



*The following invited opinion piece, by three Anglo-Indian Studies scholars, appeared on 17 December 2019 in The Hindu, in response to the Government's move the previous month to revoke reservations for Anglo-Indian MPs and MLAs. It is republished here with permission from Srinivasan Ramani, Deputy National Editor of The Hindu, granted on 8 November 2024. The authors' original title was "Anglo-Indian Reserved Seats Still Very Much Needed" but The Hindu gave it the headline below. It may still be read online at: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/reservations-need-to-continue-for-anglo-indians/article30323462.ece>*

### RESERVATIONS NEED TO CONTINUE FOR ANGLO-INDIANS: THE COMMUNITY'S TROUBLES WERE HIGHLIGHTED IN A 2013 REPORT

Robyn Andrews, Uther Charlton-Stevens, Dolores Chew

The Union Cabinet approved a proposal on Wednesday to abolish the Constitutional provisions that guarantee the reservation of two seats for the Anglo-Indian community in the Lok Sabha, as well as seats in particular state assemblies. The decision not to renew this provision is based on the view that the community is doing well and does not need these political reservations. Our view is that this premise is inaccurate.

While census data is not available (as Anglo-Indians are no longer identified as a separate category in the ten yearly census survey) those working on the ground with the Anglo-Indian community, to ameliorate and improve the situation of its community members, have experience and evidence that tell a different story. And this is supported by the Government-commissioned Ministry of Minority Affairs report (2013) on the situation of Anglo-Indians.

The report, based on surveying Anglo-Indians in a number of cities, documents poor economic and social conditions for too many in the community. For example, it notes that 'unemployment is a common and major issue' in all the cities surveyed. It explicitly states and commends the assistance Anglo-Indians receive from MLAs, stating 'Representatives of the Anglo-Indian community in the State Assemblies and local leaders of the community are working hard for the welfare and progress of the community'.

The Anglo-Indian nominated seats in the Lok Sabha are a testament to the fair-minded and forward-looking vision of the founding fathers of the Republic of India, whose understanding of how to build a successful democracy has rather uniquely stood the test of time. Shri Frank Anthony made the case for special representation on behalf of the Anglo-Indian community. Gandhiji first agreed to Anthony's request for three seats on the Constituent Assembly, thereby giving Anglo-Indians a voice in the creation of India's constitution. However, this was only a chance for Anthony to plead his special case.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Iron Man of India, as Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Minority Rights in the constitution, proved to be the most directly responsible for the granting of these special concessions to Anglo-Indians' unique position as a thinly scattered All-India community. It was from the British that Anglo-Indians should have expected something, but from that quarter there was nothing. The magnanimity, generosity and farsightedness of great Indian statesmen like Sardar Patel saw the wisdom and the justice of supporting the Anglo-Indian claim, and recognising the positive role Anglo-Indians could play in the national debate.

Representing an All-India community, Anthony and his successors in the Lok Sabha have always used that voice to provide an independent national view of the interests of India as a whole. Even when supporting their own community's causes, particularly in areas like education, they have advanced the national interest and greatly benefited the country. The presence of Anglo-Indian MLAs in many state legislatures has similarly provided a constructive pro-national voice, less tied to parochialism or

provincialism, and emphatically against linguistic and religious separatism and similar narrowly communal interests.

In recent years, under its current President-in-Chief, Barry O'Brien, the All-India Anglo-Indian Association has continued to expand, creating and promoting positive political engagement and broad national perspectives, where there might otherwise be despondency and alienation. Other community organisations have been engaged in this work as well. It is in India's interests that the All-India Association and its branches continue to play a role in India's national life. It would be a great loss to the nation if these voices were to be further marginalised by hasty decisions or short-term political considerations to remove their representation from key positions.

While there certainly are success stories in the community the existence of many less successful ones must be acknowledged. Such a radical decision ought to be based on a thorough and comprehensive examination of the position of Anglo-Indians as a whole. It should also be noted that many individual success stories exist because of the work of dedicated community members, including those who serve or have served as MLAs and MPs, to improve the situation of their constituents as well as the wider community.

We would therefore conclude that the recognition of the need to continue reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes should be extended to the reserved seats for Anglo-Indians in Parliament and Legislative Assemblies. The costs to the government of this are minimal. But retaining the reserved seats would demonstrate the government's ability to respond to the needs of those among the most vulnerable in the nation. It would demonstrate recognition and support, whilst encouraging the community work being done on the ground. Moreover, it would be an added step in this direction for a member of the Anglo-Indian community to sit on the National Commission for Minorities.

A stronger, less socio-economically marginalised community would benefit the nation as a whole. And the community needs all the support it can get. Not less.

Signed, 8 December, 2019:

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