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MEN 201

INDIAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to

- focus on the life and works of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio
- the unit will also look at the role played by Hindu College, Calcutta, towards the propagation of English Studies in India
- will provide a personal -intellectual biography of Henry Derozio, analyse his contributions to the spirit of nationalism, examine his role in the creation of the Young Bengal Group
- will study his literary contributions in the field of Indian English Writings.

INTRODUCTION

The story of Derozio is, in a sense, inseparable from the story of Hindu College, Calcutta, where he served as a teacher of English and one that had a profound impact upon his life as it had upon the lives of many other early Indian English authors. The Unit will unravel the personal-intellectual biography of Derozio as well as his literary output. The literary legacy

of Derozio will also be discussed. Let us look at some of the contributions of Hindu College, Calcutta, towards the propagation of English Studies in India.

HINDU COLLEGE, CALCUTTA: THE PROPAGATION OF ENGLISH STUDIES IN INDIA

In the early nineteenth century, the East India Company, pushed into action in areas other than trade by the British Government and the British Parliament, started to involve itself in the educational advancement of Indians. The Company set up or helped to set up colleges in several cities of India including Calcutta, Poona, Delhi and Agra. As suggested the policy framework came from the British Government. All the colleges, more or less, were centres of oriental learning. Only the Hindu College, Calcutta, definitively and deliberately disseminated knowledge of the occident. The Hindu College, which later became Presidency College, was founded not so much because the Company desired its establishment, per se. In fact, the pressure was put on the Company officials by a group of Bengali gentlemen who wished their children should have the benefits of a Western education. Rammohun Roy was a Beginnings of Indian English Writing party to the talks held in 1816 that led to the setting up of the college, but his role ended there since the other Bengali gentlemen, all Hindus, who were with him in the project, disapproved of what was deemed to be his anti-Hindu sentiments and his pro-Muslim and pro-Christian stance. For this reason, perhaps Rammohun Roy never made it to the membership of the committee that was constituted to manage the college. The Hindu gentry at the helm of affairs in Hindu College in its formative years thus tried to bring Western philosophy and technology and, specifically, the language and literature of the English people to their offspring. Equally clearly, they were frightened by the prospect of their 'contamination' from cultures alien to their own. The aims of Hindu College, as laid down in its charter, convey a sense of the uneasy balance of the East and the West that its founders sought to maintain in their conception of the College. This opened a whole possibility of mutual interaction as well as antagonism. By May 1827 the building that was to house Hindu College was completed. In 1828 there were 400 boys on the rolls of Hindu College, out of whom 100 were scholarship students with a supply of free books. The School Book Society and the Committee of Public Instruction paid for a mere 5000 books that were imported from England. Right from its inception, the curriculum of Hindu College, especially in the senior section was weighed in favour of Western Studies. By 1841, instruction in both Sanskrit and Persian was suspended, and Bengali was the only Indian language that continued to be taught in Hindu College side by side with English. The logic behind this fusion between

an Indian language and an alien one was that both were modern languages and catered better to the needs of the people than was the case with respect to the classical languages. Such was the rapid progress in Western scholarship there, that Hindu College emerged as a showpiece of education as per the Western system, and as a justification for greater emphasis on the study of English culture. The quick development of Hindu College provided a pretext for further British intervention in Indian education. The parameters of 'reform' were however, different. 'Reform' was not meant to modernise or secularise Indian thoughts but merely to present the English model formulated by the Indians. Educational standards were frequently raised through the appointment of 'approved' faculty in institutions of education - faculty with a Western outlook, if not Westerners themselves. It was felt that such faculty would help to carry forward the task most effectively of reforming society in India in the image of British society. One of the earliest Indian faculty members of Hindu College, appointed to teach English Language and English Literature, was Henry Louis Derozio. Born in Calcutta of Eurasian parents, his family and community made him easily susceptible to Western influences. His speech, habits, dress, manners, reading and thinking were closely modelled on those of the colonial rulers. Derozio's position as a teacher in a college that catered to the most elite section of Bengali society empowered him in a way that might not have been possible if he had not occupied that hegemonic position. His authority extended beyond the classroom into the movement known as the movement of the Young Bengal group, spearheaded by himself and some of his students, but it also percolated down in a more diffuse sense, because many of those he taught at Hindu College later held public positions as academics and activists. Derozio set into motion a process in which the youth from the families of the upper rung moved towards a new identity and role. Ironically, it was Derozio's pedagogic popularity that proved to be his undoing. His English lectures were instrumental in indoctrinating many, upper-crust Bengali youth with the ideas that the British would like to instil in Indians and which orthodox Indians would regard as British heterodoxy. His dismissal from the faculty of Hindu College illustrated, as Manju Dalmia has analysed in her essay "Derozio: English Teacher: " The anomalies that surfaced when opposing purposes were at work; while Indians accepted Western learning for material, practical purposes of their own, the British viewed it as a means of establishing their cultural, political hegemony. At the other end of this phenomenon, we see the fears and apprehensions of the orthodox sections in India. Let us now take a look at the personal-intellectual biography of Henry Derozio in the next section.

A PERSONAL INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY OF HENRY LOUIS VIVIAN DEROZIO'

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was born in April 1809, in Calcutta, of Eurasian parentage. At the age of six years he enrolled at Dharamtola Aoademy, run by David Drummond. At fourteen he finished school and joined Messrs. J. Scott and Company, the employers of his father, to earn his livelihood as a clerk. At sixteen he left for his aunt's indigo plantation in Bhagalpur. Here he spent the next three years and wrote much of his poetry, including a romantic epic "The Fakeer of Jungheera". He sent his poems to the India Gazette under the pen name of Juvenis, and, with the encouragement of the editor, John Grant, decided to collect his poems. At eighteen he came back to Calcutta and was appointed assistant editor of the India Gazette by Grant who also helped to publish his poems in a single volume. His repute as a writer in English spread to such an extent that within a few years he was selected to teach English Language and English Literature at Hindu College. His stay at the college was eventful but brief for he was dismissed from its service within three years of joining it. After his dismissal he returned to journalism, but not for long as he suffered an attack of cholera and died in December 1831. David Drummond, the principal of his school, and an avowed rationalist, left indelible impression on Derozio's personality. The emphasis on rational inquiry later became one of the cornerstones of Derozio's lessons. Derozio also inherited from Drummond an admiration for radical ideas and the liberal arts. Derozio was influenced by a number of people and various events that had a major impact upon him. Drummond influenced Derozio greatly as the young Derozio studied at Drummond's school from the tender age of six years to his teenage years. He was highly influenced by the moral philosophies of David Hume. Derozio was well schooled in the classics and the western intellectual tradition. By 1828, the year Derozio was appointed to Hindu College, English Studies including English Language, English Literature and History, had shown a steady rise of prestige. The texts for this composite came included Shakespeare's Plays, Milton's Paradise Lost, Dryden's version of the Aeneid, Pope's version of Homer's Epics, Gay's Fables and Goldsmiths' History of Greece, Rome and England. By positioning the histories of England, Rome and Greece together, and combining their study with the study of literature from England, the syllabus gave England an elevated status in the chronicle of Western civilisation. Derozio, who himself had been educated in the tradition of rationalist thought of Western Enlightenment, proved enormously effective in handing down his ideological apparatus to his students. Numerous testimonials exist to his reach as a teacher,

including a glowing one from Baboo Hurro Mohun Chatterji, a clerk in Hindu College, which has been cited by Thomas Edwards, the nineteenth century biographer of Derozio writes: They (the pupils) loved him most tenderly; and were ever ready to be guided by his counsels and imitate him in all their daily actions of life. In fact 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 taught the evil effects of idol worship and superstition, and so far formed their moral conceptions and feelings as to make them critical of the antiquated ideas and aspirations of his age. This worked at both the social and the ideological levels. The former related the behaviour and practice of youth, who would critique all that, that was obsolete and irrational. The latter would inspire them.

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio and the Early Voice of Identity Beginnings of Indian English Writing to investigate their assumptions and notions. In fact, things happening at the ideological level would translate sooner or later into a new and radical way of representing feelings in literary writing. Derozio's interaction with the student body took shape not only on the college premises but outside of the college as well. One forum for these exchanges was the Academic Association, a debating club begun by Derozio and over which Derozio himself presided. The Academic Association inevitably attracted the attention of Company officials who now and then attended its meetings. These meetings were held regularly and covered a wide range of subjects of intellectual interest. Critical attitudes to traditional customs in every sphere of existence proliferated, as the so-called Young Bengal Group, who constituted the core of the Academic Association, applied to tradition the interrogative perspectives of Western thinkers. During his very short lifetime Derozio produced several important works of poetry and was on his way to becoming one of the major literary legends of India. He shaped through his practice the new aesthetics of India that would inspire future generations of writers to struggle for dynamic idiom. Let us examine Derozio's nationalistic fervour next.

2.4 DEROZIO AND HIS NATIONALISTIC FERVOUR

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio as mentioned earlier may be regarded as one of the earliest Indian English poets, whose commitment to India was commendable. Being of Eurasian parentage at a time when his own community would have repudiated his mixed origins, he chose to give something to India that he describes as his native land - In his sonnet To India - My Native Land he talks about the glorious past of India before colonisation, how India was revered and "worshipped as a deity", but he also laments the fact that - "that glory" and that "reverence" is now no more. He takes it upon himself to restore India's "fallen" state and all he desires from his chosen land

what he calls his native land is - "one kind wish from thee!" - the wish to be seen, to be accepted, and recognised as an Indian poet and not a Eurasian. He laments the fact that India is under foreign rule and feels the need for India to awaken; in another poem - The Harp of India: But if thy notes divine May be by mortal wakened once again O harp of my country, let me strike the strain with (The Harp of India) This burning nationalistic fervour, this zeal was unusual for a person of Eurasian origins. M K Naik considers Henry Louis Vivian Derozio's poems to: Leave an unmistakable authenticity of patriotic utterance which stamps Derozio as an Indian English poet who is truly a son of the soil. (M K Naik, A History, p. 23)

DEROZIO AND THE YOUNG BENGAL MOVEMENT

In the earlier section on Derozio's personal- intellectual biography the Young Bengal Movement was introduced. This section will deal with this movement in some detail. Derozio was one of the earliest activists to wage a war against the traditional orthodox society of India in general and of Bengal in particular. Though Derozio died young, his brilliant but short literary career is: I Honourably associated with the literature and the moral, social and political improvement of his countrymen. (Calcutta Gazette: Editorial, 9 January 1832, Quoted in Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, A Memorial Volume, edited by Mary Ann Dasgupta, P. 8). Derozio had the charisma and enigma to influence a group of very talented yet also highly volatile young students. While radicalism and the questioning of various orthodox Hindu rituals, had already set in during Raja Ram Mohun Roy's time, Derozio was to take it a step further. He set the trend for ultra - radicalism aggressively. His influence over his students was such that he was considered to be more of an event or a phenomenon than a mere mortal in the history of the renaissance in Bengal. His group of followers - the Young Bengal were able to shake the very foundations of orthodox Bengali society during the first half of the nineteenth century. He appeared on the literary scene before his time. The Bengal of his time was not ready for change of any sort. They were too shackled with the binds of orthodoxy and tradition and they reacted sharply against Derozio and his followers. While Derozio stood for liberty, and for free- thinking, the orthodox Bengali society of his times was deeply against this zealous revolutionary and they did everything they could to destroy his hold over his students, thereby dismissing him from service at the Hindu College, Calcutta.

HENRY DEROZIO'S LITERARY OUTPUT

Derozio himself was an extremely well-read person, having read a vast array of literary and extra-literary texts from the Greek and Roman classics to more modern texts such as *The Rights of Man* by Thomas Paine and the works of the Romantic and the Victorian poets. His readings filtered down to his writings that were by no means prolific, given his all too brief span of life. Apart from his array of journalistic writings before and after his stint at Hindu College, during which he contributed ' ' extensively to *The India Gazette*, *The Calcutta Literary Gazette*, *The Indian Magazine*, *The Calcutta Magazine*, *The Bengal Journal*, *The Enquirer* and *The Hesperus*, Derozio wrote poetry, and it is the poems which are the foundation of his literary reputation. Derozio published two volumes of poetry: *Poems* (1827) and *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and other Poems* (1828). The shorter poems are written under the shadow of the Romantic-Victorian poets of England in subject, imagery and diction. These poems include "Sonnet: To the Moon," "The Golden Vase" and "Sonnet: Death, My Best Friend" which reveals him as an individual as not daunted by death or by fate. 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. But man's eternal energies can make An atmosphere around him, and so take Good out of evil, like the yellow bee, That flowers malignant a sweet treasure, O tyrant fate! thus shall I vanquish thee, For out of suffering shall I gather pleasure. Instead of being a direct statement, this quote brings out the 'problematic nature of the situation chosen for representation. The conflict is Romantic in the sense that suffering and pleasure are imagined as two inseparable parts of a unified emotion. Derozio stood for the spirit of freedom and liberty. Born during the era of colonial Raj, he loved independence and this love for independence is one characteristic of him and his works as is evident from his *Ode to Independence*: Henry Louis Vivian Derozio and the Early Voice of Identity Beginnings of Indian English Writing Look on that lamp which seems to guide Like a spirit O'er the stream, Casting upon the darkened tide Its own mysterious beam. My heart, - and shall that little lamp, My glorious image be; Shall the night so murky, the stream so damp Be lit and cheered by thee? It is interesting to see in these lines that "the darkened tide" is more of a challenge than a threatening object. The stress is clearly on "lit" and "cheered" than on "murky" or "damp". Derozio was such a personality that he may be said to have initiated the , meeting of minds of the East and the West. Critics have credited him with having, "sown the seed of the first western style movement on Indian soil." (Tarasankar Banerjee, 1985, p. 279) The long poem, "The Fakeer of Jungheera." shows a specific Byronic affinity. Its narrative encompasses the tragic life of Nuleeni, a high caste Hindu widow rescued from the funeral pyre by a young bandit - chief,

who faik in love with her and whose love she reciprocates. Just when Nuleeni is about to be cbumed by the flames on the funeral pyre of her dead husband, she is carried away by Fakir, her former lover and the chief of the outlaws, and she has a brief new lease of life. Nuleeni's absorption in her lover is revealed in these lines
And I would keep thee like a thought Which
memory in her temple keeps, When every sorrow sinks to nought, And all the past of misery
sleeps. O thus should thy bright image dear Above my heart's wann altar sit ... But Nuleeni's
father is furious, and a raid against the Fakir's stronghold follows, and he dies fighting. Her
relatives, however, are determined to 'save' her from this fat: that they deem to be worse than
death. In the ensuing battle, the lover is killed, but not long after is joined in death by the
heart-broken Nuleeni. Nuleeni rushes through the filed and clasps the body As is she dreamed
Of him in her embrace.'. but they who thought That Ive was tempting her breast, and sought
Some answerfi.om her heart to hush the doubt, Found that its eloquence had all burnt out.
Nuleeni has found her peace in blissful death in the aims of her dead lover. In this fast
moving, ideologically daring tale, divided into two cantos, Demzio skilfully employs
different metres to suit the mutations of mood within the narrative. He uses the iambic four-
foot couplet for straightforward narration, but adopts a slower tempo for the descriptive
passages and the anapaestic metre for the spirited account of the battle between Nuleeni's
lover and the relatives of Nuleeni, while the choruses of the chanting priests and women
round Nuleni's funeral pyre are in trochaic and dactylic measures. The other popular narrative
poem of Derozio is The Enchantress of the Cave. Cast in the same dramatic mould that
characterises some portions of The Fakeer of Jungheera, it is set in the eve of a decisive battle
to be fought between the Muslims and the Hindus for the mastery of India. Nazim, the
Muslim general, seeks the enchantress of the cave to learn "whether all is well" with his wife
Jumeeli whom he has left behind. He finds that the youth who had accompanied him to battle
has deserted him and he proceeds alone to the cave. In the cave he discovers Jurneeli, his
wife, who had accompanied him to battle disguised in male attire, now in the female guise of
the enchantress. This is the sum and substance of The Song of the Enchantress. Appended to
the narrative are notes A to F which show an amount of out-of-the-way reading and an
acquaintance with several literatures, which exhibits the wide range of Derozio's scholarship.
Derozio's poetic productions all but ceased once he left Hindu College. For the remainder of
his life, he almost single-handedly edited and managed the East Indian, the fust newspaper
that was the recognised organ of Eurasians in India, which advocated their claims as well as
the claims of what was considered to be liberal issues in society. The highest tribute to this
newspaper was paid by John Grant, himself a veteran journalist, when he said that "whatever

differences of opinion existed among his (Derozio's) contemporaries as to the mode of conducting it, there could be none whatever as to the talents, the perfect honesty, and the unfettered views of the editor." Henry Louis Vivian Derozio and the Early Voice of Identity

A noteworthy trait of Derozio's writing is its nationalistic fervour. Not only in his journalism, but also in his poetry - poems such as "To India - My Native Land", "The Harp of India" and "To the Pupils of Hindu College" are excellent examples - there is strong assertion of patriotism which stamps Derozio as an Indian English poet whose Indianness supersedes his Englishness. The Harp of India

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?
 Silence hath bound thee with her fatal chain;
 Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,
 Like ruined monument on desert plain:
 O! many a hand more worthy far than mine
 Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave,
 And many a wreath for them did Fame entwine
 Of flowers still blooming on the minstrel's grave:
 Those hands are cold -- but if thy notes divine
 May be by mortal wakened once again,
 Harp of my country, let me strike the strain!

His poetry introduces images and ideas emanating out of his sense of national belonging, e.g. 'Highest Himalaya' (Poetry); 'Ganga's Roll' (Song of the Indian Girl); 'Chandra's beams' (The Eclipse), 'Sweet Sitar' (Song of the Hindoostani Minstrel) etc., making him the first Indian English poet to do so. An illustration from the Song of the Hindoostani Minstrel: The Surmah tinge the black eye's fringe "Twill sparkle like a star; With roses dress each raven's tress, My only loved Dildar!.. . In Busrah there is many a rose Which many a maid may seek, But who shall find a flower which blows Like that upon thy cheek?.. . Like birds from land to land we'll range, And with our sweet sitar, Our hearts the same, though worth may change, We'll love, and love, Dildar!

Beginnings of Indian English Writing We notice in these likes an amalgam of the Indian and European. Nature exists not in its objective state but has got linked with the native tradition of projecting a mood, at once individual and stylised.

THE LITERARY LEGACY OF HENRY DEROZIO

Nothing proves Derozio's influence over his students at Hindu College, Calcutta, so convincingly than the fact that he had to be dismissed from the service of Hindu College barely three years after he joined its service, allegedly because he motivated his students to be "hostile to Hinduism and to the established customs of the country." Some conservative Bengali gentlemen brought the charges against Derozio, but his prosecution under these charges must equally have gladdened the conscientious British officialdom. For Derozio

preached a secular nationalism and preached it so passionately that he won innumerable converts to his cause. His converts included upcoming young men such as Krishna Mohun Bannerjee, Mahesh Chandra Ghose, Ram Gopal Ghose, Gobin Chunder Bysack, Amrita LaH Mitra and Duckinarunjun Mukherjee. Many of them took to intellectual pursuits and produced literary writings inspired by their mentor. But unfortunately, not many of these writings have survived, although most of the young men in question had tremendous influence in their own chosen sphere of activities. Derozio's inspiration came from the English Romantic poets who castigated the orthodox, restrictive nature of the neo classicists. Derozio applied the radical English thoughts to the existing views in India. In the individual case of Derozio, the secular notions of behaviour posed a threat to what was considered the native Indian ethos.

LET US SUM UP

This Unit has focused upon the life and works of Henry Derozio, undoubtedly the most renowned among the early Indian English authors after Raja Rammohun Roy. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio may be considered one of the first Indian English poets. His father was of mixed Portuguese and Indian descent, and his mother was English. Born and educated in Calcutta and belonging to such an ancestry, he was compelled to choose a community to which he could be associated with, to which he could closely relate. His was an unusual dilemma. He was neither full Portuguese, nor English, nor Anglo or even Indian for that matters. At one level, identity mattered a great deal to him. The institution expected him to adhere to a specific point of view, call it 'Indian' if you like. Being of Eurasian stock he was obviously critical of various Hindu customs and mores but at the same time he was also a Lecturer at the Calcutta Hindu College. He was however, dismissed on the grounds of having corrupted and negatively influenced Hindu youth. As mentioned earlier he was a teacher not because of any ulterior motive but because he was genuinely interested in the intellectual well being of his students and he also wanted to be able to identify with them as an Indian. His debating club the Academic Association provided a forum for discussing various socio-political issues, the position of women in society and traditional and orthodox Hindu customs. His poems carry a number of influences and are full of the fervour of patriotism and nationalism. A casteist, orthodox India of the time would not adopt so ething as new and interpretive as patriotism. The word required a lot of self- question g. He made use of Indian imagery, Indian themes, Indian myths and everything Indian in an effort to create a sense of identity both pr himself and for his artistic and creative impulses. Hi? two volumes of poetry

are Poems (1827) and The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Henry Louis Vivian Metrical Romance And Other Poems (1828). They are replete with details typically Derozio and the Indian, in geographical as well as historical sense. Though heavily influenced by the Early Voice of English Romantic poets and writing during the great wave of Romanticism, despite Identity not having produced a vast or huge body of work, he gave, "expression to a distinct Indian personality," (C P Verghese, op. cit., p. 7., quoted by GJV Prasad, P. 17). He may be considered to have as Prasad says: The dilemma of the early Indian Englishpoets- of having to prove their understanding and mastery of the English language and tradition, while at the same time maintaining and expressing their Indianness. (Prasad, p. 17) Derozio's story is intricately interlinked with the story of Hindu College in which he worked as an English teacher for three years and through which he came to the limelight as an academic and as an achiever, as did many other Indian English authors of that era. The Unit has also sought to explore the literary output as well as the literary legacy of Derozio, from which a large number of writers and social activists derived benefit.

QUESTIONS

- a) Discuss the role of Hindu College in bringing Henry Derozio into the limelight of the intellectual world of early nineteenth century Calcutta.
- b) Give a brief account of the character of Henry Derozio's literary output
- c) Comment on the literary legacy of Henry Derozio.