



## THE FUTURE OF ANGLO-INDIANS

Rudy Otter

Many Anglo-Indians of my generation shake their septuagenarian heads and declare that we are a dying community.

Well, yes, we are.

Other Anglos maintain that our community shall not only survive but thrive.

That view is also valid.

I come down firmly on both sides of the fence.

Those of us who were born and brought up in India during the British Raj shall certainly fade away within the next 30-40 years, unless by then scientists discover the secret of immortality and allow we oldies a bit more breathing (or bragging?) Time.

The children and grandchildren of Anglo-Indian emigrants, meanwhile, show no special inclination to marry other Anglo-Indians of their generation, having gravitated into the cultures and mindsets of their respective lands of birth – mainly Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States. They often marry a member of the adopted or host community, so diluting their Anglo-Indian blood .Or maybe restoring it more strongly to the white part of its Anglo-Indian origins (which of course include other European ancestries as well, such as Irish, Portuguese, Dutch, French and German).

It is possible that Anglo-Indians in India still carry on the tradition of marrying other Anglo-Indians and keeping the community alive, although these days they also marry Indians, in this case restoring more strongly the Indian side of our Anglo-Indian

origins.

In Britain, for example, our beloved Anglo-Indian culture, our inexhaustible fund of happy memories, mean nothing to Anglo-Indian youngsters who were born and brought up over here.

In a typical Anglo-Indian family in Britain, for example, one child might possibly express a genuine or casual interest in our glorious past; our retinue of servants; those wonderful sessions at the railway institute where we jitter-bugged or tombola-ed the nights away; the hockey matches; the never-ending round of food, fun and friends...

Most Anglo-Indian youngsters born abroad are not remotely interested in a topic that gave us so much pride. For instance, our part-white ancestry, which we liked to present as a wholly white ancestry all the way down the line: a claim that still puzzles and intrigues Anglo-Indian youngsters because they see, in their parents, relatives and other Anglo-Indians, a vague or marked resemblance to the Indians in their midst, here in Britain.

Why, they wonder, is there this old Anglo-Indian obsession with just one part of their ancestry, the white part?

It is a mystery to the sane and sensible young Anglo-Indians of today, wherever they may be, and they are bewildered by our one-track minds.

Undoubtedly the Ancient Order of Anglo-Indians, if I can put it that way, will draw to a close within the next few decades. In other words, we crusty old Anglos, with all our many deep-rooted sensitivities about our identity, will die off.

How then, you ask, could I assert (as I did at the beginning of this article) that the Anglo-Indian community shall not only “survive” but “thrive”?

It will happen like this.

In England today, for example, English men and women are not only marrying Anglos but Indians as well. So far it is only a trickle but could well turn into a torrent in the future as the communities continue to integrate at an encouraging pace.

This brings the entire Anglo-Indian story full circle.

We are back where we started when British white settlers in India married Indian women during the British Raj and produced Eurasian offspring to help them gain a firmer foothold in India.

In those far-off days, however, the differences between British and Indian cultures were vast.

We can imagine (way back in the 1800s or earlier), a nervous young Indian woman, her face shyly shielded by the top of her sari, her black eyes downcast, being offered to a white man as a bride while her humble Indian parents stand hopefully beside her with joined palms, bowing deferentially to the white “burra sahib”.

These days, in Britain, a romantically linked young Englishman and young Indian woman (with Westernized parents), will have been born and brought up in Britain. The couple will have identical English accents, attitudes and lifestyles, and share the same sense of humour. Their marital roles, based on equality, would be interchangeable, with the man willing to do the cooking and the woman the gardening.

Although their children would be Eurasians in the way our ancestors were in India until 1911 (when, controversially, they campaigned for and won the “Anglo-Indian” status of the white settlers), the similarity would end right there. Because their children would already feel totally “British-white” and would therefore be more deserving of the Anglo-Indian label than we, in those far-off days in India, ever were.

Even more importantly, the children of white-British and British-born Indian unions would not try to sweep their Indian ancestry under the carpet, as our guilt-ridden, ultra-sensitive Eurasian ancestors did in the distant past to justify their victorious Anglo-Indian “upgrading” as it was regarded.

On the contrary, they would probably take a lively interest in both their white and Indian backgrounds with equal curiosity and joy.

And that mindset would provide a positive resurgence for the Anglo-Indian

community which, as I said, would thrive and prosper as never before, complete with the authentic “white outlook” that our ancestors craved and tried to emulate back in the old days in India in our then pseudo-British way of life under a scorching sun.

As one set of Anglo-Indians dies away, a new set will emerge and keep the community going ever more powerfully, perhaps growing from its once highest number of 300,000 to several million.

Here's to a great and thriving Anglo-Indian future!

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