have most intuitively recognized as fitting the desired diplomatic habitus, had departed for Pakistan during Partition.²⁷⁸ Since the 1950 Indian Constitution foresaw no reservations for India's relatively deprived Muslim communities,²⁷⁹ the Service mostly attracted the '*crème de la crème* of Muslims', who were 'very warmly accepted' because 'they came from very good pedigree', one retired Muslim diplomat chronicled.²⁸⁰ The Service may have been 'casteist and classist [...] but not communal', he continued, so 'a person like me would be easily accepted because of my class'. Eschewing a negative typecast of Indian Muslims as somehow less refined than their Hindu peers, these Muslim officers emphasised their elite education and upbringing.²⁸¹ There was a subtext of erasure to this way of inhabiting the habitus. An upper-caste diplomat from the mid-1970s batches offered her admiration of the Service's Muslims in a strange kind of compliment: 'if you met them, you would never know they are Muslim!'²⁸² The Muslim diplomat represents a deviation from a supposedly universal ideal, which nonetheless excludes the possibility of religious and cultural difference.²⁸³ The way for a Muslim to perform the diplomatic habitus "correctly" involved a vanishing act of sorts: erudite, elite-educated Muslims were cherished precisely because their Otherness in Indian society was not palpable in their habitus.

By contrast, the insistence on "cosmopolitan capital" in the mythologies of diplomatic culture also created a category of internal Others. Those without elite education or urban backgrounds were 'hemmed in' by life in foreign capitals, a Stephanian from the early 1990s batches expounded.²⁸⁴ Officers who had originally pined after a position in a Home Service were often the most maladjusted: 'those who were put in the IFS were very unhappy people – in terms of lifestyle, it was even more difficult to integrate than for me,' one senior diplomat from outside Delhi's civil service circles commiserated.²⁸⁵ Some thought the Home Services would have better suited those from rural India²⁸⁶ – mirroring an indignant Vijayalakshmi Pandit who in 1949 tried to transfer an addition to her staff at the India's Moscow Embassy: '[t]here must be plenty of work for her in her home Province where she will not be such a complete misfit as she is here'.²⁸⁷ Those who did not speak the 'poetic' English of the Service, with its 'flowery' dispatches,²⁸⁸ or those with 'a heavy Indian accent',²⁸⁹ were never truly part of the circle of elite officers either.

Cosmopolitanism had a caste, too. If cosmopolitanism was supposed to transcend parochial classifications, it ought to have transcended caste – a qualifier that some liberal diplomats attached to their description of cosmopolitanism as a commitment to anti-discrimination, even if sometimes

²⁷⁷ 'Oral History Transcript: Lakshmi N. Menon', 1971, 8, Oral Histories, NMML.

²⁷⁸ Interview 30.

²⁷⁹ The new reservations for OBC communities under the Mandal reforms did designate some isolated Muslim communities as backward, thus allowing them entry into Government Services through affirmative action – even if the scarcity of Muslim officers suggests few have availed themselves of these seats. See Seik Rahim Mondal, 'Social Structure, OBCs and Muslims', *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, no. 46 (2003): 4892–97.

²⁸⁰ Interview 7.

²⁸¹ Interview 9; Interview 53; Interview 57.

²⁸² Interview 52.

²⁸³ For a discussion on the epistemic and ethical consequences of imposing a secular conception on Indian Muslims and seeing all observable difference as an unwanted expression of communalism, see Faisal Devji, 'Hindu/Muslim/Indian', *Public Culture* 5, no. 1 (1992): 2.

²⁸⁴ Interview 56; Also Interview 51.

²⁸⁵ Interview 45.

²⁸⁶ Interview 70; Interview 63.

²⁸⁷ Vijayalakshmi Pandit, 'Letter to G.S. Bajpai', 10 November 1949, '1947-1951: Correspondence of V. L. Pandit (as Indian Ambassador to USSR) with G.S. Bajpai – Secretary General, MEA, regarding official matters', SF/55, Vijayalakshmi Pandit papers, NMML.

²⁸⁸ Interview 49; Also Interview 58; Interview 73; Interview 77.

²⁸⁹ Interview 45.

only moments before beginning their descriptions of all the various ways in which lower-caste officers struggled to be sufficiently worldly.²⁹⁰ Reserved-category officers, in particular, ‘did not have the confidence’, as an otherwise sympathetic former Foreign Secretary argued.²⁹¹ One serving officer complained that OBC communities were ‘by nature less cosmopolitan’,²⁹² and a retired diplomat, in response to an incredulous clarification question on whether Dalits could be cosmopolitan, pronounced with a baffled self-evidence: ‘of course not’.²⁹³ One serving Dalit officer noted that the much-discussed ‘lack of confidence’ among reservation recruits was fed by the stigmatization they faced from the same diplomats telling them to be more at ease with the world.²⁹⁴ Much as the prizes after which “aspirational India” clamours, the marker of an effortless cosmopolitan, too, was out of reach for many, even within India’s diplomatic corps.

Cosmopolitanism, then, functioned as a powerful metonym: it allowed diplomats to approximate opinions they did not wish to express in so many words – or felt the very word “cosmopolitanism” already encompassed. It was common, for example, to describe the process of democratizing the Service or the expansion of reservations as making the Service less cosmopolitan.²⁹⁵ ‘They wouldn’t even know what a cosmopolitan is!’, proclaimed an anguished diplomat of a late-1960s batch, decrying entrants from conservative households or provincial schools, who could not ‘appreciate a wider world culture’.²⁹⁶ With a nod to the imperative of effortlessness, a Delhiite Joint-Secretary lamented that, owing to amendments in entry procedures, ‘a lot of the people from the Delhi-cosmopolitan background are no longer getting in’, meaning that ‘the level of sophistication, cosmopolitanism, relaxed upper-class background’ had suffered.²⁹⁷ If cosmopolitanism was a metonym, it was a metonym of exclusion: it designated boundaries of belonging in international society according to class markers and status signals, and then used these boundaries to construct a hierarchy of cultural belonging inside the Service, too.

Conclusion

Born into a fragile postcoloniality that espoused Third Worldist principles of inclusion and “Indianization” even as it measured itself against European ideals, the Indian Foreign Service has been seeking to abide by notions of representative bureaucracy since its founding in 1946. While the first four decades were marked by the pronounced un-representativeness of the upper-class, upper-caste, elite-educated men who by and large constituted the diplomatic cadre, administrative changes in entry regulations in the early 1980s as well as broader societal changes brought about by the deregulation of the Indian economy in the early 1990s have gradually rendered incoming diplomats more representative of the Indian public at large. This, in the narratives of the Service’s traditional elites, is a process best described as “democratization” – and in these terms, it is also a remarkable process, not least for the range of regulatory and constitutional interventions expended to allow lower-caste, tribal, rural, and non-Anglophone constituencies a chance at diplomatic life.

Yet it is also remarkable just how light the footprint of this so-called democratization has been on the hierarchies and power structures that have historically defined the Service. This was the

²⁹⁰ Interview 38; Interview 46; Interview 55.

²⁹¹ Interview 45; Also Interview 25; Interview 35; Interview 36; Interview 41; Interview 70; Interview 85.

²⁹² Interview 57.

²⁹³ Interview 7.

²⁹⁴ Interview 75.

²⁹⁵ Interview 7; Interview 57; Interview 61.

²⁹⁶ Interview 37.

²⁹⁷ Interview 57.

argument made in the second part of the chapter, as it sought to draw out the incongruences between demographic change and cultural continuity. Democratization was a beautiful slogan, diversity a doxic ideal – but only insofar as they did not meaningfully alter how the Service operated. More representative batches at the point of entry have not yet meant more representative officer corps at senior levels, with reservation recruits and women, for whom some data is available, remaining underrepresented in the culture-defining upper echelons of the Foreign Service. The inequalities of social capital between different social groups inside the Service have also reproduced existing inequalities of social power and voice.

Finally, the ideal of the Indian diplomat – the “correct” habitus – has not responded or yielded to demographic pressures. In fact, it seems that there has been no meaningful change in conceptions of the ideal diplomatic habitus, just in the average ability of an incoming officer to inhabit it. If anything, demographic changes have only made the bearers of this correct habitus rarer, and thus more culturally powerful. Hoping to be recognized as equals within an old imagery of international society, made in the image of European aristocrats and colonial officers, Indian diplomats have shown more flexibility around the demands of a postcolonial, radically egalitarian ethic than around the ideals of old-school diplomacy. Indeed, India’s loud rejection of the European diplomatic club of elite white men has long enabled a privileged club of Indian elite men to denounce unfair power imbalances globally along a colour line, while allowing the advantages of caste, class, and gender hierarchies to work in its favour within the Service.

What emerges out of the autoethnographies of officers is also the centrality of a concept one would perhaps have expected to encounter in different kinds of conversations: the notion of a cosmopolitan diplomat. Instead of transcending private loyalties, as political theory tells us cosmopolitanism does, cosmopolitanism in the Indian diplomatic imagination was tied to a certain class, habitus, and forms of cultural capital. Cosmopolitans, in some ways, were the only tribe that thought they belonged to none. Self-described cosmopolitans spoke the language of diversity while engaging in practices of social exclusion, in which internal Others were marked by their inability to imbibe the cosmopolitan aesthetic. The changes in cadre demographics which have swollen the numbers of such internal outsiders, it is felt, have put a heavy burden on training and socialization into the appropriate Indian diplomatic habitus. This is the topic of the next chapter.

4. PEDAGOGIES OF A CLEFT HABITUS

We have to produce a type that is capable of holding its own according to international norms, and yet retains the distinctiveness of our national ethos. This requires intensive and imaginative training and grooming.¹

The over seven decades of Indian diplomatic training constitute an ongoing attempt at reproducing, managing, and re-appropriating the diplomatic cleft habitus. These pedagogies have institutional and ideational genealogies (Chapter 2) but they also respond to demographic pressures (Chapter 3). They have sought to reflect the inherited social demands once born under European international society as well as the political ideals that tied the spirit of the freedom struggle to a wider culture of postcolonial international society.

This chapter considers how Indian diplomats are made in the image of an idealized cleft habitus. As Bourdieu wrote in *The State Nobility*, ‘the sociology of education lies at the foundation of a general anthropology of power and legitimacy’.² The chapter, therefore, considers education as an instrument of legitimation and hierarchization, distinguishing insiders from outsiders and valorizing certain social features – accents and skills, backgrounds and ways of relating to the world – over others, ‘with the dominant group always having the capacity to make its particular attributes universal ones’.³ That is, pedagogical processes tend to privilege the cultural capital and ideals of the dominant social class. In many ways, this is the pedagogical crux of the Service’s democratization, too, as the Service’s novel “misfits”, to borrow G.S. Bajpai’s phrase from Chapter 3, navigate socialization into an institution that was not originally structured around their strengths, needs or characteristics.

The chapter begins with a brief descriptive outline, intended as a kind of reference manual for the arguments ahead, on the Service’s training structures, organizational changes, and academic content over the decades – what Bourdieu, writing with Passeron, called *explicit pedagogy*, formalized into instructions and vocalized as overt aims.⁴ It then explores the *implicit pedagogy*, which reveals the underlying ambitions and unspoken assumptions of training, which this chapter considers to revolve around producing the cleft habitus. Finally, the chapter asks what the “democratization” of the Foreign Service has done to the accents of the pedagogical balancing act, as the relative weight assigned to each side during training has shifted as a consequence of the Service’s demographic shifts. From an earlier emphasis on making “real” Indians out of suspiciously worldly

¹ Badr-ud-Din Tyabji, *Indian Policies and Practice* (Delhi: Oriental Publishers, 1972), 18.

² Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*, 5.

³ Sapiro, ‘Field Theory’, 166.

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1977) (London: Sage, 1990), 50.

elites, Indian diplomatic training now coalesces around anxieties that future diplomats may be excessively “real” and insufficiently comfortable in the wine-drinking club of elite diplomats. This part takes account both of the attempts of seniors to instil a certain habitus in their youngsters, as well as the autodidactic attempts by self-professed outsiders to imbibe the ideal habitus outside official training hours.

4.1. The explicit pedagogies of the Service

The basics of Indian Foreign Service training have stood in place for five decades, since the Service discontinued the practice of sending probationers to Western universities and training at the British Foreign Office in the late-1950s.⁵ A foundation course of about four months, jointly attended with probationers of the Home Services, has covered the first principles of Indian governance, economics, and politics, after which Foreign Service probationers have dedicated anywhere from four months to two weeks to lectures on foreign policy and diplomacy. These academic efforts have been followed by about half a year of learning-by-seeing, with probationers touring the nation’s cultural and historical highlights, military bases, and villages, as well as learning-by-doing, with another half a year spent attached to various wings and Territorial Divisions of the Ministry at Headquarters. Future diplomats have also learned a language allotted to them according to their rank in the entry examination and are finally posted as Third Secretaries to Missions in countries where their language is spoken.

Even as these building blocks have roughly stayed in place, the institutional arrangements have evolved. Following the Appleby and A.D. Gorewala Reports’ suggestion that the Superior Civil Services train together, IFS trainees were relocated from Delhi’s Metcalfe House, in use since the British Raj, to the new Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration in Mussoorie in 1959, where the foundation course has taken place for both the Foreign Service and the Home Services ever since.⁶ The subsequent academic training in international affairs in Delhi was transferred from Sapru House to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in the 1960s, where professors of International Relations used to teach a syllabus comprising the theory of international relations, law, and organisations, diplomacy, India’s foreign, defence and economic policy, as well as area knowledge on India’s neighbourhood and the great powers.⁷ For almost two decades, this stint of academic training ranged between three and four months, before shrinking to two weeks and then being replaced altogether in the 1980s.⁸

⁵ ‘Training Programme of the Indian Foreign Service Probationers’, 1968, ‘Revised Training Programme for IFS probationers of 1968 batch and subsequent batches’, F/Q/FSI/580/10/68.

⁶ Interview 40; Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 59.

⁷ For all the imperatives of a decolonization of the mind, archival records suggest that the reading list in this time never moved away from a heavy reliance on American and European sources, from Morgenthau to Rosenau and Quincy Wright, so that only the section on India, with works from Mohammed Ayoob, Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, Sisir Gupta and K. Subrahmanyam, boasted an all-Indian syllabus, or any Indian authors at all. ‘Reading List for IFS Probationers’ Training Course’, n.d., ‘Training of IFS Probationers of 1981 batch at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi’, F/Q/PA II/580/16/82, NAI; ‘Statement from the Director of the Indian School of International Studies’, 1968, ‘Revised training programme for IFS probationers of 1968 batch and subsequent batches’, F/Q/FSI/580/10/68, NAI.

⁸ ‘Statement from the Director of the Indian School of International Studies’, K.P. Misra (Dean, SIS), ‘Letter to M.K. Rasgotra (Foreign Secretary)’, 28 August 1982, ‘Training of IFS Probationers of 1981 batch at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi,’ F/Q/PA II/580/16/82, NAI; D.K. Jain (Under-Secretary, FSP), ‘Memorandum’, 10 September 1982, ‘Training of IFS probationers of 1981 batch at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi’, F/Q/PA II/580/16/82, NAI.

It was only during Jawaharlal Nehru's grandson Rajiv Gandhi's tenure as Prime Minister, in 1986, that the IFS received its own training facility with the establishment of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), which assumed primary responsibility for lectures on foreign affairs and diplomacy, held alongside brief attachments to agencies like the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade.⁹ In its own premises in the heart of Delhi since 2007, the FSI functions under the MEA with a lean permanent staff of less than a dozen, with guest lecturers from academia and diplomacy.¹⁰ With India's growing global footprint, the syllabus has expanded to cover the environment, terrorism, technology, consular and commercial relations, and most recently, press management and the Indian diaspora.¹¹ In a nod to modern pedagogical method (as well as the perceived intellectual deficiencies of the "democratized" batches), the teaching now involves role play, case studies, and simulation exercises, such as climate change negotiations or mock press conferences organized with the MEA's External Publicity Division.¹² A separate module on "soft skills", beyond diplomatic conventions around etiquette, entertainment, and public speaking, involves an attempt to inculcate an appreciation for Indian literature and arts in the probationers.¹³

The most consistent administrative trend from the 1980s onwards has been a push to shorten training in favour of more "practice", so as to 'add more emphasis on practical training in the Missions during the probationers' first posting'.¹⁴ The least consistent aspect remains the sequencing and duration of various training components, with changes of several months not uncommon even between consecutive years. The current structure involves one year of off-desk training and another year of on-the-job experience.¹⁵ Probationers begin with about three months in Mussoorie, move to the FSI for half a year, then do desk attachment at the Ministry (down from its peak of nine months to only one or two), and finally proceed to Mission attachment as Third Secretary (with the time dependent on the difficulty of their language). Brief army, navy, and air force attachments, sometimes only for a day, as well as a shortened Bharat Darshan ("pilgrimage of India") tour remain part of the curriculum, and a protocol attachment that can send probationers to, say, an ASEAN summit.¹⁶

The chapter will pay close attention to one more pedagogical component: district training – an unusual practise, possibly unique to India, of probationers spending months in Indian villages observing local administration. Once a central component of the Service's pedagogies, district training fluctuated between three and six months for about five decades, withered down to one month in the new millennium, and was discontinued in 2014¹⁷ – to the universal dismay of older generations.¹⁸ Brief village visits during training in Mussoorie remain, as does "state attachment", which involves probationers choosing one state, along with its economic status and business interests, to acquaint themselves with. Embodying 'India's cooperative federalism' by making states into 'stakeholders' of foreign policy, state attachment, so the official line, is 'more value for the time [*sic*]' than district training.¹⁹ And yet, as some disgruntled old hands exclaimed, it is hardly a substitute: observing iron ore projects and imbibing the demands of Indian business is in many

⁹ Rana, *Inside Diplomacy*, 286.

¹⁰ 'History of the Institute', Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service, 2020, <https://ssifs.mea.gov.in/?3672?000>.

¹¹ Interview 32, April 2019; Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 2005; Rana, *Inside Diplomacy*, 286.

¹² Interview 32; Interview 44; Interview 68; Interview 78.

¹³ Interview 32.

¹⁴ Jain (Under-Secretary, FSP), 'Memorandum'.

¹⁵ Interview 32; Interview 68; Interview 73; Interview 76; Interview 77; Interview 78; Interview 80.

¹⁶ Interview 32.

¹⁷ Interview 12; Interview 20; Interview 22; Interview 28; Interview 32; Interview 66; Interview 68; Interview 71; Interview 74; Interview 76; Interview 83; 'Chapter on 'Organisation and Administration', (Iii) 8.', 1966, "Annual Report of the Ministry of External Affairs for the year 1965-1966", F/Q (GA)551/132/65, NAI.

¹⁸ Interview 35; Interview 36; Interview 37; Interview 45; Interview 48; Interview 61.

¹⁹ Interview 32.

ways the very opposite of the spirit of district training,²⁰ as this chapter will show, and in its own small way points towards the fractures in the ideals of the cleft habitus explored in Chapter 6.

Whatever their pedagogical merits, the standardized reading lists and lectures may not have left the kind of lasting imprint on probationers that those doing the training may either have presumed or prayed they would. A common thread in the recollections of Indian diplomats across generations was the dismissal of explicit teaching as a near-irrelevance to which little attention ought to or had been heeded.²¹ In fact, those entrusted with lecturing future diplomats often felt resigned and unimpressed, claiming to have lacked both resources and a captive audience.²² Those trained before the establishment of the FSI in 1986 would often accuse the programme of inconsistencies and incompleteness.²³ One former Dean of the FSI – a position reserved for career diplomats – sighted that he had always sensed a ‘lack of faith in the institution’, even by successive Deans themselves.²⁴ Yet there is more to education than the explicit communication of standardized knowledge – indeed, it is in the implicit pedagogies that one finds how the diplomatic cleft habitus of the Indian diplomat is produced.

4.2. The implicit pedagogies of the cleft

The pedagogies of the Indian Foreign Service, like those of any institution imparting education and knowledge, are to a great extent about ‘imposing cultural practices that it does not teach and does not even explicitly demand, but which belong to the attributes attached by status to the position it assigns, the qualifications it awards and the social positions to which the latter give access’.²⁵ Education, Bourdieu reminds us, is about appropriation. With juniors ‘groomed over a period of time’, both during official training and the socialization that ensues within the Service, diplomats are ‘moulded’,²⁶ so that ‘after a while, your outlook becomes the same’²⁷ and officers ‘project a certain, more or less homogenous identity’.²⁸ As Ambassador Badr-ud-Din Tyabji impressed on his colleagues in a letter in 1961: ‘I am convinced that we shall never be able to function as efficiently as we are capable of doing, unless we have a homogenous service’.²⁹

This homogeneity was to be produced by having all probationers come to embody the cleft habitus in a similar fashion.³⁰ It was in the name of an imagery of an old-fashioned, European international society that commentary on etiquette training and “social graces” repeatedly occupied the traditional elites of the Service during interviews, as they fretted over the future fates of their less elegant colleagues in the diplomatic club. Conversely, the Bharat Darshan tour and district training were supposed to root probationers in Indian soil and instil an appreciation for the primacy of

²⁰ Interview 41; Interview 45.

²¹ Interview 25; Interview 35; Interview 38; Interview 57; Interview 61; Interview 73; Interview 74; Interview 78; Interview 80; Interview 83.

²² Interview 44; Interview 64, May 2019; Jain (Under-Secretary, FSP), ‘Memorandum’; Anonymous probationer, ‘Hand-Written Note’, 1982, ‘Training of IFS probationers of 1981 batch at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi’, F/Q/PA II/580/16/82, NAI.

²³ Interview 40; Interview 45; Interview 74.

²⁴ Interview 45.

²⁵ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 18.

²⁶ Interview 16; Interview 22; Interview 36; Interview 70.

²⁷ Interview 22.

²⁸ Interview 19.

²⁹ Badr-ud-Din Tyabji, ‘Memorandum’, 17 January 1961, ‘Review of the Indian Foreign Service’, FSP(I)/MC/3/61, NAI.

³⁰ Tyabji, *Indian Policies and Practice*, 18.

development and poverty alleviation in their roles as Indian representatives abroad. These latter pedagogical exercises spoke to a different reading of international society: one that saw diplomats as servants of the people, congruent with the stated commitment to the subaltern in whose name the Third World ought to be governed.

The inculcation of the cleft habitus is not a set process, abstracted from time and place, but rather reflects particular political moments, power equations and cultural concerns. At the founding of the Service, for example, there was a division between those who, like K.P.S. Menon, wanted to immediately dispatch fresh recruits into British universities for 18 months, as the British Foreign Office did with its probationers, ‘when the cadets’ minds will be most receptive and they will be best able to assimilate the extra-curricular advantages of travel’, and those who wished to organize an attachment at Headquarters first, ‘on the ground that only so will the new recruits be able to acquire a basic knowledge of conditions in their own country’, instead of imbibing a foreigners’ conception of their own nation.³¹ The contestation was about how best to produce a balanced cleft habitus, and spoke to a dual anxiety: how ought probationers be trained so that they are both sufficiently attuned to the still supposedly dominant practices of European diplomacy, while also becoming propagators of a postcolonial international society in which diplomatic priorities looked very different? In various guises and with varying conceptions of the correct balance, the management of these two tendencies has structured the logic of Indian diplomatic training.

4.2.1. From the Raj to the Taj

As Chapter 2 might have led the reader to anticipate, the history of Indian diplomatic training began with some colonial hangovers, dressed up as sober assessments of the “realities” of international society. In one of the many administrative ironies of Indian Independence, the ICS generation that India had fought to rid itself of were put in charge of training postcolonial diplomats – ‘students of British Indian administration but teachers of the new bureaucrats’.³² Dixit considered it an obvious outcome that IFS training was grounded in ‘the conventions and practices of the late 19th century and pre-second-world-war-traditions and practices of the British imperial administration’.³³ Sketches for diplomatic training repeatedly appealed to pedagogical precedent under the British Raj.³⁴ With a fabricated emphasis on practicality over principle, the British diplomat C.B. Duke impressed on his Indian counterparts in 1947 that

For training of a new entrant to the Foreign Service the most satisfactory method in practice would clearly be attachment in the earlier years of service both to the Foreign Office in London and to British missions abroad for the Indian cadet to acquire something of the tradition and technique of the Foreign Office [...] There might be at first some political agitation in India against such deputation but I think that practical and responsible Indians charged with the duties of the Government would recognise the advantages to India of this form of training, at least for about 25 to 30 years until the Indian Service and Indian missions abroad were sufficiently established to be able to undertake exclusively the training of their own young men [*sic*].³⁵

³¹ ‘Statement Attached to the Summary: “The Creation of an Indian Foreign Service”’.

³² Mathai, *Reminiscences of the Nehru Age*, 193.

³³ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 95.

³⁴ H. Dayal (Under-Secretary, MEA), “The Type of Training Required by New Entrants, Non-Officials and Officers Recruited from Various Sources”, 27 March 1946, ‘Establishment of a separate Indian Foreign Service’, FSP/47-2(7); Dayal, ‘Qualifications to Be Prescribed for New Entrants into the Service’.

³⁵ Response from C.B. Duke to Shah, ‘Secret Appendix to Notes: “An Indian Diplomatic Service”’.

Duke had his way, even if imperfectly: for a little over a decade after Independence, the first diplomatic batches were sent to the Anglophone West for training.³⁶ Much like ICS-training had involved a period at Oxford or Cambridge, postcolonial diplomatic probationers, too, spent 18 months at a European or American university – primarily at Oxford and Cambridge in Britain or at the Fletcher School of Diplomacy in the US.³⁷ The majority of probationers, sent off to the academic epicentre of the British Raj, also attended a course run by the Commonwealth Relations Office in London, intended to familiarise future Indian diplomats with the idioms of British diplomacy and the workings of the British Foreign Office.³⁸ One grandee of the Foreign Service, who partook in this training in the 1950s, recalled being lectured by Harold Nicolson himself.³⁹ The Marxist anti-imperialist in residence, High Commissioner Krishna Menon, had organized this training so as to acquaint his juniors, as Foreign Secretary Rasgotra recalled his experience, with ‘the British diplomatic tradition of formal speech, lightened by an occasional touch of typical British humour’.⁴⁰

Ministerial notes from the MEA considered the time probationers spent abroad ‘invaluable for the broadening of their outlook’.⁴¹ And just as, according to a 1920 British Home Department document, a primary objective of sending Indian ICS probationers to train in the UK had been ‘that they may be, to put it crudely, to some extent Europeanized’,⁴² so too the “broadening of outlook” during postcolonial diplomatic training sounded like a particular form of narrowing. Youngsters who would soon serve a postcolonial India in a world transformed by decolonization, post-war reconstruction, and Third World assertiveness were socialized into anachronous imageries of a European international society. In order to fit in in the Indian Foreign Service of the early decades, a recruit from the late 1960s described, it was important to be ‘conscious of the old-style grace’ of the ICS.⁴³

Having lost the battle on only admitting foreign-educated Indians into the Service, ICS veterans saw foreign training as a substitute for a foreign degree, allowing a similar process of socialization to unfold without a comparable political backlash.⁴⁴ Notably, Indian probationers were not at these universities to follow a particular syllabus or acquire a specific corpus of knowledge (“explicit pedagogy”, if you will) – there were no examinations for them to pass, no actual training in diplomacy.⁴⁵ Instead, they would ‘absorb as much as possible from the environment of Oxford’, in the words of one probationer sent to Brasenose College in the late 1940s;⁴⁶ ‘spend a year polishing themselves at Balliol’ so that they would ‘speak English well, write English well’ upon their return, as one Cambridge graduate from the mid-1960s batches approvingly described, with another allusion to the particular draw of this one college.⁴⁷ Tellingly, those who already held an Oxbridge degree were not usually sent back, because ‘you’ve got that exposure and background’ already, as an Oxford History graduate from the 1950s mentioned like it was the most natural

³⁶ Interview 16.

³⁷ B.K. Kapur, ‘Memorandum’, 27 May 1947, “Question of holding combined Examination for the Indian Foreign Service and All India Administrative Service in November-December Every Year. Prescription of high minimum mark at the interview for recruitment to the Indian Foreign Service”, FSP/47-F/22(11), NAI; Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 48.

³⁸ ‘Oral History Transcript: B.K. Acharya’, 1976, 10, Oral Histories, NMML; Chib, ‘The Making of an Indian Diplomat’.

³⁹ Interview 79.

⁴⁰ Rasgotra, *A Life in Diplomacy*, 66.

⁴¹ ‘Statement Attached to the Summary: “The Creation of an Indian Foreign Service”’.

⁴² A Home Department letter from 26.03.1920 quoted in Potter, *India’s Political Administrators*, 116.

⁴³ Interview 28.

⁴⁴ Dayal, ‘Qualifications to Be Prescribed for New Entrants into the Service’.

⁴⁵ Interview 16; Interview 18; Interview 31; Interview 40; Interview 79.

⁴⁶ Interview 16.

⁴⁷ Interview 23.

decision.⁴⁸ The pedagogy of early Indian diplomatic training, then, had less to do with a body of academic or even practical knowledge than it did with acquiring the old-world graces and bearing of a Balliol man – validating the sociological adage that when it comes to educating the elites, it is often less important to learn *about* the world than to learn ‘how to carry oneself *within* the world’.⁴⁹

After the 1958 batch, the pedagogical umbilical cord was cut, officially on the grounds that it was ‘expensive and of little practical value’ to send probationers to foreign universities and the British Foreign Office,⁵⁰ but also because such training was ‘considered unrealistic in the long run from the national point of view’, it having become paramount to develop ‘a wholly indigenous training programme’, as the ICS-trained diplomat A.S. Chib emphasized.⁵¹

This decision did not, however, signal a closure for an old imagery of international society.⁵² Recruits were still to be brought up to an internationally recognized standard of demeanour, which bore a cunning resemblance to Western diplomatic practice.⁵³ Such mannerisms were never an afterthought, Dixit clarified, but crucial for ‘the sociological training’ of Indian diplomats.⁵⁴ Satow’s *Diplomatic Practice* was ‘the gospel which one referred to when in doubt about procedures, functions and protocol’.⁵⁵ Against the postcolonial imperative of standing apart, diplomats believed that ‘[w]e must all study the etiquette with the one object of attaining smoothness of contact in the social sphere in which we work’, as one Head of Mission in Cairo instructed in 1950.⁵⁶ Hoping to impart wisdom on decorum and tact from the ICS onto young diplomats in the early 1950s, K.P.S. Menon penned the short monograph *Do’s and Don’ts in the Indian Foreign Service*.⁵⁷ Delving into the details of appropriate attire, entertainment, and official and private behaviour, the guidelines reproduced British administrative mores for the modern era virtually untouched by postcolonial demands for Indian difference – which is probably why a letter from G.S. Bajpai to Vijayalakshmi Pandit on 11th May 1951 warned about the ‘awkward possibilities that may flow from such a pamphlet falling into the hands of unauthorised and possibly malicious persons’.⁵⁸

A sense of decorum and exclusivity has also always marked training back in India. Dixit recalls the daily routines at Metcalfe House in Delhi as ‘very Sahib-like’, with one *chaprasi* (bearer), assigned to a pair of probationers, so that they began their day with tea served by the bedside as though to a master of the house.⁵⁹ Saturday evenings were for formal dining, for which probationers wore the Indian equivalent of black tie – a black *Bandhgala* with white trousers in winter, a white *Bandhgala* with black trousers in summer. From 1959 onwards, the foundation course at Mussoorie initiated recruits into protocol formalities and dining etiquette, premised on ‘conventions of the

⁴⁸ Interview 40; Also Interview 43.

⁴⁹ Shamus Rahman Khan, *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul’s School* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 83.

⁵⁰ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 58.

⁵¹ Chib, ‘The Making of an Indian Diplomat’.

⁵² Training at the Academy in Mussoorie also upholds a further colonial curiosity: horse riding. Preparing officers for life in remote areas, the final ICS examination had involved a riding test. Of course, if horse riding had been a mere practicality, the Academy might have settled for a simple routine to be taught to the Home Services alone. And yet, although only compulsory for the IAS, IFS officers across the decades of postcolonial Indian history have been invited to mount horses on their road to international negotiating table – to this very day, in the words of a millennial officer, ‘trot, gallop, canter – all of that is still there’.

⁵³ Tyabji, *Indian Policies and Practice*, 18.

⁵⁴ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 92–93.

⁵⁵ Dixit, 96; Also Interview 30; Interview 48.

⁵⁶ Head of Mission of India, Cairo, ‘Note Responding to Jawaharlal Nehru’s Letter on Prohibition’.

⁵⁷ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 95.

⁵⁸ Bajpai, ‘Letter to Vijayalakshmi Pandit’, 11 May 1951.

⁵⁹ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 60.

West European type'.⁶⁰ Intent on impressing their seniors – eager to make 'brown young Englishmen out of us', as one sharp-tongued attendee jibed – some youngsters resorted to enjoying their *chapatis* and *sambar* with knife and fork, too.⁶¹ For all the talk of a break with colonial mores after the Service developed its indigenous training programme, one diplomat who trained in the mid-1970s still recalled formal dinners, with 'bearers in the Raj style'.⁶²

Since the establishment of the FSI in 1986, social graces have been imparted through exposure to the supposedly luxurious lifestyle of diplomats at Delhiite five-star hotels, where probationers have spent anywhere from a few days to a week matching wines, sequencing spoons, memorizing vocabulary on French cookery, and imbibing 'Western manners of behaving ourselves', as one attendee recalled of his training in the early 1990s.⁶³ Since the world of etiquette is as gendered as the world of diplomacy it is embedded in, some recent batches of female probationers have also undergone 'grooming sessions' at the Taj Hotel, learning, among other things, how to correctly do their eyebrows.⁶⁴ One female millennial officer from a late 2000s batch spent a whole week learning with the 'ladies of the External Affairs Spouses Association'⁶⁵ – a lesson on how to look one's best while defending India's national interest, which male probationers seem not to have been invited for.

The intangible markers of diplomatic practice – a certain slant of speech, a way of carrying oneself, unwritten rules of social and professional conduct – are also learned during Mission attachment and the first few postings, by observing one's Ambassador and seniors.⁶⁶ Outside official training hours, senior officers are expected to take young recruits under their wings, inviting them to cocktail and dinner parties intended as dress rehearsals for international occasions.⁶⁷ One disgruntled disciple recalled his ICS superiors' interest in joining all kinds of exclusive clubs across Delhi,⁶⁸ and another remembered how, at least as late as the mid-1970s, probationers were counselled to 'make sure you get Gymkhana membership' at the exclusive Delhi club.⁶⁹ A similar imperative of fluency in the idioms of European international society came through in interviews with younger generations, too: 'It's easy to laugh about it, but there's a subtext there – it's foreign etiquette, it's not our own, but that's the global reality,' explained one millennial recruit about the need to study Western diplomatic code.⁷⁰ And yet, if this subtext was accepted as a doxic article of diplomatic faith, it has always existed alongside a very different, if equally naturalized, need to make Indian diplomats into servants of the subaltern.

4.2.2. The Discovery of India

It is emblematic of the diplomatic cleft habitus that, even as the Foreign Service was sending its probationers to the British Foreign Office for training, the same probationers would also be treated to a 'pep-talk' by Krishna Menon at the Indian High Commission in London on the topic of 'what India stood for', from Non-Alignment to Third World solidarity and socialism, and were advised

⁶⁰ Dixit, 60.

⁶¹ Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India's Foreign Policy*, 216.

⁶² Interview 7.

⁶³ Interview 58; Also Interview 45; Interview 61; Interview 57.

⁶⁴ Interview 80.

⁶⁵ Interview 63.

⁶⁶ Interview 6; Interview 7; Interview 16; Interview 24; Interview 25; Interview 28; Interview 31; Interview 39; Interview 43.

⁶⁷ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 92–93.

⁶⁸ Interview 24.

⁶⁹ Interview 29.

⁷⁰ Interview 63.

to join the Oxford Labour Club – for whatever Anglophilia Indians harboured, colonial history compelled that ‘we hated the Tories – it was our psychology’.⁷¹ The two imageries of international society may have appeared polar opposites in their attendant manners and priorities, but they formed a cultural symbiosis in the pedagogical mindset of the Foreign Service. Indeed, the troubled debates on belonging among ICS officers had taught the founders of the IFS a lesson: an independent, postcolonial identity was not something to be assumed, but to be learned and rehearsed.

Whatever the outward markers of elite belonging, in terms of the postcolonial political commitments that underlay diplomatic pedagogy, training was to ‘be related to the actual needs and conditions in the country’, and ‘rural bias and a simpler mode of life should be encouraged’, T.N. Kaul, wary of reproducing ICS culture for the postcolonial age, pleaded in 1955.⁷² For, as P.N. Haksar implored six years later, a ‘Foreign Service officer, unless he [*sic*] is firmly tethered to his own country, is likely to be a spiritual castaway’, and this ‘casts a heavy burden and imposes an onerous responsibility on those who are called upon to train’ the possible fugitive.⁷³ Therefore, as Dixit explained about diplomatic training in postcolonial India, the ‘new Indian diplomat was to be deeply imbued with a sense of social, economic and cultural realities of India when representing India abroad and when articulating Indian interests to foreign civil societies and foreign chancellors of the world’.⁷⁴

Much as Nehru had written *The Discovery of India* as a kind of late introduction to the country for himself, so one purpose of diplomatic training was to ‘acquaint you with India’.⁷⁵ And much as Nehru, the early batches, too, had often, through family and schooling, been ‘completely Anglicized – they were a little cut off from India’, as a rueful member of the mid-1970s batches stated.⁷⁶ ‘There was no problem with the West’, one such Anglicized officer of the 1960s batches offered on behalf of what he considered to be most of his peers, ‘the problem was with the East’.⁷⁷ A self-professed Nehruvian, he confessed that his Nehruvianism had remained ‘very superficial’ ‘because it lacked depth’. Wondering whether the ‘huge void in my life of not really knowing anything about our epics, dance, spiritual beliefs’ made him a ‘bad Indian’, this officer had christened himself ‘a coconut: brown on the outside, white on the inside’. The purpose of training was to produce an officer steeped in Indian cultural tradition and political thought, which, instead of betraying a jingoistic pedagogy, is better thought of as an appeal to Indian “authenticity” and Third World difference, once suppressed under the Raj.

Foreshadowing a debate on language that would turn acrid after 2014, the question of Hindi skills among diplomats, which animated parliamentarians and bureaucrats alike, had made the officers’ preference for English a potential breach of postcolonial belonging.⁷⁸ Nehru appointed the famous Hindi poet and Cambridge PhD H.R. Bachchan to teach Hindi to probationers, and Ministry officials summoned to Parliament ensured their audience that those few Ambassadors who spoke no Hindi were ‘being equipped with credentials in Hindi for presentation’, so that minimum standards could be obtained across the Service.⁷⁹ A simple departmental test in Hindi has been

⁷¹ Interview 16.

⁷² Kaul, ‘Letter to the Foreign Secretary’.

⁷³ Haksar, ‘Memo’.

⁷⁴ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 48.

⁷⁵ Interview 3.

⁷⁶ Interview 69.

⁷⁷ Interview 43.

⁷⁸ “Lok Sabha Starred Questions No. 19634 and 19639 Regarding Passing of Hindi Examination before Confirmation of IFS Officers”, 1968, FSI/1968– F/125(6), NAI; Kaul, ‘Note’.

⁷⁹ Jawaharlal Nehru, ‘Note’, 17 September 1955, “Additional posts in Hindi Section of the Ministry of External Affairs: Appointment of Dr. HR Bachchan”, F/13(76)–CP/1955(Part II), NAI.

compulsory for officers before official confirmation into the Service since 1951, although its threshold would not satisfy the description of “proficiency”, and Ministry officials were aware that the 1968 Amendment of the Official Languages Act had emphasized that Hindi was supposed to be only one among India’s numerous “authentic” languages.⁸⁰ Either way, the hope was to attenuate the Service’s reputation as a bastion of Anglophiles – even if this project of attenuation, as the last part of the chapter outlines, has since been replaced by one of feverish conservation.

The lectures at Mussoorie have also spoken to a very particular reading of postcoloniality, Indian priorities, and its place in the world. Lessons on Indian history, law, economic policy, culture, and public administration have been complemented with sessions on ‘Gandhian philosophy’ and the evolution of modern India ‘as a democratic, secular and welfare state’.⁸¹ Thus, even if the language of Indian postcoloniality suggests liberation from imposed imperial standards, it has also itself been a hegemonic discourse with its own truisms and heresies. ‘You learn the same things, so you also think the same way’ afterwards, as one self-ascribed free-thinker and Additional-Secretary snickered, in preciously thinly veiled critique of the continued reproduction of socialist vocabulary even as the Government’s official economic philosophies were evolving.⁸² One particularly disaffected recruit from the late-1990s branded it a ‘brainwash syllabus’.⁸³ At the same time, for those of a more radical persuasion, Mussoorie was a process of ‘de-schooling’ which ushered probationers from their youthful rebellion into ‘sophisticated mediocracy’ by ‘restructuring your mindset; that you are a government man’, as one retired sociology major with Marxist sympathies explained with a mischievous smile.⁸⁴

While visits to institutions like the Indian Centre on Cultural Relations educated probationers on Indian art and dance, the two most cogent elements of the diplomatic Discovery of India were arguably the Bharat Darshan tour and, even more so, district training. While it was ‘a common complaint against Civil Service in general [...] that they fail to respond to social and other developments in the country’, as the 1966 Pillai Committee Report noted, ‘the specific criticism against the Foreign Service is that its officers tend progressively to lose contact with developments in India in the economic, social and cultural fields, spending as they do so much of their working life abroad out of personal contact with our people’.⁸⁵

Bharat Darshan pre-empts this alienation.⁸⁶ An all-India tour completed in small groups for up to 15 days,⁸⁷ it offers probationers ‘a bird’s eye view of India by taking them to different parts of the country to see a few places of outstanding historical and cultural interest, representative of India’s rich heritage, and some of our foremost industrial plants and scientific institutions’.⁸⁸ One tour could stretch from the High Altitude Warfare School in Srinagar, Kashmir, to the Meenakshi

⁸⁰ MEA, ‘Written Reply’, 17 April 1968, ‘Lok Sabha starred questions No. 19634 and 19639 regarding passing of Hindi Examination before confirmation of IFS officers’, FSI/1968– F/125(6), NAI.

⁸¹ ‘Outline of the Syllabus for the Foundational Course’, 1968, ‘Revised training programme for IFS probationers of 1968 batch and subsequent batches’, F/Q/FSI/580/10/68, NAI; Also ‘Training of IFS Probationers of 1970 Batch at the National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie’, 1970, F/Q/FSI/580/9/70.

⁸² Interview 70.

⁸³ Interview 83.

⁸⁴ Interview 54.

⁸⁵ ‘Summary: “Bharat Darshan Tours”, 1966 Pillai Committee Report’, 1967, Paragraph 157, “Pillai Committee Report – Recommendations regarding Bharat Darshan Tours”, F/Q GA)792(27)–67, NAI.

⁸⁶ Officers embarking on new foreign assignments are invited on another Bharat Darshan tour, which concentrates on sites of pertinence to the bilateral relationship or field of expertise in question, and involves meeting with representatives of state governments, business chambers or scientific centres. Badr-ud-Din Tyabji, ‘Note’, 2 March 1961, “Criteria for Bharat Darshan Tours”, F/21(3) GA/61, NAI; Rana, *The Contemporary Embassy*, 56.

⁸⁷ Interview 1; Interview 3; Interview 20; ‘Note’, 10 March 1961, “Criteria for Bharat Darshan Tours”, F/21(3) GA/61, NAI.

⁸⁸ ‘Summary: “Bharat Darshan Tours”, 1966 Pillai Committee Report’, Paragraph 321.

Temple in Madurai and the Thumba Rocket Launching Centre in Kerala's Trivandrum.⁸⁹ The charm of Bharat Darshan was built on 'the beauty of the monuments' and the 'great technological achievements'.⁹⁰ Undertaken on trains with separate compartments for probationers, it shows future diplomats 'the rich India, not the actual India' – 'a very luxurious kind of thing', in the words of one millennial recruit, which 'makes you want to represent the good part of India'.⁹¹

As though reading off the same script, diplomats of all generations declared that Bharat Darshan was about being exposed to and coming to treasure the exceptional diversity of India⁹² – even if one was supposed to emerge from the exercise with a concomitant appreciation for the 'great underlying unity which the foreign observer often misses'.⁹³ 'Psychologically and subconsciously, it encouraged this business of unity in diversity', as one tourer of the 1960s put it.⁹⁴ A millennial sceptic conceded it was a 'great narrative: you go around India, you see the diversity, you are of a piece'.⁹⁵ As such, a fellow sceptic and Under-Secretary explained, Bharat Darshan's notions of unity-in-diversity were 'part of the mythology of the Service you grow up with'.⁹⁶

District training, by sending probationers to administrative districts in villages across the country, showed probationers the "other" India. For Bourdieu, the goal of education is always a kind of 'cultural appropriation' of the tastes and habits of the dominant classes by those of non-dominant classes.⁹⁷ The philosophy of district training turns Bourdieu on its head, even if only for a few months: district training is a performative attempt at imbibing the habits and ambitions of the subaltern classes by members of more dominant classes. The anticipated process of all-Indian identity formation would solve the representational challenges of the elitist diplomatic corps: the project was one of making future diplomats 'more representative of their nation than they were' in actuality.⁹⁸ Authenticity was to be artificially manufactured.⁹⁹

Preparing local authorities for the arrival of diplomatic probationers, the MEA instructed in 1974 that the 'training in the districts is meant to give them an idea of how the country is run at District level, the problems of the rural population and of the varied aspects of development activities in the country to enable them to project a proper image of India abroad', on which probationers were expected to compose fortnightly reports to Headquarters.¹⁰⁰ In the company of a District Collector or an Organizer for Tribal and Dalit Welfare, probationers toured development projects and met with Directors of Agriculture, divisional engineers, district judges, and forest conservators

⁸⁹ 'Bharat Darshan Tour Programme of Indian Foreign Service Probationers of 1981 Batch: September-October 1982', 4 October 1982, "Bharat Darshan of 1981 Batch of IFS Probationers", F/Q/PA II/580/22/82, NAI.

⁹⁰ Interview 37.

⁹¹ Interview 80.

⁹² Interview 1; Interview 3; Interview 4; Interview 12; Interview 22; Interview 24.

⁹³ Interview 4.

⁹⁴ Interview 35.

⁹⁵ Interview 71.

⁹⁶ Interview 59.

⁹⁷ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 15.

⁹⁸ Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, 175.

⁹⁹ In fact, there sometimes is an air of quiet desperation to these pedagogies aimed at imbibing some subaltern spirit that could be recognized by "the people" if they ever were witness to its diplomatic manifestations. One is reminded of Rosalind O'Hanlon's remark on elites seeking to do popular politics across South Asia: 'this consuming ideological imperative makes it intolerable for us to accept publicly that we cannot appropriate the masses to our projects, that there may be only silence where their own authentic voices should be raised in our support'. Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Recovering the Subject: Subaltern Studies and Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia', *Modern Asian Studies* 22, no. 1 (February 1988): 195.

¹⁰⁰ Surendra Singh Alirajpur (MEA), 'Letter to V.S. Mathews (Development Commissioner for the Government of Orissa, IAS)', 7 January 1974, "District Training of IFS Probationers of the 1974 Batch", F/Q/PA II/580/16/74, NAI.

to discuss local projects and development challenges.¹⁰¹ Probationers learned about irrigation methods, co-operative banking, and animal husbandry,¹⁰² and visited minority settlements to ‘observe their social, religious and other customs’.¹⁰³ One interviewee recalled staying in a Bihari forest with a tribal community for three days.¹⁰⁴

One element of district training was epistemic: ‘If you don’t know your own country, you can hardly represent it’ was a popular statement in interviews.¹⁰⁵ Sheer geographical reach made it impossible for one Indian to grasp the full breath of experiences that made up the nation; which is why the original convention was for probationers to travel as far away from their home state as possible, from Bihar to Tamil Nadu and from Bengal to Rajasthan.¹⁰⁶ They would discover how rural India looked upon the administration,¹⁰⁷ but also how administrators looked upon their India: districting training was also about how to ‘align your thoughts in a manner that [a district bureaucrat] could recognize’.¹⁰⁸ These ‘*babus*’ among whom ‘structures, status and hierarchy’ mattered greatly, were reportedly very different from South Block inhabitants,¹⁰⁹ although the claim to comparative disinterest in matters of status can, in light of archival sources and interviews, only be reported here with an interpretive sidenote of scepticism.

District training also made implicit ontological claims about “real” India. Probationers had apparently grown up in an India that only existed in their heads; comments about exposure to ‘the Indian reality’ were common.¹¹⁰ One former Foreign Secretary, when lecturing youngsters during training, used to remind them of a shared origin story: most of them were only a few generations away from the village.¹¹¹ Even if they were not one’s own, it was ‘important that you are connected to the roots’, one Under-Secretary concurred.¹¹² Wherever the probationer was sent should be a ‘representative village, which is neither too big or [*sic*] too small, neither too rich or [*sic*] poverty-stricken’,¹¹³ as one instruction from 1974 advised, as though the essence of “real” India could be adjudicated by calculating a perfect median of all different possible Indias. The discovery of this newfound Indian reality had to also be supervised, lest it was completed incorrectly: ‘On return from Bastar, the Probationer should report to the Development Asst. To Collector. He will then have an opportunity to correct and balance his impressions’, read the programme for probationer Deepak Ray, training under the Collector for Raipur in 1974.¹¹⁴ Real India, itself, was a carefully curated construct.

¹⁰¹ Vinay Shanker (Collector, Jabalpur, IAS), ‘Training of Shri J.S. Pande, Indian Foreign Service (Probationer) in Jabalpur District’, 10 March 1974, “District Training of IFS Probationers of the 1974 Batch”, F/Q/PA II/580/16/74, NAI; M.D. Ashthana (Deputy Commissioner, Sonapat, IAS), ‘Training Programme of Shri V.S. Verma, IFS Probationer, from 3rd March, 1975 to 25th May, 1975’, 29 March 1974, “District Training of IFS Probationers of the 1974 Batch”, F/Q/PA II/580/16/74, NAI.

¹⁰² Government of Tamil Nadu, ‘Memorandum Regarding the Training of Three IFS Probationers in Tamil Nadu’, 2 February 1974, “District Training of IFS Probationers of the 1974 Batch”, F/Q/PA II/580/16/74, NAI.

¹⁰³ R.N. Vaidya (Collector, Raipur, IAS), ‘Training Programme of Shri Deepak Ray, IFS Probationer in Raipur District’, 11 March 1975, “District Training of IFS Probationers of the 1974 Batch”, F/Q/PA II/580/16/74, NAI.

¹⁰⁴ Interview 67.

¹⁰⁵ Interview 46; Also Interview 1; Interview 20; Interview 25; Interview 67.

¹⁰⁶ Interview 20; Interview 27; Interview 35; Interview 24.

¹⁰⁷ Interview 12; Interview 14; Interview 24; Interview 26; Interview 27; Interview 41; Interview 62, May 2019; Interview 72; Interview 74.

¹⁰⁸ Interview 72.

¹⁰⁹ Interview 71.

¹¹⁰ Interview 9; Interview 19; Interview 20; Interview 29, 29; Interview 37; Interview 46; Interview 68.

¹¹¹ Interview 6.

¹¹² Interview 72.

¹¹³ Vaidya (Collector, Raipur, IAS), ‘Training Programme of Shri Deepak Ray, IFS Probationer in Raipur District’.

¹¹⁴ Vaidya (Collector, Raipur, IAS).

Genealogically, district training was in fact ‘a hangover from ICS days’,¹¹⁵ which after Independence was continued according to ‘the British pattern’,¹¹⁶ as retired diplomats readily conceded. Even the term “District Collector”, still in use in the IAS, was ‘a name that came down to us from the British’.¹¹⁷ During ICS “settlement training”, the probationer was ‘taught what his behaviour should be, how he should acquaint himself with the culture, customs, desires and difficulties of the people in the villages’ – in other words, as B.K. Nehru affirmed in his retirement, ‘to know the people by living among them’.¹¹⁸ In fact, the pedagogical irony of postcolonial diplomacy was that, whatever charges of distance were levelled against ICS-trained diplomats, ‘the older group of ICS officers had the advantage of having served in the country for a number of years before going into the Foreign Service’ following Independence, and so they, unlike many of their equally privileged juniors, ‘were able to project India abroad with full knowledge of the internal conditions of the country’.¹¹⁹ District training was an attempt to make up for this curious chasm, whereby colonial officers could claim to grasp the ground realities better than the representatives of postcolonial India.

Yet the philosophy of district training was also not without precedent in Indian nationalist thought. The confidence that geographical proximity and rural living could reshape elite identities had driven Gandhi to order that Indian National Congress annual sessions be held in villages, so the ‘rural problems most vital for India would surround the Congress delegates and keep them aware of their purpose’.¹²⁰ Inspired by Gandhi’s example, Vijayalakshmi Pandit in her memoirs repurposed the project for the global stage, musing on the idea of holding UN summits in impoverished Third World villages to recentre diplomatic minds.¹²¹ The imperialists and anti-imperialists agreed on something: the Indian elite’s ability to merge with “the people” in whose name it ordered the world by temporarily living among them.

In interviews, many officers did in fact state that their exposure to rural, often poverty-stricken India had shaped how they came to think of their roles as diplomats.¹²² One officer with an extended resume of multilateral postings had, he believed, been motivated to work on the UN Sustainable Development Goals because of his time in the districts,¹²³ one former Foreign Secretary had deduced from district training the importance of Third World solidarity in the face of poverty – a realization which had ‘stood us in good step’ in international fora.¹²⁴ Diplomacy was not about ‘smoke-filled rooms’, and instead, from trade to climate, ‘foreign policy has to be relevant to the social problems’ of India, ‘taking into account the interests of the people’.¹²⁵ If Indian diplomats vied to belong among the international elite, they believed themselves to be doing it in the name of a symbolic subaltern.

Yet district training had its limits, even if few in the Service volunteered to touch upon them. Sometimes probationers were stranded in a state whose language they did not speak, leaving them to fend for themselves in English (not known for its vernacular reach) or Hindi – which especially in the South could lead to charges of creeping language imperialism, with one particularly awkward stay in Tamil Nadu in the 1960s coinciding with anti-Hindi riots that lasted all throughout the

¹¹⁵ Interview 37.

¹¹⁶ Interview 79.

¹¹⁷ Interview 36.

¹¹⁸ Nehru, ‘The Civil Service in Transition’.

¹¹⁹ Kaul, ‘Note’.

¹²⁰ Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, 219.

¹²¹ Pandit, 219.

¹²² Interview 28; Interview 36; Interview 48.

¹²³ Interview 27.

¹²⁴ Interview 48.

¹²⁵ Interview 48.

district training period.¹²⁶ One was also conscious that, for all this exposure, one was about to become ‘part of a profession that would never be forced to live in a tribal block’.¹²⁷ While taking something with you about the psychology of district management may have been useful, ‘there was a certain disconnect between what you were being trained to do and trying to understand hierarchies at a district magistrate’,¹²⁸ the cultures of district management and international diplomacy often standing at odds despite all attempts at nurturing some joint sense of purpose.

One also cannot fathom the everyday indignities of poverty by spending some months in the districts, as a former Foreign Secretary critical of Nehru’s Third Worldism pointed out.¹²⁹ At times, a self-conscious millennial cringed, ‘you feel like a brown saheb touring around’, the performativity of newfound rootedness only accentuating the distance.¹³⁰ Some officers from more disadvantaged backgrounds were also sceptical about whether their privileged peers ‘made a serious effort to change their perspective’¹³¹ – whether decades of socialization could be unwound in a matter of months. At the end of the day, there was also a sense that this expression of belonging may not have been as compulsory as the ability to belong among an elite, Europeanized club of diplomats. In a sense, the Foreign Service seems to have always displayed more anxiety about the latter: as Shashi Tharoor chided in his doctoral dissertation in 1982, ‘six months in the Indian countryside did not compensate for poor grounding in foreign life and customs’.¹³²

It must be noted, not least in anticipation of the changes explored in Chapter 6, that whatever “Indianness” diplomatic training sought to instil in probationers was an Indianness of a very amorphous kind. The postcolonial compromise on identity, scarred by Partition and shaped by Nehruvian renditions of secularism and liberalism, had relied on a purposefully ambiguous definition of what a postcolonial Indianness might actually involve. There was no one India, no true essence. This is why it had been a crucial underlying tenet of district training and Bharat Darshan to expose future diplomats to as alien a part of India as possible. Diplomats repeatedly described their training as ensuring that future officers would be ‘aware that you are representing a country that is very, very diverse’¹³³ by ‘exposing people to the diversity of India’.¹³⁴ Even as many academic lessons eluded young probationers, they would ‘have a concept of diversity’.¹³⁵ Whatever the pathologies around “authenticity”, they were always expressed in a permissive plural. This, as the fractures in the diplomatic cleft habitus are beginning to show, is not the only way to express belonging in an international society founded on difference.

4.3. Democratization and its discontents

The so-called democratization of the Foreign Service has shifted the burden of pedagogical proof. Once suspected of failing to bridge the cleft because they were unmoored from “the people” of the Third World, probationers today are likelier to find themselves defending their credentials as members of the sophisticated, European-like elite. The training of Indian diplomats, once intended

¹²⁶ Alok Prasad (IFS probationer), ‘Letter to the Under-Secretary of PA Section, MEA’, 22 January 1974, ‘District Training of IFS Probationers of the 1974 Batch’, F/Q/PA II/580/16/74, NAI; Interview 20; Interview 35.

¹²⁷ Interview 27.

¹²⁸ Interview 42.

¹²⁹ Interview 39.

¹³⁰ Interview 71.

¹³¹ Interview 49.

¹³² Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, 175.

¹³³ Interview 48.

¹³⁴ Interview 19.

¹³⁵ Interview 20.

to root probationers deeper in Indian soil, has become more about ensuring that ‘even’ those from ‘rural India’ and ‘deprived communities’ can be made into ‘excellent projectors of Indian culture’, as one recently retired officer affirmed, the self-evidence in her voice suggesting that this culture had not been theirs before.¹³⁶

Even if, as one Dean of the FSI emphasized in calculated defiance of the Service’s elitist past, ‘diplomats are made, not born’,¹³⁷ who they were born as matters for how they are made. One recently retired diplomat, looking at his interviewer as though he was formulating an open secret, referred to the undiminished utility of ‘family-type training’ – training that the more representative cohorts lacked.¹³⁸ Even if everybody has met the same official criteria to gain entry into the Service, ‘the contacts you have had, the readings you have done growing up’ distinguish you from your colleagues, posited one millennial officer who had grown up with neither.¹³⁹ This reversal of socialization concerns is the crucial pedagogical turn that has occurred with the onset of “democratization”.

4.3.1. To the manner born

Preparing to take their UPSC exams, traditional diplomats of older generations were often persuaded by those around them that their resumes of Anglophone elite schooling and a pair of urban professionals for parents made them better fits for the Foreign Service than for any of the Home Services, with their vulgar power games and the disregard for sophistication and the art of persuasion.¹⁴⁰ They would grow more naturally into their roles than others, not because of an innate talent for summit negotiation but because of their inherited endowment of cultural capital. One senior Stephanian considered diplomacy a natural choice for somebody like himself who had been to Cambridge and studied English literature,¹⁴¹ although officially, of course, such biographical anecdotes were not supposed to matter in the bold new international society under creation in postcolonial India.

Habitus first becomes inculcated in childhood, as children of the upper classes not only ‘derive from their background of origin habits, skills, and attitudes which serve them directly in their scholastic tasks, but they also inherit from it knowledge and know-how, tastes, and a “good taste” whose scholastic profitability is no less certain for being indirect’, Bourdieu believed.¹⁴² Diplomats who seemed to most effortlessly fit the old-school European trope of a suave, eloquent envoy, spoke of their parents sitting them down as children for *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News* to improve their English elocution, growing up around copies of the *Times Literary Supplement* scattered around their living rooms, and discovering Lawrence’s *Esprit de Corps* at the tender age of 11 in a household led by two ‘big history buffs’.¹⁴³ These children were at home amidst a cultural landscape of domestic elites that existed in India, but could mirror and be compatible with imageries of European international society.

¹³⁶ Interview 81.

¹³⁷ Interview 32.

¹³⁸ Interview 67.

¹³⁹ Interview 65.

¹⁴⁰ Interview 7; Interview 9; Interview 10; Interview 28; Interview 29; Interview 35; Interview 37; Interview 39; Interview 50; Interview 52; Interview 57; Interview 67; Interview 40; Interview 70; Interview 79.

¹⁴¹ Interview 23.

¹⁴² Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron, *The Inheritors: French Students and Their Relation to Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 13.

¹⁴³ Interview 12; Interview 35; Interview 52; Interview 56.

It was this inculcation that later made the offspring of privileged milieus a good “fit” in the elite institutions educating them. In the elite circles of postcolonial India, certain schools ‘inculcated’ ways of behaviour, dress, and basic norms ‘since you were four’ – ‘normal public-school traits which you used to get from Harrow and Eton’, as one beneficiary of such institutions from an early-1970s batch outlined as though this could only be considered a benign advantage that saved the Service a lot of pedagogical trouble further down the line.¹⁴⁴ Most iconic among these was the Doon School, an all-boys boarding school in Dehradun modelled on Eton, where – as its alumni from since before Independence reminisced with palpable fondness – practice in public speaking, extracurricular exercises like writing, debating, and acting, as well as talks from visiting ambassadors from across the world, all were gently rearing a generation of future elites, secluded amidst the mountains of Uttarakhand and among their own social class.¹⁴⁵ ‘Following the maxim of the elites’, who had a notion of public service and the familial funds to frown upon the pursuit of wealth, ‘the brightest went to the Foreign Service’, explained a proud alumnus – bringing with them ‘a very superior conception of ourselves’ which provoked those who were not themselves ‘Doon School boys’.¹⁴⁶

In *Dominance and Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Ranajit Guha observed that by the last quarter of the 19th century, education had established itself as ‘the most distinctive aspect of Westernization in our culture’,¹⁴⁷ and ‘what most of the first beneficiaries of education imbibed from it as a code of culture was a superficial Anglicism amounting to a mimicry of the vigorous liberalism of metropolitan England’.¹⁴⁸ Probationers who had studied at Oxbridge were perceived by their peers as more worldly than their Indian-educated colleagues, and sometimes mimicked to reportedly comical effect.¹⁴⁹ Yet education in India could impart such manners and ideals with equal ardour, as products of elite boarding schools and selective colleges named after Christian saints found upon reaching Western universities – in a phrase repeated across several interviews, there was a ‘natural transition’ from St Xavier’s College in Mumbai to Oxford, from St Stephen’s College in Delhi to Cambridge.¹⁵⁰

Much like their predecessors in the ICS, the Stephenians who dominated the culture of the IFS, too, were mostly liberal arts graduates.¹⁵¹ They, too, cultivated a belief in the supremacy of the liberal arts, staying true to form to the definition from classical antiquity which defined as liberal arts all those subjects which were required for a person to be a worthy participant in public life.¹⁵² One young liberal arts graduate believed her kind to ‘have a head-start’ over pedantic engineers and scientists, for whom diplomacy is a problem to be solved rather than a complex web of meanings to be managed and marvelled at.¹⁵³ The ‘peer pressure’ at colleges like St Stephen’s – ‘Have you read Orwell? Have you read Huxley? Have you read Fanon?’¹⁵⁴ – prepared future diplomats for a world in which the Western canon still constituted a common frame of reference, but in which postcolonial readings were also *en vogue*. ‘We were very well groomed to understand issues’, concluded one proud alumnus of the 1960s.¹⁵⁵ Liberal arts graduates, with Stephenians at

¹⁴⁴ Interview 33.

¹⁴⁵ Interview 37; Interview 40; Interview 43; Interview 79.

¹⁴⁶ Interview 43.

¹⁴⁷ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 167.

¹⁴⁸ Guha, 167.

¹⁴⁹ Interview 17; Interview 43.

¹⁵⁰ Interview 9; Interview 31; Interview 43.

¹⁵¹ Interview 57.

¹⁵² Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages (1948)*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 37.

¹⁵³ Interview 82.

¹⁵⁴ Interview 33.

¹⁵⁵ Interview 10.

the helm, felt “at home”, rather than “out of place” during training, as Bourdieu might have remarked,¹⁵⁶ since they were entering an institution moulded, in many ways, in their image. In fact, with their wild overrepresentation in Government Services, ‘Mussoorie was like an extension of St Stephen’s College’, an alumnus rejoiced.¹⁵⁷

The pedagogies of elite belonging functioned as a social sieve, signalling to privileged probationers that they had arrived among their own,¹⁵⁸ while others, a self-described outsider contrasted, were ‘worried about how they will cope with diplomatic entertaining’, because ‘their families are not used to that kind of lifestyle’.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, there may have been little need to teach etiquette to those who had enjoyed “family-type training” or the formative experience of Convent Schools and urban liberal arts colleges, because ‘we all came from a pretty homogenous class’¹⁶⁰ and ‘our background being what it is, about forks and knives and all, we knew’.¹⁶¹ There would be no need for English classes – or often, as retired diplomats liberally quoting works in the ‘lingua franca of the diplomatic world’¹⁶² exhibited, even French classes.¹⁶³ Indeed, ‘the fragrance of French permeated our Foreign Service’ in arguable disproportion to its professional payoff – in 1980, the Service had 70 French speakers, almost twice the figure for Arabic and more than three times that for Chinese.¹⁶⁴

Instead, such probationers required pedagogical chastening and, if anything, some counterbalancing of just how deeply comfortable they were in the world of Anglophile elites. A concern about diplomatic probationers with a deep familiarity with Western culture unmatched by knowledge of Indian history, literature, and art has troubled the Service since its founding.¹⁶⁵ Ambassador K.M. Panikkar, representing the IFS on the UPSC Selection Board, echoed Nehru’s lament about probationers’ disproportionate comfort with European history and thought when he suggested that the Service run an intense training course intended to impart a sense of both Indian and pan-Asian identity on future diplomats.¹⁶⁶

District training, too, took on such elevated relevance precisely because of the social make-up of the early cadres. Products of urban milieus, upper-class households, and elite education would need a crash course on how to represent a developing, rural nation.¹⁶⁷ ‘Since most of such officers come from urban backgrounds’, as one apologetic diplomat explained in a ministerial letter to his IAS colleague in 1982, they would need to be taught what most Indians instinctively knew about the villages in which the majority of them lived.¹⁶⁸ So revelatory was district training for the sheltered recruits of the Foreign Service that many considered their months in the villages the most formative spell of their training.¹⁶⁹ Convinced that their elite education had endowed them

¹⁵⁶ Bourdieu and Passeron, *The Inheritors*, 13–14.

¹⁵⁷ Interview 43.

¹⁵⁸ Interview 74.

¹⁵⁹ Interview 51.

¹⁶⁰ Interview 6.

¹⁶¹ Interview 35.

¹⁶² Interview 52.

¹⁶³ Interview 6; Interview 37; Interview 41; Interview 52; Interview 51.

¹⁶⁴ Raman, *Indian Diplomatic Service*, 27.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Circular Letters Issued by N.R. Pillai Chairman, IFS Committee, B.K. Nehru, Foreign Secretary and Other Papers Relating to ICS/IFS Services Matters’, 1966, SF/14, T.N. Kaul papers, NMML; ‘Oral History Transcript: B.K. Acharya’, 10; Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 53–55; Raman, *Indian Diplomatic Service*, 29; Rana, *Inside Diplomacy*, 40.

¹⁶⁶ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 55.

¹⁶⁷ Interview 4; Interview 12; Interview 19; Interview 29; Interview 31; Interview 36; Interview 41; Interview 48; Interview 54; Interview 63; Interview 66.

¹⁶⁸ C. Narayanaswamy (IFS), ‘Letter to I.J.S. Khurana (Collector in Koraput, IAS)’, 20 October 1982, “District Training of IFS of 1982 Batch”, F/Q/PA II/580/25/82, NAI.

¹⁶⁹ Interview 1; Interview 9; Interview 26; Interview 27; Interview 46; Interview 36; Interview 48; Interview 41; Interview 72.

with an understanding of the world that ordinary Indians could never match, probationers were met in the districts by District Collectors who were convinced that ‘these guys don’t know anything about India’, as one self-effacing officer of a 1970s batch recalled.¹⁷⁰ These District Collectors would not have been entirely wrong, some diplomats conceded, since many harboured ‘a lot of prejudice about what other Indians are like’.¹⁷¹ Bureaucrats in the Home Services saw their colleagues in the Foreign Service as prodigal sons ‘sheltered from the hurly-burly of Indian life in the districts’,¹⁷² thinking they could ‘reconnect with who you are’ by returning to what were supposed to be their roots under government supervision.¹⁷³ It was, in other words, precisely because of the elite character of early diplomatic batches that Indian diplomatic pedagogies developed such a strong anti-elite tone.

4.3.2. Democratization as appropriation

With the push for democratization came very different cohorts, and along with them, very different challenges to balancing the diplomatic cleft habitus. Although it coincided with a personnel crunch during which training was condensed across the board, the cancellation of district training for diplomatic probationers in 2014 also told of a milestone: with many more probationers joining the Service from India’s peripheries, district training had, for much of the cohort, rendered itself pedagogically obsolete.¹⁷⁴ A rising star of the late-1990s batches conceded that much of his training would probably have felt superfluous ‘if you are in Delhi, your father is a diplomat, your sister is in the IAS’, but pointed out that diplomatic training was no longer built around the needs of such probationers.¹⁷⁵

As the cadres have become more representative of India at large, the question of representability has occupied the Service’s traditional elites. The newly ‘uneven’ quality of officers, one former Grade I diplomat phrased with a pregnant pause – presumably to let the various meanings of the word register – exerts a different kind of ‘pressure on training’.¹⁷⁶ In the words of a former Dean of the FSI, the ‘dilution of competence’ had to be rectified before probationers became diplomats.¹⁷⁷ It was easy to celebrate democratization, a self-ascribed liberal now in retirement admonished – ‘but then you have to train them’.¹⁷⁸

The pedagogical imperatives most eagerly discussed among the elites of the Foreign Service today demarcate clear boundaries to the project of producing Indian diplomats for a postcolonial international society, supposedly marked by its celebration of the subaltern and its disregard for the undemocratic mores of the old regime. The linguistic leverage endowed on the Foreign Service through colonial rule and its Anglophile elites has always dictated that it was imperative not only to speak English, as one recently retired Ambassador emphatically specified, but to ‘think in that language, dream in that language’.¹⁷⁹ The need for diplomats to be ‘articulate’ was repeatedly emphasized in interviews with the sort of vehemence that suggested the term conveyed a wider

¹⁷⁰ Interview 22.

¹⁷¹ Interview 45.

¹⁷² Interview 10.

¹⁷³ Interview 1.

¹⁷⁴ Interview 12; Interview 24; Interview 32; Interview 61; Interview 65; Interview 66; Interview 74; Interview 78; Interview 83.

¹⁷⁵ Interview 83.

¹⁷⁶ Interview 36.

¹⁷⁷ Interview 30.

¹⁷⁸ Interview 52; Also Interview 5; Interview 6; Interview 30; Interview 35; Interview 36; Interview 48; Interview 54.

¹⁷⁹ Interview 55.

set of cultural demands than the mere ability to formulate arguments with care.¹⁸⁰ It has therefore been with subdued horror that India's traditionally dominant diplomatic elites have witnessed a deterioration in the English skills of their juniors, often schooled in Hindi Mediums rather than English Convent Schools.¹⁸¹ The stigma around poor English has been such that the optional after-hours English training guardedly introduced at the FSI has met with indignation by those who have been asked to attend it.¹⁸²

Yet it is not only language per se that concerns the Foreign Service elite, but rather the conceptions of the world that language gives expression to. Here, it has been the entire worldview endowed by a liberal arts education that has been felt to be at stake. Socializing the ever-growing constituencies of engineers, in particular, has been identified by historically dominant liberal arts graduates as an exercise in intellectual damage control.¹⁸³ 'We were actually at a loss for what diplomacy was all about', admitted one serving officer with an engineering degree, touching on one of the peculiarities of Indian diplomatic recruitment: the Service attracts officers who may never have engaged with foreign affairs at all.¹⁸⁴ Engineers (who often seem to stand as placeholders for all kinds of non-liberal arts entrants in the imaginations of the Service's traditional elites) lack 'a sense of international history'¹⁸⁵ and struggle to 'imbibe the language of diplomacy', with its idiosyncratic 'tenor' and 'manners'.¹⁸⁶ One lecturer suggested that those accustomed to rote-learning and singular scientific truths could not be taught critical thinking.¹⁸⁷ A retired diplomat recalled his lecturing experience at the FSI with melancholy dread, with probationers 'parroting answers' the reading material suggested, 'their bearing, the way they answer questions' inferior to the independent-minded takes of liberal art graduates with their confident English and cultural references.¹⁸⁸ Only 'those who don't affect the *esprit de corps*' are welcome,¹⁸⁹ one of the earliest entrants into the Service specified about engineers – assimilation into a liberal arts mindset remains a prerequisite for acceptance in a Service whose evolving demographic composition no longer matches the continued cultural dominance of liberal arts graduates.¹⁹⁰

At its most fundamental level, however, "democratization" presents a challenge to the pedagogies of diplomatic training because of an overarching sense of cultural incommensurability. This is the realm of polite euphemisms. A commonly expressed imperative revolved around the need to 'polish up their social skills'.¹⁹¹ It is no coincidence that this imperative has been felt more keenly since the mid-1980s,¹⁹² as the reforms proposed by the Kothari Committee began to alter the social face of the Service. For rural recruits in particular, one millennial officer noted in a matter-of-fact-way, 'basic etiquette and all is not there'.¹⁹³ And so, it is said of those from non-traditional backgrounds that problems of 'social integration' and 'behavioural patterns' have meant that 'it needed a great effort to get them to settle themselves' into the Service,¹⁹⁴ and the 'learning of social

¹⁸⁰ Interview 3; Interview 25; Interview 41; Interview 55; Interview 63; Interview 69; Interview 85.

¹⁸¹ Interview 30; Interview 36; Interview 51; Interview 58; Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 48.

¹⁸² Interview 32; Interview 38; Interview 45.

¹⁸³ Interview 56; Interview 64.

¹⁸⁴ Interview 72.

¹⁸⁵ Interview 14.

¹⁸⁶ Interview 16.

¹⁸⁷ Interview 44.

¹⁸⁸ Interview 36.

¹⁸⁹ Interview 16.

¹⁹⁰ Interview 14; Interview 82.

¹⁹¹ Interview 12; Also Interview 6; Interview 12; Interview 14; Interview 19; Interview 35; Interview 39; Interview 58; Interview 60; Interview 78.

¹⁹² Interview 19.

¹⁹³ Interview 60.

¹⁹⁴ Interview 40.

graces, even simple things like table manners’ has become a pedagogical priority.¹⁹⁵ Well-born elderly bureaucrats conceded under their breath that whatever pedagogical effort to ‘make us all the same’, it was usually possible to tell reservation recruits apart right until retirement.¹⁹⁶ One presumes, then, that it is no coincidence that “communication skills” have become an independent component of FSI training over the past decade.¹⁹⁷

With repeated references to the culture of elite diplomacy, the welcome extended to the beneficiaries of the Service’s democratization has been conditional on whether ‘a person can be trained and polished’, becoming capable of ‘interacting with foreigners’.¹⁹⁸ ‘A certain kind of behaviour is expected of you when you go abroad’, and so there is ‘a greater responsibility on the Ministry to train people accordingly’, a young officer explained¹⁹⁹ – for even if the nature of Foreign Service intake may have changed, the quasi-aristocratic conventions of international diplomacy, with ‘a style in which modulation is important’,²⁰⁰ apparently had not.

Democratization, in other words, required appropriation. After an impassioned moral case for democratizing the Service, one former Foreign Secretary noted that the increasing diversity of recruits posed no threat, because ‘once they have joined the Service, there is also the existing culture in the Service which they imbibe’, so that non-traditional probationers could begin ‘making up for whatever disabilities they have’, as though markers of a non-traditional background were best seen as malfunctions to paint over.²⁰¹ The doxic language of appropriation employed a vocabulary of normalcy and self-evidence – as when one recently retired self-ascribed Nehruvian suggested that although some ‘imbibe correctly’ the appropriate manners and mores, it was often ‘difficult to integrate them in a way where everything is normal’.²⁰² To allow for this normalization, mentorship has, since 2018, been elevated from an unspoken convention to an official arrangement: the Foreign Service’s novel mentorship programme pairs each probationer with a Joint-Secretary for the first five years of their career, to smoothen socialization.²⁰³ Mentoring officers from non-traditional backgrounds ‘in the correct way’ ‘in social graces’ had to be done, one particularly candid believer in meritocracy spelled out, ‘by people like us’, referring to an undefined but evidently elite collective of diplomats.²⁰⁴ Many who themselves had slid effortlessly into the desired habitus defended their rural, socioeconomically disadvantaged, or lower-caste colleagues with the strange, well-intentioned compliment that after some years in the Service, their alternative biographies had been rendered imperceptible.²⁰⁵

4.3.3. The diplomatic autodidacts

Those who felt out of place in the Service struggled to produce an air of effortless to suggest they belonged everywhere and anywhere, like good cosmopolitans – they were anxiously seeking to imbibe the effortless that K.P.S. Menon and M.C. Chagla, too, had sought to attain under the Raj. Most of those marked out as internal Others to be socialized and standardized understood their place in the Service’s hierarchy through a cultural inversion: through what the ideal was

¹⁹⁵ Interview 48.

¹⁹⁶ Interview 7; Also Interview 3.

¹⁹⁷ Interview 51.

¹⁹⁸ Interview 29.

¹⁹⁹ Interview 60.

²⁰⁰ Interview 74.

²⁰¹ Interview 48.

²⁰² Interview 85.

²⁰³ Interview 32.

²⁰⁴ Interview 7.

²⁰⁵ Interview 48; Interview 52; Interview 63; Interview 82.

against which they seemed to fail. One impossibly eloquent and witty millennial recruit, who had only pushed himself through an undergraduate degree in order to sit the CSE while working night shifts at a call centre, joked that ‘some of your St Stephen’s types would be aghast: not only am I not a St Stephen’s graduate, I am not even a classical graduate’ at all, before conscientiously subscribing to the dominant narrative about socialization: ‘you can’t be an outlier without the entire system changing itself, so you tweak your own mental blocks to fit the system’.²⁰⁶ Peering at his interviewer through a pair of edgy glasses and clad in a crisp white shirt under a beige Nehru jacket, one millennial recruit from a rural family of teetotallers who ate with their hands professed to no longer be the person who had entered the Service as the first IFS officer from his district: ‘from the place that I come from, I have changed my lifestyle’, ‘dress’, ‘personality’ – ‘I tried to desperately change myself on how I looked, I talked’.²⁰⁷ An ST batchmate from a tribal region declared that ‘the Foreign Service has made me a completely different person: I have moved up a notch’, meaning he could now ‘speak about history and art’ and ‘enjoy a good drink’ like those around him.²⁰⁸ His background, which so obviously spoke to the vast diversity of the country which the training otherwise pathologised, was, to him, something that luckily ‘evens out’ over the long run.²⁰⁹

Caste also comes into play in the socialization of recruits from non-dominant groups. A term coined by the Indian anthropologist M. N. Srinivasan, *Sanskritization* describes a process of cultural upward mobility, whereby lower castes attempt to adopt practices and beliefs of a higher caste in order to climb up the social ladder²¹⁰ – a process that Bourdieu surely would have recognized: One retired Dalit diplomat – a sociology major with little patience for academic niceties – took on Srinivasan’s vocabulary, jeering that ‘Sanskritization is a nice term for hiding your caste’.²¹¹ Instead of the culture growing to accommodate different castes, different castes were to accommodate themselves into Foreign Service culture, and if they felt discriminated, it was up to them to change, for ‘it means that they have not yet assimilated themselves’.

Although one serving Dalit officer protested that the very term ‘social graces’ was ‘upper-caste code’ meant to stigmatize the lower castes,²¹² there was no meaningful contestation of upper-caste renditions of the diplomatic habitus. A retired officer emphasized that Dalits in particular made conscious attempts at emulating what had been presented to them as the universal language of diplomacy: ‘we learn to speak and articulate so that others will understand us’.²¹³ Some Dalits went to more desperate lengths to belong. Most were already married upon entering the Service, usually to ‘some illiterate village girl’, as one former Foreign Secretary noted,²¹⁴ but sensing their unsuitability for diplomatic life, many opted to divorce and then re-marry supposedly more presentable wives, so as to fit in with their colleagues at home and abroad.²¹⁵ The hold that the cultural interpretations of diplomacy as an elite space had on the Service came not only with a heavy homogenizing imperative, but also with considerable personal sacrifice.

A millennial Dalit officer, having of his own accord brought up Bourdieu’s concept of “structural violence”, confirmed that all throughout training, ‘you try and imitate the higher castes’, because

²⁰⁶ Interview 65.

²⁰⁷ Interview 78.

²⁰⁸ Interview 77.

²⁰⁹ Interview 77; Similar attempts at growing out of one’s own background were, often heartbreakingly, described in Interview 58; Interview 49; Interview 71; Interview 74.

²¹⁰ M.N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India (1965)* (Bhopal: J.K. Publishers, 1978), ix.

²¹¹ Interview 54.

²¹² Interview 75.

²¹³ Interview 54.

²¹⁴ Interview 45.

²¹⁵ Interview 43; Interview 45.

diplomacy is all about cultural codes which few Dalits have exposure to growing up.²¹⁶ The “Dalit-Bahujans”²¹⁷ quietly look for mentors to fit in, hoping to ‘obfuscate’ their caste background as an attempt at ‘keeping up with the Joneses’.²¹⁸ If upper-caste diplomats don’t “see caste”, this is also because lower-caste diplomats work hard to make theirs invisible.²¹⁹

And yet, caste is not something one trains oneself out of through rigorous practice. Speaking of a senior diplomat who had joined the Service outside the reservations scheme but was in fact a Dalit (a half-guarded secret of sorts among the cadres), the millennial recruit with his war chest of academic theories noted dryly that, whatever polish or seniority might give an officer, they ‘will still be a Dalit [...] it’s not like you take a dip in the Ganga and you come out with a different caste’.²²⁰ If it is true that diplomats are made, not born, they cannot be reborn either. Diplomatic training may foster homogeneity, but it cannot guarantee equality.

Becoming a female diplomat also called for autodidactic methods, not least because the stage directions for how women ought to behave toward the dominant habitus have often proven internally contradictory. For Bourdieu, caught up in domesticized understandings of women’s roles, existing in a gendered world implied that women were expected to exhibit their submission in ways corresponding with orthodox notions of “femininity” – ‘smiling’, ‘demure’, ‘restrained’, ‘self-effacing’.²²¹ And yet, fitting in in the male-dominated world of diplomacy was often premised on suppressing all such practices. If anything, such ‘so-called feminine qualities’, as one retired officer remembered, went against the perceived hallmarks of professionalism in international diplomacy.²²² The imagery of women as wives and homemakers, unaccustomed to the power struggles of international diplomacy, nurtured a belief among male colleagues that women were less politically savvy and easier to manipulate by fellow diplomats and politicians alike.²²³ The female autodidact’s lessons in socialization, therefore, involved learning to imbibe a habitus that negated such stereotypes.

And so, to be taken seriously, women sought to adjust themselves to what they believed was a masculinized diplomatic habitus in a male diplomatic world. Female officers dressed down, lowered their voices, and adopted an accentuated serious demeanour.²²⁴ ‘There was this perception that there has to be a profile’, marked by hard or politically sensitive postings, and women, in a vicious circle of gendered readings of both womanhood and diplomacy, were rarely granted such positions, as one female officer who joined the Service in the early 1980s explained.²²⁵ ‘We have this discussion quite a lot: how should we project ourselves?’, a female officer from the mid-2010s

²¹⁶ Interview 71.

²¹⁷ The interviewee used a political term which describes both Dalits and OBC communities as belonging to a shared, lower-caste collective. See e.g. Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, *Post-Hindu India: A Discourse in Dalit-Bahujan, Socio-Spiritual and Scientific Revolution* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications India, 2009).

²¹⁸ Interview 71.

²¹⁹ These subtle sociological cues, while perhaps indicative of discriminatory attitudes or hierarchical distance, are a kind of social sorting which can only happen in a nominally post-caste, relatively liberal space like the Foreign Service. By contrast, the rich literature on caste-based discrimination in Indian education documents very explicit discriminatory practices against Dalit students by peers and educators alike. See e.g. Geetha B. Nambissan and S. Srinivasa Rao, ‘Structural Exclusion in Everyday Institutional Life’, in *Sociology of Education in India*, ed. Geetha B. Nambissan and Srinivasa Rao (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), 199–223; Thorat Committee, ‘Caste Discrimination in AIIMS’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 22 (2 June 2007): 7–8.

²²⁰ Interview 71.

²²¹

²²² Interview 42.

²²³ Interview 52.

²²⁴ Interview 42.

²²⁵ Interview 50.

batches asked.²²⁶ Practices like lowering one's voice or the absence of practices like smiling are small, perceptible attempts at rendering the diplomatic Self less stereotypically female. Yet there is also a lot of autodidactic work that women found it difficult to even pinpoint or notice themselves. Bourdieu, too, warned of the difficulties of trying to give voice to embodied knowledge, himself arguing in entirely gendered but supposedly universal language: 'As soon as he [*sic*] reflects on his practice, adopting a quasi-theoretical posture, the agent loses any chance of expressing the truth of his practice'.²²⁷ Perhaps female diplomats knew this kind of subconscious learning was constantly apace, however: a frustrated Under-Secretary felt that moulding herself for the job of a diplomat as a woman 'is so much a part of my existence that I don't even know where to start'.²²⁸

Conclusion

The education of an Indian diplomat is not a mere series of lectures, reading lists and facts and figures; it imparts its most precious lessons between the lines. At its core, diplomatic training is meant to socialize probationers into embodying the diplomatic cleft habitus. Thus, after outlining what Bourdieu called *explicit pedagogy* – the formalized structures, principles and contents of education –, this chapter focused on how the training builds up either side of the habitus, and how the gradual democratization of the Service has shifted the pedagogical accent on how this habitus is constructed. A Service once anxious to have its probationers reflect "authentic Indianness" is now adamant that this authenticity be disciplined into a more presentable whole, so as to preserve the balance between the two conceptions of international society, the elite and the "real" people, the polished and the vernacular.

In many ways, these pedagogies – and how successfully officers imbibe them – structure precisely the kind of cultural hierarchies inside the Service that Chapter 3 discussed. In this way, the imperative of "being presentable abroad" is also a heuristic for gauging the domestic order that characterises the Foreign Service. It therefore reflects the various intersections of class, caste, gender, family background, and education that go into the making of the Indian diplomat. Yet insofar as diplomacy is a performance put up for the benefit of a foreign audience (or different kinds of foreign audiences), the pedagogies of the Service also crucially prepare officers for the outward projection of the diplomatic cleft habitus. These projections, and their complications, limits, and diplomatic upshots, are the topic of the next chapter.

²²⁶ Interview 80.

²²⁷ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 91.

²²⁸ Interview 59.

5. PROTEST AND PROTOCOL

Our Ambassadors will represent a great country and it is right that they should make others feel that they do so. But they should also represent a poor country where millions live on the verge of starvation. They cannot forget this nor indeed should they do anything which seems in violent conflict with it.

[...]

To some extent we shall be guided of course by the usual rules and procedures which obtain in other embassies. But there is no reason why we should consider ourselves bound by them completely. Where considered necessary we can strike out a new line, provided this is not unbecoming or indecorous.¹

Writing in a letter in 1950, an Indian Head of Mission in Cairo laid out the complex imageries of international society that Indian diplomats should heed.² Firstly, he wrote, their attitude ought to be based on ‘respect for and adherence to the principles laid down by our Prime Minister’, which should be unmoved by ‘European ridicule’. Yet, secondly, in disquietingly orientalist language, ‘we must learn the iron discipline of the British Foreign Service’, because ‘[s]ometimes we put on the garb of independence and display our lack of breeding’. Finally, he declared, ‘we must also be true citizens of the world’ – cosmopolitans, if you will. In the form of a diplomatic dispatch, this is the set of tensions and overlapping ideals that Indian diplomats have sought to embody abroad.

This chapter explores the traditional outward expressions of the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus. It considers how either side of the habitus has structured Indian diplomats’ stance toward and engagement with the world. This straddling of worlds has produced the traditional brand of diplomacy that has distinguished India both within and from the old-school European conceptions of international society – the former implying distinction in the sense of accomplishment according to established parameters (the “worldly” diplomat), the latter connoting a desire to diverge from them (the “Third Worldist” diplomat). While belonging in the cultural universe of European international society entailed a sort of continuous permission-seeking, belonging in postcolonial society, of which India understood itself as an original founder, was more about assuming one’s rightful place.

¹ Nehru, ‘Note for Asaf Ali and K.P.S. Menon’.

² Head of Mission of India, Cairo, ‘Note Responding to Jawaharlal Nehru’s Letter on Prohibition’.

These processes and performances are not fixed, and so this chapter does not argue that the diplomatic habitus has been static and immovable – as no performance ever can be. Rather than making absolutist ontological claims about the permanence of the habitus over time, the chapter seeks to query the resilience and adaptability of some of its most prominent features, as they have been perceptible to the outside world. It draws attention to the ‘deep continuities’ that have sustained the Foreign Service even in the face of large structural changes at home and abroad,³ analysing how these have expressed themselves through the diplomatic habitus. This habitus has endured precisely because of its hybridity; the two imageries function almost like cultural resources that diplomats can draw on depending on context, shaping the performance of the habitus in malleable, even if mostly subconscious, ways. And yet, some more notable cracks have also been opening up in the production, practice, and outward translation of the Indian diplomatic habitus, first with the dawn of a “post-Western” world and then with Narendra Modi’s ascent to Prime Ministership in 2014 – these are explored in Chapter 6.

The chapter proceeds in three phases. It first considers the ways in which Indian diplomats have sought to belong in the elite club of diplomats as they have imagined it: European, quasi-aristocratic, sustained on protocol and worldly charm. Here, the deep historical significance of performing according to a diplomatic “standard of civilisation” shows why seemingly trivial social practices like etiquette and manners are in fact a deeply political affair, infused with the colonial legacies, racial hierarchies, and class distinctions of diplomacy. The chapter then considers a very different diplomatic register: diplomacy as protest. Reflective of the ideals and priorities of a postcolonial society founded on Third World solidarity, anti-imperialism, and difference, India’s diplomacy, when conducted in this tenor, has sought to represent not just India but the entire Third World. Finally, the chapter considers what it means for Indian readings of cosmopolitanism as an international ethic that they occur not in “anarchical society”, as Bull would have it, but rather within imageries of international society founded on material, racial, caste, and cultural hierarchies. It considers the lived experiences, understandings, and critiques that Indian officers have made of the essentially contested concept of cosmopolitanism, and the difficulties of imagining a postcolonial rereading. It also sketches the limits of officers’ own commitments to global solidarity, as it queries the intersections of race and caste in Indian diplomacy.

5.1. Belonging among the elite

5.1.1. Habitus and belonging

Upon Independence in 1947, India entered an international system long in the making before its own recognition as a sovereign member, leading Ambassador and ICS veteran Badr-ud-Din Tyabji to caution those with a romantic postcolonial vision that diplomacy had been ‘well-set in its traditional ways since the dawn of modern history’ and could not be refashioned for ‘the Indian way of life’ overnight.⁴ This meant that to exist in the diplomatic world and to engage with one’s diplomatic counterparts necessitated a set of behaviours reflective of these supposedly fixed ways of European diplomacy. Taking it upon himself to capture the expectations that his Western colleagues had of subcontinental diplomats – with the kind of confidence that only a man of the Global North talking to representatives of the Global South can – former Canadian High

³ Narang and Staniland, ‘Institutions and Worldviews in Indian Foreign Security Policy’, 77.

⁴ Tyabji, *Indian Policies and Practice*, 17.

Commissioner J.R. Moore has outlined that '[i]n Western Europe and North America, the new diplomats were expected to regard themselves as heirs to those traditions; they might be black or brown or something in between, but the old practises would remain intact'.⁵ Or, as a member of one of the very first diplomatic batches of independent India explained: the Foreign Service 'had to fall in line with the world practice' of diplomacy, with its own etiquette, meanings, and practices.⁶

Seeking to excel according to the principles it believed European international society to operate by, the Indian Foreign Service cultivated forms of capital and habitus that would win its diplomats recognition as worthy members of the diplomatic club. The Service was 'forced to adapt' to alien mores like knives, forks, or wines, because 'you should be like the best from the rest of the world', as one former Foreign Secretary declared in a self-evident tone.⁷ In interviews, many diplomats in the older generations appreciated that diplomatic culture had been shaped by European aristocrats, 'and we continued that', as one member of the mid-1970s batches offered, almost proudly.⁸ One veteran who joined the Service in the early 1960s even suggested that the reason liberal arts graduates made the best diplomats was because 'we know what is suitable for a life abroad', having studied 19th century European diplomacy at university.⁹

Having set itself what it imagined to be a shared international set of standards – a refashioned standard of civilization – the Foreign Service functioned on the anxious assumption that it could fall short of it at any point. Recounting the Prime Minister's meeting with the 1982 batch of probationers, Foreign Secretary Rasgotra conveyed a concern to the heads of Indian Missions on 10th May 1982 that 'our diplomats did not entertain enough and in the right manner', and lacked a 'sufficiently wide range of interests', reminding his colleagues of the importance of a diplomat being 'a conversationalist, with broad knowledge and interests'.¹⁰ Such reprimands function as constant reminders that India's membership of international society was not, as Buzan has argued about postcolonial nations, a question settled once and for all with the end of colonialism,¹¹ but rather a performance of belonging that would need to be maintained in the everyday practices of diplomatic conduct long after formal admission had been granted.

There was also a conception among senior diplomats, harking back to old distinctions between "high" and "low" diplomacy, that economic, commercial, and technological diplomacy were of little prestige in the diplomatic club.¹² One officer who served from the mid-1970s until the early 2010s contended offhandedly that during his time, 'you thought that there was somebody subordinate to you who would take care of commercial work'.¹³ India's elite diplomats 'felt like commercial and economic diplomacy was too exotic, inferior to political affairs', one Doon School boy of the 1960s batches batted off the question of expanding diplomatic duties.¹⁴ In fact, commercial diplomacy in particular was seen as so 'dirty' that the clerical branch IFS(B) was tasked with conducting it, an officer of a 1950s batch recalled.¹⁵ A materially weak nation like India ought perhaps from the fabled "rationalist" perspective have accorded such work the very highest priority, and yet its diplomats looked down on it with visible disdain. One is reminded of

⁵ Moore, *Third World Diplomats*, 18.

⁶ Interview 16.

⁷ Interview 45.

⁸ Interview 69.

⁹ Interview 30.

¹⁰ M.K. Rasgotra (Foreign Secretary), 'Circular Letter to Heads of Missions', 10 May 1982, "Training of IFS(A) of 1982", F/580/28/82, NAI.

¹¹ Buzan, "The "Standard of Civilization"", 585.

¹² Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 86.

¹³ Interview 69.

¹⁴ Interview 43.

¹⁵ Interview 40.

Bourdieu's proposition that 'all dominant aesthetics set a high value on the virtues of sobriety, simplicity, economy of means, which are as much opposed to first-degree poverty and simplicity as to the pomposity or affectation of the "half-educated" striving for material influence and wealth'.¹⁶ One might speculate that it was felt to be unbecoming for sophisticated diplomats to concern themselves with material striving, drawing attention to the poverty of the nation they represented, while trying to belong in a European-dominated international society where such 'first-degree poverty' would likely be frowned upon. Indian diplomats ought to speak eloquently about the world's poor, but not concern themselves too closely with technical details of material improvement at home.

By contrast, tastes and knowledge which had no technical bearing on defending India's national interest were repeatedly mentioned by senior or retired officers as defining features of the best diplomats – 'whether they can appreciate a foreign play', for example.¹⁷ The distinction between an excellent diplomat and a mediocre one, a member of the late 1960s batches instructed, lay in 'sophistication, refinement, the ability to appreciate the arts, music, paintings, good conversation, good wine'.¹⁸ One particularly poised officer of a 1970s batch ascribed a 'typical European style' to herself, thinking back with pride to how she once 'fit in very well into the cosmopolitan world of Paris'.¹⁹ Many diplomats were sure to mention, unprompted, if they were 'fanatic about jazz'²⁰ or enjoyed classics of French literature in the original language.²¹ They quoted Hegel, Bacon, and "Yes, Prime Minister".²² An Additional-Secretary of an early-1990s batch, who concluded that 'cultural references' remained important wherever in the world one was serving, certainly spoke to a sentiment shared by his colleagues.²³ One former Foreign Secretary suggested that mastery of 'social graces' could 'help in timing your gestures correctly', and that the rapport between Margaret Thatcher and M. K. Rasgotra (who in his own telling resented all Tories) during his term as High Commissioner in the UK in 1988–1990, despite significant political differences, was 'purely on this basis'.²⁴ Knowing the customs and tastes of international diplomacy was an act of displaying cultural capital – an act, ultimately, of belonging.

Those who possessed classical markers of cultural capital and embodied the "correct" worldly habitus were usually called upon to represent India where status signalling was thought to matter the most: Europe. It was long conventional for the majority of young officers to be posted to developing countries, where they would be polished before their dispatch to Europe.²⁵ European postings, not just in the early decades but well into the new millennium, have come with an institutional prestige that seems disproportionate to their strategic weight. The senior-most ambassadors tend to cluster in Western capitals, with Bern in Switzerland still the monopoly of Ambassadors in Grade I (equivalent to the highest ranking civil servant, the Secretary to the Government of India), while postings in regional capitals of arguably higher political salience, such as Singapore or Kathmandu, are generally lower in grade.²⁶ Complaining of an officer whose seniority ranking meant he was due a posting in the High Commission in London in the mid-1950s, an incensed Vijayalakshmi Pandit argued that since 'the personality of the officer, his ability to develop contacts and mix with people, his personal habits etc. are very important

¹⁶ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 224.

¹⁷ Interview 18.

¹⁸ Interview 37.

¹⁹ Interview 81.

²⁰ Interview 18.

²¹ Interview 41.

²² Interview 25; Interview 56; Interview 65.

²³ Interview 70.

²⁴ Interview 39.

²⁵ Interview 12.

²⁶ Rana, *Inside Diplomacy*, 48.

considerations’, it was unfortunately the case that ‘[w]hile O.P. Khosla may be suitable as P.R.O. in a place like Dhakarta [*sic*], he would not be suitable for London’.²⁷ What might be most immediately striking about this barb is the haughty rejection of an officer based on seemingly superficial markers, but it also speaks to the duality of the two imageries of international society: there are different prescriptions for correct diplomatic performance in the old colonial heartlands and in the new heart of the “Bandung spirit” of the Third World born in Indonesia in the 1950s.²⁸

One might expect that such instincts would have been unlearned long ago, and certainly it would be caricatured hubris to argue that they have not abated; and yet, it is precisely the tenacity of this imagery of European international society, born out of empire, that serving diplomats themselves, too, acknowledge to this day. ‘We Indians are so used to seeing ourselves as these bastards of Macaulay’, one self-deprecating Under-Secretary announced with a sarcastic grin, seven decades into independent Indian diplomacy.²⁹

5.1.2. The cultural capital of constructive ambiguity

The significance placed on eloquent English in the Indian Foreign Service has colonial roots (Chapter 2), relates to ideals of the worldly habitus (Chapter 3), and has been a politically sensitive concern for training (Chapter 4). All these expressions of the centrality of English find their legitimation in the kind of diplomat Indian officers believe themselves to be abroad. English made India a ‘natural’ choice for committee work and drafting at the United Nations,³⁰ granting the country significantly more diplomatic sway than its rank in the world’s material distribution of power would have suggested – for, as an Anglophile retiree of the Foreign Service emphasized, ‘the person who presents the first draft has the advantage’.³¹ With the quiet force of the pen, India was ‘able to shape the language in a manner than was beneficial to the developing countries’, as one proponent of the drafting-theory of Indian influence explained.³² A familiarity with English that could only have been born out of lifelong use allowed Indian diplomats to employ the kind of ‘constructively ambiguous’ phraseology that made for successful diplomacy and widened India’s room for foreign-policy manoeuvre, believed one retired multilateralist.³³

There is, in other words, an external context to the careful emphasis placed on English, which has to do with the deep-seated role of Indian diplomats at and around the UN, as their conflict mediation, human rights, development, and anti-racist efforts have put Indian diplomats in leading positions in multilateral diplomacy.³⁴ This linguistic leverage has convinced officers that India “punched above its weight” because of the quality of its diplomats,³⁵ matching what one

²⁷ Vijayalakshmi Pandit, ‘Letter to B.F.H.B. Tyabji (Special Secretary, MEA)’, n.d., “1955-60: Correspondence of V. L. Pandit as Indian High Commissioner to London with P. N. Haksar, N.R. Pillai, R. K. Nehru, M. J. Desai and S. Dutt’, SF/17, Vijayalakshmi Pandit papers, NMML.

²⁸ See e.g. Heloise Weber and Poppy Winanti, ‘The “Bandung Spirit” and Solidarist Internationalism’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 70, no. 4 (2016): 391–406.

²⁹ Interview 59.

³⁰ Interview 4; Interview 20; Interview 26; Interview 28; Interview 29.

³¹ Interview 28.

³² Interview 17.

³³ Interview 15, March 2019.

³⁴ Malone, *Does the Elephant Dance?*, 254; Stanley A. Kochanek, ‘India’s Changing Role in the United Nations’, *Pacific Affairs* 53, no. 1 (1980): 50; Shyam Saran, ‘India and Multilateralism: A Practitioner’s Perspective’, in *Shaping the Emerging World: India and the Multilateral Order*, ed. Waheguru Pal Singh Sidhu, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, and Bruce D. Jones (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 43.

³⁵ Interview 33; Interview 39; Interview 58; Interview 67.

Additional-Secretary called ‘the sense you have that we are meant for bigger things’.³⁶ This made multilateral drafting a considerable source of professional pride. In the middle of describing the broadest strokes of Indian philosophies of diplomacy, a former Indian lead negotiator for the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro paused to emphasize that India had been the first country to put a full draft declaration on the table, later disrupting a train of thought to remark: ‘I remember that wording because I drafted that’.³⁷ It was therefore with some despair that many diplomats viewed the relaxation of English requirements after the reforms of the Kothari Commission’s report in the early 1980s.³⁸ ‘You will see less and less of an imprint on drafting’ from India and the ‘ability for India to articulate’ its policies, one former multilateralist chided.³⁹

Thus, if diplomacy has traditionally been ‘a preserve of the English-speaking elite’ and it has been ‘hugely difficult [to] break into the English-speaking club’, as one serving diplomat involved in translating works on Indian foreign policy into vernacular languages complained,⁴⁰ it is not only because of the dominance of Anglophone elites in Indian society. Rather, it is because this dominance is, in the eyes of dominant diplomats at least, legitimated by the felt demands of international society, impressing the urgency of English on the Foreign Service. And yet it might be argued that the heavy emphasis on English cannot be exhaustively explained by appeals to drafting and committee work. A wonderfully erudite former Foreign Secretary believed that English had been especially crucial because Indian diplomacy traditionally prioritized ‘getting the perspective out’, and was ‘not so action-oriented’⁴¹ – but perhaps it had become so centred around performative eloquence precisely because Indian diplomats took such pride in their English. Perhaps, as one former Cabinet Minister complained, India’s argumentative diplomats had been ‘helped by their English too well’.⁴² Indeed, the prevalent argument of older diplomats that how an issue was expressed was just as significant as the issue itself⁴³ is a conviction that has long frustrated the less devoted Anglophiles of the Service.⁴⁴ There could, in other words, be an ‘excessive emphasis on form rather than substance’, as Dixit once despaired.⁴⁵ Clear outcomes on ‘tangible, well-defined national objectives’ often became an afterthought, Tyabji, too, lamented, with ambassadors returning to Delhi from international negotiations content that they had fulfilled their duty ‘to project the Indian point of view’.⁴⁶ The former Cabinet Minister, who had toured the climate summit circuits in 2009, found that little had changed, at least in the diplomatic community’s perceptions of India: one saying suggested that it was difficult to get the Japanese talking and equally difficult to get the Indians to stop talking.⁴⁷ At the same time, what Indian diplomats could not stop talking about was, in contents, a rejection of essentially everything that the colonial imagery of European international society stood for – creating a complex set of often contradicting demands on the diplomatic performance.

³⁶ Interview 70.

³⁷ Interview 15, March 2019.

³⁸ Interview 3; Interview 12; Interview 17; Interview 25; Interview 43; UPSC, ‘Kothari Report’, 53.

³⁹ Interview 27.

⁴⁰ Interview 61.

⁴¹ Interview 9.

⁴² Interview 8, March 2019.

⁴³ Interview 27; Interview 31.

⁴⁴ The shifts in argumentative power in this debate are discussed in Chapter 6.

⁴⁵ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 84.

⁴⁶ Tyabji, *Indian Policies and Practice*, 10.

⁴⁷ Interview 8.

5.1.3. Postcolonial balancing acts and the parochialism of worldliness

Conformity with the aristocratic remnants of European international society came with its own hypocrisies, constraining Indian diplomats in their performance of what one former Foreign Secretary acerbically called being ‘gentlemen at large’.⁴⁸ If ‘an ambassador cannot devalue the validity and dignity of the sovereignty he [*sic*] represents’ by flaunting its conventions and status signals, High Commissioner Moore described the conundrum, at the very same time, ‘the Third World ambassador who conforms to such a lifestyle denies the need for greater equality in distribution of the earth’s resources – which it is his [*sic*] professed duty to promote’, and in so doing, falls short of the dictates of postcolonial diplomacy.⁴⁹ As Tharoor has argued for India: ‘Indian diplomats had long tried (with uneven success) to maintain standards of style and hospitality on limited resources while avoiding the appearance of either miserliness or vulgarity’.⁵⁰ The imperatives of new Indian authenticity meant that whatever the temptations of ‘demanding high allowances in order to compete on the social plane with other Embassies’, as Vijayalakshmi Pandit assured Bajpai on 5th February 1948 from Moscow, ‘every effort will be made in this Embassy to keep down expenses and to live according to a pattern which is not too far removed from our own’.⁵¹ ‘Being a member of an elite in a poor country puts special responsibilities on you’, as a member of the early-1960s batches put it.⁵² These special responsibilities presented an impossible Bourdieusian trade-off: Indian diplomats had to conform to the elitist practices of old European international society while rejecting them as decadent and immoral.

What is more, the habitus of a “worldly” – or curiously Europeanized – Indian diplomat was not only in tension with the opposite side of the diplomatic cleft habitus, but sometimes failed even on its own terms. The imagery of European international society, ostensibly making demands on reticent Indian diplomats who would have preferred to behave otherwise, was always in some ways a fiction perpetuated by Indian diplomats themselves. The allegedly unassailable cultural capital that came with socialization into the mores of a European international society of old was, in fact, an obstacle at times. There were often considerable audience costs to reproducing this imagery abroad, especially in the Soviet Union, China, and the Third World. ‘We were, in the beginning, apt to copy the British and adopt their methods and manners for want of any other experience’, T.N. Kaul noted in a letter from the Indian Embassy in Moscow in August 1965, which was ‘useful in some countries but a handicap in others’.⁵³

Indeed, in some capitals the supposedly worldly but ultimately quite parochial enactments of effortless cosmopolitanism were outright detrimental. In a letter from 26th January 1948, Pandit relayed from to Bajpai at the Headquarters in Delhi that there was ‘a good deal of criticism’ from some countries, especially Russia, about the Foreign Service’s continued reliance on English, instead of Hindi.⁵⁴ In another letter, she admonished:

Russia is not Washington or London. What would be right and proper in either of these capitals does not fit into the framework of Moscow where human beings and policies are judged from different angles. It is not enough to choose your representative to this capital on Satow’s principles of “good temper, good looks and good health” with an “average intelligence” thrown in for good

⁴⁸ Interview 74.

⁴⁹ Moore, *Third World Diplomats*, 13.

⁵⁰ Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, 174.

⁵¹ Pandit, ‘Letter to G.S. Bajpai’, 5 February 1948.

⁵² Interview 1.

⁵³ Kaul, ‘Note’.

⁵⁴ Vijayalakshmi Pandit, ‘Letter to G.S. Bajpai’, 26 January 1948, “August 1947-61: Correspondence exchanged by Mrs Pandit with G.S. Bajpai (Secretary-General, MEA, and Commonwealth Relations) in her capacity as India’s ambassador to Moscow and later USA”, SF/56.

measure. The first question here is “what have you done to deserve the honour of representing your country?” And because our reply to this could not, in the nature of things, be the right one, we have had to be specially [*sic*] careful of our actions and behaviour generally – our unfortunate background has also been responsible for a good deal of suspicion regarding us.⁵⁵

Faced with a similar charge in the 1960s, former Ambassador Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya was witness to a lapse in cordiality by a Russian diplomat following a game of chess: ‘Your High Commissioner and many of the other Indian diplomats I have met do not represent India or the Indian people in any way’.⁵⁶ American and British political systems and values might have been disagreeable to the Soviet Union, but at least their diplomatic representatives embodied them well, he decreed, while ‘most Indian diplomats do not represent their culture, their country, or their people’.⁵⁷ Bandyopadhyaya recalled protesting out of duty, not conviction.

In fact, there was no diplomatic typecast that worked perfectly in every corner of the international society Indian diplomats were seeking to belong in. While suits may have worked in Geneva, in Kathmandu wearing kurtas ‘made it easier to talk to the Nepalis, who were not part of the elite’ of international society, one former Ambassador to both believed.⁵⁸ Sometimes the stylized reproductions of a worldly habitus even fell flat in Europe. After two years of hearing about the imperatives of social etiquette in training, it was a shock to discover that some expressions of cultural capital were ‘actually not that important’ once one got to a European posting – something that felt both liberating and disappointing to the recently retired Stephanian relaying his revelation.⁵⁹ ‘We made too much of this being-at-ease-with-the-rest-of-the-world’, he concluded, in language reminiscent of Bourdieu’s thoughts on the ‘the “natural” self-confidence, ease and authority of someone who feels authorized’.⁶⁰ “The worldly” has never been quite as fixed – or indeed, quite as worldly – as Indian diplomats have themselves long insisted.

5.2. Representing the subaltern

5.2.1. Third World difference

Even as they have seen themselves as members of an elite club embedded in old European imageries of international society, Indian diplomats have also considered themselves staunch defenders of the global subaltern, whom it has only been possible to honour in the idioms of postcolonial, anti-imperial international society. In the postcolonial imagery, one 1970s-batch diplomat who has lectured probationers on the need to abandon colonial ideals argued, dignity and status could never be achieved by engaging in ‘derivative mimicry’.⁶¹ Seen through its postcoloniality, Indian foreign policy could be understood, in the words of Priya Chacko, ‘as a self-reflective ethico-political project of identity construction that emerged in reaction to the colonial encounter’.⁶² Anticipating the ambiguous relationship of Indian diplomats toward

⁵⁵ Pandit, ‘Letter to G.S. Bajpai’, 5 February 1948.

⁵⁶ Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India’s Foreign Policy*, 185.

⁵⁷ Bandyopadhyaya, 185.

⁵⁸ Interview 24.

⁵⁹ Interview 19.

⁶⁰ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 250.

⁶¹ Interview 4.

⁶² Priya Chacko, *Indian Foreign Policy: The Politics of Postcolonial Identity from 1947 to 2004* (London: Routledge, 2013), 3.

Western notions of modernity, this project was ‘deeply ambivalent toward modernity because it at once embraces modernity, as the cure for the condition of backwardness that led to colonial subjugation, and repudiates modernity for its creation of an exploitative and violent colonial relationship in the first place’.⁶³ This foreign policy emphasis has reflected itself in diplomacy, too, and thus also in the outward projection of the diplomatic habitus.

While one side of the diplomatic cleft habitus was premised on an acceptance of the continued power imbalance toward and valorization of the West, the postcolonial side was more akin to what Itty Abraham calls a “boundary-making technology”: the deliberate establishment of an ideational, cultural, and political boundary between the Western and the non-Western, the European and the Third World, the colonizer and the Indian.⁶⁴ One former Foreign Secretary believed that India engaged in ‘inverse snobbery’: it took great pride not only in its ability to showcase its Anglophile credentials but also in its loud postcolonial rejection of the uncouth power politics supposedly invented by Europeans.⁶⁵ In fact, this “inverse snobbery” served a purpose not unlike the traditional purposes of Bourdieusian signalling: as a former senior Ambassador from the early 1980s batches explained, Nehruvian thinking ‘distinguished us’ from the diplomats of other countries.⁶⁶ A postcolonial moral high can be a form of distinction – and a deliberate outsider status, too, is a kind of status to be cherished.

Thus, points of diplomatic principle and parlance tended to fold into a broader postcolonial, Third Worldist agenda, which may have assigned India a leading role, but always philosophically apart from the insiders and incumbents. Consider, for example, India’s environmental and climate diplomacy, with Indian diplomats always insisting on bifurcating the world into developed and developing nations, rather than accepting what a former chief climate negotiator considered the false “shared global responsibility” discourse of ‘glossy magazines’ produced for Western audiences.⁶⁷ Indian diplomats made a point of standing out: they did not seek to obfuscate but to accentuate what they considered an unbridgeable divide between North and South, developed and developing, and in making their arguments about differentiated responsibilities on the environment, they attacked the language of the common good as an imperial discourse.⁶⁸ It was not even industrialization (a supposed hallmark of Westernization and an indelible marker of “modernity”) that was at fault for India’s environmental troubles, as an inter-departmental communique from 1970 contended, but rather the ‘widespread squalor, insanitary conditions, dirt and dust, poor housing, urban slums, formless and ugly towns, derelict lands and, in general, poor management of land and water resources’ (signifying India’s identity as a developing nation).⁶⁹ Environmental diplomacy, too, was about representing the global subaltern: ‘[s]een from this angle, the problem of tackling the environmental question in the developing countries becomes part of the general problem of achieving economic and social development.’

⁶³ Chacko, 3.

⁶⁴ Itty Abraham, *How India Became Territorial: Foreign Policy, Diaspora, Geopolitics* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2014), 1; See also Manu Bhagavan, *India and the Quest for One World: The Peacemakers* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Andrew B. Kennedy, ‘Nehru’s Foreign Policy: Realism and Idealism Conjoined’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Foreign Policy*, ed. David M. Malone, C. Raja Mohan, and Srinath Raghavan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 92–103.

⁶⁵ Interview 6.

⁶⁶ Interview 3.

⁶⁷ Interview 15, March 2019.

⁶⁸ On India’s approach to climate negotiations, see e.g. Navroz K. Dubash, ‘Copenhagen: Climate of Mistrust’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 52 (2009): 8–11; Lavanya Rajamani, ‘Differentiation in the Emerging Climate Regime’, *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 14, no. 1 (1 January 2013): 164.

⁶⁹ S.K. Das (Under-Secretary, UNI), ‘Letter to K. Chatterjee (Under Secretary, Ministry of Food, Agriculture, CD&C)’, 15 May 1971, “UN Conference on the Human Environment (Working Group on Conservation, Environment and Development)”, F/UI/251(6)/70, NAI.

In this postcolonial imagery of international society, hierarchies both domestic and international looked very different. Indian diplomats represented not just India, but a far more ambitious coalition that defined the spirit of a new international society founded on difference and equality: the developing nations of the Third World, former colonies, the G-77, and the Non-Aligned Movement, all of which India saw itself as the natural leader of.⁷⁰ In this imagery, India was not a dependent but a trailblazer – ‘a role model for smaller countries and the Third World’, as one retired multilateralist, relaying a common conception among his colleagues, established.⁷¹ The link between international and domestic hierarchies was reversed: in European international society, the domestic elites who governed the Foreign Service were anxious to obfuscate their marginal position in the historically white club of international diplomacy; in the imagery of postcolonial international society, the same elite sought to obfuscate its elite character at home so as to seem sufficiently “authentic” while proudly claiming the mantle of *primus inter pares* among Third World nations.

If the “Europeanized” flank of the cleft habitus called for a subdued performance of stiff upper lip and the quiet effortlessness of superiority, the postcolonial enactment of difference could be purposefully emotive and animated. Fighting Apartheid and imperialism at Bandung and at the UN, Davis and Thakur argue in the register of the “practice turn”, India adopted ‘a theatrical and aggressive manner’.⁷² For this, it often bore the brunt of white Orientalizing, as its diplomatic counterparts revelled in declaring India’s anti-imperial practices and discourses “irrational”, sentimental and ungentlemanly.⁷³ What such a gamble, and the willingness to be ridiculed for one’s performance, shows, is just how sincerely many of the facets of the postcolonially rooted side of the cleft habitus were reproduced. They also go to show that, despite the prevalent language of “diplomatic etiquette” propagated by Indian diplomats themselves, the performances of diplomacy have never cohered around a singular conception of appropriate diplomatic behaviour.

‘Coloured by left-wing ideals’, as one member of 1970s batches put it,⁷⁴ India’s eloquent diplomatic lexicon has also been characterised by moralism. In interviews, arguments were often couched not in assessments of capability or capacity, but in binaries of fair/unfair, equal/unequal.⁷⁵ A former Cabinet Minister who had worked with high-ranking IFS officials derided their ‘sense of victimhood’: ‘there is a white man and a black man, and the white man screwed the world’.⁷⁶ The argument may have been offered as a criticism, but as a point of principle, it was nothing the diplomats negated: ‘The lexicon of our parlance could not but echo our experience of [...] suffering under foreign rule’, as Rasgotra argued in his autobiography.⁷⁷ This was diplomacy pronounced from a ‘moralistic high’, as one former senior Ambassador phrased it.⁷⁸

Academics have often found less flattering phraseology for the occasion, describing Indian diplomacy as ‘self-congratulatory’⁷⁹ and delivered ‘from a moral high horse’.⁸⁰ Diplomatic counterparts have sometimes found their otherwise formidable Indian colleagues ‘arrogant’ and ‘confrontational’, to a point where ‘India’s long position as a moralistic and contrarian loner in the

⁷⁰ Interview 3; Interview 19; Interview 23; Interview 29; Interview 67; Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 106.

⁷¹ Interview 11.

⁷² Alexander E. Davis and Vineet Thakur, “‘An Act of Faith’ or a New “Brown Empire”? The Dismissal of India’s International Anti-Racism, 1945–1961’, *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 56, no. 1 (2018): 25.

⁷³ Davis and Thakur, 27.

⁷⁴ Interview 33.

⁷⁵ Interview 15, March 2019; Interview 19.

⁷⁶ Interview 8.

⁷⁷ Rasgotra, *A Life in Diplomacy*, 367.

⁷⁸ Interview 3.

⁷⁹ Bhagavan, ‘India and the United Nations, or Things Fall Apart’, 605.

⁸⁰ Narlikar and Narlikar, *Bargaining with a Rising India*, 73.

international community has not excited others about working with India at the apex of the UN system'.⁸¹ Listening to Foreign Secretary Dixit's team make the case for India's right to nuclear capabilities amidst the Indo-US negotiations in August 1993, an agitated US Assistant Secretary of State Lyn Davis objected to India constantly 'raising questions of philosophy and theory'.⁸² Yet these questions of philosophy and theory were, in fact, there for the benefit of the superpower: they betrayed that the emperor had no clothes. Indian moralism was an almost ironic response to the moralistic language and ethical failings of Western, particularly American, exceptionalism. They were an expression of postcoloniality and the urge not just to stand apart, but to dismantle the rickety moral legitimacy of continued Western dominance, which ought to have ceased at decolonization.⁸³

The debates on Indian moralism, the outdatedness of Western superiority, and the need to imbibe the rallying cries of postcolonial international society have most recently found expression in the normalizing academic discourse about whether India is becoming a "responsible power".⁸⁴ Senior and retired officers – as ever, fully aware of and ready to debate academic work done on themselves – rejected the unspoken assumption that "responsibility" was a fixed parameter,⁸⁵ defined by and owed to incumbent Western powers.⁸⁶ If it was an 'inflexible' negotiator, as one former Foreign Secretary phrased it, it was only because India was up against an unfair world (while Balkan countries, for example, 'don't have any qualms about being supplicants, this is not the case with India').⁸⁷ The fiction of the global common good, he argued, was perpetuated by a slanted literary canon – 'so much is written on international affairs [...] from the viewpoint of Western interest'.⁸⁸ An arch-liberal former Foreign Secretary concurred: 'India has kicked against' the notion that European and American interests can transcend into universal concerns from the very beginning – 'and long may that unpopularity continue'.⁸⁹

The imagery of postcolonial international society is not the sole property of the Indian Foreign Service, but it is notable just how much more adamant the Foreign Service has been on playing to its perceived rules than other Indian bureaucracies and actors have. That Indian negotiators have faithfully carried their risky, contentious negotiating traditions into the 21st century is a puzzle that Amrita Narlikar has sought to explain with reference to the generally anti-imperialist political culture and public mood in India, which permeates all Indian political and bureaucratic institutions in equal measure.⁹⁰ Yet there is, in fact, something very particular about the Foreign Service. When Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri sought to formulate foreign policy that was considered pro-Western in the wake of Nehru's death, he felt compelled to actively keep them secret from the left-leaning diplomatic cadres brought up to emphasize Third World solidarity and developmentalist politics.⁹¹ Over forty years later, something similar occurred in climate diplomacy, when the Indian Government, hoping to adopt a more conciliatory stance toward Western demands at the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit, had to side-line senior IFS officers

⁸¹ George Perkovich, 'Is India a Major Power?', *Washington Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (2003): 142.

⁸² Dixit, *My South Block Years*, 201.

⁸³ For an analysis of the Indo-US "clash of exceptionalisms", see Priya Chacko, 'New "Special Relationship"? Power Transitions, Ontological Security, and India–Us Relations', *International Studies Perspectives* 15, no. 3 (August 2014): 337–38.

⁸⁴ Xenia Dormandy, 'Is India, or Will It Be, a Responsible International Stakeholder?', *Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (2007): 117–30; C. Raja Mohan, 'India and the Balance of Power', *Foreign Affairs*, August 2006, 17–32; Amrita Narlikar, 'Is India a Responsible Great Power?', *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 9 (2011): 1607–21.

⁸⁵ Malone, *Does the Elephant Dance?*, 270.

⁸⁶ Interview 6; Interview 9.

⁸⁷ Interview 39.

⁸⁸ Interview 39.

⁸⁹ Interview 9.

⁹⁰ Narlikar, 'Peculiar Chauvinism or Strategic Calculation?', 67–72.

⁹¹ Benner, *Structure of Decision*, 5.

and replace them with Government-appointed negotiators.⁹² Méliissa Levaillant has convincingly argued that the continued insistence on postcolonial non-conformity and the discourses of Non-Alignment, in the face of an increasingly more *laissez-faire*, reformist tone in the Home Services, has shown the Foreign Service to act, in Iver Neumann's vocabulary, as a 'discourse police',⁹³ keeping diplomatic practices 'compatible with the inherited culture' of the Service.⁹⁴ One might add that this is also the inherited culture of a very particular rendition of postcolonial international society: a rendition founded not on the imposition of universal oneness but on inherent difference and diversity.

5.2.2. Sisir Gupta's paradox

Just as the reproductions of European international society always came with their own compromises and conundrums, so too embodying the ideals of postcolonial international society has often involved some performative trouble. In fact, Indian diplomats have been exemplary illustrations of what Sisir Gupta meant when he spoke of India as 'a Third World country with a First World attitude'.⁹⁵

The project of signalling authentic difference and postcolonial protest often meant foregoing the benefits that came with the kind of capital that India's diplomatic elites had. It was not, for example, always feasible to make one's Anglophone education, cultural repertoire and social capital fully work in one's favour in the dispatch of diplomatic duties. A postcolonial nation like India could leverage the 'cultural exposure in both directions', as a former senior diplomat and Cambridge graduate recalled of his time in the Indian High Commission in London.⁹⁶ Such exposure was certainly there to exploit, with Oxbridge friends ending up on either side of the Indian and British Foreign Services, and India's Anglicised elites proving themselves in very intimate terms with European conventions, thought, and culture long after Independence.⁹⁷ Yet India's declared commitment to representing the Third World with postcolonial pride meant its diplomats could not be seen working too smoothly with Western colleagues. All the way to the new century, 'I couldn't join hands' with Western representatives, one recently retired diplomat with a multilateral resume agonized, although 'socially' his relations, forged over conversations about English-language education, literature, and music, were much stronger with UK and US colleagues in particular.⁹⁸ This did not imply some strict binary between the two imageries of international society, even when they were obviously in tension – one diplomat from the early-1970s batches, for example, was convinced that 'you could seek to overthrow imperialism and still be very close with Western diplomats'.⁹⁹ In the traditionally moralistic register of Indian diplomatic discourse, a former veteran of climate negotiations spoke passionately about the 'shackles of mass poverty' his Western counterparts were locking around India's wrists with their negotiation demands, before suggesting with considerable pleasure that he had made great lifelong friends on the American delegation.¹⁰⁰ For the purposes of boundary-making, however, much of this

⁹² Navroz K. Dubash, 'The Politics of Climate Change in India: Narratives of Equity and Co-Benefits', *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 4, no. 3 (May 2013): 194; Interview 8.

⁹³ Iver B. Neumann, 'Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn: The Case of Diplomacy', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31, no. 3 (July 2002): 648.

⁹⁴ Levaillant, 'The Contribution of Neo-Institutionalism to the Analysis of India's Diplomacy in the Making', 154.

⁹⁵ Sisir Gupta, *India and the International System* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1981), 47.

⁹⁶ Interview 9.

⁹⁷ K. Natwar-Singh, *My China Diary, 1956-88* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co, 2009), 4.

⁹⁸ Interview 11.

⁹⁹ Interview 14.

¹⁰⁰ Interview 15, March 2019.

communicability and comradeship had to be attenuated and played down, instead of harnessed to India's advantage.

And yet, sometimes the draw of the old imagery won over. For all the professed allegiances to the postcolonial Third World and, sometimes, the socialist bloc, some retired diplomats candidly admitted that India, even today, is 'over-concerned with the West in the implementation of diplomacy' – a preoccupation not lost on frustrated Asian and African partners expecting India to live out its role as a "natural leader" of the Third World.¹⁰¹ Postings to Africa sometimes even served a disciplinary function: repeat postings, in particular, were interpreted as signalling displeasure on the part of senior officials at something an officer had done in a previous post.¹⁰² The ideational insistence on Third Worldism has also come with its own learning curve. The earliest members of the Service, most empathically those who had served under the Raj, struggled to stomach Nehru's insistence on Third Worldism and did not, Foreign Secretary Dixit believed, find a meaningful way of imbibing the Non-Aligned Movement's solidarist emphasis on developing countries.¹⁰³ Having spent much of the interview evaluating Indian diplomatic convention against its European counterparts, a mid-1950s recruit exclaimed that his superiors 'felt at home with English-speaking foreign diplomats' but 'didn't have the foggiest idea where Africa was'¹⁰⁴ – a strangely apt accusation given Ambassador Apa Pant's first reaction upon hearing he would become India's First Commissioner to East Africa: "Where is East Africa?"¹⁰⁵

A parallel incongruence ran along the Cold War's East–West axis.¹⁰⁶ Describing a clash between Nehru's insistence on solidarity and anti-imperialism and the socialization of the Service's ICS-trained founders, K.P.S. Menon noted: 'It was not too easy to apply them to particular situations. For instance, I can say, by and large, there was a strong suspicion in the Secretariat about the Soviet Union. As you know it was the result of a century of anti-Soviet propaganda'.¹⁰⁷ Here, too, one diplomat of a 1970s batch with considerable left-wing sympathies admitted, Indian diplomats preferred Western counterparts, since, 'though our interests were supported by the Soviet Block', linguistically and culturally, 'our conversations with them were always difficult'.¹⁰⁸ 'An Indian diplomat is quite alone', he concluded; for while American and European diplomats had their 'reference group' among themselves, and Africans and Arabs often forged intuitive diplomatic groupings, India straddled the spaces between – a Third World country with its First World attitude.

¹⁰¹ Rana, *Inside Diplomacy*, 48.

¹⁰² Interview 2; Interview 43; Interview 45; Interview 49.

¹⁰³ Dixit, *My South Block Years*, 38.

¹⁰⁴ Interview 79.

¹⁰⁵ 'Oral History Transcript: Apa B. Pant', 22.

¹⁰⁶ Amidst references to Europe, the Third World, and the Soviet Union, what is striking in its absence is any sustained commentary on the US. Of course, references to the continued dominance of the West in the wake of decolonization are also implicit references to US hegemony. Yet even here, the US folds into a more amorphous "West", so that its analysis is swallowed into a broader critique of Westerncentrism in international society. The American century, as it has been experienced by Indian diplomats, seems to have been coded as one defined by its likenesses with European colonialism and its opposition to the goals pursued through Third World alliances. In this way, it features implicitly, but rarely as a topic in its own right – perhaps even revealing some of the cultural disdain that elite Indian diplomats felt toward "boorish" American diplomats (to borrow the phrase of one former Foreign Secretary of a mid-1960s batch).

¹⁰⁷ 'Oral History Transcript: K.P.S. Menon', 12; See also Dixit, *My South Block Years*, 38.

¹⁰⁸ Interview 33.

5.2.3. Diversity talk

One further feature of the performance of Third Worldist diplomacy is worth independent mention. Instead of stamping on the vast diversity of the world for the sake of imperial governability or seeking to homogenize it in the name of liberal internationalism, India's diplomats have propagated a discourse of diversity. This discourse reflects the perceived nature of postcolonial international society but is also deeply rooted in a domestic postcolonial project of managing India's own internal diversity. It is, in many ways, an internationalization of the official "diversity talk" of liberal postcolonial elites in Indian domestic politics,¹⁰⁹ which has sought to preserve domestic peace and prosperity by accentuating a composite culture that, unlike European nations, rejects the construct of 'one people, one language, one religion'.¹¹⁰

Diversity has done a lot of work in Indian diplomatic projection. It can be a tangible diplomatic asset: there seems to be a recurring pattern whereby the Service's few Muslims are posted in Muslim-majority countries, presumably on the assumption that the intimacy of a religious bond strengthens diplomatic ties.¹¹¹ Yet most importantly, the emphasis on diversity signals an identity out into the world. Variations on the diversity theme accompanied virtually every interview with the over eighty Indian diplomats. India's ingrained diversity made it 'inherently equipped to handle diversity' in global governance, its plurality of religions and cultures 'the calling card of India in a troubled world', as one devout Hindu officer, wary of the weaponization of his religion, insisted.¹¹² India's first female career diplomat saw India's diversity as a blueprint for postcolonial international society: 'India's acceptance of diversity, often called its "tolerance", is a better model for a future world society than the existing models of uniformity and intolerance whether of race, religion, political ideology or other factors', C.B. Muthamma outlined in an article for *India Magazine* in 1986¹¹³ – sidelining, on this occasion, the various domestic discriminatory forces which she otherwise was an exacting public critic of. This diversity, aligning as it does with the supposed spirit of the contemporary era, constitutes one of India's 'greatest strengths in a globalized age'.¹¹⁴ It turns Huntington on his head: instead of containing dangerous 'fault lines' that will become theatres of cultural conflict in the new century, as *The Clash of Civilizations* foresaw, India can find common ground with diverse cultures across the globe because of the repeatedly learned lessons of its domestic diversity.¹¹⁵ While Ambassador Kishan Rana has spoken of India's internal diversity as a question of branding, as recently as 2013 arguing that diversity was more eagerly espoused by envoys than ever before,¹¹⁶ his contemporary, Ambassador Paramjit Sahai, has considered cultural diversity more akin to bio-diversity – 'essential for a sustainable world'.¹¹⁷

Diversity has also been diplomatically weaponized against China. Witness Dixit's claim that 'our identity has a wider spread, unlike China's which is less pluralistic in character'.¹¹⁸ Where China's

¹⁰⁹ Srirupa Roy, 'Instituting Diversity: Official Nationalism in Post-independence India', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 22, no. 1 (1999): 81.

¹¹⁰ Lion König, *Cultural Citizenship in India: Politics, Power, and Media* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 15.

¹¹¹ Interview 7; Interview 72; Maitra, 'Ills of the Indian Foreign Service: A Comment', 550; Mostafa Kamel (Indian Embassy in Egypt), 'Letter to J.K. Atal', 18 December 1957, "Copies of Official Correspondence", SF/53, Subimal Dutt papers, NMML; J.K. Atal, 'Letter to Nawab Ali Yavar Jung', 21 January 1958, 'Copies of official correspondence', SF/53, Subimal Dutt papers, NMML; Subimal Dutt, 'Letter to B.F.H.B. Tyabji (Indian Embassy in Iran)', 11 February 1958, 'Copies of official correspondence', SF/53, Subimal Dutt papers, NMML.

¹¹² Interview 4.

¹¹³ C. B. Muthamma, *Slain by the System: India's Real Crisis* (New Delhi: Viveka Foundation, 2003), 100.

¹¹⁴ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 285.

¹¹⁵ Rana, *Inside Diplomacy*, 424.

¹¹⁶ Rana, *The Contemporary Embassy*, 34.

¹¹⁷ Paramjit Sahai, *Indian Cultural Diplomacy: Celebrating Pluralism in a Globalized World* (New Delhi: Indian Council of World Affairs, 2019), 41.

¹¹⁸ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 285.

rise roots back to a hopelessly passé imperialist conception of a Chinese century, the ‘humanist, value-based Indian tradition places emphasis on relations of peace and cooperation with neighbours and others’, and – former Foreign Secretary Rasgotra continues – is ‘in tune with modern times and a globalizing human society’.¹¹⁹ The diversity discourse extrapolates India’s importance for the world from its internal characteristics, and valorises them above those of rising contenders: China compels with homogeneity, India inspires with heterogeneity.

Achieving this impression of India’s own internal diversity abroad was sometimes hard work, not only because, as Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated, the Service has struggled to come to terms with genuine diversity among its own cadres, or because brutal stories of homogenization and marginalization abound in Indian history,¹²⁰ but also because of external cultural stereotypes of India as an eternal, exotic land of wondering *sadbhus*. To combat the slippage from India’s image as spiritual to inherently Hindu in the 1970s, the Service even took to correcting the convention in Spanish-speaking countries of referring to Indian nationals as “Hindu”, with Indian Ambassador to Argentina B.K. Sanyal requesting in 1971 that the Ministry instruct all Foreign Offices in countries where India had missions to only use the term in relation to the religion, not the nationality, having already written to the Spanish Royal Academy of Letters to discuss the term’s description in Spanish dictionaries.¹²¹ In line with such anxieties of association, diplomats who entertained religious figures at Embassies were reprimanded by their superiors.¹²² In other words: Indian diplomats were consciously countering a conception of India as a *Hindu rashtra*, or Hindu nation. In fact, the sheer frequency of commentary on the beauty and imperatives of Indian diversity during interviews seemed to reflect a version of what Skinner meant when he argued that ‘anyone issuing a serious utterance will always be doing something as well as saying something’¹²³ – in the most diplomatically roundabout way, one presumes that many officers were passing judgement on India’s Hindu nationalist turn, presaging the fractures of the diplomatic habitus explored in the final chapter.

5.3. The hierarchical society

5.3.1. Hierarchies of belonging, or: whose cosmopolitanism?

The elite status of Indian diplomats has always been ambiguous. They exist as members of a domestic elite in an international elite culture but have at the same time represented a nation that has been – and has thought of itself as – a victim of a hierarchical international system which has assigned an inferior status to India. Their readings of cosmopolitanism, beyond the class marker explored in Chapter 3, are consequently complex, and often conflicted.

Cosmopolitanism as an ethic of international scale ‘elaborates a concern with the equal moral status of each and every human being and creates a bedrock of interest in what it is that human beings have in common, independently of their particular familial, ethical, national and religious

¹¹⁹ Rasgotra, *A Life in Diplomacy*, 373.

¹²⁰ See e.g. Guha and Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies*; Zoya Hasan, *Politics of Inclusion: Castes, Minorities, and Affirmative Action* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹²¹ B.K. Sanyal (Ambassador to Argentina), ‘Letter to the MEA’, 3 March 1971, “Use of the word ‘Hindu’ in Argentina when referring to Indian nationals”, FW(II) 307/3/71, NAI.

¹²² Interview 7, 7; Interview 45; Interview 85.

¹²³ Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Volume 1, Regarding Method*, 106.

affiliations'.¹²⁴ It espouses coexistence and respect for the Other, and in its institutional garb, has only become conceivable as a guiding principle of international life because, as political philosopher Thomas Pogge argues, 'all human beings are now participants in a single, global institutional scheme – involving such institutions as the territorial state and a system of international law and diplomacy'.¹²⁵ Hedley Bull himself spoke of 'cosmopolitan civilization' and 'cosmopolitan awareness', although these terms rang rather hollow, as he dated the emergence of cosmopolitanism as a feature of international society right after the Second World War, 'at least in the advanced countries'.¹²⁶ This hopelessly ahistorical qualifier brings to light how cosmopolitanism, not only as an aesthetic and social status marker but also as an international ethic, has something of the standard-of-civilization logic to it, audaciously claiming to speak for humanity while pleading ignorance to the recent realities of empire and elevating the West as a carrier of original cosmopolitan impulses.

In line with such orthodox scholarly work on cosmopolitanism, Indian diplomats, too, sometimes tied their cosmopolitanism to a set of abstract ideals, all rooted in coexistence with and respect for the Other.¹²⁷ As far as it actually spoke to conceptions of the global – rather than signalling domestic class, which most officers ended up speaking about – cosmopolitanism signified faith in liberal principles of international life, equal human rights, and a commitment to multilateralism in Indian diplomacy.¹²⁸ At home, it dovetailed with liberal convictions and a commitment to oppose various forms of discrimination, be they along lines of religion, gender or caste.¹²⁹ In fact, it was the amorphous boundaries and diverse expressions of "Indianness" which many believed to make such good instinctive cosmopolitans of Indians.¹³⁰

In the Indian diplomatic imagination, cosmopolitanism also meant that "global citizenship" and national loyalties were never mutually exclusive – what Ulrich Beck calls the "both/and" logic of cosmopolitanism, juxtaposed to the "either/or" logic of nationalism.¹³¹ One passionate multilateralist, now in retirement, thought back to his *viva voce* in the late 1960s, when the interviewer representing the Indian Police Service had told him that the correct answer to a question about a diplomat's most important quality would in fact have been "patriotism": 'it's the opposite that is true; you need to attenuate your pursuit of the national interest', he argued in response to his own question about how to define cosmopolitanism.¹³² In this reading, cosmopolitanism became a more sophisticated version of 'patriotism through a different lens'.¹³³ Another instance of Skinner's "doing something while saying something" occurred here, too, as diplomats alluded to the contrast between this brand of enlightened patriotism and the narrower conceptions, cut off from cosmopolitan allegiances, of Hindu nationalism.¹³⁴

The ideational commitment to cosmopolitanism pledged by a number of officers did not equate to imbibing everything that was intuitively associated with a cosmopolitan creed. Anecdotally, one immediate divergence from a fuller, late postmodern lexicon of cosmopolitanism involved an expanded human rights agenda, with one member of a mid-1960s batch identifying 'this LGBT

¹²⁴ David Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals, Realities and Deficits* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), x.

¹²⁵ Thomas W Pogge, 'Cosmopolitanism and Sovereignty', *Ethics* 103, no. 1 (1992): 51.

¹²⁶ Hedley Bull, *Hedley Bull on International Society*, ed. Kai Alderson and Andrew Hurrell (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 137, 221.

¹²⁷ Interview 27; Interview 37; Interview 41; Interview 49; Interview 56; Interview 57; Interview 74; Interview 76.

¹²⁸ Interview 23; Interview 27; Interview 28; Interview 52; Interview 74.

¹²⁹ Interview 7; Interview 42; Interview 46; Interview 85.

¹³⁰ Interview 27; Interview 62; Interview 82.

¹³¹ Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge, Mass.: Polity, 2006), 57.

¹³² Interview 28.

¹³³ Interview 28.

¹³⁴ Interview 1; Interview 3; Interview 42; Interview 45; Interview 48; Interview 52.

business' as the kind of 'Western, selfish myth-making' that, in his generationally and culturally bounded assessment, sometimes made cosmopolitanism feel alien to Indian diplomats.¹³⁵ Yet one did not, in fact, need to get into individual rejections of pieces of what was considered the cosmopolitan canon to gauge a disjuncture; the most painful facet of the cosmopolitan creed was, in fact, the unspoken power asymmetries one was not supposed to speak out loud.

For all the universalistic language, which the diplomats themselves liberally indulged in, they also knew that cosmopolitanism was not an ethic propagated from a place of equal standing. Once again breaking the third wall and commenting on the academic literature that Indian diplomats were themselves part of, one disillusioned member of the early 1960s batches complained about some of the IR literature he had studied, whose atmospherics of an international 'brotherhood' of diplomats was 'a piece of nonsense' – 'they want all of us in the Global South [...] to conform to standards' developed elsewhere, while 'nobody asks African diplomats whether they can contribute to this shared culture'.¹³⁶ In the Western-narrated histories of international society, Callahan has argued, one must be alive to the unspoken definitions which dictate that '[j]ust as "society" is restricted to certain well-mannered classes, "international" also means Europe and not the colonies'.¹³⁷ And so it was with Indian diplomats, seventy years on from Independence, who in interviews repeatedly recycled "international" and "Western" as interchangeable descriptors, both as a subconscious slip-up and a conscious critique of Westerncentrism.¹³⁸

The cosmopolitan creed, then, sometimes appeared to Indian officers as a prettified façade. Many might have ascribed to Rahul Rao's argument that 'the praxis of liberal cosmopolitanism today assists in the consolidation of Western hegemony', signalling elite belonging more than egalitarian commitments.¹³⁹ India, Gupta's "Third World country with a First World attitude", was caught up in a lexical illusion in which a vision of "one world" under cosmopolitanism was 'a sometimes unconscious, sometimes unconscionable, euphemism for "First World" culture'.¹⁴⁰ 'The standards have been set by the West', concluded a wry former Foreign Secretary in an indirect response to a question about the cosmopolitan character of diplomatic culture.¹⁴¹ Cosmopolitanism was apoliticization at scale – 'an ethical mask' for hegemonic power.¹⁴² In order to swear by equality and tolerance in a world of deep racial, class, and national hierarchies, it had to continuously enact a double elusion: 'a downplaying of the present importance of past atrocities (including those perpetrated by colonialism), and a relative disregard for the economic structures that produce inequality'.¹⁴³ A former Foreign Secretary with a pronounced nationalistic slant was, in a way, referring to such evasions when he complained of colleagues who 'try to advocate building bridges by skirting big issues' – they were 'so taken up by their linguistic affinities' that their Anglophile cultural sympathies erased (or required not seeing) the fundamental power asymmetry of their cosmopolitan commitments.¹⁴⁴ This made him the only diplomat to reject the cosmopolitan moniker outright, because in a world of unequal cultural imageries (which sustain unequal

¹³⁵ Interview 1.

¹³⁶ Interview 1.

¹³⁷ Callahan, 'Nationalising International Theory', 318.

¹³⁸ Interview 25; Interview 26; Interview 28; Interview 42; Interview 48.

¹³⁹ Rahul Rao, *Third World Protest: Between Home and the World* (Oxford: University Press, 2010), 36; See also Craig J Calhoun, 'The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travelers: Toward a Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002): 869–97.

¹⁴⁰ Ackbar Abbas, 'Cosmopolitan De-Descriptions: Shanghai and Hong Kong', in *Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge et al. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 210.

¹⁴¹ Interview 45.

¹⁴² David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 84.

¹⁴³ Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta, 'Introduction', in *Cosmopolitanisms*, ed. Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta (New York: University Press, 2017), 8.

¹⁴⁴ Interview 39.

distributions of material power), cosmopolitanism was a luxury Indian officers could not afford – ‘you have to stand your ground’.¹⁴⁵ The cosmopolitan imperative, in this respect, resembled Ranajit Guha’s analysis of English education in colonial India, which ‘stood not only for enlightenment but also authority’, and which in its everyday garb elided the fundamental asymmetry of colonial pedagogy so that it was possible to ‘look upon it as a purely cultural transaction, and ignore that aspect which related it directly to power’.¹⁴⁶

Indeed, it matters for an understanding of the practice of cosmopolitanism in the Foreign Service that Indian diplomats, even those who embraced it, did not feel recognized as equal shapers of a globally developed cosmopolitan praxis. Whatever the language of Third World leadership, Indian officers felt that their readings of the world rarely moved Western counterparts. A former diplomat who has published widely on the question of Indian identity felt that the ‘huge cultural asymmetry’ that governed international society meant that India was always being coaxed to ‘co-opt’ into a global ‘mainstream’,¹⁴⁷ rather than shaping it. This felt inferior position was embodied through the habitus of the Indian diplomat, as officers spoke of a latent uneasiness or anxiety when serving in Western postings, the emotional toll of European condescension, and the need to imbibe Western etiquette in order to manage the alienation.¹⁴⁸ ‘No matter how good your accent is, it’s still a foreign accent’, one recently retired Stephanian noted sardonically about his colleagues’ attempts at belonging to a hallowed Anglophone international elite of diplomats.¹⁴⁹ Writing of his professional challenges as High Commissioner in London (1973–1977) in tellingly casteist terms, B.K. Nehru once complained that in the British diplomatic imagination, ‘the Indian High Commission had quite definitely been relegated to the Shudra category of Third World missions who did not matter and whose views were not worth bothering about’.¹⁵⁰ In this light, cosmopolitanism appeared not so much as a universal ethic but as an audition: through the performance of “cosmopolitan” discourse and its elite markers, upper-class diplomats sought to transcend their grievous misrepresentation as the lower castes of the world.

In other words, Indian elite diplomats with the correct elite habitus could barter it for recognition in the diplomatic club. This is where the more genuinely internationalist or global conversations about cosmopolitanism with officers tie right back to their dominant narrative of cosmopolitanism found in Chapter 3: cosmopolitanism as a social marker of distinction. As domestic hierarchies became entangled with attempts at levelling international pecking orders, “cosmopolitan capital” – with all its classist and casteist baggage – was precisely what individual diplomats could bring to bear on their diplomatic duties. It was this capital that could buy esteem and belonging in the diplomatic club – not despite the fact that cosmopolitanism was never as inclusionary as it claimed to be, but precisely because it was not.

It is almost as though Indian diplomats, even when most of them so readily professed their cosmopolitan identity, knew that cosmopolitanism was at best a domestic marker of elite distinction rather than a practicable principle of a genuinely global international society. Practices like etiquette training, then, became a kind of defence mechanism: learning to whirl around wines in their correct glasses mattered, a 1960s recruit intoned bitterly, ‘because otherwise your interlocutors will have a poor opinion of you’.¹⁵¹ Diplomats with the confidence of background could level some of the playing field in diplomatic encounters, their dominant domestic status essentially standing in for the international status that might have come from representing a

¹⁴⁵ Interview 39.

¹⁴⁶ Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, 166.

¹⁴⁷ Interview 4.

¹⁴⁸ Interview 14; Interview 33, 33; Interview 35; Interview 41; Interview 82.

¹⁴⁹ Interview 19.

¹⁵⁰ Nehru, *Nice Guys Finish Second: Memoirs*, 552.

¹⁵¹ Interview 35.

dominant nation. This sense of entitlement meant that ‘you’re not subdued’ when negotiating abroad, as one Stephenian argued in his defence,¹⁵² unwittingly echoing the arguments of ICS veterans encountered in Chapter 2. Fulfilling the social status markers of being cosmopolitan could push one up a cultural hierarchy in international society, just as it could push less polished officers down the cultural hierarchy back home in South Block.

This leaves an oddly unoccupied space to be explored where one might expect elaborations from Indian diplomats on the possibilities of an alternative, postcolonial cosmopolitanism. To the extent that postcolonial Indian elites have felt ‘a sense of inadequacy generated by [the] internalisation of Western norms’, as Ashis Nandy has argued,¹⁵³ a certain rejection of the hypocrisies of Western cosmopolitanism within the Foreign Service, too, was perhaps paramount for overcoming the internalized sense of inadequacy. And yet what is striking is that not a single diplomat, among over 80 interviewees, made the connection to an alternative reading of cosmopolitanism grounded in, say, Third Worldism or Nehru’s highly suggestive discourse on “One World”.¹⁵⁴ The sense of tolerance and oneness, which they knew to be missing in the prevalent uses of cosmopolitanism, was available in interactions with the Third World, perhaps most acutely across Africa, where historically, as one left-leaning Stephenian retiree beamed, Indian diplomats were ‘really accepted as real brothers in arms’ in the postcolonial struggle for recognition.¹⁵⁵ Academic work on alternative, decolonial cosmopolitanisms has come up with notions like “coloured cosmopolitanism”, a term which situates the cosmopolitan instincts of Gandhi in a solidarist alliance with African American thinkers struggling against racism and imperialism.¹⁵⁶ However, despite the prevalence of the discourse on solidarity in the imageries of postcolonial international society, the discourse on cosmopolitanism itself only ever appeared in the idioms of European international society.

Perhaps it was precisely the disappointment at discovering the partialities and power imbalances of cosmopolitanism – at just how little space it actually seemed to hold for difference and diversity – that reduced cosmopolitanism into a domestic elite marker in the first place. Perhaps it was too entangled in colonial histories and European notions of an “expansion of international society” for Indian diplomats to connect their postcolonial language of Third World solidarity with a discourse of a cosmopolitanism reconsidered. Cosmopolitanism could not buy much by way of genuine equality in the international system, and so it settled into a scarce personal resource that individual diplomats could use to purchase social standing within the Service and, so they hoped, in their own interactions with global elites.

5.3.2. Caste and race in international society

The ambivalent status of Indian diplomats in the various hierarchies that govern their work has also underpinned their conception of which hierarchies are worth resisting. Here, international racial hierarchies meet with caste hierarchies, showing how global and domestic power

¹⁵² Interview 19.

¹⁵³ Ashis Nandy, ‘The Culture of Indian Politics: A Stock Taking’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 30, no. 1 (1970): 77.

¹⁵⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Volume 19: 16th July–18th October 1952*, ed. Sarvepalli Gopal (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1966), 42.

¹⁵⁵ Interview 33.

¹⁵⁶ Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012); Similarly, Mignolo develops conceptions of cosmopolitanism that transcend ‘a cosmopolitanism that only connects from the centre of the large circle outwards’. See Walter D. Mignolo, ‘The Many Faces of Cosmo-Polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism’, *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 745.

constellations intersect to produce both the elite character and subaltern performativity of Indian diplomacy.

In India's postcolonial reading of the world, international relations have also been race relations.¹⁵⁷ At a time when post-imperial Britain and the segregationist US were only beginning to develop a vocabulary in which to talk about race in the context of a UN human rights agenda, India was assiduously championing the notion that anti-racist advocacy could not afford to respect sovereign boundaries.¹⁵⁸ Fights for global racial equality were not considered accessory to India's interests, as a Ministerial review of India's foreign policy noted in 1970, but instead, '[i]t is also part of the conception of India's national interests to eliminate colonialism, imperialism and racialism', and to lend support to the 'oppressed races and nations of the world'.¹⁵⁹ This meant both providing material assistance to African liberation movements in the form of, for example, medical equipment and clothing, and, in a more traditional diplomatic mode, pressing for decolonization, anti-discrimination measures, and economic sanctions against Apartheid at the United Nations and other international bodies.¹⁶⁰

Yet while anti-racism has been a prominent – albeit understudied¹⁶¹ – facet of Indian diplomacy, Indian diplomats have fought with conviction against anti-casteism making it onto the diplomatic agenda. While the two systems of oppression have their distinct, separate genealogies, social logics, and political contexts, activists and academics have developed elaborate comparisons and solidarities between the two struggles¹⁶² at least since the Dalit reformer Jyotirao Phule dedicated his 1873 book on the fight against Brahminism under the British Raj to those fighting racial discrimination in the US.¹⁶³ Nonetheless, the MEA and members of the IFS have rigorously opposed the proposition of protecting Dalits under the banner of race and descent-based discrimination, and have been using their famous drafting power at the UN to block discussion and inclusion of Scheduled Castes in international conventions or monitoring mechanisms at least since the mid-1970s.¹⁶⁴ A rare occasion on which the imperfect parallels between race and caste were nonetheless forced out into the open was the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism

¹⁵⁷ Nehru, 'Note for Asaf Ali and K.P.S. Menon'.

¹⁵⁸ Cohen, *India*, 87; Pandit, *The Scope of Happiness*, 222–23.

¹⁵⁹ 'A Review of India's Foreign Policy – Document No. 4977', 1970, 'A Review of India's Foreign Policy', FS/70–F/ WII 101(45)/70, NAI.

¹⁶⁰ 'Note from C.D. Chaudhri (Under-Secretary, UN-I)', 22 April 1966, "International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965 – Ratification of India", F/ UI/106/7/66, NAI; 'Oral History Transcript: Apa B. Pant', 22; MEA/UN and Conference Division, 'India's Country Report to the Second World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination', 1981, "Second World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, Genova August 1983", F/ UI/352/60/81, NAI.

¹⁶¹ Davis and Thakur, "An Act of Faith" or a New "Brown Empire"?, 23.

¹⁶² See e.g. Sankaran Krishna, 'A Postcolonial Racial/Spatial Order: Gandhi, Ambedkar, and the Construction of the International', in *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line*, ed. Alexander Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam (London: Routledge, 2014), 151–68; Gyanendra Pandey, *A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste, and Difference in India and the United States* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); Ambrose Pinto, 'UN Conference against Racism: Is Caste Race?', *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 30 (28 July 2001): 2817–20; Deepa S Reddy, 'The Ethnicity of Caste', *Anthropological Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (2005): 543–84; Nico Slate, 'Translating Race and Caste', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 24, no. 1 (2011): 62–79; Anand Teltumbde, 'Race or Caste, Discrimination Is a Universal Concern', *Economic and Political Weekly* 44, no. 34 (2009): 16–18; Suraj Yengde, 'Race, Caste and What It Will Take to Make Dalit Lives Matter', *The Caravan*, 3 July 2020, <https://caravanmagazine.in/essay/race-caste-and-what-it-will-take-to-make-dalit-lives-matter>.

¹⁶³ Jyotirao Phule, *Slavery in the Civilised British Government under the Cloak of Brahmanism (1873)*, trans. P.G. Patil (Bombay: Education Department of the Government of Maharashtra, 1991).

¹⁶⁴ Srivivasan (First Secretary, PMI New York, 'Letter to A.K. Gupta (Director, UN.I/MEA)', 9 April 1975, "International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. Fourth Periodic Report as required under Article 9", F/UI/151/18/75, NAI; Muchkund Dubey (Permanent Representative, UN), 'Letter to J.S. Teja (Additional-Secretary, UN)', 14 August 1983, "Second World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, Genova August 1983", F/UI/352/60/81, NAI.

in Durban. Dealing with race, racial xenophobia and “related intolerance”, the Conference sparked a spirited debate in India about whether caste ought to be tabled for discussion in Durban, as UN officials had done, and Dalit campaigners had long insisted upon.¹⁶⁵ The official Indian line suggested that the UN was mistaken to consider caste a form of descentance-based discrimination, that India had developed sufficient procedures to ameliorate caste discrepancies, and that unlike anti-racist advocacy, which necessitated interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign nations, it would be an affront to Indian sovereignty to debate anti-casteist advocacy in a multilateral setting.¹⁶⁶ In the end, caste was dropped as a category of descentance-based discrimination, but only after Indian representatives threatened to boycott the entire Conference.¹⁶⁷

Those who have studied India’s involvement in multilateral anti-racism diplomacy in depth have concluded that its decades-long insistence on excluding Dalits from the descentance-based framework, under various government coalitions, is not upheld by Government or political parties but rather by a diplomatic consensus generated by the IFS’ career diplomats.¹⁶⁸ What comes out in anonymized interviews, however, is the caste hierarchy that divides the Service into two camps on the topic, and lays bare the importance of caste hierarchies inside the Service to the diplomatic work India does abroad.

Sometimes, it seems, different renditions of India’s national interest run along caste lines. Every non-Dalit officer interviewed on the topic toed the official line with considerable conviction: race was genetic while caste was sociological,¹⁶⁹ the fight against caste discrimination was an internal matter while the fight against race discrimination was an international one.¹⁷⁰ By contrast, ‘all the Dalits within the Service were rooting for it’, sighed a millennial Dalit officer about the proposed inclusion of caste into the anti-discrimination framework.¹⁷¹ ‘I will tell you, as an SC officer, what is denied to me – and you are telling the world that there is no discrimination?’, a retired Dalit diplomat recalled his plea to the colleague in charge of UN affairs in anticipation of the Durban Conference.¹⁷² Reservations meant that Dalits had a place in the Service, but it did not guarantee them a voice: there had been no consultation to draw on the lived experiences or professional opinions of Dalit officials, few decision-making positions on UN affairs ever fell to Dalits to begin with, and even then, it was doubtful whether an officer would have felt at liberty to express a dissenting view to the upper-caste rendition of India’s multilateral anti-discrimination stance.¹⁷³ As a consequence, sometimes representing India as a Dalit meant that ‘you get into tricky situations’ in which, in order to perform your diplomatic duties, you have to ‘tell untruths’ about India’s respect for equality and diversity, one retired multilateralist admitted – noting with a subtly raised

¹⁶⁵ Human Rights Campaign, ‘Press Release: “Campaign of Untouchables and Buddhists of India - Mass Demonstration of Indian Untouchables in London”’, 26 January 1975, “1975-78: Press release and press clippings regarding violation of human rights, also includes problems on human rights on untouchables”, SF/60, Gopal Singh papers, NMML; Ambedkar International Mission (on behalf of eight Dalit organizations), ‘Letter to General Kurt Waldheim (UN Secretary-General)’, 17 September 1978, “1975-78: Press release and press clippings regarding violation of human rights, also includes problems on human rights on untouchables”, SF/60, Gopal Singh papers, NMML.

¹⁶⁶ Shepherd, *Buffalo Nationalism*, 73.

¹⁶⁷ Shiv Visvanathan, ‘The Race for Caste: Prolegomena to the Durban Conference’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 27 (July 2001): 2512.

¹⁶⁸ Dag Erik Berg, ‘Sovereignties, the World Conference against Racism 2001 and the Formation of a Dalit Human Rights Campaign’ (Ceri Sciences Po, 2007), 13, Research in question - No. 20 - April 2007.

¹⁶⁹ This, in itself, is a highly contentious claim. See e.g. Lauren Davenport, ‘The Fluidity of Racial Classifications’, *Annual Review of Political Science* 23, no. 1 (2020): 221–40; Sharjeel Sabir, ‘Chimerical Categories: Caste, Race, and Genetics’, *Developing World Bioethics* 3, no. 2 (2003): 170–77.

¹⁷⁰ Interview 11; Interview 26.

¹⁷¹ Interview 71.

¹⁷² Interview 54.

¹⁷³ Interview 75.

eyebrow that it was important to remain ‘diplomatic’ at all times, including when asked about the topic during an interview.¹⁷⁴

As far as India’s commitment to an egalitarian world order was concerned, then, there were caveats placed on this diplomatic quest which ran along social lines within the Service itself. In interviews, liberal upper-caste diplomats who spoke about the need to redress racial inequalities repeatedly explained that, as progressives, they “did not see caste”.¹⁷⁵ Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd has suggested that India’s ‘ultra-nationalist theoreticians’ suppress international debate on caste because of a worry for India’s global prestige.¹⁷⁶ Yet this worry for prestige (the most generous reading of all possible motivations) has equally, if not more acutely, occupied the upper-caste cosmopolitans for whom caste is a philosophical embarrassment and a marker of the lack of progress in Indian society. This has turned caste into a taboo form of social stratification – one of the very few that Indian diplomats have not sought to equalize in their diplomatic work. The upper-caste diplomacy on descentance-based discrimination has shown, as Bourdieu would have it, that ‘[w]hat is at stake in the struggles about the meaning of the social world is power over the classificatory schemes and systems which are the basis of the representations of the groups and therefore of their mobilization and demobilization’.¹⁷⁷

The dissenting conceptions of which hierarchies ought to be equalized through diplomatic means tie to the particular ways in which race, class, and caste have played themselves out in the history of Indian diplomacy and political life. As Chapter 2 outlined, the Brahminical elites of the ICS had themselves closely observed and personally felt the unequal race relations of the British Raj, when even high-ranking Indian civil servants and dignitaries could not achieve the same standing as the British occupying the land.¹⁷⁸ Thus, the ignominy of racial discrimination was a vivid lived experience for the Indian elite championing anti-racist causes abroad. In fact, it bears mentioning that the crowning jewel of India’s self-conception of its anti-racist diplomacy – its early pioneering of the global fight against Apartheid South-Africa, admirably begun as early as during the first session of the UN General-Assembly in 1946 – was motivated by the plight of Indians, not black South-Africans, in the country.¹⁷⁹ ‘Gandhiji got thrown out of a train in South-Africa’, was the impassioned reply of a recently retired officer, visibly irritated at the notion of caste discrimination being an international issue, to a question about why race was one.¹⁸⁰

By contrast, the need to fight caste discrimination had no roots in the lived experience of most of India’s colonially educated postcolonial elite. Only the lawyer, intellectual, activist, and father of India’s Constitution, B.R. Ambedkar, as a rare Dalit voice in the anti-colonial struggle, had suffered the double indignity of caste discrimination among Indians and racial discrimination across empire.¹⁸¹ The anti-racist idiom championed by India’s historically upper-caste diplomatic elites had no place for caste, because while this elite could relate to the humiliation of a well-spoken, elite-educated Gandhi being thrown off a train in South-Africa, they had no such reference point to empathise with Ambedkar. Ambedkar himself wrote to W.E.B du Bois in 1946, comparing Dalit and African American liberation struggles and raising the possibility of action through the UN:

¹⁷⁴ Interview 67.

¹⁷⁵ Interview 11; Interview 26; Interview 31; Interview 52; Interview 85.

¹⁷⁶ Shepherd, *Buffalo Nationalism*, 74.

¹⁷⁷ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 481.

¹⁷⁸ Shepherd, *Buffalo Nationalism*, 73.

¹⁷⁹ Davis and Thakur, “‘An Act of Faith’ or a New ‘Brown Empire’?”, 23.

¹⁸⁰ Interview 26.

¹⁸¹ Shepherd, *Buffalo Nationalism*, 73.

There is so much similarity between the position of the Untouchables in India and of the position of Negroes in America that the study of the latter is not only natural but necessary. I was very much interested to read that the Negroes of America have filed a petition to the U.N.O. [United Nations Organisation]. The Untouchables of India are also thinking of following suit.¹⁸²

Yet just as upper-caste freedom fighters had once considered Dalit struggles against untouchability a sectarian concern detracting from a national effort,¹⁸³ so too the upper castes of the Foreign Service now seemed to consider the fight against casteism a distraction from India's global fight against descentance-based discrimination. Although it seemed to let down the subaltern that Indian diplomats otherwise so readily evoked, the opposition to Durban-like projects is actually congruent with the performative demands of both sides of the cleft habitus. The quasi-aristocratic mores of European international society are premised on performing elite belonging, which an elevation of Dalit experience sits uncomfortably with, while the postcolonial performance has traditionally involved a professed commitment to egalitarianism, in light of which any conversation around the taboo inequalities of caste at home would have meant losing diplomatic face. The web of international and domestic hierarchies that govern India's readings of international society enable and shape its diplomacy in complex ways.

Conclusion

All diplomats straddle many words. India's position has been distinctive, however. Embedded in inherited imageries of colonial bureaucracy and wedded to classical markers of European diplomacy, its diplomats have traditionally embraced much of what they perceived to be cosmopolitan diplomatic culture with a singular vehemence and skill. At the same time, Indian diplomacy has also reflected its imperial past in a tone of defiance against a Westerncentric world order, in a bid to distinguish an "authentic", postcolonial India from an unequal diplomatic club. Because of the porosity of social ties, the formative experience under the Raj, and the cultural capital that accrued to classically trained liberal arts graduates, this defiance would always coexist with a deep familiarity and fluidity that tied Indian diplomats to the Western practices and networks of diplomacy.

What has ensued is an avant-garde alliance between a performance of a colonially tinted habitus and anti-colonial grandstanding, elite-signalling and allegiances with the powerless, all intensely focused on distinguishing India both within and from old, inherited conceptions of a European international society. Indeed, while in some respects the demands of the two sides of the cleft habitus have been permanently at odds, they have also been mutually dependent on one another. Against the backdrop of questioning Westerncentric policies and terminology, the adherence to the frills of its diplomatic culture has been not so much a paradox as a precondition. It was precisely because, not despite, of India's commitment to an anti-imperialist, Third Worldist and solidarist diplomatic script that its diplomats hued so closely to the style of those they sought to oppose. 'The decision to be different in concept reinforced the resolution to be identical in style', as Moore noted of Non-Aligned diplomats in the early postcolonial era – 'and not for the first time a radical departure in international affairs had a conservative effect on diplomatic behaviour'.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Ambedkar cited in Eleanor Zelliot, 'India's Dalits: Racism and Contemporary Change', *Global Dialogue* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 4.

¹⁸³ Rawat and Satyanarayana, 'Dalit Studies: New Perspectives on Indian History and Society', 8.

¹⁸⁴ Moore, *Third World Diplomats*, 29.

Indian diplomats have also nurtured an ambivalent relationship toward cosmopolitanism as an international ethic. Unlike the understanding of cosmopolitanism as a domestic marker of elite distinction (Chapter 3), cosmopolitanism as an international concept does not afford Indian officers high status in international society. While many were committed to its most broad-stroke, abstract renditions, diplomats considered much of actually existing cosmopolitanism to be Western parochialism masquerading as universalism – a less-than-categorical imperative that demanded world-embracing tolerance and respect from Indian officers while rarely returning the favour. The absence of any elaborations on an alternative “postcolonial cosmopolitanism” shows both a certain social investment on the part of dominant officers in “cosmopolitan capital” as it expresses itself in domestic elite status, and the difficulties of thinking against and past Western hegemonic concepts. At the same time, the upper-caste resistance to anti-casteist diplomacy alongside India’s long-standing commitment to anti-racist diplomacy has shown the limits to India’s own commitment to global equality and solidarity with the subaltern.

Deep continuities mark the balancing acts that have characterised the outward projection of the diplomatic cleft habitus, even as it has encountered exogenous change and endogenous shifts in the nature of its cadres. The various hang-ups about India’s relation to the West, the some-time sense of inferiority coupled with pride in Indian distinctiveness and postcolonial leadership, and the complexities around belonging mirrored for modern times the torn sense of self which K.P.S. Menon had attributed to his fellow ICS officers, speaking of ‘a certain complex, resulting from the unnatural relationship between Great Britain and India, the ruler and the ruled’, which had produced ‘an inferiority complex which, as it often does, took the form of a superiority complex.’¹⁸⁵ However, deep-seated continuities, too, can be ruptured – both because the external environment gives way, and because internal perceptions and preferences change. These ruptures are the topic of the final empirical chapter.

¹⁸⁵ Menon, *Many Worlds*, 53.

6. DE-ELITIFYING COSMOPOLITANISM OR A LESS COSMOPOLITAN ELITE?

Neither the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship, is the goal of human history. And India has been trying to accomplish her task through social regulation of differences on the one hand, and the spiritual recognition of unity on the other.

She has made grave errors in setting up the boundary walls too rigidly between races, in perpetuating in her classifications the results of inferiority; often she has crippled her children's minds and narrowed their lives in order to fit them into her social forms, but for centuries new experiments have been made and adjustments carried out.

[...]

The worldflood has swept over our country, new elements have been introduced, and wider adjustments are waiting to be made.¹

The evolving global balance of power has brought India into a new position in international society, as it is heralded as a “rising power”, and the evolving balance of social and political relations within India is producing new forms of “authenticity”, as a Hindu nationalist reading of Indian difference supplants much of what once defined the ideal Indian diplomat.² One retired diplomat pronounced the arrival of a new India, suspended between an ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ and a ‘spiritual halo’³ – neither of which fit neatly within the two imageries of international society that Indian diplomats have reproduced and enacted over seven decades. As a consequence, the cultural credibility and political salience of both imageries of international society – the old-school European and the radically postcolonial – analysed in the preceding chapters are under challenge, as are the particular ways in which they legitimate and reproduce domestic hierarchies.

This chapter considers the ways in which the twin transformation of India's changing global stature and its changing domestic power constellations are creating fractures in the traditional conception of the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus. It asks what cultural capital might look like beyond these traditional conceptions, and who within the Foreign Service possesses it. In Bourdieu's vocabulary,

¹ Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism (1917)* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 35–36.

² Hindu nationalism itself has roots in pre-Independence India, as does the Hindutva brand that is at issue in this chapter. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar wrote the seminal work defining the contours of Hindutva as early as 1923 – a pamphlet which is better known as *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*, reissued in 1928. However, it cannot be meaningfully argued that Hindu nationalism or Hindutva impinged on the workings of the Foreign Service before the election of Prime Minister Modi in 2014.

³ Interview 4.

the traditional cleft habitus now produces “misfires”: occasions on which the habitus clashes with its environment and seems to have outlived the conditions in which it was originally assembled.⁴ With outward conditions in flux, are new forms of habitus emerging, or indeed, desirable? ‘We are all creatures of our circumstances [...] and the circumstances of India’ and ‘you cannot separate the human from the professional’, a diplomat of an early 1970s batch ruminated, concluding that perhaps a new century of global governance and a new kind of India and called for a new kind of diplomat.⁵

The first part of this chapter considers changes brought about by the dawn of an increasingly “post-Western” world in the early 21st century, asking what the marker of a “rising India” might do to the performance of the diplomatic cleft habitus. It argues that while an increasingly multipolar world is rendering the imagery of European international society ever more redundant, the imagery of postcolonial international society has, perhaps counterintuitively for many, been far less challenged by these shifts. Even against the backdrop of India’s own economic liberalization since the early 1990s, the challenge to a Third Worldist, postcolonial reading of international society has been mitigated by the deep scepticism among senior diplomats in particular toward market-driven narratives of India’s “rise”.

The second part attempts a first draft of a moving target, and a process still in its early phases: the effects of saffronization on the Foreign Service.⁶ While it is debatable whether Prime Minister Modi’s supposedly transformative tenure has actually defied any basic tenets of India’s foreign policy since he came into office in 2014,⁷ diplomatically, Hindutva ideology fits with neither side of the diplomatic cleft habitus, and seems to reject both visions of international society that the Foreign Service has operated by. It cares little for elite, colonially tainted imageries perpetuated by India’s Anglophile classes, but it also rejects the narratives of a diverse postcolonial society. The latter represents a revision of how to demarcate Indian distinctiveness in international society: away from a Nehruvian postcolonial Indianness premised on elite-managed diversity toward a saffronization of the Indian Self, premised on uniform civilizational and religious identity. The debate around cosmopolitanism – both as an ideal and a lived experience – crystallises some of the dynamics that underpin the global backlash against the supposedly rootless “global elites” who stand apart from the supposedly authentic, real “people”.

⁴ Bourdieu, ‘Habitus’, 31.

⁵ Interview 12.

⁶ Saffronization - alluding to the colour saffron used in Hindutva symbols - refers to attempts by Hindutva-supporting entities to reimagine India as a Hindu nation, both by constructing an imaginary history of India defined not by its inherent diversity but Hindu unity and dominance, and by refashioning political institutions to reflect the ideals of Hindu majoritarianism. See e.g. Edward Anderson and Christophe Jaffrelot, ‘Hindu Nationalism and the “Saffronisation of the Public Sphere”’: An Interview with Christophe Jaffrelot’, *Contemporary South Asia* 26, no. 4 (2018): 468–482.

⁷ Rajesh Basrur, ‘Modi’s Foreign Policy Fundamentals: A Trajectory Unchanged’, *International Affairs* 93, no. 1 (2017): 7–26; Sumit Ganguly, ‘Has Modi Truly Changed India’s Foreign Policy?’, *The Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2017): 131–143; Manjari Chatterjee Miller and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, ‘Pragmatism in Indian Foreign Policy: How Ideas Constrain Modi’, *International Affairs* 93, no. 1 (1 January 2017): 27–49.

6.1. Misfires in a post-Western world

Since the early 21st century, following on the heels of the end of the Cold War and the liberalization of the Indian economy in the early 1990s, narratives of a “rising India” have complicated the imageries of international society that the Foreign Service has lived by. The diplomatic practices of old European international society look ever more out of place in a complex multipolar world, whose cultural practices are less underwritten by Western conventions posing as universal ideals. As Yosso notes, chastising Bourdieu for assuming a natural hierarchy between different social markers and skills, it is not that marginalized groups lack cultural knowledge or resources but that their forms of capital are not recognized as such.⁸ Hindi Medium Schools are not naturally inferior to English Convent Schools, the gated housing colonies of South Delhi are not inherently more capable of raising future diplomats than other milieus. These markers are only rendered dominant and desirable within a given cultural and social context. Even the most normalized hierarchies of capital can be contested and rearranged. The possibilities of a post-Western era of diplomacy provide occasions for precisely these kinds of rearrangements and are discussed below.

Yet those studying India’s rise have also tended to read the geopolitical shift as a sign of the growing irrelevance of India’s insistence on postcolonial readings of international society – wrongly, as this chapter will seek to argue. It is here we must begin, if only because this contestation seems to have consumed most of the analytical oxygen in the debate on India’s rise, as India’s self-ascribed “realist” scholars have sought to convince the world that India has closed the chapter on its postcoloniality, trading its protestor identity for that of a superpower. The following will be a qualified argument to the contrary: the imagery of postcolonial international society has proven itself remarkably resilient in the face of a post-Western age of rising powers. As the strange cultural afterlives of European international society have shown, a habitus is not automated to respond to systemic or structural changes. And so it has been with the premature epitaphs for a postcolonial international society, whose rules and ideals do not mechanically expire as India reaches a set GDP figure or wins a prestigious post in the global governance architecture.

6.1.1. Untimely pronouncements of post-postcoloniality

The prominent scholarship on India’s rise has a habit of pushing immeasurable elements out of the frame, its currency a litany of “objective standards” that might predict India’s diplomatic behaviour by calculating the precise coordinates of its strengthening military, economic, or institutional capacities.⁹ Unspoken amidst such standards is the realist hope that India may finally be socialized into behaving “normally” – although the boundary conditions of normalcy are never ontologically defined or epistemologically justified.¹⁰ Accordingly, Indian diplomats are celebrated

⁸ Yosso, ‘Whose Culture Has Capital?’, 76.

⁹ Sanjay Baru, ‘Strategic Consequences of India’s Economic Performance’, in *Globalization and Politics in India*, ed. Baldev Raj Nayar (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 321–45; Bharat Karnad, *Why India Is Not a Great Power (Yet)* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015); Daniel Markey, ‘Developing India’s Foreign Policy “Software”’, *Asia Policy* 8, no. 1 (2009): 73–96; C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India’s New Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Viking, 2003); Ashley J Tellis, ‘India as a New Global Power: An Action Agenda for the United States’, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 2005, Washington, DC.

¹⁰ Relatedly, there is a strong argument for reconsidering India’s rise through a social constructivist paradigm, put forward in e.g. Sullivan de Estrada, *The Evolution of India’s Great Power Identity - Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*.

for any signs of shedding their ‘anti-Western ideologies in favour of a pragmatic foreign policy’¹¹ and reprimanded whenever they seem to stray their course.

In fact, some of the academic puzzlement around India’s rise is arguably down to the proclivity of prominent scholars to ridicule Indian diplomats, prescription masquerading as description. India’s uncooperative maneuvering is read not as a developing country defending itself against hegemonic institutions but simply as embarrassingly dissonant with its newfound status as a superpower. Harsh Pant has charged Indian diplomats with ‘intellectual laziness and apathy’,¹² and Sunila Kale castigates their ‘lofty ideals of anti-imperialism’.¹³ India should abdicate its anachronistic moralism and engage with the international system as though it had already arrived at the club of great powers. Or as Edward Luce, writing from his vantage point as South Asia Bureau Chief for the *Financial Times*, wryly remarked in 2007: ‘It would be tempting to conclude that India is rising in spite of its diplomacy’.¹⁴ Sumit Ganguly even entitled an article ‘India’s foreign policy grows up’,¹⁵ as though a postcolonial international society was a fabled never-neverland to mature out of.

However, what the concept of the diplomatic cleft habitus gives us is an understanding that socialization is not a process that suddenly began at the end of the Cold War or with India’s gathering strength. The socialization of Indian diplomats into imbibing the “correct habitus” has structured Indian diplomatic behaviour all along. These commitments complicate the project of ‘crossing the Rubicon’, as C. Raja Mohan would have it, into some promised land of realist power-projection.¹⁶ In fact, evidence for this crossing is sparse, at least for now.¹⁷ And it is precisely the tenacity of visions of postcolonial international society, founded on anti-imperialism and Third World solidarities, that has made it difficult for many diplomats to accept the cultural grammar of “rising India”.

Thus, Indian diplomats are not about to abandon a foundational part of their habitus on cue. One stalwart of climate diplomacy made the disconnect explicit, insisting that while since about the early 1990s, and certainly after the global financial crisis began in 2008, a great transformation of international economic power relations had taken place, this ought to change very little for, say, Indian climate diplomacy – ‘no, India does not need to change its traditional stance’, because amid all the punditry and lobbying, for Indian diplomats, ‘development is the *sine qua non*’.¹⁸ A retired Nehruvian officer described the ideal Indian diplomat as somebody who ‘understands India’s placement in the international order’ and was unswayed by the rise rhetoric, which was ‘all nonsense’.¹⁹ A recently retired multilateralist and defence specialist pointed out with a world-weary frown that allowing India to abandon its Third Worldist emphasis, as realists would have it, would itself be the realists’ worst charge against the diplomatic elite: naïve.²⁰

¹¹ C Raja Mohan, ‘Rising India: Partner in Shaping the Global Commons?’, *The Washington Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2010): 133–48; Malone, *Does the Elephant Dance?*, 53.

¹² Harsh V Pant, ‘A Rising India’s Search for a Foreign Policy’, *Orbis* 53, no. 2 (2009): 262.

¹³ Sunila S Kale, ‘Inside out: India’s Global Reorientation’, *India Review* 8, no. 1 (2009): 57.

¹⁴ Edward Luce, *In Spite of the Gods: The Rise of Modern India* (Abacus Books, 2007), 288.

¹⁵ Sumit Ganguly, ‘India’s Foreign Policy Grows up’, *World Policy Journal* 20, no. 4 (2004): 41–47; Karnad, *Why India Is Not a Great Power (Yet)*; Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*.

¹⁶ Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*.

¹⁷ If anything, India sometimes appears to be moving in the opposite direction. In language that suggests a misfire of some sort, Narlikar speaks of the ‘even more anachronistic’ behaviour of Indian diplomats in international trade negotiations since its liberalization project in the early 1990s, as their ‘consistently defensive, nay-saying’ tenor invites diplomatic impasse and interpretations of India as a diplomatic pariah. See Narlikar, ‘Peculiar Chauvinism or Strategic Calculation?’, 64, 60.

¹⁸ Interview 15, March 2019.

¹⁹ Interview 25.

²⁰ Interview 24.

Among the old hands in particular, “superpower” was a suspect category precisely because it has been framed as signalling a closure of India’s postcolonial project. A diplomat interviewed by Manjari Chatterjee Miller in 2013 declared the very idea of India’s rise an imposed Western construct, designed to lure India out of its insistence on prioritizing development and poverty alleviation, and weaved into ‘a rope to hang ourselves’.²¹ During the interviews in Delhi in 2019, too, there were few committed takers for the narrative of India’s rise. ‘I never felt comfortable’ with it, declared a former Indian Consul-General in San Francisco, charged with promoting emerging Indian technologies in the United States – the narrative itself was preserved for ‘investment bankers in Las Vegas’, with few true believers inside the Service.²² A former diplomat who later served in an advisory governmental capacity called the narrative a derivative of “the India Shining Syndrome”, in reference to the ill-gotten marketing slogan of the Indian Government in 2004, which drew widespread ridicule for portraying India as a land of economic prosperity.²³ ‘Not everyone is in a position of privilege like us’, the officer chastised, noting that India was not the sole preserve of ‘your IITs, your IIMs’ but also belonged to ‘the 200 million [who] go to bed hungry.’ It is as though senior officers felt it an offense to go against the pedagogies of their district training.

Even the story of India’s bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) can be read many ways. Its decision in 1994 to sidestep collective efforts to reform the Council and seek a seat for itself has usually been interpreted as emblematic of India’s move from solidarist diplomacy to a diplomacy of singular striving.²⁴ This move ‘signifies a willingness to think of yourself as a power’, a former Indian UN veteran insisted.²⁵ Such willingness arguably made solidarity hard to practice. In fact, India has been seen to neglect the L-69 alliance of developing countries in favour of a new coalition, the G-4, forged in 2005 to lobby for a permanent seat for India, Germany, Japan, and Brazil.²⁶ Opportunistic collaboration with two developed nations and one regional hegemon perhaps makes it appear as though India no longer feels itself compelled by a postcolonial vision of international society.

At the same time, an underreported story of the bid is just how internally divided the Service is on whether the project for a permanent seat is particularly significant, or even wise.²⁷ It might also not signal the kind of move away from developmentalist, Third World values that many commentators have inferred it to. ‘You don’t have to sacrifice your values’ to sit on the UNSC, the multilateralist insistent on India’s ability to think of itself as a power specified;²⁸ a former Permanent Representative at the UN Headquarters in New York, similarly, distinguished India’s bid by insisting that India was uniquely placed to be a voice for the developing world.²⁹ India, in the visions of its multilateralists, intended to become a permanent protester inside the halls of power. The bid did not necessarily signify a departure from the ideals of the cleft habitus, as much as it signified a willingness to stretch the contours of the original habitus to accommodate new diplomatic projects. Arguing for a permanent seat during the Eighth Round of Intergovernmental

²¹ Manjari Chatterjee Miller, ‘India’s Feeble Foreign Policy: A Would-Be Great Power Resists Its Own Rise’, *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 3 (2013): 14.

²² Interview 22.

²³ Interview 52.

²⁴ Rohan Mukherjee and David M Malone, ‘India and the UN Security Council: An Ambiguous Tale’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 48, no. 29 (20 July 2013): 110–17; Manish S Dabhade, ‘India’s Pursuit of United Nations Security Council Reforms’, *Observer Research Foundation Occasional Paper: India and Global Governance*, December 2017.

²⁵ Interview 11.

²⁶ Oliver Stuenkel, ‘Leading the Disenfranchised or Joining the Establishment? India, Brazil, and the UN Security Council’, *Carta Internacional* 5, no. 1 (2010): 53–63.

²⁷ Interview 6; Interview 11.

²⁸ Interview 11.

²⁹ Interview 67.

Negotiations on UNSC Reform in 2011–2012, India’s Permanent Representative Hardeep Singh Puri thundered against the P-5 for denying ‘the dispossessed of this world a voice’.³⁰ Quoting Machiavelli to his UN colleagues, he declared: ‘The mass is wiser and more constant than the Prince’.³¹ India could shrink itself to join the wretched of the Earth, even when vying for one of the most powerful positions in global governance.

This is not to say that cracks in the habitus of a Third World diplomat have not appeared along the way, but rather to put these cracks and their magnitude into perspective. A quiet and unceremonious departure from a stance rooted in solidarity, postcolonial authenticity and anti-imperialism has been afoot for decades, mostly, it sometimes seems, out of fatigue rather than change of heart. ‘Breaking out of the Nehruvian mode’, one multilateralist was convinced, India was no longer ‘uncomfortable with power politics’, the rejection of which had once been an ‘article of faith’ for the Foreign Service.³² Some were even a little offended by Chatterjee Miller’s research on India “resisting its own rise”, even though it was their own colleagues who had provided the vivid opposition in confidential interviews.³³ In an age of rising powers – with new contenders vying for incumbent status – the insistence on India’s outsider identity, some felt, no longer lent it the kind of moral authority it once had.³⁴ A few diplomats tied a sense of ‘greater confidence’ in their own diplomatic behaviour with the liberalization of the Indian economy in the early 1990s, which had allowed India to assume a ‘footing of equality’ with the West’.³⁵ ‘I belong to an India that contributes a lot to the IMF’, one millennial recruit from a mid-2010s batch argued, contrasting his experience with his seniors’ memories of the balance of payments crisis which resulted in India’s 1991 bailout by the International Monetary Fund – so he was, consequently, ‘more confident in flaunting the things that your culture has’.³⁶ Was there a chance, in this new power constellation, to prove one’s belonging simply by excelling by the material metrics of incumbent powers?

What may sound like a generational divide – old-school Nehruvians versus pragmatist millennials – often seemed to be a debate between those who fit the original diplomatic cleft habitus and those who did not. The narrative of a rise sat most uneasily precisely among the urban liberal arts graduates with left-leaning sympathies at the cultural helm of the Service, one of whom chided the uncouth status-consciousness among some of his supposedly power-hungry colleagues.³⁷ Even shifts that are usually read in the register of universalistic ideologies – such as the battles between socialism and capitalism – were felt as a sociological divide inside the diplomatic corps. One frustrated Additional-Secretary who joined the Service after some overtures in the business world declared that the batches of the 1960s and 1970s had ‘destroyed the Service, because ‘everything had to be socialist’ and ‘everyone had to adhere to certain norms and ideals’ simply because this was, he insisted, the kind of Nehruvian propaganda that had been endemic at their elite liberal arts

³⁰ Permanent Representation of India in New York, ‘Statement by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, at the Eighth Round of Intergovernmental Negotiations on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Council (Improvement in Working Methods of the Security Council)’, 2 May 2012, <https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/pdf/uploadpdf/33889ind2021.pdf>.

³¹ Permanent Representation of India in New York, ‘Intervention by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Representative, at the Informal Meeting (Closed) of the Plenary on the Intergovernmental Negotiations on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Council’, 2 March 2011, <https://www.pminewyork.gov.in/pdf/uploadpdf/75808ind1832.pdf>.

³² Interview 11.

³³ Interview 1; Interview 6; Interview 12.

³⁴ Interview 3; Interview 8; Interview 11.

³⁵ Interview 22; Also Interview 14.

³⁶ Interview 65.

³⁷ Interview 6.

colleges.³⁸ To the extent that the diplomatic attitudes are slowly evolving on the question of India's rise, this might be not only a considered response to India's changing geopolitical coordinates but also an outcome of the changing balance of cultural power inside the Foreign Service.

1.1.1. The overdue elegy for the European club

Although diplomacy has long ceased to be a vocation for the nobility, or indeed the monopoly of Europeans, the preceding chapters have borne testimony to the resilience of the imagery of European international society, as it has lived its cultural afterlife in the wake of decolonization in the beliefs and behaviours of Indian diplomats. In a vignette that politely glosses over the racial hierarchies of this imagery, Ambassador P.L. Bhandari in 2013 crowned the diplomatic club envisioned under European order 'the best club that ever existed – founded by the Congress of Vienna, developed by the wealth and conveniences of the industrial revolution, not yet affected by the political and social changes that have finally upset the applecart'.³⁹ What is falling by the wayside now is much of the exclusive glamour that once attached itself to this vision of international society. For the advent of a post-Western era could promise a double-democratization of sorts: a democratization of who gets to define the high culture of international society, and a concomitant possibility that this rethinking may make the Foreign Service's "internal Others" less suspect in the eyes of a diplomatic elite that has long sought to belong in European international society.

The imageries of elitism that came with European international society were always racialized, but insofar as elite Indian diplomats could buy second-class belonging in its cultural hierarchies through the performance of an Anglophile, elite-educated habitus, it seemed to hold its own charms. These charms now seemed difficult for many to let go of. The stature of a diplomatic generalist was tied to images of the 'glamour' of diplomacy – a word that kept longingly reappearing in interviews as Indian diplomats described their reasons for joining the Service and a characteristic which, as the diplomats lamented, no longer seemed to capture its culture.⁴⁰ The idealized Indian diplomat had been defined by what one Delhiite liberal arts graduate Joint-Secretary, in grieving, remembered as 'the colourful, expansive, old-world figures' who had 'that kind of wit'.⁴¹ Yet now, a certain 'aura' around these erudite, well-read diplomatic elites was receding, one retired officer observed with some melancholy, casting blame on the "democratization" both of his Service and of the practices of diplomacy at large.⁴²

The habitus of a worldly diplomat, comfortable in elite circles across the world, also no longer seems quite as worldly as it once had appeared.⁴³ A powerful illustration of these fractures is the

³⁸ Interview 70.

³⁹ Bhandari, *How Not to Be a Diplomat*, 1.

⁴⁰ Interview 3; Interview 12; Interview 15, March 2019; Interview 17; Interview 29; Interview 38; Interview 52; Interview 57.

⁴¹ Interview 57.

⁴² Interview 55.

⁴³ There are also bureaucratic turf wars afoot that are threatening the stature and role of Indian Foreign Service officers. It is a truism of diplomatic studies that career diplomats no longer have a monopoly on diplomacy, as non-governmental and subnational actors as well as Ministries not historically associated with foreign policy become ever more involved in an increasingly contested arena, and the need for technical or specialist expertise on topics like climate change, nuclear policy or cyber security impinges on the original conception of diplomacy as the domain of well-read generalists. In an ever more complex world, as one proud Stephanian generalist mourned, 'the luxury of being a generalist is gone' – a luxury whose loss and hastened demise at the hands of standing committees and public commentators the Service has long disdained. In India, these changes in the roles of diplomats have meant a push for lateral hires at Joint-Secretary level from the Home Services as well as fixed-term consultants from the

evolving role of English – a repository of cultural capital once jealously guarded by the Foreign Service, whose place is now being rethought in an increasingly diverse, post-Western world. If their superiors had believed that English was an end in itself, millennial officers were partial to a more pragmatist argument. A British-educated member of the mid-2010s batches was pleased to observe ‘a growing recognition that English serves a functional purpose, it does not buy you esteem’ – ‘diplomacy is not just about speaking good English and having a certain background’.⁴⁴ ‘People in New York speak bad English!’, one early-2010s batch officer once stationed at the UN exclaimed – ‘the world has changed’.⁴⁵ To drive this point home, her and some younger colleagues would sometimes smuggle intentionally incorrect English expressions into communications with Stephanian superiors to ridicule their ‘obsession’ with the language.⁴⁶ ‘In a world of information overflow, clarity is key’, one Additional-Secretary noted with evident glee; and in this ‘new paradigm’ of diplomacy, there was less need for eloquent generalists with a liberal arts degree and an embellished English vocabulary.⁴⁷

The habits of the cosmopolitan class can also evolve to match an increasingly post-Western world. If the old imagery of international society has reflected an old Europeanized hierarchy of tastes, and the Foreign Service has historically equated “social graces” with customs in its most-coveted “A-postings”, then the notion of social graces might change as the beliefs about what constitutes A-postings evolve.⁴⁸ China’s ascendancy, for example, might mean the expansion of an etiquette of forks and knives to chopsticks. Diplomatic manners, in the 21st century, are ‘not just French food and wine, it’s also not just Westernized’, as one Francophile Stephanian Additional-Secretary hastened to add to his description of diplomatic skills.⁴⁹ ‘Cosmopolitanism itself has changed’, one recently retired multilateralist declared – a ‘new kind of cosmopolitanism’ could perhaps not only come to embrace the Global South, but, with the decline of Western hegemony, even revolve around it.⁵⁰ True, the term had once by historical necessity bounded itself within a heavy Western-centrism, but Indian diplomats today were ‘less diffident in following the stereotype’ which once governed a habitus ‘Westernized in approach and habits’, one former Foreign Secretary gauged.⁵¹ The ‘wine-drinking liberal classes’ are not naturally more cosmopolitan than anybody else, as one lively Additional-Secretary from outside their circles pointed out.⁵² Indeed, it is notable that the

private or academic sector – a push spearheaded by the Lok Sabha Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, chaired by Shashi Tharoor, in 2016. For broader analysis of the changing diplomatic landscape, see e.g. A.F. Cooper and B. Hocking, ‘Governments, Non-Governmental Organisations and the Re-Calibration of Diplomacy’, *Global Society* 14, no. 3 (2000): 361–376; Richard Langhorne, ‘The Diplomacy of Non-State Actors’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 16, no. 2 (1 June 2005): 331–39; For India-specific debates on generalists and specialists, as well as proposals for lateral hires and bureaucratic changes in recruitment requirements, see e.g. Sanya Dhingra and Srijan Shukla, ‘India Wants to Be Vishwa Guru but IFS Gets Too Few Diplomats to Take Us There’, *ThePrint* (blog), 17 August 2020, <https://theprint.in/india/governance/india-wants-to-be-vishwa-guru-but-ifs-gets-too-few-diplomats-to-take-us-there/481684/>; Marthand Jha, ‘Revamping the Indian Foreign Service’, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 11 April 2017, https://idsa.in/idsacomments/revamping-the-indian-foreign-service_mjha_110417; Lok Sabha Standing Committee on External Affairs, ‘Recruitment, Structure and Capacity-Building of IFS Cadre, Including Need for a Separate UPSC Examination for Cadre, Mid-Career Entry and in-Service Training and Orientation - Twelfth Report’, August 2016, http://164.100.47.193/lssccommittee/External%20Affairs/16_External_Affairs_12.pdf.

⁴⁴ Interview 76; Also Interview 63.

⁴⁵ Interview 80.

⁴⁶ How much the attitudes are actually shifting is a complicated question: one eloquent Stephanian who in an interview had made similar arguments about language elitism and the purely functional role of English was himself a target of these pranks. The ideals and cultural capital that animate Indian diplomats may not always meet the modernizing impressions they feel compelled to relay to outsiders.

⁴⁷ Interview 70; Also Interview 36; Interview 73.

⁴⁸ Interview 44.

⁴⁹ Interview 56.

⁵⁰ Interview 11.

⁵¹ Interview 45.

⁵² Interview 70.

more representative batches have brought more strict vegetarians and teetotallers into the Service⁵³ – one retired Stephanian noted with some alarm in his voice that they were even beginning to frown upon etiquette training on wines.⁵⁴ Those for whom indulgences like wine were an alien marker of Indian urbanity and foreign custom were convinced that the insistence on creating wine connoisseurs out of Indian diplomats was a vestige of the old school of diplomacy, shackled to the West, which modern Indian diplomats need not abide by.⁵⁵ In this realm, the shifts in international hierarchies align with latent changes in the cultural hierarchies inside the Service.

Some even ventured to turn the habitus on its head, suggesting that the insularity cultivated by Anglophone education and elite backgrounds, once legitimated by its family resemblance with dominant European culture, was an obstacle in a world edging into a post-Western era.⁵⁶ Younger diplomats who themselves fit all the appropriate elite markers had learned a most millennial performance: they kept “recognizing their own privilege” when giving what they feared may be perceived as elitist answers, “called out” the insufficient liberalism and openness of their superiors, and self-policed their own answers for ‘essentializing markers’ when talking about less privileged colleagues.⁵⁷ The new batches, liberal elite officers were careful to acknowledge in an idiom that reproduced tropes of untouched Indian authenticity, were ‘far more attuned to realities of life’ outside the Anglophile circles who had once bound India to the mores of European international society.⁵⁸ A young Under-Secretary from outside India’s traditionally dominant classes assumed a more combative tone: ‘those that used to form part of an elite club – their monopoly is broken’.⁵⁹

Those who do not fit a dominant habitus, Bourdieu has been telling us all along, tend to seek to imbibe the manners and practices of those who do. However, he pointed out, they also tend to resent the pretensions which they associate with the dominant, however much they feel compelled to mimic them.⁶⁰ With the desirability of the dominant habitus with its “worldly” performances now in question, this resentment has finally found a functional justification. This allows for the possibility of cultural rebellion: should the dominated seek to join the dominant group without abiding by the prevailing definitions of distinction, they put in play the very principles by which fields operate and habitus is embodied. And should such rebellions become more systematized, ‘dominant individuals may fall into the dominated poles of the field’.⁶¹ In such moments, new ideals and priorities can be fashioned to support and legitimate new kinds of hierarchies.

Indeed, the changing composition of the Indian Foreign Service may not clash with an elite world of European-born diplomacy, as traditional diplomats have feared, but work in alignment with a new set of emerging priorities that themselves speak to the passing of asynchronous imageries of international society. One rising star of a late-1990s batch believed that the more representative batches brought with them a different set of professional priorities and skills which were far more in tune with the evolving modalities of diplomatic practice.⁶² The emblematic dichotomy of European international society which divided the world into spheres of “high” and “low” diplomacy struggled to stand the test of time. For if India was to compete for status in the age of rising powers, it needed technological and commercial diplomacy to leverage its strengths. These kinds of diplomacy are often taken more seriously by the more representative batches, who have

⁵³ Interview 33; Interview 58; Interview 59; Interview 65; Interview 73.

⁵⁴ Interview 33.

⁵⁵ Interview 58.

⁵⁶ Interview 17; Interview 33; Interview 38; Interview 45; Interview 49; Interview 62; Interview 70.

⁵⁷ Interview 56; Interview 59; Interview 82.

⁵⁸ Interview 28.

⁵⁹ Interview 65.

⁶⁰ Reed-Danahay, *Locating Bourdieu*, 111.

⁶¹ Steinmetz, ‘Bourdiesian Field Theory’, 612.

⁶² Interview 83.

had less time to imbibe the Service's classical disdain for matters of "low diplomacy" (discussed in Chapter 5). 'Down-to-earth people' from India's interior did not consider the project of material advancement taboo or beneath them, a Dalit officer argued in celebration of the Service's democratization – 'a person like me could grasp that commercial work was important'.⁶³ The elite performances of anti-materialism matched the practices and pretensions of old European international society, but were looking ever more alien in a world in which India was seeking to outgrow rather than mirror the West.

There may be some truth to the remark of a retired multilateralist looking at the generations growing up after him: instead of globalization and international cooperation rendering the world more homogenous by the generation, Indian diplomats joining the Service now have 'far less in common with the West' than their seniors.⁶⁴ And yet this change need not be read, as it so often has, as a form of decline, making Indian diplomats less capable of meeting their foreign counterparts on an equal footing.⁶⁵ In fact, one recently retired multilateralist read this change as a broader sign of the democratization of global governance: there was no longer one dominant 'Anglicised' model to follow in a seemingly more multipolar world.⁶⁶

Against this backdrop of a possible double-democratization of sorts – both of the cultures of international society and the culture inside the Service – cosmopolitanism, too, might become something bigger, almost emancipatory. Could there be space for more inclusive practices of cosmopolitanism in a world where its performance no longer needed to signify adherence to a Western aesthetic or its political supremacy? And yet, just as the arrival of a post-Western world with its changing hierarchies and dispositions was beginning to make it possible to truly rethink cosmopolitanism, a political ideology that rejects cosmopolitanism outright has captured the highest office in the land.

1.2. Saffronizing the Foreign Service

1.2.1. Trading solidarity for saffron

Nehru cast his shadow over Indian diplomatic thinking long and wide, and the core tenets of his India – secular, diverse, egalitarian – went virtually unchallenged after his passing.⁶⁷ Even the BJP Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee (1998–2004) once described himself as a Nehruvian – meaning, argued one former diplomat, that officers wedded to the founding principles of the Service were not challenged in their beliefs in any significant way until very recently.⁶⁸ The election of a Hindu majoritarian, nationalistic government under the Premiership of Narendra Modi in 2014 has, however, put these commitments in question, along with much of how the imageries of

⁶³ Interview 49; Also Interview 78.

⁶⁴ Interview 11.

⁶⁵ The point about a post-Western world can be overblown, however. As many frustrated officers discussed, a European posting continues to be seen as a sign of merit on one's resume even as Europe's importance to India continues its arguable decline. Interview 7; Interview 12; Interview 25.

⁶⁶ Interview 11.

⁶⁷ Pratap Bhanu Mehta, 'Still under Nehru's Shadow? The Absence of Foreign Policy Frameworks in India', *India Review* 8, no. 3 (13 August 2009): 209–33.

⁶⁸ Interview 43.

international society have functioned over almost seven decades.⁶⁹ And if Nehru was a towering figure, Modi, too, has striven to become one: while the Foreign Service's influence on foreign-policy making has long ebbed and flowed in tandem with changing governments,⁷⁰ the concentration of powers in the Prime Minister's Office under Modi has been notable even against this checkered record.⁷¹ Under the Hindutva regime, the diplomatic cleft habitus is delegitimized both because Anglophile elites are scorned as insufficiently Indian and because the left-wing sympathies, secular values and Nehruvian presentations of the "St Stephen's type" are seen as the wrong kind of Indianness. Both imageries of international society, then, sit uncomfortably with the Hindutva project.

The nativist turn is of course not peculiar to India alone. Indian diplomats recognised this, drawing parallels to a global tide of nationalism, isolationism, and revolts against perceived elites from Trump in the United States to Brexit in the United Kingdom, and the *gilets jaunes* protests sweeping across France – currents which had rendered the notion of cosmopolitanism 'a very loaded question' the world over, as a retired officer anxiously put it.⁷² In a global age of identitarian movements, former Ambassador Paramjit Sahai writes, India too, is faced with a reactionary challenge to the 'cherished values of democracy, pluralism and secularism, which has come to be defined as the "Idea of India"'.⁷³ These reactionary tendencies are also an assault on much of what Indian diplomats have been expected to stand for.

In its diplomatic garb, the Hindu majoritarian turn challenges the diplomatic imperative to represent a diverse, secular India, which stands as a beacon of a syncretic postcoloniality. Slowly, the blurry edges of ambiguous Indian "authenticity", purposefully ill-defined, are being drawn in sharper strokes: a once almost ethereal conversation about "Indian culture" is, one Muslim officer argued, becoming a conversation about "blood and soil".⁷⁴ The Hindutva accents on diplomatic life involve, in the words of one recently retired senior Ambassador, 'going back to more quote-unquote Indian aspects' of diplomacy: a reassertion of India's "civilizational" identity and Hinduism, expressed in annual diplomatic practices like the celebration of *Kumbh Mela*, a major religious festival.⁷⁵ Since 2014, there has in fact been a proliferation of Hindu events held at or sponsored by Indian embassies, including those organized by the paramilitary Hindu-nationalist organization *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS),⁷⁶ even though these have met with 'immediate backlash' from the Service's religious minorities, one officer noted.⁷⁷ In the polemical rendering of the BBC foreign affairs correspondent Ashis Ray, after 2014, 'senior diplomats began to look over their shoulders, RSS activists were planted at Embassies and High Commissions and local loyalists of Modi started bossing over pliant or petrified Heads of Mission'.⁷⁸ The "soft power" emphasis

⁶⁹ Despite protestations from diplomats themselves that their Service had always stayed out of politics much more than the Home Services, there is nothing inherently new about the Foreign Service's politicization. Jawaharlal Nehru's intimate involvement already tied the executive branch to the Service from its very beginnings. The Emergency of 1975-1979 under Indira Gandhi introduced the concept of committed bureaucracy to the Service, and Indian diplomats have often seen benefits to staying loyal to either the Congress Party or, more recently, the BJP. See e.g. Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 177.

⁷⁰ Benner, *Structure of Decision*, 202; Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 199, 241, 252; Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, 117.

⁷¹ James Manor, 'A Precarious Enterprise? Multiple Antagonisms during Year One of the Modi Government', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38, no. 4 (2015): 737.

⁷² Interview 7.

⁷³ Sahai, *Indian Cultural Diplomacy: Celebrating Pluralism in a Globalized World*, 39.

⁷⁴ Interview 7.

⁷⁵ Interview 3.

⁷⁶ The RSS ("National Volunteer Organisation") is a mass Hindu nationalist, paramilitary organization with close links to the governing BJP-party. See e.g. Walter Andersen and Shridhar D Damle, *Messengers of Hindu Nationalism: How the RSS Reshaped India* (London: Hurst & Company, 2018).

⁷⁷ Interview 52.

⁷⁸ Ashis Ray, 'Has the "Foreign Service" Declined?', *National Herald*, 14 July 2020, <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/opinion/has-the-foreign-service-declined>.

on yoga – at India’s initiative, the UN has observed International Yoga Day since 2014 – portrays India as a ‘benign and beneficial cultural force in global affairs’ while also employing a globally popular phenomenon to normalize some “softer” tenets of Hindutva cultural-nationalist discourse.⁷⁹ One officer who had once been lectured on the importance of a secular Service by Nehru himself considered it ‘almost demolished’.⁸⁰

This changing meaning of Indian difference is intimately tied to its diplomatic existence. If India once sought to envision a postcolonial international society founded on diversity, depicting this as a break from the uniformity imposed by colonial international society, the Hindutva rendition of Indian difference represents it as a religious, civilizational distinction which rejects the diversity creed supposedly imposed on India by its postcolonial liberal elites. In his book on the evolution of Indian foreign policy, former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran (2004–2006) warns that ‘India is in danger of being reduced to a mere agglomeration of narrowly conceived communities with closed minds’, and anticipates that since ‘[h]ow Indians relate to one another influences how the country handles interstate relations’, a ‘shrinking vision at home cannot sustain an expansive vision abroad’.⁸¹ In an alternative phrasing, a retired Stephanian multilateralist agreed: ‘If India looks narrowly at itself, it will look narrowly at the world’.⁸²

With the Modi administration has also come an aggressive push to marginalize English in diplomatic communications – not to mark the democratizing of international order or the dawn of a post-Western age, but to cement Hindi as India’s one “authentic” language. At the time of the interviews in the first half of 2019, the very first Hindi-language book for the Indian Council of World Affairs was about to be published, the first Hindi-language foreign policy conference was in the works, and the Prime Minister’s conference for Heads of Mission had been held in Hindi, during which even Ambassadors uncomfortable in the language had been made to speak in it.⁸³ This is part of a wider bureaucratic push, with heads of various Government Ministries having to appear in front of official language committees to testify how Hindi is being brought into ministerial work – if these efforts are deemed insufficient, you ‘get quite a scolding’, one serving officer from a mid-1990s batch mentioned.⁸⁴

Diplomatic pedagogies, too, are acquiring hues of saffron. Culturally, many of the changes in training are ‘an offshoot of this Government’, as one retired diplomat phrased it,⁸⁵ following the mandate of the “Ayush” Ministry established in 2014, which, among other indigenous modalities, promotes Ayurveda and homeopathy, with yoga acquiring a particular centrality as both academic and physical classes prepare future diplomats to promote the International Day of Yoga.⁸⁶ While protocol attachments have usually involved probationers attending international summits or conferences, in 2019, future diplomats were dispatched to the *Kumbh Mela* festival in Uttar Pradesh.⁸⁷ In February 2020, what had been known as the Foreign Service Institute since its founding in the 1980s became the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service, in honour of the late BJP Minister of External Affairs.⁸⁸ Many diplomats who had been calling for the mimicry of Western diplomacy to be reined in during training now wonder how to speak in this idiom without

⁷⁹ Aavriti Gautam and Julian Droogan, ‘Yoga Soft Power: How Flexible Is the Posture?’, *The Journal of International Communication* 24, no. 1 (30 October 2017): 18.

⁸⁰ Interview 25.

⁸¹ Shyam Saran, *How India Sees the World: Kautilya to the 21st Century* (New Delhi: Juggernaut Books, 2017), 291.

⁸² Interview 27.

⁸³ Interview 61.

⁸⁴ Interview 61.

⁸⁵ Interview 38.

⁸⁶ Interview 32.

⁸⁷ Interview 32.

⁸⁸ ‘Home - Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service’, accessed 23 August 2020, <https://ssifs.mea.gov.in/>.

sanctioning a pedagogy of ‘aggressive superiority’ which exalts a parochial Indianness and rejects all things “foreign”.⁸⁹

Indeed, it is not only the original tenets of postcolonial diversity that are under siege, but also the imagery of old, European international society. During an address to IFS probationers in the presence of media on 12th June 2014, the newly-elected Prime Minister Modi, seemingly intending to reach both Indian and international audiences, compared foreign nations to a haughty aunt, never as deserving of diplomats’ loyalty as *Bharat Mata* (Mother India): “*Apni ma phate purane kapdon mein bhi toh bhi ma boti hain, aur mausi agar ache kapdon mein ho toh bhi mausi hi rehti hain*” (“Your mother is still your mother even in old and torn clothes, whereas your aunt, even in her best finery, is still an aunt”).⁹⁰ The worldly diplomat was no longer an ideal to be imbibed: “*Chammach kahan rakna hain [...] in sab baton se hatke kaam karo*” (“Where your spoon has to be laid [...] ignore that kind of issue and do your work”). For Shashi Tharoor, the taunt was emblematic of ‘the Modi notion of stoutly resisting the siren call of foreign countries while haranguing others about the strengths of your own’.⁹¹ As far as the traditional cleft habitus was concerned, it was a declaration of closure for the “worldly” diplomat expected to imbibe historically European mores of diplomacy.

1.2.2. Cosmopolitanism cancelled

The challenge that Hindu nationalism poses to the reproduction of the diplomatic cleft habitus shows just how important it is to observe the Foreign Service through sociological eyes, not least when it comes to the very particular modalities in which the saffronization of the Foreign Service puts the ideals and practices of cosmopolitanism in doubt. The ideational cannot be separated from the sociological. There is a twin rejection afoot: of both internationalist, liberal principles and the elites who claim to hold them. The two are not happening at the same time by accident, but perhaps always had to come together. It has been far easier to represent an ideological rejection of the cosmopolitan ethic as a principled stance against out-of-touch elites, and to use the awkward coexistence of world-embracing cosmopolitan beliefs with the exclusionary practices of the worldly upper castes to argue against both, rather than to openly declare the rejection in the language of ethnonationalism.

Even as cosmopolitanism has always come with its own exclusions and power imbalances in the imagination of the Foreign Service, its different expressions have relied on the basic belief that cosmopolitanism and patriotism were fundamentally compatible. Since 2014, what was described by a former multilateralist as ‘patriotism through a different lens’ in Chapter 5⁹² is giving way to diplomacy as nationalism by other means. As one former Foreign Secretary noted, there is now an expectation that diplomats perform ‘a strong assertion of national identity’ in the discharge of their duties.⁹³ A BJP-affiliated contract employee of the MEA declared that the old-fashioned regard for cosmopolitan niceties had only ever tied India’s hands as it fended for itself abroad.⁹⁴

The contrast between an English-educated Kashmiri Pandit like Nehru, and a supposed ‘man of the masses’ like Modi, a member of the OBC community who, in the political mythologies of the BJP, rose from a *chainwallah* to become Prime Minister, symbolises, to his sympathisers, a ‘de-

⁸⁹ Interview 4.

⁹⁰ Shashi Tharoor, *India Shastra: Reflections on the Nation in Our Time* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2014), 59.

⁹¹ Tharoor, 59.

⁹² Interview 28.

⁹³ Interview 45.

⁹⁴ Interview 2.

elitification'.⁹⁵ One former Foreign Secretary believed that Modi's personal brand itself 'is giving a message: you must not be cosmopolitan by upbringing' to join the Indian elite, or ever be 'apologetic' about not meeting classical elite markers.⁹⁶ Commenting on the tide against the liberal intelligentsia sweeping through Delhi, the essayist Pankaj Mishra put it more sharply, arguing that a 'cleansing of rootless cosmopolitans is crucial to realizing Modi's vision'.⁹⁷ 'The Service has felt this, too – one retired Muslim officer offered that 'five years ago all of us were cosmopolitan', but that 'in today's polarized environment, narrower assertions of identity have come to the surface'.⁹⁸ 'Not once' having had to explicitly justify his cosmopolitan beliefs or interpretation of his own Indianness in his almost forty years in the Service, 'now I own ten books on the topic of culture and identity', he exclaimed. Moments of fracture have a tendency of unmasking doxic assumptions, shattering their self-evidence.

The desire to rescue a concept which promises tolerance and diversity – even when culturally and historically, it has done so within paradoxically elitist bounds – has also evoked reconsiderations of the Service's brand of cosmopolitanism. 'The idea is to make it accessible', one impeccably dressed Stephanian Joint-Secretary implored, believing that cosmopolitanism was 'often mistaken for elitism' but ought not be abandoned in a moment of crisis for this misconception.⁹⁹ 'I wouldn't self-identify as a cosmopolitan, but then again, what's the choice?', a weary Dalit officer asked, weighing his options between the elitism of upper-caste, upper-class cosmopolitanism against the cultural absolutism of Hindutva, which to him signified not empowerment but another form of exclusion.¹⁰⁰ The choice between a faux embrace of diversity and the faux embrace of "authentic" saffronized Indianness, to him, was no choice at all.

1.2.3. Adaptation and resistance

The saffron challenge to the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus, then, concerns both imageries of international society and notions of India itself. This battle has divided the Service, whose former and current members debate the essence of majoritarianism, the diplomatic purchase of Hindutva, and the new foreign policy overtures under Modi on an ongoing basis in a closed Google group of about a thousand members.¹⁰¹

Allegiance or acquiescence to the Hindutva project and the government steering it can take many forms. Modi has surrounded himself with retired and seconded IFS officers, appointing former Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar as his Minister of External Affairs in 2019, and filling senior positions in the Prime Minister's Office with trusted appointees from the Service.¹⁰² Yet

⁹⁵ Interview 1; Interview 3.

⁹⁶ Interview 45.

⁹⁷ Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present*, 162.

⁹⁸ Interview 7.

⁹⁹ Interview 56.

¹⁰⁰ Interview 71.

¹⁰¹ Interview 1; Interview 10; Interview 15, March 2019; Interview 35.

¹⁰² Press Trust of India, 'Sanjeev Kumar Singla Appointed Private Secretary to PM Narendra Modi', Livemint, 20 July 2014, <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/xHmdQIS03l9bDHFmD10rxJ/Sanjeev-Kumar-Singla-appointed-private-secretary-to-PM-Naren.html>; Sanya Dhingra, 'PM Narendra Modi Inducts 5 Retired IFS, IAS Officers in His New Govt', The Print, 31 May 2019, <https://theprint.in/politics/pm-narendra-modi-inducts-5-retired-ifs-ias-officers-in-his-new-govt/243617/>; Press Trust of India, 'IFS Officer Rudra Gaurav Shresth Appointed OSD in PMO', India Today, 2020 2001, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/ifs-officer-rudra-gaurav-shresth-appointed-osd-in-pmo-1642037-2020-01-31>; Press Trust of India, 'IFS Officer Vivek Kumar Appointed Private Secretary to PM Narendra Modi', Business Standard India, 19 July 2019, https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/ifs-officer-vivek-kumar-appointed-private-secretary-to-pm-modi-119071900678_1.html.

most diplomats who were complimentary of the new accents on Indian diplomacy spoke not of Hindutva, but business, lauding the right-wing BJP's aspirational emphasis on economic diplomacy, supposedly exemplified by the "Make in India" manufacturing and branding campaign, which diplomats, too, were expected to champion.¹⁰³ As far as daily diplomatic praxis is concerned, the Foreign Service, one senior retired diplomat who served under the first Modi administration explained, had been 'quick to readjust to his style', toning down its Nehruvian rhetoric and adopting what he called a 'modern-world approach to things'.¹⁰⁴ However, a more visibly concerned retired officer was convinced that the growing number of RSS affiliates within the Service signified a cultural project of re-education, which could not be described through the modernizing language of business but only be captured in the nationalist idiom in which the cultural aspects of Hindutva were always expressed.¹⁰⁵ And, indeed, a BJP-affiliate working for the MEA sounded confident in the slow churn of promotion patterns, suggesting it might take about one and a half decades for the attitudinal change to find indigenous roots within the Service, as liberal Nehruvian diplomats began retiring out of the Service and more nationalistically-minded colleagues assumed their place.¹⁰⁶

There was some disagreement among officers on the sincerity with which some seemed willing to shed established diplomatic ideals and practices. One retired Muslim diplomat suggested that some colleagues would 'wear their culture on their sleeve' only to win political favour with the current government.¹⁰⁷ In the words of a staunchly secular-minded Hindu colleague, nationalism 'plays well now'.¹⁰⁸ Many, a former Foreign Secretary relayed, had joined the ruling BJP party before the 2014 and 2019 elections – a pattern not too dissimilar to the once highly-prized allegiance to the Congress Party, which had elevated many former diplomats into ministerial positions and had long infuriated the Indian right.¹⁰⁹ Others speculated that the permissive political environment would continue revealing 'closet RSS' diplomats, now emboldened to express their genuine views once buried underneath the imperatives of the traditional diplomatic cleft habitus.¹¹⁰

And yet, although diplomats were keen to identify others as potential Hindutva advocates, few offered themselves up as such – partly, perhaps, because the notions espoused by Modi so ill-fitted the demands of the Service's traditional diplomatic habitus which they still thought it best to uphold, partly because of the self-perpetuating sociology of the snowballing of interviews. By and large, in the most senior circles, sincerely held Hindutva allegiances were considered a fringe occupation of some 'less bright' members of the Service.¹¹¹ 'I slept through the rise of the Hindutva movement', a retired Muslim diplomat frowned, because to diplomats, it had always seemed like 'something that happened on the side', not inside their Service¹¹² – another sign of the distinct sociology of the Service that set itself apart not just from the Home Services but much of Indian political life at large. Either way, the elaborations on the breaking or betraying of some original ideals of the Service underlined the hold of the cleft habitus, and the penalties inside the Service for diverging from it.

There was, often, the air of a taboo to discussing Hindutva, both because there was a sense that dissenters were vilified as out-of-touch elites and because the clash with the existing Foreign

¹⁰³ Interview 2; Interview 3; Interview 32; Interview 39; Interview 45.

¹⁰⁴ Interview 3.

¹⁰⁵ Interview 7.

¹⁰⁶ Interview 2.

¹⁰⁷ Interview 53.

¹⁰⁸ Interview 85.

¹⁰⁹ Interview 45; Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 241.

¹¹⁰ Interview 85.

¹¹¹ Interview 3; Interview 43.

¹¹² Interview 7.

Service culture was striking enough to elicit strong views either way. Most of the critique was courteously cryptic, even when the demeanour, tone or context may have betrayed more conviction than the utterance alone – ‘loyalty or patriotism is not the monopoly of any religion’, one diplomat of a mid-1960s batch noted;¹¹³ ‘you can’t make it a fetish to be Indian’, a recently retired Ambassador cautioned.¹¹⁴ One young officer, seemingly apropos nothing, suggested that ‘there is a broad consensus’ among his colleagues ‘that we want to represent a modern, rising, progressive India’, and since ‘broadly the ethos remains intact’, ‘we will survive as it is’.¹¹⁵ Others agreed cautiously that most of their colleagues have been ‘compelled to compromise’ on their values since 2014.¹¹⁶ ‘The current regime represents a completely contradictory value system’ to the one the older batches had been socialized into, a left-wing officer from a 1960s batches argued, claiming that even those who did not speak up had ‘their worldviews challenged’ in the discharge of their duties.¹¹⁷ Some were less guarded: one incensed officer who had retired by 2014 scoffed that it would have required considerable ‘self-discipline’ on his part to ‘represent this wretched country even now’.¹¹⁸ A retired Sikh officer broke into tears describing a battle to uphold the values of diversity and secularism that he had spent a career defending as an Indian diplomat.¹¹⁹

In testimony to the strength of the original conception of Indian difference, the scepticism toward Hindutva inside the Foreign Service extended to many devout Hindus who had previously objected to a supposed suppression of Indian culture within the Service. One former Foreign Secretary once critical of his colleague’s supposed disinterest in Indian tradition considered the ‘endless talk’ about India’s ‘5000-year-old civilization’ overblown – ‘you don’t challenge China by doing yoga’.¹²⁰ Another nationalistically minded former Foreign Secretary thought that the rejection of foreign influences could be overemphasized, decrying the ‘fake resistance’ to the ‘*savoir-faire*’ of Western diplomatic custom.¹²¹ Similarly, a diplomat who had publicly spoken for the importance of engaging with Hinduism in diplomatic representation took a wary tone, insisting he had – perhaps falsely – imagined that this could be done ‘without jingoism’.¹²²

Yet the Service’s broadly liberal outlook, at least as far as its declaratory discourses are concerned, are strained not only under political pressure from above, but also in the tide of the more “representative” cohorts joining the Service. If once the Foreign Service took pains to distinguish its cadres from those working in the Home Services, the gradual “democratization” of the Service, explored in Chapters 3–4, has meant that the batches are becoming ever more closely aligned with batches in any other domestic bureaucracy, and more reflective of India at large. ‘Rural India, small towns have started exerting themselves and their values’ in the Service, one Delhiite from a 1970s batch noted,¹²³ although the shift had to do with class and caste as much as with geography. These batches, in the words of a senior retired Ambassador, are showing ‘more consciousness of who they are’, religiously and culturally.¹²⁴ ‘Secularism is not born out of denial’ was the retort of a millennial officer for whom India’s ‘composite culture’ actually owed its pluralistic nature to

¹¹³ Interview 1.

¹¹⁴ Interview 3.

¹¹⁵ Interview 66.

¹¹⁶ Interview 14.

¹¹⁷ Interview 43.

¹¹⁸ Interview 37.

¹¹⁹ Interview 26.

¹²⁰ Interview 45.

¹²¹ Interview 39.

¹²² Interview 4.

¹²³ Interview 33.

¹²⁴ Interview 3.

Hinduism's universalism, making it entirely appropriate for Indian institutions to centre around 'a Hindu perspective' which his urban Stephanian superiors derided.¹²⁵

Ideas are not free-floating entities without social moorings, as Bourdieu reminds us, and so it was perhaps no surprise when it came to Nehruvian secularism, as a former Foreign Secretary noted of older generations, that 'people felt a sense of comfort, because the social background of the diplomats was not religious themselves [*sic*].'¹²⁶ 'The idea of India that Lutyens Liberals have is that India is a secular country', an officer who left the Service mid-career argued, juxtaposing popular sentiment against the elite progressivism that supposedly confined itself to the governing quarters of central Delhi built by architect Edwin Lutyens.¹²⁷ Even the most committed secularists often felt that there was a tinge of condescension to the stigmatization of religion in the Service, and few were surprised to see a growing sense of Hindu pride emerge amongst the new cohorts, whose rural roots and provincial education were interpreted as signalling a more conservative, religious predisposition.¹²⁸

Indeed, the dominant conception of Indian secularism has been, in Bourdieu's words, a 'worldmaking power', allowing the upper-caste postcolonial elite to set the 'legitimate vision of the social world and of its divisions'.¹²⁹ As has been argued, this elite upper-caste secularism has obfuscated the role of caste. Yet it has also made religion a taboo, whose stigmatization in the diplomatic and political everyday of Indian life has built up unspoken pressures for cultural contestation. Hindu nationalism emerges against this consensus, like Faisal Devji argued over two decades before Modi's national ascendance, 'as the only credible, organized form of alternative politics in a country where the ruling elite has appropriated secular nationalism so completely as to allow no room for dispute in its terms'.¹³⁰ In this constellation of cultural power, even a majoritarian push for a singular religion can dress itself up as emancipation, whereby "real" India is released to express its "authentic" Self.

True to such simplifying dichotomies, the autoethnographies of the Service's traditional elites tended to centre around the popular binary between enlightened elites and irrational masses – in the words of one St Stephen's and Oxford-educated diplomat from a 1960s batch, 'you can't be a semi-literate person and be expected to understand the beauty and richness of our country'.¹³¹ Of course, these divisions are rarely as clean-cut as the auto-narrations of diplomats might imply. For example, the elevation of former Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, a suave Stephanian of the 1977 batch, into Minister of Foreign Affairs under Modi's second government in 2019 suggests that ideational commitments, diplomatic performances, and political motives are difficult to entangle.¹³² Yet when diversity becomes a clarion call of the elites against a broader constituency of Indians, who are deemed unable to appreciate it, the ideological and the sociological intersect in ways that make the rejection of a cosmopolitan ethic appear a principled stance in the name of some suppressed Indianness. As with the two dominant imageries of international society, so too with the emerging alternative visions of Hindutva: appeals to higher principles and conceptions of universalism always create an internal Other and legitimate certain hierarchies within.

¹²⁵ Interview 65.

¹²⁶ Interview 45.

¹²⁷ Interview 10.

¹²⁸ Interview 10; Interview 16; Interview 45; Interview 65.

¹²⁹ Bourdieu, 'What Makes a Social Class?', 13.

¹³⁰ Devji, 'Hindu/Muslim/Indian?', 5.

¹³¹ Interview 37.

¹³² Sreemoy Talukdar, 'S Jaishankar's Appointment as Foreign Minister Reveals Narendra Modi's Mindset on Trust, Acumen and Leadership', Firstpost, 31 May 2019, <https://www.firstpost.com/politics/s-jaishankars-appointment-as-foreign-minister-reveals-narendra-modis-mindset-on-trust-acumen-and-leadership-6737001.html>.

Conclusion

Focusing on points of fracture in the original Indian diplomatic cleft habitus, this chapter considered emerging forms of what Bourdieu called “misfires”: moments in which changes in the environment render particular performances of a habitus asynchronous or out of place. Firstly, the age of rising powers and a potential “post-Western” world have posed a challenge to each imagery of international society that Indian diplomats have sought to reproduce, shape, and contest for almost seven decades. And yet the imageries are not challenged in equal measure, at least not in the telling of Indian diplomats themselves. As India “rises”, taking on an elevated status, there has been a strong assumption in much of the scholarship and commentary on India’s new role that this requires abandoning some tenets of the solidarist, postcolonial international society Indian diplomats have long championed. And yet the case of a newly realist India seems to have been much over-stated in the scholarship on India’s rise, as Indian diplomats themselves have resisted interpretations of this geopolitical shift as signifying the withering of postcolonial international society. By contrast, the old-school European imagery of international society has begun to look even more old-fashioned or ill-fitting than it did throughout the first decades of decolonization. The fractures to this imagery involve the potentially declining roles of the English language and European “social graces” as well as the heightening salience of non-traditional “low diplomacy”, the evolution of diplomatic tastes, and a democratization of sorts of diplomatic culture.

Yet secondly, since 2014, fissures have also begun to appear in the kind of India that will be demanding a seat at the negotiating table as its powers increase. The gradual – and often resisted – saffronization of the Foreign Service is putting in play the very question of what kind of India its diplomats are expected to represent. The traditionally amorphous sense of “Indianness”, insistent on authenticity but purposefully vague on its definition, is giving way to a new, narrower assertiveness, which sees Indian diplomats representing a *Hindu rashtra*. This Indianness sits awkwardly both with the Nehruvian, postcolonial conception of secular, liberal India and the cultural conceptions of the Service’s self-appointed cosmopolitans.

With both external and internal changes facing the Foreign Service, cosmopolitanism is also under review. As the preceding chapters outlined, cosmopolitanism has never been merely a set of normative internationalist commitments or a foundational value of international diplomacy, but also a Bourdieusian form of distinction which orders diplomats into various internal and international hierarchies. Under the fracturing of the cleft habitus, both cosmopolitanism as a less-than universal ethic and cosmopolitanism as a class marker of elite belonging are under challenge. The backlash against cosmopolitan elites in India must be thought of in a twin context: against a backdrop of global changes, colonial legacies and international commitments on the one hand, and shifting cultural and political alliances as well as the changing face of the diplomatic cadre in India on the other. It has been occasioned both by a diversifying pool of diplomats, who may not fit the cosmopolitan mould *à la* Bourdieu, and by a narrowing interpretation of Indianness and the scope for international sympathies.

This chapter’s story of change, then, is complex. Firstly, it is far from clear how rapid, deep, permanent, or sincere many of the points of fracture actually are. Just as the colonial, white imagery of European international society outlived the material conditions in which it was born, so it would be premature to assume that global power shifts or domestic cultural changes would mechanically alter the fundamentals of the diplomatic habitus that Indian representatives consider an ideal. Heavy quotation marks must be placed around any notion of an “end” to various things: the classical trappings of diplomacy, the deep-seated culture of the Foreign Service, Indian diplomats’

philosophical commitment to representing a diverse country, and their concomitant insistence on valuing the Service's social exclusivity.

Secondly, the changes described in this chapter form neither a straightforward teleology of liberal progress nor a simple storyline of a more "assertive" India, be that geopolitically or culturally. Rather, change has come to the Indian Foreign Service in various guises, which both complement and contradict each other. More demographic diversity among diplomatic cadres can coincide with, or even abet, a narrowing vision of Indianness. The "democratization" of the Service – theoretically allowing for a more pluralistic Service – has also meant the entry of officers who may reject the liberal values of Nehruvian secularism – thus making the Service less pluralistic. "Modernization" in the garb of a more business-friendly diplomatic agenda can be presented as part of a set of changes which at their core reject much of what we might think of as "modern". The gradually diminishing role of English is a similarly ambiguous case: it has receded into the background both because diplomats who speak vernacular languages are becoming more prevalent and the perception of English as a superior means of communication has come to be seen as excessively elitist, but also because it is part of the Hindutva project to replace foreign languages with Hindi, even in the face of the linguistic diversity of the country. The "de-elitification" of the Service can either be celebrated as a win for democracy, mourned as a decline of diplomatic standards, or feared as a Trojan horse that erodes the supposedly elite liberal values that have shaped the Service since its founding. There is no one-lane, linear assessment that captures the complex forces eating away at the original diplomatic cleft habitus imbibed and performed by Indian diplomats for decades.

For now, what can be offered is a tentative evaluation of changes in the making, still to reveal themselves in full. And yet the changes already speak to something: not only to possible future trajectories but just as crucially to the hypocrisies, instabilities, and inadequacies of the past which often go unremarked upon. They reveal cracks in the compromises historically forged in order to sustain the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus, and in so doing also pry open some of the ostensible consensus around diversity, representation, and difference that has governed the management of international society since decolonization. As the Conclusion strings the arguments of the preceding chapters together, it is this consensus that it will also query.

A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

The representative and the representable

How one imagines international society is not an esoteric question of high theory. Such imageries make themselves felt in a very real sense by shaping how diplomats behave, how they see the world, what they understand their place in its hierarchies to be, and who they think best represents a nation within them. They can even become institutionalized to some extent, insofar as they influence the recruitment, training, promotion, and duties of diplomats. In Bourdieusian language, they call forth a particular diplomatic habitus, which reflects the values, codes, and rules of the field. Yet what happens when there is no one, cohesive, or relatively settled notion within one diplomatic service on what international society is? What does it look like when a diplomatic service reproduces a kind of “standard of civilization” in its attempts at belonging in European international society, while its most pronounced diplomatic discourse speaks to the radical anti-imperial potential of a postcolonial international society?

With a Bourdieusian sociological sensibility, this thesis analysed the construction, institutionalization, reproduction, contestation, outward projection, and fraying of the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus. This habitus has, for over seventy years, been awkwardly suspended between two very different imageries of international society – one, an archaic international society built in the old image of colonial Europe, the other, a postcolonial international society founded on anti-imperialism and Third World difference. The respective rules, codes of conduct, sets of desirable capital, and ways of behaving in the world between these two imageries stand in tension, both contradicting and complementing each other. Thus, they also constrain and enable different modes of diplomatic practice and thought. Both imageries reflect various international hierarchies – of race, colonial relationships, material wealth – but they also intimately tie to domestic hierarchies – of caste, class, gender, education, religion – that structure the Indian Foreign Service. For imageries of international society legitimate hierarchies and forms of marginalization not only between nations but within them.

With much of the conversation around hierarchy in international society lodged in a binary mode between colonizer – colonized, West – non-West, incumbent and challengers, two things become difficult to study. Firstly, the hybridity of the Indian diplomatic habitus is lost: if India is to be categorized as a postcolonial, non-Western challenger, we can only see Indians as Third World diplomats contesting the Western order. By contrast, the analytical device of the cleft habitus allows us to see ways in which so much of the Indian diplomatic habitus is in fact indebted to, mimics, and reproduces tropes of diplomacy founded under colonial conceptions of international society all at the same time. Secondly, a move beyond the conventional binaries that order the world into states allows us to query the way in which imageries of international society are

connected not only to international hierarchies, but also to hierarchies within nations. The Indian diplomatic habitus is also a reflection of domestic inequalities, which tie themselves in particular ways with the perceived “demands” of international society. And in this process of legitimation, these imageries of international society are themselves reproduced or contested from within nations. This is where the story returns to an old English School problematic: what keeps international society together, and what happens to its underlying culture in the wake of radical systemic shifts?

How, in other words, are we to make sense of the stickiness of an old, colonially tainted and culturally narrow image of European international society that a postcolonial nation like India seemingly had no reason to sustain? Bourdieu reminds us that the most stable forms of social order are maintained neither by ideological imposition nor physical force, but instead by the everyday, subtle legitimation of certain dispositions, behaviours, and ways of being. At Independence, Indian diplomats entered a world in which racialized diplomats representing a postcolonial, Third World nation struggled for recognition. To secure such recognition, they imposed an internal hierarchy within their Foreign Service, which rewarded and legitimated a habitus that fit the imagery of European international society. Thus, in one sense, it was the impracticability and impossibility of unlearning the entire old world after Independence that explains the stickiness, not least when its supposed cultural superiority had been part of socializing the Indian elite under the Raj. Yet there is also a second potent force: the social and cultural investment of many historically dominant constituencies within the Foreign Service in reproducing facets of a habitus that had once granted people like them their elite status. Those whose cultural capital – eloquent English, elite education, social networks – fit old ideals of an Oxbridge-educated elite officer have had an interest in reproducing such old notions alongside a postcolonial narrative of Indian difference.

In this respect, the narratives of a standard of civilization, once imposed on the world outside Europe, resemble the rationalizations of dominant diplomats within the Indian Foreign Service, defending their continued dominance over a now much more diverse Service. If it once was European powers who employed the standard of civilization ‘to defend their domination of non-European societies, to stand in judgment of their social practices’,¹ in a formally postcolonial order, a rendition of this judgement has been offered by generations of Indian diplomats themselves. In this rationalization, a particular conception of international society, defined by European aristocratic and colonial conventions, is used against internal Others – lower-caste or lower-class Indians, rural recruits, vernacular speakers, sometimes women – not seen as adhering to the codes of civility, manners, and etiquette expected of an ideal diplomat. The ideals of being *representative* in the sense of representing the nation bump up against the ideals of being *representable* while doing so.

The traditional elites of the Indian Foreign Service, therefore, stand in a complex relation to the old imagery of European international society. On the one hand, colonial pedagogies and class investments make the reproduction of this imagery not some foreign imposition but a perfectly natural expression of the cultural hybridities of sections of India’s elites. Its social codes may leave most kinds of Indians outside its inner circles, but they do empower a small Indian elite to belong, to some extent, in international society envisioned around an old “standard of civilization”. At the same time, the colonial origins by necessity separate even the upper-most crust of Indian society from white elite European markers of status, necessitating a postcolonial imagery which promises belonging for all Indians on equal terms with the rest of the world.

¹¹ Andrew Linklater, ‘Process Sociology and International Relations’, *The Sociological Review* 59 (2011): 49.

Projected outwards into the world, both expressions of the diplomatic cleft habitus – the quasi-colonial and the anti-imperial – are therefore, in their own ways, about belonging. Describing the shifting academic emphasis of the English School in the wake of decolonization, Buzan has argued that '[w]ith the right of independence and sovereign equality becoming almost unconditional, questions of membership in, and conditions of entry to, international society largely disappeared'.¹ This thesis has argued that recognition is more than formal accession into a club of nations – it is a continuous performance of belonging, status, and distinction. Thus, the embodiment of the Indian diplomatic habitus, too, has been about attaining some form of distinction within an old conception of Eurocentric international society, while also displaying a desire to distinguish India from it. The old, colonially tainted side of the habitus allowed Indian diplomats to belong by imbibing the habits and tastes of an old kind of club of diplomats. The postcolonial, “authentically” different side sought to secure equality by rejecting old hierarchies and speaking from a marginal and moralistic position of Third World solidarity. In this reading, India was not a permission-seeking original outsider of an old, European international society, but a culture-setting original founder of a new postcolonial international society where the formerly marginalized were no longer peripheral to the narratives of international life. The tension in diplomatic performances and practices in the everyday of the Indian Foreign Service has lain precisely in the ambivalence about just how much of a transition had actually occurred in the social codes of international society following the formal breakdown of empires, and how Indian diplomats ought to embody this change and signal their belonging.

Heirs and pretenders

The cleft around which Indian diplomacy cohered for almost seven decades now seems to be fraying at both ends. In some ways, of course, the cleft habitus has long pushed against systemic shifts that strayed it to its limits – decolonization itself being a case in point. In this way, the cleft habitus has, in some ways, always occasioned what Bourdieu called *misfires*: moments in which the habitus, welded in one particular environment, no longer seems to meet the conditions and demands of a new kind of environment. In fact, as the Indian Foreign Service bears testament to, misalignments and misfires between habitus and the external world constitute one of the most pivotal conditions for change.

However unsteady the tension between the two visions of international society, at least it was a familiar tension – institutionalized, practiced, and imbibed in the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus. Now, after decades hoping to be recognized as legitimate representatives of India abroad, many diplomats no longer recognize either the diplomatic world they used to be a part of nor the India they ought to represent. These diplomats embody the fraying both of classical dispositions of diplomatic tradecraft, homed in under colonialism, and the postcolonial tradition that emerged to counter them. With the clarity of this old tension now blurring, the emerging new forms of being in the world are yet to fully form themselves. One is much too tempted to quote Gramsci's well-worn precept: “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear”.²

¹ Buzan, “The “Standard of Civilization””, 585.

² Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 276.

A Bourdieusian analysis of how Indian diplomats are navigating the changing conventions of international society allows us to get at these uncertainties even as their manifestations in institutional arrangements, global power shifts, and evolving allegiances have yet to show themselves. A focus on the diplomatic habitus, reflecting social orders on and through ‘the body of the diplomat’,³ gives us the humility to see that this fracturing is not necessarily a grand ideological declaration. Rather, it reflects two kinds of estrangements, felt as cultural hypocrisy by those who never really fit the original cleft habitus. For those failing to embody the habitus of an old-world, Oxbridge officer, it is the social arrogance and cultural distance of dominant officers within the Foreign Service that triggers a rejection of an old, elitist notion of international society. Those whose idea of India never reflected the official pluralist, Third Worldist rendition have welcomed the break with the postcolonial side of the habitus, which had felt like a cultural straitjacket imposed on India by its secular elites.

Neither rejection comes from ignorance, but deep intimacy. It does not reflect a misunderstanding but a misrecognition: a felt marginalization in either international society called into being through the continued production of the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus. In this process, the Foreign Service becomes a cultural battleground where the two imageries of international society clash both with each other and with new emerging visions, with a struggle ‘between the heirs and the pretenders’⁴ now apace. The breaking of the cleft is, therefore, not a straightforward story of either socialization, distancing, or teleological progress.

In fact, there is also nothing particularly modern – and certainly nothing more “authentic” – about the turn toward a civilizational reading of political order that the saffronization of the Indian Foreign Service represents.⁵ If anything, it is deeply reminiscent of the civilizational, religious thinking which underpinned colonial notions of international society, when late-19th century discourses on diplomacy were bound up with notions of religious unity and hegemonic nationalism. It bears pointing out that there is nothing inherent in a turn to nationalism that threatens international cooperation or sovereign equality. If anything, the Indian nationalism of the freedom struggle against the British Raj was a productive force that demanded sovereign equality and a genuinely international society. Third World nationalism also opened up avenues for postcolonial nations to build bonds of solidarity across the world, and in so doing allowed Indian diplomats to strive for a more equitable international society. What is a threat, however, is the essentialist demand for indigenous, hermetically sealed “non-Western” “authenticity”, which makes idiosyncrasy and a rejection of all things foreign a condition of true national allegiance.⁶

It is this totalizing discourse of civilizational thinking that may fracture international society – not, like English School theorists once feared, by making it too pluralistic, but rather by imposing a new kind of civilizational homogeneity onto it. Perhaps an idiom once used to argue for the supremacy of white Christianity and European civilization can be reappropriated to speak for the supremacy of an ancient Indian civilization expressed in a *Hindu rashtra*. This may seem, at first, as though it would finally allow for a prevalent civilizational discourse that speaks of civilizations in the plural, instead of conceiving of one civilization threatened by a multitude of barbarians. Yet in claiming civilizational standing under the banner of Hinduism, this call for a new, disciplined, and narrow “Indianness” makes internal barbarians of all those Indians who do not fit the majoritarian

³ Neumann, ‘The Body of the Diplomat’.

⁴ Bourdieu quoted in Bigo, ‘Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations’, 240.

⁵ The saffronization of the Foreign Service, insofar as it will end up occurring over the coming decades, would become one rendition of a trend whose roots are domestic but whose basic characteristics are, in many ways, global. It would mirror processes of ethnocentrism, nationalism, and majoritarianism apace from the United States under President Donald Trump to the nationalistic leaders gaining momentum across Europe and the Brazil of President Bolsonaro.

⁶ See also Pinar Bilgin, ‘Thinking Past “Western” IR?’, *Third World Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2008): 5–23.

mould. Once again, imageries of international society meet with a set of hierarchies within nations, legitimating a particular kind of ideal for diplomats, too.

Difference and neutrality in international society

The exercise of mapping the Indian diplomatic habitus, undertaken in this thesis, was not based on a derivative discourse to see just how well our theories of the world may fit India; rather, it was also intended as something which would allow us to ask what India might tell us about how to think about the world. At the end of this exercise, there are questions that arise around representation and pluralism in international society, and the situational limits of the cosmopolitan creed that was supposed to bind international society together.

The task, then, is to reimagine how we think of the possibilities of difference and diversity in international society in the 21st century. Just as institutions have a recognition function, in that they govern which actors belong to a given system of norms and regulations,⁷ so too different notions of international society themselves must be thought of as enabling, constraining, shaping, and legitimating various forms of difference. It was a classical preoccupation of the English School in the wake of decolonization to ask what diversity and pluralism would do to international society. And yet it seems that what emerged was often a decided lack of such diversity – indeed, an explicit desire to uphold some notions of cultural conformity even in the face of a new, postcolonial world.

Something seems to be missing, therefore, not only in some prevalent English School accounts of how difference operates in international society, but also in the now perhaps more mainstream retelling of pluralist order offered by liberal institutionalists like John Ikenberry. Ikenberry has assured anxious students of rising powers that the current order was built to defang difference, not express it: it exhibits ‘an unusual capacity to accommodate rising powers’ since ‘[i]ts sprawling landscape of rules, institutions, and networks provide newer entrants into the system with opportunities for status, authority, and a share in the governance of the order’.⁸ International engagements and institutional arrangements run on plain, objective rules and procedures, which regard the cultural affinities of their members with absentminded disinterest.⁹ Any ‘discriminatory obstacles to the admission of states of culturally diverse backgrounds’ have been suspended in favour of a ‘common, rules-based framework in which to pursue their interests’.¹⁰ This, it is implied, renders international society politely blind to difference – a feature that the defenders of this kind of liberal world celebrate as a prime virtue.¹¹ In many ways, this is a rationalist, institutionalist retelling of the pluralist strand of the English School for the age of rising powers – bearing its analytical blinders, too.

This account not only beautifies radical divergences of power, resources, and voice in international politics, but also brackets diversity and difference without due process. In fact, if international society was actually blind to difference, it is debatable whether the Indian diplomatic cleft habitus would ever have come into being. What we find, rather, is a case of one dominant set of cultural assumptions masquerading as a universal state of affairs, with everything else branded an

⁷ Christian Reus-Smit, ‘Cultural Diversity and International Order’, *International Organization* 71, no. 4 (2017): 877.

⁸ G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 345.

⁹ Chandran Kukathas, ‘Liberalism and Multiculturalism: The Politics of Indifference’, *Political Theory* 26, no. 5 (1998): 686–99.

¹⁰ Reus-Smit, ‘Cultural Diversity and International Order’, 861.

¹¹ Reus-Smit, 866.

identitarian assault on the seeming neutrality of international society. This is where a study of Indian diplomats can generate new analytical vantage points. For, in miniature format, the case of the Indian Foreign Service's "democratization" speaks to debates on representation and pluralism in international society.

The Bourdieusian exercise inside the Indian Foreign Service has shown the limits of an understanding of recognition that focuses purely on formal admission into an institution. Within India, it matters that a certain, typically upper-caste and upper-class, "St Stephen's type" still dominates the Service, both organizationally (by disproportionately occupying higher posts) and culturally (by continuing to demarcate what an ideal diplomat looks like). That there exists a cogent interpretation of the growing diversification of cadres as a source of organizational weakness ought to give as a clue as to why diversity at recruitment level has meant neither diversity further up the organizational ladder nor proportionate increases in cultural influence. The continued admiration for the "St Stephen's elite" bears witness to Bourdieu's intuition that cultural capital in all its forms is valued most highly when it is at its most exclusive. In this way, the nominal commitment to diversity has had an almost therapeutic function on India's cosmopolitan diplomats: it has allowed them to thrive as celebrated pluralists abroad while perpetuating an elitist diplomatic culture within.

By extension, winning formal recognition as a sovereign member of international society does not solve or settle a deeper struggle for recognition as a diplomatic peer and cultural equal. What matters for understanding the supposed diversification of international society is the significance or space afforded to the difference and diversity that members from new, different, non-dominant backgrounds embody. For genuine presence and voice depends on cultural and social, not procedural and formal, recognition – it is about the ability to 'win a place in the social order'.¹² The "democratization" of an elite culture is no numbers game, because cultural codes and social ideals are not determined by majorities. Indeed, the tenacity of certain forms of habitus lies precisely in their resistance to demographic change. An elite institution can welcome individuals from non-elite backgrounds without altering its ideals and behaviour. It can socially punish newcomers for non-conformity or discipline their expressions of identity to fit the ideals of the institution. The mere presence of minorities or marginalized groups does not miraculously render an organization, system, or community diverse – neither inside the Indian Foreign Service nor in the supposedly pluralist and culturally neutral liberal order of liberal institutionalists or the English School.

Inclusion through assimilation is hardly an act of great tolerance or diversity; for assimilation is always assimilation into dominant culture. By contrast, a politics of diversity, as Srirupa Roy writes about India, is a politics that recognizes 'the distinctiveness of group identity' not through ghettoization or assimilation, but by allowing these identities 'to flourish within the context of a single institutional framework'.¹³ It is the responsibility of the international society of the 21st century, too, to 'learn to live with, accept, celebrate, and operationalise its own diversity'.¹⁴ If international society is to reach the sort of pluralism that English School theorists already debated more than half a century ago, inclusion must mean more than formal accession to a society of states and recognition must mean more than the right to have your difference neutralized in a supposedly technocratic vacuum. This language of neutrality is not liberating – it shields power from view but does nothing to democratize its distribution.

¹² Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 483.

¹³ Roy, 'Instituting Diversity', 81.

¹⁴ O.P. Dwivedi, 'The Challenge of Cultural Diversity for Good Governance', *Indian Journal of Public Administration* 48, no. 1 (2002): 28.

This raises the awkward question of whether it is, in fact, the very principles by which international society has long operated that are stifling the diversity that a postcolonial world was supposed to manifest. It has, after all, been precisely the desire to be recognised, included, and treated as equal in international society that has legitimated the stigmatization of difference within the Foreign Service. Liberal readings of cosmopolitanism have understood it as delivering us from parochialisms and ensuring diversity, pluralism, and tolerance. Yet it is precisely the demands to fit into this “cosmopolitan” fold, free of cultural baggage, with fellow diplomats the world over that has thwarted attempts at practicing diversity among India’s representatives abroad. There is no definitional compulsion whereby cosmopolitanism goes together with diversity. If anything, it has stood in its way. For sometimes cosmopolitanism – as it has actually been understood and practiced by Indian diplomats – has required a negation of diversity and difference within.

The once and future cosmopolitans?

Where does this leave the historically embedded and hierarchically ordered process of making and unmaking India’s cosmopolitan elite of diplomats? What cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitans have been understood to be in the Service tells us both about the cultural hierarchies of international society and the hierarchies within the Foreign Service, about the clash between worldly mores and post-colonial Nehruvian ideals, the longing for parity in similarity and pride in difference, and the pushback now underway against the ostensibly (but never quite) liberal world order. For all this sociological baggage, it is important to study the backlash against cosmopolitan elites such as India’s traditional diplomatic community not only as a backlash against a supposedly world-embracing ethic, but also as a rejection of the Bourdieusian distinction-making that “cosmopolitanism” has facilitated in places like India.

One legitimate interpretation of the foregoing chapters is to see the processes of colonial assimilation and the socialization of diplomatic probationers into a world of elite diplomatic etiquette and manners as a “making of a cosmopolitan elite”. This cosmopolitan elite would, then, be in a process of its own unmaking – both because the more diverse incoming cadres fail to imbibe the correct elite habitus and because the nativist turn in Modi’s India rejects all things foreign as culturally suspect.

Another way of reading the story of the Indian Foreign Service over more than seven decades is to see in it an unfinished journey toward a “cosmopolitan elite” that never truly existed. If the cosmopolitan ethic is supposed to be about celebrating difference and diversity, then this celebration is at odds with the historically very homogenous group of diplomats whose pedagogies and promotion patterns have sought to assimilate vernacular elements and marginalized officers into a dominant habitus. This cosmopolitan elite could perhaps have finally been in the making, with the evolving nature of diplomatic elites abroad and the gradual shift among younger generations toward a more inclusive imagery of what “worldliness” might look like. Yet in this interpretation, too, the ethnocentric turn stops the process in its tracks: it may not impose an elitist, “worldly” standard, but it does go against the nominal commitment to diversity pledged by proponents of a Nehruvian, secular India. It may be comfortable with difference expressed in geographic, perhaps even socioeconomic terms, but it rejects the idea that the Indian diplomatic habitus can be inhabited by an officer of any religion. Its emphasis on conservative Hinduism is unlikely to have a place for lower-caste recruits or non-Hindu tribal officers. Its conservatism sits uneasily with a gender-equal diplomatic corps, too. Replacing one hierarchized notion of enforced sameness with another does nothing to democratize India or international society.

In the end, this is a matter of interpretation that, again, harks back to the question of just what kind of international society diplomats understand themselves to operate in. Are they part of a quasi-aristocratic club whose racialized, colonial, and cultural exclusions call forth a cosmopolitan class cut adrift, or are they members of an international society built in the wake of decolonization precisely to evolve beyond the parochialisms of the old order?

The everyday exclusions that flow from the Service being divided between existing, aspiring, and rejected cosmopolitans show, once again, why it is important to think beyond the nation, and beyond a West – non-West binary, too. Pratap Bhanu Mehta has suggested that individuals from outside the West make better cosmopolitans, since ‘it is only in these parts of the world, where living deeply in two cultures – the modern “Occidental” and the vernacular – translating back and forth between them, negotiating their contradictory demands and incommensurable outlooks, is not a matter of choice but a deeply internalized practice that makes the complacencies of the West, or even its gestures towards multiculturalism, seem decidedly settled and provincial’.¹⁵ Yet there are also complacencies shared between elites across the supposed divide between West and non-West. These order themselves not so much around lines of nationality but class, caste, education, and familial background. Indian diplomats can practice a ‘decidedly settled and provincial’ cosmopolitanism, too. Cosmopolitans are a community, and as such, understanding the boundary conditions and codes of belonging in this community – which claims to transcend all communities – is an important step in any critical analysis of it.

Ideals and values are not randomly held preferences, as Bourdieu continually reminds us, and so we ought not divorce a consideration of cosmopolitanism from the social structures that sustain its various interpretations. Cosmopolitanism, too, is to some degree about power – not only the power that comes with being able to set the dominant definition, but also the cultural and material resources to embody whatever this definition entails for its everyday performance. Indeed, the acquisition of certain elite cultural markers, branded as cosmopolitan, was what was required for an Indian diplomat to enter the so-called cosmopolitan world of international diplomacy. Perhaps it too easily escapes those who can embody the virtues of an elite cosmopolitan diplomat that for cosmopolitanism to manifest itself as genuine openness and hybridity, power and resources have to be relatively equally distributed.¹⁶ Therefore, to understand the resistance to or turn away from “cosmopolitanism” is also to understand whose habitus and capital are legitimated by a commitment to it.

Cosmopolitanism, insofar as it remains an elite marker of social distinction, will do little to hold together a fractious international society. Cosmopolitanism is cheap if it asks nothing in return – if it does not necessitate a critical evaluation of the basic political and cultural structures within which it is practiced. In this sense, as Calhoun cautions

Much of its appeal comes from the notion that cosmopolitanism (a version of ethical goodness) can be achieved without much deeper structural change. But cosmopolitanism is not simply a free-floating cultural taste, equally accessible to everyone; it is not just a personal attitude or a political choice, although it can inform these. Cosmopolitanism is also a matter of material conditions that are very unequally distributed. What seems like free individual choice is often made possible by capital – social and cultural as well as economic.¹⁷

Therefore, far from transcending lines of difference, the cosmopolitan marker can – and has – ordered societies into a socio-cultural hierarchy, which ranks its members by education, class, social circles, and upbringing. When an increasingly more diverse Indian Foreign Service is

¹⁵ Mehta, ‘Cosmopolitanism and the Circle of Reason’, 632.

¹⁶ Bender, ‘The Cosmopolitan Experience’, 120.

¹⁷ Calhoun, ‘A Cosmopolitanism of Connections’, 189.

mourned as decreasingly cosmopolitan, the lament reflects a particular understanding of cosmopolitanism – one that has little to do with the celebration of difference that cosmopolitanism is supposed to advance. In many ways, this rendition of cosmopolitanism actually shares its ideals with Ikenberrian liberal institutionalism: as Calhoun has argued, ‘[s]tarting from the perspective of abstract equivalence, seeing essential similarities as the main ground for cosmopolitanism tends to make differences appear as potential problems’.¹⁸ Difference is, at best, tolerated, but ideally, ironed out. With the felt imperatives of an elite, internationalist habitus, what diversity has existed has historically been suppressed through the pedagogies of diplomatic training and socialization.

Is it even possible to sever or relax the ties between cosmopolitanism and elitism? Those hoping to counter the charge that cosmopolitanism is irretrievably elitist have tended to turn to a “cosmopolitanism from below”, studying migrants, mobile labour forces, or even seafarers or translators.¹⁹ Rahul Rao, acknowledging that cosmopolitanism has often been ‘at best, a normative world view that would be beneficial for subalterns if adopted by elites’, turns to social movements in order to discuss alternative engagements with notions and practices of cosmopolitanism.²⁰ But can there be notions of cosmopolitanism *inside elite spaces* that make room for marginalized perspectives that are not articulated in a dominant idiom? Can the cosmopolitanism of diplomatic elites themselves evolve into something different? Are there cosmopolitanisms that lead not to a contraction of international society, but finally, an actual expansion?

If we want to keep some of the ethical virtues of cosmopolitanism in a fracturing world, we might need to abandon some of the social imageries and cultural expectations that have long accompanied it. It is this elitist imagery, which diplomats embody so well, that makes the nativist, ethnocentric appeals to “authenticity” so personally palatable to those who do not count themselves among the elite. One might, at an earlier point in time, have assumed that such appeals would go unheeded by diplomats – after all, they surely count among elites by professional default. Yet the case of the Indian Foreign Service, in large part owing to its reservations system, shows that diplomatic cadres need not be made up of “elites” in a conventional sense of the word. It reminds us that diplomats, too, are carriers of a multiplicity of identities which can be graded against the dominant ideals of the diplomatic habitus. A cosmopolitanism which celebrates difference – instead of ridiculing it when it looks vernacular – is a cosmopolitanism that can be embodied by diplomats of any background. This would involve relaxing, rethinking, and in many ways democratizing notions of a presentable diplomatic habitus.

Cosmopolitanism is not a professional perk, served with canapes and identical opinions, but a professional challenge, practised with patience – for ‘the world of difference, the foundation of cosmopolitanism, is a domain of inevitable uncertainties and recalculations about oneself and of people and places’.²¹ Thus, a cosmopolitan is not, in fact, “comfortable anywhere in the world”, as Indian diplomatic elites often argued, but rather ‘always slightly uncomfortable, even at home’.²² A cosmopolitan is, if anything, the very antonym of Bourdieusian effortlessness. If diplomacy is the ‘representation and governing among recognized polities’,²³ we must ask what this representation entails and what recognition and belonging inside its social codes looks like. The conversation about governing difference in the 21st century cannot be a simple choice between

¹⁸ Calhoun, 195.

¹⁹ Robbins and Horta, ‘Introduction’, 2017, 9.

²⁰ Rao, *Third World Protest*, 199.

²¹ Bender, ‘The Cosmopolitan Experience’, 116.

²² Bender, 119.

²³ Sending, Pouliot, and Neumann, ‘The Future of Diplomacy’, 530.

“cosmopolitan” and “closed”. Instead, it but must be an honest debate about the very nature and possibilities of cosmopolitanism in a fractious international society, yet to take its shape.

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