



**THE HINDU CENTRE**

for

Politics and Public Policy

## Political Nominations & the Anglo-Indian: A Reality Check



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The 11<sup>th</sup> World Anglo-Indian Reunion 2019 held at Loyola College, Chennai, on January 8, 2019.  
Photo: M. Karunakaran

*As India gears up for another general election, a forgotten section of the electorate is the about 1.50 lakh strong Anglo-Indian community. Under the constitutional guarantee of Article 331, two members would be nominated to represent the community in the next Lok Sabha as has been the procedure since independence. In this analysis, Bryan Oliver Peppin, Retired Professor of English, The New College, Chennai, and author of Black and*

*White: The Anglo-Indian Identity in Recent English Fiction, discusses the issues that matter for the Anglo-Indian community.*

*Emphasising that “no other individual parliamentarian serves people across the length and breadth of the country” he calls for consensus in the process of nominating the Anglo-Indian representatives to the Lok Sabha. Moreover, the nominated MPs “must have unblemished records and be well-known regarding the welfare of the people they are supposed to represent”. Peppin points out that it is “always better to have outspoken crusaders rather than people who simply sign above the dotted lines” and that the nominated Members of Parliament should be ready and willing to take up a just cause and see to it that justice prevails in all disputes. “Since the two representatives are sometimes lucky enough to be chosen, they should not take it as a matter of course to look down on the people they are supposed to serve”.*

### **Anglo-Indian Politics, a brief history**

**T**he “Anglo-Indian” community has been in existence for about 500 years, but was not recognised as such until the twentieth century. In times past, therefore, any Englishman who had lived in India and had later settled very comfortably back “Home” was commonly known as an “Anglo-Indian”, leaving the mixed race he had spawned the task of finding a name for themselves. Many Indian languages have many words that describe this human fusion of East and West, mostly derogatory, so can English be far behind?

It was left to the 1911 Census to define a person of mixed racial parentage and this was cemented in the Government of India Act, 1935, which described the “Anglo-Indian” to be “a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is a native of India”.<sup>1</sup> The Constitution of India permanently laid down the definition of this recognised minority community, giving it a distinct identity in the great diversity that is India, but the Association headed by the late Frank Anthony went a step further by mandating that the mother-tongue of the “Anglo-Indian” is English. What Anthony was perhaps more convinced about was that the community was, even in his time, a hundred per cent Indian. That a great number of Anglo-Indians had differences of

opinion and often fled the country was something that Anthony had to live with, alongside the general opinion that the community's allegiances were suspect.

### **A unique special status in India**

The greater truth is that, by and large, the Anglo-Indian community today knows where its heart is and that is why it is now more than ever contributing to national development in almost every sphere of human endeavour. The good old Railway job (from fourth form to platform, as they used to say!) may not be available now, but in the traditional avenues of education, sport, the services, business, entertainment and the media, young Anglo-Indians are showing that they come close to being better than the best, if not more. India gave the community an identity; the time has now come to showcase the all-round talent available and to take pride in being part of an ancient yet ever-evolving civilization.

It is common knowledge that, in the colonial past, the "Anglo-Indian" often sought concessions and privileges. The Railway job was considered a sure thing and the

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imperial masters did nothing to burst that bubble. The same was the case with the other Government jobs, leading to the myth that the British in India depended on the "Anglo-Indian" to keep the wheels of the nation turning. This half-truth was shattered when Great Britain closed shop quite abruptly, leading to cries of betrayal from many quarters. Some sections of the community believed they were hostages in the country of their birth, while others could only envision a mass exodus if the "Anglo-Indian" was to survive. Even the huge concessions that were engineered by the eight-time nominated MP, Anthony, who represented the Anglo Indian community in the Constituent Assembly and in eight of the first 10 Lok Sabhas (except the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>),<sup>2</sup> were not enough to allay the fears of the rank and file of the community. The special status accorded to the "Anglo-Indian" community is something unique in world history and that these rights are still guaranteed is also without parallel.

Before India gained her Independence, the "Anglo-Indian" community had, in spite of its miniscule numbers, representation in the Constituent Assembly. Thereafter, in

accordance with the stipulations in the Constitution, two members of the “Anglo-Indian” community were nominated to the Lower House of Parliament. Anthony attended the Lok Sabha for about 50 years and led the community almost single-handedly for all that time. His legacy includes the establishment of three Public Schools, in New Delhi, Kolkata, and Bengaluru. The late A.E.T Barrow, another nominated MP, was also integral to the governance of the All-India Anglo-Indian Association.

### **Cocooned in a lackadaisical disinterest**

There may or may not have been a decline in the post-Anthony years, but there was certainly no one to compare with that enigmatic leader. Other parliamentarians served for a term or two, but there was no guiding light in the Anthony mould. It is very clear that, in the last 30 years, many Members of Parliament (and legislators) have come and gone, most of them unheard and unsung. A few have left identifiable examples of their good works, but the overall output has been meagre. The community has not demanded to know what their leaders have achieved and most of the self-styled leaders have not come forward to enlighten their people. With this come-what-may attitude—on both sides—the community now finds itself in limbo, with no succour in sight.

The normal (or average, if you prefer) “Anglo-Indian” is still not too interested in the politics of the country, because he or she does not see where we fit in, if we fit in at all. He (or she) knows deep down that in a general election, defeat is the only outcome, though there is at least one instance of an “exception” proving the “rule”. One reason for this lackadaisical disinterest may be because the community is still constitutionally guaranteed two seats in the Lower House of Parliament under Article 331 of the Constitution of India:

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**"331. Representation of the Anglo-Indian Community in the House of the People.—**Notwithstanding anything in article 81, the President may, if he is of opinion that the Anglo-Indian community is not adequately represented in the House of the People, nominate not more than two members of that community to the House of the People."<sup>3</sup>

and one seat in some of the State Legislatures, under Article 333:

**"333. Representation of the Anglo-Indian community in the Legislative Assemblies of the States.—**Notwithstanding anything in article 170, the Governor of a State may, if he is of opinion that the Anglo-Indian community needs representation in the Legislative Assembly of the State and is not adequately represented therein, nominate one member of that community to the Assembly."<sup>4</sup>

It may be that this is too facile a reason, but the time is soon coming when these concessions (and others) may vanish altogether. According to the Constitution's Art. 334:

**"334. Reservation of seats and special representation to cease after seventy years.—**Notwithstanding anything in the foregoing provisions of this Part, the provisions of this Constitution relating to—

(a) the reservation of seats for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in the House of the People and in the Legislative Assemblies of the States; and

(b) the representation of the Anglo-Indian community in the House of the People and in the Legislative Assemblies of the States by nomination, shall cease to have effect on the expiration of a period of seventy years from the commencement of this Constitution:

Provided that nothing in this article shall affect any representation in the House of the People or in the Legislative Assembly of a State until the dissolution of the then existing House or Assembly, as the case may be."<sup>5</sup>

Then, subject to a review in 2020, when the last “reservation” is irrevocably lost, the community may be rendered exposed and defence-less, just like so many other marginalised minority groups that struggle to exist and co-exist in this great country.

This nonchalance may be the norm, but it has not stopped individuals from making the best use of the “reservation” policy as it stands today. In the past, even though our leaders projected themselves as being non-partisan, the rewards of office very often stemmed from carefully cultivated contacts. I do not know if Anthony still holds the record for being a member of the Lok Sabha for the longest period of time, but almost everyone will concede that his closeness to a particular political family helped his cause. He was not openly a Congress-man, in much the same way as the thousands upon thousands of Anglo-Indians who looked upon him as their supreme leader. He went on to do great good for the community, legally, educationally and otherwise, but after a 51-year stint as President-in-Chief (P-in-C) of the All-India Anglo-Indian Association (and almost the same amount of time as a parliamentarian), the community found it hard to find a suitable replacement. The next P-in-C was never able to fill such big boots, and soon the mantle fell on fresh shoulders, a mere five years later.

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### **A questionable nomination process**

From almost the end of the twentieth century and right up to the present, it has not been uncommon for leaders of the “Anglo-Indian” community to be chosen, depending on their proximity to the powers that be (or were), to be our representatives in Parliament or some State Legislatures. In the Lok Sabhas of the post-Anthony era, the community has seen the rise of many parliamentarians, quite a few of them low-key performers on the national stage, but chosen representatives of the “Anglo-Indian” people in spite of not being representative of the general public. No thought was, or has been, given to the idea of consensus candidates, since the community continues to be as divided and fragmented as it ever was.

A very rough estimate of the “Anglo-Indian” population in India would put the figure at 1,50,000. Chennai can account for about 35,000 of those, making it the city which has the largest number of “Anglo-Indian” residents. Kolkata would probably be next in line, with Bengaluru following. The State of

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Tamil Nadu is home to more than 40 per cent of the “Anglo-Indian” population, but has never figured greatly when it comes to Parliamentary representation. It would be easy to point fingers and make accusations, but the truth is somewhere out there. Even in Tamil Nadu there are at least five distinct “Anglo-Indian” groups, not inimical but definitely not enamoured of one another.

This is my point, exactly: how do we identify potential parliamentarians and legislators? Not all of the leaders of the “Anglo-Indian” community are members of this or that or the other political party in the country, because membership entails accepting, endorsing, propagating and perhaps even living the ideology of that particular party openly, since a covert operation almost always creates a stench. If a politician, especially of the “Anglo-Indian” kind, still enjoys a steak, or even two pegs (or three or four) of whisky, he cannot profess to be a true and loyal member (there are many other items on the “no, no” list, of course) of any political party. If he or she is not a true and committed member, he or she must be there for self-gratification, among other things. And that is where the ball-game really starts and ends. The politician of today (as has been, maybe, for all time) is always looking for long-term benefits, and quickly comes up with unsubtle strategies to keep going for as long as the going is good.

That’s where the “reservations” may come to an end, too. Since almost everyone seems to be in it for more than altruism, why should Anglo-Indians have special privileges? Should they not fight it out with their fellow citizens? With everyone trying desperately to climb on to the minority bandwagon, the powers that be may consider rewarding the minority group that has the majority numbers. These numbers translate into votes, and votes translate into power, and power into pelf, and so the old mill keeps turning.

The present-day scenario for the Anglo-Indian community may not be bleak, but it is certainly dismal. The two selected (or nominated) Members of Parliament have become members of the ruling party, so that with the upcoming elections, they may perhaps stress their importance and indispensability under the banner of continuity. However, it must not be forgotten that there are other Anglo-Indians in the country who are also a members of the ruling party or some other regional variant; these “leaders” may have similar or dissimilar ambitions as the sitting MPs (with—

maybe—the added weight of having—theoretically, at least—the strength of the community behind them).

So must the rank and file just play “follow the leaders”, or go their own way? And who is going to monitor the situation, to see that voting (or support, or pressure, or

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whatever) follows the recommended lines? Does the winner of the overall ballot really care for public opinion?

From the very first parliamentary session, ruling parties or coalitions have selected, by and large, the favoured or chosen few from the community who they imagined (or hoped) would best serve their interests. The larger interests of the community are inevitably given a go-by, while individuals in their exalted positions assume that they cannot be held accountable.

In the years gone by, when money power was not the be-all and end-all of everything, a public figure could slip silently away into oblivion. Now that there is supposed to be a Right to Information clause for all kinds of issues, would it not be laudable if the “Anglo-Indian” Members of Parliament showed the way to all the others as to how the funds available to them were utilized? The common man would like to know what went where, and for what purpose, or if the funds remained unused and therefore returned to the Government’s coffers. If the available funds were not put to use at all, or, God forbid, if they were misused, the public servant has much to answer for.

### **Some imperatives for the nominees and the Anglo-Indian community**

There is so much that an “Anglo-Indian” MP or MLA can do. Since the chosen candidates are most often in the dark until the very last moment, it is imperative for them, first of all, to go back to their roots. Even if it were a lucky strike, it is always a good thing to take the people along. Making overtures of gratitude and courtesy may certainly win over the unknown Anglo-Indian that the candidate has been selected to serve. The chosen ones should not be bound down by local, personal interests, because no other individual parliamentarian serves people across the length and breadth of the country. It may not be possible, or even feasible, to bring all the



Anglo-Indian groups together under one banner, but no one has suffered greatly for trying.

The Anglo-Indian community knows what its strengths and preferences are. These must be built on, consolidated and expanded. Since everyone has come to understand that the key to upward mobility is education, young Anglo-Indians are now going where none of their forbears dared to go. It is time for the powers that be to take stock, to identify real strengths and potential weaknesses and to see that the community moves forward as a whole—socially and economically. Every Anglo-Indian should be encouraged to be a part of the larger group, because with such dwindling numbers, everyone needs everyone else.

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A census, therefore, on a national scale, of the Anglo-Indian community must be initiated forthwith. When the data is available, it will be a matter of collective pride

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to show to the world and to our own countrymen our stupendous achievements. Such a census, if it is comprehensive in its scope, will also create a database of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled members who could then actually be slotted into appropriate job situations. It will help to identify where basic or higher education needs to be bolstered, where immediate social action is called for and where a strong base may be improved upon by roping in the necessary expertise. When such concerted action, through hard and dedicated and selfless work, begins to bear fruit, as it certainly must (since all the intents and purposes are for the general good), it will then be a distinction to be called an “Anglo-Indian”, another native son or daughter.

Whichever political party, or coalition, is given the mandate by the people to run the Government for the people, must

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make sure that the candidates they support are really acceptable to the people. The new (and not so new) parliamentarians—for the two reserved seats for the

“Anglo-Indian” community—must have unblemished records and be well-known regarding the welfare of the people they are supposed to represent. It is always better to have outspoken crusaders rather than people who simply sign above the dotted lines. The nominated Members of Parliament should be ready and willing to take up a just cause and see to it that justice prevails in all disputes. Since the two representatives are sometimes lucky enough to be chosen, they should not take it as a matter of course to look down on the people they are supposed to serve. It will not be out of place to here recall the Thoreau principle of “simple living and high thinking”.

Will such a candidate be discovered? Will the “Anglo-Indian” community be represented by men and women of real standing, or will the wheel of fortune continue spinning? Your guess is as good as mine, dear reader. However, the time is fast approaching when concessions may be a thing of the past.

When will there be light? I am not just looking at the 2019 General Election. The year 2020 is when a review will take place.

A new dispensation is at hand. Are you ready, *mon ami*?

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*[All URLs were last accessed on March 23, 2019]*

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