International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies

MEMORIES IN MUSIC: READING TREVOR TAYLOR'S *THE DEAF OF ELVIS AND THE LAST OF THE ANGLO-INDIANS*

Upamanyu Sengupta

ABSTRACT

The Deaf of Elvis and the Last of the Anglo-Indians: An Autobiography *is a life-story by Trevor Taylor, an octogenarian Anglo-Indian who migrated to England in 1960. The author's identity as an Anglo-Indian immigrant serves as both a theme and a backdrop against which he charts his ambitions of a career in music. I read this book to find out how the two thematic strands intersect and bring out the author's portrait as an individual. Taylor's narrative simultaneously embraces, but also cuts across, each aspect of his identity, whether as an Anglo-Indian, a South Asian immigrant, an aspiring artist, or a doting family man. In the process, I also examine my own expectations, preferences and practices as a reader.*

INTRODUCTION

The Deaf of Elvis and the Last of the Anglo-Indians: An Autobiography, published in 2020, is a life-story[1] by Trevor Taylor, an Anglo-Indian currently in his early eighties, who migrated to England in 1960. An aspiring artist and avid Elvis Presley fan, Taylor charts his life across seventy odd years from his childhood days in Mumbai (then Bombay) to the present in Purley, London. While most of the book devotes itself to his time in England, it is the chapters based on Taylor's early life in India that carry some of the finest detailing in terms of the cast of characters and events that shape the

[1] I use the term 'life-story' interchangeably with 'autobiography' throughout my essay. This is a term I borrow from *A Philosophy of autobiography: Body and text* by Akash Singh Rathore, who in turn has borrowed it from Carlos Baker's biographies of Ernest Hemingway (Rathore, p. 66).

author's life. Perhaps the earlier chapters engage us more because of how intricately he connects his own life's turns with critical moments in history: the Second World War and the independence of India.

As we move from the opening chapters of his childhood and youth, to his marriage and family life, this connection is less evident, but the more personal narrative note he strikes makes up for it. The most prominent among the people in his life is his wife Zoe, whom he describes on more than one occasion as a 'guardian angel', but also his parents, and especially his mother, brother, children and grandchildren, about each of whom he speaks with doting fondness. All in all, Taylor's book recounts the life of a content and loving family man living a comfortable life following all his struggles as an immigrant, if also beset by regret for not being able to be the artist he aspired to be.

Why do people feel the need to write about their lives? In our times, celebrities lead the charge in penning autobiographical accounts, and understandably so. The gossip, glamour and drama surrounding their lives serve up rich material for such an exercise. *The Deaf of Elvis and the Last of the Anglo-Indians: An Autobiography*, does not fit into any of these categories, however. Neither does the author Trevor Taylor claim to be a celebrity, nor does it relate a particularly eventful life. In his title though, he promises to share the story of a community on the wane, as he identifies himself as among the last of its members. Autobiographies after all, can also be a record of collective memories, as the present work shows. Such recollections are especially significant for a number of reasons.

First, each such telling makes for a powerful assertion for a community that finds itself increasingly marginalized in the Indian national life.[2] According to Kathleen J. Cassity (2014), Anglo-Indians who tell their own stories correct "the distorted historical record" of the stories penned by the British or the other Indians about Anglo-Indians. In the process, they strike a new, autonomous trajectory distinct from having their stories told by either the British or the Indian mainstream (2014, p. 4). Even as descendants of

[2] The 126th Amendment Act passed by the Lok Sabha in December 2019, for instance, discontinued the provision for nominating members of the Anglo-Indian community to the parliament and fourteen state assemblies.

the Raj, Anglo-Indians like Taylor forge an independent path away from the shadows of its more numerous contenders.

Second, an individual life even in its utmost ordinariness deserves narration, if only to record and celebrate its uniqueness. As Adriana Cavarero (2020) argues, the story of a life allows a glimpse into its distinct, unrepeatable narrative arc that larger, community-based identities often gloss over and miss. Autobiographical accounts are expressions of the singular instance of a person, the 'who' subsumed by the larger 'what'—the slew of identities that pin them down (2020, p. 45). To borrow an analogy from the philosopher Akash Singh Rathore (2019), autobiographies render in flesh of the lived experience what identities and epithets trade in mere abstractions (2019, p. 1). An autobiography captures in intimate particulars the lives lived behind these abstractions, and sketches them in sharp, vivid relief. Abstractions after all, function at the level of theorizing: Who are the Anglo-Indians for instance, as per the constitution? What role do they play in the economic life of the country? Where do they stand sociologically? What impact does the country's politics have on them?

As we see, an autobiography can raise these vital questions, but who exactly is the person, Trevor Taylor, beyond these group identity questions? How do we know him? What are the quirks of daily life that foreground the individual in him, while also telling us of how they relate to the larger collectives of identity? Delving into a life-story answers to that curiosity of knowing the person beyond his identities, as an Anglo-Indian, an immigrant, an artist, any of those terms that straitjacket him into a type. Calling a life unique, as Cavarero or Rathore do, is a nod towards its fundamental unrepeatability, that this life is Taylor's and his alone, and not a mere measure of how exceptional it has been in terms of achievements. In being narratable then, every life stands out, and navigates past the identity brackets that seek to arrest it and make it conform. In my reading too, I had to constantly grapple with the challenge of how much Taylor let us into his life as an Anglo-Indian versus finding out more about him as a person. In writing this review, I approach the problem by examining the book's title, how its author sets the social context of his life story, lets us into his artistic growth, and the contradictions and dilemma that mark his journey.

A TWO-PART TITLE

Autobiography titles often carry an air of nostalgia and an instant, catchy appeal. Taylor's title too treads this line. On the one hand is the word 'deaf', evidently both a play on 'death' of his hero Elvis Presley as well as his own hearing impairment. It is the second part of the title referring to 'the last' Anglo-Indians that pique one's interest. Is this a reference to the declining numbers of the community in India and elsewhere? Could it be a more limited allusion to his immediate family's presence in India, as they migrate to England, Australia and elsewhere over the last decade of the twentieth century? Or perhaps, it is a hint at the gradual, but steady fading away of a distinct way of life, as more and more Anglo-Indians in India either migrate or culturally align themselves closer to a normative idea of a 'national mainstream'.

Taylor explains:

> Anglo-Indians finally began to settle and raised families and then related to their children and grandchildren their roots; this next generation of Anglo-Indians were not called Anglo-Indian because they were born in the UK or wherever and they had been born British. They adapted to that particular country's ways […] They found it quite difficult to understand their parents' roots, of such a mixture of English, Dutch, Polish, Armenian, Scottish, Welsh and Irish. We are the last of the Anglo-Indians of our generation, those who emigrated during 1947 till 1960. (p. 7)

He thus defines the 'last' in terms of an entire migrant generation, and places himself and his family somewhere towards its tail end. In explaining the title, he evokes a sense of nostalgia for this generation, now British citizens, and fading. Children and grandchildren born to them no longer fathom their mixed ancestry and see themselves as singularly British and laugh at the accents and seemingly strange manners of Taylor's generation of migrants. As he notes elsewhere, Anglo-Indians had always been something like outliers in British society too, not unlike in India. However, with the passing of generations, Taylor and others of his time find themselves a bit out of place in their own families too, and fervently hope that the stories survive the test of time. Noticeably, he cannot pin hopes on them continuing the Anglo-Indian way of life, but must settle for them becoming custodians of these stories. What Taylor essentially nudges towards, is a memorializing of his personal life, as it twines with his collective identity. One might infer his life story as a first step in that process.

The book's title is something of a giveaway of the protagonist's commitment to a life of music, and his admiration for Elvis Presley in particular. At the same time, the title's reference to deafness captures something of his frustration, if also self-deprecating humour, at all the obstacles he had to overcome while pursuing his passion. At another level, it also pays homage to his Anglo-Indian upbringing and exposure to a variety of music from early in life. Added to that, the cosmopolitan setting of Bombay meant exposure to a wide variety of western music for the young Taylor. His natural talent and the childlike lilt in his voice caught the attention of the priests at school and in the local church where he quickly became a part of the choir groups. At home, his songs were a regular fixture at the pound parties, his 'caruso' style adding to the charm. Churning out one song after another for such occasions meant staying updated on the latest trends in music from an early age, something he rather enjoyed doing.

SOCIAL SETTINGS' IMPACT ON IDENTITY

Taylor's memoir explores his identity on multiple fronts: that of an Anglo-Indian, a migrant, and an artist. I was especially struck by how his Anglo-Indian identity takes greater prominence when he recounts his youth in India. While not so evident in his early childhood, this highlighting of Anglo identity becomes more pronounced from his teenage years. What explains such a shift? Perhaps, what accounts for it is his growing up in a locality marked by identity awareness and a gradual coming of age amid these differences. We read that the apartment and its neighbourhood housed a mix of diverse religious and linguistic communities and classes. At Dehdusty Building, his childhood apartment, they "had the landlord, Mr Dehdusty, a Muslim man, living to the right side of us, and to the left, we had Hindu neighbours" (p. 45). From their balcony overlooking the road, a young Taylor would watch life flow by at all hours of the day, "the huge crowds coming out of the late-night movie around midnight and talking aloud and smoking their *beedis* [and] the *paan*, which went along with the *beedis*" (p. 47). As much as they all inhabited this space, they would no doubt have had a deep awareness of their differences too. While nothing suggests animosity among the neighbours, a constant, unavoidable awareness of each other's differences marked their daily interactions. This is perhaps the reason Taylor identifies his neighbours by religion as he reflects on his childhood a good six decades later.

If these were boundaries the grown-ups drew around their own identities, they found an echo among the young ones too. Predictably, at school too, Taylor's friend circle gradually coalesces around groups of Anglo-Indian boys who share an interest in music, and scout their own hideouts in the jukebox joints, cinemas, and late-night pound parties. The only exception seems to be a friend called Velu, presumably a Tamil, who the author describes as a Madrasi, as was the wont then. Taylor obviously admired Velu. Their easy bantering around each other's food, skin colour, and accents makes for a delightful read, especially when we learn Velu is that one friend from Bombay still in touch with the author. However, such moments are rare. By and large, Taylor's childhood shows how in mixed societies when children navigate social boundaries, they often creatively mirror the behaviour of the grown-ups.

In this, the contrast with the latter half of the book is especially striking. By then, the question of identity takes on a more settled, calmer tone. Two things have happened by then: first, Taylor's migration to England, and second, he has settled into family life. As if on cue, the heady pace of the earlier half of the narrative eases down. At this stage, most of it reads like standard fare for the? ordinary middle-class life of an immigrant family gaining a steady foothold in a new country. I felt that recollections from his youth come across as all the more convincing as a result of this narrative shift. Taylor casts his early, formative years as turbulent, devoid of the certainty that marks the later years. It is no coincidence then that his evolving sense of Anglo-Indian identity should overlap with other accounts of coming of age: his earliest sexual adventures, and also the first serious considerations of a career as a singer.

This portrayal of simultaneous growth of all these aspects of self-identity lends the initial chapters a real, palpable feel that the later chapters lack. As a reader, I was left wondering if the later silence on more personal aspects of identity is a deliberate attempt at showing a shift. Does it convey a reconciliation with himself in his identity, a more settled acceptance of the person Taylor, with all his flaws and shortcomings, portrayed with such admirable frankness in recollecting his youth? Or is it simply a hindsight advantage that allows a more realistic take on the past than it does for the present? Either way, given its formative role, I felt this transition could have been charted with a greater degree of care and attention.

EVOLUTION AS AN ARTIST

The greater detailing in the earlier chapters also has the author link the evolution of his artistic streak with the support offered by his family and school. Consider this, for instance:

> I was always a caruso as a little boy and used to sing along with my parents' gramophone player to old Johnny Ray records and old songs my dad used to sing when he was tipsy. He was of Irish descent and used to sing songs like 'Danny Boy' and 'I'll Take You Home Again Kathleen' and my little sister used to sing as well and did a song called 'My Happiness'. (p. 23)

Again, while talking of his selection for the school choir, Taylor highlights how he aces through with ease and just how elating the experience of being in the choir is for him:

> It was as if an angel of God was guiding us with his wings and inspiring the choir and me to sing with special emotions and feelings. It was the best experience that happened to me as a choir boy, being selected to sing with the soprano's section of the choir. […] We had a massive sound, and I was in heaven. (p. 25)

The 'Elvis' and the 'Anglo-Indians' of the book's title are thus closely related and the author's passion for music is an integral part of his Anglo-Indian identity. The earliest bands he forms are mostly with fellow Anglo-Indian boys, some of them from school and some from elsewhere. All of them bring to these groupings a shared sense of musical pride and heritage drawn from their family and social settings. By this stage, Taylor already falls silent on any mention of how the other communities fit or engaged with this musical space. The somewhat exclusive nature of these groupings is hard to miss: none of them counts a non-Anglo-Indian fellow student among its members.

Perhaps the author deliberately avoids mentioning this to steer clear of any controversy or blanket generalizations. However, addressing this issue might have added more nuance to his narrative, especially since it is a recollection that allows him the benefit of hindsight. It could have served to remind us, for instance, of the reticence that marked the mainstream Indian engagement with even cultural aspects such as western music in the pre-liberalization era. Moreover, part of the appeal of an Anglo-Indian life memoir lies in how its protagonist navigates the complex terrain of identity and inter-cultural contacts in the Indian social setting. This issue becomes all the more critical since it moulds his interest and taste in music too.

COLLECTIVE AND SELF-IDENTITIES

An autobiography or life-writing then links an individual and their community at multiple levels. It is acutely conscious of forging a link between the self, the individual, and the world, and their society, that is, the larger community relationships they find themselves in. As Mikhail Bakhtin contends, in exploring the formation of the individual, the form also records the emergence of the world as they see, encounter and inhabit it (Bakhtin cited in Graham, 2019, p. 4). The larger social cultural context that sustains an individual's journey through life is more than a mere prop in life-writing. Recollection of a life's formative moments as presented in autobiographies is also a record of how an awareness of oneself emerges in relation to the world, in how they interact, defy, and engage with it. At the same time, the impressions of this world that we get are invariably inflected through the perceptions of the individual observer. However, as one flits between people, contexts, and places, what emerges is not just one world, but an ongoing blend of multiple worlds and their own rich perspectives.

Portraying socio-political influences of one's life helps contextualize an autobiography better. Musings on a community's past, its origins and its evolution in that social setting also serves us well here. Early on, Taylor offers a background to the Anglo-Indian story, especially around the heady days of partition riots and independence. While on this, he sets up, almost anecdotally, the Anglo-Indian community as something of an outlier in the Indian social-political mainstream. This disconnect with the rest of Indian society was an inheritance for the Anglo-Indians, the first generations of whom were born out of unions between British men and Indian women. While the British as sahib rulers never quite jelled with the larger Indian populace, for the Indian women such marriages often triggered exclusion from their communities of birth for exogamy. Consequentially, the children of these unions grew up attracting a mix of scorn and begrudging respect from fellow Indians.

While parts of this historical backdrop might read a bit too reductive to a scholarly gaze,[3] the casual, easy tone he adopts makes a complex story enjoyable. After all,

[3] As Benita Parry notes in *Delusions and Discoveries: India in the British Imagination*, "the British-Indian encounter became a battle expressed as a political struggle and experienced as a psychic crisis" (1972, p. 30) and goes on to add about European perception of mixed marriages, "...intermarriage with Indians and Eurasians had by mid-nineteenth century become a symptom of degeneration, and in popular fiction Eurasians were shown as debased and without dignity, as shrill and cringing, a warning against

nothing obliges him to adopt an objective, analytical framework when offering the history of his people. It only provides a setting for his own story, and thus even starts off on a personal note where he explains his very English sounding name, presumably to an unsuspecting English reader. If anything, such a framing strikes the right kind of informal, conversational tone. Consider, for instance, the question "Quite fascinating, wasn't it?" he playfully tags with his account of the unlikely relationships that occasionally led to almost fairy-tale marriages between European officials and the *aayah*. Such an informal, easy take on the subject skilfully taps into the community history as a means of making the story of Taylor's own life all the more relatable.

Not always does Taylor's use of a historical background to trace his own life story make for a convincing narrative. He explains his decision to leave India, for instance, in light of how "the Anglo-Indians did not fit in India any longer" (p. 7). However, we need to take his version with a few riders. For one, even as he concludes the Anglo-Indians did not fit, he hints at the quandary the prospect of migrating posed:

> I was in two minds about leaving India for good, because after so many difficult years, I felt I was living the life of a king in comfort of every kind […]. The English side of my birth was calling me to England. How could I leave the place where I was born and ate the salt of Mother India? I was in turmoil and totally confused. (p. 8)

Perhaps, his career and family pressures prompted his call to migrate at the age of twenty. On more than one occasion, he talks of lapsing back to reckless lifestyle when in Bombay, which was always a train journey away from any part of India. A lot of these habits traced back to his childhood years and early teens, and could return at the slightest nudge. While Taylor calls these years out for their "juvenile, delinquent ways" (p. 28) in hindsight, that he nevertheless expresses a certain fondness for these memories after all that time shows just how addictive and appealing he found them.

In fact, I sense his passage out of India was more his mother's intervention to ensure greater stability in his career. For his part, he wavers around the decision, even after reaching England, and is tempted to return on more than one occasion. I do not intend

---

the mixing of the races" (1972, p. 50). Also, scholars such as Adrian Carton observe that the earliest records of Anglo-Indians in fact pre-date British imperial presence in India. Drawing from early European travelogues, he shows "…the existence of Eurasian communities in India before the arrival of the British, suggesting that the Eurasian community had a pre-British heritage quite separate to the imperial connection (2000, p. 3).

to play down the author's feeling of not belonging in India. At the same time, it helps to keep in sight the myriad concerns that influence such critical decisions. Banking on the much-charted reason of non-belonging as the sole reason for his leaving India does not quite capture this complexity.

NARRATIVE TENSION

Whether in descriptions of his social cultural settings, or the decision to leave India, Taylor's narrative carries within it a recurrent tension. We see this manifest in the form of the multiple divides he sets up in the story. While relating his Bombay days early on, Taylor sets up the Anglo-Indian social sphere as culturally distinct. For instance, he refers all non-Anglo-Indians as 'Indians' throughout the book to bring out the distinctly hyphenated identity of his community. If he sets up this distinction in terms of socio-religious divides, he also separates his own childhood personality between that of home and the world outside. On the one hand, is the homely, warm and comforting environs of his home, steeped, like his school chapel, in comforting religiosity; and on the other, the world outside, "filled with all sorts of places of vice" (p. 29) such as the gambling snooker hubs around the dockyard area where he would cavort with his schoolmates.

The two distinct worlds coalesce around his boyhood in formative ways. While the one outside exposed him to the risks of bad company, even as he mostly managed to steer clear of harm, home was where he could return to a safe and assured shelter and redemption. Home offered a refuge against the vices of the outside world and allowed him a connection with his spiritual side, which he also felt as a choir boy in the school chapel.

In these early chapters then, Taylor weaves his story into the social setting he grows up in. He highlights their competing and even contradictory influences in terms of straddling a spatial, cultural divide. Indeed, these portions of the book contain some of the richest detailing in terms of how the social world leaves an imprint on the individual in their formative years. That this description appears against the backdrop of his inner, personal struggles and maturing shows how much of a central role such tensions play at this point in the narrative. After all, even as he recollects his years of

turpitude, he does so with evident relish, conveying just how enjoyable these escapades might have been back then.

At the same time, he highlights the inevitable phases of guilt that would follow as he tried to expiate his wrongs through service to the church. Then again, the comforting spirituality of the church and the home held its own charm for the young mind and allowed him a space for what he was most passionate about: singing. We thus see the home-world divide as not merely a backdrop for his life's narrative, but also marking his inner self and shaping his personality. At his level, the divide functions also as a link between his self-perception, and his sense of belonging to the myriad social groupings around him.

The divide informs his passion for music and dance too. In more than one instance, we see how he picks up the more 'hip-hop' and jiving styles from outside, while being guided by country and blues music at home. At the same time, because of the contiguity of tastes and styles across home and school, church music and carols leave a deep imprint on him. As an author looking back at his life, Taylor has crafted this stage especially well. From a reader's perspective, it sets up an anchoring point for the narrative where he realizes his artistic streak, along with all its contradictions. Even as the refinement and solemnity of carols inspired him, the charms of jazz beats and rock were too attractive to let go. Not only did the beats of jazz and rock appeal for their youthful, rebellious energy, but the escape and transgressions they promised in the company of friends, proved too addictive to ignore. Throughout these chapters, Taylor builds and develops this tension as it courses through his own boyhood and into the larger sphere of his evolving relationships with his friends, family but also the community.

Why does Taylor make this dilemma so central to his narrative? After all, we find it play out well beyond his growing up years. In England too, he constantly vacillates between keeping a full-time, often secure job, and pursuing his passion for music. At the same time, a sense of guilt too gnaws at him as Zoe, his wife, works that much harder to sustain the finances. Throughout the narrative, he seems torn between charting a predictable, settled career arc and craving a life of artistic freedom. Even during his Bombay days, the conflict essentially pivoted around these same concerns.

Music surely provided him an escape from the daily grind of a life dangerously close to poverty. More alluringly though, he had just the right share of talent to potentially make a glamorous career out of it. In effect, he set this as a goal in life, and *The Deaf of Elvis* indeed reads like a journey of gradual reconciliation with this being a chimeric and unattainable possibility. To his credit, even in cherishing a spirited, carefree past and the lost dream it conjured, Taylor steers clear of over idealizing it, and sustains till the end the tension between the two types of life. That he refrains from making a judgment one way or the other reflects an inherent merit of life-writing in capturing complexities in detail.,.

For William Dilthey, life itself forms a fundamental narrative act allowing "a reiteration, in order to trace its footsteps and gain a better grasp of the flurry of events lived through, or reconcile its open, untied ends" (Dilthey cited in Steiner, 2019, p. 90). For Taylor, these loose ends space out across his life in the form of dilemma between choosing a stable career path and pursuing his passion in music. Whether one consciously attempts charting a course of character/career formation, the story of one's life invariably addresses this as a theme. Often, such conflicts appear as critical moments of decision making, not only about choosing a career, but also as in Taylor's case, taking a call on migration. Without a doubt then, such moments hold a special significance for the author. And yet, the question remains as to why such moments should appeal to the reader too? What piques our interest around these episodes?

Perhaps, such junctures realize one of the most crucial aspects of life-stories, that of the conflict between the individual self, their aspirations, and the demands of social conformity that tie them down. What complicates this conflict in Taylor's narrative is its refusal to be framed neatly along these binaries. They surface in his life at critical moments, when he has already started aligning his own expectations to social demands of a stable career, and yet cherishes his passion in music. Months before he sails for England, the manager at the Premier hotel in Srinagar almost convinces him to remain there as their star showstopper, and Taylor is "tempted to take up his offer" (p. 87). Even in England, he flits between jobs, hoping to buy himself more time to take up music more seriously, trying a desperate balancing act between his job and his passion.

To recount these in a life story is not merely an act of recording, reporting sets of facts, but an attempt to fit them in the larger scheme of life formation that one wishes to draw up, to closely scrutinize those moments when the individual wishes came into a contact, and often conflict with social mandates, and how these conflicts/moments of contact channelled/shaped one's life. An autobiography like Taylor's drives home the truth of just how implicit such conflicts are in our lives and decisions. Narrating these incidents offers clarity past life's unpredictable turns.

NARRATIVE LOOSE ENDS

In tracing an individual life arc, an autobiography brings forth an entire world. However, when we say, that a world emerges alongside the story of formation of the protagonist, which world are we talking about? It might after all be too reductive to refer to Taylor's emerging world as merely Anglo-Indian, or a South Asian immigrant or an artist. They are all of these, and more besides at any given point. In the latter half of the book, for instance, we see his artistic-self take centre stage and consequently, even holiday trips to Cyprus, Italy and the USA read like packed performance tours as he charms his way from one hotel to the next. Similarly, both at the beginning and end of the book we see a highlighting of Taylor's spiritual side, often in tandem with his deep romantic affection for Zoe, and for the reader. Each of these stand out as defining the person and his actions. Does he want us to choose or prioritize one set of identities and worldviews over another? For the world that the text highlights also determines how we eventually perceive Taylor.

It is on this count that I found the book somewhat lacking in places. Many a time, the text read like disjointed bits spread out over a lifespan without the sort of connecting threads that frame a narrative recollection. While a narrative arc might map a lifespan, it cannot really imitate its passage in toto. A life marks passage from one point of time to the next, and perhaps even depends on an at least partial obviating of the past. Even as it traces this journey, a narrative arc cannot afford to re-enact too literally this glossing over of the past by the present. In many ways, a narrative framework remedies this fragmenting, disjoining impulse of life and helps us make meaning by piecing individual events into a coherent, meaningful whole. In this, past events often offer a stage, a context to those in the present, and help us make better sense of them.

A critical part of the interaction between the world and the self involves coming to recognize and reconcile with its realities and disappointments.

As a literary convention, an autobiography devotes itself significantly to exploring how we come to terms with the disappointments life inevitably throws at us. Typically, the protagonist moves through a series of challenges and eventually experiences closure as they come to value virtues such as perseverance and fortitude that bring them success. Within the western tradition, this appears as a major factor favouring the *bildungsroman* as an instrument of example and learning for young minds. As Jose Santiago Vazquez (in Hoagland, 2019) notes, however, autobiographies and other similar forms of life-stories written from non-western perspectives both adopt and contest some of these essential norms. For him, such writing arising from postcolonial traditions "incorporate the master codes of imperialism into the text, in order to sabotage them more effectively" (cited in Hoagland, 2019, p. 218).

However, I differ with such a position in the context of Taylor's life story. He shows no obvious intent to defy or challenge a literary form. The bildungsroman continues being an effective and simple narration of a life and lends such narration a perspective to make sense of it better. Taylor also closes his life story with an increasingly spiritual slant. In fact, he also ties together his passion for music with a search for the divine as he signs up as the lead voice and frequents the local church more often. To that extent, Taylor largely toes the generic convention in trying to tie together the various strands of his life in a continuing search for the divine. Speaking of how he feels blessed at this stage of life, he observes:

> Every day we thank our loving saviour Jesus Christ. We thank him every day for all his help and the loving wisdom he has bestowed on us, how to love each other and our fellow neighbours. He has blessed us abundantly with our dream home and financial situations, where we rose from rags to riches, so to speak. (p. 245)

Such a move even mimics his early adolescence torn between the solace of religion and appeal of delinquency. At the same time, his life story does leave loose ends too. For one, he fails to make much of his musical career, and admits as much in his usual humorous fashion, with perhaps a tinge of warning: "try to be yourselves as copying Elvis all my life did not get me anywhere" (p. 249). If anything, towards the end his narrative shifts from trying to stitch together a musical career to a search for an ideal

English home to settle down for the rest of his life. His musical ambitions remain unfulfilled, but so does the reader's curiosity to know how he comes to terms with it.

DISILLUSIONMENT AND NOSTALGIA

Unfulfilled ambitions are not the only disappointments in Taylor's life. Yet another marked moment of disillusionment for him is the visit to India thirty-eight years after his migration and the sheer disconnect he feels from what was once home for him. Except for a short sojourn at Kerala, his trips to Agra, Nagpur, Calcutta and Bombay all prove fairly underwhelming. One remark following his stay in Bombay sums it up. He asks, "How did I even live there for eighteen years of my youth?" (p. 213). An immigrant's disenchantment upon returning to their home country is of course, a familiar theme in postcolonial literature. In his research, Rishi Iniyan (2013) traces the trajectory of novels that engage with the theme of disillusioned return in authors as diverse as Balachandra Rajan, Amitav Ghosh and Arun Joshi (2013, p. 19). At the same time, in the context of life-writing, such a theme takes on an even more real, almost visceral quality. This is particularly the case for Anglo-Indian life-writing, especially overlaid with a story of migration and diaspora.

Predictably, the author arrives in India full of hope, and eager to revisit the haunts of his early youth. Even more predictably, he finds himself gripped in agonizing disappointment to discover all the places that are gone or have been transformed beyond recognition. However, he does not give up on the nostalgic tenor entirely, but sustains it as an idyllic foil to his actual experiences in all these places. As a reader, I initially found this a bit puzzling: why would someone simultaneously recognize the delusionary nature of nostalgia, and yet continue indulging in yearning for a past so surely out of reach? What explains this contradictory narrative movement?

In the *Future of Nostalgia* (2008), Svetlana Boym distinguishes between two kinds of nostalgia in the western literary tradition: restorative and reflective. While restorative nostalgia pines to revive an idyllic past and reconfigure the present to the requirements of that past, reflective nostalgia acknowledges the irretrievable loss of that past, and focuses on our process of coming to terms with that loss. Taylor's recollection too charts a movement from restorative nostalgia to reflective nostalgia as he comes to

grips with the stark reality of never being able to salvage the country he had once known.

Such a movement mimics the inevitable coming to terms with the past and its loss, that he undergoes. In life-stories, coming to terms with the past, the passage of time, and its accompanying transience are critical ingredients of identity formation. In fact, these serve as crucibles where multiple identities such as ethnic, professional and religious overlap and draw up a sketch of the protagonist. In presenting this sketch too, however, Taylor's account feels a bit wanting. Even as the keen anticipation of the earlier leg of his India tour gives way to disappointment, he wraps up its account a bit abruptly. While these episodes read like a string of let-downs, we do not get enough of a glimpse into the mind that nevertheless keeps pursuing them, in spite of accepting the passing of his world. It would make for so much more of an interesting read to know, for instance, if and how the present, with all its disappointments, manages to hold out that special and unique attachment in him we reserve for our homes, and especially the homes of our childhood. He does tell us how be tears up on seeing Dehdusty Building gone, but leaves it there, with just that much of a mild emotional nudge.

CONCLUSION

If, as Cassity says, Anglo-Indian life narratives provide space for their own voices, they also build an expectation with which the reader approaches the text. In this case, I was especially curious to know if being an immigrant brought challenges unique to the Anglo-Indians in the UK. Sure enough, literature on the politics and social circumstances surrounding Anglo-Indian immigrants is available aplenty, but only a life narrative can render these as intimate snapshots more accessible to readers like me. I have always wondered if Anglo-Indians abroad stood apart from the rest of the South Asian immigrant communities owing to their distinctly western ways, but came away none wiser after reading the book. Insights on the dynamics between the different immigrant communities too might have been a great addition. We do hear of a certain Joyanti, presumably a Bengali Hindu, going by her name, but no further details are shared. As a result, these portions often seem incomplete and a bit abruptly rounded off.

It is not as if interactions with other Indian immigrants from other communities is completely absent in the text, though. We see him sign up, for instance, as the lead musician mostly at bars and pubs run by Indian businessmen in and around London, and for a moment it seems he shows an unstated preference for these. Possibly, it follows patterns of preference and affinity determined by social networks of his, which might have been predominantly Indian, or connected to Indians.[4] With him throwing hardly any light on these connections however, they remain largely distant and formal, and we miss out on a crucial aspect of his social and professional life. As mentioned earlier, I also could not help but notice just how starkly contrasting this silence appears versus his rich and detailed descriptions of community lives around him at his childhood apartment in Mumbai. Perhaps, he recreates in text a transition that echoes in our lives. Experiences of the other, and aspects of their lives that do not match our own milieu, are particularly vivid for the young and leave quite an impact on impressionable minds. As grown-ups, perhaps that sense of wonder fades, and we notice these idiosyncrasies a lot less or take them for granted. Be that as it may, some description of the distinct cultural lives of other immigrant communities he encounters would no doubt have made for an even more enjoyable reading.

But then, a critique of Taylor's silence on this aspect is also perhaps a questioning of my own expectations as a reader. Reviewing a book after all, also involves a closer scrutiny of the reader's approach to it. I cannot unsee how prone I am to straitjacket the text within an imagined Anglo-Indian narrative type. In fact, as mentioned before, this search for the author as an Anglo-Indian and the author as himself – not arrested

[4] In his article "British South Asians and Pathways Into Selective Schooling: Social Class, Culture and Ethnicity", Tahir Abbas observes that the social and educational networks among first and second generation South Asian immigrants were defined by "their social interaction with others like themselves in their own communities" (2007, p. 83). It is more than likely a broader pattern that holds for other age groups too, and might explain Taylor's preference for seeking employment in Indian run establishments.

by any one of his identities – underlines my reading. Why does his silence on the British-Anglo Indian relationship seem jarring? Does it confound an expectation with which I approach the text of him documenting experiences as an immigrant, and in the process also bring up the unique stories of engagement as an Anglo-Indian? Am I beings a bit too presumptuous to suppose there was a struggle in these processes of engagement and settling down in the first place? Or did time make it easier, and he became 'used to' enough to not even notice?

Which readership Anglo-Indian life-writing caters will remain a shifting goal, and not without its share of paradox. It is perfectly possible that Taylor writes primarily for an Anglo-Indian audience, and especially in the latter part of the book does not feel the need to engage with questions of identity all that much. At the same time, these questions might often be the staple fare that often leads non-Anglo-Indian readers to take up a book like his. What we have then is indeed a tricky terrain to navigate. At some level of course, to expect a narrative coloured in the Anglo-Indian lens places an unfair and unnecessary burden on the author. At the same time, as Taylor himself says, the stories of Anglo-Indians of his generation need to be told, and in a manner that foregrounds their identity as an anchor for collective memory. For an author who sets himself to that task, I must concede there are moments which leave more to be desired. It would perhaps not be off the mark either to say that it might even feel the same way for Anglo-Indian readers who did not migrate out of India. The task of the author in this case would be a tricky balancing act between these expectations and a telling of his life story as just another unique event. While Taylor's narrative does waver a bit on this count at times, it reminds us of the extraordinary eventfulness of a supposedly ordinary life, and for that reason alone, should be worth a read.

Upamanyu Sengupta *teaches English at Maharashtra National Law University Mumbai. His doctoral dissertation examines the hermeneutics of travel writing. He was awarded a DAAD Fellowship for a semester's study at the Technische Universität, Dresden, Germany. Upamanyu's research interests on studies of space and place, Anglo-Indian Studies and affective mapping are reflected in his publications. He can be reached at upamanyu@mnlumumbai.edu.in.*

REFERENCES

Abbas, Tahir. (2007). British South Asians and pathways into selective schooling: Social class, culture and ethnicity. *British Educational Research Journal, 35*(1), 75-90. https://www.jstor.org/stable/30032725.

Boym, Svetlana. (2001). *The future of nostalgia*. Basic Books.

Carton, Adrian. Beyond "Cotton Mary": Anglo-Indian categories and reclaiming the diverse past. *International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies, 5*(1), 3-20. https://international-journal-of-anglo-indian-studies.org/index.php/IJAIS/article/view/153/143.

Cassity, Kathleen J. (2014). Anglo-Indian life writing: Why it matters. *International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies*, *14*(1), 3-16. https://international-journal-of-anglo-indian-studies.org/index.php/IJAIS/article/view/13/8.

Cavarero, Adrianna. (2000). *Relating narratives: Storytelling and selfhood.* Routledge.

Ghosh, Abantika. (2019, December 13). Rajya Sabha passes SC/ST quota bill after brief walkout by Congress MPs. *Indian Express*. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/rajya-sabha-passes-sc-st-quota-bill-after-brief-walkout-by-congress-mps-6164327/.

Graham, Sara. (2019). Introduction. In Sarah Graham (Ed.), *A history of the bildungsroman* (pp. 1-9). Cambridge University Press.

Hoagland, Ericka A. (2019). The Postcolonial Bildungsroman. In Sarah Graham (Ed.), *A history of the bildungsroman* (pp. 217-238). Cambridge University Press.

Iniyan, Rishi. (2013). *Remigrating home: A study of the theme of return in selected Indian English novels* [Unpublished MPhil Dissertation]. The English and Foreign Languages University Hyderabad.

Parry, Benita. (1972). *Delusions and discoveries: India in the British imagination 1880-1930*. Verso.

Rathore, Akash Singh. (2019). *A philosophy of autobiography: Body and text*. Routledge.

Steiner, Lina. (2019). The Bildungsroman in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. In Sarah Graham (Ed.), *A history of the bildungsroman* (pp. 84-116). Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, Trevor. (2020). *The Deaf of Elvis and the last of the Anglo-Indians: An autobiography.* Xlibris Publishing.