

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has focused on the complex interaction of relations of ethnicity and gender as they play out in the lives of Anglo-Indian women in Kolkata. As a minority community, the Anglo-Indians have moved from one ambiguous location in the colonial period- struggling for political, social and economic proximity to the British, the then ruling class, to a very different but equally ambiguous location within Independent India-with their commitment to English and European cultural habits being perceived as alien. The latter position follows from a lack of fit with mainstream definitions of Indian-ness, which had developed through the nationalist discourses in contra-distinction to precisely these forms of the ‘western’ that the Anglo-Indians saw as central to their cultural identity. Given the fragile location of the community itself, my research shows that the category gender alone cannot explain the situation of Anglo-Indian women. I have thus sought to contextualize their perceptions and attitudes against the background of long-term historical formation of the community. I have argued that the development of a specific ethnic identity and a minority status, which was formalized after Independence, has played a major role in framing the social and institutional setting within which individuals, women and men, relate to their community and to others outside it. Given the significance attached by the community to its minority status and its attendant privileges, the withdrawal of some of these has been a major landmark in the contemporary history of the community. In the 1960s, a major exodus to Britain and other erstwhile British colonies have left the deepest possible imprint on a now much depleted community. To capture this change, I have introduced generational difference as a variable in my study, in addition to gender and ethnicity. This dissertation has thus mapped the responses of a hundred Anglo-Indians of Kolkata (90 women and 10 men) on a triple grid of gender, ethnicity and generation.

The study has traced the ways in which Anglo-Indian women have been subjected to multiple patriarchal dominations within and outside the community. One major aspect of their experience of this domination has been structured by a strong ethnic identity, which has provided a basis for their self identity and expressions. Thus, while a commitment to

their Anglo-Indian identity is common to men and women in the community, women have experienced their ethnicity very differently from the men- patriarchal values and the emphasis on a gendered self-construction is a key to understanding this difference. There are also differences among Anglo-Indian women— the generations before and after the 1970s decades— offering rather different sets of negotiations and adjustments between their ethnic and gender identities. While some the younger generation of Anglo-Indian women surveyed have spoken of loosening boundaries and many of their decisions regarding occupation, marriage and residential location show a greater flexibility, this is not always the case. The differences in the responses of the two generations of women also show marked commonalities, and are inflected by other factors such as economic background, educational achievements and access to social connections outside the community. Overall, there has emerged in this study, the dominance of racialized and gendered self-expression in the experience of members of the community. The dissertation argues, therefore, the need to understand the ways in which Anglo-Indian women are doubly marginalized- through their experience of multiple patriarchies within and outside the community. As women, they are rendered a minority within a minority community. The experience of this marginality and dominance is expressed in myriad ways in their ideas about education, culture, language, family, marriage, kinship and in their other interactions with members of their own community as well as members of other proximate communities in residential neighbourhoods or workplaces.

This research has highlighted the marginalisation of Anglo-Indian women as a *process* as well as the dynamic and changing nature of their experience of patriarchal domination. Given the rather unique location of the community and the tide and ebb in its fortunes, it is of crucial importance to *historicise* the experience of the community. Thus, though based primarily on a field study of women and men in the early twenty-first century, the dissertation has drawn liberally on the written history of this community in its roughly three centuries of existence. This is particularly helpful in contextualizing the location of women in the community since the problem began with the very formation of this race of mixed descent— in the mix of descent, the Indian mother was rendered invisible in favour of the European father. The name of the mothers of the Eurasian children baptised

in church was absent in the Church records till the first half of the eighteenth century. Baptism records included only the name of the father of the child. Moreover, in the Anglo-Indian community, women have been marginalized in decision-making processes from the beginning of written history on the community. Nowhere do the women feature in the written history of the community by its members before Frank Anthony noted their contribution in the Army during the Second World War only in late 1980s. Thus in considering various issues- whether of education, marriage and family, or that of wider social interaction and their role in organizations- the historical marginality of the women of the community has been considered of prime importance. It is of particular relevance here that in a new shift of their relative status, the Anglo-Indian women, once regarded as and regarding themselves as more emancipated or liberated by reason of their proximity to western cultural habits- dress, work, public appearance and control over relationships- appear to have fallen behind in terms of asserting themselves within their community. The minimal presence of women as administrators or in the decisions regarding educational affairs is an important indicator of their continued marginal position within their community, one that offers a contrast to some other communities in urban India as well as to the ‘western societies’ they explicitly express allegiance to. It has only been a few years that the women of the community have been allowed voting rights that too only in a few of their clubs and organizations. It is not therefore surprising that there is, among many women, a low self-esteem and a fear of discrimination. The strongest expression of this is a much greater inwardness than men- a sense of threat from the ‘unknown’, a hesitation to cross the boundaries of habitual social interaction, a suspicion of ‘others’. The historical gendering of the Anglo-Indian community thus has concrete consequences in the lives of contemporary women.

The notion of multiple patriarchies has been deployed to understand the many structures of power within which Anglo-Indian women are enmeshed- gender and racial power in the processes of imperialism is not just a hangover from the past, but a contemporary reality in terms of familial, cultural and organizational links with the diaspora; perceptions and attitudes of other Indian communities towards the Anglo-Indian community are alienating- again on both gender and race terms- and encountered in

schools, neighbourhoods and workplaces; within the community, there are significant discriminations based on colour of skin, economic resources and conformity to gender stereotypes in dress and other everyday habits. These different forms of race, class and gender discriminations intersect in the lives and experiences of Anglo-Indian women, providing either advantages or disadvantages depending on their comparative locations. Thus, despite appearances to the contrary, it is difficult to homogenize the experiences of the ‘Anglo-Indian woman’; rather, one may speak only of some commonalities within a complex matrix of relative subordination.

The Anglo-Indian women are dominated by the men of their community in choices they make; they experience subordination within their community and in the society at large. The vulnerability of their position became evident from the very beginning of this research when I began my field work. I met a number of women respondents who did not want to sit for an interview with a woman of the ‘other’ community; there was a sense of discomfort about speaking of community issues with someone outside the community; and many women insisted that their brothers or husbands sit for the interviews instead. There were elements both of self-surveillance as well as patriarchal control in such responses- in some instances I had to explain my questions to the respondent’s male guardian before conducting the interview. Sometimes the women insisted on this; at times also there was pressure from the male guardian. One of the respondents, who did not want to sit for an interview, asked her brother to answer the questions. Clearly, the idea of male guardianship remains a strong force; and adult, even older, women submit to such control by men in the family. The issue, however, goes beyond the merely familial. There is also an element of uncertainty, a trope of ‘protection’ in such familial/community dynamics- women feel they do not know the answers, even to questions about their own lives. They indicated that they would have been more comfortable fielding ‘objective’ questions, such as asked in case of market surveys of consumer products. Such ‘interviews’ they were used to; moreover, they pertained to the ‘domestic’ that they considered being their domain. Questions about social and cultural ideas and practices, however, implicated the ‘image’ of the community; and women were not accustomed to representing their community or considering their views and opinions

to be germane to such a representation. There appeared also be a third element in the women's non-cooperation- there was a heightened sensitivity to the judgmental eye of the 'other' community. The sexualized representation of Anglo-Indian women in dominant Indian culture has produced both a hesitation and hostility. The deep suspicion of an unsympathetic audience continues to inhibit possibilities of conversation, dividing women of this community from women of other communities of the country. It is notable that though at least a few women from most other communities- Hindus, Muslims, Indian Christians, Jains, Sikhs, Parsees- have had some participation in the women's movement, there has been very little by way of such political links and alliances with Anglo-Indian women in the context of Kolkata. This study suggests that it behoves the women's movement to reach across such suspicions and prejudices, which have developed over many decades.

The vulnerability of the women of this community finds expression in their personal choices. Even though, theoretically, Anglo-Indian women have much greater freedom in marital decisions, not being subject to parental and community authority to the same degree that Hindu and Muslim women (for instance) are supposed to be, this survey finds a great deal of indecision in respect to inter-community/inter-religious marriage. Many women think such marriages will dilute the position of the community- even though it is by definition of one of mixed races. More women respondents were open to inter-community than inter-religious marriages, however. Men, in contrast, were more comfortable with inter-marriages of all sorts. This study has found more Anglo-Indian men in inter-community marriages than women. The pressure to marry within the limits of the community is also much more on the women than on men. It is accepted within the community that it is difficult to contain men and their choices of partners within community boundary; but women are expected to bear the responsibility of satisfying the expectations of their family and community. The scope of interaction outside the community for both men and women are equal, but it is again the women who shoulder the responsibility of keeping them confined within the limits of their community. It is the men who have more friends outside the community, many of whom are close friends. Moreover, this dissertation has found more men to have made friends from the locality

whereas women have made friends mostly from among school mates and colleagues. This again shows their reluctance to venture beyond the boundary of their known space. An interesting observation while doing this research was that the women of the community did not want to divulge details of their friends especially if they were men. I have found quite a number of them who said they had male friends both within and outside the community but did not want to talk about them.

The charitable organizations of the community are aimed at supporting the vulnerable groups within it- it is telling, therefore, that among the old, the orphan and the destitute, women predominate. There are a number of organizations that cater to the needs of the women of the community such as old-age homes for women, special provisions for girl children, etc. While women are the prime objects of charity, they are excluded from leadership, rights-bearing roles and communal decision-making. The social clubs, which help maintain community networks and provide the springboard for public representation, tend to exclude women from full membership with voting rights. The classic patriarchal pattern is thus confirmed— protection coupled with political disenfranchisement.

As a consequence, the ethnic identity of Anglo-Indian women is stronger than the men of the community. They identified themselves as Anglo-Indian women, as distinct and different from other Indian women. The women think they are different in many ways from the other Indian women and they strongly differentiate between ‘their’ and ‘our’ women in their expressions of selfhood. They express their deep concern for their language, their dress, their ways of everyday living, their culture and so on. This concern is also present among the men, but the men are less constrained by these self-limiting boundaries. Whereas the women fear that they might be ostracized for contravening these self-regulatory norms, men are able to move in and out of community boundaries with more ease. The fear of crossing the boundary has kept women more confined, shifting on to the women the burden of maintaining ethnic identity. As is common to most patriarchal arrangements, Anglo-Indian women are caught in a vicious circle- the more

they remain confined, the more they are dominated and less they are able to break out of their confinement.

I complete this exploratory and descriptive study with a greater sense of urgency than I began with- the community is continually destabilized by migration and as their numbers decline, there is a greater sense of insecurity and besiegement. Since it is those with better access to resources who have been migrating out, the proportion of the poor in the community is increasing. The obsolescence of some of the jobs in which the women predominated, such as secretarial jobs, is leading to acute poverty and even destitution. The women from the poorer sections of the community are unable to access basic resources such as food, security, and shelter. Community support systems are woefully inadequate in the face of the deepening crisis. There is an urgent need to address these questions— and social and women's movements need to pay more attention than they have so far.
