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BEING ANGLO-INDIAN

Practices and Stories from Calcutta

A thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Social Anthropology
at Massey University

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnography of Anglo-Indians in Calcutta. All ethnographies are accounts arising out of the experience of a particular kind of encounter between the people being written about and the person doing the writing. This thesis, amongst other things, reflects my changing views of how that experience should be recounted. I begin by outlining briefly who Anglo-Indians are, a topic which in itself alerts one to complexities of trying to get an ethnographic grip on a shifting subject. I then look at some crucial elements that are necessary for an “understanding” of Anglo-Indians in Calcutta: the work that has already been done in relation to Anglo-Indians, the urban context of the lives of my research participants and I discuss the methodological issues that I had to deal with in constructing this account.

In the second part of my thesis I explore some crucial elements of the lives of Anglo-Indians in Calcutta: the place of Christianity in their lives, education not just as an aspect of socialisation but as part of their very being and, finally, the public rituals that now give them another way of giving expression to new forms of Anglo-Indian becoming.

In all of my work I was driven by a desire to keep close to the experience of the people themselves and I have tried to write a “peopled” ethnography. This ambition is most fully realised in the final part of my thesis where I recount the lives of three key participants.

I dedicate this work to my late parents,

Zoë and Kevin McNulty,

whose shortened lives prevent me from sharing this and so much more with them.

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Of the people I identify, Theo heads the list. She, more than anyone, right from the beginning made me feel welcome: in her home, with her friends, and in her city. Unbeknown to her, she had a significant role to play in my taking on this project.

A special thanks is reserved for the three women whose stories I have written, whom I have referred to as Jane, Philomena, and Irene. Without their generosity in sharing the stories of their lives with me this work would not be as rich in people or experiences. I always wanted to write stories but I couldn't have done that without their enthusiastic participation.

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lessons) and helped to fill up my social calendar. I am appreciative of the company of Zena with whom I spent many enjoyable hours.

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INTRODUCTION

In mid 2001 I was in Calcutta¹ embarking on research into the city's century old "New Market".² When on holiday in Calcutta six months earlier I was taken by its liveliness, and the sense that shopping there involved more than simply material transactions; it was a social event that could not be rushed.³ There was also the mysterious matter of the fire, which destroyed a large block of the market in 1984. The conspiracy theories that surrounded this event would, I thought, be interesting to catalogue and try to understand.

In making arrangements to go back to Calcutta I got in touch with the only contact I had in the central city area to help me find suitable accommodation. This contact was the administration office of Dr Graham's Homes. For almost twenty years our family had sponsored children at the school, which I knew as a school in the Himalayas for destitute children from Calcutta.

On the day I arrived back in Calcutta there was a knock on the hotel room door. I opened up to the sight of an older, slightly swarthy skinned woman in a knee length, short sleeved, pattern print dress caught at the waist with a fabric belt. Her wavy brown hair was tidily cut, and styled and she wore just enough makeup to highlight her always mischievous eyes and ready smile. In her hand was an electric jug, and the makings for cups of tea. She welcomed me warmly, and introduced herself, (in slightly accented English that I couldn't quite place) as the woman who had made my

¹ Calcutta is now officially known as Kolkata but I have used the old name, as this is how most of the people I worked with referred to it – when they didn't use the shortened version of 'Cal'.

² Also known as Hogg Market, it was opened in 1874.

³ I had been told, for example, that some people had a three generational relationship with particular stores; that is, their grandparents had bought particular goods from the grandparents of the present owners.

hotel booking, Theo from Dr Graham's homes.⁴ She told me she lived downstairs from the hotel we were in, as she had done for about thirty years. She offered me the use of her jug saying that she knew I'd like to be able to make myself a cup of tea first thing in the mornings, rather than rely on the overly sweet, milky tea offered by the hotel. Her hospitality extended to company and advice anytime I, or my husband who had accompanied me, needed it. Such generosity and hospitality is a characteristic I came to associate with her, and with her people.

When I opened the door to Theo I couldn't place the woman in front of me in my imagination of people who live in India. She told me that she was an Anglo-Indian, and that I already had a strong connection with the Anglo-Indian community,⁵ through sponsorship of Anglo-Indian children at the school – the children I had previously thought of simply as Indian, with unusually western names.

The more time I spent with Theo, and other Anglo-Indians she introduced me to, the more I found their history and current situation fascinating. At the same time I was pulling my hair out over the New Market project, struggling to find a research angle. I came back to New Zealand confused about how I was going to conduct research on the market but determined to find a way to fit Anglo-Indians into the project. So I started reading anything I could find on them. I was dismayed to read the pessimistic prognosis I found in Younger's (1987) work, the first I read. In her view the prognosis for the community I had recently been introduced to was one of decline and eventual demise – within decades of her writing. I was academically interested in the contrast between the pessimistic prognosis in what I was reading, and the apparent vitality of the community I had been introduced to. In addition it was hard to resist the opportunity to work with people whose company I found so enjoyable. It wasn't long before I realised that my heart was set on a different project: one with Anglo-Indians at its centre.

⁴ I have kept research participants anonymous by using pseudonyms (chosen by them where ever possible) except in cases where they have been happier for me to use their given names.

⁵ I use the term 'community' in terms of a people who have a sense of 'groupness' because they identify with each other through geographical, historical and experiential, connectedness, and they recognise the commonality of their cultural characteristics. Another significant reason for use of this term is that this is how they refer to themselves.

WHO ARE ANGLO-INDIANS?

In this introductory chapter I shall briefly introduce the Anglo-Indians. At the risk of simplifying and homogenising a huge diversity of ways of being Anglo-Indian in Calcutta today, I shall include a list of cultural characteristics. I shall also attempt, through a description of practices and presentation of life stories, to convey something of that richness and variety. At this stage though, a generalised understanding will be useful.

I have mentioned some characteristics in relation to my first meeting with Theo; characteristics that differentiate Anglo-Indians from other communities in India include having English as their mother tongue (the All India Anglo-Indian Association argues that this characteristic is crucial to their identification as Anglo-Indians), acknowledging their historical link to Europe, and being Christians. They frequently dress in western clothing, enjoy (spiced-up) western food and employ western eating practices, and usually have European names. Caplan (1995) refers to their ‘culture of emigration’. This idea is empirically supported by the waves of Anglo-Indians who have left India since Indian Independence.⁶ In terms of appearance, Anglo-Indians range from being “fair”⁷ to swarthy. Some have “coloured” (blue or green) eyes but most have brown. Some have the “pulled” eyes of north-eastern ‘tribal’ Indians.

Anglo-Indians may be seen as a product of colonialism. It is through western expansion of trade and rule in the 17th century that first the Portuguese, then the French, then finally and most significantly, the British came to be in India. Colonialism was almost exclusively a masculine endeavour. In the case of the British in India, tens of thousands of single males found themselves in India for years at a time, many of whom formed alliances with local women. It is from these alliances that the first Anglo-Indians were produced. In the earliest days of their existence they were treated as if they were British. After some time, the British distinguished or distanced themselves from Anglo-Indians. One result of this is that Anglo-Indians came to form themselves into a distinct community over this period. The British varied in their treatment of and attitude towards Anglo-Indians, barring them from some positions but

⁶ Caplan discusses this issue and suggests that up to a half of the pre-Independence population of Anglo-Indians may have left India (2001:129-141).

⁷ To use their term which refers to skin tone, rather than hair colour – which is always dark.

generally giving them preferential employment in subordinate roles in maintaining the infrastructure of British India. They worked in the railways, post and telegraph, customs, the armed forces, as well as in nursing and teaching.

Indian Independence posed a potentially serious threat to this minority that had strong cultural links with Britain. Fears and insecurity about their future in India led to the first of three major waves of migration from India. From 1949 tens of thousands left for England, which they had always considered as some sort of a homeland. The second major migration wave was in the early sixties coinciding with a move in India to replace English as the national language. The destination this time was Canada and Australia as immigration to the UK had become difficult and Australia had dropped its 'White Australia' policy, which had affected all but the fairest Anglo-Indians. The reason for the third wave, from the seventies onwards, is referred to in India as the "family reunion" wave (O'Brien 2002, pers. com.). The main destinations are Australia, England, Canada, and to a lesser extent, New Zealand. There are now more Anglo-Indians living out of India than there are in India, and there are people who identify as Anglo-Indians who have never lived in India.

DEFINITIONS

Anglo-Indians are the only minority community to be defined in India's Constitution. Section 366 (2) of 1935 Government of India Act states that:

An Anglo-Indian means a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only.

There are problems with this official definition in terms of the reality of communal life. One difficulty is that it doesn't distinguish between domiciled Europeans, and the progeny of the European men and Indian women. Caplan comes closer to the generally accepted understanding of who Anglo-Indians are:

They emerged during the colonial period as a consequence of the liaisons (formal and informal) between European males (colonial officials, traders, soldiers, etc.) and local, non-European women. (1996:315)

They were initially known as Eurasians. The term ‘half-caste’ was also used to refer to them. Some, particularly post-colonial, scholars consider them a ‘hybrid’ community. Their name suggests this but I prefer to regard them, after over three hundred years, as distinctive in themselves rather than being a “mixed race and culturally composite community” (Caplan 2001:1).

A further problem with the constitutionally imposed definition is that it is gender biased. It is only children whose fathers are Anglo-Indian (or European) who can claim to be Anglo-Indian.

Anglo-Indians generally take the definition seriously and literally. And they don’t talk about people as being ‘part Anglo-Indian’.⁸ People either are, or they aren’t Anglo-Indian. Most people seemed to simply accept the definition, although the sexist dimension did rankle with some. One woman and I had a heated discussion with a man who said that up until then he had never thought about this as a problem. He later came to me with examples illustrating the point we had been making to him. One example was of an Anglo-Indian man who had a non-Anglo-Indian wife. They separated after they’d had children. It was not disputed that the children are Anglo-Indian even though they were subsequently brought up amongst non-Anglo-Indians. In cases where the mother is Anglo-Indian and the father is not, the children are not able to call themselves Anglo-Indian, for all their mother may bring them up “as Anglo-Indian”. They may, it seems to me, be seen as being ‘culturally’ Anglo-Indian but will be denied an Anglo-Indian identity, and any material advantages that go with that identity.⁹

In my study I have included people who are ‘culturally’ Anglo-Indian but who may not fit the Constitution definition.¹⁰ One of the life stories, for example, is of a woman whose mother was Anglo-Indian, whose partners were both Anglo-Indian, and whose children were Anglo-Indian. She was introduced to me as being Anglo-Indian. When

⁸ That they don’t talk about a person as being part Anglo-Indian was brought home to me by the fact that this was how I was introduced at one occasion. I realized that I had never heard anyone described in that way before.

⁹ There are fewer advantages now than there were in the past but Anglo-Indians still have preferential access to Anglo-Indian schools, access to some education subsidies (see Chapter Five), have political representation in some states as well as having two members of parliament with significant budgets available to them.

¹⁰ In this thesis I indicate where I am referring to a ‘contested’ Anglo-Indian.

I first realized that, technically, she was not an Anglo-Indian I was disappointed and thought I would have to abandon the series of interviews I had planned with her. But as her story began to unfold in that initial interview I became convinced that she was Anglo-Indian – in all ways but one; her paternal line.

One issue that I did not hear raised was whether Anglo-Indians born out of India should refer to themselves as Anglo-Indian. This, theoretically, could become more of an issue as Anglo-Indian migrants have families in their adopted countries. I would support a more inclusive definition and I think it is imperative that Anglo-Indians do too. A critical mass of people who identify themselves as Anglo-Indians needs to be nurtured so that the community continues.¹¹

As something of a counter to the constitutional definition, I shall relay some comments by Anglo-Indians about who Anglo-Indians are. The first comment was obtained after asking one young Anglo-Indian man how he identified himself.

I don't feel Anglo-Indian, but I don't feel Indian either. I just feel like myself.

Who do you feel comfortable with? Who do you like to spend time with?

I feel most comfortable with Anglo-Indians. They think like I do. They like the same things, have the same views. I like them. They are fun-loving, and kind people. And have Christian values. Although lots do the wrong things and have to learn a few things in life.¹²

In addition I was told by several people, men and women, that one can always tell an Anglo-Indian woman by her “grazed calves”, that is, her slender and shapely legs. Other comments that were made to me on many occasions were that Anglo-Indians are the only people in India who have “Indian” in their name, and that they were “people of India”, rather than of a particular region (which most Indians are, for example, Bengalis and Punjabis are people of Bengal and the Punjab respectively).

¹¹ In a diasporic context definitions imposed by a nation like India become less and less relevant though the definition can still be a matter for debate.

¹² Throughout this thesis, wherever I have used excerpts from interviews my questions or comments are in italics, and those of the interviewees are not.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Initially, based on the pessimistic prognosis I had read, I was interested in investigating the reasons for the anticipated decline of the community, and also in exploring the apparent contradiction in what I had observed. As I spent more time with Anglo-Indians the focus of my research changed. Eventually I decided that what I wanted to do was to explore what it means to be Anglo-Indian, in Calcutta, at this time. As I describe further, in Chapter Two, the focus of my work has been directed by the experience of spending the time I did with Anglo-Indians in Calcutta. I have written from the point of view of this experience and have focussed on particular practices that were highlighted to me as being significant. The other means that I have employed to convey the experience of being Anglo-Indian is to tell the life stories of three of the people I met.

In brief, my objectives became, firstly, to describe contemporary Anglo-Indian practices and to make some attempt to see their role in the community's continued survival as a distinct minority group. My second objective (which has become the most important) was to 'people' this thesis in such a way that a reader might gain some understanding of what life is like for, and what it means to be, an Anglo-Indian in this early part of the twenty first century.

Part of what I hope to do in this thesis is to show by what Anglo-Indians do, that is, by their practices rather than through objective indicators, who Anglo-Indians are. I also illustrate Anglo-Indian world views using life stories.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Being Anglo-Indian is a proactive, reactive, variable, process of drawing on life-so-far to move through each day. The same can be said of a researcher of Anglo-Indians, and the writing of a PhD. This project grew out of personal experience and has been written up in terms of that experience.

In this thesis I feel bound to a certain extent by traditional PhD convention. Just as I straddle the two foci of study – exploring something of why the Anglo-Indian community may still be a viable minority group – as well as fashioning a text which conveys a sense of the lived reality of life as an Anglo-Indian, I also attempt to straddle two different ways of writing ethnography. In the first two parts I discuss my interests

in this group of people, along with experiences and data collected over the course of the research. In these parts I take words from the people who I spent time with, I describe and discuss my observations and I link these to existing publications. In Part Two particularly, I discuss various ‘themes’ that emerged as important dimensions of the ethnographic experience. In the Third Part of the thesis I endeavour to do what I so admire in my favourite anthropological texts (works I discuss in Chapter One), that is, present stories to portray lives. A linking thread throughout the work is the story of my own experiences during the course of the research. I will now outline the contents of the chapters in this thesis.

In Chapter One I review a number of works which assisted me in thinking about, and then writing about, the data; impressions and thoughts I had of Anglo-Indians in Calcutta. I focus my writing about Anglo-Indian related literature to those which were written as a result of direct experience with Anglo-Indians. I then discuss those theoretical accounts that I sought to help me to think more abstractly about the experience. Finally I review the works that I regard as my ethnographic models.

In Chapter Two I discuss my experience of working with Anglo-Indians. I outline my approach to the data collection phase of the research including a description of research experiences and problems that I encountered along the way.

Chapter Three introduces what has been, up until this point, a background character of the work: the city of Calcutta itself. The habitat is very much a part of the lives of the people who live there and needs to be explored in order to more fully comprehend the lives of those people who live within its bounds. This chapter completes the “back-grounding” set of chapters.

Chapter Four is the first part of the ‘practices’ chapters. This first has Christianity as its focus. Christianity pervades all parts of the life of Anglo-Indians in Calcutta but I have attempted to draw out some themes from among the many impressions and data I have collected. I discuss practices around Christianity, as well as suggesting that the way Anglo-Indians practice their faith is, not surprisingly, influenced by the milieu of Indian religions in which they exist. I also discuss some methodological issues involved in researching Christianity.

In Chapter Five I describe practices around education. I write about attitudes and experiences of Anglo-Indians in relation to education. I also discuss some of the ironies, or paradoxes, in connection with Anglo-Indians being involved with (in teaching and administration of) the elite schools of Calcutta yet Anglo-Indian children are said to perform poorly. I look at the relationship between fluency in English and education in an Indian context. Finally in this chapter I explore the role of education in strengthening the Anglo-Indian community's spirit.

The focus of Chapter Six are two events that I attended during the course of the research: Anglo-Indian day in Calcutta 2003, and the World Reunion in Melbourne 2004. I describe these two occasions and discuss the role they play in giving members of this minority community¹³ the opportunity to "be" Anglo-Indian for the duration of the celebrations.

Part Three of this thesis comprises three life stories. In Chapters One and Two I write about some of the influences which brought me to the writing of 'stories'. In the introduction to Part Three of the thesis I shall elaborate further on this issue before presenting life stories written up as interviews, the form in which I collected them.

¹³ Anglo-Indians are a minority both in India as well as diasporically in their adopted countries.

PART ONE: CONTEXT

CHAPTER ONE

THINKING ABOUT ANGLO-INDIANS

INTRODUCTION

Once I had conceived my project I began research by reading all I could find on the Anglo-Indian community. Within six months I had moved the research from the library to fieldwork in Calcutta. Interspersed with a number of field trips to Calcutta I wrote the chapters (and some papers) that make up this thesis. As I wrote about the various issues that my attention had been drawn to in the course of the fieldwork, I read related theoretical works in order to assist me in thinking about the material and the impressions I had gathered. This thesis reflects this process of growth. I begin with a review of a number of works on Anglo-Indians in which I outline some of the background I had equipped myself with before beginning the fieldwork. I review some theoretical literature I have found influential and I conclude with a discussion of anthropological works that I have found congenial to my approach. In each of the following chapters, in which I explore different themes, I refer to the relevant literature as well.

MY EARLY ANGLO-INDIAN TEXTUAL EXPERIENCE

As will be seen in the next chapter, my research has mainly involved direct experience with Anglo-Indians. However, I have also looked at published writing and theses about Anglo-Indians. The literature that I have found most agreeable and useful for my aims is that which is based, at least to some degree, on direct experience of Anglo-Indians and I restrict most of my discussion to this kind of material. This material speaks also to the experience of being Anglo-Indian. The works that most closely approximate this approach are those of Younger, Mills, Roychowdhury (nee Bear), and Caplan. However, I have also found the works of others, such as the historian Hawes, useful as they make reference to being Anglo-Indian in other times. In the section that follows I discuss the work of each author in turn.

CORALIE YOUNGER

In the next chapter I recount the circumstances surrounding my meeting with Coralie some years before beginning this research. Here I deal with her written work: *Anglo-Indians: Neglected children of the Raj* (1987) is based on interviews carried out over a nine-month period in the early 1980s in both Australia and India. Younger was primarily interested in gaining insights into the issues that were important to individual Anglo-Indians (both in India and in her home country, Australia), rather than what had been regarded as ‘important’ by historians of the community (1987:6). Another part of her project, which could have been a project on its own, was to examine “the novels and short stories written by and about members of the Anglo-Indian community” (Younger 1987:6) in order to see whether the authors drew on stereotypical images (and, if so, which ones) and whether there was any correspondence between what the authors identified as significant issues, and what the individuals she interviewed emphasised. Younger’s interest reflects the abiding concern of many Anglo-Indians of how they are seen or portrayed. This coincides with the kind of issues raised by Edward Said (1978) in his work on ‘Orientalism’ which was concerned, among other things, with stereotypes of ‘Eastern’ peoples and their sources.

Younger organised her discussion of the lifestyle and attitudes of Anglo-Indians into two periods, 1919-1947 and 1947-1983. 1919 was used as the starting point because it was the year that Anglo-Indians were first defined as such under the Government of India Act.¹ It was also, paradoxically, according to Younger, the end of a period of relative prosperity for the community (1987:15). 1947, was a pivotal year: it was the year of Indian Independence and marked the beginning of mass migration of Anglo-Indians out of India. 1983 was the final year of her fieldwork. She was able to interview people who had lived through this entire period. Her book is organised into five chapters covering a range of themes such as employment, economics, social relations, sex, and politics. In each of the sub-chapters she compared her interview findings to fictional accounts featuring the community covering the same periods.

¹ 1911 is more usual as the year in which ‘Anglo-Indian’ became the accepted term used for persons “of European descent in the male line but of mixed European and Indian blood” (Anthony 1969:3) as this was the term by which the community was described in the census of that year.

She saw Anglo-Indians as a neglected people – neglected by the British as well as by other Indians. Her prognosis for the community was that, “They will in the future exist only in memory and on the written page since they are now migrating from India and intermarrying with non-Anglo-Indians” (Younger 1987:3). These views of neglect and decline were repeated by some of the Calcuttan Anglo-Indians that I spent time with during my two and a half years in and out of the field. The irony should be noted, however, that these views were expressed to me at a time when, if Younger’s prognosis had been correct, I would have had very few people to interview. In Younger’s account the two sentiments (of neglect and of decline) are related, one being seen as a possible cause of the other: neglect being the cause for what some see as their dire situation. This theme is a recurring one, both in Calcutta and out of India. Even at an Anglo-Indian reunion I heard people wondering about how long such events would be able to be run (even though these events have only begun quite recently!).²

Younger was not the first to draw attention to the notion that Anglo-Indians in India felt that they had been let down by those they thought they could trust. A glance at the titles of other accounts make this obvious: Anthony’s (1969) *Britain’s Betrayal in India*; Stark’s (1926) *Hostages in India*. Blunt has pointed out recently that “by describing Anglo-Indians as ‘hostages’ to India in the title of his book, Herbert Stark implied not only that they were powerless and held there against their will, but also that their fate remained a British responsibility” (Blunt 2002:68), a responsibility which, from their point of view, the British had neglected.

However, not all accounts take the approach that Anglo-Indians should be regarded as victims of British decisions or attitudes. Christopher Hawes, for example, can be seen as an ‘anti-conspiracy theory’ historian. In an interview with Glenn D’Cruz (1998)³ he explained that his work sought to right some of the errors of representation. He feels that significant historical accounts before his own have contended that the British deliberately aimed at eroding opportunities for Anglo-Indians. He doesn’t believe that this is the case, even though the effect of their actions may have resulted in it. He

² I describe the 2004 Reunion in greater detail in Chapter Six.

³ Glenn D’Cruz is an Anglo-Indian Australian who wrote a PhD thesis on textual representation of Anglo-Indians (1999). He continues to write widely on ‘race’ and ethnicity issues especially as they relate to Anglo-Indians.

agrees that as (non-Anglo) Indians were given more opportunities through the Indianisation project, in the early decades of the 20th century, Anglo-Indians were given less, but he views this occurrence as an unfortunate outcome rather than a deliberate decision on the part of the British. Anglo-Indians were, in other words, unfortunate casualties of what he calls, “an inexorable process” (Hawes in D’Cruz 1998). Though there are no inexorable processes in history, one can see what he means.

Younger’s work was the first work I read about Anglo-Indians and it engaged my interest. I make reference to her work in later chapters as well.

MEGAN MILLS

When I first discovered Megan Mills’ (1998) thesis *Ethnic Myth and Ethnic Survival* I was concerned that my research had been pre-empted. When I read her work carefully, however, I realized that my work occupied a different space from hers. However, this work is the most similar to what I had initially set out to do. She is primarily interested in the issue of ‘survival’ of Anglo-Indians. This had been my starting point though fairly soon my own interests had widened considerably. What has become the central focus for me, that of providing an account which tries to look at certain aspects of the lived experience of being Anglo-Indian, she only passingly refers to as an aim of her work. Even though she says her work emerged from a “desire to return to one Anglo-Indian enclave or another with fresh eyes and new formulations regarding what it means to be an Anglo-Indian in the 1990s and what this membership has meant in the past” (1998:62), in the end her work focuses less on lived experience and more on ‘myths’ connected with the issue of survival. While some of our aims may have been similar, our approaches, ways of interpreting and analysing findings are quite different.

Like most of us who write about Anglo-Indians, Mills begins with a discussion of the work of earlier researchers who, in her opinion, for one reason or the another failed to get the balance and accuracy she herself was aiming for. She is very critical of the research methods of some of her predecessors. She is, for example, disapproving of those who limit their research to the main cities, or one city (usually Bombay, Madras, Lucknow or Calcutta), or hill stations following what she calls, “a sort of academic pilgrimage route of some decades’ standing involving one Anglo-Indian concentration

and then another” (1998:49).⁴ Her criticism seems to suggest that to focus on just one city, or even several main sites of Anglo-Indian concentrations, leads to a narrow or limited understanding of Anglo-Indians. A wider range, she feels, can lead to a more accurate representation, one which is more likely to represent the diversity of Anglo-Indians and their ways of life. She says that as an anthropologist she used, among other methods, family histories and oral histories whose “prime benefit has been a superior awareness of an Anglo-Indian community of remarkably diverse origins and locations, of contrasting classes and occupational traditions” (1998:15). She says that “understanding Anglo-Indian ethnicity at the end of the 20th century is very much a business of coming to terms with what resides to varying degrees in the Anglo-Indian heart” (1998:7).

Casting her ‘net’ wide (1998:62), in 1994 and 1996 she carried out interviews in New Delhi, as well as in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Over a three year period, she collected recollections and sentiments from almost 300 Anglo-Indians. She had over 100 Anglo-Indians who she refers to as “active assistants” – informants rather than subjects. She also made use of assistants in Canada, America, Britain and Australia.

Her thesis could be described as an anthropological approach to Anglo-Indian history from their ‘mythical’ origins in India in 1500 AD (1998:67) to the present time. She writes about various myths Anglo-Indians have of themselves and how the myths that affirm them as a community help to perpetuate the community. Mills relied heavily on A. D. Smith’s (1986) *Chosen Peoples: Why Ethnic groups Survive*. Smith’s views have been summed up by Nagel as follows: “[he] refers to ethnic and national groups’ “deep nostalgia for the past” that results in efforts to uncover or, if necessary, invent an earlier, ethnic “golden age” (Nagel 1998:254). This idea has been echoed more recently by Ghassan Hage (2004) who speaks about Lebanese Maronites leaning on a past “golden age” in order to gain a sense their own worth and viability.

⁴ Examples of researchers who work in the way she criticises are Caplan (whose work focuses on Madrassi Anglo-Indians), Roychowdhury (who focussed on Anglo-Indians in Calcutta and Kharagphur), and Blunt (who is more comprehensive in her approach but still restricts herself to research based in Calcutta, Lucknow, McCluskiegunj and Bengali hill stations).

Mills used Smith's work to frame her chapters, taking Anglo-Indians as her test case of how and why an ethnic group survives. Mills devotes two sections of her work to what she calls, following Smith, "An Heroic Age" of the Anglo-Indians. These sections refer to two different periods when she, and Anglo-Indians, felt that the community fared particularly well. This treatment of the community seems to be one of the pendulum swings characterising many works on them – first the indictment or highlighting of negative features, then the reaction highlighting the positive features, and people, of the community.⁵ She ends her own work with an appended account of contemporary Anglo-Indian achievements including their 'champions'. She titles this appendix "Parting notes on *The Genius*." Here Mills gives the strongest expression to her attempt to make her own work a part of the process of community perpetuation, a goal I share with her.

However, I do have a number of difficulties with Mills' work. I am not convinced, for example, that a wide net is a useful anthropological tool. It seems to me that Mills falls into the trap, or tendency, to generalise from the inevitably variable views of diverse peoples. Any generalisations seem very abstract. My more limited source of data led me to draw conclusions that are at odds with some of hers. An example is our respective impressions of how Anglo-Indians feel about their survival as a distinct ethnic group. Her view of their attitude is expressed in this quote: "it is probably telling that the Anglo-Indians' survival towards the turn of the 21st century, is not at all surprising to the Anglo-Indians themselves" (1998:31). As I have already indicated in my discussion of Younger's work, from my experience I would say that for many of the Anglo-Indians I talked to, their survival is a constant, although not always conscious or verbalised, concern to them. In other words, there is a range of views, and ironically, a more tightly focussed research method highlights the need to keep these varied views fore-grounded rather than dissolving them into generalisations. Another example is her discussion of views about the film *36 Chowringhee Lane* (1991), of which she says, "its depiction of a lonely retired Anglo-Indian teacher whose relations have all gone abroad has not been favoured by Anglo-Indian viewers and understandably, in Calcutta's Chowringhi district" (Mills 1998:309). In my own

⁵ Another example is the Channel Four television documentary that highlighted the plight of Anglo-Indians in India, which was followed by the Marion Education Centre's almost "heroic" depiction of the community.

research, I encountered one high profile community member who believed firmly that the film encapsulated the essence of being Anglo-Indian in Calcutta today – and while that may include a sense of pessimism, it was real. Other Anglo-Indians commented that it was a ‘nice’ film about an Anglo-Indian woman and that I should try to see it. Thus, Anglo-Indians in Calcutta demonstrated an ambiguous attitude to the portrayal of an elderly member of their community. A method based on close encounters allows this ambiguity to be fore-grounded.

As well as the criticisms of other researchers’ methods, Mills was also critical of some theoretical approaches. Given her attachment to Smith’s theory, or paradigm, it was a surprise to read the following:

Various determined efforts to fit the community within one paradigm or another have left the community’s own definition of identity and affiliation largely unexplored. The picture is less appealing still in view of the archaic theoretical constructs at hand. (1998:51)

She singles out Hawes’ work as an example. In my judgement she is a little harsh. Hawes is an historian. His work is for a different purpose and his style is different, but he has made an extremely valuable contribution to the body of works on Anglo-Indians and to understanding their present position, in and out of India.

Mills, like myself, is an activist anthropologist. Her concern to allow Anglo-Indians to speak is one I share. Her goals, as I have already indicated, are close to my own.

LAURA ROYCHOWDHURY (NEE BEAR)

Laura Roychowdhury’s *The Jadu House: Travels in Anglo-India*, was published in 2000. This is a memoir of her life during the period of her fieldwork for her thesis on Anglo-Indians in Calcutta and Kharagpur. In this work, published two years after her thesis (Bear 1998), there is some account of her fieldwork methodology and data collection experiences. In *The Jadu House* she writes about the people she spent time with, describes some of her adventures (many of them romantic), and discusses impression management and the ways in which she transforms herself through the time of her fieldwork. She reflects on the influences on how she conducted herself. One

gets a vivid picture of the lives of the people and her experiences of them. It comes as a surprise, then, to turn to her thesis and discover a quite different kind of work.

Bear wrote her cross-disciplinary anthropology and history thesis *Traveling Modernity: Capitalism, Community and Nation in the Colonial Governance of the Indian Railways* (1998) based on archival material and also on interviews with Anglo-Indians and local, mainly middle-class, Bengalis. Her thesis is unusual for a contemporary anthropological work in that there is very little discussion of methodology, or reflection on the data collection process. Concern with these sorts of issues is central to most contemporary anthropological works.

The focus of Bear's thesis is on filling a gap in the history of Indian colonialism, particularly the spread of Empire through the national railway system, which created an otherwise unrecorded "railway caste" of people: Eurasians and Anglo-Indians.⁶ She extends this theory suggesting that Anglo-Indians identify primarily, at a community level at least, through their association with the railways – even today.

She gives a sense of being interested in the experience of being Anglo-Indian but in a very limited way with a focus on their sense of identity as it links them to the social and material life of the railways. She writes of the Anglo-Indian community that it is "only made real by its wages and residence in large railway colonies" (1998:183). The wages, she argues, are required for a western lifestyle; an Indian lifestyle is not as expensive. In spite of including some Anglo-Indian narratives, and descriptions of aspects of Anglo-Indian life, she does not convey a sense of what it means, on a day-to-day basis, to be Anglo-Indian. The analytical hoops she pushes the narratives through suck the vitality out of the lives of the people they are about. I realise that I am setting up a type of "straw man" argument here, as what I am commenting upon as an insufficiency in her work, is what I wanted to see, rather than what Bear set out to achieve.

⁶ The relationship between the terms is a problem. Historically, 'Eurasian' was restricted to 'hybrid' peoples; 'Anglo-Indians' on the other hand could include Europeans domiciled in India. The definition of these terms is itself a matter of much comment.

In both works I was surprised at the number of references she makes to the promiscuity of Anglo-Indians. This perpetuates a long-standing stereotype, especially in regard to Anglo-Indian women.⁷ Perhaps this reflects the views of some of Bear's research participants, especially the middle-class Bengalis she spoke to. She mentioned that she was told by Bengali men of Anglo-Indian women that they had had affairs with (1998:19). It would not be at all surprising if there was a tension between her increasing affinity with Bengalis and the discovery that her research subjects showed signs of wanting to hide any trace of their "Indian blood" (1998:27). After the end of her fieldwork she married the Bengali man who she had met while carrying out fieldwork in Calcutta.

In the little she wrote in her thesis about her ethnographic experience she says that the only way she could meet Anglo-Indians was by visiting colonial institutions, "[following] the circuits of governance that had labelled and formed [them]" (1998:14). As this is the way in which she engaged with the community, and given that her primary interest was in the colonial encounter (through the railways in particular), it is not surprising that she ended up with a rather different impression of Anglo-Indians than others have.

We all come to the field with some agenda, and are influenced by the particular experiences we have, but most contemporary works of anthropology contain sufficient description and reflection for a reader to make an assessment about the degree of influence these may have had on the interpretation and analysis of the finished product. There is, in Bear's work, an absence of this middle ground between the very personal fieldwork memoir and the heady theoreticism of her thesis.

LIONEL CAPLAN

Lionel Caplan is a prolific writer on Anglo-Indians. In addition to a number of journal articles, he has published a book, *Children of Colonialism: Anglo-Indians in a Post-Colonial World* (2001). Caplan has focussed his work on Anglo-Indians in Madras and in the introduction to his book argues the case, in contrast to Mills, for research at a single site. He adopted an ethnographic approach to fieldwork and "became

⁷ This is an issue that is referred to by Mills (1996, 1998). Nirad Chaudhuri in *The Continent of Circe* (1965) wrote particularly damningly of Anglo-Indian women. Delores Chew gave a paper at an Anglo-Indian symposium in Melbourne in August 2002 titled "Reading Race and Gender in 'Mummy' and 'The Crooked Line': How authors of marginality represent Anglo-Indian women".

acquainted with over 350 households” (2001:16) over a period of some months in each of the years 1991, 1992, 1996 and 1999.

He says that he suspects that what he has to say about Anglo-Indians that he met in the course of his research will be reasonably consistent with what can be said about Anglo-Indians in other parts of India. I’m not so sure about this. I suspect that there are some important regional differences – which some of the stories that I recount may illustrate. I can only speculate about this, as I have no first hand knowledge of the situation in Madras. However, while at the Anglo-Indian Reunion in Melbourne, a man from Madras approached me to say that his heart had sunk when I was introduced as I was yet another speaker to talk about Calcutta’s Anglo-Indian community, which he felt was different to his.

In his articles Caplan addresses a number of themes: the place of social service organisations (1996, 1998b); Anglo-Indians’ “culture of emigration” (1995); the changing practices of marriage (1998a); shifting constructs of women (2000); and the contrast between their colonial and the post-colonial situation (1995, 1998, and 2001).

In all of his works he explores issues of contemporary anthropological interest using the Anglo-Indian situation as a contribution to the debates. In other words, his work subjects Anglo-Indian experiences to the mill of anthropological theoretical debate. Central to his book (2001) in which he explores issues such as contemporary identity and belonging, emigration, kinship and some cultural practices, is a discussion of the (presently quite ‘fashionable’) topics of racialism, colonialism and the emergence of hybrid colonial communities. His works make contributions to larger debates but do not give a feeling of what life is like in 20th century Anglo-India.

Less fashionable topics, such as Christianity, which may have lead him closer to matters central to Anglo-Indians themselves, were neglected. This was all the more surprising given his earlier research on South Indian Christians (2001:ix). In his chapter on emigration he does discuss what he understands to be an increase in the practice of pilgrimage to shrines. He claims that supplicants seek divine assistance in obtaining visas, among other worldly favours (2001:142). I suspect that many of the Anglo-Indians I spoke to would be offended to have these practices reduced to little more than an instrumental exercise.

He dismissed the idea of writing in detail about their practice of Christianity in his 'Practice of Culture' chapter, saying, after a few brief statements about their devout Christianity, that "while Anglo-Indians frequently distinguish themselves from Indian Christians by claiming that the latter were 'converts' while they were born Christians, the everyday exercise of their faith is no different. The chapter therefore omits further discussion of Anglo-Indian religious behaviour" (2001:194). He supported Mills in saying that this *is* a significant aspect of their day-to-day lives but focussed his discussion of cultural practices on those activities that he claimed the Anglo-Indians he was involved with suggested as being typical and distinguishing of their way of life; those of dress, food and marriage. This is surprising to me because for many Anglo-Indians in Calcutta, their Christianity is so important as a part of who they see themselves to be. This difference between Caplan and myself may be the result of the complex relationship between Anglo-Indian Christians and other local Christians in the two different cities. I can only speculate about this.

CRITICAL SUMMARY

While all of the works discussed were useful to me in preparing myself for the encounter with Calcutta's Anglo-Indian community, none of them provided me with a model once I began to think about writing about that experience.

Both Mills and Bear include an historical aspect in their work. Bear's overview relates particularly to the railways and therefore spans a limited period as well as taking a particular approach. Mills' overview is more comprehensive, and combined with Hawes work, has given me an invaluable insight into the major influences on Anglo-Indians over the last four centuries.⁸ As Bear points out, there are a number of histories of India but very few incorporate a history of Anglo-Indians. Even monumental structures such as Calcutta's Victoria Memorial, the history of the area is recorded without one mention of Anglo-Indians. Some Anglo-Indian personalities are mentioned; for example, Warren Hastings who married an Anglo-Indian and fathered Anglo-Indian children, but their connection with Anglo-Indians, and where appropriate, identification as Anglo-Indians is not pointed out. Calcutta is a city in which Anglo-Indians have been extremely influential, and the city is home to some of

⁸ Other works that have increased my understanding of Anglo-Indian history are those by Anglo-Indians such as Stark (1926), Mahar (1962), Anthony (1969), Moore (1986), Brown (1997, 1998), and Wilson-deRoze (2001).

the most well regarded Anglo-Indian schools in the country. In compensation one can note that Anglo-Indians are recognised by the names given to some streets.⁹

One serious omission from all the works is a lack of in-depth discussion of the significance of Christianity to Anglo-Indians in India. Reference is made to the fact that Anglo-Indians *are* Christians, and Mills states that there should be a study on this topic alone (1998:321), but so far there has been very little attention paid to this aspect of their identity. This may be a shortcoming in anthropology generally. As I discuss in Chapter Four, Christianity is an area that researchers have tended to keep away from – lest they be seen to be “believers” themselves – the very term drawing doubt around that which is believed in.

There are, no doubt, omissions from my thesis also. Members of the diasporic community who I have talked with in the latter stages of completing this thesis have, for example, voiced their concern that I have not devoted a chapter to practices around food. In my defence I say that from what I have observed, food and practices in relation to it gain *extra* significance once Anglo-Indians are out of India. It becomes a fetishised indicator of their identity, which is not so much the case for Anglo-Indians living in India. Other areas that I have not talked at length about are dress, marriage or migration. I have, however, incorporated discussions of each of these practices in other chapters, and they are referred to in the individual stories in Part Three.

Turning back to the works I had read on Anglo-Indians, apart from some omissions in terms of content, I did not find the descriptions of everyday life as an Anglo-Indian presented in a way that I wanted to replicate. What comes closer are those excellent works by Anglo-Indians who write of their own lives, and their own experiences, allowing a reader to gain an insight into the particular lives portrayed. Some examples of these works are those by Gloria Moore (1986), Ester Lyons (1996), Keith Butler (1998, 1999) Stan Blackford (2000), Eric Stracey (2000), and K.C. Sen (2001).¹⁰ What I felt was missing, however, was a work that presented, and then reflected on, the experience of being Anglo-Indian, one that was set in present-day India.

⁹ It is ironic that in the Indianisation process streets using Anglo-Indian names have been changed; Kyd Street, for example, has been renamed Dr. Mohammed Isaq Road.

¹⁰ While Sen wrote the autobiographical account titled, *The Absolute Anglo-Indian*, his status as an Anglo-Indian is contested.

CONCEPTS AND THEORIES: TYRANNIES?

The sensibility that I had developed as an anthropologist in my student career also led me to look at a range of writings that I felt I *ought* to make myself familiar with, in response to the voice of the anthropological superego or conscience whispering to me what I should and ought to be doing. As a result of these voices I turned to the voluminous literature on ethnic groups and ethnicity. These topics have generated a veritable industry and it would need the patience of Job, unflagging commitment to fairly heavy theory and a huge energy to engage in it. Nevertheless there were some works that I experienced (for, after all, encounter with the anthropologists through their literature are experiences too) that I did find useful and which resonated with my growing understanding of Anglo-Indians.

FREDRIK BARTH

Barth's (1969) seminal work on ethnic groups provided a good starting point in considering the anthropological debates on this topic and in finding a way in which to understand some of the dynamics of Anglo-Indians in relation to their ethnically diverse neighbouring populations. Aspects of his discussion made sense of some of the behaviour I witnessed and opinions heard expressed; examples include his discussion of (social) boundary maintenance, and the clusters of characteristics (which allow one person to "belong" to the group while excluding another); and his ideas about the choice individuals have about whether or not to be "participants" in the ethnic group that they can justify a claim to. His writings on self- and other-ascription are particularly relevant to how Anglo-Indians identify themselves in light of the sexist Constitution definition imposed upon them.

ROGERS BRUBAKER

Brubaker has written extensively of identity and ethnic groups (and categories). He challenges social scientists to rethink ideas about these concepts and strives continuously for ways of expressing the sense of social connection without resorting to these overused (in his opinion) schemas or frameworks to capture the sentiments.

In Chapter Six I discuss the Reunion and Anglo-Indian day celebrations and make use of the piece he wrote with Cooper (2000) to illuminate what was happening in terms of Anglo-Indian identity formation and maintenance. While the focus of their paper was to argue the case for dispensing with the term 'identity' altogether, their dissection of

(or attempt at pulling apart the many and varied strands of) what is meant at different times by different users of the term helped me to understand 'being Anglo-Indian' as a number of processes rather than a thing called 'identity'.

CRAIG CALHOUN

Calhoun (2003) is another theoretician who explores the ways in which people regard others as being, in some way or another, categorically similar to themselves; whether it is through shared cultural characteristics, material interdependence or by being brought together by material power. He articulates the sense of belonging in terms of voluntary membership of (imagined) solidarities: that the sense of belonging may more productively be understood in terms of solidarities. Both he and Brubaker make the point that groups cannot be considered to comprise of a homogeneity of individuals, any more than it is productive to dispense with the notion that, even within human individuality, there is a craving for a sense of social belonging.

GHASSAN HAGE

Much of what Hage has written has been extremely useful (as well as being enjoyable reading). In particular, Hage's (2004) essay on the Maronites of Lebanon resonated with many aspects of how I see Anglo-Indian understanding and articulation of themselves. He claims that Maronites appear to have fetishised their identity to the point where an individual will claim, for all the evidence to the contrary, that he or she has a particular set of characteristics which make him or her superior to ethnically different neighbours.¹¹ I have mentioned earlier in this chapter that he discusses the way in which Maronites rely, for at least some of their communal self-esteem, on the stories they can tell of their predecessors. This, as Mills has noted, is characteristic of Anglo-Indians. Yet another point of Maronite/Anglo-Indian correspondence or convergence is identification with, and support of, the colonisers. In the Anglo-Indians' case, they feel themselves to have an undisputed biological and cultural claim to this attitude. Maronites make the claim with less 'evidence', but still their connection to their colonisers is a point of pride in both cases.

¹¹ He has made the same sort of argument in *Against Paranoid Nationalism* (2003) in his discussion of British migrants to Australia.

IN SEARCH OF AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL HOME

The works of these social scientists have been important in thinking about the dynamics of social relationships; however, I had reached a point where I was growing more and more dissatisfied with the idea of using any of the work I had encountered as ‘models’ for my own work. By this time my direct experience of Anglo-Indians had grown and I had the material for a number of individual stories, some of which I had written.

Another contribution to my sense of dissatisfaction with the procrustean bed of theory was what I learnt at the 2004 Anglo-Indian Reunion Symposium which I attended and participated in. One of the Anglo-Indian speakers, D’Cruz, said that he felt that texts written about Anglo-Indians (which are usually written by academics, who are usually non-Anglo-Indians) lack “the sense of our everyday lived experience”. He wanted to see more *stories* of Anglo-Indians, making the point that “they give material form to our experiences”. He felt that through a range of stories of different people’s lives it is possible to show that Anglo-Indians are not a homogenous group of people. He said that one thing he had difficulty with is that some, especially academic, writers “try to pigeon-hole us into particular ways of being and ways of life – like saying that they are particularly religious or Catholic and so forth. And this is not actually the case.” He felt that story-telling emphasised the diversity of ways of being Anglo-Indian and that Anglo-Indians have not had a good opportunity to tell their stories. I agree with him in the value he places on stories.¹²

The comments made at the Reunion were timely and made me aware of what was being said, within the Anglo-Indian community, about social scientists’ treatment of Anglo-Indians. I determined to be true to my inclination to ensure that my work was alive with the people whose lives I had drawn on in the course of my fieldwork. However, I still felt the need to locate an anthropological model to give me the confidence to do this. As happens so often, it was resources that were close at hand that, by chance, I turned to next and found what I was looking for. I first turned to an essay and a book by Abu Lughod. The essay, “Writing against Culture” (1991), I had read some time before but this time, with much of this work still to be structured, it

¹² Demonstrated by my MA thesis (2000), which includes the life stories of the women I interviewed.

really resonated with me. I then turned to her book *Writing Women's Worlds* (1993) which I had had sitting on my shelves for several years, unread. The next work I read was Edith Turner's *The Hands Feel It* (1996). As I read, and lost myself in one world, then the next, these works reinforced my sense that this is what anthropology, can (and should) be. When I compare my growing understanding of the human condition, based on more and more exposure to writing of this kind, with the growing suspicion that much of the theoretical literature was scholastic pedantry which only came to life in momentary flashes when the scholars turned to "exemplifying" their arguments it was not difficult for me to see what I should be trying to do with my own work. Simply to use the lives of one's participants to "exemplify" concepts struck me as a form of intellectual violation of these people. Surely, it was the lives of people that needed to be communicated? Anthropological research is carried out through the immersion of the anthropologist in the experiences of people and life of the social groups that they are working with. The texts that are written out of the experience ought to reflect this.

This leads me then to briefly discuss works by anthropologists whose 'feeling-thoughts'¹³ resonate with my own and which I find congenial to the spirit with which I have done the work.

LILA ABU-LUGHOD

Abu-Lughod initially wrote the more 'traditional' text, *Veiled Sentiments: Honour and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (1986), based on her fieldwork with Bedouin women in a small Egyptian hamlet. In *Writing Women's Worlds* (1993) Abu-Lughod fills the gap between her experiences of the women she had met (which she longed to explore), and her expectations of what an anthropological text ought to be. In the latter work she adopts a practice of "tactical humanism", writing thoroughly edited and organised "specific and personal tales" (1993:37) of the women from the family of three generations with whom she had spent almost two years. Her work is organised into chapters each of them around a theme. The table of contents gives the impression of a more traditional ethnographic text with chapter headings such as "patrilineality" and "polygyny". However, rather than a discussion of these concepts, and generalisations made about the various practices surrounding them, the chapters comprise narratives

¹³ To use a concept that Unni Wikan uses in relation to her Balinese research (1991).

from the women in relation to each of the themes. From these a reader can come to understand what the concepts (polygyny, for example) means for particular people in a particular setting.

Abu-Lughod (1991) urges anthropologists to write “against culture” in order to avoid essentialising culture in a way that promotes the idea of boundedness and coherence, as well as leaving room for a sense of cultural hierarchy to slip into our texts. Abu-Lughod suggests that there are (at least) three ways in which to write against culture. Firstly, she encourages writing which focuses on practice and discourse, rather than on generic cultural characteristics. She maintains that this allows for the representation of what is always the reality of social groups: that there is diversity, contradictions, shifts over time and between sub-groups (and individuals).

Another strategy in Abu-Lughod’s view is to include discussion of the researcher’s association with the community that they are working in.

An important focus should be the various connections and interconnections, historical and contemporary, between a community and the anthropologist working there and writing about it, not to mention the world in which he or she belongs and which enables him or her to be in the particular place studying that group. (1991:148)

The third suggestion Abu-Lughod makes is to write “ethnographies of the particular” (1991:149), as opposed to discourses of generalisation, in order to avoid the widespread trend of “othering”. She also stresses that anthropologists ought to write in language that is easily understood, rather than use “the professional and authoritative discourses of generalisation” (1991:151) which has the effect of further “othering” (with its potential for exclusion and condescension) those we traditionally write about.

She claims that: “when one generalises from experiences and conversations with a number of specific people in a community, one tends to flatten out differences among them and homogenize them” (Abu-Lughod 1991:153). D’Cruz’s criticisms of writers who homogenise Anglo-Indians culturally exemplifies these concerns. Consequently, Abu-Lughod suggests, we should tell stories about particular people set in a particular place and time. She suggests that this can be complementary to, rather than a

replacement of, other “types of anthropological projects, from theoretical discussions to the exploration of new topics within anthropology” (1991:153).

Ethnographies of the particular are effective for a number of reasons. One advantage is that they demonstrate that, although a person may be enacting what may be generalised about their social group, this is not done automatically, that it is not a straightforward matter that is either easy or free of personal struggles or contradictions. The other is that it draws attention to the similarities between our lives and those whose lives are written about. We recognise ourselves in others’ reactions to tragedies, joys, sorrows, obstacles and turbulence in relationships.

She notes that there are a handful of ethnographies written in this way which are by “‘untrained’ wives of anthropologists” such as those by Fernea (1965), Shostak (1981), Turner (1987), and Wolf (1968). She notes that they are: “more open about their positionality, less assertive in their scientific authority, and more focussed on particular individuals and families” (1991:152). Her discussion referred particularly to *women* who do not write in the traditional anthropological style. She drew attention to their relationship to anthropology, suggesting that their ‘untrained’ status may be responsible for this technique. More recently, “trained” anthropologists have also written ethnographies in the way she suggests. Some excellent examples of these are Meyerhoff (1978), Belmonte (1989), Bourgois (1996), and Wikan (1996).

EDITH TURNER

Edith Turner adopts a similar writing practice but goes even further from traditional anthropological texts in organising her work chronologically rather than thematically.

The Hands Feel It (1996) is an account written from the “personal and anthropological” journal she kept throughout her time in Alaska. On the back cover is the comment “This book breathes with life” – the life it breathes is Turner’s as well as the people she describes through their words and actions. Her intention was to spend time with the Inupiat people and record their stories as a vehicle to understanding their healing. As her fieldwork progressed, her focus broadened to include Inupiat spirituality. She is frank and engaging about her method, her knock-backs, and her gradual accumulation of knowledge. Along with observations of people and events she brings her previous knowledge and experience to the fore in her lively speculative

analysis. This text allows the reader to come to some of the same understandings as Turner did, through the stories, conversations and recounting of occurrences rather than through a set of generalised conclusions.

BARBARA MYERHOFF

A member of a PhD discussion group, who is also employing a humanistic approach to her work, drew Myerhoff's *Number Our Days* to my attention. She suggested one of the chapters as a monthly reading for the group at a time when we were exploring issues involving methodology. Myerhoff's focus is a group of elderly Jews living in California whose attendance at a Jewish senior citizens' centre gives the members a sense of a community. It is this community that is the focus of Myerhoff's study. At about the same time as I read this, I heard of the existence of an Anglo-Indian Rest Home in Melbourne.¹⁴ It seemed to me that there were some strong connections between the two groups of residents.

For the most part, Myerhoff lets the people tell their own stories and reports them in their own words – and they are a magnificently articulate and recognisably Jewish (by their speech patterns and vocabulary) group of people. As well as their stories she muses on and speculates about the meanings that are attached to the stories told. In this way she writes about immigrant and ethnic experience, 'Yiddishkeit', growing old, religious experience, and kinship. There is no evidence of a theoretical position other than to be true to what is seen, sensed and perceived.

In his foreword to the book, Victor Turner quotes Blake who urges us to "labour well the Minute Particulars, for General Forms have their vitality in Particulars. And every Particular is a man". Turner himself makes use of this notion in his earliest work *Schisms and Continuity in an African Society* (1957).

In her work Myerhoff allows free expression to the closeness of her personal association with her research participants. Her empathy and warmth towards the people is evident in portions of dialogue that include her voice, as well as in the way she describes and discusses people and events. She openly identifies with the people. In a moving interview she contrasts her position doing this research, with her earlier

¹⁴ I am interested in carrying out research with this community.

research in Mexico. An important difference for her was that while she would never “become” the people whose lives she had investigated in the earlier research, one day she *would* be an elderly Jew living in California. Tragically, she died of cancer before her prophecy could be fulfilled.

These works, along with ethnographies by the likes of Shostak (1990), and Wikkan (1996) are to me, the ideal. Others, which I also would be happy to be able to emulate, are those by Belmonte (1979) and Bourgois (1996).

One of the distinguishing features of these ethnographies is that the researcher includes herself or himself in their work. Another is that the day-to-day life of the people involved is kept to the forefront, as opposed to theoretical concerns being paramount.

Another work which (while not satisfying the first characteristic of including the researcher in the text) satisfies the second objective (of forefronting people) is a later work of Bourdieu’s, *The Weight of the World* (1993). This work comprises a collection of excerpts of interviews, some with a comprehensive introductory discussion, others with very little, telling of the experiences of people whose lives have been challenging, and unhappy, for a variety of social reasons. This is a far cry from the theory and data-rich, but thinly peopled, earlier works of his, such as *Distinction* (1984). That he has written a book of this type after decades of producing highly theoretical works gives me further confidence in working towards a similarly peopled piece. Fowler (1996), in writing of Bourdieu’s (1993) work praises this collection saying that, by presenting people’s experiences in the way he has, he has prevented their genuine anguish in relation to particular examples being “softened in conventional discourse with the anaesthetizing name of ‘relative deprivation’” (1996:2). Rather than discuss the theory of social deprivation he has illustrated such phenomena through the experiences of people.

IN CONCLUSION

This review of my engagement with written material (both specifically about Anglo-Indians and about work that I considered whilst trying to think about my experience with them) has attempted to indicate the background of how it is that I came to work with Anglo-Indians in the way I have. Clearly, for me, method is more important than theory and therefore I now turn to an account of methodology.

CHAPTER TWO

WORKING WITH ANGLO-INDIANS

INTRODUCTION

I was in Calcutta on holiday with my family when I heard via e-mail that I had been awarded a three-year scholarship to study for a PhD. It took me six months to decide to accept the scholarship, and another trip back to Calcutta before I decided on research on Calcutta's Anglo-Indian community. To a large extent the development of my work has been driven by the data I have collected over the course of five fieldwork trips to Calcutta over a two and a half year period. The first was a reconnaissance trip, which was followed by three significant periods of fieldwork, then another short visit near the end.

As I have said in the first chapter, my work has been driven by experience rather than theory. In this chapter I shall describe my fieldwork approaches and experiences and how they related to the objectives I had in mind as a starting point for the different visits to Calcutta. I also describe what drove the research from conception through to its finished shape. I address, therefore, both the data collection phase and also writing up from that material. I discuss the types of data I collected and their various uses in the construction of an ethnographic thesis. Another issue I address is based on the fact that the people I have written about are generally a literate group who are interested in what is written about them. Awareness of this fact has affected the way the work took shape.

FIELDWORK TRIPS

In July 2001 I made a trip with my husband to Calcutta in order to ascertain the feasibility of a study of Calcutta's century-old colonial market, Hogg's New Market. As I have discussed, I became more and more daunted and disillusioned at the prospect of the problems of this project as the weeks unfolded. In the course of the visit, however, I came into contact, and became more and more involved, with a group of

Anglo-Indians in central Calcutta. I felt an immediate interest in and rapport with these people. Over the next few months I searched for a way to tackle the New Market project in order to incorporate work with Anglo-Indians. This only made the original project harder. I soon realised that my heart was set on another project: to work with Anglo-Indians. Having made that transition the research immediately began to take shape and picked up momentum. I read all that I could find about Anglo-Indians in Calcutta, India, and abroad in order to find an angle to approach the research. I have described this reading experience in the previous chapter. It was the prognosis presented in Coralie Younger's work that gave me the initial project objectives. After carrying out fieldwork in India in the early 1980s she claimed that:

After twenty or thirty years, one will not hear of an Anglo-Indian as such. The few Anglo-Indians that are left in India will marry Indians and become Indians. The community that was born 300 years ago will eventually disintegrate. (Younger 1987: dust jacket)

This prognosis of decline seemed to be at odds with the impression I had already gained of Calcutta's Anglo-Indian community. But I needed to spend more time with them to even begin to make a useful comment on the life and prognosis of the community. I planned a much longer return fieldwork trip to take place six months after the first. The objectives I set myself for this research were to learn as much as I could about the Anglo-Indian community in Calcutta, to understand their day-to-day lived reality, and to gain insights into the dynamics of reproduction and production of the community as a distinct minority.

I arrived for this first extended visit keen to get going, to meet community leaders, to tape interviews, to collect life stories, to be invited to attend Anglo-Indian events. But on many of those early days very little happened. I began to feel frustrated at accomplishing so little. In the beginning I was particularly concerned about whether I would be able to find people willing to participate in the research. I guess that the anxiety I felt then mirrored that of other anthropologists in a new setting. When you have come for a prescribed time you feel keenly the loss of each day that passes without a meeting, an interview, or an event to attend.

Arriving when I did, between Christmas and New Year (or “the 31st” as it was much more commonly referred to), meant that some potential research participants were “out of station” (away from Calcutta) while others were busy with guests, or involved in other social engagements. The pool of Anglo-Indians I knew who had agreed to help me with the research was initially very small and even these people had other things to do besides spend time with me, let alone be interviewed. Writing this now, after my fourth visit, I realise what an opportunity I missed by being in Calcutta but not being ‘in’ with the Anglo-Indian community at this time of the year. On my fourth visit I was constantly told that I must return over the Christmas and New Year period so I could see the community at its communal best. One insight it gives me, however, is that the community is relatively invisible. Unless you are part of it, it is easy to miss what goes on within it.

On the second visit family members (my husband and two of my daughters) accompanied me for the first month. It was my intention to establish myself as married and family-oriented. My family ensured that this was the impression I gave. In those slack or relatively uneventful (in terms of data collection fieldwork) early days we all got to know the central city, its attractions and landmarks, and some of its shopping, eating and entertainment centres. This type of activity was generally not recorded in my journal but added to my knowledge of the fieldwork site. It gave me a feel for the environment in which many Calcuttan Anglo-Indians live. It meant that when I began to spend time with research participants I was familiar with many of the places they referred to.

An important role played by my family was that of sounding board (bored?) for me to rehearse my fieldwork-related uncertainties and anxieties. I was also grateful for the insights they could offer once I did start to get underway with my research. Their understandings were from a different, often complementary, perspective to mine. Their comments on what I was seeing and hearing, and on the people I was meeting was often illuminating. They could also, at times, be a source of frustration, especially on occasions such as when my teenage daughters would turn down the opportunity to accompany a group of local teenage Anglo-Indians on some activity or another. My children did not help the situation (or my disposition) when later the same day they would complain about “being bored and having another day of doing nothing”(from

fieldwork journal, 6 January, 2002). My idea of turning them into a variety of research assistant was never embraced by them.

In some ways, having my family in the field inadvertently hindered my fieldwork: for example, I discovered after they had left that several people who knew of my interest in their community, and of the fact that my family were to leave after the first month, had waited until they had actually gone to firm up arrangements to meet with me. Had I known the reason for their reticence I could have addressed it, or at least been reassured that I would be busy as soon as the family left. On one occasion the woman, who I had imagined might be my equivalent of Shostak's 'Nisa', told me that she would have invited me to come with her to an Anglo-Indian residential home's annual Punch Party had it been scheduled after my family had gone. She expected that I would prefer to be spending time with my family rather than getting on with my research!

As I met more people and conducted follow up interviews and meetings I became satisfyingly busy. I met with most people several times, some many more times than that. At times I found it difficult to maintain a professional relationship (whatever that is) with the people I was meeting, being inclined to become friends with the people whose company I enjoyed. I discuss this in more detail below.

After my family left for home I moved into a guest room at the Birkmyre Hostel, a hostel for young men, which is closely associated with Dr Graham's Homes. The hostel was home for me on all subsequent visits. Staying here gave me day-to-day contact with a community of Anglo-Indians including the family who managed the hostel, the office administrators of Dr Graham's Homes, a number of young men who were residents of the hostel (old boys of the school), the parents of current pupils who came into the administration office, as well as past students who would drop in to see various "aunties" and "uncles" working there.¹ The hostel is just off Park Street so very centrally located and within what used to be the hub of the Anglo-Indian residential area.² It is adjacent to an Anglo-Indian girls' college and a Catholic church

¹ Past pupils who visited while I was there included girls currently attending Loreto College who passed the hostel on their way to college, as well as middle-aged 'old girls and boys' who now lived overseas.

² In Chapter Three I discuss the recent trend of internal migration of Anglo-Indians from the centre of the city to areas further out, particularly to Picnic Gardens.

where Masses are said daily in English. Anglo-Indians I met away from the hostel would ask where I was staying and always knew the hostel, and generally knew someone associated with it. I can't imagine a better place for me to have stayed for the degree of comfort, security, and company it provided. In terms of the research it was unquestionably the best possible accommodation I could have had: while I had autonomy and a degree of privacy when I wanted it, I was included in any activities that were being run, such as family parties, dances, and even the annual fund raiser for the Homes. By taking part in as much as possible that was going on around the hostel I met many people and experienced a social life similar to a number of Anglo-Indians. The hostel and the school drew a wide range of visitors of differing educational and socio-economic circumstances, many of whom I was able to meet at different times when I was there. As well as senior school board members, there were also very poor Anglo-Indian women – solo parents who were hoping to enrol their children, some as young as two years old, in the boarding school.



Plate 1 Birkmyre Hostel

The second substantial fieldwork trip was undertaken almost a year after the first. In the intervening time I had refined my research objectives based on the directions I was exploring with the material I had collected. I was starting to think about the complexity and the often-ambiguous nature of the factors relating to the prognosis for the community. I had become particularly interested in the factors that supported or

promoted community reproduction rather than just those leading to its 'decline'. However, I was still interested in what it was that might weaken the likelihood of community survival. For this visit the particular issues that I set out to understand better and gauge the effect of were those relating to marriage trends and to Anglo-Indian education. I also wanted to meet some of the prominent community members who I had not been able to meet the first time.

I talked to a number of people about their experience and expectations and opinions of marriage – theirs and others'. I looked at photograph albums, discussed wedding-related photographs, sat in on planning for an engagement, a wedding and a 25th wedding anniversary, and attended a wedding blessing. On this trip I also met with school teachers, trainee school teachers, past teachers, students, members of school boards, parents of school children, and some people who were central to the decisions made in running the current schooling system. Much of the material on Anglo-Indian marriage has not made it into the thesis after making a decision to focus on just three main practices.³ The material on education, on the other hand, became the basis for a chapter. As well as having some definite ideas about what I might pursue in this fieldwork trip I also left myself open to picking up on ideas, or leads, that presented themselves to me. This approach resulted in the chapter on Christianity, which I had not expected to write but was the first to be completed. I explore this fieldwork 'technique' further in this chapter under the heading of 'serendipity'.

The next trip was timed to coincide with the second Anglo-Indian Day celebration. I spoke to people before, during, and after the day. As I describe in the chapter based on this day and the world Reunion, I immersed myself in the celebrations as much as possible emphasising the participant rather than the observer role in participant-observation. By the time of the 2003 Anglo-Indian Day many people knew me and knew what I was doing in town (and are presently waiting for 'the book'). I felt self-conscious about getting my camera out too often, or taking the tape recorder out of my bag (where it lived during the time in Calcutta, along with a small journal, spare batteries, film, tapes etcetera) but I wanted to record the day in detail. On this day I

³ However, there is some discussion of marriage in the chapter on religious practices, as marriage is a religious sacrament as well as a civil union. It has become clear to me in hindsight that I was drawn to those themes that give vitality to the community rather than those – such as marriage to non Anglo-Indians, and migration – which seemed to be the most mentioned factors leading to its decline.

overcame my natural reticence and kept the camera out and took several rolls of film. An unexpected bonus of this strategy was that because it reminded people about why I was there, they would come up to me at various times of the day to tell me that some event was about to occur, or that I must come over and witness something or another that they felt was particularly typical of Anglo-Indians. This interaction gave me insights into what Anglo-Indians themselves regard as being their cultural markers.

The final fieldwork trip, of just one week, was in late March 2004 on my way to a conference in Durham, England. On this trip I caught up with many of the people I knew (including the women whose life stories I had written up), I attended several church services and made a day trip to Bandel, and I came to know more about the local medical system through spending time with an Anglo-Indian street-dweller who needed medical attention. I was also able to see the progress of flyover construction in central Calcutta, and experience the city at a different, hotter, time of the year.

I am convinced that sequential trips made to the field over a longish period is a highly effective and efficient way of carrying out fieldwork, whether or not one is able to stay for one traditional-length period. My family situation never allowed for such an extended fieldwork stint. The advantages for me of this technique (apart from fitting in better with other commitments) are that, firstly, I was able to see the changes over time in people's lives. Secondly, by keeping in touch with people between visits I was able to build up relationships, Thirdly, by arranging outings, interviews, and meetings before arriving in Calcutta I was able to maximise my time there. People were almost unfailingly generous with their time. This may have been, at least in part, because they knew that my calls on their time were limited by the relatively short time I had in the city. The greatest advantage of being able to be in touch with people over the course of several years was that, rather than being left with a snap-shot impression of people's lives, I could begin to see their life changes as an unfolding continuum, and to gain some idea of the meanings of the changes that took place in their lives. Over the research period people experienced significant life-changing events: for example, one couple, newly married when I first met them, had a baby (whose baptism I was able to attend) by the time I visited them subsequently. Another example is a woman whose son died of a long illness. The first time I met her she was completely housebound

through her care of him, and was very depressed. Over the year after he “expired”⁴ I was able to see the changes in her life as she became busier and seemingly more full-filled: certainly she appeared happier. Yet another woman suffered a stroke between the first and second visits – thankfully, I could see some improvement in her condition after another visit. Several people experienced changes in employment – through job loss, a change of job, and through gaining employment after obtaining degrees. Others moved from one home, or living arrangement to another. I would not have had access to the meaning of these experiences of change had my research been conducted in the space of a more intensive but compressed period of fieldwork.⁵

HIERARCHY OF DATA CATEGORIES?

The ‘data’ I collected over the fieldwork periods is in several forms. I had recorded and transcribed interviews with community leaders as well as with people whose life stories I was interested in. I had an abundance of hand-written journal entries, photographs and mementos from visits. I also had memories of experiences, unrecorded in hard or electronic copy, and not all at a conscious level. It is in this last category that I had, and still have, a substantial amount of ‘data’. It is, perhaps, the most problematic, being seen by many as the most subjective.

It would seem that, for some scholars, different types of data can be put into a hierarchy of usefulness.⁶ It has been argued that data that has been captured immediately has greater value than that captured by the memory of the ethnographer. Lareau, for example, discusses that fact that she never uses data that she has not formally recorded either on tape or written up in her journal within 24 hours of the experience. She claims that:

...fieldwork without notes is useless and destructive. It is useless because without documentation the observations cannot and should not be incorporated into the study; it is destructive because worrying about missing

⁴ To use the local expression for death.

⁵ Wikan’s (1996) work with Cairenes described in her book *Tomorrow God Willing* is a particularly good example of the value of this kind of long-term sequential fieldwork. She lived with her informants for a total of 30 months over a 23 years period (1996:8).

⁶ There is an ongoing discussion about what constitutes ‘the field’, and by inference, what is meant by coming back from it. See Bamford and Robbins (1997), Boggs (1996), D’Amico-Samuels (1991).

notes takes away valuable time and energy from the project, creates new problems, undermines competence, and turns a potentially rewarding process into a burdensome one. (1996:219)

Lareau was carrying out fieldwork for six to ten hours a week in schools in the area in which she lived.

The nature of my fieldwork, especially during the second substantive visit, meant that much of the ‘data’ I ‘collected’ was not recorded on tape, nor was it written out in detail in my journal. This may be seen as methodologically sloppy, but I would argue that it is the only reasonable and realistic way I could go about it. It would be good to see more ethnographies that directly address this issue.

It is impossible to record all that is seen, felt, experienced or heard in any day of fieldwork. It would take much longer to record than to experience. I would challenge anyone who claimed that they could record a full day’s fieldwork. When you enter a fieldwork situation, unless it is restricted to circumscribed interview sessions (as my MA research was)⁷ much that happens that may be relevant to the research is not recorded. Some incidents observed or phrases spoken are immediately recognised as relevant and do make it to the journal; others take longer to recognise as important because the link between what has been heard or seen in the field and its relevance to the thesis topic is not clear until much later. For example, it was not until almost a month after returning from one trip to Calcutta, for example, when I reread Barth’s (1969:9-38) discussion of ethnic identity, that I recalled a comment made to me by one research participant about another which went something like: “As well as not being Anglo-Indian by the definition, you just have to listen to the way he speaks to know he’s not. And I remember him at university where he wore Indian clothes and carried his books in a cloth shoulder bag, just like an Indian does – no Anglo-Indian would do that”. If I adhere to Lareau’s philosophy I would not be able to use this example as an illustration of the use of objective “cultural indicators” in ascribing ethnic identity in the Anglo-Indian community.

⁷ I interviewed six women over four or five lengthy sessions in order to write an account (2000) of their experience of downward social mobility after marriage separation.

There seems to be a tension between the now no-longer questioned necessity of making use of the subjective experience gained in the ‘participant’ aspect of participant-observation fieldwork, and the more highly valued (by some) objective forms of data collected from the ‘observation’ aspect of the fieldwork experience. While the experience of immersing yourself in the life of the community you are working with is applauded, returning with just a few taped interviews and more excuses, than completed journals, may not be. Memory is a tool which anthropologists should not be too hasty to discard. It is a human capacity which we can make use of and I have done so extensively in this research alongside the use of more ‘traditional’ tools.

ON INTERVIEWING AND WRITING LIFE STORIES

I collected data on audiotape for two purposes: firstly to record life stories, and secondly to record interviews on particular topics with people whose opinions I was interested in capturing. After recording the life stories, I had the entire tapes transcribed. Then I put together a chronologically edited version of each of their lives using verbatim portions of the interview transcriptions. I had used this technique in my MA and produced ‘stories’ that the research participants then read and commented on. We discussed the stories and I made changes as they were requested. In each case the person whose story it was had the final word on what remained and what was deleted and in how the stories were presented. This was a relatively easy undertaking in New Zealand when I was doing my MA but was very much more problematic when the research site was so far from home – geographically as well as ‘culturally’ and experientially. In the case of my MA research, each of the New Zealand women wanted only minor alterations to her story. With this as my only experience I was taken aback at the Anglo-Indian responses to the stories I had put together from their words. One woman denied that she spoke in the way I had recorded her. She then put in a huge amount of work correcting the life story manuscript that I had taken back to Calcutta for her to look over. I was sad to see so many of the, to me, typically Anglo-Indian expressions (or Anglo-Indianisms) taken out of the manuscript and replaced by characterless, but grammatically correct versions. But perhaps I shouldn’t have been surprised by this because isn’t this what we do in the process of writing up as well? Don’t we take a raw, lived, messy, multi-sensory experience and then filter it into a format acceptable for consumption by a particular audience?

As well as the criticisms some of the subjects of life stories had of the way in which I had written up the story, some were concerned about the content of what I had written. In every case I had conducted the interview with the tape recorder sitting between us; invariably I would change or turn tapes over a couple of times during the course of an interview session (there were usually at least three sessions). At times I was asked to turn the recorder off as the person wanted to tell me something, but didn't want me to record it, or use it. In spite of this I still recorded and used material in the first draft of their stories that they didn't want me to use. The reasons for this varied. In one case the person had made some derogatory comments about people – which, in a pretty universally human way, was later regretted. Another decided that the details about her family life looked too callous in print. Another decided that a three-page synopsis was representative of her extremely full and fascinating life. Surprisingly, it was a person whose life is impossible to disguise who was the happiest with the original version of what I had written about her life.

Because of the difficulty in completely disguising any of the people whose life histories I recorded, it was very important to me that the people were happy with what I had written. Reaching this point involved writing up several drafts, distributing them personally (when in Calcutta), and later posting them, discussing the content (as well as grammar) by phone and email until eventually we were all satisfied with the end product.⁸ The stories, then, are a collaborative effort. They required participation from the research participants (aptly named) to a high degree.

I sometimes ended up being unable to record stories for variety of reasons, in spite of people saying they were happy for me to record them. One man, for example, was too shy with me to relax and tell me the same stories that he had shared with me on taxi or auto-rickshaw trips, or with his family around adding in bits to encourage him. I had enough conversations with him and with his family (all women) to be able to piece together a truncated version but did not, in the end, include this as a story as the discrepancy between the substance of his account and the others is considerable. Inclusion may have given the erroneous impression that his life was less eventful. This

⁸ The knowledge that a thesis is likely to have a small readership meant that the people whose stories are included were happier than they might otherwise have been with the final product. I have assured them all that I shall confer with them further when I prepare to publish from this thesis.

would not have been true: rather the technique of recording I had used here were not suitable to bring out the richness of his life.

Another case was that of the person who I had imagined might be my Anglo-Indian 'Nisa'. While I attempted to interview her about her life, we never got more than quarter of an hour or so on tape before she would say "so that's my life", signalling the end of the formal part of the visit. She didn't seem to value her life story and could not see how it could be of use or interest for my work. She was always happier to talk about other people's lives. When I look back on the way our interviews invariably progressed I think her idea of a 'good' life story was of a life that involved valiant fights against adversity. She was full of praise for people she knew who had started life with serious disadvantages but had made good (which she would probably define as becoming educated, in full employment, church-going, and happy) through institutional help, combined with their own perseverance, faith, and even some form of luck. At first I interpreted her reluctance to be interviewed about her own life as reasonable caution on her part about talking to someone she hardly knew, but even as I came to know her well this reluctance to talk about herself did not shift. Although the 'Nisa'-like research relationship that I had hoped for didn't eventuate we did become firm friends and confidantes. She was an invaluable part of my project – without her help I wouldn't have met many of the people I did, nor would I have understood as much about the community as I do. We spent many hours together: going to New Market to buy supplies, visiting a home for the elderly, attending church services and a wedding blessing, as well as spending time chatting at her home, often along with numerous young Anglo-Indians who all called her and treated her as "aunty". She introduced me to many people and is well known and well regarded in the community. I confided in her at times when I needed social advice, and she offered advice when she thought I needed it!

WOMEN ONLY

It was not what I planned but I have ended up with three stories, all of women. I have material from some men but none of it is as suitable for converting into a life story as the material I had for these women. I got along with the men but didn't get the same sense of ease as I did with the women. I'm not sure what to attribute that to – caution on my part perhaps and an awareness of the effect of gender politics and dynamics. I

learnt during the course of my MA research that effective interviewing requires that there be a two-way sharing of experiences with the result that the interview session becomes a conversation. Anglo-Indian men are generally comfortable with women and engage with women regularly and easily through family life and employment, but the topics (such as relationships) that were important to discuss in order to construct a meaningful life story did not always seem suitable to talk about, or share.

NOT REPRESENTATIVE

As well as the stories seeming to be unrepresentative in terms of gender there are other imbalances; for example, two out of the three women are unmarried and have not had children; none of them seem to hanker after a permanent move ‘abroad’⁹; two have travelled extensively. None of the women fit the idea of a ‘typical Anglo-Indian’. Even the one who is married, has children, is church-going, and is involved in the education system may not be considered ‘representative’ as she does not fit within the constitutional definition of an Anglo-Indian. I could perhaps have put together a ‘typical Anglo-Indian life story’ but as well as *no* Anglo-Indian fitting this, it may imply that there was such an entity, which would take away from the heterogeneity that I encountered in the Anglo-Indians I met. The three stories I have here on the other hand are of three real lives.

THE TRAJECTORY OF A FIELDWORK FRIENDSHIP

There were a number of key people involved in this research. In addition to the women referred to above there were others who took on roles far beyond research participant, or even key informant. Bourdieu writes about the “spiritual exercise” (1996:22) of the interview. Just as you listen closely to a friend telling you about an important incident in their lives, so must a person carrying out qualitative research listen attentively and empathetically to research participants. One potential result of this treatment of research participants is that they become your friends. Then it is not appropriate to use a tape recorder when you meet them because the time spent together is no longer in the nature of researcher and research participant.

Thus, at the risk of shocking both the rigorous methodologist and the hermeneutic scholar, I would say that the interview can be considered a sort of

⁹ Caplan (1995) has written of Anglo-Indians’ “culture of immigration” believing that the aspiration to live abroad is characteristic of many Anglo-Indians in India.

spiritual exercise that, through *forgetfulness of self*, aims at a true *conversion of the way we look at* other people in the ordinary circumstances of life. The welcoming disposition, which leads one to make the respondent's problems one's own, the capacity to take that person and understand them just as they are in their distinctive necessity, is a sort of *intellectual love*... (Bourdieu 1996:24 emphasis in the original)

I will outline the trajectory of the development of one such relationship¹⁰: I was interested in meeting a particular man who many in the community made sure that I knew was “not really an Anglo-Indian”, or in another Anglo-Indian's words was a “contested Anglo-Indian”. He had represented the community politically some time beforehand. It took me a while to hear of his existence; a fact that he and the rest of his family found amusing. It was not until well into the first long fieldwork visit that it was suggested that I meet him. I was given his contact details by a woman with Anglo-Indian connections, although not an Anglo-Indian herself, who knew him well. I telephoned him giving her name as a reference and told him a little about my research, and then requested an interview. He seemed unenthusiastic, perhaps even sceptical, and said he would get back to me to arrange a meeting. I didn't expect to hear from him again. Several days went by before he called back saying he had spoken with the friend we now had in common and he would be happy to meet in the next day or so at a time and place suggested by him.

We had an enjoyable and, for me, successful meeting. In preparation for the interview I had revised my knowledge of Anglo-Indian history as well as present-day statistics and policy affecting them. In the early stages of the interview I felt that my knowledge of the community was being tactfully scrutinised. At some stage the dynamics changed and I was allowed to direct the discussion to my roughly pre-conceived agenda. At the same time as dealing with business phone calls he was frank in his opinions about the community. He was generous in his full answers to questions I asked. As we parted he enquired whether I would have time during my remaining days in Calcutta to meet his wife. I had heard that she was an Old Girl from one of the

¹⁰ There are others who I could use as examples here, including the young man who came to feel like a family member, and those whom I continue to write to as friends. I acknowledge their place in this work in other ways throughout the thesis. I trust they will forgive my singling out someone else at this point.

schools I was particularly interested in, so for both social and research reasons I said that I would be keen to do that.

Over the course of the remaining week or so that I had in Calcutta he invited me to make use of his substantial collection of Anglo-Indian related books, and extended other practical assistance. He and his wife also began including me in their social arrangements. Good friends of theirs, for example, invited me to a party in honour of relatives visiting from Australia and other parts of India. Their invitation came with the explanation that this would be a “genuine Anglo-Indian party”. When the dancing began I suggested that I would keep to the observation aspect of participant-observation fieldwork. They would not allow this, insisting that dancing was compulsory at Anglo-Indian parties, two left feet or not!

Once back in New Zealand I remained in contact via occasional e-mail messages with them and then, close to the time of my return, I reminded them of arrangements for my return. We met a number of other times on subsequent visits but I didn’t record another interview. I met more of his family, we talked together after Church services, and I was invited to join them for several more dinners, a ball, and a visit to the beauty parlour with his wife. Close friends of theirs held a house party for me where I was introduced to people they thought I should meet and was reacquainted with some I had met the last time. I later taped interviews with several of these people. I requested a formal, taped interview with him before I left after the second long fieldwork period in order to run past him some ideas that had come up in the course of that fieldwork trip. But in the last week we both had to cancel our arrangements to see each other because of social clashes and illness.

Although I did not manage another formal, taped interview these occasions added enormously to my fieldwork experience, to the knowledge I have, and to the “feel” I have for their community. I was told by a number of people that this family were not ‘typical’ Anglo-Indians, and that he was not an authentic Anglo-Indian. (The Anglo-Indian identity of his wife was never in question.) While there may be some doubt about his authenticity in terms of the State Constitution definition, there is no doubt that they are part of the Calcutta Anglo-Indian scene. A benefit that accrued from people telling me that he was not a real Anglo-Indian or that his family was not typical was that it gave me the opportunity to ask these people for their views on what *was*

typical. This account of the development of an important fieldwork relationship demonstrates how complex the formation of such relationships are.

PROBLEMS

HONESTY

People say these things to you and they're not true. But you believe them. (A research participant)

As well as collecting the life stories, and interviewing “experts”, and living closely with Anglo-Indians, I talked to many people about their lives – including their childhood, religious convictions, hopes and dreams, plans for the next holiday, and even plans for the next day, anxieties about their jobs, their children, frustrations about living in Calcutta, and their experience of relationships. At times when I returned to the hostel after spending time with a group of Anglo-Indians I would chat with people there about my day. I would comment on something that someone had said they had done, or the job they had or some other incident or ‘fact’ that I imagined would be public knowledge, only to be told that what I had been told just wasn’t true. I found this interesting, and confusing, and had difficulty knowing where ‘the truth’ lay. I would wonder why I might have been misled, if this was what had indeed happened. Sometimes I interpreted such events in terms of impression management. (I was, after all, engaged in such a project myself.) The ‘alteration’ of reality, if that was what had happened, invariably resulted in a better light being thrown on someone’s situation. In relation to this problem the best solution is time: in time the ‘truth’ reveals itself.

WHAT TO DO WITH GOSSIP?

Another category of problematic data was that given to me in confidence especially when it was malicious and related to people I was seeing in the course of the work. On the second trip I was privy to a lot of the local gossip that I had not heard a whisper of on the first trip. I took it as a sign that I was increasingly accepted into the social scene. While the particular piece of ‘information’ might have been ‘interesting’ from the point of view of my role as friend or acquaintance, it was sometimes a problem for me to know how to deal with it as a researcher. In some instances it would throw light on some aspect of the community in a way that made me keen to use the information in order to illustrate a point, but doing so would be a breach of the confidence I had established. At times I have been able to turn an example of a particular incident into a

generalisation (based on hearing of other instances of the same type of occurrence) without revealing the subject or the source.

WHAT TO DO WITH MATERIAL GIVEN AS A FRIEND?

Beyond run of the mill ‘gossip’ some people would also talk to me as a friend but not talk to me as a researcher. One young woman, for example, whom I became very fond of, shared personal and potentially upsetting details of a relationship. She would be appalled to see reference to it in this thesis and would see such use as a breach of trust. On the other hand while I cannot use the particular ‘material’ she shared with me, it does give me insights into some significant issues for Anglo-Indian women of her age and situation. Talking with her meant that when I talked with others who I did not know as well and who had agreed to be interviewed, I could shape the right questions, and could steer the conversation to areas that I thought would be illuminating, based on those earlier private conversations. Also, I could be more empathetic: I could better understand when others revealed similar situations.

In conclusion, I have discussed above some of the problems I encountered in my research, and my solutions or accommodations to them, so as to give a feeling for the sensibility I brought to my fieldwork.

SOME RESEARCH LESSONS

THE VALUE OF SERENDIPITY

I have already indicated that my research experience has been characterised by serendipitous occurrences along with some outstanding coincidences. One of the most unexpected was not revealed until well into the research. When in conversation with Glenn D’Cruz in Melbourne I was alerted to the fact that I had already, four years earlier, met the woman whose work had captured my attention and stimulated my interest in this area. Coralie Younger, her six-month-old triplets, and a female friend were staying at the same hotel as my family, in Madras. Because we and Coralie and her friend were feeling starved of antipodean company we fell on each other like long lost cousins. I was introduced to the father of the triplets and on one occasion my family looked after the triplets so that Coralie and her friend could have an uninterrupted meal at one of the luxury hotels in our vicinity. We all left Madras for Singapore on the same flight, following the unlikely sight of numerous police officers accompanying two Australian women and three Australian-Indian babies through

checkout and customs control. I was told about Coralie's illness and about the research that had brought her to Madras and that she was writing up as "Molly and the Raja".¹¹ At the time of my first meeting with her I was quite unaware of her Anglo-Indian research and interest.

Thus, it was not until January 2003 that, thanks to my conversation, I was made aware of the connection between the woman my family and I had met in Madras and the woman whose work was the first I read on Anglo-Indians.¹² Coralie died in December 2002 from the cancer she was receiving treatment for when we met in early 1997.

This coincidence was one of many events that gave me a feeling that, in some mysterious way a path was being cleared for me to proceed with this particular research.

Another of the more remarkably serendipitous moments occurred on the corner of Park Street and Middleton Row as I waited for the traffic control police to make the decision to allow pedestrians to cross. As I waited a man commented to me that the officer in charge must have had an argument with his wife before coming on duty, and we were paying for his bad temper. For a minute or so we speculated about whether that was preferable to him taking it out on her, and bandied about other explanations and possible courses of action for the officer. Finally we were given permission to cross. As we walked across the road we introduced ourselves to each other. He introduced himself to me giving me his name then saying, "I'm the leader of an Anglo-Indian association". Taken aback I looked around to see who had set me up. Seeing no one I knew, I commented that I'd thought Joyce O'Brien was the local leader. He explained that he was the leader of another Anglo-Indian organisation. He then began to explain to me who Anglo-Indians were. I stopped him, telling him I knew about Anglo-Indians; that I was in Calcutta in order to understand and find out as much as I

¹¹ This work was published as *Wicked Women of the Raj: European women who broke society's rules and married Indian princes* (2003).

¹² Even the fact that I was in Melbourne when I was, was serendipitous. A combination of events (a short stretch of time when my children were all spending time with respective friends, an invitation from a Melbourne-based cousin, Anglo-Indian contacts available to visit and interview, and cheap air fares) transpired to make not being there nigh on impossible.

could about the community there. It was his turn to look astonished. As we were both late for our respective appointments we quickly arranged a meeting for the next day.

Numerous other such events occurred throughout my work. I raise this because I think of serendipity and an openness to it as a valuable research lesson.

THE VALUE OF DOGGEDNESS

If it seemed to me really important that I meet or do something in relation to the research then I would try different approaches until I found a fruitful direction, or else I would give up with the conviction that it could not have been as significant as I had thought. My eventual meeting with Sister Marisa is an example of how this approach played out.

During my first trip I heard of her in relation to the Marion Education Centre, which she had set up for Anglo-Indian ‘drop-outs’ from school. She was near the top of my list of people to see on the second extended trip, as one of the primary objectives of that visit was to understand the education system as it applies to Anglo-Indians. Her prominence in the community was also a factor in my determination to meet with her. From the time I arrived I put out word that I was keen to be introduced – but to no avail. I then telephoned several people and requested that they introduce me to her – still no success. Eventually one research participant suggested to me that I go to the Roman Catholic Mass the local diocese (Parish of Christ the King) runs from the Marion Education Centre at Picnic Gardens, and seek her out after the service. With less than a week remaining I took that advice, only to wake on Sunday morning to see that it was 7:45 am and Mass began at 8:30am. I had no real idea of how to get to her centre but rushed through a shower, took a couple of mouthfuls of the watery bulgar wheat porridge that had been delivered to my room and got to a taxi by shortly after 8am. The taxi driver, a Sikh gentleman, refused to take me anywhere as I did not speak Hindi, did not have an address or a map, so could not tell him, in sufficient detail, where I wanted to go. Another taxi driver who had heard my futile attempts to describe the destination I was after (“chota church, Picnic Gardens”) indicated (non-verbally, we had no shared language) that he was prepared to give it a go. I set off to the scornful amusement of various by-standers who had witnessed my attempts. I was reasonably familiar with the city by this time so knew we were going in the correct direction, until we turned left towards Tiljala and the Auxilium Church. I insisted,

“chota church, Picnic Gardens”, and we turned back and across the main road towards the new housing area. I recalled an instruction given to me days before about following a particular bus route. I conveyed this to my philosophical driver who seemed to understand what I meant. After several minutes he pulled over and asked directions of a Bengali man outside a tea stall. This took us along a side road that narrowed off sharply, soon preventing vehicle access. We retraced our way until I observed a young woman, in her late thirties, wearing Western style dress. We stopped again and I asked her if she spoke English, and after confirming that she did, asked if she knew how to get to the Marion Education Centre. She was an Anglo-Indian, was acquainted with the Centre and gave the taxi driver directions in Hindi. We set off again. After a few minutes a motorbike pulled up alongside us, and the rider (who had his two sons riding pillion) indicated that we should follow him. Five minutes after the church service started we arrived. The hall in which services are held every Sunday was packed and overflowing. A young man, who works as the maitre de at a restaurant along from the hostel I stayed in, who I greeted at least twice every day, courteously gave up his seat for me.

The same man whose motorbike we followed sought me out after the service and introduced me to Sister Marisa. She very generously put aside her morning’s work and spent the rest of the morning with me; talking about the history of the Centre, herself, and about problems she was having with her Bengali neighbours who had recently planted a peepal tree, sacred to Hindus, outside the Centre’s entrance. She was charming and welcoming, epitomising the hospitality and accommodating nature of so many Anglo-Indians I met.

It was the nature of my fieldwork that, quite often, I had to persevere in order to accomplish the simplest things. Calcutta is not a village. Work in an environment like this may require greater patience and sense of purpose than is required in other environments.

WHAT TO WRITE ABOUT?

Given what I have already said about the rich density of the experience, I had to make choices about what to write about. I could not write about everything. The decision as to what to write about is affected by a number of factors. The chapter on Christianity, for example, was written after being struck by the disparity between what I had seen of

Anglo-Indian Christianity and the almost complete lack of reference in the literature to the everyday-ness of Christian practices among most Calcuttan Anglo-Indians. The chapter on education also grew out of the fieldwork experience as it became evident that Anglo-Indians had played, and continue to play, an important role in education in the city, not only for Anglo-Indians but also for the wider, especially the wealthier, Calcuttan community. The importance of both these topics is supported by Brennan (1979) whose views are described by D'Cruz in the following terms:

Brennan locates the Anglo-Indian in a liminal space, negotiating between the centripetal forces of institutions, like the school and church, which reinforce community affiliations, and centrifugal political and economic forces which threaten to erode traditional ethnic identifications. (D'Cruz, 1997)

I chose to focus on the Anglo-Indian day celebrations because the very first were held about a year after I began the research. Many Anglo-Indians I spoke to after the event told me about it with obvious pride and with, what seemed to me to be, a renewed sense of their own Anglo-Indian solidarity. The Reunion seemed an obvious companion piece and attendance gave me the opportunity to meet Calcuttan Anglo-Indians outside of Calcutta, and to hear what the diasporic community was doing and how these people felt about Anglo-Indians still in India.

It has only recently occurred to me that I have done what many Anglo-Indians (and some non-Anglo-Indians) do in respect of their community: I have written primarily about the positive aspects of the community. I have focused on practices that maintain and augment community feeling, and have sidelined the processes that threaten the community, such as mixed marriages, emigration, and poverty. This bias has, perhaps, arisen out of two features of the research (and researcher): the first is that my original concern was with the longevity of Anglo-Indians as a distinct social group (with the assumption that Anglo-Indians were going against the prognosis of a trend towards decline, I was looking to see why this was the case); the second was that I am (initially subconsciously) biased in terms of a favourable prognosis – I want to see that Anglo-Indians survive as a distinct social group.

Another consideration about what and how I write is that this work is driven by a sense of responsibility to participants, and more generally the Anglo-Indians of Calcutta.

They are a literate people with whom I wish to have an on-going relationship. Supporting this attitude is the ethics of my profession, which require that, above all else, I “do no harm”. This includes social “harm” which takes account of the potential for embarrassment felt by the group or by individuals.

I have attempted to write in a way that represents what I see as the reality of my experience of their community. I am aware of the need to ensure that this is not a neat and tidy portrayal, because that would certainly not be accurate. I have endeavoured to avoid being influenced by people who haven’t lived in, or in some cases visited, the city for the last 20 or 30 years. I like to have what I’ve said affirmed but it’s not essential. While I took heart when told by an Anglo-Indian that I had reached the “emotional truth” in a portion of the analysis of the Reunion,¹³ I’m not too concerned, or surprised, to find some disagreement with what I write. I have already received this type of reaction from a Calcuttan to one aspect of the Christianity chapter. His objection was that I was “pandering to them” (Hindus, and to a lesser extent, Muslims) and that “they” would love to read what I had written: that Hinduism and Islam have influenced the practices of Christianity of Anglo-Indians

The audience that I am concerned about, who will be my toughest critics are Anglo-Indians. I didn’t want to write a useless saccharinised piece but I also didn’t want to cause hurt. I keep in mind a comment by a Calcuttan Anglo-Indian who, after reading a thesis, made the point that whoever examines academic theses may not be qualified to verify accuracy. He said of the one he had read that the author “hadn’t got the facts right” and he wondered about the process for examining theses. Ideally I would like the reaction of Anglo-Indian readers to be that they can see themselves, or other Anglo-Indians they know, in my record of their community; that what I have written resonates with what they already know, at some level, about themselves.

I reflect on other aspects of my own experience in the chapters that follow. The discussion of methodology above is not exhaustive. It should be read in the context of my discussion of other experiences in the rest of the text.

¹³ Before I presented a paper based on the reunion and Anglo-Indian day an Anglo-Indian friend read and commented on the content.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC SITE OR HABITAT

INTRODUCTION

There is the spirit and the genius of [a] city, where almost every stone tells you a story, where history is embedded even in the dirty lanes...It has a definite and positive atmosphere which you can feel in your bones. (Jawaharlal Nehru 1982)

A major character in the story of Anglo-Indians in Calcutta is the city itself and its story. This city 'environment' or 'habitat'¹ that they grow up in, both as individuals and as a collectivity, is a complex and layered one. As well as a description of the environment (including "its dirty lanes" and the "atmosphere") I describe the specific spaces of the city inhabited by Anglo-Indians. I also give something of the history of the city of Calcutta itself as well as Anglo-Indians' sense of their own history.

While history is important, in some form, it is the Anglo-Indian sense of it and of the contemporary environment, their habitat, which is most compelling, as it is that which is so influential upon their day-to-day lives now. One of the aims of this work is to convey an impression of the reality of life for Anglo-Indians living in Calcutta in the twenty first century. It would not be possible to do this without paying attention to and describing the current surroundings of the people I spent time with over the course of my various visits to Calcutta. The primary task I set myself, in this chapter, is to convey a sense of this experience of living in Calcutta. It would be a distortion of the social reality of Calcutta as a habitat to write a textual narrative which was seamless and one connected 'story'. The city is described in both 'objectivist' and 'subjectivist'

¹ I have called the chapter 'habitat' because, following Bourdieu, one could argue that 'being' exists in two forms: in the embodied state of what Bourdieu calls 'habitus', and in the materialised and substantial form of habitat. There is, according to Bourdieu, an 'ontological correspondence' between these forms of 'being'. In a traditional sense the thesis subject matter might be called 'Anglo-Indians of Calcutta', but, to convey the idea that justifies or underlies the material of this chapter, it might be better titled 'Anglo-Indians-in-Calcutta', where the hyphens express the mutuality of this particular configuration of environment and human existence.

ways. It is a fragmented totality. In order to convey this the following account itself is made up of a variety of accounts; it is, in other words, a montage.²

The context I shall provide will be one of day-to-day experiences of living at this time in this particular place in the world. In addition, at the end of the chapter, I give a history of Calcutta based on historians' accounts followed by a short discussion of the Anglo-Indian sense of their history.

CALCUTTA: INTRODUCTION TO THE CITY

Calcutta is the youngest of India's mega-cities and the one most influenced by the British. Growing on both banks of the Hooghly river, it was first settled for its potential as a trading port, and from 1857 to 1912 was British India's administrative centre. Today it has a human population of around 14 million,³ and though it is no longer India's administrative nor commercial centre, it remains the capital of the state of West Bengal. Middle class Bengalis claim it is the cultural centre of the country. Internationally it is known for its homeless and destitute. Myths about this huge and diverse city concentrate on this aspect of it. But that is only one aspect of the city. In a city of so many millions, even though more than half of the population live in some degree of poverty, many millions don't. I shall elaborate on both the myth and the reality of the city.

CALCUTTA AS MYTH

They're careful the way they step into the lake in the kitchen and they tell one another. Isn't this a disgrace? They keep shaking their heads and saying, God Almighty and Mother of God, this is desperate. That's not Italy they have upstairs, that's Calcutta. (McCourt 1996:113-114)

...Calcutta is often seen as the classic case of urban failure. The city is notorious for its poverty – perhaps unfairly so. Its side walk dwellers, street children, and scavengers have become a cliché for the worst in human degradation. (Thomas 1999:vii)

² Bourdieu and Clifford, in quite different ways, make deliberate use of montage to do ethnographic work (Bourdieu 1984; Clifford 1988).

³ There is uncertainty around this figure. I came across a variety of population statistics ranging from eight to forty million people.

Portrayed as an overcrowded place of poverty and despair, of desperation and decline, the rumour of Calcutta travels all over the world. (Hutnyk 1996:vii)

Few modern cities have bred so many myths as Calcutta. By 'myths' I do not mean falsehoods, but myths in the social or anthropological sense: popular beliefs and images that acquire the status of basic truths and guide our interpretation of reality. The chief Calcutta myths are depressing ones, relating to poverty, over-population and urban blight. Almost as compelling, however, are the equivocal myth of political awareness and political turmoil, and the reassuring myth of Calcutta's cultural pre-eminence, her intense intellectual and artistic life. (Chaudhuri 1990:xv)

Calcutta has a significant place in the Western imagination. I will not explore the complex phenomenon in detail but, just as one cannot avoid talking about Calcutta's climate, so too an account would be lessened by the absence of some engagement with this issue.

Publications, films, as well as general knowledge about Calcutta invariably make reference to the widespread poverty, homelessness and despair to be found in the city. Some refer to the widespread perception as a myth while others take it for granted that this view is unchallengeable. Closely associated with and perpetuating this particular view of Calcutta is the renown of the religious Order, Missionaries of Charity.⁴ This organisation is depicted as a source of hope for the destitute of the city and attracts young, socially conscious, westerners.⁵ It also attracts large amounts of aid. Accompanying the aid is the stigma attached to the reputation for requiring the assistance. With more than half of the population living in slum-like conditions the people have the capacity to absorb all the help that comes its way and still be in need of more.

⁴ This order became renown through its founder, Mother Theresa, who worked for most of her adult life in Calcutta.

⁵ The Lonely Planet guidebook to Calcutta includes a section on volunteer organisations. Of the overseas visitors to Calcutta many come to carry out some form of voluntary work or are employed by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) rather than coming to spend time in Calcutta as sight-seers in the way a traditional tourist may.

As well as the large numbers of NGOs providing relief of various kinds, the local population frequently takes responsibility for the poor of their own community (both ethnic and neighbourhood), I witnessed many examples of what appeared to be a common ethos of responsibility to feed those whose lives intersected with their own. While I was visiting one woman, for example, a man knocked on the door, and was invited to take 'his usual' from the fridge. Over the course of the day the homeowner collects scraps of food leftover from her meals (which are invariably shared with others who call by to visit on a formal or informal basis) to give to him. She commented that I would be surprised at the number of people who were fed out of her home each day. Many others, including the young men living in the hostel that I stayed in, give food and money to local street dwellers, replicating this attitude.

CALCUTTA AS REALITY

THE ETHNOGRAPHER'S CALCUTTA

First impressions, and a home for the anthropologist

My first impression of Calcutta was of an impossibly congested and polluted city. It seemed that trying to do more than one thing a day was hardly worth the effort. At that time, for example, it was with a considerable sense of accomplishment that a friend and I managed, in the course of just one day to get from Lake Gardens in south Calcutta, by taxi, to Nahoums Bakery in the centrally located New Market where we bought a cake for a birthday, had it iced with Happy Birthday – in Hindi – and after successfully shopping for Christmas presents, found our way to meet up with friends at the Writers building, arriving only half an hour late.

After spending more time in the city, as in any city, it became easier to understand how it operates and to navigate around it – to find a current to move around with, rather than against. I realised, for example, that at different times of the day travel was easier, and that walking or taking a rickshaw was more efficient than vehicular travel for short distances. And that the metro is cheap, quick and efficient and importantly, has a portion of every carriage reserved for women. This is important because in the central city area men comprise an overwhelming proportion of people in the public area.

In the time I spent in Calcutta I lived in three different places including a private home in Lake Gardens, a Muslim-run central city hotel, and, chiefly, a central city Anglo-

Indian hostel. I came to know the central part of the city well and to know others who lived and worked nearby. It was evident that they also became accustomed to seeing me. After a short time I would be greeted with smiles, hellos, salaams, a quick chat, an offer of one sort or another. In many areas of the city there are groups of beggars, homeless families, people selling household services, and this part of the town is no exception. Invariably people work and live in the same place from year to year – whether the place was the piece of pavement or an elegant airy apartment. When, between fieldwork trips, I told friends in New Zealand that I was going to interview a beggar who lived on the street, they looked sceptical and asked how I would find him again. I found him, as I'd expected, living on the same part of the pavement as he had been when I saw him last. Homelessness is frequently confused with transience. In fact, there can be a stability about homelessness which housed transience can miss altogether.



Plate 2 Anglo-Indian street-dweller and his wife

The human truth that underlies this phenomenon was brought 'home' to me by one of my experiences in Calcutta. I had decided that for one night on one of my last fieldwork trips I would stay in a well-known and relatively expensive hotel in the central area (on a street which is home to many of Calcutta's tourists) of the city. I packed an overnight bag and walked a couple of blocks from the hostel to the hotel. I was mindful of the fact that I might come to regret the decision and might not want to

return to the hostel after being in the hotel. I was mistaken. By the next morning I longed to return to the familiarity and friendliness of the hostel. The experience highlighted the fact that once certain basic physical needs are met the next most important requirement is social fulfilment. At the hotel the staff were courteous but not interested. The other guests were in town for a short time – they were all French and Korean on the day I stayed – and they already had other people for company. I never felt more alone in Calcutta than in my short stay at this hotel. It was a revealing experience that demonstrated to me how much I had come to see the hostel as my home, and the others who lived close by as people I felt at home amongst. As well as the familiarity of the hostel, its location made it a more pleasant place to stay than the hotel. The hotel was a tourist stopover and as Hutnyk (1996) notes, tourists come to Calcutta for just a few days unless they are there for volunteer work, which is generally a youthful undertaking.

Casual relationships

As a middle aged western woman I'm sure I was seen by the central city street beggars, hawkers, and other service providers as someone there for a short stay, so someone that they needed to work quickly and persistently. Another place where I experienced the sensation of being valued for my tourist dollar rather than any personal qualities was New Market; the old market in central Calcutta that was, initially, to have been the site of a different research project. The market is a favourite shopping place for Anglo-Indians and was established in 1874 to meet the consumer needs of the British in Calcutta. I asked one of the very fair Anglo-Indian women I was shopping with on one occasion if the 'market boys'⁶ gave her as much of a persistent hard time as they did me. She said that some recognized her – and would still offer their services – while others tried to persuade her that she needed curios, pashmina shawls, jewellery, clothes, spices etcetera, and were only effectively discouraged when she addressed them in the vernacular.

On the other hand, the occasional excursions I made to a cinema to see a Bollywood or Hollywood movie were very different experiences. I was still given more attention

⁶ The men who work as coolies in the market are known locally as market 'boys'. They act as both guides and bearers of purchases. Their payment is whatever the service-user decides. They make their best money from tourists in the form of a cut in profit when purchases are made from certain shops – mainly curio shops. Many are elderly and support their families in outlying villages through this insecure, poorly paid, form of employment.

than I was comfortable with but I was seen more as an object of curiosity than a means for financial gain. And, of course, many people didn't notice me at all as the hall was generally too packed for anyone to do more than look after himself or herself.

Calcutta as a Sensory Experience

The sights, smells and sounds

Experience is intimately tied up with the senses. The interface of habitus and habitat is mediated by the 'senses'.⁷ The following gives some sense of the way Calcutta impinges on the senses.

Two strong visual impressions I have of Calcutta are the crowds of people and traffic, and the pollution. There is a huge volume of foot traffic, and I write further about vehicular traffic below. The pollution is in the form of rubbish on the ground, the dust on the buildings, the haze in the air. It is water-borne, as well as airborne: it is both particulate and sonic. It is all pervading. I occasionally required anti-histamines to combat the affect of the airborne irritants, and it always took time to adjust to the constant noise. At almost any time of the day or night the cacophony included calls from men advertising services or goods on offer, dogs barking and fighting, crows cawing, the continuous honking of horns, sirens, rickshaw bells, church bells, Muslim calls to prayer mingled with the tinkling of bells and chanting sounds of Hindu worship, and the sound of Bollywood songs played through very loud speakers.

The first trip I made to India I braced myself for the smells of organic deterioration, but this is only one of the many odours I encountered. Smells of wood burners and cooking food, coffee, incense, flowers, and perfume compete with pockets of urine-filled alleys and public toilets, the stench of raw meat at the markets, and the smell of boiling tar. The odours combined with the humidity give Calcutta streets a unique sensory character.

Traffic

The traffic in Calcutta is nightmarish from midmorning until late evening, even where it is controlled by traffic lights, and in some places by traffic police. Of the Anglo-Indians I spoke to who owned cars, very few drove them. An exception was one elderly man who would drive himself to church each Sunday. Others said they would

⁷ Bourdieu would say that there are many more than just five senses (Bourdieu 1990).

drive in the very early morning or late at night but generally they left this challenge up to their employed drivers. Many Anglo-Indians think of themselves as more western than the local population. Many, too, have been overseas themselves or have family members who have moved permanently overseas. Consequently they frequently make comparisons between the situation in Calcutta and in cities abroad. Comparisons relating to the traffic, for example, were commonplace. While some said that they were afraid to drive overseas, because the traffic moved too fast, most used their experience to make negative remarks about the driving in Calcutta, and about the condition of the roads, and about the corruption of the traffic police (who were believed to earn good money in bribes).⁸ My feeling was that while I was terrified at the thought of driving in Calcutta I was often impressed by how accommodating the drivers were to each other. Certainly, the lanes were not kept to, but when there is so much traffic from one direction and little from another why not improvise?



Plate 3 Traffic in Free School Street

⁸ The police force is regarded by many as a lucrative career – but not because the salary is particularly high.

Services

Calcutta is, on one level, an extremely well serviced city. For a private citizen it is possible to buy, cheaply, almost any home help one could imagine from gardeners, cooks, sweepers and swabbers, quilt makers, dog walkers, food deliverers, shoe cleaners, sweet sellers, ironers, dhobis⁹, and nannies. Wages paid for these services are extremely low. I was told, for example, that it would cost Rs500 (less than NZ\$20) per month for someone to come in every weekday to sweep and swab the floors. I was also told innumerable times that Calcutta was the cheapest city in India in which to live. It is possible, for example, to buy a freshly prepared meal for just a few rupees. An old British woman who has lived in Calcutta for most of her life said that Rs20 (less than NZ\$1) a day covered her food requirements.

On the other hand, at another, more public, level the infrastructure and lack of public resources means that the city is poorly serviced and maintained. The roads are uneven and pot-holed, poor drainage means that monsoon rains quickly flood the streets. Over the time I spent there the city corporation had undertaken a project to build a number of flyovers in the hope of easing the worst areas of traffic congestion. But it seemed that as fast as progress was being made in one area other areas were falling into serious decay, such as drains which blocked and had to be cleared by first of all digging up roads and pavements to get to the pipes. These were never restored to an even surface after the repair.

The Climate

Moorhouse, in writing his history of Calcutta, quotes Mark Twain who “thought the weather of Calcutta ‘enough to make a brass doorknob mushy’” (cited by Moorhouse 1971:18). He himself observes in his description of paintings in the Marble Palace in Calcutta that:

...they are desperate for restoration and some of the oil paint is beginning to slide from the canvasses in the terrible humidity of Calcutta. (1971:22)

A discussion of the environment of Calcutta would be incomplete without a mention of its climate, which was described to me on one trip as “treacherous” (and this was in reference to the coolness (sic!) of the month of December). This term seems apt for

⁹ This is the Hindi name for people who offer a clothes-washing service.

other times of the year; from late March through until the monsoon comes in early July the heat builds up to the point that the authorities advise no one to be on the streets during the middle of the day. Moorhouse describes the effect on inanimate objects:

It becomes so hot that the tar liquefies on the roads and goes oozing down the drains, and the colossal steel mesh of the Howrah bridge is habitually four feet longer by day than it is at night (...) On top of the blistering heat comes the humidity, and it is commonplace for that to register 100 per cent. (1971:24)

From the time the monsoon breaks the temperature becomes more bearable, but there are other problems. The rainfall is so extreme that the streets flood, the sewers flood, and it becomes difficult to have confidence in any body of water. As well as that, the flooding leads to further traffic congestion, and the ponding of water is perfect for breeding malaria-bearing mosquitoes. Intermittent torrential rain and sticky between-downpours-heat carries on for three or four months into September.

At times I escaped the heat and humidity by going into one of the growing selection of western-style air-conditioned cafes or shopping malls. As soon as I re-entered the 'normal' climatic environment my glasses would fog up. I presume that if this was the effect on my glasses then the same would be happening to my skin – which explains the shiny exhausted face looking out from some photographs.

The most pleasant time of the year is the dry winter from December to February when Calcuttans make the most of the pleasant mid 70-degree days and cool nights to wear their warmest shawls and coats. Managing the cool, dry, winter is easy – as long as care is taken to avoid the 'treacherous' dew. It is the heat that is the challenge. As well as some cafes and shopping malls, a number of modern businesses and restaurants have air-conditioning, but most Calcuttans rely, for cooling, on the air movement provided by ceiling fans. The old buildings are built to be habitable in the hottest months with high ceilings, thick walls, small windows, and in some cases, deep shady verandas. More recently constructed, low-ceilinged buildings can be stiflingly hot. The shacks and one-roomed dwellings in the bustee¹⁰ of Tiljala offer very little

¹⁰ Bustee is the local term for what we would call a slum.

protection from the weather, although even the most modest Anglo-Indian homes I visited in Tiljala ran ceiling fans.

At the hottest times of the year the air-conditioned cinemas are used as much as a break from the heat as for entertainment. Cinemas and “the disc” (discos) are popular, and practical, places for young Anglo-Indian couples to conduct courtships at this time of the year.

If one thinks of Calcutta as a character then its sensual dimensions are a very important part of its temperament and Anglo-Indians in Calcutta have to live with them.

PERCEPTION OF THE CITY FROM A BENGALI ACTIVIST

To give another perspective, let me present an extract from an interview with a Calcuttan social activist who has lived all his life in Calcutta.¹¹

What is Calcutta’s heritage and how has that played a role in defining the city today?

Few cities in the world are faced with a situation similar to that which Calcutta confronts. In early times it was the centre of British colonial rule in India and was a premier industrial and port city – a busy hub for trade, commerce, finance and banking. It boasted a reputation for scientific research, arts and culture, and was a showcase of architectural splendour.

In the early 20th century this started to change and Calcutta’s political and economic fortunes began to decline. Over the last three decades the remainder of the city’s proud industrial heritage has crumbled. Unsurprisingly this long process of blight has had a massive social impact.

Calcutta is still a wealthy city, but that largely serves the few who control it. For the rest, the city that was once known as the “city of palaces” is mired in extreme squalor.

What are the biggest immediate challenges facing your city?

Calcutta’s city population is roughly 6 million, and the greater metropolitan area has a population of 14 million. About half the city population, and a third of the metropolitan population, live in degraded, overcrowded slums lacking in basic civic amenities like water and sanitation. In some places this poses acute environmental health risks, with high infant mortality and general morbidity from gastro-intestinal diseases. Additionally, half a million poor people live in entirely unserviced shanty settlements, with the fear of eviction ever looming over them.

Unemployment is high, with little prospect of decreasing. The education system is a shambles. Quality education – defined as that which serves to

¹¹ The interviewee, V. Ramaswamy, sent this to me by email in late 2003 for use in this thesis.

perpetuate privilege – is available only to those who can afford it. The public transport system is in a mess. Traffic is chaotic. Severe socio-economic disparities divide the different linguistic, ethnic and religious groups that make up the city population. The environment is pregnant with latent conflict and violence.

The city and provincial governments are in severe financial crisis, with developmental activity at a standstill. Urban sprawl is destroying ecologically sensitive wetlands on the eastern fringe. Corruption in public life has reached menacing levels, like a monster devouring the masses. Economic globalisation will result in large numbers being consigned to destitution.

Those who matter, and who have the power to effect change are active in securing their own narrow interests. There is no “civil society” to speak of – nobody is engaged in public domain concerns founded on social and environmental justice. For the last 25 years, the state has been ruled by a party that has taken a complete stranglehold over people’s lives, while systematically tutoring the citizenry in delusion.

This pessimistic view is shared by many people I spoke to. Such a perception of Calcutta’s situation results in many wanting to leave India – Calcutta’s problems are seen as being widespread throughout India. People gave different reasons for things being the way they were. Many Anglo-Indians, for example, regard the city’s demise as a result of the withdrawal of Britain from India. However, there are others who have the means to leave but have decided that the good features of the city outweigh the bad.

ANGLO-INDIAN CALCUTTA: PHYSICAL SPACE

DEMOGRAPHY

The issue of ‘numbers’ is at the heart of the original problem I had set out to study. Anglo-Indians are a community but they are also individuals and it is the foreboding sense that the numbers of the latter are declining that was the immediate reason for beginning this work.

It is difficult to obtain an accurate estimate of the current population of Anglo-Indians in Calcutta. Since 1961 Anglo-Indians have not been counted separately in the census (Caplan 2001:74). In addition, as noted by McMenamin, “The population statistics for Anglo-Indians in Census reports has always been questionable” (unpublished:3). This applies as much in Calcutta as anywhere else in India. One reason for the difficulty in obtaining accurate numbers is suggested by McMenamin who, when referring to the

population figures for India generally said: “The 1943 (sic)¹² census puts the Anglo-Indian population at 140,422,¹³ although no doubt it was in fact much greater, because not all sections of the wider community identify themselves as Anglo-Indians” (ibid.). In his 1969 publication Anthony gives the figure of 29,000 in the whole of West Bengal, based on the 1941 Census report (1969: 205). An indication of the uncertainty in population numbers is the fact that Anthony puts forward different figures for the population at the time of Independence – he says that officially it was about 140,000 (1969:203), but he also uses the figure of “about 300,000 souls” (1969:viii), and says he believes the real figure to be between 250,000 and 300,000 (1969:9). This is in comparison with Sen’s figure of 40,000 for Calcutta and West Bengal at the time of WWII based on reports by an Anglo-Indian Welfare Society (1983:40), a figure which is thought to have reduced dramatically from the time of Indian Independence. Since the Census Reports have not specifically identified Anglo-Indians as a minority group for some decades now, the best estimate may be the number of people who profess to be Christians who also speak English as their mother tongue. Although this seems a logical way to estimate the figure, the 1991 census gives just 15,394 as the number of people who claim English as their first language (Census of India, 2003:4). All Anglo-Indians ought to make this claim but don’t.¹⁴ Community leaders in Calcutta gave both the figures of 30,000 families and of 30,000 people when I enquired. The All India Anglo-Indian Association (AIAIA) has figures for their paid-up members only. I asked the Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) currently representing Anglo-Indians for an estimate of the number of Anglo-Indians in Calcutta, as well as her views on emigration and the perceived decline of the community. Her responses were:

You were asking about the decline of the community. I don’t think it’s declining at all, you know. We still have, I would say, around forty thousand Anglo-Indians or more...

Forty thousand total?

Yes, in total. In Calcutta and in West Bengal definitely. In the other parts of West Bengal another twenty, twenty five thousand, there would be.

Oh, like places like Karagphur...?

¹² There wasn’t a census in 1943. Indian censuses are carried out decennially and fall on the first year of the decade.

¹³ Government of India *Census of India*, I, Part I, Table 13, pp.98-99 (as cited by McMennamin 2003:3).

¹⁴ It has been suggested that for reasons to do with the politics of language Anglo-Indians might not choose to identify English as their first language even though it is always the case that it is.

Yes, Karagphur, Adra, you know these places? And Chakhradhapur, all these places. And each place has its own Association and the Anglo- Indians come together at various times. We are trying, those who are more affluent, those who are better off, are trying to help those who are not so well off. And so it's not really declining, if anything I think the sense of belonging together is stronger. So I would say we are a growing community. There are, of course, a number who have emigrated as you know, but now that has stopped. Now I think they realise that their roots are here in India and that it's good for us and they're integrating more with the people here. And we definitely have a place. The Government also is good to us. We have our representation here at the Centre as well. So I think that has helped people to realise that we should perhaps stay on here in this country and do whatever we can.

Make it here rather than...?

Yes, rather than going. And really I feel that if you're doing well here there's no reason to go abroad. At the time when people emigrated there was a little uncertainty about what would happen to them, about what would be their fate. But now I think we are more or less assured of a place here and accepted by the people here. So there's really no need to go abroad.

I've read about the BJP government and their Hinduisation policies – is that affecting people in West Bengal?

Not at all. In fact in West Bengal I think that they're really safe. This is what I keep saying, that the Government is always ready to help. I mean I work with them so I know they're always ready to help the minorities if we have any problem. And where Christians are concerned even, we are very safe. We can still worship freely. There's no persecution or anything like that. So in West Bengal I would say we are better off in that respect than perhaps in other parts of India.

Clearly the MLA's views are but one set. They are more optimistic than those of others but she is far from alone in these views. We will see this optimism expressed both verbally and non-verbally later in this thesis.

ANGLO-INDIAN HABITAT

ANGLO-INDIAN NICHES AND HOMES

The issue of numbers is not trivial for a variety of reasons: politically because political representation depends upon it; culturally because a critical mass is required for survival, especially in an urban environment such as Calcutta. In this respect the story of the Armenians of the city is instructive. It is certainly the case that, as a proportion of the total of the city, there has been a dramatic change in Anglo-Indian presence in Calcutta. I talk about this further, later.

Calcutta's population includes Bengalis¹⁵, Muslims, Biharis, Sikhs, Parsis, Marwaris, Armenians, Chinese and Anglo-Indians. The population of the city is divided by language, religion and caste as well as by the usual social discriminators of class, education and occupation. The range in socio-economic status is huge and is tied to educational achievement and employment. It does not necessarily correlate to ethnicity although there are some patterns. Higher caste Bengalis, Marwaris and Parsis, for example, are generally wealthier than Biharis, Muslims or Anglo-Indians and form the core of the commercial classes.

In the early days of the city it was divided into two main sections: Black Town and White Town with the 'natives' inhabiting the former and the British administrators, businessmen and Anglo-Indians, the latter. According to Thomas (1997), there was a plan for rebuilding the city as recently as 1914 which was to separate it into two distinct areas: In the north and east would lie the Indian district and south of it would be the "chief business houses of the British, the sterling banks, the seats of governments, the public offices and leading hotels" (Thomas 1997:23). As it is, the central district is significantly more influenced by the British (made apparent in the architecture of many buildings in this area) than other parts of the city, and it is in this area that the Anglo-Indians originally made their home. Other areas are considered to be the domain of particular sections of the population. Still others are considered to be more cosmopolitan. On the other hand, as noted by Thomas, dotted about throughout the city, in every ward, are pockets of bustees, and homeless people living on the streets. In the next section I will describe some of the social spaces of the city in which it is likely that Anglo-Indians will be found.

There seemed to be a feeling among some Anglo-Indians in Calcutta that I would want to meet a particular type of Anglo-Indian. I was invited to a birthday party on one of my trips and the friend who had accompanied me later reported that one of the reasons I had been invited was that this group of Anglo-Indians wanted me to meet "a better class of Anglo-Indians". Interestingly this was before I had made a trip to Tiljala where I witnessed the poorest living conditions. Calcuttan Anglo-Indians I spoke to

¹⁵ Although the term 'Bengalis' may more accurately refer to the language group of Bengali speakers, Anglo-Indians, and others I spoke to in Calcutta, used this term only in reference to the Hindus of Bengal. It is important to understand how the 'locals' use terms such as these.

were aware of the way they were generally portrayed overseas. McMenamin makes reference to this issue of the image of Anglo-Indians:

The reason for the [oral history] project arose from the author's family-history of generations who lived in British India, which reflected a happy, even privileged, relationship with both the British and Indians. This is in complete contrast to the poor, restricted and certainly diminished socio-economic lifestyles of Anglo-Indian communities in India described in contemporary academic works. (unpublished:1)

It is not my intention to sensationalise the 'plight' of Anglo-Indians. I merely want to be able to give a sense of the diversity of their lifestyles. I was not able to spend time in all Anglo-Indian residential areas but I attempted to visit those that repeatedly came up as areas I ought to see. The area in which I had anticipated that I would find Anglo-Indians in the highest concentrations was Central Calcutta. Sen (1988) identified the wards 51 to 60¹⁶ as areas where Anglo-Indians could be found in high numbers. These wards cover "Bowbazar, Taltala, Wellesley, Royd Street, Ripon Street, the area between Circular Road and Chowringhee up to Park Street and Park Circus" (1988:242). Other areas that she notes that are popular with Anglo-Indians are Entally, Phulbagan, Iqbalpore, Kidderpore and Tiljala. One area, which she did not refer to, was Picnic Gardens. This is an area beyond Park Circus that is still being developed and has, within the past ten years, become one of the fastest growing residential areas for the community. I describe and discuss some of these areas below.

CENTRAL CALCUTTA

It is in this area that Keith Butler (publication pending) has written about his fictitious character, Puttla Butler looking for Anglo-Indians:

He had returned to Calcutta after 30 years. He walked the city, looking for Anglos in the usual haunts, ambling down Park Circus, reading the oncoming crowd, his eyes scanning for snooty class Anglos – light eyes, fair skin, grazing calves, nice clothes, then down Elliott Rd watching this time for darker Anglos – lychee nut eyes, coffee skin, slicked back hair, then into Wellesley second lane, searching for once-were-rockers, jivers, Anglo Presley's,

¹⁶ Calcutta is divided into wards which are identified by numbers.

slicked back hair, sideburns, collar up, thin leather belts coiled like Brahman holy thread around their waists, then onto Kidderpore and dockyard Anglos living in Muslim bustees and shacks, their homes marked with chunam – white lime, crosses on the doors because when Hindu rioters went on their annual rampage to rip Muslim stomachs in these bustees they ignored the white lime crosses of Christian homes. Puttla found nothing.

He then stood at busy intersections, Chowringhee and Dhurumtalla, Shakespeare Sarani and Nehru, Lenin and Alimuddin, with his eyes shut and listened as the crowds streamed past him, his ears straining for the familiar tell-tale lilt of Anglo voices, hoping for a ‘Hullo men, got a fag?’ or ‘Denzil had a scrap with Harold.’ but all he heard was buzzing and droning and babbling.

Butler’s account highlights the areas of central Calcutta where Anglo-Indians live. Unlike Puttla, I met many Anglo-Indians in this area.¹⁷ Some lived very comfortably, in homes close to the CBD that were spacious, light and airy, and well furnished. In most cases the homes had been family homes for decades although the residents did not usually own them. The home of an elderly man I visited, for example, did not belong to him but he had a perpetual lease that could be passed on to any of his children - as long as they took up residence there. This home was half of the downstairs floor of a large two storied colonial style-building and comprised three large bedrooms, each with an en suite bathroom, a large lounge, dining room, and kitchen as well as a deep enclosed veranda – which is where he spent much of each day. This man employed five servants, still meagre in comparison to another Anglo-Indian household that I visited that employed twenty-two.

Other homes came as a surprise because of their contrast between their street front and internal appearances. I walked down some very grubby sidewalks, through narrow lanes and up ill-kept stairways and ancient manually operated lifts to find myself in

¹⁷ I am not, of course, in a position to compare the numbers of Anglo-Indians in the streets now, with thirty years ago. So my idea of ‘many’ is likely to be very few in comparison to past times. In the last few weeks before completing this thesis I spoke to a friend who had been brought up in Calcutta and now lives in New Zealand. She had recently been to Calcutta for an extended visit and she had made the same observation as Butler through his fictitious character “Puttla”: that in the central city where she had been used to seeing “crowds of Anglo-Indians”, she could now count them on her fingers.

elegantly decorated, spacious and spotless homes. They offered a haven from the outside world.

Every Anglo-Indian home I visited, from the smallest to the most spacious, was spotlessly clean and well organised. In an environment that is polluted and has poorly serviced public amenities this was particularly noticeable and it wasn't something I ever took for granted. Nor was it a feature of all Calcuttan homes I visited. While I took 'practical' clothes to wear on my fieldwork trips – which often meant colours that 'wouldn't show the dirt' – the people I spent time with didn't seem to think in these terms.

This effect was made particularly forcefully late one night after a house party. I had felt at ease and 'at home' during the evening, in part because of the hospitality of the hosts and also because there was a familiarity about the evening based on my memories – the music, the songs, and dancing were from an era I was familiar with. When it came time to leave I walked from their second storied flat into 'midnight in Calcutta' with the feeling that I had been transplanted into a foreign and unknown place. There were two young children asleep in the entranceway with the parents organising themselves to sleep alongside them. The air was warm and fragrant. People were asleep in small groups along the pavement. Dogs were roaming freely. The streets were dark, and deserted. This was the only experience I had of something akin to culture shock – and it occurred well into the second month of one of the early visits.

I lived in central Calcutta for most of the time I was there and visited a number of Anglo-Indians who lived in this area. I was told repeatedly that the area is nothing like it used to be in terms of visibility of Anglo-Indians (which supported the idea of 'Puttla's' fruitless search for 'Anglos' in this area). It is, in fact, in this area that the change in Anglo-Indian demographics is the most noticeable. Over the last decade Anglo-Indians from this densely populated central city district have given up their rented homes in favour of purchasing apartments further out. This movement is an example of the trend of internal migration and the growth in numbers of middle-class property owners that Caplan also observed in Madras (Caplan 1998a: 24). In both cities, migration involved the relocation en masse from one area to another, but for different reasons. In Madras it was because of rapid increase in rental prices,

particularly in Anglo-Indian residential areas. In Calcutta, however, rental increases are strictly controlled under the Thika Tenancy (Acquisition and Regulation) Act of 1981 (Thomas 1999:84). A result of rent controls is that some long-term Anglo-Indian tenants are paying as little as Rs100-500 per month for spacious two roomed inner city apartments.¹⁸ In this area people are extremely well-served with churches, schools, markets, banks, cinemas, beauty salons, cooked-food outlets (from hole-in-the-wall kati roll sellers to high quality restaurants), and employment opportunities. Many of the Anglo-Indians I met from this area were nearing retirement, or had retired from the workforce, and intended to live out their days in this area. In the next section I have included an extract of an interview in which a central-city dweller discusses his reasons for staying put, along with his understanding of why so many have moved from this central area.



Plate 4 The changed face of Elliott Road

¹⁸ In Calcutta there is a range of rental options from paying a small deposit and a higher monthly rental, to paying a substantial deposit (referred to as 'salami') and rent that is fixed and at a very low rate. One young man, for example, said that he was looking at a two bed-roomed apartment near Picnic Gardens for which he would pay a refundable deposit, or salami, of Rs30,000 and monthly rent of Rs2500.

PICNIC GARDENS: INTERNAL MIGRATION DESTINATION

Picnic Gardens is where, more than in any other area of Calcutta, Anglo-Indians are really putting down roots and buying their homes, rather than renting them as they have in the past. Ironically they have given this area the name of ‘Little Australia’ – which would seem to contradict the idea that roots are being put down. An explanation for the name was “if you can’t emigrate, then a home in Picnic Gardens is the next best thing”. This area is reasonably close to the CBD, has a good bus service and, while it is a predominantly Bengali area, it is regarded as being more cosmopolitan than many other districts.

The stated reasons for moving to Picnic Gardens ranged from not wanting to live in an area which was increasingly populated by Muslim families, to wanting to take advantage of the financial incentives being offered to vacate their central city flats. Below is an excerpt of an interview with a man who has chosen to stay in his flat. As well as talking about the reasons for people moving there he discusses Picnic Garden’s short-comings. A year after this interview his son moved to a flat there, in a building that houses several other Anglo-Indian families.

So ah, yes, what I was saying is that Anglo-Indian families who have lived along Ripon Street, Elliott Road, McLeod Street, Wellesley, these areas have been here for, let us say, 50 or 60 years. Okay. Now in the passage of those years they have been paying small rents.

Mostly they rent? They don’t own their own house?

No they don’t own their own homes. Which is sad. They rent. But of course now things are changing. I’ll come to that later. All are rented houses, okay, with small rents in comparison to what people are paying now.

50 or 60 rupees per month?

100 rupees, 150. Okay, that’s reasonable, per month. But suddenly it changed, about seven or eight years back. So it’s all quite recent.

Yes, it is.

There was a Muslim gentlemen who had a business, you know, in making leather shoes and slippers and things like that, and he went to this family who lived along Ripon Street and told them, “Now look here, you have a nice place here. Why don’t you give it to me by way of Power of Attorney?” Now legally speaking Power of Attorney means that you give a letter to your landlord stating that this man is looking after your house now so give him the rent bills. You might say “I am going for a holiday.” So he says, “You give me this flat of yours and I will give you 7 lakhs.”

7 lakhs, that’s 700,000 rupees, is that right?

Yes, 100,000 would be one lakh. Now, the Anglo Indian has never seen one lakh.

Let alone 7.

It's a fact. He has never even seen one lakh. Now when this man comes round the corner and says I'll give you 7 lakhs, he thinks, "Whow!!" Okay? Then someone else told them, because now they were prepared with 7 lakhs in mind, someone else told them, "Why don't you go to Picnic Gardens because there a lot of places are coming up? The Bengalis are building their own houses over there and many will be able to give you a place. You can buy a flat."

With your 7 lakhs?

Yes, you can buy a flat with that. Okay. So when they went over there, at that time, 7 or 8 years back, the Bengali said "You can buy a flat. This is my building and I'll sell you a flat." That means no monthly rent.

Are they high-rise apartment buildings?

Yes, high-rise. High-rise there means about four or five floors. That's all. With say three small rooms. Like this one room could be divided into two.

Okay. So, for four lakhs, three lakhs even... They were very happy. They paid the money. Because they thought to themselves, "My goodness, if I pay four lakhs, I still have three. I'll put the three in the bank and I'll live like a king."

There is mixed feeling in the community about the merits of leaving the central city area. This same man who has resisted the invitation to sell his rights to the family's centrally located rental flat felt that there were a number of reasons against the move.

The houses are like chicken coops. They are very small. They are very congested and not very well ventilated.

The second disadvantage is that the water was not good over there. I think I told you that earlier. The water in Picnic Garden is bad, it's polluted. There's a lot of arsenic in the water.

Is this the water out of the pump?

Yeah. Even out of the tube well. But a lot of arsenic is coming out (...). So, you find families coming down here, to around this area, because they still have their relatives and friends here. And they bring these Bisleri¹⁹ bottles.

Yes, I have seen those. Yes, oh they fill them up...?

They fill them up and take them back in bags...just to drink that water. The water there is yellowish, a dirty colour, and tasteless.

The third disadvantage is transport. They had been living here practically all their lives. They are in their forties and fifties and sixties and suddenly have to jump on buses and jump off buses. I couldn't do it. It's a great distance away. It takes you about 45 minutes to an hour to get there. And

¹⁹ Bisleri is a brand of bottled water.

the roads are very narrow also. One bus is going up this way, the other is coming and there's a tight squeeze, and people are walking...It's terrible. So transportation is a problem. They can't hurriedly go anywhere or do anything.

The fourth big problem is the community. They are not used to the Bengali community. Now the Bengali community's way of looking at life is so different from the Muslims, who they have grown up with. You can fight with the Muslims. You can tell them and they will listen to you. They will respect you. But when you go to a Bengali community...the Bengalis have always been the educated class of Indians, but the Muslims are not that. You can shout at them and they'll listen to you. They respect you if you have a position. But these people have gone there and the mentality of the Bengali is, ah, "Who came to your house? Why did he come to your house?"

They want to know?

Yeah. "Who is he? Why is that person staying with you?" All this they had never experienced you see. "You are playing music too loud in your house. It is disturbing my children."

So there's a lot of interference...?

A lot of interference. A lot of problems. Now they are wringing their hands and saying, "Why did we do it?" Money is running out at the bank, you see. And, what happened in the beginning was, they kept advising all their friends and family "Give your place up, give it up."

So there were a number of Muslim developers who offered this 7 lakhs?

Even 10 lakhs.

It went up as high as 10 lakhs?

As high as 10 lakhs. And if you have a palatial place, a big spread, it can go to 15, 20 lakhs even.

And these were places that weren't even owned by the Anglo-Indians? They were rented?

They were rented.

So they paid them to leave?²⁰

Yes, to leave. And they said, "You don't worry about the landlord. We will fight it out with the landlord." So the Power of Attorney will last about six to eight months and the landlord is going to question them but they said, "You don't worry about that because we are business people." They said, "We will make an agreement with the landlord and transfer it into our name." And it's been happening. And today the statistic is that there are 635 Anglo-Indian families in Picnic Gardens.

Who have moved from this area?

²⁰ In a similar manner, but for different reasons, it was suggested in an article on the so-called Hindu/Muslim riots in Calcutta in 1992 that 'promoters' or property developers took the opportunity to inflame the rioters in order to clear land for development (Das 2000). Particularly relevant is the comment that: "In the pre-riot days a group of promoters are thus said to have offered (...) Rs20,000 as an incentive to desert their huts" (2000:297).

From around this area. Yeah.

Are they forming a community there? Are they managing to form some sort of Anglo-Indian community?

Unfortunately so far no one has taken the step to try and get them organised. Each is living in their own little world, you know. And of course now there is a church coming up there. And ...

Oh, is a church being built there?

Yes. A Roman Catholic Church. It's coming up there, so there is hope, because that's one of the plans of the church, to get the community together. Let's see what they can do.

What about schools? Are there any schools?

There is Sister Marisa's Marion Education Centre.

A year after recording that interview I attended a church service at Picnic Gardens. It was held at The Marion Education Centre because the diocese had not gained permission from the KMC (Kolkata Municipal Corporation) to commence building a church and community centre on the land they had bought for that purpose. At the end of the Mass the priest announced that after six years they still did not have building permission – they had been repeatedly turned down on the grounds that the access road was too narrow. The priest beseeched anyone for ideas to help them strengthen their application. He added that he would be interested in any ideas, as long as it did not involve money. After the Mass Sister Marisa showed me the land that the diocese have bought. It is within a hundred metres of the Education centre. I was told that she had had no problems in obtaining permission to build the school.



Plate 5 Sister Marisa at the site of proposed church

In 2004 I was given a news clipping from the *Herald*, a Catholic parish newspaper, announcing that Calcutta was to have a new church and community centre, at Picnic Gardens. The church is to be called “Church of Our Lady of Vailankanni” and the news clipping was as much an announcement as a call for funds.

It is important for the formation of a cultural community of Anglo-Indians in Picnic Gardens that they have a space to meet. In this way the other communities they live alongside will also be aware of the Anglo-Indians among them and, hopefully, will respect them. A community centre would provide a space to be Anglo-Indian, as well as being part of the church community. Their attachment to a church may result in Anglo-Indians being able to build up their reputation in positive ways rather than the oft-heard negative stereotypical ways. For Anglo-Indians their sense of being the victims of negative stereotyping is very important. D’Cruz (1999) has analysed stereotypes in fictional literature. But stereotyping is also, from the point of view of Anglo-Indians, something that happens on an everyday basis. In particular, they are concerned about the sense they have that Anglo-Indian women are perceived as being promiscuous and Anglo-Indian men as drunken layabouts.

THE BOW BARRACKS

Though still part of ‘Central Calcutta’ the Bow Street Barracks has its own identity. Located in the central business district of Bow Bazaar, the barrack buildings have been home to Anglo-Indians for several generations, from the time the US army personnel vacated after WWII. Nowadays the population is about 60% Anglo-Indian along with Chinese, Bengalis, Gujaratis, Goans, and Muslims. All of the tenants are facing the prospect of relocation after The Calcutta Improvement Trust, in 1981, issued letters to the tenants and residents of the 132 flats advising them that “the houses were condemned and unfit for occupation” (Action Research in Conservation of Heritage 2001:5). The trust continued to take rent until April 1999 when tenants were once again advised of the condemned nature of their dwellings and that, should they continue to live there, it would be at their own risk.



Plate 6 Bow Barracks

The Barracks are made up of four, three-storied, solid brick buildings of one-, two-, and three- bed-roomed flats. The one-bed-roomed places would be better described as ‘bed-sits’ or studio flats. Each has a kitchen area and storage area but shares bathroom facilities. The two and three bed-roomed flats are quite spacious, each having a kitchen, bathroom, veranda as well as a separate living area. Because of the tenancy dispute there has been no maintenance by the trust that owns the buildings but individual tenants carry out minor maintenance to their flats, such as repairing the plaster and repainting the walls.

There are also some informal living arrangements at the Barracks such as a Bengali woman and her mother and small baby who live under the stairs between the ground and first floor. They have made a snug, but tiny, home for themselves that is sheltered from the weather, probably safer than the streets and is close to the place of work for the young mother who cleans several homes in the Barracks. Another example of an informal arrangement is that of an Anglo-Indian family who live on one of the roofs of the barracks in the single-roomed servants’ quarters, which are allocated (and in this case, sublet) to each of the three-bed-roomed flats. This room was barely large enough for the family’s needs, with room for one small double bed and hardly enough space to move from the entrance at one end to another at the opposite end. Nevertheless, in spite of the lack of space, they found room for the Anglo-Indian hallmark: the showcase. To increase the living space the tenants, or occupiers, of this room had

arranged a type of waterproof awning under which they stored their cooking supplies and equipment. They had some seating here too and used it for dining and entertaining visitors. At the opposite end of the pucca²¹ room and several feet outside was a separate room that appeared to be used for ablutions. Just to the side of this area they stored water,²² which they had to bring up three flights of stairs.

This discussion illustrates the varied nature of Anglo-Indian occupancy in this particular area.

TILJALA

If Calcutta evokes horror in the western imagination, Tiljala has a similar effect on the imagination of middle-class Calcuttans, as this extract taken from an interview with a wealthy Anglo-Indian businessman demonstrates:

I realised that the community was falling into backwardness. It had a genteel wealth, this community, at one point in time and slowly because of emigration and the loss of jobs and what have you, they started moving into the slums.

Into Tiljala?

Yes, Tiljala. And Tiljala shocked me. I was shocked. I was living in the city and I had no knowledge of the circumstances of people who lived in Tiljala.

The dwellings of Tiljala are mostly one-roomed homes, tenement-style. Some are built around small central courtyards where activities can overflow from the homes into this more public area – the washing and drying of clothing, space for children to play. I use the term ‘public’ as if they have an alternative. This may misrepresent their situation. Their public and normally accepted private lives merge to the point where they have very little that is private in their lives. Their comings and goings, visitors, raised voices, cooking odours, etcetera are easily observable by others. Most homes in this area do not have windows so an effect of the climate is that it is almost essential to keep the door of their home open in order to catch any breeze.

²¹ ‘Pucca’ is a Hindi word in common usage referring to a permanent construction, as opposed to ‘kutchra’, which refers to a makeshift or temporary construction.

²² In addition to the two ‘official’ water deliveries per day, made by council water trucks, water is sold by the pani wallah (Hindi for water-man) who carries it on his back in leather bags.

Although I visited this area a number of times, I came and left from different places at different times so never achieved a sense of the layout or even the size of the area. It seemed labyrinthine with mainly single storied dwellings and the occasional multi-storied, quickly constructed building divided up into a large number of small, low-ceilinged apartments. On each visit a resident, who acted as guide leading me through narrow people-filled alleyways from one person's home to the next, accompanied me. I had the sense that a guide was thought to be required as much for navigation as for security reasons. At times people commented in a vernacular language as we went past. I couldn't understand what was being said and on enquiring from my guide was told that it was better that I didn't know. I was left with the impression that some sort of obscenity was involved. On one occasion I asked to be taken to a particular person's home and was told that they lived "in the interior" and it was too risky to take me there. An Anglo-Indian woman who was involved with a social service organisation told me that Anglo-Indian girls are sometimes assaulted, and have even disappeared from this area. She said that where so many had to share toilet facilities it was especially dangerous for the young girls.

I came to know some of the people living in this area so made my own arrangements to visit – always with a local resident to act as a guide. The person who had made the arrangements for my first visit, on hearing of my plans for a subsequent midday visit asked: "Are you mad? The people you'll want to visit will be taking their midday meal, and they'll be embarrassed because they won't have enough to share with you. Then they'll want to have a rest. And it's a real hot spot, the housing there traps the heat. It will be too hot for you. You'll get head swings." I talked with my guide for the afternoon about this opinion to which he responded: "Yes, it can be hot – but today it's not so bad. You have been in worse. The people in Tiljala mostly are too poor to have a meal at midday. They don't have to have a rest in the afternoon – they aren't at work and they would rather have some company." I put the trip off for an hour or so by interviewing him and then we set off.



Plate 7 Tiljala fronting the railway tracks with an Anglo-Indian woman at her doorstep



Plate 8 Tiljala behind the railway tracks

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

In early 2003 I spoke to the Anglo-Indian MLA of West Bengal about the housing situation for Anglo-Indians in Calcutta:

And now they are going (further) out because of housing...This is a problem that I have particularly taken up during this tenure of my office. I hope to be able to do something because housing is a big problem for our people. It's very difficult to find a place in central Calcutta unless they've been living there for years and years. But young people, when they get married, find it's hard to pay the salamis and all that. To own a place is very difficult.

In central...?

Yes, in central Calcutta. But what is happening is that people are moving to the outskirts. It's cheaper and now there's a new township coming up at a place called Rajarhat.

Rajarhat?

Rajarhat. It's beyond the airport. And there they're going to have low cost housing mainly for people like members of minority communities. I've spoken to the Minister for Minority Affairs. I've also spoken to the Housing Minister and they've assured me that there will be a number of flats for the Anglo-Indian community. And of course I have to follow it up. But the thing is that some organisation must be able... or the individual should be able to put up some money. Even though it's not much they still have to have something.

My sense of Anglo-Indians is that not many would like to live so far from the centre of the city, but some may want to do so because of their circumstances.

In these brief accounts of various niches of Calcutta occupied by Anglo-Indians I have tried to give a sense of the way they live in the city as a distinct minority. The very fact that they identify strongly with particular areas, rather than living in dispersed homes across the city, shows their desire to be close to each other. The central area is, clearly, still one which they identify with particularly strongly, even if they don't occupy it in the numbers they once did. Butler's story demonstrates this because 'Puttla' starts his search there.

ANGLO-INDIAN CLOTHING

As the quote from Butler indicates, not only do Anglo-Indians think of themselves as being attached to particular parts of the city but also it is clear that clothing is also a distinctive marker for them and for those who engage with them. Further into this thesis, in the chapter on Christianity, I will discuss a particularly interesting aspect of

their domesticity, that of their very evident Christianity. The homes I visited all housed altars, or at least holy pictures, in prominent places. I was told early on that this was a marker of an Anglo-Indian home, along with the showcase and, often, a sound system of some type. In this section I will describe some of the more day-to-day aspects of domestic life.

It is more difficult to recognise Anglo-Indian men by their clothing than it is to recognise Anglo-Indian women. Anglo-Indian and non-Anglo-Indian men who live and work in the city frequently wear long tailored trousers and open-necked business shirts.²³ Women, on the other hand, wear a range of clothing. Middle-aged to older Anglo-Indian women are easily recognisable by their western clothing – usually modest skirts and blouses, sometimes trousers or dresses. In central Calcutta, large numbers of teenagers of all ethnic and religious communities also wear western clothing. Most mature Calcuttan women, however, wear the ‘modest’ clothing of the shalwar kameez or sari. Many Anglo-Indians also wear shalwar kameez to work – as much for comfort as to avoid unwanted attention, or simply to blend in with others in their workplace. One young Anglo-Indian woman I spoke to worked in an upmarket international clothing store in the CBD. At work she wore the fashionable, western clothing sold by the store. She lived close to where she worked and usually walked to the shop but said that on the few days that she had to take public transport she made sure she wore more ‘modest’ clothing than that which she wore to work in order to avoid lewd stares and suggestive comments. She seemed slightly exasperated that she needed to do this but accepted that it was in *her* interests to conform to the locally acceptable norms of bodily attire. It is generally understood that western clothing worn by many Anglo-Indian women may make them more likely targets of uninvited attention.

Anglo-Indian women I spoke to generally found that walking in the central city area was not a pleasant experience as they were prey to unwelcome attention, especially when they wore western clothing, but not only at those times. I frequently heard comparisons between the experiences of being able to walk around freely in foreign

²³ At times Anglo-Indian men wear non-western clothing for example, a kurta pyjama. This is unusual and elicits comments indicating that clothing is an important cultural marker. The wearer, for example, may be described as ‘becoming an Indian’. In another instance it was pointed out as ‘proof’ that the wearer was not Anglo-Indian at all.

cities, with the experience of feeling quite unsafe (or at least, uncomfortable) on Calcuttan streets. In fact, the incidence of attacks on women (also known as ‘eve-teasing’) is relatively rare. In the many months I lived in and walked around the streets I never felt unsafe (even though I experienced minor incidents of being pinched and punched on two occasions). I attribute that to the fact that there were always so many people around and I was confident that among them would always be at least one who would come to my assistance if necessary. One aspect of public life in Calcutta that distinguishes it from ‘foreign’ cities is that most of the people on the streets are men. In the central areas the men are likely to be more westernised but in some of the outlying areas of the city they are likely to be ‘orthodox’ and follow strict rules about dress.

The following is an excerpt taken from an interview with an Anglo-Indian university student about clothing. She distinguishes different parts of the city in terms of what clothing may be comfortably worn:

When we went to your place last week, you were saying that when you were there [in Topsia; a very high density almost exclusively Muslim area], you felt you couldn't really wear your usual college clothes [jeans and tight fitting tops]...

Yeah, you couldn't really wear those because everybody around there stares at you so weirdly, because they are all so covered up and orthodox. So they believe like other girls also should be the same.

Do they pass comments?

Yes, they pass comments, you know. Weird comments.

What sort of things?

You just can't repeat it. They are so weird.

I see, dirty sort of comments?

Yeah. Dirty comments, yeah. They seem to scrutinise you as soon as you are walking past and then... it's really bad. You or your friend, they talk about you. It makes you really conscious of yourself then you just don't feel like wearing it, they won't make you feel comfortable. But it's better where you live [in the Central city area]. And here [in Park Circus] it's okay too.

So in Bengali areas it's okay?

It's much better.

Is it because they're not so orthodox or is it just that they don't make the comments?

No, no. It's just that their dress sense is not so strict. They don't believe in covering up and all that sort of thing. The girls wear pants and skirts and all, that's fine. I mean the women, the married women and the elderly women,

they wear their saris and all, but the younger group they dress up in whatever they want. It's fine like.

So it's in the Muslim areas that it's a problem.

Yes.

To sum up, clothing is a very important dimension of Anglo-Indian life, especially for women. It is both a burden and also, on the other hand, something they value because of how it expresses their identity.²⁴ I discuss this further in a later chapter.

THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY

Moorhouse observed that if Anglo-Indians:

...possessed a keener sense of history, if they had attended more carefully to the political winds that were beginning to stir towards the end of the nineteenth century, [they] might have served their own future better than they did. (1983:142)

Moorhouse's comment resonates with the idea of lost opportunities, an idea which, in part, expresses how Anglo-Indians see themselves, both individually and collectively.

Anglo-Indians' sense of history is based on a number of different types of resources: These take several forms, biographical, and fictional being the most common. Biographical accounts include such works as Gloria Moore's family history, *The Lotus and the Rose* (1986) while fictional accounts include Alan Sealy's *The Trotternama* (1988) and John Masters' *Bhowani Junction* (1954). In the case of the fiction, some of the authors have made use of verifiable material as well as fables and settings familiar to those Anglo-Indians who are interested in their history. There are also a small number of excellent treatises that explore Anglo-Indian history. I shall juxtapose historians' history of Anglo-Indians in Calcutta with research participants' sense of that history. In both their history of the city and the history of their own community the research participants' view of history varies – with education, life experiences, and significance of their identity as Calcuttan, and as Anglo-Indian. In the main, and predictably, Anglo-Indians of Calcutta do not have the same historical sense of themselves as a historian does.

²⁴ For further discussion of Anglo-Indian clothing see Caplan (2001) and Sen (1983).

THE HISTORIAN'S HISTORY

The following is a brief account of the history of Calcutta, drawing principally on Geoffrey Moorhouse's work on Calcutta.

Moorhouse, in an early comment about the site of the city, says:

Some of Charnock's sailors found it so unhealthy that they christened their landing place Golgotha. Yet on this bog the British created their capital in India. Nothing but commercial greed could possibly have led to such an idiotic decision. (Moorhouse 1971:26)

Before the seeds of the sprawling metropolis were sown there were several small native villages on the banks of the Hooghly. The one which the modern city takes its name from is Kalikata which has mythical links to the powerful and frightening Hindu goddess, Kali. The first European contact in this area was with Portuguese merchants who attempted to establish a trading post up stream from Kalikata. The French also had designs to establish a secure trading post in the region. Administrators of the Mogul Empire varied in their treatment of these would-be settlers but none managed to establish a secure settlement before the British did. The Portuguese and the French were more successful in establishing themselves elsewhere in India (Moorhouse 1971:27).

British settlers, as employees of the East India Company, secured a legitimate foothold in the area in 1636, after one of their surgeons, Mr Gabriel Boughton, successfully treated Shah Jehan's daughter for serious burns. The doctor was offered a reward for his services. He accepted, and as a loyal employee of the company, requested that "his nation might have liberty to trade, free of all duties, in Bengal, and to establish factories in that country" (Moorhouse 1971:28). In August 1690 the infamous Job Charnock came from Madras as the representative of the East India Company bringing with him a group of factors (commercial staff) "along with their Indian wives and children, and thirty soldiers under an Officer" (Pearson 1954:24) thus creating the first generation of Anglo-Indian children in Calcutta. Even with permission having been granted for the East India Company to trade and settle, hefty bribes had to be paid to various Indian authorities in order that they were able to continue, and prosper. By 1756 fifty European ships visited annually, bringing trade estimated at one million

pounds sterling. Along with the prosperity came a rise in the English population from twelve hundred in 1720 to twice that in 1750 (Pearson 1954:75). By this time the 'white town' was becoming established: Fort William had been built, as had St Anne's Church. The Freemasons' society and lodge had been established, and the first theatre had been opened. By 1750 the estimated total population (including the locals, British and other Europeans) living in white town, black town and outlying villages was estimated at 400,000 (Moorhouse 1971:42). More than now, Anglo-Indians would have been a significant portion of this population.

The growing city was briefly lost to British settlement after the death of Nawab Alivardi (the Muslim ruler of Bengal) and his replacement by Siraj-ud-dualah who attacked the British fortifications (Wild 2000). This led to the notorious incident referred to as "The Black Hole" of Calcutta. On 20 July 1756, the day before monsoon broke that year, the Muslim ruler, the Nawab of Bengal overthrew the British Fort and locked his British captives in the Company's punishment cell for the night. In the morning only twenty-three of the 146 of the captives were still alive.²⁵ Less than a year later Robert Clive led a Company army in the Battle of Plassey, which had the result of reinstating the British Company in Calcutta. Their position was strengthened once the Nawab had been assassinated and replaced by a Muslim leader acceptable to the Company. Compensation in the form of more than ten million rupees and close to nine hundred square miles of land south of Calcutta (still known as the 24 Parganas (Moorhouse 1971:45)) was paid to the Company. The land ownership put them in the position of being the major rent collectors of the area which gave them the status of governing the State.

Approximately a century later, in 1858, the Crown absorbed the Company as it formed the British Empire in India with Calcutta as its administrative centre. The 16,000 strong Company of soldiers transferred to the British Army, Queen Victoria became the Queen Empress, and India the 'Jewel in the Crown' of her Empire. This was a time of commercial progress with the first Railway-train, the discovery of coal reserves, and the opening up of jute factories, and the exporting of tea from up-country gardens (Moorhouse 1971:70). As the British were becoming more and more

²⁵ These numbers have been challenged with one Indian historian speculating that only nine were locked up, six survived and those who died did so of wounds (Wild 2000:139-140).

profitably established, educated middle-class Bengalis began to react to their growing success in their city. 1861 saw the formation of The Society for the Promotion of National Feeling (Moorhouse 1971:80-81), which encouraged the local Bengali population to use the Bengali language rather than English, and wear traditional Indian clothing and eat Indian food rather than British.

I am aware as I write the historian's history of Calcutta that it is very much a history of the British in Calcutta. This is explicable due to the influence of the British on the city. The architectural landscape of central Calcutta remains unmistakably British. Moorhouse notes that according to a correspondent to *The Englishmen* near the end of the nineteenth century:

Calcutta is a purely English city. The city belongs and has always belonged to the English, and the native community in it is simply a foreign and parasitical community, which would cease to exist if the English were to abandon it. Its site was selected and the land taken up for it was taken up by the English. They founded it, built it, occupied it, maintained it, defended it, regulated it, and it is still from their commerce and enterprise that its revenues are now developed. (1971:81-82)

Even today there is no question of the origins of the city – at least in the central areas.²⁶

The statement quoted above gave expression to increasing feelings of unrest in Bengal. Since the time of 'the mutiny' (which is known by Indians as the First War of Independence) grumblings from the Bengali population of Calcutta had been heard. The Calcutta Corporation was increasingly pressured to reduce British dominance and include representation from Bengalis. It was due in large part to this increasing feeling of unrest and foreboding that a major governmental change took place. In 1912 with the population of Calcutta at over one million (including about 14,000 British, and 16,000 Anglo-Indians) the British transferred the seat of government to Delhi.

²⁶ At one time the British-in-India were known as Anglo-Indians, in a different sense, obviously, to what is meant by Anglo-Indians today. One of the interesting features of Calcutta is that a lot of its public architecture is Anglo-Indian, in this different sense of the term - but a sense that nevertheless is important because it incarnates the encounter that produced Anglo-Indians, in the contemporary sense of the term.

Even though the seat of government had moved to Delhi, Calcutta continued to be the most important commercial centre of India through the early decades of the 20th Century and right up to World War II. During WW II it was an important staging post for British action in South East Asia. The war speeded up the construction of Howrah bridge across the Hooghly river which was the catalyst for the development of the western shores of the river.

At Independence, there were bloody conflicts between the Muslim and Hindu residents of the city. It became the capital of the state of West Bengal and enjoyed a period of moderate calm for a decade or so even though this period saw the decline of its relative importance as a centre for commerce.

A Marxist government was elected in 1967 and it has had a leftist government ever since. This, along with the Bengali sense of being the cultured elite of India, has given the city a unique flavour amongst Indian cities.

The most significant aspect of Calcutta's recent history is the growth in its population. This was given huge impetus by the influx of migrants from Bihar as well as refugees from the newly formed state of Bangladesh, in 1971. It has, therefore, a strange mixture of a left-leaning government, declining commercial significance, and a huge population growth.

ANGLO-INDIANS' ETHNO-HISTORY

In the section above I have given a synoptic history of Calcutta, one drawing on accounts of a fairly traditional history. In this section I don't discuss this kind of history. I am more interested in trying to convey the place of the idea of history in Anglo-Indian lives.

It seems to me that while most Anglo-Indians do have some idea of how their community came into existence, very few have a good knowledge of the details of their community history since those early colonial times. That they have no formal education in their history (or their 'culture') has to exacerbate this situation.²⁷ On many occasions Anglo-Indians commented to me that Anglo-Indians do not know their own history. They were disparaging about their community in relation to this situation. I

²⁷ I discuss this issue further in a later chapter.

was puzzled about this: Why was it perceived that there was a lack of a sense of history? And why was there concern about it? As luck would have it, I was able to discuss this issue with Sanal Mohan, an Indian ethnographic historian, presently based in Calcutta but who was in New Zealand for a few months as I was writing up this portion of the thesis. He wondered if there might be a link between Anglo-Indian's degree of literacy and their relative lack of a comprehensive knowledge of their own history. He contends that a non-literate society is likely to have a strong oral history tradition, whereas a literate society is more likely to have their history recorded in text. And also that a literate society will be more likely to be concerned with the issue of 'proof', or verifiability. In contrast, a society with an oral tradition will be less concerned about proof. That is, it is likely to be important for members of a literate society to be able to record their past as an unbroken verifiable chronology. Given this difference, then the personal transmission of historical knowledge in a literate society becomes a problem. Whereas history in an oral society is transmitted directly through persons, history becomes disembodied, literally, in a literate one. It becomes the realm of specialists.

On the other hand, in terms of a personal history, a history of families, I was reminded of Bear's (1998) thesis, and her memoir (2000), where she discussed the, frequently unsuccessful, pursuit of archival data by Anglo-Indians wanting proof about details of their own forbears. I was also reminded of a discussion with an Anglo-Indian writer who said he had an idea to write about the individual 'paper chase' that Anglo-Indians are involved in throughout their lives, particularly those who emigrate. And thirdly, I was reminded of visits to very poor Anglo-Indians who had shown me their most precious possessions: all paper.²⁸ In the case of one woman living in the bustee of Tiljala, for example, it was her marriage certificate and her husband's death certificate that she kept in a tin box on her altar. For another it was the passport he had been issued with but was never likely to use. I was also reminded of Barnard's thesis (2004) in which he asserts that even in non-literate societies the printed word is revered, but in literate societies it is as though putting something in print makes something 'true' in a way it isn't without being put into print.

²⁸ Hage, at a symposium, made reference to the significance of certain pieces of paper when he writes of the preciousness of Lebanese immigrants' certificates of citizenship.

For Anglo-Indians, constantly in search of printed proof of their European forbears, those kinds of historical documents are very important. Their personal histories are likely to be disjointed and incomplete. So being literate in combination with not being able to verify aspects of their (community and personal) past is bound to make them feel troubled about the fact that they don't know their own history.

In addition, it may be the case that many literate people do not know the details of their past but the difference between them and Anglo-Indians is that they also know that should they decide to, they can learn about it. Anglo-Indians on the other hand have very few resources that they could turn to for a sense of their own history in their own terms. My own experience in attempting to purchase copies of histories written by Anglo-Indians was unsuccessful. The books are no longer in print, and because the initial print runs were small very few are available second-hand. Instead I had to rely on borrowing books from the few people I found who had copies.²⁹ I am hopeful that this situation will improve shortly having recently become aware of an Anglo-Indian 'popular history' being written by two people in Melbourne, one of them an Anglo-Indian.³⁰ Should this project be completed it will help to fill a gap in what is currently available on Anglo-Indian history.

And, finally and paradoxically, in broad terms Anglo-Indians are very conscious of their history, perhaps more than others. The most pivotal event in the history of Anglo-Indians, other than the colonial presence in India, is Indian Independence, which saw a dramatic change in their social location. They are all aware of this – more aware of it, for example, than, say, New Zealanders about the key events like the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have tried to give a sense of the wider material and historical context of the lives of Anglo-Indians in Calcutta. Just as it is impossible to capture the richness and depth of the lives of individuals, so too it is impossible to capture the richness and depth of the life of the city in which the individuals live. However, to get

²⁹ Many of the copies that I saw in Calcutta are in poor condition; suffering from the humid conditions and the vagaries of silverfish. An important project for the future may be to digitally preserve these materials.

³⁰ Michael Ludgrove and Lynne Hadley are currently writing this work and expect it to be published by Penguin India later this year.

a sense of the lives of individuals it is important to have a feel for the habitat they occupy.

PART TWO: PRACTICES AND PERFORMANCES

CHAPTER FOUR

AN INDIAN CHRISTIANITY?

“I think we are a very God-fearing type of people.” Jane

“It’s hard to be a Christian in India.” Brother James, a charismatic preacher who has an Anglo-Indian following

“We, Indians, are all spiritual people. We worship different gods but we all do so fervently. People say we do so because we’ve got nothing. That we pray to have a better life, and if we had the sorts of lives they have in the West then we wouldn’t need our religion. They say that, they do! Someone said it to me.” Philomena

INTRODUCTION

One of my first impressions of the Calcutta Anglo-Indian community was of their very obvious Christianity. It is central to their personal lives and to the life of their community. They are regular church-goers, display altars in public areas of their homes, go on pilgrimages, and at all social levels, freely discuss their faith.

Philomena, who I have quoted above, lamented the fact that her brother and sister who have left India “left for a better life but I don’t know that that’s what they’ve got. Materially it’s better, yes, but spiritually...”. She knows (or strongly suspects) that none of her family practice their faith in the way she and her family and most Christians in Calcutta do and she emphasised the centrality of Christianity to the lives of Anglo-Indians there.

According to its Constitution, India is a secular nation. Increasingly, however, it seems to be re-casting its identity from a secular to a Hindu State.¹ The issue of religion, therefore, is increasingly central to ethnic and individual identity. From the

¹ The removal, in the 2004 national elections, of the exceedingly pro-Hinduism BJP-led government may affect this ‘recasting’ trend.

point of view of this minority Christian community there has been a feeling of apprehension associated with this development.

In this chapter I describe and discuss the faith based activities I observed while in Calcutta as well as the displays of religious material culture, and look briefly at the mechanisms by which Christianity may act to strengthen the Anglo-Indian community identity. I begin by discussing the impact of sharing religious beliefs with one's research participants.

There is a change in the tone of my writing in portions of this part of the thesis. As I have already indicated my ethnographic sensibility was subject to strains and conflicts during the course of research and writing up. This chapter and those following are more engaged with themes than stories, though the latter are not neglected. The writing is true to my experience of the story of my research.

RESEARCHING ANGLO-INDIAN CHRISTIANITY

As I point out later, others have observed that researching Christianity is a problem for anthropologists. In this section I will discuss my own experiences and stance to the study of Anglo-Indian Christianity as well as, briefly, that of others.

THE DILEMMA OF BEING A CATHOLIC FIELDWORKER

Of all the practices on which the anthropologist reports (...), religion is the most likely to raise suspicions that the anthropologist has gone native.
(Klass 1995:2)

The fact that I had been brought up a Catholic, the fact that I knew the ritual responses – the correct verbal and physical behaviour – gave me an entrée in to the community, which I hadn't anticipated.² I had thought, when I thought about impression management, that I would present myself as part of a close-knit family unit, as a mature married woman, with children. I hadn't, however, known enough about the community, when I first became involved, to realise what significance my Catholicism would have.

² Anne-Marie Fortier (1996) also writes about her Catholicism giving her initial access to contacts, in her case, within the Italian Catholic community in London.

A few years ago a Singaporean post-graduate student who was carrying out research in New Zealand made the point that New Zealanders he met hardly ever talked about religion out of a religious context. I agreed, admitting that I too would always wait for some sign before ever asking a person about their religious convictions, and that a sign was seldom forthcoming.

This reluctance, or inability, to demonstrate religious affiliation is not the case in Calcutta where a person's religious convictions is more often than not made obvious either verbally or by some adornment of their person, vehicle, business or home. It became relatively easy for me to identify Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Female Anglo-Indian Christians, for example, were easily identifiable by their clothing and often wore a cross on a necklace.³ I was frequently asked if I were a Christian, not only by Anglo-Indians but also by Bengalis who presumed that because I was a westerner I would be a Christian.

There is no question that my religious background gave me easy access to both people and to practices. Because of the nature of their own faith, both individually and as a community, I was almost never asked about the way I practiced my faith when I was 'at home'. As I observed them practicing their faith, they observed me – as I attended Sunday and other services, as I took part in religious processions, recited the Rosary, and visited pilgrimage sites.

At times I felt uncomfortable about perhaps misleading them, giving them a false impression of my religious practice when not in India. I also, at times, felt uncomfortable about using my faith, however unintentionally, to gain access to these people. At the same time my faith grew, so I then felt uncomfortable about using my research to build up my faith, and wondered how it would affect my ability to be a rational, objective observer. I wondered, as I became more involved at a spiritual level with their church, would that lead me to emphasise a phenomenon that, while increasingly important to me, was not particularly significant to them? Some months after returning from Calcutta, as I prepared to write this chapter, I came across a discussion of suspicions surrounding anthropologists who study religion especially in

³ In a city where different religions were adorned differently depending on ritual observance I felt quite at home wearing ash on my forehead for the day after attending Ash Wednesday service.

terms of them “going Native” (Klass1995:2-5). It seemed that my self-doubts were mirrored by my profession’s.

Klass notes that some anthropologists, for example, Frazer, give the impression of being embarrassed about being seen to be impressed by the belief systems of their research participants lest readers interpret their interest as conversion (1995:1-7).⁴ This is not a concern shared by anthropologists researching and writing about other aspects of a culture or social system (with the exception, as noted by Klass, of those exploring issues relating to sex). Bowie also comments on the “widespread bias in anthropological circles against Christianity, especially mission Christianity” and that “anthropologists commonly stress their distance from the beliefs and practices of their informants”(Bowie 2003:67). Klass claims that rather than being methodologically rigorous it is problematic to claim that the belief systems one is writing about should not be taken seriously; that is, that a society’s beliefs are ‘false’ in some way. He concludes his argument saying that it is better to be a ‘believer’ than to defensively distance oneself from the beliefs of the people whose belief systems you are writing about.

It is not necessary for an anthropologist to either agree or disagree with what he or she is reporting. If, however, the anthropologist shares the beliefs of his or her research participants it is essential, in the spirit of the reflexive methodology, to make this fact evident when writing about it. Even then, as Bowie (2003), (who draws on her experience as a Catholic Focolare Movement ‘insider’ in her research site in the Cameroons), comments: “to admit to a spiritual affinity with fieldwork subjects, rather than friendship, common interest, or perhaps advocacy, may be to test recent subjectivist, relativist, stances to their limits, inviting the charge of illegitimate bias and religious apologetic” (2003:51). Once a fieldworker is at the stage of writing, what else can they do apart from declaring their position? The alternative is to avoid research where this may be a factor, but if my experience is anything to go by, it is not always possible to know enough in advance to take this decision.

⁴ Matthew Engelke (2002) and Edith Turner (2003) also write about the “problem of belief” in relation to the work of Durkheim, Evans-Pritchard, and Victor Turner (the latter two converted to Catholicism).

Based on my experience in carrying out research where the community was very receptive to my presence among them, it seems to be advantageous to share in some important way, their belief system. While I was not a member of their community it was assumed that I shared many of their Christianity-based values and I suspect, largely because of this, they entrusted me with their ideas and gave me insights into their way of life.

VIEWS OF OTHER FIELDWORKERS

After returning to New Zealand from the first extended period in Calcutta (from late December through to the end of February, 2002) I searched through books, journal articles and other written material for references to the significance of religion to the people I'd spent the last two months with. One of my strongest impressions of their community was that Christianity was important to them yet I could find almost no relevant discussion of this facet of the community in any of the literature. Megan Mills' work (1999) was the only real exception and I was heartened by her comment that

Scholarly treatments of the Anglo-Indians have mentioned in passing the predictability of what is quite normally *daily* religious observance. [...] In many academic and other offerings, rather obvious clues to the centrality of religion in one form or another to Anglo-Indian social life and the Anglo-Indian identity have been omitted or overlooked entirely. (1999:321, emphasis in the original)

She wonders at depictions by writers and film makers of the “festoon[ing]” of Anglo-Indian homes “with British Royal paraphernalia ...” which adorn only the most Anglophilic homes and is in fact an unusual phenomenon, yet they pay no attention to the religious picture, crucifix, or other symbol which is “an Anglo-Indian given with regard to material culture and one which has reappeared in the course of all fieldwork” (Mills 1999:321).

While Mills' work is primarily concerned with the role of myths in the survival of the community, that we had independently come to the same conclusions about the place of religion in their day-to-day lives was reassuring. Caplan's (2001) work, which was

not available until after that initial lengthy fieldwork phase, also supports Mills' view but did not provide a detailed discussion of Anglo-Indian practices of Christianity.

It is not only in the area of Anglo-Indian studies that attention to people as Christians is lacking. Robbins,⁵ writing about his own work in Papua New Guinea, comments "In addition to being a book about Cultural change, then, this is an ethnography of a Christian culture. As such, it belongs to a still small group of anthropological works that focus on people as Christians" (2004:27). In the early part of his work he looks at some of the reasons for there being so little in the way of an anthropology of Christianity. He likens anthropologists' reluctance to study Christianity to their similar reaction to the study of another issue; there is a tendency to "recoil from hybrid studies" (2004:29).

THE PRACTICE OF CHRISTIANITY: ANGLO-INDIAN STYLE

Durkheim (1965) offers a definition of religion that suggests a dichotomous relationship between the sacred and the profane. This dichotomy can be seen played out by many Christians in the world in the way their week is organised into 'ordinary' days (where certain activities would be carried out on an almost daily basis, for example, attending school) and 'holy' days where the ordinary activities are suspended or modified. Prior to these more secular times in New Zealand, for example, people have not been required to work at paid employment on Sundays, nor were the shops or public houses open on that day. This dichotomy extends to buildings, which are used solely for either religious or non-religious purposes.

Years ago, on my first family trip to India we visited the Hindu Menakshi Temple in Mudurai. We were taken by the fact that whenever we visited the temple it was alive with activity; no matter if it was early pre-dawn morning or the middle of a winter's day, the temple and its grounds were humming. As well as housing the inner chambers where the figures of Menakshi and Shiva reside, there are various commercial areas within and around the temple. Some of these are directly related to worship in the temple, such as the manufacture and sale of sweets to be given as puja offerings.⁶ Other commercial ventures relate to the visit to the temple; for example, the

⁵ In another work by Robbins (2003) he argues for an anthropology of Christianity.

⁶ 'Puja' refers to ritual worship.

sale of souvenirs, maps, films, postcards and the like. Many, however, are there to provide for ordinary daily needs: food stalls, jewellery, cooking supplies, tailors and tinkers. There were also artisans, artists and beggars making their living from visitors to the temple.

At that time I was involved back home in teaching Sunday school. Soon after I returned home the lesson for the week centred on the story of Jesus, in a fury, moving the traders and moneylenders out of the temple. The message I'd always taken from that story was that temples were for praying in and not for carrying out business, that such commercial activity was tantamount to desecrating the holy place.

What I had seen in the Menakshi Temple gave me a fresh view of the New Testament story, and challenged the dichotomous theory that I had subscribed to. Rather than being appalled by what I had seen I had found it healthy and refreshing to see the temple accommodating such use – every day of the week. There were places in the temple that were free from the commercial activities but the proximity of business to the sacred areas made it easy for people to visit the sacred areas as a part of their everyday activities. In this respect, I am clearly not happy with the Durkheimien idea that the sacred and the profane are necessarily dichotomous.

Christianity for most of the Anglo-Indians I met was more than a Sunday or Holy day obligation, rather it was a part of their every day life. Some of the churches I visited also reflected this attitude to religion. I was reminded of my visit to the Hindu temple when I visited some of the churches in Calcutta, for example, St. Anthony's Catholic Church in central Calcutta and the Church of Our Lady of Bandel, thirty miles out of the city, a pilgrimage site. The following are entries (which are not chronological) from journals I kept:

Feb 3 After having heard so much about the Church at Bandel I finally spent a day there. The Church is beautiful, clean and full of people quietly praying, lighting candles (there are numerous little stalls around the entrance where they can be purchased), and touching the feet of statues. In many ways it felt more like Hindu temples I've visited than a Church, in that people do their own thing and take their own time. An outdoor mass was being held as we left. The priest had to compete with a jeep revving its motor in an adjacent section. The hostel boys (my escorts for the day) are very devout - while I was alternating my role between

prayerful Catholic and observer, they were prayerfully focused. The steps around the outside of the church leading up to the statue of Our Lady of Bandel (where people were writing petitions, and dropping them into boxes beside the statue) is designed to lead you through the rosary, ten narrower steps then a wide one etc. We had to take care to avoid people who were saying the rosary by kneeling on each of the steps on the way up as they recite the appropriate prayer.

I took no photos – it didn't feel like the right place for a camera.

Jan 25 [A friend] told me today about St. Anthony's Catholic Church (or is it called St Joseph's church?) in Market Street, near to New Market. Every Tuesday they recite the rosary, pray prayers of intercession, gift loaves of bread (this is linked to prayers of intercession) and conduct a mass. At the end of mass whoever wants to take bread (which has been blessed during mass) lines up as if for communion, and collects a few slices of bread from the priest. Bread is taken as "a blessing" for those at home who are too sick to come to mass, or as food for the hungry.

Feb 5 St. Anthony's has become my regular Tuesday evening venue. It's the most peaceful of churches despite feeling full of life - maybe because of what I walk through to get there, and walk back out into. It seems so much more of an every day experience, rather than being an obligatory and highly ritualised time-defined session that characterizes most Catholic masses.

Feb 19 Another Tuesday spent at St. Anthony's. I brought loaves of bread this week (there are a couple of shops just outside the church which do a good trade in bread and candles on Tuesdays before the evening mass), but no candles. I watched the steady stream of people file into the church, place their loaves on the altar, touch the feet of their favourite saints or light a candle and leave it at the foot of the saint's statue.

Two old AI women parishioners lead the pre-mass rosary today. At the end of mass most of the congregation lined up to receive pieces of the blessed bread. [A friend] came and found me at the end of the service. He and [his wife] were coming back from shopping at New Market and had called in on their way home. When I saw him the next day he said that St. Anthony's and the Carmelite Church are seen by many people who are in desperate straits as holding some hope for them. "It's desperate people who go to these two places".

The comment, that attendance at certain churches was reserved for “the desperate,” made me wonder how many Anglo-Indians do go there regularly. Was I reading too much into church attendance? My observation was that while very poor Anglo-Indians⁷ did attend, there were also others who did not seem to me to qualify as “desperate”. But then desperation can have different interpretations and being financially impoverished is but one interpretation. I didn’t ask the person who made this comment to elaborate so it may be another kind of desperation that he was referring to.



Plate 9 St. Anthony's Church

Another service that I attended a couple of times was the Wednesday ‘healing service’ at the Auxilium church; a huge recently constructed, colonnaded, marbled and stained glass addition to Calcutta’s Christian scene. The service was lengthy, extremely well attended, and dramatic – with many of the supplicants keeling over as the priest’s hand came close to their forehead and they were prayed over. Some took minutes to recover from this and walk back to their seats. As well as the healing session, the service

⁷ I recognized some people who received rations and pensions from the Calcutta Anglo-Indian Service Society (CAISS).

included readings, songs, a sermon⁸ and the opportunity to donate to the church. People travelled from many parts of Calcutta to attend.



Plate 10 Auxilium Church

My initial reaction to this recently constructed, lavishly fitted-out church, built on the edge of the Tiljala bustee, was that it represented a squandering of money which would

⁸ On the two occasions that I attended services there the theme of the readings and the sermons was to avoid being concerned about material wealth while on earth; that God would look after tomorrow.

have been better spent on the earthly needs of its parishioners. I changed my mind to some extent after talking to people about the church, without voicing my views, and seeing the pride they took in this piece of beauty within their midst. Others in Calcutta have other reservations about the church: that a lot of the money came from an “overseas” source which promoted a cult-type following. I am not certain of the church’s affiliations but I was invited by people I was visiting in Tiljala to attend the ‘Stations of the Cross’ service being held there one Friday during Lent – this seems to me to be a more traditionally Catholic, rather than a ‘cult’, practice. On one of my visits an Italian film crew was also there, the same one that I had seen a few days earlier at the Catholic Church in Bandel.

One day in Central Calcutta at the beginning of Lent I came across a team of enthusiastic young American missionaries who attended a missionary school in America and were in Calcutta doing a “practical” stint. I was infuriated and affronted (on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of Indian Christians) by their arrogance, their lack of knowledge of the extent of Christianity in Calcutta, along with their total disinterest in finding out anything that would contradict their assumptions (of illiteracy, of education, of ignorance of English, of heathenism, of lack of a sophisticated and coherent worldview). They hung out inside and outside the trendiest coffee house on Park Street distributing pamphlets and collecting stories to take back. I invited them to come to Mass with me⁹ to see an example of the extent of Christianity in India; they declined.

I have made the observations above in order to introduce this section on the practice of Anglo-Indian Christianity. In the next section I discuss the temporal, physical and material dimension of their religious life.

EASTER, CHRISTMAS AND OTHER HOLY DAYS

I have already indicated that Christianity and its practices are everyday matters for Anglo-Indians. I disagree with the idea that the sacred and the profane can be separated out. However, this is not to suggest that there are not special days for Anglo-Indians, and I describe them briefly here.

⁹ It was Ash Wednesday – so the churches all over Calcutta would have been full for several services a day.

I was in Calcutta for two Ash Wednesdays, and one year arrived just two days after Christmas, but I have not been in Calcutta for Easter or Christmas. In 2005, I hope to be in Calcutta for Christmas, which will be valuable for further writing about this community but too late for this work. From talking to people about Easter (several of whom said that I was really missing out on something by not being there then) I have built up a picture of what occurs: Masses all throughout Holy Week with foot washing, anointing of the oils, a Good Friday procession around the central city churches in the killing conditions of pre-monsoon heat and humidity,¹⁰ and finally a vigil Mass on Easter Saturday night or a Sunday morning Mass with everyone wearing, and showing off, their new clothes. People sent Easter cards and greetings to me, and told me about arrangements for family outings and parties to celebrate the occasion.

From the descriptions given to me of Christmas I associate the day in Anglo-India with midnight Masses, dances and family outings, such as the 26th December picnic at the zoo finishing off leftover Christmas dinner. Other significant features of the Christmas season are the parties, meals and gifts given to the community's elderly and impoverished, by social service organisations such as CAISS, the local branch of the AIAIA and many others. Many Anglo-Indians are involved with one or other of the organisations so spend some time over this period involved in community service for their community.

CHURCH PRACTICES

“First thing you need to know is that there are two types of Anglo-Indians: the first are converted Christians, the other has European ancestors. All are Christian.” Sanjay, whose mother is Anglo-Indian and whose father is a Bengali Christian

I was interested, originally, in the significance of the social practices that promote community feeling. It was a Bengali friend who first told me about the internal migration from the central areas to Picnic gardens. He stressed their need to build a church in order to give them a focus and an identity in the area. An Anglo-Indian man I spoke to who said; “The church always gets the community together, and so let us see what they can do” mirrored this view. As I have discussed in Chapter Three, this

¹⁰ From an Anglo-Indian now living in Perth: “Holy Week is something else here. The churches are all full, and it's *so hot* at that time of the year” said with awe.

residential area, which has only in the last decade become an Anglo-Indian area, is now establishing a church and a community centre.

Further examples stressing the importance of the role played by the church in maintaining a sense of community are the following extracts taken from interviews:

That was the original score, where the Church was the centre, as it's always been, you know, for communities to meet. Christian communities. So even other denominations, their centre is the Church and the Church programmes, activities and you know, inspires and whatever the Church does. But besides that for the Anglo-Indian community, it's the clubs, you know, that keep them together. The clubs. Now when Anglo-Indians emigrated to like, places like England and Australia, they were not, I mean, they were not received as they had expected to be received by the people over there, you see. All racism, in England, in Australia believe it or not, from what I've heard. So the individual, the families, Anglo-Indians, they felt cut away, you know. And they felt lonely. Spiritually, emotionally lonely, you know.

Another, from Jane:¹¹

I think we are very God fearing people and that plays an important role in our lives. A lot of Anglo-Indians are Roman Catholic and you see them all on the 24th, Christmas night, and ringing in the New Year. Anglo-Indians are packed to capacity in the churches.

Is it social as well...?

Yes, a bit, but they are very spiritual and very serious about their faith. They have peace processions by walking from one church to the other – it's to make people aware of the Christian faith, even though we are a very small minority. We are only 4%¹² in the whole of India.

Is that Christian?

Yes. Christian.

And Anglo-Indians would be an even smaller percent?

Yeah. We are just a dot on the map. So it's important in Anglo-Indian life to be Christian. And you can see in every Anglo-Indian Catholic home, they will have an altar.

Some churches give coffee and cake after the church service. Some Anglo-Indians meet in the clubs after the service and catch up with a little gossip and what different ones did during the week.

¹¹ Jane's story is included in Part Three of this thesis.

¹² According to the 1991 census Christians constitute 2.34% of the population of India (Robinson 2003:291).

Klass speaks of “Religion in a given society [as being] that instituted process of interaction among the members of the society – and between them and the universe at large as they conceive it to be constituted – which provides them with meaning, coherence, direction, *unity*, easement, and whatever degree of control over events they perceive as possible” (1995:38, emphasis added).

Klass, drawing on the writings of people such as Tylor, Spencer, Frazer, Malinowski, Muller, Durkheim and Freud, proposes that among other purposes religion “serves both to symbolise and to express the sense of unity in a society and its sense of separation or distinction from other social groups” (1995:15). Anglo-Indians in Calcutta expressed their sense of unity through their Christianity, and also in their distinction from the various religio-cultural groups who make up their various neighbourhoods.

Marshall (2002) makes a relevant (in the context of writing about religion) observation when he writes about belonging being a step beyond membership “just as belief is a step beyond knowledge” (2002:360). Being Anglo-Indian is one of a number of senses of belonging that an Anglo-Indian might experience. Others are as Christians or more specifically, by denomination, as Catholics, or Protestants.

MATERIAL CULTURE: SIGNS OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE HOME



Plate 11 Inside an Anglo-Indian home

One community representative told me that you could immediately recognise an Anglo-Indian home by two pieces of furniture: the altar (a small platform mounted on

the wall at about head-level with candles, statues and the like arranged upon it) and the showcase (a glass-doored cabinet in which the owner displays precious objects such as souvenirs, photos, crockery, and decorations).¹³ I do not recall going into an Anglo-Indian home which did not have at least one holy picture on the wall and most housed an altar in the main room.¹⁴ In comparison, I don't recall seeing an altar in a New Zealand home since I was a child. I spoke to a New Zealand parish priest about this difference. He said that in some of the homes of elderly parishioners he visits he does see a small altar, but it is much more common to find a "tasteful crucifix or piece of art depicting Christ on the crucifix, or sometimes a painting of the Holy Family". Extracts from my journal illustrates the pattern in Anglo-Indian interiors:

Today I met Sharon and her 8-year-old son, Paul, who attends St Xavier's [school]. They live in the tiniest of flats. The only living area is dominated by a double bed. Several small pieces of furniture and cabinets line the walls, competing for space with the many holy pictures. She told us that she is a Catholic from Bangalore who's married to a Punjabi Hindu.

A description of the interior of another one-bedroomed flat I visited is as follows:

There is a very ornate wall-mounted altar in their main room (the other room in their "one-roomed" flat is a tiny cupboard of a kitchen). "[My wife] bought it", explains the husband, "she prays at it twice a day – lights the candles and says her prayers". They have their old altar in the kitchen, also mounted on the wall. On the altar shelves, arranged symmetrically, are vases of plastic flowers, candles and statues. Above and forming a part of the altar hangs a picture of the Sacred Heart. In this house there is a picture of Christ on each wall, and three clocks in the main room.

¹³ The Anglo-Indian exhibition held in Melbourne's Immigration Museum from December 2004 to February 2005 included a Drawing room scene featuring a showcase and an altar.

¹⁴ In addition to religious pictures, adorning most Anglo-Indian homes were pictures of Mother Theresa who founded the Order of Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta over 50 years ago, which now has numerous branches around the world. There were also a number of photos of Princess Diana.



Plate 12 Altared home

Later that day: Met [a friend] whose front room feels a bit like a chapel. It's very Catholic with large statues arranged on a freestanding altar at one end of the room. On other walls there's competition for space between holy pictures (The Sacred Heart), clocks set on different countries' time, catholic calendars, certificates of awards given to Anglo-Indians personally and to their organisations (all for service to the community), and family photos.

And another:

Back at The Barracks Doreen introduced me to Lindy and Cedric who live in one room (genuinely one room in this case) on the top of the building. It was the servant's quarters in the old days when The Barracks housed British soldiers. Each of the three-roomed flats came with a rooftop room to accommodate servants. Lindy and Cedric have the obligatory altar (and show case) in their room. Doreen who lives in a three roomed flat (2 bedrooms and a living room) has an altar in her living area and her bedroom. Both altars incorporate large pictures of the Sacred Heart. After lunch Doreen showed me a photo of herself in her wedding gown – gorgeous, white, western styled. She tells me that she met her

husband through the local Baptist Church and that all of her children met their spouses at the same church.

REFLECTIONS ON THE NATURE OF ANGLO-INDIAN CHRISTIANITY

In this section I want to describe and discuss my observations and my sense of the fact that Anglo-Indian Christianity is something in itself. I use the word ‘faith’ because this is an ‘emic’ term but unfortunately connotes the concept of ‘belief’ for the casual reader and all the problems this concept raises, that I have discussed on page 96. However, it is a term understood and used by Anglo-Indians. I also, on the other hand, realise that their Christianity is an accommodation of larger contexts – Christianity as a whole, and the Indian religious scene. I will discuss these as well.

TALK OF FAITH

As well as the visual signs of Christianity in their homes, the Anglo-Indians I met talked freely about their Christianity and their activities associated with their church community. Our family, for example, was invited to the First Communion service of the son of an acquaintance. The following is a portion of what I wrote about it immediately afterwards:

We all went to the after-Mass ‘breakfast’ held at [their] home. The First Communion boy was dressed entirely in white and spent the time we were there playing on his Play Station with friends, and opening presents absentmindedly when they were proffered.

We sat around the walls of a reception area and talked in groups with the other guests. Rochelle [my 21 year old daughter] commented later that she couldn’t believe how much they talked about their religion. Different ones talked about going to Porta (to the church of Our Lady of Vailankanni which is some sort of retreat or pilgrimage site – in South India I think), their various prayer groups, charismatic church services they’d attended and the miracles performed there, and at Porta.

There was ready talk of miracles everywhere I went. Several times, to my alarm, my presence was openly talked about in miraculous terms. Further journal extracts illustrate this:

Jan 7 Karen described my arrival at The Barracks and her being the first person I met as “A gift from God”.

Jan 30 Philomena had been talking to Melhyn and me about the series of miracles, which allowed the Night Shelter to be set up. Melhyn then pointed out to her that my presence there was also a bit of a miracle – the fact that I was a Roman Catholic researcher interested in their community.

Feb 4 Met a leader of an Anglo-Indian organisation quite by chance at a busy pedestrian crossing. At the end of our conversation and after arrangements had been made to meet again he said, “You’re a western researcher – I know you will be objective. I’ll bring my documents and you can see what is happening (referring to injustices being done to the community by some of its leaders) for yourself... I believe that God has sent you to me”.

This last encounter, I in turn, described to people back home in terms of a miracle,¹⁵ except, as I was writing for New Zealanders I used the terms “amazing coincidence” and “serendipitous” to resonate with the belief system of those who would read my e-mails. Klass describes miracles as “unpredictable results” (1995:23) where the explanation given for their occurrences is based on the religious belief that a supernatural power, for example, God, has intervened in the course of events. The alternative explanations do not attribute the unexpected course of events to any supernatural power but rather these are seen as the result of ‘an accident’.

There is an important issue here, one which I have already discussed a little but do not want to go into further: about ‘belief’ and ‘knowledge’. I am unhappy with the idea that one dismisses other people’s experiences with terms like ‘accident’.

As I have discussed, most Anglo-Indians I spoke to highlighted the fact that Christianity is a very significant aspect of their lives. I did, however, speak to Anglo-Indians who were not so enthusiastic when I shared my belief that Christianity was a very important characteristic of the community. The reaction from one woman, for example, was a snort of derision followed by an explanation that there is a big difference between going to church and having a personal relationship with God. She felt that although Anglo-Indians are good church goers, they did so for reasons other than to spend time in the prayerful presence of their God. In her view the young ones,

¹⁵ I had heard recently of this organization and had hoped to meet someone involved so I was amazed by the way it happened.

for example, went to church primarily to show off their latest clothes and to meet up with friends.

This woman clearly sees religion as something to do with ritual and ritual performance and sincerity in performing them. From my point of view I couldn't help noticing how Christianity pervades all aspects of their lives.¹⁶ It reminds me of one of Myerhoff's Jewish participants who talked about the domestic aspects of their religion. She believed that it was this aspect in particular that meant that "Jewish comes up in you from the roots and it stays with you all your life" (Myerhoff 1978:235). It is the aspect of religion that influences one's worldview and attitude to the most everyday parts of life rather than what is practiced in the more public and ritualized performances. In this sense Anglo-Indians are Christians just as Myerhoff's participants are Jews. This is another reason that I think it's an anomaly that Anglo-Indian mothers, who are likely to provide the religious and socio-cultural grounding to their children, are not recognized by the Indian Constitution as contributing to the Anglo-Indianness of their children.

A VERY CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY

The particular image of Christ most commonly displayed in Anglo-Indian homes was that of the Sacred Heart. This traditionally Roman Catholic image was not restricted to Catholic homes nor was the display of images of the Virgin Mary or statues of saints. I was brought up to believe that a defining difference between Catholics and other Christians was that Catholics would display icons whereas other denominations did not, and that while Catholics might call on the saints to intercede on their behalf, other denominations focused their prayers exclusively towards Christ. Initially I took what I thought were signs of Catholicism to mean that the homes I was in were Catholic. Incidents such as the one I refer to below made me more cautious about making such an assumption.

¹⁶ I was struck by the number of times religion came up when engaged in other aspects of their lives. Some examples are: When looking at engagement photographs I noticed a priest in some photos. On asking about his presence they answered (surprised that I needed it explained) that he was there to bless the couple, and the engagement ring; in Irene's story the local priest is called upon several times to help solve both family and health problems; when travelling around the city with an Anglo-Indian it was not uncommon to be occupied in talking about something or another and, without pause, they would quickly bless themselves. We would have passed a church.

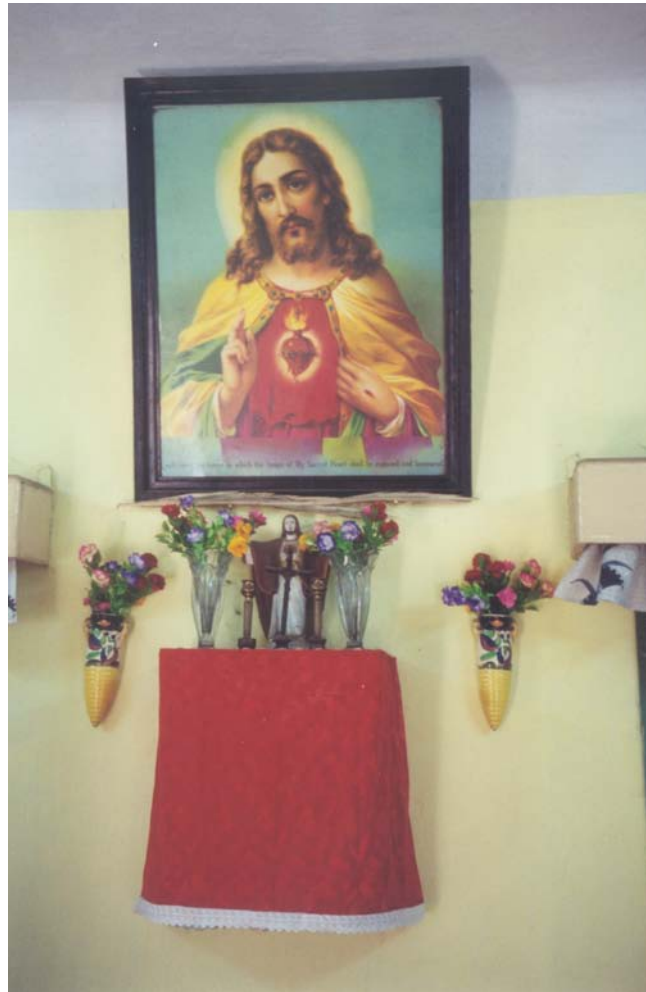


Plate 13 The Sacred Heart

I was invited to attend “a church service” with one of my research participants and her family. This family, who knew of my Catholicism, had an altar in each of the three rooms of their home. Pictures of the Sacred Heart were hanging on the walls, and they had shown me where they and other members of their community recite the rosary.¹⁷ They told me that at 7:15 every night a bell rings summoning the residents to the grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes. In comparison with the size of Bow Barracks population, the group that attends is small, but constant. The recitation of the rosary is an outdoor, public event, which is led by residents and takes about three-quarters of an hour. Having been told about the rosary by these people, and told that they sometimes

¹⁷ They recite the rosary at a grotto, which was built in 1999, against the wall separating two blocks of the Barracks.

participate, I was surprised to end up in a Baptist church after taking up their offer to attend a Sunday service with them.

I spoke to a devout Catholic Anglo-Indian who lived in another part of Calcutta about this and recorded his explanation accounting for non-Catholics attending the rosary at Bow Barracks.

*One thing that puzzled me and I thought you might be able to help me to understand... Certainly in New Zealand, and Australia, where I've been to Catholic services and other services, one big difference between Catholics and Protestants is the worship of Mary. As Catholics, we do it, but Protestants don't. But I mentioned this to somebody who said that they went to the rosary nearly every night and this person (who told me she was Baptist) said they **all** meet, so it's not just a Catholic thing. She said that they all meet, all the Christians who want to ...*

Who want to, now that, "want to", you could underline that. Yeah, but it's not part of the make up of the Church, the Baptist Church, no, no, no. It's an individual thing.

Although the Baptist service itself did not resemble a Catholic service, it seems that it is in the privacy of their homes and in non-institutional (in the case of non-Catholic) practices that Anglo-Indians display a particularly Catholic Christianity. Other events that I describe in the next section caused me to extend my conclusions about their Christianity.

ROSARY AND PROCESSION AT THE BARRACKS

As well as this daily observation of their faith, once a year, on the Feast Day of Our Lady of Lourdes, they celebrate the anniversary of the building of the grotto with an evening rosary and procession, mass and supper. As it had become known that I was a Catholic and interested in their Christianity I was invited to attend. Hundreds of Anglo-Indians, Religious,¹⁸ and other Christians from around Calcutta attend this event.

On the evening of the anniversary we met a little before 6pm in the long narrow gap between buildings that had been converted into a space resembling a chapel. The usually dark, relatively deserted area had been transformed with narrow rows of seats and decorated with streamers, strings of lights and flower heads. The statue of Our

¹⁸ Priests and nuns who belong to orders that participate in the community.

Lady of Lourdes had been festooned with garlands of flowerheads and lights, and candles were alight at her feet.

The evening commenced with a procession from the grotto, around the outside of two blocks of the Barracks and through the central area back to the start. Participants carried candles, which at the end of the procession were added to those in the grotto. The mass was celebrated followed by a supper of a selection of Indian snacks and sweets accompanied by orange juice. As we were eating, mementos of holy cards commemorating the service, along with plastic rosary beads were distributed to each of us.

The evening impressed me as containing elements borrowed from many Indian celebrations I have attended in India. The chains of marigolds and asters, for example, are found at all Indian ceremonies and always adorn the relevant statues or effigies (for example, Gandhi on Republic day, Kali during Kali puja). This was a recognisably Indian version of a traditional Catholic ceremony.

NAMASTE?

I attended Baptist, Church of North India and Catholic Church services. While the Baptist Church was run on a traditional preacher-led format (hymns interspersed with berating sermons), in the other churches at least one obvious influence of Hinduism was evident. There is a part of the service where the priest asks for the congregation to give each other the “sign of peace”. In New Zealand the usual response is a handshake, or sometimes a kiss on the cheek, accompanied by the words “peace be with you” or “the peace of God be with you”. In the services I attended in both Catholic and CNI (Church of North India) churches, the universal response was a ‘namaste’ gesture (of hands held palm together at chest level) accompanied by the standard recitation of “peace be with you”.

This is not a greeting used in everyday situations among members of the Anglo-Indian community but is a reasonably standard greeting used in the wider community, particularly between Hindus. I’ve attended Catholic Masses in a number of European countries, as well as in other parts of Asia. It seems that in Europe the trend is to respond with a handshake, or a kiss on the cheek, while in Asia, the Namaste-type response is commonplace. In each case the response coincides with the usual style of

greeting when people meet each other outside of the church. Anglo-Indians, however, adopt an Asian style of greeting rather than using their usual greeting practice. The majority of the Christians in India are Christians whom the Anglo-Indians refer to as “converted Christians”. Most Catholic priests in India are (non-Anglo-Indian) Indians. It is, I expect, from this group that the ‘sign of peace’ response has originated.¹⁹ Further on in this chapter I discuss other examples of adaptation.

A VERY HINDU CHRISTIANITY?

Based on these experiences, and the Anglo-Indian echoing of the Hindu tradition in their own use of shrines, along with their public practice of their faith, I want to go further than to suggest that aspects of Anglo-Indian Christianity are observably Catholic. I argue that Anglo-Indian Christianity is strongly influenced by the milieu of Hinduism in which it exists. It is a distinctly Hindu Christianity.

While many Anglo-Indians who read this may feel their hackles rising at this statement, there were comments made to me which indicate that many are well aware that their practice of Christianity is different to that practiced by Christians abroad and by the many Anglo-Indians who now live overseas. I gave the paper I wrote which made this same conclusion to several Anglo-Indians in Calcutta. One said that she thought I had it about right; another was visibly disconcerted at what I’d written and said that I was “pandering to them” (Hindus, and to a lesser extent, Muslims), and that “they” would love to read of their influence on the practices of Christianity. He wondered aloud if I was trying to “sell” my thesis through connecting it with Hinduism. He argued that it wasn’t only Hinduism that was influencing the way Christians practice their faith; Islam also influenced it. He felt that the Jesuits and Salesians²⁰ were particularly at fault for “willfully breaking into and trying to change the Anglo-Indian culture in terms of religion”. Some examples he gave were of the increasingly common practice of asking parishioners to remove their shoes upon entering the church, of raising their open hands skyward in prayer, and prostrating themselves in front of the cross.

¹⁹ Fuller (1992:3-4) discusses at length the symbolism of the seemingly simple action and its centrality to understanding Hinduism.

²⁰ Salesians are from the teaching Catholic Order of Don Bosco.

Robinson, in her work (2003) on contemporary Indian Christian Communities, offers an explanation of the trend noted by this Anglo-Indian: “while a degree of syncretism has always characterized popular Christianity, in recent decades the [Catholic] church has *officially* begun to promote the indigenisation of its modes of worship in certain specific respects. Encouraging seating arrangements on the floor, the harmonization of the architecture of new churches with indigenous forms, the aarti²¹ and the ritual use of garlands or *agarbatti* are some expressions of the shift” (Robinson 2003:302-3, emphasis in the original). Susan Bayly (1989), writing about the spread of Islam and Christianity in the south of India mentions deliberate modifications made to Christian teachings and practices by the early missionaries and priests in order that they better fit the cultural practices of would-be converts (1989:241-262). This is a very old issue dating back to the ‘quarrel of rites’ in the 16th century, which involved Jesuit missionaries in India and China, in particular Roberto De Nobilo and Matteo Ricci. Indigenisation to ‘local’ practices presents particular difficulties for a community such as the Anglo-Indians, in that their culture might be quite different from that of ‘converted’ (sic) Christians.²² Put simply, the fact that Anglo-Indian ‘indigenous’ practices are closer to those that were associated with European forms of Christianity means that the kind of indigenisation referred to above moves these practices away from those that they feel are close to their own!

ANGLO-INDIANS AS CHRISTIANS

In this section I will discuss the diversity of Anglo-Indian Christian affiliation in Calcutta and Anglo-Indians sense of their religious identity. I will begin with a brief discussion of ‘converted’ Christians, that is, non-Anglo-Indian Christians. I believe they are an important foil for Anglo-Indians and their sense of their own identity. I will go on to discuss the internal differentiation of the Anglo-Indian Christian community and also Anglo-Indian perception of other socio-religious groups.

‘CONVERTED CHRISTIANS’

While the Indian census no longer distinguishes between Indian Christians and Anglo-Indians, members of the Anglo-Indian community do. Based upon talking with some Anglo-Indian youths, I concluded that, as far as some of them were concerned, Anglo-

²¹ ‘Aarti’ is the practice of honouring an event or an image with a flame (often a camphor flame).

²² Many ‘converted’ Christians were not converted at all, but born into Christian families.

Indians, being “born Christian”, are superior to “converted Christians” whom they also sometimes refer to as ‘South Indians’ at times saying, “they look like Hindus”.²³ Caplan notes that while working with Indian Christians in Madras he came across very few Anglo-Indians as “they were not considered, nor did they consider themselves, as belonging to the Indian Christian fold” (2001:ix). From my experience in Calcutta, and taking into account Caplan’s in Madras, it appears that both groups, Anglo-Indians and Indian Christians, distinguish themselves from the other.²⁴

The sense of superiority of Anglo-Indians over other Indian Christians (which I saw played out, and Caplan (2001) has commented upon) is far from universal. One indication of this, in Calcutta, is the number of marriages occurring between Anglo-Indians and non-Anglo-Indians. Williams (2002) has recently surveyed some Calcutta church marriage registers (he looked at registers from six Catholic and three Anglican churches²⁵) and notes that while Anglo-Indians were almost endogamous up until the 1940s and 1950s, by the 1990s about 50% of Anglo-Indians were marrying outside the Anglo-Indian community (2002:23-24). Irene,²⁶ met both of her partners (both Anglo-Indians) at her Church. Her children followed her example in meeting their spouses at the same church but, while two of her children married Anglo-Indians, the other two married Bengali Christians.

In this family there seems to be more pride associated with being Christians than in being Anglo-Indian. I spoke to one daughter (who had married a Bengali) who was

²³ Indian Christians have some advantages over Anglo-Indians at this time when India has been recasting itself from a secular to a Hindu nation. Their advantage lies in not only looking like Hindu Indians in terms of dress and cultural practices but in having Hindu names (with the exception of Muslim converts and those whose descendants converted several generations ago when the practice was to take on a Western, or Christian, name at the time of their conversion).

²⁴ Writings about Christians in India tend to focus on “converts”. Robinson (2003), for example, ignores the Anglo-Indian population (as well as the European population) who were practicing Christians for as long as they existed as a distinct social group. Robinson notes that Christianity in India is generally linked to British rule in India but, as she also notes, there were many Indian Christians in India before the British established themselves there. Syrian Christians, for example, have existed as a distinct Christian community in Kerala since the first century AD (Robinson 2003:291) as a result of Saint Thomas’s arrival in India i.e. they originated from west Asia rather than from Europe. If Christianity is associated with Saint Peter’s vocation to spread the word of the Lord, then these first Indian followers of Christ must be considered pre-Christian followers of Christ’s teachings. Christianity, then, has been an Indian religion for as long as it has existed.

²⁵ I think he means CNI churches, rather than Anglican. One of the examples he gives is St Thomas’s, Free school Street, and they definitely refer to themselves as CNI.

²⁶ Her story is included in Part Three of this work.

raised in Bow Barracks and is now a schoolteacher at a school where there are a number of Anglo-Indians. She said that when she tells her colleagues and friends that she is an Anglo-Indian they don't believe her. She related this with pride. For this Anglo-Indian woman, it was her church community that she felt most strongly connected to. She was a Christian first, and her Anglo-Indian identity was not readily acknowledged. She lived with her Bengali husband's extended family in a large Bengali style central city flat. Every time I saw her she was dressed in shalwar kameez. Her children had Indian names.

Jyoti Sen (1988), who carried out research in Calcutta in the periods 1974-1975 and 1979-1982, looked closely at marriage patterns among the Catholic Anglo-Indians. She found through examining parish marriage records that the majority of marriages were between Catholic Anglo-Indians, the next highest group was Anglo-Indians marrying Protestants, followed by Anglo-Indians marrying non-Anglo-Indian Christians. The smallest group was of Anglo-Indians marrying non-Christian Indians.

Catholics were not permitted to marry outside their denomination until after the Ecumenical Council of 1961 (Sen 1983:43). If a couple of 'mixed' denomination were determined to marry, they either married in a Protestant church, or the non-Catholic partner was formally inducted into the Catholic Church so that the couple might marry at "the main altar" (Sen 1988:250). Sen based her findings on a very small number of marriages (less than 150 from three parishes) and found that about one fifth of the couples were of mixed religion (that is, marriages between Anglo-Indians and Hindus, Muslims, or Armenians). She carried out a statistical analysis and it is not apparent that those involved were interviewed about the factors involved in the decision to marry outside both their faith and their ethnic group. Interview material may have provided some valuable insights.

Mills states that "[t]he intermarriage of Anglo-Indians and other Indians which was once hailed as a harbinger of the eventual assimilation of the Eurasian community is not regarded any longer as threatening the Anglo-Indian identity" (1999:325). From my fieldwork I found this lack of concern voiced only among those who had, themselves, married outside their community (be it religious or ethnic).

DENOMINATIONAL CHRISTIANITY

CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT

As I have suggested above, as well as the distinction being made between Anglo-Indians and Indian Christians, and Indian Christians and non-Christians, within the Anglo-Indian community still further distinctions are made on the basis of denomination. Although all Anglo-Indians are Christians, they are of different denominations, generally described as Catholic or Protestant (all non-Catholics being grouped together). The bishops are very powerful, perhaps due to their involvement and influence within the education system. There seemed to be a degree of animosity between Catholics and non-Catholics. The following is one example I came across: after attending a CNI service with friends one Sunday morning I commented to one of the women I was with that even though I'm a Catholic, the service felt very familiar. Her response was "Yes, except for communion. In Catholic services the congregation is advised before communion that only Catholics may take part. They think they're better than us. It's embarrassing – just sitting there with everyone else knowing".

A devout, very involved woman from the CNI told me that increasingly the Catholic Anglo-Indians are outnumbering the Protestants. The reasons she gave were that they have large families because they're less likely to use family planning; and that in mixed marriages the couple must make a pledge before they marry to bring up any children they may have as Catholics.²⁷ This same woman felt that Catholics were over-represented in the lower socio-economic groups. She had at one stage been the Welfare Officer for a Hill Station school and part of her job involved the assessment of children, and their families, for admission to the school. She said that of those who come to her for consideration for their children to receive a sponsored education at least 90% were Catholics. In order to be considered for admission as a sponsored child the family is required to show that they could not afford to educate their children any other way, and that they struggle to provide them with the necessities of life. Her belief that Catholics form the majority of the very poor Anglo-Indians was supported

²⁷ On the day I accompanied her to church (CNI) there were very few Anglo-Indians in the congregation, in fact the entire congregation seemed very small. She explained that there were fewer Anglo-Indians there than usual because it was First Communion day at one of the local Catholic Churches. Consequently, a non-Catholic parent who usually attended the CNI would, that day, be at the Catholic Church.

by my experience of visiting a central city bustee, Tiljala, where all the Anglo-Indians I met were Catholic.

The fact that Catholic Anglo-Indians are over represented in the lower-socioeconomic groups may be as a result of their large families, as was suggested to me, but perhaps there is another explanation, exacerbating this trend, that of conversion. Both Mills and Sen point to this as being a possibility:

Since 1947, the Indian Catholic Church as India's largest Christian network has sometimes drawn Anglo-Indian converts from former Anglican congregations and other Protestant groups due to its wider array of educational and pastoral helps (sic), plus the greater sense of security which the Roman Catholic fellowship is seen to offer in a more direct insight into mundane questions and their solutions. (Mills 1999:323)

Change from one segment of Christianity is not unusual. Quite a number of informants or interviewees have changed over from the Anglican church to Catholicism since the latter is much better organised and run with great insight and understanding of its congregation not only in spiritual matters but most mundane matters as well. It extends all possible help and guidance and pastoral care of the Anglo-Indian community is left to Anglo-Indian religious as far as practicable, which gives its flock a sense of security and support in facing the challenges of day-to-day life. (Sen 1983:42)

An indication of the general feeling that the Catholic church is generous in its pastoral care of parishioners is illustrated by the slip: Calcutta Anglo-Indian Service Society (CAISS) was once referred to me as the *Catholic* Anglo-Indian service society.

Not all feel that the church is helpful enough as this entry from my journal, after a visit to a low socioeconomic Anglo-Indian area indicates:

Sanjay [a Bengali Christian married to an Anglo-Indian woman] was keen to tell me that the RC priests are not looking after their flock of Anglo-Indians "They are selfish. They will visit me because I have what I need (sweeps his hand around his sparsely furnished single-roomed flat to illustrate) but they won't visit those who don't. Catholic priests are all Indian now - Keralites, Mangaloreans, and Telegus. Only the pastor from the Assembly of

God (I think he's American) really does help - he's not a hypocrite like the other priests. He gives food and helps the other Christians. He's the only person who helps the Christians".

He finished by saying that it's the priests and broken homes that are to blame for the poor condition of many Anglo-Indians – that the problem is basically one of finances.

ASSEMBLY OF GOD

Another significant player is the Assembly of God Church. They combine a church, a school, and a huge, state-of-the-art hospital which dwarfs its Park Street neighbours. I heard from several sources that students must convert to AG denomination in order to be admitted to the school. One young woman, who is completing her year 10 there, told me that she attends school for the afternoon only, beginning with the compulsory, daily church service which is followed by a couple of hours of classes.

Sen noted the attraction of this denomination, commenting that “The Assembly of God Church is comparatively recent in the city but it is well-known for its charities and help, and also for having persons with charismatic qualities of healing. This church also has a big Anglo-Indian following” (1983:42).

Mills (1999:339) believes that it was only in the late 1970s that Indian leniency enabled this missionising denomination to practice in India. According to Mathew (1989) Anglo-Indian converts are regarded with some disdain and accused of having succumbed to “rice Christian” tactics because the Church extends housing, food allowances and educational opportunities to its members (Mathew 1989 cited in Mills 1989:339).²⁸

OTHER SOCIO – RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The distinction made by Anglo-Indians between Christians and non-Christians was important to those I spoke to. They are in the position of living and working in very close proximity to Hindus, Muslims and to Buddhist Chinese. Other minority groups within their wider community include Parsees, Jews, Jains, Sindhis, and Sikhs. I asked

²⁸ It is interesting to note that in Calcutta's 2002 Anglo-Indian Day celebration the bishops of the Roman Catholic and CNI churches spoke at an Ecumenical Service (Anglo-Indian: The Newsletter May, 2003). Other denominations, for example, the AG Church, were not involved. Lawrence Hartnett, the principle of the AG school was, however, involved in the 2002 Anglo-Indian Day celebrations.

one research participant about the relationships between Anglo-Indian (Christians) and other religious groups:

Do all the groups get on together do you think?

Pardon.

Like Muslims, Hindus, Anglo-Indians, do they all get on together, in Calcutta?

No.

No? They're not tolerant of each other?

No.

Where are the factions..., which are the groups that don't get on?

Well, we don't get on with Muslims, nor with Hindus. Because the difference... and they don't get on with us well either because the whole issue is politics. Politics comes in between.

What about the way they live their lives? Do you think, is there a difference in what Muslims do, the way they ...?

Mm?

Is there, is there a difference in what Muslims value and, and how they live their lives and where they live ...?

Muslims have a different way of living. One thing I'll say, a Christian must never trust a Muslim. Because they are, actually they are Satan. They betray people. See in the whole world... Whatever the chaos is... bombing ...

Like the other day? (Referring to a drive-by shooting aimed at the guards outside the American Centre in central Calcutta)

Yes, and like in Palestine. The Jews who are like our sisters... Muslim... Palestinians are Muslims (...) Muslims you cannot trust. In America what have they done? It's the Muslims that have done it. [It's just four months since September 11th attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon].

What about, what about them here?

They love to see the destruction of a person. Or of a prosperous nation, or of a prosperous person. They can never see a Christian remain prosperous. See in Palestine, see in the whole of the Muslim world, see in Pakistan, see in Afghanistan, see in India...

So for you, that's...?

What has the US Consul in Calcutta done to them? They haven't done anything so why must they just go and have a shoot-out with them? Feelings, yes if I hurt your feelings, then you hurt mine in that very place. The matter is, it's tit for tat. But I can't go and attack some other, some other place and put a claim on... that's stupidity. So you can never ever trust a Muslim. Never.

But you don't feel like that about the Hindus. You don't, you're not ...?

No.

No.

Hindus, they are, they are good people. They are very good people if you talk to them, if you mix with them, but they believe... everything they believe is politics. They put politics first.

Bengalis are very political?

Yes, they are very political. Exactly. Very true. Bengalis are very political. Muslims are very ignorant. They believe might is right. They never use their brains.

Time and again I struck this attitude towards Muslims. They were variously described as dirty, immoral (for example, they are said to own and run the local brothels), dishonest, violent, and “uncultured”. In central Calcutta it is the Muslims who Anglo-Indians live in the closest proximity to. Yet it is they who seem to be most despised.

I wondered how much Anglo-Indians know about Hinduism. One young man, who obviously had at least some knowledge, asked me “What sort of a religion is it that worships a penis?” and “How can a man who has thousands of mistresses be any sort of god?”

CONCLUSION

For Anglo-Indians, Christianity is one of a set of characteristics that they see as giving them their distinctiveness as a unique community. These characteristics include having English as their mother tongue, a more western lifestyle, a particular understanding of their historical roots and association with Europe, identification as an educated and literate community, and connection with the diasporic Anglo-Indian community. Some of the individual features that I have described as being important to Anglo-Indians are not unique to them but it seems to me that it is only Anglo-Indians who uniquely have the whole set. The way they ‘have’ the set varies with individuals but a sense of having the set is what makes them Anglo-Indians.

In the next chapter I look more closely at another feature of being Anglo-Indians, that of their practice and identity as an educated and literate community.

CHAPTER FIVE

PARADOXES OF ANGLO-INDIAN EDUCATION

“Now that the crutch of reservations has been thrown aside the next generation have come to realise that they need to get a good education.” Neil O’Brien

“In the past they’d send their children to school but most of the children would become drop-outs, because the parents themselves were not interested too much. That was in the past. Now things have changed...” Melvyn Brown

“If a teacher at school has an Anglo-Indian in her class who does well, it’s exceptional, and everyone talks about it.” Anglo-Indian school teacher

INTRODUCTION

Even before I had heard of India’s Anglo-Indians my family had supported several young Anglo-Indian women through their boarding school education at Dr Graham’s Homes, in the Himalayan foothills. In a roundabout way it was through this sponsorship, and therefore through the education system, that I came to learn about Calcutta’s Anglo-Indian community.

The relationship between Anglo-Indians and the education system is characterised by paradoxes. The link between Anglo-Indians’ involvement with the elite schools in India, and the modest educational achievements of Anglo-Indians, is an example. Anglo-Indians founded and continue to be involved at a level exceeding their population ratio in the administration and teaching of these elite schools. Paradoxically, while these schools contribute to the success of privileged Indians, it is widely accepted that Anglo-Indians are the most disadvantaged students.¹ I will explore this situation in this chapter. Yet another paradox is the view that education is

¹ Writings about Anglo-Indian education seem to focus on underachievement: see, for example, Lobo (1994) and Gilbert (1996).

the way forward for the Anglo-Indian community as a community, yet the trend is that individual Anglo-Indians utilise their education to leave India.

Finally, yet another paradox is that, even though English is the most highly valued language in India (in practice if not in theory), the fact that it is Anglo-Indians' native tongue seems to bring them no advantage. In fact, it leads to such phenomena as illiterate English speakers, an idea which in the minds of many in India is a contradiction in terms.

More importantly than all of this, from an anthropological point of view, it seems to me that education, to Anglo-Indians, can be seen in terms of what Hage refers to as "fetishising" of a "collective identity" (2004) in a process where people identify with particular characteristics displayed by the "best of the best" of their community. To use Hage's example, when a Maronite thinks of him or herself as European (through their connection with the French colonisers whose influence they take pride in) they think of "white people rich in economic, aesthetic and/or cultural capital" (2004) rather than "a group of smelly French destitutes sleeping under a bridge" (2004). Hage explains the use of the collective "we" idea as an example of identity fetishism writing:

For one of the most enjoyable powers of the collective "we" lies precisely in its capacity to make an 'I' experience what the 'I' by itself cannot possibly experience. 'I' can be uneducated and yet can confidently claim that 'we are highly educated compared to the Muslims'. 'I' can be a peasant but can proudly boast that 'we are a very sophisticated people'. (Hage 2004)

Anglo-Indians fetishise 'being educated'. This is based on the reality that it is they who provide disproportionately (in terms of their numbers) the teachers, especially in the past. They believe, somewhat contradictorily, that they are an educated community, and if they aren't, they should be. However, my concern with using Hage's theory of fetishism in relation to Anglo-Indians and their education is that to draw attention to a process where a person can gain a sense of enhanced self-worth (through their connection with a group of people, and possession of a set of characteristics) may be to undermine any self-esteem that may have been acquired. The idea that people have about themselves can be both a source of motivation to strive to fulfil that idea for oneself and also a source of hope. I can understand that in

the case of a characteristic such as ‘whiteness’, which is the characteristic that Hage focuses on in his article, all the aspiration in the world won’t make it a reality. But for a characteristic such as being an educated, literate community, it is a different matter. What I see happening in the Anglo-Indian community of Calcutta is that through their belief in themselves as an educationally achieving people, individuals see this as being within their reach, and endeavour to achieve in this area.

I will show as concretely as I can, how ‘education’ is ‘a good’ in this sense. Anglo-Indians bring out this dimension of the life of ‘education’ as an idea in their lives. Individual stories, will I hope, convey the experiential dimension of this part of their lives.

ANGLO-INDIANS AND THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

There are several publications and theses that explore the history of Anglo-Indians’ involvement in India’s primary and secondary education system, and others that comment on the current educational scene for Anglo-Indians (Anthony 1969, Lobo 1994, Gilbert 1996, Younger 1987, Gist 1972, Gist and Wright 1973).² Briefly, an elite system of schools, modelled on the British system, was set up for the Anglo-Indian offspring of European (mainly British) men.³ The schools were established for two main purposes: Firstly, to educate Anglo-Indians so that they could take up subordinate positions in the East India Company (which ran India’s infrastructure for a century before the British government took over the role of administration of the India Empire in 1857)⁴ and, later, in British India’s government services. The second reason was, as

² Anglo-Indian involvement in the tertiary education system has always been limited.

³ Lobo’s 1994 PhD thesis provides a comprehensive, and very readable, history of Anglo-Indian schools in India. Its focus is the exploration of reasons for Anglo-Indians not achieving in their own schools.

⁴ The first school was set up in Madras in 1673 for children of British or Portuguese heritage to learn, in English, “about English history and customs, so the company could “insure the continuation” of British customs and attitudes and to “provide trained recruits” for the East India Company” (Gilbert 1996 citing Goodrich 1952:93). Macaulay, (who in 1835, held responsibility for the education budget in India) presented to the government his now famous ‘Minute’, which strengthened the grounds for the establishment of English medium schools. Below is a portion of his recommendation: “It is possible to make natives of this country thoroughly good English scholars, and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed. It is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population” (Young

Lobo says, “Christian missionaries wanted to evangelise the Indian population and saw the Anglo-Indian population as the ideal entry point” (1994:34). The first schools were associated with churches and it is still the case today that most Anglo-Indian schools are affiliated with a church.⁵ They are referred to variously as Christian schools, English medium schools, and, of course, as Anglo-Indian schools. These schools form the majority of the elite schools in India. They have been prone to criticism from some quarters, as Colonial institutions (Raman 1996). Nevertheless, wealthy non-Anglo-Indian Indians seek after places in these schools.

Two articles of the Constitution of India, 1950, protect the Anglo-Indian schools:

Article 29(1) states that: “Any section of citizens residing in any territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve that same. This protection extends to its right to administer its own schools where the community’s Christian heritage is fostered and the English mother tongue is reinforced through its use as the medium of instruction.”

Article 30(1) states: “All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.”

ANGLO-INDIAN SCHOOLS

There is significant variety in the types of schooling available to Anglo-Indian children ranging from evening school in a hall in the bustee of Tiljala (in day-school premises), city and hill station boarding schools, to small privately-owned schools. Many of Calcutta’s Anglo-Indian schools, which Anglo-Indians have, at least in theory, privileged access to, are the elite schools of the city. Some examples of the best of these (as suggested by a Roman Catholic Bishop⁶) are La Martiniere, St. Xavier’s, Pratt Memorial, Modern Girls, St James, and the Loreto House schools. I will describe two institutions that I came to know.

1952:729). Although Macaulay’s ‘Minute’ is directed at Indians, Anglo-Indians were also seen as a class between the ‘Indian masses’ and the British.

⁵ The exceptions are those set up since Independence by politicians and entrepreneurs (Lobo 1994:148). ‘Frank Anthony’ schools are an example of an influential chain of Anglo-Indian schools established in Independent India.

⁶ I interviewed this man on my second education-focussed fieldwork trip.

THE MARION CENTRE



Plate 14 The Marion Centre

The Marion Centre is one of the latest educational centres to be set up to cater particularly for the local Anglo-Indian community. It was established by ‘Sister Marisa’⁷ in Picnic Gardens, in 2000. Before this, from 1985, she ran an education centre in Ripon Street, central Calcutta, in association with St Mary’s Roman Catholic Church. In an interview with her she told me about her education centre. She started with twenty-two Anglo-Indian students, “‘drop-outs’ from some of the best schools in Calcutta”, whom she wanted to give “a second chance in life”. This venture was funded by aid providers such as *Help a Poor Child* and *Action Aid (London)*. The nature of the education centre has evolved in response to Sister Marisa’s reading of the community’s need. Since its opening she said she has seen over two thousand Anglo-Indian students through her school which offers the “Open School” curriculum, an

⁷ Sister Marisa was an Apostolic Carmelite nun for many years. Although she received a papal dispensation in 1992 she continues to be known by her religious title and now has a secular position in association with the Archdiocese of Calcutta.

alternative to the Delhi Board curriculum.⁸ Originally she had discerned a need for remedial studies and ‘catch-up’ classes for students who had failed at their schooling or left school without gaining qualifications necessary to gain reasonable, liveable employment. Her centre runs night classes as well as classes for full-time day students. She had, by 2003, introduced Delhi Board curriculum for day students from years one to seven, and after another year intended to offer classes to year eight at which point the education centre will gain recognition as a Delhi Board school.

DR GRAHAM'S HOMES

This is a school which although not located in Calcutta is very much a part of Calcutta's Anglo-Indian educational scene. The school is situated in Kalimpong, in the Himalayan foothills, several hours drive from Darjeeling. The missionary John Anderson Graham founded it in 1900 after seeing the hardships suffered by the (often illegitimate) children of mixed British and local parentage. Liaisons between British tea planters and local Nepalese, Lepcha and Assamese women were not uncommon and the tea planters frequently avoided responsibility for their offspring. This situation of neglect was exacerbated if the young planters stayed on to be promoted, and were joined by their British wives (Mainwaring 2000:4-5).⁹ Nowadays the school caters for the poorest of Anglo-Indian children who are sponsored for their nine months of boarding, plus their tuition fees. The school is recognised as having a good academic and sporting record and like most Anglo-Indian schools is known for its emphasis on Christianity.

In terms of hierarchy of schools, Dr Graham's Homes School occupies an ambiguous position. While it is a school that is well thought of, it is common knowledge that the children from Calcutta who attend come from very poor backgrounds. Being known as a good school for poor kids, I wondered how the low cultural capital required to attend stacks up against the cultural capital attained from the good education acquired through attendance. A suggestion of the possible, or potential, stigma attached to having attended this school was indicated through a comment made to me before I met

⁸ Indira Gandhi introduced the “Open University” system to India. “Open School” is the primary and secondary system associated with this tertiary system.

⁹ It seems that tea planters retained a certain reputation. Philomena, in her story in Part Three of this thesis, tells of being warned by her mother to take care of herself in their presence, as they were “rather wild”.

a wealthy Anglo-Indian businessman. I was told that he was unlikely to inform me that his wife was a Dr Graham's Homes' old girl because he would be embarrassed by the disclosure. As it turned out, however, the man did volunteer the information, early in our association, with no hint of embarrassment.

THE EXPERIENCE OF EDUCATION

ATTITUDES TOWARDS EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

In talking to Anglo-Indians in Calcutta it was evident that there are conflicting views about the success of Anglo-Indian students. On the one hand, prominent community members expressed confidence about the way current students were achieving (Brown, pers. com., O'Brien, pers. com). On the other, there was a recurring theme relating to poor work habits of Anglo-Indian students. This was expressed in terms of lack of motivation, and poor parental support. Reference was often made to the waste of scholarship funding on Anglo-Indian children. I shall explore these varied convictions in this section.

Here is the view from an Anglo-Indian schoolteacher, teaching at one of the church schools. It is similar to many others I heard:

All the teachers know that if a girl is an Anglo-Indian from the Barracks then she's going to be a drop-out – going to year 7 or 8 only. If a teacher at school has an Anglo-Indian in her class who does well, it's exceptional, and everyone talks about it.

Yet again, whilst driving past St Xavier's College, my host for that evening expressed his anger with the priests and nuns who teach at the Anglo-Indian schools: "They teach the Bengalis well, but the Anglo-Indians... and the schools are called Anglo-Indian schools... they [Anglo-Indians] do badly." I speculated aloud about how much the teachers are really to blame. He grinned and said, "Well, maybe there're other things... Anglo-Indians love to socialise. Of the 24 hours in a day, they want to party for 25. The Bengalis have no social life. They just work."

Many Anglo-Indians seem to be hard on their own people. They have a stereotypical view linking educational achievement to ethnicity. They believe, for example, that Bengalis study hard (as the quote above indicates) and achieve good results, that Muslims are not good scholars, and that Anglo-Indians tend to be influenced by their

neighbours and were generally not good scholars either.¹⁰ They believe that Anglo-Indians have a ‘natural’ tendency to live an Epicurean life and have little heed for the future, and they say that a result of this attitude has been a lack of interest in schooling.

Not all share this view however: One person I spoke to, who is involved in Anglo-Indian education, believes that while this may have been the case in the past, it is now changing. He said that for the last decade or so Anglo-Indians have started to take their studies seriously and have realised that:

...in the past they’d send their children to school but most of the children would become drop-outs, because the parents themselves were not interested too much. That was in the past. Now things have changed for the last, say decade. Things have changed because now they feel responsible and they feel that without an education, there is no future for the community and the children. But prior to ten years back, from the time of ’47, 1947, nobody ever thought seriously about education and the children’s future. Parents were always in a domestic struggle of making ends meet. They were not getting very good jobs. But somehow they managed to exist.

So what is happening now is that we are trying very hard to educate the children so that the least they can do is be a graduate - because going as far as year 12 is not enough in today’s world. And Anglo-Indians have a very good chance here in India. If they are graduates and there is competition, it’s always the Anglo-Indian who will come out first, for the simple reason that English is his mother tongue. You see? And because our way, our style of living, our way of thinking, is so westernised we could hold good jobs.

This change, he and others believe, may well have resulted from the elimination of the job reservations that had been available to Anglo-Indians until 1960. Prior to this they had received preferential employment opportunities in central government services such as Railways, Customs, Posts and Telegraph, and in the Defence Services.¹¹ In the words of Neil O’Brien, the President-in-Chief of the AIAIA:

¹⁰ A further example is a young couple I spoke to about their decision to move to Picnic Gardens who said they had moved partly because it is a more cosmopolitan area but what was more significant was that it would be better for the children they hoped to have. They said that they would prefer that their children “mix with Bengali children rather than with Muslim because the Bengalis took their studies seriously”.

¹¹ Mahar notes that these reservations were of “transitory and illusory benefit” and “wrought on the other hand the greatest damage” (1989:41-42). The “damage” that he writes of is the belief that Anglo-Indians became victims of prejudice as being seen as “the favoured” as well as becoming increasingly reliant on the types of jobs their forefathers had held serving the Government (Mahar 1989:42).

“Now that the crutch of reservations has been thrown aside the next generation have come to realise that they need to get a good education.”

FIELDWORK OBSERVATIONS

I have recounted varied views by Anglo-Indians of their own educational achievement and their attitude towards it. The following is based on my fieldwork observations. I saw children who were working far harder at their studies than many of the New Zealand children I knew, and often in extremely difficult circumstances. They spent large portions of their after school hours and their school holidays studying, and worked in conditions far from conducive to good study.



Plate 15 Young Anglo-Indian boy studying at his home

One of the people I met while in Calcutta, for example, was a middle class Anglo-Indian woman, estranged from her Punjabi husband, who, at the time I interviewed her, was attempting to have her son admitted to La Martiniere. He was attending St

Xavier's at the time.¹² Whenever I visited her she demonstrated how hard she expects him to work. As well as showing me his schoolbooks, his well set-up desk space, and quizzing him on his general knowledge, she complained (to him, and to me in front of him), that he does not do enough schoolwork at home. It seems to me that he works as hard as any middle-class Bengali child that I saw. She told me that he is not allowed to watch any movies as it takes time away from his studies.



Plate 16 Secondary school student at her desk

Another example is a young woman who was studying for her year 12 exams when I visited her family. Her exams were scheduled to begin two weeks later. She pointed out the tiny study area in one corner of her family's one-roomed home (one of a group of five adjacent rooms sharing toilet and ablution facilities). When she is at home, she lives with her mother, father, sister and brother. She said she usually studies through the night when it is quiet in the house because everyone is asleep. Her father sometimes gets up during the night while she is working and makes her a hot drink. He has to take the kerosene-fuelled stove outside into the dark of their shared access walkway. She also made use of the flat roof of her home, or the communal stairs

¹² La Martiniere and St Xavier's are elite schools in Calcutta.

leading up to the roof. She was able to work in these spaces during the day as long as there was no one else around to distract her, and as long as the temperature allowed.

This young girl's parents have almost no education. Her mother never attended school, and her father completed up to year two. He is immensely proud of his children's academic achievements and said how important it is to him and his wife that they do well. Many very poorly educated parents were taking on the role of encouraging their children's education, sons and daughters alike.

I have included her father's story next as it captures something of the importance of education to him.

PETER: A CASE STUDY

Peter, who is in his early forties, and looks a bit like a slim Michael Caine, was born and brought up in a poor, very congested area of Park Circus - one of the inner suburbs of Calcutta. The third of four sons his schooling finished part way through year two. He refers to himself as "an uneducated man". His illiteracy was brought to my attention when I gave him and his wife, Maya, an anniversary card – it was passed to his teenage daughter to read to them both. The explanation offered by him was his curtailed education. He said that his mother decided that he should stay at home and cook for the family instead of going to school. His mother was a schoolteacher so perhaps she thought she could educate him at home; that never happened.

Some of his early childhood memories include delivering lunch to his older brothers at their school. From early on he had the responsibility of preparing the evening meal in time for his mother's return after her day of classroom teaching followed by private tuitions. His father was a driver¹³ in Calcutta but Peter referred to him so infrequently in his discussions that I am left with the feeling of little family involvement or influence from him. His mother, on the other hand, was described by various family members as "ferocious". The job his father had was eventually taken over by one of the older brothers. There is no question that Peter is bitter that his two older brothers were given opportunities that he was denied. He attributes his present situation to parental partiality.

¹³ We would use the term 'chauffeur'. Anglo-Indians and Indians refer to 'drivers'.

He and Maya married while they were both in their teenage years. They met as neighbours and always seem somewhat sheepish about disclosing this fact. I'm unsure why but can only presume that the circumstances were somewhat embarrassing or that it wasn't the right thing to do. Maya is from a Muslim family. Peter says he "converted her" to Christianity and to "being Anglo-Indian".

They now live not far from the place they grew up. Like many poor Anglo-Indians they live in an almost exclusively Muslim area. They are the only Christians in the vicinity and the only English speakers – a characteristic of Peter's rather than Maya's. Where they now live is on the fourth floor of an old apartment block. A maze of narrow lanes must be negotiated to find their building. In places the space between buildings is so narrow that it feels as though you're walking along an internal passageway. Peter says you can jump from one building to the next where the buildings are the same height. Going up to their floor there is no stairway lighting – even in the middle of the day it took a good few seconds for my eyes to adjust to the dimness. On the way up to their home we passed rooms that were being used for various forms of light industry and manufacturing. A group of women were sewing; caps and t-shirts, leather was in various stages of treatment, and in one small poorly-ventilated room a group of six or seven young boys, aged from what looked like about seven to thirteen, were stitching leather wallets and bags for export.

Peter pays Rs100 (NZ\$3.50) per month for this place that is bigger than their last home and has the advantage of a separate bathroom. Water is delivered and paid for as they need it, and power (used primarily to run the ceiling fan), costs about Rs40 per month. They have access to a fridge in which they store meat and fish (for their Bengali son-in-law when they know he is to visit) in one of their neighbour's homes.

Peter gave me the impression that he feels very isolated and alone where they live. He said that he doesn't talk to anyone, and that he stays in the house except when he comes and goes from work, and Maya locks herself in when he is away.

The first time I visited them they lived on the outskirts of the city, at least 30 minutes by train from Sealdah station. Their home there was a tiny, very tidy one room in the centre of five single-roomed homes. The single story low-ceilinged, flat-roofed

construction had shared water, bathroom and toilet facilities. The shared roof top provided space for washing to dry, kites to be flown, and an escape.

On one occasion I visited, Peter was very late arriving home. In fact he hadn't arrived home by the time the rest of us had eaten dinner and I had to leave for the hostel with their younger daughter. The later it became the more Maya fretted for him. She sat at the window and looked out over the street below hoping to see him coming. She became more and more distracted by worry. He travels by public transport to and from wherever he is selling his caps. If he is late returning home he has no way to contact his family as they don't have a telephone.

While we waited for his return I was told of an incident which had led to his late return the previous week: He was selling caps in an open, public garden area when he noticed a girl on a bridge near to him. He guessed she was about the same age as his younger daughter and looked as if she was about to jump off into the deep water below. He called out and ran and grabbed her before she could. He caught her from behind and held her there as a group gathered around them. What began as a spontaneous, life-saving gesture rapidly came to be seen in a different light by some members of the group. They accused him of behaving inappropriately with her. The police were called; interviews were conducted with the girl, him, and 'witnesses' from the park. The girl's parents were contacted. All the while he was being held by the police. Eventually his version of events was believed and he was allowed to return home. He arrived back late, and upset: with very little to show for his long day away.

His mode of earning a living for himself and his family is very insecure – both in terms of the money he makes and his physical safety. At one stage he owned a machine which he used to sew caps but now buys them for Rs3 from a local "Mohammedan"¹⁴ woman, and sells them for Rs5. He had to sell the machine several years ago when one of his children became sick and he had to find money to cover medical treatment. He makes an average of Rs40–50 per day (from the sale of 20–25 caps). In the past he has restricted his cap sales to people on trains or on station platforms. Until recently living close to the railway station meant he didn't need to spend any of his income on

¹⁴ To use Peter's expression.

transport. Now, however, he lives away from easy access to a station so sells on the roadside and in public parks as well as on the trains.

To trade on the trains vendors require a licence – another cost to bear. Peter was selling on the trains during a recent licence inspection. As his licence “needed renewing” he and others in the same situation were taken to a lock-up for the day. They had no food or water for the entire day, were fined and eventually allowed to leave. He arrived home late, and very upset. His family aches for their gentle provider.

His lifestyle has made him determined that his children are not left in the same situation. He said on numerous occasions that his lack of education is his downfall. He had wanted to emigrate to find a better life somewhere, anywhere, else. After saving and spending Rs800 to be issued with a passport he is reconciled to the fact that he will never use it because even though he would work hard “no country will take an uneducated man.” He knows it is too late for him but it is not too late for his children. His ambition for years has been for his three children to gain a good education, including a degree and professional training and then to “find a nice job.” Then he will stop working. Maya echoed his sentiments when she said, “What we don’t have we want our children to have”.

A major disappointment for them in the year between two of my fieldwork trips was that their eldest daughter gave up her teacher’s training course to marry. He told me that he was “still very angry” with her: “She could have had a nice job, a very good job.” He retains the dream in relation to their other daughter saying with restrained optimism: “Let’s see what happens with her”.

Peter epitomises what I frequently saw happening in Calcutta. The sense I had of him is that he is a man who assesses himself and finds that he lacks ‘being’ of a type that is particularly significant to Anglo-Indians – that of education. He can see that it is too late to improve himself educationally (that is, he can’t add to his sense of his own ‘being’ by further education) so he does what he can to improve the lives of those closest to him, and through them, his own sense of himself will be enhanced. He has transferred his aspirations to his children and provides whatever he can to improve their chances of achieving. He takes a keen interest in their work, and their grades,

while showering them with love and affirmation. It is only through his children's success (which he measures largely by their educational achievement, and through that, their employment and material comfort) that he can augment his own being. If his children are successful he will be more generous in assessing himself.

Such Anglo-Indian attitudes to education challenge other Anglo-Indian perceptions of those attitudes. I will now turn from attitudes and the perceptions to the reality of the resources that Anglo-Indians can draw on for their education.

EDUCATION SUPPORT

The system of resources, itself, is subject to varying perceptions. The president-in-chief of the AIAIA, for example, believes that social service organisations can aid Anglo-Indians through education:

Poverty is not an exclusive domain of the Anglo-Indian community, but we have opportunities to get out of it. (...) But I'm not very much in favour of just welfare. That is a temporary solution. So what you need to do with that money is help these children to get an education.

This ideal has practical support through the numerous scholarships and other assistance made available to Anglo-Indian youths. I'm not sure how the Anglo-Indian community compares with other Indian communities but they do seem to be able to access funding for educational purposes relatively easily. Anglo-Indians who attend Anglo-Indian schools, for example, are entitled to make use of a partial waiver of their tuition fees, facilities fees, and equipment fees, as well as being entitled to free lunches in some institutions. This is available only upon the production of 'proof' of their Anglo-Indian identity by, for example, a certificate from the AIAIA guaranteeing their status as Anglo-Indians. Those who attend church schools may have to provide evidence of their active involvement in their parish in order to qualify for entrance and fees waiver.¹⁵

The necessity to provide a certificate can be problematic, as one woman I visited pointed out on the day I visited her in her tiny home in Tiljala where she lives with a number of family members including her two grandsons. She was upset and frustrated

¹⁵ I was told by a number of people that there are many non-Christians, for example, Muslims, who have had their children baptised in order to meet eligibility requirement for attendance at good central city Christian schools.

over her failed attempts to enrol them at St Thomas's, a primary, day school. It was the last day for enrolment and she hadn't managed to get the application forms together. She said that the main problem with the forms was that she had to get the AIAIA to give her a certificate stating that the boys were Anglo-Indian. And they wouldn't give it to her because they aren't members of the association. She said it costs a minimum of Rs20 per month to belong and she couldn't afford that. She said that she would probably end up sending them to a local hall for evening school, but she was far from resigned to this option.

According to Lobo (an Anglo-Indian researcher who attended Anglo-Indian schools), by 1990, more than 30 associations, groups or societies professed to look after the needs of the Anglo-Indian community nation-wide (1994:144). Some of the Calcutta-based organisations which offer financial and other assistance towards education include: The Rangers Club, CAISS, CTR (Calcutta Tiljallah Relief, Inc.), the East India Charitable Trust Fund, the AIAIA, The Oxford Mission¹⁶ (which operates through the East India Charitable Trust, and manages and administers a fund called the Anglo-Indian Schools Trust Fund), and some of the schools organise independent sponsorship for their students, for example, Dr Graham's Homes. An example of the type of practical assistance available is that offered by CAISS whose education panel takes responsibility for assessment and distribution of educational aid with the aim that "no child turns a drop-out due to lack of books, uniforms, shoes, medicals, examination and other fees" (CAISS 2002:4). In 2002 they sponsored the education of 75 children who range from primary school students, to college (university) students, to those enrolled in specialist higher courses, for example, hospitality courses. In the first six months of 2002 they distributed over sixty thousand rupees, the majority of this going to cover admission and school fees.

NON-ANGLO-INDIANS ON ANGLO-INDIAN SCHOOLS

As well as talking to Anglo-Indians, I spoke with several middle-class Bengalis who had been educated in Anglo-Indian English-medium schools. One of them expressed the view that Anglo-Indians have contributed hugely to the education of the Calcuttan

¹⁶ Funds from the Oxford Mission are made available for Anglo-Indian youths who require money for higher studies or vocational training, for example, nursing, engineering, law, medicine, hotel management (which costs about one and a half lakh). Such fees are well out of reach for most Anglo-Indian families.

community while at the same time disempowering themselves. One said that his well-to-do family enrolled him in an Anglo-Indian school because they wanted him to be proficient in English. He said that as well as the language “my lady teachers also taught us about Western manners, proper behaviour, etiquette, speech, taste, dress etc.” He also made the point that: “Over the years, hundreds of [Anglo-Indian] teachers have taught thousands of Indians who have gone on to do well, and who wouldn’t think of repaying the favour. They might build a temple or do something for their own people but they wouldn’t consider doing anything for the Anglo-Indian community.”

DISADVANTAGED IN RELATION TO THEIR OWN SCHOOLS

Given the history of the connection and the commitment to education, as well as the resources available, it came as something of a surprise to discover the educational disadvantage amongst Anglo-Indians. This seems to be played out in various ways. Lobo (1994) believes that Hindi and religious studies could be viewed as obstacles in Anglo-Indian children’s education.¹⁷ Hindi because a lack of Indian language proficiency at year ten can hold back a student’s education. Simply, no pass in Hindi means no promotion. I discuss the problem of language further on in this chapter.

Religious instruction was seen as an obstacle because it took time away from the study of other subjects. According to Lobo, the time spent on religious instruction was significant and affected only the Anglo-Indian students. While Anglo-Indian children are receiving this instruction other students were able to spend the time on their other subjects. While this may be a factor in other parts of India, this does not appear to be the case in Calcutta. One person who is involved in the education system, and is aware of Lobo’s thesis said he felt it is “out of date”:

“I’ve talked with Ann [Lobo] about this; you can’t find *one* school that has this emphasis on religious instruction...”

He compared his own schooling with that of his grandchildren who attend local Christian Anglo-Indian schools:

¹⁷ According to Lobo (1994) a third factor, which disadvantages Anglo-Indians in Anglo-Indian schools, is the lack of coherence and cooperation at administrative level between one Anglo-Indian school and another. This has led to a diversity of educational policies and failure to meet the needs of the Anglo-Indian community (1994:352-364).

“The kind of catechism that I learned at school would be enough today for me to be a theologian, but now it’s all very different. So I don’t think the pressure of that study... No, it’s not there. Even those who go to the very good Christian schools know very little about their own religion, but what they do learn is to *practise* their religion.”

FINANCIAL SOURCES OF DISADVANTAGE

According to several community leaders I spoke to, who have been involved in the Anglo-Indian schooling system for a number of years, there are several ways in which Anglo-Indians are excluded from their own schools. At entry level, the schools do not want or seek their admission because, firstly, they are not full-fee paying students. Anglo-Indian children (and other Christian children in the case of Christian schools) are entitled, in principle, to admission at an extremely low rate of fees: In the vicinity of Rs300-600 per month. Full fee payers pay very much more.¹⁸ It is said that the fee-paying students pay at a rate that covers the costs of the 5-10% of non-fee paying students. One Anglo-Indian couple I spoke to voiced the opinion that to speak of ‘Anglo-Indian schools’ was a “big joke”: That they are popular with all Indians because they are English medium, but only a few teachers are Anglo-Indian and only about five percent of the students are. Much of the Bengali population of Calcutta is considerably wealthier than the Anglo-Indian population and so can afford to pay the large sums of up-front entrance fees required. The vast majority of Anglo-Indians cannot afford to pay the amount required by school boards for admission even though, in principle, if they are Anglo-Indian they are not supposed to need to pay this.

Another reason that Anglo-Indians can feel excluded from their own schools is that these students are often not in the market for the out-of-school-hours tuitions,¹⁹ which, in many cases, the classroom teachers offer on a one-to-one (or small group) basis to children. One former teacher at St. Xavier’s has, in fact, referred to this practice as “institutionalised corruption” (pers. com.). Pay rates for teachers are very low so I was not surprised to learn that teachers choose to supplement their income in this way.

²⁰ While many Anglo-Indian children come from families who cannot afford to take

¹⁸ This figure varies from one school to another but in 2002 some fees were several thousand rupees per month.

¹⁹ This term may sound strange but the plural is the preferred form used by Anglo-Indians.

²⁰ In 2003 a graduating teacher told me that his basic rate of pay would be Rs2500 - 3000 per month. He said that he could make that much again in tuitions if he worked hard. Even Rs5000 is a very modest income.

the extra lessons, full fee-payers can relatively easily afford the additional cost. Anglo-Indian admissions can, therefore, be seen as a drain on the finances of both the schools and their teachers.

The very need for tuitions in order to succeed in the school system disadvantages Anglo-Indian children.²¹ Class numbers in the normal school system are high, even in the elite schools 50-60 children per class is not uncommon.²² When the teacher knows that most of her or his students will be taking some outside lessons (even those offered by the same teacher) the incentive to ensure that the students are learning well in class time may be diminished. I was told by a number of people in Calcutta, both Anglo-Indian and others, that one of the main problems with the Indian school system was that it was a two-tiered system – one tier comprised classroom teaching, and another was in the form of tuitions, which were run simultaneously and complementarily. It seems that without the extra lessons the chances of passing sufficiently to be promoted were severely diminished. Once students begin to fall behind their age group it would not be surprising if their self-esteem and self-confidence took a knock – factors that contribute to the likelihood that they will prefer to leave school early in order to escape a humiliating situation, that is, become a “drop-out”, a phrase common on the tongues of Anglo-Indians.

EFFECTS OF FINANCIAL DISADVANTAGE

As anyone who has had children at school knows, there are all sorts of hidden costs involved with education. From my insider but amateur observations in New Zealand (as a parent), it seems that the opportunities to take on extracurricular activities is generally in proportion with the social status of the school. Higher status schools, for example, offer more expensive sporting opportunities, camps, and other supplementary activities. This trend also applies in India – with the result that Anglo-Indian children, in many cases, are financially unable to take part in many activities offered by their elite schools. One woman I spoke to, who does not have children of her own but takes

²¹ This aspect of the educational system disadvantages the poor, generally, but most of ‘the poor’ would not be at Anglo-Indian schools.

²² I have recently spoken with teachers who had taught in Indian schools before emigrating - to New Zealand in one case and England in another. They commented that even though the class sizes were large, the students in India were well behaved compared to the students in their current schools. Both find the need to constantly enforce discipline makes teaching out of India more difficult.

a particular interest in the education of Anglo-Indian youth, said that poorer Anglo-Indians generally fare better at the lower status Anglo-Indian schools. The girls, for example, fare better at the Loreto School in Elliot Road than they do in Loreto House in Middleton Row, which is regarded as the top school. She felt that the teaching was probably much the same in all of the schools but the Anglo-Indian girls do not prosper at Loreto House because of the social pressure from the wealthy (generally non-Anglo-Indian) students. Lack of capital means that Anglo-Indian students, who are often poor, can not take part fully in the life of the school and this affects students in various ways. For example, on sports days students are required to wear sports clothing and Anglo-Indians frequently cannot afford the Rs900 plus sports shoes that the wealthier students wear. She gave an example from her own experience: she was a keen drama student but she did not bother to audition for parts in the school productions because she knew that her family would not be able to afford to costume her. She said she knew of plenty of others who do not take part in additional school activities because they could not afford to. She said that even in regard to the regulation uniform there were differences relating to economic status. An example would be how long a uniform was made to last, and the number of uniforms a person could afford to own at any one time. She speculated that some teachers might take note of the economic differences between students and treat them differently.

Another person I spoke to said that as a 'scholarship boy' the cost of his school uniform was a crippling financial burden on his family. It was all very well that his fees were paid but no aid was given for other costs.²³

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES

The acquisition of Hindi and Bengali is still regarded by many in the community as a problem. Explanations for this vary, as do opinions about the extent of the problem. The head of the Anglo-Indian schools board believes that it is no longer a problem, that more Anglo-Indian students are passing at higher levels than ever before.²⁴ As I have mentioned, Lobo's research identified the acquisition of an Indian language as a problem, and others (for example, parents of current students) point to Indian language

²³ It is in this area that social service organisations, such as CAISS, offer assistance.

²⁴ Neil O'Brien, as the Board's head, made this comment at the 2004 Anglo-Indian Reunion in Melbourne.

lessons (other than English) as being the most problematic for Anglo-Indian students. This is the view of one Anglo-Indian businessman who sits on several school boards:

My argument is that they must look at the classrooms and find out how many kids are going into nine, ten, eleven and twelve. Now that is where your answer lies. And then look at what's happening in the interim. You can use the arguments that they don't want to study, but the kids are very sensitive people. You have to understand they're not studying in class because it's so difficult for them. Again there's prejudice by the teacher who thinks "Okay, an Anglo-Indian child - you'll never learn Hindi. Get out of the classroom." Now my daughter learnt Hindi very successfully, but never at school. She had a private tutor who's very good and she did exceedingly well in Hindi.

But she needed that ...

Oh she needed the tuitions, or she would not have survived. Teaching in classrooms is so bad.

With a hundred and fifty children in the class²⁵ how can they ever give any personal attention? And these children need focused attention in the language they don't know. And you take another child who speaks the language at home, and gets all the tuitions and what have you. It's unfair! Now that's got to be recognised by schools.

A 'cottage Auntie' at an Anglo-Indian boarding school believes that Hindi is problematic because of the children's attitude to the language (and in some cases to learning in general), combined with the fact that it is a new language for many of them which they feel has little practical application. Lobo's (1994) findings were that Hindi lessons are an easy option for non-Anglo-Indians because very often it was their native tongue. In Calcutta, Bengali is the most commonly spoken language and is a language option in schools. One Anglo-Indian university student I spoke to, however, said that in her school, a hill station boarding school that catered for both Anglo-Indian students and non-Anglo-Indians, the Anglo-Indian students were not given this option, rather they were told that at year ten they must take Hindi. The option of Hindi *or* Bengali at this level was available only to non-Anglo-Indian students. Both Hindi and another vernacular language is compulsory until year eight. From year ten, one language may be dropped. From this point onwards, in order to be promoted to the next year, proficiency in a vernacular language is obligatory, as is a pass in Mathematics and English.

²⁵ I'm not sure if this figure was meant. I tried to check it at the time but the conversation was going elsewhere.

I was told by many Anglo-Indians that Anglo-Indian students find little opportunity to practice the Hindi they learn at school as they do not, generally, speak it at home. They have just a few lessons per week, and they feel it has little practical purpose. That said, many of the Anglo-Indians I spoke to could speak Hindi and used it regularly. The younger Anglo-Indians seemed to me (never a language student!) to be competent speakers while some of the older people told me, when I commented on their use of Hindi, that they spoke only ‘kitchen’ Hindi – which they found was useful for their servants and for “marketing”.²⁶

One of the major advantages for me in working with the Anglo-Indian community was that I spoke the same language as they do. Whether I was interviewing or just spending time in their company, communication was easy. I often, however, found myself in a situation in the wider Calcuttan community where it would have been useful for me to know Hindi or Bengali. At times I felt socially handicapped by my inability to comprehend what was being said around me, or to be understood by non-Anglo-Indians (very occasionally Anglo-Indians would use my lack of understanding of an Indian language to talk to each other about something they didn’t want to include me in). Even in central Calcutta, where a larger proportion of the population speaks English than in any other parts of the city, a local language would often be invaluable. Anglo-Indians mix with the local Indian community more than they ever have before: living, working and being educated alongside other Indians when in the past it was possible to mix almost exclusively with English-speakers.²⁷

English medium schools give the Bengali-speaking students the equivalent of full-immersion English language teaching. It was suggested to me by one person who had been very involved in the Roman Catholic school system, that an option for Anglo-Indian students was to attend the government-run vernacular language schools. As well as being cheaper, this would extend to them the full-immersion method of learning an Indian language. The person who made this suggestion is aware that Anglo-Indians would resist such an idea. In one of my interviews the comment was

²⁶ In Chapter Six I discuss this issue once again based on my observations at Calcutta’s Anglo-Indian Day panel discussion.

²⁷ In the past the population of Anglo-Indians in the city was higher, and there was the option of living in self-contained railway cantonments, which meant that many Anglo-Indians could almost completely avoid contact with non-Anglo-Indians. That is no longer possible.

made that there is high status associated with a parent being able to say that their child goes to one of the Christian or English medium schools, but there is little status attached to attendance at a government school.

FLUENCY IN ENGLISH VERSUS EDUCATION

In my reading about English language in India, it is evident that the ability to speak English carries prestige, and it is taken for granted in India, that a speaker of English is an educated person (see Raman 1996, Green 1998, Mishra 2000, Mee 2001).²⁸ In my travels in India, and in Nepal, I would look for someone who looked ‘educated’ if I needed directions or advice, because it had been my experience that if they were educated they were more likely to speak English. Wearing glasses was often a sign to me of a person’s education, as was western clothing. The elderly Anglo-Indian beggar at the corner of Middleton Row and Park Street fitted the description of the sort of man I would approach for assistance. Had I sought advice from him I would have thought I was right in my assumptions about his educational status when in fact he is almost illiterate and had only rudimentary education. He was one of many Anglo-Indians I met who were illiterate which was a surprise to me in light of what I had read about the community. Frank Anthony, for example claimed that: “The community is cent-per-cent literate” (1969:ix). Lobo also said that all those she met were literate (1994:456).

²⁸ Bourdieu’s (1984) idea that education may be used as a weapon of distinction is relevant here. The effectiveness of this weapon will be dependent upon the current feeling about Western influences. At the time of independence, English was regarded as the language of the elites. It was the language of government and the national language in a country where local dialects are most commonly used in the local regions. It is the language of the Constitution. The IAS (Indian Administrative Service) insists on its members being fluent in English and all its business is carried out in English. The IAS represents the real power in the country.

On a conscious national level, India is becoming Hinduised, with for example, the national languages now being both English and Hindi. By some accounts (Mee 2001, Raman 1996) there is a ground swell of opposition to the continued privileging of the ‘language of colonialism’. By other accounts (and in some cases the same) (Raman 1996, Green 1998, Marquand 2000, Mee 2001) there is an important place for the English language. There appears to be a contradiction between the practice, and the ideal of Indianisation. This is played out in the tension between politicians who “oppose English publicly for political reasons and supports it privately for personal reasons” (Raman 1996:16). Evidence of this is seen in the fact that English medium schools are among the most sought after. Small-scale local businesses may get by without English-speaking staff but larger businesses with international dealings will not, as invariably business transactions are carried out in English. The fact that many Anglo-Indian women are employed as tutors in conversational English language, and Western etiquette, for the wives of Bengali businessmen is an indication of the perceived necessity for proficiency in English language, and other Western ways.

Proficiency in English ought to have given Anglo-Indians a huge social and career advantage in India. As custodians of English medium schools they ought to be influential. Why has this not been realised? Raman’s comment that “teaching as a career has a distressingly low priority in India” (1996:18) may shed some light on the situation, as might the public move towards Hinduisation, under the BJP government in particular.

Illiterate and semi-literate Anglo-Indians represent a contradiction to the commonly held belief that speakers of English are educated. There are many Anglo-Indians in Calcutta, especially older ones, who are illiterate. When I observed the distribution of pensions to older, very poor members of the community I was shocked at the number of pension recipients who were signing for their pension with a thumb print. I was told that the auditors were not very happy about it – “But what to do?” was the helpless rhetorical question in response.



Plate 17 Anglo-Indians signing for their pensions, some with a thumbprint

As well as these older Anglo-Indians, I spoke to people in their early forties who could not read or write. What was heartening was that in each case illiterate parents' children were attending primary or secondary school, and in some cases even tertiary education.²⁹

²⁹ A comment was made at Calcutta's Anglo-Indian Day panel discussion to the effect that today's parents were better at parenting than their predecessors had been. An example used to support that claim was that they were actively encouraging their children in their schooling even though they may not have the educational skills themselves.

ANGLO-INDIAN VIEWS ON ANGLO-INDIAN SCHOOLS

Anglo-Indians take a great deal of interest and express concern about their educational system. In this section I will briefly present the views of a couple of them to give a sense of how these people feel that Anglo-Indians are served by the system as a whole. I draw on the work of Lobo and comments made at diasporic reunions. Lobo commented that, “According to British Anglo-Indians who visit India, the unemployment and poverty are linked to the educational system” (1996a:20). She is of the opinion that a number of Anglo-Indians are too poor to attend their own schools (1996a:17-20). She notes that, “The Anglo-Indian education system is the ‘social instrument’ of the community. It is the ‘distributor of life’s chances’ and the schools act the part of a ‘cultural transmission of values’” (1994:145).

Lobo is also of the view that Anglo-Indians will soon lose their own schools and have already lost a lot of control. She puts some of the blame for this on the fact that there is conflict between the different organisations which means that they are not able to make decisions for the benefit of the community as a whole - rather they are each interested in working in a way that promotes the interests of the separate associations. Also, the boards tend to be made up of Bengalis and Indian Christians rather than Anglo-Indians. She also argues that the success of Anglo-Indian schools lies in the control for their management lying with professionals rather than “ambitious politicians” (1994:366).

One of the conclusions of her research is that it is essential that the various groups get together and work out what is best for the community as a whole in order that it will be correct to say that there is an “Anglo-Indian community”. Lobo has a rather pessimistic opinion of Anglo-Indians, believing that they prefer conflict to co-operation (1994:362), and thinks that this characteristic makes it less likely that the required cooperation will eventuate.

A concern that has been raised by Anglo-Indians is that Anglo-Indian schools do not teach Anglo-Indian history. At the symposium at the 2004 Reunion an Anglo-Indian asked a question about teaching Anglo-Indian history in Anglo-Indian schools. The question was brushed aside by a Calcuttan Anglo-Indian (who has more connections to the Anglo-Indian education system than anyone I can think of) with the comment that Anglo-Indians learn about this “on their grandmothers’ knee”. In looking back

through communication from the very first Reunion, in London in 1989, I see this issue was raised there as well. Rather than the idea being dismissed, on that occasion the following conclusion was reached:

That we should teach our children Anglo-Indian history (when one considers the fact that our fathers and fore-fathers were the prime executors of the British administration, law and order and civilian life in India, we have a lot to be proud about). (As reported by Gaynor 1989)

Whenever I broached the topic of the ‘health’ and prognosis of the community, education was advocated as the primary means of strengthening the community. One successful businessman, said, in response to my query:

I believe very strongly that education is going to be the survival of the community and nothing else. If the kids are not educated, they do not go to college. ‘That’s what I tell these boys in Birkmyre.’³⁰ I say, “you have to go through college.” Once they’re through college they will find a job. But you have to have that base to go forward.

So it’s not just about personal survival for these kids, so they can get a decent job...? How is it going to affect on the community? How’s it going to ensure that it gets stronger?

You see if they’re educated they can get good jobs. If they come to me as a graduate I can get them jobs. Because they’ve got good personalities, they talk well, so you know...

Further discussion indicated that his rationale was that if the youth of the community can get good jobs then that will build community pride, which will contribute to the strength of the community as a whole. Whether the employment is overseas or not did not seem to be relevant. This is consistent with the way they see each other, as members of a mobile diasporic community. What was important is that they would be part of an imagined community that was an educationally and materially achieving community. So even though, individually, those who do well educationally have often ended up leaving India, the fact that they provide an example of what an Anglo-Indian can do, of what they can achieve, outweighs the fact of their physical removal from Calcutta. They are a source of pride and of reinforcement of how to be, or what it means to be, Anglo-Indian.

³⁰ This central city boys’ hostel (that I have referred to earlier) was set up for Dr Graham’s Homes graduates who wanted to continue their studies in the city. The equivalent for female graduates was set up in 2002 in Marquis Street as St Mary’s hostel. Neither is exclusively for Dr Graham’s school graduates.

Grimshaw says that education has always been of “central importance” to Anglo-Indians (1959:236 cited in Gilbert 1996) even if they were not attaining at a high level.

It is this characteristic of themselves, which if not achieved in their own lives, can result in people being particularly harsh on themselves, perhaps seeing themselves as failures: as individuals as well as Anglo-Indians. Peter’s harsh view of himself, as expressed in his reference to himself as “an uneducated man” is an example of this. He is determined that his children will not be able to say this about themselves. Rather they will represent “the best of the best” of what Anglo-Indians can be. It is true that, in saying this, education is being ‘fetishised’. On the other hand I deeply admire and respect the way Peter has committed himself to enhancing the ‘being’ of his children. His life represents in its own way “the best of the best”.

CHAPTER SIX

COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

I have already described and examined some day-to-day practices of Calcuttan Anglo-Indians, which I have identified as contributing to the maintenance of the community as a reasonably distinct sociocultural group. In the case of Christian and educational practices, I do not presume that Anglo-Indians see them in terms of contributing to a sense of belonging to the community in the way I have described. Rather, they are more likely to say that their religious practices are based on a particular set of beliefs relating to their being Christians, and that they do what they do because they belong to the Christian community. And what they do in terms of education is based on their understanding that a good education is an essential requirement for an individual to support themselves as adults. In other words, though “education” as an idea has a particular place in the formation of Anglo-Indian identity, they don’t *all* necessarily see it as a particular characteristic of their community, or of being Anglo-Indian.

In this chapter, however, I discuss events that are deliberately created with the survival of some type of Anglo-Indian entity in mind, indicating that the community *is* important to its members, at least to those members who organise and participate in the various events. There has been a ground swell of interest from and about Anglo-Indians, which could perhaps be referred to as a renaissance. This has resulted in the establishment over the last two decades of several socially strengthening and unifying events. The first is a World Reunion, which is held every three years. The second is World Anglo-Indian Day which is celebrated each 2nd August since it began in 2002.

As part of the fieldwork for this project I went to Calcutta for the Anglo-Indian day celebrations in 2003 and to Melbourne, Australia, in 2004 for the Reunion. In this chapter I begin by describing those events. I then discuss the ways in which they may act to engender a sense of community by regarding them as rituals, in that they are not

a part of the day-to-day life of the people who enact them, are performed with a particular outcome in mind, and follow a prescribed set of actions. I explore the purpose they set out to serve, and the success of the events in obtaining that result. I also look at the idea of ‘identity’ and discuss the way this concept is played out at these occasions. In addition to this I speculate on the individual motivation for attendance at such celebratory events.

THE EVENTS

ANGLO-INDIAN DAY

On the morning of August 2nd 2003 I asked a couple of Anglo-Indian boys at the hostel I was living in if they were going to the dance at the Rangers Club that night. Neither of them was but they knew about it. I asked if they were going to any other of the Anglo-Indian Day events. One response was “No but...Oh, is that what the dance is for?”. Why was the second of August chosen as Anglo-Indian day they wondered? One speculated that perhaps it was the date of Anglo-Indian independence. “From what?” another asked, then ventured a reply: “India? We’d love independence from India!” This statement is particularly revealing of what an Anglo-Indian may consider paradise: a country of their own which is at once India and not India.

August 2nd 2002 marked the first celebration of World Anglo-Indian Day. The late Gene Leckey, a New Zealand Anglo-Indian, proposed the idea for an annual event in 2001.¹ The date is significant as it was on this date in 1935 that the definition of an “Anglo-Indian” first appeared in the Government of India Act.

In this first part of the chapter I discuss World Anglo-Indian Day as it is celebrated in Calcutta. I give an overview of the events of the first World Anglo-Indian Day, held in 2002 based on written and oral reports. I then describe the events I observed and participated in that August weekend of 2003.

Around the world, but particularly in England, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and India, Anglo-Indian groups put together programmes to celebrate the day. Calcutta’s first celebrations were particularly extensive. Planning started in April when a core committee was formed under the leadership of the MLA, Gillian D’Costa-Hart. The

¹ I discuss this further below.

committee consisted of members of CAISS, the AIAIA, Calcutta Rangers Club, and Melvyn Brown of *The Anglo-Indian Newspaper*.² It was, I was told, the first time that these groups had worked together.

Calcutta's 2002 celebration was held over three days. The following description of the weekend's events is based on reports in CAISS's *Reach Out* (November 2002), a newspaper article written by Barry O'Brien (O'Brien 2002), a report in *The Anglo-Indian Newspaper*, and personal communication with research participants. On the Friday, 2nd August, at 8am, members of the community gathered at the graveside of Anglo-Indian poet Henry Vivien Derozio. The chief guest was Md. Salim, Minister for Minority Affairs. Speeches were made by him and by the MLA and prayers were led by Lawrence Hartnett, Principle of the Assembly of God Church (AG) School. A song and a hymn were sung by the school choirs of Welland Gouldsmith and the AG school respectively, and then the 'last post' was played. Following this was the opening of an exhibition at St. Xavier's College put together by Melvyn Brown. It included "posters, press cuttings, articles, books, and photographs on Anglo Indian culture, achievements and way of life" (CAISS 2002:19). An ecumenical service and fellowship was held at St Paul's Cathedral that evening.

On Saturday a panel discussion was held on the topic of "Looking back for strength – Looking forward with hope and confidence". Members of a senior and a junior team gave their views on the topic and the MLA, acted as the moderator. After the panel discussion six people were officially honoured for their roles by being presented with awards for service to the community. The Chief Guest on this occasion was the Speaker of the West Bengal Assembly, Mr Halin. That evening a dance was held in the Calcutta Rangers' Clubrooms. As well as the expected convivial socialising and dancing, an Anglo-Indian queen, and an Anglo-Indian king were crowned, and a jive competition was held. On the Sunday the Rangers Club "Tent"³ was the venue for about 750 people at the Food Fest and Day Out.

² Melvyn Brown produces this newspaper monthly. He distributes it to the diasporic community as well as to local Anglo-Indians.

³ The "Tent" is a simple, single-storied, shed-like construction on the Maidan, which the Rangers Club use as a clubroom.

2003: *SATURDAY MORNING*

I was disappointed not to be able to attend the first Anglo-Indian day programme in Calcutta so was determined to be there for the next. The closer it came to the day the more concerned I became that anything would actually happen. I had heard mixed forecasts about the day: from Gillian D'Costa-Hart, in March: "There will definitely be a programme this year. It will be bigger and better than last year's" (pers. com.), to, "they're not having one this year because they're having the reunion in January" (personal correspondence from an Anglo-Indian research participant in early July who seemed to have confused the two events: the Reunion, and Anglo-Indian Day). Some expressed uncertainty or spoke of being kept out of the "information loop". A week before I was due to leave New Zealand I finally received confirmation by e-mail that the day *was* being celebrated. I was told about the programme for the weekend and advised that it would commence at 10am on the Saturday morning with the inauguration and a debate.

The programme changed marginally from what I had been told but at least I knew for sure that my trip, timed to coincide with Anglo-Indian day, would be particularly worthwhile in being able to incorporate participation in the weekend's events. From the time I arrived in Calcutta, a few days before 2nd August, I asked many of my Anglo-Indian friends and acquaintances if they were attending the various events. Almost nobody I spoke to was going to, or had even heard about, the panel discussion, but it seemed from those I spoke to that the dance and the "Family Day Out" at the Tent were going to be well attended.

On the morning of the 2nd I walked down Park Street to St Xavier's College auditorium. It was a mild, low thirties, slightly humid day. There seemed to be some confusion over the starting time. A local newspaper had given 10am as the start time, and my contacts on the organising committee said 10:30am. By 9:50am a few people had congregated in the hall, including, I was pleased to find, an old friend from CAISS. Over the next half hour various Anglo-Indian dignitaries and participants in the panel discussion arrived. The audience numbers gradually increased but never to more than one third of the capacity of the hall. This was different from last year I was told, when the hall was full. Apparently there had been more publicity last year, so less confusion over what was on, and where and when it was to be held. This year's

celebration was very much a CAISS, AIAIA and Rangers Club event. People who belonged to those organisations were likely to have been notified, but many other Anglo-Indians in the city had not heard about the programme for the weekend. The only public notices were to be found in the personal column of the Statesman newspaper on the preceding Thursday and Friday mornings, and there was also a congratulatory notice in the papers from the MLA on the morning of 2nd August.

Several people who had attended the events the previous year told me that they were not attending this year because they had not received an invitation. The issue of invitations (and consequently of rights) to attend what seemed to me to be a public event was puzzling. In the previous year, at the inauguration session, awards had been given for service to the community. This was one of the features that was missing from this year's event, and its absence was suggested to me as another possible reason for the small turnout at this first occasion of the weekend.⁴ Another reason I was given for poor attendance was that where there are no "women, dancing and drink", Anglo-Indians would, "of course", be poor attendees. I was also told that one of this year's organisers had been in hospital within the previous month or so, and that another had in recent times lost her husband, so organisation had been left until the last minute.

Barry O'Brien opened the morning's events.⁵ He introduced the guests of honour and leaders of the organising bodies. To inaugurate the day each of these guests lit a wick of the ritual lamp, a ceremony that resembled the performance of the aarti rite⁶ (Fuller 1992:68). Father Orson Wells was the chief guest (an Anglo-Indian, unlike the previous year's guests of honour who were Bengalis). Others who participated in this inauguration ceremony were Gillian D'Costa-Hart, the MLA; Sandra Martin, the Calcutta president of the AIAIA; Philomena Eaton, the convenor of CAISS; and Norman Knight, the president of the Rangers Club. After the lamp was lit it was

⁴ At an unrelated function I had attended the previous evening there had been speculation, by Anglo-Indians who obviously didn't know about this omission from the programme, about who would be receiving awards at the next day's ceremony.

⁵ Barry O'Brien has an unparalleled Anglo-Indian leadership pedigree. His father is the President-in-Chief of the AIAIA, until recently his mother was the local president of the same organisation and it is thought by many people I spoke to that that he himself will become the next MLA. His brother became the President of the Dalhousie Institute (which was, until the 1960s, an exclusively Anglo-Indian club – it now has more Bengali members than Anglo-Indian) the following weekend.

⁶ This Hindu rite is referred to as "the lamp service" and is almost invariably part of Hindu puja, or religious, ceremonies (Fuller 1992:68).

announced that the weekend's celebration had been launched, and Father Orson Wells was invited to lead an opening prayer.

This was followed by the panel discussion which O'Brien moderated. He made the point that actually it was an "adda"⁷ rather than a panel discussion, and that all three major events of the weekend could be covered by that term. The theme for discussion was "Tomorrow's People Speak Today". The participants in the panel discussion were introduced: one was a high school student and three were college students.⁸ Two older Anglo-Indians, a social worker and an educationalist joined them.⁹ O'Brien began the discussion by making the point that this year they were not looking back, just looking ahead. He stated that he did not encourage references being made to the community's history. He then facilitated the discussion on topics such as education, occupation opportunities, emigration, mixed marriages, and contemporary Anglo-Indian lifestyles. He questioned the panellists about the ethnicity of their friends and, to the amusement of the good-natured audience, of their boyfriends and girlfriends. He asked them about their competence in a vernacular language. After they had unanimously asserted a conviction that knowledge of a vernacular was important he asked for demonstrations of their competence. They each spoke in Hindi, Bengali or Nepali. I am not able to assess competence in any of these languages but did note that while a couple of the speakers seemed slightly hesitant at times, generally they spoke with confident fluency. One who spoke in Hindi was responded to with laughter from the audience, and was applauded when she had finished (which was also an indication of the language competence of members of the audience).

Except for the comment by one of the young woman that "we don't have a country of our own" (which was quickly refuted by O'Brien) the young panellists gave the impression that they were very much at home in India. One of the panellists, for example, ended his opening address with "we are Indians, the Anglo-Indians". As well as being competent in a vernacular language I was interested to see that three of the four were dressed in traditional Indian clothing. Both young men wore kurta

⁷ An adda may be translated as a chat amongst friends. See Chakrabarty (1999) for further discussion.

⁸ In India tertiary institutions are referred to as colleges.

⁹ In their introduction a distinction was made between them as "people of today" and the students who were "tomorrow's people".

pyjamas and one of the young women was wearing a shalwar kameez. The second girl was in a western top and trousers. The other official Anglo-Indian guests, all older than the panellists, were wearing western clothing (with the exception of the priest who wore clerical clothing). The moderator commented upon the clothing of the boys, saying they looked as though they had thought it was a fashion show. One of the boys, responding to this comment said that this was “St Xavier’s uniform” and that he would wear this type of clothing to “the Club”,¹⁰ shopping and anywhere else he went. I saw him several times while I was in Calcutta, both before and after Anglo-Indian day, at “the Club” and other places, and on each occasion he was dressed in a T-shirt and jeans. I speculated to one of my neighbours about the politics of wearing this type of Indian clothing while representing Anglo-Indian youth. In dressing in the way they had they were reinforcing one of the central themes of the morning’s debate, that they were “Indian”. To my mind the comment by the young woman who said that Anglo-Indians don’t have a country seemed spontaneous; the others seemed to me to be too rehearsed to be viewed without some scepticism.

As well as several of the young panellists articulating the desirability of integration of Anglo-Indians with “the rest of India”, (some going further, to say that Anglo-Indians were well along the road to integration), this sentiment was also evident in various forms of symbolism throughout the morning – the opening celebration and the reference to the discussion as an ‘adda’ are two examples. While I had sometimes found this view amongst people I spoke to in the course of my research,¹¹ it was not as widely held, in my view, as the morning’s discussion would suggest.

Soon after mid-day the discussion was wound up. The event was concluded with a short speech from the MLA who thanked all those involved in the morning’s event: the participants, the sponsor, and the core committee members for their behind-the-scenes organisation. In conclusion the Indian National Anthem was sung, and the hall emptied out into the recently drenched streets.

¹⁰ The Dalhousie Club

¹¹ Some of the more successful Anglo-Indian families are openly pro-integration.

AN ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMME

Melvyn Brown did not attend the official celebrations on this occasion. As a tribute to his community he made other arrangements to celebrate the day. On the afternoon of Anglo-Indian Day he screened the film *Queenie*, which is a depiction of the life of the Anglo-Indian film star, Merle Oberon. Melvyn held the screening in his front room that is often converted into a public space.¹² He hired plastic chairs and arranged them in rows for the people he was expecting. I had visited him during the week, just after he purchased a table fan for Anglo-Indian Day. He then had to have the switchboard rewired to run it. During the screening he supplied refreshments every hour or so of the three hour film.

As well as the film screening he had arranged an essay writing competition with prizes, which he advertised in his publication, *The Anglo-Indian*. He also published a bookmark that he distributed with his newspaper. He did not attempt to cover any costs by charging for the event. Generally, his focus is as much, if not more, on the overseas Anglo-Indian community, which he reaches through his newspaper.

THE DANCE AT THE RANGERS' CLUBROOM

The dance that evening was held in the Rangers' Clubrooms, on the second floor of a once grand central city building. I was invited to attend with one of the organisers who was rostered on duty at the entrance. We were the first to arrive, which suited me. It gave me the opportunity to look around and take photographs before people began to arrive, while the band, *Shiva*, a well-known local band with several Anglo-Indian members, was tuning up and sound-testing.

The main room had been decorated with red and white streamers. During the evening one or two of them detached themselves and were caught in a ceiling fan – alarming me each time as they crackled like a fire. Tables with red or white plastic chairs were arranged for designated groups. All 450 available tickets, priced at Rs150, had been sold before the evening began.¹³ I was told this was not unusual for Anglo-Indian dances: that several weeks before the “31st Dance” tickets are sold out.

¹² He has screened other films (often religious), and Catholic Masses have been said in this space.

¹³ Their sale was restricted to people 16 years and older.

People started arriving in significant numbers by 8pm or so, and at about 9:30pm the gates to the building were locked “to keep out the rowdy element” (as explained by one of the organisers). By then the music was playing loudly, strings of lights around the dance floor were flashing, a reflecting “disco ball” swung, and a smoke machine produced an effect to go with the occasional crackling streamer caught in the fan. Waiters took orders for and delivered snacks and drinks all evening.



Plate 18 Rangers Club dance

I was struck by the goodwill expressed towards one another at the ball. People who would not have had social contact with each other at other times went out of their way to greet, converse, and dance together. As if to emphasise the point, a number of people approached me, knowing that I was interested in their community, and pointed out that what I was witnessing was a typically Anglo-Indian way of socialising. The point was frequently made that this was in contrast to how other Indian communities celebrated. They commented on the easy mixing between men and women, on the type of music being played (which was almost entirely western) and on the dancing.

It was a hot, humid night, which no one but I seemed to mind. Some of the men, I noticed, changed their shirts during the evening and many mopped their faces. At

various times during the evening I estimated that two thirds of the guests were on the dance floor. People of all ages danced with considerable efficacy. I asked one man if they held dances in April or May - when it's hotter still. "Of course!" he laughed.

This year they did not hold a contest for the Queen and King of the dance. I was told, in a good-humoured way, that it had taken too much time away from the dancing last year. They did hold a jive competition though. A couple in their twenties won it. They had serious rivalry from among another dozen or so superb dancers.

It was on this visit that I discovered how central the jive is to Anglo-Indian identity. One person described it as the "national" dance of Anglo-Indians. Other comments made to me during the course of that weekend also highlighted the significance of being able to jive if you are an Anglo-Indian: one of the dance organisers told someone, as she introduced me, that I was half Anglo-Indian (which I am not but was interested in the divisibility of the identity) then corrected herself, "no, she's three quarters Anglo-Indian. She's learning how to jive". And an Anglo-Indian friend's reaction when I told her I was taking dancing lessons was: "Oh, you're learning to jive?" Implying: what other dance could there be?

I left a little before it finished but I later heard reports about the rest of the evening. I was told that, perhaps even before we had left, there had been a fight between two well-known members of the Rangers Club. Over the next week I heard many different versions of what had taken place, and why. According to people I spoke to it is not uncommon for there to be the odd "scuffle" during the course of a dance, but they are quickly forgotten.

STEPPING ON TOES, BALANCING ACTS

Before the evening, I had been concerned about the potential effect of my alliances being publicly revealed or indicated by whom I sat, and danced, with. This was an opportunity for a public display of my friendships, and in many cases, of my data sources. I was concerned that this overt display would negatively impact on my ability to work with other people. I made a point of mixing with as many of the people I knew as possible. This was partly to get around the problem of seeming to be strongly allied with any one particular group, but also because I enjoyed the company of so many different people I saw on that night. It was a good opportunity to catch up with

people I hadn't yet seen on this visit, and make arrangements to meet with them again. I can never be sure of the effect of being seen with certain people. Uncertainty comes with the terrain, not just of being a social scientist working with a factionalised group of people, but for any person involved socially with any similar group. Some people are better than others at walking the requisite social tightrope.

DAY OUT AT THE RANGERS' MAIDAN TENT

At eleven o'clock the next morning, Sunday 3rd August, people began to arrive at the Tent. I arrived closer to midday (after observing and helping a little at CAISS's Sunday morning ration and pension distribution, going to Mass, then collecting a friend on the way) by which time it seemed that every one of the white tables and red plastic chairs was occupied. About one thousand people of all ages came during the course of the day. Some came and went but most stayed for hours to take part in the full programme. An announcement was made every half an hour or so about what was coming up next. On many occasions we were reminded what the day was about. At one stage, during the housie session when the emcee had everyone's attention, the members of the different organising bodies were introduced and formally thanked.

It was a genuine "family day out" with activities organised for all age groups, from football games for competing teams of teenaged boys, to marble and spoon races, sack races and three legged races for the youngsters, and a treasure hunt for the very youngest. Many of the days' events were organised along lines of rivalry between CAISS, Rangers Club, and AIAIA teams. For example, tug of war competitions, and drinking races were held where soft drinks were consumed by the children and beer by the adults. Other activities included housie, music and dancing, and different Anglo-Indian organisations provided a selection of Anglo-Indian food for lunch.

After a couple of hours of housie, culminating in a final winner of a Rs10,000 prize, it was announced that the Rangers Club was going to bring back the tradition of having a housie session every third Sunday of the month. This was going to begin with a trial period. It was stressed that card games being played while housie was on would not be allowed. Sunday afternoon seems to be a traditional time for card playing. Several people I knew slipped away before the housie began to go to their regular card group, and I did notice one group discreetly running their own cards' session while the housie was on.

Early in the afternoon teenagers took the opportunity to spontaneously demonstrate their break-dancing talents. As I watched them a woman beside me made the point that: “We excel in dancing.” Another Anglo-Indian man commented that with the music we were listening to, and watching the skill of the teenagers ‘breaking’ we could be in New York, or anywhere in the world. The dancing, interrupted for a while by the housie session, went on for hours. Different styles of music – all danceable – brought the people who could manage the ten-degree increase in heat on the partially enclosed dance floor, to their feet. The littlest ones moved rhythmically to the music encouraged by the teenagers. No one seemed self-conscious.

There was no mistaking where we were: the Ochterlony Monument could be seen clearly through the recently washed air, as could the Peerless and the Grand hotels. Every now and again a mounted police officer rode past and glanced over the hedge at us. Indian snack sellers were outside the Club entrance all day and into the evening—never missing an opportunity to sell ice creams, nimbu pani,¹⁴ and moori.¹⁵ Parents, tired from the night before, were kept from going home by their children who didn’t want to be parted from their friends, in spite of having school the next day. As dusk fell the awning that had offered some protection from the rain during the day was taken down to free the trapped over-heated air. Fans that had worked all day were adjusted to point to groups who pulled chairs up to catch some extra breeze. Waiters tried to keep up with the orders for drinks and snacks as first the Bacardi breezers, then the beer, then soft drinks were sold out. It was hours since anyone had had a really cold, cold drink. Some of the men were a little “high” but not unpleasantly so. The teenagers had been high all day – but on their own good humour and company. No one was in a hurry for the day to end.

I was left with no sense, from this occasion or from the dance the night before, that these people were hankering for integration with the “rest of India”. While some of the women wore Indian dress, mainly shalwars but the occasional sari, none of the men appeared in Indian dress (even the young panellist who proclaimed that he often wore the kurta was there in jeans and t-shirt). The food was more Indian than I would expect to find back home, but distinctly Anglo-Indian. Food on offer for lunch, for

¹⁴ A lemon flavoured drink, literally lemon juice water.

¹⁵ A dry snack food made with a puffed rice base.

example, included pork vindaloo and rice, jhal frazi,¹⁶ meatball curry and yellow rice or parathas, and sandwiches. From the CAISS tent people could purchase a choice of roast beef, or egg and mayonnaise sandwiches. There was plenty of mixing between men and women, which would not occur at an “Indian” function. I was reminded – verbally as well as through observation – that this is a sociable, fun loving community. The comment, “That’s typical Anglo-Indian; if there’s drinking, dancing and women they’ll be there” offered in the context of a criticism (as an explanation for Anglo-Indians being present in good numbers at the dance and the day out, but not at the panel discussion) distinguishes this group from other Indian ethnic groups. The music and the dancing were western, at both occasions. The weekend’s events, with the possible exception of the panel discussion, left me with the impression of a people celebrating their culturally distinctive characteristics.

It is important to note in conclusion, however, that a consequence of their approach to their celebrations is that it attracts a certain portion of the population and makes it almost inaccessible for others. The attendees were those who could afford to buy tickets to the different sessions and who had heard about the occasion through one of the associations involved in the organisation of the day: the Rangers Club, the AIAIA and CAISS. I believe that no one from Tiljala attended, although many have connections with CAISS (as recipients of aid) and would most probably have known about the day. But they would not have been able to afford to come. Middle-class Anglo-Indians who I spoke to after the weekend celebrations said they had not known about it, as they were not members of any of the associations involved. There was very little advertising in the media, and the numbers attending was low in relation to the population in Calcutta. In spite of that, the organisers were pleased with the turnout. The venues (with the exception of the forum) were full to capacity. As we shall see, attendance at the reunion was also largely limited by financial factors. Once again the organisers were happy with the numbers attending. It did make me wonder

¹⁶ Jhal frazi means, literally, a hot and frizzled dish (jhal means hot and frazi is a corruption of frizzled). According to people I spoke to, it is not iconically an Anglo dish but is often served at Anglo-Indian functions. There are many versions of it, but the original one was of Indo-Brit legacy - devilled meat (left over roast from the night before) curried up with potatoes and served up. So in one way the original was truly ‘Anglo-Indian’ in the wider sense of the word (pers. com. Anglo-Indian friend and cook.).

about the effect of the fact that the group participating in the events is a relatively elite group.¹⁷

THE SIXTH WORLD ANGLO-INDIAN REUNION¹⁸

The second part of this chapter will focus on the Sixth World Anglo-Indian Reunion held in Melbourne in January 2004. I attended this event as both an observer and as a participant. I had been invited to present a paper at the symposium, one of the only sessions that didn't involve dancing, and I attended all others except the sightseeing tours. As well as describing the various elements of the reunion I will make comparisons between it and the Anglo-Indian Day celebrations held in Calcutta. These celebrations seem to represent a conscious act that ensures that a time and a way of being Anglo-Indian is preserved and given a space in the lives of those who identify with the community. At the Reunion there was a range of activities which meant that those who attended could all feel included in some way, whether through the numerous opportunities to dance, to eat excellent Anglo-Indian food, or discuss issues of importance to the community.



Plate 19 Anglo-Indian Reunion site

¹⁷ Blunt (2003) briefly discusses the demonstration staged by Anglo-Indians who could not afford the registration fee required to attend the 1998 Reunion in Bangalore, India.

¹⁸ I know this event is not in Calcutta but I have included it here as my attendance at the reunion was based on my work in Calcutta. In addition, there was a small group of people at the reunion who still live in Calcutta, as well as many who had done, before they left India. According to Brian Brooks, the chair of the Reunion committee, 39% of those who attended came from Calcutta originally (pers.com.).

The reunion of over three thousand people took place over the course of seven days in a number of venues around Melbourne. Of those who attended most were Anglo-Indians from Australia but there were also groups from the UK, Canada, New Zealand, America, and a small contingent from India.

The programme for the week was as follows:

Day One:	Meet and Greet followed by a Multi-Cultural Concert.
Day Two:	Symposium, and an evening Bay Cruise.
Day Three:	Sight Seeing.
Day Four:	Sight Seeing.
Day Five:	Aging and Poverty Conference, and Pagal Gymkana.
Day Six:	Grand Ball.
Day Seven:	Mass, Jam Session and Food Festival, and General Meeting.

A DIARY (OF SORTS)

DAY ONE: I arrived at 'The Palms' in Albert Park with Melbourne friends and a couple from Calcutta. Hundreds of participants were there already. A huge yellow banner welcomed us to Melbourne and to the reunion. It was soon after the start time of 10am and we anticipated staying for the morning, having lunch, then leaving well before the 3pm scheduled finish. It was a clear Melbourne day so tents and shade screens had been erected to protect us from the antipodean sun. Plastic chairs were set up in the shade; a stage of sorts was arranged on one side of the tent-enclosed area. A sense of excitement and anticipation pervaded the atmosphere. People had come to enjoy themselves and to meet up with old friends and family. The day was punctuated with cries of recognition, hugs, and excited catching up on decades of people's lives. I felt a part of that as I scanned the crowd for familiar Calcuttan faces and for a friend from New Zealand whom I knew was there, somewhere. I was as excited as the rest as I caught sight of one person after another. In good conference fashion we all wore name tags which also identified each person's Indian geographic origin and their present residence. By the end of the week I had added Calcutta to my nametag: A geographical link shared by a large portion of the people attending.



Plate 20 Reunion participants

The reunion was officially opened by Brian Brookes, the chair of the reunion committee, Gloria Moore (a well known Melbourne-based Anglo-Indian writer), and Neil O'Brien, the President-in-Chief of India's AIAIA. We were welcomed, and invited to have a great time, meet old friends and make new ones. After the opening and housekeeping announcements the music started, followed soon after by the beginning of a week of dancing. On all occasions except, ironically, the food festival, the catering was well organized to feed the several thousand people attending. Another feat of organisational efficiency was the transportation by chartered bus of hundreds of delegates from central city hotels and apartments to the various events.¹⁹

Throughout the day the music was interspersed with calls over the loud speakers for people to meet with those looking for them. Old pupils from various schools were called to meet up at specific times, and for photographs. Some people I spoke to had attended past reunions but for many, especially locals, this was their first. Fifty-something was the average age of attendees but there were a number of younger

¹⁹ As in Calcutta, this was an opportunity for various organisations to work together for the first time.

people. The couples who came were commonly both Anglo-Indian. There were a few families and at least one group of thirty-something women who had come together to have a fun week away from home. I chatted to a young man in his twenties from London who had come with his slightly older cousin. He was born in London, as was his Anglo-Indian mother, but he socialized there with Anglo-Indians and looked and felt completely and enthusiastically at home with this reunion community.²⁰ Some of the teenagers thought it would be a good idea to have an event during the reunion especially for them – a western concept which had not seemed necessary at Calcutta's Anglo-Indian Day where all age groups attended and happily participated (with the exception of the dance where attendance was restricted to sixteen year olds and over).

A person I spoke with at the end of the day remarked that he didn't think the day had the feeling of a whole community reuniting, that it was really a venue for the reunion of friends and family. I asked about all the school-related announcements over the course of the day. He agreed that there was also a large element of school reunion about the day. One tent, for example, had been designated as La Martiniere and another was set up with a Bishop Cotton School Old Student banner. The feeling of a school reunion was also a theme at other events.

Only as the day was coming to end, and the chairs and port-a-loos were packed up, did people (including the group I was with which had anticipated getting away early) begin to leave and get ready for the evening. The evening event was a multicultural concert starting at 7pm. As well as the entertainment featuring many talented Anglo-Indians, a highlight of the evening for me was finding a kati roll in my supper snack box – my first since leaving Calcutta. The first day was over at close to midnight with the symposium and evening cruises on the agenda for the next.

DAY TWO: The symposium was opened by Keith Butler representing the EIC (East India Club), a Melbourne-based study group. He remarked that this, along with the Poverty and Aging conference on Friday, was the “cerebral” portion of the week. The title of the symposium was “Chatting on the Verandah” and began with a video of stories by Anglo-Indians, presented and produced by Richard Johnson and Glenn

²⁰ Several months later I met up with him and his cousin in London where they invited me to attend a family party. It was a large family gathering with Anglo-Indian food and great dancing - it could easily have transplanted to Calcutta. His mum said he'd always loved to dance and preferred these sorts of evenings to 'clubbing'.

D'Cruz, also members of the EIC. The 'stories' were anecdotal snippets of experiences and opinions of several Melbourne-based Anglo-Indians about being Anglo-Indian, and living in Australia. A feature of their stories was that food and the way they looked distinguished them from other Australians. I was reminded of what Ghassan Hage (1998) wrote about being Lebanese and living in Australia and the saddening impossibility of ever really feeling that you fit in or can meet the criteria required for "being" Australian. But this week was a time to enjoy their Indian-influenced characteristics, to take pride in their cultural and physical distinctiveness.

After lunch (nostalgically referred to as Tiffin²¹) six people spoke of issues that they anticipated, or hoped, would be of interest to the three or four hundred who attended. The papers included a rather positive report from India from Neil O'Brien; a discussion of whether Anglo-Indian women were "harlots or heroines"; a talk by a young man giving a youthful viewpoint; and a Canadian man's perspective on being Anglo-Indian. I presented observations based on my fieldwork in Calcutta, and the day finished with a plea about the plight of India's Anglo-Indians from a Perth-based charity worker.

During the last papers people began to leave in order to get back to their hotels to ready themselves for the evening Dinner Cruise. Although it had been showery during the day the evening was fine and the sunset stunning. It was a great venue for five hours of catching up and cementing friendships while eating, drinking, taking photographs and videos, and, of course, dancing.

Over the course of the week a number of people talked about the community in terms of it being very factionalised. Certainly there may be some distinct groupings but the same could be said of Anglo-Indians in Calcutta, and non-Anglo-Indians almost anywhere. A man from New South Wales voiced his concern over the potential damage caused by the number of people who talked about this feature as a strong, even distinguishing, characteristic of the community. He was afraid that it would erode community feeling, that such talk would escalate and become destructively self-fulfilling. To me, as an outsider, there seemed to be great harmony in the physical reuniting of this group of people. They gave an excellent show of reuniting bodily –

²¹ Lunch in India is referred to as Tiffin.

through dance, their ebullience, their energy, capacity for socializing and having fun, their taste in food, as well as their shared vocabulary and distinct turns of phrase.

DAYS THREE AND FOUR: The next two days were devoted to sightseeing around Melbourne. I didn't take part in this, as I'm familiar with the city, and had a ball dress to buy.

DAY FIVE: On Friday morning, in competition with a round of golf, was a "Poverty and Aging" conference (inadvertently, and tellingly I thought, referred to by one participant as "The Poverty and Grief Conference"). This was not officially a part of the reunion but had been sanctioned by it, advertised at previous events, and given tent space on the opening day. Little more than one hundred reunion participants attended it. The conference organizer, Adrian Gilbert, opened the morning's session introducing Blair Williams, an American Anglo-Indian who spoke about the fund he set up in 1998.²² Williams also ended the day presenting a proposal that a fund of US\$200,000 be set up so that the interest could be used to fund very poor Anglo-Indians in India after he and the current generation of Anglo-Indians who still have a "heart connection" with India have "expired". Others who spoke were Renshaw Dennis on behalf of CAISS who talked about what this social service organization does in Calcutta and also gave a less than optimistic view of the situation for many Anglo-Indians in Calcutta.²³ Another speaker was Neil O'Brien, who restricted himself to the topic of aging in India rather than addressing the issue of poverty. He normalised the aging process, making the point that loneliness and isolation among the old can be found the world over. He also defended what is done by the AIAIA in India (seen by many as being too little) arguing that many old Anglo-Indians who live on the streets don't want to be anywhere else. He referred to the televised documentary *A Calcutta Christmas* (Haslem 1998) which had been the subject of some discussion at the symposium in terms of what is happening to their people in India and reminded the audience that it is only the poorest of Anglo-Indians who go to the Tollygunge Home and they would be grateful for the three meals and shelter that it provides them. I think

²² The Calcutta Tiljallah Relief (CTR) fund was set up to assist poor Anglo-Indians living in various parts of India, not just those living in the Calcutta slum (or bustee) that the fund was named after.

²³ An important participant was to have spoken but a condition of her visa was that she didn't. Anglo-Indians in India have difficulties attending overseas reunions because of the problem in obtaining visas.

he's probably correct on both counts. There are other, very much more comfortable, homes in Calcutta for elderly Anglo-Indians who can afford to contribute to their own keep.²⁴

A later speaker was Brian D'Monte who talked about the residential home that has been set up in Melbourne for elderly Anglo-Indians. It is, according to people I spoke to, a home where Anglo-Indians can live their days out in an Anglo-Indian lifestyle. The activities are culturally appropriate: for example, Mass is said every Sunday and a curry is served every day. After hearing D'Monte speak about the home I talked with a couple of men (who are brothers) whose mother is there. This woman was initially a resident in one of Melbourne's elite homes, where a large deposit was required on admission, but she was miserable there. The sons heard about the opening of the Anglo-Indian residential home and were able to have her accommodated there. They visit her every Saturday and say that this is where they want to go when their time comes.

Other speakers on the day talked on issues such as the regulations to set up residential homes in Australia, and other (non-Anglo-Indian) charity work in India.

After this conference we headed out to an out-lying suburb for the "Pagal Gymkhana".²⁵ The afternoon began with each attendee being allocated to one of four "houses": red, blue, yellow and green. All were given the appropriate coloured T-shirt to wear for the day. After an "exhibition" hockey match, Springvale (the local team) versus "The Rest of the World", everyone was entreated to join their team members for the official opening and 'march past'. "Just what we used to do on school sports days" I was told. The local mayor opened the day and we were introduced to a 'Priest' and 'Sister' who, we were told, were there to ensure that there was no 'hanky-panky'. The sports afternoon included sack races, three-legged races, a tug of war, sack fighting and a number of games of 'Kabadi', an Indian game that I never understood, no matter how many people tried to explain it to me. It resembled a cross between team-Bull Rushes and tag. The sports part of the day was finished with a prize giving. For the second part of the event we took our plastic chairs inside for games of Housie,

²⁴ Up until recently the concept of a 'home for the elderly' in India was restricted to Anglo-Indians. Hindus have homes for widows.

²⁵ Literally, a "crazy sport's meeting".

and then dancing until midnight. During the evening they held a jive competition, which was won by the young man from London.



Plate 21 Pagal Gymkhana sports event

DAY SIX: The Grand Ball was the most well attended event of the Reunion with over two thousand tickets sold. I have attended dances in Calcutta that were called Balls but were reasonably informal dances, so I thought I knew what to expect. I was wrong. This was the most lavish occasion I have ever been a part of. It was held in the Royal Exhibition Building, a colonial style building on a grand scale which was reminiscent of the Victoria memorial in Calcutta. The style and condition of the building would not have been out of place in Calcutta at the peak of the Raj. The lack of ceiling fans would be the only architectural omission. In keeping with the grand venue, women wore beautiful ball gowns and men were in formal black evening suits.

The Lord Mayor of Melbourne welcomed the guests to Melbourne and to the evening, then Neil O'Brien gave a short speech congratulating the organisers and reminding guests that he was their representative from India: "The country we all have in common". The band filled the stage and played almost continuously from seven o'clock until after one in the morning. At one point, early in the evening, a young

Anglo-Indian couple gave a jive, then a rock'n'roll demonstration. The guests needed no encouragement to dance. They began dancing even before eating, long before the sun had set. For most this was the highlight of the week and many remarked that this would have been a great place to end. I disagree, as would others.

DAY SEVEN: The Mass at St Patrick's the next morning was another highlight, both spiritually and visually. The church is on the same scale and is architecturally as beautiful as the Exhibition Building, the Christmas lights adding to the beauty by picking out the columns and altar's backdrop. A full congregation packed the church and made for a spine-tingling rendition of the final hymn, "How Great Thou Art". It affected many of us: noticeable by the handkerchiefs that came out and neighbours putting a comforting arm around shoulders. For me, *this* completed the reunion. By voicing this opinion I show myself up as non-Anglo-Indian: that I would give up the next opportunity to dance.

The Food Festival and Jam Session saw the only glitch in the entire series of events: the food festival ran out of food with several hundred still to eat lunch. Arrangements were soon made to remedy this. The rest of the time was spent in talking, dancing the afternoon away, and the beginnings of farewells. My lasting memory of the young man from London was of him refusing to stop dancing. Even in the foyer, with his bus waiting and his cousin pleading for him to leave, he found someone to jive with to the music that was almost out of his hearing.

The final event was the Anglo-Indian Federation General Meeting. This is the meeting of all affiliated Anglo-Indian organisations worldwide. The reunion booklet advised that this was where the next reunion venue would be decided. There was, in fact, only one application so a decision to hold the next reunion in Toronto, Canada, in July or August 2007 was made in less than half an hour. The meeting lasted almost three hours with many other issues discussed. An insight into the philosophy of the federation, and the purpose of the reunion was given by one of the office holders when she asked, "What are the reunions for? Getting together or raising funds for Anglo-Indians in India?". The consensus seemed to be that the reunion ought to meet both demands. The focus proposed by one member was that "we want to give people a good time so that they leave smiling. We are here to make friends not money". It was agreed though that, "we all want to help our people in India". Apart from the

conference on Poverty and Ageing, which was not an official part of the Reunion, there was little emphasis on the situation of poor Anglo-Indians in India. One proposal discussed at the meeting was that a portion of any profits made by reunions should be channelled back to India. During the discussion that followed this suggestion it transpired that many of the past reunion committees had done just this; for example, profit from the last reunion in Canada had been used to set up education scholarships. Other ways of raising funds were also discussed; for example, a “dollar a month scheme” was proposed by a UK organisation who said they would administer it and could absorb most administration costs.

The meeting ended with one of the council members leading a prayer that began, in Catholic-style, with each person blessing him or herself, and ended with the group reciting the Lord’s prayer.

DISCUSSION

EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

From both of the occasions I detected a sense of nostalgia – a characteristic which I increasingly associate with Anglo-Indians. At Calcutta’s Anglo-Indian Day the nostalgia was for the past, at the Reunion it was for both the past and a place – for India (but India of their past perhaps). At Calcutta’s Anglo-Indian Day celebration there seemed to be a denial, at an official level at least, of this sentiment. The denial manifested itself in the form of advocating the need to become mainstream Indian, whatever that really means.²⁶ Calcuttan Anglo-Indians were entreated to “look forward” with enthusiasm and confidence to the future, as the topic of the forum, “Tomorrow’s people speak today”, suggested. They were advised against holding onto ideas of what had been and what might have been. The nostalgia for what might have been took several forms: a sense of loss of opportunities demonstrated in the expression of, for example, the belief that Anglo-Indians could have been leaders of the country (based on South American experiences). And on another, more personal level, such as that expressed by a woman who had come from Calcutta, who lamented during the Reunion, to several men who had left Calcutta almost thirty years beforehand: “Why did you all have to leave? Such lovely boys.”

²⁶ See Khilnani (1998) for an excellent discussion of “who is an ‘Indian?’”.

At the Reunion nostalgia was frequently linked to the relationship they have with India. Neil O'Brien made the point that India is the country they all have in common. While this may be factually correct there was a wide range of feelings for India, relating to their differing experiences. Many have never been back, so their memories of India were decades old. Some had no memory of living in India. For some, such as the young man from London, this was due to never having lived there, and so far, never visiting. Some seemed keen to go to India while others seemed afraid. Others have been back and are saddened by the changes they saw. Yet others have been back and still feel "the pull of mother India" (Butler 1999). India was not emotionally neutral territory for anyone.

Another emotional characteristic of Anglo-Indians is a sense of the fragility or precariousness of their way of life, and of concern about the longevity of their community. Several people at the Reunion remarked to me about the average age of those who attended, and wondered about how many more reunions would be run. The view was generally pessimistic with people seeing an end because "the next generation is not interested" and that, more generally, "we're a dying breed."

COMMUNITY FEELING AND INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

Anglo-Indian Day, and the World Reunion are relatively recently conceived of and are now celebrated at regular intervals. The idea for both events can be traced back to the formation of a newsletter *Anglo-Indians In Touch* in Canada, which was begun for the purpose of "keeping in touch" (Welsh 2003:17) with diasporic Anglo-Indians. From the group who produced the newsletter came the idea of a reunion which "would draw Anglo-Indians from across the globe and provide the opportunity to meet and renew old acquaintances and make new ones" (Sheila Williams cited by Welsh 2003:17). The first reunion was held in London in 1989 and from there it was decided to hold a reunion every three years. In 1995, after the third reunion, they formed an incorporated association of Anglo-Indian organisations with the objective of strengthening links between communities world-wide. In the year 2001, at the fifth reunion, (in Auckland, New Zealand), it was proposed that a day be set aside each year to "celebrate our Anglo-Indian heritage, culture and history" (George Henderson cited by Rebeiro 2003). As I have already indicated, earlier in this chapter, this idea was

taken up and Anglo-Indians held the first of the yearly celebrations in 2002, wherever there were organised associations of Anglo-Indians.

The expressed intention for this Anglo-Indian Day celebration was somewhat different from the stated purpose for the first reunion. It was seen by the President of the International Federation of Anglo-Indian associations as “A day to celebrate, give thanks and reflect on our individuality – to look to the future by propagating our unique culture to our youth and the wider community in which we live” (Rebeiro 2003). It was said to be celebrated out of a sense of pride in their community and it was hoped that it would work towards the “consolidation, unity and strengthening of our widespread community” (Gene Leckey in Rebeiro 2003). This was in contrast with the less ambitious objective of the first reunion: that of simply getting together with old friends and acquaintances.

The rhetoric of pride, consolidation and unity was expressed in a number of ways at both celebrations. The President-in-chief of the AIAIA, for example, referred in one of his speeches at the Reunion, to Anglo-Indians as a diasporic community, but commented that he thought they were emotionally closer than ever because of the good communication that was possible through newsletters, web-based sites and e-mail. Another example is Calcutta’s Anglo-Indian slogan or motto: Unity and Upliftment. These sentiments express the desire to build up a sense of identity as a distinct community.

Brubaker and Cooper (2000) have cautioned us against the use of the concept of identity in analysis. They are concerned that the word is too vague and illustrate this by demonstrating the variety of ways that both social scientists and the general public use the term. They note that on the one hand it is used as if it refers to something definite and concrete and substantial, while others use a “softer” meaning, emphasising fluidity. They argue that adequate vocabulary already exists for analysis without using the term identity. They feel that we could carry out better analysis by using alternative terms, and they suggest a range of alternatives. They would say that the “identity” that events or celebrations such as the Anglo-Indian day and the Reunion are intended to engender could, for example, be more richly and unambiguously described using the words such as: commonality, connectedness and “groupness”. This better represents what seemed to be happening within the community in the course of these celebratory

events. Brubaker and Cooper note that it is particularly in the area of “collective identities” that this alternative vocabulary is useful. They add that “This is the emotionally laden sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded group, involving both a felt solidarity or oneness with fellow group members and a felt difference from or even antipathy to specified outsiders” (2000:19). They also refer, still using the same vocabulary, to “some sense of affinity or affiliation, commonality or connectedness to particular others, but lacking a sense of over-riding oneness vis-à-vis some constitutive “other”” (ibid.). During the Reunion and at Anglo-Indian Day celebrations there was perhaps something of this intense, more over-riding or primary feeling of identification with each other and an imagined community. In their day-to-day lives, however, the all-pervading sense of being Anglo-Indian is likely to be replaced by a more background sense of themselves as Anglo-Indian.

What is the mechanism whereby people link to the community through these events? One participant noted that the Reunion was really about friends and family reuniting, with the next level of reuniting being their Indian based schools. The “wider community” may be seen not so much as a collection of connected individuals but as the networking of smaller groups of people who have intimate personal connections through family and friendship relationships. The wider community is the “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) of Anglo-Indians worldwide. Just as the individual relationships need to be nurtured, so do the relationships which contribute to a feeling of “groupness”.

For Anglo-Indians, it may be that it is only in the type of setting that I have described that such strong feelings of being a part of a bounded group occur. It could also be argued that it is only in these settings that something called an Anglo-Indian “community” exists at all. Following from this, the events could be seen as rituals in that they *do something* – they bring a community into being – at least for the days of the celebrations, and particularly for the people who attend them. In terms of identity this is something that occurs with intensity at these celebratory events and, due to the repetitive nature of the celebrations, is regularly rekindled.

ANALYSIS OF THE EVENTS AS RITUALS

Anglo-Indian day and the World Reunions have elements that lend themselves to interpretation as rituals. Guided loosely by Grimes (1995) I shall draw attention to some of these elements before discussing the task, or purpose of the ritualised events.

There is a pattern of ritual action in both celebrations which Anglo-Indians regard as being characteristic of their way of getting together with other Anglo-Indians – referred to as the “ethos” of the community.²⁷ Sessions common to both events were a sports’ session organised along the lines of a school sports day, a formalised discussion of issues relevant to Anglo-Indians, a church service (although this was not organised in time for the second Anglo-Indian day celebration in Calcutta, and its absence was noted), games including “housie”, and a Ball.

Durkheim proposed that religion plays a crucial role in organising social relations in that it “functions to ensure the unconscious priority of community identification” (Bell 1997:24). He felt that religious “rituals are designed to arouse a passionate intensity (...) in which individuals experience something larger than themselves”(ibid.). According to Bell, he believed that civic rites in commemoration of national events would, in the future, replace religious rites and rituals (1997:25). For Durkheim, God represents the community. If this is what is happening in a religious ceremony then rituals at secular ceremonies may be able to be seen in the same way.

The (arguably recent) phenomenon of the *invention* of rituals is also discussed by Bell. She analyses some recently invented rituals such as those seen at the Olympic games, in Soviet Russia and American nationalist ceremonies, and in an African-based unification celebration. She believes that in comparison to earlier rituals, modern ones are “a response to the need for new forms of relatedness” (1997:237). Bell believes there is a new ritual paradigm that, among other things, “allows for the formulation

²⁷ This is illustrated in a letter to the various affiliated associations from the President of the International Federation of Anglo-Indian Associations (Inc.), Gene Leckey, announcing the establishment of World Anglo-Indian Day: “I would appreciate your promotion of this day via your Organisation’s Publication and by conducting functions either on this day or around the time to celebrate and give thanks for our history and heritage. This may be expressed in many forms appropriate to the Anglo-Indian ethos; i.e. social get togethers, thanksgiving services, picnics, sporting activities, concerts, symposiums, debates, book readings, movie sessions, cultural quizzes etc” (Leckey 2001 cited by Rebeiro 2003). He added that “This ‘small step’ will one day be seen as a ‘huge step’ towards the consolidation, unity and strengthening of our wide-spread community and I look forward to your support in this ‘first’ for the Anglo-Indian community” (ibid.). These remarks make the vision and the hope for the community apparent.

and expression of new identities...” (1997:241). Also that it is “created to socialize people into a certain way of thinking and feeling” (1997:229) and that, “ritual is indispensable not only to nationalism but also to basic modes of communal socialisation” (Bell 1997:231). She argues that the reason for the invention of a ritual is to engender a spirit of unity and feeling of connectedness.

In contrast, Myerhoff believes that an essential part of ritual is that its construction is concealed from the participants: that rituals, to be most effective, need to be seen as something other than a human invention designed to serve a particular purpose. She believes that there needs to be something magical or mysterious about the process and that we do not want to see them as “products of our imagination” (Myerhoff in Bell 1997:224). In the case of the Anglo-Indian celebrations it would be difficult to see the events as anything other than deliberately constructed products of the imagination of the designers. Yet it transcends the realm of the imagination in its effect: not only does the performance of the event move it from imagination to reality, but also the community itself is transformed by the event – from an imagined into a real community. This is a mysterious or magical effect of the ritual.

They could be considered to effect a transformation in that both events provide the space (in both senses of the word: geographically and temporally) for the creation of something that in ‘ordinary’ time exists only in the imagination – an Anglo-Indian community. The events could be seen to transform isolated networks of friends and family into a larger collective or aggregate.

Or perhaps the Reunion and Anglo-Indian Day could be viewed as being restorative in that, historically, there were ‘real’ communities of Anglo-Indians in India who lived together, went to school and church and socialised together. Events such as those I have described revive the memories of the best of those times, effectively restoring the past into the present.

The very obvious and expressly articulated purpose of both events was to strengthen their identity and maintain a particular sense of themselves as distinct, and as a “community”. They did this, at least at these events, by consciously working to engender a sense of unity and pride in their history, their culture, and in their current lifestyles.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

What I have addressed so far in this analysis relates especially to the public rhetoric associated with the Reunion and Anglo-Indian Day celebrations. I wonder though how significant the sentiments expressed in the rhetoric are to the individual's decisions to attend. The vocabulary used to refer to the events seem to be used as if the celebrations are tools capable of effecting a particular outcome – the building of a sense of unity, the transmission of culture, the appreciation of their history. The words they use, the sentiments they express are strikingly Durkheimian. What else is happening in these celebrations, which make over 3,000 people, in the case of Melbourne's reunion, come together to form something larger than themselves?

Judging by my observations at both events, the vision for a united community, and the way to achieve it are widely held. Calcutta's Anglo-Indian Day and the Reunion followed the prescription articulated by the federation president. For a community, which some members criticise as being factional, they show remarkable unity in their perception of the most effective way of achieving a sense of community solidarity, or identity. There is, however, only so much that the creators of the events have control over. The final bit of magic, which makes the difference between whether the event will "work" (to fulfil its purpose) or not, must come from the participants in the event (or ritual) themselves.

There were non-prescribed features of the events which seemed to me to pull the events from being well-organised social outings to events which nourished the deeply held, very human, sense of belonging. These related more to the characteristics that made Anglo-Indians feel Anglo-Indian, and those who were not Anglo-Indian feel that too.

One such feature of the events was the language used. While English is the language of general communication, Indian colloquialisms were scattered throughout announcements, speeches and informal conversation, and always met with the warmth of affectionate familiarity. As an outsider, unfamiliar with the language, I felt excluded. This, therefore, was an effective mechanism by which they inadvertently delineated between those who belonged and those who did not; that is, it marked the boundary between insiders and outsiders (Barth 1969).

A further feature of the events, that of food and drink, was unifying even though it may not have been as effective as language in distinguishing between insiders and outsiders. Indian food was served at every function, with the exception of the Reunion ball – and this was due to the venue contractors who did not offer the option of Indian food. In India, Anglo-Indians generally eat with a spoon and fork. At the Reunion, spoons, forks and knives were available. In terms of drinks, very little alcohol was consumed but what was there was typically Anglo-Indian. Bacardi breezers, for example, were a popular premixed drink at the Anglo-Indian Day in Calcutta. They are an imported drink that many people seemed to have been introduced to by friends and family overseas. And conversely, drinks such as the rum, Old Monk, which is made and sold in India and is popular with Anglo-Indians out of India, was available at the reunion. Soft drinks and beer were served at both functions while wine was available only at the Reunion.

One activity that was fully participated in was dancing. This was a focal point of many of the sessions and a topic of conversation. Anglo-Indians know themselves as dancers. They told me stories of how they came, individually, to be dancers. Some examples of their comments are:

“My sister taught me to dance when I was just little.”

“We would invite friends home for the evening, pull back the furniture and dance the evening away.”

“We didn’t have television so we’d dance.”

“As teenagers in India going to dances was the way we socialised.”

Being able to dance, as I have commented already, was a point of pride to those who could dance, and of mild humiliation to those who could not. One of the Reunion organisers told me that in the day or so before the Ball, on two separate occasions, he had telephoned Anglo-Indian friends and been told that they weren’t available to talk; they were practising their dancing. I took informal dancing lessons from local Anglo-Indian friends in the lead up to both Balls. Rather than provide me with the skills I needed I was sensitised to the skills of the dancers and observed their dancing with extra admiration.

D'Cruz also draws attention to this characteristic of the community. He gave the impression that he had felt inadequate at the 1998 Reunion in not being able to fulfil the stereotypical image of the jiving Anglo-Indian, and comments in his discussion of a reunion dance that "most reunion delegates appeared to enjoy jiving, and to revel in the act as a celebration of community identity" (1999:322-323). He drew attention to this facet of Anglo-Indian character using the example of a local paper running stories on the 1998 reunion which referred to him as an Anglo-Indian who did not know how to jive (1999:1). For all D'Cruz railed against stereotyping, this was a shortcoming that he was concerned about.

I suggest that the celebrations are, as Bourdieu would say, sites of "a sort of *conatus*, of a tendency to perpetuate themselves in their being, to reproduce themselves in that which constitutes their existence and their being" (Bourdieu 1993:274). Diasporic Anglo-Indians, it seems to me, may feel unhappy, even incomplete, as if they are in some way dismembered due to their inability to be who they really are in their adopted country (and to some extent in their Anglo-Indian-depleted Indian population). On occasions such as the Reunion they physically/bodily display their Anglo-Indianness: they smatter their speech with Hindi, they eat Indian food (of a particular variety), they dance, they gossip, they reminisce, they share immigrant experiences. These events give them the opportunity to "be" (or fully identify as) Anglo-Indian. I sense that they feel a sense of completion when they are able to "practise" being Anglo-Indian. This is the sort of feeling that has been referred to by Turner as "communitas" (Turner 1974:274) and by Myerhoff as "intense camaraderie" (1978:225). It is this sentiment that makes Anglo-Indians feel they have a "community".

Perhaps it could be said that it is because of their love of socialising in a particular way, especially through their dancing, that many of the out-of-India associations exist. The associations are required in order to organise their dances. The history I traced earlier in this chapter indicates that there is a link between the associations and the worldwide events now held. It is due to the existence of individual associations that these events are organised.

Events such as the Anglo-Indian Day and the Reunion provide a venue for the nurturing of the different levels of relationship: those between individuals and their family and friends, and between those networks and their wider "imagined"

community. A consequence of Anglo-Indians' encounter with their wider community is that it gives them a sense of belonging to something larger. These events make the community more real than imagined. This identification as Anglo-Indian will impact on their day-to-day lives well after the days have passed.

A remark from an Anglo-Indian waiter, whose restaurant I passed on my way home from the Anglo-Indian Day "Family day out" in Calcutta, gave me an insight into how, at least some, Calcuttans felt about the occasion: "The community is changing. At one stage they all wanted to go away so they were scattered, and they still are. And still the best go away, but the community is coming together now. Look what's been happening this weekend." He hadn't attended the weekend's events but knew about them.

PART THREE: STORIES

INTRODUCTION TO LIFE STORIES

From the beginning I had always intended to write life stories. Initially I had in mind to produce a work something like Shostak's *Nisa*: I even had a 'Nisa' in mind. When my *Nisa* didn't perform in the way I'd hoped (!) I looked at doing what I had done in previous research which involved collecting a number of shorter, chapter-length, life stories.¹ This is what I have done here. In Chapter One I have discussed some of the reasons I have written life stories: apart from it always being an intention, the idea was reinforced by some negative comments from Anglo-Indians about the sorts of works on their community produced by social scientists so far. I have also been encouraged in the idea of writing stories by what I have read by other anthropologists; for example, Abu-Lughod. In Chapter Two I have talked about the process of recording and reporting stories, from interviews to literary form. I also discuss the non-representative nature of the stories; for example, the fact that they are all women's stories.

Another reason for writing stories, that I have not discussed earlier, is that I would like this work to be *read*. I have a number of audiences in mind. I want to make it accessible to those who would read it anyway; that is, interested Anglo-Indians. I also want to make it interesting for those who wouldn't otherwise read it. From the experience of my earlier study I know that the stories in fact may be *all* that is read of that study. Family and friends who asked to read my earlier work would comment, on returning it to me, that they had read the stories but hadn't quite got through "the chapters". More recently, over the last few weeks, I have had entire chapters of this work sitting around home. My daughters hadn't asked to read anything until they saw the stories. These they asked to read, read enthusiastically one after the other, and then commented on them. Their comments were on the lives of the women (as well as

¹ In my MA, where I studied the experience of women after divorce, I hadn't anticipated writing stories. I collected them simply to gain an insight into the women's lives so that I could better understand the dynamics of their changed circumstances. After a while it occurred to me that if I needed this background then anyone reading the more analytical chapters of the work would also need it.

some stylistic issues), reinforcing my conviction that this is the way to tell lives and ways of living.

I am not presenting stories primarily to illustrate the issues in the chapters (although I hope that happens to some extent) but rather to offer an alternative way of understanding what it means to be Anglo-Indian, in Calcutta, today.² The way I have put the stories together also, I hope, gives them a twenty first century Calcutta flavour. I have kept the stories in the form that I collected them, that is, in the form of an interview. Except where the women have requested that I tidy up some of their expressions I have been true to the way they speak. In this way I hope to convey a sense of their world as well as their ways of presenting that world.

Several of the stories I have collected tell tales of social suffering. The first story shows that, in spite of physical and emotional suffering, given the right circumstances – which may well be quite unexpected – some individual's experiences can be positive. Jane, herself, views her experiences through her deep commitment to God. She also suggests that the positive aspects of her life come from the goodness of others and through her own determination.

One of the strongest features of Philomena's story is also a commitment to God. She is an active Christian, in that she actively works towards God's will, living her life fully and recognising God's hand in the good things that happen to her and others. That she is full of energy, goodwill and fun, is, I hope, obvious in her story.

I spent many hours collecting the material that makes up Irene's story. She tells her life as a story; it is rich in details, variety and events – what I have in this work is but a portion of the material I collected. She is a spirited woman with a strong sense of justice and is fully involved in the life of her family, her school, and her community.

² In the future I would like to put together a book of Anglo-Indian life stories. I would use these three stories as well as spending more time with the people who I have some material from already, finding ways to work that material up into further stories.

JANE'S STORY

Jane is a very independent young Anglo-Indian woman in her mid-thirties. She lives in her own central city apartment in a secure compound of five blocks which is about a kilometer away from her place of work. A “secure compound” means a lot in Calcutta. In enclaves like this people find the space for growth and an optimistic view of the world.

I met Jane through a woman she and many others I met call “Aunty”. I cannot tell the full story of Jane’s life. There are aspects of it that are very personal, which are a product of her circumstances. Had I been able to write about them they would only accentuate the poignancy of this person’s history. Jane was struck by polio when she was a child but this was only one of a number of blows that she has had to contend with.

I interviewed Jane in her flat. To get there I took a taxi from where I was staying in central Calcutta, getting into the taxi only after throwing off the unwelcome “assistance” of a Bengali gentleman by assuring him that I was quite capable of getting where I wanted to on my own. This prelude to visiting Jane highlighted the necessity for a woman, especially one with the sort of disabilities she has, to have secure living arrangements and be confident about transportation.

After an hour in evening traffic which alternated between stop and snail’s pace I was dropped off outside the compound where I was met by a guard as I entered. He pointed out the building I needed to make my way to in the dark and unexpected quiet of a Calcutta evening. At the bottom of the building I located the ancient lift that took me up the three flights to the flat. Jane’s flat was easily recognizable by the holy picture on the door, and also by the chest-level peep-hole in the door. She answered my knock with a smile and the affectionate, typically Anglo-Indian, kiss on each cheek as she welcomed me in. Her flat is spacious and bright in contrast to the dingy, grubby entrance and lift. She is a tiny woman who exudes life and energy and optimism. She

is a little “swarthy”¹ with short, well-cut hair, wears western clothing and almost always a smile. I had met her a couple of times already and we’d had telephone conversations about what I was wanting to do so we quickly settled down to the first of several sessions. I asked her about her life and taped her story. This is an edited and re-ordered version rendered mainly in her words.

“It was difficult for my parents to take care of me because I have polio.”

When I was one year old suddenly I contracted polio. My parents didn’t give me the vaccine. But there were five of us in the family. So, you know...

You were the youngest?

I am in the middle (of four sisters and one brother) so it was very difficult for my parents to take care of me because I had polio, and they are from a very, very poor family.

They were facing a lot of problems and during our childhood my parents separated. They have both remarried. So, looking at all this poverty they wanted to discard me as a handicapped child. My mother must have thought “In the future how am I going to support this girl when I also have others to take care of?” So then she took me to a lady who works [as a Welfare Officer at a Hill Station boarding school]. I was never to see my parents again.

Being born into an extremely poor family was her first disadvantage; contracting polio was another and as she says:

“But I had another disadvantage... To be born a girl... is like a sin.”

My main problem is that I had polio, but also it’s because I’m a girl child. We face discrimination from there itself. To be a girl is a big boon² here in India and being handicapped. People think that it’s because your parents have sinned, and that the sin has fallen on the child. That’s why people don’t want to take such a child out into society or expose them to friends and family.

So they looked at your polio...?

Yes.

Looked at the effect of that, and say that that’s a result of their sin. Is that what you mean?

Yes, sort of. They feel like that in the Indian society.

Is that a Hindu belief?

It’s more a Hindu belief, yes. So that’s why... for me to come out and walk on the streets... They look at me and people think, “How could she

¹ In India “swarthy” refers to skin tone. She is dark haired, but quite fair skinned.

² I presume Jane is being ironic in saying this.

walk on the streets like that?” Yes, but, I’ll come back to that³. And this lady, the Welfare Officer, said, “Okay if this case is genuine, and if it’s so that her parents don’t want her, maybe the school could try to take care of her”.

“But I always say that God has been so good to me.”

Did you have to be Anglo-Indian to go to the school?

No.

Did your family have to be Christian?

My parents are Roman Catholic, but [admission] was based on the situation, not on being Christian. So because I had polio, and I was in a critical condition; I was very thin, and very weak... It was a blessing in disguise. You can see children like that being used here, by their mothers, to beg. They even break their bones to put them on their hips and then take them around to beg. But I always say that God has been so good to me.

When they took me to the school I was very weak and really needed some attention. I was loved by all of them. They did exercises for me. They made special parallel bars so that I could practice walking, and I had massages every day. I would always cry because my legs used to pain quite a lot. But they really took good care of me, gave me vitamin pills and every day I used to have exercises. I didn’t much like to do the exercises. Of course, as I started growing up I realised that I have to do things for myself and have to try to be optimistic in life and see what I can do with these legs.

I’m also a human being and I have feelings and it’s not easy when you have parents, and yet you don’t have them at the same time. Here in India, to get an education is very difficult. My mother approached that same lady and said “Maybe this handicapped girl would like somebody to help her, so why don’t you take my elder daughter into the school as well?” And so my elder sister was admitted into the school with me.

How much older is she?

She’s one year older to me. But the sad part was, as we started growing up, she never recognised me as her sister because I was handicapped.

I was always a fun-loving kid. I loved to get attention, and ... so what if I’m handicapped? I’ve got my hands. I’ve got my brains. But the growing up was not easy, because being a child you want to play, run and swim, do it all, try to take part in all the activities in the school. But I just had to sit and look at them and I really felt that I was missing something in life. The girls

³ Later in the interview she added:

And literally people they just stop me on the street as though, “My God, how can you just walk on the street. How can you...?”

Is this in India (She’s visited thirteen other countries in the world)? Who are the people who stop and..?

Mostly Hindus.

Is it children?

No, the parents. Because most of them have handicapped children in their homes... so they feel that I am a living example to them. Some of them are so positive, and some of them just want to know how I have progressed in life.

would get parcels and letters from their parents and I have this younger sister who used to write to me only.

She used to write to you when you were at school?

Yes. They studied in a Catholic school here in Cal. As we started growing up we were taught about Christianity, and that was a very important aspect in my life then. I said to the Lord, "If I don't have anyone, at least I have you". And that was a big source of inspiration to me. I came to the understanding that He was asking, "What are you going to do in this dark world?" And it was then that I really gave my life to the Lord and said, "You take over my life. You have brought me to this world and now it's up to you to break me, mould me and make me into what you want". So after I gave my life to the Lord I really felt that things started moving positively for me.

How old were you then?

I was eight years old.

Quite young.

Yeah, I was quite young.

That's when Catholics make their First Holy Communion isn't it?

Actually um... I don't know much about the Catholics.

You were being brought up as a Protestant?

As a Protestant, yes. But I do have a Catholic Baptism certificate because my parents had already baptised me. But after I joined [the school] we learned all the Protestant ways and I didn't know anything about Roman Catholicism.

I always felt that if I'm going to sit back and just cry over my polio it's not going to help. So I tried to take part in as many events as I could in my school and I discovered my singing, drawing, and handicraft talents – stitching and sewing. So I really felt that I should put the emphasise more on that and give some more importance to that. We had singing competitions and dramas that I used to take part in. My school friends never, ever treated me like a handicap and that was really one plus point for me. They'd say, "Come on Jane, let's go here" or "let's go there". So I thought "Why not?"

How did you get around? Did you use crutches?

Yes, from the age of three I started using crutches and calipers. And since we have three months of holiday during the wintertime, my school would pay for me to go to a very big Christian medical college in South India to have full physiotherapy, muscle assessment, and to see if I was improving. But the doctors made me aware that calipers and crutches would always be a part of my life. So I knew from an early age that there was no chance of improvement. Since I was slowly growing, I had to have new caliper and crutch measurements and I would be there for practically all the winter holidays. Every year I had to go back and forth.

Initially I did feel a bit lonely because I was just a child. I didn't know the patients because they were changing all the time. I spoke English so I would talk to all the medical students and sometimes one would say, "Why don't

you come and sing to us? Bring the guitar, and we can have a singsong. Or read the Bible. I'm sure the patients would love that".

"They say it is very difficult to get one certificate... I had seven!"

Jane completed her secondary schooling and then stayed on at the school to complete further training. This is an option given to many of the students at her school. If they're interested in a paediatric nursing career or in horticulture they have the opportunity to begin their course while at the school. They can fulfil the practical requirement by taking over some of the responsibilities for caring for the orphans and other very young children, or, in the case of the latter course, for tending the extensive ornamental and kitchen gardens. There is also the opportunity to stay at the school while taking secretarial training, as Jane did:

I did a secretarial course through the Pitman's Board in London. They say it's very difficult to get *one* certificate. And it was a correspondence course so the question paper comes from England. When I got the results, I had seven certificates and I did the highest examination! I got a first class advanced certificate and I did all the other examinations. So that really gave me a big boost and I thought, "This is something for me to go out with into the dark world." And what occurred to me was that, especially because I'm from a poor background, I really had my mind set on working for the poor people. So I thought if I take this secretarial training I could sit in an office and do some correspondence and be a secretary, and that became my aim in life. So after I did my training at school I came down to Calcutta.

"Wherever I have stayed, they have always been very loving to me."

It was Auntie who helped me to find a place to stay as a paying guest. It was not easy. I think they must have turned her down quite a lot of times because nobody wants the risk of taking care of a handicapped person. But finally she did get a nice Anglo-Indian family and I stayed there for three years.

As a boarder, a paying guest?

As a paying guest, yes. It means you pay for the month, and they give you just one bed, and maybe some food. It depends on their household situation. So there were times when I had to depend on the shop food.

When I came down to Calcutta I went for many interviews to all these NGOs, because these are the ones who are supporting poor people. They would ask if I was willing to sit for a test. I always said "Of course". I didn't want to be taken because I'm handicapped. I knew I had the ability. I have a sharp brain and definitely I can pick up the skills. I can pick up things very fast. I did sit for a lot of examinations and they would say, "Yes, you've got the job" immediately. But I had one problem, and that was transport. I can't depend on the buses or even waiting for a taxi. It's too hard for me. Also, it's expensive, and it's difficult to get a taxi everyday to come and go. So I

asked these companies “What about giving me transport?” “Oh, I’m very sorry, we don’t give transport to staff”. I said, “But you have to make an exception. You are the ones who are helping people in need. We are the ones in need. I mean you have to make an exception somewhere”. Finally we did get through to one organisation. They said “We will give you transport but we will take a part of your salary - sixty rupees.” So I joined this International Christian NGO where I was for 19 years. I really feel that it’s so rewarding when you give your whole life for the cause of the poor people. Especially when I didn’t get it from my parents... I have since left this NGO and have joined another religious firm, to date, holding a prestigious post for the top-most boss.

I asked Jane about the flat she lived in. It is a beautiful spacious, well-maintained and well-furnished home; one of the most pleasant homes I visited in Calcutta, or anywhere else for that matter.

A handicapped friend from Holland gave this flat to me as a gift. He saw that I was going through such a bad time. I was staying as a paying guest at first but then I moved into a hostel. It’s not always easy to be a paying guest. You have to be very obligated to the person you stay with.

Did they not trust you in the house?

No, it’s not that. It’s just that they feel it’s not nice that a girl stays alone over there, especially when she’s like this... Or they think people will take advantage of you. In that protective way. Wherever I’ve stayed, they have always been very loving to me. And they were all Anglo-Indian people. But for the last six years before I got this flat I stayed in the hostel which is just outside my office gate. It was quite difficult for me because I had to climb three floors every day. It was a real olden-day building, and, literally, the roof was falling down. And I had to share this room with three old people.

“People think that you owe me so much, but the truth is I owe you much more.”

She told me of the visit to Calcutta made by her Dutch Director.

He was interested in me because I was handicapped. He would always try to help me and he would take me out to the Clubs and parties. One time the Dutch Director’s friend paid us a visit and when he came to see me he said “Jane, where are you living? I’m really interested to get to know you better because you and I have something in common. We both have polio”.

Jane offered to show him where she had been living for the last six years, sharing the little room with three others who were all over sixty years old.

I said “I am living in that room.” And he said, “I can’t believe it. I can’t see how you can climb up all those steps.” I said, “It’s so difficult to get accommodation in Calcutta and even if you get the accommodation, it’s so expensive.” So this friend didn’t even really know me, and he’s got his own family abroad. But when I was away in Norway that year he said to my

Dutch Director, "I am so upset about Jane living in that condition I want to buy her a flat. No matter what the cost is I just want to buy her a flat". So my friend said, "What are you saying? It's so expensive". But he responded, "I just want to see that this girl gets rehabilitated and she has something of her own."

So he bought the flat that I visited her in and gave it to Jane. Accommodation in Calcutta has become expensive which has led to many Anglo-Indians who once lived in the central areas to move to outlying regions, as I have discussed earlier in this work. Jane's flat is comparatively close to the central part of town and was very convenient to her place of work. Although it took me an hour by taxi to visit Jane I had been tempted to walk there— it would have been quicker, but more demanding in terms of having to cross busy, pedestrian-unfriendly roads.

Her benefactor came to see her after she moved in:

We have this house blessing ceremony whenever we shift into a new house and he came all the way from Holland with another friend. I was so touched because he said he felt that I was such a positive person and he even wrote in my guest book, "People think that you owe me so much, but the truth is that I owe you much more."

And now I'm living here from '96. Friends keep visiting me and it's been so wonderful just to feel that I have a place of my own. I didn't have even a spoon to my name when I was in that hostel. I just had this one box with all my clothes for the office. In the hostel, they just gave us one bed and a small table and a chair – for four hundred rupees per month. It wasn't much, but at the same time...

You didn't get much for it either.

They put on the water pump only three times a day and if I missed the water in the morning... because the next two times it would get turned on I was in the office. So if I missed that one...

So what time did they put it on?

At six o'clock in the morning.

So you'd have to be up by six. Would you have your bath at that time or would you just fill containers with water?

I would fill up on water first, because there were the other three who had to fill the water also, and they just put it on for one hour, and so we had a lot of problems... If I come back from work very late and I wanted to eat something hot or drink some Bournvita, I couldn't because they wouldn't allow us to keep a stove. They were very strict and at the same time accommodation is so difficult, so I really...

How did you eat then, how did you manage?

They gave us the food. They brought it in a tiffin carrier and they kept it on the table. But when I came back at nine o'clock or ten o'clock it was cold.

“You should try to be optimistic and go out and reach your goals and try to touch other’s lives.”

As well as making her way through each busy day and becoming an extremely valuable member of the company she works for, she sets herself other goals.

God has taken away my legs but He’s given me ten gifts in their place, and I really feel like... I can be so proud of my achievements and what I have done today for people, and many people have said that I have been a great example to them.

It’s just that I’m very positive and I always feel that if you sit and brood over things that will not help. You should try to be optimistic and go out and reach your goals and try to touch other’s lives. And I know that God is with me and He’s really using me through my singing or through even just talking to people. That is a strong testimony for Him as well. I have been so lucky because my friends have sponsored me abroad eight times to Norway and Holland, and I have travelled to thirteen countries in the world. I even studied in Norway for one year. Where could you get all these opportunities?

What did you study?

It was all on global issues. And we also led a solidarity project in Latvia. It was so interesting and even while I was studying... We have a donor agency in Norway itself so they also utilised my services there, to talk to them about the [Christian NGO] so that people would see that whatever money is sent is put towards the cause of the poor people. That it’s being utilised properly.

I also participated in a “sort of” Olympics – it was a handicapped sports, but when you have international people from 15 different countries you could almost classify it as a Para-Olympics. It was so amazing; I took up this challenge from my friend to enter the skiing competitions. She wanted me to participate. I’d never been on, or even seen, snow before.

Yes, it was so nice to get the three gold medals after the races for skiing! It was really something for me, and I did a lot of newspaper and radio interviews and appeared on the TV.

“I am an Indian by citizenship but my community is the Anglo-Indian community.”

Did you talk about being Anglo-Indian?

Not exactly, but some of them did ask. Since I’m from India they expect that I should say I’m an Indian. I’d say, “Yes, I am an Indian by citizenship but my community is the Anglo-Indian community.” Then they are a bit confused and they ask, “What is Anglo-Indian?” Very few people, especially in Europe, have ever heard of an Anglo-Indian community.

They can see how they relate so well to you, I guess, because you’re so western.

Yes, especially because of the flow of language. They would say, "When you talk to an Indian you have to listen very carefully. It's hard to get what they're actually saying. But with you, Jane, I can understand every word".

I don't actually know my family roots and I don't know where the Anglo-Indian part comes in my life, but I know that they must have married some British or French down the line somewhere.

When they ask "what is an Anglo-Indian", what do you say? How do you describe...?

Well, that it's a mixture of an Indian marrying into either Portuguese, or French or British from when the British ruled in India. So we get our origin from there. I think they did try to give us a community in the Andaman Islands. But since we are such a minority we have to mingle with the community out here.

Most of the previous narrative came from the first interview. After that interview I came back to the hotel I was staying in with my family thinking that Jane identified herself more as a devout, handicapped woman from a deprived (in a number of ways) background, than as an Anglo-Indian. I admit to being a little disappointed that she had not focussed very much on the latter, and I wondered what it meant in terms of my research. In the subsequent interviews, however, two things became obvious: one was that much of this story is well-rehearsed due to her high profile over the previous few years which had resulted in her giving numerous interviews and even featuring on a local televised documentary. The second was that she definitely identifies at a deeper, perhaps less conscious level, as an Anglo-Indian.

"If you say 'I am an Anglo-Indian servant', then that is quite demoralising."

Jane has many friends who obviously feel comfortable in her home. Near the end of one interview session she had a Bengali friend visit her and offered to make us coffee. This was the one and only time I was served a hot drink, in a private home, by a non-Anglo-Indian man. I commented on this to Jane:

Basically the Indian men don't go into the kitchen. They feel that it's the woman's job. When I tell my (male) friends in Norway they start laughing and say we all have to move to India.

Traditionally these Indian men will sit back and relax while the women go into the kitchen. But with him it's different, I mean he has mixed a lot with Anglo-Indians so he knows that it's okay. Even if I tell him, "Can you please make tea?" he doesn't mind it. He goes straight into the kitchen and he's very good...

He knows it's not an insult to his manhood or anything?

He would do it gladly. Not because you are my friend but he wants to take part in helping.

Do most Anglo-Indian families that you know have domestic help?

Yes, most of them. I know all my friends have domestic aid. What the domestic servants are supposed to do is come to the house and wash clothes, cook the food, wash all the dishes, clean the house, and dust. They sweep and swab the floors. Some of them iron the clothes for the children going to school and sometimes the domestic person may also take the child to the school - so that's part of the job. Of course there are some Anglo-Indians who keep the servants only for taking care of the child. So she doesn't have to do anything else. Her job is to dress, clean, wash, and feed them etc.

And the cost of a domestic servant? I imagine it's relatively low.

I pay my servant quite well according to Indian standards. She's got a big family, so I pay her a little extra sometimes on special occasions like Christmas.

Does she work for anyone else at all?

Yes, now she works in another Anglo-Indian house as well.

I asked if she knew of any Anglo-Indians who work as domestic servants:

No.

Okay, so for Anglo-Indians it would be too demoralising to be a servant?

Yeah. If you say "I am an Anglo-Indian servant", then that is quite demoralising. They prefer to take help from CAISS⁴, but not to work in people's houses.

At the time I asked her this question I hadn't met any Anglo-Indians who worked as domestic servants but I did on subsequent visits. I met a couple of women who lived in Tiljala who would walk 40 minutes or so, even in the baking summer months, to work in the homes of wealthier Calcuttans.

"So these are some of the very famous Anglo-Indian dishes."

On several occasions I shared a meal with Jane. She was keen to improve my knowledge of all things Anglo-Indian – I especially appreciated the food lessons.

After one of our meals I asked about "typical" Anglo-Indian food:

One thing that's typical is yellow rice and ball curry. Ball curry is kofta curry; it's meatballs which are cooked in a sauce. Then we have duck roast, pork and duck vindaloo. So these are some of the very famous Anglo-Indian dishes.

For breakfast, what would there be? Are there typical...? I mean tell me if I am trying to stereotype something that doesn't really exist.

No, that's ok. Typical means it's different from the Bengali dishes. Bengalis are more used to eating paratha, poori, bhaji, jilabees, or singaras. But Anglo-Indians eat something more like toast, eggs, cornflakes, bananas,

⁴ Calcutta Anglo-Indian Service Society.

jam, cheese and spreads. They have that with coffee or tea. But some Anglo-Indians also eat dal pooris, kachori, nahari, and bakhakhani.

You can get this on the side of the street...?

On the side of Ripon Street is where you get dal poori, which Anglo-Indians love.

But is that a Bengali dish?

You can say both.

That's something they both share.

So that's for breakfast, and then for lunch we usually have a curry, salad and rice, or a bhaji and some pickle.

And do you get that at your work place?

No, the girls who used to cook in my office were all Bengalis. So we were forced to eat Bengali food like fish, in the Bengali style with gravy, and dal, one vegetable and rice. That's the usual thing that we get. Then we get egg curry, mutton, and chicken curry once a week.

So it's traditional in the workplace in India for the business to provide lunch...?

Not usually. If it's a very renown company like ITC⁵ they usually provide lunch packets.

“It really distinguishes us from a Bengali when we take food.”

I asked what else set Anglo-Indians apart from their other Indian neighbours. I have been criticised at times, by Anglo-Indians living out of India, for generalising (in papers I've written) in relation to cultural characteristics. But when I asked Anglo-Indians in Calcutta for their version of what it is that distinguishes them from other Indians the responses are remarkably similar.

One big difference is they are Hindus. They have to stick to much stricter rules and regulations in their society.

And the food is so different. We eat vindaloo, duck roast, kofta curry and yellow rice on special occasions. The food we take really distinguishes us from Bengalis. And also the way we dress. You can see at once that a girl is an Anglo-Indian because she would be wearing a skirt. We don't wear saris as such.

And one other thing we do is really look forward to Christmas. And we often celebrate together with dances.

Do you drink alcohol? Do Anglo-Indians drink alcohol?

I don't drink alcohol, but most Anglo-Indians love to drink.

“It's important in Anglo-Indian life to be a Christian.”

⁵ International Tobacco Company.

I think we are very God fearing people and that plays an important role in our lives. A lot of Anglo-Indians are Roman Catholic and you see them all on the 24th, Christmas night, and ringing in the New Year. Anglo-Indians are packed to capacity in the churches.

Is it social as well...?

Yes, a bit, but they are very spiritual and very serious about their faith. They have peace processions by walking from one church to the other - it's to make people aware of the Christian faith, even though we are a very small minority. We are only 4% in the whole of India.

Is that Christian?

Yes. Christian.

And Anglo-Indians would be an even smaller percent.

Yeah. We are just a dot on the map. So it's important in Anglo-Indian life to be Christian. And you can see in every Anglo-Indian Catholic home, they will have an altar.

Some churches give coffee and cake after the church service. Some Anglo-Indians meet in the clubs after the service and catch up with a little gossip and what different ones did during the week.

“At times it's quite difficult to be an Anglo-Indian.”

Basically we are really accepted in this [wider Indian] community because we are very fun-loving, open, and straightforward. They like our outgoingness and we are very frank with people.

Being accepted as a work colleague or even a friend is one thing but acceptance as a spouse can be more difficult. I asked Jane about her Anglo-Indian friends and whether they are married:

They are all married. And most of them have married Chinese. But unfortunately there are some who, because they're Anglo-Indian, don't get accepted into that community.

“The calling back to Calcutta is very strong in me.”

I asked Jane how she felt about staying in India. Most people I spoke to wanted to leave. Exceptions were the very wealthy who knew, from their experience, that they couldn't get the same standard of living out of India. Jane had travelled abroad more than most people I met so I was interested in her response.

I made up my mind since I've got this beautiful flat, I have my roots here, I like to live here in Calcutta. I've travelled so much around the world, to thirteen countries, but still the calling back to Calcutta is very strong within me. They talk about the hardships that people here face. But abroad I've

seen the differences and I wouldn't like to live where people don't even wish you. If you're lucky it's a hello, or good morning. But sometimes you don't even know who your neighbour is. I prefer to come back to Calcutta where people are so friendly. I just pop into my friends' house and you don't have to make a call to say, "I'm coming" – because that's really strange for us. But abroad I've seen that it's customary to call the person and say you're coming over.

Even if you want to cut your hair you have to make appointments abroad – but here you just walk into the salon, and these are sorts of barriers. There are so many good aspects and job opportunities, and lots of good things in the stores when you go abroad. But where socialising is concerned I think people abroad have got a lot to learn from us, and also in keeping the family together.

I don't like it that the moment they're a little older they put their parents into old age homes. And once the girl is 18 or 19, she wants to move out with her boyfriend and then there's this split family... Here in India they cling to the last, even to their grandmothers, no matter how difficult. People abroad don't even get married they just live together, have a child, and then finish. But that doesn't happen in India.

The children in the classrooms abroad are quite rude to their teachers. They chew gum, put their legs on the table, talk to the teacher and they don't stand up or wish them. They call them by their name, and I feel that is very disrespectful. I think the children abroad are exposed to things too fast. They attain adulthood very fast compared to our Indian children.

Another difference between the Indian and foreigners is the drinking and smoking problems with young children. I was so shocked when I saw school children having a break and a big group of boys were standing outside the school smoking, and the teachers are not allowed to chastise them.

We may be poor in one respect but we are rich at heart and we have so much love and affection and smiles. You can see it on the streets even. Abroad you have so many materialistic things but you are still not happy and always thinking about your materialistic things and money...

It's friends who make me very happy. We have a good clique, and go to the market, the movies and shows, and wherever we feel like. We go to Victoria Memorial and have picnics and so that gives us a lot of joy. We feel very happy with each other, especially with our Anglo-Indian friends.

Jane is far from a 'typical' Anglo-Indian in many ways, but the significance to her of being Anglo-Indian is typical of many people I met, and her story reflects Anglo-Indian values.

PHILOMENA'S STORY

I had heard about Philomena many times before I finally meet her. People talked about her in terms of awe, admiration, and affection, and they insisted that I must talk with her. She is in her 60s, has a sparkle of humourous mischief in her eyes, and is always ready with compassionate and practical help for her community members. Along with a team of other Anglo-Indians she runs the Calcutta Anglo-Indian Service Society (CAISS) an organisation set up in 1976 to help the less fortunate of the Calcuttan Anglo-Indian community. In another part of this thesis I describe some of the work CAISS does but in general terms it is a welfare organisation that offers material help to aged, destitute members of the community, and funds education for poor youth in order to improve their prospects. A recent venture was the opening, in August 2001, of a night shelter for Anglo-Indians who currently live on the streets.

I met Philomena through mutual Anglo-Indian friends who were keen that I spend time with “successful” Anglo-Indians. After the first casual conversation, I invited her to assist me in my research by talking to me about her life, including the social work she is so involved with.¹ She is a great raconteur; within the first few minutes of our meeting she had told me, amongst other things, that I could always recognise an Anglo-Indian woman by the shapeliness of their calves, and also told me the story of the series of miracles which had led to CAISS being able to realise her dream of establishing a night-shelter for Anglo-Indians who lived on the streets. Her compassion for the people she works for is very evident and it is impossible to listen to her without being affected by her empathy for them. She is also realistic about the tactics that desperate people may use to make a little extra money. The combination of compassion and caniness make her perfect for her role as convenor of the organisation. On CAISS distribution mornings at the Lawrence D’Souza Home for the elderly she and other CAISS officers handle over one hundred needy Anglo-Indians

¹ One problem with interviewing people who are successful is that they often have very little free time. Compounding this problem, in Philomena’s case especially, any time I took in interviewing would mean she was away from much more valuable work.

who arrive to collect their rations and pension. I was impressed to see the way in which these people related to Philomena. They would generally greet her in an openly friendly and respectful way. She would respond in a friendly manner but would not hesitate to tackle them over any transgression she may suspect them of, such as having moved to live with a family member who ought to be supporting them, or of not really being Anglo-Indian but rather, Goan.

Other roles I saw her in was as host and friend at her birthday party, in charge of a food stall at Anglo-Indian day, selling Catholic newspapers after Mass, as a respected guest at the Anglo-Indian day panel discussion, as well as my tea companion on a number of occasions.² In her role as practical advisor to the uninitiated Anglo-Indian fieldworker she was invaluable. I occasionally called upon her for practical advice such as where to buy blood for an Anglo-Indian beggar's wife's transfusion. But the image that stands out sharply in my memory is seeing her at the Anglo-Indian Reunion in Melbourne, 2004. There, for the first time, I saw her in holiday mode: carefree, always with a smile, and surrounded by overseas family and friends.

Philomena is the oldest of four children, one of two still living in India. She lives in the flat that has been home to her grandparents, parents, siblings and a retired uncle. She currently shares it with her 17 year old German shepherd dog, a cat and a kitten, "not to mention three other strays who present themselves at 8pm with clockwork regularity". As she grew up the area was predominantly Anglo-Indian but now that has changed and Muslims make up the majority of her neighbours. She said she has noticed huge changes over the years. Even within her flat she is affected by the changed cultural practices around her. One morning that I phoned her, for example, after turning music down to talk to me she explained that she had been playing it loudly in order to cover the sound of goats being slaughtered. It was a Muslim holy day that called for this form of ritual sacrifice. She advised me to keep off the streets that day.

She said that as she grew up she had "enjoyed the basic necessities of life but not much else." And that the strength of her upbringing "lay in strong family ties, finding leisure activities within the family or with a couple of special friends." Her mother played the

² Tea in India is a late afternoon light meal generally savoury, and consisting of Indian snacks, or sandwiches, along with a hot drink of tea or coffee.

violin and her the father the piano. Musical evenings on a Sunday were the highlight of the week, “especially with the special dinner which followed.” She attended a local Loreto school for all of her schooling, travelling each day by hackney carriage, rickshaw or tram, never by taxi, which was considered “a luxury” her family couldn’t afford.

Although she is probably known more for the social work she does voluntarily, she has had a very successful career:

“I felt that unless I spread my wings, I was never going to make anything of my life.”

We grew up in Calcutta, and then I went away to Assam. I worked in the oil fields for six years.

Doing secretarial work?

Yes, as a secretary. I went when I was two months off twenty-one. And very sheltered because we never went to boarding school or anywhere else. We were very sheltered. And, I felt that unless I spread my wings, I was never going to make anything of my life. Because, you know, I used to come back from work, lie in bed and read a book. End of story. And I felt that life must have more to it than that. Even my mother would push me out to join a club and to go here or there... but I wasn’t interested. My sister used to have any amount of boyfriends. Every month she had a new boyfriend. And she was very house proud and she would look after any visitors who came. She would make the tea and I would be in the bedroom reading a book. I couldn’t care less.

But I felt that there must be more to life than just going to work and coming home and reading a book. There must be more to life than that. And so what happened is this; my mother was a secretary and my father had bought her a second hand typewriter. An old Remington rattle thing. He got it as a gift for her. I came from work and saw this typewriter and immediately put a bit of paper in to it, just to try it out. And the newspaper was lying just beside it at the Situations Vacant column. And there was a job going in Assam wanting a secretary in the oilfields. Assam Oil Company. My eye just fell on it and so I started to type an application. Yes, just because it was there.

And when I finished typing, I hadn’t made any mistakes. It was a beautifully typed letter. I thought to myself. “Oh, what a shame to destroy it”. I promptly put it in an envelope and sent it off and forgot all about it. I got a shock when I got a telephone call from the head girl there. In those days you had covenanted secretaries. They used to come out from UK.

Covenanted, what does that mean? What does covenanted mean?

It means that they come out from England. They’re covenanted secretaries, and all the big firms here, they all had covenanted secretaries.

They were senior secretaries, you know, and they'd come out on covenanted terms, as they would call it. Quite different from our terms. They would get everything under the sun. Anyway, so she said, "come for an interview." So I went for the interview and after I did a shorthand-typing test this man offered me the job. He said, "You must join on the twentieth of December". I said, "Oh I can't join then, Christmas is coming. I must stay at home for Christmas. I can't go on the twentieth of December". I said, "How am I going to tell my parents that I'm going off to Assam...?"

"I am going to prove that I'm as good as anybody else."

Let alone...

They'll think I'm mad or something like that, suddenly out of the blue... Anyway I came home and I explained to my mother what had happened and my father said "You're not going anywhere. Why are you going to Assam? What do you want there? Our girls don't... It's out of the question". And I said "Mummy, what to do? I've gone and made this big blunder. I've sent this application and it will look so bad now to refuse." I said, "Mummy please, I want to do something with my life. I'm just lying in bed and reading books and I really don't know where I'm going and I want to be a good secretary. And I feel that if I go there, I'll get a little experience, you know, and also of living on my own." So she only asked me one question. She said, "Are you leaving home because you're unhappy". I said, "I've got nothing to be unhappy about. I'm not unhappy". So then she said, "All right, you promise me one thing. You go, and if even for one day you're not happy then you come home. You leave the job and come right home. You've got a home to come to". I said, "I promise you I'll do that. I'll come right home". But I was so happy there. I was so happy for six years. They were the happiest years of my life. I grew you know. I was very dark, and not attractive. My sister was the attractive one, bless her heart. And you know I had this terrible inferiority complex. Even though I was intelligent. You know, if I used to go and visit a friend and there were a whole lot of people in the house, I'd come away and wouldn't go in.

Is this you up there? [Pointing to a photograph on her living room wall.]

That's me.

Oh, that's not unattractive is it? Sometimes you feel...?

All that was to do with Assam. You know I went there... In those days it was a very European place and a lot of tea planters were European. It was a very European community. And my mother said, "How are you going to feel when you are dark, in this community?" I said, "Mummy, I'm going to prove myself. I'm going to prove that I am as good as anybody else. I am going to prove to myself that I'm as good as anybody else." And I did. I did prove it. I was a good secretary. And then when the new oil fields opened up they offered me the senior job there. They didn't offer anybody else. So you know I felt that...

You had passed some sort of test?

No. Well. Not only that, but I, you see, let's face it, even in the Anglo-Indian community... I told you that story about Delhi and about the old man

and these girls who wouldn't dance with him. There is that same thing, because you're dark. Maybe it happened in other communities but it happened in the Anglo-Indian community too.

“She was descended from the French, and she had red hair and green eyes... and she was just as Anglo-Indian as I was.”

There's a type of hierarchy of colour?

Yes, yes. And at parties I was so shy because I wasn't attractive. I was as thin as a rake and maybe I didn't have a personality so I'd just sit quietly...

But when I went to Assam, I can't tell you how I blossomed because people accepted me for what I was and I've never forgotten that. I've never forgotten that. The first day that I went the head girl said “You spend the night tonight in this bungalow and tomorrow you'll move in with Jeannie”, who was the other Anglo-Indian girl. Now she was French. She was descended from the French, and she had red hair and green eyes. Now we were both Anglo-Indians together and look at the difference between the two of us. I mean it just goes to show, and she was just as Anglo-Indian as I was.

That first night, the others wanted to go off somewhere but I was very tired. I wanted to write a letter home to Mummy. So I was sitting in the sitting room by myself and then... and Mummy had warned me about these tea garden types. She said, “Now be careful of these tea garden types. They are rather wild.” She had warned me.

The people that work on them do you mean, or who own the tea gardens?

The tea garden's... the manager's assistants and all. You know it was, it was a great life. You don't get that life now. It was a beautiful life – very free, very easy. The boys would come out [generally from England] when they're twenty-two, twenty-three. They would do about three or four contracts. That's about twelve years then they would become managers, or superintendents. They'd get married and raise families, or if they didn't get married they'd have liaisons with tea garden women. That's why you've got Dr Graham's Homes in Kalimpong. But it was a different kind of life. So, and Mummy warned me about these tea garden fellows: “Be careful of all these tea garden types”. So the minute a tea garden fellow came near me my antennas went ting, ting, ting, ting. Anyway while I was there on my own this fellow came up to the bungalow... I said to myself, “Oh, he's come to ‘survey the land’. He must have seen Jeannie with red hair and green eyes and now he's come to see the new secretary. Oh boy, what a shock he's going to get”. I was laughing to myself and I thought “I wonder what he's going to tell all his pals at the Club about the new secretary”. Anyway he was a very nice chap. He came and spoke to me and all that, and said... they used to call me Philly. He started it. He said, “Philly, I want to give you a bit of advice. If you want to enjoy your stay in Assam” he said, “You do whatever you want to do as long as your conscience tells you you're not doing wrong. As long as you don't go against your conscience, you do what ever you want to do, because if you're going to listen to what people say, you'll be miserable”. And so I did.

You took his advice.

I did. I followed what he said and I enjoyed myself and I used to write to my mother. I always used to write and tell her what I did. That I would say straight. And she'd write back letters and say "Such dissipation" and I used to say "What a dear old fashioned word". It used to sound so sweet my mother saying "Such dissipation". We would start work at six in the morning. We worked 'til ten; we'd go back at one and get off at three. And, you know, you had to have some social life...

"On the weekends we thought nothing of going forty miles or fifty miles to a dance."

And you see everybody had to get that time off to play tennis, or do what they had to do in the evening. Otherwise you couldn't manage. And also the tea garden people; the factories, began very early in the morning because of the climate. So, it all worked out. So we used to come home at ten o'clock. Have our lunch by eleven o'clock and potter around the garden and do little things and have a snooze, even in the winter. Then go back, and at three o'clock we used to come back home. The servants would have our tennis kits ready. We used to go either to tennis, swimming, some played golf, and then we'd go to the movie or we'd just sit and have a snack in the Club, or have dinner at the Club in summertime. The servants used to bring our dinner down to the pool. We wouldn't come back till ten, not later than ten, because everybody began work early in the morning...

And then on the weekends, we got Saturday and Sunday off. On the weekends we used to go off, say to a dance, and think nothing of going forty miles or fifty miles to a dance.

People would come from all over, would they?

Yes. We'd hear that a club was having a dance, so people from the whole surrounding area would come there. It was like that.

Everyone would know?

Yes, yes. And so you'd travel about forty miles just to go to the dance and you left the dance floor at say two or three in the morning. So by the time you got back at about four, four thirty, what would we do? We'd have our swimsuits in the car, so we'd go straight to the pool. Everybody would have a good swim, come home by six thirty – hair wet – have a nice hot cup of coffee, have your bath and you were at church at eight o'clock.

Oh my goodness.

And then come back, have your breakfast out on a picnic. We used to go up the river. It was the same river down which the Japs came. It was. We used to go up that river on picnics – rafting up the river. All day long we used to go, and come back in the evening, get dressed, go to the movie, come home. And mother would say, "such dissipation." But we enjoyed ourselves.

I had a good group of friends, you know, and they accepted me for what I was.

Were they Anglo-Indian?

No, and they never ever said we were. But I'll tell you what; we had a club called the Hilltop Club, which we all, which the Anglo-Indians would go to.

See, because the Anglo-Indians were not the top people in the country, or in the company. They were the middle level management in the company.

There the British were...?

British were top, and then came the Anglo-Indians.

So they didn't go to the top club, Anglo-Indians would go to what they called the Hilltop Club. So, I would go to both the clubs. I enjoyed the Hilltop Club because it was our type of music, our type of dancing. It wasn't a question of just standing at the bar and having a drink. It was ...

Which is what the British was?

Which was the British thing.

Yes, so it was more fun at the Hilltop?

Yes, it was more fun and so we used to go over there and we used to have regular Saturday evening dances there. Sometimes the Europeans used to come to the Hilltop Club. We would have Easter dances and they were free to come. There was no problem. When they would come they would say they're "going slumming". That's what they would say. Like that. But they came to have a good time. Because if they didn't, they wouldn't have come.

That's right, they wouldn't bother.

"So we'll celebrate your birthday like that."

I celebrated my twenty first birthday two months after I arrived. My mother sent a big parcel, and the cards were coming and all, and then the girl I worked with, she was covenanted too, and she said, "What's happening?" So I said "Oh it's my birthday, my 21st coming up."

And she asked, "What are you going to do for your birthday?" I said, "I don't know. I don't know anybody. What to do? I've just come and I'm still very new". Anyway and my mother sent my dress and shoes. Everything my mother had sent. All the gifts and all. So she said, "Okay", she said, "We, we're having a Valentine's dance at the Club" she said. "So we'll have a little party at the bungalow. The covenanted staff bungalow. We'll have a little party, just a few drinks, you know, and then we'll all go to the Club. So we'll celebrate your birthday like that". So I said "Fine". I landed up there; the house was ablaze with lights. There was a cake, a twenty-one pound cake in the shape of a key. These tea garden boys had made it from the factory for me. Now I was so touched...

That was very...

So touched. And I met a lot of people there who I didn't know. And there was one lady, she was... She used to work as an airhostess before she got married and she came. And she made me the most beautiful corsage out of the flowers in her garden. It started with light pink and came down to deep rose, deep rose, you know. And those things I have never forgotten. And then after that we went to the Club. I had to cut that cake in the Club and I had to give everybody in the Club a piece and everybody wished me, and everybody wanted to dance with me. You know I've never forgotten. And that made me feel important. I said to myself, "If people treat me like this", I

said "Why should I feel awkward?" and you know, I really blossomed. I blossomed completely. I had self-assurance.

I learnt a lot over there. A great deal. I learnt about flowers, we won prizes in the flower show, you know. I learnt so many things, which I never had a chance to learn here. I mean, like tennis. Where do we ever learn to play tennis here? There's no Clubs to go to. I mean, okay, we've got to be well placed in life to go to the Clubs and we were not well placed at that time, with four of us in school. Mummy and Daddy were struggling to give us a good education. So... and swimming.

When I came home, I remember one Sunday I put my shorts on and my Mother said, "What on earth have you got on?" I said "Mummy I've got my shorts on. Today's Sunday, it's a relaxing day". "You've got no self respect. The cook is coming and going and you're wearing these shorts. Go and take them off". And that was the end of my shorts.

So you'd worn them in Assam, which was fine for there...?

That was fine. It was, see the culture was different. We used to go sunbathing in the garden. You know, swimsuits, and nobody would turn a hair.

It was much more British, much more...?

Very British. I couldn't do that here. My mother made me take my shorts off and that was the end of the story and I never swam again. I never played tennis again. But then I found other, I found other avenues. Like doing all this social work.

Yes. When did you start that? So you were twenty seven when you...

I went when I was twenty-one, twenty-one - I can say I was. Six years there, so I came back when I was twenty-seven. And then Percy Jones of the Anglo-Indian Association, he came to me one day and told about work that was being done for Anglo-Indians...

No, first of all I came back from Assam and then most of my friends had married or they'd emigrated. My sister was married, my brother was married, and the other brother had gone to become a priest so I was alone at home with Mummy and Daddy. And, it's okay; we used to go out together, Mummy, Daddy and I. They were very sweet. I mean I would come home at say about eight o'clock sometimes and say "I feel like going to a movie tonight." And poor Daddy was practically in bed and Mummy was getting ready for bed, and they'd say, "You want to go now?" "Yes, I want to go now. I feel like going to a movie." They were sweet. They'd both get dressed and they'd come with me. They were very sweet. They'd come with me and promptly go to sleep in the cinema. And I used to be petrified in case they started to snore. I used to be petrified. And if it was a funny movie, I'd be laughing my head off and I'd come home still laughing and saying "Mummy", you know, "wasn't that funny?" "Yes." Now I said "What? Yes! You and Daddy were fast asleep". "No, no, no. We understood the movie". "Yes, I know how much of the movie you understood". But they were very sweet; they would always come if I asked them to come.

Are you the youngest?

I'm the eldest. My brother who's the Priest is the youngest. I'm the eldest. So I was the first to leave home and first, the only one, to come back and stay.

You stayed and looked after them.

I felt, because they gave me... I felt that they gave me my freedom. They allowed me to go. They allowed me to go and I felt that when they needed me then I came home. I had my freedom. I enjoyed it. I didn't misuse it. And when I did come home because Mummy was not well, she had a bad heart. So I came...

That's why you came home?

She had a bad heart and there was nobody here. They'd all gone and my brother said, "You know Phil, we need someone to look after Mummy."

The others had married or gone overseas...?

My sister had married, brother had married and one's a priest. So there was nobody.

Yes, so there was no one else.

So anyway, she couldn't believe I'd actually come home. I said "Well you see my big trunks with all my books and everything, so I have come home". She couldn't believe I'd come home.

"Oh God, fifty and I have to learn to walk like a model. Oh it's too funny."

She told me about entering the 'All India Secretary of the Year' contest:

...that was in 1987 when I was fifty. Fifty! That was a miracle. That was another miracle. I belong to this Institute, as I said, and they were having this contest and we all got the forms and I just put it away in the drawer. I said to myself "Who's going to enter for this at fifty?" You know, and put it in the drawer. And then one night I was very restless. I didn't want to read, I didn't want to do anything so I started cleaning up the drawer at about eight o'clock in the night. And this form came out. And I said "Oh" and I sat down and with pencil I started filling it out. And as I filled it up, it sounded good to me. So next day I went... It was the last day, on the last day, I sent it off and forgot all about it. Then I got a call to go for the first test, it was a written test and I thought to myself, "Oh let's go and see what it's like." Picked myself up and I enjoyed my written test and the other girls said, "You know, the way you were writing so seriously..." I said, "Oh, I felt I was back in school again."

What was it you had to write about?

I had to do it on: If your boss is an important man in the company, then you must be an equally important person. Write a one-page essay. And then we had spelling, you know two l's, two s's and you know that sort of thing.

Like embarrassed and harassed and those words that I can never remember?

Yes, but I enjoyed doing that. And then they had words like glycyl, glycol. You know, one's a medicine and one's an oil and, and things like that which I find very interesting. And then they had situations, you know, they had

situations in the office like; what would you do in this situation? So I quite enjoyed myself. I was writing away quite happily.

If you were fifty, I guess you'd had lots of experience.

Yes, but I was... all the other girls... the oldest of them must have been about thirty, thirty-five. I was fifty!

And then the second test was a personal interview, with an HR Executive. So I went along and I always remember my mother telling me, "when you enter a room, don't go creeping around the door. Open the door and go in; what to creep around the door for?" I remembered all the things that she had told me when we go for an interview, you know, how important it is to look self-confident. So I opened the door, went in and sat down. "Sit firmly, don't sit on the edge of the chair. Sit firmly and talk to him." And I was chatting away and I just asked him, I said "Do you remember my mother?" and I told him where she worked, and what department. It so happened that he was an HR man of the company where my mother used to work. And he was interviewing me. And he said, "You know, I was just a trainee. I remember your mother in the cable department." So I had a really nice interview. I mean we spoke naturally.

And we had about twenty who went for the first interview and then ten were being chosen for the next one. I was listening to all these girls when I came out. "Well, this is a piece of cheesecake. So easy", you know. They were not chosen and when my name was called I could see an expression on their faces. I can just see them now. "How was she called? She's as old as the hills." Anyway, we had six, no eight, eight were chosen for the finals and that was, we had it in the five star hotel and we had to choose two questions out of a box. One of them, you had to say why you're not talking on that topic, and the other one, why you've chosen it...

And you've got to talk on it.

And two minutes you have to speak.

That's an interesting way to do it.

Yes, so I, the one I picked was: "A woman does not live by bread alone." So I said, "I'm sorry I'm not speaking on this topic with a name like Eaton, I cannot speak on the subject." And everybody laughed...

Yes, that's a good start.

And then the one I was speaking on was human resources in an organisation. Now that was, I knew it was a rich subject, a beautiful subject and I knew what I wanted to say on it, but you'll never believe after I said "I've chosen the subject" my mind went blank. I have never been so afraid in my life. I couldn't think of...

Was this in front of a...

The audience, it was about two to three hundred people. I was looking at them and smiling but my mind was blank. And then the words came to me. The Bible says, "Don't be afraid. Open your mouth and I will put the words in it." And as God is my judge, I opened my mouth and what came out to this day I cannot tell you. In all the interviews I've got all the press cuttings, there's no report on what I said. I myself don't know what I said. You know

it was a miracle and I finished in two minutes and I sat down. What the hell did I say? I don't even know what I said. Anyway then when the results came and all, I was runner-up. This same gentleman, the HR man, came and said, "You lost by one point." I said, "I'm surprised I even lost by that one point" I said "Because I didn't feel that I gave a good talk." And he said, "No, the content of your talk was excellent. But" he said "You gave it with no conviction." I wanted to say "How can I give it with conviction ...?"

If you can't even remember, don't even know what you said?

"Since it's a national event I'll be wearing a sari. I do wear saris for weddings and things like that."

I didn't know what I'd said. He said "you lacked conviction" but he said, "Your content was excellent." I, truly, God put the words in my mouth. So anyway the girl who got it, she's a Parsee girl. Very sweet girl, and she, her subject was: If I was the Chief Minister of West Bengal. Oh she was... it was hilarious. She made it hilarious and she was very good, she was really good, you know. So anyway, we went off to... we had to go to Bombay. And then we were discussing what we'd wear and all, and I said, "Since it's a national event I'll be wearing a sari." I do wear saris for weddings and things like that. I said "Somebody will have to help me to tie it so I don't fall flat on my face with it." So that was my choice. I wore a green... Green is my favourite colour, and it's got leaves on it, you know, like tea leaves. Tea has always been where my heart is so ...

From your Assam days?

Exactly. So we went off to the national finals and we stayed in a five star hotel and were given the best...

The two of you went?

Yes, the two of us went, and two from all the metros in India. From all the various capitals we came. And then we had to be at this five star hotel, the Taj, at about four o'clock in the evening and we all went there. And I noticed that everything went alphabetically and I, Eaton, I was first. Then we were all lined up and we had to walk in and you should have seen me. I said "Oh God, fifty and I have to learn to walk like a model. Oh it's too funny." Anyway...

Especially in saris, they're very elegant the way they swing.

Yes, actually, because I wore the sari my stomach went in and my shoulders were back. I looked elegant and tall, you know. Anyway we went in and then we had a discussion, a group discussion, and then I realised how different my values were from the others. It surprised me because the subject we chose was: What is more important to you - money or job satisfaction? And every single girl said money. You know! I, I couldn't understand it, and then it came to me. And I said, "Job satisfaction. Money's important, I don't say no, but job satisfaction is the most..." and they asked me "Why?" I said "Because if you're satisfied with your job, then you'll be good at it. And if you're good at it then the money follows." That is my contention. And I said, "You don't ask for a big salary first. I mean if you can't produce the goods you fall flat on your face. I'd rather do it from the other way. Prove

myself and I'll get the money. 'There's no problem.' That was my contention. Then after that we had a personal interview. We had six judges sitting there and they kept throwing questions at you because they said "In an office, you have to deal with so many things at one time." So there were these questions...

"What does India need most?"

And the questions ranged from everything to "What does your name mean?" So I said "Lover of horses." And "What was the high point in your career?" So I said "I worked for a boss who owned race horses. And since I love horses, every time he was out of station, my job was to go to the races, put his money in at the bookies. I had to learn how to put money on the bookies, for I didn't know what the bookies were. And I had to give him, my boss, literally a minute account of how that horse ran. Whether he lost or he won." I said, "I enjoyed those afternoons because I loved the horse. So that was the highlight of my career. And what a funny job, but never mind. I enjoyed that." And they said, "You've got a South Indian sari on. Are you from South India?" I said, "No, I'm Calcutta born and bred." And then they said, "What do you think India needs most? And I was a bit floored because they were asking me other questions and suddenly you know: "What does India need most?" And I said "Honest politicians."

You know, that was the end...

And then after that, they invited the entire corporate world. They really had a big show; there was dancing, and there was music and all. And at ten o'clock at night, by which time everyone was pretty tense, you know, naturally. Ten o'clock at night we were all put on the stage for this impromptu talk.

Ten o'clock at night!

Ten o'clock at night. And the only prayer I made... I had a medal inside my bra and I put my hand there and I said, "Our Lady, please don't let my mind draw a blank. That's all I'm asking. Don't let me make an ass of myself with my mind going a blank." I was so petrified of that happening. And here you had to chose a subject and speak on it for two minutes. And if you spoke after that you lost points, after the bell rang. And I was the first, Eaton again. Anyway I picked it out and I got the subject: How do you deal with a difficult boss? Now maybe I've always had empathy. I don't know but I had a feeling that at ten o'clock at night, people are not going to listen to dull stuff. You've got to put humour in it. You've got to give something that will catch their interest. Because it's ten o'clock at night and they've been dancing and the music... So immediately I told them. I started, by saying "I did have a difficult boss." And of course everybody started laughing.

That caught their attention.

Yes, caught their attention. And then I went on to say how he used to, literally, I used to have to type eighty letters a day.

Eighty!

Eighty letters a day. As God is my judge. Taking shorthand and from the tape. Typing on manual typewriters, not electronic in those days. I used to

come home at nine o'clock at night crying out of sheer tiredness, and how often my father said "Give up this job, you're killing yourself." I said "No. Either he breaks me, or I will win him over. And I'm not sure what it's going to be." And then I thought to myself "You can't go on like this." He pressurising you, you're fighting him. It doesn't make...

It must have been exhausting ...

It doesn't make for a happy working... and maybe I'm not even producing the goods, as he wants it, because I'm fighting him. So I decided to put a little humour in. Which I did. It was an honest thing. I imagined the Tom and Jerry cartoon. He was a big fat white cat. And I was the little fat brown rat and every day, he would be ready to pounce on me. And every day I was scurrying around the office trying to avoid that. And I brought the house down because that is true. That is really and truly what happened. And I said, "When a situation arose when I felt that he was ready to pounce on me, I laughed. But I never laughed, honestly, had never laughed at him. I laughed at myself. I could see myself as the little fat brown rat, little Jerry running all over the place and not getting anywhere. And when I laughed the tension went out of me and I was able to relate better to him, because I wasn't fighting him anymore. I was able to relate better and shortly after that, about two or three months after that he got a better job offer somewhere else."

And before he left he told me "Miss Eaton, I know very often you wanted to grind your teeth at me", he says, "but you must admit today that I brought you to a potential you didn't even know you had." Which was very true and as I finished that last word, the bell went. And all I could say was "Thank you, Jesus. Thank you that I didn't make an ass of myself." And I sat down. And then of course all the others gave their talks on various subjects. But they didn't put humour in. Maybe because their subject wasn't such that they could...

Mind you, I wouldn't have thought...

So anyway that was finished, and I was quite pleased. I thought to myself, now I have done my best. I can't do any better and, you know, it wasn't a case of me winning. It was Calcutta winning. You know Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, Madras, Bangalore, you see. And the girl who came first here, when it came to her turn, she was the last, and I think she was just plain tired... Her name started with W so she was last. She didn't even speak for two minutes. She just spoke for, as if to say, let's get it over and done with, you know. And I was so... I said "What's the matter with you? What happened to you? So anyway when the results were read they took six of them and gave them complimentary gifts, so we knew we had a chance. And then they said "Third..." so I was amongst the last three. So when they said "The second runner-up", so I said "It must be me." I was ready to jump up, you know, but it was somebody else. It was the girl from Bombay, so then I said, "Oh, I must be first runner-up. I was ready to jump up again. It was the Bangalore girl. And I said, "I don't believe this."

Oh, my goodness.

I just don't believe this. And then they did announce my name. I just sat and sat. They said "Get up" and I said "I can't." I was in shock. Then I went

and they crowned me and I knew how Princess Diana felt. I was smiling away. Smiling away. Heaped with gifts and all sorts of things and so it was...

It must have been fantastic.

I look happy there. [Looking at her photo taken at the time.]

You do. You look happy and relaxed and confident, yeah you do. Beautiful.

“So you see how God works these things.”

Yes. And then, but then I must tell you the story behind this. Just before that, that year was my sister's silver wedding and her son was getting married in the UK. And she wanted both Patrick, my brother, and myself to go. Now I could only afford one fare because I had to pay, give foreign exchange for two. Two fares plus foreign exchange to use there, and I didn't have the money for four. So I told Pat “Since it's a silver wedding and since it's the marriage of your nephew, you go. And you perform your priestly functions. So I'll save for you and I'll give you the foreign exchange. You go. And I'll give you a long list of things to buy for me. That you can do.”

That's... yeah.

That you can do. But “No” he said, “It's your hard earned money, you are going.” And, this way, we were both squabbling and my sister kept saying “When am I going to send the letter for you all to get your visas? Why don't you make up your mind?” She was asking me, “How many...? Are you both coming, who's coming?” I didn't know what the prizes for the contest were. You'll never believe it; I was shocked when they announced the first prize. Two tickets to London return! Tell me this is not God's work? I couldn't believe it. Plus, of course, other things. I got this, this music set. It's very old now, but I won't change it for the world. And, you know, a lot of other things. And then when I got back to the hotel, I rang Pat. It was about twelve o'clock and I said, “Come, get your box ready. We're going to the UK.” He said, “What on earth are you talking about?” I said “Guess what, I won two tickets for London return.” So he said, “What did you win the tickets for?” I said, “Oh, I won the contest.” He said “Then why didn't you tell me that in the first place?” “I don't know. It's not so important. I got the tickets to London. No problem.” So you see how God works these things? But you know I've always said that whatever little I have done for Him, for His people, He has given me so much more. I've given you the examples.

“I am not concerned with your moral issues. I am concerned with the fact that you are hungry.”

I asked her about her philosophy on social work:

I always say, “When you do the work we are doing, you never sit in judgement”. I don't care whether you have been married or not married, whether you've had children out of wedlock, in wedlock, where your husband is, who your husband is. I am not concerned. I am not concerned with your moral issues. I am concerned with the fact that you are hungry. You need

food, or your child needs education, full stop. I'm not concerned whether you've lived a rake's life and now that you've come to the age of sixty you've got no house any more. Perhaps it is your own fault but I'm not here to judge you. I'm here to say that you are living on the pavement *today*. This is your situation *now*. What can I do about it? Full stop. I couldn't care less about your past and more or less the committee are now, nine out of ten, coming around to that, otherwise they see that - Oh it's your own fault.

That idea of the deserving the poor and the undeserving poor...

I always say if you live in those circumstances, in a slum area, if you lived in those circumstances, you would be in the same predicament as those young girls are today. You would be, because of the force of circumstances and not for any other reason.

So, you know, I always tell other people, don't begrudge what you do for the poor, because God gives his gratitude in so many, many different ways. And don't do it because you want praise. Just do it because all it's part of... Maybe because it's part of your religion and you've grown up like that. But I've always felt that whatever talents you have, you've got to share them. I've always believed that. If you've got something, give it to somebody. Don't keep it. Okay, now I mean, I'm offering these public speaking courses. I don't take any money for it. I've always done so. I've never taken anything for it. I've given it, I've got something. If I can share that with you and make you a better person, I'm happy. That's my role. I don't want anything else, like that, you know? So, and most of the people, not most, all of the people in CAISS, they give up their time very generously. They don't look for anything in return. Nothing in return. Even for the shows that we have, we all pay our full tickets. We don't take anything, you know, like because we're on the Committee and so on and so on...

No perks?

No, nothing. We all take our full tickets. We went on a picnic recently and the ladies, four or five ladies, decided we were going to make alloo chat³. You must see these men on the road selling alloo chat?

Oh, is that the one that's sold from the glass cases, in a public stall?

Yes, yes.

Yes, I went to Bandel yesterday and I had some there which, which they just put local water into.

Thyme and water they use, and they put a little potato and gram and things in it. Now we were making the plain one, not with this...but this was being crushed and put on top and with a lot of masala and all. Oh, it was terrific. So we decided we were going to do this for the picnic, so each one of us boiled our potatoes and we brought it, and we made four hundred and sixty rupees on the little stall - that we did. We didn't know how it was going to come out, but they sold like hotcakes. What we put in, the costs, we never took out for it. We didn't say "Oh yes, we spent ten rupees, or twenty or thirty or whatever." We didn't take it. It was part of what we gave and on

³ An Indian snack made with potato, herbs and spices and deep-fried.

the contrary, when we ate ourselves, we paid for the plate that we ate. That's what we did.

It's all part of your...

Yes, you know. So like that, I mean even in this night shelter, one of us gave the crucifixes, another one gave the framing of the pictures. You know each one...

So together, it was a combination of...

Yes, each one did something. Now for Christmas two of the girls gave them the breakfast. Christmas breakfast. Two of us gave them the dinner. Then on New Years day two others gave the breakfast, two others gave the dinner. Like that, you know, we do it as a joint effort.

I asked Philomena what she is involved in now, a year after taping the interviews. She is busier than ever with a nine to five secretarial job on a project that has recently gone on stream. As well as being Convenor of CAISS she has the primary responsibility for the Night Shelter and is in charge of CAISS public relations. She is also secretary for an Old Age Home for (at the time) eighteen women. She is secretary of Legion of Mary, a church organisation visiting the homes of the old, lonely, sick, broken or distressed. She is on the managing committee of the West Bengal chapter of the National Institute of Professional Secretaries.

She has travelled many times to the UK, Ireland and Scotland when her sister was alive and lived there. Sadly her sister died of cancer in 1999. She has been to the continent and to Canada. She's also visited Australia twice (now three times with the trip at the beginning of 2004 for the Anglo-Indian Reunion) as she has a brother living there. She said that she does not see any foreign travel in the future, as it's too expensive.

She is happy to spend the precious leisure time she has available with household chores, listening to music, reading and generally relaxing with her dog and other domestic animals. Pressures on her time means that even opening and answering email is a problem and is done either at midnight or at 6am.

IRENE'S STORY

Irene lives in the Bow Street Barracks, a central city residential enclave.¹ She's lived there for most of her 50 plus years. Other Anglo-Indians in Calcutta say that the Barracks' Anglo-Indians can be pretty rough. I had the opportunity to be introduced to some residents by a Bengali man who had taken an active interest in their fight against eviction – as it was I didn't take up the opportunity for a variety of reasons, one of which was that my precious fieldwork time was passing quickly and we were still to finalise a time to suit us both. Eventually I decided to go to the Barracks unannounced and see how it would go from there. I was slightly apprehensive about going on my own but never had any problems with Anglo-Indians from there, or anywhere else.² I was given directions, along with cautions from an Anglo-Indian friend, and found my way there. No sooner had I entered the compound than I saw a middle-aged woman with short hair wearing a dress – a sure sign that she was Anglo-Indian. I approached her and introduced myself. She invited me in to her home, (a single-roomed flat with shared bathroom) to meet her husband and have a cup of tea with them. While she was an Anglo-Indian and they were both interested in what I was doing they didn't think they were the people I should be talking to so offered to introduce me to Irene. The reason they'd thought of Irene was that she's well known as being forthright, feisty and someone who works hard for the cause of the Barracks' residents.

At first she thought I was interested in the residents' campaign to avoid eviction and introduced me to some of the key figures – all Anglo-Indian and all well acquainted with Anglo-Indian politics. I learnt a lot from the time I spent with them about the roles of the local MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) and the two Anglo-

¹ The Bow Street Barracks are also referred to as 'Bow Barracks' or just the 'Barracks'. In Chapter Three I have discussed, briefly, the history and the current state of the buildings, and the residents' position.

² This was the area in which I received something close to a physical assault – not at the hands of an Anglo-Indian. At dusk one evening as I was on my way to an event at the Barracks an elderly Muslim man separated himself from a group to come towards me and punch me on my upper arm. No words were spoken and he moved back into his group and I carried on – shaken and confused about what was meant by it, and what to do. I did nothing but had an anxious evening knowing I had to get home again across the city in the dark.

Indian Members of Parliament. I came to some understanding of what finances were available to assist their cause but never really understood why help hadn't materialised several years after money had been allocated for improvements at the Barracks.

Once Irene understood what I had come to her for she was happy to help me. Prior to recording her life I met with her several times, once over a meal shared by members of both of our families. I went to a church service with her son and daughter-in-law where I met one of her daughters and her very cute grand daughter who at four years old sang the songs for me that my girls had sung at the same age. Almost every time I met Irene she seemed to have taken on a different persona. On the first occasion she wore a saree,³ had her hair tied back and would pass easily as a Bengali woman. Other times she wore shalwar kameez, and occasionally she wore trousers and western tops. She also had a few clothes that she referred to as her "tribal" clothes – woven or embroidered blouses and jackets.

She lives in a two bed-roomed flat on the second floor of one of the four blocks that make up the Barracks. To get to her flat I would walk past the enclosed recreation area that her flat looks down on, into one of the entrances and up the old wooden stairs. At the bottom of the stairs lives a Bengali woman with her mother and tiny baby (who was just a week old when I first met them). They have set up a home sleeping under the stairs and cooking on a kerosene cooker just outside the entrance. The mother of the baby does domestic work for some of the residents. Irene employs another domestic servant and has various people coming to the flat to offer their services.

She teaches at an English medium school and like many other teachers in Calcutta subsidises her income by taking tutorials. She also owns, and oversees the running of, a school for destitute Muslim children, where the teaching is in the vernacular. She was involved with the Bow Barracks' action group and spends time with her daughters and grandchildren – several of whom she tutors. On my first trip in particular she was exceedingly generous with the time she spent with me. On subsequent visits I was busy in other parts of the city and she was busy with the normal pace of her life but still she made sure we could catch up on each other. On many afternoons in that precious time she had between finishing school and beginning tutorials she would

³ I have used the spelling of 'sari' in other places in the thesis but in this story I use Irene's preferred spelling, 'saree'. As with many Indian words, there is more than one 'correct' spelling.

make a space for me to interview or visit her. In this way I recorded what she had to tell me of her life, which I have condensed in the following pages. I left an earlier version of this with her for her comments. After doing a fair amount of work on it (correcting her grammar and sentence structure in particular) ⁴ she returned it to me wishing me well and expressing her hope that I received a good grade for it.

Irene is not an Anglo-Indian according to the Indian constitution as her father is a Bengali. I have included her story because she identified herself to me as Anglo-Indian and practically all of her immediate family members meet the criteria given in the Indian constitution that defines Anglo-Indians. Her mother, her partners, and her four children, for example, are all Anglo-Indian by that definition. Also, she is recognised as being Anglo-Indian by her neighbours.

When I first interviewed her I was still uncertain about who qualified as Anglo-Indian and who did not, so I began by trying to get a sense of her identification as an Anglo-Indian.

My maternal grandfather was a German, and Grand Mum was a Bengali, not a Hindu.

Was she a Christian?

Christian, yes, we were all married into Christian families. My mother fell in love with my father after they met in this very same church, which you have visited, the Baptist Church. And my Mum's parents and my Dad's parents didn't want them to get married.

Oh, what was your Dad? Was your Dad a...?

My Dad had an Indian name.

So was your Dad an Anglo-Indian, or a Christian, Indian Christian?

Daddy was not an Anglo-Indian, but he came from a background where his grandfather, that is, my great-grandfather was a converted Christian. We have our own cemetery and our own church where my grandfather was the pastor of that church. That's on Daddy's side.

When my parents fell in love they had a lot of problems. My Mum would get a good beating, and a lashing, from her family. Her brother used to beat her up also.

⁴ To do this myself, or not, is always a dilemma. In this case I ought to have edited it more than I had done. I felt that I had offended her by presenting her with her words verbatim. She was determined that that was not the way she spoke. I attempted to reassure her that we all speak differently than we write; but that I was happy with any alterations she wanted to make. So this story is still in her words but edited by her for this medium. I am grateful to her for putting yet more time towards my research.

Was that was because she was in love with...

Daddy. After getting married Mum was living in Grandma and Grandpa's place and she underwent a lot of ill treatment there. They tried to take away my little brother from her and they beat her up about many things. Mummy and Daddy had a lot of problems but they stuck it out together.

So your father and mother moved into their parents' (your father's parent's) house. Was that a traditional Bengali house?

Yes, Christian.

So it was run as a joint family house?

No, they never ever lived in a joint family. We had our own garden house. But it was the usual Bengali bungalow, huge with plenty of land, and...

A compound?

Yes. A compound with mango trees, any tree you name was there. We had jackfruit trees, many mango trees, star apple trees and wood apple trees. Just trees, trees and more trees. And of course we had many areas where we kept chickens and goats. I used to spend a lot of time with my grandparents. But they had a dislike for Anglo-Indians.

Oh, did they?

Yes, I would go there as a little girl, along with my little brother, but I never liked going. But I would go and when I did I would be made to feel uncomfortable because they never, ever liked Mum. My Mum, even until she died, never, ever had any dealings with them.

Why didn't they like Anglo-Indians? Did they say?

I really don't know. I don't know why but Bengalis don't care for Anglo-Indians. It might be their way of dressing, or maybe the way they speak.

They would comment on it?

Yes, my grandparents never liked Anglo-Indians. They thought that all Anglo-Indians had lice in their hair. They called them nits and lice. So whenever I would go over I would be bullied. They would make me sit down and they would look through my hair and find nothing.

But did they think you would have them?

Yes. They associate the Anglo-Indians with this sort of thing, and it would make me feel most uncomfortable. So we preferred to be left at home with Mum. When we would go there, in Bengali they would say, "Ah, Anglo-Indian" [in Bengali: "she's come from the Anglo-Indian house and they've always got lice in their hair, they have this, they have that, they're so dirty"]. They'd say it in Bengali.

What did that mean?

That meant that they have dirty heads. They are dirty people. It was my grandmother and aunt, Daddy's sister, who would say these things.

I asked her about her schooling:

My father put me into a mission school, which was run by all the Europeans. And it was a boarding school for all the Anglo-Indian kids who had been left behind, after the British left. So they were in this mission school, they were boarders.

Dad, my Poppa, couldn't pay a big fee. We were not very well off at the time. So Daddy paid only five rupees a month. I attended St Paul's Mission School at 5 Scots Lane. The Anglos treated all Indians with contempt - they thought they represented the British during the British Raj. As Indians, we were not treated very well at that time. But I was very active; I was a very good dancer, very good in sports, you know. But I was never allowed to take part in dramas or sports events. 'Til one day, they discovered accidentally that I was a good dancer. Then I got my break.

And that's Indian dancing, or...

Yes, Indian dancing. I used to compose my own dances. How I became a good dancer has got a big story behind it. My Mum never allowed me to mix with a single person in this locality [Bow Barracks].

In, so she didn't allow you to mix with...

No, nobody.

Anglo-Indians, or...?

My Mum would not let me mix. She would lock me in. She would go down... and she liked playing cards: rummy and flush. So she would go to a friend's place and to ensure that I never went down, she would lock me up from the outside when she would go for her card sessions. And in those olden days we never had cassettes. We had that winding gramophone which played the 45 rounds per minute records. So I used to put on the records and I used to dance, all on my own. I would just make up a dance myself. Mummy had two left feet for dancing. Mummy would come home and she wouldn't know that I would do these things, you know, like dancing or things like that. And she didn't like Indian dancing, or the Indian costume.

Were you dancing an Indian dance?

Yes, sometimes. It was during the British time, no. The Indian film actresses used to mimic a lot of the English type of dances. So I used to copy them. And my Dad and I liked to go to the movies. Mummy would not let me go to any Indian movies. So I would go with Daddy. Daddy would take me. Mummy would say "What, I don't like you taking her to Indian movies and gifting her with sarees which I don't like her to wear."

Your mother didn't...?

No, no.

She didn't wear Indian clothes at all then?

She wore sarees once or twice. I have photographs of her when she had worn them, but she would never usually wear Indian clothes. She would wear dresses.

“Treat her better than you would treat your own daughter.”

I must mention to you. We had an adopted sister. This little girl had European looks but even up to now we don't know whether she was a European. She had been discarded in the medical college hospital.

She was abandoned?

Yes, when she was a very small baby. I think she must have been about two months, or three months old. The baby was offered to a lady in the hospital who didn't want her. Her mother had left her with the attendants, and so they went around asking the patients if anybody wanted the child. So there was a lady there who said, “I think I know a family that will take her”. She was referring to my grandfather. Because all his children had grown up, Mummy and everyone. And we were just smallies. And my grandfather, and grandmother, agreed to take her. They brought her up until she was about three or four. I can't remember exactly how old. But before they died, they handed her over to my mother and they told her “You take very good care of her. Treat her better than you would treat your own daughter.” Now my Mummy was very literal. So Mummy brought her up with me. Both of us grew up together, as two sisters.

How old were you when she came into your house?

Maybe, we were, I was about seven or eight.

Okay. And how old was your brother, at this time?

My brother is two years older than me.

We grew up together wearing the same clothes, the same shoes, the same bags. We would look identical... except that her hair was blonde and she was very sweet looking also. We were both brought up together and Mummy favoured her a lot. More than she favoured me. And I really felt it. But in any case Mummy put her into the St Paul's boarding section. We used to feel very upset that Mummy had put her there. I'd always tell Mummy, “Mummy take her out from there.” Because I would see what the boarders would get to eat. At lunchtime the boarders used to just get one big coffee mug of plain lentils to drink, and that's about all. And then the second day they would get two slices of bread with peanut butter.

So a real mixed diet of western...

Yes.

And was that school, the boarding school, was that an Anglo-Indian school?

Yes, it was an English medium, senior Cambridge school and all run by Europeans and the Anglo-Indians. St Paul's Mission school, the same school that I went to.

And was it mainly Anglo-Indians and Europeans who went?

The boarders were only Anglo-Indians and Europeans. They would not take any other Indians in. I feel that we were treated very badly in school. Indians were not treated well in school either.

Were you treated as an Indian, or were you treated as an Anglo-Indian?

I was treated as an Indian in the school.

Why was that? So in your family, your grandparents didn't like Anglo-Indians, but they treated you as an Anglo-Indian? And at school you were treated as an Indian...?

Yes, all the negative parts they tried to bring out of the Anglo-Indians.

Okay, and then you went to school and Anglo-Indians and the British treated you as if you were Indian?

Yes, but then in 1947 it all changed. When we got Independence...

How old were you in 1947?

I was ten years of age.

After tumultuous teenage years her sister married an Anglo-Indian boy from Dr Graham's Homes⁵ and had two daughters:

She had a very good job working for a good company. If you work in such a good office you can afford to keep a servant and to keep your children with you. You don't put them into a boarding school like the Kalimpong Dr Graham's Homes. But she put both the girls there. They grew up there. They became independent and very demanding.

I asked her about her father's work:

Daddy was a salesman, so he was hardly at home. Daddy had worked for the British as a soldier in the British Army. He used to drive the big trucks. Actually my mother was the cause of my father's death. And I never, ever forgave my mother for that. She treated him very badly. He was a very quiet man. And my mother was an Anglo-Indian and bullied my father.

My Dad was too quiet for her. He never wanted trouble, until the last he stuck to her. Every little while my Mum would fight with him and leave the house. She would leave the house and leave me with my Dad who was very afraid of a young girl being left like that in the house. But she would go away, and stay away. Then he would have to go and bring her back because of me. He would have to go and bring Mummy back. We were going through a hard time then. We would not get proper food to eat even. Daddy used to come late home after trying to make a little money, often amounting to only ten rupees, five rupees – hardly enough to give us a bit of a meal to eat. And we used to go to bed without eating quite often when Mum had left the house.

“I just applied and was accepted by the Kohima Baptist Mission School as a teacher.”

My mother was very hard on me. Eventually I was unable to take my mother's behaviour. I applied for a job. In the hills they wanted a teacher in Kohima. It was where they were having political fighting and strife. I just applied and was accepted by the Kohima Baptist Mission School.

⁵ As I have mentioned earlier, this was an Anglo-Indian boarding school situated in Kalimpong, Northern Bengal - in the lower Himalayas. Anglo-Indian children from very poor families are able to attend through a worldwide sponsorship scheme. Other fee-paying children also attend.

What sort of job was it?

That was a job as a teacher.

So you'd qualified as a teacher by then?

They didn't want qualified teachers.

Ab, just someone who could speak English?

Not exactly, the Nagas spoke good English themselves. I just studied up to standard nine and then I got a job in Frank Cross and Company, a medical and cosmetic shopping centre, in the Grand Hotel Arcade, as a sales girl. I worked late sometimes and then these foreign sailors and all used to come, and Mum would come and pick me from there and take me home. I applied for this teaching job while I was at Frank Cross and I got the job. So I went up and I worked for the Angami Nagas. At first the Indian Government suspected me as a spy, but after a while they realised that I was a genuine sincere teacher and nothing else.

Mummy didn't like the idea of me going to Kohima. She went and complained to the Church and asked them to stop me from going. So the members tried to discourage me telling me all the problems I would have to go through, but I had made up my mind. I said, "No matter what the problem is, there cannot be anything worse than my mother's treatment to me. I'll just go anywhere. I'd rather be living with the tribes and the rebel people than my mother".

So I travelled up by train with my Dad and I was given a good reception when I reached. They accepted me because not a single person was willing to go into Kohima. Two girls applied but the other girl backed out because it was a politically disturbed place.

She showed me photographs of the classes of Naga children she taught and the school and residential buildings. During the course of the interviews she would often find a photograph to illustrate what she was saying. As well as these school photos I saw one of her on the day of her wedding in the most beautiful Spanish style white lace dress, some of her four children, and of their weddings, and photos taken of the teachers at her present school.

We were four teachers in this mission school. Here is the bungalow in which I was living. [Pointing it out on a photograph.] This is the field, you know, where we were. And I was living here. I was living in the ex-Deputy Commissioner's bungalow.

Are these tribal children?

They are all tribal. These are Naga children. I even learned a little bit of their language.

It was an English medium school?

Yes, this was an English medium school, and there was a bible college connected to it. So when I went there I used to stay in this Deputy Commissioner's bungalow with nine little girls and eleven little boys, who

used to come to the school from villages. They couldn't go back to the village, so they used to stay in that bungalow where I had a beautiful room. It was a beautiful cottage. These cottages are made of wood and were raised on stilts. They stacked wood underneath the cottages. So I had one room. And there were two women there, one to chop wood and one to do the cooking for the kids. I would eat with the kids. I was getting Rs250 with food, and in those days Rs250 was okay.⁶ In any case there was a curfew after six so you couldn't spend your money on anything. The military was everywhere. You were not allowed to be seen on the road after six. And you had to know the password. If not you would be held up at the nearest Police outpost.

How long were you there for?

One year. When I returned home for a vacation my parents didn't let me go back.

They didn't let you?

They didn't allow me to go back. Then what happens is I didn't stay even then. I didn't want to stay with my Mum. So then I got a job in a school in Mussoorie. I was interviewed for the post of a stenographer. I had experience as stenographer and as a telephone operator so they asked me to come up to Mussoorie. So I went up there and it was in February, the year Queen Elizabeth came to Calcutta. I've never seen snow in my life. That was the first time. The heaviest snowfall was that year and I hadn't gone prepared for that. I went part of the way by bus and travelled the latter part on the Principal's M. P.A. Kids scooter. I used to wear these short tight skirts and there we were whizzing down the road with snow on either side. Then we reached his wife who was a very sweet person. They had a great fire burning. I stayed with them for a while because they said, "You'll have to stay here and eat with us because the Mess is closed." I stayed with them for some time but I didn't like the diet. They used to have potatoes in place of rice etc so I was looking forward to eating in the Mess.

It was western food?

Yes, yes. Absolutely western food. But then I adjusted.

So then I went to work there and what I discovered was he [the principal] was wanting me to do Dictaphone typing. So I said, "I was interviewed as a Steno. Dictaphone typing is too much for me." So he said "No, no. It's simple - you'll be able to do it." So eventually I did. You know, you put the thing in your ears and you have a little pedal underneath and all. And he would dictate all night, 45, 50 letters.

What work did he do?

He was the Principal of both the schools – the boys' and the girls'.

So he had a lot of work for you.

He had lots of work and I had to manage it all. I would have to see to all the boys from Uganda, their passports. I would have to send up the woollens to the Girls' School. See to the woollens in the Boys' School. All their

⁶ This amount would be her monthly earning. In India salaries are almost invariably expressed in terms of earnings per month.

blazers and various things. Then the medicines, indent for all the medicines. Plus see to the office work.

“Then we got friendly.”⁷

I was friendly with a nice group who were also Anglo-Indians. These girls were very friendly with me. So we would always go into town and we would get a special diet once a week. And the boys used to have their study classrooms here. The boys were very fond of me. And there was one master who was liking me. He was a PT teacher there.⁸ He would always want me to go down and play tennis. And at first I would not go with him. I would go with the other masters, and then he started getting very upset about it, that I would not go and play tennis with him. I liked to play badminton and tennis. Then we got friendly. We became very, very friendly. I fell in love with him. And I didn't know, I still don't know why he hid the following from me...

I returned from office one day and I was sitting and having my meal and what happened was the House Master told me “Have you looked into Mr Alfred's room, Irene.” I said “No, I've not.” He said “You just go down the hill and have a look inside his room.” At the hill stations you have these railings going down. So I went down and looked into his room and then I saw a little girl there, and a little boy. There was a lady there also. So then I realised that the housemaster was just trying to tell me that he was a married man!

Oh, no!

So just then he came out and saw me. As soon as he saw me I ran up the hill. I went right on up to my quarters.

You'd be upset.

I was very upset. I just started running and he carried on coming at the back of me. Trying to stop me and talk to me. I said “I don't, I don't want to talk to you anymore. I'm too upset to talk to you. This is something you should never have hidden from me. I would not have got so involved with you.”

No, you wouldn't have got attached to him. No.

That's right. I said, “I have become very fond of you so it's really very upsetting. I never knew you had a wife. And you've got two kids!” Two little kids! So I left the school. I resigned from there. I resigned and I went and joined another school.

You left because of that relationship?

Yes, I left because of that relationship. But then he followed me to the next school where I got a job closer to town.

He moved his job as well, or did he just walk down and see you?

⁷ Getting “friendly”, when referring to the relationship between a male and female, is a euphemism for falling in love.

⁸ Physical Training teacher.

No, he used to sprint in the morning, so he just ...

He would come and see you?

He came, he did and I confess that I broke down holding on to him and started crying and I said "Why did you ever do such a thing to me?" I said. "You should not have done this to me." And then I phoned Daddy and told him I wanted to come back home. And then I came back home. And then he started phoning me in the house of my parents. And then what Daddy did was he went up there.

He was in love with you too? He didn't want to finish it?

Yes, he was in love with me. He told me "I'll leave my wife for you." So then Daddy went up to Delhi. And Daddy spoke to him. And then I got a letter from his wife, and his wife said, "It's in your hands to break or make our home. It's up to you to save my home." Because she knew that he was in love with me. Then I decided not to have anything to do with him.

I don't know what happened to all the letters. I think my parents destroyed them later on. I will be honest with you, when I started going up to Delhi I did try to contact him. I've told my daughters about it. And they said "Mummy how will you react if you meet him again?" I said, "I don't know how I'll react but I would like to see him, wherever he is, once again."

"Then I came back to Cal and met the man I married, at church."

Then I met my girls' Dad.

Where was he from?

He is from here only, from Calcutta. He was born in East Africa because his father was working in East Africa, in the Railway, the East African Railway. They are Anglo-Indians from the South but all his sisters and brothers were born in Africa, in East Africa. So they were all British Citizens holding British passports. When I got friendly with him he was in love with my sister, the adopted sister I told you about in the beginning. But she was in love with someone else.

He used to drive a 3.5 Royal Enfield motorbike. I would always bump into him at Church. He would come there for my sister. So after service they would wait around. He, his Mum, his sisters and they were all very dark complexioned. Maybe because they were from the South. People are like that from there.

My sister didn't like him but they would wait after Church. As we would come out of Church I would say, "Don't be so rude. The whole family is waiting for you to talk to them. At least be decent and just chat with them if you can." But she would take off from the other side so I would end up talking to them. Then when I came down from Mussoorie he was on the bike and I was with a whole gang of girls who were walking down the path to the gate. And he said, "After a long time I'm seeing you. Have you been working out of station?" He said "Are you living in the same flat?" I said, "Yes, I am in the same flat." "Is your phone number the same?" I said, "Yes, my phone number is the same also." So then what happens. He knew my number.

He was after my sister but he found that he was getting no response from her, so he started ringing me at our flat. He wanted to talk to me so I spoke to him but then after some time I just refused to take up the phone. I didn't want to because I didn't want to get friendly with him. Then my mother insisted on me talking to him. She said, "Why are you being so difficult? You just talk to him. What's the problem with you?"

Did she like him?

Mummy had her own reasons. They wanted me to forget that person in Mussoorie. So they were in a hurry to make an arrangement, get me married to somebody, so then I would forget the past. And they were afraid that perhaps we would contact one another again.

Did they like the fact that he was Anglo-Indian or did they ...?

No, it was okay. Mummy was an Anglo-Indian. So she didn't mind, she didn't like the Indians. But his people didn't like me because I was partially an Indian. They didn't want me. Not his mother. Not the father. His father had been separated from the mother for 25 to 30 years. The father was living in [the South]. His mother and father broke up long time back. They never got on.

And they didn't like you?

They didn't like me because they said, "She's an Indian.

Even though you...?

They were too much of Anglo-Indian. They were dark but what they were looking for was... My sister was lighter than me in complexion. Eddie was quite old, over thirty years, and he hadn't got married. He was a bachelor. He had been friendly with another girl, and that girl jilted him. So he was afraid that he wouldn't get married so he was in a hurry to get married.

How old were you then?

He was ten years older to me.

So then he started frequently coming and taking me on dates. He had a beautiful house across the river, at the Jute Mill in Howrah. He had some quarters there. Bachelor quarters, but very nice. Two huge rooms going one into another and a balcony facing the river. He started dating me and then Mummy got angry and said "Don't keep her out so late. You're not even engaged to her and we don't approve of you keeping her out so late." So then he told them he was sorry, and we got friendly, and I don't know what month it was, about six or nine months later, he proposed. He came and it was a big excitement for my sister-in-law. She said, "I'd like to see how he proposes. He's such a shy boy." She would always make fun. He came with a big bouquet of roses on the day he proposed.

"So it was partly like an arranged marriage."

My parents accepted the proposal. So it was partly like an arranged marriage; being with him made me sort of get used to him. It was half arranged and half sort of... I really just went in for it because my parents were insisting and then we agreed so we had to go to the Church for them to

announce it. We got engaged in February and we got married in June the same year.

And then what happened is, before we got married, the day before the marriage... His father was not living with his mother... So the father came to Cal and stayed with Eddie. He had nothing to do with the wife and the other children living with her. They were all grown up and one or two of them were married. And they were giving objection until the last. Then his elder sister told him to stop me from wearing a saree after I had married him.

To stop you...?

She doesn't wear sarees. But I used to wear sarees.

So when did you change from wearing, sorry, when did you change from wearing western clothes, which you had in Missouri ...?

I always wear western clothes even now.

Okay, but you used to wear sarees as well?

Yes, I wear everything. I wear Naga clothes also. So I just wear anything I feel like wearing. No one's going to tell me what to wear and not to wear. So the day, the eve of the wedding the last word that that my husband-to-be told me was "See that you don't wear sarees after we get married." I said, "I am not going to stop wearing sarees. So you can consider the wedding off." So I just went up and I told Daddy about it. I said, "Daddy this is the condition he is giving me." So Daddy told him, "Even though the wedding is finalised, now it's considered absolutely cancelled. The whole thing is off. That's all there is about it. My daughter wears sarees and she will keep on wearing sarees." Just imagine, one day before the wedding! Then immediately Eddie came down by bike with his father. Then I don't know what happened. They spoke and then they must have taken back their conditions, and the wedding was on again. We had the wedding at the Carey Baptist, and then we had the reception at St James'.

You know that at the reception the bride has to have the first dance with the groom.

Yes, that's right.

Eddie refused to dance and he was very annoyed that my mother had arranged a band. My brother had to start the reception by dancing with me. My brother is an excellent dancer. So I had the first dance with him.

"Because I was going on the bike I was not getting pregnant."

In 1962 we got married and then the doctor said that due to riding on the bike I was not getting pregnant. So we sold the bike and bought a car: a 1962 Standard Herald. I learnt how to drive in that car but he never trusted me with the car. He loved his car. When he died, I really felt bad, because as he was an engineer we had never spent one... we say "nai paisa", on repairing the car or giving it to anyone else for servicing.

But my husband was too possessive, he wouldn't allow me to dance with anyone or allow me to have anything to do with anyone. We would go to a party and he'd say, "You are not to dance with anybody at the party." So my

whole evening would be spoilt because of it. Yes, I had a lot of trouble with him.

We were transferred from Howrah Jute Mill in 1965. We got transferred from there when our first girl had just started toddling around and I was pregnant with the next one. There was just 17 months between the first two. We got transferred to another Jute Mill at Kamarhatti.

Owned by the same people?

The same people. On the water front this time. Everyone in the Jute Mill started taking a liking to me and I began to socialise and I became the Secretary of the Ladies Section there. We would have these barbeques and parties and I started doing all the organising and also I became quite popular among the Bengali ladies. And his position started getting a little better because of me.

At Kamarhatti Mills he didn't want me to work. He wanted me to stay at home. He said, "I don't want you to work," or "An engineer's wife doesn't work." So I said "It's okay but I'll be heartily bored." I tried to adjust but I had nothing to do. I had about five servants. I used to play music. I used to dance by myself, as usual. He would go to work and I would be bored with my duties. I said, "I am getting so bored." So then I got a job. A friend was going on leave for three months. I said to him, "Just let me do these three months at the office as my friend is taking three months leave."

So I got the job as a receptionist, typist and telephone operator. But I would not travel by car. I used to go on the bus. Then there would be these bus problems. Sometimes the bus would break down or there'd be a traffic jam, which would make me get home late. So he began distrusting me. So one fine day he took the car and he landed up at my office. And he came in. Now as the receptionist I said, "This is not your home and it's not mine, so I can't give you that much of time." I just asked him to wait in the lounge. He got quite hot about all the salesmen talking to me and my having to take calls and give messages.

So he ended up saying "You don't have to work any more." So I had to throw the job up. He made me throw the job up. So then I ended up playing tennis and badminton with a group of ladies.

Were they British?

No, not only. We had Punjabis, Bengalis, English, and there were the foreigners also. So I started mixing around with them and spending time at the club.

And you had an ayah...?

Yes, looking after my children. That ayah is still working with us. Now she is looking after my grandchildren. She came to work with me when I was pregnant for my second girl. She came to work for me just before she was born, and she has been with me from that year on. From '65...

That's a long time. Is that a full time position for her, a live in position?

She lived in with us during the week and we allowed her to go home for the weekends. She gets everything. There's nothing she doesn't get; at

Christmas time she gets gifts, she opens them all, she gets what she wants. And we treat her like a family member. She has all her meals with us.

Does she have a family?

She's got one daughter who's married and one daughter, a small little girl, who died. We tried to save the child, that was when she first joined. We tried to get the girl admitted but it was too late.

But still now she considers us as her family. She says, "I have no one else." When I went to Kashmir, I took her with me. I had two trips to Kashmir with my husband. You see he was entitled to leave every year. We could go anywhere and the company paid for the trips.

Mmm, that's good. Anywhere at all in India?

Yes. So he would say, "Honey, let's make use of that and I'll show you places." He always used to say, "Maybe it may turn out that I won't be here sometime to show you places, then you won't be able to say that your husband didn't take you around." So we were married for about eight years and in those eight years we went all over India.

The time she had with him was a mixture of very happy times along with some tough times.

"After a while we started getting quite fond of each other."

Sometimes he would just drink himself drunk and then he could get very violent with me, and one time... I think it was one of these thick fat ropes that he used to skip with.

A heavy rope?

Yes, and he lashed me with that. He beat me with that very badly and I just... I never used to retaliate. But one time when he beat me up like that I left my babies. They were very small. I left them in the cot and I decided to go. I walked a very, very long distance. But when I left the house they were crying. And that was playing in my ears while I was walking. I kept hearing them so I came back. I came back home. When I came back he tried to make up with me, but I told him "I don't want to have anything to do with you."

But, okay, we had to live together. So for the sake of the kids... I mean if we break up the kids are going to suffer. So that's the reason why I just stuck to him, because of the kids. And his Mum and all that: they would have been heartily pleased if we hadn't.

After a while we started getting quite fond of one another. But he used to say, "When I come home you're not there." I said, "Honey, I'd be fed up just sitting in the house." Then he said to me, "Okay, I don't want you to work, but why don't you look around for something that you like" and so we found that school. We started that school. And we named it after a place where we had gone to in the South for a holiday.

So that's when the school started?

Yes, we founded it in '69 and he died in '70.

Oh, so soon after.

Yes. We discovered that he was having blood pressure problems. After a long time I discovered it - he used to hide it from me. The doctor said that he was a dead man walking around. He used to say he'd get cramps and then his eyes started getting a little affected and ah...

And then one fine day we had a little bit of an argument. It was on the day he died. I would arrange our social programmes. So that day there was a plan for a movie and I had already brought the tickets. But he didn't want to go and said, "Why did you go and buy those tickets?" So I said, "Okay if you don't want to go, we won't go. I'll go and sell the tickets." We had an argument about it but then we decided we'd both go back to sell the tickets. So that last day he got on the bus with me and he stood with me defending me on the bus and we went and we sold the tickets...

Defending you from the...?

From the crowd, you know. So we did that then we came back home, but he was so annoyed he never spoke to me. He didn't speak to me and I still feel bad about it. He went to bed early. We had a huge bed, which the three little girls also slept in. We went to bed without talking to one another. We ate our food and we went to bed. And we had stopped calling each other by those names. He used to call me honey. His last three words to me before he died were "Honey, honey, honey." These were the last three words. He was in bed and sometime in the night he suddenly he got up. He went into the bathroom. I think he went to wash his face and then the blood rushed to his head and he started bleeding. He bled from the ear. The sink was full of blood. Then he just came to me. He was all red, and he tapped me on my hand. I got up and I put my hands out like this, and he fell on my hands. And he just said, "Honey, honey, honey", and he went into a coma. And he never became conscious again. After he said that to me some sort of froth started coming from his mouth. I screamed. I was very far from my parents: Fifteen miles or sixteen miles away. There was nobody around here, and the kids were small. They were six, five and three. And they woke up, and wanted to come to us. And he was foaming from the mouth.

It would be terrifying.

So I said to the oldest "Darling, you catch your sisters and stay there and I'll see what help I can get." So I ran down to see if somebody would get a car to take him to the nursing home hospital. We got him to a hospital then I went home and I told my father. Daddy came and Mummy came. I was with my three daughters. And then I heard them saying "I think we had better take her down to the nursing home." Then I knew that there was something wrong. That there was no hope. And everybody started consoling me. Too many people said that he's going to be okay - then I knew that there was something wrong. And when I went there, they were saying "He's alive" But he was on a big slab of ice. So how could he be alive if he was on a big slab of ice?

"If he did survive he would have been a vegetable."

And the company had given a blank cheque for his treatment, but I couldn't shift him to another bigger hospital. He had had a cerebral

haemorrhage. Something had burst inside. They wanted my permission to do a puncture but they didn't do it earlier enough. They said if he did survive he would have been absolutely... a vegetable. So he died. I kept the kids away from him. I didn't allow them to come to the church and see the body. Neither did I allow them to go to the cemetery. They were too small. And this lady who is still working with us, she told them that he's up there, that he's a star and whatever.

We were allowed to stay in the Mill for a little while, but they began to pester me to vacate. But I had no money, Robyn. No money to leave that place even. He never let me work for those eight years. So then I was really in a big stew and I was hardly getting any money. I was paying my teachers and there was no income from there.

At the school?

Yes, our school. The school was not making money. It was really just social work I was doing. And they were telling me to vacate, vacate. I said, "The whole flat's reminding me of him. I don't want to stay here. Every step I take, every noise I hear..." And then slowly but surely they were cutting my supplies out. They cut out my fridge, the milk. They let it go. I had lights, lights galore, and fans... The lights started fusing. They used to give the bulbs but then they stopped giving me the bulbs. I used to get coal from the company. They stopped the coal too. But the caretaker, he used to knock on the stairs and he would tell me "Come down. I'm leaving a little coal in a basket for you." I would send this girl, this girl who's still working with me. She is the only one who knows my whole story. He said "Send her down to take that coal up in the night for you."

And then Daddy used to come every night because the girls were missing their Daddy. The girls and their father used to play a little game every night when he came home from night duty. They would hear him coming and they would hide in the cupboard. And he'd say, "Where are my three babies?" And "Where are they hiding?" and he had to search and bring them out. And then they would all come out giggling. So my Dad used to come and continue that game with them. And Mum would send whatever she could. They were not well off themselves. And eventually I couldn't take it anymore. I told the officers at the Mill, "I'm due some money. You will give me at least a little amount and I'll leave and move into my school. I'll partition it." And so I shifted my kids and went to live in my school.

How did you survive then?

I was getting a little money for tuitions, one fifty per week. I would leave my girls with this girl I was telling you about, but I couldn't pay her. I told her "I can't pay you." I said "I don't have any money to give you and now you've learnt English so you'll get a job in any other sahib's house." She said to me in Bengali, "I'll get a job anywhere. But a person like you I would not find anywhere."

“I was very scared of taking from anyone because they’d want something in return.”

I told her “When I do well, and if I come up in the world at any time, you can depend on me. I will never forget this day.” And she has stuck with me. She stuck to me from that time up to now. She knows what I have gone through. Sometimes I used to sit and cry that we were not getting this ration. If you miss collecting the ration for three days your rations are cut. But I had a lot of pride. I was very scared of taking from anyone because they’d want something in return. The ration was only ten rupees. But in those days that was quite a lot of money.

What did you get for a ration?

I used to get some rice, some sugar, some dhal. And we would manage on that.

And where did you get that? How does the ration work? I’ve heard people even now talking about their ration. I don’t understand how it works.

You have ration cards and you can buy the food cheap. You go to the Government ration office and you get food and things on the card. If you buy it from outside they charge you more. So the ration card means it’s cheaper. That’s the use of the ration card.

So it saves you money?

Yes, it saves you money. And during the strikes and during the bombing we are the only ones who got bread and all – because we have that ration card.

I don’t like to take anything from people because I’ve had some bad experiences. I had one uncle, well we called him uncle, who one night when he was over saw me crying. I quickly wiped my tears but he asked that girl, the ayah, “Why is she crying?” She told him I didn’t have the money for the ration. So he said, “Then why is she being so stubborn and not taking any help?”

So then he gave the ten rupees for the ration card, and then after that he started wanting to dominate me and tell me what to do and what not to do. He also thought he could have another sort of relationship with me...

Your uncle?

Yes. One night there was a strike or something and he told me “Tonight I won’t go back, I’ll stay here.” I told that girl... She’ll tell you. I told her “You don’t go home today.” I said, “You please stay back with me.” So then he saw that I had stopped it. So he says “Okay I see” and he went away. I was very afraid at that time. I was very afraid, and I was alone with the children. I was still living in my school. After a while I got two of my girls into a boarding school, just temporarily, so there was just one girl at home with me. They lived well at the school but they broke down sometimes. They would say, “Mummy, we feel that you are far, far, far, far away from us.” I said “Mummy promises you she will take you out of school soon and make you a day-scholar. Just give me some time.”

How did you cover the costs?

I got them into the school as... They were sponsored. They had foreign sponsors. I got my two girls in there.

The girls are Anglo-Indians aren't they?

Yes, yes. Definitely. All the girls are Anglo Indians.

I was eight years with the girl's Daddy but I was thirty years with this man.

I have to tell you how I got involved with my son's father. I used to come sometimes and stay with Mummy here [in The Barracks]. I'd come over and that boy's [pointing to a photograph of her son] Daddy used to stand on the balcony alone.

Oh, he lived here too, in this place?

He always lived here. This is his house. He lived here with his father who died sometime back. His mother and sisters had gone abroad and left him with his father. They were another set of people, there's a long story about them. I was eight years with the girl's Daddy but I was thirty years with this man.

So you all lived here? Your mother had a flat next door?

Yes. And my Aunt lived at the back.

So he had this flat, and he would never talk to me in those days. He used to be down with my Aunt, always talking to my Aunt. Everybody said that he was friendly with my Aunt. Okay, so I would pass them and I would just say "Hi." He later on said, "When you were in school and college I used to stand and watch you going to school and coming from school."

So how much older than...?

He's ten years older than me. He said he used to see me standing at the balcony and putting one knee out. I would have my school uniform on. He said, "When I came from work I'd always look to see if your knee was out, with your green uniform". So he had a fascination for me.

He had been married before. His marriage didn't last more than four or five years. He married and he had two kids from her – a boy and a girl. And they were very, very small when they broke up. But night and day, he told me this later, she was always fighting with him. He used to compare me with her. He'd say things like, "I'd come home dog tired and I'd tell her to give me a glass of water. She used to tell me to get up and get it myself. But when I come home, first thing you hand me is a glass of water. Second thing you open my shoes, you take off my socks. You help me off with my clothes. This sort of pleasure I never ever had with her."

It was after my first husband died that we started getting friendly. We soon got very friendly, both of us. Now he had been married and he was a Roman Catholic. Even if you are divorced you cannot do anything about it if you're a Roman Catholic. So he and I would see each other and my Mum and my aunts got mad about it and they said, "You should not be having anything to do with him - he's a married man". But he had left his wife in the sixties. Even before I got married their home had broken up. But they said that I had broken up his home. He said when I came into his life there was no one around and he was never ever going back to the wife.

So the wife had left...

She left him. Now, mind you, she was living at the back. But she thought that he would never get another person because he had a very bad temper, and she had a bad temper...

And then one fine day it came to a push and the whole locality ganged up against me, this very same locality. They all came around here and gave us a very bad time. That day my aunts and all tried to break us up. Even my Dad was mad because I had got friendly with him. And that uncle who was having a soft corner for me, he was there, and the whole locality was against us.

“Now one’s a post-graduate and two are graduates, all because he helped me.”

That was too much for me. I packed up and I went back to the school. And I took my little daughter also. Then my daughter got taken up with typhoid. He told me “Honey, you bring her here. This house is here for you. You bring her here. You live with her here and we’ll take care of her and we’ll bring her back to health.” So I brought her and from that time on I started living here, with him. I had promised the girls that I would take them out of that school when I got a place; so then I made them day scholars. He paid for their education. He educated those girls. Then when it started becoming too much for him I started doing extra tuitions, working for 70 and sometimes 30 and coming home at nine o’clock in the night, even ten o’clock in the night.

What’s 70 and 30?

70 rupees for one tuition. That’s very little to take, but I wanted to get them a good education. Then he told me, “Why are you educating them so much, honey. They can finish up at year ten. Let them go in for secretarial work.” I said, “Listen honey, my daughters are coming first and second and third.” I said “And they want to carry on. The minute they tell me “Mamma we don’t want to study”, then okay, then I’ll take them out. But they want to study.” Now one’s a postgraduate, two are graduates and all because he helped me. He said, “Okay, so let it be.”

“My mother’s story is a very sad one. She died a very bad death...”

Daddy died because he had asthma and I didn’t have the money to give him treatment. I was unable to treat my Daddy properly. He used to be on homeopathic treatment. But then he suddenly got sick and they put him into hospital and they straightaway put him on to allopathic and he couldn’t take it. That night he died.

My son was five then. He had a good relationship with his grandfather. He remembers his grandfather and grandmother.

When did she die?

Mummy died thirteen years after Daddy died. That’s a very long story. I had to treat my mother’s sickness. Mummy developed a very serious disease, which she got when she was very young. Mummy was the most beautiful daughter of the nine children my grandmother had.

When my Mum fell in love with Daddy people were very jealous of her. Even though at first she wasn't able to have any babies... Somebody put this mercury in a sweet and fed it to my mother. After that my mother slowly became ill. Very gradually she started getting leprosy. But we got it treated ...

She developed leprosy?

Yes, very, very slowly it came. It took years. We got her treated with this and that. Daddy always told me "I hope your mother dies before I die because there will be nobody to look after her." But I was left with her, my husband and me. Up and down he used to go with her food.

Go up these stairs, down, across and up the other side?

Yes, exactly. The kids would have duties to take food to their Grandma. My mother's story is a very sad one. She died a very bad death...

Mummy became very bad at a certain time. So much so that the hospital took her in: First the foreign hospital for people with leprosy, and then Mother Theresa's centre here. I had to rush her to Mother Theresa's centre for the leprosy people.

It's not in the family at all. And that place which she was taken to is usually for the very contagious and mostly it's the very poor class of people who go to that one. But they really keep you well.

One day I was really upset. I was upset because that day, I don't think you'll like to hear about it even... In the morning I would always go and see to my mother. My aunts and all had discarded her. They would just talk to her now and again but they would never want to go to her house.

Were they worried about getting it?

Perhaps, but my Mum was very aware of it. She never allowed us to touch a thing she drank out of. She never allowed us to go near or touch the clothes she wore. And she would always want the children to be kept away.

And actually, leprosy is not contagious by touching; you get it through the nose. Its infection is spread that way. I found all these things out. So Mummy was just left there and I used to take care of her. She used to say, "I'm a big burden on you". And I would say, "No Mummy you're not a burden on me, Mama." But she became very bad. I would have to clean her fingers and all that. And then her whole hand started swelling. So one day I opened it up. I don't know which finger it was. And one part of one of her fingers was practically gone so she told me "Will you cut it?" I said, "I'm not going to cut it off." So she said, "Yes, you must cut it off for me." So what I did was I sterilised a blade and I cut that bit off. Now her hands were very badly swollen.

The top part, what part of ...

This portion.

Oh, right at the tips of her fingers.

Yes, and I cut it off. Most of her fingers were affected. After I cut that away, I had some water with Dettol, a disinfectant, and I put her hands into it to clean it. I was going to clean it and then tie it up. But as I cleaned it I saw

that something was disturbing the water. When I looked at the water I saw there were little worms, maggots... So I said "The water must be bad, or there's something wrong with it." So I threw the water out and I got fresh water. Again it happened. Then I said "Oh my God, don't let it be what I'm thinking!" Then I looked at her finger. Her finger was swollen and in her fingers were imbedded the worms, the maggots. So I bandaged her up fast and I ran to the church. We have a Pastor from Canada (or from America), and he's very nice. He's a very good pastor. Then I just broke down there and started crying. So they came to help me. I bandaged her hand up but with this condition there's a tendency for a lot of secretion to keep coming out. So I had to constantly keep changing the bandages.

"Some people would have felt ashamed because that hospital was actually for the beggars."

I couldn't get rid of them. I just bandaged it up. Then we took her to the Hospital and they said "it's a very serious case and we can't attend this." So immediately I told him, "Reverend, we'll take her to where Mother Theresa's centre is." So we took her there. We admitted her there. And then we had one big row. The Brothers and the Sisters or the Nuns got angry with us. But Mummy had hidden her condition from us. That is why she became so bad. She hadn't wanted to be a burden on me. So they cleaned her up nicely and I used to go after school every day to see her. And it's very far from the city and I would go and wait. I would have to wait for one hour on the road on the railway tracks. And all these beggars and all would come and they would tell me "We always see you coming and standing over here." And some people would have felt ashamed because that hospital was actually for the beggars.

So then we fixed for Mummy to go to another hospital. The church helped us. We took Mum directly to the hospital from there. We admitted her and then they did an amputation of Mum's fingers and all that. And even her leg was amputated. They got a false leg for Mummy. She was okay there.

Then my brother came from London and he acted smart and said, "You're not going to look after her any more. Let my aunt look after her." My Mum's sister started looking after her. And they neglected her. And then they admitted her one fine day, and do you know where they put her? I was at a school meeting and my son-in-law, the one whose house you went to, he came on the bike and told me that she had expired. They never bothered to inform me. They did nothing with my consent. They just put her where they put her. Then we went searching for her. We didn't even know where she was. My aunt even didn't tell me, my aunt is such a nasty woman. Eventually we tracked her down to that hospital. That place I had first taken her to. And then we went ...

To Mother Theresa's?

Yes. And then we went there. Now if you hear this, you're going to be really upset. When we got there my Aunt and her two daughters were there. And I was not on talking terms with them, so I just got off the bike, I was drenched, I said, "Where's my mother? You are looking after her." They said, "She's dead." I said, "Yes, I know she's dead, but where is she?" "And she's

also been buried.” So I said, “Buried!” So I went in and I challenged the authorities. I said to the Brothers, “How did you bury my mother without informing me?” They said my Aunt admitted her. They said “She was admitted here as a beggar.” My Aunt’s son-in-law put her in there as a beggar! We got that news, afterwards, because I was going to take them to court... They said, “this patient was brought in a taxi and the person who brought her said, ‘I have picked her up from the road.’”

And was your mother unconscious?

My mother was not in her right mind. She had been a very beautiful woman. She should have lived on. Then I went and checked the burial. I said, “I want to see the Registrar.” So then I found out that she was buried in a piece of cloth, in no-man’s land where the Muslims, Hindus and all are put. And she was not put in a coffin; she was just put into the ground there. Then the Pastor and all of us went to pray over the grave.

The Muslim gardener came over and he said, “Please forgive me. We put her into the Hindu area.” I said, “What you didn’t know, and you did, is not a sin.” If he had known that she was a Christian and he put her in a Hindu plot that would have been a sin “But you didn’t know what you were doing. It’s okay.”

I was out of talking terms with my brother. Then he came down six months or eight months later and he had her body exhumed. He paid Rs10,000 for her body to be exhumed. But he was not present. He couldn’t take it. So we don’t know whether it was exhumed or not exhumed. But I believe my mother’s been buried there.

At the Church?

At the site where that hospital is. If they did then she’s in my grandfather’s grave. The German grandfather of mine. My Mummy’s been put in there.

So I really have gone through a lot of problems. When I tell people in the school I’ve been teaching at for twenty-seven years... I’ve told them all this in dribs and drabs. The teachers have told me this is not a very nice story.

Yes, it’s been a tough life hasn’t it?

Right through, the only little happiness I got was this man I had for 30 years. And him I couldn’t marry.

Irene’s sister and her family now live in Australia. Her brother lives in London but comes back for months at a time where he enjoys the purchasing power of his British pension. All four of Irene’s children are now married and have children of their own. Her son and his wife live in the flat with her and two of her daughters live within a ten-minute walk away. None of them talked about wanting to leave India.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

I began this study with the idea that I might shed some light on the disparity between the prognosis of decline and eventual demise of Anglo-Indians, and what appeared to me to be a vibrant, culturally distinct minority group. In this thesis I have indicated how some of the practices of Anglo-Indians might have the effect of perpetuating the community. In addition, and more importantly, I hope I have been able to portray the day-to-day lived experience of being Anglo-Indian in Calcutta today. This I hope I have achieved through my account of the words, actions, discussions, and stories of some of Calcutta's Anglo-Indians.

I will not present a collection of conclusions as if I have been able to reach such a point after this experiential exploration of Anglo-Indians in Calcutta. My research has been against a method that generalises; rather it is the particulars that are valued: particular experiences and particular lives. Which is not to say that Anglo-Indians in Calcutta don't comprise a unique combination of ways of being in the world, but being is also becoming: it is a project into the future and my becoming has become intertwined with theirs.

I want to reflect now on other things that matter, rather than on conclusions. From interviewing people about being Anglo-Indian, and particularly from their stories, it is evident that being Anglo-Indian is important to these people. I spent an evening talking to one community leader who gave me his well-rehearsed argument for assimilation with "the rest of India", supporting his argument by wearing Indian kurta pyjamas. He commented at the end of the evening that I should come to a dance at the Rangers Club the next weekend. They could get me tickets. He said that he has many Indian friends who he socialises with but that there's nothing like an Anglo-Indian function. I asked him about this, but he said he couldn't put his finger on what it was that differentiated their 'dos' from others – he dismissed it as something one couldn't *begin* to explain, even (or especially?) to someone like me. It seems to me that while

he and others may rationalise and argue for being “Indian”, in their hearts they are Anglo-Indian.

I endorse this sentiment, and would support any attempt they make to ensure that future generations will have the opportunity to ‘be’ Anglo-Indian. In light of that, I would like to see the Anglo-Indian community working towards an acceptance of a wider sense of who may be regarded as being Anglo-Indian. There is a gendered dimension to the definition of who is an Anglo-Indian that women, in particular, should protest against. The adoption of a definition that is not biased against Anglo-Indian women and their children is particularly timely now, as their numbers diminish. Women play a huge part in the reproduction of the community – it is they who have a significant role to play in the transmission of culture and to a sense of cohesion. I can understand how the definition came to take the form it has: historically it reflects the origins of Anglo-Indians and it recognises that the first ‘Anglo’ influence was from the paternal line. I find it alarming, however, that more than three hundred years later, this arbitrary definition, that recognises only the male contribution to the life of the community, is tolerated. Surely it is possible to move towards a change in the Constitution. Another possibility is that individual organisations, beginning with the AIAIA, resolve to adopt an inclusive understanding of who an Anglo-Indian is, and ensure that their policies do not discriminate against females.

In April 2004 I gave a paper (based on the Reunion and Anglo-Indian Day), to the Association of Social Anthropologists in Durham, England. I was disappointed at having no questions from the audience relating to the content or the analysis I’d presented, but was heartened by the comments about my obvious enjoyment of the fieldwork – all that socialising, and dancing! I was pleased I’d conveyed something of my satisfaction of the experience. Carrying out this study has made this period of my life both academically and personally extremely rewarding. It has been a time of some personal upheaval and sadness but the goodwill of the people I have worked with has helped to fulfil me.

After reading the entire thesis as I was nearing its completion I realised that while I had been able to present a number of experiences and a lot of data, there was a wealth of material that I had not been able to make reference to. Among this unused material are the many publications that I have not referred to. But the greatest loss is that many of

the people I met, and the experiences I shared with them, do not make it into this work. My experience is far richer than this work can express just as their experience of being Anglo-Indian is richer than I have been able to convey.

I would like to think that I would have an ongoing relationship with Calcutta's Anglo-Indians, as well as the diasporic community, and hope that they recognise what I have written as fair and that they feel that I have done justice to the experiences I have focussed on.

In 2004 I was involved, albeit marginally, in the development of an exhibition of the Anglo-Indian experience in Australia. It strengthened my feeling that it was through the engagement with new forms of 'mediation,' such as exhibitions and reunions and other public rituals, that a community such as Anglo-Indians can grow into the future. It is true that others use these forms but they each do it in a distinctive way.

I intend to involve myself in contributing to the growth of the community by reciprocating what they have done for me. I have in mind some projects for future work with Anglo-Indians. As I have mentioned earlier, I would like to produce a book of stories of Anglo-Indians. I would also like to study Melbourne's home for elderly Anglo-Indians. I could imagine carrying out research along similar lines to Myerhoff's work with the elderly Jewish community in Southern California. I would also like to ensure that a project to preserve the old and increasingly rare books on and by Anglo-Indians is implemented. In these and other ways I hope I shall find ways of repaying them for the generosity of their contribution to this thesis.

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