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SOME COMMENTS ON STEREOTYPES OF THE ANGLO-INDIANS PART 1

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Through most of their history the Anglo-Indians have had to contend with a plethora of harmful and depreciatory stereotypes. This article counters these pejorative stereotypes with carefully reasoned arguments and positive Anglo-Indian imagery.

The Anglo-Indian community through time has been subjected to various stereotypes which are discernible in academic sources, the offerings of journalism, and in colloquial attitudes. Several of the stereotypes discussed in this paper have maintained similar motifs in keeping with Lieberson's (1985) comments on the fixity of stereotypes as they are passed intact from one generation to the next. At the very least, they remind of the kind of dangerous myths which tend to denigrate peoples (McNeill, 1986).

Within the academic field of Post-colonial studies the Anglo-Indian rarely emerges despite much attention to l9th century novels which abound in Eurasians presented as pathetic or quaint figures. In fact, in the Anglo-Indian may well be found India's answer to the Stage Irishman. Historical writing on British India usually omits the Anglo-Indians' colonial administrative role despite the fact that much scholarship is now devoted to determining the nature of the colonial state and society; that the Anglo-Indians were relied upon throughout British South Asia seems not to be known or is not mentioned.

Most important, there is rarely understanding of the community as a people equipped with an ethnic history, an uniquely fused Western and Asian culture and a consistent value system. It is little wonder that Anglo-Indians have been so regularly disappointed by works tackling their community for the community has been studied

according to a so-called "Anglo-Indian Problem", in socio-economic or legal terms, devoid of what the community holds at its heart as part of a long-developing culture. Another tendency has been one of stereotyping the community as an uneducated one: in modern India, this stereotype can only be derogatory in view of the dominant culture's tremendous emphasis on the accoutrements of formal education.

It does not matter that the Anglo-Indians have made an inestimable contribution to English-medium education throughout India, the stereotype prevails. Similarly, it is often assumed that members of the community suffer from racial self-consciousness and that the practice of "passing" as Europeans has somehow been the preoccupation of the many. Romantic accounts of a people stranded in India do not take into account the reality of a people very much belonging to India. Moreover, assumptions to do with the Anglo-Indians as, "lackeys of the British," replete with ideas of eternal emulation of English culture do not consider a culture which is Anglo-Indian despite its logically British heritage - scarcely a unique trait among educated Indian communities.

I THE ISSUE OF "MIXED" DESCENT

Hybrid peoples emerged throughout the colonised world but infrequently appear in studies of colonialism at large. In South Asia, peoples of mixed ancestry proved indispensable to the builders of Empire. The Burghers of Sri Lanka served all of the colonial powers established there and the Anglo-Burmese played an intermediary administrative role until the end of British influence (Bayly, 1989). The Anglo-Indians are doubly significant as the only South Asian hybrid group to have withstood the reducing factors of absorption and emigration since the departure of the British in the late 1940s.

Mixed communities were promoted through to the mid-18th century at various coastal centres, expanding to form permanent and endogamous Eurasian populations. There was no strong stigma attached to interracial marriage until the l9th century and as many an Anglo-- Indian family history avers, the core of the community originated in legal alliances between Europeans and Indians. With regard to the Europeans involved, the term Anglo-Indian has evoked much confusion for an Anglo-Indian genealogy generally presents evidence of more than one kind of

European bequest: virtually every European nationality is found in the community's past as well as assorted Americans, West Indians, Armenians and more than a handful of Chinese.

The Eurasian-ness of Lord Liverpool, the merchant princes of Bengal or the Bourbons of Bhopal, contrasts with the offspring of assorted European vagabonds, eccentrics and less flamboyant, respectable-Europeans appearing in India from every walk of life. In a fascinating melange of 18th century characters can be found the younger brother of Ireland's Wolfe Tone, countless Scots displaced after Culloden, a great many aristocratic French and Portuguese, plus occasional Polish counts or Swiss mercenaries (Reghelini, 1988).

The question of communal origins begs that the same question be posed anywhere in what was the British Empire. Colonial societies produced exotic ethnic mixes indeed, and from a Canadian point of view, Anglo-Indian ancestry sometimes resembles what our Robertson Davies once referred to as the early "Canadian Cocktail" -- of equal parts Scottish and Irish, a sprinkling of French or German, and a dash of native Iroquois or Ojibwa. The hybrid Metis of Canada often protest the assumption that their non-native ancestry is solely French and in general, colonial environments were far more conducive to ethnic admixture than staid linear accounts of colonialism might suggest. A longer Anglo-Indian genealogy will predictably present roots in two or more Indian peoples, in an Anglo-Celtic family and perhaps two or three other European groups having made their way to India. Quite rarely does a family reflect the tidy phenomenon of a Briton of the past, "crossed with" an Indian.

The Indian Constitution of 1950, in its definition of an Anglo Indian as a person descended from a European male progenitor, states the only possible determinant amid the community's ancestral complexity. The British cultural influence was the strongest and in the 18th century Eurasian sons were quite regularly educated in England, with a great many attending Harrow in particular (Neill, 1985). In Britain, they were perceived as only as a more interesting sort of British subject and it was the East India Company's repressive legislation of the 1780s which ushered in the long period of comparative isolation of the Anglo-Indians from Europeans. It did not

obviously, erase the evidence of a long period of interaction at every level between Indians and Europeans and in turn, between Europeans and Eurasians.

This different sort of Indian past is remembered in the subcontinent's buildings, objects and landscapes of the present and is appreciated via historical fieldwork (Baird, 1992; Cohn, 1987a; Jenkins, 1994). In addition to the archival records routinely examined by researchers, Anglo-Indian origins are recalled in the crumbling houses of Calcutta, in the military sites of old, in the fairer Indian figures found occasionally in Indian miniatures or faded murals, the Eurasian mercenary officers once retained by many of India's princely houses.

There are also the cottages behind older bungalows in Madras which one might assume were always servants' quarters but which often housed assorted "native" families. There are the former orphanages for the children of British military men and the longest established of India's English-medium schools. Churches replete with Celtic crosses or other buildings alive with the symbols of Freemasonry similarly point to another kind of subcontinent, and every Indian locality will reveal its local tale of favourite Europeans "gone native", referring to the kind of Indiaphile who might be an officer or doctor, a merchant, planter or a scoundrel, but who could not bear to return to the West. To this cornucopia can be added India's older cemeteries, her harbour towns, and some very old- fashioned music indeed, as played into the 1990s by the musicians of regimental bands. Through it all, one must cultivate an imagination for the 18th century Europeans' experience of India as a land of rapid wealth or destitution amid the omnipresent shadow of early death (Wilkinson, 1976).
Second and third marriages were common, rendering many European and Eurasian families a genealogist's nightmare but also, pointing to an India of heterogeneity, not always of the stratified order which studies of the l9th century have stressed. The Anglo- Indians emerged from a variety of lesser examined additions to Indian society which were made with the advent of European influence. In a wildly "miscegenative" 18th century, they quite predictably appeared, untarnished the vicious racialism that was imported by the quite different sort of European who later arrived in India. However, stereotypes of Anglo-- Indian origins continue to revolve around the sordid and this writer has endured some truly fantastic accounts of the community's origins; there is rarely an awareness of the past's alliances forged between well - placed

families of every origin and less still, of intermarriage as something which once occurred in a commonplace way.

At present, there seems to be little consideration of the fact that the rigid social order of the later Raj in all of its protocols and distinctions, may have simply presented a greater array of rules to be broken. The Anglo-Indian community did become more endogamous after 1800, which is not to say that all interaction between Indians and Europeans and indeed, Eurasians, effectively ceased.

II THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE EXCLUSION ACTS

The politics of ethnic exclusion set in motion by the East India Company in the late 18th century sent many Anglo-Indians into poverty and many more into occupations and enterprises not entertained previously. The two or three generations between the 1780s and the Charter Act of 1833 saw the mobilisation of the Eurasian population via the contributions of Kydd, Derozio and Ricketts, the endowment of a great number of Anglo-Indian schools and other benefactions, all stemming from the predicament of a community thrown upon its own resources.

As has proven the case through the community's history, conditions of crisis and decline prompted the rise of communal leaders. Nevertheless, there was much to promote impressions of the Anglo-Indians as a "genetically" as well as economically impoverished presence. The Rev. Long's (1858) survey of Calcutta refers to an often downtrodden community of 4,666 Anglo-Indians living in view of 7,534 Europeans. By this time, large numbers of the Bengal community had slipped into disrepute and akin to the experience of disadvantaged minorities everywhere, the reasons for their decline were quickly forgotten. The inability to own land, to take up East India Company employment or to travel to Britain over five decades had a lasting impact and as would recurrently be the case, all of the presidency cities housed ghettoes of poorer Eurasians.

The Mutiny of 1857 constituted a watershed in the history of modern India and in the fortunes of the Anglo-Indian community. Accounts of the Mutiny persist in referring to such heroic figures as Kennedy and Kavanaugh as, "British". Several Anglo-Indians became legendary including the telegraphist George Brendish who remained at his

post in Delhi through the outbreak and managed to send a warning across the Punjab. Survivors of the Siege of Lucknow commended the aid received from the Eurasian boys of LaMartiniere School, and in Bombay, the Anglo-Indian chief of police, Charles Forjett, prevented the Mutiny from erupting there. As few histories of the Mutiny explain, the recovery of Delhi after the momentous arrival of the siege train and the "taking of the ridge" were the accomplishments of Anglo-Indian volunteers, hastily recruited into new units of the Bengal Army.

No matter how one interprets the Indian Mutiny, Anglo-Indians who paid a heavy price for their mixed ancestry were at the forefront of developments, and in the Mutiny's aftermath were recognised by Canning whose reconstruction included preferred employment for the community in India's expanding administrative infrastructure. The result was one of the Anglo-Indians virtually running British India with regard to vital communications and transportation services, the surveys and forests administrations and dozens of lower bureaucratic functions. Beyond this involvement, through to 1947, many Anglo-Indians could be found among India's clergy, in the professions of law, medicine and engineering, in association with the thousands of women who offered dedicated examples in the fields of education and nursing. The contributions to military life have prevailed through to the time of writing, carrying on an Anglo-Indian legend of heroism and dedicated service.

Unfortunately, ideas of hybrid weakness and immorality were instilled at a time when Anglo-Saxonism and its accompanying "cult of character" was at its height (Mellman, 1991). Scientific racialism after the mid-19th century bolstered much of what had already become part of the attitudinal landscape of British India (Bolt, 1971). Members of the omnipresent Anglo- Indian underclass were taken to represent Anglo-- Saxonism's darker themes of "contamination" as presented in mental and moral degeneracy. Racialist theory of course, contributed its concepts of "miscegenation", including mental and moral degeneracy as genetic results of hybridisation.

The typologising of India's peoples according to their usefulness to the colonial system reinforced much of the hearsay circulating already: stereotypes of martial Sikhs or Rajputs, serious and reliable Tamils or crafty Bengalis flowed through to the

"weak" or "excitable" but loyal Anglo-Indians (Des Chene, 1991; Raskin, 1971; Wurgaft, 1983). Categorisation was instilled before British colonial servants reached India, a partial explanation of the incredible uniformity of opinion which existed among the British in India (Blunt, 1937; Cohn, 1987c). Once in India, the Briton's observations would seem very much as previously described. The Anglo-Indians he encountered were likely to be subordinate colonial service workers, perhaps people in plainly trying economic straits in the towns, or otherwise distinct from those in positions of greater authority. In short, a variety of forces contributed to ideas of alleged inferiority and the biological.

Stereotypes of Anglo-Indian women have proven as tenacious as they are contradictory. The much quoted rantings of Nirad Chaudhuri in The Continent of Circe (1965) to do with unstable, promiscuous, degenerate women, are the eccentric notes of an eccentric writer. Nonetheless, Chaudhuri's editors at Chatto and Windus seem to have seen nothing in need of revision when preparing subsequent editions. His wildest comments reappear replete with his remarks concerning Anglo-- Indian prostitutes and "amateur practitioners". Beyond Kipling or the self-projecting novels of bored colonial housewives, the image of the promiscuous or otherwise sordid Anglo-Indian woman recurs.

Mircea Eliade's (1950) Bengal Nights contains several unsavoury comments on the community at large and the "shallowness" of Anglo-Indian women in particular. Rumer Godden (1975), who might be expected to offer a better interpretation in view of her lifelong exposure to India, managed to create a superlative post-Independence caricature in Alix Lamont the social climbing woman intent upon hiding her origins in The Peacock Spring. This kind of representation might be simply dismissed except for an Anglo-Indian reality pointing strongly in the opposite direction.

If a female Anglo-Indian stereotype were to be constructed it would be influenced more by the convent- trained nurse, the loyal teacher or office worker all of which contrast with perhaps the ghastliest female stereotype of all: the Anglo-Indian girl trying to ensnare an Allied soldier during World War II - at a time when thousands of these women staffed medical and communications services throughout Asia and

beyond and their "feckless" brothers made up large contingents in the RAF and other forces in every theatre of the War.

All of these myths associable with Eurasian "degeneracy" become more ludicrous in the face of parallel stereotypes which refer to the community's excessive idealism, of loyalty and dedication too great, and all that these elements prompted with regard to British and Indian treatment of the community.

III AN UNEDUCATED COMMUNITY

Anglo-Indian literacy and primary education, as provided by India's network of 250 "Anglo-Indian" schools, have long surpassed the rates of other Indian communities (d'Souza, 1976; Varma, 1979). However, the technical as opposed to intellectual orientation of the community is interpreted according to India's strong pro-intellectual bias. Most Anglo-Indians at present in India, do not pursue post-secondary education on account of financial restraints. There is also the legacy of a past in which matriculation from a good Anglo-Indian school afforded employment opportunities. The preference or the necessity was for work as opposed to endless study. Nevertheless, when one investigates the community from more than one perspective, it is plain that a great many more have been engaged in university study and at higher levels through time than impressions might suggest. For instance, the Anglo- Indian medical role included lasting contributions to research into tropical medicine (Arnold, 1994).

Contemporary India abounds in educated persons but continues to avail herself of Anglo-Indian engineers, medical professionals, communications and media workers, flight instructors and admirals. The Indian Air Force and Navy have particularly strong representations of Anglo-Indians among their officers. Many others are still to be found as educators and in some Indian towns the complimentary stereotype prevails of the Anglo-Indian lawyer as, "the only honest fellow in town". The legendary Anglo-Indian nursing sisters are now a scarce commodity on account of the 1960s and 1970s demand for them in the United Kingdom. As for the Anglo-Indian religious, on each visit to India this writer has noticed the high reputations of several among Christians and non-Christians alike.

The respect with which successful Anglo-Indian individuals are regarded is an ironic angle of Indian popular culture amid what are damaging attitudes concerning the community at large. Fortunately, the increasing interest in university education reflected by contemporary community members is contradicting a good deal that has been assumed. Beyond India, Anglo-Indian young people are certainly availing themselves of university education and fortunately an increasing number demonstrate an academic interest in their ethnic origins. Members of the South Indian community which has always demonstrated higher rates of post-secondary education, have taken up the Indian "paper chase" in earnest; it is understood that competition in the Indian labour market necessitates frequent returns to the university towards new qualifications.

IV PASSING

Lord Valentia's Report (1809, vol 1) referred to the Anglo-Indians as a people living apart from the Europeans in India. Goodrich's (1952) research similarly pointed to some individuals' colour prejudice by the end of the 18th century in that the fairer Eurasians in India's military orphanages were considered better prospects for education in Britain. Nonetheless, colour as a determinant of status and as a reason for discrimination seems to have arrived later in India and the incentive to obscure the Indian heritage was a comparatively recent development prompted by l9th racialism. Even then, at odds with what has been so commonly projected upon hybrid populations, "passing" or claiming membership in the European community was by no means as prevalent as many materials might suggest. Frank Anthony's (1969) account of his community pointed to a "poor white" mentality among the Anglo-Indian underclass which featured an exaggerated regard for "our European" ancestry.

The film *Queenie* emphasised Merle Oberon's need to obscure her origins in the 1930s plus her careful self-exposure once she had achieved success. John Masters (1956; 1971) on the other hand, in his autobiographical works, obscures his family's inevitably Eurasian ancestry in the manner of many of the longstanding Domiciled Europeans. This kind of insecurity may be said to be gone from the community. Anglo-Indians are more apt to volunteer their families' interesting mixed origins and the roots of their uniquely fused culture. In this light, it was unsurprising that Coralie

Younger's (1983) paper concerning racial stereotyping was not well received by Anglo-Indian readers.

In references to women as recently as the 1940s attempting to hide their ethnicity, is found a perhaps unwittingly contribution to the idea of an ethnic group very much preoccupied by questions of race and colour. The matter of "passing" is invalidated greatly by the fact that a great many Anglo-Indians are not recognisable as other than Caucasians. Darker members of the community appear as "East Indians" but of western culture which in multicultural Canada at least, is scarcely an unusual manifestation.

In view of the East India Company's discriminatory policy of the late 18th century, it was logical that fairer Eurasians should simply shift towards inclusion in the European fold. In the l9th century the incentives which promoted the obscuring Asian ancestry are plain. What is probably more significant is pointed to by Sir Henry Gidney's comments concerning the Rear Rank Europeans or Albino Anglo-Indians - or more amusingly still, his referrals to Domestic Occurrences as the subjects of disdain on the part of Anglo-Indians unconcerned by, or rightfully proud, of their descent. A note on "Domestic Occurrences" appears in Humphrey Trevelyan's (1972: 119) account of his 1929 posting to Coimbatore where he noticed in a non-mixed club that, the single most rigid defenders of the social barriers were "... the families of mixed descent or with generations of life in India ... had lost their English roots and who in order to conceal their own Indian origins or associations, despised everything Indian."

Gist and Wright's (1973) research revealed that some of the last generation had carried on the colonial prejudice concerning those perceived to be "dark". As a rule however, pigmentation was much less important than impressions of British India might suggest. Europeans would always prove capable of ignoring the familial pedigrees of well-placed Eurasians. Through the course of Crown Rule, position and wealth were still factors which diluted distinctions as suggested by the prestige derived from mingling with wealthier Eurasians. Furthermore, in the Madras Presidency, social life on the whole was less segregated. A more commercial than martial atmosphere produced a pattern of Madras boxwallahs fraternising with a

broader range of Europeans and Eurasians as well as Indians (Renford, 1987). It was a quieter province in which the colonials tended to speak Tamil badly, the Tamils to speak English well, and in which people felt themselves to be collectively distanced from the influences of the North. Research to date has not produced a single Madras-born Anglo-Indian reporting the experience of prejudice from British quarters and anti-British feeling seems not as pronounced as is occasionally the case among families from elsewhere.

Passing was also precluded by its frequent impossibility: among families anxiously hiding their Indian past, ordinary genetics dealt a corrective blow by virtue of the fact that genes no not blend but combine. As anyone familiar with the Anglo-Indians will explain, a single family will often reflect a broad range of colouring. In some quarters, the birth of what is commonly referred to as a "throwback" must have been the source of alarm. Even then, colour was not the simple and divisive barometer that Kipling among others would suggest. Stratification most definitely occurred within the Anglo-Indian community. It is one of the attributes which renders it a decidedly South Asian community, albeit English speaking and Christian. However, the divisions remain predominantly economic, educational and cultural.

Amid the galvanised order of a martial British culture in all of its protocols and legal definitions went the dynamics of rules made to be broken. At odds with the idea of the Anglo-Indians as an always ghettoised, down-trodden, very insular group is Trevelyan's (1972) 1930s encounter with a Hyderabad Muslim descended from an 18th century German adventurer whose daughter had married a Madras establishment chaplain, the Rev. Mr. Foulkes. Great room must be made too, for eccentricity and aberration which were not absent from the colonial period. Colonialism as explained earlier has to be looked at with an eye to "muddling" factors. It was rarely a neat pitting of Europeans against natives despite the attitudes or accounts which have tended to perpetuate this view.

A good many colonial personalities were absolutely unfettered by official decorum and descriptions of l9th century rigidity are offset often by observations of India's planter community. For instance, Cohn (1987b) has recorded his encounter with Jaunpur district's legend of one Christie Sahib and his several lawyer sons by two

Indian wives at time when few Europeans entertained Indian marriages. Beyond this extreme may be found innumerable cases of successful alliances between Europeans and Anglo-Indians, over and over, from region to region.

In summary, the tendency to place the Anglo-Indians within a pathetic category on account of the offerings of Maude Diver (1909) or Alice Perrin et al (1903), is unforgivable. It seems to matter little that their novels compare only with the sort still produced in second-rate ladies' magazines; their themes have been absorbed in real terms by those who would comment upon the Anglo-Indian community across the boards.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Ms. Mill's article will continue in the next issue.

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