My Anglo Indian Heritage

My Mother moved to England from India when she was nine years old on a ship named Sydney, which was my grandfather's middle name, and is now my three-year-old daughter's middle name. Anglo-Indians' first language is usually English, and many are Catholic. My mother grew up in Secunderabad, a zone of Southern Hyderabad, famous for its biryani, which my 'Nan' would cook for us every Christmas.

The Anglo-Indian communities' history is not well-known, so the story I am telling is about the history of these communities. I hope you enjoy learning this story.

Asia Giuliani, Founder of Global Routes Project CIC



My Mother and Grandparents in Secunderabad, 1951

Who are Anglo-Indians?

In the 16th and 17th century, Portugal and later the Netherlands, France and Britain engaged in the colonisation of India. Portugal established trading posts along the coasts, centred in Goa. Portuguese Admiral Albuquerque promoted marriages between soldiers and native women in India. This policy sought to create a loyal population to safeguard Goa. Families were offered incentives upon the Catholic baptism of their children. During the 17th century, the British gained control over the Indian subcontinent. British men were sent to India to assist in administration. The children of these men and local Indian women were known as 'Eurasian', or 'half-caste', until they were defined as Anglo-Indian in the early 20th century. Many of these children were abandoned due to their mixed heritage and were raised in orphanages.

During the 19th century the East India Company drove the expansion of the British Empire. Their revenue policy drained Indian wealth and caused policy-induced famine killing impoverished Indian people in millions. During the British Raj, Anglo-Indians' status evolved from initial acceptance, notably in British orphanages where they were treated equally with European orphans, for example receiving the same education as in England. However, later fears of ‘mixed-race’ groups' influence and uprising in other colonies led to restrictions and exclusion from senior positions, highlighting a complex history of their acceptance. An opportunity for Anglo-Indians arose in the nineteenth century in the railways’ sector creating employment opportunities as it expanded. The recognition in The Government of India Act of 1919 as a distinct group, ‘Anglo Indian’ was a gateway for the community to gain a higher social status than native Indians. The British Raj viewed them as a lower-class relation which was proven useful in the postal, nursing, and railways sectors.

Following India's independence in 1947, the Anglo-Indian population, which numbered around 300,000, saw a decline in social status. Having sought status from the British Raj, they were rejected by many Indian people. Consequently, many families migrated abroad, with destinations including the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and the United States, contributing to the dispersal of the Anglo-Indian community.

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