

RESERVATIONS NEED TO CONTINUE FOR ANGLO-INDIANS

Relevant for: Indian Polity | Topic: Parliament - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these

The Parliament house in New Delhi. File | Photo Credit: [V.V. Krishnan](#)

The Union Cabinet recently approved a proposal to end the constitutional provisions that guarantee the reservation of two seats for the Anglo-Indian community in the Lok Sabha and in State Assemblies. The decision not to renew this provision was based on the view that the community is doing well and does not need these political reservations. Our view is that this premise is inaccurate. While Census data are not available (as Anglo-Indians are no longer identified as a separate category in the Census survey), those working on the ground with members of the community have experience and evidence that tell a different story. And this is supported by the government-commissioned Ministry of Minority Affairs report (2013) on the situation of Anglo-Indians.

Based on surveys conducted among people belonging to the community in a number of cities, the report documented poor economic and social conditions for too many. Among the major challenges and problems faced by people of the community, the report observed, the most significant ones related to identity crisis, lack of employment, educational backwardness, lack of proper facilities and cultural erosion. The document also explicitly commended the assistance Anglo-Indians receive from their nominated MPs and MLAs, stating that “representatives of the Anglo-Indian community in the State Assemblies and local leaders of the community are working hard for the welfare and progress of the community”.

Nomination of seats for Anglo-Indians in the Lok Sabha was a testament to the fair-minded and forward-looking vision of the founding fathers of the Republic, whose understanding of how to build a successful democracy has rather uniquely stood the test of time. Frank Anthony made the case for special representation on behalf of the community following which Mahatma Gandhi agreed to his request for three seats in the Constituent Assembly, thereby giving Anglo-Indians a voice in the creation of India's Constitution.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel as Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights, Minorities and Tribal and Excluded Areas was the person most directly responsible for the granting of these special concessions to this community, scattered across the country. Representing an All-India community, Anthony and his successors in the Lok Sabha used that voice to provide an independent, national view of the interests of India as a whole. Even when supporting their own community's causes, particularly in areas like education, they advanced the national interest and greatly benefited the country. The presence of Anglo-Indian MLAs in many State legislatures similarly provided a constructive pro-national voice, less tied to parochialism or provincialism, and emphatically against linguistic and religious separatism and similar narrowly communal interests. Unfortunately, the present Lok Sabha has no representation from this community.

In recent years, under its current president-in-chief, Barry O'Brien, the All-India Anglo-Indian Association has continued to expand, creating and promoting positive political engagement. Other community organisations have also been engaged in such work. It would be a great loss to the nation if these voices were to be further marginalised by hasty decisions premised on short-term political considerations.

While there certainly are success stories in the community, the existence of many not-so-successful ones must also be acknowledged. A radical decision like that involving scrapping of reservations ought to have been based on a thorough examination of the position of the community as a whole, and not on the status of some eminent individuals. It should also be noted that many success stories exist because of the work of dedicated community members, including those who serve or have served as MLAs and MPs.

We would therefore conclude that the Indian government needs to continue giving reservation to this marginalised community. The costs to the state here are minimal. But retaining the reserved seats would demonstrate its ability to respond to the needs of those among the most vulnerable people. This would also be a recognition of encouragement for the work done on the ground by grassroots groups involved with the community. In the near future, the community can also possibly find representation in the National Commission for Minorities.

A stronger, less socioeconomically marginalised Anglo-Indian community would benefit the nation as a whole. And the community needs all the support it can get.

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