Derozio

Nishi Pulugurtha

DEROZIO

Pegasus Monographs

Nishi Pulugurtha

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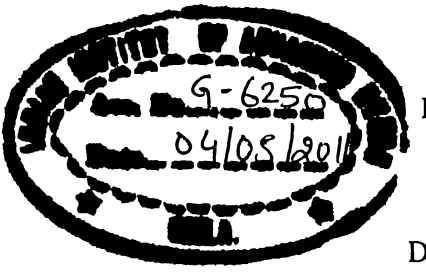

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My interest in Indian poetry written in English, in the nineteenth century Bengal, began after I completed my doctorate on Samuel Taylor Coleridge. I was trying to find a link between British Romantic poetry and Indian poetry written in English. It was then that I came across the group of poets who created a corpus of work that provides a site for examining this cultural interaction between India and Britain in the nineteenth century. This led to a Minor Research Project on the interface between India and Britain as seen in poetry written in English in the nineteenth century Bengal. This monograph emanates partly from that work.

The financial assistance of the University Grants Commission indirectly facilitated the completion of this work and I am grateful to them. I thank the staff and librarians of National Library, Kolkata, British Council Library, Kolkata Brahmananda Keshab Chandra College, Kolkata, the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad and Indian Institute for Advanced Study, Simla for providing efficient and speedy service.

I am greatly indebted to my father, my inspiration and guide. This monograph is dedicated to him. I thank my mother who patiently supported and encouraged me, my sister, brother-in-law and especially, my nephew whose smile and chatter was a pleasant break from the tedium of work. I have received help, encouragement and guidance from my teachers, colleagues, and friends, to all of whom I feel indebted – I thank them all. Special thanks are due to Dr. Smritikanta Chakraborty. I would like to thank Sri Salil Biswas of *Pegasus* for all his help and cooperation.

Nishi Pulugurtha

Preface

This is the second monograph of the series *Pegasus* hopes to continue publishing in future. These are meant to provide short but informative introductions to writers who have contributed to literary endeavours and creative thought all over the world in different subjects. These affordable little books are intended for the inquisitive beginner who might become sufficiently enthused on reading these to look further into such writers and their work.

These monographs should not be taken as replacements of available critical material on these authors. These should rather be perused as longer versions of entries in literary dictionaries.

All our monographs will be reviewed by experts in the concerned areas before being sent to press. We thank Dr. Jharna Sanyal of Calcutta University for having reviewed this monograph. We thank Dr. Nishi Pulugurtha for writing it for *Pegasus.*

One word of apology in regard to this monograph. The author intentionally did not take a detailed look at Derozio's deep and far-reaching social and political contributions, nor at his personal life and predilections. She has concentrated, as far as practicable in a book of this size, on his poetic output. While we understand that no study of Derozio can be complete without a searching look at contemporary Bengal, we perforce have stayed away from situating him in the larger picture.

Hopefully, these little books will find favour among students and teachers and interested lay persons.

Salil Biswas
August, 2010

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INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century was the high point of Britain-India interaction, particularly in Bengal. This era, often referred to as the Bengal Renaissance, was a period of intense cultural and technological advancement as well as a time of great social, cultural, and political change. One of the most important effects of this interface between India and Britain was evident in the sphere of education and literature. English education entered India with the passing of the Charter Act in 1813. The beginning of English education in Bengal is to be seen in private enterprise and in some efforts made by Eurasians as commercial venture. The General Committee of Public Instruction was established in 1823, the year the first grant was made available. English schools were set up under the patronage of the Calcutta Diocesan Committee, the Church Missionary Society, London Missionary Society and most importantly the General Assembly's Institution of the Church of Scotland founded in 1830 by Alexander Duff. The interest in learning English among the Bengalis gave it added impetus.

Many schools were set up in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century by people like David Drummond and Sherbourne among others. There were schools run by Bengalis also. Many of these schools organized recitations from English poets, debates in the English language, and stage performances of scenes from Shakespeare. During the last quarter of the eighteenth century, several plays of Shakespeare were staged in Calcutta.

The English Education Act of 1835, proposed by Governor General William Bentinck on Macaulay's advice, made English the medium of instruction in Indian education. This not only determined the policy of the Government but resulted in an increase in the number of private institutions teaching English in Calcutta and its surroundings. The Government began fourteen institutions in 1835 and within two years the number had increased to forty-eight.

These forces of history led to the use of English for writing poetry by the educated, urban Bengali in the nineteenth century. The history of Hindu College in its early days is closely linked with the life and work of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, the most famous and popular teacher of the institution.

Derozio: A Life

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was born on 18 April 1809 at 155 Lower Circular Road, Calcutta. His father, Francis Derozio was a merchant and belonged to a respectable Portuguese family, called DeRozario and worked at Messrs. J. Scott and Co. in Calcutta. His grandfather Michael Derozio was a Portugese businessman. Francis Derozio married twice and Derozio was the son of his first wife, Sophia, who was of English descent. There were four other children too, two brothers Frank and Claudius and two sisters Sophie and Amelia. Derozio was very close to Amelia. When he was six years old, Derozio's mother died and his father married an English lady called Anna Rivers.

Derozio studied at Drummond's school in Dharamtala, Calcutta and was soon saturated with radical thought from his teachers. Drummond was a Scotsman and a disciple of David Hume, was an extraordinary man of his time. An atheist and greatly interested in metaphysics, literature and politics, he came to Calcutta in the year 1813 and established his Academy for earning a living as well as for infusing revolutionary ideas into the minds of his young pupils. The inscription on his tomb reads: 'a successful teacher of youth'. Drummond was a great influence on the method of teaching that Derozio adopted at Hindu College, Calcutta. Thomas Edwards in his biography of Derozio writes:

> 'The naturally imaginative, impulsive and powerful mind of Derozio was quickened and spurred into action under the clear, incisive, logical guidance of David Drummond, . . . [Drummond] watched him with interest, and aided the rapid development of his splendid powers of intellect and imagination; and before the age of twenty, ... his acquaintance with the literature and thought of England,... his knowledge of the best thinkers and writers of European celebrity, was of such a character as to mark him off, at that early age, as a man not in any degree inferior to, and in some respects far in advance of, any of his contemporaries of any nationality in India.'[1]

Apart from Drummond, Derozio's mentors were John Grant, D. L. Richardson and Henry Meredith Parker, all of whom were trying their hands at poetry. David Drummond published a periodical called *Weekly Examiner*, for propagating his radical views. He was Forced to leave his native country because of his unorthodox views on religion,

Derozio's student life extended from 1815 to 1823 and he had a brilliant academic career. He left school at fourteen, and embarked on a career in commerce and became a clerk at Messrs. J. Scott and Co, the company where his father had worked. He worked for two years till his father's death and then joined his uncle at an Indigo plantation at Bhagalpore, Bihar.

It was during his stay at Bhagalpore that Derozio wrote his first poem 'Happy Meetings' (1825). Thomas Edwards writes, that it was in Bhagalpore, that

> '. . . the youthful poet drunk in all those sweet influences of nature and much of human nature, which indelibly impressed themselves on his intellect and imagination, and stirred him to the production of his 'most sustained effort in poetry', the *Fakir of Jungheera.*'[2]

John Grant, the editor of *India Gazette*, encouraged Derozio's poetic talent, having known him as a student at Drummond's Academy. It was Grant who encouraged Derozio to return to Calcutta.

Derozio was a voracious reader and read the major works of the rationalist philosophers of all ages. He joined the Hindu College in 1826 as a teacher, as assistant master in the senior department of the College and taught there till 1831, the first philosopher of what is often referred to as the Bengal Renaissance. The brilliant young, predominantly upper class, urban boys of Bengal were then flocking to Hindu College to receive the new education. Derozio, an exceptional teacher, influenced their minds with ideas of rationalism and freedom. He was a very popular teacher, yet he lost his appointment, though the charges against him, of propagating atheism and encouraging disobedience, were not proved. He continued to exercise a great influence over his former pupils, many

of whom became distinguished men in contemporary Bengal's social and literary circle. Thomas Edwards writes,

> 'The teaching of Derozio, the force of his individuality, his winning manner, his wide knowledge of books, his own youth, which placed him in close sympathy with his pupils, his open, generous, chivalrous nature, his humour and playfulness, his fearless love of truth, his hatred of all that was unmanly and mean, his ardent love of India, evidenced in his conversations and recorded in his lines,
>
> "My country! In thy days of glory past
> A beauteous halo circled round thy brow,"
>
> his social intercourse with his pupils, his unrestricted efforts for their growth in virtue, knowledge and manliness, produced an intellectual and moral revolution in Hindu society since unparalleled.'[3]

Derozio taught the second and third year classes at the Hindu College. Initiated into the rationalist thought of Europe by his teachers, Derozio never failed to develop his ideas. He introduced his students to Francis Bacon, David Hume, Thomas Paine and the Scottish School of philosophers, the ideas of the French Enlightenment and the philosophy of British Empiricism, which revolutionized the ideas and standards of the life of his disciples. Within a year of his joining Hindu College, he had a band of loyal students who followed his thoughts and beliefs. Referred to as Young Bengal, they were the first modern rationalists of the country and became the first exponents of the Indian Enlightenment. Veracity in thought and action and a high sense of social responsibility characterized the members of the Young Bengal. Under Derozio's guidance the liberal writers of England and America were introduced to the students of Hindu College, the Young Bengal group. He encouraged his students to judge the customs, practices, and the rules of Hindu society according to the dictates of logic and reason alone. As a result, the members of Young Bengal condemned Hindu dietary laws, the authority of gurus and priests, caste divisions, the status of women in society, idol worship, and other traditional Hindu practices. Above everything, Derozio encouraged his students to think for themselves.

It should be mentioned that Calcutta was witness to two important schools of thought – one was the progressive group and other was the group that advocated conservatism in terms of society and culture. Many of the rich and influential people of Calcutta, like Radhakanta Deb, Iswar Chandra Gupta, Rajkamal Sen, were conservatives. They were opposed to reforms regarding sati and were against women's education. The progressive group advocated new social ideals meant for the upliftment of society and amelioration of social ills. Mention may be made of Krishna Mohan Banerjee, Radhanath Sikdar, and Dakshina Ranjan Mukhopadhyay, among others.

Derozio established the Academic Association where he and his students met for regular discussions and debates. A clerk of the Hindu college, Hurro Mohun Chatterji wrote about this great influence that the young teacher had over his students.

> '. . . the students of the first, second and third classes had the advantage of attending a Conversazione established in the schools by Mr. Derozio where readings in poetry, literature and modern philosophy were carried on. The meetings were held almost daily after or before school hours. Though they were without the knowledge or sanction of the authorities, yet Mr. Derozio's disinterested zeal and devotion in bringing up the students in these subjects was unbounded, and characterized by a love and philanthropy which, up to this day, has not been equaled by any teacher either in or out of the service. The students in their turn loved him most tenderly; and were ever ready to be guided by his counsels and imitated him in all their daily actions in life. In fact, Mr. Derozio acquired such an ascendancy over the minds of his pupils that they would not move even in their private concerns without his counsel and advice. On the other hand, he fostered their taste in literature, taught the evil effects of idolatry and superstition; and so far formed their moral conceptions and feelings as to make them completely above the antiquated ideas and aspirations of the age. Such was the force of his instructions that the conduct of the students out of the college was most exemplary, and gained them the applause of the outside world, not only in a literary and scientific point of view, but what was of still greater importance, they were all considered men of '*truth*'. Indeed, the

> 'College boy' was a synonym for truth, and it was a general belief and saying among our countrymen, with those that remember the time must acknowledge, that 'such a boy is incapable of falsehood because he is a College boy'.[4]

Chatterjee's account gives a good idea of the organization and its activities. The meetings of the Academic Association were held at various places in Calcutta and later mostly in a house at Manicktolla. The prominent members of Young Bengal were Tarachand Chakrabarti, Chandrasekhar Deb, Ramgopal Ghosh, Rasik Krishna Mallik, Ramtanu Lahiri, Krishna Mohan Banerjee, Harimohan Sen, Hur Chandra Ghosh, Dakshina Ranjan Mukherjee, Nilmony Basak, Peary Chand Mitra and Sibchandra Deb. All of them were present in these meetings. On some occasions David Hare, Bentinck's private secretary Colonel Beatson, the principal of Bishop's College, Dr. Mills and other eminent people of the day attended these meetings. Hurro Mohun Chatterji wrote:

> 'The principles and practices of the Hindu religion were openly ridiculed and condemned, and angry disputes were held on moral subjects; the sentiments of Hume had been widely diffused and warmly patronized . . . The most glowing harangues were made at the debating clubs, then very numerous. The Hindu religion was denounced as vile and corrupt and unworthy of the regard of rational beings. The degraded state of the Hindus formed the topic of many debates, their ignorance and superstition were declared to be the causes of such a state, and it was then resolved that nothing but a liberal education could enfranchise the minds of the people. The degradation of the female mind was viewed with indignation; the question at a very large meeting was carried unanimously, that Hindu women should be taught, and we are assured of the fact that the wife of one of the leaders of this new movement was a most accomplished lady, who reckoned amongst the subjects with which she was acquainted, Moral Philosophy and Mathematics.'[5]

Reverend Krishna Mohan Banerjee's drama *The Persecuted* gives a good idea of the social and cultural fabric of nineteenth century Calcutta. Banerjee was a student of Derozio and had later converted to Christianity.

Derozio encouraged debate and discussion on political issues and along with his pupils brought out a number of journals where they not only attacked Hindu orthodoxy but also questioned the legitimacy of British colonization of India.

> '... colonization would not be beneficial, unless the British Legislature interferes, and materially alters the present system of Indian policy, by admitting natives and Indo-Britons to a participation of privileges, on a similar footing, as far as practicable and expedient, with the Europeans. It is only such a measure that discontent can be prevented from brooding into rebellion, and the arts and sciences, when established can produce benefits both to the governors and governed...'[6]

The members of the Young Bengal group were also referred to as the Derozians, after their teacher. They signified the emergence of a new class of Bengalis– Western in outlook and temperament.

The members of the Young Bengal decided upon publishing a paper called the *Parthenon*, through which they hoped they could carry out their struggle against the conservative class in Calcutta. However, due to a stiff opposition from this class, nothing much came about this project and the *Parthenon* soon went out of existence. The same was the fate of a second journal called *Hesperus*. However, they were lucky the third time and their third attempt called *Kaleidoscope* had a longer period of circulation than the first two.

Many in Bengal, particularly the conservatives, were apprehensive of the teachings of Derozio and the activities of the academic association. Their fears were false since what Derozio taught his students was an enlightened view of society and a logical approach to life. He also taught them the ideals of nationalism by making them aware of Western thought and ideas. He advocated the use of reason since only that could bring about a change in society. Opposition to this group intensified in Calcutta with the conservatives establishing an association called the *Dharma Sabha* as a counter force to the influence of the Derozians.

The Academic Association left an indelible mark on Calcutta's social and literary life. Many such associations sprang up in

Calcutta. A description in the *India Gazette* is interesting and important:

> The spirit of union spreads itself; and in the course of a short time a great number of literary societies have been formed in Calcutta consisting principally of the former and present leading students of the Hindu College, the society's English Schools, and the seminary generally known by the name of Ram Mohan Roy's school. It has been ascertained upon enquiry that seven associations of this kind are now in existence, the proceedings of which are conducted exclusively in the English language. ... At some of the societies written essays are produced, which become the subject of discussion; at one of them lectures on intellectual topics are delivered in rotation by the members and at another by the President, an East Indian gentleman of great abilities, whose name has been for some time familiar to the public ear as the author of some interesting poems. Justice to the merits of this individual requires it to be said, that not content with a conscientious discharge of his duties as a teacher of the charge, he devotes his care and talents during a very considerable part of his time out of school, to the improvement not only of those immediately placed under his tuition, but of all such native youngmen as come within his reach. He is connected with one society only as president, but with most of the others as a member. In short, he lends a very able and active hand in raising the intellectual character of the native youth, many of the youngmen who have enjoyed the advantage of his instructions have distinguished themselves by their proficiency . . . The example thus set in English has been imitated in Bengalee literature, and two or three associations have been formed principally of persons not connected with schools above mentioned, for writing upon and verbally discussing various subjects exclusively in the Bengalee language.[7]

Derozio, as is evident, from this record, took his task as a teacher very seriously. Not restricting himself to just the curriculum, he took up himself the task of the complete well being of his students. His students, in turn, revered and respected their teacher a great deal. What is interesting is Derozio's age at this point of time when his influence was so great, he was still in his late teens and early twenties – he died when he was twenty three.

Many of Derozio's teachers and friends were poets, like D. L. Richardson, who published many volumes of prose and poetry and was the editor of the *Bengal Annual*, Henry Meredith Parker, who lampooned Derozio's poem in his poem 'Young India', published his *The Draught of Immortality* in 1827, the year Derozio's *Poems* was published, Horace Hayman Wilson, the eminent scholar, who was known for his translations from Sanskrit, and who were all very close to him. It is therefore evident that Derozio belonged to a literary and intellectual circle which influenced his literary art and thought.

After his stint at Hindu College, Derozio devoted most of his time to journalism. With the support of his mother, sister, Amelia and his younger brother, he managed and edited the *East Indian*, a newspaper that championed the cause of the Eurasian community. The precursor of the *East Indian* was *Hesperus* which he had launched when he was still at Hindu College. His prose works were published in the *India Gazette*, *Calcutta Literary Gazette*, *Indian Magazine*, *Calcutta Magazine*, the *Bengal Journal*, the *Enquirer*, apart from the two, mentioned earlier.

In the *India Gazette* of July 17, 1826, he writes on the beginnings of literature in India. Another entry speaks on the state of education in India, a subject that was close to his heart, having been a teacher for quite some time and having had a considerable impact on his students in such a short span of time. In that essay he says that the state of education in India is poor and that steps need to be taken to bring about a change.

> The man who has the welfare of his countrymen at his heart will endeavour to raise funds for their improvement, establish institutions for the same purpose, but not till these are effaced, will he risk the welfare of his child by educating him in his native country, while the advantages to be derived from foreign education are so very superior? I was born in India and have been bred here, I am proud to acknowledge my country, and to do my best in her service, but even love of country shall not hinder me from expressing what I believe to be right.[8]

What he says here can be correlated to his patriotic temper that characterizes some of his sonnets.

Derozio also worked as the Assistant Editor of the *India Gazette* and was the editor of *Calcutta Literary Gazette*. The last lines that he wrote before his death appear in the *East Indian* of 17 December, 1831 and reveal his concern for education in India.

> At the Dhurrumtolla Academy it is quite delightful to witness the exertions of Hindu and Christian youths, striving together for academic honours; this will do much towards softening asperities, which always arise in hostel sects, and when the Hindu and Christian have learned from mutual intercourse how much there is to be admired in the human character, without reference to differences of opinion in religious matters, shall we be brought nearer than we are now to that happy condition . . . [9]

He fervently hopes that no segregation is made between the Hindus and Christians and that both Hindus and Christians will be able to partake in education and will strive for the betterment of the country.

In an article written in the *East Indian*, December 1831, he enjoined his fellow Eurasians to think of themselves as an integral part of India. He expressed his belief that only a process of assimilation could lead to the upliftment and betterment of the entire nation.

In December 1831, Derozio contracted cholera and during his sickness he was tended by his loyal band of students, Krishna Mohan Banerjee, Ramgopal Ghose, Mohes Chunder Ghose, among others. He died on the 26th of December, 1831. The *Government Gazette* ran a tribute to him on 29 December, 1831.

> . . . Destined to terminate his short career when others are but commencing theirs, he nevertheless lived long enough to acquire a reputation that is not likely to perish; and that is honourably associated with literature, and the moral, social and political improvement of his countrymen. . . . [10]

On 30 December 1831, there appeared an advertisement in the *India Gazette* which had been inserted by Derozio's sister, Amelia.

> Encouraged by my friends and most of the East Indian community to publish the memoir of my late brother, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, I bring myself before the public and solicit their patronage to the above work.[11]

This proposed memoir was never written as the family fell into bad times. His friend and mentor, John Grant wrote a memoir in the *Calcutta Literary Gazette* in 1833 where he wrote about his first meeting with the young poet. A few other reports and tributes appeared in contemporary newspapers.

Derozio's biographer, Thomas Edwards, gives a description of the young poet in his biography:

> In stature Derozio was rather below the middle height, always neatly, if somewhat foppishly, dressed. His colour was nearly, as dark as that of the darkest native. A frank, pleasing smile was the usual expression of face round and chubby as a boy's, out of which shone the great brown, glowing eyes that usually indicate the possession of acute feelings and vivid imagination.[12]

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[1] *Henry Derozio.* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2002), p. 5.

[2] Ibid. pp. 17-18.

[3] Ibid., p. 50

[4] Ibid, pp. 51-52.

[5] Ibid. pp. 52-53.

[6] 'On the Colonization of Indians by Europe' published in September 1829 in *The Kaleidoscope*, a journal edited by Derozio. The article is unsigned, hence the conjecture that it was written by the editor. In *Bengal: Early Nineteenth Century* (Selected Documents) ed. Gautam Chattopadhyay, (Calcutta: Research India Publications), 1978.

[7] Quoted in 'Hindu College: Derozio: Adhunikata' by Sureshchandra Maitra, in *Derozio* ed. Rama Prasad De, (Calcutta:Sasadhar Prakashani, 1983), pp. 58-59.

[8] Song of the Stormy Petrel: Complete Works of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio. (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 2001), pp. 305-306. Henceforth referred to as Complete Works.

[9] Quoted in *Henry Derozio* by Thomas Edwards. (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2002), p. 124.

[10] Ibid., p. 134.

[11] Ibid., p. 136.

[12] Ibid., p. 141.

Derozio was the first Indian poet to use the English language and the first nationalist poet writing in English in India. In his short life span he played a major role in what is referred to as the Bengal Renaissance. Thomas Edwards, his biographer, referred to him as a Eurasian Poet. D. L. Richardson included three of Derozio's poems in his *Selections from the British Poets*. Introducing Derozio's lecture on 'The Modern British Poets' in *The Calcutta Literary Gazette*, Richardson wrote of the young poet – "Who can think of this promising young man, such an honour to his class, and doomed to so untimely an end, without mingled admiration and regret?"[1] Bradley-Birt in his Introduction to a collection of Derozio's poems regards them as "extraordinarily mature considering his years," and as "showing a remarkable command of language and beauty of expression". Derozio's poetry, he says, reveals, "unbounded enthusiasm", "wealth of imagery" and "a passionate resentment of wrong" though it lacks "originality and undoubtedly owes much to Byron and Moore"[2].

A contemporary review published in the *Oriental Herald*, July 1829, later reprinted in the Calcutta Gazette referred to the Orientalism prevalent in Derozio's use of imagery and commented that his poetry was derivative of Byron's verse.

> [Mr. Derozio's] style and manner, though borrowed in a great degree from Byron, are characterized also, by frequent resemblances to other fashionable poetry of the day, to which his reading seems to have been unfortunately almost exclusively confined. Thus we are continually reminded of Moore's 'Lalla Rookh', and Miss Saunder's 'Troubadour'[3].

Derozio's friend and mentor, John Grant, replied to this review in the Government Gazette.

> When the Reviewer blames him (Derozio) for making the Byronic

> School too much his model, we must say for our young poet that he himself, at the time of publishing his *Fakeer of Jungheera*, anticipated that an objection against exaggerated passion and sentiment would be made.[4]

He goes on to say that the initial consideration of Derozio was that his book should sell and hence, a 'fashionable model'[5] was adopted for the purpose.

R. Parthasarathy says that the earlier poets writing in English 'from Henry Derozio ... to Aurobindo Ghose ... are only of historical interest. They wrote like English poets and, as a result, failed to establish an indigenous tradition of writing in English.' While it is true that the poets belonging to the nineteenth century and writing in English definitely illustrate a historical and social phenomenon, nevertheless, they are part of a literary tradition, a tradition that allows the entire group writing at this time to be viewed together. These poets write in a language that is not their mother tongue, and what one notices in their poetry is an amalgamation of the east and the west. As G. J. V. Prasad says:

> Indian English poetry has always been the poetry of the displaced: a poetry born of the education imparted to the urban middle - and upper-classes in a largely illiterate and poor and mainly, rural country. And because of the very fact of writing in English, and of their need to stress their Indianness, Indian English poets have had to confront this displacement, have had to try and situate themselves in the cultures and traditions of the country.[7]

Derozio's poetry was written with the encouragement of an audience of friends, themselves writers, poets, scholars, educationists and journalists. His mentors were William Drummond, John Grant, D. L. Richardson and Henry Meredith Parker. His first poem was published in the India Gazette. It was during his stay at his uncle's plantation at Bhagalpore that Derozio sent his poem to Dr. John Grant of the India Gazette under the pseudonym 'Juvenis'. The poem, 'Happy Meetings', was published in the India Gazette of 15 March, 1825 –

> How keen the pang, how sad the thought,

> How oft to quiet remembrance brought,
> When friend from friend is forc'd to part
> When distance separates the heart[8].

John Grant encouraged Derozio to write poetry and later employed him as assistant editor. Derozio dedicated his first volume, *Poems*, published in 1827, to Grant.

Derozio's stay at Bhagalpore had a great impact on his life and literature. His biographer Thomas Edwards writes,

> . . . there fell on Derozio's . . . eye, and lingered in his memory, the splash of oars in the river; the greetings and gossip of women round the well: the creaking of the yoke: the patient toil of the ryots in their fields: the sounds that happy children make at play . . . the song of girls . . . the drums and music and songs and processions . . . many voiced, ever changing scene, full of life and beauty and wonder . . .[9]

It was what he saw and felt here in Bhagalpore that stirred his imagination. In his notes to *The Fakeer of Jungheera*, Derozio writes:

> Although I once lived nearly three years in the vicinity of Jungheera, I had but one opportunity of seeing that beautiful, and truly romantic spot. I had a view of the rocks from the opposite bank of the river, which was broad, and full, at the time I saw it, during the rainy season. It struck me then as a place where achievements in love and arms might take place; and the double character I had heard of the Fakeer, together with some acquaintance with the scenery, induced me to found a tale upon both these circumstances.[10]

Derozio's poetic oeuvre can be categorized thematically. Some of his poems have as their subject matter Indian themes – to this class belong poems such as *The Fakeer of Jungheera*, *The Enchantress of the Cave*, *The Ruins of Rajmahal*, *Song of an Indian Girl*, *Songs of Hindustani Minstrel*, *On the Abolition of Sattee*. There are some poems which reveal a strong European influence, for example, "Thermopylea", "Greece," "Greeks at

Marathon," "Address to the Greeks," and "Sappho". There are some that have a much more universal appeal and have as their subject humanism and freedom – "Poetry of Human Life," "Morning after a Storm," "Independence," "Freedom of the Slave". Some engage with personal emotions like love, affection, and hope – "Sister-in-law," "Here's a Health to Thee, Lassie," "Sonnets to the Pupils of Hindu College" among others. There are also some poems which do not fall into any of these categories, poems such as "A Walk by Midnight".

In 1828 was published *The Fakeer of Jungheera, A Metrical Tale and Other Poems*, a long narrative poem exploring the theme of sati in a romantic tale. The introductory verses at the beginning of the two cantos state the theme of the poem.

> Affections are not made for merchandize.-
> What will ye give n barter for the heart?
> Has this world wealth enough to buy the store
> Of hopes, and feelings, which are linked for ever
> With Woman's soul?[11]

Derozio's most sustained and ambitious poetical work, the poem is a metrical romance between a Muslim Fakeer and a Hindu girl. The Hindu Brahmin widow, Nuleeni, is carried from the funeral pyre of her husband by her former lover, the bandit chief Fakeer to his stronghold at Jungheera. They are about to embark on a happy life when the king's men kill the bandit. The poem, written in two cantos, also has a subplot. The first canto of the poem ends with Nuleeni and her lover safe in their rocky home in Jungheera. The second canto begins with a festive scene that is disrupted by the entry of Nuleeni's father. The men of Rajmahal's ruler, Shoojah raid the hideout of the Fakeer on a complaint from Nuleeni's father. The end of the poem sees Nuleeni dead in the arms of her dead lover.

> Nuleeni's settled glance is fixed upon
> That dying form, as if for him alone
> Her soft eye's lamp were lit - his brow is cold –
> And now the soul is hastening from its mould –

Her hands on his heart – does she not hear
Its faint, small beat still speaking to her ear?
Alas! deluded dreamer! 'tis thine own –
What seek'st thou now – his spirit? – it is flown![12]

The subject matter of the poem is interesting in the light of the social reforms regarding sati and widow remarriage in India in the nineteenth century. It is important to note that William Bentinck's law (1829) regarding the abolition of sati did not come into being when this poem was written. Derozio's attitude to the practice of sati is evident in the poem.

O! this is but the world's unfeeling way
To goad the victim that it will soon slay,
And like a demon 'tis its custom still
To laugh at sorrow, and then coldly kill.[13]

In his notes to the *Fakeer of Jungheera* he writes about the practice of sati.

> A mistaken opinion, somewhat general in Europe, namely, the Hindu Widow's burning herself with the corpse of her husband is an act of unparalleled magnanimity and devotion. To break those illusions which are pleasing to the mind, seems to me a task which no one is thanked for performing; nevertheless, he who does so, serves the cause of TRUTH. Sattee is a spectacle of misery, exciting in the spectator a melancholy reflection upon the tyranny of superstition and priest-craft.[14]

Derozio's views on the condition of widows reveal his compassion for their state in Hindu society. He writes:

> The most degrading and humiliating household offices must be performed by a Hindu Widow; she is not allowed more food than will suffice to keep her alive; she must sleep upon the bare earth, and suffer indignities from the youngest members of her family.[15]

He makes an appeal to social reformers for the amelioration of the status of widows.

> The philanthropic views of some individuals are directed to the abolition of widow-burning; but they should first ensure the

comfort of these unhappy women in their widowhood, – otherwise, instead of conferring a boon upon them, existence will be too many a drudge, and a load.[16]

Derozio supported the movement against sati which resulted in its abolition. He wrote a poem, "On the Abolition of Sattee", in the India Gazette (August 8, 1831) celebrating its abolition.

Hark! Heard ye not? The widow's wail is over;
No more the flames from impious pyres ascend,
.....
The widowed Hindoo's fate no longer weeps;
The priestly tyrant's cruel charm is broken,
.....
The storm is passing, and the Rainbow's span
Stretcheth from North to South: the ebon car
Of darkness rolls away: the breezes fan
The infant down, and morning's herald star
Comes trembling into day: O! can the Sun be far?[17]

The last line, of course, has obvious echoes of Shelley's 'O Wind/ If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?'[18] In 'On the Abolition of Sattee', Derozio speaks of the inhuman practice and he lauds William Bentinck's legislation against it.

Back to its cavern ebbs the tide of crime,
There fettered, locked, and powerless it sleeps,
And history bending o'er the page of time,
Where many a mournful record still she keeps,
The widowed Hindoo's fate no longer weeps[19]

The poem begins with an epigraph:

'The practice of Sattee, or of burning or burying alive the widows of Hindoos is hereby declared illegal, and punishable by the Criminal Courts. – REGULATION XVII, 1829.'[20]

Bentinck, be thine the everlasting mead!
The heart's full homage still is virtue's claim,
And 'tis good man's ever honoured deed
Which gives an immortality to fame:
Transcient and fierce, though dazzling is the flame
That glory lights upon the wastes of war:

Nations unborn shall venerate thy name,
A triumph than the conqueror's mightier far,
Thy memory shall be blessed as is the morning star.[21]

The poem eulogizes Bentinck who played an important role in abolishing the practice of widow burning. It ends on an optimistic note; the storm is over, and a soft breeze seems to herald the new era.

The Fakeer of Jungheera owes much to the British Romantic poets, in particular, Walter Scott and Byron, though Derozio uses Indian mythology, imagery, theme and sentiment. The first canto of the poem ends with the prospect of a happy union between the two lovers while the second ends tragically.

Each cloud or melts, or swiftly flies
Like strangest dreams from sleepers' eyes;
And lo! The sun now beams above
Nuleeni and her Robber-love.[22]

The figure of the widow recurs in some of Derozio's other poems as well. "The Maniac Widow" portrays a picture of a widow who dies after a long wait for her lover. Derozio paints a sad portrait of a despairing widow who is not very sure of what she should do. There is some hesitation on her part as she is standing on the brink of the cliff ready to throw herself into the sea far below. She pauses for a while, looks all around and then realizing that waiting further would be futile plunges in with a cry – "I come! I come!"[23] It is almost as if only in seeking death could she find an end to all her woes. The condition of widows in the nineteenth century was miserable and Derozio's descriptions of the state of the forlorn widow reveal his awareness of and sympathy for their state. Many of these widows were child brides.

The figure of the widow recurs in 'The Orphan Girl' where the girl is orphaned after her father dies in war and her 'anguish'd mother's suffering heart' unable to 'endure a widow's part'[24] dies. In 'The Ruins of Rajmahal', he describes the desolation and decay, the ruins and compares it to the life of a widow.

And there ye stand in mournful mood,
Like woman in her widowhood. [25]

He compares the moon to a widow in the poem 'Night'

. . . and the Moon,
Pallid, and weary, wandering slowly on,
Comes, like a widow, sorrowing for her lord.[26]

In the notes that Derozio appends to *The Fakeer of Jungheera*, he writes that he read about the description of the sati.

> The following account of all that the Suttee does when about to immolate herself with the corpse of her husband, is taken from the Bengal Chronicle, and is in general very correct, except that the author does not specify, as in the text, the number of circuits she makes round the pile. Nor does she light the pile herself, as it appears in the poem; this is done by the nearest of kin; but I have a license with the fact which thus assumes a more romantic character.[27]

In the poem, Derozio describes Nuleeni as circling the pyre seven times. Before doing this she prepares herself for the final parting.

Before the pile she bends her brow,
With all affections she must part,
And those that cling to earth must now
At once be severed from her heart –
And from her head the wreath she takes,
Seven circuits round the pile she makes.
And now with a baleful brand on fire
She slowly mounts the dreadful pyre! [28]

The Hindu belief that a widow self immolating herself on her dead husband's funeral pyre would attain everlasting happiness is referred to by the Chorus of Women in the poem.

Such is the boon that to her shall be given;
Myriads of ages for her are in store;
She shall enjoy all the blessings of heaven,
Till heaven, and its blessings themselves are no more [29]

The poem also has a sub plot about the Legend of Shushan, that

of the legend of King Vikramaditya and the supernatural spirit Betaal, and is set in a cremation ground (shushan). The sub plot relates how a dead beloved is brought back to life through penance and contributes to the theme of love that is central to the poem.

> He sat on a stone, all mute and lone,
> By the corpse of his Radhika fair,
> When the lightning flashed, and the wind made moan,
> And a beautiful spirit stood there![30]

The beauty of the poem lies in Derozio's portrayal of sati and his humanistic faith, in its melody and imagery.

> Even death had failed to conquer – her lips seemed
> Still parted by sweet breath, as if she dreamed
> Of him in her embrace: but they who thought
> That life was tenanting her breast, and sought
> Some answer from her heat to hush the doubt,
> Found that its eloquence had all burned out.[31]

The poem reveals an enthusiasm for Orientalist themes. This is in keeping with the general interest in Orientalist themes and subjects witnessed during that time. Derozio's treatment in his work reveals the influence of Western sources, the poetry of Thomas Campbell, Lord Byron and Thomas Moore as well as Orientalist texts and the translations of William Jones and H.H. Wilson. This is seen vividly in the subplot of *The Fakeer of Jungheera* – the Legend of Shushan. In his note to this section of the poem, Derozio writes,

> A student of that excellent institution, the Hindu College, once brought me a translation of the Betal Puncheesa, and the following fragment of the tale having struck me for its wildness, I thought of writing a ballad, the subject of which should be strictly India. The Shushan is a place to which the dead are conveyed, to be burnt. In conformity with the practice of eastern story tellers, who frequently repeat the burden or moral of the story, have I introduced the "O Love is strong". &c. wherever an opportunity offered . . .[32]

The stories of King Vikramaditya were one of the earliest translations from Sanskrit to Bengali at the College at Fort William

and were translated by Mritunjay Vidyalankar in 1802. The opening of the Legend of Shushan reads:

> O! Love is strong, and its hopes will build
> Where nothing beside would dare;
> O! Love is bright, and its beams will gild
> The desert dark, and bare. [33]

The theme of romantic love is once again reiterated in the subplot as these lines make clear. One of the best verses in the poem is that dealing with the parting of Nuleeni and her lover.

> How beautiful is moonlight on the stream!
> How bright on life is Hope's enchanting beam:
> Life moves inconstant like the rippling rill,
> Hope's and the moon's rays quiver o'er them still! [34]

Derozio uses the Indian legend while the form that he chooses is that of the English ballad. This was characteristic of Orientalist writing being done in India at that point of time and is in tune with the general interest in Orientalist themes, thought and subject matter. A nationalistic note, so very prominent in Derozio's sonnets, is seen in this poem too. In Canto two, a song introduces this nationalistic temper. The first lines of the first three verses bring in the reference to the native land. 'O! lovely is my native land', 'My native land hath heavenliest bowers', 'My native home, my native home'[35] – of course, here the native land is so very important since it is where Nuleeni's lover is.

> O! lovely is my native land
> With all its skies of cloudless light;
> But there's a heart, and there's a hand
> More dear to me than sky most bright.[36]

M. K. Naik in *A History of Indian English Literature*, describes *The Fakeer of Jungheera* as a fast moving tale. Derozio varies the meter of the narrative to suit the tone and temper – 'the iambic four-foot couplet for straight-forward narration', a 'slower line' for the descriptive passages, 'anapaestic metre for the spirited account of battle' and the choruses of the priests and the women at Nuleeni's pyre are in 'trochaic and dactylic measures'.[37] S. K.

Chakrabarti says that the beauty of the poem 'lies in the melody of the songs especially when Derozio alternates tetrameter with trimeter lines, and also in his deft use of imagery and descriptive art'.[38]

There is a 'Hymn' in the poem addressed to the sun god and this address to the sun is related to the rites associated with the practice of sati as presented in the poem. Derozio appends an explanatory note to the 'Hymn' in which he writes that the Vedas contain the quintessence of wisdom. The idea of the sun god is derived from the Vedic pantheon and in the note Derozio refers to the practice of invoking the sun before any ceremony. It is interesting to note that no complete English translation of the Vedas were available at the time of Derozio's composition of the poem. William Jones had used a few lines from the *Rig Veda* in his hymns to some of the Hindu deities. H.H. Wilson's translation of the *Rig Veda* was published in the middle of the nineteenth century, Derozio's student, Krishna Mohan Banerjee, became a Vedic scholar and might have helped his teacher.

The atmosphere of *The Fakeer of Jungheera* was medieval, and was replete with religious rites, incidents of romance, chivalry and warfare and a tragic end. The use of Vedic hymns added to the medieval feel of the poem while the note of patriotism, humanism and the idea of religious tolerance indicate a modern consciousness at work. The ballad form of the poem might have been influenced by Sir Walter Scott.

Love is an important theme in his poems and recurs in long narrative poems like *The Fakeer of Jungheera* and shorter poems and sonnets too. The suddenness of romantic love is seen in 'Love's First Feelings', a poem which describes the first meeting between lovers. The 'Song of the Hindustanee Minstrel' is also an invocation of love. The feelings invoked by love together with a strain of melancholy are brought out through the song of the minstrel. Love is described as a ray of brightness that brings hope in even the most despairing of hearts.

One of the strongest influences on Derozio's poetry is the poetry of Byron and Thomas Moore. Byron's preoccupation with political events in Greece is echoed in Derozio's 'The Greeks at Marathon' and in his smaller poems like 'Sappho', 'Tasso', while 'Italy' reveals his fascination with Italy. It is interesting to note that Derozio taught Greek history and Homer's epics at Hindu college. He also wrote an essay on the legacy of the Greeks: 'The Greeks and what we have received from them'. 'The Greeks at Marathon' begins with a long epigraph from Byron.

> The Mountains look at marathon –
> And Marathon looks on the sea;
> And musing there an hour alone,
> I dreamed that Greece
> might still be free;
> For standing on the Persian's grave,
> I could not deem myself a slave.[39]

Derozio's poem celebrates the bravery in battle of the Greeks against the Turks and their subsequent victory.

> Think of victory, think of fame,
> Freedom, fortune, nation, name![40]

'The Greeks at Marathon', 'Address to the Greeks', 'Thermopylae', 'Greece and Phyle', reveal Derozio's admiration for the Greeks, their patriotism and sense of pride in their heritage. In the poem Greece he speaks of the Greek heroes who fought valiantly for freedom.

> Chains! – O! the very thought was death,
> A thought they could not bear;
> Their lofty spirits were as free
> As their own mountain air![41]

'Thermophylae' also refers to Greek heroes who died fighting for their country, heroes who scorned slavery and fought for freedom.

> Fighting, falling, unsubdued,
> Unconquered still.
> They scorned to breathe the breath of slaves,
> They fought for free and hallowed graves![42]

In 'Address to the Greeks', Derozio moans the state of the Greeks but hopes that the awakening of the patriotic spirit will see the emancipation of the Greeks. The poet exhorts the Greeks to fight against the Turks,

> O Greece! Is the day of thy glory gone by?
> When "Freedom" the watchword was – "Death" the reply –
> When said the high matron, "Yon field must be won;
> Return with thy shield, or upon it, my son". [43]

He is sure that once the Greek spirit is reawakened, they are sure to be victorious in their endeavours against their enemies.

> Sparta's heroes never turned,
> E'en submission's name they spurned;
> Bold they answered, deaf t' alarms,
> "Let them come, and take our arms!"
> This is Freedom' shall owed earth[44]

For Derozio, Greece is a symbol of liberty. The ancient battle of Thermopylae and Marathon are examples of Greek valour and might.

Poems like 'Sonnet: To the Moon', 'The Golden Vase' reveal a strong influence of British Romantic poetry. 'A Walk by Moonlight' resonates with the Wordsworthian wonder at the mysteries of the world. In the poem the speaker describes the stages of awakening of the senses as he takes a casual walk with his friends. This walking experience enriches him as his deeper senses are stirred and it turns into something more than just an appreciation of a moon light walk.

> ...there was something in the night
> That with its magic wound us;
> For we – oh! We not only saw,
> But felt the moonlight round us.[45]

The poem is also reminiscent of Coleridge's 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison' where the poet, unable to join his friends on a walk due to a foot injury, tries to imagine their path and as he does so he arrives at a better understanding of nature and the world

around.

> The inward eye is open then
> To glories, which in dreams
> Visit the sleeper's couch, in robes
> Woven of the rainbow's beams.[46]

The 'Enchantress of the Cave' is about an anticipated battle between invading Muslims and the defending Hindus and is interesting for its use of a rich range of sources from Orientalist scholarship and Western poetry about the Orient. It is a narrative poem about Nazim, who before the decisive battle to be fought between the Muslims and Hindus for the mastery of India, seeks the enchantress to find out if all is well with his wife, Jumeeli, whom he has left behind. He later discovers that the enchantress is his wife who had followed him to battle in a man's disguise and is now disguised as the enchantress. He describes the enchantress:

> And who is the hag so wan and grim
> That sits there, all regardless of him?
> Her yellow skin is shriveled and shrunk,
> Her locks are grey, and her eyes are sunk;
> And time has set on her brow, it appears,
> Perchance the seal of a hundred years.[47]

The poem begins with the poet's assertion that he will continue to write poems glorifying his country.

> Though my neglected lyre I wake once more,
> And touch with untaught hand its strings again,
> And though but poor in "legendary lore"
> I strive to sing in legendary strain....[48]

The hero of the tale, Nazim, questions the Witch about the welfare of his wife and his relatives and the witch makes a long speech full of references to Middle Eastern legends – to the seal of Soliman, a stone, and Sukhrat. Finally the witch tells Nazim that his wife is pure and reveals herself as his wife. Both then leave for the battlefield.

> She hath loved thee, loves thee still,

Come what may, or good or ill;
She will love thee well, till death
Seal her fondness and her faith.[49]

The poem begins with two epigraphs, one from 'The Giaour, an Oriental romance by Lord Byron' ('Love will find its way/ through paths where wolves would fear to prey')[50] and the other from 'Lalla Rookh', an Eastern romance by Thomas Moore ('Go where we will, this hand in thine,/ Those eyes before me smiling thus,/ through good or ill, in storm or shine,/ The world's a world of love for us').[51] This suggests that Derozio was well acquainted with Romantic Oriental tales so popular in the nineteenth century. Both these epigraphs tell of the longing of lovers for a union. Derozio's poem is about the devotion of the wife for her husband. The 'Enchantress of the Cave' is written in iambic tetrameter. The poem has references to Muslims and Muslim history and is an indication of the Western interest in Muslim culture. The poem, however, privileges the Hindu over the Muslim. The plot of 'Enchantress of the Cave' is romantic and the poem is in the form of a dialogue between the main characters.

Rosinka Chaudhuri in her work on nineteenth century poetry in Bengal, *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial India*, says that it was from Campbell's *Pleasures of Hope* that Derozio derived the idiom of 'The Enchantress of the Cave'. Campbell, in turn, was influenced by contemporary Orientalist texts.[52] Chaudhuri quotes from Campbell's poem to show the influences it has had on Derozio's poem.

Ye orient realms, where Ganges' water run!
Prolific fields! dominions of the sun!
How long your tribes have trembled and obeyed!
How long was Timour's iron scepter swayed![53]

Derozio's poems do not refer to the British exploitation of India, rather he uses the analogy of the Hindu-Muslim conflict to speak of liberty. In the 'The Golden Vase', Derozio refers to the Muslim conquest of India,

The Moslem is come down to spoil the land

Which every god hath blest. For such a soil,
So rich, so clad with beauty, who would not
Unlock his veins, and pour their treasure forth?
The Hindoo hath marched forward to repel
The lawless plunderer of his holy shrines,
The savage, rude disturber of his peace.[54]

The poem is about a maiden pining for her lover who is away at war.

How do men leave beloved hearts, to pine
In wretchedness unutterably sad,
With no companions in their solitude
But thoughts as dark and dismal as despair?[55]

Derozio brings in the idea of a country suffering under foreign yoke. He depicts the state of his country in despair, of the melancholy cry that he hears, of the spirits longing to be free, of hope of freedom some day. The colonizers treat 'our country' who is in 'galling chains' like a 'dog', Derozio says. He is so troubled by the state of his country that he wishes that her 'wild cry' of despair be heard all over the place so that all the countrymen would rush to her relief.

Like sons, at an unhappy parent's wail!
And when we know the flash of patriot swords
Is unto spirits longing to be free,
Like Hope's returning light; we should not pause
Till every tyrant who on us hath trod
Lies humbled at our feet, or till we find
Graves, which may truly say thus much for us –
Here sleep the brave who loved their country well![56]

Derozio gives a graphic description of the horror of war that is noteworthy for its attention to detail and its power.

The hamlet desolate, the wall o'erthrown,
The city sacked, the hostile town besieged;
The hoarse breath of the trumpet; the war cry
Of armies rushing to the charge; the neigh
Of steeds caparisoned with gold and purple;
The moan of soldiers dying gasp by gasp;
The howl of midnight hungry wolves, which feast

> Upon the uncharnel'd dead; and the shrill scream
> Of ravenous vultures warring o'er their prey.[57]

There is a staccato rhythm is these lines that create a tone of harshness quite in keeping with the harshness associated with war. 'The Golden Vase' is written in blank verse.

'A Dramatic Sketch' is also a verse dialogue like the 'The Enchantress of the Cave'. The poem is set in the Himalayas and is a dialogue between a saint and his disciple. The saint preaches the concept of Brahma and bliss to be achieved after death while the disciple expresses an eagerness to lead a worldly life. What is interesting is the fact that the disciple is a Roman, while the guru is a Vedanta scholar.

Many of Derozio's poems had epigraphs from Byron, Moore and other poets too. These epigraphs reveal a close reading and influence of the British Romantic poets. Rosinka Chaudhuri presents a very interesting argument.

> 'The impact of the English canon as well as of Orientalist studies upon nineteenth-century English poetry by Indians can often be determined from endnotes, footnotes, or subheadings to the titles. The admiration these Indian poets bore for Southey or Moore, Byron or Wordsworth, is self-evident from phrases, images, and even complete lines taken from these British poets and transposed into their work. As often as there were allusions to English poetry, there were also, when these poems referred to the use of a particular Hindu image or Indian metaphor, allusions to the Orientalist scholars of Calcutta.'[58]

Governor General Warren Hastings supported Orientalism personally and through governmental policy. The Orientalist policy was necessitated by the need to get the British administrators and civil servants to understand the culture and way of life of the Indians. He founded the Calcutta Madrassa as a school for Muslim officials of the East India Company. The language of instruction at the school was Persian, the court language of the Bengal government and the Mughal Empire. By the 1770s, it became necessary to reproduce government documents in Bengali, which was achieved after Robert B. Wray succeeded in casting Bengali

type in 1778. The Asiatic Society was set up with this end. Orientalist scholars like William Jones, Henry T. Colebrooke, Nathaniel Halhed and Charles Wilkins made available native literature and culture. In 1788, Nathaniel Halhed published a Grammar of the Bengali Language. Charles Wilkins established the first vernacular printing press in India in 1778.

Lord Wellesley (1798-1805) created Fort William College, the 'Oxford of the East' to train civil servants. Scholars at the college translated ancient texts, wrote grammar books, compiled dictionaries and collected a library of manuscripts. With the expansion of British territory, the regional languages became increasingly important. The shift of emphasis from Sanskrit and Persian to Bengali was followed by an increasing demand for the use of English as the language of administration and education. This interest in the Orient and Orientalism is noticed in the innumerable translations and histories being written by the British at this point of time. The most important figure is, of course, William Jones. It was from Jones that Romantic poets got the names of Indian flowers, etc and used them in their poems.

Almost all nineteenth century poets were familiar with William Jones and his translations. It was Jones who actually began the tradition of verse tales based on Oriental stories which later on Byron and Moore and other Romantic poets followed. Derozio's *The Fakeer of Jungheera*, too belongs to this tradition and may have been modelled on Jones's *The Enchanted Fruit; or The Hindu Wife: An Antediluvian Tale*. Kashiprasad Ghose's *The Shair* (1830) and Michael Madhusudhan Dutt's *The Captive Ladie* (1849) also followed this tradition.

Derozio reveals an awareness of his knowledge of the Vedas in his notes to *The Fakeer of Jungheera*,

> The Vedas, which are supposed to contain the essence of wisdom, declare in various places, wherever the language of praise is employed, that the object of such praise is the Deity or Brihm. Thus fire is Brihm, the sun is Brihm, water is Brihm; and a

number of other substances are deified in like manner.'[59]

Here he spells Brahma as Brihm, in 'The Enchantress of the Cave' he spells it differently, as Bramah. Derozio also appends elaborate notes to 'The Enchantress of the Cave' about places, people and things mentioned in it. The notes reveal the nature and extent of his reading and are similar to those seen in Orientalist verse so very popular at the time.

(A) *Oh! Chuhulmenar is far from me.*

Chuhulmenar is the modern name of Istakhar. It signifies "forty pillars", so called (as Mrs. Ramsbottom would say) because forty pillars were built in it by Soliman Ben Daoud. It was known to the Greeks by the name of Persepolis, so famous in the history of "Macedonia's Madman." Here, it is said, are deposited the treasures of the seventy pre-adamite Sultans, (about whom Mussalmans only pretend to know anything,) and the diadem of Gian Ben Gian, the chief of the Genii, to whom the building of the pyramids of Egypt, as well as the temple of Soliman, has been ascribed. Gian Ben Gian is said to have reigned two thousand years over Peris.[60]

Rosinka Chaudhuri notes that Derozio's use of footnotes reveal the influence of William Jones and the British Romantic poets, many of whom wrote poems based on Oriental stories and themes and often provided notes to substantiate their work. She gives the examples of Campbell's *Pleasures of Hope*, Southey's *Curse of Kehama* (1810) and Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (1817).[61]

Derozio also wrote poems which are autobiographical, poems on his relatives and those on his unrequited love. These poems have an air of nostalgia and melancholy about them. In a poem, 'Night' written in 1827, he reminiscences about his dear ones.

This to the soul of feeling sadness brings,
And painful thoughts of those who once were dear,
But who, now far from bleak misfortune's sphere,
Fly on from world to world with golden wings
This wakes in many an eye a hopeless tear,

'Tis vainly shed, for the fond heart still clings
(Though sorrow all it's best enjoyments sear)
Unto the memory of vanished things! –
The moon is gone; and thus go those we love.[62]

The poem records his memory of his mother who died when he was just six and his sister Sophia who died in 1827 when she was just seventeen. Memory of his mother is evident in a poem called 'To the Dog Star', written in April 1827.

...Thy lovely light,
Eternal Sirius, calls one dear to mind;
For Oh! Her form was beautiful and bright,
And like thy ray, her soul was most refined,
And made for tenderness, and purest love;–
Then smile on her, bright star, smile sweetly from above.[63]

'To My Brother in Scotland' is addressed to Claudius, the only son of the Derozios who went abroad to study.

O'er the blue, boundless, watery waste
To that far land where now thou art,
Be many a blessing borne to thee!
By guardian seraphs of the heart! [64]

In the poem he also speaks of the fears of an uncertain future that may be awaiting his brother.

Th' uncertain future wakes the fear
I feel, but must not, dare not tell – [65]

At the request of his sister, Amelia, with whom he was very close and who wanted him to marry, he wrote a fanciful poem titled 'Sister-in-law'.

A sister-in-law, my dear sister,
A sister-in-law for thee?
I'll bring thee a star from where angels are
Thy sister-in-law to be.

In 'Song' Derozio laments about unrequited love. He also speaks of his lady love in 'Elegaic Stanzas' written for the India Gazette,

Her eyes were bright –
As stars of night,
And shone as softly too –

They said was rest –
'Twas language fair and true.[67]

In 'Love Me and Leave Me Not' written, like the earlier poem, during his stay at Bhagalpore, he writes –

Love thee and leave thee! - Lady first
Shall all that's keen of misery cleave me –
No – tho' this breaking heart should burst,
It still will love and never leave thee.
Tho' fate thy form from me should part,
Tho destiny our fortunes sever –
Still, Lady, this devoted heart
Will throb – and true to the for ever. [68]

Here too he speaks of love, something he celebrates in his longer narrative poems. This poem is written under the pseudonym 'Juvenis' and hence is one of his early poems written during his stay at Bhagalpore.

There are a few other poems which belong to this period and are similar in subject matter. They are 'Elegaic Stanzas', 'Lines at the Request of a Young Lady', 'Good Night', 'Here's a Health to Thee, Lassie!' and 'My Dream'. 'Lines at the Request of a Young Lady' is written under his pseudonym and was sent to the India Gazette.

Like roses blooming o'er the grave a fair and fragrant wreath,
That hides, with all its loveliness the wreck of life beneath;
E'en so, the smile, the flash of joy that on my cheek appears,
Although 'tis seen, no longer now my blighted bosom cheers.[69]

The poems belonging to this period have a similarity in subject matter and are characterized by effusiveness. 'Good Night' speaks of the poet's separation from his lady love. The cause of this separation is not known but it has made things melancholic for the speaker.

Good Night to thee, lady! good night -
One smile from that lip ruby red
Would have made my dark fortune most bright,
And revived my heart's blossoms long dead.[70]

He describes her beauty and the charm that she had for him,

> Though a word I received from thee never;
> Yet a magic lurks in thy soft eye's light
> Whose spell I'll remember for ever.[71]

He is held captive by the glow in her eyes. It is almost as if the lady has cast a spell on him.

> Afraid that our peace they might ruin;
> Thine eyes on the ground shed their light;
> Despite of their care, 'twas the young heart's undoing;
> Yet – good night to thee! Good night.[72]

Writing under the pseudonym 'Juvenis', Derozio published two poems 'Woman's Smile' and 'Woman's Tear'. The latter poem written in 1825 during his stay at Bhagalpore speaks of the way a woman's beauty brings about a great feeling in him, of how it is able to transform him. The poem expresses the young poet's feelings of love and is juvenile in character. There is an emotional effusiveness in the poem that is reinforced by the use of couplets.

> The tear that starts from woman's eye
> With stars celestial fair may vie: -
> Hail! Sacred drop of pity's stream,
> Grief's commencement, joy's extreme,
> Preface of each tragic tale,
> Liquid balmy treasure, hail! –
> To let the tear unconscious flow,
> To thank the hand that gave the blow,
> This is sweet – a lovely sweet –
> Sweeter sweet ye seldom meet.[73]

Of course, there are times when the idioms of his poems seem derivative. 'Woman's Smile' praises a woman's smile and says that a woman's smile is one of the best gifts that heaven has endowed women with. The poet believes that it has the power to relieve problems and ease tensions.

> Her smile is bright as May's young moon,
> And sweet beyond expressing.
> It fills the soul with sacred fire,
> It feeds with fancy young desire,
> It tells the eye a tale of pleasure.[74]

These poems have a similarity in theme. 'Elegiac Stanzas', also written during his stay at Bhagalpore, while celebrating the woman's beauty also refers to his estrangement from her. The poem is a record of an unrequited love.

> Her smile was morning's beam –
> Alas! But now
> How cold's her brow! –
> She's of the past a dream.[75]

In 'Here's a Health to Thee, Lassie!' he recognizes that the estrangement is permanent.

> Though wild waves roll between us now,
> Though Fate severe may be, Lassie;
> Though darkness cloud, at times, my brow,
> Yet, here's a health to thee, Lassie![76]

'The Neglected Minstrel' reveals the poet's gratitude toward his friend and mentor Dr. John Grant who had nurtured Derozio's poetic talent.

> My hopes perchance are fragile flowers, but then
> Remember on what soil they grow, and more, -the friendly
> hand that rears them into strength.
> Nay-nay- I shall be blest![77]

The poem refers to the aeolian harp, a favourite image with the British Romantic poets. The image of the aeolian harp recurs notably in Coleridge's 'The Eolian Harp', 'The Nightingale', 'Fears in Solitude', and 'Dejection: An Ode'. Derozio uses it in 'The Neglected Minstrel' to refer to the qualities of the minstrel that he speaks about in the poem.

> His heart was like a soft Aeolian harp
>
> Whose sweetest chords are waked by gentlest winds.
> Let no rude hand upon the minstrel's heart
> Attempt to play; its strings are delicate,
> And frail, and they will break when harshly swept.[78]

The poem 'Canzonet' has obvious echoes of Spenser's Amoretti Sonnet LXXV. Derozio's poem begins in almost the same vein–

I wrote my name upon the sand
One happy, happy day;
The wave came rolling toward the strand,
And washed my name away.
.....
My labour was at once undone;
And then – I thought of you.[79]

'Evening in August' is once again characterized by melancholy. The speaker is sitting by the Ganges at twilight and as the last rays of the setting sun colour the waves, he thinks of the time as one of 'watchfulness and thought'.

Roll on, Ganges! – What a noble stream!
And on its bosom the last, lingering beam
Of the red, setting sun serenely lies,
Smiling, like Hope's last ray – and then it dies![80]

The poem describes vividly the setting of the sun –

The sun sets on a bank, whose yellow sand
All brightly glows; as if an angel's hand
Had scattered gold there, heedless of the worth
That gold hath gained among the sons of the earth.[81]

All the beauty and colour of the landscape leads him to recollections of the past.

It is an hour of watchfulness and thought;
It is the chosen season when are wrought
The fairest pictures ever Fancy drew.[82]

The beauty, the richness and all that is associated with it moves him so much that he is 'loath to leave this spot'.[83]

The melancholic mood is seen in 'The Ruins of Rajmahal'. The poem describes the ruins that 'sadly speak of what is gone'.[84] There is hence a sense of nostalgia for the past as well.

The weed is on the sable wall,
The broken column's scatter'd by;
And hark the owlet's dismal cry
Is driven through the lattice high[85]

The melancholy brings back memories –

To times he can never forget,

When he was yet a tranquil mind,
Whose memory's all that's left behind.[86]

He is able to find beauty in these ruins too,

There's music in the moonlit stream,
There's beauty in the lunar beam,
There's sacred stillness in each star
That shines in cloudless skies afar,
But most these very stones impart
A lesson to the human heart. [87]

The lesson that the ruins have is that each individual will be left alone – 'forlorn – neglected – desolate!'[88]

This melancholic note characterizes quite a number of his poems. The poem 'Leaves' begins with an epigraph from Shelley and speaks about the transitoriness of life. It is interesting to note this tone of melancholy in a poet who was so young at the time of composition of the poems.

Brown, and withered as ye lie,
This, ye teach us, 'tis to die;
Blooming but a summer's day,
To fall in autumn quite away.[89]

The lesson that he draws from the leaves and their behaviour is:

This is life – some smiles and tears,
Joys and sorrows, hopes and fears;
Here to-day, all fresh and fair;
Gone to-morrow – where? Oh! Where? [90]

In 'The Poet's Habitation' Derozio describes what he believes a poet's surroundings should be like.

It should be an Aegean isle,
Where heaven, and earth, and ocean smile,
More like an island of the blest.[91]

The poet's description of the habitat is idyllic, characterized by quietitude and calmness

A little boat should softly glide,
That bark of on fairs hell should be,

Like purest pearl on sapphire sea;
And never should its slender sail
Be stretched, but by a scented gale
That brought its odours from the shore
So sweet, that none should wish for more! [92]

In an essay 'On the Influence of Poetry', published in the India Gazette of January 22, 1830, Derozio mentions his ideas about the function of poetry and of the poet. 'The influence of poetry,' he says, 'in refining and purifying the springs of life is confessedly great'. Poetry, Derozio feels, is capable of 'elevating and improving man's moral and intellectual nature'.[93]

Derozio describes the morning after a storm has struck with great power and vividness.

. . . there lay
Around me many a branch of giant trees,
Scattered as leaves are by the southern breeze
Upon a brook, on an autumnal day.[94]

Of course, all the descriptions of nature lead him to draw moral lessons and when he does that the language lacks the vibrancy and power.

The river was wreck-strewn; It's gentle breast
Was like the heart of innocence, at rest;
I stood upon it's grass-grown bank, and smiled,
Cleaving the wave with pebbles like a child,
And marking, as they rose, those circles fair
Which grew, and grew, then vanished: - but Oh! There
I learned a moral lesson, which I'll store
Within my bosom's deepest, inmost core![95]

This tendency to draw moral lesson is also seen in the poem 'Leaves' quoted earlier.

The flowering of poetry in English in India began with Derozio. His poetry and ideas influenced an entire generation of poets. His poetic sensibility was essentially Romantic and the influence of

British Romantic poetry is evident in his work. His poetry is characterized by a great sense of patriotic fervour, a melancholy and wistfulness.

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[1] Quoted in *Song of the Stormy Petrel: Complete Works of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio*, eds. A. Mukhopadhyaya, A. Dutta, A Kumar and S.S. Mukhopadhyay. (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 2001), p. xvii. Henceforth referred to as *Complete Works*

[2] *Poems of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio.* (Delhi: OUP, 1923), p. lvii.

[3] *Calcutta Gazette*, 1829.

[4] Thomas Edwards, *Henry Derozio.* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co, rpt. 2002), p. 147.

[5] Ibid.

[6] 'Indo-Anglian Attitudes,' *TLS*, March 10, 1978, p. 285.

[7] *Continuities in India English Poetry: Nation Language Form.* (Delhi: Pencraft International, 1999), p. 17.

[8] *India Gazette*, 1826-27, Calcutta.

[9] Thomas Edwards. *Henry Derozio.* (New Delhi: Rupa & Co, rpt. 2002), p. 19.

[10] Complete Works, p. 161

[11] Ibid. p, 101.

[12] Ibid. p. 159.

[13] Ibid., p. 109.

[14] Ibid., p. 316.

[15] Ibid., p. 162.

[16] Ibid., pp. 162-163.

[17] Ibid., pp. 241-243.

[18] 'Ode to the West Wind', F.T Palgrave, *The Golden Treasury.* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994), p. 323.

[19] *Complete Works* , p. 242.

[20] Ibid. p. 241.

[21] Ibid. p. 242.

[22] Ibid., p. 128.

[23] Ibid., pp. 14-15.
[24] Ibid., p. 39.
[25] Ibid., p. 59.
[26] Ibid., p. 245.
[27] Ibid., p. 165.
[28] Ibid., p. 119.
[29] Ibid., p. 106.
[30] Ibid., p. 137.
[31] Ibid. p. 160.
[32] *Complete Works*, p. 168.
[33] Ibid., p. 134.
[34] Ibid., p. 143.
[35] Ibid. p. 132.
[36] Ibid.
[37] M.K.Naik, *A History of Indian English Literature*. (Sahiyta Akademi, New Delhi, 1982, rpt. 2004), p. 23.
[38] *Four Indo-Anglian Poets*, (Calcutta: Dhakeswari Library, 1987), p.52.
[39] Ibid., p. 37.
[40] Ibid., p. 38.
[41] Ibid., p. 34.
[42] Ibid., p.16.
[43] Ibid., p. 61.
[44] Ibid., p.38.
[45] Ibid., p. 212.
[46] Ibid. p. 211.
[47] Ibid., p. 248.
[48] Ibid., p. 50.
[49] Ibid., p. 45.
[50] Ibid., p. 55.
[51] Ibid., p.45.

[52] *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial India: Emergent Nationalism and the Orientalist Project.* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2002), p. 47.
[53] Campbell 'Pleasures of Hope', *Poetical Works*, p. 40, quoted in Rosinka Chaudhuri, p. 47.
[54] *Complete Works*, p. 188.
[55] Ibid., p. 188.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., pp. 187-188.
[58] Rosinka Chaudhuri, op.cit. p. 6.
[59] *Complete Works*, p. 165.
[60] Ibid., p. 90.
[61] Rosinka Chaudhuri, op.cit., p. 41.
[62] Ibid., p. 86.
[63] Ibid., p. 45.
[64] Ibid., p. 23.
[65] Ibid., p. 24.
[66] Ibid., p. 213.
[67] Ibid., p. 283.
[68] Ibid., p. 284.
[69] Ibid., p. 287.
[70] Ibid., p. 248.
[71] Ibid., p. 247.
[72] Ibid., p. 25.
[73] Ibid., p. 277.
[74] Ibid., p. 276.
[75] Ibid., p. 283.
[76] Ibid., p. 25.
[77] Ibid., p. 182.
[78] Ibid., p. 178.
[79] Ibid., pp. 248-249.
[80] Ibid., p. 32.

[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., p. 33.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., p. 57.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid., p. 58.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., p. 71.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., p. 87.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., p.320.
[94] Ibid., p. 67.
[95] Ibid., p. 68.

THE SONNETS

Derozio's favourite poetic form was the sonnet and he was the first Indian poet to use the form. He wrote about forty sonnets and his sonnets are characterized by a variety of themes and rhyme schemes. The themes of his sonnet are nature, hope, death and his country. The tone of many of the sonnets is characterized by a melancholy quite similar to that found in some of his other poems. He uses the Shakespearean, Italian and other different modified forms of the sonnet and some of his sonnets also have rhyming couplets. When using the Italian form of the sonnet he does not always submit to the discipline of the octave and sestet and the development of thought in his sonnets too varies depending on the form. Sometimes his sonnets have a three tier development of thought. The sonnet 'Dust' is a case in point. Its rhyme scheme is irregular, *ababcccdeedffe*. The sonnet begins with a description of dawn with all its sights and sounds and we are introduced to Julian.

> Of soft cerulean colour was the sky,
> The sun had not yet risen o'er the scene,
> The wild lark sang his morning hymn on high,
> And heaven breathed sweetly o'er the foliage green;
> Julian and I walked forth . . .[1]

The second tier takes us to the description of the tomb of 'a high son of fame' and an enumeration of his noble qualities.

> The marble told his deeds, his years, and name.
> Struck with his greatness, and the sounding praise
> That was bestowed upon him, I began
> Almost to envy him the race he ran[2]

The third movement is sudden and the reader is taken to the conclusion when Julian takes up some earth in his hand and reminds the poet of mortality.

> . . . but Julian stooped, and took

Some dust up in his hand, and bade me look
Upon it well, and then he cried, See, this is man![3]

Derozio is also the first Indian poet to bring a note of patriotism in his poetry. In an essay "On the Colonization of India by Europeans" published in *The Kaleidoscope* (September 1829), he speaks of the effects of colonization. He enumerates the advantages and disadvantages of colonization. The inference he comes to is that colonization is not beneficial unless and until the colonized be treated at par with the Europeans. 'It is only by such a measure that discontent can be prevented from brooding into rebellion, and the arts and sciences, when established, can produce benefits both to the governors and governed, to Britain, and to this, at present, our oppressed and neglected native country.'[4]

Derozio's patriotic poems reveal his pride in India's glorious past. He describes the splendour of his country and the sufferings under foreign yoke and even expresses a desire to join the freedom struggle. The nationalistic zeal is a noteworthy feature of Derozio's poetry and is seen in poems like 'To India - My Native Land,' 'The Harp of India,' and 'To the Pupils of Hindu College'. The sonnets addressed to India passionately proclaim the former glories of the poet's native country, India, while mourning its present state of degradation. The 'The Harp of India' begins with conventional imagery often found in eighteenth century English literature.

Why hang'st thou lonely on yon withered bough?
Unstrung for ever, must thou there remain;
Thy music once was sweet – who hears it now?
Why doth the breeze sigh over thee in vain? [5]

The harp is a conventional Romantic image. In Coleridge's 'The Eolian Harp,' the harp figures as a redemptive Romantic symbol,

And what if all of animated nature,
Be but organic Harps diversely fram'd,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?[6]

In Derozio's poem, the harp signifies a revelation of national deprivation.

> Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,
> Like ruined monument on desert plain [7]

The poem refers to a long line of gifted artists who once contributed towards the greater glory of India:

> O many a hand more worthy far than mine
>
> Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave [8]

This awareness of ancient achievements follows a description of the present condition of the country.

> Thy music was once sweet – who hears it now?
> Why doth the breeze sigh over thee in vain? –
> Silence hath bound thee with her fatal chain:
> Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,
> Like ruined monument on desert plain [9]

The poet describes moments of past glory and contrasts that to the country's present state and hopes that India might be able to regain her former position and glory. He goes on to reveal his commitment to his country, his muse and promises to take an active role in the restoration and rejuvenation of India.

> ... but if thy notes divine
> May be by mortal wakened once again,
> Harp of my country, let me strike the strain! [10]

The rhyme scheme of this sonnet is *ababbabcdcdcee* with the octave lamenting the state of the country and the sestet revealing the poet's eagerness to do something, so that his motherland will be able to regain her former state of glory.

The nationalistic zeal seen so very prominently in 'The Harp of India' is evident in Derozio's other poems as well. His choice of subject matter, legend and myth all seem to strive towards this zeal. Derozio's desire for a place among his illustrious predecessors who enriched the ancient Indian arts and his awareness of the glorious past of his country also reveal an emergent nationalism.

Derozio was aware of his imminent death and in the following sonnet he sings of death and fate.

> Death! My best friend, if thou dost open the door,
> The gloomy entrance to a sunnier world,
> It boots not when my being's scene is furled,
> So thou canst aught like vanished bliss restore.[11]

Derozio's sonnets are products of a colonial sensibility and represent the coming together of different influences, that of British literature and of the Orientalist mission of disseminating knowledge about India. His poems are a clear example of the intermingling of Western scholarship into Indian surroundings, and of the colonial situation. The principal of Hindu College, Captain David Lester Richardson, who also published several volumes of prose and poetry, included three of Derozio's poems, 'To India, My Native Land', 'Sonnet to the Pupils of Hindu College', and 'Ode From the Persian of Hafiz' in his *Selections from the British Poets*. Some of the best names in Calcutta's literary circle were close friends of Derozio. Apart from Richardson, the Secretary to the Board of Customs, Henry Meredith Parker, the Orientalist Horace Hayman Wilson, the educationist David Hare and Raja Ram Mohan Roy were among Derozio's close friends.

Derozio's revolutionary spirit was evident in his role as teacher at Hindu College. His poetry also attempts to expose the social evils of the time. His poem 'Freedom to the Slave' refers to the ideas of great philosophers who valued freedom and liberty. The poem begins with an epigraph from Campbell, 'And as the Slave departs, the Man returns'.[12]

> Oh Freedom! there is something dear
> E'en in thy very name,
> That lights the altar of the soul
> With everlasting flame.[13]

The poem echoes the spirit of humanism that formed part of Derozio's philosophy. A slave had been told that henceforth he was a free person. The poem describes the feelings that the erstwhile slave now has. The slave's reactions are described in a language

that is emotional, yet controlled. The poem goes on to pay a tribute to people who have fought against slavery all over the world.

The nationalistic mode is once again evident in Derozio's famous sonnet, 'To India - My Native Land', a poem which has often been included in school syllabi in India. He looks back to the time of India's past glory and contrasts the days of India's glorious past to its present lowly state.

> My country! In thy day of glory past
> A beauteous halo circled round thy brow,
> And worshipped as a deity thou wast
> Where is that glory, where that reverence now?
> .....
> . . . let me dive into the depths of time,
> And bring from out the ages that have rolled
> A few small fragments of wrecks sublime [14]

The octave bemoans the fallen state of the poet's motherland, talks about the country's glorious days in the past while the sestet is a fervent prayer and hope that those days of past glory might return.

Patriotism is not the only theme of Derozio's sonnets. Derozio's biographer, Thomas Edwards says in his biography of the poet that the influence of Shelley's 'To the Moon' is evident in Derozio's two sonnets on the moon – 'Sonnet to the Moon' and 'Sonnet to the Rising Moon'. Both the sonnets are characterized by a note of melancholy. The 'Sonnet to the Moon' begins

> Lonely thou wander'st through the wide heaven, like one
> That has some fearful deed of darkness done,
> With grief upon thy cheek; while sad despair
> Coldly refuseth thee a shelter where,
> Repose might give thee welcome [15]

The sonnet goes on to say that it is probably the moon's proximity to the earth that is the cause of its melancholic state. It is a close witness to all the troubles and tribulations that beset life of earth.

> Ah no! it is that thou art too near earth

Ever witness rosy pleasure's birth;
And ceaseless gazing on the thousand showers
Of ill that inundate this world of our's
Has touched thy heart, and bid thine aspect be
For our misfortunes, pale with sympathy.[16]

In the sonnet 'To the Rising Moon', Derozio refers to the moon as 'melancholy queen' quite in contrast to the beginning of the sonnet where it seemed to appear like a 'blushing lady'. The idiom of the sonnet is derivative and one can find definite echoes of the British Romantic poets in these lines.

But thy red rose has sickened on thy cheek,
And there thou wander'st sorrowful, and weak,
And heedless where thou'rt straying, sad, and pale,
Like grief-struck maiden, who had heard revealed
To all the world that which she wished concealed –
Her trusting Love's, and hapless Frailty's tale.[17]
He writes of fancy,
O! could my wandering, breeze-pinioned mind
True brotherhood in earthborn spirit find,
One that might ever on unflagging wings
Companion me in my imaginings,
One that from earth could take its earthliness,
And robe it with the mind's own light – 'twould bless
The wheeling of existence – [18]

The mood in this sonnet is also melancholic as the poet speaks of the pain that is within him. He is unable to let his fancy soar, though his 'enthusiasms' ceaselessly grow in his 'volcanic brain'. His inability to let his thoughts and emotions find an outlet has caused him great pain –

And left my mind in dark, despairing mood
To feel, and think upon it in solitude.[19]

In another sonnet he speaks of regret for what has gone by. He consoles himself saying that he does not want to think about that, 'For those bright visions Time can ne'er return'[20]. Change and loss trouble him, 'Where are they now those air-built visions strange, / Why should they perish, wherefore should they change?'[21]

Regret has ne'er brought back a vanished day,
And sighs are vain for dreams that pass away
Even like themselves . . .[22]

It is memory which is the repository of 'warm fancies, aspirations high'. [23]

Those fancies are but things for Memory;
And henceforth Hope with faithless, meteor ray
Shall never cheat, or lure me from my way.[24]
In one sonnet he refers to memory as 'faithful':
Still faithful Memory will fling back her beams,
And bring to light those wild, unearthly dreams,
Which were, in mercy, to my spirit given
When thou didst teach me all I know of heaven! [25]

The sonnet begins with the poet's belief that probably he would soon be able to have joy and happiness in the future. Of course, now he is restless, 'robbed of rest'[26] and is 'forced to war with a malignant world'.[27]

In the 'Sonnet to the Rising Moon', memory figures once again, this time the moon is compared to memory. The use of words like 'art', 'yon' define the very idiom of the lines that Derozio writes.

Why art thou blushing! Art thou shamed
To show thy full, fair face? Behind yon screen
Of trees, which Nature has enrobed with green
Thou stand'st, as one whose hidden sins are named:
Peeping the leafy crevices between,
Like memory looking through the chinks of years
For some fair island-spot unsoiled by tears [28]

While, in another sonnet, he refers to memory as a despot which tortures him.

. . . I cannot flee
From thoughts which crush my soul upon the rack.
O! what curse is immortality!
We feel it but in pain, when Fate's attack
Leaves the mind vanquished, but to suffer still
Such tortures from the despot, Memory

As Hope despairs of healing. [29]

At the beginning of the sonnet, the poet refers to his state as that of Atlas, he is so overburdened with misery. There is a sense of artifice in many of these poems, showing their derivative nature. But inspite of this, the sonnets stand out as important documents in literary history.

The sonnet 'Scarce has it Blossomed' deals with the transience of life and its glories. The poet compares the feeling of hope's absence from human life to aspects of nature without its colours. Death features in many of his poems and though he is someone who enjoys life and wants to live it to the full, he is not oblivious to the fact that death is inevitable. In 'Death, My Best Friend', the poet seems aware of the imminence of death – 'It boots not when my being's scene is furled'. The sonnet is an expression of the poet's readiness to accept what is inevitable and also reveals his belief in the immortality of the soul. The emphasis on the idea of death in the sonnets is interesting in a poet who died when he was just twenty three years old. 'Misery on Misery' is an acceptance of the presence of good and evil, joy and sorrow in life. 'Night', a series of six sonnets, is Derozio's most sustained effort in sonneteering. The themes of these sonnets are love, hope, despair, grief, nature, themes that appear in Derozio's other sonnets. They are all addressed to night and there is an integration of theme and imagery in the six sonnets.

In the sonnet 'To the Pupils of the Hindu College', Derozio speaks of his students, some of whom became important later in literary and social circles in Calcutta.

Expanding like the petals of young flowers
I watch the gentle opening of your minds,
And the sweet loosening of the spell that binds
Your intellectual energies and powers [30]

As a teacher at Hindu College, Derozio tried to inculcate in his students progressive thoughts and ideas and this sonnet speaks of his joy at seeing his students mature the way he expected they would.

O! how the winds
Of circumstances, and gentle April showers
Of early knowledge, and unnumbered kinds
Of new perceptions shed their influence:
And how you worship truth's omnipotence![31]

The influence that he had on his students was immense and in the concluding lines of the sonnet he says that he is able to foresee the future of his students, and it is what he sees in the future that makes him feel that his career as a teacher had not been in vain. His students did become leading figures of nineteenth century Bengal and carried the legacy of their teacher. Derozio wrote a few sonnets which are encomiums like this one to his students at Hindu College. Another sonnet is addressed to H.M. Parker and has the epigraph addressed to the people 'Who originated and carried into effect the proposal for procuring a portrait of David Hare, Esq.'

Your hand is on the helm – guide on young men
The bark that's freighted with your country's doom.
Your glories are but budding; they shall bloom
Like fabled amaranths Elysian, when
The shore is won, even now within your ken,
And when your torch shall dissipate the gloom
That long has made your country but a tomb. [32]

It is the very same students whom he has nurtured who will usher in hope of a new dawn.

Guide on, young men; your course is well begun;
Hearts that are turned to holiest harmony
With all that e'en in thought is good, must be
Best formed for deeds like those which shall be done[33]

The rhyme schemes he uses for the sonnets are varied. In 'To India My Native Land' the rhyme scheme he uses is *abababccdedeff*. 'The Harp of India' too has a rhyming couplet – 'May be by mortal wakened once again, / Harp of my country, let me strike the strain!'.[34] But the rhyme scheme is quite different to that of 'To India My Native Land'. Many of his sonnets are written in rhyming couplets.

Fair lady! I was but a minstrel boy
When first thy dark glance told my soul, that joy
Might be, perchance, by heaven bestowed on me,
In thy soft heart heaven's almoner would be. [35]

The sonnet 'The Poet's Grave' is marked by a melancholic mood. He wishes to be entombed 'on an untrodden, solitary shore'. The poem has an epigraph from Campbell, a common feature in many of his poems. The epigraph speaks of the need for a higher philosophy to refine and ennoble the soul. Except the first four lines, which rhyme *abab* and the last four lines, rhyming *fgfg*, the rest of the sonnet is in rhyming couplets. - The grave would be located beside the sea – 'There, all in silence, let him sleep his sleep'.[36] He goes on to say that nobody would ever visit his grave. There is the same melancholic strain in his sonnet on Lethe.

Where are thy waters, Lethe? – I would sleep
My past existence in their source, and sleep
In Death's cold sheltering arms. . . [37]

The theme of the sonnet is the poet's desire to escape from the trouble that life entails.

. . . O! Life
Which dost thou love me so – do not hate
Thee, and thy gifts accursed? – but there's a strife
My soul has long engaged in – 'tis with fate;
And in my sorrow, I am half elate
With something kin to joy, that I must be
Soon in that conflict vanquished – then from thee
Loathsome existence! Shall I separate.[38]

In another sonnet, where he addresses death as 'my best friend', the melancholy strain continues.

Death! My best friend, if thou dost open the door,
The gloomy entrance to a sunnier world,
It boots not when my being's scene is furled,
So thou canst aught like vanished bliss restore
I vainly call on thee, for Fate the more
Her bolts hurls down as she has ever hurled;

And in my war with her, I've felt, and feel
Grief's path cut to my heart by misery's steel[39]

However, inspite of the sad strain with which the sonnet begins, there is a note of optimism in the poem and an assertion of hope.

O tyrant Fate! thus shall I vanquish thee,
For out of suffering shall I gather pleasure. [40]

The sonnet 'Yorick's Scull' expresses the idea that the inevitable end of life is the same for all.

Must one day turn to nought, or worse than nought;
Despite of all his glory, he must fall
Like a frail leaf in autumn; and his power
Weighs lighter than his breath in his last hour;
And then earth's lord is fragile as a flower –
This is a lesson for thee, Pride! . . .[41]

Like Hamlet, the poet meditates on Yorick's Scull. In 'Dust', the poet reminds us of the fact that it is dust that human beings are composed of and that it is to dust that they will return. Man's sense of grandeur, his elaborate plans for life and the ultimate disillusionment is a theme that one finds in Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, in the graveyard poets and in Shelley's 'Ozymandias in Egypt'.

'Morning after a Storm' is a series of two sonnets describing the calmness of nature after the ravages of a storm. The two sonnets strike a balance between the tumult of storm and the quietness after it is over. There is a contrast between the two aspects of nature and it is this contrast that drives home the lesson that life is thus. The troubles and hardships that human beings must undergo until peace is achieved is the theme of these sonnets.

One of the students upon whose works Derozio had the strongest influence was Kasiprasad Ghose. The opening lines of Kasiprasad Ghose's 'The Shair' echo Derozio's sonnet 'The Harp of India'. Kasiprasad's poem begins,

Harp of my country! Pride of yore!
Whose sweetest notes are heard no more!

O! give me once to touch thy strings,
Where tuneful sweetness ever clings.[42]

In both the poems the poet's country is symbolized by the harp, an instrument dear to the British Romantics. Both the poems refer to the past when the music from the harp was sweeter since it was played by worthier souls and end with a wish on the part of the poet to revive the glorious traditions of the past. The line 'In vain; - 'tis all I wish from thee' from Kasiprasad's poem also echoes Derozio's sonnet 'To India, My Native Land', 'My fallen country! One kind wish from thee'. The numerous allusions to Derozio reveal the influence he exerted upon other poets in Calcutta. The sentiment, diction, imagery and metaphor in Derozio and Kasiprasad are almost identical.

Michael Madhusudhan Dutt's sonnet 'Written at the Hindu College by a Native Student' echoes Derozio's 'Sonnet to the Pupils of the Hindu College'. Both sonnets voice similar sentiments of feelings for the students of the college and for the country. Derozio's sonnet says,

I watch the gentle opening of your minds,
And the sweet loosening of the spell that binds
Your intellectual energies and powers
That stretch, like young birds in soft summer hours,
Their wing, to try their strength. [43]

Madhusudhan's sonnet contains the same hope of greatness for the students of Hindu College.

Oh! How my heart exulteth while I see
These future flow'rs, to deck my country's brow,
Thus kindly nurtured in this nursery! [44]

Madhusudhan's sonnet refers to his contemporaries, some of whom became important figures in the intellectual and social life of nineteenth century Bengal. While Derozio was the first Indian poet to use the form of the sonnet, Madhusudhan was the first to write sonnets in Bengali.

Derozio's love sonnets express a deep feeling and passion and are characterized by a sense of nostalgia. In 'To the Dog Star', the very sight of the star's light evokes rapturous thoughts in the poet. The beloved is as bright as the star that shines brightly high up in the firmament. There is an exultation on the part of the poet.

> . . . her soul was more refined
> And made for tenderness, and purest love.

In 'Romeo and Juliet', the poet identifies himself with the immortal lover and rejoices in the idea of love itself. Love, he writes, is the essence of passion, it is an emotion that is of great importance in life and is lofty too. 'Saphho' is based on the tragic love story of the Greek poetess. This sonnet also celebrates the great passion of love. Derozio describes love to the rage of a storm thereby stressing its strength. In another sonnet, 'To the Rising Moon', Derozio identifies his beloved with the moon. The sonnet has echoes of Shakespeare in its suggestion of remorse, agony, and disloyalty.

Derozio does not follow one style or tradition when he is writing his sonnets. It is difficult to classify his sonnets as Petrarchan or Elizabethan. His sonnets have no distinctive rhyme scheme and he often overlooks the octave and sestet structure. However, the sonnets are Derozio's most successful poems. It is interesting to note that these sonnets are the result of the influence of British Romantic poets and the Orientalist need for spreading knowledge about India. Derozio refrains from making any reference to British oppression in India, instead he camouflages it deftly. Derozio's poetry reflects the interaction between nineteenth century Bengal and the British colonial mission to spread Western education in India.

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[1] *Complete Works*, p.71.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid, p. 71.

[4] Ibid., p. 319.

[5] Ibid, p.11.

[6] *The Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Wordsworth Poetry Library, Wordsworth Editions Ltd., Hertfordshire, 1994. *Poems*, 'The Eolian Harp', p. 102.

[7] *Complete Works*, p.11.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., p. 203.

[12] Ibid., p. 20.

[13] Ibid., p. 21.

[14] Ibid., p. 99.

[15] 'Sonnet to the Moon', *Complete Works*, p.202.

[16] *Complete Works*, p. 202.

[17] Ibid., p. 205.

[18] Sonnet, *Complete Works*, p. 204.

[19] Ibid., p. 204.

[20] Ibid., p. 202.

[21] Ibid., p. 202.

[22] Ibid., p. 202.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., p.202.

[25] Ibid. p. 205.

[26] Ibid., p. 205.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., p.206.

[30] Ibid., p 245.

[31] Ibid., p. 245.

[32] Ibid., p. 213.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., p. 205.

[35] Ibid., p. 204.

[36] Ibid., p.37.

[37] Ibid., p. 203.

[38] Ibid, p. 204.

[39] Ibid., p. 203.

[40] *The Shair; and Other Poems*, Calcutta, 1830, p. 1.

[41] Ibid., p. 66.

[42] *Complete Works*, p. 99.

[43] Ibid., p. 245.

[44] Poems [41] *Madhusudhan Rachanabali*, p. 454.

DEROZIO'S PROSE WORKS

Derozio's prose contributions are many and varied. The earliest prose piece is a letter that he wrote to Dr. Grant of the *India Gazette*, January 8, 1825. This letter and many sent later are prefaced to his poetic contributions to the *India Gazette*. He appended long notes to *The Fakeer of Jungheera* and *Enchantress of the Cave*. Derozio's prose writings can be divided into three categories – those dealing with literature, history and other social sciences, those dealing with philosophy and finally articles written in a lighter vein. Some of his prose writings are –

1. 'The Modern British Poets'

2. 'Torn-Out leaves of a Crap Book' – (a) 'Beginnings' (b) 'Literature in India' (c) 'Polemics' (d) 'Chit-Chat' (e) 'Scandal' (f) 'Tea-Parties' (g) 'Education in India'

3. 'Thoughts on various Subjects' – (a) 'Acknowledgement of Errors' (b) 'Definitions' (c) 'Titles' (d) 'Locke's Style and Reasoning' (e) 'Human Action' (f) 'The Greeks and what we have received from them' (g) 'Conclusion of My Address to My Students Before the Grand Vacation in 1829'

4. 'On Moral Philosophy' – (a) 'What is Happiness and What is Misery' (b) 'in Ordinary Life, the Sum of Evil Exceeds That of Good' (c) 'Reflections on the Nature of Pleasure and Pains'

5. 'Objections to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Kant'

The essay on 'Education in India' is about the problems of education of the East Indians primarily, and about his younger brother Claudius who was then in Scotland pursuing his studies. Derozio's main thesis in this essay was that the education system of a nation should take into account the socio-economic realties. Newer developments that have been emerging elsewhere should also be incorporated. The best sort of education would be a balanced combination of the two. Derozio's own methods of teaching were actually along these lines. The essay is important in the light of the controversy prevailing between the Orientalists

who were in favour of the traditional Indian forms of learning and the Anglicists who advocated English education.

'The Greeks and What We Have Received from Them' reveals Derozio's deep interest in all things Greek, an aspect that is revealed in some of his poem too. 'Thoughts on Various Subjects' deal with subjects as varied as history, philosophy and social behaviour. Derozio also translated three small articles by the French philosopher Pierre Maupertuis. He prefixed three subheadings to these translated essays – 'What is Happiness and What is Misery', 'In Ordinary Life the Sum of Evil Exceeds that of Good' and 'Reflections on the Pleasure and Pains'. Derozio translated Maupertuis with the purpose of acquainting his students with the thought of this philosopher.

Derozio's career as a journalist began after his dismissal from Hindu College. Journalism was not just a means to earn money but a tool by which he could fight social ills. Derozio regularly contributed to the *India Gazette*, though many of his prose writings published there were unsigned. He also wrote in the *Enquirer* which was edited by his student, Krishna Mohan Banerjee. He was also closely associated with another contemporary periodical, *Kaleidoscope*.

Derozio was a pioneer in inculcating in his students the ideas of nationalism His influence was wide and vast. Many of his students became leading lights of nineteenth century Bengal. The patriotic poems of Kashiprasad Ghose were greatly influenced by those of his teacher. In 1835, Kylash Chunder Dutt wrote a work of fiction called *A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours in the Year 1945* which is the story of an armed revolution against the British Rule in India. Shoshee Chunder Dutt's republic of Orissa: annals from the pages of Twentieth Century (1845) also had the idea of an armed freedom struggle. Apart from these two works in English, the patriotic note can also be found in Bengali works, such as, Rangalal Banerjee's *Padmini Upakhyan* (1859) and even in Madhusudhan Dutt's *Megnad Badh Kabya* (1861).

DEROZIO'S STUDENTS

Derozio was a great source of inspiration to his students some of whom are referred to here. Senior to Derozio in age and universally acknowledged as the leader of the Derozians was Tarachand Chakraborty (1806-1855). He worked as the translator of Buckingham's *Calcutta Journal* and also for two Bengali journals *Chandrika* and *Kaumudi*. He contributed regularly to the journals of the Derozians and edited the Bengal spectator, the organ of the Derozians. Krishnamohan Banerjee (1813-1885), who wrote the first English play in India, *The Persecuted*, was Derozio's most brilliant student. The play ridiculed the hypocrisy of the members of the Hindu community. He converted to Christianity and served as minister at Christ Church in Calcutta. He taught at Bishop's College, Calcutta. A great linguist, he was proficient in a number of languages, including Latin, Greek and Hebrew and edited *Encyclopaedia Bengalensis*, also referred to as which was a thirteen volume work (1846-1851). Ram Gopal Ghosh (1815-1868) was actively associated with the literary activities of the Derozians. He delivered a series of lectures on moral philosophy and English poetry at the Debating Society of the Derozians. It was as an orator that he was most well known. Dakshina Ranjan Mukhopadhyay (1814-1878), radical in political views, established the Young Bengal journal *Gyananneshun* in 1831. Rashik Krishna Mullik (1810-1858) studied at Hindu College and began his career as a teacher at Hare School, Calcutta. He worked along with Dakshina Ranjan Mukhopadhyay and transformed *Gyananneshun* into a bilingual weekly, publishing articles in English and Bengali. Peary Chand Mitra was the most prolific writer among all the Derozians and contributed regularly to the Young Bengal journals. He co-founded a monthly journal for the education of women, the *Mashik Patrika*. His novel *Alaler Ghare Dulal* was published in serial form in this journal.

The Derozians belonged to the urban, upper class strata of Calcutta society and this is the class that received English education in nineteenth century Bengal. Their careers bear testimony to Derozio's legacy and influence.

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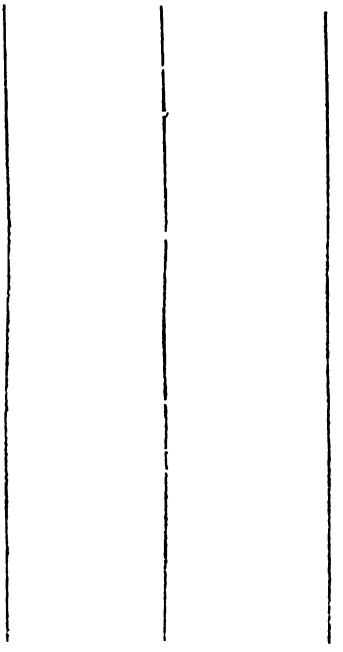

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