

INDIAN CULTURAL SOCIETY OF TASMANIA INC
50TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER
SPEECH BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HELLENIC HOUSE, NORTH HOBART, SATURDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2022

Thank you, Kiran. [Mrs Kiran Yellapu, ICST Treasurer introduced HE]

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their enduring culture and continued connection to land, sea, and waters. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I commit to a future that listens to and respects Aboriginal stories, culture and history.

Thank you, Ike, for the invitation to attend this evening's dinner. Many of you would have been at the Government House reception at the end of July this year when we all enjoyed marking your 50th anniversary. We could say: that was the entrée and now we have the main course!

I would like to mention, as Governor, the consistently close and amicable relationship that Australia shares with India, as demonstrated by our diplomatic ties. In Tasmania, these ties are expressed through official visits by Indian High Commissioners and looking back through our files we see that these visits are possibly the most regular of High Commissioner or Ambassador visits to Tasmania.

Since the turn of this century, Government House Tasmania has hosted official Indian High Commissioner visits, of two or three days, on no less than six occasions, most recently in 2018. We have also hosted numerous day visits by Indian Consuls-General.

Tasmania, incidentally, is the only Australian State where visiting diplomats stay at our Government House. We know, from experience, that our visitors enjoy being able to relax and enjoy our local hospitality and the lovely Government House grounds after their busy programs each day.

Diplomatic relations between Australia and India were forged in the early 1940s – a difficult time for all, being the height of World War Two and, of course, in the complex lead-up to Independence from Britain in 1947.

Those complexities of British rule had gone back a long way, as we know. John Sullivan, the noted 19th century colonial administrator in Madras, in criticising key aspects of British rule, made the memorable observation, quote, “that the present system acts very much like a sponge, drawing up all the good things from the banks of the Ganges and squeezing them down on the banks of the Thames!”¹

By the the early 1940s, Australians were eager to engage with India, despite ongoing difficulties with British rule. An article in Sydney’s *Daily Mail*, written by a clergyman John Stuart Watts, put it this way: “Though Australia is at the very gate of the East, remarkably little news of what is going on in the great Indian sub-continent reaches us. One cannot help suspecting a conspiracy of silence in high places ... It is high time that we insisted on knowing the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about Empire affairs. The family of the British Commonwealth of Nations should be marked by mutual confidence, intelligent interest in each other's welfare, and a readiness on the part of the favoured members to help the less fortunate. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance for Australia of a complete understanding with India ...”²

And the same writer went on to state that: “... Australia can help by maintaining the friendliest cultural and diplomatic relations with India throughout the war, and by working out a programme for closer co-operation in peace-time.”

This proved to be true, because just a few years later, in 1943, the *Sydney Morning Herald* was able to report that: “Australia’s name stands well with Indian officials and our move in becoming the first Dominion to establish diplomatic relations with India will enhance our standing ...”³

And then by January 1945, quoting again: “The fact that a High Commissioner from India has now been sent into this country indicates the strengthening of that relationship, and a willingness to concede maturity on India’s side of the relationship...”⁴

So, this early groundwork was of great importance. And, I am sure you will be interested to know that in October 1945, then Tasmanian Premier Robert Cosgrove and the High Commission of India in Canberra agreed to an exchange of Tasmanian and Indian teachers. That started in 1946, with two teachers from each country taking up 12-month posts.

¹ <https://www.historydiscussion.net/history-of-india/short-essay-on-economic-drain-during-british-india/728>, accessed 18 November 2022. (This is one of numerous instances of this quotation.)

² *Daily News* (Sydney), Wednesday 29 May 1940, page 4.

³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday 25 December 1943 page 8.

⁴ *Barrier Miner* (Broken Hill, NSW), Friday 5 January 1945, page 2.

Our Indian Cultural Society of Tasmania came into being in due course. Some years later, your contributions to our community and to our island's multicultural fabric for fifty years are very worthy of celebration.

As Governor, personally and on behalf of all Tasmanians, I congratulate everyone associated with the Society and with your every success in your next 50 years.

Thank you.