



Anglo-Indians of India: Studying socio-political challenges of the community

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Abstract

Anglo-Indians were an imperial diaspora in British India. The Anglo-Indians have developed a distinct culture and a world outlook due to their mixed parentage. Today, they are constitutionally accepted as a distinct minority community of India and certain safeguards are guaranteed to them. Their origin and existence questioned several existing institutionalized structural patterns. In this paper, we will trace the trajectory beginning from historical events leading towards their social status and their political existence in the country.

Keywords: Anglo Indians, British India, diaspora, identity, culture

Introduction

The British gained control of the greater portion of the Indian subcontinent starting in the 17th century and retained significant power well till the 20th century. Many men were brought from England to assist in the administration of India.

When the British finally departed in 1947 they left behind a westernized mixed-race called 'Anglo-Indian', a community whose largest single stock is British on the paternal side. On the other hand, the stock is almost entirely of Indian origin on the maternal side. The group is predominantly British in its cultural affiliations.

Anglo-Indians were offered employment in the subordinate grades of Public Services without disturbing the existing hierarchy. They were employed as telegraph operators, engine drivers, electricians, guards, mechanisms and technicians. Anglo-Indians became a class of servants of first the East India Company and later the British Government. Many of the problems of the group may not only be explained with recourse to biological conjectures due to their unfortunate position in Indian society.

There are official definitions used to describe the community. The Government of India Act of 1935, defined an Anglo-Indian as "a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is a native of India." Drawing from this Act, Article 366 (2) of the Indian Constitution states that 'an Anglo-Indian is considered to be someone who lives in India and whose father or any of the male ancestors belong to the European lineage'.

The Anglo-Indians were a marginal group; they were disowned as half-breeds and treated with contempt. A number of social problems reflect their unstable position. Life in congested cities of India further complicates such problems. Anglo-Indians are mainly settled in places such as McCluskieging and other few pockets of the country.

Diaspora and Identity in the Making - Historical Aspect

Ashish Nandy defines colonialism as a shared culture that may not always begin with establishment of alien rule in a society and end with the departure of alien rulers from the colony. What remains are the inner rewards and punishments, the secondary psychological gains and losses from suffering and submission under colonialism^[1]. In the

Indian experience of colonialism, such anguish and struggles were faced by a neglected and sidelined community - the Anglo Indians. Characterised by their mixed parentage, the Anglo Indians form a small community whose fathers were of European descent and mothers were Indian.

The period of 1600-1750 is significant during which the foundations of English factories were laid and also the intermarriages between British men and native women slowly began to take place^[2]. Thus, the Anglo Indians have connections on the side of their mothers, usually belonging to the lower classes, to Indian land. This provides them with a unique mixture of identities. In this way, the initial phase of the entry of the EIC was of the 'Policy of Encouragement' where European men were to foster relations with Indian women. Their offsprings garnered favours and were treated as European for all purposes. They were also favoured for jobs. Slowly, this phase drew to an end due to numerous reasons. The Anglo Indian workers began to outnumber the English community soon as even in their subordinate positions they became proficient in technical functions essential in developing the economy and maintaining the colonial system. For their diligence, loyalty, and efficiency they were rewarded with ample wages, and they generally received higher incomes than most other Indians. British found the Anglo-Indians a useful ally in consolidating and maintaining the system of colonialism in India. They were rejected either as potential competitors for positions of prestige or power, or as social equals in intimate interpersonal relationships. Anglo-Indians were accorded jobs strategic to British interests - mainly in transportation, communications, the police and military, and customs -but seldom were they assigned to positions which might afford a threat to British power, or which would enable them to exercise authority over other British functionaries. British colonists made use of the Anglo Indian community for specific works designating them as a class of workers, all the time making sure this class remained subordinate to them and guaranteeing that they never acquire power. This was the main theme in their colonial administration.

Though, Anglo-Indians held only an intermediate position while serving the British they developed skills of language and culture over time as were committed to British and helped to establish communication between the EIC and

Empire efficiently running the telegraph and postal services to keep up communication run smoothly and uninterrupted. They stood by the British during the Mutiny of 1857. They served as the main buttress of the Crown by going to the battles when it sent them as and when it sensed the danger and political revolution. They were recognized for their faithfulness.

Later, when Englishmen's wives started to accompany them to India, the relations between Indians and English halted. Their situation complicated when their ties with their fathers got torn, they were not allowed to take on roles that their fathers held.

The English soon refused to have any ties with this class except an employer and employee relation. The Anglo-Indians were thus forced to shift their workplace to the royal chambers of Indian Kings. But when the kings and the EIC came in conflict, their loyalties again were divided as both sides asked for the support of Anglo Indians situating them in an unviable position^[3].

At the time of Independence, their population was no more than half-a-million. Frank Anthony, an historian and a political leader came to define them as 'microscopic community' interspersed in railway colonies, within enclaves in large cities. Anglo Indians had a European upbringing and even had Roman Catholic religious teaching. They followed western education, traditions and lifestyle. Even after these Europeanised routines, they were still linked to their Indian-ness even though through superficial features such as skin and accent^[4].

The three terms used to describe them came to be known as 'trinity of existence'. For instance, use of the term 'Anglo-Indian' to distinguish them from Europeans and Indians, 'European British Subjects' for military and defence purpose and 'Statutory Natives of India' for occupational purposes. It depicted the deep uncertainty of their status and future in India^[5].

Henry Gidney spearheaded the task of leading the delegation to London to petition referring to Lord Birkinhead, Secretary of State for India in order to discuss the 'anomalous position' of Anglo-Indians. It was contended by Gidney during his representations to the Indian Statutory Commission of 1928 - the Simon Commission - Anglo-Indians being the minority community of India had special claims owing to the fact of their distinctive feature of both being their permanent domicile in India while sharing affiliation with Britain attributing to blood, religion, language and habits and customs, living and education analogously^[6]. He broached the economic concerns such as increased competition for employment.

The outcomes of his representation culminated in undertaking various measures to defend their interests in matters related to services, education and politics. By the time of the Round Table Conference of 1930-1, there was broader shift in his ideas by emphasizing dual affinity to both Britain and India, which was restricted to only Britain earlier by staking permanent claims in India. There, he laid emphasis upon the fact that how his people endeavored to incorporate themselves with Indian tradition, its history and a beautiful amalgamation of India and Britain residing on Indian soil with distinctive identity. It could act as a unique and a strategic bridge between both nations. He attempted to garner the imperial bond^[7]. The Cripps Mission of 1942 which was led by Sir Stafford Cripps was to draft out a solution and procedure for Indian independence. This

mission failed to provide claims of Anglo Indians to representation in the constituent assembly. This treatment was also meted out for their participation in the interim Government of India. This was labeled as a betrayal by the Anglo Indians.

After gaining independence, the government had decided to treat the Anglo-Indians as a nationalist minority that sought citizenship in the newly formed nation. They could no longer balance themselves on two stools as opined by Gidens^[8].

The leaders of free India gave specific recognition of the Community's place as one of the important, politically recognised minorities in India'. Nehru and Patel gave assurance to Anglo-Indians about just treatment and representation to them in decision making that Britishers denied. Thus, Anglo-Indians were granted 3 seats in the Constituent assembly to be able to address their concerns and incorporate their ideas into the law of the land.

Anthony expressed 'a deep debt of thanks to the Congress leaders for their generous recognition of the rights of the community'. According to an editorial in the Review, 'The British who owed us a great deal gave us nothing, while Congress who owed us nothing have given us a great deal' and, as Maher explains, Indian leaders 'extended the hand of kinship'^[9]. Earlier, the Anglo-Indians had very staunch identity links with Britain as their homeland but Anthony Giddens elaborates how it took great efforts and the disconnect created with Britain after partition for them to come to terms with their Indian roots. It is a feasible solution if the Anglo Indians are able to unite their two identities by sidelining neither. By forming a healthy mix of their western British and Eastern Indian traits and asserting their identity in the socio-economic-political spheres.

Marginality in Societal Fabric - Progress of Anglo-Indians

The Indian society has always been complex. The social fabric has been both stiff and smooth as per the conditions. The Anglo-Indians have had to face the wrath of social exclusion and injustice due to their 'mixed' blood. Despite these challenges, Anglo-Indians have tried to contribute to the development process by their attempts to break free from the social mould made for them. The role played by Anglo-Indian women needs special mention here because it is imperative for the community. They were employed as nurses, teachers, secretaries and stenographers and many of them served as members of the Women's Auxiliary Corps (India) - the WAC(I) - in the Second World War.

They Anglo-Indians were scornfully looked upon by English elite as these people attempted to recreate an European domestic life in India while some of them continued to identify themselves more with their powerful paternal ancestry than with their subjugated Indian maternal ancestry as they constitute less material wealth and low status in Indian society^[10]. It is a matter of great concern pertaining to the size of population as it is deteriorating. For instance, McCluskieganj is a secluded town in Jharkhand established in 1933 by Colonisation Society of India as a settlement for Anglo-Indians on 10,000 acres of forest land, given by Raja of Ratu, and was named after businessman Ernest Timothy McCluskie. "From over 200 families at one time, we now have no more than 25-30 people, not families, staying here"^[11]. Another settlement built by the British as military housing almost a century ago, is one of the few

surviving clusters of Anglo-Indians in the country. The Grant Govan Homes is a community for aging Anglo-Indians located in one of the older sections of Delhi^[12]. Many Anglo-Indian live in congested settlements eg- Ripon Street in Kolkata while others depend largely on welfare organizations for financial support. Here, 70% of the 132 families that reside in its red-brick apartment blocks are Anglo-Indians. There have been attempts of demolition but Kolkata Municipal Corporation has decided to declare it a heritage site.

The community has found ways of sustaining themselves amidst looming circumstances. For instance, in McCluskieganj, former member of Jharkhand assembly Alfred George de Rozario opened a school—Don Bosco Academy—in 1997, which led to economic opportunities for the members of the community and others—some opened hostels, others preschools and bridge schools. It also brought back some people like Malcolm James Hourigan, who had left town owing to lack of opportunities. He returned to McCluskieganj in 2007 after doing a series of non-teaching jobs with private schools in different states, and now runs a hostel and bridge school mainly for tribal children^[13]. English is the language of choice used in the home and also medium of instruction in Anglo Indian schools make them ineffective to communicate with people speaking other languages causing hindrance for the community. In order to safeguard their cultural autonomy, the espouse the cause of intra community marriages and efforts are made in this direction. Such as, A marriage bureau run by the Anglo-Indian Guild has helped conduct marriages. Efforts are still made in the direction of intercommunity marriages which are becoming common. To some extent reflects that due to increasing unemployment among Anglo-Indians males and but also as a matter of choice as economic security Anglo Indian girls marrying an Indian but face resistance.

They have to face fierce competitions in entrance examinations to get into governmental jobs and institutions while others lack the motivation to pursue higher education in spite of good literacy levels. There are no folk arts or crafts that can be said to be unique to the Anglo-Indian community. Their very basic existence is being challenged. Their proposals for allocation of lands for houses and Community cum Skill Development Centers are pending and not addressed with the Central government Ministries.

Due to the absence of leader and visionary leadership caused due to general indifference has resulted in failure to develop Anglo-Indian Organizations that showcase their cultural uniqueness or identity due to attachment of the idea of mixed breed with them, exclusively. They have not been able to assert their identity in the political or social realm. The schools and churches are primarily dependent upon funds provided by government institutions missionary agencies. They have to depend on philanthropists for social work. Anglo-Indian journals are published with the aid of Anglo-Indian associations or federations^[14]. While exercising their cultural affinity the notions of identity, nationality and home, some feel that they are forced to dispense with the construction of national identity and turn towards India as their Land of their mothers while others make reference to a distant fatherland for Britain disowned by them. This shift in identity and difficulty and changing allegiance acts as a barrier to their integration. The Anglo Indians' dual identities were always seen as somehow

incompatible with each other. There is also a generational divide that has emerged between the younger and older generations of Anglo Indians reflecting the transience of traditions and mixing of their European way of life with more Indian features with the passage of time^[15].

Notwithstanding, they have not achieved anything of great importance which leads to increased unemployment, social and cultural marginalization. They have been pushed to the periphery of the institutional framework of Indian society. Anglo-Indian writers though have been able to express their experiences through writings that have been recognised and appreciated^[16]. The community has immensely contributed to national development in almost every sphere of human endeavor and stands tall when it comes to social service and national reconstruction but still their experiences remain marginalised due to lack of formalisation and institutionalisation of their identity.

Representation and Beyond- Political Situation

The modern democratic way of empowering a people is to provide them a share in decision making. The futuristic vision of the Constituent Assembly of India can be testified when we see the provisions of fair representation encapsulated in the constitution for ensuring the people from under-represented sections of the Indian society to have a say in decision making. For implementing this, provisions of election reservations were given to communities. This idea was implemented when the Constitution of India provided for the nomination of two representatives of the Anglo Indian community to the Lower House of the Indian parliament. Anglo Indians are the only community that have a provision of ensured representation. This constitutional safeguard was provided in Article 331 that says the President may appoint two members from Anglo-Indian Community to Lok Sabha, if in his opinion that this community is not represented adequately notwithstanding anything mentioned in Article 81 which deals with Composition of Lok Sabha. The same is provided for the state legislatures in Article 333, where the governor has the discretion to nominate Anglo Indian members. This is applicable in several legislative assemblies in states such as West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka.

The position of Anglo-Indians in the societal fabric of India is overshadowed by their less assertive stance on political power. The participants from the community had felt that they would not be able to gain representation due to their comparatively small numbers. Thus, constitutional guarantees in the form of Article 331 and 333 came as a respite to the community^[17]. Dr. Charles Dias, former MP and President, The Federation of Anglo-Indian Associations in India has opined that this visionary provision in the Constitution has aided the Anglo Indians. It is a way of recognition of the contributions of the community in various sectors ranging from education and railways to sports and cinema. Their lack of geographic, social and linguistic unity has not hindered their participation as the nomination system has served as safeguard.

Under the purview of the constitution, the community found ensured representation and acquired a sense of legitimacy and empowerment. It enabled the strengthening of their connection with India as they saw themselves as a stakeholder in Indian development process and desire to contribute to the legislative trajectory of their 'motherland'. But in a recent change of stance, the Government of India

decided to pass the Constitution 126th (Amendment) Bill the bill sought to withdraw the reservation of Anglo Indians through changes in Article 334.

Article 334 (A) stipulates reserved constituencies for Scheduled Castes and Tribes for stipulated years. Article 334 sub section B, reserved seats in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies were provided for stipulated periods for Anglo-Indians. Article 334 (A) and (B) were extended up to 25th January 2020 by 95th Constitutional amendment last. But now the 126th Constitutional amendment to extend only for Article 334 (A). This virtually means that the 334 (B) has become void. Justifications have been provided by the government for its steps. The government had opined that the Anglo Indians have progressed. The reasons mentioned for not extending Article 334 (B) is that the Anglo-Indians are 'well off and they do not require reserved seats' through nomination.

This contradicts a 2013 report by The Ministry of Minority Affairs that had categorically identified some of the pertinent issues of Anglo-Indian community, in a report published in 2013 which mentions the need of formulation and thorough implementation of welfare schemes for Anglo Indian development. The Anglo-Indian organizations in the country express their concern over the Central government's move to do away with Article 344 (B) to deny Anglo-Indian representation in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies. They have expressed wishes for Article 334 to be extended and continue the facilities for nominations of Anglo-Indians to Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies. They see representation in the legislature as being their only forum to voice and redress their grievances. The All-India Anglo-Indian Association has decided to engage in democratic formal communications with the government through a resolution for 'reconsideration of the amendments that has left the community shattered'.

The present situation can be summed up in that the social exclusion and marginalisation of the Anglo Indian community, due to its lack of contiguity or assertive political stances, continues. The constitutional safeguards of assured representation in the parliament and state assemblies was seen as a tool to assert their existence in a complex and identity based society. It served more than just a path for their inclusion in the wider discourse of nation building but also gave them a sense of legitimacy and belongingness. So even if the government feels that the former benefit has been utilised in plenty, it can't turn a blind eye to the former, for it is the government lag that has failed to bring about an inclusive development where the Anglo Indian community can be seen as a part of the mainstream Indian society^[18].

Conclusion

The Anglo-Indian community in India is an important community due to their manifest progressive contributions. They accommodate themselves to new situations and survive within a dynamic Indian society. They follow a distinctive lifestyle and culture as a result of amalgamation of their tradition with other cultures of India. They had to undergo a tumultuous period of time. Their small population size has been a factor in their neglect. Their quest is not only to consolidate their identity but also to foster a way to act, express and exercise their agency. They endeavored to create an important niche by displaying virtuous qualities of resilience to establish themselves in modern India. The use of self-descriptive term of an Anglo-Indian have been

appropriated and re-signified to take their potentials into affirmative strength. The need is to stop turning a blind eye to the reasons behind their marginalization. Their nomination to Legislative bodies is a bare minimum that could be done to bring them at par with other sections of society. It is no less than any affirmative action in empowering and mobilizing generations of Anglo-Indians far more effectively in contemporary times than before. It opens the space for them to be seen and heard.

Their nomination to the House of the People inspires the members to use it as a tool to help them to reach at a certain threshold and rebuild one's own social and political identity. In order to prevent their voices from further marginalization initiatives should be undertaken to create, expand and promote positive political engagement rather than left for short-term political considerations. It requires a thorough examination of where the community stands at its grassroots and their involvement within the processes of nation building.

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