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BOOK REVIEW: *BEYOND THE METROS: ANGLO-INDIANS IN INDIA'S SMALLER TOWNS AND CITIES*

Shyamasri Maji

Andrews, Robyn & Anjali Gera Roy, ed. (2021). *Beyond the Metros: Anglo-Indians in India's Smaller Towns and Cities*. Delhi: Primus. 270pp. ISBN: 978-93-90737-65-9.

The edited volume under review studies aspects of Anglo-Indian societies located in smaller towns in India. This represents a major shift in Anglo-Indian studies which has usually marked metropolitan centres as the locales of the community. In this respect, this pioneering project widens the scope of research on the Anglo-Indian community. The bifurcation of the community based on its spatial location is meant to bring out the fact that it is not a homogenous body, that it has wider varieties of place-specific socio-cultural activities than is usually acknowledged. In the ten chapters of the book, the differences are brought out through the responses of the members of the community towards cultural representation, 'nationality' discourse and citizenship rights. Born of a research project funded and supported by the New Zealand India Research Institute, the book includes contributions of a wide range of scholars belonging to different disciplines in the Social Sciences and Humanities. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, Director of New Zealand India Research Institute, rightly observes that the volume "breaks into a relatively less-explored scholarly field" ("Foreword," p.vii).

To date both media and academia have dealt prominently with Anglo-Indians in the metro cities which has served to establish their lived experiences as a norm for all Anglo-Indians. The editors of the volume attempt to offer us a cartography of the socio-cultural life of the Anglo-Indians based on India "beyond" the Metros. The contributors'

essays have made ethnographical and historical explorations of the selected places in different regions of India. They have used survey and interview methods for collecting primary data. The book is divided into three parts on the basis of three major spatial categories—railway towns, hill stations and port cities—that share a history of colonial settlement. These places have each been the habitat of a section of the Anglo-Indian community who live far away from the din and bustle of the big cities in India or the Anglophone countries such as the UK, the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The first part, “Railway Towns”, covers the stories of the Anglo-Indians in Kharagpur (West Bengal), Asansol (West Bengal), Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh), Jhansi (Uttar Pradesh) and Secunderabad (Telangana). The second part, “Hill Stations”, represents the community life of the Anglo-Indians in Dehradun (Uttarakhand) and Ranchi (Jharkhand). The third part, “Port Cities”, deals with the history of the community in Pondicherry (Union Territory), Cochin (Kerala) and Goa (Union Territory).

In Chapter One, “Kharagpur: The Remembered Railway Town of Anglo-Indian Memory”, Anjali Gera Roy studies the recollections of the diasporic Anglo-Indians, who once lived in Kharagpur. They consider the railway colony there as ‘home’ and re-visit it virtually on websites such as ‘Kharagpur’ and ‘Kharagpur’s Diaspora United’. These digital archives of nostalgic narratives recreate a vicarious homeland – a virtual presence that seeks to compensate for its actual absence. Roy employs the mainstream discourse of *desh* or “ancestral village,” the contested notions of *pitrabhumi* (“land of the father”/ ancestral land) and *punyabhumi* (land of religion) to explore the concept of Anglo-Indian ‘home’ in the Indian subcontinent.

While *pitrabhumi* confers natural citizenship on the inhabitants, the railway colony problematises the idea of home. Unlike *desh/village*’ the railway town is artificially created—a product of Western modernity. It can create a cohesive community of affiliation based on ethnicity but cannot confer natural citizenship on its residents. Roy observes that the nostalgic recollections of Kharagpur from the diaspora challenge the fixed, traditional notions of home. She mentions that some of the members of the Anglo-Indian diaspora prefer to preserve the old photographs of the colony and often discard the recent images of the decrepit buildings there. This shows the gap between their imagination of the railway colony and the reality that surrounds them. Roy

explains this gap as the “spatial and temporal distance of the Anglo-Indian home in the colonial and postcolonial imaginary” (p. 31).

Located 110 kilometers from Kolkata in Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal, Kharagpur is widely known for the Indian Institute of Technology, a premier institute of national repute. A quick internet search shows that Kharagpur had, until recently, the longest railway platform in the world. It also has one of the biggest railway workshops in India. In the second chapter, “Past and Present: Mapping the Anglo-Indian Journey in Kharagpur,” two young research scholars Catherina Moss and Anannya Chakraborty examine the changes that have crept into the Anglo-Indian spaces of Kharagpur. Their findings show that most of the Anglo-Indians have shifted their residence from the dilapidated buildings in the colony (Blocks) to new areas (Jholi). Remarkable changes have come in their social life with the decrease in their number in the colony. With the loss of job quotas in the railways, the community members now believe that education is the only means to enhance their economic prospects in India and abroad.

In “Other Places, Other Spaces” (Chapter Three), Deborah Nixon explores the community life of the Anglo-Indians in Jhansi and Jabalpur, two large railway junctions of the British Raj. By analysing the narratives, anecdotes and memories of the older residents of these towns, Nixon links the resilience of the community to the socio-cultural changes that followed Independence. She describes their initiatives to preserve the cultural distinctiveness of the Anglo-Indians through regular church services and a Westernised lifestyle. Although marriages of Anglo-Indians to non-Anglo-Indians are common, they often fail to be a part of the greater section of the society due to their reluctance to learn Hindi and eat Indian food (p. 83). To the older generation Anglo-Indians ‘home’ is still located in colonial times. The younger generation, however, thinks differently and locates itself comfortably in post-Independence Indian society.

In Chapter Four, “Asansol Anglo-Indians: Buying into the Nation?”, Robyn Andrews examines the scope of citizenship for the Anglo-Indians in India, as many of them feel culturally alienated here. She conducts an ethnographic survey in Asansol, an industrial town situated in the Paschim Burdwan district, to find out if the Anglo-Indians

could claim their belonging to this city, like the people of other Indian communities living there. Her findings show that the Anglo-Indians in Asansol are economically well-off. Most of them own houses and private vehicles. It is through their purchase of property in different parts of the city they have established their belonging to the place. Their existence and identity are no longer restricted to the railway colony. With the passage of time, they adapted themselves to the changing patterns of community life by maintaining good connections with community bodies and by gaining agency in local administration.

In "Voicing a Return" (Chapter Five), Upamanyu Sengupta talks about the railway Anglo-Indians in Secunderabad. Their employment opportunities were enhanced with the flourishing of the IT industry in this south Indian city. Due to their fluency in English and effective communicative skills, the local Anglo-Indians found jobs in the BPO sector and this immensely changed the socio-economic condition of the community in Secunderabad, Hyderabad and the surrounding areas. It instilled in them the confidence to seek better opportunities in the corporate sector and some of them even started their own business enterprises after gaining extensive professional experience in the BPOs. The easy employment of large number of young Anglo-Indians in the BPO industry seemed to be a fit compensation for the loss of the community's job reservations in the public sector.

The railway towns were indeed an important part of the community's history since the inception of the railways in the nineteenth century. Since the railway colonies were mostly located outside the metro cities, these helped the community to have a close-knit world of their own. This, however, distanced them from the local people of other communities. The older generation feels deeply the loss of the community's space in the railway colonies. Unlike them, the younger generation is concerned little about the golden days of the community during the Raj. Like other Indian youth, they look for better job opportunities to improve their lot in India. Their fluency in English is a silver lining for the community as it helps them to find work in the IT sector.

The second part of the book consists of two chapters: Robyn Andrews' "Educators of the Doon Valley: Dehradun's Anglo-Indians" and Afrinul Haque Khan's "Negotiating Culture and Identity: Anglo-Indian Community in Ranchi." Andrews describes the

social history of the Anglo-Indians in Dehradun and discusses the role of the Anglo-Indian community in disseminating quality education through reputed schools such as Carman School, St. Jude's School and Hilton's School. These institutions provide good academic training and hone the English communication skills of the students. These also offer an environment for learning the etiquette of the West. The schools as well as the Anglo-Indian society in this hill station are led by three families—the Gardners, the Manns and the Hiltons. These schools have a significant role in regulating the community life and preserving its traditions as most of the social functions on cultural occasions are organised in the school premises. In her chapter, Khan argues that identity is culturally defined. She discusses the cultural distinctiveness of the Anglo-Indians in Ranchi by distinguishing their cultural practices from the Christians of the local tribal groups or the Adivasis: "The prayers, ritual readings...and ceremonies of the Anglo-Indians are performed in English whereas for tribal Christians are conducted either in Hindi or tribal languages" (p.168). She explains that the differences are also evident in the clothes worn by the women of the two groups. While the Anglo-Indian women wear frocks, gowns and skirts during the prayer service, the tribal women represent themselves in ethnic clothes such as saris and salwar suits.

As mentioned earlier, the third part of the book deals with three port cities which were dominated for a long period by non-English colonial rulers such as the Portuguese, the Dutch and the French. The mixed descent population in these cities, particularly in Cochin and Pondicherry, were recognised as Anglo-Indians much later. While Cochin was under Portuguese control for many years before it ended in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Pondicherry was officially a French settlement until the 1960s. In "Pondicherry Anglo-Indians into the Fold" Cheryl-Ann Shivan and Robyn Andrews examine the problematics of Anglo-Indian identity in Pondicherry, the seat of French culture in India. The creoles and the Franco-Indian group in Pondicherry often chose to have French nationality instead of Indian and enjoyed employment opportunities in France. They can go to France anytime without a visa. However, the mixed descent people who came to Pondicherry after 1962 were not offered French citizenship. This group was recently recognised as Anglo-Indian by the All India Anglo-Indian Association, which has now established a branch there (p.191).

All sections of the Portuguese Eurasian population in Cochin, especially the ones living in the hinterlands, could not conform to the criteria of English language and Westernised lifestyle. As Brent Howitt Otto explains in his chapter "The Unique History and Development of Cochin's Anglo-Indians" the rural Anglo-Indians in Kerala continued with farming and skilled trades for generations, after the retreat of the Portuguese from Cochin. They spoke Malayalam for public transactions and Portuguese at home. Even in the twentieth century their prayer services were conducted chiefly in Portuguese. They differed from the urban Eurasians who conformed themselves to the English ways when the British made strong their hold on Malabar in the nineteenth century. Otto clearly mentions that the socio-economic and cultural adherences of the Anglo-Indian community in Kerala represent a sharp contrast to the urban mindset of the community members in northern India: "Anglo-Indians from the north often did not master the local vernacular language because they frequently moved for work in the railways or the military" (p. 221).

Of the three chapters discussed in part three, Andrews' chapter on the Anglo-Indians of Goa is unique in the sense that it addresses the trend of reverse migration; that is, the return of the Anglo-Indians from the West to this Union Territory in India. Most of the returnees have decided to settle down in Goa after retiring from their jobs in English-speaking Commonwealth countries. Instead of going back to the familiar towns where they were born and brought up, they moved to this port city, which is considered as one of the chief holiday destinations in India. Goa is also known for its Westernised social ambience, and this may be a possible reason for the gradual increase in the number of Anglo-Indian returnees here. The reverse migration shows that the financial savings they accrued from the global-north enabled them to improve their prospects on the Indian soil where they feel rooted like the other Indian citizens.

Of all existing literature in Anglo-Indian studies, this edited volume is the only book that makes its exclusive focus the Anglo-Indians in the smaller towns and cities of India. The chapters discussed above represent the variety of Anglo-Indian experiences in different geo-cultural regions in India. The facts presented in them contest the trend of homogenisation by highlighting what Bandyopadhyay explains as "diversity in the lived experiences, aspirations, memories and sense of identity within this community" ("Foreword," p. vii). This volume critically examines the concepts of

collective identity such as community, nationality and citizenship from the perspective of a section of Anglo-Indians hitherto living in the periphery of academic discourse. The diversity of their lived experiences inspires the readers to re-view the history of the community as well as of the Indian nation. The great variety of their occupational and professional engagements since the colonial times shatters the stereotyped images of the Anglo-Indians in mainstream cultural representations. Considering all these factors, this book is strongly recommended for research scholars and senior academics in Anglo-Indian Studies and other branches of the humanities and social sciences.

**Shyamasri Maji** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Durgapur Women's College (affiliated to Kazi Nazrul University, Asansol), West Bengal, India. She completed her PhD in English from the University of Burdwan (India). The title of her doctoral thesis is *Anxiety of Representation in Select Anglo-Indian Writers*. Areas of her research interest include *Diasporic Studies, Postcolonial literature and the Anglo-Indian community*. She is the recipient of Independent Research Fellowship 2018-19 at Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute, Kolkata.