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# Colonial Cousins

Joyce Westrip was born in southern India in 1929. She left India in 1947 to live in England. She moved to Perth in 1955 where she completed her education at the University of Western Australia.

Indian history and culture hold her fascinated, and she regularly visits the subcontinent to continue her research. She has the largest known collection of books on Indian cooking including rare and out of print cookbooks. She has presented radio and television programmes on Indian culture and cooking and regularly gives talks and classes on the subject. She is the author of *Moghul Cooking: India's Courtly Cuisine*, *Fire and Spice: Parsi Cookery*, and *An ABC of Indian Food*. Joyce was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2000 for her work promoting cultural links between Australia and India.

Peggy Holroyde was born in England in 1924, but has become a global citizen spending four years in the USA at Radcliffe College Harvard 1941–1945 with a degree in English Literature and Fine Arts. There she found her mentor, H.N.Spalding who created the Spalding Chair of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford University in 1936. She studied Hindu and Buddhist faiths under Dr. S. Radhakrishnan at Oxford in 1946–1948. In 1953 she joined her BBC Representative husband in India where she spent five years.

During that time she travelled the sub-continent extensively and has returned innumerable times. She has lectured on Indian history and cultural attitudes at various educational institutions in the UK as well as Australia where she has lived since accompanying her husband on his academic appointment in 1976. She is a Member of the Order of Australia after administering various Indian Ocean Festivals in Australia.

She is the author of *Indian Music, East Comes West*, *Social Change Amongst Asian Families in England* and *An ABC of Indian Culture*.



# COLONIAL *Cousins*

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A SURPRISING HISTORY OF CONNECTIONS  
BETWEEN INDIA AND AUSTRALIA

JOYCE WESTRIP AND  
PEGGY HOLROYDE



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*To Charles and Derek*



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# Foreword

There are a number of factors that make this book remarkable, not the least of which are the two authors Joyce Westrip and Peggy Holroyde. Both have had a long association with India; in the case of Joyce, being born and brought up during the period straddling both pre and post Independence and, in the case of Peggy, having lived for many years on the Sub-Continent accompanying her husband who was the BBC's first foreign or overseas correspondent based on India.

The book traverses a period of history involving the movement of Anglo-Indians from India to Australia and is the first time anyone has recorded such a comprehensive social history covering one group migrating from India to Australia over two centuries.

The authors began their archival searches in the 1980s and their research has involved oral histories from descendants of three generations, together with personal knowledge and experience in India during the most historically significant period. Their experience is supplemented by extensive travels in many other countries.

This book is more than just an historical survey because it brings the reader right up to current times with a rare appreciation of policies which impact upon both trade and business between the two countries in present times.

The authors have managed to blend the unusual story of the 'colonial cousins' in historical times with more recent developments in the India–Australia relationship in terms of trade and business. Their reference in the concluding chapter to the report of Dr Mark Thirwell of the Lowy Institute for International Policy confirming India's economic program, as being the stepping-stone to becoming a tortoise giant, is particularly apposite.

What emerges through the pages of this book is the authors' deep understanding and genuine love of India and Australia and this is threaded through the historical facts and figures, which makes the book so readable.

They are as they say 'two individuals originally of Anglo-Saxon heritage but at home in both cultures, and of an age that once was biblically significant, that of two score years and ten – and over!' so they are able to take a longer more philosophical view.

I am proud of having had the privilege of meeting both the authors and being invited to write a foreword to this book which I have taken the time to read and appreciate.

Brian Hayes, QC

National Chairman of the Australia India Business Council  
Government of South Australia's Special Envoy to India

# Preface

## *Imperial ties*

Mention the British Raj and there immediately springs to mind a vision of imperial splendour and of the ‘Heaven Born’ English administrators of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) who sometimes met their equals in the hauteur, intellectual prowess and hereditary acumen of the Sanskrit-speaking Indian Brahmins. But there is another story to be told, a real down-to-earth Australian version of experience in and with India from the very first days of settlement by the white British. This story takes place far from the well-oiled wheels of the splendid chariots of power trundling through Indian–British history and examines the antipodean experience. It is a story concerned with the little-known links that have existed between what were, for at least 160 years, firstly two cousin colonies and later dominions.

The connection between Australia and India was bound to be a quite different relationship from that between Britain and India. India and Australia often suffered together under the watchful paternalism, and maternalism in the latter part of Victoria’s reign, of the mother country. Her rascal-children swarmed out from the tiny north island and made their fortunes in the southern hemisphere in the wake of the trading urges of the earliest mariners of the 1600s. As the impetus turned into the colonialist era of the eighteenth century the Hindu ‘ward of court’ was seen as ‘heathen’, and the other, natural children, the maturing Australian offspring, as virtually beyond redemption.

## *The infrastructure of Empire*

A pattern of connections between India and Australia emerged during the early colonial days of Australia, involving an interchange of people through merchant trade, army service and lands grants. Often large British families

servicing in the Indian Army sent their last son to try his luck as an adventurer in the free-for-all economy opening in the Australian colonies. There was also a natural flow of migration among the hierarchy of officials and administrators appointed by the Crown to both colonies. Nearly all of this movement of people occurred from the beginning of settlement of the new colonies in Australia because of the common umbrella of the Raj.

There was not only the to-ing and fro-ing of troops who guarded either the predominantly convict society in the new Australia or the territory in India, but also the individual service personnel who came to this southern island continent with its salubrious coastal climates for recuperation or as tourists on holiday from the heat of India in the nineteenth century. Following in their wake, entrepreneurial Indians also came to trade in a basic fashion as the easily recognisable hawker with brown leather suitcase, hawking his wares to impoverished communities of scattered individuals struggling to scrape a life in the outback. In doing so, the Indian hawkers helped to develop the intractable inland areas of Australia with camels, their soft-footed transport, 100 years before Indians brought the sacred Hindu cow into the densely-packed backyards of Manchester, Coventry or Bradford. However, even before this time, individual Indians had arrived as brown servants to the white families who were coming from India to settle the coastal towns 'down under'.

At the very time that we co-authors met in the 1970s as two Anglo-Saxons permanently settled in Perth, there had been an explosion of literature in Britain about India and the Raj. There were also radio programs and films such as *Heat and Dust*, *A Passage to India* and *The Jewel in the Crown* that had augmented the written word. Having had a long involvement with India ourselves, we felt that there was an Australian perspective to recount, one that reflected an exciting range of Australian history which we were both learning afresh.

Joyce Westrip was born near Bangalore in South India, going to school there before coming to Perth at the age of 24. Peggy Holroyde had lived in New Delhi with her husband during the fifties when he was BBC Representative to India and Pakistan. Having travelled all over India, we have both returned there innumerable times to organise tours or prepare for cultural exhibitions not only in Australia, but also in Britain.

Our backgrounds led us to conceive the idea of enlarging upon this cultural phenomena, especially after hearing the BBC series *Plain Tales from the Raj*. This had reached Australia and been broadcast on ABC Radio in 1980. Why not an Australian Tale? We started our research on Indian matters in the

Battye Library archives in our own state of Western Australia, as well as interviewing over 50 local people who had been associated with life in India. Eventually the interview trail led us all around Australia, even to Tasmania and the Northern Territory. This considerable material formed the basis for a three-part radio series of scripts for ABC Sunday Features.

We thought we had begun at the beginning when we first turned our attention to interviewing people in Perth who had been involved in the British Raj in India. There was a different flavour to their stories, an Aussie flavour as subtly different as Vegemite is from Marmite. We soon found out, however, in the Hindu way, that things are never what they seem to be.

### *The beginnings of the story*

Four years down the track, the beginning – the anecdotal chapters in the last section of the book – was becoming the end.

A shuttlecock process had been taking place. Many of the individuals we had talked to had opened unexpected vistas to us. This took us along paths into distant archives around the country; we found ourselves drawing together material from primary sources such as diaries and letters of well over 200 years ago. The bibliography itself gives a clear insight into the extent of the search that seemingly could go on forever. Every time we met someone who had heard of what we have been delving into, they would utter that highly seductive phrase: ‘Oh! Do you know . . .?’

So this work is more than an historical account of the Indian–Australian story until the shutters came down in 1901 with the officially promoted White Australian Policy when few Asians were allowed to migrate. This is a personal exploration into an Indian–Australian landscape, a subject largely ignored or overlooked by recorders of social history, novelists and the media. In our years of travelling around this huge island talking to people whose memories reached back to the beginnings of the last century, we learnt that in a strange and ironical way, both peoples knew more in colonial times about each other through press coverage, trading encounters, and family connections than they do today. And sadly many of the people involved in our story have now passed on.

We realised that this account could not be based purely on the human links; the similarities between the island of Australia and sub-continental India in geological, anthropological and mythological terms could not be ignored. We felt India in the ambience of the vast Western Australian state. Eons before the British Raj, in times of distant immensity, Indian–Australian connections were shaping. These were geological times when India and Terra

Incognita were bound by soil, flora and fauna into one super-continent – Gondwana.

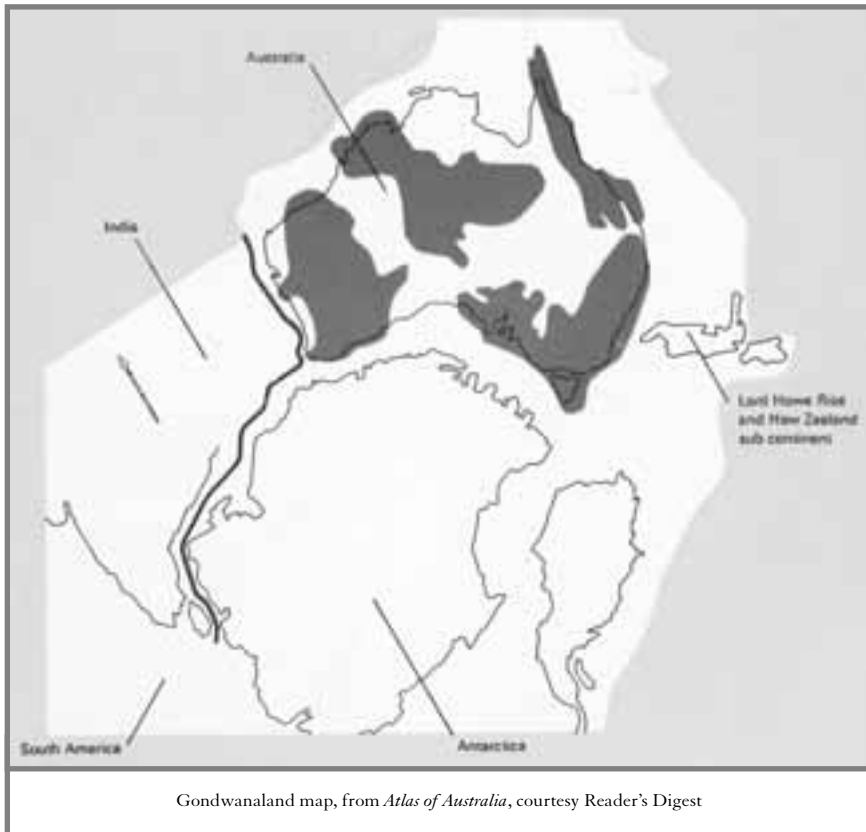
For us there have always been strong physical reminders, vibrations in the psyche, of India in the Western Australian landscape. Driving up to one of our homes in the hills of the Darling Range, the remains of old Devonian and Cambrian rocks divide the coastal sand plain from the endless flat lands to central Australia, and remind us of being in Tamilnadu. From the flat red plains of what once was the Madras presidency, the same sudden outcrops of smoothed granites and eucalypt-wooded hills constitute the idyllic hill stations in the south.

We were haunted by the ancient name Gondwanaland (a misnomer in fact, Gondwana being an Indian word meaning ‘land of the Gond people’, a tribe known in ancient times in the north-central sub-continent). This was as familiar to Indians on the east coast of India (now delineated by the state political boundaries of Orissa and Andhra) as it is to many of the tribal Aborigines of this vast continent. Modern Australian geologists exploring rich seams of minerals laid down at least 300 million years ago in the ancient seabed of Terra Australis are also familiar with the term. Basalt flows have recently been analysed and traced 60 kilometres off the south-western coast of Western Australia. These flows occurred approximately 130 million years ago when what is now India split from Gondwanaland and began to drift northward. Geologists now state that these flows came 200 kilometres to form the base of the Darling Escarpment that leads down into the Stirling Ranges and Porongerups of Western Australia.

In the architecture and design too, everywhere there were reminders of India. The bungalow (from the Bengali/Hindi word *bangla*, a name used by early British settlers for the low single-storey houses with curved turtle carapace roofs constructed from bamboo and plantain thatch) or homestead with its deep verandahs, high roof and trough draughts so air could flow into the centre of the house, was ecologically right for the hot, dry and humid climates of both India and Australia. The Indian *pank̄aa* (initially manually operated), or overhead fan, was a natural addition once electricity was installed and a good deal healthier than air conditioning.

Contemporary Australia is a far cry from the archives we were searching. We are now struggling to accept a more integrated Australian identity in which landscape, Aboriginal roots and embossed European, then Asian, cultural influence are reflected. The umbilical cord binding us to a northern ‘home’ has finally been cut and this nation of ours is on the move again





psychologically. Geo-politically, influences are now running strongly, creating a tidal wave of cultural re-exploration. Many of Australia's artists, as ever in the advance party, are expressing this new-found identity in challenging creations of music, ballet and painting, fusing Aboriginal, Pacific, Asian and European influences into one mosaic. This palimpsest, itself a beautiful English word based on both Latin and Greek, was a word much beloved of Pandit Nehru, India's first Prime Minister (1947–1964), in his own expression of the truth about India's remarkable experiment in merging plural identities into a bonded concept of national unity.

### ***Charles Staples and the Prinseps***

Serendipity happily played a part in unlocking the historical facts in the archives. The pioneering Indian Ocean festivals and conferences of Indian Ocean Studies in Perth in 1979, 1984, and 1986 in which we had both been involved, highlighted once again the importance of this long-neglected region.

All this pioneering activity brought us into contact with a local historian, Charles Staples. A chance remark revealed our mutual interests in India. Charles Staples had already been to Calcutta in pursuit of Prinsep family records, the direct result of investigating his own ancestors who had settled in the Busselton region of Western Australia's south-west. Here it was that Henry Prinsep, son of the powerful Charles Prinsep, Advocate-General to the East India Company in the 1830s, had married a daughter of the influential pioneer Bussell family, after which that small coastal town, Busselton, south-west of Australind, is named.

As our story unfolds, names such as Swanston, Clifton, Drake-Brockman, Lockyer, Blaxland, Fenton, Campbell, Sturt, Warburton, Chisholm, Governors Stirling, Darling, Denison, Viscount Gormanston of Tasmania and Lachlan Macquarie, who referred to himself after 20 years in India as an 'awkward rusticated jungle-wallah', crop up. These individuals appear to form an Indian–Australian society in the new colonies to the south-east of the Indian Ocean; colonies which were yet to become a nation.

In a paper delivered to the Royal Western Australian Historical Society in 1962 (*Early Days Society Journal* Vol. 6, 1962–1969), Charles Staples explained how Marshall Waller Clifton came out from England as Chief Commissioner to what was called the Western Australian Company in 1839. This was a decade after the opening up of the Swan River Colony by Captain James Stirling. Stirling had sailed around from Sydney for Governor Ralph Darling (Governor of New South Wales 1825–1831) in order to secure for Britain the western third of an uncharted continent, the French presence in the ocean region a constant in British strategic thinking.

Clifton, related to Elizabeth Fry (renowned for her dedication to prison reform in Britain in the nineteenth century) through his wife, and a close friend of Edward Gibbon Wakefield, the colonisation theorist, was certainly au fait with Gibbon's belief in rapid settlement of this part of Australia. One thousand migrants per year were needed to strengthen its economic base, so vulnerable at the time. The coastal strip north of Bunbury in Western Australia was to give pasture and a home to many of these new arrivals, and was to be called Australind, obviously because of the connection it would have with India. With no more specific documented origin than that, the name Australind initiated the beginnings of this personal exploration.

Dwarkanath Tagore, grandfather of the famous poet and Nobel Prize-winner Rabindranath Tagore, put good rupees along with other Calcutta Indian business tycoons into a Bengal Association set up in Calcutta (with a

certain amount of pushing from these influential wheeling and dealing Prinseps) to invest finance and shipping in the impoverished Swan River Colony. With this discovery and many others, we quickly realised we had stumbled on a phase of Australian history as yet little explored.

We were soon to discover that, like the early explorers Sturt and Warburton, we were venturing into a vast territory of barely explored terrain. Our quest started in Western Australia on the road to Australind and for this we have to thank our 'guru', the late Charles Staples, for leading us into the annals and territory of the Prinsep family. He generously shared his years of research with us and encouraged us to embark on the voyage searching for these forgotten links with India.

### *Connections*

In the long quest for elusive connections, our search fell naturally into three sections:

- that of affinities, conjectured and real, which we certainly, and others in their own way, could affirm. This became the bedrock of the text.
- research into documented evidence long since absorbed into state archives or forgotten private memorabilia. Both of these provided a context and a framework of history for the third area.
- the anecdotal, based in the taped reflections, the immediate linking of people, many still alive, who can trace memories back through several generations, or who still travel between India and Australia as their forebears did from the earliest days of settlement. This was the oral history.

Many of the individuals of our early chapters stand out in the records of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, or in the various archives housed in state libraries, but these may only be the tip of an iceberg. And even their records, retrieved wherever possible because of the individuals' fame or historic contribution (such as the hessian-bound journal of Captain Philip Gidley King as he sailed in to become Governor of the infant settlement and later colony of New South Wales), are scanty.

What then of the many unknown comings and goings of those lower down the hierarchy, some of whom were the ordinary untutored citizens, not well-versed in writing?

Often, even with those who went into print and about whom biographies, or accounts, have been published, records suddenly peter out, sequences of

events are unclear and dates are omitted. On these occasions it pays to be reminded of the perils of travel in those times; the long sea journeys ending in shipwreck, diaries lost to silver fish, flood and bushfire.

Because this research has been funded privately, some restriction had to be placed on time and researching certain sources, particularly in the United Kingdom and India. Even in the India Office Library in London and the National Library in Calcutta, archival assistance is severely stretched. We found we were constantly battling against financial constraints.

We know that many of the records referred to here are incomplete or require further research: some await younger researchers who have professional backing and proper resources. All we can hope is that we have laid some foundation stones. The links continue with people such as Barney Fernandes VM Wing Commander (retired) Indian Air Force. He came to Australia and founded Flying Training Schools, and although now in his eighties he is currently involved in setting up Flying Instructor Schools in Northam, Wyalcatchem and many airfields in the Wheatbelt of Western Australia. Barney's vision is to convert the Wheatbelt of Western Australia into the flight training belt of Australia.