



UNWANTED! MEMORIES OF A PRIEST'S DAUGHTER
BY ESTHER MARY LYONS (SPECTRUM)

Adrian Gilbert

This autobiography is set initially in Northern India, where the author was born in the 1940s. It describes her experiences in India and then the USA - where her Father lived, and concludes in Australia in the 1980s. The book is interesting mainly for the insight it provides into the Anglo-Indian and Indian cultures and how they impacted on each other. A second and less important reason for reading the book is that the author was the illegitimate daughter of an American Jesuit priest and an Indian Catholic nun. Whilst the book was probably published because of the illegitimacy issue and the possibility that this might increase sales, I believe the book has much more to offer the reader.

For the reader interested in the interplay of different cultures the author provides a quite detailed description of events in her life and how they impacted on her. The reader is given an impression, by the characters in the book, of a style of English spoken during the 1940s and 1950s in India by the Anglo-Indians. Further, many of their behaviours and actions are explained in terms of the socio-cultural milieu that operated at the time. The Anglo-Indians had their own subculture and much of this subculture with its own values, lifestyle and way of talking are captured here.

The author describes a number of interesting and amusing experiences and it helps to understand them if one has lived in the subcontinent. One such incident was when she was accused of being a Pakistani spy by a railway guard because she was carrying a suspicious package. It turned out that the package was a transistor radio that she had bought for her mother. Another issue that she raises is that of the double standard that often characterises people. While condemning somebody else

for not living by particular standards we tend to be much more forgiving of ourselves when we transgress those standards.

While I have reservations about the emphasis placed on the authors' beginnings as the "love child of an American Jesuit priest and an Indian Catholic nun" I believe many people will find the book interesting for other reasons. It describes a place and a time that lives on only in the memories of many people. The India of today is a vastly different place to that in the 1940s and 1950s and the Anglo-Indians and Indians of today are a very different people.

Anybody interested in acquiring the book can get in touch with the publisher Spectrum Publications: PO Box 75 Richmond Victoria 3121. Australia. Tel: +61 3 9429 1404.