

## Anglo-Indian Women

A study on the Anglo-Indian women in India has to be a study of the intersection of race, class, caste and gender. The chapter aims at discovering how this intersection has had an imprint on the situation in which the Anglo-Indian women live in India today. Anglo-Indian (Eurasian) women in India have had myriad interactions with European as well as other Indian women. By the beginning of the twentieth century, there were several groups of domiciled Europeans and Eurasians in India distinct from the Europeans. These groups insisted that they were Europeans, but British society laughed at their *chee-chee* accent and at the names given to them—for example, Blossom and Honeydew, among others—and ridiculed them for speaking of a ‘home’ they had never seen.<sup>1</sup> In the early days of European settlement very few European women actually came to India. In 1810 the total number of European women did not exceed 250.<sup>2</sup> Under these conditions it was natural that European men in India would seek to enjoy the company of native women in different ways.<sup>3</sup> This evolution of the Anglo-Indian community and its early beginnings were traced in detail in the introductory chapter of the book. The domiciled Europeans and Eurasians made up the lower strata of British society in India, with the Viceroy, a European, marking the top. In between were minute gradations of rank mostly invisible to outsiders but important to the British themselves. Social status depended on what one did, whom one married or on what one’s husband did.<sup>4</sup>

The *burra memsahib* (a term often used for a European woman) was a woman whose husband occupied a senior post; and she enjoyed a full range of social privileges like the biggest sofa to sit on the club, the first shuttle cock to start the game of badminton and many more. Before the middle of the nineteenth century, sport was exclusively for men. Women were supposed to sit idly by, but by the end of the century women were busy with archery, badminton and later with golf and tennis.<sup>5</sup> By the twentieth century women became members of clubs and were recognized for their roles in supporting the Raj. But even so, society considered the main functions of women to marry ‘manly’ servants of the Empire and to keep the progeny coming.<sup>6</sup> It was a common view to see unmarried women as innocent, fun-loving and even boyish, while married women were allowed to experience the world but still maintain the virtues of a womanhood that was dictated by British society. These women’s ambition was, according to society, was to further their husband’s careers. At the end of the nineteenth century, women were brought up to be good mothers and wives; the idea of being anything else was criticized, and the Anglo-Indian women (who were not yet known by this nomenclature) followed the trends set by European women living in India. Maud Diver, a successful novelist of the period, commented on the extreme ‘backwardness of Anglo-Indian society in recognizing the modern advance in the intellectual and social position of women’.<sup>7</sup> Femininity was associated with weakness, and therefore it was commonly believed that women were to be protected. European women in India were expected to keep busy with their daily tasks—creating homes for their men, bringing up children—in short, living a life of an English gentlewoman among alien people.<sup>8</sup> The Eurasians merely followed the lifestyle of these European women to create a domestic environment close to that of a European home. In other words, they tried to emulate a life that could be termed ‘pure’ European (although they themselves were considered impure because of their mixed blood line) European. The poorest of the *pure Europeans*<sup>9</sup> gradually merged into the ranks of the mixed population, who were called Anglo-Indians, Eurasians, and other and names. They were at the lowest rung of the racial hierarchy. The British ruling class in India did not mark or identify these people as part of the ruling class or race and sometimes complained that these people were lowering the dignity of their own *race*.<sup>10</sup> Although the Anglo-Indian were of a lower social status and poorer than the British in India, their European ancestry was reflected by cultural

markers such as language, dress and eating habits. Their everyday life was closer to British than Indian ideals of domesticity. Middle-class Anglo-Indian homes deployed Indian servants to cook, and were run according to many of the same household guides used by a British *memsahib*. Meals were a mixture of Western and Indian food and were eaten with cutlery rather than with the hands. Like British *memsahibs*, *Anglo-Indians* spoke 'kitchen' Hindi (a simplified form of Hindi sufficient to manage household chores) to their servants and managed them directly. By emulating the domestic ways of Europeans, the Anglo-Indian attempted to overcome a series of racial and class differences between them. It is true that the leaders of the community often declared their community to be of Indian nationality, the everyday experience of the Anglo-Indian was quite different. The domestic roles of Anglo-Indian women continued to show influence of a British forefather.<sup>11</sup> This chapter on Anglo-Indian women focuses on what their position in India is now and on the way this patriarchal influence has jeopardized their position in India at present.

### ANGLO-INDIAN WOMEN NOW

Anglo-Indian women made changes in their dressing styles and inter-marriage (i.e., inter-community) practices only after independence. Since Western dress had been in fashion as the dress for work for men in India long before India gained independence, most Anglo-Indian men still continue to wear Western dress. However, Anglo-Indian women started to wear Indian dresses like *salwar kameez* and *sari* at work only after independence. (This is corroborated in this research, where we see that Anglo-Indian women from an older generation are still more interested in wearing Western dresses, reflecting that accommodation to Indian culture and customs is only recent.) Moreover Anglo-Indian women are likely to conform to the norm of endogamy, whereas men are more likely (because they are not discouraged as the case with Anglo-Indian women) to marry outside the community. For Anglo-Indian women, when the question of marrying outside the community appears, it is preferred that the potential groom be a member of the community or some European or Western person (for example, an Anglo-Indian respondent in this research had married a Parsee). But for Anglo-Indian males there is not so much pressure to conform. They are free to marry anyone from their community, from the rest (other) of the communities in India,

or from Europe or the West. This will be dealt with in further detail in forthcoming chapters on marriage and family. But before we can start discussing the issue, we need to understand the Anglo-Indians' position in colonial India and the theoretical underpinnings surrounding it.

### PATRIARCHY AND THE EXPERIENCES OF ANGLO-INDIAN WOMEN IN INDIA

Till around the eighteenth century it was quite common for a white man in India to cohabit with a local woman, in or out of wedlock. During this time it was common that an Indian mistress would be kept for some years until an English bride was brought to India, at which point the native woman would be 'pensioned off'.<sup>12</sup> In the early 1800s, according to Mary Martha Sherwood (who was the wife of Capt. Henry Sherwood of the 53rd Regiment of Foot), described the role of these women, who her lived in huts near the barracks and acted as servants to men housed there. These women bore children of the men they were engaged to but often witnessed the departure of these European men they had trusted. The following quote clearly explains the role these women played in the early eighteenth century as the mothers of Eurasian children in India:

...and the only idea these poor creatures have of morality and honour is, that whilst thus engaged to one man they are to be faithful to him, and faithful many are, perhaps following him for years, bearing him many children, and may be standing with those children on the sands of the river to see the last of him and those of the vessel which bears him away.<sup>13</sup>

Two important points needs to be brought up here: One is that by the late eighteenth century more European men lived with Indian women outside of marriage than within it. In Bengal, between 1757 and 1800, only one in four British covenanted civil servants, one in eight civilian residents and one in ten army officers was married. Among the military, the proportion was even smaller, one in 15 and one in 45 men was married. It is noteworthy that of all the British residents in India only a small proportion were married. The poorer they were, the more likely that they were not married.<sup>14</sup> Second, not all married Indian women or mistresses wanted to go with their men after they decided to return to their home country. The majority of British soldiers were not allowed to take their Indian partners and Eurasian children back to Britain.<sup>15</sup> History has

many examples of British upper-class men who lacked opportunities to have social contact with Indian women of higher ranks, whether Hindu or Muslim. There were, of course, some exceptions. The question of illegitimacy of the children and of their mixed origin became important if the father died. The attitude and policies of the colonizers were also important when the question of heirs became significant. There was an adverse British attitude towards the morality of the mothers of mixed-blood children as well. For example, when Frederick Shore commented that the women who lived with English men were with few exceptions common prostitutes it was widely accepted!<sup>16</sup>

History provides many such examples where Eurasian children were not given the surnames of their European fathers and were even denied proper education because they were dark skinned by European standards. The son of General Gardner was named James Valentine; Colonel Kirkpatrick's son was William George and his daughter, Katherine Aurora; or three sons of Julius Imhoff, Warren Hastings' stepson, were William, Charles and John Fitzjulius; Neil Edmonstone's boys John and Alick's surname was Elmore; Charles Metcalfe's sons—Henry, Frank and James—had the surname Studholme. Metcalfe acknowledged in letters that they 'bore a stigma inflicted by fault of their father'.<sup>17</sup> Imhoff, Warren Hastings stepson, died young and left his sons with General William Palmer. Palmer consulted with Hastings over the well-being of these children; and the first two sons, William and Charles, were given an English education, whereas John was admitted to 'Mughal'<sup>18</sup> schools because of his dark skin. Despite being very fond of children, Hastings never allowed William Fitzjulius at his home in England during the holidays and had admitted his embarrassment to have had this child before he left for India in 1809. Neil Edmonstone delayed marriage for 20 years, although apparently he did not disown his illegitimate children's mother, as they frequently sent their love to her through letters written to him.

For the British soldiers serving in India, marriage and divorce was a less serious affair. Only a minority were given permission to marry and many formed various liaisons with local women, usually domiciled Europeans or Eurasians. These women often thought that they were married properly, and the truth came out when the Regiment was called back home.<sup>19</sup> Margaret MacMillan<sup>20</sup> refers to one such officer who was responsible for organizing the passage of wives and children just before the First World War and describes the affair as a harrowing

one that the officer said he never wanted to experience again. Indeed, there were marriages that were legal, but these husbands too tried to cut off such ties in India once they were posted back in Britain. It was a custom for the British to look at Eurasian and lower-class European women in India as possibly open and flirtatious. MacMillan refers to one Radclyffe Sidebottom, who was posted in Calcutta in the Bengal Pilot Service before the Second World War, who found these women very attractive and beautiful to court and discovered to his astonishment that during the cold weather the Eurasian and poor white women could be available for sex (while when the European girls repaired to the hills for winter).<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, when Indian men, especially those who were rich, made advances towards European women, they faced ridicule from their compatriots.<sup>22</sup> The potential threat to European women from Indian men was often seen as stemming from the 'unworthiness of the native mind'. Thus did racial, class and ethnic axes of power, privilege and opportunity interact with gender differences in the case of Anglo-Indian women.

### THEORETICAL OVERTURES

The literature on academic feminism started to shift its focus in the 1970s when feminist scholars took up the issue of implicit gendering. There is ample evidence of the impact of this change not only in the West, but in other parts of the world, as different experiences of women became the focus of many studies. Anglo-Indian women have been the focus of many studies as well, but examining them in the context of Indian society and their responses to it had not been done. In this respect, this study is been unique.

In a hierarchical society, the different strata are organized on the basis of a differential ordering of prestige, privilege and power. The groups express this differential ordering through cultural values as manifested in behaviour patterns, marriage rules and group-affiliation and inter-group relationships. The inequalities that are expressed socially and culturally reinforce the marginality of the consciousness of the barriers between different groups. The acceptance of social barriers inhibits social interaction among the different groups marked as separate. In analytical terms, this sense of a barrier reflects culturally through restrictions imposed from within a community with regard to interactions and attitudes towards other people. Oftentimes, such barriers do not imply any legal

sanctions. There are often amorphous (although sometimes concrete) expressions of individual, family or community disapproval when attempts are made to reach out to others across the self-imposed barrier. To most individuals belonging to ethnic and minority groups, the status of the community is important despite their individual inclinations, achievements or failings.

The perception of a barrier felt by a group is subjective.<sup>23</sup> That is to say, every individual perceives such particular situations differently; but this range of subjective perceptions inheres within a broader objective understanding of the situation (i.e., the inequality of power, privilege and prestige) as marginal. Only in such circumstances do we have the formation of a marginal personality. Kerckhoff argues that it is an individual's orientation towards her/his dominant group that most often leads to marginal personality traits. According to him, the preconditions for the development and expression of marginal personality traits are that, first, there should be at least two groups coexisting; secondly, that there must be some definite advantages available to one group; and, thirdly, that there must exist the perception of a barrier that prevents easy passage from one group to the other. Most importantly, the successful maintenance of this barrier is manifested not only in the restrictions imposed by dominant group but also in the rejection of those who want to associate with it.<sup>24</sup> It should be pointed out that living also being raised in marginal situations does not necessarily lead to the development of marginal personalities; but in case of the development of marginal personalities, marginal situations play a significant role.

R. Park (1950)<sup>25</sup> had viewed marginal situations as a product of cultural conflict. A marginal situation acts as a hindrance to normal association and assimilation between cultures. Among the early writers on this issue, Park and Stonequist<sup>26</sup> argued that a marginal situation always gives rise to psychological marginality: the individual is portrayed as unhappy, a caricature of the ideal he/she wishes to aspire to. This view is strongly criticized by Dickie-Clark.<sup>27</sup> He thinks that it is inculcated in individuals born and raised in a marginal situation; they comes across fellow beings who consider them to be marginal as well, and on the whole everyone directly or indirectly helps in the development of a 'marginal culture'. The situation affects the individuals so deeply that it becomes more important to them than their income, religion, education, and so on. It not only determines their sense of life but also that of the community at large. Their perception of the larger community through the

situation they are in makes it more difficult for them to cross the barrier between their group and that of the other. The barrier becomes more important for those who cannot transcend it. The privileges, power and prestige enjoyed by those on the other side of the barrier affirm the place of the community in the hierarchical structure.<sup>28</sup> As Hughes (1952) puts it, the individual in a marginal situation, denied the possibility of a higher status, produces the dilemma of a confused social identity. It is needless to say that the perception of the barrier may vary at the individual level, but culturally and socially the barrier exists for each member of the community.

Even in a hierarchical situation where barriers exist, some cultural traits of the dominant culture do seep through the barrier into the cultural habit of the subordinate group. This proves that communities are not hermetically sealed but have permissible 'pass-throughs'. However, learning about the cultures of others and practicing them habitually are not the same. In stratified societies, multiple hierarchies may regulate and control levels of participation in social relationships. In a caste-based society such controls are acutely evident but they also intersect with other social hierarchies, such as class and ethnicity, resulting in forms of discrimination that are intangible and can only be visualized in the perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of the subordinate group. The dominant group may employ certain devices to uplift the subordinate group or recognize talented individuals from subordinate group, or it may be completely unaware of and indifferent to the subordinate group. The dominant group may also try to instil its values and moral ideals into the subordinate group in order to guide and control them. Sometimes, the subordinate group may resist such indoctrinatory strategies and refuse to become culturally subservient to the dominant one. For these reasons, objective marginal situations help to develop personalities that subjectively view and portray the situation as marginal and have certain inhibitions against the dominant culture. This situation is more pronounced for a racially mixed community like the Anglo-Indians.

The Anglo Indians are 'Western', or at least European, in their self-proclaimed orientation insofar as the basic features of their culture are concerned. Their mother tongue is English, their religion is Christian, they dress like the Europeans and their family organization, eating habits and general lifestyle bear the hallmarks of a 'Western' cultural heritage. There is abundant evidence to suggest that they cultivate habits which bear a close resemblance to those common in British social



and cultural life; but no substantial evidence suggests that they share intimately and extensively the cultural life of the Indian people (with the possible exceptions of the Indian Christians, with whom they share the common bond of religion, and the Parsees and Armenians, with whom they share the western way of social living). Throughout their historical existence in India they showed indifference towards Indian culture, history and politics. They made very little effort to understand the religious and philosophical systems of India. There are very few Anglo-Indians who take the trouble to learn an Indian language. In the past they mainly interacted with English-speaking Indians and Europeans. At present Anglo-Indians make a reluctant effort to understand and learn the local language because it is mandatory in schools and is sometimes required for jobs. Most Anglo-Indians have limited understanding of Indian art, music and dance and take no interest in Indian literature. Most of them know less about the legendary personalities of India than about folk heroes of England and Europe. The Anglo-Indians are loath to wear Indian clothes. Members who do so often face harsh criticism. However, it should be mentioned that some women adopt the *sari* for special occasions and for jobs where it is mandatory. Anglo-Indians have a fondness for the Indian curries but they consider eating without cutlery unacceptable. The traditional Indian joint has never been adopted by the Anglo-Indians, who have stuck to the nuclear family as their sole kinship organization. The extended joint Indian family stands in sharp contrast to the more nuclear Anglo-Indian family. The Anglo-Indians completely reject the Hindu caste system. A degree of acculturation has no doubt occurred, but the position of the Anglo-Indian community is still best perceived as peripheral to mainstream Indian culture.<sup>29</sup>

Historically, the British rulers had kept the Anglo-Indians at a remove from themselves in matters of social intimacy. The former did not accept Anglo-Indians as marital partners, although Anglo-Indian women were accepted in unconventional (non-marital) relationships. There, are however, a few instances of intermarriage between British men and Anglo-Indian women. This shows that the line of separation drawn was porous, allowing undesirable crossings. There are also a few instances where the Anglo-Indians and the British worked together. One can think of the Christian missions and the people they served, of the British teachers in Anglo-Indian schools and of the Church, where the pastor did not discriminate amongst his flock.

The Anglo-Indians *did* receive to some extent preferential treatment from the colonial administrators in matters of certain professions, and this gave them an economic edge over the other Indians. From this advantageous position they often viewed other Indians as an inferior order.<sup>30</sup> They constructed stereotypes of the Indians as dirty, lazy, corrupt, inefficient, backward and superstitious. Such stereotypical images still prevail. But what is interesting here is that the Anglo-Indians themselves, scorned by the British, remained at the margins of British social life. The British looked down upon the Anglo-Indians, who, in contrast, looked up to the British as their beneficiaries. The privileged position of the Anglo-Indians and their protected occupational position was often a source of irritation for other Indians, who found it difficult to accept with equanimity what they considered unfair competition from persons they had come to regard as aliens. Once the British left, these protected jobs were increasingly opened up to competition. With the complete removal of job security by the 1960s, the Anglo-Indians, so long accustomed to job protection, found it difficult to obtain positions that would enable them to maintain their traditional way of life. Unemployment gradually increased and the economic position of the community languished.

Anglo-Indian authors often sketch an image of the Anglo-Indian as someone who lacks adaptability in post-independence India: this individual can neither give up her or his bias for the British way of life nor merge with the dominant Indian community. Wallace found that 'freshness and breadth of vision' to be 'almost entirely lacking'. The other Anglo-Indian features, according to him, 'are social inferiority, over-sensitiveness, lack of confidence, independence or industry, precociousness in the young and immaturity in the older members'.<sup>31</sup> Maher considers the essential elements of Anglo-Indian character to be 'loyalty, devotion to duty, sportsmanship, generosity, physical courage, and discipline, obedience to authority, hospitality, a love for orderliness and a sense of responsibility concerning work tasks'.<sup>32</sup> Frank Anthony's observations in contrast are about the 'extraordinary beauty of Anglo-Indian women, the sporting prowess of the members of the community, their valour in times of military crisis, their contribution in building the colonial infrastructure of India'. But he also points out the split the psychology of the community, its alleged social exclusiveness and the overwhelming arrogance of the Anglo-Indian community towards other Indians.<sup>33</sup> Such wide-ranging sentiments probably provide the necessary counterpoint to

the overemphasized stereotypical images described by other non-Anglo-Indian writers.<sup>34</sup>

When a community shares fundamental cultural values, has a membership that can be identified and distinguished from others, exists as a subgroup and is created by commonality in race, religion, origin, history or any combination thereof, it can be said to possess ethnic qualities. Ethnicity is not a product of common living, but is a product of self-awareness belonging to a particular group as distinct from others. Ethnic identity primarily distinguishes a person in terms of origin or background. This identity is also expressed in overt signs such as language, general lifestyle and value orientations. Barth defined ethnicity not as the 'possession' of cultural characteristics that makes social groups distinct but rather as the social interaction with other groups which makes that difference possible, visible and meaningful. The difference is created, developed and maintained only through interaction with others. Cultural differences per se do not create ethnic collectivities: it is the social contact with others that leads to the definition and categorization of an 'us' and 'them'. Group identities must always be defined in relation to that which they are not, that is, in relation to non-members of the group.<sup>35</sup>

But, as students of the sociology of ethnicity, we are not interested in the study of ethnic group behaviour simply as a means to detect the variety of cultural difference that group relations can demonstrate. It is also vitally important for us to understand how such cultural differences are mobilized for political purposes when social actors, through the process of social action, create and recreate the narratives of common descent to respond to a changing social environment. Thus, ethnicity is a dynamic and mobile force. Ethnicity largely depends on the maintenance of a boundary. The cultural features that signify the boundary may change, but the boundary persists, distinguishing a member from a non-member. A particular identity lends its possessor a distinguishable character. The boundaries through which a community asserts its distinct identity are not only culturally determined, they are socially instituted as well, thus encompassing social life and imparting to the community a complex behavioural organization. Such identification distinguishes a member from a non-member and establishes identity with a fellow-member. This implies shared understandings, restriction of interaction with non-members and mutual interest in the members of the community. The cultural differences that persist across boundaries are reaffirmed through 'in-group structured interaction' and 'generation of shared codes of

behaviour' and also response towards non-members. This allows interaction with non-members in limited spheres of social activity and thereby insulates the in-group culture and social values. This is why the maintenance of ethnic boundaries entails an organizational structure.

For Rex and Mason, ethnic attachments do not create groups in themselves. Rather, they provide a skeleton around which a group can be formed. Ethnic groups are not self-evident and fully formed collectivities. They are analogous to a class, estate or status group, in the sense of a quasi-group, whose formation and articulation is dependent on social action. Therefore, not only social inclusion in the group but also social exclusion from the same is dependent on the group's exercise of power and control from the top down.<sup>36</sup>

Language helps in constructing and maintaining such ethnic identities. The role of language is important because it signifies the 'common objectification of everyday life...it builds up semantic fields or zones of meaning that are linguistically circumscribed'.<sup>37</sup> After all, it is through language that the ethnic identity is given meaningful expression, publicly and privately. There are other factors which help the construction and realization of ethnic identity, such as ideology and religion, among others. Berger and Luckman suggest that there are strong normative control devices which have been brought into effect in such instances from as long back as the days of primary socialization. These devices ensure compatibility and coherence in everyday life. This is not to say that these are the only criteria of ethnic identity. It all depends on how much or to what extent the group is dogmatic and rigid.<sup>38</sup> In the occasion of a threat to a group's culture such dogmatism and rigidity become prominently visible. *Group-ness* is sharpened when imperilled. Whenever a group identifies a conflict or inconsistency between what it believes and the conditions under which it lives, the group seeks to reduce the tension by trying to alter the situation but not its beliefs.<sup>39</sup>

Since power and symbols saturate all social life, they also form an integral part of ethnic relations. In this respect, ethnic groups are informally organized interest groups who share a common culture and form a part of the larger population, interacting within the framework of a common social system. Two important aspects of ethnic groups have been specified by Cohen.<sup>40</sup> The first aspect pertains to the political symbolism of various interest groups that are in a state of competition with each other. The second aspect concerns the symbolism through which elite power operates. What differentiates elites from other informal groups is their

privileged position in some important sphere of social life. They validate their elite position in terms of an ideology which is designed to convince the ordinary members of the society as well as themselves of the legitimacy of their special status.

Ethnicity usually serves as a factor with the widest appeal in mobilizing the masses for the elite's particularistic goals, that is, to gain and remain in power. Therefore, the elite of an ethnic group always attempts to present its particularistic and self-serving interest as the universal and shared interest of the community as a whole. This signifies that ethnicity of a minority group is relational to the ethnicity of the majority group. Minority ethnicity is possible only if there is a majority ethnicity. If a minority group emphasizes its cultural distinctiveness, it is only because there is a distinct dominant culture from which it differentiates itself.

Guillaumin and Freneton have traced historically diverse patterns of ethnic and gender subordination. In most cases, sexual relations between dominant and subordinated ethnic groups acts as a predictor of social relations between groups, where subordinated women are regularly seen as sexually accessible to superordinate men. This shows not only the degree of dominance of superordinate over subordinate groups but it also demonstrates the gendered structure of this domination, where superordinate women are subordinate to superordinate men.<sup>41</sup> These links between gender and ethnicity are also visible in contemporary Western societies with 'the feminization of labour opportunities'—that is, with the advent of women immigrants such as baby-sitters, maids or prostitutes who are demarcated and exploited on the basis of both their ethnic and gender identity.<sup>42</sup>

Feminists such as Anthias and Yuval-Davis have also provided elaborate and detailed studies of ethno-national narratives where women are depicted as central to ethnic projects.<sup>43</sup> As Yuval-Davis argues, women are often given the social role of intergenerational transmitters of cultural traditions, customs, songs, cuisine and of course the *mother* tongue.<sup>44</sup> Their behaviour is communally postulated as a moral compass that sets the boundaries of an ethnic group. The sexual promiscuity of women is often invoked as a parameter that delineates and demarcates 'our' women and 'our' morally superior community from 'their' lax women and 'their' morally inferior community. Being sexually dissolute does not merely make a particular woman an immoral individual, but more importantly, it makes her, say, a lesser Hindu because it is the behaviour of women that sets the parameter for what it means to be a good Hindu.

Women are regularly conceived of as biological reproducers and ideological producers of ethnic groups, since the ethnic group's culture is structured around the gendered institutions of marriage, family and sexuality. The fact that ethnic territories are often described as the 'motherland' indicates that through the use of such a hegemonic discourse women are chained to patriarchal notions of purity and honour where the motherland—just as actual mothers and daughters—is viewed as a passive object that needs to be defended and protected by active subjects: by husbands and sons, in other words, by men.<sup>45</sup>

The two axes along which the Anglo-Indian community can be identified as ethnic are education and employment choices. They have retained their distinct language, that is, English, and have shown their reluctance to use any other language. This attachment to English is an overriding characteristic of the community, even if we were to set aside for the time being other cultural markers such as monogamous romantic marriages, nuclear families, a European kinship pattern, a European lifestyle and a conscious effort to maintain such practices. Most Anglo-Indians resent the idea that Indians regard English as a foreign language. The Bombay School Case is an important example of how much Anglo-Indians love their language and how significant a cultural marker it is.<sup>46</sup> At present, almost all Anglo-Indian boys and girls are sent to English medium schools, for English is *their* language. It is probable that many Anglo-Indians are unable to pursue higher studies or even continue school because they are not well versed in other languages such as Bengali and/or Hindi. This again affects their future communication skills and interaction with friends outside the Anglo-Indian community. Most of the Anglo-Indians only have friends from outside the community who are fluent in English. This reluctance to learn any other language has been an important impediment to their interacting with other communities. This is not to say that no Anglo-Indian has intimate friends who are non-English-speaking. It only suggests that such a case would be rare.

As a considerable portion of the Anglo-Indians in Kolkata live near slums—areas where most of the residents have insufficient economic means and a big family to support—Anglo-Indian boys and girls come to appreciate the value of money from an early age. This is especially the case with the boys and, to some extent, explains their high dropout rate from schools. Girls, however, try to pursue their studies and mostly look for jobs at offices. The members of the community who are in a comparatively better economic position try to accommodate such boys and girls

in their business or firms. Nearly 90% of such firms are staffed by Anglo-Indians. The principal source of employment for Anglo-Indians in the past was government jobs, which they did not have to try hard to obtain. Most of the Anglo-Indians of yesteryear were employed either as police or in the post and telegraph, railway, tramway, or telephone departments. Women were either secretaries in such services or were teachers at Anglo-Indian schools. However, with increased mechanization, such clerical jobs have been on the decline. Moreover, the recent emphasis on higher education and demand for specialized technical expertise in the job market has hit the Anglo-Indian community hard. Anglo-Indians are facing stiff competition from non-Anglo-Indians. Women and men now work either as teachers or in low-paying part-time jobs. Only a few with good contacts and expertise in specialized fields such as hotel management and computers can find proper jobs for themselves. As the previous generation had meagre economic means and had not been able to provide their children with effective education, the present generation currently seeking employment is finding it difficult to land suitable jobs.<sup>47</sup>

Anglo-Indians are reluctant to look beyond the traditional job options. This has created their limited and stereotypical occupational pattern. Last, but not the least, Anglo-Indians are wont to enter into institutions where they can get easy admissions: that is, the institutions where seats are reserved for the community. This has contributed to their insularity and remoteness from mainstream India. They live a life circumscribed by family and community, almost wholly segregated from the rest. As a result, they remain confined to their culture, to their communal ethos, to themselves. They remain 'Anglo-Indians'.

One of the fundamental facets of Anglo-Indian's social identity is their identification with and preference for their own ethnic group. There is of course no crucial contradiction in identifying with one's group. But for an ethnic group like the Anglo-Indians, the situation is different because it is compounded by the fact that the community lives in subordination to the majority group. Furthermore, not all Anglo-Indians prefer to identify with their own group. A small number of them actually internalize the ideas other communities have about them and prefer the non-Anglo-Indians to their own kind. Psychologists studying children of ethnic minorities believe that the social situation of the minority children must result in negative consequences for their level of self-esteem. They formulate their assumptions on the basis of a conjoint consideration of two important concepts: reflected appraisal and social comparison.

Reflected appraisal means that the self-concept is largely built by adopting the attitudes of others towards the self; and it follows therefore that if others look down on the minority group, an individual member of the minority will come to see him or herself more or less as the others do. However, this will be true only if the following assumptions hold: first, the individual knows how the majority feels about her/his group (the assumption of awareness); second, she/he accepts the societal view of the group (the assumption of agreement); third, she/he accepts these views as being applicable to her/himself (the assumption of personal relevance); and last, she/he is critically concerned with the majority attitudes (the assumption of significance). In the case of the Anglo-Indians, they are aware of the derogatory attitudes towards their group, are in agreement with these views, apply these views personally to themselves and are critically concerned with the majority's attitudes. Thus, they develop low self-esteem.

The second principle of social comparison holds that the minority group members have lower self-esteem because they compare unfavourably with the majority group both in terms of their group characteristics and in other ways. These unfavourable comparisons—such as low class position, poor academic performance or undesirable skin colour—are in themselves often the consequences of prejudice and discrimination and are used by the minority individual as bases for comparison, which can only be damaging to the self-esteem. During childhood, social comparisons made exclusively with members of one's own ethnic group are not so damaging. However, comparisons with the majority are inescapable in adolescence and adulthood, when occupational choices are made, political ideologies are formed and sex roles are sorted out. It is worth noting, however, that the members of the Anglo-Indian community may have low self-esteem at the individual level but still express a high collective self-esteem. This again emphasizes their strong ethnic identity.

The members of a minority group may not always feel bound together by race, nationality, culture or common history. But what they do share is a common fate and a common experience of discrimination and social disadvantage.<sup>48</sup> Together, these factors serve to strengthen in-group cohesiveness and solidarity. They also enhance consciousness of minority status. The difference between an ethnic group and a minority group inheres in the social imbalance of power and prestige. Minorities are subordinated segments of the society who experience 'discontinuation' and feel that they are living in a socially disadvantageous position.<sup>49</sup>



This leads to the development of attitudes of discrimination and prejudice against the majority, which in turn strengthens the internal cohesion of the group. Ethnic and racial minorities suffer from the same feeling of disadvantage and discrimination, but an ethnic minority need not always be a racial one.<sup>50</sup> Ethnic minorities are those who usually maintain their cultural identity, whereas racial minorities often scarcely have a distinct culture.<sup>51</sup> Their identity therefore is not maintained from within the group but is enforced by the majority culture. Therefore, for racial minorities the boundary is drawn by the racially major group—so much so that the minorities do not participate in the larger society. But possessing sub-cultural traits of the majority group can often identify the minority as a racially minor group. If social minority is also an ethnic collectivity, then assimilation can become a possibility and this perhaps facilitates the groups' process of coping with its ethnic identity.<sup>52</sup>

Ethnicity often overlaps with the dimensions of minority group status. Ethnicity in this case is correlated with assumed social discrimination and deviance through a process of labelling. Kinloch suggests that ethnicity is inherent in minority groups as well. Ethnic minorities are defined as culturally inferior in physical, intellectual and behavioural traits, thereby having limited access to occupational options. These groups are economically dependent and their cultural differences are more emphasized than their physical differences in a racially homogeneous situation.<sup>53</sup>

Articles 28–30 of Part III of the Constitution of India guarantee fundamental rights and contain provisions dealing with educational institutions. Article 28 forbids the imparting of religious instructions in any educational institution 'wholly maintained out of the State funds'. The text and the marginal notes of the Articles 29 and 30 show that their purpose is to confer those fundamental rights on sections of the communities considered minority communities. Under Clause (I) of Article 29 any group of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof and having a distinct culture of its own has the right to conserve the same. Since the Supreme Court declared the Anglo-Indian community as a religious and linguistic minority in India,<sup>54</sup> the community can effectively preserve its language, script or culture by and through educational institutions of its choice. Article 30(I) confers on all minorities, whether religious or linguistic, the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. These can be classified into three categories: (a) those which do not seek either aid or recognition from the state; (b) those which seek recognition but not aid from the state;

and (c) those which seek aid as well as recognition from the state. The Anglo-Indian institutions fall into the third category.

Article 337 holds that unless at least 40 of the annual admissions therein are made available to members of the communities other than the Anglo-Indians', such institutions shall not be entitled to receive any grant from the government. Article 337 protects aid received by the Anglo-Indian schools for a period of ten years. Since the Anglo-Indian school is a state-aided institution, according to Article 29(2) it cannot discriminate in the matter of admission on the grounds of religion, race, caste, language among others. Besides the constitutional identity, which is formal, Anglo-Indians' feelings of being dominated, along with feelings of alienation and a strong sense of belonging within their own institutions make them a minority in India.

The Anglo-Indian women was juxtaposed and buttressed between two worlds: the British concept of womanhood, which had reflections of British imperial patriarchy, and the mores of the Indian (Hindu) patriarchy. For example, on the one hand, Anglo-Indian women were praised for their national and imperial pride and duty as members of WAC (I)<sup>55</sup>; and on the other, the women who instead stayed at home and nurtured children were criticized for living in a world of illusion based on the possibility of marrying a European and leaving India. In a hierarchical society, gender oppression is often linked with oppression based on caste, class, community, tribe and religion, and in such multiple patriarchies the idea of 'men as the principal oppressors' is not easily accepted.<sup>56</sup> However, Mary E. John argues that multiple patriarchies are the by-products of discrimination in unequal patriarchies, and 'there is a need to conceptualize the complex articulation of different patriarchies, along with the distinct and equally challenging question of how subaltern genders are relating to questions of power in the current conjuncture'.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, patriarchal plurality is a facet of Indian social life. It entangles and produces social disparity; it is characterized as a network of overlaps and differences as well as a field of interaction. But it is important to state that women who are united on the bases of systemic and overlapping patriarchies are nevertheless simultaneously divided along other lines. Three such divisions are persistent: first, by class and the accompanying power to oppress women and men of other classes; secondly, by consent to a patriarchal structure and its compensatory structure and the accompanying power delegated to oppress women of other communities or patriarchies; and, thirdly, by the values and ideologies of the 'other'

as opposed to 'us'. Each of these divisions can by themselves produce equally significant divisions between women. In this regard, affiliation to a community identity can make a difference to women but need not produce a conflict between them. It is only when this difference is translated into politics and is aligned with institutions that maintain power that it has the capacity to divide women. Structured diversity is a marked feature of these multiple patriarchies. This diversity is partly a product of discrete ideological systems. However, these are continuously subjected to restructuring in the domain of customs and by class imperatives. The separateness of these patriarchies is in fact partly due to an ideological effect. But even in areas of striking difference there is similarity.<sup>58</sup>

A patriarchal system provides restrictive standards of social behaviour and rewards those who learn to accept this structure. Of the several elements that constitute patriarchy, gender is perhaps the most significant because it allows the articulation of power within relationships that are fundamentally intimate. Therefore gender is not merely an analytical construction. It is a methodological category for understanding how our world is organized in a hierarchical structure. The treatment of masculinity and femininity is understood here both as a category of description and as a category of analysis. In a patriarchal structure, wifehood and motherhood are glorified and granted social sanction. The women in society not only accept and respond to the notions of a 'beautiful body', they try to actualize these expectations as well.

Like the women of any community and culture, Anglo-Indian women live within the patriarchal structure of their community; but what makes them different from others is that they face multiple layers of patriarchal domination: one within their own community and the other from the outside world. In this case, the demands and expectations of the multiple patriarchal structures faced by Anglo-Indian women intersect and overlap at certain points and have distinct qualities as well. While the multiple structures may be analytically distinct, in reality they may be confronted as a single patriarchal structure by the subject. The women of the community are subject to all the layers of patriarchal domination at the same time, and their responses to all these layers are different. For example, they may mutely accept the patriarchal structure of their community on the one hand; but, on the other, they may harbour cynical reservations about the patriarchal structures of the rest of the world (in this case, that of India as a whole). All these patriarchies reinforce and reproduce masculinity and gendered power relations where the women

may act as agents of patriarchal demands on other women. Let me first consider what the expectations of these multiple structures are among Anglo-Indian women and then take into consideration how they respond to these differing expectations.

The Anglo-Indian community is patrilineal. Though patrilineality does not automatically impose patriarchy, historically the recognition of the mother's contribution was absent in the early period of the community's development. This implies a male bias from the very outset. There are innumerable birth records and baptism records of the Anglo-Indians (then known as Eurasians) which do not show the name of the mother of the child. Scholars have identified these 'absentee' mothers whose names were not recognized to be of Indian origin. Moreover, these Indian mothers were not recognized by their caste members either because they had defied their caste patriarchy and bore children of a *bid-harmi* (heretic) and a *feringee* (Eurasian). These women laid the foundation for the community but were de-recognized by the same community. In later years, the women born into the community emerged as a subordinated group with low status and a stereotypical identity.

#### EXPERIENCES OF ANGLO-INDIAN WOMEN IN INDIA THROUGH A HISTORICAL LENS

The status of Eurasian or Anglo-Indian women was considered low from the inception of the community. It remained so in comparison to that of the European women who lived in India during the same time. As marriage of British officials with Eurasian women was discouraged from the nineteenth century on, any emotional or sexual liaison with European men seldom matured into something of legal standing. So there are innumerable histories of Anglo-Indian men and women who were born as illegitimate children. These children automatically had a status lower than that of the children of legitimate parents from any community in India. There was rampant physical abuse of Eurasian women. In the journals published in the 1870s, wife-beating, desertion by the husband, poverty, squalor and high female mortality were recurrent themes.<sup>59</sup> *The Calcutta Review*, published between 1860 and 1890, shows that the barrack wife (an appellation for a Eurasian wife) remained a peripheral/marginal figure in the discourse of colonial rule in India.<sup>60</sup> The following excerpt demonstrates the case clearly:

Despite a fairly large presence, poorer whites (barrack wives, especially) remained more or less peripheral to the discourse of Anglo-India—the obvious reason being that their presence arguably threatened to undermine colonial hierarchies of race and class ...Indeed their erasure from the consciousness of the community was so completely effected that in the 1850s Lady Canning could express her naïve ignorance of any “poor people, except very dark half-castes or natives”.<sup>61</sup>

The above quote of Lady Canning implies two things: first that the poverty-stricken Eurasian population was marginal; and second, they were identified as ‘natives of India’. As such, there was an inherent class bias against these women. The position of the Eurasian woman before this period was no better. *The Calcutta Review* illustrates that the poorer white women (read the Eurasians) who existed in the margins of the society were considered socially inferior to such an extent that they were socially degraded more than the women of the other communities in India. The articles in *The Calcutta Review* expressed the fear that these women were devoid of the ‘self respect which even native women may feel’.<sup>62</sup> The status of Eurasian women compared to that of native women was such that the former were identified and treated as nothing more than concubines. Moreover, child marriage was a frequent practice among Eurasians as well: young girls were married off to much older men. This was followed by early motherhood. *The Calcutta Review* illustrates the story of a 14-year-old girl who was frequently beaten by her older husband because she played marbles with boys of her age.<sup>63</sup> The following excerpt also illustrates the pitiful condition of Eurasian women in the late-nineteenth-century India:

Indeed in 1871 *The Friend of India* admitted to such a replication of the ‘native’ practice of ‘child marriage’ among the poorer whites and went on to locate it as deep-rooted class problem that was prevalent even among the working classes in metropolitan England: “There is the same difficulty in Manchester and our manufacturing towns generally. Poor little lassies, mere children, are commonly enough mothers”.<sup>64</sup>

The nineteenth century brought about distinct changes in the way the community bestowed low status on its women. In the nineteenth century, especially after the Suez Canal opened, English ships brought cargoes of venturesome beauties bent on matrimony so regularly that it

grew into a social phenomenon called the ‘Fishing Fleet’.<sup>65</sup> The captain of the ship and other well-known ladies arranged parties where the candidates would sit as if they were on exhibition and the eligible bachelors would rush there to try their luck.<sup>66</sup> ‘In such situations some Anglo-Indian girls were accomplished flirts. As long as the girl made a suitable catch in the end, flirting was accepted as a pleasant activity except when the girl overdid it’.<sup>67</sup> In the nineteenth century, then, Anglo-Indian women were considered nothing more than ‘wives and mothers’. The way Anglo-Indian women were depicted in the nineteenth century and afterwards bears testimony to the fact that they were considered no more than a commodity within the community: merely objects to be seen and appreciated. Moorhouse describes Anglo-Indian women not only as the saddest result of British imperialism but also, and paradoxically, as very good-looking—‘as though the chemical processes of assorted generations had compensated the outcaste by gradually purging her line of all coarseness until total refinement was reached’.<sup>68</sup> Hyam also identifies Anglo-Indian women as outstandingly beautiful.<sup>69</sup> Many Anglo-Indian writers, especially Frank Anthony, have expended quite a number of lines on the beauty of Anglo-Indian women. Anthony, for example, not only praised Anglo-Indian beauties but also condemned ‘penny shovelling exercises in near pornography that sexualize them’.<sup>70</sup> This recognition of their beauty carried no parallel respect for their personhood. Anglo-Indian women were considered ‘wax dolls without a mind’ but capable nevertheless of ‘looking frighteningly unhappy or demons driven by heady but volatile essence of sensuality with no body’.<sup>71</sup> Such identities were imposed upon the Anglo-Indian women by the men of their community. This shows the patriarchal nature of the community, which commoditized the women as mindless beauties who had brought shame to the community. Such stereotypes continue to exist for the Anglo-Indian women. The men and women of the community alike still consider the beauty of Anglo-Indian girls to be their boon and bane.

My fieldwork among the women of the community resulted in two related observations. When I introduced myself to the men of the community as a researcher on Anglo-Indian women, most of them thought it to be a trivial project. To them, these women had no minds. When I approached the women to discuss ‘their issues’, they were unwilling to do so. They thought their brothers, husbands or fathers were better equipped to discuss *their* matters, since they knew so little—the women did not think they could answer the questions on their own. They relied

on the males, who had already anticipated such incapability on the part of the Anglo-Indian women. The patriarchy of their community identifies women as objects, as bodies without minds. As 'wax dolls', the women's opinions were worthless not only to the men of the community but also to themselves.

The arrival of the British women in India marked a change in community relations and the context in which the community members lived. The presence of the British wives and mothers in India—known as *memsahibs*—provoked racial antagonism between the rulers and the ruled. While the reference group for the Anglo-Indian women was these European women, it was these British women who acted as the chief agents for the imposition of British imperial-patriarchal domination on the Anglo-Indian women. For example, during the years of the mutiny, the conflict was the most severe on the domestic front.<sup>72</sup> The women of the community were not dishonoured but were made to feel their servitude.<sup>73</sup>

Unlike the situation with Indian Christians, the European ancestry of the Anglo-Indian community led to an emphasis on some cultural markers, such as language, dress and eating habits. Middle-class Anglo-Indian women employed Indian cooks and servants and served their meals on tables and with cutlery, much in the fashion of the British *memsahibs*. Though Anglo-Indian cuisine was different from English food, the Anglo-Indians were always quick to point out that their way of cooking and dining was clearly distinct from the traditional Indian customs. Though Anglo-Indian homes were of a lower status and poorer than those of the British elite in India, Anglo-Indians' upbringing and lifestyle reflected a masculine, middle-class, imperial heritage aligned to British rather than to Indian norms of domesticity.<sup>74</sup> This represents a clear inclination towards the powerful paternal ancestry and a disregard for the Indian maternal ancestry. The imperialist domination was never a burden for the Anglo-Indians because the community always hoped that they would be eventually recognized by the British as one of them. Rather than identifying with other Indians, they were antagonistic to them. One of the excerpts from the response of an Anglo-Indian subject in Gaikwad's research on the community reveals that the greatest pride of the Anglo-Indians resides in their European descent and that there is nothing that Anglo-Indians deplore more than their own dark skin. An Anglo-Indian father would rather give everything he had to marry his daughter off to some lowly, despicable European who would ill-treat her

perpetually than to marry her to a fellow Anglo-Indian. The respondent in Gaikwad's study also expressed his great disdain for Indians, whom the Anglo-Indian community treats with contempt.<sup>75</sup> Such outbursts show that Anglo-Indians experienced the entire gamut of social pressures—to be British in the eyes of the British, to be Indian and also to be Anglo-Indian—but they responded to these sets of expectations differently.

The women had accepted the patriarchal domination of their community as well as the British patriarchal domination, but had cynical reservations against Indian patriarchy. Perhaps this adulatory attitude towards British life and the completely opposite attitude towards Indian men and women made Anglo-Indian girls seek higher status by marrying European men and becoming a 'lady' in the eyes of others. For example, it was (and is) common for an Anglo-Indian woman to change suddenly when an Englishman took notice of her. She forgot that her parents were dark-skinned. Instantly, in her eyes, India became this horrid place and Indians the most ill-mannered, untrustworthy and dirty people on earth.<sup>76</sup> Hicks' comments that the Anglo-Indian girl is prepared to sacrifice 'everything' for an Englishman, invoking the stigma of interracial sex and illegitimacy. As a result, she is perceived as more licentious than other European and Indian women.<sup>77</sup> This popularly held image of the debauched Anglo-Indian girl is discussed in Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt's article on self-images of the Anglo-Indian community, where she comments on the 'stereotypical image of lax morality of Anglo-Indian women' in the minds of the Indians.<sup>78</sup> On the one hand, the Anglo-Indian girl she portrays strives to forge a link with her British rulers by imitating whatever they did. On the other hand, she actively distanced herself from the native (Indian) culture to prove that her ways of life and standards were not only different but also distinct from those of other Indian women. Their attempts at distancing themselves from Indian social mores and nationalist patriarchy—or to be more precise, the ideology of nationalist domesticity—had an impact on the daily lives and social arrangements of Anglo-Indian women. Alison Blunt points out, 'Anglo-Indian women and homes were positioned within wider discourses of *both* imperial *and* nationalist domesticity'. She argues that in the case of these women, their roles as homemakers were 'both manifested and erased by their dual identification with Britain as fatherland and India as motherland'.<sup>79</sup>

Indian patriarchy deplored the social habits of the Anglo-Indian girls and the 'freedom' they enjoy. Anglo-Indian girls like to dance, go



to balls, use cosmetics, wear European clothes—none of which conform to Hindu or Muslim society's notion of becoming feminine modesty and propriety. Let us consider a case from popular culture. In the film *Mahanagar* by Satyajit Ray, the heroine—a middle-class Bengali wife from a joint family—joins a company as a salesgirl and befriends an Anglo-Indian colleague. This girl had also come to work to sustain her family, as had the Bengali woman. But what distinguished her were the lipstick and sunglasses that she carried in her purse. The Anglo-Indian girl offers her lipstick to the Bengali protagonist, and it occurs to the latter that putting on the lipstick would help her impress her customers. The interesting part is that the Bengali wife removes her make-up before she enters the home. This shows the difference between the Bengali middle-class sensibility regarding dress and makeup in the late 1960s and that of the Anglo-Indians.

Anglo-Indian women projected themselves as more emancipated and Westernized than their Bengali counterparts not only in the way they dressed but also in their occupational choices. From the nineteenth century on, the Anglo-Indian women worked outside the home. Most of these women were educated and had technical training. During the Second World War, many Anglo-Indian women served as members of the Women's Auxiliary Corps (India) and featured prominently in promotional photographs of the WAC (I).<sup>80</sup> Frank Anthony noted that the contribution of Anglo-Indian women to the war effort was greater than that of all the women from all the communities in India put together.<sup>81</sup> The Anglo-Indian women of pre-independence India were employed as secretaries, typists, clerks and teachers long before Bengali middle-class women dared to take a similar step. Their struggle to support themselves had begun much earlier—in direct contrast to the Bengali middle-class patriarchal norm. One result of this struggle was that Anglo-Indian women were more visible in public.

### PROBLEMS OF BEING AN ANGLO-INDIAN WOMEN IN INDIA: QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY AND THE ANGLO-INDIAN WOMAN

The discourse on community identity within the field of sociology is particularly concerned with the problem of definitions. One major aspect of these definitions is the emphasis that community identity is a socially constructed phenomenon. Central to this constructionist approach is

the idea that collective identity is mutable and contingent—a product of social ascriptions and a reflexive process involving internal and external forces and actors. The struggle between classes and whether community identity is administered from the ‘bottom-up’ or ‘top-down’ are some of the questions this field explores. This definition of community identity as territorially based implies the existence of distinctive but connected levels (the neighbourhood, the zone, the city) which prefigure the presence of two opposing dimensions: the micro-dimension and the macro-dimension. The exploration into concepts of how the human psyche develops a real sense of ‘we’ and ‘ours’ rather than ‘theirs’ is at the core of social psychology studies.

It is well known that identities can originate from the dominant institutions of the society. However, they truly become identities only when and if social actors internalize them and construct their meaning around this internalization. Since social relations are also relations of power, the social construction of identities always takes place in a context marked by power relationships. Accordingly, there are three forms and origins of identity building. First is legitimizing identity introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination vis-à-vis social actors? Second, resistance identity is generated by those factors that are in positions or conditions devalued and or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from or opposed to those permeating the institutions of society. Third, project identity occurs when social actors on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them build a new identity that redefines their position in society and by so doing seek the transformation of the overall social structure. These three forms are only analytically distinct. In reality identities that start as resistance may also over time become dominant in the institutions of society, thus becoming legitimizing identities used to rationalize domination.<sup>82</sup> The history of the mixed racial community manifests such processes of complex identity formation, but it is too early to predict whether the community has been able to follow the path of legitimizing its identity towards rational domination in Indian society. I would argue that given the mixed-race community’s small numbers in India and its accompanying low demographic and social presence, such rational domination in legitimizing its identity in Indian society is a near impossibility. There are larger issues that need to be handled before such pursuits are undertaken.

The issue of identity also revolves around the idea of a homeland. The history of the community centres on a debate between two contrasting histories of the community's legitimacy. The community has produced a version of its history that substantiates its claim to legitimate origins. Anglo-Indian historians claim themselves as the 'chosen people' charged with supporting the assumed prerogatives of the Empire. In order to produce a wholesome image of their descent and origins, the Anglo-Indians have praised the morality and attitudes of the colonizers. This history is produced from within the colonial discourse. The community has portrayed itself as a handmaid of the Empire, often boasting about how Anglo-Indians held key positions within the colonial administration, such as the telegraph and railways departments. This dominant representation often created resentment in the other Indian communities, which rejected the notion of English superiority and in turn regarded Anglo-Indians as 'un-Indian'. These attitudes manifested themselves clearly in the creation of anti-colonial Indian nationalism as, while Indians attained the deserved freedom they had fought for so tirelessly, the Anglo-Indian community was alienated from contributing its part in embodying the national identity and was made to feel 'unhomed'.

The history the Indian majority has produced about Anglo-Indians encourages a perception of the community's illegitimacy. It is still a widespread belief that Anglo-Indians are bastard consequences of sexual misdemeanours—between outcaste Englishmen and morally wayward Indian women—products of the 'sins of miscegenation'. This supposed illegitimacy of the Anglo-Indians de-legitimizes their right to 'an authentic' subjectivity within the nation, consequently problematizing their relationship to India as 'home'.<sup>83</sup>

The community's abandonment into the realm of being 'unwelcomed' in India is a result of the way in which Anglo-Indian history has been produced from 'outside' what is specifically an 'Anglo-Indian' way of thinking and experience. That is to say, Anglo-Indian history has been constructed through English colonial and Indian nationalist rhetoric. Consequently, the Anglo-Indian voice is silenced by these 'totalizing discourses'.<sup>84</sup>

The problem of identity and its consequent devalued legitimacy of rational domination can be seen in three social phenomena. One, the community which was once formed out of inter-community—that is, mixed marriages—now practices endogamy. The practice forces them to look for marriage partners within the community. This does not

mean there is no crossover, but Anglo-Indian families prefer to look for prospective grooms within their community (to be discussed in Chap. 3). Since the community is patrilineal, the father's line needs to be identified to have a connection to a European progenitor. Therefore women from other communities and religions can be welcomed into an Anglo-Indian family but probably not the opposite. This does not mean Anglo-Indian women do not marry or are prohibited from marrying outside the community; it only suggests that the politics of inclusion does play a significant role in instilling the responsibility on the women for maintaining the honour of the family and community. If such a 'transgression' was encouraged on a wider scale and the community became open to intermarriage, it would ultimately mean that the community would lose its identity with the European progenitors, and the 'Anglo' connection would cease to exist. So the responsibility to cater to a patrilineal setting is bestowed on the Anglo-Indian girl so that she does not transgress the boundary lines of community identity and representation. The second aspect is that women who have already transgressed the boundary and married someone outside the community and are also poor find it very difficult to prove that they are Anglo-Indians unless they are identified and offered help by a social-service agency. The third aspect is concerned with the problems of being an Anglo-Indian in Kolkata. Poverty is surely a problem, but is it the only one? That is, are Anglo-Indians poor because they are uneducated, unskilled or semi-skilled and cannot access 'good' jobs? Or is it transgression of social mores *and* poverty? That is, are Anglo-Indians who have crossed over in marriage choices and are poor in a worse situation than their unmarried or endogamous counterparts? The subjective positioning of the identity question becomes one of overwhelming importance. The way Anglo-Indians feel towards being Anglo-Indian or their sense of being and fulfillment is often associated with their self-esteem and personality traits.

The Anglo-Indian community in India started migrating to different Commonwealth countries long ago. Therefore, there is a wide diaspora at present, of whom many are second-generation Anglo-Indians born to Anglo-Indian parents settled outside India. The first-generation emigrant Anglo-Indian is at present a Canadian, Australian or British citizen. They might recognize their Anglo-Indian roots, but they are not Anglo-Indian by definition. They may be emotionally involved with their motherland and family members and friends they have left behind, but they are

formally excluded from the intense bond shared by Anglo-Indians here. They are in fact in the same position as those Anglo-Indians who had transgressed in selecting marriage partners outside the community and have also been excluded from the formal definition of being an Anglo-Indian.

The Anglo-Indian is connected to India. That is the recognition of an Anglo-Indian is bound to their root in India, with their indigenous mothers. But the women of the community are not being given the equal opportunity to exercise choice and still be an Anglo-Indian and also transfer the identity to her children. The community which proclaims to be liberal and open has always used the women as the chief instrument to build and maintain a unique identity. This is a problem specific to the Anglo-Indian community and there has been virtually no discussion of these issues. There has been much work on gender and class, mixed racial heritage and aspects of assimilation and accommodation in India, but much less research has been done on the issue of identity and the politics of representation.

## LANGUAGE

British disdain towards Anglo-Indians was frequently focused on women. Despite their diverse origins, Anglo-Indians' language was what marked them as culturally close to the British. The majority of Anglo-Indians with no or average schooling spoke a version of English at home with a characteristic mode of expression, inflection, slang and humour. It was a distant variant of the English spoken by the British, who and made fun of the Anglo-Indian accent. Here too it was the Anglo-Indian woman's speaking style which drew the most comments.<sup>85</sup> This mode of speaking came to be labeled as '*chee-chee*' (or *chi-chi*) and was subjected to endless British mockery.<sup>86</sup> The accent often sounded like a Welsh accent. Raising British children in India was also racialized because of this. Just as wet-nurses in India were often thought to pose a threat to the assumed racial purity of British babies, Anglo-Indian nannies were also often thought to pose cultural threat because of their accent.<sup>87</sup>

The English language spoken by Anglo-Indians often included Hindi, Urdu and Bengali words and idioms, but before independence it was a custom among Anglo-Indians to learn French and Latin as well. After independence it was customary for them to learn Hindi or Bengali as a second language in school. When asked about their level of fluency in

any Indian (local) language, most Anglo-Indian replied that they had picked it from the *ayah* (the maid who was responsible for the care of children). Thus they did not acquire a pure version of the language but rather other than a class-reflected version of it.

With the growing importance of English as a worldwide language of communication it is quite surprising to note such a state of affairs within a community whose mother tongue is English. In a globalized era such as ours, with the liberalization of markets the importance of English as a spoken language is far reaching. But for the community in question and for the women of the community in particular this has not been an advantage. They are often forced to speak in other languages in local conversations; most young Anglo-Indians get poor marks and eventually are disqualified in examinations for not being able to perform well in the local language and Hindi. Since they speak mostly English at home and with friends who are from the community, they fail to make friends outside the community unless they are proficient in the local language or the friends are proficient in speaking English. The schools built for the children of the Anglo-Indian community now recruit non-Anglo-Indians in quite large numbers because they have learned to speak the Bengali language and have comparable academic records. The women of the community who were employed as teachers in these schools because they could speak good English are now failing to keep pace with new non-Anglo-Indian recruits. So the language which had set them apart and given them an opportunity for employment is no longer an advantage (to be discussed in this chapter). The same occurred in one recent employment sector in the city. When the call centres first appeared in Kolkata city, it was the Anglo-Indian boys and girls who were hired in large numbers because they were proficient in speaking the language mostly required in such centres; but soon the Anglo-Indians faced competition and challenges from members of the other communities who could speak the language and also sometimes had higher-level formal education than the average Anglo-Indian. Their discomfort with speaking the local language pushes them to a marginal position, where they are left with little choice. Though the leaders of the community claim that their members, especially the younger generation, can speak the local language, it is their insistence on starting a conversation in English or carrying out the entire conversation in English along with possessing lower levels of formal education support that works to their disadvantage. This is for the most part

true of Anglo-Indians living in the poorer areas of the city. The comparatively rich Anglo-Indian, who can afford to mix with people (local) who are conversant in English, is better placed in this context. So the problem of the community with language is concentrated at the lowest (i.e., poor) rung of the stratification and it is a problem for the average Anglo-Indian. Any negotiation about language (as was seen earlier), which bonds a community together, is obscure. The community and its leadership failed to take up the issue when it emerged in the late 1990s. It is an irony not unrecognized among the English-speaking communities of India today.

## DRESS

Emma Roberts notes that the 'rich Indo-British ladies attire' followed the latest fashions of London and Paris, whereas the 'inferior class' dressed in a style which was equally European.<sup>88</sup> Very young children of both sexes wore little gowns and petticoats; and by the time they started to walk they wore dresses like adult girls and suits like men. As girls grew older, they wore longer skirts. Like their parents, the children wore more formal dresses in the evenings even in the hottest weather. Girls wore several layers, all starched and edged with lace, from pants to vests to petticoats with frilly dresses. Little boys wore sailor suits and little versions of their father's uniform.<sup>89</sup>

The Anglo-Indian adoption of European sartorial modes was treated as a caricature to diminish the British standing in eyes of Indians; thus the European women in the ruling circles consistently sought new styles and materials to escape emulation by Anglo-Indian women.<sup>90</sup> Hawes points out class attitudes, no less than racial considerations, were important influences on British behaviour towards Anglo-Indians.<sup>91</sup> Unconventional dress made European women publicly admired in India. In 1856, one such European, Miss Wallace-Dunlop, was criticized for not wearing her hat while she was being carried in a litter in a hill station.<sup>92</sup> Eurasians during this time also were very anxious to showcase that they were also part of the ruling class. Eurasian women did their best to cover themselves with muslin and silk and trimmed their dresses with lace.<sup>93</sup> Caplan notes that Anglo-Indian women probably drew a disproportionate amount of British hostility because they were seen as the principal and most visible mimics.<sup>94</sup> Hawes points out that besides (and to a lesser degree than) racial prejudices, this annoyance over being

‘copied’ coloured the attitude of Europeans towards Eurasians.<sup>95</sup> Anglo-Indian women were also criticized for what was seen as their attempts at enticement of European men.

In recent years, older Anglo-Indian women have often continued to wear Western dresses, but women of the younger generation usually wear Indian clothes (*salwar kameez* and *sari*) to work and formal gatherings but prefer wearing western dresses in functions organized by the community or at informal get-togethers. Here it should be remembered that dresses for Indians in recent years have become more Westernized and modern (to be discussed in subsequent chapters). This is largely the result of English-language education, media representations and wider processes of globalization and is an adjustment to the pressure to perform like any Indian in formal gatherings, which men have not experienced.

The word *tash*, often used as slang for Indian Christians and especially Anglo-Indians, is another example of the disdain other Indians have for Anglo-Indian women. This word has a deeper connotation in Bengali language with reference to Sukumar Roy’s notion of a cow that was a ‘*tash*’. It cynically symbolized how Anglo-Indians, though born and brought up in India, looked up appreciatively to anything that was European. Instead of eating grass as cows usually do, the *tash goru* craved candles and soups made of soap water. The cow is a Eurasian clerk in ill-fitting Western clothes who is represented as having a weak constitution possessing low-class values and an easy virtue.<sup>96</sup> Since it was Anglo-Indian women who served predominantly as clerks, the poem demonstrates how Anglo-Indian women were (and still are) imagined to be low class and unacceptable in public. They were despised by the Indian society, which upheld the moral virtues of *satitva* (chastity) and *matritva* (motherhood) and celebrated the ethicized femininity of the *pativrata* (devoted wife) and *sati-savitri* (a chaste wife of mythological sanctity). The Bengali middle class of the time was full of anxieties about imminent Westernization of the woman and the domestic sphere. The ideal woman of the Bengali middle-class household was therefore in sharp and direct contrast to the already Westernized Anglo-Indian woman. The Anglo-Indian woman also responded to the dominant societal stereotyping. For example, Isolde, an Anglo-Indian girl in Laura Roychowdhury’s book *The Jadu House*, expresses her pain at being an Anglo-Indian. She felt that the actress (who played the role of an



Anglo-Indian unwed mother in the Hindi film *Julie*) could not get work after this film because she played an Anglo-Indian girl on screen and candidly performed the role of an unmarried mother. She could not escape the scandal of illegitimate motherhood; and Isolde thought that, as an Anglo-Indian girl, she had to suffer shame as well.<sup>97</sup>

Bengali middle-class women before independence seldom ventured out unless forced by financial crisis or, in rare cases, when they were educated and desired independence. Though the situation at present has changed for Bengali women, it has remained quite the same for Anglo-Indian women. They are still yoked to the responsibility of the family and are not free to follow their own goals. Moreover, the presence of the Anglo-Indian girl in the public domain was anathema to the Bengali middle-class conservative sensibilities right up until the twentieth century. The two incompatible modes of social orientation deepened the difference between the Bengali and the Anglo-Indian woman. The dual patriarchy of Hindu brahminical provenance on the one hand and of Anglo-Indian provenance on the other bore down simultaneously on the Anglo-Indian woman. The brahminical patriarchy of the Hindu-Bengali kind eschewed everything *mlechha* (European) or which otherwise did not conform to Hindu prescriptions. Therefore, the Europeanized lifestyle of Anglo-Indians and especially the way the women of the community behaved were against the patriarchal norm of the Hindus.

Moreover, the pro-British role of the Anglo-Indians in British India also fueled a deep antagonism against the community. This feeling was (and is) so deep that many members of the Bengali middle class (still) harbour hostile sentiments which are expressed in terms such as *tash* and *feringhee*. The Anglo-Indians retaliate by using slang terms such as *bong* for Bengalis. They feel that there is a deep prejudice against the Anglo-Indian girl in the Bengali mind and that this is why Bengali families are loathe to accept Anglo-Indian girls as wives. They also think that it is due to the parochial and scornful attitude of the Bengalis towards them that the Anglo-Indians have become so inward-looking and insular. My fieldwork data also suggest that Anglo-Indian men are more open to intercommunity marriages than Anglo-Indian women. Perhaps this corroborates the idea that Anglo-Indian women in particular were forced to draw more distinct boundaries of 'we' and 'they' to ward off the patriarchal domination of Indian society.

## DOMESTICITY AND ANGLO-INDIAN WOMEN IN COLONIAL BENGAL

During the nineteenth century a collection of middle-class European ideas and practices on home and family life became a hegemonic discourse on global space. Over time, as this discourse grew in diversity, there appeared traces and variants of its ideological and practical concerns which could be found in literature like household journals published in India. Scholars have agreed that domesticity was a discourse of the nineteenth century European middle-class—a set of ideas about the proper ordering of the home and family relations that are integral to bourgeois ideology and self-identity linked to industrialization, industrial capitalism and new modes of production of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Central to this discourse was a conviction that the ‘natural’ order of human relations involved a patriarchal family system with a gendered separation of spheres of activity and the husband at the head of the family unit. Wives came to be known as ‘ministering angels of the house’ who played important roles as the husband’s soul mate, companion and friend. As a product of nineteenth century bourgeois ideology, domesticity was a secular discourse deeply imprinted with Enlightenment themes of order, reason and science. The proper ordering of home and family life would come from the application of science and scientific methodologies to the domestic sphere. At the same time the European bourgeois classes saw themselves as universally hegemonic, which led them to promote domesticity as a natural and universal category of human life.<sup>98</sup>

Print was the popular medium through which the message was spread nineteenth century women regarding domesticity. By the end of the nineteenth century, colonial empires were producing domestic manuals for their own internal consumption. In 1888, Flora Annie Steel wrote *The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook* with Grace Gardiner, an Anglo-Indian woman. Their manual remained popular for 20 years, was published in three different editions and reissued multiple times through 1917. In four important (popular) manuals<sup>99</sup> on domesticity published during this period, home was imagined to be a conceptual structure defined by system, order, economy, efficiency and the scientific practice of hygiene. All four manuals naturalized domesticity as a civilized orthodoxy of home and family life. In the Anglo-Indian housewife’s manual we see an innate sense of order and cleanliness deployed against the

dirt and chaos of indigenous Indian life. In the Anglo-Indian context, domestic work was seen fit only for servants. The Anglo-Indian woman's proper role in society is supervision of her Indian servants, not the performance of their tasks herself. Educated women, according to the authors, should not do the work of their lazy servants. Here the colonial household becomes the site for contestation between Western civilization and Indian superstitions. The question to which the manual offers suggestions is how to establish proper domestic practices in the face of an ignorant and sometimes hostile servant population. In this view, the Indian servant seems to have been trapped in ancient customs and habits and can be brought back to civilized conduct only through the intervention of an Anglo-Indian mistress.

The Anglo-Indian woman of today carries forward this legacy, and my fieldwork found too many of them boasting of their 'kitchen Hindi', which they usually spoke with their servants and maids. Class and racial boundaries resurface in their interactions and reflections of their conversations with domestic help. Moreover, the responsibility of domesticity of an Anglo-Indian family primarily rests with their women. It is an irony that the community frequently refers to their women as the first 'liberalized' women of India to work outside home. But they fail to consider in addition that the women of their community have carried both the family (domesticity) and the economy of the family (finance) on their shoulders for long enough. The men have often been trivial and irresponsible with regard to these matters. This again corroborates the patriarchal structure of family relationships and community pressure the women face (discussed in detail in Chap. 4, Family and Marriage).

## CONCLUSION

This is not to suggest that only Anglo-Indian men have cultural features distinct from those of their women. Anglo-Indian women are distinct from the women of other communities in India in their dress, language, employment status and other cultural markers such as their affinity towards their schools, among others. But what makes them distinct from the men of the community are the multiple patriarchies they face. However, the quantum of Hindu aggression faced by Anglo-Indian women is not necessarily greater than that faced by the Anglo-Indian men. What is crucial here is the depiction of how the Anglo-Indian woman has been subjugated to multiple layers of patriarchal domination within her community.

She faces the non-Anglo-Indian man not only as a male, with his universal masculine expectations, but additionally as a member of a different community expressing a set of patriarchal expectations different from those of her own community. These women are already *marginalized* as members of an ethnic minority group—the Anglo-Indians. Yet their subjection to multiple patriarchies (caste, gender, racial, majority) *marginalizes* them further even within their own community—that is, they are a minority within the minority group of Anglo-Indians. Thus, they are doubly marginal, doubly minoritised. Their response to society is framed within this multiple-patriarchal setup. Therefore any study of the responses of two generations of Anglo-Indian women living in Kolkata should pay heed to these layers of patriarchies. The next chapters on education, marriage and friendships will explore these issues in more detail.

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Anglo-Indian Women in Transition  
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2017, XI, 202 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-981-10-4653-7