Moderating Revolution: V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, Toussaint Louverture, and the Civility of Reform

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Moderating Revolution

V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, Toussaint Louverture, and the Civility of Reform

In early autumn in 1869 in British India, two men were born who devoted their lives to the articulation of emergent political subjectivities in what would become, in 1947, independent India. The story of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the political agitator credited with having brought the British Raj to its knees through *satyagraha*, has been immortalized, inspiring 20th century civil rights movements around the world. The story of V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, diplomat, renowned writer and orator, leader of the Indian Liberal Party, and, at ten days his senior, Gandhi's "conscience-keeper" (Ramanan 24), is largely forgotten.[1] If Gandhi, known as the "Mahatma," is the epic revolutionary hero of India's anticolonial resistance, the David to Winston Churchill's Goliath, then Sastri is the moderate footnote who countered the romance of Gandhian civil disobedience with the civility and pragmatics of reform.

Whose story is better suited to "the politicohistorical presents within which we now live and write" (Scott 57)? This essay returns to David Scott's 2004 argument that postcolonialists have for too long uncritically utilized a Fanonian "longing for total revolution" (6) as the template through which to evaluate all forms of anticolonial political practice. In Scott's telling, assumptions regarding the fundamentally "negative structure" of colonial occupation and the priority of "the colonized's agency in resisting or overcoming" colonialism have delimited the writing of postcolonial histories (6). I propose that the critical sidelining of Sastri, "a moderate in revolutionary times" (Hand 162), results from just such a preoccupation with conventionally narratable forms of radical politics. For instance, the introduction to a recent volume on *Revolutionary Lives in South Asia* begins with the familiar Marxist-Leninist account of revolutionaries as those who "catalyse the transition from capitalism to socialism" (Maclean and Elam, 1). Discussed revolutionaries, like M.N. Roy, were interested not in "social reform but an aggressive political rejection of . . . cultural conventions" (Manjapra 68). There is no place here—nor in any major history of South Asian anticolonialism to date—for Sastri, who rejected aggression and opposed non-cooperation, who described himself as "a lover of the

golden mean" ("Confession" 5), and who was "an unflinching proponent" of anglophone education as a tool for nation-building in India (Bayly 2011, 15).

Yet Sastri was an internationally renowned statesman in his time. When he died in 1946, a *New York Times* obituary recognized him as "leader of moderates in India." In addition to heading the Servants of India Society and attending major constitutional conferences on India's behalf, Sastri was India's representative at the 1921 Imperial Conference and the second assembly of the League of Nations. He was also a key figure in Indo-African relations who developed the principle of African paramountcy (Park 353). In *Recovering Liberties*, the historian C.A. Bayly credits Sastri and T.B. Sapru with not only establishing the Indian Liberal Party but with making it permissible for "Indian public men" to call themselves liberals in the tradition of Locke and Mill (3). While Indian liberalism has long been construed as an "appeasement of colonialism," Bayly shows that it was "foundational to all forms of Indian nationalism and the country's modern politics" (3, 1).

Following Scott's revisionist reading of C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins* and its figuring of Haitian revolutionary Toussaint Louverture as a "conscript [of] colonial modernity" (Scott 168), I identify in Sastri's philosophy and politics critical resources for a new anticolonial history that might illuminate both India's present postcolonial predicament—persistent structural inequalities, poverty, and sectarian violence, coupled with resurgent nationalisms—and the broader historical conjuncture of climate crisis and worldwide threats to liberal democracy, a catastrophic present which nevertheless "does not ring with the strong cadences of revolutionary anticipation" (Scott 97). Reading between the colonial contexts of Haiti and India, I argue that the rhetorical practices of Toussaint (as James refers to him) and Sastri, respectively, reveal not only the vexed compatibility of reform and revolution, civility and catastrophe, but the necessity of the former in each pair for the latter: from establishing particular familial and paternal relations with their people, nations, and the colonial powers in question, to their modes of relation to and with other colonial functionaries; from the consideration of race equality along with the question of sovereignty, to the status of each individual man as a recognized spokesperson of a colonized people. Their politics make evident, I argue, that the practice of civility in politics, and of politics *as* civility, constituted a calculated, even visionary, response to slavery and colonialism.

I use the term "visionary" deliberately and with reference to recent work from political theorist Romand Coles. Rejecting both forms of political pragmatism that "dismiss far-ranging critiques and alternative visions as impractical, irrelevant, and hence of no value to the world that matters" and forms of political radicalism that "refuse the demand that theory (and political engagement) be oriented by ambitions that are practical and relevant according to the present horizons of time, spa-

tiality and meaning," Coles argues for a politics of what he terms "visionary pragmatism," a politics that is:

> pragmatic insofar as it relentlessly thinks, works, and acts on the limits of the present, drawing forth and engendering new resonances, receptivities, relationships, movements, circulations, dynamics, practices, powers, institutions, strategies, shocks, and so forth, in an effort to contribute to desirable changes in our lived worlds . . . [and] . . . visionary in the sense that it maintains an intransigent practice of peering underneath, above, around, through, and beyond the cracks in the destructive walls and mainstream ruts of this world. (19)

Such a politics eschews the reform-revolution binary, seeking instead to marshal a "profoundly receptive democratic common sense" (Coles 12) in the envisioning, enactment, and revision of radical reforms. Coles's argument recalls a distinction drawn by French Marxist philosopher Andre Gorz between "revolutionary reforms" and "reformist reforms." The former "advance toward a radical transformation of society" (Gorz 6), whereas the latter ultimately preserve the status quo. The gradual, minor, and incremental can all be revolutionary reforms as long as they "assume a modification of the relations of power . . . assume structural reforms," which Gorz defines as reforms requiring "the creation of new centers of democratic power" (8).

Following Gorz and Coles, I am interested in a mode of political practice that may not necessarily enact societal transformation but which markedly prefigures it. The goal of such a politics is the creation of possibilities, the illumination of the outside and beyond of the present conditions of existence, and the setting of the stage for new situations of action to unfold. These are the terms in which I will read Sastri, who acknowledged that while the present was "by no means perfect," it was nevertheless "capable of adaptation to better, finer issues" (*Citizen* 87). For that reason, Sastri was wary of "any movement which has the tendency to overthrow, the tendency to disestablish, the tendency to bring about a state of anarchy in the country, the tendency which destroys order and ordered Government" (*Citizen* 87). Describing Sastri, biographer T.N. Jagadisan borrowed from a famous estimation of Edmund Burke: "He loved reform because he hated revolution. He hated revolution because he loved reform" (40–41). By contrast, I seek to specify the ways in which Sastri was involved in the articulation and enactment of specifically *revolutionary* reforms, and I find in Toussaint's extraordinary biography a narrative template for the writing of just such a program.

II.

Valangaiman Sankaranarayana (V.S.) Srinivasa Sastri was born on September 22, 1869, to a poor Brahmin priest. The eldest son in a large family with high social status, if not wealth, Sastri read Huxley, Mill, Tyndall, Tolstoy, and the *Ramayana* and was in his own description "a favourable specimen of the early products of English education" ("Confession" 3). He graduated from the Madras Teachers Training College and taught at Salem College before joining, and later heading, Gopal Krishna Gokhale's Servants of India Society.[2] Sastri rose to become a member of the Council of State in the 1920s and attended most major international conventions in which India was represented until his death in April 1946, sixteen months before India achieved independence.

An orator ("top five of the world," comes one acclamation ["Mahatma's Dear Brother"]), debater, prolific letter-writer, and contributor to numerous publications, Sastri produced a significant body of work in English including letters, lectures, articles, essays, a critical study of the *Ramayana*, a biography of his contemporary, Pherozeshah Mehta, and addresses to assembled parliamentary bodies. "He was among the greatest masters of the English language of his time," writes biographer P. Kodanda Rao. "The late Lord Balfour . . . heard Sastri's speech at the League of Nations and said that he then realized the heights to which the English language could rise" (xiii). The limited scholarly attention Sastri has received to date thus centers on his legacy as a man of English letters, as opposed to as an anti-colonial political actor—a tenuous distinction, since the majority of his writings are concerned with the status of India in the British Empire and the proper terrain of political practice.

Like many Indian liberals, Sastri advocated "English-style education for nation-building in India" (Bayly 2011, 15). Given Gandhi's insistence that the English language be "driven out of the field" in India ("Hind Swaraj"), some have understood the liberal position on anglophone education as a capitulation to Thomas Babington Macaulay's notorious 1835 "Minute on Indian Education": "I have never found one [Orientalist] who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia." But Sastri was no brown Macaulay. Nor was he Homi Bhabha's "mimic man," "not quite/not white," caught in the ambivalent enunciation of colonial discourse. Sastri's interest was not, to invoke Audre Lorde, in disseminating the master's ill-fated tools, but in sharing with his countrymen the tools that he himself had been privileged to utilize. Whereas Gandhi held fast to a purist position against the linguistic hegemony of English ("to give millions a knowledge of English is to enslave them" ["Hind Swaraj"]), Sastri better anticipated the ways in which English would continue to serve in India as "a language of possibility . . . a promise of modernity . . . a move away from

old and oppressive spaces of social life" (Aneesh 6).[3] Their opposed perspectives served as a precursor to later entrants into the "language debate" in postcolonial studies.[4] Whatever side one takes in this debate hinges on the answer to the question of whether or not languages like English and French, which are colonial bequests, can be "grafted" onto the national bodies of formerly colonized peoples.

For Sastri, the question was not whether the English language could be indigenized in India; given its privileged position in the civic realm, it *had* to be, in order for the flourishing of a liberal democratic political community worthy of the name. "We know," Sastri argued, "that there is no surer way of creating a brotherly bond between human beings than to bring them together in the classroom . . . nothing to break our differences and to enable us to realize one's kinship to the other like the common pursuit of educational aims" (*Citizen* 81). For Sastri, in what today we might call Habermasian terms, public discourse, critical association, and sustained interlocution were the motor of liberal politics. His conception of citizenship was consequently an active one; the democratic citizen, whom he contrasted with the figure of the imperial "subject," had to have "a certain amount of public spirit, meaning by that the desire to sink his own personal ends in the larger ends of his community . . . practical commonsense, a shrewd eye on the affairs of the world . . . [and the] quality of being able to decide between right and wrong in moments of excitement . . . of preserving his balance of mind" (*Citizen* 12). It was a vision of citizenship that Sastri sought to democratize, just as he advocated, in English, the extension of the anglophone education he himself had received to the broader Indian society.

What does it mean to *have* a language—to own and master it, to deploy it at will? Conversely, what might it mean to be *had* by it—to be spoken by it, suffused with it, to have *it* speak *you*?[5] Does such having imply or entail such being had? In all Sastri's writings, we find him thinking with and through both Eastern and Western canons, translating from Sanskrit into English as per the requirements of his audiences. Sastri benefitted from an English education, but his deepest literary and spiritual attachment was to Valmiki's *Ramayana*. He could as easily cite the Bible as the *Mahabharata*, and spoke playfully of Mill, Morley, and Rama as all equally apostles of truth ("Values," 121). Working tirelessly "on behalf of reconciliation and cooperation" (Raghunathan xxiii), Sastri was a man between worlds, maneuvering between India and the British government, between Gandhi and the Servants of India.

In Scott's terms, Sastri was a "conscript" of colonial modernity, "obliged by the modern conditions of his life to . . . seek his freedom in the very technologies, conceptual languages, and institutional formations in which modernity's rationality" sought his subservience (168). Scott's elaboration of the conscript allows us to read Sastri's anglophonism, broadly construed, as stemming from the appreciа-

tion and recognition of the aesthetic value and political efficacy of cultivated English. The same was true of Toussaint's French and metabolism of certain francophone "enlightenment" ideals. Reading Toussaint through James, Scott argues that the slave-turned-revolutionary was not simply "a newly languaged Caliban" (the conventional reading of the colonized subject), but also "a modernist intellectual, suffering, like Hamlet, the modern fracturing of thought and action" (16). It is this suffering, this fracturing, and this conscription that bind Toussaint and Sastri, an unlikely pair bookending the long nineteenth century, from whose lives we might derive a vision for political practice in the twenty-first.

III.

The most recent scholarly biography of Toussaint Louverture is divided into twenty-one chapters that variously identify Toussaint, born in 1743, as "aristocrat," "child," "slave," "revolutionary apprentice," "family man," "freedman," "slave driver," "muleteer," "witness," "rebel," "monarchist," "Spanish officer," "French patriot," "politician," "diplomat," "planter," "governor general," "God?," "renegade," "prisoner," and "icon" (Girard). This motley typology captures both the multifaceted nature of Toussaint's biographical itineraries and the various forms of reinvention he underwent throughout his life, as well as the many ways in which his story has been told since his death in 1803. For William Wordsworth, writing in 1807, Toussaint was "the most unhappy man of men!" For Frederick Douglass, who wrote multiple unpublished biographies of Toussaint, the Haitian was the paradigmatic black male hero, one whose life demonstrated that black men were "full participants in the universal brotherhood of man" (Bernier 99). "The black Napoleon, the new Spartacus" (Girard 1), Toussaint was also the subject of James's *The Black Jacobins*, "one of the seminal anticolonial histories of the twentieth century" (Scott 9–10).

By that same token, Toussaint has been oddly understudied (Girard's 2016 work is the first major scholarly biography since James's, first published in 1938) because, I would argue, what Girard calls his "revolutionary life" nevertheless confounds conventional narratives of anticolonial radicality. Scott suggests as much in *Conscripts of Modernity* when he argues that Toussaint is figured by James "as a man of consummate deliberation, strategic calculation, and immense—*almost unbelievable*—compassion and restraint" (72, my emphasis). He was at once a skilled diplomat, visionary leader, intellectual, and illiterate. He epitomized the ideals of the French Revolution—liberté, égalité, fraternité—yet inconsistently extended them to the men he was called to lead. For Scott, the tragic lesson of Toussaint is that "he inhabited a cognitive universe he could neither simply claim as his own nor completely disavow" (155).

This is the classic predicament of the native intellectual, and a cognitive universe that Sastri, in his time, inhabited as well. What I wish to draw attention to here is a specific aspect of this inhabitance—namely, how it necessitates an art of negotiation, accommodation, and compromise, what James refers to as Toussaint's capacity for "brilliant diplomatic negotiation" (Scott 72). Scott notices this emphasis in James, but does not consider the broader political implications of diplomacy as the reformist engine of revolutionary change.

James's Toussaint is a "master of a proclamation" (158) who wrote, or rather, dictated, scores of letters to his allies and foes. His "maturity" was evidenced by his intercourse with white, Mulattoes, and blacks alike, as well as the French, Spanish, and English (James 124). Toussaint "always had perfect tact" and was "full of diplomatic tricks" (James 206–207). He was "a master of the art of war" (James 131), who nevertheless preferred to spare lives wherever possible: "All his life he strove for conciliation with enemies and peaceful settlements in all disputes" (James 168). Eventually, Toussaint would come under fire for his forgiveness of the whites, willingness to return land to former slave owners, and appointment of whites to government posts (James 157)—a subject to which I will return.

James writes that Toussaint was "not only the born soldier, but the born writer" (159), despite the fact that Toussaint "to the end of his days . . . could hardly speak French, he literally could not write three words without the grossest errors in spelling and grammar" (104). (Toussaint dictated letters to secretaries, who were then tasked with a laborious revision process, overseen by Toussaint himself.) In his telling, Toussaint chose to wage his revolution in letters, conversations, missives, and proclamations—i.e., with the rhetorical tactics and strategies of diplomacy. When we first read one of Toussaint's letters, the former slave is a Brigadier-General in the French army, having declared his allegiance to Laveaux after the French National Convention of 1794 abolished slavery in the colonies. In commanding his 5,000 men, Toussaint "had the advantage of liberty and equality, the slogans of the revolution" (148). Again, for Toussaint to have had the slogans ("great weapons" [James 149]) of liberty and equality at his command, despite having been the product of the *dis*advantages of institutionalized slavery and inequality, means that "he was constrained to imagine and make the revolution . . . within the conceptual and institutional terrain of modernity" (Scott 129)—an unequal and uneven modernity that had sanctioned, even depended upon, his original enslavement.

In a revealing episode, a certain Dieudonné is negotiating with the British, and the French army risks losing the thousands of troops under his command, but "with a single one of his dictated letters, Toussaint changed the whole situation" (James 149). Toussaint's letter to Dieudonné implores him to ally with France now that the Convention has abolished slavery. The appeal is gentle and warm ("my dear friend"; "my dear brother"), and the letter-dictator admits his own prior errors

("For a time the Spaniards had blinded my eyes, but I did not take long to recognize their rascality"). Toussaint employs a language of kinship in order to make a claim on Dieudonné. France, he argues, has finally "[recognized] us for her children." Governor Laveaux is described as "a good father to all of us," and one in whom the "mother-country has placed its confidence." The mother-country in question is France; there is as yet no Haiti to which to declare attachment. Toussaint pronounces himself brother to Dieudonné ("I hope that you will not refuse me, who am a black as yourself") and suggests that they both belong to a larger family ("you and all our brothers"). Is this a family bound by race, that is, by the fact of being black? Is this a family bound by slavery? Or is service to the French Republic the binding tie? Toussaint is ambiguous on this point, and another. When he appeals to Dieudonné—"together let us chase these royalists from our country"—he may mean from San Domingo, which is part of the French Republic, or he may very well mean from "our France" (James 149–150).

There are several elements of Toussaint's rhetorical strategy worth considering. For one, he intuits the efficacy of performing such identification with France and Laveaux. As James reads it, the "epistle" to Dieudonné is "a delicate piece of maneuvering" (James 158) which wins the day. The passage concludes with an account of Dieudonné's arrest and Laplume's appointment as colonel: "A force of 3,000 men was an immense acquisition, and Toussaint had won them by a letter and a deputation" (James 150–151). James does not consider the fact that Toussaint's letter does not actually achieve Dieudonné's allegiance. Given his swift arrest, it seems that Dieudonné was barely given a chance to consider responding to Toussaint's call. The effective addressees of the letter were the blacks who "burst out into invectives," proving "that though they were ignorant and unable to pick their way among the mass of proclamations, lies, promises and traps which surrounded them, yet they wanted to fight for liberty" (James 150). In other words, Toussaint's direct address to the presumed defector was a ploy; Dieudonné's allegiance was neither expected nor required.

IV.

What kind of story is best suited to "the politicohistorical presents within which we now live and write" (Scott 57)? What kinds of political actors do we require? What kinds of heroes? Reading *The Black Jacobins* alongside biographies of Sastri, there are remarkable convergences in descriptions of their respective life circumstances, dispositions, and political practices, despite the fact that one was born into slavery, the other into a high-caste Brahmin family. For one, there is the fact of each of their deaths, made tragic by timing. Both men labored for their countrymen under the

sign and promise of liberty, and each died on the cusp of a new day: Toussaint in jail in France in 1803, as his comrades drafted Haiti's declaration of independence; Sastri on his Madras sickbed in 1946, just months before the Partition of India, which he, like Gandhi, strongly opposed. In both cases, then, what is notable is not the revolution each man did or did not achieve, but what his anticolonial efforts reveal about possibilities for future, postcolonial action.

Toussaint's opposition to violence, his "no reprisals" policy, and his reliance on letter writing as a means of political persuasion are striking because they emerged from within the context of the slave society's unregulated and widely dispersed violence. But James complicates this origin story by deliberately stressing that the San Domingo slave once called Toussaint Bréda did not have a bad master, was not whipped according to the provisions of the Negro Code, and did not face torture or mutilation (12–13). History had other designs: "circumstances conspired to give him exceptional parents and friends and a kind master" (James 20). Toussaint's godfather taught him elementary French and Latin; his father imparted basic knowledge of medicinal plants. Beyond this, he was self-taught; gifted with a keen intellect, he read the Abbé Raynal and Caesar and acquired what James dubs "a grounding" in economics and politics: "He had had exceptional opportunities, and both in mind and body was far beyond the average slave. . . . He could swim across a dangerous river, jump on a horse at full speed and do what he liked with it" (James 91–92).

Sastri's account of his early years in the Tanjavore district of Tamil Nadu similarly emphasizes his fortunate circumstances and opportunities, his own might-have-been-otherwise: "I was born in poverty, but inherited a good brain. My parents pinched themselves hard to keep me at school and college. . . . Though brought up on inadequate nutriment, I was a strong boy and spent many hours out of doors, mingling in the street and river-bed sports and excelling in several of them" ("Confession" 1–3). The assertion of exceptionality in James is the underlying condition of the revolutionary narrative, the method by which he writes Toussaint as both romantic and tragic hero. Sastri's relatively fortunate upbringing has yet to be subject to heroic treatment, but here, as in the selection of passages below, the seeds of such a tale about the Indian liberal are evident.

> Of Toussaint: "His comparative learning, his success in life, his character and personality gave him an immense prestige among [all who knew him], and he was a man of some consequence . . ." (James 93).
>
> Of Sastri: "Gifted with the rare powers of eloquence, he was the most authentic exponent in his time of liberalism, a philosophy which can never be outmoded so long as men care for liberty . . ." (Raghunathan i).

Of Toussaint: "He was ready to go a long way to meet the colonists" (James 108).

Of Sastri: "On quite a number of occasions he changed his stance when persuaded that that might be the way to hasten the day . . ." (Raghunathan ix).

Of Toussaint: ". . . he was self-contained, impenetrable and stern, with the habit and manner of the born aristocrat" (James 147).

Sastri, in his own words: "It is only my lifelong practice of self-control that cloaks the gnawings of my inmost being behind a blank expression of face" ("Confession" 4).

Temperamentally and philosophically, Sastri and Toussaint share commitments to self-control, diplomacy, and rhetoric that are evident in their respective negotiations with Britain and France as well as their relationships to their incipient nations, as the following episodes make clear.

The Convention's provisional abolition of slavery in the colonies secured Toussaint's allegiance to the French. The recall of Sonthonax and the wavering of the Directory in 1797 instilled in Toussaint the suspicion that France would eventually restore slavery in San Domingo. In November of that year, he composed a letter to the Directory that James calls a political document of a piece with Pericles on Democracy and Paine on the Rights of Man. Toussaint addresses the Citizens Directors, hoping to influence and "enlighten" the legislators but also to give warning that he and his men are "going to watch every party in France" (James 195).

> Already perfidious emissaries have stepped in among us to ferment the destructive leaven prepared by the hands of liberticides. But they will not succeed. I swear it by all that liberty holds most sacred. My attachment to France, my knowledge of the blacks, make it my duty not to leave you ignorant either of the crimes which they meditate or the oath that we renew, to bury ourselves under the ruins of a country revived by liberty rather than suffer the return of slavery. (James 195)

The warning is couched in the language of a generous informant, sharing "knowledge" of his people because of an attachment to the mother country. Even as Toussaint declares in explicit terms that the blacks will never return to slavery, he gives credit to his letter's addressees—"your wisdom will enable you to avoid the dangerous snares"; "France will not revoke her principles" (James 195–196)—and speaks inclusively of "common enemies." In this letter, Toussaint returns to the language of "children," i.e. the language of "my children" and "my country" (196). Against, or perhaps in spite of, France's paternal claims on San Domingo, Toussaint declares himself father of what is not yet a nation and speaker for the people of San Domingo. In order to become the voice of his people, to communicate "the

principles that they transmit to you by me" (James 197), Toussaint has to renounce something of his own political ambition: "I shall never hesitate between the safety of San Domingo and my personal happiness" (James 196).

This mode of renunciation is one of the tenets of modern politics, in which the actions of an individual are only politically relevant "to the extent that they draw on or express our interdependence," and in which the publically committed citizen must have "a sacrificial self-understanding" (Mehta 10). Sastri's location within this political tradition is also evident in his writings and speeches; he consistently and unwaveringly advocated a reformist political philosophy and conceived of the politician as public servant. "A man may act fearlessly in his own affairs, not minding the consequences," he wrote. "But when he deals with the affairs of his country, i.e. with the interests and feelings of a large mass of people, he must act with fear of consequences" (Jagadisan 41). Bayly clubs Sastri with other prominent liberals of his time like Hriday Nath Kunzru, Tej Bahadur Sapru, and C.Y. Chintamani, each of whom opposed non-cooperation out of deference to the law: "They vowed to oppose the British government, but from within the constitutional process" (2011, 14).

Sastri had tremendous faith in the potential of the legislative process, and many of his most stirring speeches involve critiques of inadequate, unfair, or unethical legislation, such as his condemnation of the Criminal Law Emergency Powers Bill (the Rowlatt Bill), which would have empowered the government to detain and imprison without trial anyone suspected of "political offenses." The Rowlatt Bill was the outcome of a commission headed by Justice Rowlatt of the Supreme Court of Judicature of England which was charged with investigating the "Seditious Movement in India." On February 7, 1919, Sastri delivered a speech in the Imperial Legislative Council which opposed the Bill. Jagadisan calls his speech against the Bill "historic"; it made "a profound impression . . . and became an abiding memory [for all] who listened to it" (27–28). Gandhi praised the speech in his autobiography as well, while lamenting its failure to halt the passage of the bill.[6]

Sastri's speech begins with the almost gentle admonition that the "nature of" and the "time for" the legislation are unsuitable, and he reassures the imperial government that it need not empower itself to strike preemptively against supposed criminals: "[the Government] is avowedly in full possession of the powers that it needs to put down wrong of every kind" ("Rowlatt" 25). Having assuaged the insecurity of his audience, Sastri employs the inclusive "we" in addressing the purported necessity of the bill: "To say now, long before the necessity may arise, that we want to equip ourselves permanently with weapons of repression . . . is, in my opinion simply to set the country in an unnecessary state of excitement" ("Rowlatt" 26). He is speaking out against a bill which he had no part in formulating, yet he assumes the posture of a legislator among peers.

With this non-combative opening, Sastri begins to wage his critique in more

pointed words: "We are asked to supplant the experience of civilized government"; ". . . a bad law once passed is not always used against the bad"; ". . . when Government undertakes a repressive policy the innocent are not safe." Sastri's meaning could not be clearer, but he continues to speak of a general susceptibility that implicates all governments, not simply the British:

> In times of panic to which all alien Governments are unfortunately far too liable . . . I have known governments [to] lose their heads. I have known a reign of terror being brought about, I have known the best, the noblest Indians, the highest characters amongst us brought under suspicion. . . . Men like me would not be considered innocent. ("Rowlatt" 28–29)

The intimate appeal ("men like me") is followed by criticism of the anarchists and revolutionaries whom the Rowlatt Bill explicitly endeavored to repress. "In my opinion," he says, "[the anarchist, the revolutionary, the bomb thrower] are blind . . . they dwell too much upon the unfavourable aspect of things. They read contemporary affairs wrong, they read history wrong, they see no righteousness anywhere" ("Rowlatt" 32–33). Is this condemnation of revolutionary action simply that: condemnation? The close of Sastri's speech reveals a more involved appeal to the craftsmen of the offending bill.

Sastri closes with the statement that his own opposition to the Rowlatt Bill, as well as that of others like Gandhi, is not and will not be responsible for any "agitation" of the Indian people. "Agitation," together with the "unnecessary state of excitement" with which he began, returns us to the image of the anarchists, revolutionaries, and bomb throwers. "The agitation must be there," Sastri says. "Already the heart must be throbbing . . ." He then offers himself up as an example, he who would be implicated by the bill's criminalization of all political activity: "I have yet borne no part in this agitation, but if everything goes wrong, if we are free to face with this legislation, how it is possible for me, with the views that I hold, to abstain from agitation, I, for one, cannot say" (35–36).[7] Sastri's hesitance here—his shaking resolve to abstain from "agitation"—recalls Toussaint's hesitation before joining the slave uprising on August 21, 1791; instead of joining, he first "undertakes to safeguard his former master and mistress" (Scott 72).

Two years after Sastri's speech on the Rowlatt Bill, in the midst of the noncooperation movement led by Gandhi, Sastri delivered a speech at the British House of Commons as a representative to the Conference of Prime Ministers and Representatives of the United Kingdom, the Dominions, and India. His address began with an avowal of India's appreciation of the British Empire: "That the British Empire is the most fitting exponent of these [generous enthusiasms and noble ideals for humanity which the War has kindled] we realize, and it is the peculiarly good fortune of India to remain within the British Empire and take part in

the work that we need ever increasingly for the realization of these noble aims and purposes" ("Opening Speech"). The good fortune he went on to describe, however, included contributing munitions, troops, and food to the British military forces at the expense of Indian men and women ("making dangerous inroads on the scanty stocks of our own people"), as well as the fact that India had not yet acquired "full Dominion status." Sastri called the Government of India Act of 1919 "a great landmark in the growth of Indian constitution," even though his contemporaries in the Congress deemed the act inadequate and disappointing in its limited reforms and provisions for Indian participation in the imperial government.

Why grant so much to the British Parliamentary audience, including the reference to non-cooperation as one of "the perils [with] which we have to live"? At first blush, Sastri's condemnation of non-cooperation in the House of Commons seems tantamount to betrayal of Gandhi, whom Sastri in fact loved and revered for his selflessness, forgiveness, piety, and courage, and whom he referred to as a younger brother ("Mahatma"). But Sastri had also explicitly opposed the non-cooperation movement at the December 1920 Congress session in Nagpur, where his position was extremely unpopular. Sastri feared that non-violent non-cooperation would too easily spawn violence and jeopardize any future possibility of working *with* the British toward India's independence. Perhaps, too, he sensed the precarity of the line between force and peace, the ease with which non-violent action could create the conditions for violent reaction. Like Toussaint before him, Sastri had "a genuine horror of useless bloodshed" (James 254), and he would offer "no reprisals." Thus Sastri chose, here as elsewhere, to make his appeals palatable to his audience—to give first where he endeavored to receive. As Raghunathan writes, "To enhance the effect of antithesis he had to lay the colours on thick" (xvii).

Sastri's opening passage on India's fortune was followed by an entreaty to British statesmen to "show as much chivalry and tenderness as may be expected from a mighty victor" ("Opening Speech" 33) in making provisions for the Turkish Empire at the end of World War I. He also argued for an improvement in the status of Indians throughout the Dominions of the British Empire: "a full enjoyment of citizenship within the British Empire [applies to] every self-governing Dominion within its compass . . . no deduction must be made from the rights that other British subjects enjoy" ("Opening Speech" 33). Sastri's rhetorical strategy on this point involved a diminishing of the importance of the issue of equal status. "We have great tasks," he said. "Let little things be got out of the way" ("Opening Speech" 33). We know from his writings on the status of Indians in South Africa that the issue of equal status was no "little thing." But by rendering the issue "little," Sastri created space for other requests, revisions, and future advocacy, while the use of the inclusive pronoun "we" established a non-threatening and even conspiratorial tone.

A few months later, Sastri came to the United States as India's delegate to the

Washington Naval Conference and, on December 13, 1921, was a signatory on the Four-Power Treaty between the United States, the British Empire, France and Japan. Sastri was India's representative on the same basis as the representatives of the other commonwealths of the British Empire including Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa ("Treaty"). While in the U.S., he gave a lecture at the University of Michigan, where he again asserted his opposition to non-cooperation. Like Toussaint, Sastri was consistent: "These were his views; he never changed them" (James 261). His speech garnered protests from the Hindu community in Detroit, as it had upset those at the Nagpur Congress. I quote at some length from a report on his address:

> The Indian diplomat . . . paid high tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, who is now the acknowledged leader of the present revolutionary movement in India . . . Mr. Sastri, however, believes that his policy of non-resistance will fail. . . . Already a strong element among his supporters are demanding the right to use force, [and] this will be not only the negation of Gandhi's programme, [but it] will surely mean its failure and a distinct check to the newly-established Indian government.
>
> . . . Mr. Sastri frankly showed himself, as is to be expected, a friend, though a critical one, of the British government . . .
>
> . . . [he] acknowledged that a great responsibility lies in the response of the Indian people. They must show effectively and convincingly, not only their readiness to cooperate with the British government, but their willingness to remain a part of the British empire. Here is the only salvation for India, for he said freely that the Indian peoples can never effectively oppose by force so formidable a power as the mother country. In this he is evidently at one with Gandhi, though not with the general revolutionary movement. ("Sastri on the Indian Political Situation")

Sastri was not afraid of espousing an unpopular position, of standing alone against the rising tide of so-called revolutionary fervor. As he said in the Imperial Legislative Council, ". . . when the stern call of duty comes, when the requirement of truth [is] laid on me, when the best interests of my country, as I understand them, demand it, I am perfectly prepared to submit to unpopularity" ("Rowlatt" 34). Like Gandhi, he sought salvation and sovereignty for India, but his method and language were different. Sastri employed the rhetoric of kinship to assert India's relationship to Britain as "the mother country." He also assigned foremost responsibility to those he deemed his brothers, exhorting his countrymen to rise to his liberal ideals and even placate the imperialists with preemptive professions of ongoing belonging.

Similarly, "Toussaint always addressed the blacks as French citizens: what will France think if she learns that your conduct was not worthy of true republicans?" (James 154). He explicitly urged the blacks to take the lead in trying to live harmoniously with the whites and Mulattoes who were once their masters: "Toussaint took a glass of wine and a glass of water, mixed them together and showed the result. 'How can you tell which is which? We must all live together'" (James 252). Toussaint's demand that former slaves live together with former masters was arguably even more ambitious than Sastri's aspiration of cooperation between liberty-seeking-colonized and liberty-granting-colonizer. But both men understood that the violence of colonialism was relational; it bound aggressors and victims, ensuring their continued association in time and space, necessitating that they practice what David Nirenberg has termed *convivencia*: civil coexistence "predicated on [violence]" (9).

v.

In March 2011, I attended a South Asian Studies workshop on the subject of "civility at the limits of the political." It was a felicitous theme; that same month, the man who would, in six years time, become president of the United States was uncivilly calling for President Barack Obama to release his birth certificate, which the congenitally unflappable statesman would in fact be forced to do in a matter of weeks. Without mentioning the "birther" movement (we did not know then that we were also witness to the birth of a new political regime), C.A. Bayly's introductory remarks to the workshop drew attention to how the boundaries of political civility were being tested and redrawn. Civility, Bayly noted, involves "decorum and restraint in political practice, particularly in political language." He continued:

> Obama has tried to re-introduce civility into American political language. The Speaker of the British House of Commons has urged civility on MPs who recently jeered at a disabled colleague. In the Indian case, it seems correct to argue that British forms of constitutional civility went out of the window after 1900 and particularly after 1914. Violent political language became common. . . . The British became a 'satanic government'; Muslim rulers became 'barbarian devils.' (2011, 8)

At the time of writing in 2016, American political language has been so debased that children must now be guarded from hearing the exchanges in presidential debates. The schoolyard quality of post-Brexit political discourse between Members of the European Parliament is well documented (Harding and Siddique). In India, although it has been two years since a Member of Parliament used pepper spray

in order to halt the discussion of a bill, widespread infringements on the freedom of expression represent a most nefarious form of state-sanctioned incivility (Tharoor).

For Bayly, the problem of civility in political language was tied to larger questions of civilization, what in French is known as *civilité*, meaning both an "organized political community" and "polite, orderly behavior" (OED). Norbert Elias's canonical elaboration of the civilizing process, in which the presence or absence of violence constitutes individual subjects and is the key mode of relation to which a population becomes habituated, was central to his account. Individuals do not "civilize" on the basis of superior reason, intellect, merits, or strengths; rather, individuals who are always already members of society practice civility because living together necessarily requires it. Civilization, in Elias's admittedly Eurocentric account, is achieved once individuals—through the interweaving, intermingling, and interdependence of their lives—arrive at a harmonious "balance" and are able to coexist in enjoyment and not fear. In the Indian context, such European notions of civility were transmitted through educational institutions, the social and cultural complex of anglophonism, and the democratization of particular norms of conduct concerning food, dress, sport, and the proper conduct of an aspiring citizen-subject.

Eliasian civility undergirds all efforts to live with others. It is fundamentally pragmatic, involving sustained practices of recognition and accommodation of the other. Elias's example of the road system in a complex society ("Cars . . . rushing in all directions; pedestrians and cyclists . . . thread[ing] their way . . . policemen [regulating] the traffic") is thus both a literal and figural account of the demands that "the civilized" make of themselves and others in order that there may continue to be traffic and interlocution between parties: "The chief danger that people here represent for others results from someone in this bustle losing their self-control" (Elias 368). Both Sastri and Toussaint feared the possibility that others would lose their self-control, that reprisals and non-cooperation respectively would undermine the present and future prospects of their people and nations to achieve and enjoy liberty.

In a 1935 speech, "Can a politician be a gentleman?", Sastri acknowledged his tendency to concede points to adversaries in the name of establishing common ground, to seek out opposing perspectives, and to strive to maintain in public life an attitude of generosity, tenderness, and chivalry. "It is sometimes accounted to me for a weakness," he said ("Gentleman" 76). But those practicing politics must do so with deference to certain ideals; for politics "requires you to put yourself always in the position of a servant of the community" ("Gentleman" 79). Sastri urged his listeners to practice politics as friends and "gentlemen" and to refrain

from abusing, ridiculing, or maligning their opponents. Unfortunately, he noted, the posture of superiority toward one's political opposition is common: "It is all angels on one side and devils on the other; swans and crows, upon the one side all unworthy citizens, upon the other all saints" ("Gentleman" 84). For Sastri, black-white, good-bad distinctions were not only unethical, but also mistook the fact that rhetorical opposition is requisite for political practice: ". . . the essence of politics is that we should take different sides in order that by effective advocacy of both sides, the mean may be arrived at, truth may be served and the ends of justice be preserved; *it is your duty to be on one side, it is the duty of the other man to be on the other side*" ("Gentleman" 88, my emphasis).

Reading Sastri in light of Toussaint, I have begun to map the terrain in which opposed parties—anticolonial subjects faced with the functionaries of colonial power—must live together, imagine a future together, negotiate, dialogue, combat, and engage in order to achieve their ends. By marrying an affirmation of the golden mean to the allowance that one's political opponents are rightly responding to their respective *dharma*, Sastri hoped to civilize the political discourse of his time, a time of social and political upheaval, with the nation on the brink of independence. The young revolutionary Bhagat Singh had been hung four years earlier; the Indian National Congress would launch the Quit India movement in 1942. Over the previous fifteen years, Gandhi had led the movement for non-cooperation with the British Raj. But Sastri's revolutionary reformism anticipated the inevitable co-operation that would be required between an independent India and the former Raj. Having had a seat at the table, he knew that anticolonial India could not afford to irreparably damage ties with Britain, purveyor of violence who would nevertheless necessarily become India's postcolonial ally.

Toussaint's history of conciliation toward the French, by contrast, caught up with him toward the end of his political career. Most strikingly, he had his nephew, General Moïse, put to death for violating his orders to protect the white colonists. James discusses this in a footnote: "Toussaint did not trust the French Government. He would not have armed to the extent and in the manner he did if he had. *But he allowed the people to think that he trusted the French*" (297). Toussaint's ploy, the mistake of performed trust in the French, cost him the trust of his men; later, when he needed their support, they were not be able to see "why Toussaint should call on them to fight these whites, when all his policy had been towards conciliation of them" (James 297). Toussaint's failure to communicate his intentions to his close subordinates and reticence to ask for advice contributed to his removal from San Domingo—and, eventually, his death. But we would be mistaken to throw out Toussaint's reformist impulse with the proverbial bathwater of biographical failure. His successor, Dessalines, succeeded where Toussaint failed, because, "un-

like Toussaint, he [took] his men into his confidence" (James 314). Toussaint's fatal mistake was not the practice of civility, but rather that he extended his civility in one primary direction, toward the colonists, while ultimately neglecting to address his men. As Scott writes, "The singular achievement and the utter failure of his political subjectivity are," like revolutionary reforms, "the sides of one and the same coin" (155).

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NOTES

1 To date, only three books have been written on Sastri: biographies, published only in India, by P. Kodanda Rao (1963), T.N. Jagadisan (1969), and Mohan Ramanan (2007).

2 Gopal Krishna Gokhale founded the Servants of India Society in 1905 with the goal of furthering the national interests of Indians and improving educational opportunities across the country. Sastri joined the Servants of India Society in 1906, at the age of 37. He would become President of the Society in 1915 upon Gokhale's death.

3 English has always been a vehicle of upward mobility and economic development in India, but at the time of writing in 2016, in the New India, it is finally available to lower-caste and class communities formerly barred access to educational and vocational institutions for English-language acquisition. It is verily a *new* English, one that, as Rashmi Sadana observes, many young Indians "have only ever related to as a global rather than a colonial or even postcolonial [language]" (125).

4 By postcolonial "language debate," I mean the debate over the possibility and outcome of indigenizing languages like English that are imperial bequests in formerly colonized countries like India. For instance, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o holds a purist position like Gandhi's, whereas Chinua Achebe in his time made more pragmatic use of English. We might also term the contest in question the "mother tongue" debate: Is the adoption of English by a person of Indian origin (or French or Spanish in Haiti) a rejection of some earlier tongue spoken by one's mother or grandmother, figurally speaking? Or is, as Sheldon Pollock has argued, the obsession with mother tongues a European obsession? For many Indians, choosing or not choosing to speak English is no choice at all, and cannot be vested with undue significance by the arbiters of Indian authenticity—just as "modernity was not a choice New World slaves could exercise but was itself one of the fundamental conditions of choice" (Scott 19).

5 Here, I take inspiration from Trinh T. Minh-ha, whose work has consistently emphasized that as "you speak it, it speaks you" (56).

6 In *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Gandhi reflects at some length on the nature and efficacy of Sastri's speech: "I have attended the proceedings of India's legislative chamber only once in my life, and that was on the occasion of the debate on [the Rowlatt Bill]. Sastriji delivered an impassioned speech, in which he uttered a solemn note of warning to the Government. The Viceroy seemed to be listening spell-bound, his eyes riveted on Sastriji as the latter poured forth the hot stream of his eloquence. For the moment it seemed to me as if the Viceroy could not but be deeply moved by it, it was

so true and so full of feeling.But you can wake a man only if he is really asleep; no effort that you make will produce any effect upon him if he is merely pretending sleep. That was precisely the Government's position . . ." (457–458).

7 The bill passed. Two years later, in 1921, the Rowlatt Act was overturned after a period of non-cooperation and the Punjab tragedy. The period between 1919–1921 involved numerous statements, political actions, and the unfolding of *satyagraha*.

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