



THEY STAYED BACK – PART II

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INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with the Anglo-Indian as a marginalized entity and examines the relationship between hybridity and the marginalized and the role that exclusion plays in the process of this marginalization.

I also discuss the current phenomena of transcultural convergence, a process that is inevitable in all societies where the dominant community itself is opening itself up to newer influences that tend to follow patterns similar to those the minority followed.

I then attempt to explain the concept of the subaltern arising out of the marginalization of a community.

This paper also makes the case for a more vibrant, full of vigor hybridity, and the need to celebrate this vibrancy in no uncertain terms rather than being apologetic.

HYBRIDITY & THE MARGINALIZED

Hybridity refers in its most basic sense to 'mixture'. The Hybrid is the offspring produced by the crossing of two individuals of unlike genetic constitution. There is a distinct dividing line pertaining to hybridity, between Colonial literature and Post-colonial offerings. Colonial constructs of hybridity tended to be largely derogative and ranged from the uncharitable (half-breed) to the downright abusive (mongrel). The colonial version of hybridity promoted the profile of the typical hybrid as being, indolent, unproductive and morally degenerate. The post-colonial literature on the other hand, freed from the shackles of dominant culture hegemony, heralded by the arrival of a host of non-white social commentators of considerable calibre, posited the Hybrid as being a victim of marginalization and the very antithesis of the purity of the hegemonic dominant society.

Stonequist's 'Marginal Man' (1937) has largely impacted most recent polemics on marginalization. The Marginal Man was a person, "who fate has condemned to live in two, not merely different but antagonistic cultures---- his mind is a crucible in which two differing and refractory cultures, may be said to melt and either wholly, or in part, "fuse" Stonequist's life-cycle of a Marginal smaller group, ahead of the rest of the minority ,shows remarkable similarities with the Anglo-Indian Experience: while the rest of the minority emigrates, seeing themselves as aliens, not in sync with the dominant group's culture, the smaller group stays back, aspires to equality as an objective and using the potent tool of assimilation, forms a new social framework. In this way the cycle ends with the minority group being incorporated into the dominant group.

The process described above could very well be the rallying anthem for the Anglo-Indians that chose to stay back in India. Aspirations for achieving acceptance from the dominant group, were largely sub-conscious, but at least in some cases, a conscious effort to escape the odious shackles of marginality. Assimilation became the rallying point. It must be mentioned that socio-cultural assimilation came much easier to Anglo Indians who chose to stay back. At the very base of their identity mind-set was the clear perception of their being Indians first and Anglo-Indians next. Frequent intermingling with dominant group in elite schools run by Christian Missionaries, but driven by Anglo-Indian Principals and teachers, lent itself to an easy, uninhibited camaraderie between Anglo-Indians and the dominant group. Higher education, then, cemented this developing of a synergy between the dominant group and the marginalized community.

TRANSCULTURAL CONVERGENCE

With the departure of the English Colonizers, the identity of the 'Colonized' ('The other') as postulated by Homi Bhabha (1994), took on the dimension of a challenge to the traditionally adversarial roles in the ongoing saga of hybridity. No more was Indian society constituted of the Whites (the Colonizer) and, "the other" (Colonized). 'The Other' gradually morphed into an avatar of the Colonizer. The dominant cultures in any case were itself on "a continuous process of hybridity" (Rutherford, 1990). Caste, and Communal lines began to blur, mixed marriages among the dominant majority were becoming increasingly common. Marriages between the dominant

majority and the marginalized Anglo-Indian minority also began to occur with increasing regularity. The women of the community, in more and more instances, found themselves marrying 'Out'. An intriguing aspect though, is the noticeable absence of inter-marriage between Catholic and Protestant, whereas inter-marriage between Christians and Hindus are far more prevalent. How does one explain this obvious dichotomy? Is papacy the ultimate divider?

“The other side of hybridity is transcultural hybridity” (Jan Nederveen Pieterse, 2004) On the cultural level the distances between Anglo Indian groups and other communities is being reduced. Cultural barriers are being dismantled at amazing speeds. Movements in opposite directions by both dominant Indian cultures and established Anglo-Indian lifestyles are witnessing what Jan Nederveen Pietersen terms as “Transcultural Convergence”. Through the convergence, both groups are acquiring cultural attributes they did not possess earlier – convergence of contamination. Perhaps the only barrier that has not been totally dismantled is that pertaining to inter-marriage between Anglo-Indians and dominant Indian groups. However, here too, as mentioned earlier, the number of inter-marriages are increasing exponentially, especially in the more liberal, progressive and urbanized cities of India. One outcome of this proliferation of inter-marriages, is the fact that the Churches in India, across denominations, are facilitating these marriages by removing impediments to Church weddings between Christians and non-Christians.

Gunnar Myrdal (1944) in his Seminal work on “*Race Relations in the US*”, mentions that among Whites and Blacks, the barrier against inter-marriages was most rigid. The same can be said of inter-marriages in India. Here however, the Anglo Indians are in the forefront of the dismantling of this most formidable of barriers. Here it must be mentioned that the complexity of this exercise of dismantling of barriers, “must be seen in the light of the fact that marginality (in the case of the Anglo Indian) is not limited to relations with a homogenous Indian Community, but with several distinctive communities, including Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsees and still others”, (Gist & Wright (1973). Indeed the Anglo Indian community’s rapidly unfolding saga of inter-marriage has a parallel with other tiny minority groups in India, notably with the highly Westernised Parsees and the Coorgs, a fiercely independent minority subgroup within the Hindu majority.

ANGLO-INDIAN WOMAN AND INTER-MARRIAGE

While earlier decades saw the increase in the number of Anglo-Indian women marrying outside the Community, the last few years has witnessed a huge spike in these numbers to the detriment of the position of Anglo-Indians in contemporary Indian society, since their off-spring will not qualify to be called Anglo-Indian. The reasons for this are all too familiar; hardly any increase in the number of Anglo-Indian boys opting for higher education. With the increased voiding of the stigma attached to a Hindu marrying an Anglo-Indian, the colleges and other institutions are increasingly becoming fertile breeding grounds for inter-marriage between Anglo-Indian girls and boys from other dominant communities. More than a 100 Anglo-Indian women who have married out, live in Bangalore, and none of them are able to further propagate the Community. This depletion does not augur well for the future of the community in India. Even among the diaspora, there is a growing incidence of Anglo-Indians, especially girls, marrying into communities of contingent Asian Communities like Sri Lankan, Malaysian, Thai, Burmese, etc. Cheryl Shivan, (2010) an Anglo-Indian Writer and Scholar from Pondicherry, who has herself married 'out', is a lone voice in the wilderness, calling for reform in the Constitutional definition of the Anglo-Indian being restricted to descent from the male line. We need to learn from the example of another miniscule minority – the Burghers of Sri Lanka, which has practically been decimated by Intermarriage. Inter-marriage will only increase in the years to come, and unless serious efforts are made in India to alter the Constitutional definition of the Anglo-Indian, the community is doomed to be extinct much sooner than was originally forecast.

MARGINALISATION AND EXCLUSION

The story of the marginalization of the Anglo-Indian community in India has been a story of exclusion. And this exclusion has been largely self-inflicted. The ghettoized minority enclaves like the Railway Colonies of old, stand in stark contrast to the variegated textures of today's Indian social fabric.

Surprisingly, the Anglo-Indian's spiritual motherland, England, has been able to, by its broad policy of Inclusiveness, transform English society into one of the most multicultural countries.

Sadly there are still some marginalized Anglo-Indians in India who follow a doctrine of self-exclusion, not having learnt the lessons of the past. Mr. Charles Dias, Member of Parliament, in a recent address to Members of the community in Bangalore, appealed to the well-off, land-owning Anglo-Indians to donate land, so that an enclave for the settlement of Anglo-Indians in colonies would be established. While this was probably well intentioned, it is fraught with danger. The last thing the community needs in India is to again retreat into insularity by congregating in colonies, reminiscent of the old Anglo-Indian railway colonies. Those at least were neighborhoods contiguous to their place of work; the railway junctions and rail yards. Also, the fact that the large majority of the Railway work-force in those days were Anglo-Indian, lent it justification. This is not the case anymore.

On the other hand, what is more acceptable is the current trend of the community from across the country, migrating to more hospitable climes like Bangalore and Pune, cities with a balmy Mediterranean- like climate with a large number of religious congregations, convents and schools, where abundant teaching jobs are available. More importantly, they have booming job markets, not in the least caused by burgeoning IT, ITES and financial services industries.

HYBRIDITY AND THE SUBALTERN

While in all Colonial literature and discourse, hybridity was a term of abuse, and the term “half-breed”, was used to describe the outcome of miscegenation, a union between “superior Whites” with inferior Blacks & Browns. Post-Colonial writings and commentaries saw the emergence of the term, ‘subaltern’, a word that has been used increasingly to refer to marginalized groups like the Anglo-Indians, rendered without agency by their social status, or lack of it. Homi Bhabha defines the Subaltern groups as, “oppressed minority groups whose presence was crucial to the self-definition of the Majority group. The word ‘subaltern’, is a British military term for a Junior Officer and literally means ‘subordinate’.

De Souza Santos (2002), in my view, comes closest to describing the Anglo-Indian’s subaltern credentials, when he talks of “subalternism” being the struggle by largely marginalized groups against social exclusion. He goes on to use the term subaltern in reference to marginalized and oppressed people, specifically in their struggle

against hegemonic powers. If the Anglo-Indian community in India wishes to rid itself of the subaltern label, it needs to rid itself of its meaningless exclusion from the mainstream, adopt assimilation as its mantra, and celebrate its hybridity.

Edward Said (1978), the influential and Prolific Palestinian Writer, calls himself a subaltern, not because he himself was marginalized (which he was decidedly not, being from an elitist Anglophone background), but because he saw himself as the Literary flag bearer of arguably the most marginalized people, the Palestinians.

The Anglo-India needs to be the flag bearer, marching ahead to rid itself of all subaltern labels. What this writer finds intriguing though, is that after a more than cursory glance of Subaltern writings by Indians like Sudipta Kaviraj, Lata Mani, Ranajit Guha (Subaltern Studies (1986 – 1995) et al.) there is not a mention of the Anglo-Indian community, by far the most literate of all Subaltern Communities in the country. In the entire series of Suburban Studies, spread over a decade and a half, the Anglo-Indian community, marginalized, and forced into social exclusion by both the dominant Indian majority and the British, did not qualify to be included among the ranks of the subaltern groupings. It would be interesting to engage the Indian Subaltern writers in discussion and discourse, as to the reason for exclusion of the Anglo-Indian community.

It would seem that subalternism, in the Indian context, would necessitate the existence of two major ingredients; peasantry and insurgency. The first certainly would exclude the community, while the second was the very antithesis of the *raison d'être* of the community. Furthermore, the presence of two major attributes, engagement in politics and representation, both of which are available to the Anglo-Indians, having been enshrined in the Constitution of India, mandated their exclusion from the ranks of the subaltern. The Anglo-Indian community, clearly is in a uni-dimensional spatial binary: intrinsically subaltern and at the same time excluded from primary membership of the Group.

Finally, the way ahead for those “Anglo-Indians who stayed back, has to be charted and a road map to be drawn up for the “mainstreaming of the marginalized,” by those in the community who have successfully navigated their way by employing the concept of “hybrid vigor” - the tendency of cross-breeds to show qualities superior to

those of both parents.

This would be the main text of the next paper.

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