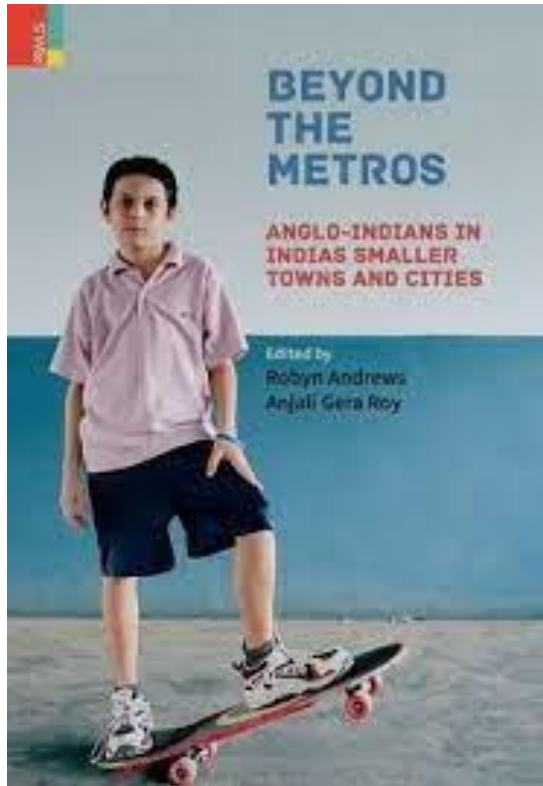


Robyn Andrews and Anjali Gera Roy, eds. *Beyond the Metros: Anglo-Indians in India's Smaller Towns and Cities*. New Delhi: Primus Books, 2021. xvi+270 pp. ISBN: 978-93-90737-65-9.



In many ways, the publication of this collection of essays is timely and pertinent. Those who find themselves allied with Anglo-Indian interests in India, whether as scholars or comrades, have for some time now been troubled with the sudden cessation of Article 331 of the Indian Constitution. Over the past two centuries, from the dawn of the Company Raj to this moment, the presence of Anglo-Indians has posed challenges for all those who have attempted to thrust misplaced notions of cultural and racial purity onto life, polity, and politics in the subcontinent. The Anglo-Indian community's unsteady engagement and integration with mainstream Indian society after 1947 has also been marked by similar anxieties of place, space, and belonging. Today, when the very existence of Anglo-Indians has been questioned and relegated with a heavy hand to the annals of colonialism, it is necessary to assess the socio-economic aspirations

and challenges of the community and consider how it may retain its agency and right to self-determination.

Comprising ten essays clustered in three thematic sections, *Beyond the Metros: Anglo-Indians in India's Smaller Towns and Cities* is a welcome scholarly step in this direction. The volume emerges from a workshop titled “Ethnographic Profiling of Anglo-Indians in Small Towns of India” and organised by the editors in 2014. It has a marked tendency towards grounded, qualitative assessments of the Anglo-Indian communities’ lived experiences in India over the past few decades. As the title suggests, the volume focuses only on small towns and cities, such as Jabalpur, Cochin, Asansol, Kharagpur, Pondicherry, and Jhansi—sites which seldom draw scholarly attention and research. While the field of Anglo-Indian studies has generally considered the bigger, metropolitan centres like Kolkata, urban studies has also revolved more or less on cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore. In managing to shift the critical gaze to smaller cities which have hitherto not been studied substantively, the volume may be considered a valuable contribution not only to Anglo-Indian studies but also urban studies in India.

One of the central concerns of all the essays is to question received wisdom on the homogeneity of Anglo-Indian life and experience in India, in terms especially of the sense of decline and decay alleged to be endemic within the community. The first section, “Railway Towns” discusses these familiar tropes with specific reference to Kharagpur, Jabalpur, Jhansi, Asansol, and Secunderabad. These were important entrepôts of the British Raj where large numbers of Anglo-Indians settled and built residential neighbourhoods. Roy’s chapter usefully theorises the notion of productive nostalgia in light of the ambivalence which characterises not simply diasporic but also domiciled community members’ memories of Kharagpur from its supposedly halcyon days during the Raj. She suggests that often home for the Anglo-Indian community has not been a tangible, rooted site or structure but “built generic space” (22) of the railway colony. A more perceptive understanding of the gradual exclusion of the community from the imagined and lived spaces of the Indian nation-state can be arrived at from this insight.

These arguments acquire a more corporeal flavour in the second chapter by Moss, Chakraborty, and Roy, who trace through photographs the transformation of Kharagpur over the past century. This chapter presents an evocative picture of the progressive loss of residential and cultural privilege experienced by the community. However, the following three chapters in this section—each on Jabalpur and Jhansi, Asansol, and Secunderabad, respectively—move away from this conceit of decline to consider stories of success and settlement. Nixon’s chapter on Jabalpur and Jhansi proposes that

nostalgia has also contributed to the resilience of the Anglo-Indian community to survive and maintain the distinctive hallmarks of their culture, i.e. adherence to Christianity and a so-called Western sociability. Andrews' chapter on Asansol goes a step further to counter the conventional culture of migration prognosis to argue that Anglo-Indians are also capable of putting down roots "through a strategy of social and physical mobility into comfortable and secure home ownership" (109). Sengupta's chapter brings the section to a close with a pertinent analysis of the Anglo-Indian community's engagement with the emergent BPO sector in Secunderabad, bringing to the fore stories of hope, transition, and disenchantment.

The second section, "Hill Stations," presents chapters on Dehradun and Ranchi. Andrews' chapter on the former discusses the significance of educational institutions—such as residential schools—in acting as spaces "for the ongoing cultural construction of Anglo-Indianness" (135). This is an important segue from the overarching narrative of decay, nostalgia, and resilience to investment in the present and hopes for the future. The Anglo-Indian community in Dehradun has been able to successfully leverage its social and cultural capital to position itself as ideal educators in a rapidly globalising India. This has allowed them to not only maintain their lifestyles but also create sustainable opportunities for cultural and economic continuity. Likewise, Khan in her chapter on Ranchi underscores the educational aspect of Anglo-Indians' collective identity, particularly with respect to their engagement with tribal communities of Jharkhand. She also suggests that adherence to rituals allows for consolidation of the community's precarious sense of self: observance of Christianity, participation in community activities, and a strategic positioning as educators has facilitated sustenance of the common, shared self.

The third section of the volume, "Port Cities," ventures further into comparatively uncharted terrain with chapters on Pondicherry, Cochin, and Goa. Shivan's and Andrews' chapter traces the curious history of the Anglo-Indian presence in Pondicherry, a former French enclave within British India. Anglo-Indians began to converge here after the transfer of power to India, to avail better opportunities and quality of life in what they felt would be a familiar milieu of Christian, European life. They also discuss the challenges and pitfalls of this assumption, and the dissensions between communities of French and Indian descent, Franco-Indians/Eurasians, and Anglo-Indians, who largely identify themselves only on the basis of British patrilineal descent. Otto's chapter on Cochin moves on to highlight the hybrid nature of the Eurasian community, formed as it was with the eventual intermingling of Portuguese, Dutch, and British with each other. He argues persuasively that "there was no purity of descent among the mixed community" (216) —an important

suggestion which should be kept in mind by all scholars of the Anglo-Indian community. The last chapter, on Goa, comments upon an unusual, exciting phenomenon of Anglo-Indians returning to India to live out their retirement in peace and comfort in select locations which appear sufficiently cosmopolitan. This is not as much a case of diasporic longing to return home as to create a new kind of home in materially familiar surroundings.

The issues of identity, belonging, and nationality raised in these essays provide food for thought. For instance, how does one reconcile the Anglo-Indians' dual sense of loyalty and selfhood with the homogeneity expected by the modern nation-state as a socio-political entity? After all, the latter has historically proven itself to not be very adept at managing and integrating exceptionality. Can the Anglo-Indian example be taken to argue for a more expansive notion of the nation than what is currently at hand? Careful readers will also notice throughout the book recurring references to Indians as natives by Anglo-Indian respondents: How is this to be interpreted and located within the dialectics of self and society/nation? Are Anglo-Indians then citizens of India without being its natives? Similarly, why are notions of patrilineal descent so dearly—and perhaps dogmatically—cherished by a majority of the Anglo-Indian community? Does that not in turn fuel racial and cultural anxieties of loss of individual and collective selfhood within the community?

It may also be useful to reflect on the peculiar nature of Anglo-Indian identity. The Persianate milieu of the preceding millennium produced many such communities in South Asia, all of whom have over time merged to form the umbrella identity of Indian. What are the cultural apparatuses which make such a fusion difficult and undesirable? How should the working of these apparatuses and institutions be understood with reference to the long, evolving history of modernity in the subcontinent? These are some of the questions which this volume could also have addressed, perhaps in the Introduction. Table 5.1 in Chapter 5 on Secunderabad also seems to have suffered a vital lapse in proofreading, which renders Sengupta's data inaccessible. Unfortunately, readers will have occasion to detect minor typos throughout the volume, which mar in some ways the reading experience of an otherwise excellent book. Nonetheless, considered as a whole, the essays curated in this volume constitute a significant addition to the corpus of scholarship on Anglo-Indians in India and are likely to open many avenues for future research and collaboration.

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