Conditions of Inter-Group Relations: The Anglo-Indians*

NOEL P. GIST

University of Missouri, Columbia, U.S.A.

The Anglo-Indian community in India has always been an ethnic minority in a socially unstable relationship with other communities in the country. During the centuries of European dominance of India the Community experienced periods both of relative economic stability and of insecurity. Because the Anglo-Indians proved useful to the British in their empire-building program they were afforded preferential consideration in the allocation of jobs in such strategic occupations as those related to transportation, communications, and customs. But at times they were also suspected of divided loyalties and were therefore denied jobs in the civil and military forces of the East India Company in India. Later in the immediate pre-Independence and post-Independence years, they met with increasing economic competition from Indians, who resented British policies favoring the Anglo-Indians in the labor force. After Independence the new Indian government accorded the Community a transitional period of a decade during which time its members were given special consideration in the allocation of jobs. That period ended in 1960.

If the Community was favored by the British in the allocation of jobs, no such favoritism was shown them on the level of personal relationships. Indeed they were socially rejected by their European superiors. Yet in spite of the barrier of social snobbery erected against them, and even in spite of British exploitation of the Community, they admired and generally identified with the British raj in India, cherishing the hope and expectation that some day they could go "home" to England.

Thus the Anglo-Indians came to occupy the uncomfortable position of being socially ostracized by the people they most admired and respected, and also by the Indian people whom they believed were culturally and socially inferior to themselves and to the British. So long as the British were deeply intrenched in India they could at least find solace in the economic protection afforded them

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1 Anglo-Indians are persons of mixed racial parentage. Generally they are defined as persons whose father or other male progenitor regularly resided in India is (was) a European, and whose mother or other female progenitor regularly living in India is (was) an Indian. Because of intra-group marriages most Anglo-Indians have parents and other ancestors who are also Anglo-Indians.
by the forces of the Empire and in the satisfaction of having a role in empire
building. But the moving hand of history pointed to crucial changes ahead.

As early as the 1920s it became apparent that the days of the British raj were
numbered, that the Anglo-Indian community would sooner or later face a new
India without protective support of their European benefactors. How would
they fare? Was the social and cultural chasm so wide, the misunderstandings so
great, that it would be better to abandon India altogether and go to England?
Or could they achieve a satisfactory modus vivendi which would enable them to
preserve their own cultural and social values and carry on harmoniously with
the Indian people? Such questions reflected the uncertainties and anxieties of
the Community as its troubled members pondered the prospects for the future.
Those anxieties have by no means been resolved.

The years since Independence have brought into focus the cultural and
social conditions that bear upon the relationships of the Anglo-Indians with
other communities. This paper will be concerned mainly with these relation-
ships and with the attitudes that determine in part the place of the Anglo-Indian
community in Indian society.

1. Inter-Community Attitudes

Basically, relationships between the Anglo-Indian community and other
groups are determined by reciprocal inter-community attitudes. Whatever
may have been the nature throughout the Community's history of inter-personal
relationships across community boundary lines—many close friendships and
satisfactory work relations developed—categorically the community has been
held in disfavor by other Indians, though barometric readings of prevailing
attitudes have fluctuated according to the political and social climate of the
times.

If the Anglo-Indians chafed under British social discrimination, in their
relatively secure economic position they took a haughty view of their Indian
fellow-countrymen and regarded much of Indian culture as inferior to the
civilizations of the West. This attitude was certainly not one to elicit either the
admiration or the affection of the Indian people. Even today Anglo-Indian
images in the minds of other Indians are a mixture of admired as well as dis-
liked qualities. For example, in a survey of attitudes among students at Calcutta
and Jadavpur universities in 1964, terms used to describe Anglo-Indians ranged
from favorable to strongly unfavorable. Such positive expressions as "clean-
liness", "cleverness", "practical", and "ability to work hard" appeared fre-
quently when the students were asked to mention two or three terms which
best indicated their conceptions of Anglo-Indians. But unfavorable expressions
were more numerous. Among these were terms like "foppish", "snobbish",
"hypocritical", "opportunistic", and "low morals".

1 For an adequate understanding of these relationships it is necessary to view them from the
perspective of history. But a detailed history of the Community is beyond the scope of this paper.