

The Anglo-Indian Community in Contemporary India¹

by

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FROM THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY onward, numerous European powers attempted to establish colonial footholds throughout the continent of Asia. Certainly there had been outside contacts and conquests earlier in the history of this area, but European economic and political dominance on a long-term and lasting scale was first potent at that time. Shortly after European colonial representatives arrived in Asia, a biological hybrid, the Eurasian, was sired by these invaders. This action was so typical that all Asian countries having a history of European colonial dominance evolved such a minority. The extensive period of European colonialism in India propagated one such population of biological hybrids, generally referred to as Anglo-Indians. The Anglo-Indian Community, as the term is used in contemporary India, has a history that is traceable to the earliest arrivals in India of European colonials, the Portuguese in 1498, but more significantly to the British in 1600. Between the periods of dominance perpetrated by these callers other European powers, notably the French and Dutch, were present in India, but the scope of their dominance was quite limited. The influence of the Portuguese was, however pervasive, especially in the southern coastal region. Colonial encouragement, as well as inevitable social and cultural contacts, soon produced a large number of individuals having a mixed biological heritage. Within a few decades, this group of Eurasians expanded substantially and became identified with other communities of similar origin, especially those having a British heritage; evolving into what is presently known as the Anglo-Indian Community of India. To legally designate members of this minority the Constitution of India contains the following official definition.

An 'Anglo-Indian' means a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only.

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The historical influence of both the cultural and social patterns of the Anglo-Indian Community has had an important effect upon the position occupied by this group in contemporary India. Anglo-Indians are English-speaking urban dwellers who have retained the cultural characteristics of their European ancestors. Much change has, however, occurred recently within their community. The focus of this change is indicated by the current need of the Community to develop a self-identity now that England has abandoned its cause. During colonial rule Anglo-Indians were usually afforded protected political, economic, and sometimes social positions by the British. They were often guaranteed jobs in certain strategic occupations — customs, communication, transportation, and the police. However, with the coming of national independence in 1947, the reference group and protector of this Community, the British, were no longer present. It was then necessary that they stand alone or simply cease to exist as a cultural entity. Constitutional provisions in 1950 guaranteed all Anglo-Indians certain continued privileges for a period of ten years so as to assist them in their adjustment to the new social order that was destined to inevitably develop after independence. At the end of that protected period they were to be placed in open competition with the remainder of the indigenous population. As a result of their obvious social and cultural emulation of Europeans, making them uniquely identified in the culture of India and their insecure position in a society becoming increasingly nationalistic, they found themselves occupying a truly marginal status.

The Community now stands in a position outside of the dominant culture of India, externally and internally limited from membership and acceptance. When it became obvious that Indian independence was inevitable, a large number of Anglo-Indians decided to abandon India and migrate rather than face an uncertain future in an India without British dominance. Even though the number is smaller than in the past many Anglo-Indians continue to migrate from the land of their birth, primarily to England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Because of inadequate records, it is impossible to indicate the number who have abandoned India, but there have been many. There are also no means of accurately indicating the number of Anglo-Indians remaining in India. The last census that enumerated the Community (1931) as a distinct category indicated a total Anglo-Indian population of 138,895 (including 19,200 in Burma). Many Anglo-Indians appear to have listed themselves as "European," thus confusing the issue further. There is, therefore, no way of knowing the actual number of Anglo-Indians remaining in India, but a rough estimation of between 80,000 and 100,000 is normally used. The President of the All-India Anglo-Indian Association, in a 1964 interview with the senior author, estimated the number

having departed India at that time to be between 100,000 and 150,000. The number he cited is undoubtedly too large; however, an estimate that migration has encompassed upwards to one-half of the original Community is probably close to being accurate. Those who have departed India appear to have been Anglo-Indians of higher economic status, whereas most of those still remaining will be unable to migrate, largely because of the economic problems involved and migratory restrictions placed upon all persons residing within India.

Being unable to migrate and unwilling to assimilate the Anglo-Indian Community of India currently occupies a position peripheral to the general society of India. The on-going efforts at adjustment, whether assimilative, accommodative, or escapist in nature can, and do, indicate a time of profound social change for the membership of this group.

With national independence the Anglo-Indian Community entered a new era» having as its hallmark, except during specific periods; new and increased anxieties. The old era had been one of relative security, allowing political bargaining for guarantees — guarantees of governmental protection concerning their economic and educational livelihoods as well as a guarantee that they would be left alone to maintain their own heritage. The Anglo-Indians now feared that without British support they would encounter insurmountable difficulties- However, the Community, in comparison to its total size, received rather generous guarantees from the newly independent government.

In almost all spheres of life the Anglo-Indian feels threatened, realizing the tentative position which he occupies socially and culturally within the new nation. Competition, and not ascription, is the keystone of the new nation. Although numerous Anglo-Indians are well-trained;

many members of the indigenous society have better vocational preparation and more education. As a result Anglo-Indians are being replaced in their traditional occupational status at a rapid rate. The membership of the Community have the uninviting choices of becoming better trained, entering a new occupation, remaining unemployed, or leaving India,

Since 1950, Anglo-Indians have found their employment patterns changing. There are a few professionals within the Community (teachers, doctors, lawyers, etc.), but most are in the non-professional occupations. Many Anglo-Indians are in the services (railways, customs, military, police, etc.), but they no longer maintain a dominant monopoly as they did in past years. Many men hold jobs in

commercial firms, the military, airlines, and entertainment, while a large number are employed in occupations requiring mechanical skills, such as for automotive firms. Numerous Anglo-Indian women are employed, especially in nursing, secretarial, and clerical fields. Traditionally Anglo-Indian women have enjoyed employment in the nursing profession, finding lucrative jobs in many of the major hospitals of India. Today Anglo-Indian women find increasing employment opportunities as secretaries in the large commercial and business firms of India, especially those firms owned and operated by European-based companies. With increased urbanization it has become somewhat easier for Anglo-Indian women than for men to find lucrative employment. The ramifications of this situation immense psychologically, socially, and culturally for the Community.

The Anglo-Indians have rejected most of the ancient cultural and social heritage of India, accepting instead the traditions of England. Their dress and dietary patterns are British, their language is English, and their religious and marriage patterns are European. The Anglo-Indian considers the literature, music and culture of Europe to be his, and is commonly indifferent to the cultural heritage of his birthland.

The Anglo-Indian of today, as he has always been, is an urban dweller. The British were interned in the urban areas of India, and owing to the fact that the Anglo-India Community maintained residence within a close proximity of the British it was natural that an urban pattern would develop. The jobs secured by Anglo-Indians were usually located in cities, and the patterns of behavior indicative of the Anglo-Indian way of life could more easily find acceptance in urban centers,

Periodically the Anglo-Indian has attempted to develop agricultural schemes, but in all cases these attempts have failed. Thus Anglo-Indians have been destined to reside within the confines of an urban area- Today they are primarily found in Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay, Madras, Hyderabad, Secunderabad, and Bangalore. There are other urban areas; usually having a population of over 100,000, in which concentrations of Anglo-Indians are found. Several of the smaller cities within the country were initially rail centers, and as a result cantonments, predominantly occupied by Anglo-Indians who managed and operated these rail systems, developed. However, it should be noted that Anglo-Indians are indeed scattered throughout the country. Wherever the British concentrated an Anglo-Indian group was usually fostered. Although they are concentrated in the above mentioned cities, there is no large city, and certainly no state, from which Anglo-Indians are absent.

The membership of the Anglo-Indian Community attempts to maintain a Western standard of living with an Eastern income. Although by European or American standards such cost is comparatively low, in India the expense involved in providing a Western style of living is beyond the general income of most Indians. The socioeconomic problems of the Community are depicted by a 1957-1958 pilot survey made in Calcutta. This survey was composed of 491 families, representing about 10 percent of the membership of the Calcutta Community. The average monthly income of Anglo-Indian families was 335 rupees per month, or about 67 U.S. dollars. Only a small minority had a monthly family income of over 750 rupees (approximately 125 U.S. dollars) while one-fourth of the families received less than 100 rupees per month (approximately 20 U.S. dollars). Although these figures are representative only for the Community in Calcutta, and are additionally somewhat dated, they appear to be fairly indicative of the situation existent today in Calcutta and in other parts of the country.

The behavior patterns of the membership of the Community could be generally characterized as expensive. In order to maintain the overt symbols of communal identification, such as Western dress; domestic help, recreation, home furnishings, etc. Anglo-Indians often sacrifice many items of necessity. Because they ignore the future they are usually viewed as being non-realistic in their approach to life. Many Anglo-Indians attribute this to the uncertainty of the future, enjoying as much of life as they can, while they can.

In this tradition, Anglo-Indians of today participate in a variety of social activities. There are several Anglo-Indian clubs, such as Delhi's Gidney Club and Calcutta's Rangers Club, located in the major cities of India. These clubs are expensive, and only the more affluent members of the Community can afford membership. They offer European food, drink, recreation; entertainment, and relaxation for their patrons. In many instances they are physically situated in buildings originally constructed to serve as British clubs during colonial rule. Since most of the membership of the Community cannot afford the cost of these clubs, the less affluent rely upon movies, church organizations, supper clubs, informal neighborhood visits, etc., for their social life. The cost for these diversions is not especially prohibitive, and the type of entertainment is more in the European tradition. Individuals holding leadership positions are involved in many political activities. In most matters, with the general exception of education and language, the Community officially supports the goals and policies of the national government. As one of their two members of the national assembly, Frank Anthony has often been outspoken and critical of many political moves by

both the government and leading political parties. Except for this leadership, Anglo-Indians do not appear to be especially interested in politics. A federal emphasis on national integration in India has prompted some negative reactions from the Community. In respect to these policies, there have been two areas with which the Community has been vitally concerned during the past few years, the national policy and community attitudes toward education and toward language. To the Anglo-Indian both a British type of education and the English language are vitally important as instruments in the continuation of the Community. During recent years there have been increased nationalistic demands from many parts of the country that both the British system of education and English be discarded. The leadership of the Community have fought numerous legal battles in an attempt to preserve both. In these contests the Community has thus far generally been successful.

To illustrate the official Community attitude concerning these problems, in his 1966 Presidential Address to the All-India Anglo-Indian Association, the major political arm of the Community, Frank Anthony indicated his concern for both the English schools and language with the following remarks:

Remember this, without our schools and without our language. English, we cannot be an Anglo-Indian Community. We may be like the Feringis of Kerala who claim to be originally of Portuguese descent but who have merged into the lowest stratum of the Indian Christian community, with their mother-tongue as Malayalam. Without our language, without our schools, we cannot be an Anglo-Indian Community. We may be anything else. And that is why we have mounted increasing vigil in respect of our schools and our language-

The All-India Anglo-Indian Association; purporting to be the representative agency for most Anglo-Indians in India, maintains a large section whose function it is to supervise and foster British-styled education. This educational body, administered by A. E. T. Barrow, who with Mr. Anthony is one of the two Anglo-Indian representatives to the Lok Sabha, the most influential house of the national parliament. This organization acts as the central supervising agency for the Anglo-Indian schools of India, including the organization of curriculum and the administration of Cambridge-styled examinations.

Throughout the colonial history of India, numerous Anglo-Indian schools were established in India. Most were small, several had religious affiliations, and almost all had continuous economic problems- Fearing an eventual banning of English

in all public schools, the All-India Anglo-Indian Association, some ten years ago, initiated a program designed to construct several large Anglo-Indian schools. To date, three of these schools, one each in New Delhi, Calcutta, and Bangalore, have opened. These schools were designed to be available for Anglo-Indian education should the government totally restrict the usage of English in the public school system.

These schools, however, serve only a few members of the Community. Anglo-Indian enrollment is low, owing to the high cost of attendance. The principal of the Frank Anthony School, New Delhi, indicated to the senior author in a 1964 interview that the school had an enrollment of between 1,850 and 1,900 students, but of this number only 65 or 70 were Anglo-Indians. Reports are generally the same for Anglo-Indian schools throughout the country. The same principal, who has since migrated to Australia, said that he felt the small number of Anglo-Indians attending these schools was due to the fact that a great number of Anglo-Indians have abandoned India; leaving behind those of low economic status who could not afford to migrate. Consequently, many Anglo-Indians still remaining in India cannot afford to send their children to the official schools of the Community.

It is difficult to say whether the reason for low Anglo-Indian enrollment is entirely due to costly but expense is certainly a big factor. Federal law requires that Anglo-Indian enrollment in these schools, in order for them to receive financial aid from the national government, cannot exceed forty per cent To date this has been no problem, Even though Anglo-Indian enrollment is low, the Association considers continued school construction to be paramount

The language question, i. e., whether or not English will be retained as a medium of instruction and communication, continues to be a problem for the Community. The government has, at numerous times, attempted to replace English and make Hindi the sole national language. Anglo-Indians have, naturally, been opposed to such replacement, but their political influence, as indicated previously, is limited. However, because of regional and linguistic group opposition, as well as periodic violence, the government has not been able to establish Hindi as the national language. Thus the Anglo-Indian has temporarily been spared many of the difficulties of being faced with a new language medium.

Anglo-Indians rarely speak, in a fluent manner, the indigenous languages of India. Although they must study Hindi and one other regional or national

language in school, they normally utilize these languages only when social situations make such usage necessary, i. e., in dealing with domestic help, in the market place, or increasingly in a place of occupation. This rejection, as perhaps would be expected; has been resented by other Indians.

The Anglo-Indian Community of today's India continues to face many of the problems familiar to past generations. They continue to exist as a discrete entity finding themselves threatened by nationalism and rising "All-India" feelings. Amid these overt threats they retain many, if not most, of the behavior patterns characteristic of their European ancestors. It appears that most of those remaining in India will, because of economic reasons; be forced to spend the duration of their lives within the country. As a result they have often attempted to adjust to realistic conditions, and find a place for themselves within the society of India, Some, on the other hand, have not been able to adjust. Consequently the continued existence of this community within the confines will undoubtedly manifest serious problems for both Anglo-Indians and other indigenous citizens of the country.

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