



CHRISTOPHER HAWES IN CONVERSATION WITH GLENN D'CRUZ

Dr. Christopher Hawes is the author of Poor Relations: The Making of A Eurasian Community in British India 1773-1833. A graduate of St John's College, Oxford, Dr. Hawes completed a PhD in 1993 at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Poor Relations, which is based on his doctoral dissertation, is published by Curzon Press and will eventually be augmented by a study of the Anglo-Indian community in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. What follows is an edited transcript of an interview which took place in Dr. Hawes' home in Buckinghamshire in March 1997. Glenn D'Cruz is a lecturer and doctoral candidate in the Department of English and Cultural Studies at the University of Melbourne. His dissertation is titled, 'Representing' Anglo-Indians: A Genealogical Investigation. A review of Dr. Hawes book Poor Relations was published in the last issue of the IJAIS.

GLENN D'CRUZ: Maybe we could begin by talking about what motivated you to write a history of the Anglo-Indian community.

CHRISTOPHER HAWES: When I went up to Oxford, this was about 40 years ago, to read modern history, and I had to do a special subject. I could have done something like the French Revolution, but there was a special subject on the British in India during the eighteenth century. It looked far more interesting so I did that. I then went into business for many years. I'd always wanted to study Indian history further; during my business career I was quite closely connected with India; I have a lot of Indian friends. It was then that I decided to do a PhD in Indian history at the School of Oriental and African Studies. If you are looking to do a thesis you need to find something which has not been done before which is original, and different. To my surprise very little had actually been written about the Eurasian community other than by Eurasians themselves. Of course, there is stuff around, but colonial historical

studies are very much focused on the 'big names' and 'important dates'. I could almost have written my thesis in the anthropology department or the social sciences department. I chose history because I felt that in many ways some of the hangovers of British attitudes towards Eurasians still exist amongst historians - they [Eurasians] tend to be dismissed in a footnote or else described as marginal people. So, that's really why I thought here's something to tackle which is a delicate subject but a very interesting and a very important one.

GLENN D'CRUZ: And why did you choose to focus on the period between the years 1773 - 1833? Obviously you have to demarcate an area for pragmatic reasons.

CHRISTOPHER HAWES: It seemed to me this was the key period. Of course, there were Eurasians in India well before the period 1780 - 1830. First of all there were the Portuguese and the Dutch, but it was not until the role of Britain in India started moving from what I'd call a quintessentially "trading" role to one of government and paramount power that numbers of Eurasians started rising very rapidly. The genesis of a Eurasian community was actually linked to that period 1780 - 1830, when the number of British soldiers rose from a few hundred in India to about 30,000. There were few British women for them to marry, so they naturally lived with Indian women. Of course, these soldiers had children, and Eurasians suddenly became a social phenomenon that had to be recognised. So that period is key because it took Britain from trading to rule. The other important aspect of that period was that it marked a profound change in what I would call the 'justification' of the British right to be in India. It was then that the British formulated a sort of nationalism/racism argument which was that we are here because we govern these people justly and well. So you have got the formulation of strong British national identity and role. And then at the same time, in this period, you've got the other dimension which was a change in attitude to Christianity. The Church of England in the eighteenth-century was in a pretty apathetic state until towards the end of the century when the Methodist movement, and the missionary movement developed in the Anglican Church in Britain. They exported a vigorous Protestantism to India. These Protestant missionaries found the 'marital' customs of the British in India totally reprehensible - most British lived with Indian women, and the vast majority of their children were illegitimate. It was one of those paradoxical things that if there had been, as there is

now, a civil marriage possible they [the children] wouldn't have been illegitimate. If an Indian woman was not a Christian, and most were not, then her child was illegitimate. Towards the end of the period you have actually got a community beginning to form in a proto-typical way. John Ricketts, who was particularly interesting, was active in trying to better the social and economic lot of his fellow Eurasians. Of course, he lost the battle for Eurasians to be defined as British subjects. This was the one battle that if it could have been won, would have made quite a considerable difference to the Eurasian situation. So that's really why I chose the period, and also because it provides a solid base for looking at what actually happened in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, which is what I am working on now.

GLENN D'CRUZ: You mentioned that Eurasians were usually put into margins of most historical studies of the British in India. Apart from the work of Herbert Stark and Frank Anthony, are you aware of other significant studies apart from your own?

CHRISTOPHER HAWES: There are two books; one written by an Anglo-Indian in Canada named Evelyn Abel [The Anglo-Indian Community, Survival in India. Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1988]. Her book is excellent, but the problem is that she repeats Stark lock stock and barrel in the first chapter. We owe a great debt to Stark, he was not actually a historian; he was a polemicist. Another important book in understanding British attitudes was written by Kenneth Ballhatchet, you probably know it [*Race, Sex, and Class Under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics, 1793-1905*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980].

GLENN D'CRUZ: I want to return to your comments on Stark because my preliminary research confirms that every study of Eurasians or Anglo-Indians cites Stark, and I'm thinking of works as diverse as Cedric Dover's *Half-Caste* [London: Secker and Warburg, 1937] and Gist and Wright's *Marginality and Identity* [Brill: Leiden Publishers, 1973]. I was amazed to discover that there have been at least three PhD's written about Anglo-Indians in fields like sociology and anthropology in the U.S.A.

CHRISTOPHER HAWES: Oh, yes, I've got *Marginality and Identity*. I don't rate that book because, if I can divert you slightly, it performs a sort of sociological trick. To label Eurasians as marginal people, as it does, and explain that they were in the middle ignores the extent to which they overlapped with the British the whole time. But, as you say, Gist and Wright take Stark at face value. Stark is the bible. There are actually two 'Bibles': the other one is Anthony's book, *Britain's Betrayal in India: the History of the Anglo-Indian Community* [Allied Publishers, 1969].

GLENN D'CRUZ: And as you said they had basically polemical works insofar as they had very specific political agendas. How do you situate your own work in relation to Stark's book?

CHRISTOPHER HAWES: Well, I haven't really thought about making the comparison, but I've tried to correct some errors. The most important thing I've done is put the history of the Anglo-Indian community of that time into perspective, into the context of the wider scene of what was happening in India, particularly in terms of the British policy towards India. In a sense, I feel that the community was an unfortunate historical victim. If you read Stark, Anthony, or Austin D'Souza they postulate a deliberate policy of destruction, formulated by the British and aimed at eroding opportunities for the Anglo-Indian community. Now, as I say in my book, I don't reject the fact that the aspirations of Eurasians in British India were never met; but there are many cases of repression which were cited by Stark and Anthony that are misleading. I'll give you one example, it's either Stark or Anthony who says that when Eurasians were banned from covenanted service in 1791, they were all fired - they weren't. Actually, all those Eurasians who were in covenanted service continued on, and several of them became generals. Only one person called John Nairn, who was a mariner was not re-employed, but mariners were employed on a voyage basis. Another example, soldiers like Skinner and Hearsey and other Eurasians were employed in running irregular troops during the Maratha war, and afterwards they were all discharged because, apart from Skinner himself, the irregular units were disbanded. That is taken as another example of the British attacking the Anglo-Indian community. It was for reasons of economy that they were disbanded, and they'd only been raised in the first place simply because of the particular wartime situation. One of the sad things, I think, about Stark and Anthony is that they take

such a polemical point of view, as it were. They see everything as an injustice to the Anglo-Indian community, and quite often there was injustice, but there is a counter-side to that view which I have tried to display in my book. If official British policy in London was not conducive to the interests of Anglo-Indians, nevertheless, many British people in government in India were very supportive of the community. For example, the Bengal officers undertook to restore marriage allowances to Eurasian women, and there are many cases of charity which one can cite -for instance, the orphanages and the schools such as the Parental Academy. It wasn't actually the Eurasian community which really supported the Academy financially; the large donations came from people at the top of British society in India, so I'm trying to bring that out. What I've tried to do is present a balanced picture, and lead people to draw their own conclusions. To come back to my feeling about the Anglo-Indian community, they were victims to a degree of an inexorable process. And part of that process which started in the 1820s was the Western education of Indians. This was encouraged not for any philosophical motives other than as a colonial power; people like Bentinck and Metcalfe recognised that if they had a western educated Indian elite, they could do some of the work of government more cheaply and they [the Indians] would have a stake in the whole issue of colonial rule.

GLENN D'CRUZ: That was a widespread policy was it not? It reminds me of Thomas Macauley's famous minute on Indian education.

CHRISTOPHER HAWES: Yes, that's right. Its purpose was quite pragmatic, and the British, on the whole, were pragmatic colonialists. The other thing I feel about the situation is that British policy was made on the 'hoof'. From the Anglo-Indian community's point of view they always assumed they were top of the agenda. They weren't. They were not politically very important by the 1830s. What led to Indian independence (and I think all of us, whether we are Indian, British or Anglo-Indian, must see Indian independence as a desirable thing) was Indianisation which was gathered pace in the 1920s, 1930s, and, of course, did harm the Anglo-Indian community very much; but this was, as I've said, an inexorable process.

GLENN D'CRUZ: I've recently read Doris Goodrich's PhD thesis, and Evelyn Abel's book on the Anglo-Indian community; both writers argue that a distinctive Anglo-

Indian community consciousness did not really exist before they fell victim to what you have described as the inexorable process of Indianisation. Do you think there were other factors that contributed to the formation the community's 'self-conscious' identity?

CHRISTOPHER HAWES: Self-conscious community? Well, I really don't quite know where to start except to say that I've always seen the Anglo-Indian community as a very dependent community. In the early days of the community, if you were born Eurasian the odds on chance were that you would be taken from your Indian mother as early as possible and sent out to an orphanage because that was official policy. You would stay in that orphanage and if you were a lower class Eurasian, the son of a soldier, you would actually go back into the army as a bandsman, and you would marry the daughter of a British soldier. So, you would be completely institutionalised from the very beginning. If you were middle class, and shall we say, the son of an officer by an Indian woman, you would go to the orphanage but, of course, a higher class orphanage for sons and daughters of officers and you could get a clerical job in a government office, or you might become an apothecary, an engineer, or a surveyor or indigo farmer. So, in a sense there was a dependency culture from the very beginning. I don't know what it must have been like to never have been brought up in a family situation – it is almost impossible to envisage. One feels that the community became and showed great dependency. It was also always deeply infected by the class attitudes of the British. What was gentlemanly, what wasn't gentlemanly. One of the reasons why farming colonies failed is because Anglo-Indians didn't want to be farmers. The reason why they didn't want to be farmers was because they didn't want to cross the line between the ruler and the ruled. The ruled are the people who dig and the rulers supervise the diggers themselves and so forth. But the self-consciousness, I think, is partly to do with dependency forced upon them, and the other thing is racial. It is a very difficult thing to discuss racialism in a sense because I think most nationalities are racial, and the British were undoubtedly racist. If you were a rich Anglo-Indian like, say, William Palmer (a really splendid man who made a fortune and lost it) who was erudite, educated, handsome, charming, brown, and the son of a general by his Indian lady, you could mix with the whole British society, as did Kyd, the master shipbuilder. So class could surmount race. But the problem for the Eurasians, and this is one of their feelings I tried to approach in the book, is

the feeling of rejection. It is very, very strong and it had a lot to do with the nature of the opportunities open to them, which were not gentlemanly, so they were often treated as inferior beings, and that I think this is part of the Anglo-Indian complex, if there is a complex. On the other hand, I would say that the British themselves were also affected by considerations of class. If you were an East India Company officer you would be deeply looked down on by a Royal army officer. An army officer would aspire to be a civil officer because all positions in colonial government society determined one's social position. The British were as snobbish and class ridden amongst themselves as they were in relation to the Anglo-Indian.

GLENN D'CRUZ: To change tack slightly, and return to the category of race, are you aware of historical documents, official or otherwise, which directly address the question of 'mixed blood'?

CHRISTOPHER HAWES: Some certainly do. At the beginning of the early nineteenth century, charitable funds were set up by Bengal civil servants and military officers, and this spread round other presidencies. Beneficiaries were excluded if they were of mixed race, and Eurasian wives were excluded, even though they were legitimately married; forms were produced which you had to sign in order to claim which testified that you were of 'unmixed' blood, and the definition of unmixed blood was four generations. There's quite a lot of commentary in all sorts of different documents.

GLENN D'CRUZ: Of course, Indians also feared miscegenation, and 'mixed-blood' progeny.

CHRISTOPHER HAWES: Absolutely. High caste Indians despised Eurasians. But I think there are other things that should be said; contrary to what Stark and Anthony claim, the Anglo-Indian community was not at any time a very organised community. A lot of Anglo-Indians did not want to be part of it. There was race, and class prejudice within Anglo-Indian society itself, thus an interesting little story. Back in 1916 the Anglo-Indian Association was asked to raise a battalion of Anglo-Indian soldiers - an Anglo-Indian force; some of them served in Mesopotamia. They raised nine hundred Anglo-Indians for this force. But in the raising of it some of the recruits

were rejected because these were recruits from the south of India, who were very much darker than their northern brethren. I only corresponded with Frank Anthony once when I started my project (I've got a letter, I wish I could find it) in which he said that the trouble with Madras is that the Portuguese have infiltrated the community; and Dover, too, talks about this sort of racist attitude, so one has to say that the Anglo-Indian community has always been a very reluctant community; in fact, I nearly called my book 'The Reluctant Community'.

GLENN D'CRUZ: Evelyn Abel maps these dissensions within the community in some detail; If I recall correctly, she argues that the major divisions occur along north/south lines, which have racial implications.

CHRISTOPHER HAWES: I think Abel is valuable for her account of the community's political structures. It may not be on your list of questions, but there is one that I've been thinking about. One of the big problems is for the domiciled British Anglo-Indian community was paradoxically the hill schools run on British public school lines - all teetering on the edge of financial breakdown. These schools, I feel, raised expectations amongst the community as to what the jobs were on offer because most senior appointments were made from Britain. It also actually side-tracked the Anglo-Indian community out of any sense of shared development in education with the Indian population at large. I know why they did it, but it meant of course there were very few Anglo-Indian scholars at the Indian universities; and very few at British universities because they couldn't raise the money to go back here. I think, in a sense, and as I said it is only a hypothesis, that all that effort was misdirected for after 1919 university degrees were required for high level government appointments and Anglo-Indians lost out fast.

GLENN D'CRUZ: Finally, do you have any idea of how your work has been received by the Anglo-Indian community in Britain?

CHRISTOPHER HAWES: I don't know. I don't know that many of them have got the book. It has been well reviewed, and people who are Anglo-Indians have said to me that they value it.

GLENN D'CRUZ: So who are your audience?

CHRISTOPHER HAWES: Well the prime audience extends far beyond Anglo-Indians themselves. Britain is still in love with its experience in India and the audience is actually quite large. There are still people in their seventies and eighties, who were the last of the Raj generation, but they've got children - children of the Raj. So there is the lay audience. Beyond that is what I would call an 'academic' audience of historians, sociologists and anthropologists to whom the mixed race experience in the colonial story is important. That interest seems to be growing rather than diminishing.