



POOR RELATIONS - A CRITICAL NOTE

Megan M. Mills

Hawes's volume is apt to satisfy many an indifferent reader hailing as it does from a respectable academic press and showing referral to the now customary documents. However, a discerning reader will wonder after a few chapters, precisely what it is that Hawes is endeavouring to prove for the title does not match the text and for long segments Hawes seems to be trying his best to prove illegitimacy as a general condition of Anglo-Indian genealogy. Not only is this summation incorrect in view of what a more careful exploration of Eurasian origins in South Asia will reveal, but the exercise has relatively little to do with Hawes's aim of explaining how the Anglo-Indians became the reluctant minority he asserts that they have always been.

Hawes's editors have accepted his estimates of a percentage of "illegitimate" Eurasian births before 1800, at above the 75% mark. However, this assessment is impossible to make on account of a lack of documentation pertaining to the early colonial period in India. As anyone having studied the longer history of the Anglo-Indian community will argue, Eurasian families in South Asia were generated by circumstances far more complex, flamboyant, not to mention respectable than the stereotypes of the *Nabob's Zenana* would allow. Moreover, the issue of legal origins seems irrelevant with regard to trying to explain Anglo-Indian "reluctance" in view of the fact that illegitimacy was rather a common condition through to the rise of British law which placed emphasis on legal relationships across social classes, i.e., involving more than the aristocracy and other propertied groups. Hawes might have been wise to first assess rates of illegitimacy among the working classes of London in the same period if indeed, matters of precise origins were as important to the experience of the community as he claims.

What is most disturbing is the author's lack of awareness of a community which was not always to shrink before colonial authority. The Anglo-Indians have a long record of resolve converted to legal agitation as well as more flamboyant expressions of dissent. It will be remembered that young Captain Hearsey of Allahabad once horse-whipped the editor of *The Pioneer* after an account of his nationalist activities employing such expressions as brown captain and half-caste. Note must be made too of assorted families who were able to pass as Britons yet made their Eurasian roots known. Hawes also seems unaware of the tendency of many Anglo-Indians to refer to *Brits* and *Limeys* as a people distinct from themselves, an unsurprising practice in a people whose male progenitors were seldom English. Scottish, Irish and other nationalities, yes, -- but this is another angle which Hawes has not ventured to explore. In general, Hawes rather misses the entire question of race and descent as it was less important to Eurasians themselves than related forces of prejudice and policy which rendered racial distinctions of great legal and economic importance. The evils of 19th century scientific racialism dealt the Anglo-Indians a terrible blow which Hawes touches upon in rare ventures away from preoccupation with Eurasian origins *on both sides of the blanket*.

In leaving this volume, it is unclear as to what Hawes set out to prove. He has not tackled a more salient or under-reported aspect of the community. There remains a history to be fully written of Anglo-Indian contributions made when something has really mattered... as various military officers have commented of Anglo-Indian performances in assorted forward areas, reluctance is not an Anglo-Indian failing. Perhaps more people ought to be "miscegenated".

Megan Mills MA (Toronto) MA (Guelph) PhD (York)

Dr. Mills recently completed a Ph.D which explores the survival of the Anglo-Indian community in India. She is presently in the process of converting her dissertation into a book while writing various articles dealing with topics of colonial history, in particular South Asian history. She lives in Toronto, Canada and was one of the contributors to the first edition of the IJAIS, she makes a welcome return to the journal.

[Email to: Dr. Megan M. Mills](#)