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## THE LOSS OF COMMUNITY AMONG ANGLO-INDIANS IN INDIAN HILL STATIONS: THE DEHRA DUN CASE

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[AUTHORS NOTE: The following piece is based upon a continuation of my research about the Anglo-Indian community of India. If the reader has examined any of those articles he or she will note several common threads concerning the present and future of the group. This manuscript is based upon observations and interviews conducted in Dehra Dun, one of the hill stations in the lower Himalayan Mountains to the north and east of Delhi. When there, during the mid-1990s, I resided in a private school that focused on teaching and training young men in the traditional subjects that would prepare them for careers in government and/or commerce, or perhaps admission to one of the better colleges and universities of the west. It was in that context that my guide introduced me to and led me into the homes of many members of the Anglo-Indian community in and around Dehra Dun. I would like to thank my guide, Aubrey Lund, who provided me with the opportunity to meet, observe, and interview many Anglo-Indians in the Dehra Dun community. His sincerity and skill will always be appreciated. I have not provided the names of my respondents within this manuscript since in most instances they requested that they remain without identity. Without their willingness to open their homes and their personal stories would have prevented my having a better understanding of them and their community. I thank them all.]

The lowlands in and around Delhi, what historically became the center of the British Empire in India, is often smothered by the oppressive heat of summertime. During April of any year the average temperature of Delhi is 105 degrees Fahrenheit. Even for the most hearty this sort of temperature is essentially unbearable, leading inhabitants to seek the cooler locations in the low mountains of the Himalayans

where the daytime temperature tends to be an average of 65 or 70 degrees Fahrenheit during summer days. In an attempt to escape the unbearable heat in the summertime centers of government moved to more moderate climates into the lower elevations of the Himalayan Mountain ranges, the most prominent geographic feature of northern India. Further, many overseas British "took holiday" in these more comfortable regions of India. Thus, scattered throughout the mountains there emerged numerous settlements or "hill stations" where the British literally moved the government as well as prime vacation locations along with its British inhabitants and continued to reside there until the waning days of summer and the oncoming of Autumn. In several instances overseas Europeans took up permanent residence as they found enterprises of business, education, medical care, commerce, and service industry meeting their career needs.

Throughout northern India these hill stations became centers of British commerce, government, and culture. It is not surprising that these locations, the essence of British culture, also became the center of Anglo-Indian culture. As one quickly understands, wherever the British clustered children of European fathers and Indian mothers became an inevitable and fundamental part of the landscape. These hill cultures became famous as locations of crisp, clear, and above all comfortable communities. As one Anglo-Indian resident of Dehra Dun (one of the more prominent low mountain hill stations to the north of Delhi) commented in an interview with the author:

My greatgranddaddy was Welsh. He came here as a young man and worked his way to Dehra Dun. He went to work for the Post and Telegraph, marrying my greatgrandmama and raising a family here. His children and grandchildren all went to proper schools (British) and married into English or Anglo-Indian families that were permanents here in this community. Everyone loved it here. There were hundreds of Anglo-Indians locally even when I was a child. We did lots of things together, but today things have changed. I remember many evenings when my granddaddy and father would tell stories of the "good old days" ... they made it sound so lovely. Today in the whole of the community there are maybe fifty or sixty families that claim Anglo-Indian stock. We once were a lovely peoples.

Members of the Anglo-Indian Community who were raised in the hill stations entered personal and professional pathways that characterized members of their community in other parts of the subcontinent, the railways, post, telegraph, police, nursing,

teaching, etc. They were automatically granted jobs in these and other middle-range, but highly respected, positions in government. They taught their children to enjoy things that were British; take the cultural traditions of Europe as their own; become literate in the oral and written traditions of the English language; accept Christianity as their personal religion; and in all ways social and cultural to join in and become part of the traditions that characterized Anglo Indians as something unique and within which a sense of identity and pride could be maintained. Once the children were old enough they entered jobs that were protected or reserved first (and without competition) for Anglo-Indians. There is no doubt that these entitlements caused wide-spread resentment among outside groups, but that was the way things were under colonial rule.

One of the key elements of the hill culture that surrounded Anglo-Indians with the ability to maintain this cultural and social identity was the European system of education -- the private school system that focused on teaching the culture and tradition of the west. Some of the most respected schools of India were located in the hill stations and their graduates took positions in higher levels of government and business as well as exhibited personal pride in successfully graduating from these schools. It was this institution that gave a formal endorsement (or a seal of approval) to the Anglo-Indian culture as a way of life. Culture was very important for Anglo-Indian identity and any perpetuation of the community. Behavioural traditions, language, items of possession, dress, dietary patterns, style of living, and such gave a visual identification to members of the community ... to be seen by other members of the community, the British, or local members of the population. As such, Anglo-Indians could enjoy the associational status that these items of culture gave them and their families. Non visible culture also played a significant part in the lives of members of the community ... belief systems, values, and norms as well as the way these more hidden part of life led to an affirmation of their relationships with both the British and indigenous community. Through these belief systems Anglo-Indians justified their social and cultural positions somewhere between the British and Indian communities ... the first to which they identified and the second to which they found little commonalty.

On the other hand the social dimensions in which Anglo-Indians found themselves living created a culture that was a mixture of the two from which its members sprung. Anglo-Indians were never fully accepted into the inner circles of British society and at the same time rejected and were rejected by local Indian society. They were on the margins, never really a member of either culture, being forced to construct their own social system and personal identity to meet their social needs. One could always emulate European culture and accept those more visible or potent elements. Yet, they could not simply walk into British culture and be "at home" ... for the most part they were on the outside. There were instances of the most prominent leaders of the community being accepted into social clubs, informal associations, and day to day society, but for the most part there were three very distinct levels of society in which Anglo-Indians lived: British which was always above them but out of reach; their own in which they constructed a "quasi" British system; and the heterogeneous local communities that represented the many parts of the indigenous Indian social system. Thus, Anglo-Indians formed their own social clubs, came together to celebrate important holidays (Easter, Christmas, and important dates central to the culture of England), and in other ways constructed a society that was marginal to but at the same time reproduced most of those things that were British. They played the games of England, gambled in a manner characterizing western cultures, celebrated major life events (marriage, baptism, funerals, etc., in a manner consistent with the west). In other words in almost everything social they emulated those things western, especially British, and came to occupy a social position between these two more dominant cultures ... England and India.

Western private schools brought together almost all aspects of western life into one cultural place. Religion was fundamental since these schools were maintained, staffed, and oriented to the religious groups that owned the facility -- usually Roman Catholic. Students learned, through the medium of English, their European and religious heritage. They institutionalized their cultural heritage through study, prayer, talk, and learning to do the things that Anglo-Indians were supposed to so as to assume their position in the heritage of their native land. Their teachers reinforced the values, norms, and cultural importance (teachers and staff often passed on their assumption of western superiority along with the ethos of British colonialism). Many of these schools became leading educational institutions, preparing their students to

assume positions of leadership within the government and private works as well as preparing students for foreign education, the military, and commerce. In the most general sense they served colonial India as status sifting institutions. It was often necessary to have their name firmly on one's resume if there was an expected or respected job to occupy in the future.

Outside of this educational spectrum networking with religious memberships and participation, family ties, and selective employment in jobs that were traditional to Anglo-Indians created a life in which being an Anglo-Indian was all-inclusive. This unique mixture of exclusion and inclusion evolved into a blended combination of society, culture, and a casting of opinions or attitudes that justified or neutralized the negative or exclusionary parts and emphasized or exalted those things that were consistent or positive. Almost nothing happening in the life of an Anglo-Indian that was outside of the general community. Even residential enclaves demarcated Anglo-Indian residents from overseas British and indigenous populations. A condition of social, cultural, and social-psychological isolation and exclusiveness marked the lives of the group. Even though this community manifested itself in cultural and social exclusiveness, thinking they would never witness a decline in influence, a future of national independence was destined to happen.

And happen it did. Slowly but surely all groups in India came to the realization that Indian independence was inevitable. By the 1930s two major responses to Indian freedom could be seen: first, thousands of Anglo-Indians began preparation for migration to a 'safe haven' ... a country where they could live in the life-style to which they had both become accustomed and aspired. Second, here and there selected numbers of Anglo-Indians began to literally carve out quasi-utopian or collective communities where they could live in isolation from the more general Indian populations. In Bihar the community of McCluskiegunge was carved from the farmlands in the southeastern part of the state. In Dehra Dun a leader of the religious community organized a movement to purchase and construct an exclusive Anglo-Indian living area in which members could exist in a community once independence came. He and others divided a plot of land to the south and west of the city into housing lots and encouraged Anglo-Indians to purchase, build, and move into the protected enclave. Although the enterprise ultimately faltered and failed, many

members of the community built houses and settled. Today you can still find a sprinkling of Anglo-Indians residing in the residential area, several retired from government service, the railroads, or the military. Here they live with others who share a common social and cultural heritage.

When the British gave up the colonial throne and India gained independence, many Anglo-Indians remained in the numerous hill stations and struggled to save their slowly disappearing culture. Their numbers dwindled to the point that eventually the critical mass necessary to perpetuate community identity dropped to the point where they were no longer existed as a separate group. There is no magic number at which this event occurred, but once they could no longer hold a dominant position in a school or school room, in a church or religious community, neighborhood, job category, social club, or some other important entity ... they ceased to be able to perpetuate their independent identity as a community. As individuals they remained Anglo-Indian in their own eyes and the eyes of many outsiders. Everyone who lives in Dehra Dun has an image of a "typical Anglo-Indian" and thus their cultural reference group. This imagery has often led to problems for members of the community, informal discrimination is commonplace as they are denied jobs or admission to schools or groups due to constructed stereotypes of who they are and a keen memory that recalls when they were guaranteed jobs and other real or perceived benefits at the expense of locals.

Many Anglo-Indians reported that the only way to deal with this problem is to pretend that they are not a part of their community and, if possible, to assume the identity of a Hindu man or woman, one who speaks the local language and takes on the more visible social and cultural traditions of traditional India. This is not easy for many, and Dehra Dun is not large enough to "disappear into the masses." Most Anglo-Indians carry their cultural heritage on their faces through their mixed racial heritage and even more so through their preferences in language, informal gestures and symbolic communication, as well as general demeanor. It is very difficult to "pass" as something you are not, especially in the hill stations of northern India.

One major option for Anglo-Indians since long before independence has been to migrate ... and most who could have long ago left India for England, Australia,

Canada, or the Gulf. It is common for Anglo-Indian men to travel to the Arabian Gulf area for three to five years, earn a comparatively high salary, bank the money and come back to India where they can supplement their incomes with their savings. Most Anglo-Indians who have migrated to England, Australia, and Canada have done so with the intent of not returning ... their leaving is considered permanent. With the common core of fifty or more families still living in Dehra Dun, there is little confidence that ten to twenty years in the future the community will cease to be identified as anything other than a historical artefact in those records that chronicle past cultural groups of India.

With all of these social forces focusing on current Anglo-Indians, everyone that was interviewed voiced the opinion that it was only a matter of time until the group ceases to exist. There is no longer a culture or society into which the youth of the community can fit, gain an understanding of self, and eventually construct for him- or her-self a sense of identity consistent with past images of what it was like to be an Anglo-Indian. As one Dehra Dun informant, sitting before his nine and twelve year old sons said:

My kids will not have the opportunity to experience the kind of things we did -- and they will never know what it is like to do things with other Anglo-Indians. They will not grow up knowing the community as I know it. In twenty to twenty-five years there will be no Anglo-Indians left here in Dehra Dun. They will all have gone.

The older son of the informant then turned to my "guide" and spoke in Hindi. I asked the father if he could have done that at the same age. His reply illustrated the changes that have taken place in only forty to forty-five years

I did not learn any Hindi. We were exempted from Hindi. We studied English and French. I got the best marks in French. We were taught a different type of education at that time.

He is employed as a mechanic at a local automobile repair shop and his wife works as a secretary in one of the local religious schools. His children are after them to migrate, they commented during the interview. I asked where and the father responded that ... "It really does not matter, anywhere."

I asked if they have relatives abroad who would sponsor and help them in the migration process. Both the husband and wife responded in the affirmative, that they

have aunts and cousins in England. Do they keep in contact? "Yes, they love us ... they put us on top. We regularly keep in contact ... we get a Christmas card each year." This pattern was very common among most of the respondents during the field stage of my research. Most respondents comment that they have close friends and relatives living abroad, but it is common that contact is made annually or perhaps there has been no contact for five, ten, or even twenty years. It is evident that without closeness of contact little support can be expected for anyone who wants to migrate from India to a western nation.

To affirm the problem faced by members of the Anglo-Indian community as they try to maintain a niche in contemporary India, informants noted over and over how difficult it will be in the future to maintain any symbol of community identity. One senior member of the community who lives in Dehra Dun described the current condition of the community and the possibility of any change in the future in this manner:

The Anglo-Indian Community is disappearing and in a generation or two will no longer exist. Oh sure, the people will be here but there will be no reason remaining to call themselves Anglo-Indians. The term has started to have a lot of its meaning lost to the understanding of the people around here. See, there were dozens of families fifty years ago, but they simply are not here today. Many have moved away ... some to other communities in India and some to other communities outside of the country. But several have stayed here and you know they are Anglo-Indian just because you knew that their family was Anglo-Indian. There is not much reason to be one today. It does not do you any good and it really does not do you any harm since few people today know what it was like when the British controlled India.

Others were less pessimistic, perhaps making observations through experiences that place more possibility of an accommodative future compared with one that see the community in an ultimate state of decline to disappearance. One successful member of the community who has carved a respected place for himself in contemporary India responded this way:

... Anglo-Indians are a mixture ... are a synthesis of British and Indian cultures. The customs followed in Anglo-Indian families is basically Western oriented ... but the food is much a combination of both Indian and Western cuisine. It is hoped that the community will continue for many years to come. I feel strongly that the culture should be maintained and preserved as we come under the "Minorities Commission" (community). Also, a few Indian communities have come

under the authority of the Minorities Commission" ... such as Sardais of Bengal, etc.

I don't find an emptiness or void being an Anglo-Indian. On the other hand, I am happy and content with all that I have.

Finally, one elder statesman within the community who had been a resident of Dehra Dun all of his nearly eighty years and had lived a very successful life as a prominent teacher and eventual administrator in a very prominent western school commented:

In the past Anglo-Indians felt they were alien to the country, even though none of them had ever been to England. More and more they classify Anglo-Indians as members of the Indian Community and India, which we regard as our home, without any linkage to England. We live, work and are content to live and die in our Motherland.

I feel that the Anglo-Indian Community should adopt the culture of the Indian which exists around us, and that only our language and religion will help us to continue our programs as members of the Anglo-Indian Community, especially if we do not force people to adopt our culture. Many of our Anglo-Indian girls and boys are marrying outside of the community, without a feeling of being "outsiders" from the mainstream.

Marriage outside of the community, taking on the identity of the Hindu majority (culturally and socially), migrating to one of the western, English-speaking nations of the west, and other patterns that take one away from Anglo-Indian heritage do not present an optimistic picture of the future of the community in the hill stations of northern India, a place where the prominence of Anglo-Indians was historically taken for granted. Western culture came to India as a part of the British Raj, but in recent years has been expanded due to the introduction of commerce and communication that patterns the west, especially the United States. Today a pattern of internationalism and cosmopolitanism is spreading throughout the world, even into the hill stations of India. Satellite television, the world wide web, movies, and the written word has allowed a cultural sharing that is historically unparalleled. Within this context there is further room for the Anglo-Indian to face reality and disappear into the influx of this massive cultural diffusion. There may be movements that attempt to push traditional culture and values from the past into modern times, but ultimately the pressure of international trade and commerce is the victor of such battles. There is a real need to maintain as much of a Western culture as possible within a community where such a life style is both difficult and often expensive.

Indeed, the son and daughter of an Anglo-Indian living in Dehra Dun will never experience what it was like to be an Anglo-Indian fifty or one hundred years ago. Any amount of wishful thinking cannot make changes in the social and cultural patterns and force them to slow down, stop, or reverse. Indeed the two boys mentioned earlier will only know what their father and others tell them about the "good old days." They will probably never find the need to even tell their children or grandchildren what it was like to be an Anglo-Indian since they will never have the opportunity to experience such an identity. They can only retell those stories that were once told to them, but their children will ultimately forget the stories or even that they were once a part of their family and cultural heritage.

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