



PARADOXES OF BELONGING—INDIVIDUALITY AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY

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Although the mass voluntary exodus of India's Anglo-Indians for the UK in the years following Independence is common knowledge, little is known about the lives of that 'first' generation of immigrants that reached. 'Home' in the years between 1947 and 1964 under the provisions of the British Nationality Act, 1948. Sociological studies focusing on varied South Asian ethnic groups in the UK such as Punjabi Sikhs, Hindu Gujaratis and Muslim Bangaldeshis have surfaced regularly in the recent past—but, to the best of my knowledge, the fate of Britain's first-generation immigrant Anglo-Indians remains obscure. When presented with the opportunity to live and work in the UK in 2008-2009, I interviewed dozens of members of the Anglo-Indian community that left India in their teens and twenties at the end of the British Raj to create a diasporic community in Greater London, and through these interviews I gained insights into the challenges they faced as pioneering settlers in the post-War West. My findings resulted in the production of a full-length manuscript that follows the fortunes of individuals and of the community, as a whole, from exodus to assimilation. The essay that follows is but one single chapter of a much larger study that has focused on a variety of factors pertaining to cross-cultural encounters in Britain over the past half century.

While the politics of cultural encounter had dogged the Anglo-Indian community for at least a century (i.e. even while they were domiciled in India), it was emigration to British Commonwealth countries that brought them into a headlong collision with identity issues and ways of being in their new metropolises. In his book *Children of Colonialism: Anglo-Indians in a Post-Colonial World*, Lionel Caplan quotes A.L. Stoler who states that "In diverse ways, Anglo-Indians, like similar *metis* populations in the colonized world, 'straddled and disrupted cleanly marked social divides'".¹ In

India, they had developed skill in negotiating their position between British rejection on the one hand and Indian hostility on the other. A similar precarious in-betweenness became familiar to the first wave of immigrants who reached 'Home'. The expertise, developed in India, of blurring racial lines in order to straddle diametrically opposed worlds stood them in good stead in the UK.

Rudy Otter, an Anglo-Indian journalist based in Greenford, Greater London, wrote a tongue-in-cheek essay in 2008 commenting on the community's expectations upon first arriving in Britain:

We first-generation Anglo-Indian migrants, stepping ashore at Tilbury Docks or Southampton in the 1940s and 1950s, felt gloriously happy at "Returning Home"... We proudly regarded the white folk all around us in this strange and freezing land as our people, our blood brothers, our very own kith and kin. **2**

While Anglo-Indians did not exactly expect a red carpet reception in Britain, they were shocked by the hostility they encountered; and Otter's sarcasm derives from the hopelessly cold reception they received when they attempted to stake their place in Britain. As a 72 year old retired engineer from Slough says: "As far as we were concerned, this was our Mother Country. This was Britain and we had the British way of life, so we thought we could just slip in. We didn't know exactly what we were in for". A woman from Southall who arrived in London in 1961 at the age of 27, says: "We were young and we were struggling in India. At a time when we thought coming to England would be a matter of great social rising for us, it proved to be just the opposite. Our self-esteem was badly affected by coming here". Her sister echoes her feelings of disillusionment with England:

Before we left India for the UK, we were very excited. We thought the streets would be paved with gold. Nothing had prepared us for the racism we encountered. Anglo-Indians who had preceded us to the UK had sent back glowing reports of their lives and had not mentioned their hardships. They didn't want to appear to have made mistakes in emigrating. All this was a rude slap in our faces. If someone had offered to take me back to India, I would have dropped everything and gone right back. There was so much I had to give up because I made England my home but the biggest thing was my dignity.

In "What If?" an essay published in *The Way We Are: An Anglo-Indian Mosaic* (2008) Ed Haliburn writes:

The UK, to many of us, was a seminal awakening to the realities of a competitive world. Much was bandied about the welcome Anglo-Indians could expect, but all that we were greeted with was anger, suspicion and open racial hostility—‘Rooms for Rent—No Niggers, No Wogs, No Children, No Dogs’. **3**

The desire to fit, blend and eventually disappear into British mainstream society was inhibited, of course, by the fact that Anglo-Indians were a visible minority—unlike European Jews or the Irish (who were also victims of racial prejudice at the time). Their complexion, Oriental accents and appearance revealed their heritage. Despite conscious efforts to circumscribe and challenge the prevailing ethos of bigotry and ostracism against them, they were thwarted. As Homi Bhabha puts it, in *The Location of Culture*, in “the ambivalent world of the not quite/not white, they would forever stay on the margins” (89) **4** of mainstream English society. They would remain branded, as “individuals of mixed race who taken all round resemble white men but who betray their coloured descent by some striking feature or other and on that account are excluded from society and enjoy none of the privileges” (Ibid.).

In the course of time, Anglo-Indians discovered that the most successful way to combat rejection was to develop a ‘fluid’ identity. In adjusting their expectations of the Mother Country, their own concepts of ‘belonging’ underwent radical change. Their biological hybridity was contested by the environment of marginalization and categorization; but what was transformed, in the process of finding their niche, was their own individual sense of self and their community’s identity within the diaspora.

Anglo-Indians in Britain during the 1950s found themselves confronted by a strange paradox: permitted entry into certain fields, yet unwritten policies excluded them from privileged positions alongside the British. Although they did not need to take on what Shinder S. Thandi calls “DDD Jobs”—“dangerous, dirty and demanding (and offering low pay)” in *A South-Asian History of Britain*, **5** they were confined to blue-collar positions on factory floors and within the typing pools of offices. The circle that permitted them entry was, paradoxically, both inclusive (in that they had access to some mainstream ‘centers’) **6** and limiting (for they were confined to the margins with no hope of shattering existing glass ceilings created by color prejudice and racial bigotry). Lionel Caplan argues that this peculiar binary —of acceptance (albeit with limitations) on the one hand and of rejection on the other encouraged “a particular

kind of self-ascription" (*Children of Colonialism* 91). It left them confused and uncertain about their identity and their place in the wide cosmos of ambivalent Britishness. Their fantasies of becoming one with the British whose patronage they had enjoyed in India dissipated quickly.

DENIAL OF ANGLO-INDIANNESS

Almost imperceptibly, in attempting to stake their place in Britain the politics of identity affected Anglo-Indians both in the workplace and in their domestic sphere; and few knew how to react.

The first wave of immigrants acted in the manner of the timid and the voiceless—they ignored overt attempts to belittle them. Reacting in ways taught to them by their stiff upper-lipped education in India—they gritted their teeth and bore it. A 67 year old sub-contracting engineer from Croydon recalls:

I encountered several situations where I was told: "Nignog, go back to where you came from". Nignog was a derogatory term for a black or dark person. I guess the term is a derivative of the word 'nigger'. I never reacted in any way to this torment as there'd be trouble had I done so. I just kept shut. Of course, I felt suppressed—not being able to do anything about it.

A 70 year old retired engineer from Chesington states:

Racism is a very personal subject; it is a very emotive thing. It is something to which different people react differently. The most common reaction for the Anglo-Indian was to ignore it; to put it down to ignorance. In the beginning, most Anglo-Indians didn't even have a name for the sort of treatment they received. They did not understand it. They were inexperienced and ready to accept anything that people dished out to them. They didn't even see it as racism.

While it was possible to turn a deaf ear to verbal taunts based on skin color, it was impossible to ignore physical attacks. Although these were rare, a 76 year old retired male accountant from Wembley recalled specific negative instances and experiences:

I can recall three separate incidents all of which are ingrained in my mind: I was on the Tube and there was some guy who was mouthing off behind me. He kept on and on about brown skins coming to England and taking their jobs and their women. I ignored him the whole time. Then another brown skinned man entered the train. This guy happened to be big and hefty and the white guy shut up immediately.

Another time I was on a bus and I heard abuse directed at me. They said things like, "Why don't you go back home from where you came?" They called me a WOG right to my face. 7

The third time, I was actually physically assaulted by a group of dangerous skinheads. I was walking down the street and minding my own business when one of them broke off from the group and came straight and banged right into me with force. I was thrown off balance and fell down and when I was down, he kicked me in my ribs. I had to go and see a doctor immediately and I went to a hospital.

No, I did not report this. I had a great desire to get up and run after the guy and attack him in retaliation. But I am glad I did not follow that impulse. They were skinheads, they were in a gang and what's to say that they did not have a knife or something on them. I could have been killed if I had tried to retaliate. This was near Euston in the early 1970s.

How did I react to such prejudice? Well, I remember thinking to myself that these are the exceptions in what is, for the most part, a good orderly society. You had to remember that not everyone had such violent tendencies.

Although it must be reiterated that such overt signs of racial hatred were the exception rather than the rule and largely unfamiliar to pale-skinned Anglo-Indians, it is indicative of the general feeling of anger towards immigrants from the Third World, particularly in post-war times when the British economy was in the doldrums. Most early migrants suffered in silence and refused to discuss negative experiences even with closest family members for fear of demoralizing them.

Anglo-Indian responses to racism--carefully measured and proffered--brought the community face-to-face with even more startling realizations based essentially on what they collectively term "the ignorance" of the British. Thus, although they felt strongly pushed towards their Anglo-Indian roots, their sense of belonging was questioned, renegotiated and altered by the realities of small-minded societal prejudices.

FACING EMBARRASSING QUESTIONS

At its most harmless, racial prejudice took the form of subjecting Anglo-Indians to subtle questions designed to embarrass them. Questions came not just from individuals brazen enough to make their bigoted attitudes known but indeed from

collective groups such as trade unions in the work place. The 72-year old retired engineer from Slough says:

In my 20s, when I was the supervisor at work, the unions were always nasty to me. "Go back to your country", they'd say. "You asked for your Independence and we gave it to you; now why are you here?" I always responded, "So which position in the Atlee Government did you actually hold?" I mean these chaps behaved as if they were personally involved in giving India her Independence and as if I had to feel personally indebted to them!

Many respondents state that they were asked if they had lived in trees in India; others were asked where they would "park their elephant for the night" when they lived in India.

Clearly, not every Anglo-Indian fielded embarrassing questions with sarcasm. Some of the braver ones responded more aggressively and declared that they "gave back as good as we got". A 79-year old former employee on the London Underground states that when he was in his 20s, he retorted just as cheekily when colleagues tried to trip him up by making reference to his country of origin:

When I was a station foreman, there were some of the lower staff who started out asking me stupid questions. I used to say to them, "Look, never try looking down on me. First of all, I am in a position above you in my job and I can always look down upon you too. Secondly, I have lived in big houses with servants and all that. I let them have it straight away if they talked to me disparagingly.

The engineer from Slough gives yet another example of the racism he encountered on local public transport. He found a unique way of dealing with the veiled insults and taunts—by bringing humor to his rescue:

Once when I was getting on to a coach in London, a white woman said to me, "I have no color prejudices. I will sit with anyone". And I said to her, "Neither have I. I am sitting near you, aren't I?" I've always been cheeky that way. You had to have a sense of humor about it or it would drive you crazy.

Humor and tongue-in-cheek repartee did not stop the tirade against Anglo-Indian immigrants. If anything, it led them to deny disclosure of their origins in India or, at the very least, not to reveal personal information about the Indian side of their ancestry voluntarily.

PALE VERSUS DARK-SKINNED ANGLO-INDIANS

A 73-year old male security guard at a well-known London art museum states that when he was in his forties and fifties, his ambiguous identity was a constant source of bewilderment:

It's funny but in India, my complexion was considered fair and I used to be taunted by the Indians who used to say to me: "Red Monkey, Quit India". And then when I came to England, I used to hear comments on the street such as "Hello Paki"—because in contrast to the English, I was dark! I thought to myself 'Bloody Hell. This is really crazy'. These English people are so ignorant—they don't know who an Indian is, who is a Pakistani, who is an Anglo-Indian....but then I can't really blame them because at the end of the day, we all looked alike to them.

And yet, it was not only the darker-toned Anglo-Indian who was taunted in the work place. A 72-year old former museum security guard recalls that as a result of his Caucasian coloring, no one knew he was an Anglo-Indian. However, he states, "As soon as I opened my mouth, they knew I was not English—and then the awkwardness began!" When one of his colleagues, even as late as the 1970s, alluded to his skin color, the Anglo-Indian was livid:

He said to me, "Black Monkey, go and climb a tree". I was so furious that I hit out at him. I actually did get physical because I lunged at him. I said, "Come here. You see this pair of shoes? What color are these shoes?" And he answered, "Black". Then, I held my arm against my shoes and I said, "And what is the color of my skin?" I threatened to give him a smack on the face. I reported him to my supervisor, a white Englishwoman, who made him apologize to me.

Interestingly, Anglo-Indians brave enough to report racial slurs to their supervisors arrived later in the UK, in the 1970s and 80s, after Britain had become visibly multicultural. The influx of immigrants from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean confused the general British populace even further and muddied the waters for Anglo-Indians who, as long as they had been a tiny minority from the Indian sub-continent, had attempted to keep their community's identity distinct. But when the British found themselves unable to distinguish one group of brown-skinned immigrants from the Indian sub-continent from the next, they clubbed them all together as "Pakis" (short for Pakistanis), an epithet that has developed negative connotations in the UK as incendiary as the 'N' word in the United States of America. Clearly, by the 1970s, the term "Paki" had replaced the epithets WOG and Nignog that had been used derogatorily in the 1940s and 50s to belittle immigrants from former British colonies.

Anglo-Indians realized very quickly that, in Britain, attitudes towards them were constructed around a persistent binary based on the politics of skin color. The culture, in general, privileged immigrants with pale skins while darker individuals literally had doors banged in their faces. A 72-year old woman from Greenford who had arrived in Britain from Cochin in Kerala in 1954, said:

Two months after I arrived in the UK, I responded to an advert in our local paper for a steno. I went for the interview and did well. I took their tests and passed with flying colors. But I wasn't given the job. I told my sister to apply for the same position as we were equally qualified and had the same years of experience in Cochin. She did. They did not even make her take any tests. She was offered the job on the spot. Was it a coincidence that I have dark South Indian color based on my Malayalee grandmother's skin tones and my sister is white skinned like our Welsh grandfather? You cannot convince me of this.

THE PARADOX OF IN-BETWEENNESS

Ambiguous identity based on in-betweenness alienated Anglo-Indians, not just from the mainstream British populace but indeed also from the South Asian diaspora. A 65-year old woman from Ealing recalled the paradox of accommodation-hunting in the early 1950s:

The English did not rent to us "Indians" because they said we'd stink up their kitchens with our filthy muck—that's what they called our Indian food then. Yet, Indians wouldn't rent to us either because we were non-vegetarians and would cook meat in their homes. They only wanted to rent to fellow Hindu vegetarians. We fell between the cracks. It was usually Pakistani Muslims or Bengali (i.e. East Pakistani, now Bangladeshi) Muslims who became our landlords.

Thus, Anglo-Indians faced racial prejudice not just from white Britons but from orthodox Indian Hindus as well. If they were accustomed to facing taunts from both the British and the Indians in India, they steeled themselves to accept the same double-edged discrimination in the UK.

A 63-year old mortgage banker who arrived in the UK at the age of ten, recalls that Anglo-Indians were targeted not just by white Britons in the workplace but even during their leisure hours:

Anglo-Indians were often the targets of dance hall attacks. When we were out dancing with our Anglo-Indian girls, some of whom happened to be pale skinned. English guys would come up and attack us for taking their women. It did not make a difference when we told them that

our partners were not English, but Anglo-Indian. They had no idea what the term meant. They merely perceived the skin color of our female dance partners—some so fair that they looked purely English—and their minds were made up. Seeing is believing, isn't it? They saw that our partners were white and immediately thought that we were lying to them. This is one of the reasons why Anglo-Indians started to hold their own dances in this country—they were just more comfortable with their own kind.

He provides one more instance of the kind of sustained routine racial attack:

Discrimination was based entirely on skin-color. In an Anglo-Indian family of three brothers, when they went out dancing to a local club any evening, two would be admitted because they were fairer and the third was debarred because he was dark.

The 70-year old retired engineer from Chesington remembers:

When we entered a bar, we would just stand there and wait—that's under-the-table racism for you. They would ignore us completely. We Anglo-Indians got a taste of what Indians might have felt when we had treated them in India as inferior to us!

In the midst of frequent misunderstandings of identity that confronted Anglo-Indians during their early immigrant days, it disturbed them deeply to be mistaken for Indians. Oftentimes, Anglo-Indians found themselves explaining their origin and distinct sub-culture to the British. Still tongue-in-cheek, Otter explains:

English people committed the cardinal sin of calling us "Indians". That infuriated us! Instead of shrugging off what we now know was a genuine lack of awareness on their part - and what did it matter, anyway? We thought they were being sarcastic. **8**

Anglo-Indians were amazed and disappointed at British determination to restrict them economically and demean them socially. The questions that had so plagued them during their years in India such as "Who am I really"? and "To which side do I owe allegiance"? resurfaced with a vengeance upon immigration and were compounded by the plain reality of the situation they confronted—that the extent of the reception they would receive in the UK was directly in proportion to the degree of paleness of their skins.

LOCALIZATION OF BELONGING BY FINDING STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

When it was obvious that they would remain forever relegated to society's margins, they asserted their cultural distinctiveness by finding strength in numbers. In attempting to find their niche in Britain by underscoring their Anglo-Indianness, they

mobilized forces through ghettoization. A 65-year old dark-skinned Anglo-Indian woman from Southall who experienced frequent color prejudice, said: "Because white English people did not want to have anything to do with us, we were left with no option but to socialize only with other Anglo-Indians when we first arrived in 1961." Race and class were at the very heart of empire and directly affected all Indians in England (including Anglo-Indians), leaving them with little choice but to find friendships among their own ethnic minorities. Hence, Tamilians socialized with other Tamilians, Punjabis formed their own social circles, Gujeratis created Gujerati 'sammelans' and Anglo-Indians formed the Anglo-Indian Associations. Lionel Caplan refers to this phenomena as "the Localization of Belonging" (*Children of Colonialism* 100); but this locus of identification brought the Anglo-Indians its own set of problematics, mainly a gradual loathing of their own community and its culture.

Thus, ironically enough, when Anglo-Indians decided to break out of their identity *impasse* by congregating with fellow-Anglo-Indians, they were mistaken for Indians—much to their indignation. Commenting upon Anglo-Indian indignation at being mistaken for Indians, Otter writes:

"We are NOT Indians!" we curtly informed all our antagonists. "We are ANGLO-Indians!" ...But no, the working-class people whom we lived and worked among when we got here genuinely knew nothing about India and only asked one question: "When are you going back to wherever you came from?"⁹

Jacklyn Salter, a 44 year old second-generation Anglo-Indian from Brighton **10**, recalls the racial torment she endured in school in the 1960s and her Anglo-Indian father's reaction when she complained about it to him:

Though I am fair-skinned and looked one hundred percent English, I still got called a 'Paki' and my brother got beaten up because he happens to be much darker than I. I too got called a "half-caste" one day by a white English girl in my school. I must have been about 12 and I had no idea what it meant and I went home and asked my Dad to explain and he got so furious. He told me to "tell them you're an Anglo-Indian". But that was precisely what they were victimizing me for being and my Dad simply did not get it. Here he was taking pride in being an Anglo-Indian and having no idea that this was the last thing that would win me anyone's favor in school. Now I have resolved the issue in my own mind by telling people that "I am English with an Indian background".¹¹

Anglo-Indians tell amusing stories of the difficulties they faced in encountering fellow-Anglo-Indians. A 75 year old retired civil engineer from Selhurst shares the following anecdote:

Once when I was on a work site, in the early 1950s there was a guy up on the scaffolding doing some work. He had blond hair and blue eyes and I mistook him for an Irishman and I said to him, "Hey Paddy, can you pass me..." **12**. And he said to me, "Don't call me Paddy. I'm a bloody Anglo-Indian just like you". We laughed and became friends. You met many Anglo-Indians at that time as part of your work and you took them for Europeans, but they were all Anglo-Indians. Now if I could not recognize a fellow Anglo-Indian based on appearance alone, how could we expect non-Anglo-Indians to make distinctions?

On the other hand, an Anglo-Indian businessman from Essex claims that he never faced situations of mistaken ethnic identification in the UK because he simply identified with Indians. He said:

Come on, let's face it," he says. "We developed some tiny dram of British blood somewhere in god-knows-what past century. But for all intents and purposes, we are Indian. To the British, we looked like Indians, we sounded like Indians, we cooked and ate Indian curries...how could we possibly expect them to think of us as anything other than Indian?"

He continues:

My Anglo-Indian wife and I always went as "Indians" or would say that "we have come from India". We always perceived ourselves as Indians first, Anglo-Indians second. Anglo-Indianness is an ethnicity, a racial identity; it is not a nationality. Many Anglo-Indians confuse these two things themselves and that's why they are confused about their own heritage. They don't know exactly where they belong. At home, our culture was Anglo-Indian, but outside, we always said that we were from India.

His attitude was met with disbelief by a 74-year old Anglo-Indian in the UK today. This former journalist said, "This reaction is representative of the other extreme. I do not know a single Anglo-Indian who ever described himself or identified as an Indian. It was simply not done". The businessman from Essex, however, is convinced that Anglo-Indians who faced the worst crisis of identity were those who remained "neither here nor there" because they belonged in neither camp. They rejected the possibility of affiliating with Indians and were, in turn, rejected by the British. He implied that those Anglo-Indians who identified with Indians faced less discrimination than those who insisted on being identified as British or even half-British.

REJECTION OF INDIAN CULTURE

Yet another paradox of identity manifested itself in localization of belonging—a manifestation of ghettoized Anglo-Indianism. Then as now, they were bent on maintaining a distinctly Western cultural profile. Although Bollywood culture has recently swept the Western world and been incorporated into mainstream entertainment through the films of Danny Boyle (*Slumdog Millionaire*)¹³ and the music of producer-composer A.R.Rahman (whose *Bombay Dreams* was produced on Broadway in New York and in London's West End)¹⁴, the Anglo-Indian community was (and continues to be) rigid in its rejection of essentialized Indian culture. But then, Western cultural homogeneity is hardly a novelty for Anglo-Indians. In order to maintain their exclusive sub-culture during the Raj in India, most members of the community resisted the adoption of all aspects of Indian cultural values—from vernacular languages to an appreciation of Indian classical music or dance forms. Cedric Dover, a prominent Anglo-Indian scholar stated that the Anglo-Indian “stubbornly resists the emergence of his identity with the natives of the country, for he is proud of his Anglicized customs and remote connection with the ruling race”.¹⁵ This was true of the Anglo-Indian in India during the Raj and remained true for the vast majority of Anglo-Indian immigrants in the UK. Such attitudes contributed to the isolation of the community from other ethnic South Asians in the UK.

Indeed some Anglo-Indians deliberately chose to remain isolated from other members of their community. A 62 year old retired engineering consultant from Kent states: “I thought it would be in my best interest to stay far away from other Anglo-Indians; indeed to have no contact with any Indians whatsoever. I believed that this would hasten my assimilation into the mainstream—which, I have to say, it did succeed in doing.” Such a strategy of deliberate isolation was especially effective for those whose lives took them far away from the nucleus of Anglo-India, i.e. Greater London.

An Anglo-Indian security guard from Hounslow believes that isolation from the Indian diaspora led directly to integration with the British—which is what the Anglo-Indian most coveted. He said:

Perhaps we were under the illusion that the more we blended in with the British by worshiping in their churches, wearing their kind of clothing, even marrying their women, the more we'd be accepted by them. But these things only succeeded in making us an invisible minority—and today while the Hindus and the Muslims from India and Pakistan have a unique identity and place in Britain's multi-cultural world, we are nowhere to be found or seen. We have integrated a little too perfectly perhaps.

UNDERSCORING ANGLO-INDIANNESS BY LIVING IN A TIME WARP

The concept/idea identified by Caplan as 'Localization of Belonging' succeeded in creating organized diasporic cultural associations based on ethnicity. The sense of nostalgia caused first generation Anglo-Indians of the 1940s and 50s to inhabit a world of yesteryear based on accumulated memories of India and its cultural ethos. Anglo-Indian dinner-dances are replete with rock and roll hits from the 1950s and 60s. Elvis Presley leads their limited repertoire of dance tracks. By clinging, in Britain, to the westernized traditions of their Indian past, post-War Anglo-Indian immigrants created a familiar sub-culture based on memory and nostalgia, which has remained intact. Other than pop music of this *genre*, another great enduring favorite is Country and Western music especially that of the 1960s American idol Jim Reeves who is most revered—although Kenny Rogers, Hank Williams, Willy Nelson and other Western 'oldies' are an essential part of the *repertoire*. Many adult children of first-generation Anglo-Indians have rejected their parents' musical and cultural preferences:

They (our children) accuse us of living in a 1960s time-warp. They say that we are not in touch with present-day reality. In sticking with inherited preferences, we have become deaf to the British cultural mainstream in the same way that we were deaf to the Indian cultural mainstream when we lived in India.

A 54-year old female banker from Croydon further commented:

Ask any Anglo-Indian what a typical Sunday is like in his house and he will tell you. 'On Sundays, we have Coconut Rice and (Meat) Ball Curry and Country music!' This is the traditional way for the Anglo-Indian to pass a Sunday here. Nothing changes. Nothing has changed since we first came here in the 1950s. And neither does our mentality. If we belong to a cultural time warp, we are also warped in our thinking. Very petty. Very jealous. Very narrow-minded. It's all about gossip and running each other down. Is it any wonder that the more enlightened ones stay far away from the rest of the community?"

A 72 year old retired investment banker with a specialization in Information Technology agrees that Anglo Indians have remained mired in narrow-mindedness because they have refused to move with the times. He states:

Unlike most of the Anglo-Indians I meet here who seem dissatisfied, in many respects with Britain, I've had some great times along the way in this country. Most of the Anglo-Indians I meet here, talk only about the "good old days" in India. They like to fool themselves into believing that they were better off there. A lot of the Anglo-Indians here live in the past and that has prevented them from finding a secure niche for themselves here in the UK. The ones who really wanted to integrate fully with the mainstream have done that quite easily. [The others] are mentally still stuck in India which they have never really left psychologically.

CONFUSION OF IDENTITY AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Much as they hate to admit it and might choose to segregate themselves from South Asians in the UK, Anglo-Indians are painfully aware that there is only a thin line that separates them from this broader diaspora—a religious one, as Anglo-Indians are close to one hundred percent Christian. However, despite affiliation to their local churches (which, according to their own admission in interviews tends to be uniformly strong and active among post-War immigrants), mainstream Britons cannot differentiate them from South Asians who worship in temples, mosques or gurdwaras. Despite their best attempts at integration, their visible Indianness makes them the butt of nasty religious jibes and national stereotyping.

Even as recently as six years ago, a 68 year old engineer from Madras who also happens to be a musician was playing a gig at a local English pub in Middlesex on St. George's Day which happens to be England's National Day, when an Englishman requested him to play 'Land of Hope and Glory'. The Anglo-Indian responded that although he knew the composition, he did not have the music from which to play it. The Englishman immediately responded, "Well, I bet if it were Diwali or Id, you would know how to play the appropriate music". The Anglo-Indian responded that as he was a Christian, he did not know any such Indian tunes either. He objected to being stereotyped as "a particular kind of Indian", complained to the Club and never played there again.

DENIAL OF HERITAGE BY "PASSING"

Part of the phenomenon of deliberating isolation from the community was the tendency to 'pass' as Europeans. Considering how indignantly most members of the community had protested in India against the infiltration of non-Anglo-Indians into mixed-race communities, it is interesting to note that once they emigrated to the UK, ironically enough, they committed the same sin--'passing' as native Britons in their efforts to integrate racially and gain social benefits.

Rudy Otter corroborates the tendency on the part of fair-skinned members of the community. He writes:

...they (Anglo-Indians) came in contact with Britain's working classes who disdained their swarthy skin and claims of British blood lines. ...They found their way around such prejudices by denying their Indian connections and claiming Spanish, Greek, Italian or other Mediterranean descent. **16**

Scores of examples of discrimination based on color-prejudice were revealed to me during interviews. Color-consciousness led Anglo-Indians to deny their Indianness and feign Southern European or Mediterranean roots. A 72-year old former nurse from Essex recalls meeting many Anglo-Indians in the 1950s who 'passed' as Spanish, Greek or Portuguese. "Anything except Indian", she states.

Commenting on the tendency among Anglo-Indians in the late 1940s and 1950s to deny their true heritage, a woman who emigrated in 1961 from Jhansi corroborates the experience:

Fairer-skinned Anglo-Indians who tried to pass off as English found that once they opened their mouths, their accents would give them away. Paler Anglo-Indians told the English that they were Europeans from Portugal or Spain. You see, people did what they had to do to escape the color prejudice. Skin color was all that mattered at that time. For example, my husband and my sister's husband both had university degrees from India, but they too had to join the transport system as conductors when they first arrived. They could not pass for Europeans because they were too swarthy-skinned. Believe me, if they could, they would have.

Alison Blunt refers to Sara Ahmed who in her analysis of "embodied others in post-coloniality", considers the complexity of the relationship between histories of colonialism and contemporary modes of encounter" (*Domicile and Diaspora* 130).**17** Blunt argues that "the resettlement of Anglo-Indians in Britain reveals a collective

memory and (a) forgetting about previous imperial encounters”(131). This ‘forgetfulness’ or Cultural Amnesia made many early Anglo-Indian immigrants commit the very sins they had condemned on the part of non-Anglo-Indians in India. Indian Christians with a Goan or Manglorean background had often masqueraded as Anglo-Indians during the British Raj in India in order to benefit from job reservation policies that were restricted to Anglo-Indians. Ironically enough, in the UK, Anglo-Indians committed similar sins when they realized that ‘passing’ as anything other than Anglo-Indian could garner benefits in the UK. Blunt states that such communal forgetfulness was facilitated by “living away from India, and living in the former heart of empire” (131). Granted anonymity in the UK, as new immigrants, Anglo-Indians could ‘reinvent’ themselves in Britain and become anyone they wished to be without fear of exposure of their true origin or heritage.

Forms of ancestral denial and collective community pretense were common in mid-twentieth century Britain. Blunt states: “Located within a long tradition of ‘passing’ as white and British, many Anglo-Indians suppressed or denied that they were from India or Pakistan when they resettled in Britain” (*Domicile and Diaspora* 133). Yet, try as they did to infiltrate clearly demarcated binary racial divisions in the workplace, within the larger social context of the UK, their personalities, customs or traditions exposed them for the imposters they had become. ‘Passing’ was not a new phenomenon for those pale Anglo-Indians who had tried to ‘pass’ as British in India. These were the same ones who, after arrival in the UK, ‘passed’ as Mediterranean in the post-colonial metropole **18** that was London.

Emigration to Britain forced Anglo-Indians to encounter issues of identity and collective memory. Were they proud enough of their Anglo-Indian heritage to claim it or were they ashamed of it enough to deny it? Ironically, it appears that the same ones who had proudly declared their Anglo-Indian heritage in British India in order to claim employment advantages, did their best to deny it in the UK—also in order to claim employment advantages! Oftentimes Anglo-Indians who chose to admit freely that they were of mixed Indian descent—i.e. those who refused to ‘pass’—were regarded hostilely by fellow Anglo-Indians who had successfully ‘passed’.

Surprisingly, the impact of their need to rapidly compromise their cultural value system was neither profound nor disturbing to Anglo-Indians who made the conscious decision to assimilate by 'passing'. They did not experience the proverbial torment of the dark night of the soul for they seemed to battle no fractured issues of hyphenated socio-racial identification. As the 72-year old woman from Greenford states:

... we did not question anything about pride in our race or identity or any such thing. We are English. End of story. In those days, we did not pose the kind of questions to ourselves about race and sense of belonging and identity as do young people today.

TAKING A STAND—LATER IMMIGRANT REBELLION

Subsequent waves of immigrant Anglo-Indians—those who arrived in the 1970s and 80s—were offered far more than the simple two choices that their predecessors of the 1940s, 50s and 60s were given, namely, denial of their roots and maternal heritage or congregation in ghettos to find strength in numbers. Latter-day immigrants could assume whatever identity pleased them and most simply call themselves 'British Anglo-Indians' (in much the same way that one might categorize Canadian Anglo-Indians or Australia Anglo-Indians)—a nomenclature that the post-War generation of Anglo-Indians in Britain have also assumed. They increasingly took a stand against the politics of racism by being confident enough to complain. While it is true that the multi-cultural composition of mixed Britannia makes discrimination rarer today, victims are less tolerant of it and have recourse to the law. The engineer from Slough commented:

Racists are muzzled today by political correctness. Doesn't mean they feel any differently towards us. On the contrary, the resentment towards us runs deeper because now we are no longer confined to the factory floor or the transportation systems but serve in position of status and authority.

So what might one conclude from the variety of experiences shared and the number of opinions expressed by older members of Britain's diasporic Anglo-Indian community, especially with regards to their sense of belonging and establishment of community identity? It would appear that after forty to fifty years in the UK—a country in which most came of age, met their spouses, married, raised children and now enjoy the company of grand-children and great grand-children, a large measure of comfort has been established with regards to interaction with the British

mainstream. Conflicts arising from differences in race, skin color, class and status have been substantially obliterated by the contemporary mood of 'political correctness' that does not tolerate overt discrimination in Britain. Cultural compatibility was achieved early through a process of Westernization that began way back in India where most of them were born and raised but it has been enhanced in the UK by greater and freer socialization with white Britons in a country that became remarkably multi-ethnic and multi-cultural from the late 1960s onwards.

CONCLUSION

Despite the lack of regular conflict with their adopted environment and the populace that now calls Britain home, it is interesting to note that most of the respondents interviewed experienced closer ties with other members of the Anglo-Indian community in recent years, following their retirement from full-time employment, through the Anglo-Indian Associations. Weekly lunch-time community meetings in South London have strengthened old ties and generated new ones among people who, for reasons mentioned above, had deliberately isolated themselves from the community during their early decades in the UK or had strayed far from it due to varying circumstances. These weekly encounters have fostered a new sense of community 'belonging' and a greater pride in their heritage which they now manifest quite unashamedly. It is no longer shameful to be perceived as a non-Briton in a land where being British is now the prerogative of many races and people of varied original nationality. Thus, the kind of paradoxes that had plagued Britain's elderly Anglo-Indian diaspora in the immediate years following immigration have receded from their own memory. They look ahead to much greater racial harmony in Britain as they have witnessed succeeding generations of their own families become fully assimilated with the concept of a pan-Britishness that they could never possibly have dreamed of or achieved in their own youth.

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NOTES

1. Quoted by Lionel Caplan in *Children of Colonialism: Anglo-Indians in a Post-Colonial World*, (Berg: Oxford and New York, 2001) p. 85 from A.L. Stoler's "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31: 134-61.
2. Otter, Rudy: "We Have Servants, You Know", *Anglos in the Wind*, Volume 4 Issue 14, September-November 2008, pp. 45-48.
3. Haliburn, Ed: "What If?" *The Way We Are: An Anglo-Indian Mosaic*. Lionel Lumb and Deb Van Veldhuizen (Eds.) New Jersey: CTR Publishers, 2008, pp. 246-250.
4. Bhabha, Homi: "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 85-92.
5. Thandi, Shinder S: *A South Asian History of Britain: Four Centuries of Peoples from the Indian Sub-Continent* (Oxford/Westport, CT: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007), p.165.
6. The term 'center' is used here in the Bhabhaian sense meaning, places where prime, high-paying white collar positions were available, See Note 4.
7. WOG is an anagram for Westernized Oriental Gentleman and was used in a derogatory context to belittle dark-skinned men in the UK who wore Westernized clothing and spoke English with an Eastern accent.
8. Otter, op. cit.
9. Otter, ibid.
10. While I kept all first-generation respondents anonymous, where I interviewed and quoted British-born Anglo-Indians, I gave them fictitious names (aliases) to preserve confidentiality.
11. Personal Interview, Brighton, 2008.
12. 'Paddy' is a slang general term for Irishmen in England.
13. *Slumdog Millionaire*, (Dir. Danny Boyle, London 2008).
14. *Bombay Dreams*, Composer A.R. Rahman, lyrics by Don Black, based on book by Meera Syal and Thomas Meehan, produced by Andrew Lloyd Webber. London 2002, Broadway 2004.
15. Dover, Cedric: *Cimmerii? Or Eurasians and their Future* (Calcutta: The Modern Art Press, 1929), p. 42.
16. Otter, op. cit.

17. Quoted by Alison Blunt, op. cit., p. 130 from S. Ahmed's *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 14.
18. The term 'metropole' is also used in the Bhabhaian sense meaning, urban imperial city. See Note 4.