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A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE ANGLO-INDIAN COMMUNITY IN ODISHA THROUGH MEMORIES AND LIVED EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Anglo-Indians are a mixed-race Indian minority community. The word 'Anglo' denotes their mainly British descent, and 'Indian' refers to the Indian ancestry of this community. V.R. Gaikwad studied the Anglo-Indian community as a cultural and linguistic minority in July 1959-January 1961 in Bangalore, Jhansi and Bilaspur (Gaikwad, 1967). Subsequent studies on Anglo-Indians have focused on the experiences of Anglo-Indians based in metro cities such as Kolkata, Chennai and Mumbai while overlooking Anglo-Indians' historical and geographical presence in small towns and non–metropolitan cities. This anomaly was, to an extent, remedied in a book on Anglo-Indians in smaller towns and cities (Andrews & Gera Roy, 2021). However, there has been no known study on Anglo-Indians (AIs) in Odisha. This article explores social and cultural changes through their lived experiences and attempts to provide a historical perspective on the Community in Odisha and its relationship with the railways. It also touches on the concept of 'home' or desh*, examining the popular notion of Anglo-Indians not being rooted in India as home, with particular reference to the community in Odisha.*

RECOGNITION AND NAMING - A DISTINCT COMMUNITY

'Eurasian', 'country born', 'half-castes' or 'Indo-Briton' were derogatory terms used to describe the community from as early as the 18th century. In 1825, Calcutta Eurasians adopted the term 'East Indian' believing it to be common and familiar in England and perhaps because of its connotations with the East India Company (Hawes, 1996, p. 90). From the 1780s, the East India Company had imposed restrictions on the mixed-race Eurasian community, in education and employment and even questioned their

legal status as British subjects. Thus in 1830, John William Ricketts, presented a petition to the House of Lords and the House of Commons from the growing mixed race community of European and Indian parentage, begging redress for the discrimination they suffered under the rule of the East India Company (Otto, 2015). The petition, succeeded in bringing Eurasian grievances to the fore and the debate upon it, engaged the Company's government and British society in India. In Britain, it involved Parliament, the Board of Control ,and the Company's Directors (Hawes, 1996, p. 135). The petition, asked Parliament to rule on the legal status of Eurasians as 'British Subjects' but the Company view prevailed and they continued to be 'Natives of India'. According to Frank Anthony, in 1897, the Secretary of State for India, was petitioned by a deputation to recognize and give official recognition to the use of the term 'Anglo-Indian', but refused. After that, Lord Curzon also denied the request for the same designation and the term 'Eurasian' remained in use (Anthony, 1969, p. 2). Finally, in 1911, the then Viceroy Lord Hardinge sanctioned the use of the term Anglo-Indian to describe the community in the census taken in that year (Moreno, 1923).

However, the problem persisted as the community had a 'trinity of status'. Natives of India, for the purpose of employment, European British subjects for defence purposes, and non-Europeans with regard to the British Army. Sir Henry Gidney, leader of the community in India, led a deputation to London in 1925, to petition, the Secretary of State for India, to clarify the political and legal position of Anglo-Indians (Anthony, 1969, p. 97).

It was through the efforts of Gidney that the Government of India Act of 1935 included a definition of the Anglo-Indian community (Anthony, 1969, pp. 104-8). The Constitution of Independent India, which came into effect on January 26, 1950, reproduced that definition, thus Article 366(2) states:

> An 'Anglo-Indian' means a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only.

THE COMMUNITY IN ODISHA

The Constitution of India guaranteed the community political representation through nominations in Central and State legislatures. State Legislative Assemblies of twelve states in India nominated Anglo-Indians to their legislatures (Dias, 2019, p. 166). However, Odisha has never nominated an Anglo-Indian to serve in its Legislative Assembly. Dias mentions some states that offered Anglo-Indians seats in professional courses (Dias, 2019, p. 124). The state of Odisha has never extended any support of this nature to the community in Odisha and is also one of the ten states yet to constitute a State Minorities Commission.[1] Even though there has been no representation, community members felt that the state was home, was well governed and peaceful. Around two hundred Anglo-Indian families were living in Odisha until the 1990s. Currently, seventy families live in Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Jharsguda, Berhampur and the railway town of Khurda Road (KUR), which has the highest number of families.

That there was little known about the community or its existence in Odisha became evident at the Tata Steel Literary Meet, held in February 2023 in Bhubaneswar. Prof. Sashmi Nayak, interviewing Mr Barry O'Brien about his book, paused her interview when she looked into the audience and noticed her teacher Mr Gordon 'Bobby' Barren and her children's teacher Mrs Sonja Maria Benjamin.[2] She asked the audience there to give them both a standing ovation. The audience was quite captivated by the small group of Anglo-Indians, and the media people present there expressed surprise at learning that there were Anglo-Indians still living in Odisha.

According to Lionel Caplan, Anglo-Indians were ‘hardly present at all in histories of modern India’ (Caplan, 2001, p. 6). Alison Blunt also writes that the history of the community has remained a largely ‘hidden history’ (Blunt, 2005, p. 17). Much in the same way, we also noted that the community was hardly ever spoken of or written about in Odisha. In a more significant national context, we found no literature on Odisha's Anglo-Indians. Despite Odisha having been the home for many reputed

[1] See article about this situation: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/10-states-7-uts-yet-to-constitute-state-minorities-commissions/articleshow/99540658.cms?from=mdr. Accessed on April 17,2023

2 Gordon Barren also taught the second author's daughter at a well-reputed international school, and she feels that Anglo-Indians had a unique teaching style. Sonja Benjamin is also a well-known teacher and the wife of the first author.

Anglo-Indian teachers, there was not much information about the community in any form in the public domain. Therefore as an Anglo-Indian living in Odisha, I needed to write about the community and document the changes that it was going through. Writing about the community in Odisha would inform more people about the existence of the Anglo-Indian community.

METHODOLOGY

We used unstructured interviews, focus groups and house meetings to gather information for this article. House meetings, a technique developed in the 1950s, are deliberative group conversations with six to twelve participants who know each other (Cortes, 2006, pp. 24, 46-57). Such meetings create a space to have a dialogue about issues that matter to a community (Kong, 2010). Our house meetings took place in the homes of our respondents, with at least five different families participating and, on occasion, in the church compound after the English service. We conducted ten house meetings. A focus group discussion is a technique where a researcher assembles a group of individuals to discuss a specific topic, aiming to draw understandings from the complex personal experiences, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of the participants through a moderated interaction (Morgan, 1996). We used house meetings and focus groups since both methods employ the strategy of group conversation and encourage connection between participants and the telling of stories based on lived experiences.

We had two focus groups of twelve participants each, with participants ranging from 18 to 87 years old. One group comprised Anglo-Indians residing in Odisha; the second was Anglo-Indians originally from Odisha but presently residing in other states or countries. The participation of two Anglo-Indian MLAs (one from a railway town) and one former Member of Parliament in the focus group enriched the discussions and added perspective. In order to tell those stories, we focused on the senior citizens in the focus group and the community. In India, all those aged 60 years and above are considered senior citizens. Our key participants are senior citizens and elders of the community whose narratives and lived experiences are the focus of this article. We also interviewed senior citizens and retired rail workers of other communities who had worked with Anglo-Indians and knew the community.

After three meetings with the focus groups in 2020, there was a sense of direction when one of our participants, who had been born in Odisha (and is now settled in New Zealand), described how happy she was to share stories about her community:

> Sharing stories is what will take us forward. Our children are our future. We must pass on our unique history through stories that preserve our community.

In October 2021, seventy-two Anglo-Indians attended a community meeting organized by the authors on the study's objectives. However, owing to pandemic-related fears, several seniors could not attend. In December 2021, we met a number of seniors at a Christmas Tree event for children. Following this, there were follow-up meetings at social gatherings and community functions. Where there are direct quotes from the participants, to protect their identity we have not used their names, although we include brief biographical details for context.

Though our participants shared stories of incidents which reflected how the local populace viewed them, the work ethic of the community members and their willingness to stand up for their principles, most of their narratives always veered towards the railways which highlights the important role it played in their lives. The next section deals with the genesis of the relationship between the Anglo-Indians and the railways that came into being. The sections that follow include memories of the lives they had lived, tales of the railways, the railway colony, the railway Institute, their homes, and the changes in the community.

THE RAILWAYS AND THE ANGLO-INDIANS

The Directors of the East India Company, in 1844, had thought that the construction of railways was a doubtful venture because of climatic difficulties, want of qualified engineers and doubts about financial success. They knew that caste scruples could deter Hindus from using the railways, which could create a financial loss. However, Lord Dalhousie, Governor General (1848-56), impressed upon them that there was a great need for railways and that there were advantages which would accrue from them (Abel, 1988, p. 32).

When the British set out on the herculean task of constructing a railway network in India, they needed people who could take up the challenge of building it. England had

its share of problems with the Crimean War and other internal problems, so finding Englishmen to take up the task in India was not feasible. Most Indians did not take favourably to the then innovations by the government. They regarded the railways and other means of transport, like steamship navigation, as a direct threat to their caste and religion (Abel, 1988, p. 31).

Anjali Gera Roy mentions Gandhi's observation that with the railways coming, “the holy places of India have become unholy” (Gera Roy, 2021, p. 25). Educated Indians would not have worked for the meagre wages on offer for this work, so Anglo-Indians stepped in to fill that gap, as: "He knew the country; he had been born and bred in it; he knew the people, he conversed with them in their own languages. The Anglo-Indians braved the heat, the swamps and the jungles and took up the challenge" (Maher, 1962, p. 157). The Anglo-Indians found that their supposed technical adaptability, physical hardiness and ability to deal with the local workforce as supervisors (for example, they spoke the local languages) were more sought after by the British firms involved in this work than men from Britain or any other Indians (Muthiah & MacLure, 2013, p. 37).

According to Gaikwad, young Anglo-Indians left their classrooms to join the railways at a very early age. A retired Divisional Mechanical Engineer we interviewed remarked how one of his non-Anglo-Indian batch mates, while discussing the ties of the Anglo–Indians to the railways, commented, 'From the fourth form to the platform'. Apart from the availability of jobs, Gaikwad attributes this to a unique social custom among Anglo-Indians: As parents did not provide for the expenses of their children's marriages, nor were they expected to, boys preferred to leave school early to earn and start a family (Gaikwad, 1967, p. 148).

Bear writes that Bengali railway workers and middle-class Bengalis were united in their assertions that Anglo-Indians were *tash*, a term applied equally to Indian Christians and Anglo-Indians that suggests that they are low-class, too Anglicized, rootless, sexually disreputable, and cheap imitations (Bear, 2007, p. 11). Discussions with several Bengali railway families in Khurda Road Junction regarding Bengali sentiments about Anglo-Indians revealed that such thoughts had never crossed their minds. They have Anglo-Indian neighbours and have never thought of them as *tash*.

Their children have Anglo-Indian teachers whom they respect very much. They put it down to those respondents being either extremely orthodox or *'Bahaar ke log*' (outsiders), who have not imbibed the railway ethos. They mentioned how even in Bengal, many 'Bengalis' still refer to migrants from East Pakistan as 'Bangladeshis', aliens who search for a *desh* (village home) and often treat them as ‘others’.

Our study found that looking down on others as polluted does not fit into the railway ethos in Odisha. Like the Bengali rail workers we interviewed, there was another local (Male, Hindu, Railwayman, b.1948) who told us of how locomotive assistant Panda (who was Brahmin by caste) used to eat out of the same plate and drink out of the same cup as his Anglo-Indian driver (we confirmed this story while interviewing the driver). If a high caste Hindu could do that, this would, in this instance at least, dispel the notion of Anglo-Indians as 'polluted'.

A remarkable incident of railway solidarity transcending the barriers of religion, community or regionalism occurred when some thugs, at the behest of their political masters, surrounded railway driver Samad (a Muslim man), Anglo-Indian firemen John Dickson and Mervyn Benjamin. The short, sturdy, but fearless Samad gave the call, 'Stand back to back'. Outnumbered against an armed group of enforcers, John Dickson (Male, Anglo-Indian Railwayman, b.1938), one of the last surviving members of the trio, remembers a familiar voice shouting something in Oriya, which made the attackers hesitate. It was Dickson's Hindu second fireman and later union leader Panda, standing against members of his community in support of a Muslim and two Anglo-Indians. Panda's words, loosely translated, 'the first man to touch the sahibs will not have a hand before this day is out'.

The railway colony's local Odiya population have consistently admired and respected their Anglo-Indian co-workers and community members. Mrs Olga Littlewood, Founder, and retired Principal of one of the largest schools in the state, passed away in her son's railway unit, a building that housed five other families. Her sons in Australia wanted to travel to India to pay their respects, so they requested that her last rites be kept on hold till they reached India.

The state had no funeral parlours, so the body had to be preserved on ice and kept at home. Keeping the body came with its problems because Hindus have to follow certain customs when there is a death. The deceased usually is not kept for more than a few hours, but in this case, the body was kept for six days, affecting the cooking of food and the Hindu households' daily *puja* (prayer) rituals. Despite the inconvenience of living with a dead body in the building, not a single family in the unit and locality objected to having the body in the building for such a long time.

ANGLO-INDIAN RAILWAYMEN

The Anglo-Indian railwaymen, especially the drivers, are still thought of very highly in Odisha. At a dinner attended by the authors they met an elderly railwayman (Male, Hindu, Railwayman, b.1945) who spoke highly of his Anglo-Indian driver, whom he accompanied on a gruelling trip from Khurda Road to Jamalpur workshop while taking a steam locomotive for repairs. It was a hard week of heat, long halts and physical labour, but his driver had made a lasting impression even after three decades. He remarked, 'Waah! Kya aadmi tha!' [What a man!] In the words of an elderly taxi driver, 'Sahab log toh engine ko shobhha dete te' [the Anglo-Indian drivers of old added splendour to the engine] (Male, Muslim, Taxi Operator, b.1942).

The Anglo-Indian railwaymen could also hold their own when they had to and did not worry about the consequences when they felt it was a matter of principle, as this story testifies:

> The Anglo-Indian driver was about to start his train on another platform when he heard that his wife and son were being denied their reservation on the Puri Express. He rushed to their aid. Soon the Station Master, Loco Foreman and Head Ticket Collector and Railway Protection Force were all in attendance. They threatened the driver with action and begged him to relent. 'My train will not leave the station till my family is on this train', he said. Just then, in an astonishing display of solidarity with a fellow railwayman, there was another message, this time from the non-Anglo-Indian driver of Puri Express, 'Sahab bola hain Puri Express bhi nahi chalegi jab thak baccha ko berth nahi milega' [The driver says that this train will also not leave till the child gets his berth]. Khurda Road Junction had come to a standstill! No trains in, no trains out! Berths were allotted immediately! (Male, Muslim, Railwayman, b.1951)

Male railwaymen spoke about how their work began before their trip began. They had to wash and clean the steam engine and then rub her down with jute or cloth till she

was spotless. Driver John Blanche would don a white cotton glove and run it along the cabin area to check for coal dust. If it were still dusty, the cleaning would recommence. Most had been firemen before becoming drivers, and they remember that shovelling coal as a fireman was not just about strength but skill. As one participant told us, “You had to be able to stand the heat of the firebox and make sure the coal was spread as evenly as possible, and the late Mervyn ‘Sonnu’ Benjamin was an expert at this” (Male, Anglo-Indian, Railwayman, b. 1938).

While the rail workers respected authority, the drivers stood no nonsense even from the officers. Driver Hector Blanche would challenge the officer to identify himself before allowing him to board the engine. Some of the younger Anglo-Indian drivers who idolized the senior Anglo-Indian drivers were also particular about etiquette, as one officer found out:

> The signal was green. The Anglo-Indian driver had just got the train rolling out of Bhubaneswar Railway Station when he heard somebody getting onto the engine. ‘Who are you?’ asked he. ‘I am an officer’ said the man. 'You should have taken my permission before boarding my engine’, growled the railwayman menacingly. The other missed the tone in the voice and, in the blink of an eye, found himself being lowered unto the platform by a wiry arm as the train kept rolling. Once again, he yelled, 'What are you doing? I am an Officer.' The voice from the cabin door answered, 'Yes, sir! But not a gentleman!' (Male, Anglo-Indian Railwayman b. 1940)

Anglo-Indians may have benefitted from preferential recruitment policies; however, some, like Mr V. Anand, former General Manager of Southern Railways, said in his article titled, ‘Anglo Indians Contributions to Indian Railways’, that the Anglo-Indians undoubtedly made the Indian railways what it is now. Their contribution to the development of the Indian Railways was immense. (Anand, 2003)

Article 338(3) of the Constitution had ensured the continuation of job reservations for the community in the Railways, Customs and Post Telegraphs Department, but this preferential recruitment was due to cease in 1960. The lack of access to railway jobs meant the number of Anglo-Indians on the railways dwindled, and the community in Khurda Road, Orissa, lost its most important spaces - the Railway Colony and the South West Institute (SWI).

THE RAILWAY COLONY

The railway life was alluring because the railway also offered housing in the railway colony, separated from other communities, with plentiful opportunities for recreation in the railway institute (the South West Institute, in this case). Thus close-knit communities with shared interests and pursuits were created. As Moss et al. found in their study of Kharagpur, houses and lanes in the railway colony once defined social and racial relations. Non-Anglo-Indians could only use the back roads and rear entrances, as one of our study participants stated:

> Nobody dared enter the colony except to deliver milk or some other items. Even the 'Call Boy' (who called the drivers and guards on duty) could only use the rear entrance. (Female, Anglo-Indian, Railway woman, b.1941).

> Dad was transferred from Kharagpur to Khurda Road in 1957. In those days, other communities lived in the ‘Loco Lines’. Guard, driver, inspector, it did not matter; they did not live in the Railway Colony. It was only for Anglo-Indians (Male, Anglo-Indian, Railwayman, b.1944).

The older generation among the local populace still remembers the names of the families that once inhabited the colony. Many have fond memories of the lovable sahibs and their relationships as colleagues while working on the railways.

> Outside the railway station, there were only Anglo-Indian homes. The Trinidads lived here (now the Officer’s Rest House and Conference Hall). Crowds of young Anglo-Indian boys and girls would gather in the open space here for games of foot tennis or to have fun. Barren, Culpepper, Unger, Thomas, Blanche, Trinidad, Augustine, Feegrade, Lovery, William, Betreen and many more families lived here. (Male, Muslim, Railwayman, b.1946)

Gaikwad mentions how gardening was a common hobby with Anglo-Indians and how gardens were a regular feature of Anglo-Indian houses and clubs (Gaikwad, 1967, p. 157). Similarly, Moss et al. also mentions how Kharagpur residents reminisced, with great pride, about the prevalence of beautiful, well-kept gardens in the compounds of the houses in the colony (Moss & Chakraborty, 2021). Residents of the railway colony in Odisha remember the colony much the same way.

> In those days, there were no electric lights, only gas lamps, but the streets were beautifully lit. Cleaning would begin in October. The roads would be cleaned, bushes trimmed, and the houses whitewashed. The IOW Department (Inspector of Works) did a fine job maintaining the place. Everything was spic and span! (Male, Anglo-Indian, Railway Contractor, b.1934)

Although our respondents spoke of how things had changed, none felt displaced by moving out from the colony. They had retired, so they had moved on to their own homes, which they had purchased from their retirement funds or, in some cases, to their ancestral homes left to them by their family members. Though they cherish the memories of their past, of friends who had passed away or moved on, they expressed no discontent about moving out from the colony.

THE RAILWAY INSTITUTE

The cultural hub was the Railway Institute of Khurda Road, but Anglo-Indians from other parts of Odisha would also congregate there for festivities; for example, families living in Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Berhampur, Jharsguda, and Balasore would travel to participate in the festivities and celebrations. On special occasions and for significant events, westernized and well-to-do Indians and a Maharajah or two would also join in the festivities. A local businessman from Cuttack told us:

> Those were the great days of the Anglo-Indian community! My uncle was a contractor on the Bengal Nagpur Railway (BNR) and was very westernized. He used to sponsor a gold medal for the best dancing couple at the 31st December Dance at the Railway Institute at Khurda Road. All the top officials and business people would drive down to attend. (Male, Hindu Businessman, b.1935)

The Anglo-Indians we spoke to also had memories of the erstwhile capital of Odisha, Cuttack. There is a riveting account of a discussion between an Anglo-Indian and a rajah:

> Cuttack had dances too, and many high society people, westernized Hindus, would attend the dances. My brother Bas had a run-in with a maharajah. The maharajah had set his eyes on a young lass who had taken a fancy for my handsome brother. He walked across the hall in his neatly cut sharkskin coat and said, ‘Bas, I have a bone to pick with you!’. Bas replied, ‘Let’s step outside and pick it clean’. (Female, Anglo-Indian, Retired Teacher, b. 1941)

The South West Institute, or SWI (earlier known as the European Institute), was the hub for all social activities for the community members (the other railway Institute was the 'Indian Institute' for members of the other communities). The Institute had its own bowling green, bar, grand piano, tennis courts, badminton court, billiard table and a beautiful wooden dance floor. Bridge, billiards, and *whist drive* (social event where

whist, a classic English trick-taking card game was played) were popular ways to relax in those days:

> I remember Joe Doll and myself playing bridge against Jossy Lovery and Wadiyar. In the billiard room, the prize for winning a game was Ghantia (a fried snack) and tea. Yes, the Institute was the centre of our life as we knew it then! (Male, Anglo-Indian, Retired Railwayman, b. 1940)

Moss et al. comment on the centrality of the railway institute to social life and the functioning of the community in Kharagpur (Moss & Chakraborty, 2021). It was the same in Khurda Road. However, the link to the Institute remains powerful here because it was not just for socializing.

All the seniors had their wedding receptions there. It was thus not only for recreation but was a symbol of the very beginning of the families who lived in the town. It is no wonder that the community continues to feel its loss even today:

> All our wedding receptions took place at the Institute. Many people have gone now, but our memories of them in the SWI remain. It remains the most essential part of our community life as youngsters. (Female, Anglo-Indian, Retired Teacher, b.1948)

Our respondents still had memories of the Railway Institute library and how it offered a wide variety of reading, unlike the institutes of Gaikwad's study, where reading was mainly crime and detective novels (Gaikwad, 1967, p. 157).

In earlier times, the South West Institute committee had only Anglo-Indians, who brooked no interference. A retired railwayman told us how in the early seventies, a non-Anglo-Indian officer decided that lower-grade Anglo-Indian rail workers should be allowed to use only the East Institute or Indian Institute. The Anglo-Indian committee disagreed and threatened to resign en masse should that order ever be implemented. It was a sign of the close bond a well-knit community shared and would remain its hallmark for generations.

Our interviewees, have memories of couples dressed in their best attire, dancing the waltz and the fox trot on the teakwood dance floor of the railway institute. Sherlock (Anglo-Indian b.1955), John (Anglo-Indian b.1952) and Frodo (Anglo-Indian b.1953) laugh when asked how many families attended the functions*. 'The hall was crowded! There was no place on the floor to dance,'* they replied.

The Railways took back control of the Institute around 2011. With just a few Anglo-Indian railway employees left on the committee, the community lacked the numbers to form the committee. It could not prevent control being taken away by the railways. SWI, Khurda Road was arguably the last Anglo-Indian Institute to close. Gaikwad mentions how Anglo-Indians of Jhansi and Bilaspur believed that the railway authorities did not want their Senior Institute (formerly European Institute) to exist because it was patronized mainly by Anglo-Indians. The community in Odisha believes that the officers wanted the antique billiard table and took over the Institute solely for this purpose. This heritage building is now an office for the Railway Protection Force (RPF), which uses the ground floor rather than the upper floor that has the dance floor (almost destroyed now). Elderly Anglo-Indians commented on how the building stands dark and silent at the end of the working day, a stark reminder of what it once was.

Another reason for the lack of regular social events nowadays is the need for a community hall to call its own. Hiring a hall is possible only on special occasions. Earlier, the community came together to celebrate regularly. However, this happens only on special occasions like Easter and Christmas, so the community is no longer in the habit of getting together. Dwindling numbers owing to deaths and migration to cities, coupled with long working hours and professional commitments, also contribute to low attendance at functions. Due to low interest in attending, the Christmas festivities, and the New Year's Eve dance in 2022, had to be cancelled.

In the railway colony of old, every house had a gramophone or a guitar, piano accordion or a saxophone, and there was a lot of dancing and music. Seniors remember house parties and jam sessions, organized by Mrs Dorothy 'Dolly' Feegrade and Ann Lovery, in their homes, which Anglo-Indians and their Westernized Hindu friends attended. Once known for its dancing abilities, the community has now apparently hung up its dancing shoes. The organizers of a dance told us, *'Nobody dances anymore'*. In his study, Gaikwad noted the preference among youngsters in the sixties for rock and roll (Gaikwad, 1967, p. 152). Moss et al. note how the preference for contemporary English and Hindi music often excludes the older generation from participating (Moss & Chakraborty, 2021). The community in Odisha experiences a similar situation. Children once learnt to dance by attending dances

where they observed, practised and picked up the traditional slow dances, such as the fox trot and waltz, before moving on to other dances. With dancing becoming a forgotten tradition, the hustle, Charleston, cha cha, jive, jitterbug, waltz and foxtrot are not practised or passed on to the next generation.

For a community that once prided itself on its musicians, only a few youngsters now play musical instruments.[3] There is no conscious effort to form a band or come together as a choir at Church, and only one family sings for the church services.

BEYOND THE RAILWAY COLONY-HOME

Meghan Mills, writing on the myth of location and migration, mentions Rex's reference to two ethnic experiences of importance in many an ethnohistory: the claim to territory and the experience of migration (Mills, 1998, p. 374). Gera Roy's article on Kharagpur deals with the first experience (Gera Roy, 2021). Andrews addresses the second in her article on Asansol (Andrews, 2021).

Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, writes, "The late 1920s and 30s were a period of great uncertainly for the Anglo-Indians – a period of self-questioning and realignment of loyalties because the community had realized that in spite of its dedication to the ruling colonial power, they were going to be un-ceremonially discarded by the British. The Anglo-Indians pushed into a deep crisis of belonging, began to feel more insecure than ever and tried to use their collective energies to form a homeland that would reassert their separate identity within the Indian territorial mass" (Lahiri-Dutt, 1990, p. 57). Gera Roy mentions how Anglo-Indians are a community without an originary home in its traditional Indian meanings. E.T. McCluskie dreamt of a homeland for Anglo-Indians where they could identify with the land and each other as community members. To make this a reality, McCluskie leased 10,000 acres near Lapra station in Ranchi district from the Raja of Ratu to make that dream a reality. Gera Roy quotes McCluskie, "Every Indian, whatever his station in life, can proudly say he has a piece of land and a hut, which he calls by the sweet word "Home" but alas, we who are bred and born in this country cannot say we have a home" (Gera Roy, 2021, p. 22)

3 Anglo-Indian bands used to play at events and private parties hosted by westernized English music lovers, in the twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack.

Anglo-Indians rarely owned land or homes because, as Valerie Anderson mentions, the 1790s ban on land ownership and rights of residence for Europeans and Eurasians hit Eurasians hard. “Europeans could always return to Europe to buy property, whereas Eurasians born and bred in India, and rarely as wealthy, were unlikely ever to do so.” (Anderson, 2011, p. 42). Perhaps this was done with the intent to urbanize the European and Eurasian population, but it only made it harder for the mixed-race community to purchase land. Later on, even though the ban was lifted, most Anglo-Indians could not afford to buy land owing to their meagre financial resources or the transferable nature of their jobs.

Alison Blunt also writes that, “Colonization and settlement at McCluskieganj enacted the homing desire of many Anglo-Indians who imagined themselves to be living in an imperial diaspora and sought to create, rather than return to a homeland” (Blunt, 2005, p. 103).

Gera Roy echoes Blunt by writing that McCluskie’s vision, and its execution, was born out of a desire for a *muluk* (homeland) or *desh* attached to birthplace. McCluskie did, however, make it clear that there was ‘no question of domiciliary rights; we belong to India and India to us’ (O’Brien, 2022, p. 32715). More recently, in February 2023, at the Tata Steel Bhubaneswar Literary Meet in Bhubaneswar, Mr Barry O'Brien, President-in-chief of the All India Anglo-Indian Association, wondered aloud, 'What if we had our own small state like Sikkim or Goa?' He smartly added a rider, 'with the initial infrastructure built by the government'.

Like McCluskie, and now O'Brien, so many 'Indian' groups across the country are raising the demand for statehood primarily based on language, culture, ethnicity, and religion. At the beginning of the 21st century, India witnessed the creation of three new states - Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand. There are groups across the country trying to forge new homelands like Khalistan in Punjab for the Sikhs, and there is a demand for a Koshal state in western Odisha. The Bodoland demand in Assam and the recent bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh into Telangana is evidence enough to suggest that not just Anglo-Indians but Indians of all castes, creeds and ethnicities are

constantly in search of a politically and geographically distinct *muluk* or *desh* for their particular group.

Laura Bear writes that Bengali railway workers complained that the problem with Anglo-Indians was that they had no *desh* and no country of origin (Bear, 2007, p. 11). However, Anglo-Indians are clear about their originary home because India is their home, for did they not come to be as an ethnic group *in* India? Our respondents are unanimous when they say, *"for Nationality, we always write Indian"*, and an Anglo-Indian never claims regional ethnic affiliation.

Blunt mentions that in the 1930s, community members initially identified themselves as belonging to a British fatherland and an Indian motherland. However, in a second phase up to and after Independence, Anglo-Indians leaders like Gidney and Anthony sought to bolster a national identification with India as a motherland. She mentions Maher writing in 1939, of generational differences where the older generation called England home, while the middle-aged realised that it was out of their reach but that the younger generation "feels India to be his homeland, is proud of her and loves her" (Blunt, 2005, p. 46) In 2006 (the year of Gera Roy's study), Anglo-Indians might have come across as 'not at home', but there is ample evidence, in 2023, that Anglo-Indians in Odisha have no such feelings of Britain as home and do not struggle to make themselves at home in the post-colonial Indian space.

Meghan Mills talks about the "tiresome" popular designation of the hybrid Anglo-Indians as a people of no fixed cultural address, which overlooks the reality of a community whose very roots remain in India. Through the course of colonialism, Anglo-Indian's attachment to India was far deeper than various long-serving Britishers could ever hope to be (Mills, 1998, p. 374). In the words of Frank Anthony, "The community is Indian. It has always been Indian. Above all, it has an inalienable Indian birthright" (Anthony, 1942). Mills also comments that the non-membership ascribed to Anglo-Indians is not duplicated in reference to Parsis, Armenians, Jews, the Chinese or Tibetans in India.

To quote Mills once again: "The methods of oral history force attention to the irregular yet normal factors of Indian colonial and post-colonial environments. The notion is

quickly dispelled of a psychically 'stateless' Anglo-Indian people, towards the realization of the Anglo-Indians' confirmed attachments to specific places in India, and when anthropology's gift of fieldwork is applied in investigations of the Anglo-Indian community, a very different analysis emerges of the community's character through time" (Mills, 1998, p. 372). The oral narratives of our respondents reveal that they definitely do not feel stateless and are very much at home. As one of our interviewees put it:

> We had a chance to leave. My mother's sister left with her family for England, but my dad said, 'In India, I was born, and in India, I will remain'. We are born here, and we will die here. (Female, Anglo-Indian, Teacher, b.1941)

Thus, India is home, the country of birth, marriage and death. The Anglo-Indians we interviewed made many statements in support of this, such as: 'Our bones must lie here in our hometown', or 'You must come home to die'. A retired gentleman had sold his land and left to live with his sons in another city. When he died, his family buried him there, and the conversation was about how he would have wanted to be buried here ("at home").

A woman who had travelled from Hyderabad, where she now lived, to be beside her husband's grave at the All Soul's Day service for the dead, returned because this was home, where her husband was buried and where she, too, hoped to be laid to rest one day. When a young man working in Bangalore passed away, his family, at great personal expense, brought his body back to his hometown to bury him in his grandmother's grave. Community members here are unanimous that India is home to the very end, and the thought of any other home has never crossed their minds.

In her study of Anglo-Indians in Asansol, Andrews raises an interesting question of whether Anglo-Indians were 'buying into' the nation by purchasing homes and whether they were increasingly thinking of themselves as citizens of India. She mentions that Anglo-Indians began to buy flats, or apartments from the late 1990s but our respondents told us that there was an Anglo-Indian colony outside the railway colony with families who owned their own homes even before Independence. Those who retired from the railways have bought homes, and even the younger generation, have invested in their own homes, which reflects their sense of belief in a settled and

continuing existence in the land of their birth, unlike, perhaps their counterparts in more cosmopolitan settings.

This is also quite unlike some Indian communities like the Telugu Jews who came to Telangana and Amravati around 300 years ago and settled in the Guntur and Krishna district. They believe that they are one of the lost tribes of Israel and cannot wait to go 'home'. None of them own houses.[4]

A HOME WITH A NAME

Like Rose Deane of Gera Roy's Kharagpur, most residences have names like Minstead, Mon Repos, Rose Cottage, Fearnleas Palace and many other quaint European names. Many buildings outside the railway colony remain, but their names have been lost to the ravages of time and failing memories. Our seniors, for example, spent some time in a focus group reminiscing and trying to remember Rose Cottage and who owned it. The next generation is showing signs of following the naming tradition, and one can spot an Arl Villa, Daph Villa, Barren House, Kimmel House and Uncle Tom's Cabin.

> Where the railway land ended, more Anglo-Indians lived: Callahan's (they had a beautiful marble table outside their front door), Littlewoods (now the BSNL Telephone Office), Fernandez, Francis, Martins, Ambrose, Thomas, Granny Moses and the Lovery's. Then there was the 'White House of Odisha' or Fearnleas Palace, with a frontal view like the US White House, owned by the Fernandez family. The road was lined with Anglo-Indian homes. (Male, Anglo-Indian Retired Teacher, b.1952)

The Fernandez home, Fearnleas Palace, housed on a big plot of land with exquisite French windows, manicured lawns, gardens, a fountain and a driveway, sadly no longer stands (a local developer built a tutoring centre). The home of the anglicized Muslim toastmaster of many Anglo-Indian weddings, Mr Wahab, is another structure that stands silent and decaying.[5]

4 Andhra Jews keep their chin up despite the long wait to go 'home' (2023, March 20). The Hindu. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/andhra-jews- keep-their-chin-up-despite-the-long-wait-to-go-home/article66537674.ece. Accessed on March 18,2023.

5 Mr Wahab was not Anglo-Indian but lived like one and was accepted as one. He was a toastmaster at several Anglo- Indian weddings. There was once a pillar near his house with the words E. P. Dennison and Shyam, marking a partnership venture between the two. The pillar was at the beginning of a pathway, and the area became known as Shyam's Gate. Shyam is rumoured to have swindled Dennison, and the business failed.

Both the stately homes of the Hardy family still stand. A member of the local population has claimed one and the second with the Church of St. John in the Wilderness, just behind it, with its once beautiful sun porch, now lies covered in vegetation and mud. The land now houses a temple on one side and a market complex on the other.

Another retired railway officer celebrating his sixtieth wedding anniversary in May 2023 said he could go to his brother in the U.K. or his son in Australia and celebrate his Diamond Jubilee. However, it would not be the same because he had been married here, and celebrations 'at home' would be extra special.

In the last four and a half decades, a large number of families have left Odisha for work-related opportunities in other Indian states, and only three families from the state, have emigrated for ‘better opportunities’ (as they put it) thus dispelling the notion that all people are looking for another home. From the findings of this research, we argue that the terms ‘*udbastu’* (uprooted) and 'not at home' do not apply to the community here. The railway colony may have been a temporary home, but it hardly mattered because this community could call the whole of India home. The current generation is comfortable with who they are and where they belong.

Caplan mentions how the issue of emigration looms large in the consciousness of Anglo-Indians in Madras city (Caplan, 2001, p. 134). In contrast, speaking to four families of seniors, who had been on vacation to England to visit their relatives, we were told that England might be an excellent place to visit but India was home. All four families were unanimous that they had never considered staying back in England. Another slightly younger man told us how he had used his family papers to go to England, but when he went there, he felt that India was more his home. This display of strong ties to India indicates a robust sense of citizenship and belonging of Anglo-Indians in Odisha, which may well differ from those in more cosmopolitan areas. In all our discussions, the participants reiterate that they are content with their lives despite social and cultural changes.

CHANGES

Our participants unanimously believed that the younger generation has lost out due to decreased social interaction and that they need to learn about the community's

traditions. Old photographs of birthdays show how the socializing patterns of the younger generation had also changed:

> When we were children, every family knew when someone's birthday was coming up, and we would get all excited, probably as much as the birthday boy or girl. Those were not the days of theme parties and goody bags, but the cake and a 'khoi' bag (piñata) filled with coins, whistles, balloons and small toys were good enough for us. Games like pinning the donkey's tail, musical chairs, treasure hunt and crossing the River Jordan kept us busy and happy. It was an unwritten rule that nobody would be left out, teenagers included (Male, Anglo-Indian, Retired Railwayman, b. 1953).

Unlike earlier, the current trend among Anglo-Indian families, is to celebrate their children's birthdays only with their classmates and school friends (non Anglo-Indians). Anglo-Indian children are often left out because they don't fit into a particular category. 'It is a girl's party', 'Only for kids below ten', or 'Only for family'. This change reduced socializing among the younger generation of Anglo-Indians so instead of sowing the seeds of friendship and camaraderie, the children were kept away from other children in their community, thus ensuring that there was limited bonding which bodes ill for the community's future.

Many age-old practices have changed; for example, our respondents spoke of how the church bells used to toll when somebody died, the news would spread of where the death had occurred, and the community would gather to condole the bereaved family. Community members took over the home, and the family would never be without company, for many would stay on to keep 'the night watch' with them.

Peter and Paul have been 'dressing' coffins (using cloth and foam to give the coffin a better appearance) for the last forty years and wonder who will do it after them. Strong young men were always around to shoulder the coffin to the hearse (a two-wheeled wooden carriage), which had to be pulled to the Church and back to the cemetery after the church service.

The motorized hearse must be called for because nobody knows who will do the duty as the attendance at funerals is not what it used to be. Most of our respondents feel that the old traditions have broken down though some are of the opinion that it is not easy for community members to get the day off to attend a funeral, as times have

changed. A discussion at a house meeting revealed how only two people were in attendance for the funeral of the late Mr Lawrence in 2021, while there were very few people present for the funeral of Mr Quentin Mullinex. For the funeral of a senior, Mrs Dawson, there was nobody to help dress the coffin.[6] The coffin had to be carried into Church by ladies because no gentlemen were present. (Male, Anglo-Indian, Real Estate Agent, b.1959)

CONCLUSION

The community in Odisha appears to be losing members at an alarming rate, with eight deaths in the last six months. What emerges is that the Railways have been an integral part of the community and its social life. With only two community members left working on the railways, the community lost the railway institute, severely impacting social interaction and cultural life. Because the community has no hall to congregate in, there is limited opportunity to meet, talk, and bond. Interaction or socializing is limited to extended family or small groups of relations, which has impacted the sense of community. There are also marked social and cultural changes in this once close-knit community.

There were high levels of social interaction earlier, but that practice has disappeared as even youngsters prefer to stay at home and do not socialize with each other. What is clear, though, is that the community in Odisha considers the state and India home and will live out their lives here though the younger generation may move out for a better quality of life and other opportunities. Anglo-Indians in Odisha, have essentially forged an Indian identity, though they aspire to remain distinct through the tales and memories of the past generations. Future research may productively explore whether the limited social interaction between community members has impacted their health and mental well-being.

6 The Christian Burial Society provides its members with a bare plywood coffin. Dressing the coffin would mean adding foam on the inside with white satin. The outside of the coffin is then covered with black satin to give the coffin a better look.

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