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WE'RE NOT WHAT YOU THINK: CONTESTING STEREOTYPES AND NEGOTIATING BELONGING IN THE LIVES OF ANGLO-INDIANS IN ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

This article, 'We're Not What You Think: Contesting Stereotypes and Negotiating Belonging in the Lives of Anglo-Indians in Odisha', explores how members of the Anglo-Indian community in Odisha challenge enduring stereotypes and negotiate a sense of belonging in contemporary India. While dominant narratives—shaped by colonial legacies, media portrayals, and scholarly generalizations—often homogenize the Anglo-Indian identity, this study offers a grounded, region-specific counter-narrative. Drawing on the works of Glenn D'Cruz, Dorothy McMenamin, and Megan Stuart Mills, as well as oral histories and ethnographic fieldwork in towns such as Jatni, Cuttack, and Bhubaneswar, the article examines how Anglo-Indians in Odisha resist reductive labels through professional employment contributions, cultural rootedness, and everyday acts of resilience. By interrogating the production of stereotypes in scholarship and media, and foregrounding lived experiences of otherness and inclusion, this article contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Anglo-Indian identity and belonging in postcolonial India.

INTRODUCTION

Stereotypes are broadly held yet oversimplified beliefs about particular groups of people or things. These generalizations, often shaped by assumptions, misconceptions, or inherited prejudices, obscure the complex realities of the individuals or communities they target. Stereotypes can pertain to aspects of identity such as gender, class, profession, nationality, ethnicity, or race. Though they may appear trivial or humorous, they frequently contribute to patterns of exclusion and discrimination.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a stereotype as “an often unfair and untrue belief that many people have about all people or things with a particular characteristic” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Hawes similarly notes that in all colonial societies, “both the rulers and the ruled were typecast in stereotyped roles and attitudes” (Hawes, 2006, p. 81).

This article examines stereotypes associated with the Anglo-Indian community, with a particular focus on Odisha. Drawing on the scholarship of post-colonial scholar Glenn D'Cruz and oral historian Dorothy McMenamin—both of Anglo-Indian descent—and Megan Stuart Mills, a non-Anglo-Indian researcher and commentator on Anglo-Indian issues, this study engages with dominant narratives of the community. Their insights form the basis for this study, which is further enriched by personal experience and oral narratives from the Anglo-Indian community in towns such as Jatni (Khurda Road), Cuttack, Bhubaneswar and Jharsguda. While existing literature is invaluable to broader understandings of the community, it offers general representations that, though analytically useful, may often overlook localized expressions of identity. In particular, the Anglo-Indians of Odisha have historically contested such stereotypes through their rootedness, resilience, and contributions to professional and cultural life. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, oral histories, and community interviews, this article explores how members of the community navigate cultural belonging and resist outdated labels and offers a nuanced account of Anglo-Indian identity in contemporary India.

METHODOLOGY

Unlike many researchers who encounter challenges when studying small or geographically dispersed ethnic minority groups, we faced no such limitations in our study of the Anglo-Indian community in Odisha. Apart from one family in Berhampur contacted over telephone, and one in Jharsguda, all our respondents were based in the twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, and the railway town of Jatni (Khurda Road). To the best of our knowledge, there are no Anglo-Indian families residing elsewhere in the state. We identified respondents based on their self-identification, following the approach recommended by the UK’s Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2003, cited in Font & Mendez, 2013) which emphasizes the importance of allowing

individuals to define their own group membership. All participants clearly identified themselves as 'Anglo-Indian'.

We employed qualitative methods grounded in oral testimony, triangulating community narratives with textual research and our own interpretive analysis. Primary data collection involved unstructured interviews, informal house meetings, and focus group discussions. These interactions were intentionally conversational, often initiated through shared anecdotes or culturally resonant prompts designed to encourage open and reflective dialogue.

In addition to gathering ethnographic observations, we conducted in-depth interviews to capture the lived experiences, memories, and perspectives of our respondents. Where direct quotations are included, pseudonyms have been used to protect participant confidentiality. Brief biographical details including pseudonyms are provided to offer contextual depth and support interpretive analysis.

NEGOTIATING BELONGING AND OTHERNESS: PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS

In the context of Odisha, many Anglo-Indians—including myself, as first author—have encountered the subtle, and at times overt, sense of being perceived as outsiders. One particular incident remains vivid in my memory. I was applying for a passport and needed supporting documentation from a local government office in Jatni—my hometown, commonly known as Khurda Road. Accompanied by my friend, I approached the counter. The office assistant glanced at me sceptically and, without hesitation, asked, "How can you prove you're Indian? How do I know you're from Odisha?" My friend tried to explain who we were and where we were from, but the official wouldn't budge. The conversation grew more heated, drawing attention from others in the building. Then, from inside his office, the officer-in-charge called out, "Bhikari Babu! Why are you harassing those young boys? I've seen them both playing cricket in the colony since they were kids. I know exactly why you're causing trouble—just because they haven't greased your palm. Give them what they need!"

Like the officer who recognized us for who we were, many locals familiar with the Anglo-Indian community often referred to us as *Sahibo*. It brings to mind a popular

refrain from the early 1990s in Jatni, a town that once had a vibrant Anglo-Indian presence: *“Sahibo pakhala khaibo?”*—“Sahib, will you eat *pakhala*?”[1]

What stands out in this phrase is the use of *Sahibo*—a word that marks the Anglo-Indian as someone set apart, someone perceived as different. And then comes the question—*pakhala khaibo*?—which implies that the person being addressed is unlikely to be familiar with or inclined to enjoy this deeply local, culturally rooted dish of cooked rice soaked in water overnight. It’s a playful phrase, perhaps even meant in jest, but it carries with it an assumption, a stereotype: that the Anglo-Indian is an outsider to local customs, even when they’ve lived in the same towns, walked the same roads, and grown up playing cricket in the same colonies. So yes, beneath the humour lies another quiet question: how do cultural assumptions shape belonging, and when does a light-hearted stereotype become a gentle reminder of one’s perceived “otherness”?

I had another encounter with this ‘othering’ when I transferred to St. Thomas’ Boys’ School (STS) in Kidderpore, Kolkata, following the completion of my ICSE at St. Vincent’s High and Technical School (SVHTS), a Christian Brothers' institution in Asansol. At SVHTS, I had built strong, lasting friendships with both Hindu and Muslim classmates—bonds that have continued well into adulthood. However, things were different at St. Thomas’. Early on, a Hindu classmate—someone who didn’t know me well—referred to me as a *tesu*/*tesva*.[2]

When I asked him what the word meant, he couldn’t explain it, but insisted it was the term that best described me as an Anglo-Indian. Curious and unsettled, I turned to a few other classmates for clarification. They confirmed that *tesva* was commonly used for members of the Anglo-Indian community, but like him, they were either reluctant or unable to define its meaning. It was my first real experience of being labelled as “other”—not through outright hostility, but through a casual, unexamined use of language that carried the weight of stereotype and social distance.

However, when I reunited with my schoolmates from St. Vincent’s in 2017—after almost twenty-six years—I was taken aback by a remark that caught me off guard. One of them said, *“Yeh bilkul badla nahin hain!”* (“He hasn’t changed at all.”), to which

another responded, *“Hamara Lyndon unke jaisa thaa hi nahin!”* (“Our Lyndon was never like them.”) At the time, none of our Anglo-Indian batch mates were present. I had always believed that we had genuinely imbibed the values taught to us by the Christian Brothers—to look beyond caste, colour, or creed. But looking back, I now wonder if there had been unspoken feelings even then—sentiments I had either ignored or was simply blind to. What struck me most was the contradiction: I had been accepted as part of the group, even embraced—but at the same time, my community was subtly excluded. In being “ours,” I was somehow distanced from “them.” That moment exposed the lingering power of stereotypes and social boundaries, quietly shaping interactions even among those who had shared classrooms, lessons, and formative ideals. It revealed how inclusion can be selective or conditional—where individual belonging does not necessarily translate into the acceptance of one’s broader community. This paradox encapsulates the ongoing negotiation of identity: the challenge of navigating multiple affiliations and reconciling a hybrid sense of self. More broadly, it illustrates how personal encounters often unearth the persistent weight of communal stereotypes and the subtle mechanics of exclusion that endure beneath the surface of apparent familiarity.

Building on this foundation, it becomes essential to explore how these stereotypes persist and evolve in contemporary contexts, influencing not only external perceptions but also internal community dynamics. By examining the work of scholars such as D'Cruz, McMenamin, and Mills, we gain valuable insights into the mechanisms through which stereotypes are maintained and challenged. This sets the stage for a deeper investigation into the lived experiences of Anglo-Indians themselves—how they navigate, resist, and redefine their identities amidst

INTERROGATING THE PRODUCTION OF STEREOTYPES IN SCHOLARSHIP AND MEDIA

In *Midnight’s Orphans*, D'Cruz (2006) draws attention to concerns raised at the Fourth International Anglo-Indian Reunion, held in Bangalore, regarding media portrayals of the Anglo-Indian community, which many felt perpetuated damaging caricatures. He emphasizes that these representations, though sometimes seen as humorous or benign, contribute to enduring public misconceptions. D'Cruz references Dolores

Chew’s critique of such portrayals, particularly of Anglo-Indian women, who are frequently reduced to the colonial stereotype of the “opportunistic whore” (D’Cruz, 2006, p.12). He also cites Frank Anthony’s (1969) long-standing frustration with the historical misrepresentation of the community, arguing that historians and social scientists have consistently overlooked the community’s heterogeneity and lived realities. D'Cruz’s critique is grounded in the cultural theories of Stuart Hall (1997) and Richard Dyer (1977), whose work on representation and identity explains how media images can entrench social exclusion. Drawing on Gist and Wright’s *Marginality and Identity* (1973), he also highlights how such stereotypes produce both external marginalization and internalized inferiority. Notably, D’Cruz articulates what he calls the “Seven Deadly Stereotypes” (D’Cruz, 2006, p. 29)—a recurring set of reductive images that continue to frame Anglo-Indians as mimics, moral deviants, racial pariahs, or social failures.

Similarly, Dorothy McMenamin (2011) builds on these critiques by examining five core stereotypes commonly associated with Anglo-Indians: that they are fun-loving and academically lax; morally questionable (particularly women); socially insular; employed predominantly in Government sectors like the Railways or Customs; and descended from European military men. While she dismisses the first two as inaccurate—particularly when viewed through culturally relative lenses—she acknowledges that the remaining three hold partial truths but are often negatively framed. Her approach critically interrogates the rigidity of ethnic characterizations and emphasizes how stereotypes are filtered through cultural misunderstanding and entrenched bias.

Megan Mills, in a two-part article published in *The International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies* (1996), provides a complementary but distinct perspective. She argues that academic discourse itself has historically contributed to the entrenchment of Anglo-Indian stereotypes, often recycling colonial frameworks without critical reflection. Mills also critiques journalistic and popular media portrayals, which, through sensationalism or unexamined tropes, reinforce simplistic narratives that obscure the community's complexities (1996, p. 31).

Drawing on Lieberson (1985), Mills notes that stereotypes are difficult to dislodge, even when contradicted by evidence. Citing McNeill (1986), she identifies the psychological and social damage these myths inflict, while also advocating for more affirming, accurate representations rooted in the community’s own voices (p.31). Mills also challenges the often-repeated notion that Anglo-Indians suffer from identity confusion or harbour aspirations to ‘pass’ as European, arguing instead that many members of the community express confident assertions of belonging rooted in their hybrid heritage. Expanding on this, and drawing from Rex’s work on ethnicity, Mills identifies two critical dimensions in many ethnohistories: the claim to territory and the experience of migration (Mills, 1998, p. 374). These themes are particularly relevant to the Anglo-Indian context, where the community has often been misrepresented as lacking a true sense of homeland or reluctant to embrace India as home. Some of our respondents echoed this dynamic, noting that they are frequently asked where they are ‘originally’ from—implying that India cannot be their place of origin. Such questions reflect and reinforce a lingering stereotype: that Anglo-Indians are culturally adrift, neither fully Indian nor fully ‘other.’

This rejection of imposed binaries is particularly evident among contemporary Anglo-Indians in regions like Odisha, where individuals articulate a strong sense of identity that embraces both their Indian and Anglo-Indian cultural affiliations. Here, Mills’s theoretical critique resonates vividly with lived experience. Community events, school involvement, and the preservation of distinct Anglo-Indian customs—such as weddings, cuisine, and Christian festivities—demonstrate a self-assured identity that resists reductive labelling. Rather than being passive subjects of stereotype, Anglo-Indians in Odisha are narrating their own stories, articulating a hybrid identity that is both rooted and dynamic.

Community events, school involvement, and the preservation of distinct Anglo-Indian customs—such as weddings, cuisine, and Christian festivities—demonstrate a self-assured identity that refuses to be boxed into externally defined labels. Rather than being passive subjects of stereotype, Anglo-Indians in Odisha are narrating their own stories, articulating a hybrid identity that is both Indian and distinctively Anglo-Indian. Together, these scholarly critiques and community affirmations not only expose the historical injustices faced by the community but also emphasize the importance of

reclaiming Anglo-Indian identity through authentic storytelling, rigorous scholarship, and empathetic representation.

In this convergence between scholarly analysis and community testimony, a clearer picture of resistance emerges. These critiques and affirmations together not only expose the historical injustices faced by the community but also emphasize the importance of reclaiming Anglo-Indian identity through authentic storytelling, rigorous scholarship, and empathetic representation.

This ongoing contestation reveals that Anglo-Indian identity is not merely inherited but continually reshaped—through pride, resilience, and a deep connection to both heritage and homeland. The Anglo-Indians of Odisha, exemplify this dynamic resistance to stereotype, offering living proof that cultural identity can flourish in complexity, defying the narrow frameworks historically imposed upon them.

While much existing literature critiques persistent stereotypes of Anglo-Indians at the national and global levels, it is equally crucial to explore how these narratives function within specific regional contexts. The next section turns to the Anglo-Indian community in Odisha, where a markedly distinct reality emerges—one that actively contests and complicates commonly held assumptions. Through oral testimonies and lived experiences, it becomes evident that many of the tropes identified by D'Cruz, McMenamin, and Mills—such as those of mimicry, moral laxity, or marginality—are either rejected or reimagined in this regional setting. This divergence underscores the importance of attending to local variations and community-specific expressions of identity, which offer powerful counter-narratives to the homogenizing effects of dominant stereotypes. The following discussion revisits several of these key stereotypes—not to reinforce them, but to critically assess how they are engaged with, transformed, or subverted by Anglo-Indians in Odisha, whose voices and practices reveal a far more nuanced reality than the reductive images perpetuated in dominant discourse.

Anglo-Indians did not make use of education to better their circumstances due to being perceived as indolent and overly focused on enjoyment.

The stereotype of Anglo-Indians as uneducated and overly reliant on pensions, with little drive for self-improvement, has been increasingly disputed particularly in regions like Odisha. McMenamin notes that, despite enduring stereotypes, Anglo-Indians have consistently valued education and professional advancement. In *Raj Days to Downunder*, all 24 interviewees—including Anglo-Indians, domiciled Europeans, and a Goan—had completed at least high school, with many employed as doctors, engineers, teachers, and nurses. Similarly, the contributors to *CTR Chronicles*—most of whom are Anglo-Indian—demonstrate high levels of literacy across the diaspora.

While some Anglo-Indians under British rule did not pursue higher education—due in part to access to secure jobs without formal qualifications—many have since achieved professional success or received support through community organizations. Reunion observations further suggest that Anglo-Indians who remained in post-independence India are often highly educated and socially mobile. As McMenamin emphasizes, their well-known enjoyment of music and dance has never come at the expense of education.

Cheryl Ann-Shivan in her review of *The Anglo-Indians: A 500-Year History* agrees with the observation made by the authors, that many Anglo-Indians, especially those in railway jobs, historically lacked a long-term vision and relied on pensions (2017, p.71). However, this view doesn't reflect the reality in Odisha, where, Anglo-Indians have entered diverse fields such as education and other professions, demonstrating ambition, adaptability, and a strong commitment to self-improvement.

A random sample of respondents in Odisha revealed professionals such as engineers, teachers, nurses, and stenographers, many of whom had completed high school. Additionally, several prominent figures from the community, including A.K. Barren (IAS), former Chief Secretary of Odisha, Prof. Michael Vanjour, Former Dean, XLRI (Xavier Labour Relations Institute), Mrs. Olga Littlewood, the first teacher and Principal of a well-known school in the capital, and Dr. Stanislaus Ambrose, a renowned physician, and Mr. Float, the personal pilot of a former Chief Minister of the state, stand as proof of the community's academic and professional success. These individuals

and others challenge the outdated stereotype of Anglo-Indians as uneducated and lacking professional ambition.[3]

Even studies like those by Gaikwad (1967) and Rochelle Almeida (2015) highlight high literacy rates and the community's linguistic prowess, particularly in English. Despite some individuals facing academic challenges, the vast majority of Anglo-Indians have demonstrated resilience in education and continue to debunk assumptions about their lack of professional success or intellectual capacity.

In one of our house meetings, one of our respondents, Jennifer, whose parents once ran a school in a now upmarket locality in Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Odisha, responded to the question of Anglo-Indians not using education to better their circumstances:

> Our mum and dad bought the school from Nancy and Rudolph Rebeiro and ran it well. Nancy's dad Eric Francis had all sorts of business ventures and also ran a taxi business in Odisha. The Kennedy family also ran their own taxi service. In Cuttack, the Sharad's ran their own school quite successfully. Our mum Olga Littlewood was the founding Principal of Buxi Jagabandhu English Medium School, one of the largest and most well-known schools in the state. Mrs Mullins was the Principal of Father Pascal's school (now Cambridge School, Cuttack),[4] and Mr. Fernandes was the Principal of Stewart School, and the former Chief Minister's uncle was a student of his. Both these schools are prestigious schools in the state and most of the foundation teachers were Anglos. If we were not literate how that could even be possible? (Female, Anglo-Indian, b.1948)

Delicia who passed away in June 2024, and was also present said:

> Yes we were once a fun loving people. We laughed and socialized with one another and always came together to have fun, play and dance. What's wrong with that? Our parents worked hard, times were hard so that was the only way to live and mix. The entertainment and dancing at the institute and all the lovely picnics on the sea-beach at Puri or visits to the zoo at Barang. Life was to be lived and enjoyed. Nowadays, all communities enjoy themselves in their own way. Can you criticize them for having a good time? (Female, Anglo-Indian, b.1945)

All the Anglo-Indians that we interviewed were of the opinion that Anglo-Indians had, at one time, availed themselves of the easy path to assured employment, and since these jobs often did not require a university degree or even finishing school, the misconception that the community is uneducated persists. This belief endures for three

main reasons: Firstly, it stems partly from the writings of post-colonial scholars, who have often neglected the community's current situation. Their assessments are most likely based on earlier research that may have focused on less-educated groups within the community while overlooking the progress made by successive generations. Secondly, Gaikwad (1967, p.148) suggests that this pattern stems from a customary practice within the Anglo-Indian community, where parents often did not—nor were they expected to—contribute financially to their children's marriages or upkeep. This was especially true for sons, leading many young men to leave school prematurely in order to earn a livelihood and start a family (Thomas & Sthitaprajna, 2023). Thus, they chose employment over education. Thirdly, Megan Mills (1998) argues that the dominant culture's strong emphasis on formal education has contributed to the stereotype of Anglo-Indians as uneducated. This perception, however, fails to acknowledge the community's substantial contributions to the development and dissemination of English education in Odisha.

The Anglo-Indian community in Odisha has demonstrated high literacy rates, and this educational advantage—combined with fluency in English—has significantly contributed to their economic mobility within the state. Notable individuals exemplifying this upward trajectory include Gavin Rebeiro, Assistant General Manager at Viatris; Dominic Barren, Senior Manager of Administration (Chairman's Office) at the Calcutta Electric Supply Company; Wayne Unger, Vice-President of Learning and Development at Synchrony Financial; Nigel Kennedy, Services Head of Client Operations at Infosys, Ireland; Stafford Redden, author associated with Cambridge International and London Edexcel examinations; Lorraine Collison, former Senior Vice President at HSBC and now Senior Site Lead at Uber Systems Pvt. Ltd.; and Clyde Barren, General Manager of the Sapphire Plaza group of hotels. Many members of the community have also pursued careers in higher education and contributed meaningfully as teachers, lecturers, and professors. Yet, despite these accomplishments, the intellectual depth of the community is rarely acknowledged. That said, some Anglo-Indian educators in Odisha have been recognized by their respective institutions for their contributions and excellence in the field of education.[5]

Clifford, another one of our interviewees points out:

> The Stewart School at Cuttack is an Anglo-Indian school.[6] The one at Cuttack still says so on its website. St. Joseph's Convent Cuttack was once a European school and admitted Anglo-Indians. St. Thomas School in Kidderpore which was established in the 1700s, the La Martiniere schools at Lucknow and Calcutta, St. Paul's Darjeeling, Dr. Graham's in Kalimpong, Lavinia House, Welland Gouldsmith, Pratt Memorial, St. James' Bishop Cotton in Shimla, The Lawrence Public Schools and the Oakgrove School in Mussoorie, are all schools with a strong Anglo-Indian connection. Now, if people still say these things what can one do? (Male, Anglo-Indian, b.1938)

The lifestyle of Anglo-Indians, particularly that of the women, was often characterized by a relaxed approach to morality.

Otto (2010, p. 203) refers to Caplan's description of the persistent stereotype: "Among other things, she [the Anglo-Indian woman] was seen as silly, brainless, fast, loose and shameless." As Anglo-Indian women culturally identified with the British, they were perceived as a threat to British prestige. For Indians, this very affiliation severed any sense of kinship. Indian nationalists believed that authentic Indianness had to emerge through the women of their own communities, "who could still claim to symbolize an unpolluted, uncolonized and somewhat spiritual purity" (2010, p.200). Anglo-Indian women, however, were viewed as a threat to the moral codes of both the British and Indians, as they transgressed the expected social roles assigned by each.

Otto further observes that Indian nationalists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries often imagined the nation as being reborn through an uncolonized feminine ideal (p.201). The figure of *Mother India* represents the most extreme form of this ideology—a symbolic deification of the nation grounded in notions of spiritual purity, domesticity, and resistance to colonial contamination. In contrast, the Anglo-Indian woman came to embody everything this nationalist ideal rejected: modern, visible in public life and the workplace, dressed in Western attire, and actively participating in social spaces such as dance halls and clubs. Her very visibility and modernity served to reinforce prevailing stereotypes of moral laxity and cultural impurity, further alienating her from both British and Indian nationalist frameworks.

Similarly, McMenamin (2011, p.41) concludes that Anglo-Indian women were often perceived as 'immoral' or 'lax' by Indian society because their clothing and lifestyles diverged sharply from dominant cultural norms. However, such judgments overlooked the fact that most Anglo-Indian women adhered to conventional Christian values consistent with European moral frameworks. Even the British held ambivalent views—seeing Anglo-Indians as Indians mimicking British ways, rather than recognizing their distinct Christian identity and cultural affinity with the colonial establishment.

When we raised the issue of stereotypes related to sexual permissiveness or relaxed morality, the Anglo-Indians we interviewed unanimously rejected this portrayal. They emphasized that Anglo-Indian parents—particularly fathers—were traditionally very strict and protective of their daughters. It was common for a young man to require a father's permission to court a girl, and outings were typically chaperoned by a family member. According to our respondents, the roots of this stereotype lay not in actual behaviour, but in the community's historical adoption of Western clothing—such as frocks, jeans, and skirts. At a time when most Indian women adhered to conservative norms of dress, these visible differences attracted moralizing scrutiny that often had little to do with conduct.

Furthermore, like McMenamin, our respondents pointed out that conservative attitudes among sections of the Hindu and Muslim majority, particularly their disapproval of intermarriage, contributed to the view of Anglo-Indians—especially women—as morally suspect or socially ambiguous. Notably, in present-day Odisha, almost all Anglo-Indian women (with few exceptions) wear traditional Indian attire such as the *salwar-kameez* or *sari*, while Western-style clothing is now widely worn by women from the majority communities in both rural and urban setting in Odisha. This reversal highlights the shifting cultural norms and underscores how earlier moral judgments were rooted more in visible difference than in actual conduct.

Daffodil, a retired railway employee says:

> It is difficult to recognize an Anglo-Indian woman, these days, while women from other communities wear frocks and skirts, our girls are in salwar suits. Gone are the days when families would rush to Calcutta, to the tailors at Elliot Road, Ripon Street and Free School Street to stitch dresses for their daughters. Long hours were spent poring through

> catalogues and dress designs. The women these days are so modern and fashionable. Almost all the young women wear short, trendy frocks and skirts, whereas our girls dress so modestly almost to the point of covering themselves up. (Female, Anglo-Indian, b.1941)

As researchers and observers, we concur with McMenamin that the first two stereotypes—particularly those concerning indolence and moral laxity—are largely unfounded. The second stereotype, which casts Anglo-Indian women as morally lax, appears especially outdated in the contemporary context. In present-day India, it is increasingly difficult to identify Anglo-Indian women based on appearance or dress, as Western-style clothing is now widespread across all communities and no longer serves as a cultural marker. Among younger generations—many of whom lack direct exposure to the Anglo-Indian community—such views are even less likely to persist. With no visible indicators to single out Anglo-Indian women, the continued existence of this stereotype appears increasingly untenable. Crucially, such judgments are rarely, if ever, applied to Anglo-Indian men, underscoring the gendered nature of how morality is constructed and enforced. This disparity reveals that the stereotype is not only outdated but also shaped by deeply ingrained patriarchal norms.

India is not 'Home'

Mills mentions Rex's (1998) analysis of two recurring themes in ethnohistorical accounts—the assertion of territorial rights and the experience of migration (1998, p.374)—to challenge reductive portrayals of Anglo-Indians. She notes that the tiresome stereotype of Anglo-Indians as culturally rootless or lacking a fixed identity fails to acknowledge the community's deep-rooted connection to India. Throughout colonial rule, Anglo-Indians often displayed a more enduring attachment to India than many long-serving British officials, and this bond has persisted well beyond Independence. Remarkably, even those who left India in the 1940s or 1960s and never returned continue to maintain a strong psychological connection to their Indian origins. As Mills notes, Anglo-Indians exemplify how territorial ties are not necessarily bound to physical presence; rather, emotional and cultural attachments to place can endure over time and resurface with particular intensity at different historical moments (p. 377). These themes are further developed by Gera Roy and Andrews (2021) in their respective studies of Anglo-Indian settlements in Kharagpur and Asansol.

Roy highlights the community's historical lack of a traditional homeland in the Indian context. She discusses E. T. McCluskie's initiative to address this absence by leasing land in Ranchi to establish a self-contained Anglo-Indian settlement, McCluskieganj. McCluskie's poignant observation, "Every Indian... can proudly say he has a piece of land and a hut... but alas, we who are bred and born in this country cannot say we have a home," underscores the profound sense of rootlessness and displacement that many Anglo-Indians experience (Gera Roy, 2021, p. 22). This statement encapsulates the community's complex relationship with belonging, shaped by a colonial legacy and continued struggles for spatial and cultural recognition in postcolonial India.

According to Valerie Anderson, Anglo-Indians rarely owned land or property, a pattern rooted in a ban introduced in the 1790s that restricted land ownership and residency rights for both Europeans and Eurasians. This policy had a lasting and significant impact on the community, limiting their ability to accumulate wealth or establish long-term settlements. While Europeans retained the option of returning to Europe to acquire property, Eurasians—most of whom were born and raised in India and often had limited financial resources—were unlikely to do so. This disparity further entrenched their lack of access to property ownership and economic mobility (Anderson, 2011). This policy may have originally been intended to urbanize the European and Eurasian populations by limiting their ties to rural land, but in practice, it significantly hindered the mixed-race community's ability to acquire property. Even after the ban was lifted, most Anglo-Indians across India remained unable to purchase land—largely due to limited financial means and the transferable nature of their employment, which often required frequent relocation. As a result, homeownership was neither practical nor prioritized for many.

Andrews (2021) examines a more recent narrative of belonging, noting that from the late 1990s, Anglo-Indians in Asansol began purchasing flats, possibly signalling a shift toward national integration and rootedness. However, evidence from Odisha complicates this timeline. Our respondents noted that Anglo-Indians in towns like Jatni, Jharsuguda, and some in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, had owned homes well before Independence. Retired railway workers and younger community members alike have continued to invest in property, suggesting a strong sense of permanence and identity tied to their birthplace—perhaps more so than their counterparts in larger urban

centres (Thomas & Sthitaprajna, 2023). This contrasts with the narrative seen in other regions, where the Anglo-Indian community has historically struggled with the sense of owning property or being seen as rooted in the local context. The evidence from Odisha reveals a more longstanding and entrenched connection to the land and the community, reinforcing a deeper sense of belonging and permanence that has been present long before the shift noted in Andrews' study.

Odisha presents a notable exception to this trend. Contrary to the widespread assumption of landlessness among Anglo-Indians, both anecdotal accounts and emerging research suggest that many Anglo-Indian families in the state historically owned substantial tracts of land and property—particularly outside the railway colony. This pattern of ownership has continued into the present. Most members of the current generation in Odisha are homeowners, often residing in ancestral houses passed down through generations.

This pattern of sustained property ownership among Anglo-Indians in Odisha not only challenges the commonly held narrative of Anglo-Indians as transient or rootless, but also reflects a deeper degree of social integration, permanence, and local rootedness unique to the Anglo-Indian experience in Odisha.

Despite their Indian birth, cultural hybridity, and longstanding presence in the subcontinent, Anglo-Indians were implicitly excluded from this vision of a *Hindu Rashtra*, as they could not fulfill the triadic criteria of *rashtra* (nation), *jati* (race), and *sanskriti* (civilization). While it may not be accurate to attribute direct consequences to Savarkar's writings alone, thinkers and ideologues of his ilk likely contributed to an intellectual and political climate that fostered fear, exclusion, and uncertainty among minority communities—Anglo-Indians included. Their articulation of a narrowly defined national identity may have deepened the cultural and political alienation felt by the community, prompting many to question their place within a rapidly transforming Indian nation-state.

Post-independence, however, India, increasingly reflects a more inclusive and pluralistic ethos, where cultural and religious diversity is both acknowledged and celebrated. Our respondents consistently noted that this spirit of inclusivity is most

evident in present-day Odisha, where they report feeling a strong sense of belonging—even if some forms of marginalization persist beneath the surface. The widespread celebration of festivals such as Christmas, marked by public displays of festive lights and decorations, illustrates a growing cultural openness. Likewise, Anglo-Indian families—including my own [the first author]—actively participate in Hindu festivals like Diwali, lighting *diyas* and embracing the communal joy that the festival brings. Such reciprocal engagement highlights a broader conception of Indian identity, one that is expansive enough to accommodate a multitude of traditions, faiths, and cultural expressions. The blending of these practices in everyday life signals a national identity that is far more dynamic and inclusive than the rigid, exclusionary frameworks of the past. This evolving cultural landscape not only fosters a deeper and more complex sense of belonging for minority communities like the Anglo-Indians but also affirms their place within the diverse tapestry of the Indian nation (and Odisha).

While Gera Roy’s study of Kharagpur suggested that Anglo-Indians might have once appeared as "not at home" in India, recent evidence from 2024 indicates a marked shift in this perception, at least in Odisha. Anglo-Indians in Odisha, appear never to have viewed Britain as home, nor do they struggle to find a sense of belonging in postcolonial India (Thomas & Sthitaprajna, 2023). As Frank Anthony, a prominent figure in the community, once affirmed, “The community is Indian. It has always been Indian. Above all, it has an inalienable Indian birthright” (Anthony, 1969, p. 150). Today, members of the Anglo-Indian community in Odisha are unequivocal in their belief that India is their true home. Many of them state that the very idea of living elsewhere has never even crossed their minds, reflecting a deep sense of rootedness and pride in their Indian identity (Thomas & Sthitaprajna, 2023).

The Cocktail

As observed earlier, Mills challenges the common assumption that Anglo-Indians experience identity confusion or aspire to ‘pass’ as European. In a similar vein, Paul Spickard, in his afterword to Mixed Race in Asia, describes Anglo-Indians as a "prototypical long-term community that possesses an enduring mixed identity" (2019, p. 242). He notes that, in their efforts to assimilate culturally, Anglo-Indians adopted British customs, values, attire, language, food, and religion, which allowed them to occupy intermediate positions within the colonial hierarchy. However, despite these

efforts to align with Britishness, they were ultimately denied full inclusion within the British racial and cultural framework. This rejection, Spickard argues, fostered a complex sense of identity—leaving Anglo-Indians caught between two worlds: not fully accepted by the British, nor entirely integrated into Indian society (2019, p. 239). This liminal position has profoundly shaped their enduring mixed identity and continues to influence their social and cultural standing in postcolonial contexts such as Odisha.

When we explored how Anglo-Indians in India viewed themselves, particularly regarding their mixed-race identity, Nikita, the child of an Anglo-Indian mother and a Hindu (Oriya) father, agreed to an interview and said: “Are you guys really interested in me? I am a cocktail” (Female, b. 1990). This immediately recalls Megan Mills’ reference to Robertson Davies and the early “Canadian cocktail,” a blend of “equal parts Scottish and Irish, a sprinkling of French or German, and a dash of native Iroquois or Ojibwa” (Mills, 1998).

Historically and Constitutionally, Anglo-Indian identity was traced through the male line, meaning children of Anglo-Indian men and non-Anglo-Indian women were more readily accepted into the community, whereas children of Anglo-Indian women and non-Anglo-Indian men were often met with ambiguity or contestation. The term “Anglo-Indian” is officially defined in Article 366(2) of the Indian Constitution as “A person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is a native of India.” This legal definition underscores the patrilineal basis of Anglo-Indian identity, which has historically influenced community membership and social acceptance.

This patrilineal definition has had tangible implications for self-identification, social acceptance, and legal recognition within the community. For children born to Anglo-Indian mothers and non-Anglo-Indian fathers, their identity often becomes a negotiation between their heritage and societal perceptions. While contemporary attitudes within the community are increasingly embracing broader and more inclusive understandings of Anglo-Indian identity, the historical constitutional definition continues to influence how belonging is defined and experienced, especially in smaller towns or states like Odisha.

As family structures become more fluid and inter-community marriages increase, there is a growing call within the Anglo-Indian community to redefine what it means to be Anglo-Indian—not solely through lineage, but through shared culture, values, and lived experience. Like Nikita, Rahul, the son of an Anglo-Indian mother and a Hindu (Telugu) father, reflects on his mixed heritage: "I am a mixture. My father is a Hindu with different values and culture than my mum" (male, b. 1998). His identity, like that of many young Anglo-Indians today, reflects a contemporary Indian hybridity that embraces multiple cultural influences. This blending of backgrounds, values, and practices creates a unique sense of belonging that is neither fully aligned with one identity nor completely disconnected from the other. It exemplifies how modern Anglo-Indians, in Odisha, navigate their multifaceted heritage, drawing on both their colonial past and Indian present to shape a hybrid identity that resonates with the diverse fabric of contemporary Indian society.

CONCLUSION

Through oral histories, everyday practices, and vibrant community life, Anglo-Indians in Odisha actively resist reductive stereotypes—demonstrating cultural fluency, social integration, and a resilient pride in their distinctiveness. The collective scholarship of Glenn D'Cruz, Dorothy McMenamin, and Megan Mills underscores the urgency of dismantling long-standing colonial stereotypes that have misrepresented and marginalized the community. D'Cruz's dissection of the "Seven Deadly Stereotypes," McMenamin's historical and cultural contextualization, and Mills' contemporary critique all reveal how literature, media, and even academic discourse have failed to capture the nuanced realities of Anglo-Indian life.

Against this backdrop, oral histories from towns like Jharsuguda, Khurda Road, Bhubaneswar, and Cuttack reveal a community that defies the tropes of mimicry, moral ambiguity, and cultural detachment. Instead, Anglo-Indians in Odisha assert a strong sense of belonging, resilience, and rootedness. Through community events, school participation, and the preservation of customs—such as weddings, cuisine, and Christian celebrations—they affirm an identity that is proudly Anglo-Indian and unmistakably Indian.

Rather than being passive recipients of imposed labels, Anglo-Indians are narrating their own stories and reclaiming their hybrid identity through both lived experience and cultural expression. This process of self-definition is amplified by rigorous scholarship and empathetic representation, which together expose historical injustices and foster greater understanding.

Outdated perceptions of Anglo-Indians as uneducated, pension-dependent, or rootless are increasingly being challenged—especially in Odisha, where the community has made significant strides in education, engineering, healthcare, aviation, and beyond. Their evolution from a historically "railway" identity to a respected "teacher class" reflects adaptability, professionalism, and social contribution. Today's Anglo-Indians are not a vanishing remnant but a vital part of India's social fabric—rooted, resilient, and redefining their place in a diverse and changing nation.

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NOTES

[1] Pakhala – a traditional Odia dish of fermented rice and water – reflects the rich cultural identity of Odisha. Celebrated on *Pakhala Divas* (March 20), it is a probiotic-rich, summer-friendly meal made with rice, curd, cucumber, cumin, fried onions, and mint, often served with roasted veggies or fried fish.

[2] Tesva/Tesu- The first author has often heard this derogatory term being used for members of the community during his education at St. Thomas' Boys' School, Kidderpore, Calcutta. Established on 21 December 1789, it is one of the oldest schools in India.

[3] For more information on the community in Odisha see this article: https://odishapostepaper.com/edition/5284/orissapost/page/7

[4] Mrs. Mullins was the wife of Commandant Mullins of the Orissa Military Police (OMP) at Cuttack. The OMP is now the Odisha State Armed Police (OSAP). Commandant Mullins often loaned difficult to come by musical instruments like saxophones and trumpets to Anglo-Indian youngsters, to play at the dances at the railway institute. Cambridge School is now one of the most reputed schools in Odisha. Daphne Rebeiro was the 1st teacher.

[5] The contribution of the late Mrs. Olga Littlewood, the 1st Principal of Buxi Jagabandhu English Medium School was posthumously acknowledged at the jubilee celebrations of the school. Her photograph is prominently displayed in the school and on its website. Mrs. Marlyne Culpeper, a former teacher of Kendriya Vidyalaya is a national level awardee of the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan. Mrs. Theodora Fernandez has received the 'Best Teacher' award from KIIT International School, Bhubaneswar on multiple occasions.

[6] Established in 1882, by Dr. William D. Stewart a Civil Surgeon based at Cuttack. It is an Anglo-Indian School and its Principal is the State's only non-official representative on the Inter-State Board for Anglo-Indian Education.