International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies

EDITORIAL

Shyamasri Maji and Robyn Andrews

This special issue focusses on Anglo-Indian creative writers and comprises a set of responses to invitations to reflect on various aspects of their fiction or film writing. The inspiration for the special issue came from the paper which the guest editor, Shyamasri Maji, delivered at an Anglo-Indian Studies seminar held at the University of Calcutta, in August 2022. In it she explored the representation of Indianness in the fictional works of the Anglo-Indian writers. From this the idea germinated to have a special issue in which Anglo-Indian creative writers would reflect on their own writing.

We are aware that the history of the Anglo-Indian community, which has effectively been brushed aside in the mainstream discourses of Indian and British history, finds an important place in fictional works (whether produced as novels or film). We posited that there is a strong urge for narrating the 'nation' from the Anglo-Indian viewpoint which distinguishes their narratives from those of the other Indian born writers in India. While those in the global diaspora bring yet other distinct perspectives.

This special issue focuses on the socio-cultural positions which shape the literary perspective of Anglo-Indian writers. We proposed these questions to our authors to stimulate their thinking: How does an Anglo-Indian writer understand oneself as a writer of English in India? Does s/he have a unique relationship to the language not shared by others? What does one seek to do through the act of writing and publishing? Who does an Anglo-Indian writer represent? Is there a politics to writing as an Anglo-Indian in/about modern India? How is it different for an Anglo-Indian writer living in the global diaspora?

We invited selected Anglo-Indian authors to reflect on these questions in terms of their experience of producing their creative works, the purpose for which they write, and their *Anglo-Indianness* as it is manifest in their literary production. The writers who responded are those included in this issue, four of whom are novelists, and two are film- script writers. We are grateful to all the contributors for submitting their thoughtful essays to this issue. Each offers different insights and perspectives.

The issue begins with an essay from Shyamasri Maji discussing the works of Anglo-Indian writers in India including Ruskin Bond, I. Allan Sealy and Nikta Lyrad, and Anglo-Indian diasporic writers, Keith Butler and Jimmy Pyke. The essay situates these writers in the frame of Indian English Fiction, which today is recognised as a rich category of English literary studies. Since Anglo-Indian writers differ from the other Indian-born writers in their cultural and linguistic orientations, an analysis of their fictional works widens the scope of multi-cultural representation of the Indian nation in Indian English Fiction.

The essays written by Anglo-Indian novelists are from: I. Allan Sealy, Keith Butler, David McMahon and Bryan Peppin. In his essay, 'Grey Man's Burden', Sealy stresses that he writes as an Anglo-Indian*,* with Anglo-Indianness his inspiration. As he describes, before writing *The Trotter-Nama*, he had been searching for a way to tell *his* story of his community. As well as looking for a form, he sought a position to tell it from. He describes the discovery of the '*nama'* as a fitting model to adopt, and in terms of positioning, he concluded that his work needed to be written with the freedom and 'strangeness' of being Anglo-Indian, which would work best if he was writing from within India.

Diasporic author Keith Butler also draws on his identity, in his case doing so in tandem with the realisation that he lacked historical knowledge about that identity. In his essay, 'Historical Weightlessness: Writing *The Secret Vindaloo'* he explores the formative influences of *The Secret Vindaloo;* why he wrote it, and the personal and literary issues that arose in a work of fiction that foregrounded Anglo-Indians. He describes the place of magical realism in his work, which he used in places to represent weightlessness. He also dwells on how his lack of knowledge of his own history played out for him, leading to writing the novel in a particular way. He concludes with a plea for Anglo-

Indian history to be taught formally, despairing that Anglo-Indian schools continue to omit it from their curriculum.

David McMahon's mission as an Anglo-Indian author is clear from the title of his essay: 'Mentoring Aspiring Writers Is One of my Goals'. His article is in two parts: in the first he answers questions about aspects of being an Anglo-Indian novelist, and in the second he explains what led him to embark on writing at an early age, and why he is committed to helping other would-be writers. As well as inviting aspiring writers to contact him directly, he offers constructive advice to would-be writers within the article.

In his essay Bryan Peppin discusses the writing of his novel, *The Nowhere Man,* providing some sense of the plot and main protagonist*,* and then moves on to address issues he feels strongly about as an Anglo-Indian living in contemporary India. These range from the loss of political representation and the community's uncertain future to his firm stance about being Indian, and India being his country. He also offers his views on other contemporary situations, such as the recent importation of cheetahs. He compares the demonstrated concern for this endangered species to the seeming lack of concern for the dwindling community of Anglo-Indians.

The last two articles are by film writers. In his essay, Glenn D'Cruz focuses on *Vanitas,* the film he wrote and co-directed. As he describes, *Vanitas* is a short film which explores his relationship with his Anglo-Indian father who died in 1985 at the age of 53. On one level it is a belated eulogy to his father, but it is also about the way Anglo-Indians have experienced racism leading to thwarted ambitions. D'Cruz also reflects on the film's creative and collaborative processes, the place of affect, as well as the ethics involved in such a personal project.

The second film writer contributing to this special issue is Harry MacLure. His essay is titled 'Making *Calcutta, I'm Sorry*: The Idea, the Process, the Completion'. He begins by relating his early love affair with film and his dreams of becoming a filmmaker, provides information about the real-life inspiration for the film *Calcutta, I'm Sorry*, and describes some of the behind-the-scenes decisions and production challenges. The main character is an Anglo-Indian woman, and although her community is referred to, MacLure believes the film's storyline will appeal to a wider audience. As he says, "its

core theme of redemption will resonate well with anyone from any community." We wish both him and D'Cruz all the best for the success for which they have worked so hard.

We hope readers enjoy this distinctive contribution to Anglo-Indian Studies scholarship as well as to English Literary Studies. We are open to suggestions for further Special Issues; please contact the current permanent editors, Robyn or Brent, with ideas.

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International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies

LOCATING INDIANNESS IN THE WORKS OF ANGLO-INDIAN FICTION WRITERS

Shyamasri Maji

ABSTRACT

This essay situates Anglo-Indian fiction into the corpus of Indian English Fiction and discusses the fictional works produced by writers of the Anglo-Indian community in India and the diaspora. The diasporic writers here considered are in the tradition of Indian English Fiction. This essay studies the works of these well- known and less well-known writers of the Anglo-Indian community through the theoretical frame of 'Indianness,' which is seen in relation to the concept of 'historical sense.' It reviews the tradition of writing Indian fiction in English and examines the dialogue of Anglo-Indian fiction writers with the colonial and post-colonial trends in Indian English Fiction of representing Indianness while misrepresenting Anglo-Indians.

INTRODUCTION

This essay discusses the concept of 'Indianness' from a literary perspective and examines the nature of its representation in the fictional narratives of writers belonging to the Anglo-Indian community located in both India and the diaspora. Anglo-Indian writers who live in India such as Ruskin Bond, I. Allan Sealy, Hugh and Colleen Gantzer, Bryan Peppin and Nikta Lyrad are described as Indian writers in English. Those living abroad such as Keith Butler, David McMahon and Jimmy Pyke are referred to as writers of the Anglo-Indian diaspora because they were born and brought up in India and their Indian connection is strongly reflected in their diasporic fiction. This essay also includes the diasporic writers in the category of Indian English Writing. What distinguishes the two categories of Anglo-Indian writers from the larger group of other Indian authors writing in English is that their mother tongue is English.

Factors such as the history of mixed descent and the westernised ways of cultural representation, which are essential to Anglo-Indian identity, play a distinct role in their perception and representation of 'Indianness.' Since the community is small and few Anglo-Indians have achieved renown as authors, the issue of reviewing Indianness in their writing has not yet been taken up by literary critics and scholars. The present study is an attempt to address this gap in the critical discourse on Indian Fiction in English. It discusses Indianness as a discourse in Indian English fiction. It analyses the works of select Anglo-Indian writers in India and the diaspora to explore how far they have conformed to the conventional trends of representation of 'Indianness' and in what ways they have deviated from it. It also examines the narrative modes they have used in their fictional works and the styles they have followed to fit well into the locus of Indian Writing in English. It examines the long tradition of misrepresenting the Anglo-Indian community by British and Indian writers and studies how such literary misrepresentations have deeply impacted upon the consciousness of Anglo-Indian fiction writers. The overall methodology this study employs is postcolonialism and the principal research method is textual analysis.

INDIANNESS: A THEORETICAL FRAME

Indian English fiction gained prominence in the 1940s and 1950s with the publication of the novels of Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Khushwant Singh, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandya and other prominent non-Anglo-Indian writers. It established itself globally as a 'type' with the emergence of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, I. Allan Sealy and Sashi Tharoor in the 1980s. In the journey of Indian English novel from the 1930s to the new millennium, Ruskin Bond and I. Allan Sealy are two important members of the Anglo-Indian community, who became well-known as Indian English writers. Though Rusty, an Anglo-Indian boy from the Himalayan foothills in Bond's fiction, became a popular figure among Indian youth and Sealy's community saga *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* (1988) received critical acclaim worldwide, there is little research on how these authors have represented the Anglo-Indian perspectives in their narration of the Indian nation. This essay looks into the broader context of theorising 'Indianness' in Indian English Fiction, first, with reference to the works of non-Anglo-Indian writers and then, by examining the works of the Anglo-Indian fiction writers, it analyses 'Indian English Fiction' as a discourse representing a historical sense. It argues that among the Anglo-Indian writers this historical sense generates

an anxiety of representation, which may be described as anxiety of *Anglo-Indianness*. The present discussion shows that this anxiety, being connected with their minority status in the socio-cultural ecosystem of India, finds a distinct voice in their fictional writings.

The concept 'historical sense' is borrowed from T.S Eliot's essay 'Tradition and Individual Talent' in which the great litterateur discusses the impact of 'tradition,' which is a thing of the past, on a writer belonging to the present time. Here, Eliot is referring to the literary tradition of the remote past as well as that of the recent past. He observes that this "historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes the writer traditional" (1962, p. 294). He explains that a creative writer or an artist has no meaning alone until and unless he/she responds to the literary tradition that has come down to him/her in the form of historical sense. It connects the past with the present to map the continuities and the discontinuities in the literary tradition/s of different generations of writers. The present essay on Anglo-Indian Fiction uses the concept of historical sense to analyse the dialogue of the Anglo-Indian writers with the tradition of writing fiction about India in English. This category of fictional writing is officially known as Indian English Fiction and it includes in its corpus the fictional works of Indian writers living in India as well as Indian-born writers inhabiting the diasporic space. Although each group writes from its distinct location, the feature that brings them under one umbrella is their connection with the Indian nation, either through nationality or descent or both. The works of the British novelists who wrote in and about India prior to Indian Independence (15th August, 1947) were described as Anglo-Indian fiction in the academic circles for some time. Their works, which belongs to the period of the 'recent past,' played a decisive role in the formation of 'historical sense' among the Indian writers who chose to write in the English language.

In the decades following Independence, representation of Indianness in the works of the Indian English writers emerged as the primary criterion to situate these writings within the purview of postcolonial literary discourses. Locating the 'essence' of Indianness is not of utmost importance in the major Indian literatures produced in the vernacular languages, however, it becomes a pressing issue in Indian literature produced in English because English is a foreign language to most Indians (though

technically it is recognised as the second language and also as an official language). To a large section of Indian society the English language still remains the symbol of elitism and Western culture. In her essay 'Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English' Meenakshi Mukherjee observes that "writing in English and writing in the other Indian languages are antithetical enterprises marked by a commitment to, or betrayal of, certain undefinable cultural values" (1993, p. 2607). Against the backdrop of colonial history and anti-English nationalism, the choice of English as a linguistic medium of representing the nation seemed a betrayal to the dominant cultural values that sought to unify the varied groups of people into the imagined community of 'Indians' on the basis of *bharatiya sanskriti* or Indian culture. In the Introduction to *Imagining Indianness: Cultural Identity and Literature*, Diana Dimitrova describes *bharatiya* as "a particular Indian cultural identity that is inherent to India and can only be understood against the background of the plurality of India's languages, myths, religions and literatures—its shared linguistic, literary, cultural and religious history—that is, the ways Indians imagine Indianness" (2017, p. 2). The trend of formulating a homogenised cultural identity, however, should not be confused with *Hindutva,* which campaigns for an extremely politicised version of Hindu religion for establishing Hindu cultural identity as India's national identity.

In this context, Dimitrova specifies that Hindutva advocates for either assimilating or excluding Buddhist, Sikh, Islamic and Christian cultural practices on the premise that these are foreign traditions (2017, p. 3). In such a socio-cultural context Anglo-Indian writers may feel apprehensive of their religious affiliation and their cultural orientations. Though Bond and Sealy have not written explicitly about these issues, they have stuck to their Anglo-Indianness in their perspectives on Indian history and culture. This 'Anglo-Indianness' may be defined as an awareness of belonging, and simultaneously of not-belonging, to the socio-cultural ecosystem of India. The matter of the community's 'belonging' to the sovereign Indian Republic is Constitutionally settled. The question of their 'not-belonging' is discursive and often formulated by politically-conditioned contestation over socio-cultural representations.

In the postcolonial context, Hindutva and Nehruvian secularism are two prominent ideological indices for mapping and reconfiguring the cultural trope of Indianness. While the former thrives on the premise of uniting religion with state politics, the latter

insists on maintaining a rationalistic divide between the two. The spirit of Hindutva has become increasingly prominent since the 1980s, which coincidentally is the period during which Indian English fiction gained international fame. In the works of reputed Indian English writers of the 1980s and the 90s the precepts of Nehruvian secularism emerged as a prominent discourse while dealing with minority issues, fanaticism, communal strife and the rewriting of Indian history. In 'Minority Identity in India: *Midnight's Children* and *A Suitable Boy'* Neelam Srivastava observes that "the two novels share a common ideological matrix which can be traced back to Nehru's idea of the nation as a multicultural imagined community" (2008, p. 49). Both the novels—Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* (1993)—are considered canonical texts of Indian English Fiction. While Seth's novel represents the plight of the Muslims in the post-Partition period from the upper middle-class Hindu secularist viewpoint, Rushdie re-views the history of India's Independence from a Muslim minoritarian position. Although Rushdie created a telling influence with his polyphonic narrative mode and pluralistic style celebrating multiculturalism, his representation of Saleem Sinai, a character born out of interracial union, as a metaphor for cultural hybridity/syncretism has been disapproved by some critics. Loretta Mijares observes that "racial mixture in the literary imagination often becomes a metaphor for something else, and in this process of metaphorization is alienated from history from which it originates" (2003, p. 125). Such a metaphorical representation eludes the reality of mixed descent in the Indian subcontinent. It may increase their invisibility in the mainstream discourse of Indian history, literature and also in the demographic records of the Indian nation. The erroneous Census Report of 2011 which mentioned that there are 296 Anglo-Indians in India may be taken as an alarming sign in this regard (23 Nov. 2022, *The Times of India*).

Glenn D'Cruz, an Anglo-Indian filmmaker and academic, criticises Rushdie's metaphorical representation for its racist vibes and considers it as the continuation of the colonial legacy in the postcolonial Indian English novel. With reference to Rushdie's description of Saleem Sinai's character as sterile and physically disintegrating, D'Cruz observes, "The old racial science perception of the hybrid as an infertile haunts Rushdie's novel, indicating the extent to which colonial stereotypes persists" (2006, p. 170). The members of both genders of the Anglo-Indian community have been subjected to stereotyping in Indian English Fiction. Indian writers such as

Nirad C. Chaudhuri, Manohar Malgonkar and David Davidar, have depicted the Anglo-Indian women as a counter to the virtuous image of the Indian woman. This is evident in Chaudhuri's *The Continent of Circe* (1965), Malgonkar's *Combat of Shadows* (1962) and Davidar's *House of Blue Mangoes* (2002). Such misrepresentations were absorbed into the tapestry of contemporary Indian English fiction as a hangover of Raj fiction, which represented India, the Indian people and the East-West encounter from the perspective of the coloniser. These novels were mostly written by the British writers who had some experience of living in the Indian subcontinent. In his *Studies in Anglo-Indian Fiction* (2008), M.K. Naik refers to a number of English novelists who represented the Anglo-Indian men as drunkard and lazy and the Anglo-Indian women as unchaste and greedy: Henry Bruce's *The Eurasian* (1913), Alice Perrin's *The Stronger Claim* (1903), Rummer Godden's *The Lady and the Unicorn* (1938), Paul Scott's *Johnnie Sahib* (1952) and *The Alien Sky* (1958) and John Masters' *Bhowani Junction* (1954) (Naik, 2008, pp. 31-54). In *Midnight's Orphans: Anglo-Indians in Post/Colonial Literature,* Glenn D'Cruz classifies their prejudiced representation in Raj fiction as "Seven Deadly Stereotypes: 'The Mimic', 'The Whore', 'The Ditherer', 'The Poor Relation', 'The Pariah', 'The Big Shot'" (2006, p. 30). Such stereotypical images gained momentum chiefly due to the circulation of the colonial myths associated with interracial sexual encounters and mixed descent progeny.

It is unfortunate that even Rudyard Kipling could not refrain from manifesting his prejudices against the Anglo-Indians in his writings. In his story 'His Chance in Life' Kipling describes the Anglo-Indians as inhabitants of the 'borderline.' About their mixed descent, he remarks, "The Black and the White mix very quaintly in their ways. Sometimes the White shows in spurts of fierce, childish pride—which is Pride of Race run crooked—and sometimes the Black is still fiercer abasement and humility, half-heathenish customs and strange, unaccountable impulses to crime" (2012, p. 69). The nineteenth century notions of miscegenation and the role of the colonial mindset in establishing those in epistemological discourses is clear in the following comment from Kipling:

> One of these days, this people—understand they are far lower than the class whence Derozio, the man who imitated Byron, sprung—will turn out a writer or a poet; and then we shall know how they live and what they feel. In the meantime, any stories about them cannot be absolutely correct in fact or inference. (2012, p. 69)

Here, Kipling's tone of ridicule not only reveals his contempt for the Anglo-Indians, but also acts as a clue to explore the absence of Anglo-Indians from the colonial literary space after the untimely death of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio in 1831.

It took more than a century after Derozio's death for the Anglo-Indian community to gain visibility in the literary map of the subcontinent, first with the publication of *The Room on the Roof* by Ruskin Bond in 1956 and then with Sealy's winning of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for *The Trotter-Nama* in 1989. There are several questions that arise from this finding: Why don't we have a great Anglo-Indian writer between 1831 and 1956? Why does the pre-Independence history of Indian Writing in English not mention at least a few Anglo-Indian poets/fiction writers? Did they not involve themselves in creative writing or were their works not published? There should have been a considerable number of Anglo-Indian poets and fiction writers because English is the mother tongue of the community. The Anglo-Indian parents compulsorily sent their children to Christian schools where English was the only medium of instruction. The British colonial rulers preferred the Anglo-Indians in certain stream of employment for their fluency in English. Proper investigation is yet to be undertaken to explain their absence from the history of Indian English Fiction during the pre-Independence period, whether it was a matter of their non-involvement in literary activities or a case of erasure of the publishing records.

ANGLO-INDIAN 'INDIANNESS'

In the 'Introduction' to his *Locating the Anglo-Indian Self in Ruskin Bond,* Debashis Bandyopadhyay observes, "An autobiographical writer, depending upon the memory of his past life for grist, Bond's subjectivity is constantly informed by an unconscious play of dynamic alterity" (2012, p. 7). According to Bandyopadhyay, Bond's statement, "Race did not make me an Indian. Religion did not make me an Indian. But history did. And in the long run, it's history that counts", is a manifestation of anxiety (Bond qtd. in Bandyopadhyay, 2012, p. 7). At the same time, it underlines Bond's faith in history as a platform for social recognition. Both Ruskin Bond and I. Allan Sealy have examined the history of the Indian nation with an insider's point of view in their works, *A Flight of Pigeons* and *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* (1988), respectively. On the one hand it

ensures their belongingness to the Indian nation and on the other hand it gives them an opportunity to write Indian history from Anglo-Indian perspectives.

Bond's story, *A Flight of Pigeons,* a novella published in the late 1970s, is set against the backdrop of the Rebellion of 1857. It represents this historical event through the eyes of Ruth Labadoor, an Anglo-Indian girl, whose family went through harrowing experiences during the outbreak of the mutiny in Meerut and Shahjahanpur (two towns in Uttar Pradesh). The mutineers had attacked the local church one morning during Sunday service. Men and women from the British as well as the Anglo-Indian community were present. Ruth's father Mr. Labadoor, a clerk in the magistrate's office, was killed. Ruth and her mother were then brought as captives to the house of Javed Khan, a Pathan rebel. Though the Pathan did not harm or disrespect them, at times he threatened to convert them to Islam and proposed to marry Ruth. The story of the novella is based on a true story (Bond, 2010, p.289), which is neither documented in mainstream history books nor reproduced in the works of non-Anglo-Indian fiction writers. Interestingly, Bond heard this story from his father, who was born in Shahjahanpur, and the latter in turn had heard it from his father, who was a soldier (Bond, 2010, p. 289). This incident, which was preserved in the collective memory of Bond as a community narrative instilled in him a 'historical sense' with which he related the past with the present and vice-versa.

In the Introduction to the novella written in 2002, Bond conveys this idea in the following words, "I published this account as a novella about thirty years ago. I feel it still has some relevance today, when communal strife and religious intolerance threaten the lives and livelihood of innocent, law-abiding people" (2010, p. 289). Bond's personal experiences contributed significantly to his fictional writings representing the colonial past as well as the post-colonial present. In his fictional tales of Rusty, Bond establishes the Anglo-Indian boy as not only a resident of the hills in post-colonial India but as one who belongs to the hills. Here, the hills represent not only a topography but also a socio-cultural matrix composed of Anglo-Indians, domiciled Europeans, and the local communities. Rusty becomes the representative of this socio-cultural group and the 'hills' become representative of the history of these people and of how they became an integral part of the place. Similarly, the story of seven generations of the Trotter family representing the Anglo-Indian community in

Sealy's epic novel *The Trotter-Nama*, is integral to the history of Lucknow represented as Nakhlau in the novel. Modelled upon the Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great, who reinvented the religious and the social practices of his time with his magnanimity, the character of Justin, the first Trotter, is a melange of a European and an Indian. He is the embodiment of cultural hybridity in his sartorial, culinary and religious orientations. In other words, he not only sired a mixed descent progeny which with the succeeding generations formed a community, but also a distinct cultural tradition which was neither fully European nor fully Indian. In the scope of Sealy's fiction Anglo-Indianness encompasses tropes of both racial and cultural hybridity. Unlike Rushdie's metaphorical reproduction of Anglo-Indianness, it makes a realistic representation of the community from the eighteenth century to the decades following Indian Independence in 1947.

Regarding the realistic representation of the milieu and ethos in Indian English Fiction, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan placed emphasis on 'Indian sensibility' which involves translation of the indigenous cultural practices into English. In the Foreword to *Kanthapura* (1938), Rao observed, "The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American and Irish life has gone into the making of theirs" (2005, np.). R. K. Narayan conveyed a similar idea through his concept of 'Bharat brand English' in his essay "Toasted English" (2001, p. 269). Both Bond and Sealy have followed what Rao and Narayan explained as representation of the Indian sensibility in the English language. However, their Indian sensibility as it has been represented in *A Flight of Pigeons* and *The Trotter-Nama,* may be reinterpreted as Anglo-Indian sensibility which is often not counted into the theory and praxis of Indian literary culture. There's a striking difference between the Anglo-Indian writers and the Indian writers as far as the matter of representing Indian sensibility is concerned. To the latter, 'Indian sensibility' meant translating the vernacular idiom and indigenous culture into English, to the former, however, it implied re-locating the Anglicised image of the Anglo-Indian community within the multicultural scope of Indianness. Rao's 'Kanthapura' and Narayan's 'Malgudi' represent India in microcosm from the South Indian perspective. Sealy portrays Trotterpurwa, the town of the Trotters or the Anglo-Indians, as the Indian nation with the multicultural pan-Indian outlook of an Anglo-Indian writer. While Rao uses the mythical mode of *sthalapurana* in *Kanthapura* to represent the zeal of the *swadeshi* movement in English, Narayan

chooses to represent India as a postcolonial territory of both exotic and spiritual reality in his well-known works such as *The Guide* and *The English Teacher*. It is through these methods of narration that Rao and Narayan struggled to keep intact the borderline that existed between the cultural domains of India and the West. Later writers such as Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh and Arundhati Roy were not inclined to highlight this borderline. Instead, they represented the gradual infusion of the western practices into the social and personal lives of middle-class Indians.

In the matter of representing the borderline between the West and the East, Sealy has deviated from Rao, Narayan and his contemporaries. The oeuvre of his literary works includes critically acclaimed novels such as *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* (1988) and *The Everest Hotel: A Calendar* (1998). His recent works include *The Small Wild Goose Pagoda: An Almanack* (2014) and *Zelaldinus: A Masque* (2017). *The Small Wild Goose Pagoda: An Almanack* (2014) is a non-fiction piece. In these works, Sealy has experimented with the literary forms of the East and the West. The forms are highlighted in their subtitles. Literary forms such as *nama, calendar* and *almanack* are oriental in terms of origin and have been used by Sanskrit and Persian writers in the past. *The Trotter-Nama* is written in the form of an oriental chronicle. According to Sealy, the "*nama* was a medieval historical form that encouraged invention" (Sealy, 2014, p.128). Popular examples of this genre include *Baburnama,* an autobiography of the first Mughal Emperor Babur, *Humayun-Nama* by Gulbadan Begum, and *Akbarnama* by Abu-l-Fazl. Sealy incorporates the *nama* form with magical realism, a literary style of prose-fiction born and developed in Latin America. In 'Fictionalised Identities: Remodelling Anglo-Indians,' Jade Furness justifies Sealy's use of magical realism in the following observation:

> The lack of documented sources may be one of the reasons Sealy has chosen not to write a realistic historical novel about Anglo-Indians. It may also be that writing a solely realist story about this community of people would be an act of collusion with the hegemonic representations of history that excluded such marginalised groups. However, in order to recuperate Anglo-Indians into a history that has been either unrepresented or misrepresented, Sealy has chosen the narrative literary form of magical realism. For, it is only through the imagination and its interaction with what is known to be real that he can restore to Anglo-Indians their sense of belonging and being a part of an Indian history that impacted not only at the global, political level but on the individual lives as well. (2021, p. 415)

The history-fiction interface in *The Trotter-Nama* not only inverts the centre-margin dynamics of representation but also highlights the postcolonial invasion of Western literary forms. Sealy's inter-cultural forays into Indian classical poetics, are both experimental and innovative. In *The Everest Hotel*: *A Calendar* (1998) Sealy revives the classical tradition of Kalidasa's epic *Ritusamhara* (garland of seasons). The chapters of this novel are named after six seasons in Indian folk culture: Summer, The Rains, Autumn, Frost Time, Winter, Spring and Summer. The title of the seventh chapter is a repetition of the first chapter. It communicates not only the cyclical order of seasons in nature but also the circular pattern of time in the narrative. His recent works *The Small Wild Goose Pagoda,* an autobiographical piece set in Uttarakhand, and *Asoca: A Sutra,* a historical novel on Ashoka the Great, the third king of the Mauryan Empire who gave up war after embracing Buddhism, present a wider panorama of cultural syncretism by re-viewing the local narratives and the national issues from a pan-Asian perspective. His style echoes Jawaharlal Nehru's views on secularism:

> We can never forget the ideals that have moved our race, the dreams of the Indian people through the ages, the wisdom of the ancients, the buoyant energy and love of life and nature of our forefathers…their splendid achievements in literature, art and culture, their love of truth and beauty and freedom…their toleration of other ways than theirs, their capacity to absorb other peoples and their cultural accomplishments, to synthesize them and develop a mixed culture. (1985, p. 509)

While Sealy deviates from the general trend of representing Indianness in Indian English fiction through his experiments with the literary forms, Nikta Lyrad, a lesser-known Anglo-Indian writer, conforms to it through his representation of the emotional and spiritual journey of his protagonist in his debut novel *Miscegena: Crossing the Bridge* (2021). Its story begins with the Anglo-Indian protagonist's search for his white father, an Englishman called David. The Englishman abandoned the family after the second World War and returned to England. His mother, an Anglo-Indian, believed that her husband died in the war. She worked as a private nurse in Baroda, a town in Gujrat (India), to raise her children singlehandedly. When the son discovers the truth about the father, he hides it from his mother and gives up his quest to find his father. Instead, he decides to rediscover his Indian identity as an Anglo-Indian and an historian. His pursuit takes him to every nook and cranny of South India—the villages, the forts, the temples, the monuments, the museums. In the course of his journey as

a scholar, he not only writes books on colonial history but also changes his name from David to Dravid, which suggests his conviction to affiliate with the indigenous Dravidian race and culture.

He did not change his religion or his community affiliation but the change in his name shows his desire to be recognised as a son of the soil rather than being identified as a white man's offspring. After retiring as a Professor in History, he chose to be a gardener at Auroville in Pondicherry. This choice parallels the Vedic tradition of *banaprastha*, a phase of life during which an individual detaches oneself from family matters. His representation of India and Indianness is similar to that of R. K. Narayan, who in *The Guide* and *The English Teacher* dwells on the themes of spirituality and renunciation as ways of attaining enlightenment. David aka Dravid's quiet repose in Auroville is reminiscent of the emotional and the spiritual journeys of Raju the guide, and Krishna the English teacher. Like Narayan, Lyrad's India is located in South India, which is not just a geographical location but a spatial territory that distinguishes itself from the Hindi-speaking North in its linguistic and cultural orientations. Although he does not create a fictional town like that of Narayan's Malgudi, his decision to explore and stay in the South with 'Dravid' as his name, definitely conveys his conscious effort to follow the footsteps of R.K. Narayan in his representation of the postcolonial 'imagined community.' Auroville, in this context, is no less than a postcolonial utopia. Here, communal strife does not take place and corruption cannot touch the inhabitants. They abide by the norms of the *ashram* and the necessary items of life are distributed equally among all residents. It is the abode of peace and spiritual happiness, which in Lyrad's vision is the microcosmic version of the ideal nation state. In the three Anglo-Indian novels discussed above, the Anglo-Indian identity of the protagonists corresponds to the clause of mixed lineage in Article 366(2) of the Indian Constitution. According to this clause, the evidence of a white European father as the source of genesis on the paternal line is mandatory. The first Trotter in Sealy's *magnum opus* was a Frenchman. He changed his identity from the French 'Trotoirre' to the English 'Trotter' after the fall of the French in the hands of the British in eighteenth century India (Sealy, 1988, 1999, p.118). He married Sultana, a Muslim woman of the Prophet's line. The successive generations of the Trotters emerged as a result of this interracial marital alliance. In *A Flight of Pigeons*, Mrs. Labadoor's father was also a Frenchman, who served in the Maratha army. He, like Justin Trotter,

had married a local Muslim woman. In Lyrad's novel, David's father was an Englishman and his mother an Anglo-Indian.

The prerogative of a European ancestor in the male line is an important issue for historicising Anglo-Indian identity and at the same time it may be an inevitable factor for triggering 'anxiety of Anglo-Indianness' in their Indian consciousness. This anxiety is apparent in most of their fictional writings, through the representation of a search for the 'white' father or through the description of the family tree tracing their white European lineage. The trend continues in the diasporic fiction of Keith Butler and Jimmy Pyke. Butler is an Anglo-Indian writer currently settled in New Zealand. Pyke (d. 2016), an Anglo-Indian writer from Darjeeling, India, emigrated to the United Kingdom in the early 1960s.

RECALLING INDIA: ANGLO-INDIAN DIASPORIC PERSPECTIVES

In the fiction of the Anglo-Indian writers living in India, the narrative of the English father serves primarily as evidence to historicise the minority status of the Anglo-Indian characters settled in India. Unlike these novels, in the Anglo-Indian diasporic fiction, the father issue features as the mnemonic lens through which the Anglo-Indian character in the diaspora looks back into his/her pre-emigration phase of life in India, the country of his/her birth. It also provides the writer with the point from where he/she can start historicising his/her identity as an Anglo-Indian. The memory of the English father in this context serves as a utopian centre around which the images of postcolonial dystopia keep moving in the diasporic consciousness of the writer. In *The Secret Vindaloo* (2014), Butler's representation of the English father smacks of postcolonial sarcasm and irony. In this novel, Jack Marks, the Englishman, is reduced to the 'powerless' figure of a nominal father of the Anglo-Indian protagonist Puttla Marks, whose biological father was Gomeze, probably a Luso-Indian. At the time of Puttla's birth, his aunt had named him as 'Puttla' meaning 'thin' in Bengali and had said that, "He shall live between two fatherth, like a hyphen" (Butler, 2014, p. 21). Puttla's 'nominal' connection with the English *pater* certified him as a British subject. Being a British subject, however, was not same as of being a British citizen. Although his mother had thought that this certification would enhance the social status of her son, it soon turned out to be a jigsaw blade that cuts a wooden board forward and backward simultaneously: "Accepting a British subject passport had rendered her son

stateless! He now had to have a visa to stay in India! A six-month stay had been granted him!" (Butler, 2014, p. 32).

In Pyke's *The Tea Planter's Son,* Alfred Stephens, an Anglo-Indian lawyer, succeeds in meeting his English father, who had abandoned his Nepali mother and him in India during the last days of the British Raj after emigrating, but the father issue, which was crucial to his Anglo-Indian identity in India, was of no help in resisting racism in multicultural Britain. He neither condemned his father's irresponsible behaviour nor showed any emotional exuberance on meeting him. The father's existence hardly mattered to him. Through his reminiscences, he narrates the never-ending plight and acute poverty of the labourer community in the tea gardens to which his mother Mylie belonged. Like his father, who had come to India as the Manager of a tea estate in 1938, there were many other Englishmen who came to work as administrators in the tea gardens during British rule. Their liaisons with local women had become a recognised custom among tea planter employees. Most of these men abandoned their partners at the end of the tenure of their service and their Anglo-Indian children were raised by their Indian mothers with the help of the Church and the Christian missionaries. Although he had the privilege of receiving an English education, Stephens recalls his experiences of being discriminated against at boarding school for his swarthy skin colour (2014, p. 64).

The reflections of these writers on India are not similar to other Indian born diasporic writers. While homesickness is foregrounded in the writings of the other Indian-born diasporic writers, it is in a way absent in the fiction of these diasporic Anglo-Indian writers. To the latter, 'Home' or 'homeland' is connected with the problematics of their mixed descent identity. In the colonial period, most Anglo-Indians saw England as 'Home' but the British never considered them as their equals. There were a few Anglo-Indians who looked upon England as their fatherland and India as their motherland, but this did not solve the issue of their belonging and non-belonging to either of the two nations. When the cultural scenario changed in India after Independence, their 'Englishness' came in the way of their affiliating with the 'Indianness' that had a distinct opposition to the former. This was one of the reasons for large-scale emigration of Anglo-Indians from India to the 'white' countries such as the United Kingdom, the Canada and Australia. The Anglo-Indian diasporic fiction that emerged in the last two

decades highlights their economic insecurity and cultural alienation in post-Independence Indian society. Factors such as the gradual fading away of the colonial culture and depletion of job quotas for Anglo-Indians are evident in the postcolonial nostalgia of Puttla Marks in *The Secret Vindaloo*. While taking the citizenship test at Melbourne Detention Centre, Puttla recalls their days of poverty in India and his mother's hardships. The Anglo-Indians had to adjust with the changes taking place in every social sphere, including school education. In his recollection of his school days in Calcutta, Puttla describes the postcolonial situation in Anglo-Indian schools that incorporated the learning of Bengali, a vernacular language. Puttla observes that it was neither easy for the Anglo-Indian students to learn Bengali, nor was it a comfortable job for Mr. Ghosh, the non-Anglo-Indian teacher, to teach it to them:

> Mr. Ghosh came in mopping his brow with a white handkerchief. He was reading the test paper. His job depended on the results of the examination. It was not easy teaching Bengali to these brown Anglos, because they thought themselves British and prized English above Bengali. Yet if the examination results were not good, the Christian Brothers would hold him responsible. (Butler, 2014, 100)

Puttla's memories of his experiences in India and Australia move to and fro like a pendulum, thereby giving the narrative a non-linear structure. This structure is suggestive of disruption of time which plays the lead role in the construction of history and historical consciousness. Puttla's personal history as well as his collective memory was full of disruptions, which Butler represents with magical realism and postmodernist flippancy. The passport certifying him as a British subject made his stay in India uncertain, and his failure in the citizenship test prevents him from achieving the status of an Australian citizen. In India, his identity was that of a British subject and in Australia his identity was that of an immigrant. His awareness of inhabiting an in-between space on the interstices of cultures and races makes him feel devoid of history. Finally, Puttla realises that he has no home/land of his own and decides to remember his sojourns in the geo-political territories in terms of numerical figures—the first land, the second land and so on.

Unlike Puttla, Alfred Stephens in *The Planter's Son* thinks of India as his home. Even after living in London for forty years, it was an unhomely place to him due to the racist encounters and the personal losses. During his long stay in London the only Anglo-Indian family he had met was that of his wife. This highlights the relative invisibility of

Anglo-Indians in multicultural Britain. Although he patiently overcame the threats of racism and succeeded in his profession as a criminal lawyer, he felt dejected after the 9/11 terrorist attack. Pyke's novel ends with Stephens getting ready to return to his mother's house in the tea gardens in Darjeeling. The return journey is suggestive of his disillusionment with the Anglo-Indian obsession of filiating with the English father and affiliating with the white society symbolising the 'fatherland.' The reflections of Butler and Pyke on the so-called multicultural societies show that equal and adequate representation of Anglo-Indians in the diaspora is yet to take place. In their fiction, the scope of multiculturalism like that of postcolonialism is limited.

A common thread in the fiction writings of the Anglo-Indian writers in India and those in the diaspora is their passionate effort to represent the Anglo-Indian woman as a good wife and an ideal mother. This is evident in the representation of the following characters: Mrs. Labadoor in *A Flight of Pigeons,* Ivy in *Miscegena,* Angela in *The Tea Planter's Son* and Iris Tyro in *The Secret Vindaloo.* They are strong, intelligent and compassionate women. The characters of Ivy in *Miscegena* and Iris Tyro in *The Secret Vindaloo* are remarkable since they raise their children singlehandedly. Mrs. Labadoor's character exudes great courage. With her stamina and presence of mind she resists the Pathan's threat of religious conversion and also succeeds in postponing his marriage proposal. The images of these Anglo-Indian women contradict the images of the Anglo-Indian woman as a seductress and a gold-digger in the works of several British and Indian writers. This rewriting of Anglo-Indian femininity is their response to the legacy of colonial stereotyping and racist misogyny in colonial and postcolonial fiction.

CONCLUSION

The output of Anglo-Indian literary works has increased in the last two decades. This reveals the community's interest in retrieving and restoring their history in a creative way. The Anglo-Indian fiction writers in India have refashioned Indianness by infusing Anglo-Indian sensibility into it. Their postcolonial vision has broadened the dimension of postcoloniality in Indian English Fiction. To the diasporic writers of the community Indianness is the key to explain and explore the community's history in the multicultural societies outside India. As observed in the two diasporic novels discussed above, the limitations and the possibilities of multiculturalism contributed to the production of this

set of debut works recounting the experiences of the Anglo-Indian self and the community. The authors of these debut fictions are first-generation immigrants. Their reception of and response to pre-Independence history and the post-colonial situation are inevitably linked with their experiences of socio-cultural and political representation as members of a racial Minority group in India. The Anglo-Indian writers in India too have presented a microscopic view of the problematics of their representation in postcolonial Indian society. Recently, the 126th Amendment of the Constitution Bill (2019), which proposed to abolish the provision of nominating Anglo-Indian representatives in the Lok Sabha and some state Assemblies, has intensified their anxiety of representation. In the last two years, publication of Anglo-Indian fiction from small Indian presses (e.g. Lyrad's *Miscegena* published from Notion Press) and on Amazon Kindle (Bryan Peppin's *The Nowhere Man*) is evidence of literary protest from Anglo-Indian writers of Indian English fiction. With the rapid increase in the number of Anglo-Indian writers, it can be hoped that the community will find better representation in Indian English literature. In colonial times, as well as in the first two decades after Indian Independence, the nomenclature 'Anglo-Indian fiction writers' was used to refer to both Indian and British authors who wrote English fiction on India. However, in the present time, it refers to the writers of the Anglo-Indian community in India and the diaspora. This is a positive change that definitely enriches the scope of cultural diversity in Indian English Fiction.

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GREY MAN'S BURDEN[1]

Irwin Allan Sealy

ABSTRACT

In 1976 the author encountered Freedom at Midnight*, a crucial text for modern Indian writers; other influences on him were* Tristram Shandy *and* The Tin Drum*, but the turning point came with his reading of the* Baburnama*. His discovery of the nama form enabled the organization of his material and shaped his book. A decade of waiting taught him patience and the crucial lesson of orientation. Indian writing in the West--its essential Orientalism--taught him to close his eyes to a foreign audience. His Anglo-Indianness was the motor of a writing visceral in its inspiration; genetic misfits do not need to outsource their hybridity.* The Trotter-Nama *has survived a pot-belly burning by its author and strategic back-burnering by its UK publishers. Its recognition at home despite neglect in the West was part of the making of an independent literary culture. That project continues.*

In the summer of 1976, I visited India after five years in the West. The Emergency was on, shop signs were in blue letters on a cream ground, and *Freedom at Midnight* was on all the bookstands. In vexed times people lap up the past. I stayed a week with my parents in Dehra Dun and travelled on to graduate school in Canada. Two years later I passed through India again—chaotic shop signs were back—with a book of my own. It was still in my head but I had begun to see myself as a novelist.

Freedom at Midnight was history, told with a verve you associate with blockbusters: Richard Attenborough, Salman Rushdie were listening. I didn't buy a copy, but I browsed, on fire. I was preparing to tell the story of the Anglo-Indians and here was a dazzling way. In ten minutes I had conceived a hero born at midnight of India's

[1] This essay was first published as the Afterword in *The Trotter-Nama* edition published by Penguin Random House in 2019.

independence. I can imagine fifty such impregnations. For the rest of that decade I beavered away in libraries around the world, accumulating more facts than I could ever use. Like any beginner I was looking for a way into my material.

In time the Collins and Lapierre gambit lost its shine. Something in it said: scoop, something else: foreign correspondent. The telling was seductive, but it wasn't my style (if you can speak of style before you have a book). My own story moved by fits and starts: *Tristram Shandy* had shown an undergraduate the glories of patchwork. There, if anywhere, was my way. Along with Sterne's Old Testament I carried a New: *The Tin Drum* (which brought Uncle Toby's Flanders up to date in Hitler's Germany). If I could tell a tale like that! The trouble was all these ways of telling were as foreign as the novel form itself. I began to root about for another way: something less fluent than *Freedom at Midnight*, something less explanatory than *Midnight's Children*. Good readers are happy to work, I was sure.

There was something else, more vital than style: I was looking for a form, a jacket if you like, that fit. Yes, Sterne sat at the right hand of God, yes Gunther Grass sat at *his* right hand, but that heaven hung somewhere over Europe. I needed a model that belonged here, was made here. And look at my luck: deep in the stacks of a Canadian library I chance on the *Baburnama*. It had been a title, no more, one of those italicized oddities you routinely gloss over, but here it was, heavy in my hand. I devoured it, binding and all. And it was as I reached for the book beside it on the shelf, Abul Fazl's *Akbarnama*—and beside that the *Ain-i-Akbari*—that I saw the connexion between my way of telling and that of these writers. The *nama* is a medieval court history, a chronicle. My *nama* would chronicle a colonial encounter, the overlap of Europe and India, across seven generations of the Trotter family. The Trotters would embody that history, the history of the Anglo-Indians, down to Independence and after. I had found what I needed. The *nama* was that fitting form.

At a certain point you stop reading, because your labour and your joy have transported you to a place where you are the maker. I didn't realize it, but my quest for a rooted form would last a lifetime. In book after book I faced an old dilemma. It's not enough to write about India. Countless volumes have treatised us as we squirm on Europe's petri dish. Our literary forbears were unconcerned with this gaze: they wrote not as

objects of scrutiny but as subjects in their own right. Kalidas, Kautilya, Babur, wrote without the shadow of a watcher on the page—or no watcher of this world. (Years later I would write a travel book to reverse that gaze—the West is under scrutiny in *Yukon to Yucatan*—and naturally it sold two copies.) Orientation shows. Posed simply, my question was: *Which way do I face?*

I grew up with this worry. Anglo-Indians embodied the dilemma in their very persons. For the longest time they were laughed at because they spoke of Home, which was to say England, without ever having been there. Then, just as diaspora solved their problem, a new group stepped into their shoes: Indians who choose to write in English. The *baba-log* are not the only ones with colonized heads, but they invite an easy disparagement at home, and a certain puzzlement abroad: you think like a Westerner, you look like a wog. This too was an old Anglo-Indian dilemma, and this too has passed to the new Anglo-Indians. But you have something to say and say it you will. You begin to explain. A *baba-log* book is packed with explanations, information of a curious and gazetteer sort, meant for strangers, inhabitants of the West. Being understood and being known *there* is crucial. It's a form of tribute, and you pay it in conscience, for in your deepest being, and sometimes in plain fact, you live there. That *is* Home.

But look. Face the *other* way you are suddenly, rapturously free. Free to *not* be understood by strangers, free to preserve every natural strangeness, because *here it is not strange*. Who you write for determines not just what you leave out but what you put in. Here is true independence, not that semblance we inherited in 1947. Write with your head turned away then. And, if at all possible, write from here.

I came back and began to write. Again, Canada put bread in my mouth. There was money left over after my thesis (on the Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris) to spend three years writing *The Trotter-Nama*. How frugal those Lucknow years only my wife knows, but they were heaven, and not Europe's heaven. I finished writing in 1984 (I was thirty-three, Mrs Gandhi had just been gunned down) but it took four years of waiting before the book appeared. If you add on the years of research in libraries around the world, that is a decade of waiting.

While editing the manuscript with Chuck Eliot of Knopf I painted the first *Trotter* jacket: it shows the Great Trotter falling out of his balloon over a miniature-like landscape. The fall was prophetic in a way I didn't bargain for. My editor in England was Tim Binding. "I really have high hopes for this book," he wrote, and vanished. *The Trotter-Nama* got a January slot, midwinter. Six months later, the jacket of *The Satanic Verses* showed not one but *two* figures tumbling out an aircraft. Two big Indian books in the same year hadn't made publishing sense to the men at Penguin. The story I heard was that Tim and his dark horse were eased out. Without a backer, *The Trotter-Nama* went into a free fall.

Like any good witch, the book refused to sink. Hailed by critics in the first stirrings of an independent literary culture—I like to think it helped enable that culture—it kept its head above water. The Great Trotter fell into the Ganda Nala but he's managed very well. Revived (by India Ink) at the end of the last century, here he is again. His fate, played out in the composite city of Naqlau, mirrors that of his progeny. Migrating or staying on, Anglo-Indians would remain poised between the heaven of imagined refuges around the world and the earth of their nurturing here, late versions of the man on my jacket, suspended above Sans Souci, falling but not falling.

Your average novel is linear, the telling seamless: *The Trotter-Nama* is above all things discontinuous, seamly. Today I realize it's a book of hyperlinks, only the term had not yet been invented. I've spoken of literary influences, but I mustn't favour literature. Was my own experience—my in-betweenness—the engine? An Anglo-Indian growing up in this country is frequently reminded of his difference. His very name is an embarrassment: the queue at the bank freezes when it is called out, every head turning fractionally. We were always slight misfits, no seamless transitions for us: like her or lump her, a woman in a dress stuck out. How odd those first admixtures in this land must have looked in their foreign clothes! Impossible to imagine today when every man wears pants and it's the dhotiwala who sticks out. In 1857 those trousers, that dress, did you in: more Anglo-Indian civilians than British died in that encounter. Today's users put on their modernity lightly, but there's blood on those clothes, on that language.

Babur, new to the land, was making history even as he wrote it, writing out of his exploits. Whatever else *The Trotter-Nama* is, it's true to my dailiness: I find its asides and disruptions wholly natural. But perhaps there is a larger context. English, literary English, is still in an impossible position in this country, lacking an archive, devoid of spoken depth, by turns shallow and stilted. We have no colloquial tradition, no landscape of named forms and creatures, no whole and intimate lexicon—but for that patchwork piecemeal past of those first hesitant Englishers. Orthodox attempts, cut out of whole cloth, have always failed to convince, condemned either to the high priestly tones of a Raja Rao or the comic opera of a Nirad Chaudhari. It's why R K Narayan, innocent of rhetoric and trusting to narrative, came nearer the mark. Today's smartest operators use not English but English-medium.

In *The Trotter-Nama* you meet Eugene the storyteller first thing. He's your stock unreliable narrator, a little up himself. In fact the book is preparing his comeuppance. That comes at the very end when the windbag is deflated and discovered speaking plain Anglo, the Anglo-Indian demotic. The same is true of Eugene's assemblage, that mélange of styles. Bravura, you're tempted to say. Stop and think a moment: was a display of versatility so hard to resist, or might there have been a deeper motive for the bricolage? What I was trying to get at was a fundamental quality of the mestizo experience, something that doesn't leap to the mind of the pure. No single tradition is the Anglo's birthright, no inherited way of dealing with social (or literary) material to hand. Habits, tenets, words, must be worked out on the spot: the customary *does not exist*. Consider the predicament of those first Anglos: not dress, not food, not God, not even language, *not one thing*, came readymade to them, as to those with a history of forms to draw on, a whole culture ready to hand. Shut out by the whole ones on either side, the newcomers were obliged to invent another way by doubting advances. That daily patchwork I tried to reproduce in *The Trotter-Nama* because I hear the scissors grind in my head. Hybridity is not a literary conceit; the theory that goes by that name is cheaply won. The hybridity I mean is innate, so you are at every stage dipping into yourself for material. The meld is visceral: think guts, think cookery if you wish—jalebis baked in custard—but not, for godsake, postcolonial.

Of course, there is another way: the colonial migrates to Europe, takes on the standards of the master and lives by them, a kind of half-life of its own. V S Naipaul is

the exemplar of such accommodation. In that temperate air hallowed forms take on an immutable cast: you can't see past them. But there are (Wilson Harris showed me) other ways, and you must work them out yourself. A tropical form must be not so much sweated over as sweated out: foreign and native, these contradictions are part of your being. It's like the voice of the koel: you can never leave it behind. You cobble a language out of such sounds and patterns; there is no other way forward, and no way out. It was so with the Anglo-Indians: there was nowhere to fall: they were the space between two stools.

This book has led a charmed life. In a mood of despair one Sydney winter I burnt the manuscript in a pot-belly stove. It was a dark night of the soul and the smuts hung in the air of that basement, tormenting their murderer. Too heavy to contemplate burning was the Knopf photo-ready copy (on sheets of high-grade paper that felt like plastic). I put it out for the garbage collectors. In a change of heart—the space-age beauty of the object had something to do with it—I brought it sheepishly back in. I had woken out of a futuristic dream at 4AM, just before the council truck came by. India Ink used that copy for their revival edition in 1999. Continuing its chequered history, the book is back with Penguin. *Penguin Modern Classics* had better work: it's my pension.

The author has led a charmed life too. That summer of 1976 I slept a night in a small town in Bihar on a verandah under a mosquito net. I was about to turn in when Uncle Roland stopped me: there was a snake in my bed! He killed it lickety-split. It was the banded krait, whose bite is fatal.

Life is strange, and swift, and full of grace: fiction must come hobbling after.

Dehra Dun, a day of rain, 2019.

Irwin Allan Sealy *was born in Allahabad and educated at Lucknow and Delhi. He lived twenty years in the US, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, returning to write* The Trotter-Nama*. His other novels* include Hero, The Everest Hotel, The Brainfever Bird, *and* Red*. He is the author of the memoir* The Small Wild Goose Pagoda, *the travel books* From Yukon to Yucatan, *and* The China Sketchbook, *and a book of poems,* Zelaldinus*. His newest novel is* A-so-ca*. He lives in Dehra Dun.*

International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies

HISTORICAL WEIGHTLESSNESS: WRITING *THE SECRET VINDALOO*

Keith St. Clair Butler

ABSTRACT

I offer a personal essay on the formative influences of The Secret Vindaloo *(2014); why I wrote it, and the personal and literary issues that arose in a work of fiction that foregrounded Anglo-Indians. Not the least of the challenges that emerged was the sobering realisation that I, as an Anglo-Indian, had only a passing knowledge of my community, and by extension that, perhaps, Anglo-Indians, faultlessly, possess a cursory grasp of their history. 'Historical Weightlessness' is an organising metaphor I coined to reflect the sense of a collective inner historical gap and it's used to drive this essay which explores issues at the intersection of racial science, illegitimacy, marginality, stereotypes, and post-colonial theory. The heartbeat of The Secret Vindaloo, its voice, authorial position, genre, form, and strategies such as metaphors, appropriation and abrogation – are also commented upon. For the readers benefit I include a summary of the novel at the start of the essay and provide extracts from the work to illuminate points being made. Finally, noting Frank Anthony's 1943 observation that the teaching of Anglo-Indian history was being 'completely ignored' in our schools and that Anglo-Indian educationalists were 'utterly ignorant' of the subject (Charlton-Stevens, 2022, p. 112) and my sense that possibly nothing much since then has changed in the homeland, I wonder at the impact of cultural impoverishment on Anglo-Indians over time. As a result of all these reflections I plea for the prioritisation of a comprehensive Anglo-Indian course of studies starting with the Portuguese in the 15th Century up to India of the 21st Century – da Gama to Brahma – for the education of Anglo-Indians and others.*

THE NOVEL'S STORYLINE

The Secret Vindaloo is a postcolonial novel about the search for identity: individual, communal and national. It explores the British-Indian colonial encounter, marginalisation, cultural stereotypes, exodus, utopias and dystopias, diasporas, human displacement, and positive and negative discrimination.

Set in Prime Minister John Howard's Australia, *The Secret Vindaloo*, using magical realist techniques, follows the exploits of a hybrid Anglo-Indian, Puttla Marks, who, because of general deracination, is without a sense of history. This marginalisation causes him to feel historically weightless and manifests itself in him as a gravity defying lightness; Puttla can fly. Food is inextricably linked with Puttla's identity but authentic Anglo-Indian food in Australia is hard to come by. One day, believing he has finally found a genuine Vindaloo in a Food court Puttla sets down to relish it, but he soon realises it is just another fake. Unable to contain his food rage Puttla flies into the air. Subsequently arrested and tossed into a government facility for Citizenship Assessment Puttla has to apply for a visa to stay in Australia by playing Ozsophy, an iconic Board game, and posting a decent score.

The narrative uses food as a deep metaphor for the retrieval of history. Puttla's gastronomically invested responses to Australian icons document his alternative sense of personal and communal history against a verifiable, but little-known background of Indo-Australian connections. His stories, aimed at staving off deportation, selects various events and personalities from history and popular culture such as Caroline Chisholm and Governor General Sir Richard Casey. (Both Australians had significant Indian connections.) In its choice of examined events and celebrities, the novel constantly questions those mainstream constructions of writing that privilege Imperial Culture, Hindu fundamentalism, and even some self-representations of the community authored by Anglo-Indians.

PERSONAL ESSAY

If my Anglo-Indian head had a geography it would have been called Kashmir – the Gaza of the subcontinent. Like the past occupants of those fractious spaces whose claim to territory was contested by many, my head, too, was a historical repository of the beleaguered Anglo-Indian community, also known as Mestize, East Indian, Eurasian. The Kashmir-of-my-head was a sought-after space by Others; the Raj and India. Whilst I kept the duo at bay in my own life no one stopped Them in the past from measuring our heads, shoulders, knees and toes, and writing scholarly books on Anglo-Indian Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes, calling it racial science. The colonisers extended their fixation to other Anglo-Indian body parts; to wit, their

reproductive organs, (mentionable Calcutta Anglo-Indian euphemisms for body parts are arguably,‘ nunuu’, ‘duudduu’, ‘The Promised Land’). The petri dish of the times deducted that these body parts were Enthusiastic; the species was declared genetically degenerate and dangerous. Mixed-race females were regarded as promiscuous and the males louche. Their progeny was loathed and feared. And whilst Indian erotic sculptures at Khajuraho and Konarak looked on stonily as their supplicants adored elsewhere, the pejorative stereotypes for the mixed-race community flourished, nurturing salacious tales and misconceptions, evident even in the India of today.[1] This then was the beleaguerment Anglo-Indians and their forebears endured. As a consequence of being regarded variously as outcastes by the Raj and India, marginality and the lightness of being in societal terms became their endowment. Not that I knew it at the time but becoming historically weightless as it were, that feeling of not mattering, became the drive for the writing of *The Secret Vindaloo*.

In 1972 I broke out of the Kashmir redoubt and moved to Australia. The Land Down Under proved to be a demanding entity which took sole tenancy of my headspace; or was I, now, the tenant?

Australia roped me in as an Australian citizen and laid down a dinky-di cultural rubric; ditch the past, become Australian, do multiculturalism, be a successful migrant. And if I succeeded in all of this it meant I was a good tenant, and qualified for citizenship, a tick for government’s multicultural policies (D'Cruz, 2006, p. 207). It was the time of 30 pieces of silver; federal grants to produce writing, visual and performance arts that demonstrated Australia was a successful multicultural milieu. Many applied, few were rejected. For me, the act of becoming an Australian citizen was less about accepting local acculturation and more to do with securing a Down Under future. Ironically, whilst many travellers to India say they ‘found’ themselves there, I’d more than suggest that’s

[1] See, for example, senior journalist Karan Thapar’s clumsy *mea culpa*, “I, for one, didn’t know the Anglo-Indian community is not a product of happenstance and casual miscegenation” in https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/an-interesting-read-on-the-anglo-indian-community-101665839210804.html .

where I, and possibly my *jaati,*[2] went missing. Lost in full sight. Finding myself would happen elsewhere, slowly and not without consternation.

Gaining Australian citizenship was easy enough. Explaining who I was to my Australian teaching colleagues was another matter:

> You've got an English name but you changed it from Indian, haven't you?
> *No, I'm Anglo-Indian.*
> What's that?
> *British on dad's side and Indian on mum's.*
> But you're born in India, so you must be Indian mate.
> *Me thinking: "So if a kangaroo's born in a stable it's a horse?"*

I did try to explain who an Anglo-Indian was, or thought I did, to each and every teacher, each and every class, and then to parents on Meet the Teacher Day. It was an exhausting exercise, elsewhere described in terms of 'explanation fatigue' (Andrews & Raj, 2021, p. 189), but it's only later I realised I had given very superficial answers, mainly one liners about my identity; the definition contained in the Indian Constitution**,** the Brit dad Indian mum thing, or a surly "I'm not Indian". Apart from that I knew next to nothing about the history of our community. Other moments of self realisation would freight in.

Like the day I parked my car at Albert Park Lake, Melbourne. Armed with a biro and note pad I thought I'd devote the clear sky morning to starting my first novel from the Anglo-Indian point of view. I sat in the car, my capsule for writing, notebook on lap, pen at the ready, dust particles hanging in the sunlight like mini punctuation marks. Twenty minutes later I had two sentences about a kindly Irish Christian brother from St George's School, Bowbazar, site of my early education. I wondered what about it was Anglo-Indian. So, I wrote, "I am Anglo-Indian." I then read it aloud. It felt good, always does. There is no sucked in breath from onlookers, no fear of shallow buried ordnance about sacred caste and outcaste, just the tiniest echo of a nail being

[2] *jaati* (caste) is used ironically here, as it is by many Anglo-Indians of my generation to refer to their community.

hammered into a reformative chit on a Wittenberg church door. But describing one's identity is a political act, and it requires more than its declaration to make a story. A knowledge of Anglo-Indian history would have been handy. I knew a lot about Shakespeare and Siddhartha, but of our history I knew nix. I had never been offered a course entitled Anglo-Indian history at school, and I'd rather be horribly wrong than right, but it appears that no such course is available. How could I realise my writing ambition?

Help was at hand, an Elaborator sitting on a university library shelf looking down at me like a gnome. I pulled down Nirad C Chaudhuri's *The Continent of Circe (Chaudhuri, 1967)* and idly flicked through the pages and halted at a chapter, 'The half-caste minorities – genetic and cultural.' It focussed on Eurasians, a term Anglo-Indians were also known by. Some lines leaped out at me. My education on Anglo-Indians had started:

> Young Eurasians, both boys and girls, showed a weak and degenerate form of the English schoolboy and girl. (Chaudhuri, 1967, p. 260)
>
> To young Eurasian girls, more especially, the instability gave a deceptive beauty, like that of a rime-covered, but canker-eaten moss rose. (Chaudhuri, 1967, p. 260)
>
> It was the women of this class that mostly supplied prostitutes for the White Man in India. (Chaudhuri, 1967, p. 261)
>
> They were either lifeless wax dolls without a mind …but very volatile, essence of sensuality. (Chaudhuri, 1967, p. 269)
>
> As it happens, the very figure of these girls has become a sort of emblem of their destiny. they have a characteristic physical appearance…top heavy, …even when not plump…full upper limbs, equally full nether limbs down to the calves, a thinness from the calves to the ankle…the gazelle-like effect by wearing high heeled shoes they seem to be always on the point of toppling over. (Chaudhuri, 1967, p. 264)

I admit to blushing and looking around as I read. Was this part of our history? Why weren't we taught it? Did I know differently? I hid the book deep in the bowels of the library. I'd say *The Secret Vindaloo* started marinating in my head then.

There is thin air between Utopias and Dystopias and now I was caught in its vortex. My parents, like many other Anglo-Indian parents, had made emigration for my sister and me their Crusade. For entire generations leaving India for England, Australia or New Zealand was never an 'if' but 'when'. My mum, a devout Catholic, prayed continuously for me to emigrate and to me it sounded like, "Hail Mary, full of Grace, send my son to a foreign place" (Butler, 2014, p. 237). The means to travel was also another prayer, "Holy Mary, mother of care, help me get his air fare" (Butler, 2014, p. 237). It seemed, to my wonderful mum especially, that her prayers had been answered. We received our 'papers' to Australia but the experience down under soon turned sour. Not the least racist plum of immigrating to Australia was that although the White Australia policy had been officially abolished by 1973, many in the street did not seem to notice that overturn. Labour leader Arthur Calwell's cheap call – Two Wongs don't make a White – was still in the air. Stereotypes of Asians abounded, and Melbourne, in the early 70s, felt raw. In the popular imagination, India was thought of as a monolithic entity, no space was reserved for ethnicities such as Anglo-Indians. This was not the Utopia my mother had envisaged for her son.

And then I received another lesson on being Anglo-Indian by yet another Elaborator, this time an Antipodean. When a vacancy appeared for a teaching post in a Melbourne private school operating in the image of, say an Eton, I applied. I suspected that stating I was Anglo-Indian could be problematic for an English principal so what else could I edge into my application? Mention my British subject passport? So, I did. We Brits needed to hang together. The next afternoon a very English voice called my landline. It was the Master of the school I had applied to. He congratulated me on the excellence of my application, bemoaning the standard of the ones sent by the 'locals.' He gave me an interview time, mentioning it was only a formality, "One has to abide by rules, doesn't one." The next day I arrived at the school, walked past a bell tower, cricket grounds, ivy covered walls, and was shown into the Master's office. He, fair in complexion, of large girth, and wearing a tweed coat, looked askance at me. Did he not expect a pencil thin darkish person, with black curly locks wearing a body shirt, thin tie, drainpipe trousers, thin belt, and Cuban heel shoes? I really can't recall him offering a handshake, or even a chair. He seemed to just stare, conversation was at a minimum. A short time later I found myself outside the office, wondering just how I had

lost a sure-fire job. I felt it was a race issue, but I had declared I was Anglo- Indian. I held this view about latent discrimination for decades and it's only when I wrote this article that an explanation offered itself. Had the Master expected a different type of Anglo-Indian, the Britisher living in the subcontinent whom I didn't know existed as a category? Anglo-Indian to me always meant the mixed-race version. Such was my ignorance.

Caught between the legacy of pejorative stereotyping and ambiguous reception by Australian society I began to feel as though I was back in India, again a *firinghee.* The sense of displacement and alienation grew. I mattered not. I had 'found myself': a somewhat historically weightless entity. The existential question I then faced, extrapolating from Rushdie's' *Imaginary Homelands* was how was I to live in the world? (1992, p. 18).

I had to write myself into being. Write as an Anglo-Indian. Surely, words would fill me up. But before I could attempt that there was a ladder of writerly questions to be scaled. For instance, what kind of English would I write in? Having been educated in Calcutta by missionaries and in Anglo-Indian schools I was taught an English with Britain as its template. That canon now seemed inadequate. What was, to borrow Arundhati Roy's phrase, "the morally appropriate language" (2018) for me to think and write in? I don't know that I pondered long over the choice. I wrote the way I spoke, and that English echoed my geographical locations and hybridity. Importantly, I could use the variant our community was derided for in colonial times – chi chi English – akin to our Anglo-Indian patois, because I was a thack Anglo, men, *usli* not *nukl*i. Illegitimacy rules. Rushdie put it as only Rushdie can: "Melange, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that, is how newness enters the world" (1992, p. 394).

For all of that, living in the diaspora can be a gritty experience. For me, there's a sense of being unplugged, in free fall. I miss the herd, the collective of solidarity, the ritual of dance (the jive, of course), using our patois – 'dol', 'bad word' curry, and please God, Vindaloo pronounced properly. At work and play I'm really not beyond eavesdropping on conversations. I've had luck with one person saying 'dol', referring to the red lentil soupy curry, to someone across the room from me. I sidled up to her. We are now

friends. She invites me over for bad word (ball) curry and Devil's chutney, calls me 'brother' and I refer to her as 'sas'. We bring the Anglo-Indian lobby to two in our fair city of 80,000. Pucca.

Another writerly question I faced was what genre was I going to use? During my course of studies at Melbourne University I encountered the Augustans: Dryden, Pope and especially the satirist Jonathan Swift. I tried my hand at the theatre of the absurd and *blanche* (Butler, 1998) was my first published work in Australia.

But the major challenge for me was how to foreground Anglo-Indians in a narrative when I was largely ignorant of their history? It seemed like trying to make *kul kuls* without a mold. Inspirers appeared on book shelves: Sealy's *The Trotter-nama* (1998), where Eugene Trotter recounts the history of his Anglo-Indian family, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* with the narrator, Saleem Sinai, "technically an Anglo-Indian" (D'Cruz, 2006, p. 167) Desani's, *All about H Hatterr,* its eponymous Eurasian, "fifty-fifty of the species" (Desani, 1948, p. 31), Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) for affectionate parody and, later, Aristotle, "Midway between the unintelligible and the commonplace, it's metaphor that produces most knowledge" (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 50). Ashcroft's *The Empire Writes Back* (2002) gave me the final prompt for the embracing of "marginality as the fabric of social experience" (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 103). It jettisoned me to write my story, turn stereotypes on their head, such as the trope of Anglo-Indian 'illegitimacy'. Why limit that canard to one set of parents in my novel, why not have a commune of surrogates? From different historical times. Thus, I appropriated into the novel, James Shepherd of 1857 Mutiny fame; the legendary boy poet Henry Luis Vivian Derozio from the 1840s, and then went mad, got myself a rabid dog, ensuring he was a half-caste.

And what of the authorial voice? I couldn't go past the picaresque, *mastaan*, likeable rogue, the joker. Baroque the stereotype, take the racial science nonsense, fatten it up so it collapses upon its own weight, reductio ad absurdism, ad nauseam, *fattafat* prose, swirl, twirl, dervishwrite the opus bogus.

“Tell me what you eat and I’ll tell you who you are” (Brillat-Savarin, 1825, quoted by Butler, 2014) suggested itself as the appropriate epigram for the novel**.** I don’t mind admitting I have more than a passing penchant for vindaloo, hunting the ingredients down in the local Indian grocery, marinating the meat, cooking, smelling, eating, sharing, heating leftovers to have with dol and rice, placing warmed up vinegary gobbets of ‘leftovers’ down the spine of a paratha to make a vindaloo kati roll. Did I pick vindaloo as the deep metaphor for the novel or did it seek me out? The novel starts with that obsession in mind. Here in the Prologue, my alter ego, Puttla Marks:

> …plunged through to the food court. Spying the joint he had come for, he swaggered to the counter and surveyed the chalkboard menu. Minutes later he feverishly scribbled.
>
> Mama, so much to tell you. Urgent urgent. Real, real vindaloo (not as good as yours, though) has come to Melbourne! I’m sitting here at Neoteric Curries in Chadstone food court. Guess who is the cook? Pamperelle Furtado! (Butler, 2014, prologue)

And later:

> Mama, is your old gunnysack of spices still under the bed? Ms. Furtado consults a curry app on her smartphone for quantities; not like what you do, Mama—a handful of this, pinch of that. She spoons out garlic and ginger granules, some hydrogenated cumin, coriander in a tube, hydroponically nurtured mint, and organic chili. Remember when your chili powder tin overturned and the flakes bounced off the floor because merchant wallah had put in crushed red brick to increase the weight? Ms. Furtado puts the condiments in- to the neon blender. She touches the pulse button and the masala flies! You collect your secret spices onto a grinding stone, crack and pound the turmeric root with the end of your stone roller, and the stain spreads over the pitted tablet into grooves like secret writing. With the edge of your hand you sweep a ridge of spices under your grinder. You grip your roller with both hands as you kneel over the tablet, Mama. No wonder when you whacked me for not doing my homework it hurt. You press down. The garlic pods spurt vin d’alu—wine of the garlic. You flick more water over it, add more seeds, the

> sweat dripping off your brow—Mama, I've seen that happen. Then more scoops, more grinding, and then, funtoosh, the seeds crack, spices become masala, the aroma is inside our nostrils, your eyes still, other worlds explode inside you. It is done! You are my mother, Vin d'alu Queen! Pukka! (ibid)

In the same section, Marks, disappointed with taste testing yet another fake vindaloo, works himself into a rage and in a moment of Anglo-Indian magical realism, flies up into the air and moonwalks. This foreshadows the novel's ending which features an Anglo-Indian dog, a mongrel, a half-caste, a pariah, a personification for obvious purposes. Arthur, an exceptional Anglo-Indian educated dog of the 1960's, knows things:

> (Dogs in Australia eat) Pals Meaty bites, Chomp dogs Chow. No Vindaloo? (In Australia) freedom for canines was restricted. Over there he couldn't run around at will and threaten to bite people occasionally, to intimidate them with threats of Rabies. Arthur knew how Indians were terrified of Rabies and misnamed the deadly infection as hydrophobia. [In India] He quite enjoyed eyeballing people from time to time, steaming up a mad look in his eye and a few induced bubbles of froth at the sides of his mouth. Onlookers then took to their legs. But this didn't wouldn't work in Australia. There were strict Council laws over there and under certain circumstances hounds faced capital punishment! Barbaric. (Butler, 2014, p. 234)

In this final chapter Henry Lawson's, 'The Loaded Dog' is appropriated in time and space from 1920's Australian bush to the metropolis of modern Melbourne. For those who are not familiar with 'The Loaded Dog', it's a humorous short story by the Australian writer Henry Lawson. The plot concerns three gold miners and their dog Tommy, and the farcical consequences of leaving a bomb cartridge unattended for Tommy to grab, somehow ignite, and scamper around the camp causing mayhem. Arthur's story parodies this, when drunk on Anglo-Indian punch, and frothing at the mouth playfully chases reunion participants who then scamper thinking he has 'hydrophobia'. Arthur, at the end of this chapter, in another moment of magical realism,

Anglo-Indian oeuvre, is transported into the air and watches the world from above. This brings the novel to a close.

But I can't close the lid on this box featuring the formative influences of *The Secret Vindaloo* and walk away, job done. Because another job needs to be started dealing with, an uncomfortable truth: we Anglo-Indians do not really know our history. Throw a pebble into India and it'll land on a person of ancient culture, knowledgeable about their heritage, be it Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or Parsi. What if the pebble bounced off an Anglo-Indian? There will be the sound of emptiness. We walk hollowly.

What may have caused this lack of knowledge about ourselves? What price have we paid, as a community, for the impoverishment of our selfhood? What are the consequences for our youth being denied an education about their heritage? Is it possible to lead full lives when you don't know your history? As far back as 1943, Frank Anthony, founding father of the post-constitution community, was observing that "the teaching of Anglo-Indian history which should form the first and basic ingredient of the curriculum, has been completely ignored" in Anglo-Indian schools. "Not only European but Anglo-Indian educationalists are utterly ignorant of the history and achievements' of the community" (Charlton-Stevens, 2022, p. 112). Have things changed since then? Is there now a properly constructed course of studies covering the first European trader to land in India to modern times – da Gama to Brahma – on Anglo-Indians? I suspect there isn't. No matter. We need to look to the immediate future. Given that there is currently no lack of resources on the subject – journals, books, articles, creative media presentations – is it time to educate our youth with a course of studies at school level answering the questions of who they are, where they come from, where they are going?

In conclusion, I have attempted to present the history of writing *The Secret Vindaloo,* why I felt compelled to compose it, and what factors influenced the composition. Writing this essay has been a journey of discovery, not without moments of personal realisation. Before I commenced the novel I faced a sobering problem; reflecting on a history of which I had scant knowledge. Authors, notably Sealy, Rushdie and Desani, provided inspiration.Postcolonial theory carried the writing ambition to fruition. *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft et al., 2002) particularly provided the justification, rationale and strategies for the telling of marginalised histories. Other decisions I had

to make either prior to the writing or discovered during the process revolved on the 'moral choice of language' for me to use as an Anglo-Indian, genre, authorial position, and voice. I, mostly, found my way. In addition, I expressed a personal anxiety about the apparent lack of a comprehensive Anglo-Indian course of studies – da Gama to Brahma – in the homeland and its impact on the community. I make a plea for restoration, for the inception of an educational course of Anglo-Indian studies.

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MENTORING ASPIRING WRITERS IS ONE OF MY GOALS

David McMahon

ABSTRACT

David McMahon answers questions about aspects of being an Anglo-Indian novelist. He also explains what led him to embark on writing at an early age, and why he is committed to helping other would-be writers find their mojo. If you want his advice, contact him directly on his LinkedIn profile.

INTRODUCTION

This article comprises two parts: the first is a question-and-answer section which directly addresses some of the concerns raised in this special issue. It looks at issues such as how Anglo-Indians understand themselves and their relationship to the English language, what they seek to achieve in and through their writing, questions of representation, and whether there is a politics to Anglo-Indian writing, both in India and the diaspora. In the second part I explain what led me to embark on writing at an early age, and why I am committed to helping other would-be writers.

PART ONE

How do Anglo-Indian writers understand themselves as writers of English in India?

This is about inclusivity rather than exclusivity. Writing in any language is not constrained by age, ethnicity, status, talent or experience. It's totally unlike membership to a club, because no one votes you in or out. The doors are always open, so you choose when to enter and what exactly you want to do. Like a two-way

chemical reaction, you learn from those who write in the same language as you, just as other writers will one day value your contribution and learn from your own literary path and experiences in the field. In addition, being willing to share your knowledge is a major component in enabling other writers.

Do they have a unique relationship to the language not shared by others?

Not at all. To claim a unique relationship would be akin to beating one's chest and announcing that you are the supremely favoured child in a huge village. To do so would be totally without foundation. One's relationship with a language is a formative and ongoing process. Your experience with English – or any language at all, for that matter – is unlikely to be an exact clone of anyone else's.

Like any writer of any age, of any background, in any geographical location, the choice of writing in any language is fundamental: which of the many world languages do you choose to write in? Generally speaking, you would instinctively opt for the language you are most familiar with. While I would not categorise myself as strictly bilingual in terms of fluency, I still speak Bengali fairly comfortably, but I haven't written anything in that language since my school days. Ergo, I write in English because it comes naturally to me.

What do they seek to do through the act of writing and publishing?

To me, this is a key question, yet one to which there is no right or wrong answer. If you surveyed 100 authors of published fiction and posed this question to them, you would in all likelihood receive 100 different answers.

I was lucky. Blissfully ignorant about the prescribed path of first contacting a literary agent, I sent a brief email to David Davidar, who was then at the helm of Penguin India, introduced myself, told him I was halfway through a manuscript and asked whether he would be interested in the theme. To my surprise, he replied, asking me to contact him when I had finished writing. His response paved the way for the publication of *Vegemite Vindaloo* in 2006 and *Muskoka Maharani* in 2010, but after my debut novel was released, I made the conscious decision to use my own

experiences and my own learning curve to guide other aspiring writers around the world. To me, this aspect is probably even more important than being a published novelist. It's an absolute honour to have a publishing contract, but the real pleasure comes in guiding others towards becoming better writers.

Who does an Anglo-Indian writer represent?

This is defined purely by the subject matter the writer chooses. Beyond that, the writer has total freedom to explore, portray and project anything that he or she wants to. I believe I represent the family who raised me, the wider circle of people who were an integral part of my formative years, the teachers who catalysed my educational journey, and of course my wife and children who have been the central part of my life journey and who wholeheartedly supported my desire to become a novelist. That this has spanned many decades and countries says so much about the world we live in and how much we have to be grateful for.

Is there a politics to writing as an Anglo-Indian in/about modern India?

Honestly, I'd say it's more about awareness than politics of any description, be it purely political or socio-political. Long before I became a global affairs analyst, I was politically aware, not just regionally but internationally as well. But when writing a novel, you choose your own blank canvas and populate it in whatever fashion suits you best. I'm extremely proud of being Indian, just as I am about being raised and educated in India, but there is no intrusion of any aspect of politics in my approach to writing fiction. That's certainly not to say I am apolitical, but as a writer of novels I certainly have not cloaked myself in any politicisation so far.

How is it different for an Anglo-Indian writer living in the global diaspora?

The post-war, post-Independence, global diaspora has changed swiftly and dramatically due to a number of contributory factors – the acceleration of migration policies in some countries; the advent of the European Union; the opening of borders across Europe and the adoption of the euro as a common currency; Britain's return of Hong Kong to Beijing; the end of apartheid in South Africa; the reunification of

Germany and the breakup of the Soviet Union; the first non-white elected national leaders in South Africa, the United States and Great Britain; and the dramatic rise of Asian economies.

The other major change, of course, was the advent of the internet, the rise of social media and the many huge strides in technology, digitalisation and electronic access in what we now call the Fourth Industrial Revolution or Industry 4.0, where connectivity is not just its beating heart but its lifeblood as well. Instant access means that because the world has changed in so many ways, it is possible for a writer of any background or heritage to live and work in almost any country without ever feeling like an outsider. As an Anglo-Indian writer of fiction in the 21st century, I feel none of the geographical or social constraints that probably confronted many of my predecessors.

PART TWO

The genesis

I sometimes wonder if Ashish Chatterjee, my friend from primary school, remembers the day we became co-authors. Well, sort of. We were probably all of six years old when he came over to spend the morning at our house in Kolkata and I decided it would be a great idea to write a few mini-stories and give them to my mother for her birthday. I found a notepad and tore out a few pages, some for Ashish and some for myself. Each page was less than half the size of an A4 sheet of paper, so the stories, written in our neatest handwriting, were probably only three or four sentences long. When we had finished the exciting project, we glued the top of each page together, so each of the stories could be flipped up to read the next one in the sequence. I decided to put them in the letterbox and because I was far too excited to wait until someone actually found them, I told my mother where they were. Her enthusiastic reaction and her appreciation of our literary efforts probably convinced me that I would one day be an author.

In primary school, I had a class teacher whose name was Sheila Geileskey. In my childish writing, she somehow saw the same spark that my mother constantly referred to, so she would make me stand up in class and read my essays aloud to my

classmates. Not surprisingly, she was one of the people I mentioned in the acknowledgement section of my first novel and when I sent her a copy of the book, she graciously replied, saying she always knew I would be a writer.

It was when I went to boarding school at St Joseph's College, North Point, Darjeeling, that I received further validation as a would-be writer, becoming only the second student in the history of the school to twice win the North Point medal for essay writing, in my penultimate year and again in my final year. Here, in the cradle of the Himalayas, the wisdom and considerable intellectual depth of many teachers helped shape my creativity in my adolescence. Three of them in particular stood out – Maurice Banerjei, Father Hank Nunn SJ and Father Victor Tucker SJ were among the people who most influenced me at the school that was my home in the mountains. Long after I had finished school, graduated from university and embarked on my career, I exchanged letters with all three of them for many years.

Not surprisingly, North Point is mentioned in *Vegemite Vindaloo*. While it is purely a work of fiction, there are also other aspects described with a degree of forensic accuracy – the sound of the lions in the zoo, heard clearly from an adjacent classroom at St. Thomas' School; the number 35 tram that Mrs Ghosh takes to and from her teaching duties in school; the bustling Howrah Station; the lake and the migratory birds at the Alipore Zoo; the foreign doctor who operates a free pavement clinic on Middleton Row; even the man who carefully wraps a cloth around his mouth and eyes before burying his head temporarily in the mud in an attempt to earn money from passers-by is an accurate description of something I saw near the city's Indian Museum when I was a teenager.

On the other hand, Jindaroo Creek is a fictional bush outpost, but its surrounding geography is as real as it gets – the sand dunes, the sheer Bunda cliffs and the calving southern right whales are all synonymous with the Eyre Peninsula in coastal South Australia, a region I was privileged to visit in 1999, while I worked at *The Age* newspaper in Melbourne before my career and my interest in the digital world took me from journalism to technology. The chapters in which I describe Richmond station and the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) are factually descriptive too. The Australian Football League (AFL) grand final is one of the annual highlights of the national

sporting calendar, but I took the liberty of describing the first grand final played at night under lights. This had never happened when the novel was published, but in October 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic, there were two significant departures from established tradition. Not only was the grand final played interstate (in Brisbane) for the first time in the game's history, it was played under lights!

The Influences

Reading was an integral component of my childhood in Kolkata, back in the days when it was still Calcutta. Before I learnt how to read, my mother would read to me every single day and I was instantly lost in the magic of words. I clearly remember her reading A. A. Milne's delightful stories about Christopher Robin and Winnie the Pooh, Rudyard Kipling's books and many more. I actually don't remember when I learnt how to read, but I clearly recall the wonder of losing myself in books, of which there were literally several hundred in our home. I devoured Enid Blyton's stories and the 'William' series by Richmal Crompton, Richard Gordon's 'Doctor' series and many others and when I had completed them, I progressed to a wide range of more advanced literature – poetry anthologies, autobiographies, history, adventure. Every time I finished a book, I could choose from hundreds more, a veritable literary smorgasbord that helped form my own narrative preferences.

To pick up a book was to lose myself in a new world every time. I loved the freedom of choice. I was drawn to the monthly soft-cover *Reader's Digest* as well as their collection of hard-cover condensed books. Equally important in shaping me was the regular arrival at home of four other magazines – *Time*, *Newsweek*, *National Geographic* and the now-defunct large-format *Life* magazine'. The first two whetted my appetite for news reporting and design, while the other two lit my spark of appreciation for imagery, balance and, as my own interest in photography progressed, the understanding of how descriptive powers could be best harnessed in words alone. Appreciating the perspective and visual balance of my surroundings was an increasingly pivotal factor that shaped the way I wrote. These treasure troves transported me across the world, while instilling in me the awareness of how words could best be used.

As a teenager with a well-established appreciation of Byron, Keats, Wordsworth, Shelley and the Bard of Avon, I discovered the novels of Thomas Hardy and his evocative descriptions. Later in life, having become a novelist myself, I was honoured when a reviewer said my descriptive powers were Hardy-esque. The point of this is to say: always embrace your own influences. They will strengthen your writing in immeasurable ways. Follow your own instincts because they are a true echo of your influences and because they will lead you down the path of spontaneity, a great gift for any creative person.

In short, there is only one person who can tell your story. Naturally, that's you. Trust your creative instinct. Put your first mark on a blank sheet of paper. You'll be surprised at how wonderful an experience it is. Write with freedom. Write with honesty. But most of all, write with joy.

The Approach

Your literary canvas has no bounds. From a creative point of view, that is your golden ticket to literary exploration. Find your own fulcrum when you balance discipline with freedom. The process of writing encompasses a certain degree of discipline, which in turn defines focus and clarity. Yet there are freedoms at every step of the process, especially if you are writing fiction.

A short synopsis has inestimable value. When I wrote my first novel, *Vegemite Vindaloo*, I started with great momentum. But I didn't write a synopsis, so I got derailed very quickly. I could not figure out where the plot was going. This was a crucial stumbling block - but there was a simple solution. I sat down and wrote a very short synopsis - a mere three sentences. It took me all of ten minutes, but the entire theme crystallised instantly. From that point on, it was like looking at a GPS map.

If you're driving in unfamiliar territory, you always rely on a GPS-based app or, if you're really old-school, you consult a road map first. Whatever approach you choose, the intention is always the same – you need some points of reference by which to travel to your destination. Writing is no different. It helps sharpen your focus if you work out your synopsis first, whether it is one paragraph or several pages. Once you know where the plot is going, you'll find it all falls into place. And don't be afraid of taking

diversions. When I wrote *Vegemite Vindaloo*, I planned to introduce a couple of laconic 'Outback' characters and to give them two or three pages at most. But they bulldozed their way through the plot and instead they became integral to two major chapters.

So, yes, having a plan is crucial, but don't let the plan enslave you. Being willing to deviate and come back to your own broad outline is equally important. Write from your heart and you'll never go wrong.

The First Sentence

Don't fret if you can't construct the ideal opening for a piece of writing. Just start with the first thought that comes into your head. As you write and the thought process begins to fall into place, you will eventually think of the elusive first sentence. The point I'm making is: don't sit there for hours staring at a blank computer screen. If you simply start writing, you will spare yourself the frustration of a delay. Writers can start anywhere and go back to construct the first sentence. Builders can't do that. They have to start with their foundation and build upwards.

As a writer, the structure is like creating something with Lego blocks, where everything is easily interchangeable. We're lucky. We don't have to build a piece of writing in a linear fashion. We can build 'bricks' of sentences and paragraphs in any order and just cut and paste them where they belong. If you feel like you've hit a brick wall, just take a detour and start elsewhere. It's the sort of freedom that few other professions have. Recognise it. And revel in it.

Character Building

How do you create your characters if you're writing fiction? That depends on how strongly you view them in your own mind and how deftly you portray them in your writing. Take the time to present your characters exactly as you perceive them. This is not just limited to what they look like, but how they behave and how they react to situations they face. One very senior figure in the publishing industry told me something that I have always valued greatly – he said my characters were three-dimensional and believable. I still treasure that.

Like life itself, *Vegemite Vindaloo* introduces many different personality types. It is a tale of many journeys – journeys of distance, journeys of personal growth, as well as journeys of the soul. On the surface, it is a story of how a well-to-do Anglo-Indian family, with a son of their own, gradually open their hearts to the infant son of the woman who, through an unusual series of events, has become their servant. But beyond that simplistic explanation, it is a tale of pride on the one hand and prejudice on the other.

The women in the novel are the strongest characters. Zarina, the servant woman, finds a resolute voice when her husband Ismail, in maudlin mood, turns spitefully to drink instead of trying to solve the problem of their sudden displacement. Hilary Cooper, initially resistant to her husband Steve's unconditional affection for the servant's infant, Azam, is the one who bridles at his suggestion that they turn their backs on the child as they prepare to migrate. Bertha Cooper, Steve's mother, is forged of pure steel – she kills a cobra in one chapter and thwarts a curse in another. And there is a strong but crucial cameo by the simple grandmother who commands the men in Betulnagar, a slum, to listen to her. She announces her hopes and dreams for her newborn grandson and when the males question her logic, she explains how the child will slip the bonds of seemingly inescapable poverty.

And what of the men in the novel? Sailen Nath Banerji, the little slum boy who becomes a senior pilot, philanderer, and a power player in a national airline, seems keen to interfere in the Coopers' personal decisions. Yet he turns out to be a modern Solomon in a stalemate over how the prestigious Airlines Club will farewell the Coopers. His salutation to them, delivered on the shore of a lake at the Alipore Zoo, is endowed with the uncanny voice of prophecy.

Steve Cooper himself starts out as a man of uncommon depth and compassion, but when stripped of his comfort zone and forced into unfamiliar circumstances, his severely misplaced pride threatens to become his Achilles heel. Ismail, too, seems to be a pillar of strength until he comes undone in the challenging surroundings of Calcutta. Later, as a last-minute battle of emotions ensues when the Coopers are about to leave India, it is Ismail, seemingly against all odds, who becomes the eloquent voice of reason.

If you believe in your characters, so too will your readers.

Planning

I don't sit down and plan a sequence, a segment, or a chapter to the nth degree. I know which characters are going to be in the chapter, where they are and roughly what they'll be doing, but I just write the story as it unfolds in my head. In my case, the best creative instinct comes when I sit in front of my keyboard and one idea just leads to another and one sentence leads to another.

Often, a writer will work as a lot of film directors do – by planning or 'blocking' every sequence before the cameras roll. If that approach works for a writer, more power to them. It works for them and there's no reason why it won't work when crafting narrative. As I once told an American writer who sought advice on the appropriate level of planning – if you find you're getting bogged down because you can't brainstorm a whole scene, try writing instinctively instead.

Finding Your Rhythm

A childhood friend of mine is a gifted writer, a committed wildlife expert, a wonderful photographer, a published poet, and an award-winning documentary maker. Some years ago, he made a start on what sounded to me like a terrific novel. But time is his problem. As an overseas bureau chief for a major newspaper, he's on call 24/7 and travels constantly. On one of his visits to Melbourne, I figured it would have been remiss of me to let him abandon his novel entirely. So, I told him about my ‘narrow window’ theory. We all have demands on our time, but is it possible to set aside even ten or fifteen minutes each day to write? It's a very narrow window of opportunity, but one that could potentially yield great creativity. There is an added advantage to that sort of approach. Regular work on a manuscript sends your brain into ‘plot gear’. Simply put, it means ideas will regularly pop up with an efficiency that would be absent if not working regularly on a manuscript.

Writer’s Block

You're probably going to hit a brick wall a couple of times, because it comes with the territory.

A friend of mine who is a very good writer told me she was constantly frustrated because she would get bogged down with her writing. Turned out that she was writing very late at night and would often spend a couple of hours just writing a few paragraphs, getting progressively slower and slower and crankier and crankier. I suggested that she try writing in the afternoon or evening – fitting in with her busy schedule – when her mind was fresher. It worked. She wrote quicker, with more clarity, and found she wasn't propelling herself inexorably towards a standstill.

It's important to recognise when to stop and take a break. I have always encouraged writers to acknowledge inspiration and take the hard step of getting started, but it is equally important to know when to take some time out. Because writers are often busy with other aspects of their life, it’s not always possible to sit down at a computer or pick up a smartphone when inspiration strikes. Late one night, I thought of a subtle plot twist when I was writing my second novel, but the next morning I simply could not remember what it was. Several hours later, with a sigh of relief, I recalled the twist. Ever since that day, if an idea occurs to me, I write it down, because there is nothing worse than having a brilliant idea and then losing it forever in the mental fog of your myriad daily chores. Recognise your moment of inspiration. Write down the thought. And when you are back at your computer, allow it to guide you. Occasionally, these ideas ‘write’ themselves, but sometimes they need a lot of sweat and toil to translate into words on a computer screen.

There are times, too, when ideas ebb and flow. But we're human beings, we're not machines, which means that some days our output will be prodigious and on other days it will simply be a trickle of words.

Research

Be prepared to do some real research, even if you're writing fiction. I like to cite the example of the late American writer and journalist Paul Gallico, many of whose novels I read as a child. His desire for hands-on research manifested itself most notably in 1923, when he was in his mid-twenties and a sports reporter for the New York *Daily News* tabloid. Assigned to cover the training camp of world heavyweight boxing champion Jack Dempsey before his title defence bout against Argentina’s Luis Angel

Firpo, he boldly asked Dempsey if he could get in the ring with him for one round. Dempsey agreed, but asked: “What’s the matter, son? Doesn’t your editor like you anymore?” As the aspiring writer explained later: “I'd been in the sports department (of the *Daily News*) for about a year. I was hidden really, out of sight. I simply didn't exist. I thought if I wrote a first-person story, it would be a good feature. It would be exclusive. Nobody else had done it.” In the ring against Dempsey, Gallico ducked one left hook but claimed he could not remember how he did it: “But I didn't duck the next one” he admitted. “I found myself on the floor. Everything went sort of black. The ring made one complete revolution clockwise and then went back, counter-clockwise.”

So good was his account that it earned him his first byline, a rarity in that era. About a year later, he was writing a regular sports column for the paper. Fame was just around the corner, but he would have to wait a trifle longer for fortune. He aspired to fiction and in 1936, one of his short stories was snapped up by Hollywood for $5,000, a handsome sum at the time. He moved to Europe, gave up sports writing and turned his attention to converting one of his short stories into a mini novel. This of course was *The Snow Goose* and the unusual love story, with its spectral culmination in Dunkirk, changed his life.

Editing

A simple piece of advice I’ve given to every writer is this: Don't worry about editing your manuscript until you've actually finished. When your writing is complete, it’s a lot easier to judge where to edit it and how much you need to edit it. Trying to do so in an incomplete essay, academic paper or manuscript can often be a frustrating exercise.

About a year after *Vegemite Vindaloo* was published, a newspaper colleague of mine told me quietly that he had been inspired by my example and that he was also going to embark on his debut novel. I was delighted, especially because I knew he was a gifted, instinctive writer who often sat at a café and wrote in the most engaging and relatable manner. But for some reason he struggled with the novel and several weeks into the project, he confessed to me that he had only written one page. I was aghast because I knew how quickly he normally wrote. However, it turned out that every time he completed a sentence of the novel, he would agonise over every single word, questioning if he could have done it better. Basically, he was bogged down by his own

desire to self-assess. I told him that he had to discard this ‘handbrake on’ approach, break his self-imposed shackles and go back to the sort of free-flowing, unencumbered writing he did so well and so consistently before he took on the novel.

The write-now, edit-later mindset is what I call the Volkswagen Beetle approach. Back in the later 1990s, the German car was relaunched when our eldest daughter was in primary school, and she asked if she could have a birthday cake in the shape of what was being referred to as the ‘New Beetle’. In a moment of ill-judged bravado, I volunteered to make the cake, and then spent a day or two trying to work out how on earth I could deliver on my promise. To cut a long story short, I started with two rectangular cakes, placed one on top of the other and armed myself with a long, sharp knife. A little bit of slicing here, a little bit of chiselling there and some judicious finishing touches completed the project. So, how did I carve the VW out of two rectangular cakes? Simple. I just cut away everything that *didn't* look like the car.

In essence, that it how editing works – you cut away extraneous elements that do not belong.

What Next?

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair once narrated a story at a symposium I attended, and it really struck a chord. Having been chosen in 1994 as the country’s youngest Labour leader, he led his party to victory in the 1997 election, ending almost 20 years of Conservative Party tenancy of 10 Downing Street. The way he told the story, the huge transition from being in opposition for so long to finally winning government was characterised by the feeling of “Right, what do we actually do now?” the next morning.

Variations of that question have probably confronted many writers through the ages. Yes, you’ve found a publisher and your book has been released – but what will your next step be? I was in my late twenties when my first non-fiction book was published, and I always knew that one day I would write a novel. In April 2006, when *Vegemite Vindaloo* was published, I was already writing my second novel, but I decided during a conversation with my wife that I was going to help as many writers as I could, using my blog as a free advice platform accessible to anyone. Because I already had a fairly

substantial number of followers, I received multiple queries each day and answered every single one of them. This was quite simply my way of giving back. Sharing knowledge across an international community of writers was – and still is – a privilege.

This decision to lend a helping hand sixteen years ago to people whom I'd never actually met had an interesting echo very recently. One of the writers I came across in my blogging days was a health professional based in the UK, but his career and family life meant that he had little time to devote to a full-length manuscript. My own career took me to Singapore for almost a decade and I moved from Big Media to Big Tech, but he and I occasionally interacted. Then in late 2022 he emailed me to say he had finished a manuscript and wanted to know if I would take a look at it and guide him through the next steps in the process. Of course, I said yes, with a big smile on my face. Yes, I still regard sharing knowledge as both a priority and a privilege.

So Now You're an Author

Shortly after *Vegemite Vindaloo* was released, we were in Kolkata for a family funeral. Just before we flew back home to Melbourne, a family member asked me to give him ten copies of my book so he could give them to close friends. Because Amazon was then in its infancy, having launched its online operation a few months earlier, I took my children to the bookshop I knew best – the Oxford Bookstore on Park Street. It was where I had spent countless hours as a child, browsing shelves, gazing at a mind-boggling array of books, occasionally carefully picking one off a shelf and reverently turning its pages. It was very special to take my own children back to a place that was such a part of my formative years.

That day, time was tight. I picked up ten copies of the book and took them to the cashier. He put them through the register and took my card to put through the payment. I have no idea what made him look at the name on my card, but he did a double-take and exclaimed: "You're the author!" Yes, I admitted, he was correct. The person in the queue behind me, a foreign tourist, paid close attention to what was happening, especially since the cashier announced he was going to inform the store manager that I was on the premises. The tourist told me he was waiting to pay for a book he'd selected for a long flight to Europe, but that he'd changed his mind and instead was going to buy my novel instead. "I don't think I've ever met an author before," he told

me. He disappeared for a few moments, returned with a copy of my book and asked me if I would mind autographing it for him. Would I mind? Of course not. I was delighted.

As it turned out, I signed quite a few more books that day. The manager arrived and asked me to autograph a series of my novels that would be sold with special jackets saying: “Signed by the author”.

But the most significant part of that experience was sharing the moment with my own family, in a bookstore that had been such a pivotal part of my childhood. In a real-life echo of any good literary experience, I had come full circle in a way that truly mattered to me.

David McMahon, *editor, photographer, writer and family man, was born in Kolkata, where he began his career in journalism and wrote his first non-fiction book. He was the youngest associate editor at the* Anandabazar Patrika Group*. After migrating to Melbourne, he worked for* The Age *and the* Herald Sun *newspapers. He was shortlisted for two National News Awards and was a finalist in the Walkley Awards, the Australian equivalent of the Pulitzer Prize. He then spent nine years working in Singapore, where his interest in digital strategy and change management led him to the world of global technology. He can be contacted directly on his LinkedIn profile.*

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the nowhere man

Bryan Peppin

ABSTRACT

The essay, 'the nowhere man' begins by addressing a question a curious reader asked about how long Peppin took to write his novel, The Nowhere Man (2020). As well as answering the question, that it took a lifetime, he introduces the main protagonist, Joshua Pearse, and some details of the plot without giving too much away. The essay moves on to exploring why he writes, and also addresses issues he feels strongly about as an Anglo-Indian living in contemporary India, from the loss of political representation and their uncertain future to his firm stance about being Indian, and India being his country.

"How long did it take you to write this book?" was the very first question that one of my very few readers put to me. I was floored. I didn't have a ready-made response. She accepted my reply with equanimity, but it took me a long time, thereafter, to come up with an honest answer.

The truth? *The Nowhere Man* (2022) has taken me a lifetime.

The protagonist of my latest novel, Joshua Pearse, takes almost seventy years to realize that no-one cares a whit. Just as in the song by The Beatles, Joshua makes all his nowhere plans for nobody. But unlike the guy in the song, Joshua Pearse has a point-of-view and, when the chance comes his way, he says what he has to say, in just the way he wants to. Again, co-incidentally, no one listens, but Joshua does declare—somewhere in the book—that he may still be that still, small voice, appealing to the rest to prepare for the worst.

Joshua Pearse was born to be a leader – of sorts. The date of his birth adds up to the mark of the Beast and the portent is magnified by the munificence of the stars the night he was born – not just a single bright one for him. He is supposed to be like the Biblical Joshua, the son of Nun (None?), the one who, long ago, led his people to the promised land; that too was denied to Joshua Pearse, when he felt that his country had let him down. He was already aware that his community had dumped him. Undoubtedly, he was pierced (Pearse-d?) to the quick, but even he knew that a prophet is not without honour…

Another pertinently impertinent question that is frequently asked by the hoi-polloi is—"Why write?" Can there be a specific answer? I will try to attempt one.

At the World Anglo-Indian Reunion of 2019, held in Chennai, at what was termed a 'Literary Banquet', I stated clearly and unabashedly that I write for myself. To say that a writer is quite consumed with himself is putting it mildly, but in my own defence, I write (and speak) about things that I know and have experienced, or, at least, I write (and speak) about things that I think I know, (as many would like to believe). My speech at the Reunion went down—as most speeches do—without comment, though the people gathered there murmured quietly and politely among themselves. I'm sure no one noticed that I was deliberately trying to add some 'foogath' (a word extremely well-known and generously used on a daily basis by Anglo-Indians everywhere in the south of the country, but, curiously, not mentioned even in *The Concise Hobson-Jobson: An Anglo-Indian Dictionary*, or any of the umpteen other such books that I possess) to the sumptuous—as well as global—spread that was there, right before our eyes! I do like my vegetables and fruit, so there.

The same question (in my book) is put to his students by the young Joshua—"why write?" And the self-same answer comes along: it is the writer's karma; he is born to write what he writes, because no-one else can say the things he says in the way he says them. It may take just a moment, or many moments, of stimulation, or it may take a life-time: the work will emerge only when it reaches the fullness of body and soul. The writer may well be more than a medium, but ultimately, the work dictates itself. This has been my experience every time I produce a piece. I also know that the joy of

creation is enhanced when I re-read and enjoy my own writing (though nothing would be better than passing on that joy to others).

Does the Anglo-Indian writer have a unique relationship to and with the language in which he or she writes? Is such a relationship outside the ken of other writers in English? The answer to both questions is ‘yes’. I do not use any adjectives here, because one strident view still making the rounds is that Anglo-Indians do not know their own language. This is again neither here nor there, for no one can claim absolute mastery of any language. The language that the Anglo-Indian speaks (very few actually write) is often uniquely indecipherable, but it is still his. Other things may be snatched away, but no one can take away that right. If anyone is truly interested in the Anglo-Indian way, let them forsake the world in search of the truth. Wild imaginings and phoney assumptions and fabricated fantasies just will not do. And the truth can only be found in one country—India.

In my book I use colloquial terms and expressions as and when the script demands them, not just to give it that special flavour. Many of them are obsolete in Anglo-Indian jargon, but I have heard such terms used by other communities. I mention this because it may be a case of reverse assimilation and that strengthens the argument that the Anglo-Indian (their language and quaint way of using it and their mannerisms and choice of apparel, and warmth and general love of life and come-what-may attitude and so much more) is still relevant in India today. In some parts of this great land, Anglo-Indians are lauded and feted, in other parts allowed to be themself, but when it comes to the administration of the country at large, the Centre (i.e., Central Government) discovers ways and means to erase this colourful community and its proud history.

It conjures up an antiquated Census (compiled by a previous Government to which it is openly at loggerheads), justifies its actions quoting those absurd Census figures, rushes to push through its pre-determined course of action and completes the same with the bravado and bluster of a vainglorious oaf. The Centre decides that 296 humans are irrelevant to the plurality that is India; it further decides that most of these specifically-targeted, genetically-different people have already abandoned the country and therefore do not deserve any concessions on a number of counts, including the

one that suggests that the remaining few are now sufficiently integrated with their fellow-Indians. It is indeed a win-win situation for the Government: identify a hapless, helpless community, isolate them from the mainstream, brand them as being not totally Indian, denigrate their eagerness to escape the clutches of the country, marginalize and minimalize them to the point of extinction and finally declare that the community once known as 'Anglo-Indian' no longer exists—at least in its records. All this because someone is still peeved that the purity quotient of the population of the country is sullied by this obnoxious, abhorrent group. This house-cleaning exercise has been going on ever since the birth of the first Anglo-Indian, for the purity brigades on both sides were, and even today are, hell-bent on a pogrom. Somehow, phoenix-like, the Anglo-Indian survived, still survives and will continue to survive because—as I say in my book—the heart of India—**My Country**—is pure.

These observations lead seamlessly to the next question that needs to be answered: who does the writer represent and what does he expect from his writing? I believe that the writer (especially this Anglo-Indian one) writes not just for himself but for all people. He does not—ideally—project himself, but he is certainly the voice of the people, or at least his people, or at the very least the people he thinks are his people. The Anglo-Indian writer may not be representative of his kind of people, but again, as I say in my book, "what is good and honest and true for the Man must be true for the multitude also" (p.37). Extrapolating, the Anglo-Indian writer is a spokesperson for all the marginalized, the ostracized, the looked-down-upon peoples of the world. The majority may not even take notice, but the word 'conscience' is not only given great importance in India, but also practised in spirit and in truth.

Along with the question "Why write?" comes the corollary: "What can be gained by writing and publishing?" In answering the facile question regarding why a person climb a mountain, the essayist says simply: "Because it is there." I guess it's the same with writing: the words, the ideas, the form, the structure and so many other facets are waiting for the writer to give them substance, to give them wholeness. Not just any writer but I, me, myself. Together with some satisfaction of the ego, the writer, if he is honest to himself, is also hoping that his bank balance will improve. Surely, he is hoping to make an impact, yearning that people will—finally—recognize and lionize him, for even criticism is a form of recognition! To think that a writer is there for the

profit alone is particularly demeaning, just as when a writer has to retract, fearing repercussions. A writer simply writes and there's an end to it; to scratch around for why and what and when and which and where and so on and so forth seems to be the methodology, the means and the ends, of the modern-day researcher.

What about politics? Is an Anglo-Indian writer politically motivated when he/she decides to write? Is it insolent for an Anglo-Indian writer to write about India? Does the Anglo-Indian writer have to justify writing about India? Who are to be the judges to these questions and what gives them the authority to sit in judgement? When will the debate ever stop?

Everything, *mon ami/e,* is politics. I did not ask to be born into an Anglo-Indian household—it just happened. I do not want to be drawn into a war of words, because that is the domain of the critics. I just want to assert my right to express myself in my own language, even if the rest of the country says English is not an Indian tongue. The hollowness and hypocrisy of such a point-of-view is visible to everyone with even an inkling of political acumen, but politicians often rush in where angels fear to tread. Who can deny me the right to express my views on India, especially after knowing that I am an Aadhar-holding, voter ID-linked citizen of the greatest democratic country in the world? So much for the nothing-but-the-truth slogan: "*sabke saath, sabke vikas, sabke viswas"* ("everyone's support, everyone's development, everyone's trust"). If my India, especially my modern India, can unequivocally say that we are all one, this would be heaven on earth! Knowing very clearly that this is not so makes my writing politically and emotionally charged, as with all other Anglo-Indian writing, factual or fictional.

I would like to stress the point again. I am an **INDIAN** and I have every right to say what I have to say, not just because it is my truth, but also because, ultimately, the truth cannot be hidden. This is not the only place where I have aired my opinions; all this and more can be found in *The Nowhere Man*. I do not spare my own community, for, as they say, what is good for the goose is good for the gander too. To go further, I do not even spare the protagonist of my book, Joshua Pearse, for he has so many traits that are common to the human species: pride and prejudice, anger and malice, loathing and petty hatred, alongside sense and sensibility and sensitivity, passion and

practicality, desire and loads and loads of longing, of belonging, of hope that he will, at last, be allowed to be a simple man with a simple dream. Is that too much to ask?

I have also categorically stated in *The Nowhere Man*—and perhaps in other places too—that the Anglo-Indian is an Indian. That means he is of-the-soil, just like the billion and more other Indians. Governments may try to suppress the community—and we are not the first to be so minimalized—but, as I say in my book, with the strongest conviction I can muster, “a child of India will never die” (p.177). A “child of India”, I must stress, for we are brought up in the tradition of ‘Mother India’ and we know, deep down, in the ‘rag-and-bone shop of the heart’, that Our Mother will never let us down.

What more (or less) can I say about the global diaspora? I have, I hope, made my stand clear; I even predict, in my book, that sometime in the future, Mother India will gather all her prodigal children into her all-encompassing arms once more.

I have been referring to my book, time and time again. This is not only because I believe in what I have written, but also to convince as many readers as possible to acquire copies for themselves. Only when a writer gets some response from their readership can they assess their impact (if any). Even criticism for the sake of criticism is acknowledgement enough, however pejorative or personal it is. Let me say it again: I take great pride in my books, I read and re-read them all the time and still find joy and satisfaction and pleasure.

Enough of all this, I think. Let me now concentrate on the book, since it now represents me and, willy-nilly, all the people who share a common history with my kind of people. The protagonist, Joshua Pearse, leads, to all intents, a normal, unspectacular, early life. He breezes through the teenage years with girls on his mind, but he is careful enough to keep up with his education. A job in the city takes him away from the insularity of home and into the wider world. He knows he is different; he doesn’t mind being different and this openness to his personality brings him recognition from his peers and his students. Marriage brings with it joy and sacrifice and pain and suffering, but the happiness percentage always balances out. The real agony comes when he finds himself isolated, often misunderstood and ridiculed, but with this knowledge comes resignation and acceptance: the world, his world, or what he thought was his

world, has no need for him or his ideas or his vision. By the end of the book, Joshua Pearse is ready and willing to die in his own squalid sty (by and by).

Any creative writer must acknowledge and accept the contribution of the past. He/she must realize that he/she is just another voice, craving to be heard and appreciated, before going into the 'cloud' of oblivion where all works of art—to use modern terminology—reside. Even a cursory glance at my book will tell the reader—astute or random—that I use the Bible profusely. I also depend heavily on my personal reading choices and, because in real life I was a teacher, what I tried to teach and pass on to my students—the hundreds of thousands of them who passed through my hands. I also rely a great deal on my personal experience, which I try to embed in my work as a whole. Further, I react to what I see in real life, what I read about and see in the media and what comes to me in the course of casual conversation. All this, and more, needs to be churned and filtered and refined before the finished product comes into existence, especially for me, for I do not claim to be a seer or a visionary. The glorious transformation that occurs when commonality is celebrated for just what it is, is something that most writers strive to achieve; the success of such a piece again depends on its acceptance by the reader, who is the real critic, not swayed by theories and assumptions and even pomposity.

Recent events in the evolving history of India, particularly those that have affected my community, have brought pain and anguish, anger and resentment, astonishment and disbelief to the great many Anglo-Indians who know and think of no other place as home. I include myself in this very large group, though I am sure I am not one of the chosen few that the Census of 2011 listed. To say, with absolute gumption, that the fortunate (?) 296 still left in the country are sufficiently integrated into the gargantuan cauldron that comprises the population of India, to reiterate that such a small number is not worthy of concessions, or does not merit any representation in the Constitution of India, is to negate the very fundamentals of human rights that seek to protect the minorities, linguistic, religious, or any other category there may be. Let me make a comparison: To import 8 cheetahs—at what cost, is anybody's guess—from Namibia, gives the country a wider outlook regarding wild-life, but the scything away of guarantees for an already battered and broken Indian community, is to inadvertently confess that some animals are more equal than even the human Anglo-Indian. The

cheetahs now have their own reservation, where they can roam and breed freely, just like the lucky tigers and rhinos, with hardly a thought about extinction. The list is enlarged when the slender loris, another exotic species, finds a secure home in the south of the country.

And finally, quite recently, a writer, indulging in some wishful thinking, says the Anglo-Indian community could well have been apportioned a tract of land—a little Goa or Sikkim. How jejune—when we have the whole country as our eternal abode, why be relegated to a black hole?

Even the American-Indians have moved on from the old Reservations, though, perhaps, some still stay on; but they still proudly preserve and present their cultural and social uniqueness to the entire world. That the Anglo-Indian community came into being through the inter-action of the West and the East is a fact; many writers have described this coming together in very many ways, most often derogatorily, but the unspoken truth is that the Anglo-Indian has fought valiantly to survive the onslaughts of two cultures, has remarkably come out unscathed and has set an example for his fellows. It was the late Indira Gandhi who described us as the first citizens of modern India and taking pride in such a glowing tribute, we should still set our light on the hilltop so that others may see our good works and glorify the ‘Mother’ of us all.

India is a land of many countries and cultures, all miraculously coalesced into one. But ask some of them and they will describe themselves as Tamilians, or Bengalis, or Gujaratis, or even Kashmiris; only after that do they identify themselves as Indians. The witch-hunting that continues to be a part of Anglo-Indian life may stem from another debated fact: that the Anglo-Indian is the only citizen to proudly parade his pan-Indian identity. Whatever anyone may say, we are Indian and will always remain so, even after the Spartan-like figure of 296 has vanished.

I hope, *mon frere,* that you will see that I have laboured to answer all the questions that many people want answers for. I have, I think, not strayed away, like a lost sheep. I have, I think, upheld my belief that I am as Indian as any other fellow-Indian. What if I am a little different? What if I am vastly different? Can we not celebrate my sameness-with-difference? Can’t you, too? Try, please, please try.

In a democratic set-up, even the one facing the heat is given a chance to defend themself. I have just one question. But before that may I express my view that this sort of questioning reminds me of the Inquisition, the Salem witch-hunting trials, the now-forgotten concentration camps of the Nazis. If history is indeed a record of factual data, more people were sinned against than sinning in most of those instances. Does any writer—especially the Anglo-Indian one—have to wear his colours on his sleeves always? Why target just one type of writer? He uses the same words, often the same expressions, most always with the same intent: to make himself heard; to make the world sit up and take notice; even, in the smallest way, to make his world a better place. Give him at least that much freedom. Allow him say, with faith and hope and love: “I am that I am”.

To sum up, I wish to revert to a song—which I quoted in my Abstract—by the legendary Jim Reeves, himself a great icon of the Anglo-India of yore; I use his words to document my feelings, not about human love and rejection, but about my personal devastation at what is happening in my beloved India:

I’ve been accused, convicted and condemned,
The trial’s over and now I face the end;
Is this Your way of telling me You’re true
When all I’m guilty of is loving [My India] You?

As the famous (infamous?) telegram of old indicated, in a different context:

‘Peccavi?’

Jai Hind.

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REFLECTING ON *VANITAS*: ARCHIVES, AFFECTS, ETHICS

Glenn D'Cruz

ABSTRACT

Vanitas *is a short film written by Glenn D'Cruz and co-directed by Glenn D'Cruz and Steven Andrew McIntyre with animation art by John Graham. The work premiered at the Revelation Perth International Film Festival and won awards for best director and best Melbourne short film at the Melbourne Documentary Film Festival. It also received a special mention at the Antenna Documentary Film Festival in Sydney in October 2022.* Vanitas *explores D'Cruz's often-fraught relationship with his Anglo-Indian father, Anto, who died in 1985 at the age of 53. This multi-layered work is, on one level, a belated eulogy to Anto D'Cruz, but it is also about the way some Anglo-Indians experienced the sting of racism and thwarted ambition as a consequence of historical and cultural forces that are not always easily apprehended during the messy bustle of everyday life. In this short article, D'Cruz reflects on the film's creative and collaborative processes. It is important to be aware that while Vanitas is not a work of fiction it is a creative work that uses literary, theatrical, filmic and painterly techniques to tell its story.*

INTRODUCTION

It started with a letter. Realising it was the anniversary of his death, an occasion I rarely marked, I scratched and scribbled a barely legible, handwritten epistle to my Anglo-Indian father: Antoine Joseph 'Anto' D'Cruz, former goods clerk, bus conductor, post and telegraph officer and night watchman. Of course, it's not fair or accurate to define a person solely by their occupation, but Anto always seemed to be striving for an elusive professional status he believed would bestow him with a degree of social respectability and recognition. I never understood a lot of things about my father: his obsession with sartorial elegance, for one, but I was especially confused by his desire to obtain a clerical job. Surely, there were more exciting and fulfilling ambitions one could pursue, I often thought, as Anto lectured me on the importance of being a clerk.

The gap between Anto's ambitions and my own was a constant source of tension between us. My letter was a belated attempt to unpack the complexities of our relationship, which reached its nadir shortly before Anto's untimely death at the age of 53. Perhaps the letter was a form of penance, a retrospective reckoning for everything I took for granted as a 'fatted' child who was oblivious to the everyday existential struggles faced by people without inherited wealth. Suffice it to say, I generated around 2000 words of rambling prose suffused with passages of anger, apology and atonement. The experience was cathartic and when I was done, I typed the document into my computer where it remained, unread and almost forgotten for the next few years.

In 2013, I wrote and presented a performative lecture about Anglo-Indian identity, which I presented at the Walker Street Gallery in the Melbourne suburb of Dandenong. My original intention was to base the work on my academic book, *Midnight's Orphans* (2006). As I slowly ploughed my way through the book, I cringed at my clumsy locutions, barbarous omissions and pretentious invocations of in-vogue theory. It became clear to me that the anecdotal passages had weathered the passing of time the best. They were, in my view, the most compelling parts of the book. So, I decided to jettison the academic focus of my presentation in favour of a more personal and theatrical approach, which I then refined over subsequent performances, most notably at the *Performing Mobilities* conference at the RMIT gallery in 2016. By this time, the project's focus had changed. It was as much about my father's experience of migration and racism as it was about the historical and political currents that continue to batter and buffet and the Anglo-Indian community. I also became aware that the work was about my tempestuous relationship with my father. I attempted to document the performance on video, but the results were disappointing. I found it impossible to re-create the energy of the live performance for camera. Suffice it to say, I abandoned the casual and improvisational structure of the presentation for a more carefully scripted and self-consciously cinematic approach to the topic. What follows is a largely descriptive account of the creative processes used to make the film. I have mixed feelings about artists reflecting on their own work. Sometimes such reflections can be genuinely illuminating and there is clearly an appetite for such commentary—DVD box sets are filled with actors and directors talking about the minuatae of their craft. Divulging too much information about art risks losing some of the mystery that makes

creative work so compelling. So, in this article, I don't want to tell you what *Vanitas* means in any definitive sense. Rather, I will organise my reflections around three topics: archives, affects and ethics, a triptych of words borrowed from the subtitle of my last book, *Hauntological Dramaturgy* (Routledge, 2022) which includes a more expansive chapter on *Vanitas,* a 27-minute film named after a 17th-century genre of still-life painting that represents human mortality through symbols of death, transience, decay and the vanity of human achievement. For the record, the form flourished in the Netherlands and key exponents of this style include Dutch painters like David Bailly (1584–1657), Harmen van Steenwyck (1612–1656), and Willem Claesz Heda (1594–1681).

Hopefully, my thoughts on the making of *Vanitas* will inspire readers to seek out the film, which will be available on Vimeo once it has completed its time on the film festival circuit, and perhaps embark on their own creative projects.

ARCHIVES

What happens to our possessions when we die? As I age, I become more conscious of the fact that have accumulated a lot of junk over the course of my life. I'm surrounded by things from different phases of my three score years on the planet. I can conjure key incidents and relationships from my past by scanning my bookshelf or record collection (yes, folks, I am old enough to have an over-sized collection of 12-inch vinyl discs, which I rarely play). Almost every item from these collections holds some kind of personal resonance, which is probably why I haven't delivered them all to my local thrift shop yet. However, I have started divesting myself of these 'things' whose materiality is obviously more durable than my mortal human body. My father did not live long enough to entertain such thoughts about his 'things'. He did not expect to die at a relatively young age, so he didn't have time to dispose of possessions that didn't 'spark joy' (to cop a phrase from Marie Kondo's best-selling book). He left behind a lot of stuff most of which I found stored in my mother's house in Perth: an old reel-to-reel tape recorder, a cine film projector, a tennis racquet, cameras, photographs, letters, job applications and other sundry items. In many ways these objects are the stars of *Vanitas*, for these objects were once embedded in the fabric of my family's everyday life and I use them to structure the film and tell a story about my perception of father's life and struggles. It is important to stress the fact that the film does not

claim to tell a definitive story. No doubt other members of my family will have their own stories to tell. Indeed, I could have told a very different story by unpacking the significance of a different set of objects, or by finding an entirely different organising principle for the film.

Some might see these 'things' as bits of archaic junk, but, for me, personal possessions have an archival dimension even when they exist outside formal archives or collecting institutions like libraries and museums. Traditionally, we associate archives with academic activities. For those interested I have written about the politics of archives elsewhere —once again, you can find a more detailed account of this topic in my book *Hauntological Dramaturgy* (2022). In the present context, I will share a few observations on the ways I used my father's personal archive creatively and with what we might call *anarchival* intent (a practice inspired by the work of Brian Massumi (2016). This phrase refers to the process of reactivating objects by not seeing them as mere documents, but as items that can release creative potential through our interactive engagement with them. To clarify further, the story I tell about my father is not locked inside the objects. It is my engagement with them that creates something novel. I will make a few remarks about this *anarchival* work with reference to an object that didn't make the final cut of the film for reasons I will outline in the ethics section of this paper.

My father owned a Royal Crown tennis racquet made by Slazenger. He invested in a wooden Dunlop racquet press to prevent the head of the racquet warping. His ornate signature is still visible on the press. I'm drawn to the signature as an expression of personality — my father's handwriting is characterised by bold cursive flourishes, which contrasts so markedly with my illegible scrawl, which is partly the result of indolence on my part, and my father's determination to change me from a 'demonic' left-hander to a 'proper' right-hander. The thought that my father held this object, that his sweat seeped into its handle as he huffed and puffed his way across the tennis court, generated the following piece of narration:

> Anto and Uncle were like oranges and apples.
> You might find them in the same fruit bowl, but they had very different tastes.

One was acidic and tangy; the other hard and sour.
Both were testy and tempestuous, and never destined to be great friends.
Yet, bound by familial duty and arcane cultural covenants, they made a go of it, and forged a fragile friendship that was never far away from dissolving in inchoate rage.

They once fell out over an argument about whether southern hemisphere toilets flush in a clockwise direction.
Uncle was a handsome chap with a taste for malt whiskey and cigarettes.
Anto was a portly fellow with a large appetite. He'd eat almost anything (including curried offal: pig's trotters, tongue, brains, and tripe).
Anto and Uncle were not particularly athletic.
Yet, these disparate personalities shared a passion for tennis: the whitest of white sports.

In the early 1970s, Anto met Uncle at the Valentines Park Tennis Courts near Perth Road, Ilford (a presciently named location).
Valentines Park is the biggest green space in East London, a short distance from where Uncle lived.
Here, they would huff and puff, and scream at each other over ambiguous line calls, double bounces and lets.
They were combatants and adjudicators: another volatile mix.
Sometimes, I'd watch them.
Mesmerized by the thwack of rubber against taut nylon, I saw two brown men, dressed in white, revel in faux combat.
For all the superficial hostility and mutual aggravation, tennis enabled Anto and Uncle to have a bit of fun.

In subsequent years both took the road to Perth, Western Australia, where they died premature deaths.
Anto's heart gave out at 53 and lung cancer took Uncle in his early 60s.

> As far as I knew they never resumed their tennis rivalry in the land where the toilet flush pushes piss and shit in clockwise motion.
> Anto's tennis whites are long gone, but his weapon of choice, in those long-gone battles with Uncle, The Royal Crown, Slazenger racquet remains.

I'll resist the temptation to explicate this passage. Suffice it say, that *Vanitas* condenses some of my observations about how history and racism shaped my father's life and our relationship. As previously noted, I'd rather leave matters of meaning alone. Readers (and viewers of the film will inevitably interpret the film in their own ways, needless to say). In any case, *Vanitas* does not claim to represent a universal Anglo-Indian experience. I've had conversations with members of the community whose experience of migration was significantly different from my own. These interlocuters found our film unnecessarily angry and depressing, which is fine with me. The work presents a particular point of view. Moreover, this perspective is filtered through the significant artistic, conceptual and technical contributions of my collaborators, Steve McIntyre and John Graham, both of whom are white Australians. While the theatrical forerunner to the film focused on my words (supplemented with projected images) the film needed a strong cinematic aesthetic that supported and complicated the narrative. We cut the tennis racquet sequence because our attempts to find a visual style for the words resulted in a curious muddle of animation, clumsy re-enactments and archival 8mm film, which, as we shall see, posed an ethical problem concerning the documentarian's perennial problem: the matter of consent. While the passage worked thematically, it didn't fit the structure of the film, which depended on marrying most of the text to fully animated sequences. We actually excised a little less than half the text I generated for the project. The final selection and combination of material emerged after we placed everything on our editing timeline and then eliminated sequences on the basis of what I will call affective resonance — that is, a sequence's ability to elicit an emotional response from the viewer while driving the narrative forward.

AFFECTS

The term 'affect' has a specialised meaning for academics in the humanities. It is not synonymous with feeling or emotion. Rather, it is a term that is often used to describe

involuntary material processes in the human body that are stimulated by various kinds of encounters with other entities. Art generates affects in this sense, but we were not thinking in academic terms when we made the film, so my use of the term 'affect' in this paper has more to do with reflecting on the pitfalls of trying to generate visceral affects by telling a story that's informed by research, but one that eschews scholarly jargon. I am primarily an academic, and while I have attempted to make my writing as accessible as possible by using narrative strategies more commonly found in creative writing, academic protocols make it difficult to reach a general audience. This is not to say that creative writing is inherently better than other forms of expression. I don't believe in observing generic or stylistic boundaries. Academic writing can be as 'affective' as creative writing — for example, I was moved to tears by reading Roland Barthes' book *Camera Lucida* (1982), a complex mediation on photograph as both art and document. It is also a eulogy, of sorts, for Barthes' then recently deceased mother. That said, I have been frustrated by the fact that my academic work on Anglo-Indians is rarely read by members of the community (partly because of the prohibitive pricing of academic texts). Let's face it, academic work can be intimidating. Even a celebrated text like William Dalrymple's eminently readable, *White Mughals* (2003), can be too much for some readers. I hoped *Vanitas* might reach a wider audience and communicate some of my experiences growing up in an Anglo-Indian family in a manner that worked on a more emotional, visceral level.

Ironically, this goal requires some degree of artifice and calculation. This is as true of theatre as it is of film. A purely spontaneous, 'authentic' expression of emotion, in my view, is almost impossible to achieve. One of my family members criticised the film for being performative, and there is certainly a degree of deliberate artifice involved in the making any kind of artwork. There is no such thing as a zero-degree style. I appear on screen as the narrator of *Vanitas*, and while it's true my co-director Steve McIntyre shaped my 'performance' through his framing, *mise-en-scene* and feedback on my reading, I do not believe I was 'acting' (as one of the film's most vociferous critics suggested). I attempted to connect with the spirit of the letter I wrote to my father on the anniversary of his death, a detail, you will remember, mentioned at the start of this article. Of course, what I believe to be true is of little significance since it is the spectator that will ultimately determine whether the work succeeds or not, and that is how it should be, but the following point bears repeating: I am, like so many other

people, fascinated by the creative process. In many cases, I find an artist's self-reflexive commentary on their working practices informative and, on occasion, inspirational (mystery be damned). That said, I would much rather you see *Vanitas* before reading my reflections on the making of the film. I'd rather not shape your responses to the work by telling you about what I think *Vanitas* attempts to say about fathers and sons or Anglo-Indian identity. This is why I have tried to avoid saying too much about the film's specific content. The film will be available to see on Vimeo once it has completed its time on the film festival circuit. In the meantime, it's possible to get a glimpse of the work by looking at the film's trailer, which you can find at the following link: https://vimeo.com/738842498

Before concluding with a few remarks on the ethical dilemmas posed by making a film like *Vanitas*, a film that engages with the life of a deceased person who cannot consent to appearing in the work, I'd like to point out that creative work often generates powerful affects for those involved in the creative act. First, the technical and conceptual challenges involved in such a task can be frustrating and stressful. For example, I found it hard to cut the Tennis Racquet sequence from the film since, in my view, it conveyed crucial information about my father's character such as his desire to conform to the social norms of white society, his competitive spirit, his determination to succeed in the face of adversity. Tennis gave him an arena to express his 'gun-throat' volatility and fierce temper without 'falling out' with family and friends who were not 'up to the mark' in his view. These vexations pale in comparison with the emotional turbulence generated by personal disclosure. *Vanitas* demanded that I interrogate my relationship with my father in a sometimes brutally honest way. The realisation that I'm more like my father, temperamentally, than I had previously believed was especially confronting, which brings me to the final section of this reflective exercise.

ETHICS

Nicholas Ridout suggests that the question 'How to Act?' provides a succinct account of ethics (2009, pp.5–6). Put more expansively, ethics involves interrogating and justifying the actions we perform with respect to questions of justice and moral responsibility. Ethics and art are uncomfortable bedfellows, though. And this coupling has generated complex debates throughout the ages —see Alasdair MacIntyre's book, *A Short History of Ethics* (1998), for a concise account of the major strands of ethical

thought. For the purposes of this article I will note that there are those, such as Oscar Wilde who believe, if one takes them at face value, that: “No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style” (1891). Salman Rushdie puts this sentiment differently when he claims that:

> Literature is self-validating. That is to say, a book is not justified by its author’s worthiness to write it, but by the quality of what has been written. There are terrible books that arise directly out of experience, and extraordinary imaginative feats dealing with themes which the author has been obliged to approach from the outside.
>
> Literature is not in the business of copywriting certain themes for certain groups. (1991, pp.14-15)

From this position, literature, or art in general, is a kind of ethical free zone, or a frame that gives the artist license to say anything they want to say without consequence, yet the work of both Wilde and Rushdie, writing a century apart, do appear to possess ethical sympathies expressed as forms of political critique. In Wilde’s case, it is tempting to read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) as a cautionary morality tale that warns against the consequences of adopting a purely aesthetic, self-serving disposition towards life. Dorian destroys himself and those in his close orbit through an amoral embrace of art for art’s sake. Rushdie’s work, especially his most celebrated novels, rails against authoritarian violence. As we all know, Rushdie has put his life in peril by calling out Indian nationalism and Islamic terrorism. The key point, though, is that, for Rushdie, the quality of art is more important than any ethical or political sympathy. Clearly, this position has its detractors in the present age of so-called ‘cancel culture.’ Today, it is, apparently, no longer possible to separate an artist’s moral character from their work. So much for fiction. What about a work like *Vanitas*? As I’ve already noted, this work uses creative techniques within what is essentially a documentary form. This raises even more complex ethical considerations.

What ethical responsibility do I have to my long-dead father? How should I pay tribute to his life? Do I have the right to tell his story without his permission? How might other members of my family feel about playing ‘bit-parts’ in a story told from my perspective? Obviously, these are not easy questions to answer, and I’m painfully aware that I risk sounding like a self-serving egotist by even attempting to respond to these fraught

queries. To say that all art, especially autobiographical art, involves a degree of violence also sounds like an ethical cop out despite being true, in my view. It is impossible to produce a wholly impartial or objective account of any event or human life, but I believe it's important to tell difficult stories in order to reckon with the past, understand it, and then move on with a richer sense of how inherited trauma along with inherited cultural and moral values shape our sense of self. I didn't seek permission to use my family archive as a resource for making a film about my father, and I don't think I fully engaged with the ethical questions I've raised in this paper while making the work. That said, I did let go of the Tennis Racquet sequence because I was unsure about how my dead uncle's family might feel about me using his image in *Vanitas*. Am I a hypocrite for not affording members of my immediate family the same ethical consideration? No doubt. All I can say in my defence is that I believe my father's story is important since people like him are rarely given their due. I hope our film goes some way towards honouring his memory. I can only hope that the film functions as both a *mea culpa* on my part and a tribute to a man who was more sinned against than sinning.

Finally, as the child of Anglo-Indian parents who rarely spoke about their experiences in India, I felt compelled, as an adult, to study Anglo-Indian history and culture. My academic work in Anglo-Indian studies, was, I believe, in part, a thinly veiled attempt to understand my father. Freed from the yoke of scholarly convention, *Vanitas* provides a direct, raw and emotionally charged engagement with the life and struggles of Antoine 'Anto' D'Cruz. Obviously, I will never know what he might have made of my letter or the film, but I'd like to think, he would see it as an act of love, a mark of long overdue respect.

Glenn D'Cruz *is a Melbourne writer, filmmaker and former academic. He is currently Honorary Associate Professor in the School of Communication and Creative Arts at Deakin University. His film,* Vanitas*, co-directed with Steven McIntyre, premiered at the* Revelation Perth Film Festival *in 2022 and won awards for best Melbourne film and best Australian director at the* Melbourne Documentary Film Festival*. His latest book,* Hauntological Dramaturgy*, was published by Routledge in March 2022.*

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MAKING *CALCUTTA, I'M SORRY*: THE IDEA, THE PROCESS, THE COMPLETION

Harry MacLure

ABSTRACT

This article highlights the process of taking the germ of an idea inspired by real life and converting it imaginatively into a screen story and eventually as a full-length feature film. It also focuses on the writer-director and his early life in a small railway colony in South India. He grew up watching many movies by illegally entering a touring talkies near his home. He falls in love with the art of cinema and dreams of becoming a filmmaker one day. It took him almost fifty years to make his first film Going Away *(2013). His second feature* Calcutta, I'm Sorry *(2022), a road film / emotional drama, was not easy to put together. He was lucky to find a producer who believed in his script and gave him a free hand to make his vision come alive.* Calcutta, I'm Sorry *has a big distinction: it is the first Indian film centered around Anglo-Indian characters written and directed by an Anglo-Indian. It is not a story about the Anglo-Indian community per se, but it brings out the essence of being Anglo-Indian and its core theme of redemption will resonate well with anyone from any community.*

"It's a wrap!"

No other words would be more satisfying for a film director to shout. For me, these words brought mixed emotions: I knew I was going to miss the cast and crew — they had become close friends, more like family, actually. But I also knew that all good things had to come to an end.

Everyone involved in making *Calcutta, I'm Sorry* (CIS) had to move on, eventually. These creative people had other assignments waiting for them.

So, when the final scene was shot in 2019 and I yelled "It's a wrap!", I had what everyone thought was a happy smile on my face, but to be honest I was a wreck inside. My CIS family will be going back home to their loved ones, and their lives... they're saying their goodbyes... I'm going to miss them. Terribly. I was sad to part ways, with only memories to remember this journey.

Yes, it was literally a journey – a long one: 2,140 kms to be precise – since it is essentially a road film, we had to travel from the Nilgiri mountains in the South of India to Calcutta in West Bengal – by road. We hired a 16-seater van and at certain points a couple of cars as well and followed Amanda Wright, the central character, braving the peak Indian summer, shooting wherever we could but sticking as far as possible to what the script demanded.

CIS tells the story of Amanda, an Anglo-Indian music teacher, who is content with her work and life in Coonoor in the Blue Mountains. When she is diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS), a chronic illness that could eventually damage the nerves in her spinal cord and brain, Amanda is jolted out of her peaceful lifestyle. A powerful urge to hug her granddaughter, whom she has never met, overwhelms her.

Amanda makes up her mind to go to Chennai, where her estranged daughter lives. She can easily afford to go by bus, train or even by plane, but she decides to go by road, on her trusty bicycle!

Col. Ajay Varma, a friend who has a soft corner for Amanda, tries his best to dissuade her, but she says: "I always wanted to be a long-distance cyclist. I need to prove to myself I can do it! It's my way of making amends with my daughter and granddaughter..."

When she reaches Chennai, she has an emotional showdown with her daughter. She learns that her granddaughter lives in Kolkata. She pushes herself to continue her journey on her cycle to West Bengal, where a rude shock awaits her.

Even though Amanda is an Anglo-Indian character, her story of redemption will resonate with anyone in India and elsewhere. CIS is a simple road film with a touch of

emotional drama and can be summed up in a single line: "One woman's quest for a hug".

A friend of mine, who watched CIS at a special screening in Chennai recently, was fascinated by Amanda Wright. He asked me how I managed to pull off writing a well-rounded character, who has her flaws but is likeable at the same time. I had to tell my friend that Amanda was loosely based on my late Aunt Noreen MacLure. She was light-skinned and everyone who knew her well called her "Honey" because of the colour of her hair.

Honey loved cycling. When she came to spend time with us she'd suddenly go missing for hours, sometimes creating panic at home when someone would ask: "Where's Honey?" She'd be off on my sister's lady's bicycle, somewhere far away, alone and happy on the road.

My father, Honey's older brother, a simple railwayman, would take his cycle and go out looking for her, worried. This was when we were living in the Trichinopoly railway colony, like so many hundreds of Anglo-Indian railway families that also lived in the cantonment area of the famous South Indian junction and in Golden Rock, another huge suburb of Trichinopoly.

Honey's penchant for cycling and sometimes for getting lost on those lonely roads was legend. I can still remember her throwing a bottle of water, a flask of tea, a hand towel, and a packet of Parle-G biscuits into the wire basket fitted on the cycle's handlebar, waving to us as she pedalled away with a bright smile on her face.

Honey died a spinster in Bangalore a few years ago. She lived on her own – she preferred to be aloof – and was happy till her end came. Her only regret, she once told me, was that she didn't "do her dream". I asked her about her dream and she said: "I always wanted to go on a long-distance journey riding a cycle." She giggled. "From Trichinopoly to Jabalpore!"

I found out later why Jabalpore: Her older brother – one of my many uncles – lived there with his family. Her desire was simple enough, but easier dreamed than done!

An Anglo-Indian lady riding solo on a bicycle from Tamil Nadu to Madhya Pradesh? Cycling nearly 1,700 kms? No way! Any sane person would laugh at this whim and call it "insane".

After I wrote and directed my first film *Going Away* in 2013, that nagging childhood bug to make films took hold of me more strongly. I was constantly searching for a story idea that would translate well on screen – for my second film. Many ideas came to me but never stayed. The story ideas that persistently linger in my mind are the ones to watch out for and need developing.

Then one day in the shower it hit me – I don't know why but I always seem to get my better ideas while having a shower! Honey's love for cycling hit me with a bang. I realised that this idea of a character – that too a determined female character – who yearns to cycle long-distance with a bubbling "want" attached to her actions would make a visually-stimulating screen story. By the time I finished my shower – I remember I took a very long time to come out of the bathroom – I had worked out the beginning, middle and end of CIS.

Cycling all that way to see her brother and his family didn't exactly hit the spot. It was too tame. So I had to ramp up the want or the motivation for this crazy cycling trip. This is where imagination took over: Instead of Honey, we have Amanda; instead of Trichinopoly to Jabalpur, we have Coonoor to Kolkata; and instead of a brother, we have an estranged daughter and grand-daughter whom she wants to hug. And to give the whole fictional story a boost, I threw in the MS angle that makes Amanda's desire to do her dream ring especially true.

The biggest flaw in Amanda's character is that she has this desire to say she's sorry to her daughter for not meeting her for over fourteen years but doesn't do anything about it until she is diagnosed with MS. Only because of her medical condition, does she make up her mind to track down her daughter and granddaughter. This makes her realise she's not the good mother and grandmother she wanted to be.

The conflict in the story not only drives the film to its bitter-sweet conclusion but also keeps the audience engaged and invested in these dysfunctional characters – mother,

daughter and granddaughter. Three women with enough inner demons to make them extremely interesting and to hold the attention of young and old fans of family dramas.

FLASHBACK TO THE MID-SIXTIES

I began watching movies when I was very young. I must have been five or six years old when I became a movie addict, if I may use the word. In those days the only entertainment came from our old valve radio-set. Most Anglo-Indians had a radio or a transistor kept in a prominent place in their homes. The "cutie", as the radio was then called by our folk, always sat close at hand on a corner wooden stand or on a broad window sill. They were prized possessions of Anglo-Indians who enjoyed audio entertainment. Some had a Phillips or a Murphy. My father saved some money by doing overtime at work – he was a steam locomotive driver – and bought a Usha radio, which he was truly proud of. We loved to listen to all the latest songs by Cliff Richard, Engelbert Humperdinck, and the all-time favourite singer – Jim Reeves. Radio Ceylon used to be a preferred station, and everybody tuned in to its famous programme "Listeners Choice".

Only in an Anglo-Indian home, would one find it quite natural for a son or a daughter to suddenly – in a euphoric mood – take up his or her mum for a dance when there was a popular number being played on the radio. I've known many youngsters who learnt their first steps of the fox trot, jive or waltz from their mamas in the kitchen. While cooking the family meal, the ladies of the house had this uncanny knack for teaching their children how to dance. Come to think of it, this would make a great scene in a movie! Yes, we were surely living in the age of the radio. Then how come a seven-year-old boy like me became a movie "addict"?

Trichinopoly Junction at that point in time was a medium-sized railway town, not like what it is today – a bustling commercial city in the state of Tamil Nadu. There were cinema theatres around, but almost all of them screened Tamil movies. The Plaza Cinema Theatre was the only one that predominantly showed American and British films.

My father liked watching movies. Like other Anglo-Indians, he called them "pictures". On his day off, he took me to the Plaza Theatre, which while not often, I enjoyed every

picture I watched with him. But the Plaza Theatre wouldn't have been enough to make me crave to be a filmmaker. The credit should go to a 'Touring Talkies' that set up business almost overnight on the fringes of the *maidan* close to my house and the railway colony. The location was only a hop, skip and roll from my place. They opened with a bang: Loudspeakers blaring, drums beating, large-size film posters flying around, and temporary shops selling sherbet, snack food and toys; the touring talkies management even brought in a decorated elephant that blessed all the patrons who came to watch the first show – the queue to buy tickets was long and serpentine. For me, a small Anglo-Indian boy, it was as exciting as a magical mela.

I could see the *kutcha* cinema theatre from one of our home's windows and hear the soundtrack – dialogues and songs – quite clearly while films were being screened. These touring talkies showed movies in tents or under makeshift thatched roofs following the age-old tradition of moving from one town or village to another every six months or so. But the one near my house stayed on for over four years in the same place; the owner must have bribed the local politicians to have his license constantly renewed.

A few days after they opened for business, I secretly identified a place at the rear end of the theatre where a thatched section could be moved aside, and I could let myself inside behind the screen. After watching a movie, I slipped out the same way without being seen, fixing the moveable thatched section back in its place. This way I watched hundreds of movies – free of cost! The only thing was I had to watch these moving pictures as flipped images. If a character in the movie was eating with his right hand, I'd see him eating with his left!

The touring talkies used to show Tamil films. I must add here that the films – shot in black and white – were made very well. The stories were mostly melodramatic but technically they were artistic. While the acting was at times over the top, the camera work, editing and continuity were of very high quality.

Who said I didn't go to film school? Yes, this touring talkies was exactly like a film school, if not better, for me. After a year of its existence, I got lucky. The management

of this touring talkies decided to run morning shows – Hollywood and British films were brought in and screened from ten to twelve noon on weekends.

No one detected my secret entrance. While other Anglo-Indian boys were preoccupied with hockey, kite-flying, tops and marbles, I made a beeline to the secret entrance of the touring talkies to watch films. I enjoyed Tamil, Telugu, sometimes Hindi, and English films. I also watched many Italian, French and Iranian films dubbed in English. One morning when I was totally engrossed in watching the American comedy *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*, I saw someone come into my secluded space. A shadowy figure stood very still looking in my direction. A torch light came on. My heart flipped over and raced like a scene from the movie where a car chase was unfolding.

It was the manager of the touring talkies. He struck his torchlight directly into my frightened eyes. I thought my number was up. But to my happiness, the elderly man said in Tamil: "As long as you don't bring your friends with you, I'm not going to say anything." So, officially I was given permission to be a guest in the special space behind the screen. After that encounter with the manager, I didn't feel guilty at all. It was like getting a scholarship from an educational institution. And that's how I learnt filmmaking... by watching tons of movies.

I was sad when the touring talkies finally packed up and moved on to another town in the south of India. I remember sitting in a corner of our bedroom crying, and my mother trying to console me by saying: "Don't worry, my son, those pictures are only make-believe."

Learning from my experience, the advice I'd like to give young filmmakers would be: "Watch as many films as you possibly can. Even though the stories are only make-believe, they can shape your imagination and your life."

BACK TO THE PRESENT

Making a movie is like bungee jumping – jumping not once but several times at different scariest places on the planet. Filmmaking is not for the faint of heart. It involves lots of creative effort, time, hard work, and yes, money! Anything or everything

can go wrong. If you get it right, then you can have the satisfaction of being a good bungee jumper.

I never gave up on my dream. It took me more than fifty years to make my first film. *Going Away* was written and directed by me and produced by Nigel Foote of Melbourne.

The Anglo-Indian story has been one of emigration coupled with the pain of separation. Every story of emigration has been heartrending, most certainly from the aspect of the trauma of leaving loved ones behind. My story focuses on this theme. The film, *Going Away,* has gone down well with Anglo-Indians and others as well.

In early 2018, I was in the process of completing the first draft of *Calcutta, I'm Sorry*. I knew I had a fascinating cinematic story in hand: Inspired by my Aunt Honey's love for long-distance cycling, I had created Amanda Wright. After fleshing out her character and giving her an interesting back-story, I fictionalised the rest of the scenes that unfold with twists and turns throughout the script.

I then approached a couple of people who could have come in as producers, but somehow fate had other plans for my second feature film. I got in touch with my good friend Pran Amrith, who lives in the UK. We have known each other for a long time, ever since we started out as teenage bartenders in the hotel industry (yes, not all filmmakers live luxuriously...We had to take up all kinds of work to put food on the table!)

Over several phone calls, Pran and I discussed the possibility of making CIS, with Pran producing it. I happily emailed the script to him. Pran said he read it in one sitting; that even though it was a cold English night, he felt warm within – the feel-good story and complex characters made him glow and didn't allow him to sleep. The following morning, his mind was made up. He wanted to produce the film.

Pran has no previous frame of reference as a film producer, but I was over the moon to have him help me put the project together. By virtue of his passion for art and critiquing films for many years, I was truly glad to have him around, every step of the

way. Knowing he had it in him, I offered him the role of Col. Ajay Varma, a secret admirer of Amanda. He accepted it and I'm glad he did. He played his part so well that no one could believe he hadn't faced the camera before.

Once I knew the budget was in place, the onerous job of casting began. Signing on the right actors to portray the characters in the script is very important to any film. We were quite lucky to have some great thespians on board the CIS project.

To our eternal good fortune, Priscilla Corner fitted the description of Amanda Wright perfectly. I called her up and gave her a brief run-down of the story and she was hooked. She wanted to read the whole script before agreeing, which was understandable. I sent her a bound copy of the script and within a few days, she got back to me. She was excited to play the role of Amanda. She was in! She loved the idea of her cycling all the way from South India to West Bengal searching for her granddaughter.

Pran and I travelled to Kolkata and met with Priscilla in person to firm up dates for our shoots. Supremely fit for her age, she is a much-admired and successful businesswoman and is the joint owner of the June Tomkyns Chain of beauty salons in Kolkata. Other cast members included Arpita Banerjee, from Mumbai, a multi-talented actress and a qualified Bharatanatyam dancer who played a key supporting role to the central character. Gillian Pinto, also a Mumbai-based stage and screen actress had a small but pivotal role. She astounded everyone with her intense visceral performance.

Delhi-based Andrew Hoffland is a versatile actor; he played a role written specifically with him in mind. He added a touch of humour to his character and pulled it off with panache. Jaravis Dee (aka Sivaraj D), a Chennai-based actor, played the quirky truck driver called Elumalai (Seven Hills) and managed to carry it off admirably. He also acted in *Going Away* and *Split*, a short film I wrote (titled *Pilavu* in Tamil and is available on YouTube).

Tehzeeb Katari, Sriranjani, Ameera D'Costa, Gilliam Williamson and a few others also played their small roles to perfection. Their talent lent immense credibility to the family drama.

Nicholas Moses, a Chennai-based young Anglo-Indian cinematographer, shot and edited the film with great enthusiasm. He has also done the camerawork and editing for the 10-part documentary series called *The Anglo-Indians of Madras* which was written and directed by Richard O'Connor and produced by *Anglos In The Wind*.

Chennai-based Ganesh Ramanna composed and arranged the background music for CIS, and also composed three melodious songs for the film. "One Day Above the Clouds" was performed by Priscilla Corner; "Riding Solo" was performed by Gillian Pinto, and the last song "A Journey's End" was sung by Monali Bala in Bengali. I wrote the lyrics for these songs, and the last number was translated into Bengali by Dr. Jyotirmay Basu.

Working with Priscilla and all the other actors and hand-picked technical team members proved to be a Director's and Producer's ultimate dream come true. It was never a tense shoot. We made it appear to be a picnic. We enjoyed the food and the journey.

My working style was very simple: I gave copies of the script to everyone, even to the actors who had small roles. I requested them to read and understand the story in its entirety and to learn their dialogues. Yes, we did have those moments when actors did a bit of improv, but mostly they stuck to the script. I gave them my interpretation of the scenes and how characters could behave. There were times though when some of our main actors interpreted their characters in a better way than I'd envisioned, and I embraced the enhancement.

Luckily we wrapped up shooting – done in four schedules over a period of a year and a half – before the Covid-19 pandemic struck the world. Unfortunately, though, post-production on our film took a severe beating – everything came to a complete standstill, including film studios in India. CIS was delayed by over two years. We finally completed the film, after crossing many hurdles, only in 2022. It was a harrowing waiting game. It still is.

We need to do a little polishing work to reach the international standards and then obtain the all-important Censorship Certificate from the government of India. Even though CIS has no adult or defamatory content, bad language, gore or political insinuation, it's still going to take its course with the Censorship Board. Only then can we expect it to make its rounds at film festivals and attract the attention of potential OTT (Over The Top) platforms like NetFlix, Amazon Prime, Disney Hotstar and others. When I yelled "It's a wrap!" many moons ago, little did I realise that we were in for a lesson in patience and waiting. As you will know, India is one of the largest producers of films in the world – more than 1,600 every year! Hopefully, the Board will understand there is nothing to censor in our family entertainer and give us a clean chit without further delay.

Meanwhile, I'd like to go back to the bathroom for a long shower: I need a high-concept idea for my next film!

THE END

Harry MacLure *is a Chennai-based writer, comic book illustrator, cartoonist, playwright and screenwriter. He edits a 24-year-old international magazine for Anglo-Indians called* Anglos In The Wind *and is the founder-editor of* Anglo-Ink Books*. He is the co-author of* The Anglo-Indians: A 500-Year History*, published by Niyogi Books (2014). His articles have appeared in various publications in India, and four of his short stories have been published in anthologies in America. His plays* Good Heavens (2004), …And Sunshine Follows the Rain (2006), *and* Uncle Willy's Ghost (2008*) were staged successfully in Chennai, Bangalore and Delhi. He wrote and directed his second feature,* Calcutta, I'm Sorry*, completed in 2022. He can be contacted via email: harrymaclure@yahoo.com*