



STEREOTYPES AND COUNTERTYPES: AN ANALYSIS OF
THE YEAR BEFORE SUNSET

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All over the world, when different races have met in the course of discovery, trade, recruitment of workforce, or expansion of empire, the resultant interactions have had widespread and seminal consequences. Away from hearth and home for long periods at a time, the earliest travellers—soldiers, sailors, traders and explorers—have all felt the need for female companionship. Such unions very often produced offspring, and these children, having been born to men in transit were left to be raised by the indigenous women who bore them. These children, in the absence of the father and an alien influence, integrated into the local culture and disappeared into the mainstream.

Inter-racial breeding of a more widespread and deliberate nature came into being when the dominant powers of Europe—Portugal, Spain, England, France and Holland—from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onward, in their quest for economic superiority, made organised outward journeys. This time, the intention was not to be mere commercial visitors but to become more permanent fixtures on the foreign landscape. Since women of their own races did not make the long journeys in those days¹, the men were allowed to consort with the local women, thereby bringing into existence a new breed of individuals and the use of new terms to describe them, such as Creole, Eurasian, Anglo-Indian, Anglo-Burmese, Burger, Mestizo, Con lai, Haafu, Honhyeol, Luk kreung, and the like.² Over periods of time, the mixed races, for reasons stated later on, became subjects of intense anthropological and sociological disputes that raised questions about their very worth as human and social beings. Caricatures in literature, they were rarely accorded any redeemable qualities, and such representations endured into the post-colonial eras too. With particular reference to the mixed race in India, who today go under the

nomenclature 'Anglo-Indian', the stereotypes created by their colonial fathers were taken up by Indian writers and persists even today. In this essay, I will examine how the Anglo-Indian authors, Hugh and Colleen Gantzer, call into question the stereotypical representations made about Anglo-Indians and the effectiveness of the countertypes that they offer. Of particular interest is Colleen Gantzer's contribution to the work.

The Anglo-Indians (formerly called Eurasians, among other names) were a race of people intentionally engendered by British traders in India. Their existence, especially that of the men, greatly aided in the consolidation of British commercial and political domination in the subcontinent. They were often referred to as "the natural 'collaborating class' in an expanding imperial enterprise" (Malchow 105). The Anglo-Indian women were not without their own worth. Because of their familiarity with the English language and the English culture, they were preferred as brides for the ever increasing number of Englishmen coming out to India to work in the company's offices.³ Hence, initially, the Anglo-Indians were a favoured group, but over the years, several reasons contributed to their removal from a preferred position to one of marginalization and discrimination on the basis of the theories of 'imperialism' and 'race' that evolved in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in England and America. When the 'white man' began to openly advocate the need for distance between himself and the Eurasian/all mixed-communities, he called on religion and science to support the theories.⁴

Once the purported worthlessness of the Anglo-Indians was established, the men began to be portrayed as shiftless, spineless drunks and the women as promiscuous husband-hunters with nonexistent morals⁵. Stereotypes necessarily need to have a platform from which they spring and a group of people who actively discriminate against the marginalized group. The history of the community afforded reasons for certain behavioural patterns, but the negativity of such characteristics were reinforced, exaggerated and aggravated by many English men and women in India, who took to writing about life, travel, romance and the danger of racial mixing and miscegenation in the Indian subcontinent.⁶ Post-independence, the stereotyping did not come to a stop; it has just started coming from a different quarter. Indian writers have taken up where the British left off, especially with regard to the women.⁷ These

writers, however, have not produced any new stereotypes; they just employ the earlier ones when in need of a descript vamp or a whore, for example. This shows a lack of awareness of the history and cultural tradition of the community, and a deliberate ignorance of “an Anglo-Indian reality pointing strongly in the opposite direction” (Mills 4).

Over the years, the Anglo-Indians have been spoken about in literature by voices not their own. While writing is not new to the men of the community⁸, it is only since the late 1980s that Anglo-Indian women have been making themselves heard.⁹ The creation of a literary body by Anglo-Indian women holds special interest. To quote Léopold Senghor, the woman is “the source of the life-force and guardian of the house, that is to say the depository of the clan’s past and the guarantor of its future” (quoted in McLeod 83). Given the role of the woman in the quotation above, together with the oft debated topic of the continued existence of the community¹⁰, it is a useful exercise to discover the voices of the women that have hitherto been silent.

The Year Before Sunset (2005) is Hugh and Colleen Gantzer’s first attempt at fiction writing. Primarily well-known as travel writers, in this their first novel they attempt to record their experiences of being Anglo-Indian and of viewing the lives of this community as being an integral part of either the Civil Services or the railways, posts and telegraphs and the police. In conversation with the authors, it was learnt that while Hugh Gantzer provided the background for the novel by way of presenting locations, hierarchies in society and political intrigues gained from personally lived experiences and actual events, Colleen Gantzer’s contribution, and of pertinence here, is her portrayal of stereotypes that revolve around and within the community, especially with regard to the community’s women. Of greater significance is her presentation of countertypes. Bódi describes a ‘countertype’ as “a positive stereotype (one which arouses “good” emotions and associates a group of people with socially approved characteristics) which evolves as an attempt to replace or “counter” a negative stereotype which has been applied previously to a specific group of people” (18). After years of negative labelling, the antagonism, the retaliation, the defences that one might expect to find against their offenders are characteristically absent in the writings of Anglo-Indian women. Anglo-Indian history

has never recorded 'aggression' as a community characteristic and such a sentiment finds no place in Anglo-Indian literature either. However, countertyping is evident in *The Year Before Sunset* (2005).

The first part of the *The Year Before Sunset* (2005) exposes readers to a very class conscious hierarchy in the suburb of Fernside in Ringali, situated at the foothills of the Himalayas. Affluent Anglo-Indians owning massive property, descended in part from British royalty, along with the British administrators are placed above the other British residents who had to show deference to the former, albeit grudgingly. Second in the hierarchy were the 'jagirdars' who held fiefdom under their maharajahs and nawabs, followed by the other British – idle people, rich retired folk who "played the role of fawning courtiers" (7) to the second group. The main characters of the novel – the Brandons -- belong to the first group. Mr. Brandon, "first class citizen" who is not liked by the third group because he belongs to the creamy layer despite being Anglo-Indian, is neither affected by their opinions nor prepared to sacrifice his principles to favour the whites. He knew exactly what the British were capable of, he himself having experienced first-hand their warped notions of fair-play. One of the major incidents in the first part of the novel takes place in the library owned by the Brandons. Mr. Kunwar Jang Bahadur Surya Vanshi, ICS, the new district magistrate and the first Indian to hold the post applies for membership to the library of which Mr. Brandon is the guardian. Not willing to admit an Indian into their insular society, the British hope that this request would be sabotaged by their voting system. Mr. Brandon's skillful maneuvering of matters puts paid to their deviousness, thus bringing into question the stereotype of Anglo-Indians as lackeys of the British.¹¹

The novel, subsequently, goes on to discuss India's forthcoming Independence and the question of the staying or leaving that was foremost in the minds of both the British and the Anglo-Indians. Among the British residents, there were those who did not want to leave but felt they had no other option, "My grandfather, father and I were all country-born. I'll be a misfit out there. But...that's the way it is...whatever we do for them, you can't trust the natives..." (46). Others were trying to find secure ways of staying on, "I don't want to go. I'd be a stranger in any other county but India. Would your father help me to stay on in India if I asked him?" (25). Among the Anglo-Indians, there were some who felt that England was the best option, "...here I

am, sir, on the verge of honourable retirement, hoping to leave the country before it goes to the dogs.' 'Which dogs, Duncan?' 'The Indian dogs, sir.'" (49). Mr. Brandon's response to the question of leaving was, "Of course...The thought of moving has never crossed our minds. Four generations of our family have been born in India. This is our home." (46). The responses quoted above, while affording readers with the opportunity of viewing attitudes, corrects the common assumption that all Europeans and all Anglo-Indians in general were happy to leave after Independence. Mr. Brandon's declaration might be strange for those who perceive that all Anglo-Indians wanted nothing more than to migrate, but on the other hand, it is in keeping with a certain truth about a section of Anglo-Indians even today: "...the highly successful minority of Anglo-Indians who have benefited noticeably from educational and economic opportunities in post-Independence India, are less inclined to contemplate emigration, although most are in a position to do so if they want to..."(Caplan 134). Caplan reinforces this idea stating that, "For most elites the reasons for rejecting emigration arise from their economic or professional success." (149). So while Anglo-Indian poverty is harped on by many, there are a significant number of successful stories to be had. This encourages one to conclude that the community, though one, like in all other communities includes, people with differing manners and opinions; therefore, stereotypes that blanket the whole community are not valid.

The second part of the novel is set in Lakhbagan and the readers are exposed to its society which comprises British, Anglo-Indians and Indians. More importantly, this section introduces two significant groups of Anglo-Indians that existed more predominantly in the pre-Independence period, and for some time too, in post-Independent India—the railway colony Anglo-Indians and the Anglo-Indians in the Civil and Military Services. While the community struggles to overcome bigotry from outside, it overlooks the existence of the very same attitudes among its own members. Both groups are aware of the opinions each share of the other, they have created stereotypes among themselves and while they are sometimes vocal about the same, their differences have not, until now, crept into their literature. On their journey to Lakhbagan, the Brandons meet up with the Collins, railway Anglo-Indians -- who are banishing their daughter Penny to the home of relatives, namely, the Rowans, in order that she might forget her paramour Ibrahim Ismail. This is to be a

temporary arrangement until Penny's papers to go 'home' come through. Mr. Brandon reacts by stating, "They can be very hidebound in those railway colonies. They live in a different world: a narrow-minded, class-conscious, bigoted world. Did you hear what her parents said? They wanted to go 'home' to England. Silly asses!" (57), thus establishing a difference among the members of the community. While Mr. Brandon has a keen sense of right and wrong, his wife Anne is prejudiced against the railway colony people. Philip Brandon, the son, states, "My mother thought that railway people were not our class and we shouldn't mix with them" (59). "She lived in a very rigidly circumscribed world where everything which wasn't lily white was coal black. People like 'us'—civil and military—did not mix with 'them', the railway people" (156), and the former are "more at ease with, people of other communities and religions who share (their) background" (111). The railway people "probably ate out of enameled metal plates and dumped the *degchis* ...on the table" (60). When Penny realizes that Brandon too harbours the same sentiments she retorts, "I'm all right to be kissed and cuddled and, possibly, even made love to, but I'm not all right to marry" (111). Hence the distinctions based on occupations, backgrounds, life styles, customs, values and associations are stereotypes that have been created not by outsiders but within the community itself and are only privy to its members. Having earlier accepted these distinctions as normal, Phillip goes on to realize that these differences are quite often fluid. The railway people, represented by Mrs. Rowan, (Penny's aunt to whose home she has been banished), show class while associating with their social superiors, surprising Philip. Peggy and Phillip thus teach each other lessons and the stereotypes stand in question. Phillip learns that not all that is said about railway people need necessarily be true: that sometimes, their behaviour is put on to validate people's opinion of them, however skewed that logic might be. No mention is made of the promiscuity of Anglo-Indian women nor is it even hinted at. Phillip Brandon indulges in love-making sessions not with the Anglo-Indian Peggy but with Margaret Tresham, an English girl who calls Penny 'a railway tart' and who ironically makes no bones about wanting to have sex with Phillip. Anne Brandon, afraid that Margaret would not do her son any good, tries to discredit her in Phillip's eyes by bringing up the story of Margaret's illegitimacy. Thus, two fabled aspects of Anglo-Indian character, sexual freedom and bastardy are laid at the doorstep of the British characters and not at the Anglo-Indians.

Anglo-Indians have had to bear the brunt of negative stereotyping by British writers for almost two centuries. The trend to do so continues, but now comes from writers of Indian origin who find it convenient to use an Anglo-Indian female character when they want to portray a vamp or a prostitute. Such negative stereotyping persists because people are unable or disinclined to acquire all the information that is necessary to make impartial judgments about people. Through the course of the narration and the presentation of characters, the authors have laid bare the lives of people hailing from different social and economic stratas within the community leaving it to readers to determine the level of truth contained in the stereotypes that revolve around these people. The countertypes offered, in many cases, undermine previous representations in both history and literature. The narrative might, therefore, help correct certain assumptions and while doing so, it also sends out the strong message that the Anglo-Indian experience is not a single experience but one that is singular in its diversity.

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NOTES

¹European women/wives, were discouraged from travelling to the newly formed colonies/trading centres because it meant long and uncomfortable sea journeys and very different and difficult living conditions in the new locations.

² 'Creole' is probably the most comprehensive term when referring to mixed races. It derives from the Latin word 'creare' which means 'to create'. The Spanish word 'criollo', was first thought of as having been introduced in South America by the early Spanish settlers to refer to their children born in the New World. Gradually, those French, born outside France, came to use the same term to refer to themselves, but not before they altered 'criollo' to 'creole'. 'Creole', soon after, also came to refer to mixed races born outside the motherland. These mixed races were truly a 'created' race.

'Eurasian' – an umbrella term to indicate children born of European and Asian mixing.

'Anglo-Burmese' – children born to British and Burmese parents.

'Burgers' – children of European and Asian descent in Ceylon (Sri Lanka).

'Con lai' means 'half-breed' in Vietnam.

'Haafu' means 'half' in Japan.

'Honhyeol' means 'mixed blood' in Korean.

'Luk kreung' in Thailand means 'half-child'.

'Mestizo' in Haiti and other parts of the Caribbean is a word used to refer to children born of racially different parents.

³ When reports from some individual English merchants regarding the wealth in India, gained credence in Britain, plans for more organized trading were drawn up, and in 1599, the foundation for the East India Company were laid in England. The company received permission to settle for trade in Surat in 1608, and in 1612, the first factory was erected. In course of time, several other factories were set up in the different parts of India, occasioning the arrival of British factors, writers and soldiers, in greater numbers. These men were permitted to consort with the local women and the result was the creation of a new mixed race of children in India. The women of this new race, having had the advantage of speaking both English and the native language, and of having been brought up in the culture of the father, came to be preferred over the native women by the ever increasing number of Englishmen coming out to India.

⁴ The newly evolved concepts of 'race' became a topic of much controversy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The polygenetic theory, which was backed by science, insisted that men belonged to different species (races). At around the same time, 'imperialism', the simple meaning of which is the domination of one country over another, was slowly extended, through popular usage, to also mean the rule of one particular race over another. Since some European races had proved their prowess in the conquering of other nations and in the establishment of colonies, they began to regard themselves as superior to others. Religion and science were called upon to support this belief. Discussions on race inevitably included discussions on 'hybridity'. Many positions were taken with regard to the mixed races, the firmest being that a mixing of races could produce nothing but a degenerate group that would corrupt the pure races with which they came into contact. These theories spelt disaster for the mixed races.

⁵ Several reasons have been offered for the change of attitude on the part of the British towards the Anglo-Indians from the year 1785 onwards: (a) 'greed' (the shareholders in England wanted their sons in positions of power in the company; positions hitherto held by Anglo-Indians), (b) 'a swelling Anglo-Indian population' (the Anglo-Indians slowly began to outnumber the British, and there was fear that the former might overthrow the latter), and (c) 'lack of racial purity' (mixing with the half-castes would contaminate their own racial purity). All these reasons led to an overnight discharge of the Anglo-Indian men from the Civil, Military and Marine Services of the company. Hence, a vast majority of Anglo-Indians suddenly moved from the position of social and economic well-being to a state of poverty and undetermined social standing. This discrimination, while prompting some to look for alternative employment, paralyzed a great many others, and ultimately the family suffered. Both the men and the women of the community began to be negatively stereotyped in an attempt to keep them at an arm's length.

⁶ Some of the better known works are, F.E.F. Penny's *Caste and Creed* (1890) and *The Wishing Stone* (1930), Flora Annie Steele's *On the Face of the Waters* (1896), G. Dick's *Fitch and His Fortunes* (1898), Alice Perrin's *The Stronger Claim* (1903), Maud Diver's *Candles in the Wind* (1909) and *Far to Seek* (1921), Ethel Duff-Fyfe's *A Bottle in the Smoke* (1912), Alice and Claude Askew's *The Englishman* (1912), P.C. Wren's *Driftwoods Spars* (1912), Henry Bruce's *The Eurasian* (1913), *The Residency* (1914), *The Song of Surrender* (1915) and *The Wonder Mist* (1917), Irene Burns' *The Border Line* (1916), Mrs. Savi's *Neither Fish nor Flesh* (1924) and *By Torchlight* (1931), John Eyton's *Diffidence* (1925), Alice Eustace's *Flame of the Forest* (1927), Eleanor Maddock's *The Snake in the Sleeve* (1927) and Shelland Bradley's *Fifty* (1927).

⁷ Manohar Malgonkar's *Combat of Shadows* (1962), Nirad C. Chaudhari's *The Continent of Circe* (1966), Nayantara Sehgal's *Rich Like Us* (1985) and Geetha Metha's *Raj* (1989) have Anglo-Indian protagonists of questionable character and several of these works portray Anglo-Indian women in a derogatory sexual light.

⁸ Frank Anthony, in his book cited under references, quotes R.B. Saksena, "Englishmen in India and Anglo-Indians not only distinguished themselves as writers of Urdu and Persian verse, but were equally eminent in the domain of English verse... Many of them were authors of established reputation (37-38). Henry Derozio was a poet of note in the early nineteenth century and it is from his time that Anglo-Indian literature might be said to have its genesis. When community consciousness started growing, Anglo-Indian men started expressing themselves in periodicals, such as 'The Anglo-Indian', 'The Anglo-Indian Empire', 'The Anglo-Indian Guardian', 'The Anglo-Indian Review' and 'The Eurasian'. A must mention are four books now referred to as the Anglo-Indian heritage series:

Hostages to India (1926) by Herbert Alick Stark, *Cimmerii? or Eurasians and Their Future* (1929) by Cedric Dover, Reginald Maher's *These are the Anglo-Indians* (1962) and Frank Anthony's *Britain's Betrayal in India: The Story of the Anglo-Indian Community* (1969).

⁹ Erica Lewin (see *Anglo-Indian Women*) sums up the position of the early Anglo-Indian women by stating that they were accorded only second class status and were "also ignored since (they) were primarily valued for their role in reproduction and meeting the needs of the European colonists" (4). Hence, they were not encouraged to participate in the politics of the times or to voice their opinions except on some family matters. Writing, as a means of expression, therefore, was not an option.

¹⁰ The reasons for the fear that the community might die out are, (i) marriage into other communities by an increasing number of Anglo-Indian women (the children of such marriages are not considered Anglo-Indians as the community stresses on descent in the male line only), (ii) the younger Anglo-Indian generations abroad consider themselves, for example, Canadians or Australians foremost, rather than Anglo-Indian, and (iii) the disinterest shown by first generation immigrants to educate their children about their roots.

¹¹ A major stereotype of Anglo-Indian men is that of "a British stooge who idealises and mimics British manners and customs in a distorted, mostly comic form;" (D'Cruz, cited in references)

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