



Saga from beyond the pale *The Lotus and the Rose: An Anglo-Indian Story* by Gloria Jean Moore (River Seine).

Wendy Scarfe

This is a reprint of a book review by Wendy Scarfe in *The Age* newspaper in 1986.

Gloria Jean Moore begins her introduction to *The Lotus and the Rose* with the comment 'This is a family history. It is also a small part of the history of a particular group of people now known as Anglo-Indian. The Lotus and the Rose-the Lotus representing India the Rose England-is indeed more than a family history.'

Through five individual portraits beginning with Major George McGill who fought in the Indian Mutiny to her own story which begins in India and ends in Australia she reveals the characteristics, qualities and difficulties of a group of people living in two cultures. Although regarded as British for purposes of defence and used to serve the maintenance of the Raj, they were little acknowledged in their own right in India. And although India was to them the dear old place they suffered the prejudice of both of the other two main groups".

Kipling described the marriages which created this group as beyond the pale but despite British prejudice they took their culture from the West spoke English and adopted the Christian faith. However despite the ambivalence of their social position the Anglo-Indians in Gloria Jean Moore's book have an individual uprightness. The adversity that a minority suffers gives an inner toughness and staunch private morality. Arthur McGill Gloria's grandfather struggled many years to receive just promotion under the British. As he was continually passed over he consoled himself with the words of Thomas a Kempis:

What a man is in the sight of God that he is and nothing else.

Their accounts reveal a delicate appreciation for the beauty of India. The lady birds on silver oak leaves, fresh deer tracks in the forest, peacocks suddenly moving into a clearing and a sense of joy in living. Eva Cummings McGill Gloria's grandmother writes of the excitement and panoply of governing circles during the Raj when Eastern potentates mingled with resplendent officers, teas were served, bands played and women in elegant silks strolled beside dashing A.D.C's; Phyllis McGill Thomson Gloria's mother writes. We had the time of our lives in India

However they were viewed by British or Indians, the Anglo-Indian community saw themselves as a part of the fabric of Indian life and they were unified by their sense of family community and the fight to maintain their own pride.

It was not an easy life for them cholera, typhoid, bubonic plague, tuberculosis, accidents and death in childbirth took their toll. So dreadful was the suffering that many may have wondered whether the price for keeping monopolies of trade and building an Empire was worth it. As Phyllis McGill Thomson writes:

This was a country where we rarely wrote a letter to each other without the familiar D V God Willing in some line. Our lives could be taken from us at any minute.

We were the bulwark of the Empire but they [the British] made a convenience of us Nevertheless the story of Gloria Jean Moore's family is not merely a series of personal portraits by people mindlessly loyal to a colonial power. Each account portrays not only the individual man or woman who writes it but also the flavour of the times. Major George McGill's military account of the Indian Mutiny is as pro-British and anti-Indian as one would expect from this historical era. It was very much later that the history books re-wrote the Indian Mutiny as the First War of Indian Independence.

Gloria Jean Moore's story, over a century later reflects on the changing face of India; how as India moved towards independence and partition Anglo-Indian families were sometimes divided in sympathy and resolve. Her own father so different from Major George McGill she describes as sympathetic to the aspirations of people more

oppressed than he was. Yet he was not Indian. Eventually such divisions would drive many Anglo-Indians out of India.

Although it is a little strange to read of this group of 300,000 in the vast continent of millions of Hindus and Moslems maintaining a European style and although one occasionally wonders at the narrowness with which some Anglo- Indians blotted out this other world while they enjoyed productions of *The Desert Song* and *The Belle of New York*, yet a balance of viewpoints is achieved by the author through such accounts as Phyllis McGill Thomson's description of her Indian friend Dr Sen to whom she could pour out her fears and to visit, with whom she walked miles through the colony. A strong combative woman she defends her friend:

I lived with fine people like Dr Sen in that outpost of the old Empire as the sun was setting on its glories

By its warm truthful evocation of personal lives Gloria Jean Moore's book redresses the stereo-typed and false view of the Anglo-Indian community so popular with cheap modern novelists but so condemned by both the author and her mother. Phyllis McGill Thomson's comment on her friendship with Dr Sen could well have been said in defence of her own community. Different customs should not obscure the deeper significance of the human unity of all peoples of the world.

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