



THE FEEL GOOD FACTOR OF THE NEW ETHNICITY: ANGLO-INDIANS OF KERALA AND MEGHALAYA

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In this article Dr. Lobo discusses two little known groups of Anglo-Indians in India and how they have attracted government assistance by accepting the label "backward". According to Dr. Lobo the assistance from the Indian government has meant that the Anglo-Indians in Kerala and Meghalaya are "successful" compared to many other Anglo-Indians. Further, the members of these two groups "feel good" about themselves.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are two groups of Anglo-Indians who have been largely ignored as possessing Anglo-Indian status. These two groups live diametrically across from one another. One group of Anglo-Indians live in the coastal Indian State of Kerala. The other group lives in the foothills of the Himalayas in the Indian State of Meghalaya. Anglo-Indians were interviewed in the capital cities of Cochin (Kerala) and Shillong (Meghalaya).

2. THE KERALA ANGLO-INDIANS

The Kerala Anglo-Indians have Portuguese surnames as distinct from Anglo-Saxon ones. They are bilingual in English and Malayalam. They speak English as their mother-tongue and most of the women wear Western-style dress. Their hospitality was remarkable. (1)

During the British Raj, Kerala Anglo-Indians lived in two political enclaves - British Malabar and the State of Cochin and Travancore. The latter was ruled by a Rajah.

The Kerala Anglo-Indians formed an Association in 1922 with Chevalier C. Paul Luiz as President and Professor Nunez as Secretary. The Association established an industrial school for poor Anglo-Indian boys and girls. In 1934, the South Malabar Anglo-Indian Association was inaugurated.

In 1936 Sir Henry Gidney, the President of the All-India Anglo-Indian Association, visited Ernakulam and Fort Cochin and established branches of the All-India Anglo-Indian Association. Sir Gidney was aware of the poverty and inadequate education levels of Kerala Anglo-Indians, and he did not disown or discard the Kerala Anglo-Indians. (2)

In 1944, Frank Anthony the President of the All India Anglo-Indian Association visited Ernakulam, succeeding Sir Henry as the leader of the Anglo-Indian community. Frank Anthony "was all praise for the Anglo-Indians of the State at that time". (3)

In 1946, the Federated Anglo-Indian Association with its branch associations was amalgamated with the branch of the All-India Anglo-Indian Association (A.I.A.I.A.). In 1949, the states of Travancore and Cochin were integrated. The name of the new state was Kerala. The Anglo-Indians in Kerala decided that they wanted autonomy to run their own affairs. But, the AIAIA wanted 4% of local subscriptions as the branch contribution to the centre. As reciprocal assistance in the form of school support was not forthcoming widespread discontent occurred.

In 1953, the registration of the separate (Kerala) Union of Anglo-Indian Associations took place. This "outgroup" of Anglo-Indians became independent from the All India Anglo-Indian Association. The new Union was registered under the Literary, Scientific and Charitable Societies Act.

3. THE MEGHALAYAN ANGLO-INDIANS

The mineral rich and tea-growing areas of the North-East Frontier attracted the Europeans who worked for the East India Company in the late eighteenth century. (4) The European colonialists married the Khasi women who belonged to a group of Austro-Asiatic people who speak Khasi, which is one of the Mon-Khmer family of languages, and is the only surviving one in India. By the laws of succession the

daughters inherit the whole of their parents' territory, and the sons are sent to live with their wives. (5)

Ethnologically, the hill tribes of the North-East Frontier are primarily of the Tibeto-Mongoloid stock with a sprinkling of Austric and Dravidian blood. The Khasis and Jaintias belong to the same tribal community and live in the Khasi and Jaintia hills. The society of the Khasi Scheduled Tribe continues to be completely matriarchal. (6) The Khasi Anglo-Indians/Scheduled Tribe living in Meghalaya are descendants from the European colonialists and Khasi women.

4. A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE ANGLO-INDIANS OF KERALA AND MEGHALAYA

These two Anglo-Indian communities inhabit opposite corners of the Indian sub-continent. This spatial location explains why although both communities fall within the Constitutional definition of an Anglo-Indian, each may have difficulties in recognising the other as part of the same community.

On the mother's side, the Meghalayan Anglo-Indians are descended from Austro-Asiatic stock; the Keralite Anglo-Indians from Dravidian stock. On the father's side the Meghalayan Anglo-Indians are descended from Anglo-Saxon stock; the Keralite Anglo-Indians from Portuguese stock. This demonstrates the very mixed racial heritage of the Anglo-Indians and the difficulty among Anglo-Indians in agreeing who should be called an Anglo-Indian. Without such agreement and a global view of the community, Anglo-Indians have had problems in calculating the size of the community.

Both categories of Anglo-Indians attract positive discrimination for different reasons. Meghalayan Anglo-Indians receive positive discrimination from the Government of India because they belong to the Scheduled Tribe (Khasi). The Keralite Anglo-Indians also receive positive discrimination from the Government of India because they belong to the category of Other Backward Classes. Positive discrimination takes the form of reserved places in Universities for these groups, and job reservation in Government service. But, positive discrimination has had its price - the label of being "backward".

The powerful All-India Anglo-Indian Association does not recognise these groups of Anglo-Indians, because the Keralite Anglo-Indians have accepted the "backward label," and the Meghalayan Anglo-Indians are members of the Scheduled Tribe. Another reason could be prejudice against the community because its members are descended from the Portuguese and descendants of the Portuguese in India are usually called Indian Christians. The Meghalayan Anglo-Indians have been excluded from the Anglo-Indian community because of its acceptance of matrilineal descent, which does not conform to the Constitutional definition of patrilineal descent.

It is unfortunate that until now these two rather successful Anglo-Indian groups, who have successfully exploited the educational facilities offered by the Indian government, have been excluded from mainstream Anglo-Indian life.

5. CONCLUSION

The Anglo-Indian community should seek backward status. Achieving backward status for the Anglo-Indians in India would be a way forward. (7)

Decades of broken promises by the Anglo-Indian schools cast strong doubt on the ability of these schools to deliver a language curriculum which will create a feel good factor for Anglo-Indians. In other words, Anglo-Indians should become coordinate bilinguals in English and one Indian language. (8)

The differential socialization patterns of Anglo-Indian schools attended by wealthy non Anglo-Indians and poor Anglo-Indians do not arise by accident. Rather, they reflect the fact that the educational objectives and expectations of Anglo-Indian politicians and educationists, (as well as the responsiveness of the two classes of students to various patterns of teaching and control), differ for students of different social classes. Therefore, the schools should become more approachable for Anglo-Indians.

To speak of educational and social change is to speak of making history. The schools have had half a century to educate the Anglo-Indian community to become competitive not complacent. Education does fit into the picture of the feel good

factor. Anglo-Indian schools do different things to different children. Non Anglo-Indian children leave at 18+ with an enthusiasm for Higher Education. Anglo-Indian children are dropping out of school before 16+.

The conventional wisdom in education is missing for Anglo- Indian children. The personality development, bridging the gap between home and school, teaching the whole child are phrases which are missing in Anglo-Indian schools for poor Anglo-Indian children. The money is available in trust funds to educate Anglo-Indian children, but where are the Anglo-Indian children in Anglo-Indian schools? (8)

The Kerala and Meghalayan Anglo-Indians have the feel good factor. They approached the problem logically. Bilingualism and in the words of the Beatles's song "With a little help from my friends" gained both these groups positive discrimination. So, what is the fuss all about? Misplaced pride? It is completely misplaced when you do not have a front door, and sand bags do not prevent the monsoon water from swirling into your hut, or grinding poverty drives a woman into prostitution. (9)

The REUNION IV - BANGALORE - INDIA in January 1998 are going to have a party, reminiscing about the good old days. I am not a killjoy, but, before the party, at the Symposium on the 3rd day, the conference should pause and seriously ask a single question:

"Why has the Anglo-Indian community in India lost the feel good factor?"

Talk about the present. Ask questions about the future. I might well echo Gandhi's assessment of Western civilization: "It would be a good idea."

NOTES

(1) I undertook this research in 1990. The interviews took place in Cochin in the Anglo-Indian High School, Perumanor.

(2) The Brochure was informative and was given to me by the late Stephen Padua who was the President of the Union of Anglo-Indian Associations, Kerala.

(3) Lewis, F.C. (1978) a Short History of the Union of Anglo-Indian Associations, Kerala SOUVENIR IN COMMEMORATION OF THE SILVER JUBILEE UAIA (1953-1978) p.52.

- (4) Elwin, V. (1959) *India's North-East Frontier in the Nineteenth Century* Oxford: Oxford University Press p. 3. I found this information in the Institute of Commonwealth Studies Library, University of London.
- (5) Barooah, N.K. (1970) *David Scott in North-East India 1802-1831: A Study in British Paternalism (An Extract from David Scott's Report on the Garrow Country - 20 August 1816)* New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal p.248; see also, Gait, E. (1926, 1963) *A History of Assam Calcutta* pp.311- 353.
- (6) Butler, J. (1847) *A Sketch of Assam, with some account of the Hill tribes, by an Officer* London; see also, Robinson, W. (1841) *A Descriptive Account of Assam, to which is added a Short Account of Neighbouring Tribes* London.
- (7) Caplan, L. *Dimensions of Urban Poverty: Anglo-Indian Poor and Their Guardians in Madras.* IN: *URBAN ANTHROPOLOGY AND STUDIES OF CULTURAL SYSTEMS AND WORLD ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT* Vol.25 No.4. Winter 1996 p.337.
- (8) Lobo, A. (1994) *A Comparative Study of Educational Disadvantage in India within the Anglo-Indian Community.* PhD Thesis. University of London, Institute of Education. pp.250-1.
- (9) Lobo, A. (1994) *A Study of Anglo-Indian Families in two slums in Bangalore and Calcutta: Lingarajapuram and Thilljallah* Appendix 4. *ibid.*, pp.454-462.