

U.E. Charlton-Stevens, *Anglo-Indians and Minority Politics in South Asia: Race, Boundary Making and Communal Nationalism*. London: Routledge, 2018. 321 pp. ISBN 978-1-138-84722-4.

The present work is an expansion of the author's doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Oxford in 2012 ("Acknowledgements" xiv). It foregrounds the history of the Anglo-Indians, a mixed race Christian community formed as a result of colonial encounter in the Indian subcontinent. In this book the author has situated Anglo-Indians as constituting a minority community in the broader South Asian context. Very few historians have indeed dealt with this issue in their works, and in most cases, their works are imbued with the "hangovers of British attitudes towards the Eurasians" ("Introduction" 4). Since Britons held a prejudiced view of miscegenation, they refrained from documenting the history of the Anglo-Indians. Similarly, the Indian nationalist historians brushed it aside because they were fastidious about "presenting a Hindu caste purity, often embodied in the female as the representative of the nation, surviving the colonial encounter untarnished" ("Introduction" 5).

As evident from the title, this book examines racial hybridity through the prism of an interdisciplinary approach. It analyses the political implications of racial hybridity and explores the importance of asserting their "groupness" for "the genesis of their politics" ("Introduction" 3). The anti-colonial politics between 1910 and 1947 played a decisive role in the reinforcement of the political identity of the community. During this period, the Anglo-Indian leaders used communal nationalism as a diplomatic strategy for the formulation of their "minority" status in Indian politics.

The boundaries between the ethnic communities in South Asia became well-defined after the Empire was split into sovereign nation-states. What seemed alarming in this context was that factors such as race, colour, caste, religion and language, now operated as tools for defending the cultural distinctiveness of each ethnic group. Although these factors operate mostly as divisive forces, they do have a role in the construction of social identity of individuals within a culturally diversified geo-political space such as South Asia. In the core chapters of his book, Charlton-Stevens has analysed the factors with reference to the history of the Anglo-Indians and their struggle to establish the community as a political minority. The first chapter looks back at the point in colonial history when the term "East Indians" was applied to a heterogeneous group consisting of the Britons living in India for a long time, the "country-born" Britons, the descendants of the Portuguese and the Eurasians. In the Bengal Presidency, in 1829, John William Ricketts had presented a petition in the Parliament on behalf of the East Indians. Although this was an organised move for seeking representation and political identity, the author focuses on the confusion that

brewed up by the nomenclature “East Indian.” He asks a few significant questions in this context: “Who did Ricketts claim to represent, and how plausibly could he do so when the very designation of the group he believed himself to be a member of remained so hotly contested?” (36). By referring to selected case studies related to groups like the Eurasian widows, the mixed race progeny born within the wedlock as well as outside it, children of the high ranking officers and those of the petty soldiers and clerks, the author throws light on the socio-racial attitude of the British government towards different sections of the East Indians. In order to survive in an environment of racial and economic discrimination, it had become a necessity for the Anglo-Indians to emerge as a community.

The second chapter deals with the responses of the East India Company to the “Eurasian Problem.” Keeping in mind the insurrections of the mulattos in the French Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue, the Company tried to curb the socio-economic privileges of the mixed race subjects in India. The restrictive laws became apparent in the fields of education and covenanted jobs. An order passed in 1791 prohibited the Eurasian sons of the British officials “from being employed in Civil, Military and Marine Services of the Company” (61). Another order, which was passed in 1795, permitted them to work in the army as fifers, bandsmen, drummers and farriers (61). The purpose of implementing these restrictive measures was to create a class that would aid the British officials with clerical and supervisory tasks, but would not have sufficient academic qualifications to aspire after the administrative posts. Anglo-Indian boys, who studied in missionary schools and orphanages, were provided jobs in the railways or in the mariner’s office after they passed the seventh grade. However, their inferiority to the *pukka* bred officials was marked in their service conditions.

The third chapter, “Becoming Anglo-Indians,” critically looks into the socio-economic circumstances under which the Eurasians felt an urge to be recognised as “Anglo-Indians” (99). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, both nomenclatures – “East Indian” and “Eurasian” – seemed inappropriate to the group. While the term “Eurasian” smacked of the nineteenth century prejudices about miscegenation, the term “East Indian” seemed inclusive of the Hindus and the Muslims. J.R. Wallace, the founder of The Imperial Anglo-Indian Association, went to London in 1897 with the petition requesting official change in the nomenclature. His claim to rename the group as “Anglo-Indians,” the author argues, was but a strategy to highlight the filiation/affiliation of the community with the “ruling race” (105).

In the fourth chapter, “Making a Minority,” the author discusses the communal political activities of three Anglo-Indian leaders – W.C. Madge, John Harold Arnold Abbott and Henry Albert John Gidney. This chapter shows how the long-cherished tendency of blurring the boundary between the Britons and the domiciled Anglo-Indians eventually subsided with the constitutional changes

that were made in the laws of minority representation. Although the Imperial Legislative Council and the provincial councils had reservations for the Muslims and the Sikhs, two religious minority communities in India, there were none for the Anglo-Indians. In 1912, Madge, a member of the Imperial Legislative Council, moved a resolution in which he demanded that the Anglo-Indian regiment serving the British army in India should receive pay and allowances equal to the British soldiers. “[S]ocioracial hierarchy within the Domiciled community” (136) was also an obstacle in their mission. Wealthy men of pure European descent, who had married into the Domiciled community, were “seen by colonial officials as more deserving of leadership roles than those visibly of mixed race” (139). The author rightly points out that stratification within the Domiciled community conflated the problematics of racial discrimination with that of the class division.

Due to his rash decision of fighting against the Turks, whom Mahatma Gandhi supported in his Khilafat movement, Henry Albert John Gidney fell into the bad book of the Indian Muslims. However, his strategy of supporting the British in their battle against the Ottoman Empire won him his nomination in the Legislative Assembly. Afterwards, he conceded on behalf of the community that there is no harm in seeking identification as Indian and “continuing loyalty to Britain” (158). He convinced the community members to consider the Indian nation as their own place. He was hopeful about the “Indian aspirations to *Swaraj*” (158). The author reports that the “subtle shifts” in Gidney’s political language stirred a feeling of alienation among the Domiciled Europeans. Their gripe against Gidney became manifested when the latter addressed them as “Albino-Anglo-Indian” (159) and persuaded them to accept the status of “Statutory Natives of India” like the Anglo-Indians. In order to complete his political project of constructing a unanimous group identity, he pleaded amalgamation of all social, political and philanthropic Anglo-Indian bodies in India and Burma. Under his leadership a memorandum requesting improvement in the terms of Anglo-Indian employment in the railways, telegraph, defense services, nursing and medical services was submitted to the Simon Commission.

The fifth chapter, “Escapisms of Empire?,” discusses the series of projects which were undertaken for the resettlement of the Anglo-Indians in India and abroad. The scheme had begun as early as the mid-nineteenth century with the aim of providing economic sustainability to the mixed race group, who at the time of military crisis can assist the British soldiers. The model colonies were agriculture based. In the years following the gold rush, Anglo-Indian children in missionary orphanages and seminaries were provided the opportunity to emigrate to Australia and New Zealand, where they found work mostly as farmhands and technical assistants. Ernest Timothy McCluskie, an Anglo-Indian property agent and founder of Colonisation Society of India, established McCluskiegunge (Jharkhand) under his agricultural colonisation scheme. McCluskiegunge was

considered as homeland or “Mooluk” of the Anglo-Indians. Anglo-Indian settlement was also established in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. After Burma’s constitutional separation from India in 1935, the Anglo-Burmans sought assistance of the British government for their mass relocation in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and the Andaman Islands. The colonisation schemes for the Anglo-Indians and the Anglo-Burmans raised the issue of pan-Eurasianism.

The sixth chapter, “Constituting the Nation,” deals with the constitutional integration of the Anglo-Indian community into the Indian nation. In the round table conferences of the Constituent Assembly, it was decided that the Anglo-Indians were to be considered as one among the many minority communities in India. Although one-third of the job vacancies were reserved for these communities, it was clear that Anglo-Indians would no longer be able to enjoy the professional privileges they had been enjoying under the British Raj. The nationalist leaders appeased the Muslims, the largest minority, by reserving 25 percent of the vacancies for them. Concerns were also exhibited for the welfare of the “depressed class,” or the Dalits. In such a situation, Anglo-Indian leaders lobbied the British parliamentarians and the Congress leaders for improving the minority status of the Anglo-Indians. Their efforts to increase the number of Anglo-Indian seats in the communal electorate met with moderate success. Gidney succeeded in retaining the quota of the community members in the railways, telegraph, postal and customs till 15th August, 1947. This was a temporary arrangement, which as per the constitutional norms would reduce by 10 percent after every two years from the date of Indian Independence and expire completely after a decade (213). After Gidney’s death in 1942, Frank Anthony, the president-in-chief of the community, headed the political mission. Although he sought integration of the Anglo-Indians into the socio-political matrix of India, he had been very much particular in safeguarding the cultural distinctiveness of his community. After Independence, his new agenda was to establish English as “a recognised and protected Indian language” (272). He emphasised that English is an Indian language because it is the mother tongue of a recognised Indian minority.

In the “Epilogue” to this book, the author discusses the effects of decolonisation in South Asia on the cultural identity of the mixed race group. Anti-English cultural environment was one of the many reasons that led to the large scale emigration of the Anglo-Indians to the United Kingdom and Australia in the years following the Indian Independence. Constitutional splitting of the Empire into independent nations distinctively renamed the mixed race minority group in these nations as Anglo-Indians, Anglo-Burmans and Anglo-Pakistanis. The complication in their citizenship was not resolved by the newly received residence-based nomenclature. Being subjected to the British nationality law, such multiple statuses made them temporarily stateless. In the newly born states,

their Anglophile cultural identity was at stake. The Anglo-Burmans and the Anglo-Indians, who had taken Burmese nationality, had to assimilate into the Burmese society. Those who still retained their identity as British subjects faced difficulty in finding employment under the rigid Burmese labour policies (261). Since a detail discussion has been made on Burma (and the Anglo-Burmans), some readers may point out that the title of the book should have mentioned “South East Asia.” In this regard, one needs to remember that Burma had been a part of the British Empire in India prior to the 1935 Government of Burma Act.

The present work critically traces the journey of the Anglo-Indians from a marginalised mixed race group to a politically recognised minority community. It is a significant contribution to Anglo-Indian Studies. The author has referred to an extensive array of archival records. His research methodology adheres to the cult of postcolonial refashioning of historiography. Each chapter in this book represents the historical events from the Anglo-Indian perspective, which has never found an expression in the discourses produced by the British and Indian historians. For example, his detailed findings on the involvement of the Anglo-Indians in historical events such as Simon Commission, Cripps Mission, Minority Act, Poona Pact etc., act as counter narratives to the colonial/communal discourses of the majority communities. His fact-based analysis corresponds to the community narrative represented in Irwin Allan Sealy’s historiographical metafiction *The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle* (1988), which narrates the story of seven generations of an Anglo-Indian family. In this respect Charlton-Stevens’ book is a very useful co-text, which the literary/cultural critics can refer to while exploring the fictional works of Anglo-Indian writers such as I. Allan Sealy, Ruskin Bond and Keith St. Claire Butler.

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