



FALLACIES AND REALITIES OF THE ANGLO-INDIAN STEREOTYPE:
VERIFICATION THROUGH 'OUR' PRIMARY SOURCE, NAMELY *RAJ DAYS TO
DOWNUNDER: VOICES FROM ANGLO INDIA TO NEW ZEALAND*, AND TO
SOME EXTENT CTR CHRONICLES.

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n.b: Due to earthquake 4.9.2010 in my hometown, the original presentation required clarification of some ideas. These ideas are expanded and made more explicit here, although this remains a work in progress.

This paper is a work in progress relating to the lifestyles of Anglo Indians prior to 1947. It examines and evaluates the negative connotations associated with the stereotypes commonly employed to describe Anglo Indians in the context of Indian multicultural society. This is in contrast to usual evaluation of the community in isolation, either by its own members or via the lens of British or Indian writers because each group inevitably perceives Anglo Indian lifestyles subjectively through their own values. It is through understanding Indian traditional societies and their effects on the British in India that the reasons for the derogatory connotations are unveiled, and it is through these perspectives that a stereotype can be considered a fallacy or reality. There are no simple truths about the rights and wrongs of differing cultures, and the perceptions of fallacy and reality are subject to varying cultural values and beliefs.

Increasingly Anglo Indians are recording autobiographical and family life stories, and these provide valuable detailed insider descriptions of AI lives. These accounts, and particularly the life stories recorded and edited in my recent publication *Raj Days to Downunder* are utilized here to assess the stereotypes.[1] I believe this type of research is valuable because of the rise in multicultural societies around the world today, and the Anglo Indian community provides a template relating to integration, or

otherwise, of mestizo groups into cultures that uphold differing values.

FIVE MAIN STEREOTYPES TO BE CONSIDERED:

(1) Anglo Indians failed to take advantage of education to improve their lot because they were lazy, fun loving people.

(2) The Anglo Indian lifestyle, especially that of the women, was one of lax morality. [This label of 'laxness' does not affix to males involved in such laxity!]

(3) Socially Anglo-Indians tended to 'stick to themselves' and not mix.

(4) During British rule Anglo Indians were mainly employed in the railways, customs and telegraph.

(5) Male ancestors of AIs were European, most frequently British ex-army men who married 'local' women.

The first two stereotypes will be shown to be fallacious, although the second is not necessarily fallacious as seen through the eyes of traditional Indian society. The latter three stereotypes are accurate realities, but what I aim to show is why these have usually been characterized in a derogatory light.

(1) ANGLO-INDIANS FAILED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EDUCATION TO IMPROVE THEIR LOT BECAUSE THEY WERE LAZY, FUN LOVING PEOPLE.

- In *Raj Days to Downunder*, from the random sample of 14 Anglo Indians, 9 Domiciled Europeans and one Goan, interviewed in New Zealand, all 24 had attained, at least, school leaving certificates. Two men had qualified as engineers, one was an electrician, and two were land-owing farmers. Six men, including the husbands of two women, had qualified as doctors whilst their fathers had worked either as train drivers or in customs or telegraph. From a sample of nine women, two were teachers, four were nurses and three were stenographers. This provides evidence that from a random sample, everyone interviewed had completed high school.
- Contributors to CTR chronicles: The majority of these authors are AI and obviously literate, whether living in India or not. Details not available.

- As in all communities, some Als did not perform well at school. Several researchers point out that this was due to the fact that Als were guaranteed good jobs by the British, usually with accommodation, thus high school education was not an imperative. Many of these individuals 'slipped through the gaps' and are now assisted by charities, including CTR.
- It is clearly evident that large numbers of Als who remained within the independent sub-continent were highly educated and successful, as obvious at this Reunion, but no statistics available. (Await AI 'Count').
- Als are definitely a 'fun loving' group who enjoy dancing and singing, as is also obvious, but this was not enjoyed to the exclusion of schooling.
- In contrast to Europeans in their home countries and majority of ordinary Indians who maintained their own households, Als were often perceived as lazy because they were able to employ servants to undertake most usual household chores. This reputation for laziness was extended to schooling.

CONCLUSION (1.A):

My research and numerous autobiographers' accounts show that during the British period, the majority of Als took advantage of the good schools available, thereby providing evidence that the stereotype is a fallacy. [2] However, many Als took the easy route to guaranteed jobs which did not require higher education and some of these people 'slipped through the gaps.' Large numbers of this less educated group remained in India and scholars have subsequently surveyed them for anthropological research and analysis, thereby feeding the fallacious stereotype.[3] These poorer sections of the community have become more widely known compared to the hard working groups, and due to the work of charitable organizations for the poor AI groups, their profile has been further publicized. These visible poor remnants of a bygone age provide fodder for criticism by anti-colonial scholars, giving rise to the fallacy Als did not value nor take advantage of education.

CONCLUSION (1.B):

Als have been criticized for being lazy because they employed household servants, but this was normal practice for the upper and middle classes, both

Indians and European in India. Biographical accounts of AIs demonstrate that due to their good lifestyles they could either afford to employ servants, or servants were provided as part of their employment conditions. Nevertheless, when these AIs migrated to their new home countries, they worked hard, performed all their own household chores and integrated well into their new home societies.

(2) AI LIFESTYLE, PARTICULARLY OF THE WOMEN, WAS ONE OF LAX MORALITY.

- Blair Williams and other male contributors to *Women of Anglo India* are appalled by stereotypical reputation of lax morality of AI women. Likewise male contributors to *Raj Days*, especially Bill Barlow, were horrified by the stereotype. Both female and male testimonies support the idea that AI women held fast to what can be termed almost Victorian virtues. But the fashionable higher hemlines and fitted clothing worn by western and AI women were in stark contrast to traditional Indian dress, thereby raising criticism.
- There is minimal evidence of lax morality of AI women in comparison with Christian lifestyles in Britain. As in early post-Victorian society, young AI women were routinely chaperoned by family members socially. As in all societies, some AI women were 'opportunists' whilst others worked in 'siren' sectors, as in all communities worldwide.[4]
- Indian women, both Hindu and Muslim, dressed very conservatively, often veiled or totally secluded, and certainly legs were not exposed. Indian female attire and behaviour were in total opposition to that of female Europeans and AIs who socialised openly with their menfolk.
- Indian males often opposed Indian women adopting female western trends and their odium became focussed on AI women. Nevertheless, in the urban centres, large numbers of upper class Indian women attended AI schools and adopted modern western hair styles and sometimes even clothing fashions.
- Hindus and Muslims disapproved of mixed marriages, especially by their own womenfolk. AI women were symbolic of this 'impurity' or 'pollution' reflected in Indian views asserting lax morality of AI women.

CONCLUSION (2):

Because AI traditional clothing and lifestyles were quite antithetical to Indian practices, especially those of AI women, their lifestyles were considered 'immoral' or 'lax'. But by European and Anglo Indian standards of morality the Indian view of lax morality is a false. The majority of AI women adhered to a normal moral Christian lifestyle. There is some evidence that the British had ambivalent views regarding AI women because the British saw AIs as unconventional 'Indians' who 'aped' the British lifestyle; as opposed to recognizing that AIs were Christians who saw themselves as part of the British community in India.[5]

(3) SOCIALLY ANGLO INDIANS TENDED TO 'STICK TO THEMSELVES'. THIS IS A REALITY WITHIN INDIAN SOCIETY WHICH IS DIVIDED INTO STRICTLY HIERARCHICAL GROUPS.

- The derogatory connotation related to this behaviour is partly due to the resistance of Anglo Indians being classified as 'native Indians' during the colonial era. In fact Indians excluded AIs from traditional societies. Being Christian, AIs saw their cultural links more closely aligned with their British ancestors. However outsiders accused AIs of 'snobbishly' and 'pretentiously' calling themselves British rather than Indian. Being socially excluded by both Indians and Europeans, AI stuck to their own.
- Hindus socialized within their own groups, jati/castes. Muslims stuck to their own communities, both upper and lower classes. The British elites emulated Indian culture and by 20th century mixed mainly amongst themselves. This behaviour pattern domino-ed so that Anglo Indians had no choice but to socialize within their own groups also.
- Eligibility, especially to elite British clubs, frequently specified occupation as eligibility criteria. Membership by white collar workers' was always acceptable, especially managers and government officials, but **not** blue collar workers, i.e. engineers or workers involved in manual labour. Therefore Anglo Indians formed their own clubs, also based around employment, such as the Railway Institutes.

- Hindu and Muslim elites traditionally were endogamous and protected their caste/class hegemony through arranged marriages and strictly disapproved of mixed marriages. Thereby Anglo Indians were ostracized.
- An interesting earlier precedent of segregation in India: Parsees, who originally were Zoroastrians fleeing Muslim colonization of Persia/Iran, arrived in Gujarat, West India, from tenth century onwards. They were given permission by Hindus to settle under certain conditions, e.g. having to honour Hindu cultural taboos such as the cow as holy.[6] A thousand years later, although Parsees identify themselves as Indians since they had lost their own homeland, they **still** remain a separate community in India. Since 1947 large numbers of Parsees have migrated to the West.
- It should not be surprising that AIs, DEs, Goans, Indian Christians and other groups in Anglo India usually only 'mixed with their own'. But in examining one's own every day life anywhere: with whom does one socialize at home, and with how many other people on an everyday basis?
- Indian Christians and Goans often preferred to call themselves AIs simply because AI received preference for good jobs.[7]

CONCLUSION (3):

The old motto 'when in Rome, do as the Romans' appears to apply to the British in India who emulated upper class Indian society by mixing only with their own. Because Indians did not allow their women to socially mix openly, British and AI women maintained social contact with their own or European communities who shared Christian values. Due to strict hierarchical structure of Indian societies, although different groups in the work force worked together amicably, marriage and social lives were regulated on strictly demarked lines. The British and Anglo Indians followed the traditional Indian practice of endogamy, at the same time upholding British and European class structures, reflected in their club memberships.

(4) ANGLO INDIANS WERE MAINLY EMPLOYED IN THE RAILWAYS, CUSTOMS AND TELEGRAPH.

This is a true but often derogatively interpreted by contemporary society because:

- In today's world, these technologically old services are outdated, so the same jobs in contemporary society are not associated with higher socio-economic lifestyles. Therefore an anachronistic value has been negatively ascribed to people employed in these positions during Colonial India.
- The reality. These jobs were a privileged preserve that the British rulers entrusted to their loyal 'homegrown' AI community. As minority rulers of a vast Indian population, the Raj preferred to limit their risk by employing loyal AIs rather than Indians in more responsible positions.
- From their introduction in 1820s right up to mid twentieth century, railways were the most technologically innovative and revolutionary form of transport. AIs were entrusted with enormous responsibility of being the engine drivers, as described by the late Ken Blunt (whose family live in Perth) "in those days train drivers were equivalent to 747 pilots of 1970s". Because AI train drivers were considered blue collar workers involved in manual labour, they were not eligible to join elite British clubs, although the employment and living conditions of railway staff were extremely good, especially in comparison with ordinary Indians.
- Senior clerical positions in the railways, i.e. white collar workers, were mainly held by Domiciled Europeans.[8] DEs and AIs fraternized together at AI clubs, such as the Institute. Whereas Indians making up the labour force in railways were excluded.

CONCLUSION (4):

Raj Days lifestories, and all researchers, confirm that AIs predominantly worked as privileged employees such as train drivers and administrators with the railways, or in telegraph and customs departments. As with Hindu castes and their traditional ties to particular employment, British and Anglo Indians remained employed in certain jobs. But with changes in technologies and educational scholarships, the younger generation of AIs took advantage of higher education to improve their status. (Stereotype 1 above)

(5) AI ANCESTORS WERE OFTEN EX-ARMY MEN WHO MARRIED 'LOCAL' WOMEN.

- Negative connotations arose because mixed marriages were strictly disapproved of by Indian traditional societies. British attitudes were originally ambivalent towards liaisons between Europeans and Indians, but increasingly grew to reflect Indian attitudes. However, British ex-army and other personnel often married 'local' Anglo Indian women who were Christians. Due to general disapproval of mixed marriages, these marriages to 'local' women held a derogatory connotation, despite marriages between European and British males to Anglo Indian women being very common. Amongst the oral histories recorded, several contributors had detailed family genealogies, which confirmed a European ancestor was frequently a retired British soldier.
- The original bi-cultural AI offspring were fathered by British or European males to Indian women. By 20th century there was a large pool of Anglo Indian women, so that 'local' women were usually from AI communities. Occasionally these 'local' women may have been poor or abandoned AI children raised at boarding schools called 'orphanages', where they received a good, free education. Upon qualifying the young adults were sent to work in urban centres. An example is the children in Kalimpong school who later found jobs and marriage partners in Calcutta.
- Occasionally, British or Anglo Indian men married Indian women but this was 'frowned on' by most groups, unless the marriage gave rise to upward mobility on either or both parties, being mutually beneficial. It was even more uncommon for European women to marry Indian men, although this did occur, as recorded by Younger.[10] But according to the official definition of an Anglo Indian, offspring of these unions are not AIs.
- British male arrivals into India frequently married into the wider AI community, rather than from the pool of British women, known as 'the fishing fleet' that came to India to find a good 'catch'. The unsuccessful women returning to UK were unkindly referred to as 'returned empties'. This scenario possibly made the British women look with disdain (arising possibly from envy/sour grapes) at AI women, further contributing to the stereotype of AI women as 'immoral' and 'seething with sex' which induced British males to succumb![11]
- British men who married 'local women', whether AI or Indian, reflected negatively upon traditional Indian hierarchical patterns because mixed blood

or mixed race was a taboo, reflecting negatively upon AI women.

- European males, Flack's father Alborn from Norway, Hansen's family with Swedish connections, Doyle's father José were obviously European, not British, and these people identified with the term DE not 'Anglo'.
- Goans strongly identified with the Portuguese colonizers and specifically Goa but seeking eligibility for good jobs in India, called themselves AIs.
- Indian Christians were sometimes called AIs, but AIs resented this because Indian Christians lacked Anglo and/or European heritage. Indian Christians were considered part of Indian communities not the British. It is historically accepted that lower class Hindus had converted to Islam in huge numbers when India was ruled by Muslims, esp. the Mughals. Thus, apart from elite Muslim families, ordinary Indian Muslims were generally considered to be from lower class/caste Hindu groups. The same stigma has affixed to Indian converts to Christianity, therefore Indian Christians were considered a lower 'class' than AIs.

CONCLUSION (5):

This stereotype again focuses a derogatory accusation at women, that is, criticizing male Europeans who consorted with or married 'local' women. The criticism implies that these local women would be from lower classes because otherwise they adhere to traditional norms and not associate with outsiders. Indian women who contravened traditional taboos were ostracized by Indians, and any offspring from such liaisons were also ostracized - in Hindu vocabulary are described by a derogatory term for outsiders, *mlecchas*. Since it was socially unacceptable for the British males to marry Indians, liaisons with any 'local' women, not discriminating between Indian and Anglo Indian, broke societal norms and raised contempt.

The derogatory connotations associated with stereotypes (1) laziness of AIs and (4) being employed on the railways and public services, do not arise from traditional societal taboos being broken. The derogatory interpretations are in fact due to incomplete, inaccurate or anachronistic perceptions and attitudes, and, irrespective of different cultural values, stereotype (1) is shown to be a fallacy, and (4) a reality.

Whereas the three remaining stereotypes (2) lax morality of AI women, (3) AIs not mixing socially with others, and (5) marriages to 'local' women, arise from disparities in societal norms between Indian traditional patterns and European lifestyles. Stereotype 2 is a fallacy in terms of Anglo-Indian and British society norms, but a reality when viewed and compared with traditional Indian morality. Stereotypes (3) and (5) are realities, but the derogatory connotations due to Indian traditional attitudes and norms. Because Indian societies imposed cloistered conditions and different social duties and patterns of behaviour on their women, the vastly different European and Anglo Indian behaviour of their women was perceived as immoral. AIs, being as it were the meat in the sandwich, they fell prey to criticism or sometimes perhaps envy, from both Indians and the British and the derogatory connotations that arose stemmed from the different cultural attitudes in each society.

The short bullet points used in this paper contain several overlapping ideas that need to be developed into a narrative. But the importance of these points is that they illustrate the paradoxes evident in attitudes towards and perceptions of Anglo Indian lifestyles. As such, the Anglo Indian community provides a paradigm for today's multicultural and mestizo societies, from which lessons can be learnt to avoid cross cultural and anachronistic misunderstandings, so that divergent groups can live together with respect, irrespective of differing values.

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Dorothy was commissioned by Oxford University from 2004-2006 to record oral histories regarding the life experiences of leprosy sufferers in the South Pacific region. In 2009 she completed a Masters thesis which has been adapted for general publication by McFarland Publishers, due out in 2011. The book is viewable on listings at www.mcfarlandpub.com Dorothy McMenamin can be contacted at dorothym@inet.net.nz

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NOTES

[1] Dorothy McMenamin *Raj Days to Downunder: Voices from Anglo India to New Zealand*, Christchurch, NZ, 2010, available through dorothysbookshop@gmail.com

[2] Two amongst many accounts are Stan Blackford *One Hell of a Life*, SA, Australia,

2000, and George Gabb, *1600-1947 Anglo-Indian Legacy*, Yorks, UK, 1998.

[3] Some examples are Lionel Caplan, *Children of Colonialism, Anglo-Indians in a postcolonial World*, Oxford, Berg, 2001, Evelyn Abel, *The Anglo-Indian Community: Survival in India*, Delhi, Chanakya Publications, 1988, and Coralie Younger, *Anglo-Indians: Neglected Children of the Raj*, Delhi, B.R. Publishing Corp., 1987.

[4] 'sirens' ... German academic (searching full citation).

[5] William Pennington, *Pick up your parrots and monkeys...The life of a boy soldier in India*, Cassall, London, 2003, pp. 102-106, and also referred to by Frank Anthony, *Britain's betrayal in India: the story of the Anglo-Indian community*, Bombay, Allied Publishers, 1969, pp. 99 and 120.

[6] Zarine Wadia-Malik and Kersie Khambatta, in *Raj Days to Downunder*, pp. 298-315.

[7] Richard Rodrigues and Tony Mendonça in *Raj Days to Downunder*.

[8] Dorothy McMenamín, 'Identifying Domiciled Europeans in Colonial India: Poor whites or privileged community' in *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, June 2001, pp. 106-127.

[9] McMenamín, *Raj Days*, numerous contributors confirmed this in their family genealogies.

[10] Coralie Younger, *Wicked Women of the Raj*, New Delhi, Harper Collins, 2003.

[11] Lionel Caplan, "Iconographies of Anglo-Indian Women: Gender constructs and Contrasts in a Changing Society" in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4, 2000, pp. 869 and 873.