

Census of India and Disappearance of a Minority Community

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Abstract : *The history of recording the demographic profile of the population was a colonial administrative initiative. A community of Eurasians later known as Anglo-Indians begun from sexual union between a native woman and a man of European origin. The birth of the community and its evolution into a large one was in the colonial past. Later it developed and was acknowledged as a minority in independent India. From the year of independence till 1961 it was enumerated in the Census of India by its name but later on was recognized only as a Christian minority where many other groups of the same religious identity were categorized. This article delves into how a recognized minority group slowly started to disappear from the radar of official recognition as a community and a minority and how it affected their identity in India.*

Key words: *Anglo-Indian Community, Politics of Identity, Lok Sabha representations, Constitutional amendment*

Introduction

The Census of India begun under the patronage of the colonial administrators in 1872. However the first synchronous census was conducted in 1881. Since then census had been conducted of the population domiciled within the territory of India every ten years. The last one was conducted in 2011, the purpose being enumeration of the population for better administration. Though this has been a modern and western paradigm of enumeration, there was a population count as early as in 800 to 600 B.C. It contained a detailed description of the population to formulate policies. Listing and recording data of the population has been conducted in pre-colonial India in the third century B.C. and during Akbar's rule in Mughal times. The Census Act of 1949 and subsequent Census operation in 1951 was the first record of the population in Independent India. The two censuses in the first two decades after independence were different from the subsequent ones. The report of 1951 census was a complete departure from the pattern of previous census reports during colonial rule. This report attempted to interpret the past changes in the size and structure of India's population and to point out their implications for the level

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of living of the population. The report also made a plea for a reduction in the birth rate of the country. The 1951 census also attempted for the first time in the history of Indian census to make an assessment of the accuracy of the census count by a re-check in the field. The collection of the detailed statistics on population necessitated the enlargement of the 1961 census questionnaire and a number of cross tabulations of data. The new features of 1971 Census were (i) an attempt was made to collect data on current fertility, (ii) migrational particulars with reference to place of last residence were collected which yielded valuable and realistic data on internal migration, (iii) considerable departure was made in respect of economic questions. Encouraged with the experience of 1961 Census it was again proposed to have a number of studies ancillaries to 1971 Census. It was proposed to have a restudy of a number of villages and also to have intensive studies of about 200 towns and ethnographic studies of selected communities.¹ The study of communities in India was thus stopped from 1961 Census giving way to a number of omissions of the particulars of any community, no less for any ethnic minority community. The community which was last enumerated in 1951 is the Anglo-Indian community of India. It is a recognized minority community in India. It has been vast diminishing in numbers firstly due to migration in 1970s a vast majority of Anglo-Indians had emigrated leaving virtually the poorer class behind (Gist and Wright, 1973) and secondly due to pressures of assimilation. My field-work (Sen, 2017) among the Anglo-Indians of Kolkata conducted in 2008-09 was difficult in the absence of any census report of the community. This paper will delve into the nuances thus created due to such careful and planned omission.

Reviewing Literature on Anglo-Indian Community and its representation in Census

When it comes to literature on Anglo-Indian community vis-à-vis their representation in the Census of India, there is far less literature to be found. But there are subtle complexities in this issue of representation in Census regarding the community. It requires a detailed analysis of how and with what purpose the enumeration of Anglo-Indians started in the colonial period. It will involve a peek into the history of the community and its position in colonial times. The Anglo-Indian community is such a community that can be linked to India's colonial history. It had a specific historical background in which it evolved through the years. The community started to gain and take shape in view of the rise of community-sentiments and specific concerns over identities from 1773 (Hawes, 1993). The community born out of sexual union between a European father and Indian mother was a community of mixed parentage. Sometimes the sexual union of the parents was socially recognized. This community was identified in different names in the colonial times such as 'half-caste', 'mixed-blood' of which the Eurasian was most popular until the community gained its present name the 'Anglo-Indian' in 1911. It had a prominent position as a community in 1881 Census till 1951.² The census of

1921 counted them as 113,090, compared to 100,420 in 1911. In 1931 the estimated number of Anglo-Indians in India was 165000, the sex ratio being 1061 Anglo-Indian males to 1000 females (Cressey, 1935). This enumeration of the community which has stopped from 1961 (the last being in 1951) has proved to be a disadvantage to the community in many respect.

The community is a colonial legacy and has survived many hazards till date. But there remains no official recognition of the fact that it exists in the greatest epistemological visual of India, the Census. It should not be understood that the community is unrepresented in any way but it can be represented under other heads like caste/tribe/race or by religion (Christian). It should be clear that the community has distinct features that differentiate it from a tribe (like Santhal or Oraon), a caste (Brahmin or Dalit), or race. The members of the community bear clear and distinct racial heritage of both European and Indian.³ The community cannot be represented under any of the heads. The distinctiveness of the community gets blurred by the fact when calculated as something else though the word 'calculation' is very demining for a culture so specific and varied. It has not been represented in its true form from 1961. The position of the government is not clear on the issue as the community enjoyed a Parliamentary representation and representation at State Legislatures throughout the period until it was abolished in 2019.

The Constitution of India defines an Anglo-Indian as a person who can trace its progenitor in the male line to a European and or a person of European descent who have been permanently domiciled within the territory of India.⁴ This definition excludes children of Anglo-Indian women who have married outside the community, children of emigrated Anglo-Indian parents, children born to parents who can trace their descent only through their mother's line to a/any European. Social recognition of an Anglo-Indian is Christian religion, endogamous marriage and English as their mother-tongue. The census has failed to uphold an Anglo-Indian identity in none of the ways to solve the mystery of the actual numbers in which they are present. Even if we hold that they exist as a miniscule in the population the social significance of their identity is of no less importance. They are the last surviving community of the country with mixed racial characteristic. The other communities of mixed race born at the same time during the colonial rule have decayed into a natural death through assimilation.⁵ This is the only one that has survived more than five hundred years of history. The irony is that between 1952 and 2020 the Anglo-Indian community is the only one community in India that had its own representatives nominated to the Lok Sabha (Parliament) and thirteen states of India had Anglo-Indian representatives in State Legislatures. Only from 2020, the Anglo-Indian reserved seats in the Parliament and State Legislatures were abolished by the 104th Constitutional Amendment Act 2019. All through the seven decades after India gained independence the government in India noticed the fact that the community had enjoyed representation politically.

The community had existed in many names during the colonial period. At first it had no official recognition or identity. It started to take shape after 1773 when by the Regulating Act of 1773⁶ the British East India Company declared that people of mixed origin were not to be considered as British subjects. Before this time, there were people of mixed origin in India but they could pass-off as Europeans in many ways. Also true is the fact that these people of mixed heritage had started to settle outside India. As they had British surnames, mostly had fair skin and were adept in Western ways and language of the colonizer they could easily assimilate into the British society. But this does not prove that they were accepted in open arms. The people who had migrated even after independence faced challenges due to discrimination.⁷ There was discrimination against them in India for their lighter skin, low cultural standards and mixed birth parentage.⁸ This dichotomy of not being accepted here and being able to mix in the population of their paternal origin had perhaps sowed a seed of dialectics: an attraction for the land of their fathers and a dislike of the conditions in which they were left here. Perhaps this was the condition for which the desire for migration had always been very high among them. Nonetheless the decree of compulsorily being noted as a 'native of India' was labelled on them which they had always tried to ward off in subsequent years. Still they sailed through till 1911 when they were officially recognized as 'Anglo-Indian' describing them as people of mixed race. Before that they were known under various names: 'Luso-Indian', 'half-caste', 'Franco-Indian', 'feringhee' but 'Eurasian' was the most common. After 1911, they were known as 'Anglo-Indians' and by Franchise Rules of India Act 1935 they were recognized by the same name and subsequently added in the Constitution of India in 1949 in its Article 366 (2). They were represented as a community in India in the Census after independence for only one year. Prior to independence they were represented as 'Eurasians' but many could also identify as Europeans in the Censuses. This is because there were no clear official demarcations for identification. They were very similar to Europeans in their culture and social life and so could easily identify as Europeans in India. So the census of India (before independence) did not hold a distinct account of the exact number of Anglo-Indians of the country. It was a mix of Europeans living in India and the people of mixed origin both sometimes under the same head.

The term 'Anglo-Indian' was first mentioned in Census of 1871 and then subsequently it emerged in 1891 Census and afterwards. But the reference in 1891 was an indicator of people of British residents in India and not the people we now recognize as Anglo-Indians (Friedlander, 2002). Natarajan (1972) notified that it was for the first time in 1871 to classify religions a separate category was added, 'Europeans and Eurasians'. It can be seen that the notions of religion, race and caste were intertwined in the eventual system evolved for tabulating the results of the census data. One reason for this was there was an interaction going on here between the process of the census and the tabulation of the results. In particular

because the census was carried out by getting individuals to return the name of their religion and these self-identifications were then fitted into religious types as worked out by the census officials. In the process many minor religious groups were probably excluded from tabulation. However, it is also very likely that individuals would have tailored their responses to fit what they saw as likely to reflect well on themselves, or to be to their advantage in one way or another (Ibid). In Berar about 900 Christians were enumerated, but the native Anglo-Indians were not separated from Europeans or Eurasians.⁹ In British Burma the numerous Karen converts are not specified in the Census Report, and only 2,300 Native Christians have been entered; there are, however, 52,000 Christians in the province and in the Administration Export the total number of Native Christians is stated to be 34,310. The Oude report does not distinguish between Native Christians and Europeans or Eurasians (1871 Memorandum: 27). By the 1881 census the manner of classification had been reorganized along these lines for the preparation of "Form III Distribution of Peoples according to Religion": Hindu, Mohamedan, Aboriginal, Buddhist, Christian, Sikh, Jain, Satnami, Kabir Panthi, Nat Worship, Parsi, Jew, Brahmo, Kumbhpatia, Unspecified and Others (Natarajan 1972: 37). Mean while the details for Christian denominations had grown to include in "Form IIIa Christians": American, Armenian, COE, CO Scotland, Episcopalian, Greek, Lutheran, Others Protestant including: Baptist, Congregationalist, Methodist, Wesleyan Independent, Methodist Wesleyan and others, Roman Catholic, Syrians, Others and Unspecified. (Natarajan 1972: 37). It is also apparent that there was a continuation of the attitude first expressed by the Madras Board of Revenue in 1871 to stress the difference between the Christianity practiced by Indians, Europeans and Eurasians. In this respect Baines¹⁰ (1891) writes in his report concerning Christians.

In the returns of the Christian population, the distribution by race is given, in addition to that by territory and denomination, and it will serve as a sort of introduction to the rest. From Supplementary Table A, at page 496 of the first volume of the returns, the community will be seen to be composed of 89.1 percent. Of natives of India, including a few Negroes; 7.4 percent (are) Europeans, including Americans and those from Australasia, and 3.5 percent. Of a mixture of these two,(is) known by the general title of Eurasian. (Baines 1891: 177)

The foreign element is composed of, first, the military, next the civil employees of the State, thirdly, those engaged on railways or mines, and then the professional and commercial classes chiefly congregated at these aports and provincial capitals. There was also, at the time of the census a considerable contingent of seafaring people on board vessels in harbour. It is not practicable to separate these groups in the general return. Speaking roughly, the military section amounts to a little over one half.

At the time of the census the strength of the European troops was about 67,800, with 2,550 officers, 3,120 women, 5,900 children, and approximately, 800 people engaged on the staff and in various military avocations in India.... the distinctions between the three races is very shadowy, and there is a tendency for Eurasians to enter the European group, and for native Christians to be returned as Eurasians. As the return stands, however, the influence of the army is visible in the number of Europeans found in the Panjab (Baines 1891: 177-178). Assuming the Eurasian return to be correct, Madras heads the list with 26,600 out of the total of 79,790. Bengal, which comes next, returns only 15,000.... Since the community is mostly, congregated in the chief towns such an inquiry is not difficult, and can be made to include within its scope valuable details, such as the number of children per family, the age of parents at the time of marriage, and so on, which are impossible at a census. (Baines 1891: 178)

Besides, religion and caste, language was also a concern for classifying Eurasian population in colonial India. In the Report of 1891 Baines distinguished between Europeans of British descent in India and those domiciled within Indian Territory and the Eurasians (Baines 1891: 154). In the Memorandum of 1871 (28-29) there was a reference to the Eurasian population in relation to race. Broadly speaking in the census of India to be an Anglo-Indian/Eurasian a person had to be an English speaking Christian of mixed racial background. This continued till India gained independence.

When India gained sovereignty the Parliament approved the identity of these people as Anglo-Indian. In recent years the Parliament approved a constitutional amendment extending reservations by ten years for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the Lok Sabha as well as the state Assemblies but could not extend any more time for the community. Expectedly, all members across both Houses of Parliament were in agreement with this extension for some and denial for one. However, the passage of the Constitution (126th Amendment) Bill, 2019, was not entirely a smooth affair. There was heated debate and disagreement over the exclusion of the Anglo-Indian community from the extension of quotas. Anglo-Indians have two seats reserved in the Lok Sabha as well as a total of more than twenty seats in thirteen specific state legislatures. With Parliament having given its consent to the Bill, half of the state Assemblies will have to ratify it, before it was sent to the President for his assent. Introducing the Bill in the Lok Sabha, Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said that according to the 2011 Census (when community-wise enumeration had stopped.), there were only 296 Anglo-Indians in India. However, many Opposition members challenged this claim, with DMK leader K Kanimozhi saying the central government had based its figure on the Registrar General's report and 296 was an improbably low number since Tamil Nadu itself

had a few thousand Anglo-Indians living in the state.¹¹ The enumeration done by an independent researcher Robyn Andrews found that there were 1134 Anglo-Indians in West Bengal (Andrews, 2015).¹²

The All-India Anglo-Indian Association President-in-chief Barry O'Brien said: "What facts and figures, data and research material have been collected and collated based on which the cabinet has taken its decision? Is it true that the government is estimating the number of Anglo-Indians in India today to be far less than its actual number of several lakhs?" Similarly, Congress MP Hibi Eden, who represents Kerala's Ernakulam constituency, which is home to many Anglo-Indians, has alleged that "the assumption that the Anglo-Indians is a well-to-do community is not based on any detailed study", as quoted by *The Hindu*. Many leaders of the community say that there are as many as 1.5 lakh Anglo-Indians in the country. But it is not clear if there is any data to back this assertion.¹³ This inability of the leaders of the community to estimate the number of the members in the community is not new. The estimation of the numbers has historically been marred by the absence of a clear-cut definition of who an Anglo-Indian is.¹⁴

The Anglo-Indian Association which was functioning from 1926¹⁵ did not protest on the issue until the seats were abolished in 2019. The only exception being an appeal from Derek O'Brien a popular name to make Anglo-Indian a separate head in the census in 2014.¹⁶ Perhaps, the fact that the census introduced new labels for various groups did not automatically transform Indian reality. There is evidence, however, to suggest that people were subscribing to census definitions and that they attached importance to how they were classified. Quite often, to the irritation of enumerators, respondents would "describe themselves as anything but what they are."¹⁷ This was the opposite of the sort of self-identification for which census planners had hoped. Inefficient enumeration and lack of consensus on a definition of caste/ community/tribe fostered more confusion. The tension between the realistic of administration on the ground and the imperial objectives of accumulating knowledge for the governance of populations are different perspectives altogether. The ground reality for the community was/is fast changing.

Conclusion

Amid such confusion and uncertain enumerative calculations on the number of members of the community the researchers on the community face a mammoth task. On the one hand they cannot construct a sampled survey design as exact numbers of a finite population are necessary for the purpose and secondly out of the utter confusion of who could be included and who recommends so becomes very important data source for him/her. So a sampled if not complete enumeration of the cross-section of the population to view the variety in culture, traditions and use or reluctance in the exercise of local language is nearly impossible. The most popular way to enumerate is snowball sampling where the growing numbers are based on recommendation. The response in the case is limited to the class and

ethnic background of the people who recommend. The absence of classification debars a clear understanding regarding the community though we can defend in terms of Micheal Foucault who provides an analysis of the science of classification in *The Order of Things*. For him, ordering requires the creation of a *taxinomia*, a continuum of things and where they fit in relation to each other. The grid of the table is at the centre of this process of ordering: “the center of knowledge, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is the table (Foucault, 1970: 75).” The table requires a value to be attributed to whatever is being ordered; everything must be designated. The production of taxonomy also produces knowledge about hierarchy and the position of one thing in relation to the next. The designations that stem from *taxinomia* are a production of “truth.” The natural and human sciences that emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were increasingly reliant on visualizing, designating and naming. The system of names corresponds to discrete sections of the *taxinomia*, and the names are treated as genus. Since the early nineteenth century, this form of ordering and naming has been called biology. The discourse regarding what is natural was central to the emergence of biology, which Foucault argues permeated anthropology and sociology as well. The ordering and naming of biology thus became a core feature of the human sciences. Classifications spread out from the realm of names to the application of categories in the census. Censuses are thus fundamental to the process of creating hierarchies of human subjects. The concept of power is central to this formation of hierarchies too. The community which had lost power or was not close to power anymore fell out of the potentially significant ones sought to be enumerated by the government. It seems the enumeration by religious or caste heads were more important to the government than a community of mixed descent. The community might now get close to oblivion as the official recognition of the sustenance of the community through its representatives is no more in record. Perhaps the last pin on its coffin is set. The future may hold some rays of hope in case the members of the community find ways to survive despite non-recognition both official and social.

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Footnotes

- 1 https://censusindia.gov.in/Data_Products/Library/Indian_perceptive_link/History_link/censushistory.htm; retrieved on 18 March 2021 at 7 p.m.
- 2 <https://censusofindia.gov.in/dataproducts/library and census terms.html>; retrieved on 18 March 2021 at 5 p.m.
- 3 Anthropometric tests were conducted to prove its racial distinctiveness by Prasanta Mahalanobis in 1916-19
- 4 Article 366 (2) and in Part II of the Constitution of India or any other Amendment of Citizenship Act No. LVII of 1955
- 5 The Anglo-Burmese population, the Anglo-Singhalese population popularly known as Burghers has all been lost.
- 6 It was the first Act to control the affairs of the Company by the British Government.
- 7 Refer to R. Almeida for further research on generations of Anglo-Indian migrants in United Kingdom (Britain's Anglo-Indians: The Invisibility of Assimilation, 2017).
- 8 The Anglo-Indian was despised for being born of mixed parentage and lower economic and social status than that of the European in India (See Sen, 2017)
- 9 There was a clear distinction between European, Eurasian and Anglo-Indian. The colonial authority was constructed on two powerful but false premises – first that the European community in the colony was a discrete biological entity, easily identifiable, and secondly, it represents a common class interest, racial attributes and political affinities and superior culture. Both of these were absent in India and moreover the Eurasian and European community within India was far from uniform. The diversity of opinions, needs and actions within this social category were very much evident. Biologically also the distinctness was absent. Thus, homogeneity was clearly not a marker of European settlement in India (A. Stoler, 1989).
- 10 Baines changed the classification from that which had been used in the 1881 census. His obituary in the Journal of the Royal Statistical Society describes the changes as being “first the separation of caste from religion and, secondly, the substitution of the population *subsisting* by an occupation for that *exercising* it.” He wrote the resultant 300-page General Report, which had “a literary flavour and wide

- scholarship” rather than a mere analysis of the data. (Ref:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1891_Census_of_India)
- 11 <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/parliament-approves-10-year-extension-to-sc-st-reservation-anglo-indian-nomination-dropped/article30289758.ece>
 - 12 Andrews, R. 2015. Report on the 2010/2011 West Bengal Anglo-Indian Survey in *International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies*. Vol. 15 No. 1
 - 13 <https://www.timesnownews.com/india/article/who-are-the-anglo-indians-and-why-do-they-have-a-quota-in-lok-sabha-and-some-state-legislatures/527529>
 - 14 Read Arnold 1979 and D. Ghosh 2006 for further details
 - 15 The All India Anglo-Indian Association and Domiciled European Association were born in 1876 which later was renamed by Gidney as All India Anglo-Indian Association in 1926.
 - 16 http://www.derek.in/pages/media/in_parliament/DOB_SpecialMentionJuly30.pdf
 - 17 Government of India, *Census of India, 1911 Census of Bombay* (Bombay: Government Central Press, 1913),p. 195.