

Lapis Lazuli

An International Literary Journal

ISSN 2249-4529

www.pintersociety.com

GENERAL SECTION

VOL: 9, No.: 2, AUTUMN 2019

REFREED, INDEXED, BLIND PEER REVIEWED

About Us: <http://pintersociety.com/about/>

Editorial Board: <http://pintersociety.com/editorial-board/>

Submission Guidelines: <http://pintersociety.com/submission-guidelines/>

Call for Papers: <http://pintersociety.com/call-for-papers/>

All Open Access articles published by LLILJ are available online, with free access, under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial License as listed on <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Individual users are allowed non-commercial re-use, sharing and reproduction of the content in any medium, with proper citation of the original publication in LLILJ. For commercial re-use or republication permission, please contact lapislazulijournal@gmail.com

Children of the Empire: The Case of the Anglo-Indian

Ruchi Kalita

Abstract:

This paper attempts to represent the marginal position of the Anglo-Indian vis-à-vis the British and Indian communities. The Anglo-Indian, as a figure, is the creation of the empire which is unable to negotiate a sense of belonging. To do so it engages with John Masters' novel *Bhowani Junction* (1954) wherein there is a representation of the Anglo-Indian community. Through the character of Victoria the novel also represents the complicated search for identity and a sense of belonging that the Anglo-Indian faces due to their marginal position.

Key Words:

Empire, Anglo-Indian, identity, isolation, marginal.

“Where is Toba Tek Singh?... In Pakistan or in Hindustan?” (Manto 218). This is the question that the protagonist of Sa’adat Hasan Manto’s story “Toba Tek Singh” keeps asking, because Toba Tek Singh is his home, where he belongs. The question of belonging for a majority of the inmates of the asylum is decided on the basis of religion and whether their family has moved to the other country or not. However, in that same asylum there are two Anglo-Indian inmates, whose only concern at that moment is whether the European Ward is going to be abolished and whether they will still get Western style bread. The question to be asked at this point is where do the Anglo-Indians go? Where do they belong?

The answer seems to be nowhere; Anglo-Indians seem to exist in a liminal space where they do not belong anywhere. The term given to demarcate them from the Indians and the British, ends up not only separating them from the two communities but also leaves them in a no man’s land. The Anglo-Indian is, in all senses, a child of the Empire. Born of a mixed parentage, primarily through the relationship of a British man and a low-caste Indian woman, they find themselves unacceptable in both communities and hence, become a separate and marginalized community.

Noel P. Gist, in her essay “Cultural versus Social Marginality: The Anglo-Indian Case”, cites Everett V. Stonequist who focuses on the personality traits of the marginal man. According to him, the marginal man is someone who is “poised in psychological uncertainty between two (or more) social worlds, reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions, of these worlds, one of which is often ‘dominant’ over the other...” (Gist 362). He also notes the tendency of the marginal man to aspire to the ‘dominant’ group. Gist notes the use of terms like “*anxiety, ambivalence, divided loyalties, hypersensitivity, self-contempt, and inferiority complex*” (Gist 362) in Stonequist’s work.

Gist, in her paper, divides the concept of marginality into two separate categories: social and cultural marginality and how they apply to the Anglo-Indian vis-a-vis the British and the Indian communities. According to Gist,

Cultural marginality refers to the marginal or peripheral position of a group with respect to the beliefs, traditions, social organization, patterned behaviour, and systems of values that distinguish it from other groups or communities. Social marginality is the position of a group as indicated by the interpersonal or intergroup relationships with one or more different groups, and to the attitudes and "images" that tend to shape these relationships. (Gist 365)

Gist proposes the position of the Anglo-Indian vis-a-vis the British as one that is socially marginal but not culturally marginal whereas their position vis-a-vis the Indians is both socially and culturally marginal. This marginality of the Anglo-Indian is represented within John Masters' *Bhowani Junction* (1954). The reader gets access to the peculiar position of the Anglo-Indian trying to navigate a space where they are becoming increasingly marginal; hence, representing the isolation of the Anglo-Indian community from both the British and Indian communities. Furthermore, through the character of Victoria, Masters makes accessible the Anglo-Indian search for identity; a search which seems to be doomed as the Anglo-Indian is a marginal and isolated figure.

Culturally, the Anglo-Indians followed the Western model; be it in language, religion, dress or their moral code. In fact, their entire code of living followed the Western model, particularly the British. Regarding the Indian style of living, the Anglo-Indians seemed indifferent or negative towards it. They refused to understand and engage with, or even try to understand and engage with, Indian culture. For instance, during the procession carried out in support of the R.I.N. mutiny, Patrick comments on the music being played, "Music! ... It is more like cats caterwauling" (Masters 162). The Indian style of dressing was anathema to them; they constantly wore a topi to distinguish themselves from the Indians and Victoria faces a lot of ridicule when she begins wearing a sari.

Socially, the Anglo-Indians haven't been acceptable to either the British or the Indians; Victoria has to start donning a sari and convert her religion to associate with the Indians, also the Anglo-Indians are not allowed into the club meant for Europeans, and even when they are allowed in they have to face discrimination and ridicule, "The younger fellows talked to Victoria, and they were too young to know how not to be patronizing. Others did it deliberately. She was obviously a blackie-white..." (Masters 299). Gist notes that it is only in the nineteenth and twentieth century that the Anglo-Indians were seen as a separate community whose members were often regarded with disdain and hostility; prior to this their racial hybridity was hardly taken into account.

The British saw Anglo-Indians as allies as far as continuing the stronghold of imperialism on India was concerned. However, they rejected the Anglo-Indians as competition for positions of power and as their social equals. Anglo-Indians were restricted to certain jobs which they were deemed fit for by the British, which were primarily in transportation, communications, military and police, and customs. Even then they were rarely given a powerful position within the structure. As Paul Frederick Cressey mentions, "the largest single source of Anglo-Indian employment is on the government owned railways of India. In the past various types of railway positions have been definitely reserved for them, to the exclusion of all Indian candidates" (Cressey 265). This can be seen in the novel when Patrick laments that the only job he is limited to is the railways, "I am a railwayman, and there is nothing else I can do" (Masters 378) and when he envisions a better future, in terms of job opportunities, for his children, "I saw my children doing anything they wanted to do in the world- air pilots, rich men, prime ministers, they were..." (Masters 380).

In terms of marriage, Anglo-Indians were hardly regarded as acceptable, even though there were some rare exceptions. But more often than that the British men had other intentions, they saw the Anglo-Indian woman as good enough for a fling and not marriage. "He never pretended to want anything to go to bed with me... He never pretended he would marry me. He thought because he was a British officer and I was a cheechee girl I'd do anything" (Masters 59). The expectation that an Anglo-Indian woman would submit to the British man's desires is shown also through Macaulay, who ceaselessly pursues Victoria and tries to rape her twice. On the other hand, the British man is also considered as a blessing for the Anglo-Indian woman; he is a ray of hope because the British man provides the Anglo-Indian woman a means of escape from India. The women seem desperate

to land an English ‘gentleman’ and be able to go ‘Home’.¹ This desperation is evident in Rose Mary, who is ready to do anything to attach herself to the British man, Howland. When Howland mentions that in a month he’d be on his way home, “A momentary anxiety crossed Rose Mary’s face, a quick calculation. She would have to make sure within that month that she would be on the same train” (Masters 364). Mr. Jones represents the old Anglo-Indian whose chance at getting ‘Home’ has slipped through his fingers; however he wants his children to have a chance. When Col. Savage asks permission to take Victoria away with him for a weekend, Mr. Jones agrees primarily because he’s an English man and what it would mean if his daughter managed to marry him. He is excessively happy to see his daughters with Englishmen; to him they seem well on their way ‘Home’, “He looked foolishly happy... Both his daughters were here among officers, and they were both drinking champagne” (Masters 368).

To understand the marginality of the Anglo-Indians it is necessary to look at the reasons behind this exclusion of the Anglo-Indian from both the British and Indian community. What complicates the marginalization of the Anglo-Indians is the attitude of the Anglo-Indians themselves. As Stonequist shows in his model of the marginalized man, the Anglo-Indians consider themselves to be British and not Indian. Cressey cites an Anglo-Indian who states that “however black he may be, the Eurasian² stubbornly resists the submergence of his identity with the natives of the country, for he is proud of his Anglicized customs and his remote connections with the ruling race” (Cressey 264).

Hence, the Anglo-Indians reject the Indians and see them as subordinate to themselves. The Indians, according to the Anglo-Indians “were lazy, ignorant, dirty, corrupt, inefficient, backward, superstitious - people whose customs, behaviour, and beliefs were alien to their own Western way of life and allegedly inferior to it” (Gist 368). Patrick’s attitude to the Indians is a reflection of this type of rejection. “The crew were all Wogs. They liked to be called Indians... but I always call them Wogs in my mind still” (Masters 3). When Patrick is informed of a derailment, the first image in his head is that “of a Wog pulling out a fishplate, and all mixed up with that was the result of what he’d done- the smash, and the Wog dancing up and down and yelling for joy” (Masters 9). Patrick treats his assistant, an Indian, Ranjit like a dog, constantly demeaning him and sees him as an inefficient “black bastard”. There is also resentment for the Indians, because they are now taking jobs which the Anglo-Indians considered their right, they had to now compete for jobs with the Indians; “We (the Anglo-Indian) used to have that run, but it was always Wogs by 1946” (Masters 3). There is a constant differentiation between *us*, which is the Anglo-Indian, and *them*, meaning the Indian. They reject their Indian blood; Mr. Jones is proud of the fact that he is three-quarters European and is ashamed of his wife, who is three-quarters Indian. There is an aversion to brown skin and Indian habits, shown in the description of Mrs. Jones, “She is very brown...and she chews betel nut in secret” (Masters 5). Mrs. Jones is more Indian than European, hence she is pushed to the background of the narrative, ignored because of her Indianness.

Parallel to the rejection of the Indians by the Anglo-Indians is the rejection of the Anglo-Indians by the Indians as well. The fact that the Anglo-Indians had protected jobs which placed them above the Indians was a constant source of irritation for the Indians. They saw the Anglo-Indians as nothing more but puppets in British hands. Out of the many charges placed against the Anglo-Indian, the most common were, “‘imitation of the British’, ‘anti-Indian attitude’, ‘unpatriotic’, ‘low morals’, ‘fickleness’, ‘snobbish behaviour’, ‘hypocritical’, ‘opportunistic’” (Gist 370). The primary charge

¹ Home, in this sense, is England. Throughout the novel England is referred to as Home, spelt with a capital H, and differentiated from the house, which is India. Hence, making it very clear that for the Anglo-Indians England represented home, a space of belonging that they constantly aspired to achieve.

² Eurasian is one of many terms applied to the Anglo-Indian, as they are a product of “Europe mated with Asia”.

laid against their door was that the Anglo-Indians had aligned themselves to the British earlier and not to the Indians; hence they had no place in the new India.

The Anglo-Indians rejected the 'subordinate' part of their personality and tried to align themselves to the 'superordinate' British. They constantly try to ingratiate themselves with the British. Patrick, who is loud and stubborn in front of everyone else particularly the "Wogs", cowers in front of the English Col. Savage. Mr. Jones becomes obsequious and constantly tries to please Savage, whom he sees as the epitome of English gentlemanly behaviour. He does everything except literally pushing his daughter, Victoria, out of the house when Savage asks permission to take Victoria away for a weekend. Furthermore, he is as proud as a peacock to see that both of his daughters have 'landed' English gentlemen and will be going 'Home'. The Anglo-Indians considered England to be their natural home; it was the place where they 'belonged', where they were meant to return, even if they had never accessed England earlier. However, this can be seen as a dream, a way of coping with the reality that they had no home. By creating the concept of the ideal 'Home' represented by England they attempt to come to terms with their lack of belonging.

The British saw the Anglo-Indians just as a class to help them subordinate the Indians. Beyond that, the British refused to associate with the Anglo-Indians. The doors of their clubs remained closed to Anglo-Indians. The women were especially scathing of their Anglo-Indian counterparts. Indrani Sen, in her book *Memsahib's Writings: Colonial Narratives on Indian Women*, compiles some of these stereotypes held by British women against the Anglo-Indian woman. The British women saw Anglo-Indian women as only obsessed with clothes and making love³, they wore Western clothes which they were wholly unsuited for, in terms of figure and complexion⁴. The Anglo-Indian men were hardly awarded any positions of power and most of them were untrained for skilled positions due to a lack of education.⁵ Indrani Sen notes that this ridicule and exclusion of the Anglo-Indians could be because of an underlying fear among the colonisers that people of mixed blood posed a potential threat of bridging the distance between ruler and ruled (Sen xvi).

"Unable to gain admittance into European society and unwilling to be identified with India culture, the Anglo-Indian is in a situation of constant tension. The lack of group status has its counterpart in the mental conflict and emotional instability of the individual" (Cressey 266). It is this sort of tension which is embodied in the person of Victoria. Victoria is representative of the Anglo-Indian quest for identity. "You don't realize how fresh and free it is to be English – or Indian. Why must we torture ourselves with ideas that we are better than some people and worse than others?" (Masters 22). She finds a need in herself to belong to one part of her divided, hybrid identity; she has to be either Indian or British, and she can't straddle both aspects of her identity together anymore.

She tries, in turn, to align herself with both parts of her heritage. She begins by trying to be an Indian. She repudiates her Anglo-Indian form of clothing and dons a sari. She has to face a lot of opposition due to her decision, and she is ostracized from her own community because of her association with an Indian man, Ranjit. She defends her decisions, "We are half-Indian... But there's not going to be a place for half-Indians soon. I can't make myself a whole Indian, but I can show that I don't think of myself as whole-English. I can show them I think India is my home" (Masters 196). However, she finds it difficult to negotiate her position as an Indian. For instance, she can't understand the extent of the violence that the Indians choose to use to expel the British from India.

³ Julia Maitland, *Letters From Madras, during the years 1836-39, by a Lady*.

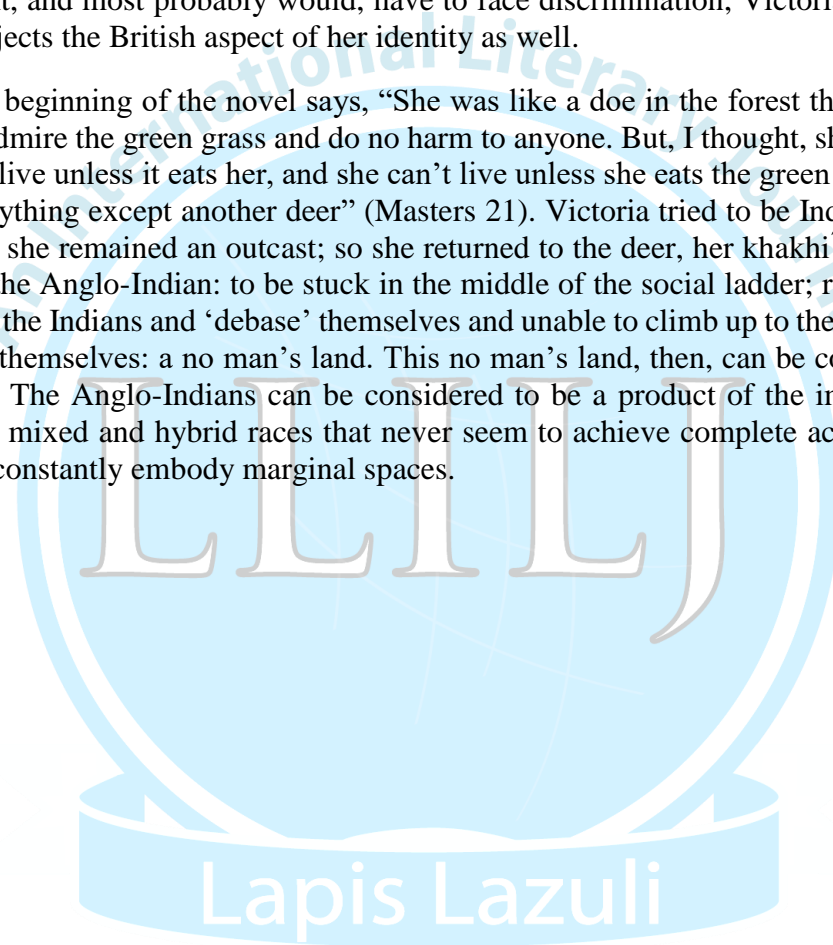
⁴ Emma Roberts, *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan with Sketches of Anglo-Indian Society*.

⁵ This was primarily because the Anglo-Indians refused to study with Indians in Indian universities and they were not allowed to study in the European universities. Hence, most of them lacked the form of education and technical training to be awarded higher positions.

The low point for her comes when she has to convert her religion; her problem stems from the fact that she has to relinquish her name, and by extension her identity, to be an Indian. She finds herself unable to do that and runs away, both simultaneously rejecting and being rejected by the Indian aspect of her identity.

Victoria, then, through her affair with Col. Savage tries to embrace the English side. She tries to fit in the world of Col. Savage and even though they love each other deeply, she finds herself unable to accept the English world. Her visit to the club makes her vulnerable to the patronizing and mocking attitude of the Europeans. She very objectively thinks of the possibilities of a future with Savage in England and tries to explain what might happen to them; “The fate of Miss Starkie⁶ was one of our hurdles. I thought of two kids in England - brothers at Wellington, say - one white, one dark. People would blink when they saw them. They’d force themselves to treat the dark one the same as the other, and he’d be bound to feel it” (Masters 303). Envisioning a future where her children might, and most probably would, have to face discrimination, Victoria rejects that future. Hence, she rejects the British aspect of her identity as well.

Patrick in the beginning of the novel says, “She was like a doe in the forest that wants to love the leopard and admire the green grass and do no harm to anyone. But, I thought, she will learn that the leopard can’t live unless it eats her, and she can’t live unless she eats the green grass, and she can’t really love anything except another deer” (Masters 21). Victoria tried to be Indian and she tried to be British but she remained an outcast; so she returned to the deer, her khakhi⁷ roots. Perhaps that is the fate of the Anglo-Indian: to be stuck in the middle of the social ladder; reluctant to go down to the level of the Indians and ‘debase’ themselves and unable to climb up to the level of the English and ‘elevate’ themselves: a no man’s land. This no man’s land, then, can be considered a creation of the empire. The Anglo-Indians can be considered to be a product of the imperialistic impulse which creates mixed and hybrid races that never seem to achieve complete acceptance and hence are forced to constantly embody marginal spaces.



⁶ A reference to a poem : “There was a young lady called Starkie/ Who had an affair with a darkie./ The result of her sins/ Was an eightsome of twins-/ Two black and two white and four khaki.” The poem points to the deep-seated prejudice that exists against Anglo-Indians and relationships with Anglo-Indians.

⁷ A derogatory term used for Anglo-Indians which highlights their mixed heritage

Works Cited:

- Cressey, Paul Frederick. "The Anglo-Indians: A Disorganized Marginal Group." *Social Forces*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1935, pp. 263–268. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2571259
- Gist, Noel P. "Cultural versus Social Marginality: The Anglo-Indian Case." *Phylon* (1960-), vol. 28, no. 4, 1967, pp. 361–375. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/274288.
- Manto, Sa'adat Hasan. *Black Margins*. New Delhi: Katha, 2003. Print
- Masters, John. *Bhowani Junction*. 1st ed. New York: The Viking Press, 1954. Print.
- Sen, Indrani. *Memsahib's Writings: Colonial Narratives on Indian Women*. 1st ed. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Pvt. Ltd., 2008. Print.



BIO-NOTE

Ruchi Kalita is an Assistant Professor (Adhoc) in Janki Devi Memorial College, Delhi University. She is a combined product of Delhi University and Jamia Millia Islamia. Her areas of research include folklore studies, postcolonial literature, and contemporary literature, to name a few.

E-mail Id: - ruchi.kalita@gmail.com