



## THE ANGLO-INDIANS - A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF INDIA

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*Studies of the Anglo-Indian community often refer to the Christian religion in passing, without much attention to just how pervasive the influence of Judeo-Christian values has been through time. Anglo-Indians continue to be noted in contemporary India for their ethos of social service as part of a religiously-inspired value system that has helped to earn a fine reputation for voluntarism in practically every town where they form a concentration.*

The Christian religion has been associated with Anglo-Indians since the earliest children of mixed ancestry made their appearance at European trading stations. Hawes has explained the way in which the East India Company took pains to distinguish persons of Indian ancestry from the European population of British India at the end of the 18th century. (1996) This development heralded conditions rather ideal for the creation of a distinct ethnies and whose religion and religiously affiliated institutions were part of a most compensatory culture that developed apart from the British colonial mainstream. For most Britons in India, religious attachments were nominal but among Anglo-Indians, religious involvement provided the gifts of dignity and meaning, particularly during gloomier chapters in the community's history. In this respect, the Anglo-Indians may exemplify Thompson's observations of British working class cultures in their once strong religious identifications that provided similar advantages (1963). More recent social scientific findings point to religion as both a preventative and therapeutic force, not so much the opiate of the masses as a force that allows resilience wherever conditions of injustice and inequality prevail.

Some scholars have stated the Anglo-Indian reputation for daily religious observance. (Gupta:1968, Sen:1988) A thorough study of religion and the Anglo-

Indians could greatly assist in discovering historical Anglo-Indian culture and its alterations over time. Anglo-Indians continue to put up with descriptions of themselves as the preservers of British Royal paraphernalia and all things Anglophilic, that I for one, have never encountered in an Anglo-Indian home. Instead, the religious picture, crucifix, or other symbol of religious attachment, is an Anglo-Indian given in India. In Canadian Anglo-Indian homes they appear too, as much loved articles brought away from India years ago now, that remind instantly of homes and ways of life that were left behind. As Gans noted of the Jewish-American identity that has easily endured through many generations, these retained symbols are most important for the way in which they help to reinforce identity (1994). I am happy to report that a friend who has done tremendously well in Canada, will never part with a simple card given to her by a parish priest the day before she made her journey to the airport in Bombay. Similarly, a crucifix taken from place to place around the subcontinent by one's relations is naturally a treasured heirloom in many a home thousands of miles from India.

Minority peoples usually manifest strong connections to their religious traditions of yore, sometimes in allegories pertaining to themselves and the world, as passed down through successive generations (Isajiw:1994; Mol,1976).

Anglo-Indian religiosity has connected to values of perseverance, the overcoming of obstacles and especially, the life well lived that is conducted 'properly' and in community. Values of service and dedication offer an inspiring view of life circumstances that must have often been most daunting. Where pay scales were low, opportunities limited, and prejudice of some form likely to be experienced, the off-setting advantages of religiosity stood the Anglo-Indians in good stead. Anglo-Indian culture emphasizes making the best of trying conditions in an ongoing regard for the job well done however unsatisfying. In contemporary India, poor Anglo-Indians often demonstrate exemplary behaviour capable of refuting all that tends to be presumed about their origins and ways of life.

In all of these ways, it is probable that the cultural traits that have earned the community the epithet of one too idealistic for India, have been precisely those that have helped to ensure the community's survival. In Anglo-Indian quarters, however

modest, church-going continues to offer inspiration and respectability. The social opportunities are limitless as any visitor to a busy Indian parish will know. Furthermore, families in need of assistance are most apt to find it through parochial concerns of different kinds as the vast majority of projects aiding the Anglo-Indian poor continue to possess some religious affiliation.

In other ways, informal religiosity and respect for the ideal of service can be regarded as rolled together to form a distinctive Anglo-Indian outlook. Frank Anthony, like various others, wrote of a debt owed to various religious schools and the contributions of individual religious. Like many of his generation's middle class, Anthony was an Anglican within the ecumenical Church of North India but he praised the contributions made by the Roman Catholic Church to Anglo-Indians throughout India (1969). Before 1947, missionaries and clergy were often staunch supporters of the Anglo-Indians as in the example of the English Methodist, the Rev. Edward Thompson, an arch critic of both colonial policy and popular British attitudes towards Anglo-Indians. In *The Other Side of the Medal* he provided sharp invective against British attitudes in particular in reference to a community that had,

Received great wrong at our [British] hands. By a process of the Most shameful neglect and active contempt it has been reduced to A weak and dependent condition. today the Eurasian community is regarded by Indians with a hatred which is rarely felt by them for The British. with the British they carry, in the stigma of 'native blood', a disability as cruel and unjust as it is crushing (1941).

The arrival of the American Methodist Episcopal Church in the 1870s brought uplift to Anglo-Indians living in ghetto circumstances through a programme designed to bolster the Anglo-Indian middle class. The MEC's educational investment in northern and western India expanded rapidly and proved most successful in encouraging educational and medical careers for women. Bishop Thoburn explained to Alden how Anglo-Indians were deliberately kept in subordinate roles by a colonial administration that feared their gaining political influence (1895). The MEC had worked earlier among African-Americans and South Africa's 'Cape Coloureds'. Thoburn gave much of his career to peoples of mixed ancestry, denouncing wherever he went the day's belief in hybrid degeneracy; of the Anglo-Indians in particular, he believed that they deserved far more credit than had ever been given them (1892).

It is likely that the Roman Catholic tradition especially contributed to the Anglo-Indian reputation for discipline and integrity as it prevails in some Indian circles. Since 1947, India's largest Christian communion has continued to draw Anglo-Indian converts from Protestantism on account of the ICC's wider array of educational and pastoral helps and of course, the Roman Catholic fellowship's often better insight into everyday problems and their solutions. When in the company of an Anglo-Indian nun of eastern India, her daily orbit involved a great many pragmatic arrangements related to the location of housing, childcare and other needs. Since the early 1980s, numbers of poorer Anglo-Indians have shown interest in the newer fundamentalist Protestant denominations to appear in India, groups that can said to employ rice tactics. A family that is considering 'going over' will hear it said that they belong within the denominations of old and most often, the ICC. The well-funded Assembly of God offers financial assistance to Anglo-Indians joining its congregations in West Bengal. However, with typical wit, less approving Anglo-Indians have referred to the organization as The Assembly Line and to its converts as The Godly Assembled.

Canadian Anglo-Indians often demonstrate attachment to an Anglican or Roman Catholic parish where it is usual that Anglo-Indians will be making their time available to the vestry community, at least one service-minded undertaking of the congregation and perhaps to a related service organization. A well-known Torontonians who has given much time and energy to the Anglo-Indian community remains a deacon of his church. In countless other individuals one is forever discovering active involvement in religious activities of one kind or another. Secularization is often predicted for Anglo-Indians born outside of India yet the younger generations do retain a confirmed preference for the church wedding, christening, and every other observance of the sacraments. Some degree at least of religiosity is bound to be manifested. It is interesting to notice too, that marriages between Anglo-Indians do occur abroad and in spite of rather dismal assumptions to do with the young 'marrying out' and towards the eventual disappearance of the community. Moreover, a number of Anglo-Indian periodicals have featured articles expressly on the subject of what marrying an Anglo-Indian entails! The point is made that one does not simply marry an Anglo-Indian but is included in an international Anglo-Indian network. There are not simply in-laws but an extended international

brood into which one is suddenly incorporated. J.D. commented that her 10-year marriage to 'the one from Calcutta' had been wonderfully social and that she has never tired of meeting her husband's school chums and others with whom they have visited, or those who arrive on their Canadian doorstep. She said that her husband's family had warned her of the gregarious community into which she was venturing but that no one had told her that it would all be such fun. J.D. is a Protestant and has raised her children as Roman Catholics out of respect for her husband's family.

Anglo-Indians have shown ample evidence of interest in other religions too. India always demands awareness of the religions of others and in the Anglo-Indian community is concentrated an understanding of every principal religion of the country and to extents far exceeding the involvement of Anglo-Indians in the festival days of Hindu, Muslim or Sikh friends. In the first half of the 19th century, Col. James Skinner's espousal of both Anglicanism and Islam was typical of many a northern Anglo-Indian. Skinner is said to have quipped that one way or another he would enter heaven after completing St. James Church in Delhi and also a mosque for the Muslims of his household. He is said to have financed a temple also in Delhi. (Biswas, 1991) Islam was of strong appeal to many of the early East India Company men who in so many cases chose to marry wives from Muslim families. In the 1990s, Anglo-Indians are frequently found living in the Muslim districts of Indian cities where a shared tradition is said to favour good relations. Anglo-Indian girls marrying into Indian communities generally retain their own religious practice and the necessary adjustments are made in the raising of children. For instance, the wife of a Sikh businessman reported that she and her husband take their children to Mass and also to the gurdhwara in an arrangement commended by her in-laws. Anglo-Indians still prefer marriage within the community but changing attitudes across communities have rendered unions with westernized other Indians less troublesome with regard to custom and the raising of children.

Much has been said of Protestant-Roman Catholic divisions of old in centres of sufficient size to allow for separate enclaves. There was once limited interaction between Anglo-Indians of the different churches in India's principal cities. At the same time, and as Dover noted in the 1930s, there was always some overlap as in Protestants' frequent reverence for Roman Catholic saints (1937). Bhattacharya

wrote of the Bombay Anglo-Indians that there had been support for cross-denominational marriages long before the Ecumenical Council of 1961 eased their solemnization (1968). In Calcutta, the sectarian divide has diminished though there are sufficient numbers of Anglo-Indians that reference can be made to two sub-groups that are slightly differentiated (Sen, 1988). In South India, most are members of the ICC though poorer Anglo-Indians have shown interest in the newer fundamentalist groups in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Anglo-Indians have not been without interest in Sufism and in Hindu philosophy and both Varma and Gaikwad pointed to a taste for the occult among Anglo-Indians of the lower classes and those beyond urban areas (1979, 1967). During my fieldwork, this 'occultism' seemed only comparable to the superstition of many a Celtic-Canadian family. More mystical and magical elements are demonstrated of kinds that will not surprise persons having been raised in religious households. I read that Helen Rodriguez, who was awarded the George Medal for her heroism during the Japanese occupation of Burma, fulfilled a promise made to a Japanese officer who had shown her decency before his death. Rodriguez and her mother travelled to Japan after the War and visited a shrine that the officer had often described and while there, both women heard the man's voice calling Helen's name (1983). I recounted the story to my own dear mother who responded that of course these things happened!

Returning to the present, the rise of Hindu fundamentalism has created an anti-Christian climate totally incongruent with the churches' deep roots especially in southern and eastern India. It seems very much forgotten that Christian activities have been mainly non-evangelical and of benefit to the generic Indian poor. The Rt. Rev. Alan d'Lastic is at the forefront of discussions between the BJP government and the Indian churches, amidst a situation that could not have been predicted two decades ago. It remains to be seen how well anti-Christian sentiment can be diffused in the parts of India where incidents of violence have erupted. In spite of the fact that the roots of Christianity are older in India than those in Europe, Christianity and Christians, including Anglo-Indians, are presented as representatives of colonialism towards most irresponsible political ends. It is certainly not mentioned that most missionary work occurred in the interval of 1858-1905, well past the time of

evangelical influence (Neill, 1985). All would be less ridiculous were it not for the fact that some rather shrill proponents of Hindutva happen to be the graduates of Anglo-Indian schools and assorted Christian colleges. C.F. Andrews did refer to a too-British flavour in the Anglican practice of Anglo-Indians (1912). In Madras, Bishop Whitehead encouraged Anglo-Indians to drive their Indian roots deeper after the example of the Ceylon Burghers whose linkages to non-Europeans tended to be stronger (1924). Nevertheless, the CSI and the CNI and of course the ICC, have developed as outward-looking fellowships that are altogether ready to cultivate relations with non-Christians. What Anglo-Indians face with regard to anti-Christian sentiment is most unfair and poorly reasoned: of all of India's Christian communities, it is possible that the Anglo-Indians possess the longest record of cooperation with members of other religions on account of their extreme minority status, not to mention a chain of schools throughout India whose enrolments have long been overwhelmingly non-Christian.

Historically too, the involvement of Anglo-Indians in missionary work undoubtedly helped to cultivate knowledge of non-Christian religions. In the early days of the East India Company, Anglo-Indians were associated with the first mission stations and their various schools, hostels and orphanages. Later on, different denominations shared the vision of preparing Anglo-Indians for the mission field in a collective venture of mixed results. Bishop Middleton's 1820s inauguration of what became Bishop's College in Calcutta, would produce more Anglo-Indians for the secular professions than it would Anglo-Indian clergy. The pattern would forever be one of Anglo-Indians contributing to religious ventures as an adjunct of their occupational lives, though with important exceptions.

Other Anglo-Indians were thoroughly involved in religious life, as the examples reviewed attest. In 1829, William Buckingham assisted the Baptist mission at Vessore. 'Indo-Britons' speaking both English and Portuguese had earlier been dispatched to the hospitals of Fort William (Potts, 1967). Later on, when Anglo-Indian Protestants demonstrated interest in becoming ordained there could be resistance due to the tendency to mistrust all Indians in positions of authority that prevailed through to the early 20th century. There were complications too, pertaining to the Anglo-Indian legal status that designated them clearly as neither Indians nor

Europeans. When Adam Anthony announced his wish to leave government service in 1855 in favour of a missionary career, the Rev. J.L. Scott arranged for him to enter a new American Presbyterian training facility at Agra. Unfortunately, a decision had been made in New York against engaging Anglo-Indians on an equal footing with westerners and upon the completion of his studies, a salary offered to Anthony was well below the rates accorded Americans and Europeans. Anthony declined an American Presbyterian post stating the he only wanted equality. The incident split opinion among northern Presbyterians, many of whom supported his case (Webster,1976).

Anglo-Indian clergy were often assigned to non-European and poorer congregations just as Anglo-Indian churches, for many years, were favoured by bishops as suitable training grounds for younger clergy having just arrived in India. British officials and box-wallahs were rarely comfortable in 'low' congregations and missionary endeavours were usually avoided as an unfashionable realm of activity, sometimes still associated with the causation of the 1857 mutiny. At the other extreme were Anglo-Indians whose contributions remain of note as in the contributions of Dr. Henry Bower (1812-1885) whose Tamil translations are still studied (Victor,1984). Bower's children carried on his Dravidian scholarship, among them Oxford graduates in law and eventual delegates to the Lok Sabha, and a daughter who served as Madras's Directress of Education. Charles Egbert Kennet(t) was made deacon in 1851 and a priest in 1853 after studies at Bishop's College. He earned his Lambeth D.D. and taught for some years in the Madras Theological College of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Preceding both Bower and Kennet was the example of the London Missionary Society's William Cruikshank(s), an individual whose memory remains dear to Tiruleveli and the 'Tinnevely' Mission, where Cruikshank and another Anglo-Indian, Mr. Browne, operated the LMS's school in the 1840s. Mr. Cruikshank's legend continues of a 25-year contribution made through which he demonstrated a gentle nature; since childhood, Cruikshank had been completely blind (Neill, 1985).

Nevertheless, it is the Roman Catholic tradition that has shaped Anglo-Indian culture most. Anglo-Indians attended the consecration of the Luz Church in Madras in 1516 and in rather an unbroken line of involvement, the community has continued to

produce such notables as Calcutta's Archbishop Henry d'Souza and the late Cardinal Eric Pachechy. In most parts of India, Roman Catholic education for Anglo-Indians followed Protestant developments. The Sisters of the Presentation and the Irish Institute of the Blessed Virgin began work in India in the 1840s as adjuncts of the Maynooth Mission. As the Padroado arrangement was dissolved, the Vatican encouraged several Irish religious for a variety of Indian initiatives in both north and south. The Patrician Brothers' mission to India commenced in a great array of educational ventures and in the aftermath of the Irish Famine, bishops seldom objected when missionaries applied to remain permanently in India (Hogan,1990). The Jesuit order has made a strong imprint and in addition to Irish Jesuits, some readers will recall others as teachers from Belgium, Italy and Malta.

Many Anglo-Indians favour Roman Catholic practice in forms that were more familiar in the West, a generation ago. There is lingering disapproval of divorce as Anglo-Indians report that in their community they marry for keeps. Very strong Roman Catholic communities are found in Kerala, Karnataka, Goa of course, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. In West Bengal, Anglo-Indians continue to follow a parish and school centred culture and urban priests have mentioned a strong adherence to customs of old; novenas are made and prayers of intercession are recorded. In New Delhi and environs too, one meets Anglo-Indians involved in their parishes and also the Legion of Mary or one of a dozen other lay organizations. They have given their time to the YMCA and the YWCA, to Alcoholics Anonymous and a myriad of non-profit organizations. Charitable ventures, such as South India's Friend in Need Society, can count on support from Anglo-Indians settled abroad. It is this collective tradition that most impresses other Indians who do know members of the community. When researching in India, the comment was several times made that many more Indians ought to follow the Anglo-Indian example. Where Anglo-Indians remain an appreciated presence it is known that many giving their time to volunteer activities are not very well-heeled, that they give what they can, and where money cannot be spared, time and effort most definitely can.

Organized religion and its related activities give creative outlets for many Anglo-Indians, including those living in modest circumstances and in a tradition that has always been in place. Throughout the Anglo-Indians' history, Christianity has offered

opportunities and a very strong sense of virtue as its own reward. Popular Christian cultures have generally excelled in transforming excluded peoples into all that they are capable of becoming, for at its root, the tradition pertains to themes of poverty, injustice, and social distinction. In British India, Anglo-Indians without wealth, connections or occupational choices undoubtedly gained everything else from a religiously shaped culture. In a community affected by questions of descent and difference, indeed, as a people Made in India, something would be rather amiss should religion be less prominent in the Anglo-Indians' culture and outlook. Religious involvement has also aided Anglo-Indians in their diverse experiences of emigration and resettlement. In central Canada, Anglo-Indians are among the stalwarts of several large parishes. In England, congregations have come to be known as 'Anglo-Indian' churches and with clergy from India periodically visiting British, Australian and Canadian Anglo-Indians since the 1970s.

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Service, service, service is everywhere in Anglo-Indian culture, perhaps as its central ideal.

As an obvious foreigner wandering from place to place by bus and rail, each visit to India has involved a tremendous amount of gossip on each and every minority community. I rarely mention what interests me and if raising the subject of the Anglo-Indian community, expect the usual poppycock. Some Indians have provided utterly glowing accounts, usually referring straight away to the Anglo-Indian record of social service. Anglo-Indian teachers have obviously touched a great many Indians and to compliment a non-middle class Indian on his command of English is to invite an account of Mr. Jones or Miss MacDonald of a school attended for a year or two, at some point in his biography. A Muslim lady of elite background who was aware of the topic I was researching, spoke fondly for an hour of a games mistress of old who was determined she would learn to swim and play hockey, as the first of her family to attend an English-medium school. The same teacher, upon learning that her former student was to go abroad with her husband commented that she must learn to drive and the next morning arrived to get lessons underway. Another woman who had attended a North Indian boarding school described rail journeys all the way to Kerala

that had begun her holidays. She spoke of the kindness shown by numerous railway employees in days when a guard would begin his shift by stopping for a chat, sometimes asking if she had everything she needed. This is the kind of generosity of spirit that remains associated with Anglo-Indians and in some cases, it is rather wistfully missed. Mr. Smith would wait at the station till someone appeared to collect me. I was looked after for the entire journey. Other Indians still recall the way that post or telegraph workers put in extra hours at festival times. It does not matter that the Indian services have been wildly over-burdened by different responsibilities and the effects of the population boom, -- Anglo-Indians remain associated with efficiency and an absence of the everyday petty corruption that came to prevail.

Most telling informants have often been, as ever, the people of the streets. India has changed over the last decade but it remains true that her most on-the-mark and opinionated souls are her scooter-wallahs, cigarette-vendors and assorted stand-about. Of course, one does not say where one is going unless on an actual trail and then, when in need of direction, India's citizens do persist in indicating an opinion, one way or another, on the nature of the person to be seen. Mention of an Anglo-Indian household as a destination has evoked a smile in various out of the way places. Anglo-Indians can possess a status that neither position nor money can really buy in the eyes of these Other Informants. Those who are often illiterate but knowing, and are unfailingly anxious to convey their thoughts on all and sundry. It is the same set of dynamics that has driven some residents of India practically round the bend. As Anglo-Indians well know, where there is boundless curiosity, there is no privacy. A minor accident without injuries cannot be a 15 minute incident for it belongs to its witnesses as local theatre, with a sizeable crowd determining fault and sometimes reparations, too.

One very warm afternoon, I spotted Mr.K. on his way to the Cathedral in his northern town. We had met earlier and would be seeing one another again. For the time being, fieldwork. The staff of the corner cafe, had been indicating their considerable curiosity for three days concerning my tendency to walk for hours about the town and -- "why always writing and smoking" and so on. I looked in Mr. K's direction.

"Kuan si fellow hai?"

"K-sahib is Gent."

It was established that Mr.K walked every day to the church and was a good man, that Mr.K attended many meetings and was known to pay his servant punctually, sending extra food to his family and when the servant's son broke his arm last year, Mr.K took him to the doctor and paid the bill. Mr.K once allowed a family to squat by his cottage for 1.5 years. In fact, the waiter's nephew saw Mr.K. defend the family against a policeman, insisting that they be left alone. Mr.K. likes to dine each week at the \_\_\_\_\_. Mr.K. has two sons who are abroad for the time being. His daughter is very nice but then the grandparents were good people, too. Mrs. K. died two years ago. etc. etc.

It will of course be pleasant to pass this account on to Mr.K.

Where academics are frequently reliable sources of misinformation on the Anglo-Indian community, I maintain that these Indians convey far more information of kinds that really matter. In India, actions do speak louder than words with conduct at all times important, and India's harshest critics, her more ordinary observers of everyday life, have given Anglo-Indians many an accolade in every part of India to which I have travelled.

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