

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

[by Masood Hasan](#)

The Anglo Indians were fun people. But more than the singular expertise they brought to the jobs that became traditionally their forte, they added a swing, vibrancy and a sheer joy of living spirit to our society that in many ways epitomised the new, fresh spirit that was Pakistan. That was then.

Now it's a fading sepia tone picture.

Those of us who grew up with them, watched with considerable sadness as family after family left this country to go and blend into their adopted countries.

There was nothing left for them in Pakistan.

In retrospect, they were wise. Look at Pakistan's bestiality towards our minorities.

But for the short time the Anglo Indians were here, they gave us a unique gift. The joy of living and of being alive.

The Anglos were a British creation.

Although the British Empire at one point held absolute power in over 52 countries there was only one undisputed 'jewel' in the royal crown. India.

It was part of their policy to protect this jewel from within as well and so began a policy of encouraging British males to marry Indian women.

Anglo Indians who would intrinsically be at home with British mannerisms and always do the 'pucca' thing yet be more English than Indian in their thinking, a defensive ring around British interests and way of life.

Many experts believe that had it not been for them, the British Empire in India would have collapsed.

Ethnically engineered, they were the only micro-minority community ever to be defined in a country's constitution and yet the irony was that they were a race without a country!

The Anglos were no ordinary people. In India and later Pakistan, they virtually ran the railways, post & telegraph, police, customs, education, nursing, healthcare, import/export, shipping, tea, coffee & tobacco plantations, coal mines and gold reserves.

Thus Anglos also became great teachers, nurses, priests and doctors.

And their girls, debonair, confident, skilful became the best executive secretaries, special assistants and office managers.

There was no one to match them.

But it was their colourful and vibrant approach to everyday life that was so infectious about them. Like all small communities, they segregated into enclaves that were all their own.

The Anglo-Indians were truly spirited people, fired with a zest to work and party hard.

The boys were typically razor sharp, cutting deals that would invariably begin with lines like, ‘I say bugga you know what happened? That bugga Tony, man he screwed me real good, bugga took my damn cash and disappeared.’

And the reply, ‘You don’t say bugga,’ and ‘I’m tellin’ ya, ask Fernandez man – Tony rogered him too man,’ ‘Say swear,’ ‘Swear bugga this Tony, man he’s somethin’ else,’ and on and on went the stories.

There were always stories.

The Anglos were superb musicians and dancers.

The floors (toba, toba) were full on Saturday nights, Sunday afternoons, jam sessions – and other handy occasions – sometimes they didn’t even need to have a reason.

At the hangouts, Karachi particularly and Lahore catching up all the time and Sam’s in Murree, the Anglo Indians could set a floor on fire as they jived, jitterbugged, rocked & rolled, swung, waltzed or shook sensuously to Latin-flavoured mind blowing melodies.

And it was on the dance floors that you saw pretty girls who could break your heart with just a look, hair tossing, laughing their pretty heads off as, adept and handsome male escorts took them through the dance paces.

The Anglos congregated in special areas within the cities where they made warm, inviting homes.

In Lahore, they were behind The Indus Hotel on The Mall, in the environs of the railway colony and in residential areas where family names like Johnson were as common as Mohammad Iqbals today.

In Karachi names like Preedy Street, Elphi were synonymous with them.

Wherever they were - they were not very affluent, but you were always welcomed with a cold beer, a quick shot if it was nippy and at Xmas time, the special cakes made to order with each family guarding its secret recipe passed from generation to generation.

There was the Burt Institute, the Railway Colony to name just two and then there were the clubs and nightspots.

In Karachi there were many and even more there were the musicians – row upon row who filled these and played jazz, rock even fusion – or whatever you fancied.

The bands grew on trees. The Strollers, Francisco Boys, The Bugs, The Cossacks, Willie Po and the Boys, The Incrowd (inspired by that superb hit from Ramsey Lewis and quite the rage then), The Drifters, The Panthers, The Talisman Set (see their group picture, faded and blurry and you could mistake them for The Jackson Five), Bloody What's the Matter? (Yes there was a group called just that), The Keynotes, Flintstone, The Fatah Brothers, Captivators and the Saints of Rawalpindi (now surely replaced by the devils incarnate).

Nightclubs with foreign acts especially in Karachi were the rage. Agents, artists, con men, musicians, strippers, belly dancers all arrived and exited at this hustling port city.

Jazz legends like Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Charlie Byrd, Benny Carter, Quincy Jones (who gave Michael Jackson that memorable beat heard in 'Billie Jean' and who was to give MJ some great musical direction) – they all came here and they loved Karachi and this country called Pakistan, where there was hardly any crime worth mentioning and nobody knew how to use bombs leave alone the killer guns.

'If someone fired a shot in midair in Golimar,' muses a gentleman from those days, 'the word would spread through Karachi like fire.'

But that was a Karachi that was perhaps just a million not burgeoning at all ends with an estimated 14 million now. And although someone recalls that 'the city was planned differently but grew differently', Karachi started to disintegrate before our eyes in the 70s.

The 1972 laws enforced by ZAB to please the fundos broke the spirit of all of us, particularly the Anglo Indians.

Bars, discos, clubs all shut down in fear.

Suddenly hosts of musicians and other artists had no livelihood.

'Tolerance went up in smoke,' recalls one sad person.

Came 1979 and the evil Zia and the coup de grace forced the Anglos to escape, migrate anywhere they could go.

They left by the droves, never to come back.

The clubs died, the dance floors uprooted, the many services they offered fell by the wayside.

In driving out this small community, we dug our own graves.

We rapidly became soulless, grey, hypocritical and boring. With them gone, an integral part of decent civilian life was snuffed out.

Guns replaced guitars.

The scorched landscape that we inherited, now mocks us. Laughter has changed to anguish.

Pakistan may be a 'hard country', but it is also a barren and desolate land.

One gentleman of the fabled 60s sums it all up in one line: 'Those days are gone. They will not come back.'

Quite an epitaph wouldn't you agree?'

The writer was a Lahore-based columnist.