





Book Review: *Beyond the Metros: Anglo-Indians in India's Smaller Towns and Cities*

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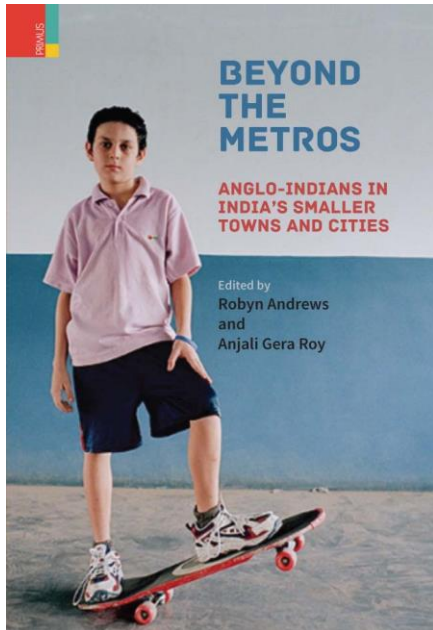
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About the Book Review

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Book Review: *Beyond the Metros: Anglo-Indians in India's Smaller Towns and Cities*

Andrews, Robyn & Anjali Gera Roy, ed. (2021). ₹1050 (Hard Cover). Delhi: Primus. 270pp. ISBN: 978-93-90737-65-9.



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This edited book with a foreword by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay is the outcome of New Zealand India Research Institute project funding to focus on the Anglo-Indian community's life experiences beyond metropolitans. It aimed to de-stereotype the image of the ethnic religio-cultural minority, who are prominently seen as standing testimony to exotic speech, dress, food and lifestyle. A further attempt has been made to question the constitutional 'homogenized' definition of the community. This book deployed 'pluralism' (foreword p. ix) to theoretically study the minority group. As Sekhar Bandyopadhyay wrote about the central argument, "...there is no single authentic version of an Anglo-Indian, despite a single constitutional definition" (p.viii).

This book has ten chapters, divided into three sections, the first section (five chapters) deals with the railway towns of Asansol, Kharagpur, Jabalpur, Jhansi and Secunderabad. The second section (comprising of two chapters) depicted the Anglo-Indians in the hills of Dehradun and

Ranchi. While the last section (consisting of three chapters) discussed the lives of the Anglo-Indians in the port cities of Pondicherry, Cochin and Goa. The rationale behind choosing such sites is pragmatic because of relative lack of recognition of this area. However, the editors took note of the fact that a sequel would be a better option if more localities were to be incorporated. Nonetheless, the broader classification of sites and their selective representation has potentially de-mystified the idea of the 'uniform identity' of Anglo-Indians. The book primarily used a comparative method to juxtapose and analyze the life of the Anglo-Indians beyond the Metros. Not only spatial comparison, the authors have also used a temporal comparison to document Anglo lives 'then' and 'now'. Overall, ethnographic and historiographic methods are employed using four variables of age, gender, place and nature of employment.

In chapter one titled "Kharagpur: The remembered railway town of Anglo-Indian memory" Gera Roy used narratives, oral history methods and archiving online blogs to detour the idea of 'nostalgia' to understand the varied imageries of 'home'. Theoretically, she invoked Blunt's idea of 'productive nostalgia' and Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia' to problematize the spatial history of Kharagpur, situating the fond memories of the Anglo-Indians. She used cartographical analysis to situate the Anglo residences downtown where 'active othering', 'boundary maintenance' and spatial segregation' had been vehemently played out, which places the railway colony outside the 'sacred enclosure' of Hindu ritual space (p.25). With the passage of time, 'rescription' and reconstitution of spatial hierarchies took place with the establishment of IIT Kharagpur, which created new structures of privilege and domination. Her findings contested the idea of home (problematized home as a stable space, relationships, habits of life, etc.). She argued that the diasporic community of Kharagpur did not believe in the Hindu ideas of home (through the notions of Pitrabhumi and Punyabhumi); rather they created a symbolic meaning of home beyond geography through nostalgia. Their home 'converges on a succession of railway towns, boarding schools and holiday homes...' (p.23). The railway networks created elaborate 'kinship networks of identification' and they consciously despise thinking or discussing the degeneration and degradation of Kharagpur localities in present times while the existing young Anglo-Indians experience 'unhomely homes' because of diminished economic status, exodus overseas, public discrimination and stigmatization of the community.

Chapter two is a coauthored article titled "Past and Present: Mapping the Anglo-Indian Journey in Kharagpur" by Catherina Moss, Ananya Chakraborty and Anjali Gera Roy. Moss being Anglo-Indian and Chakraborty a Bengali Brahmin collaboratively conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews across different age cohorts and picture portrayal methods to provide a holistic and balanced perspective of both an insider and outsider of the community. The study aimed to gauge structural changes in landholding patterns affected by economic

transitions among Anglo-Indians in Kharagpur town. Old Kharagpur provided 'comforting insularity' to Anglo-Indians given the block-based quarters as residential units provided by the railways for its managerial staff. With the changes in job, the transition took from preferential employment opportunity to potential-based opportunity, the community faced a lack of security. Their diminishing status pushed them to reside in jholis in deplorable conditions. Older generation revisits their memories of South Institute which provided epicentre for all in-community socialization including ball dances, music, bar, jam sessions, games, etc. while, the present generation/ youth is more focused on education and employment, which pushes them to move out in nearby cities for better prospects. They experience transition in their social life, which led to a preference for voluntary assimilation (including dressing patterns and learning Hindi/Bengali languages) with other mainstream communities to maintaining distinctiveness and staying aloof. This chapter is exemplary of memory studies using picture portrayal and comparative methods. The printed pictures are of inferior quality especially in monochrome, causing interpretation difficult, while the temporal comparison of the golden past and destitute future is worth mentioning.

Chapter three titled "Other Places, Other Spaces: Jabalpur and Jhansi" by Deborah Nixon attempted to illustrate anachronistic elements of small-town life among Anglo-Indians, with a specific focus on their adaptive nature, fluid identities and the challenges of the community. Nixon used interviews to document narratives, anecdotes and memories influenced by nostalgia, to locate contemporary lives in small cities. She also used the Photo elicitation method to invoke memories among the respondents. Unlike photo portrayal, which is more like photo ethnography—as Susan Sontag argued that photographs are tools of seeing, the Photo elicitation method actually targets the respondents to dive deep into memories. This method acts as a memory aid and helps in collecting rich qualitative data. Nixon also used a register of nostalgia to take account of lament, adjustment and survival of the community. Theoretically, she used Lionel Caplan's idea of 'performing identity' to show, how Anglo-Indianness is depicted through bodily posture (sitting cross-legged), appropriate dress (skirts for women and trousers for men) and having a Christian name. While with time and westernization, such identity gaps are narrowed, the boundaries of communities became porous and the population turned diminishing. She used the phrase 'a holy mix up' (p.83) to identify the heterogeneity of the community. Further, she contrasted the lives of two domiciled Europeans, one who lived like nawabs and the other living by means of community donations, depicting two sides of the community. This chapter very well analyzed the Anglo-Indian attitude towards change, which simultaneously operates with resilience towards their culture.

Chapter Four titled "Asansol Anglo-Indians: Buying into the Nation?" by Robyn Andrews was already published as a chapter in Pardo, I., & Prato, G. B. (Eds.). (2018). The Palgrave handbook

of urban ethnography. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. By means of Survey and ethnographic data, Andrews investigated the idea of citizenship among Anglo-Indians in Asansol. Her key research questions were: why do the Anglo-Indians in Asansol have higher home ownership and higher levels of tertiary education? She also explored how an increase in economic capital impacted their idea of nationhood. Her findings countered the popular notion of 'culture of migration' among them. She conducted 28 informal interviews and analyzed the data into two sections. In the first section, she pointed out the reasons 'why they could buy', which includes, inheritance, finance flow from the gulf, retirement funds, internal migration and growth of high-rise apartments which led to property purchase. While in the second section she analyzed 'why did they buy?', which includes key reasons like the 'idea of security', marital accentuations and sense of identity, the idea of staying back which instigated motives for buying property and also proximity to the church which determines their residential preferences. The most noteworthy analysis Andrew draws was 'remedying the sense of stuckness' among Anglo-Indians, through ownership of comfortable and secure homes. This led to political participation opening up avenues for exercising power and agency in public spheres and religious institutions alike. At the concluding end of the chapter, Andrews goes on to discuss the ambivalence of challenges and acceptance amongst the community. She argued that some Anglo-Indians lived in India for ages but lacked the feeling of Indianness, while on the other hand, some recognized India's diversity and secularism, which makes them secure a place for themselves. On these notes, Andrews is optimistic that home ownership has the strategic potential to burgeon a sense of citizenship among Anglo-Indians.

Chapter five is the last chapter of this section, titled "Voicing a Return: Exploring the impact of the BPO sector on the Anglo-Indian community in Secunderabad". This chapter was already published as an article in IJAS in 2016. Upamanyu Sengupta documented the evolution of perception regarding the shift in the socio-economic landscape of Hyderabad. Further, mapping the adaptation process of the community toward the changing job market. He also analyzed the workplace environment and the experiences of discrimination faced by Anglo-Indians in BPO. Surveys followed by focused group discussions were employed to collect data. The samples were disaggregated according to the age group to locate the 'earlier' and 'later' perceptions (Temporal comparisons drawn and analyzed). However, in the table of comparison, the two age cohorts are mistakenly printed as the same, which makes the interpretation incomprehensible. His findings suggest that a dialectic movement in the economic realm took place. Decades of marginalization, followed by an IT boom provided hope for the community because of their proficiency in English, but soon it resulted in a competitive market which led to a sense of defeat amongst the community. This deficit to capitalize lucrative employment was due to a lack of identity politics, absence of group activism and missed opportunity to mobilize, while for women, disparaging and offensive

remarks along with 'ethno-sexual indexing' create a deterrent towards considering BPO employment. Sengupta further pointed out the 'invisible hierarchy' based on jobs, where call centre employees are regarded as the 'new low-income group'. He argues that BPO employment is perhaps a 'launching pad' for youth entrepreneurs.

The second section of the book discusses the life of Anglo-Indians in the hills. Chapter six titled, "Educators of the Doon Valley: Dehradun's Anglo-Indians" by Robyn Andrews used ethnography to study the field sites of Dehradun and Mussoorie. Her rationale behind the focus on Dehradun was due to the numerical strength of Anglo-Indians in this region. Her sample is a mixed cohort of teachers, former military officials, bankers, entrepreneurs, etc. for a comprehensive study of the local community. Andrews attempted to demonstrate the contemporary role of schools in Dehradun. Her findings are vast and elaborate. Through interview excerpts, she indicated the insatiable importance of Anglo-Indian schools due to English medium education, with sports inculcation and social skills that teachers impart, followed by western manners, etiquette, speech, dress, behaviour, etc. Andrews studied three prominent schools of the region and noted the school's role in nurturing cultural events of the community (like Easter, Christmas, ball dance, parade, etc.) and providing physical space for socializing activities, which have in turn strengthened community bonds. Although she mentions that Anglo schools have 40% reservation for Anglo-Indians and also provide free education to all Christians (see St. Jude's School, p.148), she did not discuss how the minority community would benefit, if they are treated at par with other Christians. She also found that, unlike the popular conception, Anglo-Indians in Dehradun are better off financially (associated with schools) and contribute to a comfortable lifestyle (compared to major cities). She likewise traced the 'small counter-flow' of Anglo Indians in Clement Town in search of employment in schools, opening bakeries, joining AIAIA's roles etc.

In Chapter seven titled "Negotiating Culture and identity: Anglo-Indian community in Ranchi", Afrinul Haque Khan conducted survey interviews across three generations of Anglo-Indians in Ranchi, using simple random and purposive sampling methods. This chapter was earlier presented at a conference and published as an article in IJAS in 2016. Khan tried to identify patterns of identity formation and means of identity preservation among Anglo-Indians in Ranchi. He used conceptual frameworks of Vikki Bell's 'performative achievement' amongst many others cited. His findings suggest Anglo-Indians as a very quiet community lacking agitation and continuously participating in the incomplete project of identity formation. Anglo-Indians who arrived in the 1970s and 80s mainly rendered education. In the course of time, they lost distinctiveness and came closer to Indian roots. Their ties with the community weakened and exhibited pronounced cultural disintegration, while, in an attempt to preserve culture and provide 'visible continuity to their reality', they resort to religious participation and rituals. The chief identifiable difference between tribal Christians and Anglo-Indian

Christians is the use of the English language in the British style. Khan also noted the varying degree of Anglo-Indianness, exhibited through community associations and memories of past life and culture. He further pointed out older generations' affinity towards the west and younger generations' acceptance of Indian customs. Finally, he discussed the pulls and pressures of the transforming social milieu, which situates them in a paradoxical state of identity preservation on the one hand and identity assimilation on other hand, leading to a sense of disintegration and alienation.

The third section of the book, comprising chapters dealing with port cities, starts with chapter eight titled "Pondicherry Anglo Indians into the fold" by Cheryl Ann Shivan and Robyn Andrews. This mind-boggling chapter discusses the issues of complexity of identification due to the region's long socio-political history which leads to varied accentuations and population composition. Using Historiographic and ethnographic perspectives, the authors attempted to draw upon the demography of the town to classify the population into mixed descent, creoles and indigenous population. As opposed to the long-standing claims stating the absence of Anglo Indians in Pondicherry, this study has pointed out through historical records, marriage registries and cemetery records; the presence of Anglo Indians for a long. Sivan has particularly drawn upon the historical accounts of trade commerce and marital ties which led to the building of a multi-ethnic community in Pondicherry. Andrews reflected upon the key research questions which address similarities shared by Anglo Indians in Pondicherry with the rest of the country as well as documenting the differences. Further looking into the Tamil and French influences on Anglo-Indians' day-to-day life. Most importantly the chapter explores the impact of All India Anglo-Indian Association's absence until recently. The findings of the study suggest that the population can be further classified into French Indian creoles and Franco Indians (natives) who had opted for French nationality. French nationality status was the chief avenue to leave for France, while those domiciled in Pondicherry were assured continued service in their profession without complying with new rules and regulations, rendering them more prosperous than members of the same family but having Indian Citizenship. While Tamil was used as an interlocutor for communication between the French and English since both groups learnt the local language, the 'Sunday Masses' used to be conducted in French and Tamil, until recently. While Anglo Indians in Pondicherry and English masses irrespective of their own Parish. Socialization between the Anglo Indians and creoles was considerably high because of their shared western culture; while relative distancing and othering took place with the Franco Indians who were basically Tamilians with French citizenship. Most Anglo Indians who started inhabiting the town post-1960s were already members of Villupuram branch of the India Anglo-Indian Association. With internal migration from the suburbs, many Anglo Indians had been born and brought up in Pondicherry since then. In 2011 with the petitioning of English language masses, the Anglo Indians marked their presence. Soon AIAIA shifted its branch head office to Pondicherry which aided the revival

and revitalization of Anglo Indians within the community fold and further prevented their assimilation into mainstream India.

In chapter 9 titled "The unique history and development of Cochin's Anglo Indians", Brent Howitt Otto discussed the 'emergence, growth, change and persistence of Anglo Indians in Cochin over five centuries'. He provided a detailed historical account of the Portuguese Era marked by trade and evangelization showing the alignment between religion and economy with the accommodation of separate Christian sects (Roman Catholic and St. Thomas Christians) for material benefits. The Portuguese also encouraged marriages (with natives) over concubinage yeah providing incentives for the same. However, the pre-condition or preference for marriage was based on descent (birth) and skin colour particularly amongst the merchant class; also the compulsion to convert to Christianity before marriage. Such marital accentuation gave birth to Mestiços (children of mixed descent). With the decline of the Portuguese and the arrival of the Dutch, the Mestiços were expelled to Goa or the hinterlands of cochin. Those Anglo Indians born and brought up within the city lived in Portuguese cultural world while those of the hinterlands were nurtured in Malayali cultural and linguistic world. The judge anticipating social economic collapse soon called back the Mestiços providing inducements, which led to the growth of another set of mixed population of Mestiço women intermarrying Dutch men. The author named this mixed community as the Eurasian community which is akin to the Creole population as discussed by Andrews in the previous chapter. While with the advent of the English era and another set of mixed community evolved between the British soldiers marrying Mestiços & Eurasians. Tracing such a complex and long history of encounters and accentuations, Otto argues that "be it Portuguese, Dutch or English – there was no purity of dissent among the mixed community" (p.216). Britain's direct bowl over company territories and a fast-transforming railway and telegraph networks lead to 'Anglicization' of Cochin (by importing more British people for the posts). On the other hand, Malayalam and Portuguese language dominated the local trade, agriculture and economy. Otto's findings suggest that cultural and linguistic Gulf counters the notion of Universalized English-speaking Urban Anglo-Indian stereotypes. He also pointed out the identity fractures between Anglo Indians of North and South. In the North, the Anglo Indians do not own houses nor learn the local language and are associated with AIAIA. On the contrary, in the south, the Anglo Indians have ownership of home and are open to mastering the vernacular language and are mostly affiliated with UAIA (since AIAIA which predominantly focuses on biological origin and linguistic practices as criteria for membership).

Finally, in the last chapter of this section and the book titled "Anglo Indian returnees' reverse migration to Goa" Andrews draws upon multiple theories on migration and return migration to understand why and how Anglo Indians return to Goa. Drawing upon ethnographic

research on the collection of life histories, Andrews discussed three case studies to analyze her key findings. All three case studies specify holding OCI (overseas citizen of India registration) which allowed easy reverse migration to Goa. Other noteworthy factors include economic reasons like financial comfortability and sufficiency of funds to purchase a home in Goa; climatic considerations both in Goa making it a lucrative tourist destination for visits as well as adverse climatic conditions in the West which leads to health problems among older generations. She also discussed the problem of 'fitting in' in their adopted country (due to facing cultural differences, and workplace discrimination) which led to unhappiness. Andrews argues that reverse migration is not because of 'returning home feeling' (like nostalgia) because these returns take place decades after immigration. Hence going back to the same neighbourhood, same people, and same family friends is far from a possibility. Rather, she coins the concept of 'Ethnic capital' (p. 239) which allows them to capitalize on the opportunity to come back, unlike foreign citizens, who are allowed visas for a restricted period. This enables them to have a secure future and reclaim their place of birth. Further, the AIAIA assists the incoming Anglo-Indians to resettle and aids in community-building process.

This extensive saga explored various dimensions of the community in small towns and cities, ranging from identity issues, socio-cultural transformation, migration, memories, citizenship issues, changes in employment and so on. Attentively written and meticulously researched, this book is a comprehensive reader on the Anglo-Indians, which interrogated the existing literature and refuted the exoticized stereotypes of the community. On close reading, a second volume of the book is much needed and awaited, which would include other vibrant sites like McCluskie Ganj, Kalimpong, Chandan Nagore, etc. Wider scholarship on issues like Orphanage, and intra-community discrimination (derogatory nomenclature of Teswas i.e. mixed progeny of Anglo-Indians and other communities) needs attention. Many of the chapters were published previously and this makes the reading repetitive and outdated from 2021 onwards, because of the political transformation, where the constitutional provision for the representation of the Anglo-Indians in the Indian Parliament has been withdrawn in 2019. The scenario of the Anglo-Indian response to this exclusion demands attention. Another repetitive element in the book is the constitutional definition of the community, which is over and over again discussed in many chapters. However, the considerable accommodation of various methods in this volume, like photo elicitation to revive memories is worth mentioning. It is a unique methodological contribution towards the study of any community historical approach by invoking memories of the past. Further, developing theoretical and conceptual categories like 'ethnic capital' adds to the contribution of this book to contemporary scholarship. Otherwise, this book is a must-read for scholars and any reader interested in urban ethnography, community studies, sociology, anthropology and other branches of social sciences.