WRITING IN COLONIAL SPACE : A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH

Thesis
Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature

By

UMA RAO

Institute of English and Foreign Languages
Calicut University Centre
Palayad, Thalassery
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Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "Writing in Colonial Space : A Critical Evaluation of the Early Nineteenth Century Indian Poetry in English" by Uma Rao, is a record of bonafide research carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is a bonafide record of research work done by me, and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship,or other similar title or recognition.

Uma Rao

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Preface

Mapping the primarily turbulent, the periodically controversial and the now complacent course traversed by the movement of Indian poetry in English has proved to be a richly rewarding experience. Weaving one's way back to an era roughly two hundred years ago, an era which bore witness to the beginnings of this movement has been, to use a worn-out cliche, an eye-opener in every sense. The first realization this brought forth was the fact that it was indeed predestined that a whole corpus of literature on India and Indian themes would be written by Indians in, what was looked upon then, as a non-Indian language, English. It was once again fore-ordained that this foreign language would enter India through the East, in Bengal, for the British came to India through Bengal.

Coming down from the huge body of Indian literature in English to a study of Indian poetry in English, one is struck by the fundamental note of duality which appears to be carried down from Indian literature in English to Indian poetry in English. The strains of ambivalence were very prominently felt by the Indian writers of English, governed by factors that our writers stood to win and lose in the process of the transformation of native ideas through

a newly-acquired tongue. The evolution of Indian Writing in English occurred in an ambience of duality, of conflicting allegiances of the colonized towards the colonizer and the native.

Selecting to specifically study the course taken by Indian poetry in English and working a route backwards from the present day to the period in the early years of nineteenth century when this genre evolved,one gets inadvertently familiarised to two schools of thought. Sifting through the innumerable kinds of anthologies which have recorded the poetry written by Indian poets in English, one is inexorably drawn into a crossfire of choices, of identifications of poets and poetry. The process serves to make one increasingly aware that the entire business of deciding *when* this movement of Indian poetry in English began is governed by two opposing ideologies. While the older school declares the movement to have begun in the early nineteenth century with the poems of the first Indian poets in English like Kashiprasad Ghose, Henry Derozio and Toru Dutt, the modern school of thought, to quote R.Parthasarathy, declares in no uncertain terms that "In examining the phenomenon of Indian verse in English, one comes up, first of all, against the paradox that it did not seriously begin to exist till after the withdrawal of the British from India" (Paranjape, *Indian Poetry* xvi). That is to say, that in one single stroke, the entire set of poets, small and large, the famous and the not-so-famous, the beginners like Kashiprasad Ghose, and the grand masters like Tagore, are swept off, so to speak, since poetry "did not seriously begin to exist till after the withdrawal of the British from India".

A perusal of many modern anthologies makes one increasingly conscious of this growing fashion of the new generation of poet-critics, of poets who versified "after the withdrawal of the British from India", to denounce and cast aspersions on the first generation of poets, to dismiss them as nonentities in the field. By rejecting the past and by trying to establish a highly restricted carefully vetted, pure canon of "high art", . . . by setting itself up as a self-appointed priestocracy, adjudicating over and dictating the fortunes of Indian poetry in English, the modernist *avant garde* has alienated itself not only from others who don't subscribe to their aesthetic ideologies, but from the "common" readers (however uncommon they might be) of Indian poetry in English (Paranjape, *Indian Poetry* xviii).

Kashiprasad Ghose, Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt and Michael Madhusudan Dutt are the poets who have, since the emergence of the new class of "modern" and "post-modern" poets of twentieth century, been nudged out of the poetic lineage as poets to be merely glossed over. A critical evaluation of these poets and their poetry confirms that in this poetry and in this age rests the seed of Indian-English Writing which has now grown into one of today's distinct manifestations of English literature worldwide, despite the tendency of present-day writers to skirt over their work, their mission and their ideology.

The first poets had their own mission to accomplish, the mission of socially constructing India, of restoring Indianness, of

keeping the Indian spirit intact which they accomplished through their poetry. Their poetry also reflected the dilemma they experienced in their own ambivalence between the East and the West, in their acceptance of native heritage and their rejection of native customs and their conservatism, in their rejection of the native language for a foreign one. This conflict, this inner struggle is evident in their works.

The fact that they chose to be native in their themes, the fact that they felt the responsibility to socially be by their nation, the first strains of nationalism as witnessed in their poetry prove that it was this generation of poets who set the ground for the generations to come, to set their verses around Indian themes, to be in India, to look within themselves and their culture for their art. This generation constructed India for the later poets who in turn rejected their predecessors, devaluing their works.

The concept, the desire for return to India experienced by some of these poets like Toru Dutt and Madhusudan Dutt is a very notable factor. The reason for this inclination to return could be a fascination for their country, it could be their sense of social responsibility towards their country as a result of which they sought to modernize India, they sought to criticize customs, they desired Westernization.

The poetry of the early stages of Indian Writing in English, in the works of Ghose, Derozio, Toru Dutt and Madhusudan Dutt reflect these notable features, making this

project not merely a study of their poems but a study of the ideology issuing through their poetry, an ideology bound by the inner conflicts of acceptance and rejection, by the sense of marginalization at various levels, the personal, religious, regional, literary and social dimensions of this marginalization. This marginaliztion, this distancing, the tensions and the ultimate colonial dilemma were experienced by the poets and expressed in their poetry. This poetry therefore had its own limitations and restrictions, resulting from being bound within a definite framework.

The Romantic and the Victorian, the Byronic and the Keatsian are just some of the styles which the poets under study are accused of imitating. Similarly the technique adopted by the poets, be it in the rhyme-scheme or in the verse-pattern is also Western, as can be seen in the sonnets on love and nature written by Ghose, Derozio and Madhusudan. But the content of their poetry has always been fundamentally Indian.

The study of these poets in this dissertation begins with a multidimensional view of the period to which the poets belonged. Thus, in the first chapter, an attempt has been made to take a survey of the early nineteenth century Bengal, focussing on the social, political and cultural climate that prevailed in Bengal. The introduction of English language in Bengal was desired by the elite of the Bengali society as well as the higher-ups among the colonial administrative set-up, though their intentions differed. The chapter touches upon the acceptance of English literature in

England vis a vis the offering of English literature as a subject worthy of study to the society in Bengal. The overt comparison of English literature with Sanskrit literature made by the colonialists resulted in English emerging as the superior language. The chapter also discusses the psychological subjugation of the society by the colonialists.

Kashiprasad Ghose is claimed to be the first Bengali poet to have written in English. He was one among those early poets who made forays into a new language and formed their own idiom. The second chapter confirms a justification of the style and content of this new-born poetry, through a discussion on Ghose's poetry. It establishes the patriotic identity of the poet. The chapter concludes with the premise that Ghose is a precursor to the movement of Indian poetry in English in Bengal.

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was a poet who had to defy the stigma of ethnic marginality which came about as a result of his mixed Eurasian origin. Overcoming this handicap, be became the first Bengali poet to express, through his verses, the dreams and desires he nurtured for his motherland India. His poems described subjects like Indian rusticity, Indian students and Indian philosophy. The essential Indianness of Derozio surfaces on a perusal of his poems The third chapter highlights the different dimensions of this poet who deserves a just recognition as the first nationalistic poet of the period. He is not a poet to be dealt with in a

mere passing mention down the course of Indian poetry in English, as has been the case so far.

Toru Dutt was the most significant Indian English poet of early nineteenth century Bengal. Dutt came from one of the aristocratic and cultured Bengali families of the period, who very readily and completely accepted and absorbed the language, literature and also the religion of the colonial masters. Dutt was a poet truly representative of the age. The fourth chapter discusses the two stages in the poetry of Dutt: the period when she was away from India, followed by the period when she returned to her native land. These two sequences in Dutt's poetry reveal the dilemma of a poet caught in the vortex of conflicting loyalties. This aspect surfaces with a critical evaluation of Dutt's poetry in the light of the poet's stay abroad contrasted with her return to India as a result of the gravitational pull of her roots here.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt was the young firebrand of Bengal, who began his literary exercises under an English penname. He rebelled against the stringency of caste and religion by converting to Christianity and also took a step further by changing his name to Michael. Madhusudan was a poet who desperately wanted to become one with the English society and even went over to England for the purpose. But he too was soon attracted back to his native Bengal by the heritage in Bengal. In this feature, as in many other features too, Madhusudan forms a complement to Toru Dutt. The fifth chapter delineates

Madhusudan the poet, against the backdrop of nineteenth century Bengal. This backdrop becomes pertinent due to the sway it held over every major development in the social as well as the literary dimensions of these poets. Madhusudan is a symbol of the ethos of this age that oscillated between the adoption of the new and the disowning of the old. The psychological turbulence which this created eventually resulted in the sensitive blend of the age-old *Vedantic* philosophy with the iconoclastic modern thinking symptomatic of the age. The study of the different stages of this poet and his poetry along with the priceless contributions made by Madhusudan towards Bengali poetry have been discussed in detail in the fifth chapter.

The study concludes with a comparative study of the parallel natures of these four poets of the early nineteenth century Bengal. These poets exhibited many similar trends in their individual experiences and in their responses to the winds of change brought forth in the post colonial Bengal.

Ghose's imitative style had an underlying whisper of Indianness, of the national spirit. Derozio's Eurasian background was the chief cause of the displacement he suffered, overcoming which he strove and succeeded in becoming a total Bengali. Similarly, in accepting an alien language and religion, both Toru Dutt and Michael Madhusudan Dutt went through a psychological upheaval which culminated in their return to their native soil and to their native myth and lore. Eventually, the four poets evolved

their own individual style and technique in representing Indian mythology and folklore in its varied aspects.

The Indian poetry in English is doubtless an outcome of the struggles and pioneering endeavours of the poets of that period, representative of which are the four poets chosen for study in this project.

The evolution of the native theme and the refinement of this choice can be traced in the different stages of development of the poetry as seen from the verse content of the first poet Ghose to the later poets like Derozio, Toru Dutt and Madhusudan Dutt. They were the first generation poets of Indian poetry in English, poets who first experienced the tension of handling native themes in a colonial frame, who first succeeded in evolving a delicate balance between the native and the colonial. A study of Indian poetry in English would never be complete without encompassing these poets and their poetry. On the basis of the dimensions detailed above, this thesis attempts a re-evaluation of their poetry. Such a study would certainly contribute to a comprehensive assessment of Indian poetry in English.

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Chapter - I

REVISITING THE PAST

When totems are abstracted from the life of one community and introduced into the life of another community they acquire different and unforeseen functions and significance.

G.N.Devy

At a very fundamental level, literature emerges as an ideology of a particular, dominant social class, a class which desires to uphold its superiority over other classes; a class which holds control by imposing this ideological form over the other passive and less powerful classes. At any point of history, a close examination of the evolution of the relevant "literature" of the period and a study of the nature of literature would lead to the observation of the emergence of "literature" belonging to the more dominant of the existing social classes to be utilized for confrontation of and ultimate assertion over smaller social groups. The very purpose of this medium hence appears to be to hold the classes together, to bind them, "thus distracting the masses from their immediate commitments, nurturing in them a spirit of tolerance and generosity and so ensuring the survival of private property" (Eagleton, 26). Thus they refer in the end not simply to private taste, but to the assumptions by which certain social groups

exercise and maintain power over others (Eagleton, 16). It is after this stage of a literature gaining supremacy and ensuring its perpetuation that the apparently aesthetic features of this "ideology" emerge -- that of establishing itself as an institution to be revered, to be aspired, to be enjoyed. It is to be noted thus that not any random form of expression of art acquires the entity of a literature. Rather, it is only the form of expression which represents the views and values of a higher class that gains recognition and identity as literature per se. Through the identity of the popular literature of a particular period, the superior class thus utilizes this form to reaffirm its supremacy in society. Terry Eagleton in *Literary Theory* traces the formation and development of the literature of England as a case in point to elucidate this principle.

In a nutshell, the threat of collapse faced by the powerful bastion of religion in eighteenth century England, with the impending fear of the ideology of religion losing its control over society, shifted the focus to "English" which was adjudged the fitting alternative to continue the hegemonic mission undertaken so long by religion. English not as a language but as a "literature" then took up the reins of holding together a difficult and troubled class society by very methodically and systematically working on the emotions, beliefs and feelings of the working class. English literature was advocated as the true reflection of the noble and enriched culture of the nation, a literature whose values one would do well to imbibe. ... in the drive to reconsolidate a shaken, social

order, the neo-classical notions of reason, nature, order and propriety, epitomized in art, were key concepts (Eagleton, 17).

One ought to note that at this juncture, English as a subject was found fit only for the working-classes, to convince them into accepting the class structure and its consequent division between the haves and the have-nots as agreeable and correct.

> Literature would rehearse the masses in the habits of pluralistic thought and feeling, persuading them to acknowledge that more than one viewpoint than theirs existed -- namely, that of their masters. It would communicate to them the moral riches of bourgeois civilization, impress upon them a reverence for middle-class achievements, and since reading is an essentially solitary contemplative activity, curb in them any disruptive tendency to collective political action.(Eagleton, 25)

In Universities, English was looked down upon by the classical languages of Greek and Latin. Comparatively, the study of English was found suitable only for workers and women. The latter is a pointer reflecting the social condition that existed in England then, where women were barred from striving for higher education. English as a language befitted a recognition at par with the classical languages by the Oxbridge only by late nineteenth century. But much before this period the British imperialists had

experimented the teaching of English as a literature on Indians, falsely affirming its sublimity as a literature.

By the mid-Victorian period, the powerful hold of religion was on the verge of collapse under the joint onslaught of the developments in the fields of science and technology which in turn had its own social repercussions too in the emergence of a new class in society. It was this class which in due course toppled the supremacy of the upper class and established what we recognize today as the various genres of English literature or the literature of England. It is to be noted that at the point where literature takes over as an ideology replacing religion, it has a deeper mission to accomplish rather than to merely be a form to be assimilated and appreciated. Therefore the nineteenth century Romantic poetry of Blake and Shelley primarily represents certain conscious socio-political treatises and only secondarily becomes romantic as such. Eagleton elaborates : Its task is to transform society in the names of those energies and values which art embodies. Most of the Romantic poets were themselves political activists perceiving continuity rather than conflict between their literary and social commitments (*Literary* 20).

The path adopted for the beginning and growth of literature in England had a parallel in the growth and development of English in Britain's prime colony, India. Just as literature took over from where religion left in England, in India too, in Bengal, the English language and literature took over from the state of near-

total disintegration of and disbelief in religion in general and in Hinduism in particular. The only difference was that in India, it was her English masters who very consciously, very subvertly built cracks at certain sensitive points in the edifice of Hinduism to confirm a welcome entry for English as a language and a form of literature into India. As Devy states in his essay "Troubling Inheritances", "English literature was accepted in India, as a viable mode of linguistic production and expression primarily because it was the literature of the dominating culture, not because it was inherently superior to literature in Indian languages" (*JEFL* 108)..

A study of nineteenth century Bengal that focusses on the prevailing socio-political and cultural atmosphere presents a multi-dimensional picture, a stark feature of which exposes the cultural denigration, the low social ebb, the "stagnant, degraded and corrupt state into which our society had fallen" (Sarkar, *Renaissance* 5). Bengal had sunk into the nadir of degeneration. In social usage, in politics, in the realm of religion and art, we had entered the zone of uncreative habit, of decadent tradition, and ceased to exercise our humanity (N.S.Bose, 27).

One of the key citizens who played a very active role, be it apparently in association with the British colonialists, in pulling Bengal out of this mire and in creating a resurgence, a reawakening, a rebirth for Bengal was Raja Rammohun Roy .

Roy was born in a highly religious Kulin Brahmin family which conformed in all ways to the rites of his caste, a factor

that proved extremely advantageous for his future. He was well-versed in the Hindu scriptures, the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads;* he was taught Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian; he learnt Bengali by himself. He was the first man to translate and explain *Vedanta* in Bengali though he mainly propagated the non-dualism of Sankaracharya (N.S.Bose, 33). His aim was to instil a belief in the minds of the people in just one formless god which was the epitome of worship given in the ancient scriptures. Roy firmly believed that it was "the image worship and polytheism of the later Puranic religions" which brought about the breakdown of Hindu society (N.S.Bose, 33). It was argued by many that Roy used the strategy of propagating *Vedanta* as a mere facade whereas in reality he was against Hinduism and hence encouraged the arrival of Western education which he felt might enlighten the society to a certain extent. Actually Roy was not up in arms against Hindu religion as such but against theism and idol worship which he considered fit for "those who are incapable of elevating their minds to the idea of an invincible Supreme Being (*The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy* 41). . . . a comprehensive study of the Hindu, Western and Christian scriptures convinced Rammohun that the core of religious truth, comprehending the unity of God as spirit, his worship in spirit and in truth, the immortality of the soul and ethical discipline as the basis of spiritual life, formed the central teaching of the canonical scriptures of the historic religions (Panikkar, 29).

Roy was one of the earliest products of Western learning. Being equally well-informed in both the Oriental and

Occidental tongues and being well-grounded in the Hindu philosophy helped him foresee the doom that society would inevitably be led to if it were allowed to continue to follow certain abject dogmas of the day. It is impossible in the present day to realize the tumult of feelings and the array of opposition that met the Raja (Dae, 171). Aware of the tenacious grip of the religious and social doctrines on the society, Roy had to tread cautiously. He made an appeal to the good sense of society basing his arguments on the very religious scriptures that people swore by.

During this phase of history, to borrow D.D.Kosambi's evocative phrase, Indians were engaged in creative introspection, which meant not only exploring the vitality of the indigenous, epistemological tradition, but also assessing it in the context of the advances made by the West (Panikkar, vii). It was at this juncture that our imperial masters prodded the society in Bengal to rethink their values. The conquest of Bengal by the British was not merely a political revolution. It ushered in a greater revolution in thoughts and ideas, in religion and society.

> 'The search therefore was for a regeneration of the national culture, adapted to the requirements of progress, but retaining at the same time its distinctiveness. The attempt is deeply contradictory. `It is both imitative and hostile to the models it imitates . . . .' It is imitative in that it accepts the value of the standards set by the alien

> culture. But it also involves a rejection : `in fact, two rejections, both of them ambivalent; rejection of the alien intruder and dominator, who is nevertheless to be imitated and surpassed by his own standards, and rejection of the ancestral ways which are seen as obstacles to progress and yet also cherished as marks of identity. (Chatterjee, 2)

This was the most primary impact created by colonialism - the inner struggle involved in fulfilling one's social responsibility. A desire to get attuned and to learn to acclimatize oneself to the values and principles of the colonialist but at the same time a refusal to recognize the superiority of the colonialist was a difficult situation to adapt to, but which one eventually did. The society in Bengal identified itself with the ideals of the colonialist, the levels of development, the progressive thoughts of the colonialist, while at the same time it refused to accept the hegemonic attitude of the colonialist. To distinguish and separate such two related factors, to find a solution to equate these factors was not simple.

Bengal had many firsts to its credit. The British first entered India through Bengal. They built their bourgeois economy first in Bengal. Their imperial ideology resulted in an ambivalence in the attitudes of the society which made itself explicit first in

Bengal. The duality caused by the opposing pressures of resistance and acceptance was also first experienced by the society in Bengal. At this point there existed two chief forces that ignited the dormant spark in the minds of the Bengali community : Rammohun Roy's exhortation for reform in all fields and the Western impact. The hitherto dormant desire for change fanned into a fast-spreading flame even while a certain section of the community was held back firmly by conservatism.

A deeper examination of the inner struggle of the society demonstrates that Bengal at this stage was gripped by two streams of thought, two forms of isms, two concepts, two opposing ideas : Occidentalism versus Orientalism. The unending orthodox and bigotted features of the day victimised mainly women. They indeed formed a very downtrodden sector of the community, inflicted with the harsh practices of bride-burning, child-marriage and polygamy to name a few. Yet another downtrodden class was that of the untouchables - a man-made class justified by certain despicable principles of casteism. Still another unspeakable practice followed was that of "plunging a dying person into water in the hope that the soul purified by the Ganga may ascend to Heaven" (N.S.Bose, 60). These evils had through centuries become so deep-rooted as to be recognized as a natural, normal state of being. They were taken for granted and accepted as a part of life. This complacence was now finally cracking, bringing a rethinking in its wake, causing a requestioning of practices so far blindly followed.

The social practices and religious beliefs of nineteenth century India were thus seen as features of a decadent society characterized by constraint, credulity, status, authority, bigotry and blind fatalism, . . . sought to be replaced by freedom, faith, contract, reason, tolerance and a sense of human dignity (Panikkar, 8).

A very remarkable outcome was the emergence of a new class of people, "the middle-class intelligentsia", a class ready for the change. This chain of events reiterates the dismal ebb reached by the society, a degeneration created by a vicious cycle wherein one class fed on religion and social orthodoxy, encouraged the propagation of all types of social evils onto a class which so long very passively took in this treatment. The latter now envisaged a turn in fortune's cycle and very eagerly looked forward to the change, to the rejuvenation it envisaged in the concept of Western learning, Western impact and liberalism.

Mahasweta Sengupta, in her essay "Literature for the Empire : Rabindranath Tagore Reads English", describes the highly romantic but unreal ideas this class held about the English :

> To a large extent, the popular construction of the identity of the English in the colony was based on two stereotypes of the romantic : the revolutionary fighting for justice and equality, and the spiritually

> blissful calm of prophet -- the two aspects exemplified by Byron and Wordsworth. . . . the British were conceived as always on the side of liberty, equality and fraternity; they were taken as the torch-bearers of liberal humanism in the world, and were given credit for the imaginative achievement of poets like Shelley and Byron, who were actually social outcasts at home. (*JEFL* 120)

As a natural conclusion it seems that it was the idea of learning English that motivated the society. Sarkar stresses that:

> The Bengal renaissance received its original impulse not from ancient India but from the alien modern West. But as our awakening came within the straitjacket of a foreign semi-colonial regime the scope for the development could not have been but limited. (*Renaissance* 150)

The reason was that the British impact *created* a desire, a possibility for a new class. To firmly establish their bourgeois economy, the colonialists had to "destructure" and then "restructure" the socio-economic framework of the native society. Abdul JanMohammed says in his essay "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature" that, "the perception of racial difference is in

the first place, influenced by economic motives. . . .The European desire to exploit the resources of the colonies. . . drastically disrupted the indigenous societies." (*Critical Inquiry* 61) This manner of economic exploitation formed the basis of "colonial" ambience, it was the first step towards the restructuring of the society.

At this point, it was Rammohun Roy, who with his efforts to strike a golden mean between the East and the West, succeeded in setting in motion a huge wave of reform. The reawakening in the minds and hearts of people led to tangible changes in the religious and social spheres, which in turn put an end to many a shameful practice of the day. This was due to the pioneering work of Rammohun Roy, he being "the first of those who have worked and thought and written under European influences" (Dae, 171). The Sanskrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep this country in darkness (Naik, 23). Rammohun Roy pleaded for the cause of English education, because, to keep abreast of development in Western learning and science, a knowledge of the English language was essential. Complementing this, "under colonization . . . the suppression of vernacular languages in favour of English was used as an instrument of imperial rule (Boehmer, 207).

The changes being registered in the socio-cultural set-up of the society were a result of the dual, parallel forces at work,

the foreign imperial force of the colonialists and the indigenous reformative one of Roy and his concentrated efforts. A natural consequence of these reforms was the sweeping changes that came into the cultural face of the society due to the basic determination to change, to learn, to imbibe the new learning as in Western principles. It was a change in the old for the new in the realm of education, heralding the onset of Western culture in India. The pangs of dichotomy experienced by this society, the social and cultural ambivalence of this society formed the ground, the subject of colonial writing.

There were many new entrants in the field to fight for the cause of Western education in India. The contribution of each of them towards creating an atmosphere to inculcate Western learning was starkly different. The reason was that the motivation behind this contribution differed and consequently their influence on the students and on the community as a whole differed. Unknowingly all of them formed links of an inter-connected chain of events. Chatterjee's observation is of relevance here:

> In fact, the entire tradition - modernization dichotomy served as a cover under which the grosser facts of imperialist political and economic exploitation (were), very often quietly tucked away in a cover. . . . The argument was therefore that while there were elements of modernity in the new

> cultural and intellectual movements in nineteenth century India, these cannot become meaningful unless, they are located in their relation, on the one hand, to the changing socio - economic structure of the country, and on the other, to the crucial context of power, i.e. the reality of colonial subjection. (*Nationalist* 24)

In the initial stage, Rammohun Roy's efforts resulted in stirring the minds of the people towards desiring an English education. Rammohun Roy was "a friend of Dr. Duff and Christian missions" (Dae, 171). As a result of the combined efforts of David Hare, Rammohun Roy and Sir Edward Hyde East, the Chief Justice then in 1816, the Hindu College came into existence on January 20 1817. Sarkar explains: David Hare had come to India in 1800 and after retiring from the watch trade in about 1816, devoted the remaining quarter of his life and all his energy, time and fortune to the furtherance of modern education and upliftment of the people of his adopted country (*Henry Derozio: Poems* xii). About David Hare it has been said that "he nursed the Hindu College through all its early trials, sent up to it the cream of his own school boys and watched over it as a daily visitor (Sarkar, xii). He was an organizer and a staunch believer in the freedom of thought and worked for it all his life.

Firmly sharing this belief and working with Hare for this sole cause was the Eurasian poet, Derozio, who was not only

one of the early writers but also the principal mentor, tutor, friend and guide of the other poets of the age. It was Derozio's influence which brought about a rethinking in the minds of the young students. According to his biographer, "neither before, nor since his day has any teacher, within the walls of any native educational establishment in India ever exercised such an influence over his pupils" (*Poems* iii).

A brief survey of the deep-rooted impact of Derozio on his students - - the boys of Hindu College - - shows how it led to the evolution of the next stage of development in the field of education. At a very fundamental level, Derozio sought to create in his students a desire to think freely. He released the fetters of their tender minds and invited them, exhorted them to discuss and debate on any subject with absolute liberty. He created among them a thirst for truth which would thus induce them to question any vice. He appealed to the students to renounce all forms of double standards.

Oh Freedom! there is something dear
E'en in thy very name,
That lights the altar of the soul
With everlasting flame,
Success attends the patriot sword,
That is unsheathed for thee!
And glory to the breast that bleeds,

Bleeds nobly to be free!
Blest be the generous hand that breaks
The chain a tyrant gave,
And, feeling for degraded man,
Gives freedom to the slave. (*Poems* 18)

This was Derozio's impassioned plea for freedom. He always strove to hold high the flag of liberty and equality. He devoted all his leisure to the works of West-European thinkers - Rousseau, Diderot, Berkeley and Hume -- and, of course to the poems of the English poets - - Shakespeare, Milton, Thomas Moore, Keats, Shelley and Byron, under whose impact his philosophy of life was formed (Kalinnikova, 9).

Derozio's youth, magnetic personality and his ability to promote the students to widen their knowledge with the new English learning cast a deep impression in the minds of the students. In her essay "Derozio: English Teacher", Manju Dalmia delineates the reason English as a language and literature became increasingly appealing to Derozio's pupils :

> Notably, literature and history were taught in one composite unit, and in this case, by a man whose strengths were literary rather than historical. From the reactions of Derozio's pupils, it would appear that the study of both together tended to historicize, so that the heroism perceived in the works cited captured the imagination and became

> desirable norms of behaviour in a social system very different from the one in which the works originated. By placing the history of Greece, Rome and England together - the syllabus gave England a parallel status as a global civilizing influence . . . (*The Lie of the Land* 52-53)

A spirited band of Derozio's pupils rallied around their tutor to form the Young Bengal Movement. The Young Bengal - - the name by which the Derozians were hence known - - was held by the bond of brotherhood and love created by their mentor Derozio. The doors of Derozio's house were thrown open to the Young Bengal group - - who were exhilarated by the new learning and the free-thinking it offered. Though a victim of adverse criticism in the days to come, there is no denying the role this movement undertook in creating a dawning awareness among the people to the social and cultural ills ailing the society. Their desire for the liberalism of Western ideology emerged out of the basic desire to improve the society, to direct it towards a progressive track. It fired the students' enthusiasm and emboldened them to openly question issues which were hitherto held taboo by the society. Obviously, the basic subjects of discussion happened to be the existing social and religious structure of Hindu society. One cannot rule out the sense of social responsibility possessed by the members of the Young Bengal and which actually made them lash out against the existent social ills of the period like child-marriage, polygamy and bride-burning. Simultaneously there arose an increasing emphasis on the

necessity of science for the upliftment and advancement of the country. In 1833, the members of Young Bengal published a bilingual monthly, *Bigyan Sar Sangraha*, which dealt exclusively with scientific matters (Panikkar, 13).

Derozio's own approach to the bright young men around him has been preserved in his lines still fondly recalled by his college :

> 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,
> That stretch (like young birds in soft summer hours)
> Their wings, to try their strength,
> O, how the winds
> Of circumstances and freshening April showers
> Of early knowledge, and unnumbered kinds
> Of new perceptions shed their influence;
> And how you worship truth's omnipotence.
> What joyance rains upon me, when I see
> Fame in the mirror of futurity,
> Wearing the chaplets you have yet to gain,
> And then I feel I have not lived in vain. (*Poems* 43)

One of his pupils, Radhanath Sikdar, said of him : "He has been the cause and sole cause of that spirit of enquiry after

truth, and that contempt of vice - which cannot but be beneficial to India (Sarkar, *Introduction* iv). The Academic Association started by Derozio and his pupils in 1828 was no doubt a pioneering organization of its kind.

Thomas Edwards in his biography on Derozio, points out how the philosophical works and their analysis of certain typical factors existent in society, as studied by Derozio, struck a chord within his pupils' heart.

> Free-will, fore-ordination, fate, faith, the sacredness of truth, the high duty of cultivating virtue, and the meanness of vice, the nobility of patriotism, the attribute of God and the arguments for and against the existence of deity as these have been set forth by Hume on the one side, and Reid, Dugald Stewart and Brown on the other, the hollowness of idolatry and the shame of the priesthood were subjects which stirred to their very depths - the young fearless, hopeful hearts of the leading Hindoo youths of Calcutta. (*Henry Derozio* 32)

It was once again with Derozio at the helm that the students started a magazine, *Parthenon* (*Athenium*, according to some) on February 15, 1830. It was a foregone conclusion that such a magazine yet again bearing a first to its credit, would surely have

to die an early death through suppression by the college authorities. It is clear that Derozio entered the cultural scene of Bengal at a very crucial stage of its revival, when the society was till then at its conservative best. What he basically did was to light up the potent ember of inquiry within his intelligent students into a fast-catching flame.

The master's enthusiasm egged the students onto extremities. The intellectual revival ignited by Derozio had unfortunately severe, wild repurcussions. The long-suppressed force of rebellion burst forth and the newly gained freedom to think and conduct free-for-all eye-opening arguments proved too powerful for them to handle with caution. They resorted to excesses in society which they probably felt was the only effective manner to hit against conservatism and thus quench the fire within. . . . the valuation of one kind of literary work implicitly took place at the expense of other kinds, in this case the religious texts of the Hindus (Sunder Rajan, 54). Intake of wine leading to intoxication, going vehemently against their religion by eating beef, denouncing scriptures, casting away the sacred thread, mocking Hinduism absolutely, taking to licentiousness and committing crimes hitherto unthought of were just some of the atrocities committed. As the *Oriental Magazine* put it, "they were cutting their way through ham and beef, and wading to liberalism through tumblers of beer". The youth of Bengal believed this to be an essential part of the new learning, the new culture.

The reformer Rammohun Roy himself was not in favour of this ultra-radical movement. It was Rammohun who heralded the New Age and drew the attention of people towards Western ideas and Western learning. But while welcoming the new ideas he never totally denounced the old. A synthesis of the old and new, of East and West was the characteristic of the Raja's life (Bose, 74). He was among those intellectuals who affirmed the importance of mass education for national regeneration (Panikkar, 14) The Derozians made the most flagrant attacks on the orthodox Brahmin community. What followed was a cyclic reaction. The deeds of the Derozians sent shock waves through the entire orthodox section of society. The reaction of this section was a volte-face for they resorted to forming orthodox associations like the Dharma Sabha which regarded the Derozians as ultra-radicals, as "atheist beasts" who followed the vagabond *firingis.* In such a tense situation came the government regulation against Sati in 1829 as a reward for Roy's ceaseless efforts. This redoubled the alarm and fear of the society which experienced the first of a series of tremors which would soon break apart the very foundation of their orthodoxy. It brought them closer and the Dharma Sabha increased its clamour against the radical changes. Thus the conflict, the clash between the Old and the New reached its zenith.

In retrospect, one would apparently judge the Derozians as a young band of bright and zealous students who were

caught in the fascinating web of free thought but in reality created nothing beyond empty sound and fury. They were so taken by the external trappings of a socio-cultural revival that they failed to grasp the content, the essence of this rebirth. But despite the fact that the Young Bengal movement attracted a lot of flak and outright condemnation, there is no denying the fact that this movement contributed in its own way to the cultural, academic and religious revival of the nineteenth century. For it led to a reformative revival of religion wherein the conservatist theories and practices of the religion of the old were shed, its rough edges smoothened enough to generate a better awareness in the society as opposed to its earlier passive acceptance of all the ills.

In between these two extremes groups of the society there existed a certain section who strove to absorb the new Western ideas and apply it to its own native culture and heritage.

> . . . finding himself despised and rejected of Anglo-Indian men, the Indian was thrown back upon himself. The historical spirit returned. He began to value his own past and to find his dreams refreshening. The revival of oriental studies in England and Germany pleased him. . . . driven into his own territory, he discovered that it was a desirable land. (Kotoky, 4-5)

It was in such an exciting phase of the revolt and consequent rebirth of culture and religion that the missionaries entered the academic scene. In fact in the endeavour for "the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India" (Bhattacharya, 4) the Western educationists and the missionaries vied one another.

> There is a convergence between the great geographical scope of the empires, especially the British one, and universalizing cultural discourses. Power makes this convergence possible . . . to be in far-flung places, to learn about other people, to codify and disseminate knowledge, to characterize, transport, install and display instances of other cultures . . . and above all to rule them. (Said, 130)

The responsibilities of imparting knowledge and converting people to Christianity were taken by the missionaries of the following generation, the most prominent among them being an extraordinarily talented man - - Alexander Duff, a missionary from St.Andrews. Duff came with this purpose to Calcutta on May 27, 1830. He witnessed the social arena with mixed feelings of joy and fear. Duff is just one example of the whole set of missionaries and teachers who had set forth from imperial Britain to her colony, geared up to instil into the native's mind an affirmation of the latter's inferiority, in stature (suppressed), colour (dark), knowledge

(confused and fundamentally wrong and evil), nature (dishonest, ill-mannered and unthinking) and bring the native to acknowledge the impending urgency to change and improve his lot by of course in no lesser manner than of looking up at his imperial master, agreeing to improve his lot by getting "civilized" and Westernized by willingly getting subordinated, suppressed and subjugated. Lalbehari Dey writes in his *Recollections of Alexander Duff* : "He witnessed the revolution which the minds of the intelligent youth of the city were undergoing, the wildness of their views; the reckless innovations they were introducing, the infidel character of their religious opinion and the spirit of unbounded liberty or rather licentiousness, which characterized their speculations (N.S.Bose, 66). Duff foresaw the inculcation of European learning by the Indians as the best instrument to control Hinduism. He believed that his chief task of preaching Christianity had been made easy because of their loss of faith in their own age-old religion. Simultaneously, a certain degree of doubt also entered his mind as to the extent to which he could carry out this task because the extreme elements among the student community had abandoned faith not merely in their own religion but in the overall belief in God itself. The crisis which the Indian society was fast heading to has been very aptly put in the following statement by Nabar in her essay "The Past is Before Us : The Colonial as Postcolonial" :

> In the colonial perspective, British culture loses nothing and gains something through its acquaintance with many aspects of Indian thought

> and practice. The Indian on the other hand, is always in danger of losing whatever it has in order to accomodate the British factor. (*Post-Colonial Perspectives* 8)

A sizeable lot of this community was high on the road to scepticism and atheism. On the other hand, William Adam, a Unitarian missionary declared that the best way to spread Christianity was not by attempting to convert a few people but by preaching rationally while imparting good and sound knowledge, thus enthusing "the masses and putting the masses into a state of fermentation" (Bhattacharya, 4).

Duff set his mission rolling into motion by beginning a school on July 13, 1830, called General Assembly's Institution with a strength of merely five pupils. He was assisted in this venture by none less than Rammohun Roy. Bengal found itself in the throes of change. Slowly but surely English was gaining ground and getting an edge over the hitherto well-established Sanskrit.

It is imperative to bring our attention at this point, once again to the fact that it was the totally diverse and opposing desires of our own reformer Rammohun Roy on one hand and of the Western reformers on the other that together established the stronghold of the English language to Bengal.

The British had absolutely no intention of "educating" Indians in the actual sense of the word. The English literary text functioning as a surrogate Englishman in his highest and most

perfect state, becomes a mask for economic exploitation, so successfully camouflaging the material abilities of the colonizer. . . (Viswanathan, 20). There was no question of there existing a similarity in the patterns of education followed by Britain in its native place and in India. Once again, the reason given was that the Indian frame of mind was so underdeveloped that even the adult had a long way to go, had a vast study of English to undertake before he could be comparable to even a mere schoolboy of England. But in reality, the purpose of educating only to a certain degree and not any further was to get such educated Indians to work for the British, because the latter foresaw that being subservient as they were, they would not even dream of rising in revolt against or disagreeing with the British bosses at any point of time.

In yet another shrewd move, the colonialists aimed at creating a divide between two classes of society: those knowing or desiring to learn English and the less fortunate ones. They chose to offer their education to the upper, intellectual class, for they saw no future in spending their time and energy even attempting to coach the lower classes, "whose circumstances did not permit them to acquire more than the basic elements of knowledge and who were in subjection to the higher classes", (Viswanathan, 117). The hierarchical ordering of societies on ' a scale of civilization' reflected not just the classifying enthusiasms of the Enlightenment, but was a way to reassure the British that they themselves occupied a

secure position, as the arbiter of its values, on the topmost rung (Metcalf, 34). Thus, a select, elite group was initiated in English language, and in this group the colonialists envisaged a positive perpetuation of their culture and their ideology in India.

This section of the society was first treated to a fearful though false picture of its country, where all bestial and inhuman principles held sway. In Metcalf's words :

> As Europeans constructed a sense of self for themselves apart from the old order of Christendom, they had of necessity to create a notion of an 'other' beyond the seas. To describe oneself as 'enlightened' meant that someone else had to be shown as 'savage' or 'vicious'. To describe oneself as 'modern', or as 'progressive', meant that those who were not included in that definition had to be described as 'primitive' or 'backward'. Such alterity, what one might call the creation of doubleness, was an integral part of the Enlightenment project (*Ideologies* 6).

Thus the Westerners took the axiom of literature being a mirror of life, applied it to the traditional literature of India and contorted the role of women depicted in these epics. Sita being driven away to the forest, Draupadi having to marry five princes,

Sakuntala, being exploited and denounced by Dusyanta, were just a few of the many mangled images that the colonialists exhibited to the community. The suppression and the abominable treatment meted to the Indian woman during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was for the foreigners, a very fortunate coincidence. They exposed the plight of women to be a result of the conservative, uncivilized literature of the country. In a nutshell, the colonialists were very shrewdly attacking the epics of our country from various fictitious angles. Our society was so hopelessly bound by a sense of inferiority that it willed itself to cast away, without any second thoughts, the rich heritage as garbage; our society moulded the minds of the people to believe the false images of its own traditions portrayed by foreigners and the superior culture of Europe.

As a stark contradiction, it was noted that while Europeans of all ages could enjoy and appreciate exotic tales, romantic narratives, adventure stories and mythical literature for their charm and even derive instruction from them, their colonial subjects were believed incapable of doing so because they lacked the prior mental and moral cultivation required for literature -- especially their own -- to have any instructive value for them (Viswanathan, 5). They were thus made to believe that this abject plight was an expected consequence of the age-old scriptures and ancient tales of the country.

A play like Kalidas `*Shakuntala*', which delighted Europeans for its pastoral beauty and lyric charm leading Horace Wilson . . . to call it the jewel of Indian literature, was disapproved of as a text for study in Indian schools and colleges; sweeping judgements that "the most popular forms (of Oriental literature) are marked with the greatest immorality and impurity" held sway (Viswanathan, 5-6). These were in turn traced to the ultimate source -- the Hindu religion which created such literature. It is indeed ironic to observe that while Oriental tales were regarded worthy of discussion in the nation of the colonialist, the colonized people, whose ancestors had actually created these legends and tales, were not considered to possess a level of development mature enough to grasp or understand these tales.

The colonialists declared that the colonized Indians first needed a guidance for an extensive reading of good English books to instil in them the habit of reading and assimilation, the ability to derive an enjoyment and a pleasure out of reading. In short, the necessity, the compulsion of an English system of education was thrust onto a society which was unaware of the basic motive behind the entire step, so deep was their mental subjugation. Devy very aptly remarks:

> It is worth noting that the Indians did not accept the cultural superiority of Western knowledge after examining the intrinsic worth of that knowledge.

> On the contrary they started studying Western ideas because they had already accepted the superiority of British culture. (*Amnesia* 21)

In essence, the teachers of English were, in a two - pronged treatment, making the very concept of English and its knowledge increasingly tempting to the natives by inducing them to believe that the Hindu religion was basically degrading in all aspects religious, moral, social and economic. Fanon's description of the degradation of the Negro in the hands of the colonialist reveals the similarity in the method adopted by the colonialists in India to break down the religious structure of the native society:

> Colonialism . . . has never ceased to maintain that the Negro is a savage; . . . For colonialism, the vast continent was the haunt of savages, a country riddled with superstitions and fanaticism, destined for contempt, weighed down by the curse of God, a country of cannibals -- in short, the Negro's country. (*The Wretched* 170)

Mehta in his essay "Khuswant Singh's *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale* : A Study in Colonial Consciousness" describes this state as "a total subjugation of `the native' a denigration and dislocation of his culture . . ." (*Colonial Consciousness* 154). They stressed upon the education of women, apparently, for the benefit of

the society. They reminded the natives once again that the deprived lot of women in Indian society was due to their illiteracy which was in turn due to the social restrictions banning them to study. These restrictions were finally a result of the sensuousness of our literature.

Interestingly, it needed Gandhi to give a fitting retort to the Western world for their deliberate and malicious distortion of the Hindu religion and its tales bringing in untrue sensuous and immoral overtones within them.

> It has remained for our Western visitors to aquaint us with the obscenity of many practices which we have hitherto innocently indulged in. It was in a missionary book that I first learnt that Shivalingam (a Hindu phallic symbol) had any obscene significance at all and even now when I see a Shivalingam neither the shape nor the association in which I see it suggests any obscenity. It was again in a missionary book that I learnt that the temples of Orissa were disfigured with obscenities. When I went to Puri, it was not without an effort that I was able to see those things, but I do know that the thousands who flock to the temple know nothing about the obscenities surrounding these figures. (Viswanathan, 126)

One cannot help but be shocked at the staggering difference in the goal of the colonialists as against our misled Indian reformers, for the cause of the development of society, for the betterment of the downtrodden and finally for an English education.

Having caught the attention of our group of intellectuals by presenting this horrifying spectacle of the indelible harm done to the society through the Hindu religion, the colonialists next brought into the focus of this group, the literature of England. "A literature so full of all qualities of loveliness and purity, such new regions of high thought and feeling . . . that to the dwellers in past days it should have seemed rather the production of angels than men" (Viswanathan, 87). This literature was no doubt a surrogate for the Christian religion and which consequently reflected the qualities of love, purity, serenity, peace, truth and all things good. The colonialists were so over-enthusiastic about preaching their religion as to declare that the English literature is so "imbued with the spirit of Christianity" and "interwoven with the words of the Bible to a great degree", that "without even looking into the Bible, one of those Natives must come to a considerable knowledge of it merely from reading English literature" (Viswanathan, 94). In fact, their superiority in every sphere of knowledge, be it scientific or historic was declared to be a direct result of the purity of Christianity.

What had in reality occurred in our society was a willing suspension of belief, a "misplaced emotional affinity with

Western and Sanskrit ideas" (Devy, 49). It was in the throes of being torn into two. It was experiencing the tension of being drawn inexorably towards an alien, idealised culture which had successfully worked towards upsetting the impact of the indigenous culture for the worse and consequently building a distaste and contempt for the native culture. This alien, worthless stream of thought had caused a "cultural amnesia" in the colonized society, a period causing a willingness to forget the past which brought a false sense of embarrassment and indignity in its wake, and instilled an unwanted sense of shame in the mind by the superior alien culture. Projecting static images of the past, inaccurate and inflexible concepts of literary traditions and history and non-productive affinities with remote but idealised traditions - all are symptoms of this disorder (Devy, 50). It is an organized, cyclical process beginning with creating a sense of inferiority in the colonized culture, moving the people to seek the superior culture of the colonialists. Colonized people were seen as lacking history, culture, religion and intelligence and thus it became clear that it was a European duty to fill this void (Pennycook, 56). Elleke Boehmer describes this phenomenon as an attempt of natives across a large cross-section of the colonized world in becoming more correct, more colonialist, more English in fact than the real item; but always falling short of it *(Colonial* 116).

There was definitely an ambivalence in the attitude of the society towards discarding their religion for an alien one. While a part of their minds voluntarily believed the evils caused by

Hinduism as shown to them, the basic, inner self held back at the point of actually changing religions. This conflict expressed itself in the attitudes towards all facets of life. It was also observed in their acceptance of the role of Western influence towards the development of the native culture. The entire system of colonization was, in their minds, split into two: the right and the wrong, the benign and the malign. Accordingly, the activities and changes wrought by the colonialists in the political sphere were absolutely wrong. But their offer and aid to socially and culturally promote the society was benignant (Devy, 32).

Their indecisiveness prevented them from progressing further enough to realize that colonialism, in toto, stemmed from one fundamental root. This dialectic, this tension was one major result which came as an aftermath of colonialism.

The intentions of the colonial reformers are very much apparent in the following observation made by Tharu :

> Bureaucrats, missionaries, journalists and Western commentators of various kinds filed sensational reports about Indian culture, and made authoritative analyses of Indian culture, which was invariably presented as irrational, deceitful, and sexually perverse. The thrust of these descriptions was usually quite clear : the situation in India was so appalling that it called for intervention by an ethical and rational power. The British quickly

> persuaded themselves (and the huge profits remitted to imperial coffers no doubt hastened the process) that India was the white man's burden and their government essential to its salvation. (*Women Writing* 9-10)

Duff addressed the first of a series of lectures on Christianity. Naturally this created an uproar in the society. The students of the Hindu College were prevented from attending any meeting or lecture specially those on religion. Eating and drinking in classrooms were banned. Despite such prohibitions, the Derozians continued to meet in the house of Derozio and their meetings and discussions continued as before. As a result, all fingers pointed accusingly towards Derozio to be the cause of it all. The college ultimately declared him to be "the root of all evils and the cause of public alarm," (N.S.Bose, 67) and decided to take measures to dismiss him from the college. The Calcutta Presidency College (into which the old Hindu College was transformed in 1855) still preserves a volume of manuscript records containing the proceedings of the special meeting of the Directors of the Hindu College on 23 April 1831. Three principal charges against Derozio were : 'Do you believe in God? Do you think respect and obedience to parents as part of moral duty? Do you think inter-marriage of brothers and sisters innocent and allowable?' Derozio's reply to his dismissal remains one of the masterpieces of this wonderful

teacher's writings and gives an insight into the mind of the inspirer of the Young Bengal Movement.

> Entrusted as I was for sometime with the education of youth peculiarly circumstanced, was it for me to have made them pert and ignorant dogmatists, permitting them to know what could be said upon only one side of grave questions? Setting aside the narrowness of mind which such a course might have evinced, it would have been injurious to the mental energies and acquirements of the young men themselves. And (whatever may be said to the contrary), I can vindicate my procedure by quoting no less orthodox authority than Lord Bacon :- "If a man," says this philosopher, (and no one ever had a better right to pronounce an opinion upon such matters than Lord Bacon), "will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubt." This, I need scarcely observe, is always the case with contented ignorance when it is roused too late to thought. One doubt suggests another and universal scepticism is the consequence. (N.S.Bose, 68-69)

Derozio's contribution to the spread of English education in India was very significant. It was basically his inspiration, patriotism and zeal for freedom that spurred the youth

community of Bengal towards English education. Rammohun Roy's *A Defence of Hinduism* had already been published in 1817 and earned the prestigious position of being "the first original writing" (Nair, 4). The beginning of journalism by John Marshman with the publication of a paper called *Darpan* in 1818 (Panikkar, 57-58) and the press in Bengal gave an added impetus to the development of English. The free press introduced for the first time in Asiatic Society and managed principally by the common offspring of Hindus and Europeans, was a new and powerful agent of reconstruction (Marx, 68). It prodded more and more students to learn the language.

The Western influence in the society as a whole in Bengal was remarkable. Gradually, as the new powers staked their claims over the land and over the minds of the people, not only individual works but whole literary traditions were delegitimated and marginalized (Tharu, 11). It is to be noted that while native traditions and native culture did not disintegrate as it were, the basis for subjugation was set here, a neocolonisation of the natives took place as they got influenced and swayed towards Westernization.

A destructive impact of colonialism was "the psychological dissonance and alienation experienced by colonized peoples" (Boehmer, 188). As their tutors sought to give the pupils a thoroughly complete English education, their aim was to lift England with all its qualities, its ambience, its manners and ways of life and implant it in an alien atmosphere. As a time capsule for

English culture, India provided an ideal setting (Viswanathan, 116). The English culture was of course imbibed through the English books prescribed for reading and study, books leaning heavily on Christian tenets. The result of this venture, this experiment was that a certain class of society, represented by the educated Indian, spoke in English, dressed in the style of the English, behaved like the English, adapted English mannerisms and took great pains to learn and speak the language as would befit a native Englishman. . . .Editors of Calcutta journals and newspapers deliberately wrote in an Addisonian style under names like "Candidus", "Verax", Oneiropolus" and "Flacus" and on subjects not having the remotest bearing on Indian life, such as the fashions of the day in England and on imagination, etiquette and morality (Viswanathan, 116). The educated class had taken to studying English poets like Milton, Dryden, Pope and Gray. Positive attempts were being made to grasp and absorb the writings of Gibbon, Defoe and Johnson. The result was not merely a further marginalization of the already cast-aside native literature, but a redoubled earnestness on the part of this class of society to win the acclaim of the colonizers.

The influence on the Bengali writers of the age was a double-edged one, where though they were indebted to Sanskrit, they were simultaneously gaining an awareness of the West. The works of the budding Bengali poets of the age like Rangalal Banerjee (1827-1887), Hemchandra Banerjee (1838-1903) and Nabin Chandra Sen (1837-1909) thus adopted Western techniques

while retaining the national spirit and content. That is they wrote heroic and long narrative poems drawing material from *Puranic* tales, historic legends . . . on the model of Scott, Byron, Moore and others (N.S.Bose, 280). Developing under the patronage of the colonizers, feeding voraciously on the English literature of the period and reading the poetry of the Romantic poets of England conglomerated in an eagerness to prove the results of the new learning. Modern Bengal prose began with the work of William Carcy and his pandits Ram Ram Bose and Mrityunjaya Bidyalankar (Panikkar, 57-58). In brief, though the English tongue and the native works in the English language were still at the nursing stage, the Western mind had already commenced bringing changes in the vernacular literature. The beliefs, the principles, the attitudes and the modes of Western culture had been absorbed and assimilated by these writers. The change in the style of writing prose and poetry as witnessed at this point was the external manifestation of their internalization of Occidentalism. Thus Tharu observes :

> On the face of it, Orientalist scholarship, which "retrieved" and put into circulation many classical Sanskrit and Persian texts, would appear to have reauthorized Indian literature and reaffirmed the significance of an Indian tradition. But . . . it was a highly restructured version of the past that emerged in the orientalist frame work. (*Women Writing* 11)

The attitude of the society was, interestingly, different in various presidencies. It was thus that in Maharashtra, due to the high level of education in the vernacular, comparable to even certain places in England, the people had no desire to opt for an alien, English system of learning. In this one feature, they were even supported by the English officials themselves like Sir Thomas Munro and Mountstuart Elphinstone (Devy, 35).

Bengal presented a totally different scenario. The aristocratic intellectual class of Bengal actually wanted the English system of education, hoping to improve their standards even more and hence, here, the colonialists had no difficulty at all in introducing the Western system of learning. The sheer fact that the Hindu College which started functioning in 1817 had, by 1842, as many as ten thousand students enrolled for various lines of study (Devy, 36) shows the demand for English in Bengal.

New art forms had begun developing as in theatre and poetry in which the progression and awareness of the society were clearly visible. The name of Dinabandhu Mitra springs instantly in the mind for he was the pioneer in theatre. His *Nil Durpan*, the first, best known and the greatest of his works, describing the tortures inflicted by the European indigo planters of the time on the native cultivators, caused a striking effect on the society, to such an extent that when this drama was translated into English by Reverend James Long, he was imprisoned for his 'heinous' deed.

This dramatic turn of events, causes one to look anew at the cause and effect relation of the introduction of the English language. The various dimensions of the society were intricately connected to each other through the turbulent current of development where the changes in the social environment led to uncontrollable, associated changes in the religious and then to the cultural realms. There were no strict lines of demarcation between the various mileu, with the result that the multifaceted resurrection of the society with all its crises and cross-currents often over lapped. Hence this moment experienced the establishment by the colonialists of "English" as a language and as a literature worthy of study in India. This moment also envisaged the beginning of the Indian-English literature in India.

The historical moment which saw the emergence of "English" as an academic discipline, also produced the colonial form of imperialism (Ashcroft, 3). To elucidate this, a reference to what was mentioned earlier in this chapter is called for. Though the common aim of introducing English education in India was shared by the Indian reformers as in Rammohun Roy and the Western reformers as in Duff and others, they were motivated by diametrically opposite causes. While Rammohun Roy nurtured a fond dream of a better developed, educated and progressive India, the colonialists thought otherwise. Observing the growing power of the missionaries and also the possibilities of an upheaval by the natives, the colonialists saw in English education an answer to their current dilemma. English education came as a solution for

them to extend imperialism. They "discovered an ally in English literature to support them in maintaining control of the natives under the guise of liberal education (Ashcroft, 3). That is, in a shrewd moment they realized that an adoption of English would reaffirm their dominance in India as in other colonies. Mehta, in his essay "Khuswant Singh's *I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale*: A Study in Colonial Consciousness", describes the British colonial rule in India as "an actualization of the institution of colonialism, an actualization that led to a virtual emasculation of the 'natives' " (*Colonial Consciousness* 156).

The beginning of the history of Indian - English literature in general is to be traced back to the times when the actual impact of the conquest was gradually being felt (Kotoky, 1). This impact once again carries us to Bengal as this was the first province to cognizably encounter the experience of colonization. Keeping this study confined to the early years of nineteenth century leads to the observation that the cultural map of India of this period, concentrating in Bengal, was dotted with several remarkable events which might have together forged the beginning of Indian Writing in English in Bengal. In the academic arena, this period witnessed the opening of several schools. The prestigious Hindu College started functioning in 1817. Alexander Duff's missionary school started functioning in 1831. More significantly, in 1835, Macaulay in his famous Minutes laid the foundations of the modern Indian educational system, with his decision to promote

European science and literature among Indians through the medium of the English language. (Paranjape, *Indian Poetry* 2) Thus the English language in general and the English literature in particular came to stay in India. It was in this initial period itself of the introduction of English language and literature that this subject was placed in a platform of prestige, whence it became a matter of pride in Indian society to acquaint and familiarize oneself with this subject. The inclination for acquisition and mastery of this language and literature was observed chiefly in some of the upper-class aristrocratic families in Calcutta, as also the members and the student-community of the new middle-class in Calcutta. Right from its onset, it was established that English was an upmarket symbol, a class symbol revolving round the higher strata of society.

Obviously the privileged class of the intellectuals, the aristocrats, were deemed most suited for absorbing the new learning. The colonial intellectuals were not `organic' to a developing bourgeois order, but were those struggling for the requisition, dissemination and acceptance of bourgeois ideas and values in a period of transition from a feudal society to a stultified and dependent form of capitalism under colonial domination (Panikkar, 33). What followed was, in the words of Said, a "process of conscious affiliation under the guise of filiation (*Empire*, 4). The intellectuals as the chosen class sought to identify with the colonialists. Having been classified into an elite group, the desire to be recognized, to be accepted was utmost in the minds of this class, willing themselves to temporarily suspend their beliefs,

their roots in the midst of their struggle to become "more English than the English" - - the consequences of the "Macaulayian system" which was creating a group of emasculated people alienated from their national culture and from their own countrymen (Panikkar, 17).

Out of this stage evolved the next stage, that of a national literature. A fact first realized in America and then accepted by the other colonies was that their sheer aping of British forms was in reality incongruous when placed over native themes. When English was brought to a totally different culture and people than the British, it could not be adopted as such into the local environs. A certain degree of change had to be brought into this "English" to make it acclimatized to the native colony. English was thus gradually "colonized" to a degree enough to be recognized as a distinct form from the Received Standard English - - the form in which it had first made its presence felt in the colonies. These distinct forms have today been accepted as the Indian-English, the American-English, the Canadian-English and so forth. All these literatures come under the single classification of "post-colonial literature".

Among all forms of art, literature as a whole (and hence Indian English literature too) has been the chief decisive medium to endorse the fundamental and primary impact of colonialism right up to the finer nuances experienced by the colonized community. Being a victim of colonization, the literature, rather all the art forms of India, since the moment of colonization,

in other words all the "post colonial" art forms till date (for the process of post-colonialism continues) are evolved knowingly or otherwise from the very experience of colonization, of the subjugation, the revolt, the crisis with the imperial powers and finally an assertion of the independent identity of the native, the colonized. It is this identity which expresses itself as the post-colonial literature, the Indian English literature. In this one aspect, Indian English literature shares its quality with all the rest of Commonwealth literature.

The beginning made by Kashiprasad Ghose, Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt and Madhusudan Dutt to write on Indian themes in the English language was the actual point of evolution of Indian poetry in English. Ghose, Dutt and Madhusudan hailed from aristocratic Bengali families, representing the *bhadralok* of the Bengali community. Derozio, the friend, philosopher, tutor, mentor and nationalistic poet served as a major link between the East and the West. They were the first poets to create Indian poetry in English at a time when the only others in this field were some English writers themselves. The first collections of such poetry was published in a 46 page suppplement to what was probably one of the first textbooks of English literature anywhere in the world, David Lester Richardson's monumental *Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the present Day with Biographical and Critical Notices* (Paranjape, *Indian Poetry* 3). It is a point to be

noted that this first book of "British-Indian" poetry contained poems of Derozio and Ghose.

To sum up, as S.K.De points out, "literary movements in Bengal had perforce been closely bound up with political, social, religious and other movements . . . Every great writer of this period of transition was of necessity a politician, a social reformer or a religious enthusiast (Bose, 263).

Ultimately, the concepts which highlight Indian poetry in English, the factors that come to prominence in Indian poetry in English of the early nineteenth century Bengal is the poet's sense of creativity, the nascent sense of achievement in the successful blending of the native theme in a newly acquired foreign tongue. The poetry of this age has been declared to be romantic. Romanticism was in the air. The rejuvenation of the society, as of art, the renaissance of the era, the desire to regain and rebuild strength and confidence as evidenced in the social, cultural and political background of Bengal was naturally impressed upon the poetry of the period.

> "Post colonial" seems to be the choice which both embraces the historical reality and focusses on that relationship which has provided the most important creative and psychological impetus in the writing. It shows the rationale of the grouping

in a common past and hints at the vision of a more liberated and positive future. (Ashcroft, 24)

The self-esteem, the self-confidence, the positive tone of the poetry, which, overcoming all odds, was looking towards a promising future, the exuberant spirit of the age get expressed in the following lines of Iqbal :

Thou didst create night and I made the lamp.
Thou didst create clay and I made the cup.
Thou didst create the deserts, mountains and forests,
I produced the orchards, gardens and groves;
It is I who makes glass out of stone,
And it is I who turns a poison into an antidote.
(Kripalani,71)

WRITING IN COLONIAL SPACE : A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH

Thesis
Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature

By

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Chapter - II

GHOSE : A REFORMATORY REFRAIN

You can translate a word by a word, but behind the word is an idea, the thing which the word denotes, and this idea you cannot translate, if it does not exist among the people in whose language you are translating...

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee

Colonialism had reached a crossroad where the colonialists were perforce to take stock of their situation in India, a vulnerable one with tensions and clashes between the East India Company, the English Parliament and the missionaries building up to a climax. It became necessary to construct a parallel pillar of support in the cultural facet of the society which would strengthen their central political position. Apparently in answer to the clamour of the society itself for an English education, the colonialists saw in this a solution to their own crises.

The "necessity" for English learning was very deviously built up by the colonialists at the grassroot level, which called for an uprooting of the power of Sanskrit literature. The colonialists systematically worked towards the "cultural demoralization" of the colonized society. As J.M. Blaut puts it:

> Non-Europeans . . . were seen as psychically *undeveloped*, as more or less *childlike*. But, given the psychic unity of mankind, non-Europeans could of course be brought to adulthood, to rationality, to modernity, through a set of learning experiences, mainly colonial. (*The Colonizer's Model* 96)

The early steps towards this achievement were, unbelievably, taken by the English translators themselves like Sir William Jones who had translated into English the play *Sakuntala* by Kalidasa and H.H. Wilson who had translated the epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. In the words of Bankim Chandra, "...These pundits of Europe and America...attempt to construct historical theories out of ancient Sanskrit texts, but they cannot accept that the subject and powerless people of India were ever civilised, or that this civilisation dates from very ancient times" (*Nationalist* 60). Sweeping statements against these age-old epics and plays were made by the colonialists, aiming to shake the confidence and the trust of the society in these scriptures. Sanskrit which was the basic, ideological institution of the society was thus exploited in a covert manner by the rulers. James Stuart Mill in his *History of British India* wrote :

> . . . These fictions are not only more extravagant and unnatural, less correspondent with the physical and moral law of the universe, but are less

> ingenious, more meritorious, and have less of anything that can engage the affection, awaken sympathy, or excite admiration, reverence or terror, than the poems of any other even the rudest people with whom our knowledge of the globe has yet brought us acquainted . . . (Devy, *Amnesia* 25)

Thus in one callous stroke, Mill attempted to crack the ancient and sacred edifice on which the society was built. The prejudiced views of the colonialists and their assertions that Sanskrit literature was replete with horrors, immoralities, obscenities and exaggerations, succeeded in hitting the dart in the eye of the society. The society was subject to the more superior Western culture. In their perspective, the people considered themselves inferior in ways more than one to the better developed and advanced West. Since the beginning of colonization, they had developed a complex of being second-hand and second-class. They looked up at their conquerors and built a larger-than-life halo of superiority around the latter. In a very calculated and underhand fashion, the colonialists had created an absolutely false and unreal picture of comparison between the literatures of the two countries. A desire was implanted within the colonized to strive to imitate the colonialists. Such a ploy made our society very readily join the colonialists in denouncing our traditional literature.

Kashiprasad Ghose was an essential part of this system -- the system of colonization. His poetry represents the

initial waves of the Western learning in the literary field, in the genre of poetry, Devy says :

> There is no point in merely running down the Indian tendency to imitate the West. Even the most original of the twentieth century thinkers : Sri Aurobindo, M.N.Roy and Mahatma Gandhi could not escape the impact of Western thought. Cultural forms and intellectual institutions do keep changing continuously and no post colonial society can claim to have come unscathed out of the colonial period. The colonial past cannot just be wished away.(*Amnesia* 4)

In tracing the development of Indian English poetry, we could demarcate the evolution of Indian English poetry into three stages - imitation, Indianization and individualisation as pointed out by V.N. Bhushan and Dr. Iyengar (Kotoky, 14). The poetry of Ghose belongs to the first stage - that of imitation. His verses, as the one given below evinces are replete with echoes of the English Romantic poets, maybe reflecting the poet's latent desire to be one among them.

> Or-when his daily course had run,
> And ceased to shine the golden sun;
> Her robe of darkness wore the night;
> The stars emitted sparkling light;
> The moon sailed like a silver bark,

Along the ocean vast and dark,
All round were hushed below, above;
The night-wind sighed for flowret's love,
And strove in whispering tone to gain
Their odours sweet and pass amain:-
Then would the Shair also string,
His vocal Vin and thus would sing!

- 'The Shair'

In the last line of the above extract, note how Ghose even goes to the extent of giving an Anglicised twang to the native "Veena" making the instrument "Vin" in the process, probably anticipating a better response thus from his English colonizer. In the very first canto of the poem "The Shair" the poet in a foot note gives the meaning of the "vin" thus: "The current name of the Indian lute, and an abbreviation of the Sanskrit term *Vina*". The poet's abbreviating of this Indian term, his attempt to Anglicise a native word reflects his accomodative endeavour for the benefit of the colonizer. The poet seems more concerned in exhibiting his newly-acquired proficiency in an alien language, causing him to digress constantly and get carried away by his own verse. Speaking on cultural amnesia, Devy explains :

> The colonizing force is seen in the role of a parent hated and feared and imitated by the colonized culture which starts perceiving itself as a `child'

> who fears its own impotency and fantasizes about the productive power of the `parent'. The intimidated child then engages itself in acts to win the approval of the parent to enable itself to define its own new identity. This is where history ceases to be history and becomes an extended spectrum of fantasy and amnesia . . . (*Amnesia* 52-53)

This phase prompted our poets to bring out a spate of poetry suffused with echoes of the English Romantic poets like Byron, Keats and Shelley. Their works were portrayals of native characters clad in foreign garb - a miserable attempt to view the local theme from the ruler's eye and versify accordingly. Hence the works turned out to be shallow copies of Romantic poets of England.

> Yet if my scanty skill can make
> One note, however faint, awake,
> My weak endeavour will not be
> In vain; - 'tis all I wish from thee.
>
> Unskilled, I strive to soar on wings
> Of various, wild imaginings,
> Although my every nerve I strain,
> Yet find my labour end in vain;
> My feeble limbs can scarcely keep
> My flight unskilled through airy deep,

In the above extract of Ghose's introductory verses preceding 'The Shair', one finds the poet very diffident in his maiden venture of versifying in English. A perusal of this one poem itself makes very explicit the fact that Ghose is struggling throughout his verses to describe the beauty of his land, the many faces of her climate and the game of fate. The poet seems to be taking an extraordinary effort to share all this and more with someone not very familiar with this land, namely his English master. The poem alternately exudes tones of hope and despair, of joy and sorrow. The inner struggle undergone by the poet in handling the challenging task of relating a Shair's melancholic and romantic tale in a new language, the positive note of success in the venture coupled with the negativity of doubt finds expression in the lines of the poem, as seen in the following lines:

> The clouds of care were driven away
> And sweet contentment's cheerful ray
> Beamed forth and full revived his life,
> Where many a lovely flower of hope,
> That promised future joys did ope,
> Secure of further, woeful strife
> As if his life's sad winter past
> And spring her genial influence cast.

The following extract with its accompanying footnote expresses the poet's wish to make his poem acceptable and

agreeable to his superior masters for the sake of which he puts in elaborative explanations. The poet's allusions to Indian "poets" but European "bards", readily acknowledging the superiority of the latter is notable.

> The purling streamlet makes a song,
> As through the vale it glides along,
> The regal swans* majestic skim
> The waves with glittering sunbeams trim
>
> *The swans are here put for the Rajahansas, a superior species of the gander to whom Indian poets have made the like allusions which European bards make to the swan. (*The Shair* 6).

Ghose belonged to a class of the budding literateurs of Bengal. For him the very fact that he wrote in English, successfully in his standards, was due recognition. Versification in English was by itself an ambitious enough project. Further, the English teachers had imposed their own style of control over the undue development of the unwary poet. Childlike innonence could be reformed into maturity through education and introduction to Western civilization; childlish rebellion required strict control and authoritarian rule (Pennycook, 60). By giving him only books written in English and by English writers on English themes, all native sources of influence were barred entry into the minds of the

poet. Obviously the poet was mentally attuned to conform to the English. Moreover, approval from the English guides was the end-all of all poetic attempts. The poet did not write with an Indian audience in mind but with the English audience, the English masters in mind. Subconsciously the poet was aware of being regarded as an absurdity or an abnormality if he ever strove to change his theme or style.

Ghose says in his Preface to *The Shair And Other Poems* that his inspiration to write on Hindu Festivals came from a friend who desired that the poet write on a national theme. The subject of Hindu Festivals proved to be the poet's limit on nationalism as is obvious from his own statement : ". . . having then no other Indian subject at hand . . . but the Hindu Festivals . . ." The necessity to be more innovative, to select a theme more nationalisitic was not felt.

Though declared to be unoriginal in the choice of themes, to be fair to the poet, one should appreciate the style adopted by the poet. The English poetry which the poet read, absorbed and was influenced by was that written by the Romantic English poets like Byron and Keats. At a deeper level there was the influence of none other than the period in which Ghose wrote. In Bengal, this was an era when the socio-political and cultural dimensions of the society were undergoing a facelift. There was a concentrated attempt in all spheres to come out of the earlier decadence. This effort for revival, the desire for a renaissance

touched upon all areas of activity, art and literature. The romantic style which the poet adopted for his verses was a natural outcome of the spirit of the age. The Romantic style of English poets was, for Ghose, the best adoptable style.

The opening poem `The Shair' is a narration of the tragic fate of a Shair and his beloved. The depiction of this tragic tale of love is prominently Keatsian.

> Ah! why a sport should frail man be,
> To blasts of grief on misery's sea?
> Ah! why like wounded birds will fall
> At once our hopes and joys and all
> Such things as make our life appear
> So bright, so lovely, and so dear?
> Why gloomy care should like a cloud
> The fairest scene of life enshroud?
> And why alas! should happiness
> Be ever blended with distress?
> But so it is; like calm and strife,
> Pleasure and pain succeed in life.
> As flowers and thorns connected grow
> In human life so bliss and woe!

The poet's philosophical tone in the above lines, the delineation of the blending of happiness with distress, pleasure with pain reveals an underlying note of ambivalence of the era. It is arguable that a poet like Ghose, who represents just the rudiments,

the utmost primitive or raw elements of Indian poetry in English, could not be even remotely effectual enough to represent or relate such a complex phenomenon. But this note of duality was very deeply ingrained in the spirit of this period, so much so that maybe even without a writer's, a poet's awareness of it, it was but natural that it should find its way into the art, the poetry of the period.

Ghose's poem tells the story of the Shair and his beloved, Armita, who roamed through hills and dales in the ecstasy of their love and the sheer poetry of the Shair's songs, till one day destiny took Armita away, leaving the Shair alone in the world. The Shair, who was wild with grief and unable to bear the sorrow of the loss any further, one day left the world by plunging into the depths of the ocean.

The poet excessively indulges in depicting the pastoral beauty of the plains and the valleys through which the Shair travelled, the portrayal of day and night, of the Shair's songs, of his love for Armita, of the beauty of Armita, of the verdant nature around, of the Shair's sorrow and of destiny's blow.

In "The Indianness of Indian poetry in English", M.K.Naik suggests the application of certain touchstones to identify the genuineness of Indian poetry, irrespective of the medium, which would ultimately make the poetry stand the test of time. . . . only an art firmly rooted in a time and a place can, by the virtue of it's being so rooted, become true to all times and all climes (*Studies* 70-71). A writer's consciousness of his identity and his

culture should form the pivot round which his book rotates. The most obvious - - and the most elementary - - form this awareness can take is the use of an Indian setting or the choice of specifically Indian subject matter (Naik, 72). Applying this test to Ghose one could conclude that Ghose's poems possess this awareness in its most primary, most raw form. The poet evinces just the early glimmers of such a consciousness. Hence,the poet's subject matter may be Indian but there is a definite lack of depth in his treatment of the native subjects. The only tool that Ghose is familiar with in handling his themes is the narrative style, which he utilises to describe at length the nature, the love, the lover and the philosophy.

The following verse gives an example of the poet's repetitive style of narration :

Now o'er the wood in mid-day heaven,
His radiant care the sun has driven,
The glorious Lord of Day displays
In dazzling glow his golden rays
With withering heads and downward cast,
The flowers and leaves are drooping fast;
As if in reverence nature bends
Before the glories bright,
Which red, resplendent Surya lends
To gild this world with light.
The charm of silence all around

The bush, the brake, the mead hath bound,
The birds are mute, the wind is dead,
And heat intense around is shed;
Such is the glow my native clime
Gives forth to all in mid-day time.

Ghose has written eleven poems on some of the festivals of the Hindus. These poems are the earliest descriptions in English verse-form of the "Dasahara" "a festival in commemoration of the descent of GANGA the river, upon the earth" (*The Shair* 125); the "Ras Yatra" depicting "the many gambols of KRISHNA, the Indian Apollo, with the milk-women" (*The Shair* 128); "Kartik Puja", "a festival in honour of KARTIKEYA, the Divine commander-in-chief of the celestial army" (*The Shair* 131); "Janmashtami", "a festival in commemoration of the birth of KRISHNA" (*The Shair* 134); "Sri Panchami", "a festival in honour of Saraswati, the goddess of learning" (*The Shair* 138); "Durga Puja", "a festival in honour of Durga the consort of Siva" (*The Shair* 142); "Dola Yatra", celebrating "the swinging of KRISHNA in the cradle while a child" (*The Shair* 145); "Kojagara Purnima", "a fesitval in honour of LAKSHMI, the goddess of plenty, love and beauty" (*The Shair* 148); "Jhulana Yatra", "in commemoration of one of the numerous gambols of KRISHNA with the milk-women" (*The Shair* 152) ;"Kali Puja", a festival in honour of KALI or SYAMA, an emanation from the head of DURGA and the goddess of war (*The Shair* 155); "Akshaya Tritiya", "a day held

extremely sacred for its being the anniversary of Creation and the commencement of the *Satya yuga* or golden age" (*The Shair* 158). The choice of the festivals reflects the Bengali spirit, the Indianness of the poet.

The titles of these poems belie the contents which are more or less redundant. The spirit of the chosen Hindu festivals, the festive nature of the occasions fail to enter the poems. The liveliness, the colour, the vibrancy, the life of these festivals do not even remotely touch the poems. The poems thus get reduced to superfluously descriptive narrrations. The only striking aspect of this section of Ghose's poems is in the selection of the festivals which are intensely Bengali, especially the Karthik Puja, Sri Panchami, Dola Yatra, Kojagara Purnima, Kali Puja and of course the Durga Puja. Herein the quality of Indianness of the poet gets registered even though in a very faint, very peripheral manner.

The final section of Minor Poems finds the poet dabbling in sonnets to the moon, in such archaic poems like `Evening in May' written during a shower and `Morning in May' written after a shower and `Lines to a Star' written during a storm among many other similar poems. In all the poems in the final section of the book, we note the poet's obsession with the sun and the moon which he is never tired of depicting in their various hues.

His poem 'Song of the Boatmen to Ganga' seems a refreshing change with the tone of the poem going in tune with the rhythmic progress of the moving boat, though of course the Ganga etched by Ghose in the poem hardly matches the image of the lofty *Ganga-Mata* that resides in the minds of Indians.

> Gold river! gold river! how bright is the beam,
> That lightens and crimsons thy soft flowing stream;
> Whose waters beneath make a musical clashing,
> Whose waves as they burst in their brightness are flashing,
> Gold river! gold river! the moon will soon grace
> The hall of the stars with her light-shedding face;
> The wandering planets will over thee throng
> And seraphs will waken their music and song.
> Gold river! gold river! our brief course is done,
> And safe in the city our home we have won!
> And as to the bright sun now dropped from our view,
> So Ganga! we bid thee a cheerful adieu!

M.K.Naik states that the "quality of Indianness is ultimately seen in the ethos of the best Indian poetry in English . . . The acid test of this ethos is `could only an Indian have written this?' (*Studies* 74). Here one would definitely admit that Ghose's poems, being mostly redundant, fail this test. But in all fairness the poet must be rightly given his due in certain fundamental

aspects. Firstly, he succeeded in learning an alien language at an early stage of the post colonial development of the society in Bengal. Secondly, he made the rudimentary efforts in versifying in such a language and succeeded in getting his poems published.

It is also noteworthy that this volume of poems was written in a crucial period of the two years from March 1828 to August 1830 - - a period when the Hindu College was in her ascendancy, with her students making their presence felt in the society through their fiery debates; a period when Derozio's influence reigned supreme on a sizeable section of the student community. This was also the crucial moment when the entire society as well as the British colonialists were caught in a vicious cycle of conflicts in the religious, social and literary sectors of the society. Under such a multidimensional canopy, the period witnessed the renewed spirit of nationalism. It might be argued that at such a vital point of time when Ghose could have sought fiery themes to focus his poems on, themes having at least a remote bearing on the national spirit, he settled for ballads and sonnets on love and nature and poems on Hindu festivals.

But the colonial straitjacket in which he nurtured his nascent poetic spirit and composed his poems should not be forgotten. The very fact that Ghose chose for his poems native, Indian themes, however alien or Western his form and style might have been, reveals the latent spirit of nationalism, the quality of

Indianness within him. In "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature", Jan Mohammed says, "Even though the native is negated by the projection of the inverted image, his presence as an absence can never be cancelled " (*Critical Inquiry* 67). The conflict issuing out of the poetic attempt to describe the native, the Indian theme in a foreign form to win the acclaim of the foreign superiors emanates in a literary crossfire. What is the native? Who is the native? Is it the native as he is, as he appears or does the true native lurk behind the exterior, a certain unsaid character or nature which the native himself desperately tries to cover with the help of his newly-attained veneer? It is this basic nature which even in its absence can never be ruled out. It also offers us a glimpse of the ambivalence, the tension of dichotomy in the poet's mind, which was a natural outcome of the period. It was probably this ambivalence that resulted in a volume of poems which, though very much a vociferous imitation of the West was also a whisper of the native essence by a poet whose sincere though crude beginnings gave way for a better, more refined poetry to come.

WRITING IN COLONIAL SPACE : A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH

Thesis
Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature

By

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Chapter - III

DEROZIO : THE RADICAL ROMANTIC

> *It is however one of the curiosities in the history of modern India that a great pioneer of the New Learning in that country is a young intellectual born of a Portuguese father and an English mother. He made India's aspirations his own while he bemoaned its fallen state.*
>
> *R.K.Das Gupta*

My country! in the days of glory past
A beauteous halo circled round the brow,
And worshipped as a deity thou wast,
Where is the glory, where that reverence now?

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was born on 18 April, 1809, in Calcutta. He was born into a Eurasian family, a family of mixed origin, one of the many such families that came into existence in India after the British colonization. The tragic focal point that bound these families -- call them Anglo Indians, Euro-Asians or Luso-Indians -- together was their sense of homelessness. To be true to oneself in borrowed robes : this was the core dilemma of the colonial nationalists, most particularly of the colonized native (Boehmer, 115). These families of a mixed racial nature were as

European as they were Indian, as British as they were Indian. Seeking recognition from either of the races and receiving none, discarded by both the nations on the very basis of their hybridity, such families have been permanently and pathetically cast in a no-man's land. Thus Derozio was born into a zone of dual allegiance. This pertinent feature formed the very basis of development of Derozio as a student, a poet, a teacher, a reformer, who was finally cast away as an infidel.

Derozio is the only poet of real distinction whom the Anglo-Indian community has produced in all its three centuries of existence (Bradley-Birt, iii). This community was not just racially left unwanted by both its parent communities, rather, socially and culturally too, the community was looked down upon, despite the English lifestyle and Christian religion the members followed. Physically too, some of them "inherited the weakness of the constitution that but too often descends as a legacy of mixed European and Indian parentage . . .(Bradley-Birt, v). It was more of a curse than anything to be born a Eurasian mix that adversely affected the physical, social and cultural growth and development of the progeny.

Derozio had his education in the famous Drummond's Academy from 1815 for a period of eight years. These were the formative years for the future poet, years that witnessed his evolving love for literature and philosophy and that built his ideals

of liberty and almost radical thought. This was also for Derozio a period of realization of his marginalization, a period of dawning awareness of his inability to identify fully either with the East or the West. Basically a sense of marginalization was experienced by all the poets of the early nineteenth century, but differently in each case. As Ngugi wa Thiongo' among others describe, one of the more damaging effects of colonization was the psychological dissonance and alienation experienced by colonized peoples (Boehmer, 188). The native poets like Kashiprasad Ghose and Madhusudan Dutt were led to believe that the native element itself was derogatory, was something to rid oneself of. This line of thinking swept them away from the general stream of thought in the then society. Derozio's was an example of marginalization arising out of an identity-crisis. The sadness, the melancholy that resulted out of this awareness underline most of Derozio's poems. Beneath the impulsiveness and vivacity of enjoyment of the boy there lay the depth and strength and broad-mindedness of the man, and it was this happy combination of the grave and gay, of the spontaneity of youth and the wisdom of age that constituted something of the secret of his wonderful charm (Bradley-Birt, i).

On completion of his education, he was placed by his father to work in a mercantile firm, an experience most ill-suited for a person of Derozio's temperament. Soon realizing this, Derozio was sent, after a couple of years, to Bhagalpur to his aunt and

uncle, where the latter had an indigo factory. Though the work in the factory was no improvement on the work he had done in Calcutta, the place, Bhagalpur, and his stay there proved an enriching experience, a feast to the senses that aroused the poet within Derozio. Its rustic charm, the picturesque quality of the location, the lingering aura of a typical Indian village with its red mud roads, the swaying green fields changing colour with the turn of every season, the farmers at work, the young sun-kissed children at play, the veiled wives engaged in the various chores around the farm houses, the Ganga, a silent observer, flowing past the village, with many a boatman traversing her waves, the raw, rich, rustic music in the beating of the drums and the clashing of the cymbals, the changing dimensions of life's drama unfolding before young Derozio's eyes with the festivities of births, the celebrations of marriages and the lamentations of inevitable death, the customs, rites and rituals steadfastly adhered to during every event proved a very potent, heady presentation for the poet. The young poet desired and believed himself to be a part of this bit of earth, this slice of humanity.

His stay at Bhagalpur affected him deeply more than words could describe. It was not merely the rich dialogue with Nature in all its vibrant hues and colours that left a mark in his mind and heart, the human relationships that he witnessed there, the sense of belonging which he tangibly though momentarily felt there, left an indelible impact on the poet and motivated him,

involuntarily urged him into writing some very heartfelt, truly poignant verses. These verses are the first example in Indian poetry in English of a successful and conscious blend of English rhythm and metre with native theme and imagery. As Amalendu Bose puts it, "the earliest among the Bengalis (Derozio was a true Bengali and knew the language although English was his mother tongue and he was of Portuguese descent) to write imaginatively in English was Derozio . . ." (*Harmony* 11). The dual force of Derozio's Occidental learning and his Oriental leanings, the striking influence of Indian rusticity and native traditions that resulted out of his stay at Bhagalpur were notable aspects that led him to write the way he did, in his unique Indo-Anglian blend of theme and style. These verses are also, on the other hand, reflections of the poet's sense of being marginalized which naturally lurked within as a constant reminder of his very being.

If his eight-year period of education at Drummond's Academy initiated Derozio into literature and philosophy, into the values of liberty and equality, his two-year stay at Bhagalpur brought the poet in close encounters with those ageless, priceless, undying ideals of love, pity, faith, companionship, forebearance and sacrifice. The desire for freedom for one's motherland, the mixed elements of anticipation and joy in the birth of a new class of youth, the strong sense of optimism for the future of this nation are some of the strains that flow in and out of most of Derozio's poems.

Derozio's biographer Thomas Edwards says :

> It was here at Bhagalpur that Derozio realized what it is to love and to be loved. Here he saw that light which never shone on land or sea and which only beams from the eyes of those whose lives are intertwined in the bonds which love alone can weave. Who the lady was, or what the circumstances were which parted their lives, will probably never now be known, but it is very evident that this episode in his life made a lasting impression on him and he steadily refused to marry. (*Henry Derozio* 26-27)

This reveals a lesser-known aspect of Derozio's personality and this explains the inspiration behind the themes of some of his poems.

Derozio has also been criticized, like Kashiprasad Ghose, for merely copying Moore and Byron, for writing ineffectual verses abounding in imagery and pretty turns of phrases with hardly anything original in them. It might be correct to say that he was influenced considerably by these poets. They were the poets then fashionable, and to depart from their models was, for a young unknown writer, to court defeat (Edwards, 192). One should also bear in mind that this sort of criticism came with Derozio's publishing his first volume of poems at a very young age, -- when he was still in his teens -- a period when one does get influenced by a

class of writers who signify as being the ideal class, a period when one justly believes that the ability to write in the imagined particular style is an achievement. Charged with a rare intensity of passion and embodied in hardly improvable diction, imagery and rhythm, Derozio's poetry, at its best, impresses one with a sense of fulfilment and maturity astonishing for a man of his age (A.Bose, 12).

Derozio's first volume of poems was brought out to cater to the existing taste of the people which happened to be the contemporary Romantic style of poetry. Had Derozio lived longer, his poetry would have without doubt, opened itself out to wider and deeper vistas of experience and he might have grown into one of the greatest poets of Bengal irrespective of the language used (A.Bose, 12).

A perusal of his largest narrative poem `The Fakeer of Jungheera' would make it hard for us to believe that it was written by a person who was not a native; so Indian is the poem in its theme, imagery, vivid portrayal and spirit. Derozio himself says,

> "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 Fakir, together with some acquaintances with the scenery, induced me to form a tale upon both these circumstances." (Edwards, 23-24)

Basically `The Fakir of Jungheera' is a long, undulating poem with just two events. Nuleeni, the heroine who is a young Hindu widow is on the verge of mounting the sacrificial pyre, when her former lover who is none but the leader of a bandit-gang comes to her rescue and saves her from death. But presently in an encounter, predicted to be the last after which he intended to put an end to dacoity, the bandit leader gets killed and the next morning, Nuleeni is discovered dead in the arms of her dead beloved. Derozio has woven all his imagination, his feelings of love, sacrifice, courage, his beliefs on social revolt against obsolete customs, his philosophy of love and life and his vision of the wonders of nature into these two events and has formed a romantic narrative in the process.

> Affections are not made for merchandize,-
> What will ye in 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?

The opening query speaks volumes. It affords a fleeting glimpse into the turbulence within the heart of Derozio the man, and his unfulfilled love. The poem opens with the promise of love, hope, happiness and abundance that charges the Nature around with a power unsurpassed and which brings a wistfulness within the poet's heart of the missing elements of his own life.

How sweetly wove might be the theme
Of gifted bard's delicious dream!
His temples fanned by freshening air,
His brain by fancies circled fair,
His heart on pleasure's bosom laid,
His thoughts in robes of song arrayed-
How blest such beauteous spot would be
Unto the soul of minstrelsy?

The description of the Fakir is suggestive of a dual-sided nature like two sides of the same coin, like the human spirit itself that embodies the right and the wrong, the good and the evil, the divine and the demonic aspects.

The light of day may never shine
Upon an aspect more divine;
The Pilgrim Moon may never see
A heart with more of purity,
Pure as her own unearthly beams,

Or brightest angel's blissful dreams!
His spirit's sacred rays are given
To one perpetual thought of heaven;
In prayer for all the sin that lies
Beneath the soft and pitying skies.
. . . . . .
And never earthly life has seen
His hallowed form, his saintly mien;
Some say its holy heavenly light
Would be for mortal view too bright!
. . . . . .
But others tell of deeds of death,
Of blood-stained hands, and broken faith,
Of outlaws leaugued, of foemen slain,
The hamlet burned, the plundered swain,
The peasant forced his home to flee,
The princely maiden's treachery,
Her youthful lord's untimely fall
And he, the demon - cause of all !

The poet mocks at the ceremonial procession with all its glitter and dazzle that arrives to celebrate the snuffing of a woman's life. The poet's values of life and liberty for all, his degradation of superstitions and other meaningless and harmful beliefs come out strong in the poem. Through the two events mentioned earlier, the poet seems to exhort the people to give up

the old conventions and take up useful new learning. He strives to make them see through the shallow but cruel facade of these abominable practices.

And these the priests with triple thread
And saintly mien, and solemn tread,
Pronounce their Golden God to please,
Religion's holiest mysteries;

The Brahmin priests with their holier-than-thou attitude, who deem it their right to judge that a woman should die on her dead husband's pyre are lashed at.

Even in the structure of the poem, one can visualize the two opposing aspects, the two different mental states. The poet brings in the chorus to represent the traditional conventions, the superstitious beliefs that trick the innocent people into wrong conclusions :

Joys are immortal, hopes never decay,
Onward from glory to glory they fly !
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.

Happy! thrice happy! thus early to leave
Earth and its sorrows, for heaven and its bliss!
Who that hath known it at parting would grieve
Quitting a world so disastrous as this?

The chorus thus makes it appear that given the visions of the temptations in store for us in heaven, it would be blissful to die. The irony of the entire situation is exposed in the line `The cymbal twinkles and drum beats loud', where it seems as though the act of *sati* is a celebration to be looked forward to rather than a deed to be condemned. But then,

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

Through every word the poet endeavours to stop the society in its retrogression and exhorts the society to give up this inhuman practice. He questions their sense of sympathy and brotherhood and wonders how such base rites could be perpetuated. A tone of cynicism enters the lines making him declare :

. . . - but 'tis vain -
Sure social love dwells not beneath the skies,
Or it is like the bird of paradise,
Which lights we know not where, and never can
Be found alive among the haunts of man.

As Nuleeni mounts the funeral pyre, the poet creates an aura of expectancy, he builds a sense of hope, of promise in the minds of the readers of some unexpected act to occur :

And now with baleful brand on fire
She slowly mounts the dreadful pyre!
Now all is silent, sad, and still,
As moonlight on a heath-clad hill;
No insects wing is heard to whirr,
The very air has ceased to stir,
And expectation breathless bends
To watch the pile that grief ascends.

The very stillness in the air is akin to the calm before the storm -- the storm that breaks when the bandit-king, the secret lover of Nuleeni, in one sweep, takes her and escapes to the rock of Jungheera. The sudden tilt in the tone of the poem from the heavy one to that of gay abandon is perceptible in the song of the bandit troop:

Our toil is done, our treasures won,
And now we homeward glide;
Our hearts are light, our hopes are bright
As this transparent tide.

What follows is an idyllic picture of love, its fond dreams and hopes as treasured in young Nuleeni's heart, moving the reader to wish :

O! that the gems in pleasure's ring
Might never fade or fall away;
But 'tis, alas! a fragile thing
Breaking too like a rainbow's ray -
And oh! were bliss to mortals given,
Who, who would leave our earth for heaven?

The final lines whisper a sense of foreboding, of sad tidings to come, for after all, 'Life moves on constant, like the rippling rill'.

The bandit chief's begging an hour's time away from his beloved for the last raid of his career, his departure, the ensuing battle and his resulting death form a major part of the second half of the poem.

The philosophical lines :

Life's light and shadow ne'er must separate,
Life's sunniest hour is when the enraptured soul
Yields, willing captive, to Love's sweet control,
But 'tis that noon-tide hour which ever flings
The darkest, gloomiest shadow from its wings.

seem premonitory of the doom to occur. The death of the bandit leaves nothing for his young beloved Nuleeni to live for, who eventually gives up her life in his arms - - the real, true sacrifice for

the sake of love unlike the mockery of a sacrifice that the society forced upon her earlier on the funeral pyre of her husband.

The poem is a celebration of love, of sacrifice and of the liberty evolving out of love. The poem is also a call to shed the fetters of orthodoxy and to march ahead. An unbiased study of this one poem alone would expose the weakness of those arguments against Derozio to be a poor imitator of Byron and of including Eastern imagery in good measure in his poem. Derozio's finest and longest poem `The Fakir of Jungheera' is a classic of new spirit which found its most powerful expression in the Romantic Movement (Das Gupta, I). . . . What was missing in the perfection in diction and style, was more than made up in the reality of experience which is the very breath of poetry. There is an intensity of feeling in Derozio's verse which is unmistakable. It is a feeling which gives his lyric utterances their power, which gave conduct its grace and its nobility and gave him the courage to hold on to his convictions when they were assailed by his adversaries (Das Gupta, H).

Even though Kashiprasad Ghose happens to be the "first Hindu who has ventured to publish a volume of English poems" one has to acknowledge Derozio to be the first poet to choose nationalism as his theme.

In `The Harp of India' Derozio laments the degraded state into which his country -- India -- has fallen. Recollecting her

rich heritage, he considers it his prime duty to regain the country's noble culture :

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 !

Derozio stands out different from the rest of the Anglo-Indian community, which, out of a sense of shame, tried to desperately cover up its matrilineal origin and made futile attempts to be English, to look up to England as its native country and lost in the bargain, belonging nowhere. Derozio recognizes India as his country and shows the concern for her condition even when most of the Indians themselves were either not aware of their heritage or had not risen up to acknowledge the rut the country had fallen into.

In `To India - My Native Land' the poet asserts :

My country! in thy days 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?

The poet's sense of duty towards his motherland surpasses all else:

Well, let me dive into the depths of time,
And bring from out the ages that have rolled
A few small fragments of those wrecks sublime,
Which human eye may never more behold;
And let the guerdon of my labour be
My fallen country! one kind wish from thee!

In such verses that ring with true patriotic zeal, Derozio comes out as an Indian poet and not an Anglo-Indian or a Eurasian poet. Though a Eurasian by birth, Derozio identified himself with India. His poems on India and on freedom for the country reflect this oneness that he experienced with India, the oneness he felt with an entire generation subject to colonial subjugation. His short life was constantly dogged by the memory of his mixed ethnic background and the distress it caused surfaces unknowingly in most of his poems.

In `Freedom to The Slave' he declares passionately :

Oh freedom! there is something dear
E'en in thy very name,
That lights that altar of the soul
With everlasting flame.
. . . . . .
And glory to the breast that bleeds
Bleeds nobly to be free!

Blest be the generous hand that breaks
The chain a tyrant gave,
And, feeling for degraded man,
Gives freedom to the slave.

The poet thirsts to be free from the chains of the race, the blood and the tongue. He longs to be able to come out of the chains that bind him, that compartmentalize human beings into castes, creeds, religions, nationalities. He aspires and dreams of the ultimate liberty of man and the supreme recognition of the person as a human being. Derozio's poetry reveals the poet's mood-swings from hope to despair, from liberty to suppression, from love to death. The poetry enables us to witness the spiritual struggle experienced by the poet who longed to achieve liberty, but courted subjugation both racial and colonial. Derozio's poetry has a style of moving on twin, parallel aspects of a single theme. This yoking of conflicting features is indicative of the poet's own ambivalence, his own dialectic nature. His poems reveal the conflict in his life between his ethnic background and patriotism for India, his pro-West attitude and his state of suppression under colonialism. This passion for liberty is observed in certain other poems like `Greece', `The Greeks at Marathon', `Address to the Greeks', and `Phyle'. For Derozio, Greece signifies liberty, Greece embodies a glorious civilization and the valour of Greeks is the epitome of courage desired by every man.

The poem `Heaven' contains some haunting lines that hope for an ideal state of being :

Where grief is unfelt, where its name is unknown,
Where the music of gladness is heard in each tone;
Where melody vibrates from harps of pure gold,
Far brighter than mortal's weak eye can behold;
. . . . . .
Where truth is no name, and where bliss is no dream?-
'Tis the seat of one God! 'tis the land of the blest-
The kingdom of glory - the region of rest-
The boon that to man shall hereafter be given -
'Tis Love's hallowed empire - 'tis Heaven ! 'tis Heaven!

The lines spontaneously bring to our mind a similar poem written by Tagore many, many years later , "Where the mind is without fear...".

Derozio brings out the same sentiments of absolute liberty and freedom of thought in `Poetic Haunts' where he portrays the ideal ambience, the dream-like nature of existence which would be best suited for a poet :

Where the billow's bosom swells,
Where the ocean casts its shells,
Where the wave its white spray flings;
Where the sea-mew flaps its wings;
. . . . . .

Where the spirit of the sea
Wakes its matchless melody,
While the Naiads gather round
Gladdened by the magic sound;-
Far from human hut or home
Let the gifted Poet roam.

Another poem on this theme is `The Poet's Habitation'. The power of his verse comes from the power of this poetry of his life and we may miss that power if we fail to relate it to that life (Das Gupta, G). The agony of a poet longing for freedom and his inability to break absolutely free from the chains of imperial control get implanted these lines. Bearing this in mind, one cannot help but feel sad upon reading `To my Brother in Scotland'. Despite his strong nationalist feelings for India, the ambivalence in Derozio's mind is beyond his control. His fear for the future thus surfaces in the lines :

Th' uncertain future wakes the fear
I feel, but must not, dare not tell-
Yet Hope's sweet voice rings in mine ear,
And whispers - All shall yet be well!
These thoughts are strangers to thy breast
Where all is pleasure, peace and rest.
These thoughts - but let them pass away,
And Hope shall linger here alone -

In these few lines themselves, the alternate tones of uncertainty, fear and hope reflect the conflict in the poet's soul. An identity, a sense of belonging is an element of utmost importance to any person's being, which in its absence affects a person's thought, his happiness, his growth, his spirit, his very existence. Without it one is incomplete. This feeling of incompleteness coupled with a tangibly ingrained sense of marginalisation is felt by the poet which very naturally spills out in his poems.

In the midst of this profound sensation, which has to be borne by the poet alone, his role as a teacher to the students of the Hindu College forms a rewarding respite. The poet's melancholy vanishes when he is among his beloved students. These are the few precious moments in his otherwise troubled life, moments that witness a glow of fulfilment, a spark of happiness on the poet's visage, moments that instil meaning and essence in his life. These were some of the few sunny moments in the short life of Derozio.

> What joyance rains upon me, when I see
> Fame in the mirror of futurity,
> Weaving the chaplets you have yet to gain,
> Ah then I feel I have not lived in vain.
>
> - Sonnet To The Pupils Of The Hindu College.

Quite a few poems of Derozio are replete with his obsession with the darker side of life, with the inevitability of death, with death and all its paraphernelia of the skull, the grave yard and

the tomb. These poems are but a reflection of the suppression experienced by an artist and his art struggling under a colonial power.

'Tis the house for dust and ashes
Which the white worm revels o'er;
. . .'Tis the dreary, dismal ocean
Which we all must travel o'er
. . . Where the conqueror is conquered
And the captive breaks his chain.
. . . Where the wicked cease from troubling,
And the weary are at rest.

- `The Tomb'

The four final lines of the poem show the desire, the hope within the poet's heart of one day being able to break free from the chains of colonial subjugation. There is a constant tension between hope and despair in Derozio's poems. The whisper of hope as glimpsed in the final lines of 'The Tomb' battles with the sense of defeat, the sense of passiveness in 'Yorrick's Skull' ("Despite of all his glory, he must fall") and 'Leaves' ("Here today,...Gone to-morrow..."). 'Yorrick's Skull' exposes the fickle, weak nature of man's pride and glory which with death is turned to nought, which truth at least should make man curb his superior ego.

Despite of all glory, he must fall
Like a frail leaf in autumn; and his power
Weighs lighter than his breath in his last hour;

The fact that we live for just a brief spell on this earth and that life is effervescent compared to death surfaces in many of his 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.
. . . This is life - some smiles and tears,
Joys and sorrows, hopes and fears,
Here today, all fresh and rair,
Gone to-morrow - where? Oh! where?
And in my war with her, I've felt and feel,
Grief's path cut to my heart by miser'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 sucks from flowers malignant, a sweet treasure,-
Far out of suffering shall I gather pleasure.

- Sonnet, `Death! my best friend if thou dost ope the door'.

In the above poem, the anguish in the poet's life caused by his birth, his race and his identity, the poet's effort in overcoming his pain and his destiny by giving his best to his students, to his friends and watching their growth, the poet's

experience, through their development, of a rejuvenation in life are all hinted at. The poem is multi-dimensional where the `grief', the `good', the `evil', the `tyrant', the `suffering' represent all this and more. It represents the poet's ultimate situation under colonialism.

. . . . . O! Life
Why dost thou love me so -- do I no 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! I separate.

- Sonnet - `Where are thy waters, Lethe? - I would steep'.

Once again the poet portrays his battle with life, his desire for death; for the poet, life with its veneer of civilization, with its facade of equality and freedom, with its artificial hues is stifling to the core, where he feels himself a misfit. He believes himself to be most suited in the land of Death where the ideal of equality is upheld in a complete sense, where no distinction is made between man and man.

Derozio has a penchant for love in its multiple colours : the first love, the unrequited love, the unhappy love. `Here's A

Health To Thee, Lassie!' takes us in a flashback to the days at Bhagalpur, into a very personal, private facet of the poet's personality.

> We've smiled together -- but 'tis past:
> We've wept -- those days are o'er, Lassie,
> 'Twas too much happiness to last,
> Its loss we now deplore, Lassie.
> . . . . But we, alas! shall smile, and weep
> Together ne'er again, Lassie.

The lines suggest some unknown, unfulfilled relationship, the memories of which have been locked in a corner of the poet's mind but which come unheeded into his love-poems, as seen again in the `Ode From the Persian of Hafiz'.

> The brightest, fairest works of art
> That skilful hands devise
> Are nought, without the hand and heart
> Of her I fondest prize.

`The Fakeer of Jungheera' itself as `Ada', `Song of the Hindustanee Minstrel', `The Neglected Minstrel', `Evening in August', are some of the poems where Derozio sings of the purity in love which is too blissful to last, before separation casts a blight on its sublimity. Of course, one must admit that in the poems on love, as on the moon, the moonlight and the night, the poet leans heavily on his Romantic masters.

In `The Eclipse' through the religious overtones given to an eclipse, the poet goes on to describe "the sickly" moon and "her cold inconstancy" while in `A Walk by Moonlight' he recollects one of those lovely moonlit nights.

Derozio was the first to introduce the sonnet form into Indo-Anglian poetry (Nair, 43). In the sonnets, Derozio has written extensively on the subjects of hope, love, dreams, wishes, moon, death and memory. The sonnets are among the best of Derozio's poems. In the sonnet `To those who originated and carried into effect the proposals for procuring a portrait of David Hare, Esq.' the poet takes a dig at the orthodoxy and the blind practices of conservatism and encourages his young students in their crusade against this.

Your hand is on the helm -- guide on young man
The bark that's freighted with your country's doom

. . . . . .

And when your torch shall dissipate the gloom
That long has made your country but a tomb,
Or worse than tomb, the priest's the tyrant's den,

. . . . . .

Best formed for deeds like those which shall be done
By you hereafter till your guerdon's won
And that which now is hope becomes reality.

Most of his sonnets have an autobiographical element in them :

Regret has ne'er brought back a vanished day,
And sighs are vain for dreams that pass away
Even like themselves; then let me cease to mourn
For those bright visions Time can ne'er return,-
For those warm fancies, aspirations high,
And thoughts that gleamed like rainbows in the sky,
Where are they now, those air-built visions strange,
Why should they perish, wherefore should they change,
And henceforth Hope with faithless meteor ray
Shall never cheat, or lure me from my way.

The poet who is but a man also hopes, aspires, cherishes his dreams only to have them shattered by reality.

My aspirations mounted, but in vain -
They fell like wounded birds to earth again.

This oscillation between hope and despair once again brings to surface the poet's complex framework, the inner battle between the desire for promises, 'those bright visions', ' . . . warm fancies, aspirations high' and the inability to actually achieve them in life.

Unlike the other poems on love, in the sonnet, the poet casts love in an ethereal light, full of promise where despite being unfulfilled, the memory provides succour enough to the poet.

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,
. . . . . .
Why should my spirit deem its lot unblest,
For, however 'tis now robbed of rest,
And forced to war with a malignant world
Whose blood-red banner, against me unfurled,
. . . . . .
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!

The love portrayed here is definitely more ennobling, bright and optimistic when compared to the dark, brooding hues of the previously mentioned love-poems. It is this love that helps the poet sustain his ideals, his principles, that enables the poet to pass these same beliefs to his students who mirror the poet's hopes and promises.

The sonnets are more attractive to the reader because the same theme of love, hope, dream or death is depicted in a far better, polished style and in a crisp tone which make the lines

linger in the reader's mind whereas in the larger poems, the poet, with his tendency to describe and narrate, tends to digress from the theme very often.

In the sonnet `Misery on Misery :- I soon shall be,' the lines :

> . . . . Human ill
> Is with one nature linked eternally
> Man and misfortune are twin-born - I feel
> This to be true, at least, 'twas so with me!

are very profound and touch the reader deeply. Derozio possessed in a remarkable degree the power of linking and transfering to inanimate nature the living feelings of human nature (Madge, 20).

Another very touching poem is `Sister-in-Law', where the poet is requested by his sister to get her a sister-in-law unknowingly putting her brother in consternation for that is not destined to be.

After a study of Derozio's poems, after passing a judgement on him to be a trailblazer or on the other extreme to be of the shallow imitative class, one can only conclude that:

> What English Literature lost through the early death of Keats . . . Indian literature in English lost, in lesser degree when Derozio died; for in both men there was a passionate temperament combined with unbounded

> sympathy with nature. Both died while their powers were not yet fully developed. (Subba Rao, 63)

Derozio was the first nationalist poet, one of the group of early nineteenth century poets who through his poems on India, made India available to the future poets. It was this early poetic effort which enabled the later generation of Indian poets to stay in India, to use India, to write on India instead of looking abroad for themes. He had succeeded in catching the minds of the young students of Hindu College and in igniting the spark of inquiry, of reason, of liberty in these young minds when he himself was barely out of his teens.

Derozio had, in this tender age, acquired many firsts to his credit. He is modern India's first patriot to give expression to that patriotism in verse, the first to sing of Freedom 'that lights the altar of the soul with everlasting flame', the first to contemplate an intellectual renaissance for an ancient civilization through `new perceptions', the first to exalt reason as an instrument of progress (Das Gupta, C). What social reformers and political leaders fought for in the parliaments and meetings, Derozio fought and obtained by his debates with the students. Derozio caught them young -- showed them the right from the wrong, pointed out the bigotted orthodoxy of the society and religion. In a word, he was "a teacher and journalist who wielded a cultural and ideological influence that made itself felt in Bengal for the next fifty years" (Sunder Rajan, 43).

In a word, he practised, he proved practically what the others fought for in theory. This of course resulted in his losing his job but even that did not disappoint him. It was through Derozio that the intellectual revival reached the students and thus the society. Of few men may it be said more fitting than of Derozio "Here lies one who never feared the face of man", who sought for truth faithfully, fearlessly and with all diligence, chivalry and charity and after searching for it here awhile, "went to find it in another world,," who during the short morning glow of his brief life, worked diligently to cultivate the intellect and purify the life of all his pupils, and who spared neither care nor sacrifice to raise the native people of India, and the men of his race to a social, moral, intellectual and political position which one day sooner or later they shall retain (Edwards, 171-172).

It is no doubt true that it was the efforts of our own Raja Rammohun Roy, David Hare, Justice Hyde and among many others Derozio too which resulted in today's prestigious educational institutions of Calcutta. It is their undaunted work and struggle that brought forth the Presidency College, the Medical College, the University itself. But while due recognition has been given to most of these pioneers, the name of Henry Vivian Derozio seems to have silently vanished from history. As Das Gupta declares, it is due to the fault of the early biographers that Derozio's reputation and claim as a national poet stands damaged. Both Thomas Edwards and E.W.Madge declared H.LV. Derozio to be a "Eurasian" poet and

reformer. It would do well for us to accept that ". . . . Derozio is not one of the poets of John Company, he is a Bengali poet who wrote his poems in English" (Das Gupta, K).

In the early stages of Indian poetry in English, Derozio formed the crucial link between the East and the West. He was the first poet who served to connect the traditional with the modern, the Oriental with the Occidental. This was made possible due to his Eurasian background which created a natural affinity for the English language and literature on one hand and an ability to relate to the Indian culture and the Bengali spirit on the other. The poet's desire to be recognized and regarded as an Indian got complemented by the society's acceptance of the poet as an Indian and a Bengali instead of a Luso- Indian. It was the poet's ability to handle both the traditional and the modern principles of culture with equal ease which enabled him to help the society bridge the gulf and get aquainted with the Western principles of liberalism and equality, the tools with which one could stop the regression and bring about a progressive climate in the society. As a philosopher, Derozio possessed a radical line of thought which he infused into his students, which manifested itself in the reformative zeal of the Young Bengal movement. Derozio was the first Indian poet in English who identified the social and nationalistic spirit of the times and transformed this spirit into art. With his bicultural background which dogged his conscience constantly, with his identification with Western philosophy and Eastern culture, with

his allegiance to the pro-West attitudes of imperialism opposed to the oppressive nature of imperialism, Derozio symbolizes the basic dialectic impact of colonialism. His poetry is significant as the first perceptions to register the ideology of a new genre in Indian Writing in English.

Did this first patriotic poet of Bengal, this founder of Indian English poetry foresee his own future when he wrote :

Be it beside the ocean's foamy surge,
On an untrodden, solitary shore,
When the wind sings an everlasting dirge,
And the wild wave, in its tremendous roar,
Sweep o'er the sod! - There let his ashes lie,
cold and unmourned;
. . . . . .
No dream shall flit into that slumber deep -
No wondering mortal thither once shall wend,
There, nothing o'er him but the heavens shall weep
There, never pilgrim at his shrine shall bend,
But holy stars alone their nightly vigils keep!

WRITING IN COLONIAL SPACE : A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH

Thesis
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Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature

By

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Chapter - IV

TORU DUTT : REDEFINING MYTHOLOGY

(The) `intolerable wrestle with words and meanings' has its aim to subdue the experience to the language, the exotic life to the imported tongue.

D.E.S. Maxwell

Toru Dutt was one of the two poets who represented a very crucial period of Bengal, a poet whose poems reflected a decisive turning point in the literature and culture of Bengal, the other poet being Michael Madhusudhan Dutt. Both the poets belonged to post colonial Bengal. Their poetry shared the quality of being "distinctively post colonial", of having "emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization" (Ashcroft, 1-2). Dutt was the product of the great interaction of cultures and religious faiths that occurred in Calcutta following the cultural and social reawakening heralded by Raja Rammohun Roy. The Bengali culture was enriched by a powerful language, a deep and colourful literature, art and music which could reach out and touch those deep chords within a person. Culture, like a living organism, can sustain and progress only when it shows adaptability to changing situations (Prasad, 1). The vibrant culture of Bengal was no doubt

very open to the changes that the social rebirth wrought and it moulded itself intricately to the new influences, the new tempers of the age. The manner in which the Bengali sense and sensibility encouraged the absorption of new ideas and trends which gave birth to native poetry written in a foreign language has been discussed in the previous chapter. The lively and vivacious Bengali nature, well-nurtured by its own rich art and culture, as seen in the *bhadralok* of Bengal, was quick and eager to pick up and discover new forms of art and culture which the gateway to European education offered. The European influence in Bengal which prompted the youth there to westernize mentally, socially and spiritually is described as the "jettisoning of India in favour of a foreign culture", by Dr.H.M.Williams, "ultimately self-unfolding whose impulse comes from the centre of its own being" (*Galaxy* 14). Dutt was aptly the daughter from the marriage of "the adventurous West and East of the immortal tranquility" (*The Bengali Book* xiii-xiv).

Dutt was born into a family distinguished for its literary talents, the renowned Dutt family of Rambagan on March 4, 1856 to Govin Chunder Dutt and Kshetramoni. Theirs was one of the aristocratic families of Bengal with Govin Chunder Dutt himself being a philanthropist, a very well-read man, deeply interested in literature and poetry. He was also one of the early poets of Bengal and had brought out along with his brothers a volume of poems called *The Dutt Family Album*. This was one family that responded whole-heartedly to the winds of change sweeping the religious facet

of society. Deeply attracted towards the ideals of Christianity, the entire Dutt family converted itself to Christianity in the year 1862 and left for foreign shores.

In India and African countries the dominant imperial language and culture were privileged over the people's tradition (Ashcroft, 26). Thus Dutt's birth into perhaps the most talented family in Bengal and the education obtained in French and English first-hand from France and England were two important factors that moulded and developed the innate poetic talent and literary taste residing in this young girl's mind and heart.

The impact of postcolonialism can be very vividly envisaged in the flowering of the young poet's life and works. The migration to a superior and advanced country had resulted in "the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model ..."(Ashcroft, 9). A major displacement in various aspects had occurred: a change of religion, a change of place, an introduction into two alien and apparently superior languages - French and English. This led to an involuntary suppression of the latent Indianness within the poet. This in turn brought about an identification with French people, French poets and French literature which enthused the young poet to translate into English the poetic works of about twenty French poets. The work covered almost all the well-known poets of the French literature and some

lesser-known poets too. The translations were done by Dutt and her elder sister, Aru, a major part of it by Dutt herself. Without any explicit avowal, Toru's translations assume the character of `transcreations', which is not surprising because of her own temperament being attuned to that of French - a temperament that expresses one's nostalgia for the unceasing quest for love, freedom and beauty or the dilemmas of Self (B.Gupta, 14). The work was *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*, the only book published during the lifetime of the poet and a book that brought Dutt a lot of well-deserved international acclaim. Edmund Gosse in his Introductory Memoir to Dutt's later and posthumous work *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* declared :

> To the end of her days, Toru was a better French than English scholar. She loved France best, she knew its literature best, she wrote its language with more perfect elegance. Indeed some of the pieces translated strike us for their reflection on the young poet's personality as the one below:

My Vocation - Beranger

A waif on this earth,
Sick, ugly and small,
Contemned from my birth
and rejected by all,

From my lips broke a cry
Such as anguish may wring,
Sing - said God in reply,
Chant poor little thing.

. . . . . .

All men have a task,
And to sing is my lot -
No meed from men I ask
But one kindly thought,
My vocation is high -
`Mid the grasses that ring,
Still - still comes that reply,
Chant poor little thing

(*The Hindu Patriot,* April 3, 1876)

The opening lines of this poem are reminiscent of Govin Chunder Dutt's own description of Dutt :

Puny and elf-like, with dishevelled tresses,
Self-willed and shy, ne'er heeding that I call,
Intent to pay her tenderest addresses
To bird or cat, - but most intelligent.

(*Life and Letters 11*)

Another poem which brings forth the duality of the bicultural impact on the poet, is the concluding sonnet 'A mon Pere':

The flowers look loveliest in their native soil,

Amid their kindred branches, plucked, they fade,
And lose the colours Nature on them laid,
Though bound in garlands with assiduous toil.
Pleasant it was, afar from all turmoil,
To wander through the valley, now in shade
And now in sunshine, where these blossoms made
A Paradise, and gather in my spoil.
But better than myself no man can know
How tarnished have become their tender hues
E'en in the gathering, and how dimmed their glow!
Wouldst thou again now life in them infuse,
Thou who hast seen them where they brightly blow?
Ask memory. She shall help my stammering muse.

(*The Hindu Patriot,* April 3, 1876)

One finds it difficult upon perusing this piece to believe that this is but a translation. The sheer fact that this poem among others was published in many magazines and dailies (*The Bengalee*, May 27, 1876; *The Indian Ladies Magazine*, No.7, Vol.X, January, 1911) shows the extent of attention received by Dutt's *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* in India and abroad. It was no doubt this work that expressed through its pages the promise, the talent, the rich poetic quality that coursed through the poet's veins. The work received rave reviews in many of the leading Indian journals.

> The extensive knowledge she displays and the command she shews over the English tongue appears to us simply marvellous, when we learn that the accomplished authoress is yet in her teens. Occasional quotations and references in the work under review shew that she has some knowledge of German and Sanskrit. The work of translation has been so well done that the spirit of poetry breathes through every line. While the original has been followed very closely, there is no slavish adherence to the letter at a sacrifice of the true spirit of song. (*The Bengalee,* May 27, 1876)

As though in representation of the citizens of Bengal, most of these dailies culminated their lines of acclaim and praise for Dutt with a hope that some day she might return to her own country and render an equally brilliant or even more spirited work of translation of our own Sanskrit verses into English or hopefully in the native Bengali tongue itself.

The intrinsic value of *Ancient Ballads* lies in the fact that this volume can be picked up, read and enjoyed by any generation of people, be they young or old. The ballads in this volume deal with the most oft-heard stories of Hindu mythology -- those of Savitri, Lakshman, Dhruva, Buttoo, Prahlad, Sindhu, Sita, and Bharat. The success of this volume lies in the narrative talent

of the poet, her power to entice the reader, get hold of the reader's mind and soul and keep the reader captive. The ultimate success of the poet lies in her individual style of taking the well-known mythological characters from the Hindu epics and *Puranas* to tackle certain burning contemporary social issues of the time.

The poet's choice of these subjects tell upon the poet's own personality, individuality and attitude towards life. On studying these poems individually, one would perceive that Dutt on selecting these particular immortal characters of Indian mythology has in reality, sought to present those innate, inherent, humane qualities which always stand the test of time and form the essence of life, literature and art. Above all, one would realize that at a deeper scale, Dutt has sought to revolutionize these immortal mythological characters through a current and very relevant reinterpretation of the values they stand for. Hence, as an outcome of this evaluation, the poet confirms the immortality, the permanence of these representatives of Hindu mythology and the qualities they stand for. This also forms a reply to the many twisted interpretations of the Hindu epics and *Puranas* made by the colonialist writers. All the while, the duality within the poet and the tug between the East and West express themselves in most of her poems. For, even after her return to India and to the myths of her native land, it was but natural that at least some strains of her Western upbringing surfaced in her poetry.

`Savitri' as the title denotes, takes the reader to an age where *Sthri* denoted a liberated personality. `Savitri' is a mythological tale which showed that :

> In those far-off primeval days
>
> Fair India's daughters were not pent
>
> In closed zenanas . . . .

What strikes the reader immediately is an echo of Dutt's own voice, because she was born unto an age that exhorted the social freedom of woman. In Savitri, Dutt must have envisaged another "child of a society of freedom" who was "the first Indian feminist" (Mukherjea, 61). The poet in retelling the well-known story of Savitri in English has a greater cause to serve than a mere translation of this tale from the original Sanskrit to English. As has been noted earlier, the period during which Dutt wrote this poem was a time of abject deterioration in the social values of people, a period when woman was a highly victimized person inflicted with child-marriage and bride-burning. The abolition of *sati* was a much discussed and talked-about topic. `Savitri' is Dutt's effort, Dutt's manner of effectively dealing with one of the important issues of the period. Savitri thus becomes a symbol of not just eternal love but of liberty too. In the delineation of Savitri, one observes a total unity of the poet with the subject.

Savitri's confrontation with Death for the cause of her husband has been etched superbly by Dutt. It seems as though the

poet has merged with her subject, Savitri, in charming Death to give up Satyavan. At the very outset, by the unusual description of Death, Death himself is caught unawares. The portrayal of Death is memorable :

Upon his head he wore a crown
That shimmered in the doubtful light;
His vestment scarlet reached low down,
His waist, a golden girdle tight,
His skin was dark as bronze; his face
Irradiate, and yet severe;
His eyes had much of love and grace,
But glowed so bright, they filled with fear.

Dutt is the only poet to have afforded "love and grace" to the eyes of Yama. It is indeed a paradox to offer a touch of humanity to Death. The attitude of Savitri on setting her eyes upon Yama makes Yama himself taken aback, for Savitri asks,

. . . in obeisance bent her brow,
"No mortal form is thine", - she said,
"Beseech thee say what god art thou,
And what can be thine errand here?"

knowing fully well what Death's intentions were. Undaunted, she follows Death, speaking of the illusory world and the humanity in

it, of human duties, till death grants her the desire of Satyavan's life regained.

In the interaction between Savitri and Yama, at a secondary level, one can visualize an interaction between the positive and negative features of society, between the demand for freedom for woman and the suppression of this freedom.

In Savitri's address to Death, Dutt has literally softened the harsh contours of Death's awesome countenance with `patience, kindness, mercy, love'.

> ... and they abhor
> The Truth which thou wouldst aye instil,
> If they thy nature knew aright,
> O god, all other gods above!
> And that thou conquerest in the fight
> By patience, kindness, mercy, love,
> And not by devastating wrath,
> They would not think in childlike fright
> To see thy shadow on their path,
> But hail thee as sick souls the light."

The picture of Savitri and Satyavan presently returning overjoyed to the cottage is exquisite.

In one fair hand, the saw she took,
The other with a charming grace
She twined around him, and her look
She turned upwards to his face.

Dutt, in sketching this picture, has immortalized the timeless image of man and woman, arm in arm as life-partners that enshrines the many precious love-stories of Indian mythology. `Savitri' is the best-composed ballad by Dutt where her narrative power, the simple but extremely lyrical lines and the energetic and spirited verses are in their elements, where in a very subtle but firm manner, the poet gets the message across to the society that to move ahead with the times, to achieve progress in the community, oppression at all levels must be put to an end.

A factor that cannot be overlooked in most of the lines of this poem is the repetition of words one comes across in the poet's composition, as in,

It was that fatal, fatal speech
To-day, - to-day - it will be seen

Again, earlier in Savitri's justification of her choice of her mate,

"Once, and once only, all submit
To Destiny, - 'tis God's command;

Once, and once only, so 'tis writ,
Shall woman pledge her faith and hand;
Once, and once only, can a sire
Unto his well-loved daughter say, . . .

and finally in,

This, this is death . . . .

It appears that Dutt has brought about a deliberate repetition to complete the rhyme. But the flaws pale into insignificance in the wake of the graphic beauty of the woods, the hermitage and:

Of the late risen moon that lines
With silver all the ghost-like trees,
Sals, tamarisks and South-Sea pines,
And palms whose plumes wave in the breeze.

If `Savitri' is a poem that brings home to our minds a progressive period when the ideal of liberty was held in high esteem, if this poem reinforces those innate qualities which form the epitome of a chaste, virtuous woman whose love for her husband was akin to devotion, `Lakshman' symbolises the absolute loyalty of one for his brother. The poem is an interesting departure in poetic craft (Sethusavitri, 38). Lakshman is "the portrait of the ideal

brother, a splendid picture of chivalry and self control" (Das, 333). In 'Lakshman', Sita comes across not just as a mythological character as the wife of Rama but as a human being, a woman to be particular, prone to human emotions and human provocations. Again, as a woman, Sita comes across not as a meek and submissive character but as an authoritative and dominant person, one aware of her rights, one capable of battling for her rights and getting her demand accomplished. The title of the poem, `Lakshman' is misleading since it is Sita who plays the dominating role, Sita who controls the situation.

In the portrayals of both Savitri and Sita, the concept of feminism is at the forefront. The feminist dimension of the poem bears a direct relevance to the Western educational and social background of the poet. The aristocratic family to which Dutt belonged, the European education at its best quality that she had received, the independent attitude that she had acquired as a result, blended with the knowledge of her own country's heritage and its epics which have always spoken of the superior status of woman in her different roles. These factors, which are very deeply embedded in the poet's psyche, get projected in the feminist sketches of Savitri and Sita.

The ballad depicts Sita who is worried, excited and upset all at once on hearing the voice of her husband Rama, calling out for help. There is an attempt at psychological delineation of

character and the story is not in narration but in dramatic dialogue (Sethusavitri, 38). Taunts and scorn, mockery and sarcasm, -- Sita employs all these weapons at random to mobilise Lakshman into action. But though aghast at Sita's accusations, Lakshman emerges as the downright loyal and devoted brother that he is. Unable to retort to any of Sita's accusations and hurt deeply by Sita's strong words, he is perforce to break his principle, to disobey Rama's orders and leave Sita alone. With a keen knowledge of the dangerous step he has but no choice to take, Lakshman calls out to

> . . . ye sylvan Gods, that dwell
> Among this dim and sombre shades.
> Whose voices in the breezes swell
> And blend with noises of cascades,
> Watch over Sita, whom alone
> I leave, and keep her safe from harm,
> Till we return unto our own,
> I and my brother, arm in arm.

A sense of foreboding descends as Lakshman leaves Sita to venture in search of Rama,

> . . . Hoarse the vulture screamed,
> As out he strode with dauntless air.

A striking aspect of this ballad is no doubt the style in which Sita's accusations and Lakshman's heart-rending responses

to them are dealt with at an emotional and psychological level by the poet. The poem, from a different perspective, is an eye-opener. The tug between Lakshman and Sita, her taunts thrown at Lakshman to rouse him to move, his final decision to go and the eventual results could well signify the status of nineteenth-century Bengal with the tug between the East and West, the bend of society towards the West due to the latter's superiority, the resultant discarding of values of the East in order to ape the West, with the eventual chain of results that continue till date. The psychological picture presented through `Lakshman' offers an unmistakable parallel in the stream of thought existent in nineteenth-century Bengal, during the period Dutt wrote the poem.

India, a colony "of intervention and exploitation had traditional, precolonial cultures which continued to coexist with the new imperial forms" (Ashcroft, 26). It was this precolonial culture that was beckoning Dutt. The Sanskrit language, the scriptures, the mythology, the music, the folklore which assimilates the indigenous culture, the essentially Indian spirit were very vibrant in Bengal and had aroused in the poet's mind the dormant rhyme and rhythm of her native soil.

What the poet was undergoing was nothing short of a post colonial crisis of identity where the native culture which so long had been suppressed by a presumably superior language and culture, now came to the forefront and moved the poet to utilize or

appropriate the superior language to express her own Indian tradition and heritage. In a parallel plane, the deterioration in the values of the rich native culture might have urged the poet to socially reconstruct these ideals, to reinstate these principles once again in the society which she endeavoured to achieve through the *Ancient Ballads.*

Dutt offers one of the best studies of a poet who lived, experienced and wrote in a post colonial ambience. Beginning with her life, the dichotomy was prevalent in practically every sphere. Toru's own room was furnished half in English and half in Bengali style (P.Sengupta, 162). Having learnt and almost mastered French and English, she involuntarily turned towards her root language, Sanskrit. Her desire to learn this language was natural and expected while it was merely a question of time and precedence that qualified her return to the origin. The very fact that she handled two foreign languages adeptly made it more imperative for her to get back to her roots.

An identical attraction, a pull towards the native soil was experienced in the other spheres too - religious and cultural. Though for all purposes she formally accepted Christianity, the potent streak of Hinduism constantly stirred within her and was aroused by the songs and myths of the yore. It should be obvious that Christianity while mellowing her sensitivity, has sharpened her perceptions of the need for rediscovering, if not recovering, her

half-forsaken traditions of Hinduism which could possibly cure her of ruptured cultural consciousness (B.Gupta, 11).

The Ancient Ballads was first published in 1882 with an Introductory Memoir by Sir Edmund Gosse. It is in *Ancient Ballads* that we see the great interaction in the life of Toru Dutt, her deep bond with her roots in Bengal, her family background, her childhood days marked by the age old *Vedic* and *Upanishadic* tales told and retold to her by her mother, the serene atmosphere of her garden house, `Baugmaree' and the intense presence of nature all around it. Toru's own readings in Sanskrit as well as her mother's instructions enabled her to perceive the ethical meaning with which many of the ancient legends were charged . . . (A.Bose, 20).

A typical example is 'Jogadhya Uma' which is perhaps the best-told tale in the entire collection. The poem possesses an ethereal aura. On reading it, memories of a typical Bengali village come rushing to one's mind. The poem attracts us further because it does not form a part of any famed epic but comes from the Indian folklore, heightening the native flavour of the poem. It is a tale Dutt heard from her favourite old family nurse, Suchee.

The poem opens with the break of dawn at Khirogram. The very name of the village is musical and seems to denote, abundance and fertility, indicating, "here's God's plenty". The mud road of Khirogram,

. . . a red, red line,

the meadows veiled in mist, the trees kissed by dew suggest the beginning of a new day with the pedlar winding his way through, singing out,

"Shell bracelets ho! shell bracelets ho!
Fair maids and matrons come and buy!"

Past the village road, the simpleton pedlar reaches the bathing-ghat of the tank, where a fair lady sits, eager to buy the bracelets. She lifts her hand against the sun to examine the bracelet round her wrist and guides the pedlar to the village temple, where her father is the priest. The pedlar is requested to approach her father for the price of the shell bracelets. Should it be that there were no money with her father,

. . . - then reveal,

"Within the small box, marked with streaks
of bright vermilion, by the shrine,
The key whereof has lain for weeks
Untouched, he'll find some coin - 'tis mine.

The portrait of the vermilion - streaked box kept by the shrine is that of a typical Hindu *bhandar*, essentially Indian in idea.

The meeting of the pedlar and the priest, the latter rather puzzled at first by the pedlar's report, followed by the dawning revelation of the vision who had blessed the pedlar with her Divine sight is very skilfully related by Dutt.

The conversation between the saintly priest and the simple and timid pedlar is very easily imaginable in Bengali. The gradual realization of the actual meeting with the goddess at the Dhamaser Ghat reveals itself on the pedlar's countenance. The manner in which he suddenly drops the basket of bracelets to make a dash to the Ghats again for one more divine Vision, with the priest following closely at his heels is very graphically expressed.

The Goddess then answers their prayer by showing the white bracelet - adorned hand.

And still, before the temple shrine
Descendants of the pedlar pay
Shell-bracelets of the old design
An annual tribute . . . .

The poem's beauty lies in its unalloyed simplicity. It is typically Bengali in expression and in location, except of course for the oft-pointed "manse" of the priest which indeed is quite a flaw in an otherwise lovely song. The white shell-bracelets described in the poem, even today adorn the wrists of the married ladies of Bengal.

The folk element in `Jogadhya Uma' and in its rustic Indian expressions make the poem all the more appealing and outstanding in the midst of the poems on the well-known heroes, kings and queens present in *Ancient Ballads*. It definitely is the best-loved piece in the entire volume.

Dutt's dilemma in being torn between the traditional and the modern, the East and the West, the old and the new emerges in every poem. Examining the tones of the three poems, `Savitri', `Lakshman' and `Jogadhya Uma', one winesses the poet's upholding the virtue of liberty in depicting Savitri's character on one hand, while on the other she extols the duty of a woman to follow her husband with a love akin to devotion. Once again `Lakshman' depicts the inability to choose the best path out of two given options, the trauma wrought by this tension and the crisis that results from the ultimate choice. It also portrays the conflict between feminism and masculinism, between dominance and submissiveness. In `Jogadhya Uma', the poet finds qualities of beauty and an old-world richness in the very simplicity of an age-old myth. In the very style of treatment of the subject, there is a dialectical trend evinced by the poet which is the externalisation of the inner duality conferred on the artist by colonialism. This factor makes itself inescapable and at the same time involuntary. It manifests in the product of every post colonial artist. Thus, so far one observes a certain pattern of development in Dutt's psyche.

In the next poem, `Royal Ascetic and the Hind', "the extent to which Christian piety liberalised her outlook can be seen in her argument in defence of the royal ascetic . . . (Kotoky, 22) that brought her to disagree,

> With what the Brahman sage would fain imply
> As the concluding moral of his tale,
> That for the hermit-king it was a sin
> To love his nursling. . . .

Critics like C.F. Andrews and E.J. Thompson chose to give a Christian aura to her efforts and vouched for the Christian religion to be the basic source of inspiration for her to come forth with such moving and poignant verses. C.F Andrews believed that "the Christian spirit is all pervading, at the same time, her faith itself causes her to love more deeply than ever the ballads and songs of her own Hindu past (Kotoky, 18).

The poem relates the story of King Bharat who, renouncing all worldly ties and pleasures, retires to a hermitage only to find his senses of love and pity aroused anew by the sight of a newborn hind which he then takes under his care. Dutt in etching the saintly life of Bharat in the forest, shows that man is basically human be he a king of the past or a sage of the present period. Being human, the human feelings of love, pity, companionship and joy would be inherent in any person. The poet's expression of the

acceptance of the human world with all its joys and sufferings may be taken as a legacy of Western humanism (Kotoky, 22). It is merely in vain that the *Vanaprastha* stage exhorts one to denounce all the natural emotions present in a person. Thus in reality,

> . . . Rather should we deem
> Whatever Brahmans wise, or monks may hold,
> That he had sinned in *casting off* all love
> By his retirement to the forest-shades;
> For that was to abandon duties high,

Finally, studying the poem, we are also made to share the poet's declaration, that,

> Not in seclusion, not apart from all,
> Not in a place elected for the peace,
> But in the heat and bustle of the world,
> `Mid sorrow, sickness, suffering and sin,
> Must he still labour with a loving soul
> Who strives to enter through the narrow gate.

In `The Legend of Dhruva', contrary to her independent attitudes in the other poems, Dutt appears to be actually favouring the doctrine of Karma. Dhruva, the son of the less favoured queen Suneetee of King Uttanapado is deeply injured by Suruchee's pronouncement:

. . . Knowst thou not,
Fair prattler, thou art sprung, - not, not from mine,
But from Suneetee's bowels? Learn thy place.

A child's mind is very delicate and easily affected. When Dhruva, hurt to the quick, hastened for consolation to his mother's side, it was only to learn of Karma and the fruits of Karma which is little consolation for a tender child! One wonders why Dutt has here merely related the legend without offering her impression on the event. Ot is it that through Dhruva's reply Dutt also echoes that,

. . . Thy words of consolation find
Nor resting-place, nor echo in this heart

Is it an echo of the disturbance in the poet's own heart, an echo of her ambivalence? Were not the rigours of 'the woods where hermits live', and the `prayer and penance' too harsh a method to `collect a large sum of the virtues' for such a young and tender child? Dhruva embodies the ideals of self - denouncement in one's devotion to duty (B.Gupta, 12).

`Buttoo' is a poem which is very much Indian in its tone, its theme and its style. `Buttoo' holds aloft the utmost veneration and devotion that a disciple possesses for his guru, his teacher, his master. The West would do well to learn something

from the East in this, and it would be difficult to find a parallel for the act related in this poem -an act of supreme obedience even to the point of absolute self-renunciation and self-maiming on the part of the pupil towards a master who had but made him a jest and a laughing stock before others (Das, 336).

The concept of casteism and its ensuing evils like untouchability are brought to the forefront in `Buttoo'. The manner in which the chief character is introduced to the readers as "the hunter's low-born son" indicates the relegation of the occupation of hunting to somewhere in the lowest rungs of society. It also signifies the impossibility of such a class of people to even desire to acquire knowledge of an art which definitely was meant for the upper echelons of the society. 'Buttoo' once again makes the society realize the extreme negativity of the belief in untouchability which the society could rather do well without. Untouchability and the segregation of castes into water-tight compartments were indeed rampant during the early years of nineteenth century. The poem votes for equality for all through the story of Buttoo and its moral. This once again reveals the impact of Westernism on the poet, the absolute assimilation of the French ideals of equality and liberty in the poet which induces the poet to raise arms against such a feudal practice that prevailed in the society of her era. The poem mouths the revolt against such a shameful practice and emerges with victory for the "child of a lesser god".

`Buttoo' shows how in those days, aeons back, caste and colour were given undue value. Buttoo, "a hunter's low-born son" had no seat as a disciple under the famed Dronacharya's tutelage. He was scorned and made fun of before the royal Pandava and Kaurava princes. And so he proceeded towards the woods, where he was determined to attain the art of archery by dint of hard practice. The exotic description that follows of the trees in the woods have been quoted in full by many a writer. That Dutt had a special place in her heart for Nature and Nature's bounty in woods and trees is easily surmisable, because it is not this once that we experience the sheer beauty of the Indian forest. We are brought to share the wonder of trees in many of Dutt's poems and Dutt's letters.

What glorious trees! The sombre saul
On which the eye delights to rest,
The betel-nut,- a pillar tall,
With feathery branches for a crest,
The light-leaved tamarind spreading wide,
The pale faint-scented bitter neem,
The seemul, gorgeous as a bride,
With flowers that have the ruby's gleam,
The Indian fig's pavilion tent
In which whole armies might repose,
With here and there a little rent,
The sunset's beauty to disclose,

The bamboo boughs that sway and swing
`Neath bulbuls as the south wind blows,
The mangoe-tope, a close dark ring,
Home of the rooks and clamorous crows.

The Champac, bok and South-sea pine,
The nagessur with pendant flowers
Like ear-rings, - and the forest vine
That clinging over all, embowers,
The sirish famed in Sanscrit song
Which rural maidens love to wear,
The peepul giant-like and strong,
The bramble with its matted hair.

All these, thousands, thousands more,
With helmet red, or golden crown,
Or green tiara, rose before
The youth in evening's shadows brown.

One may argue against the possibility of the entire collection in a single forest; or the unnecessarily long and winding diversion from the subject of the poem. But the splendour of the scene before the reader, the perfection of detail, the art of very subtly painting the picture with just the right stroke which Dutt has excelled in leaves one breathless with wonder.

The "sombre saul", "the seemul, georgeous as a bride", "the Indian fig's pavilion tent", the swaying bamboos, the clinging

vines, the giant peepul together form a very heady presentation indeed. The striking element of the passage is that there is nothing blatant about the lines. It is soft and subtle or majestic and awe-inspiring in keeping with the Nature that unravels before the reader.

Again, as Buttoo goes deeper and deeper into the forest and dusk descends, Buttoo's forehead is gemmed with pearls! It is definitely an original style of depicting a brow dotted with perspiration. The utterly pure atmosphere of the forest, of the animals residing there make Buttoo revel:

> "They touch me", . . .
> "They have no pride of caste like men,
> They shrink not from the hunter-boy,
> Should not my home be with them then?

The reverence which the boy possesses for his teacher Drona, who had but refused to accept him, remains throughout unflinched. The poem reveals the absolute respect one bestows on one's teacher or guru in the ancient Indian system of learning. This reverence is the elemental principle imparted to the disciple and becomes the highest form of the *dakshina*, the gift which the disciple offers his guru. A glimpse of the *guru shishya parampara* which forms the basis of learning in Indian philosophy is brought before the reader's view. Thus when Drona asks for his due as *dakshina*, Buttoo readily offers,

"All that I have, O Master mine,
All I shall conquer by my skill,
Gladly shall I to thee resign,
Let me but know thy gracious will."

and at Drona's behest of `thy right hand thumb' the young boy does not think twice of cutting it off to offer his guru. The poem shows how in Indian culture, the disciple shows utter devotion for his tutor. Buttoo is essentially Indian in thought and spirit and has been dealt classically by Dutt.

The influence of the childhood days could never be overlooked, when sitting by the fireside in the evenings, three pairs of eyes would be brimming with tears, listening to the mythological tales and folklore narrated by their mother. "The genius of man dives deep into the dreams of childhood. Children's stories form the real basis of any heart-inspired poetry," wrote a French critic; and ballads are in essence the child-literature of the past (*Life and Letters*, 330).

It was the memory of those tales, deeply imprinted in Dutt's mind, which caused her to take up Sanskrit and read for herself the epic-stories of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha* with its manifold entwining tales and sub-tales. Harihar Das, in his essay "The Classical Traditions in Toru Dutt's Poetry", declares : "These classics embody the highest ideals of culture and civilization in

ancient India . . . it seems prophetic that Toru Dutt should have been the first of her sex to interpret the soul of India to the West . . ."(*Asiatic*, 696). Dutt while familiarizing herself with the antique culture, observed that Sanskrit was as old and as grand a language as the Greek, and the legends selected by her for the collection, were as traditional for Indian culture as the Greek myths were for Hellenism (Kalinnikova, 32).

The poem `Sindhu' shows a fundamental aspect of Indian culture that one's first and foremost duty is towards one's parents. Filial obligation is a fundamental and crucial aspect sought for in every Indian's character. It is a very relevant aspect of the close-knit Indian family system where parents, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts possess a very close bond -- an affinity one hardly comes across in the West, where the independent streak is more prevalent. Dutt portrays how old age makes one ill of health and trying in nature. Sindhu, the only son of such a pair of old parents is their sole prop now, and devoted, he stays at their beck and call, unambitious for worldly cares or fame, in the midst of a forest.

The poem emphasizes once again the powerful role of *Karma* in every Indian life: "as you sow, so shall you reap". For having unwittingly killed a dove, Sindhu is cursed to be accidently killed and for having killed Sindhu, though unknowingly, and for making his parents grieve to death, Dasarath is also cursed to die

unable to bear the loss of his son. The rule of *Karma* is that the fruits of one's deeds, be they good or bad, follow one to the deserved goal. The poem as such cannot be judged as outstanding as some of Dutt's other poems. One can sense a lack of maturity in the style which makes one surmise that this must have been one of Dutt's earlier sketches.

'Prablad' portrays a child's unflinching faith in God even at the face of a tyrannical father.

The description of Narasimha in the poem is given a deliberate, hazy effect,

> A stately sable warrior sprang,
> Like some phantasma of the brain
>
> He had a lion head and eyes,
> A human body, feet and hands,
> Colossal, - such strange shapes arise
> In clouds, when Autumn rules the lands!

Eastern . . . is the denouement wherein the tyrant is miraculously struck dead by the direct intervention of the Gods, and his son proclaimed king in his stead (Das, 337). Dutt has done justice in portraying the picture of a cruel, oppressive king that appears often in several instances in Indian mythology. Dutt has

also succeeded in transferring "some potency of Sanskrit tradition to English language" (Prasad, 18).

In all these ancient themes, "the vocabulary is just enough archaic to distance the story from our times - it is the dim antiquity of India that is evoked here but the tone of voice makes it sound as something which happened but the day before" (Narasimhaiah, 26). This remark of Professor C.D.Narasimhaiah, though made with reference to `Savitri', is applicable to all the legends and ballads narrated by Dutt.

`Sita', the last poem of the series, is a dream-picture conjured up by `three happy children in a darkened room' who are listening to the sad story of Sita as it falls from their mother's lips in song (Das, 337). `Sita' is the only example of the sonnet-form in this series. The poem has an old-world charm. The lines seem to be suspended by illusive chains over a dream-like sylvan spot, a forest "where no sunbeam pries", where quiet flows the lake in which swans glide smoothly. One almost feels the hush descending over this hauntingly divine area where fair Sita weeps. The poem tugs at the heart-strings of any reader. It is definitely one of the best creations of Dutt where without narrating any tale as such she has succeeded in creating a breathtaking atmosphere. The picture of three keen pairs of eyes captured by the sad and lovely tale sung softly by their mother as the pale light of dusk descends on to the

scene comes very vividly to the reader's mind. Unknowingly, the reader's eyes also often fill with tears.

> . . . 'Tis hushed at last
> And melts the picture from their sight away.

The culminating lines of the poem,

> When shall those children by their mother's side
> Gather, ah me! as erst at eventide?'

are the most tender and touching lines written by Dutt; they are, to quote Iyengar, a "poignant elegy on the early death of Abju and Aru" (*Indian Writing 71*).

Could these culminating lines further be questioning those who had deserted, who had cast away all the inherent values and heritage of their motherland, as embodied in the Sita of the poem? Could it be a plea to them to come back to those basic, innate principles that formed the essence of India? Could it be a reminder of the presence of the spark of Indianness within them which was momentarily dimmed by a blast of Westernism? Bearing in mind the social and cultural circumstances in which the poet wrote, keeping track of the path chosen by the post colonial natives, one cannot help but ask these questions. Despite and beyond all these queries, there remains no doubt that this poem is above all a

dedication to the poet's mother, for the lovely tales she narrated during the childhood days of the three children, for the impact it had made in the poet, lasting all this while.

The literary atmosphere of her home provided all the necessary impetus for the poet. The prevailing social conditions exhorting the freedom of women created a deep impact in Dutt's heart. The socio-cultural hue of Bengal reflected itself in Dutt's poetry. The timeless traditions of her native country gave Dutt rich food for poetry. She was the first poet to dive into the mythology of India and emerge with certain priceless, immortal gems. Enshrining them in her poems in her own individual style, she offered the world a glimpse into the rich legends and folklore of her country. Defining the quality of Indianness, M.K.Naik stresses the fact by stating the manner in which "the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan shows how an Indian poet in English can derive strength from going back to his roots" (*Studies* 74). Dutt doubtless is one of the earliest and most outstanding example of the true Indian poet.

Technically most of the poems are perfect, mostly rendered in rhymed octosyllabic lines. "The technical skill of this poetess is superior to that of any of her predecessors and this in view of her extreme youth, is little short of amazing" (Dunn, xxv). Repeating what K.R.S.Iyengar comments, "Toru is reasonably at home in them all," (*Indian Writing 70*) "them" being the four-line

ballad stanza, the eight-line octosyllabic stanza and the blank verse.

Following these ballads and legends in *Ancient Ballads* are added seven `Miscellaneous Poems'. But the very term "miscellaneous" belies the contents. These poems were discovered amongst Toru's papers after her death (Das, 338). "Of far higher poetical value and deserving much more attention than they have received, are the half-dozen intensely personal poems which follows the Ballads," says Thompson (*Life and Letters 343*). The poems immortalize certain incidents in Dutt's life which created a deep impression in her mind and heart and were unforgettable. Dutt has, through these poems, passed on its nature to be shared by the reader. Some of them contain truly touching and tender lines, moving the reader's heart.

The first poem of the series, `Near Hastings' is one such poem. The poet recalls the autumn when Aru was suffering from the baneful cough. The two of them were walking down the beach near Hastings, Aru under the tender care and protection of her sister.

A lady passing them observed that the two girls were strangers to France. She noted that Aru was ailing. She then offered the girls a bunch of beautiful red roses. The love with which the gift was offered moved the girls to the core. `Near Hastings' forms a tribute to the lady from Dutt,

Her memory will not depart,
Though grief my years should shade,
Still bloom her roses in my heart!
And they shall never fade!

`France 1870 ' brings out Dutt's passionate love for France and the ideals of liberty and equality she embodies. Though Dutt had spend a mere few months in France, so intimately did she identify herself with everything that was French that "French became her favourite language and France the country of her election" for ever in life (Madhavananda and Majumdar, 400). She is full of grief at the fall of France.

Head of the human column, thus
Ever in swoon wilt thou remain?
Thought, freedom, truth, quenched ominous,
Whence then shall hope arise for us,
Plunged in the darkness all again?

Dutt was such a devout Christian, that she believed that France had falled into bad times due to the bad deeds of her citizens. Now that they had learnt from their deeds, she was confident that France would rise up again.

"Alas! thousands and thousands of men," says she
in her diary, "have shed their hearts' blood for their

> country, and yet their country has fallen into the hands of their enemies.Is it because many were deeply immersed in sin and did not believe in God? There have been, however, and there are still, thousands among them who fear God. O France, France, how thou art brought low! Mayst thou, after this humiliation, serve and worship God better than thou hast done in those days - poor, poor France, how my heart bleeds for thee!" (Das, 38)

This was written in 1870 as also this poem on France where Dutt sees the proverbial silver lining for France.

> . . . Bow nations, bow,
> Let her again lead on the way!

The emotions in the lines of France 1870 are close to an ardent devotion.

'The Tree of Life' has an ethereal aura about it. The dreamy quality of the poem has a notable cause behind it.

> With reference to this poem, Mr.Dutt copied as follows from his memorandum books for Miss Martin - it is dated as far back as April 16, 1877 -

> Yester evening when the candles were lighted, Toru told me, in very low whispers and with some agitation, a dream or vision which she had, the day previous about 9 or 10 am. She was not asleep at all, but quite awake. I know now why she asked me the evening before, where the text was "And I will give thee the crown of life". (Das 339)

Obviously the poem was a result of the vision Dutt had. The poem begins with `a sense of weariness' in the poet, indicating the approaching end. The poem is hauntingly lovely, bringing tears to our eyes as we watch the ailing poet lying on her bed with eyes closed.

The bond between father and daughter needed no words. Our hearts go out to the father, who is well aware of the presence of death in the atmosphere.

As she lay thus she suddenly became wide awake, for, `a strange light' shone on an open plain. It is of interest to note that such visions come, very, very occasionally to certain people, with a blinding light, which people often choose to believe to be an indication of the divine presence. Dutt too saw :

> . . . that strange light, - a glorious light
> Like that the stars shed over fields of snow

In a clear, cloudless, frosty winter night,
Only *intenser* in its brilliance calm.

Dutt saw a tree whose branches had leaves of silver and gold. Beside the tree stood an Angel who placed a few of those leaves on her fevered brows. The soothing touch of those magic leaves made the pain and fever vanish. The effect of the touch made Dutt request the Angel to place these leaves on her father's brow too. The Angel moved to touch his brow "...and then gently whispered 'Nay!'" and bestowed a divine look of love and pity on Dutt. Thus ended the vision. It was almost a hint that the time for her father to leave this earth was yet to arrive. Dutt woke up to find,

My father watching patient by my bed,
And holding in his own, close-prest, my hand.

`The Tree of Life' is Dutt's most exquisite creation, on reading which one is left behind with a sense of having experienced the lesser known strata of divinity.

The *Ancient Ballads* presents before the reader the rich harvest of "a Bengali adventure in the realm of English poetry" (Dunn, xxvii). Toru Dutt was the *first to find in her own land* an inspiration for her genius (Dunn, xxvii). The poet's true literary activity began after her return to India, in those last four years, when she was well aware of the hold of the disease on her too and when she was spurred on by a voice saying, "What thou doest, do

quickly!" She diligently pursued the study of Sanskrit with her father. Death was "a guide leading her back to childhood and back to India" (Williams, 17).

Dutt loved her country house (or the garden house as it is better known) `Baugmaree'. The acres of fertile land were filled with a variety of fruit bearing trees, "yellow or vermilion mangoes, red leeches, white jumrools and deep violet jams (*Life and Letters* 61-62). The poet's special affinity with nature is reflected in the two extracts given below :

> "The morning are so pleasant in the garden. Very early at about three in the morning, the Bheemraj, a little bird, begins his song; half an hour afterwards, all the bushes and trees burst into melody, the Kokila, the Bow-Kotha-Kow - which means, `Speak, O bride' the Papia and c. And the gay little humming - birds, with their brilliant colours drive into the flowers for honey with busy twitters. Oh, it is so cool and pleasant in the morning till ten o'clock, when the warmth increases; from noon to about four in the afternoon, all is quite still, except some lone woodpecker tapping at some far off tree, Then in the evening, all the birds are astir again, till it gets dark, when, like wise little creatures that they are, they go to bed! (*Life and Letters* 86)

If the mornings were so spectacular the nights at 'Baugmaree' were still more breathtaking.

> The night was clear, the moon resplendent, one or two stars glimmering here and there, before us stretched the long avenue bordered with high Casuarinas very like the poplars of England; dim in the distance the gateway; around us the thick mango groves; the tall betel-nut trees, straight "like arrows shot from Heaven"; the coconut palms with their proud waving plumes of green foliage and all wrapt in a sweet and calm silence. (*Life and Letters* 154)

'Baugmaree' was a priceless bit of Heaven lent to Dutt which stirred the poet within her into writing those beautiful verses one comes across in *Ancient Ballads.*

`Sonnet Baugmaree,' is an offering to that lovely serene garden-house which was a source of inspiration for Dutt with its powerful presence of Nature all around. She knew intimately each shade, tree and shrub that blessed her garden. The entire picture has been captured life-like within the sonnet for posterity. The various shades of greens have been perfectly painted in the word-pictures of this sonnet -- `The light-green graceful tamarind,' `the mangoe clumps of green profound,' `palms, arise, like pillars gray, between'. Amidst these greens,

And o'er the quite pools the seemuls lean
Red, - red, and startling like a trumpet's sound.

This line is most outstanding, fusing colour and sound together through a virtual magic with words. It is an original style of expressing the vibrant red of the seemul tree by comparing it with the vibrancy of the trumpet's sound. The lines that follow portray a typical Eastern full-moon night where

But nothing can be lovelier than the ranges
Of bamboos to the eastward, when the moon
Looks through their gaps, and the white lotus changes
Into a cup of silver . . . .

The effect is really intoxicating as the poet herself feels,

. . . One might swoon
Drunken with beauty then, . . .

The poem echoes Dutt's sentiments on nature, a parallel of which has already been expressed earlier in `Buttoo'. Dutt's letters also reveal her closest friends to be her pet horses, cats, canaries, guinea-pigs, the roses, lotuses, asters, shoe-flowers, water-lilies and practically all oriental fruit-trees one could think of. The poem signifies that despite the thousands of miles that physically distance the poet from the garden-house, mentally and spiritually, Dutt is constantly drawn towards 'Baugmaree', towards the tropical beauty of its surroundings which have essentially been

a continuing source of inspiration for her to write. It is thus that we see reflected in the poems the almost regular, rhythmic descriptions of the wonders of nature, the trees, the flowers and the birds of her country. Despite having praised Dutt's similar graphic descriptions of Nature earlier, one's eyes involuntarily get rivetted to 'Sonnet Baugmaree' owing to its very perfection.

Another very significant poem is `Sonnet Lotus' a poem unique in the sense that the theme is very unreal but natural. The poet appears to have created something out of nothing. Dutt has devised a difference of opinion amongst the flower family as to who the flower-queen is. The very concept has "a fairy-tale" aura about it. Dutt declares that though the beauty of the rose has been sung incessantly by many poets and the pristine loveliness of the lily vies with that of the rose, it is the rose-red and lily-white lotus,

> . . . delicious as the rose
> And stately as the lily in her pride -

that remains the queen of all flowers.

The sonnet is specially remarkable for the glimpse it offers the reader into the poet's mind. Dutt shares her dilemma with the reader. The Indian tradition, its ancient spirit, the hoary tales from its mythology are bound very intricately within her. It is an inherent part of the poet's being which she carries with her even

when she is far away from her country. Even as this rich heritage throbs within, winds of Westernism, of liberty brush against her, touch her, affect her and question her allegiance, her ultimate love. The poet's maturity, the evolving of her self emanates in the final lines of the poem where with

> . . . the lotus, "rose red" dyed,
> And "lily - white," . . .

she offers her country and the world the rich blend of the East and West, a balanced spirit of the old and the new. Finally, the inherent quality as present in the Lotus reigns supreme, gently dyed rose-red with subtle hues of Western learning. Dutt's poetry manifests the fusion of the richness of Bengali culture and the highly refined techniques of the Western literature.

One can feel the impact of post colonialism on this young poet, where she experiences the agony of the tussle between the native Indian culture and the foreign culture that ultimately results in a hybrid creation, rather the retention and consecutive expression of the native culture but through the foreign medium. In "Toru Dutt: The Mona Lisa of Indian Poetry in English", G.S. Balarama Gupta tends to compare Dutt with Mona Lisa : Like the celebrated painting, `Mona Lisa', Toru Dutt in her poetry and in her life presents the ambivalence that characterises Mona Lisa's enigmatic smile (*Perspectives* 16).

`Our Casuarina Tree', the last poem in the series is one of Dutt's best poems thematically, lyrically and structurally. It is a memoir to her childhood, her lost brother and sister, her bond with the tree and finally a tribute to the tree itself. It is a sort of virtual homecoming of the poet. Structurally it is formed of the eleven line stanza the rhyme - scheme being abba, cddc, eee. It seems a symbolic representation of the bountiful Nature itself, offering food, refuge and nourishment to all the birds of the area.

Dutt's poems often reveal an uncanny resemblance to Keats' poetry especially to the odes composed by Keats. The "restrained intensity of language and versification" which Walter Jackson Bate observes in Keats' odes (*John Keats* 520) can be seen in "Our Casuarina Tree". In this poem Dutt exhibits her typically condensed but lucid style in paying homage to the tree, transforming the casuarina tree into a strong symbol of the heritage of her country.

The tree was all the more precious to Dutt as it evoked nostalgic reminscences of those good old days when many an hour had been whiled away playing beneath the tree with Aru and Abju. The memories of her childhood days were intricately woven with this dear tree, the thoughts of which moved the poet to tears.

The poem literally depicts the extent to which the poet misses her motherland, it voices the sorrow of separation from one's culture, even when she is in the distant shores of France.

But not because of its magnificence
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul :
Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear!

The Casuarina embodies the benign, bountiful heart of her country, the generous love that spreads into an infinite aura, the light of which draws the poet across the miles. The Casuarina is love and constancy incarnate. The poem forms an obeissance to the culture of the poet's 'own loved native clime'.

May love defend thee from Oblivion's curse.

This one line, one of the Dutt's best-written lines shows how precious the tree, embodying the ideals of her country and her culture, remains to the poet. Once again there is proof of Dutt's palpable skill in expression, formed of an illusive blend of brevity, lucidity and simplicity, which resulted in memorable lines.

Describing Keats' "Nightingale" and "Grecian Urn", Bate stresses that "a direct assertion of belief, whatever else may be said of it, can hardly be dramatic unless there is either some form of debate or else a developing discovery by the poet of what he really believes" (*John Keats* 521). Dutt fully succeeds in transferring her

beliefs and hopes into her poetic compositions be it in the depiction of the tree and the values it signifies, be it in the picture of "the lotus "rose red"dyed,/And "lily -white",..." or be it in the vivid and meaningful portrayals of the characters culled from Indian mythology.

Appropriation is the process by which the language is taken and made to 'bear the burden' of one's own cultural expression, or as Raja Rao puts it to 'convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own' (Ashcroft, 38-39). Such an appropriation is clearly the most significant feature in the emergence of modern post-colonial literatures (Ashcroft, 6). Dutt was thus in the threshold of a stage of appropriation and creation of new literature, different from her earlier work of translation of the French poets. A bilingual position poised between cultures allowed access to two kinds of rhetoric, at least two traditions of public speech. "Mixing and crossing languages, forms and styles, colonized writers evolved polysemic - truly creolized - modes of expression", says Elleke Boehmer (*Colonial* 117-118). This bilingual and bicultural influence can thus be very lucidly traced through the different stages of the literary development of the poet, in Bhabha's words, a "traumatic ambivalence of a personal, psychic history",(*Location* 11) a dislocation that was reflected on her works, her style, her choice of subjects, her choice of medium, her ultimate decision of identifying herself with India, with Sanskrit, with the native literature. Considered in this perspective, Toru's *Ancient*

Ballads and Legends of Hindustan appears as her way of ending her cultural alienation engendered by her upbringing and spiritual conditioning (B.Gupta, 11).

Dutt's literary life is the shortest ever in the world of literature -- a mere four-year period into which was packed some of the best-written verses, ringing notes of Indian philosophy, culture , rusticity, a passionate love for Nature, an inimitable art of graphic description. At this point, the striking similarity in the poetry of Dutt and Keats, the poignancy of their lyrics, their succesful efforts in making their poetry mirror their philosophy and their ideals, their reverence for Nature and her powerful beauty, the short span of life which both the poets filled with some of the most memorable lines in English poetry becomes very remarkable. Some of the best verses give the reader a glimpse into her personal life, the bond of love uniting her to her father, the joyful childhood spent with her brother and sister. The beauty is heightened when one realizes that they were written with the spectre of death hounding her fragile life, when pain became an inevitable part of her life. That such a beautiful gift to posterity could be created from pain is by itself a paradox.

Edmund Gosse declared *Ancient Ballads* to be "Toru's chief legacy to posterity" (*Introductory Memoir*, v) because they exhibited the evolving development in the poet's verse, because here the verses were her own and not translations as in the previous

work and primarily because the work signified the poet's return to her motherland. She was pure Hindu, full of typical qualities of her race and blood, and . . . preserving to the last her appreciation of the poetic side of her religion - though faith itself in Vishnu and Siva had been replaced by a pure faith (Gosse, 11).

Dutt's essentially Indian poems mark her as the first notable poet to reach out to native roots, expressing an "allegiance to the indigenous culture" (Prasad, 4-5). Though basically Dutt had transferred certain incidents of Indian mythology from Sanskrit to English, her translations, her interpretations, her narrations, were absolutely independent, stamped with her own style of creation. Dasgupta rightly declares that Dutt was indeed "the first of major Indian writers who proved that the translation is not an isolated phenomenon, but an index of personality meaningful in its relatedness with a greater heritage, cultural and literary. She gave a status to translation" (*Indian Literature* 8-9).

Dutt entered the literary scene in Bengal at a crucial phase where she proved to be one of the first modern Indian poets to buoy up the drooping literary spirit of Bengal. Despite the many disadvantageous factors like her failing health, her young age, the lack of peers in her field in her own country, *Ancient Ballad*s was indeed an outstanding achievement. It was her final contribution to her race and its literature, after having spent an entire, though short, lifetime in foreign shores. In depicting the ancient ballads of

her country, which the poet naturally chose to write in English, her basic intense Indianness surfaced in the themes, the images coming out of the rich repository of her heritage.

The fact that the poems are in English offers an interesting angle of study. Basically during this period, the major books written in the vernacular were those prepared by the Christian missionaries. The age created an aura of duality where there existed an initial stage which witnessed the waning or the native literature and the resulting wait for the rise of a new stream, a new style. This gap was filled up by a thirst for the new learning. The later stage signified the realization that followed Westernism and with that there occurred the return to the native land and the native language, effecting an upsurge of native literature. During this stage, the resultant native literature tended to be coloured, affected and tinted with the impact of the Western learning which thus gave a new approach to the subject dealt with. In short, the return was not a total return to the age-old literature of the native country, but a return imbued with an application of a present day, relevant touch to the same age-old literature, thus transforming it and giving it a new entity.

No one who has perused *Ancient Ballads* would have found them shoddy or ill-kempt or incomplete in any way. Dutt has used her liberty in choosing instances from the legends and tales of yore and in narrating them in a manner she found most fitting. Her

choice of ballads and legends is significant in that they all centre on the Hindu conception of Duty considered in its broadest sense, which is at variance with the Western in that it is compounded of self-abnegation and selfless commitment to what can only be referred to as `dharma' that does not admit of any deviation or variation whatever the circumstances (B.Gupta, 11).

The *Ancient Ballads* is the poet's social allegiance to her country. The choice of ballads mirror not just the richness of the poet's heritage but its relevance to the social and cultural milieu of the poet. The success of the poet is in her ability to choose events from mythology which could be transcreated to coalesce with the times, to be meaningful to the crisis the society was passing through at the moment and by which a social justification could be established. The temper of the age, the positive attitude which made the crisis to be just a passing phase out of which the society would emerge better-moulded, better-conformed to the progressive ethos are factors impressed on all Dutt's poems. For the first time in literature of this kind, there is struck a genuine Indian note . . . (Dunn, xxv).

Again, she was not merely a poetess but a poet. Her poems despite its feminine touches do not call for any leniency with which one is usually inclined to treat lady poets or poetesses (A.Dasgupta, 6-7).

Finally she was no doubt a poet born of the age of romanticism, a poet full of life, vivacity and vibrant feeling. To call her melancholic would be to misunderstand her totally. No statement could be more wrong in declaring as Y.N. Vaish says that "this *young melancholic* poetess did never laugh in the short period of her life" (*Modern Review* 437). Dutt's letters are a living example of the quiet humour that coursed through her veins. There is no humour in her poetry (Vaish, 437). But then she has not dealt with humourous incidents in her poems. Her poems have themes of love, patience pity, loyalty, courage and these have been dealt with deservedly. There is definitely no tinge of melancholy in her verses. In fact, for a young girl of her age who had to come to terms with the knowledge of Death being just round the corner, she has been far from being pessimistic or melancholic which one could otherwise naturally be in similar circumstances. Her frail health, instead of detering her from the joys in the landscapes of life, acted as a stimulus (A.Dasgupta, 12).

But God had destined otherwise
And so she gently fell asleep
A creature of the starry skies
Too lovely for the Earth to keep. (*A Sheaf Gleaned)*

WRITING IN COLONIAL SPACE : A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY INDIAN POETRY IN ENGLISH

Thesis
Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature

By

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Chapter - V

MADHUSUDAN DUTT : THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

Compromise may be an excellent rule of conduct, but little would have been accomplished in this world were there no errant idealists willing to stake their call on a forlorn hope, or a wild adventure.

Harendra Mohan Dasgupta

The birth, life and work of Michael Madhusudan Dutt form one of the most interesting studies among the poets of nineteenth-century Bengal. Madhusudan is a true representative of the age in the absolute sense of the term -- his birth, his upbringing, his traumas, his aspirations, his inspirations, his works, his entire life are very fundamentally bound to the temper of the age. He reflects truly the psyche of post colonial Bengal. Madhusudan offers "the image of post-Enlightenment man, tethered to, *not* confronted by his dark reflection, the shadow of colonized man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his action at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of his being. The ambivalent identification of the racist world - moving on two

planes without being in the least embarrassed by it . . ." (Bhabha, 44).

Madhusudan's childhood was a happy one with all his whims and fancies catered to by his fond parents. But this very happy-go-lucky childhood paved the way for his wild and reckless style of life later. Again, though for all purposes he had not a worry during his early days, the one blight that disturbed him was his mother's plight of having to share "her husband's affection with three other fellow-wives" (R.C.Dutt, 129). This must have proved pretty unsettling for the young boy which later caused him to revolt against his father on the latter's fixing up Madhusudan's marriage with an "appropriate" girl. This incident occurred during the poet's days in Hindu College. He retaliated his father's insistence with a most unexpected and extreme step -- he took to Christianity and became Michael Madhusudan Dutt. The history of social reforms ... illustrate the truth that great abuses lead to reform, senseless coercion leads to reaction (R.C.Dutt, 129).

Madhusudan was in the Hindu College at a period when the Young Bengal Movement was at its most active phase. He was very much drawn to the ideals of Derozio. Already possessing a sound knowledge of his mother-tongue, Bengali, and Persian, his flair for languages saw him pick up English and handle the language with admirable ease. Fanciful ideas of English being far superior to any Indian language lodged in his mind. Even as he was making forays into the English language, with, what appears

to be, save a few, ineffectual verses on the then hot themes of misanthropy and love, he was considered to be the Jupiter among the stars of the Hindu College. All this while, he inwardly aspired to cross the seas, go to Europe, breathe the air and get the feel of the "heaven on this earth", for he nurtured this dream :

> I sigh for Albion's distant shore,
> Its valleys green, its mountains high;
> Tho' friends, relations, I have none
> In that far clime, yet, oh! I sigh
> To cross the vast Atlantic wave
> For glory, or a nameless grave!

As Makarand Paranjape declares in "Michael Madhusudan Dutt: Reclaiming a Kinship", this is nothing less than "nostalgia for a place one has never been to! This I think is the first and best articulation of a pathology that colonialism created and whose symptoms are still evident in us today" (*New Perspectives* 104).

In reality, the influence of imperialism was making itself felt for Madhusudan, for whom, unknown to himself, his mother-tongue Bengali was "rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power" (Ashcroft, 10). A sense of dislocation had set in which made him believe that English was more superior. An ideological shift developed gradually between the poet's inherent knowledge and understanding of his

thoughts in not the instinctive mother-tongue but the acquired "superior" language. D.E.S. Maxwell suggests that "in the case of invaded societies like those in India or Nigeria, where indigenous people were colonized in their own territories, writers were not forced to adapt to a different landscape and climate but had their own ancient and sophisticated responses to them marginalized by the world-view which was implicated in the acquisition of English" (Ashcroft, 25).

During his period in Bishop's College, following his six years at Hindu College, Madhusudan quickly picked up and grasped more languages like Greek and Latin as well as our root language Sanskrit. The gradually estranging relationship with his father and an association with some students in the college who had hailed from Madras, moved Madhusudan to think seriously in terms of going to Madras. In his letter to his very intimate friend, Gourdas Bysack, Madhusudan himself says :

My life is more busy than that of a school-boy. Here is my routine: 6 to 8 Hebrew, 8 to 12 school, 12 - 2 Greek, 2 - 5 Telugu and Sanskrit, 5 - 7 Latin, 7 - 10 English. Am I not preparing for the great object of embellishing the tongue of my fathers?" (*Rachanabali* 16).

It was while at Madras that Madhusudan's verses began getting published in some dailies under the pseudonym of Timothy Penpoem. The enthusiasm with which his friends had

received his poems during the Hindu College days was fresh in his memory and served to be a source of continuing inspiration to the young poet.

But basically "Dutt's love for English poetry, however, was not caused so much by external influence as by his inordinate desire to be a pucca sahib" (Sen, 212). This is one of the main reasons why, as mentioned earlier, Madhusudan offers one of the best studies of the nineteenth century results of post colonialism. "Bilingual and bicultural having Janus-like access to both metropolitan and local cultures, yet alienated from both", (Boehmer, 115) Madhusudan reveals a persisting fluctuation in his life and lifestyle. His birth as a Hindu, his conversion to Christianity, his studies in Calcutta, followed by his sojourn at Madras, his picking up many languages in rapid succession despite his basic longing of retaining Bengali all point towards this one fact. ". . . can't you send me a copy of the Bengali translation of the Mahabharat by Casidoss as well as a ditto of the Ramayana - Serampore edition. I am losing my Bengali faster than I can mention," (*Rachanabali* 16) writes Madhusudan frantically to his friend Bysack, all the way from Madras. This request was sent even as he was versifying in English and still secretly fostering a dream of going one day to England, of being recognized as a poet of merit by the people there. Frantz Fanon, a key theorist of anti-imperial nationalism rightly observed that the colonized man breathed the "appeal of Europe like pure air" (Boehmer, 115).

Oft like a sad imprisoned bird I sigh
To leave this land, though mine own land it be;
Its green robed meads, - gay flowers and cloudless sky
Though passing fair, have but few charms for me.
For I have dreamed of climes more bright and free
Where virtue dwells and heaven-born liberty
Makes even the lowest happy; - where the eye
Doth sicken not to see man bend the knee
To sordid interest:- climes where science thrives,
And genius doth receive her guerdon meet;
Where man in all his truest glory lives,
And Nature's face exquisitely sweet:
For those fair climes I heave the impatient sigh,
There let me live and let me die.

Probably at the moment, it was inexplicable even to Madhusudan as to why he could not let go of Bengali even as he charged towards English. Any work of art is nothing short of a reflection of the various influences and forces at work in the life of an artist. Thus, glimpses of his carefree upbringing resulting in his wild, impatient and extravagant nature could be witnessed in Madhusudan's desire of having the cake and eating it too. The temper of the times, blended with his daring attitude, resulted in his oscillating between the old and the new. All this while, the memories of the scenic beauty of the childhood days at Sagardari in Jessore, the rippling of river Kapotaksha lingered in a corner of his heart - the first, basic influences of nature which could never be

erased. His is the tragic case of a man who had his head in India and his heart in England, and who fell between two worlds, the East and the West (Kripalani, 47).

While Derozio had an ethnic problem to battle with and Toru Dutt had to bear the agony resulting from a dual allegiance to France and India, Madhusudan's was the case of a deep inner conflict urging him to crave for the unknown, unexperienced yet "superior" culture of Europe while not completely being able to stake his claims to the rich, native culture of Bengal. `This fundamental disunity' is perhaps the price that a great pioneer must pay who has to lead his age from one tradition to another (Kripalani, 47).

It was while at Madras that Madhusudan wrote and got published what could be termed his best and largest poem in English, `The Captive Ladie', the story of the last Hindu king of Delhi, his abduction of his beloved, Sanjukta, from, the palace of Kanauj where her brother, the king, had conducted a *Swayamvara* for his sister.

A brief examination of `The Captive Ladie' as well as Madhusudan's other English verses would perhaps give us proof of what Madhusudhan himself later realized, that despite all his dreams he could just not aspire to reach great heights with his English compositions. Most of Madhusudan's poems are more a play of words on the recurrent themes of love and the beauties of

nature. On the latter subject he has written an entire series of poems reminiscent of none other than Kashiprasad Ghose, in the very titles like `Composed During a Morning Walk', `Composed During An Evening Walk', `Evening in Saturn', `To a Star During A Cloudy Night', `After A Shower In the Evening', `A Storm', `Night', . . . describing effusively these different visions of Nature. In the midst of such an assortment comes a breath of fresh air in the form of `King Porus' which acquaints us with the poet's latent patriotism.

Like to a lion chain'd,
That, tho' faint - bleeding stands in pride-
With eyes where unsubdued
Yet flash'd the fire-looks that defied-
King Porus boldly went.
. . . He couched not as a slave -
He stooped not - bent not there his knee,-
But stood - as stands an oak,
Unbent - in native majesty!

The following lines appear Derozian :

And where art thou - fair Freedom! thou-
Once goddess of Ind's sunny clime!
When glory's halo `round her brow
Shone radiant, and she rose sublime-
. . . . . .
The glory hath now flitted by!

The crown that once had decked thy brow
Is trampled down - and thou sunk low -

This lament of the lost pride and glory of the pre-colonial days recalls Derozio's opening lines in the poem `To India - My Native Land':

My country! in thy days of glory past
A beauteous halo circled thy brow
And worshipped as a deity thou wast.
Where is that glory, where that reverence now?

After `King Porus' written in 1843, the only noteworthy English poem of Madhusudan is `The Captive Ladie' which contains, while depicting the story of Prithviraj some enchanting vignettes of the Indian gods and goddesses described in the portion titled `The Feast of Victory'. This `Feast of Victory' is the *Rajasuya Yagna* which the king of Kanauj is all set to conduct, and for which occasion he has invited all the kings and princes of repute. M.K.Naik states that "the Indian poet may indeed draw his imagery from any source he likes . . . . But since the poet's imagery springs from his own vital experience, the Indian poet's world of imagery will naturally be dominated by his own cultural heritage" *(Studies* 73-74). True to his statement, in `The Captive Ladie', we observe that preceding the *Yagna*, brief scenes from the various ages of our mythology flit by, enchanting the reader with the

playful pranks of Krishna, the blazing glory of Durga, the valour of Rama, the power of the Pandavas.

In a few masterly strokes, Madhusudan presents us with the vision of Krishna playing on his flute and teasing his maidens :

From his light skiff, that sped along,
His soft reed breath'd the gayest song,
Which swelling on the fitful sweep
of the lone night-wind's sigh - so deep -
Wing'd ravishment where'er it fell -
Love's accents in their aery spell!

An instant picture of Durga is thus similarly brought to us in all her glorious beauty :

For lo! that maiden - erst so fair,
Stood like a tigress in her lair,
And swept th' accursed race away
Far from the smiling realms of Day
And banish'd Peace restor'd again
O'er hill and vale and mount and plain!

Contrasted to the heavenly, benign light in the first canto, the second canto is filled with fearsome pictures of

foreboding, of impending disaster. Sanjukta's dream of Kali in all her terror :

> Me thought there came a warrior - maid,
> With blood-stain'd brow and sheath-less blade;
> Dark was her hue, as darkest cloud,
> Which comes the Moon's fair face to shroud, -
> And 'round her waist a hideous zone,
> Of hands with charnal lightnings shone,
> And long the garland which she wore,
> Of heads all bath'd in streaming gore,
> How fierce the eyes by Death unseal'd
> And blasting gleams which they reveal'd! -

evokes a kindred fear in the reader's heart who is, at the same time, amazed at the poet's skill in creating such an ambience. This description of Kali reminds us of the poet's earlier but far more terrifying portrayal of the very same Goddess in the poem `The Upsori':

> . . . - 'twas Kally's - Frightfulness!
> Lo! there she stood in martial majesty,
> Gorg'd with the blood of Sembo's cursed race,
> And garlanded with heads! - Her blood-red eye
> Shot lightening; in her hand the gory blade
> Shone like a brand of fire - while naked, wild
> She trampled on her prostrate husband's head,

And with a fiendish glare upon him smiled!
Her raven locks strem'd wildly bath'd in gore,
And shed dark drops of blood upon the slippery floor.

Doubtless, the poet had etched each feature of this fearful Goddess in faithful detail.

The beauty of `The Captive Ladie' lies in these portrayals which hold the reader captive even as the reader settles to listen anew to the tale of *Sanjukta - Swayamvara.* The poet is in his element in picking out a single instance from the pages of history and weaving afresh the spirit of romance of the tale or Prithviraj and Sanjukta, simultaneously offering a moment's glimpse into the timeless ritual of the *Rajasuya Yagna* in all its awe and splendour and ushering exciting encounters with the reigning deities of the Hindu mythology.

It is little wonder that this poem received rave reviews and it was declared that this poem had certain verses which "neither Scott nor Byron would have been ashamed to own" (R.C.Dutt, 130).

But even as he was receiving such extravagant praise, Drinkwater Bethuene wrote,

"He could render a far greater service to his country
and have a better chance of achieving a lasting

> reputation for himself if he would employ the taste and talents which he has cultivated by the study of English in improving the standard and adding to the stock of the poems of his own language." (*Cultural* 130)

Despite his command over the language, he experienced its inadequacies and its inabilities which disallowed him from applying the language whole-heartedly and sincerely to the native heritage, theme and spirit. This disadvantage was probably made more acute by his knowledge of his own mother tongue. A study of Sanskrit revealed new vistas of his own native literature, his own culture. He viewed this - the ageless, omnipotent culture and tradition of his own native Bengal - as a virgin area, affording endless possibilities and opportunities to his adventurous spirit and mind. What he sensed in his own culture probably made him realize that if he transmitted this culture,, this heritage in the ultimately alien English language, a precious portion would be lost. He assessed that despite one's ability to talk or read or write a language, the medium of poetry, the medium of art was always the mother-tongue, the language one dreamt in, the language one thought in. English was an acquired taste whereas Bengali was an inherent and inborn quality.

In this feature one observes a distinctive quality in Madhusudan when compared to Toru Dutt or Derozio. Derozio, not being a Bengali but a Eurasian by birth, possessed a natural

leaning for only the English language and not for Bengali or Sanskrit though for all other purposes he was a Bengali in a complete sense. Toru Dutt on the other hand, had first learnt English and later on French. Living a greater part of her life abroad, mingling mostly with the French and the English and indulging in reading and studying mostly French and English served to distance her only further from her native tongue. Further, not knowing Sanskrit put her at a greater disadvantage of the inability of experiencing first hand the richness of its literature. Here her mother to a great extent served as a major link with her native language, its stories, mythology and music. It was this bond which created a desire in her to get back to her roots in her own country.

In contrast, Madhusudan had a first-hand, primary experience of both the Eastern and Western languages and its traditions that enabled him to distinguish one from the other and return to Bengali. Ashcroft declares that "in African countries and in India, that is in post-colonial countries where viable alternatives to english continue to exist, an appeal for a return to writing exclusively or mainly in the pre-colonial languages has been a recurring feature of calls for decolonization (*Empire* 30). Chinua Achebe, too, has spoken of the imperative need for writers to help change the way the colonized world was seen, to tell their own stories . . .(Boehmer, 189).

Hence Madhusudan's return to Calcutta from Madras in 1856 was a "return" in ways more than one. It was symbolic in the sense of it being the return of the native to his own land. Having got away from Calcutta to Madras in 1848, having experienced the trauma of poverty, having experienced the joys and vicissitudes of married life, which made him marry, divorce and marry again a second time to a different person, - once more, a reflection of his wild spirit, his impulsive and indecisive nature - having written and published poems in English and winning some - though not the ultimate - recognition, realization dawned on him. He ended this phase of his life and re- "turned" to his own Calcutta, to his native tongue and in 1858 he wrote his first play *Sarmistha* and "became, almost by accident, a Bengali writer" (Kripalani, 53).

It is interesting to observe that the anglicized Madhusudan came back to his own through another channel of aesthetic activity which was itself a result of Western influence, viz. the rise of the Bengali stage (H.M.Dasgupta, 59). *Sarmistha* is remembered, though not for its quality, as the first Bengali play and the first Bengali work of Madhusudan. He succeeded in introducing the spirit of Western culture to the literature of Bengal. Dasgupta very aptly remarks : By temperament Michael was peculiarly fitted to be the father of what may be called the *Sturm* and *Drang* school of Art in Bengali poetry. The struggle for self-expression in every department of life and thought in the country - the main feature of Renaissance - was certainly not to be ineffectual for our poetry" (*Western Influence* 66).

Sarmistha was followed by a couple of farces "one ridiculing the vices and follies of `Young Bengal', and the other ridiculing the more dangerous hypocrisy and profligacy of `Old Bengal'" (R.C.Dutt, 131). The four years from 1858 to 1862 were the best years of Madhusudan's literary life. According to Naik "The modern Indian poet in English is truly Indian when he draws his artistic sustenance from his heritage. He may not totally accept it; he may even reject aspects of it which he thinks are undesirable, but he cannot altogether ignore it" (*Studies* 72). Madhusudan's study and knowledge of the masters of literature like Homer, Virgil, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Dante, Tasso and Milton, among others, fortified by his profound awareness of the great epics of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and of the works of the Sanskrit scholars Valmiki and Kalidasa coalesced to form the most potent force of the century, that found the existing Bengali style of rhyme to be rather stifling. Madhusudan is the father of the epic as also of the blank verse in Bengali. In an age when the "stately measure and sonorous cadence of blank verse" was regarded most unsuitable for the Bengali language, Madhusudan proved "that the Bengali is born of the Sanskrit than which a more copious and elaborate language does not exist" (*Rachanabali* 28).

Tilottama - Sambhava, the first epic in blank verse in Bengali, was the daring result of this challenge, that took the literary world of Bengal by storm. The conception of this new form created shock waves and success among the Bengali society. The language in its newly-conceived form, its rich music, its

stately nature acquired a new dignity in the hands of Madhusudan. Actually it was only natural and inevitable that none but Madhusudan achieve this because Madhusudan's personality and life always evinced instances of breaking fetters, going against tradition, achieving the impossible, discovering and investigating the unknown, untouched aspects, viewing possibilities of development in absolutely unexpected quarters be it in life or in literature.

One could be thus sure that introducing the blank verse was not the end-all of the poet's objective. He was of course complemented by the Bengali nature which very eagerly responded to this pioneering trend in modern Bengali poetry. The Bengali sensibility, though astonished to say the least, acceded agreeably to the Miltonic style brought by Madhusudan. Speaking on *Tilottama - Sambhava*, Raj Narain Basu, one of the critics who lauded the artistry, the melody of the epic, wrote, "If Indra had spoken Bengali, he would have spoken in the style of the poem. The author's extraordinary loftiness and brilliancy of imagination, his minute observation of nature, his delicate sense of beauty, the uncommon splendour of action and the rich music of his versification charm us in every page" (R.C.Dutt, 132).

Tilottama-Sambhava depicts an event from the Hindu mythology where two Rakshasa brothers Sunda and Upasunda rise to such terrifying power that the overall strength of Heaven itself is put to test. To overcome this crisis, Brahma creates, out of all the

objects of beauty, Tilottama, the most beautiful lady. She is then sent to enchant both the brothers, who each cherish a desire to possess Tilottama. This leads to a fight between the two brothers leading to the death of both and thus resulting in peace once again on earth. Having achieved this, Tilottama is transformed into a star in the skies. This epic, thus, was the first step towards a rejuvenation of the native theme, of Indian literature. In Madhusudan's own words, ". . . I have actually done something that ought to give our national poetry a good lift" (*Rachanabali* 30).

Having successfully broken certain age-old rules of Bengali literature, having revolutionized the verse and rhyme of Bengali poetry, Madhusudan went a step further by giving to Bengal and to India the *Meghnadbadh-Kavya* in 1861. With this, the poet reached his pinnacle of success. His endless capacity in seeing the apparently invisible aspects, his success in bringing the whole society share his disagreement with certain accepted norms of our scriptures, our religion, our epics, his constantly iconoclastic view of life with its ups and downs was brought to fruition in this epic.

Though this study concentrates on the poet's contribution to Indian poetry in English, in this one instance, there is a digression to concentrate more in this particular Bengali epic composed by Madhusudan rather than on his English verse for obvious reasons. This epic represents the upheavals in the society of nineteenth-century Bengal and the ambivalent attitudes of the

people; it is an image of the poet himself with all his crises and his manner of dealing with them. This one epic could form the mouthpiece of the decisive nineteenth-century period.

The poem is a new interpretation of a mythological theme. The striking difference in the ideology of the poet bears fruit in the change in manner with which the theme of the killing of Meghnad is dealt with. The difference denotes the change that occurred to the poets of the period, a change brought about by colonialism, the rebounding of colonialism as seen in Madhusudan which made him return to India, to Bengal and to his native language.

What does the *Meghnadbadh-Kavya* represent? It is the ultimate victory of a poet, of his success in shattering certain basic age-old ideals nurtured by our society about our scriptures, our religion, our deities. It is a glimpse into the governing principle of a period which offers the possibility of the positive in the negative, the divine in the demoniac nature of things. It is a reflection of the ambivalence of the era. Madhusudan, in this venture, has been declared "the first Bengali poet who encourageously set aside prevalent limitations and injunctions, thus instilling courage in the minds of the Bengali writers of the future" (N.S.Bose, 284).

In a word, *Meghnadbadh-Kavya* portrays the trail of events leading to the death of Meghnad, the most valorous son of

Ravana. The set notions which the Hindu or rather the entire Indian society holds about *Ramayana*, compartmentalising the clan of Ayodhya in the good, positive, merited category and the clan of Lanka in the bad, negative, unmerited category come crumbling down. Just as the set notions of the society of nineteenth-century Bengal in its socio-cultural, political and religious aspects were turned topsy-turvy by the new wave of learning, so also Madhusudan appears to speak to the minds of that society of Bengal, during that particular period. He speaks through his epic and the impact, in one word, is phenomenal. Firstly, he decided to communicate through a new form in Bengali poetry -- the epic. He decided to cull an event from the most oft-read, and hence very familiar epic, the *Ramayana*. He chose for his subject, not the constantly chosen Rama with the divine halo of goodness round his head but, surprisingly for all, Meghnad , who though minus the halo was the equally or even more, noble and brave son of Ravana, whose picture as the ten-headed demon king instantly comes to one's mind first. Madhusudan then guides his readers towards a fresh appraisal of our venerated epic. Consequently, while the usual, normal introduction of the epic would have been in the kingdom of Ayodhya, Madhusudan's readers directly reach Lanka, at king Ravana's court and the readers then witness the lofty king Ravana mourning the death of his son Birbahu.

From this moment, Madhusudan begins to alter the reader's complacent notions one by one. The "demon-king" is basically a human being, possessing the entire gamut of feelings of

love, pity, faith, trust, envy, anger, jealousy and hatred. The loss of a son is as lamentable to Ravana as it is for any other human being. When Ravana "compares his great city to a festive house in which the lights are one by one extinguished, the flowers faded and the merry sound of harp and flute hushed into silence," (Dae, 177) the "demon king" that precedes the picture of Ravana in our minds is brought to nought and Ravana comes to our level as a man, a human who thinks and feels as we do. With this single incident the poet questions the society's ideas, the peoples' judgement of right and wrong, good and evil. Reluctantly or otherwise, the invariable, undettered, blackened image of the Lankans, of Ravana's family is replaced by a recognition of the spark of humanity within them, and an albeit grudging respect replaces the existing hatred for these characters.

From another equally important yardstick, the poem is a transparent image of the poet, Madhusudan himself. Having initially cast away his language Bengali, as of little worth and having sought recognition in English, the poet returned to Bengal to a rediscovery of his language. "I had no idea, my dear fellow that our mother-tongue, would place at my disposal such exhaustless materials. . . . The thoughts and images bring out words with themselves, - words that I never thought I knew" (*Rachanabali* 35).

Yet again, the poet had during his youth given up his religion of Hinduism for Christianity. But for all inspirational purposes, his heart constantly reached out towards Hinduism. The

farther he went away from it, the closer he was brought to its literature. "I must tell you, my dear fellow, that though, as a jolly Christian youth, I don't care a pin's head for Hinduism, I love the grand mythology of our ancestors. It is full of poetry. A fellow with an inventive head can manufacture the most beautiful things out of it" (*Rachanabali* 34). He himself advised that "when you sit down to read poetry, *leave aside all religious bias*" (*Rachanabali* 38).

Finally in the very characterisation of Ravana and his choice of Meghnad as the hero of his epic, one can very plainly visualize the poet's nature itself. His impulsive nature, his daring attitude, his passionate temperament, his abhorence towards set norms, his instinct to break rules, his constant desire to choose an untroddden path are encountered in the various dimensions of the epic. His very Grecian freedom caused him to "engraft the exquisite graces of the Greek mythology" in his epic (*Rachanabali* 34). He identified himself with Ravana. "I despise Ram and his rabble; but the idea of Ravana elevates and kindles my imagination; he was a great fellow" (*Rachanabali* 35).

Just as Ravana who was "too painfully conscious of the nature of his losing cause" (H.M.Dasgupta, 69) but despite it, defied it by overcoming his grief and going to the battle-field, Madhusudan too had gone after the "English" cause. In fact till the very end of his life, he was never totally reconciled to his lot. The mania to Europeanize lingered till the end. Not surprisingly, during his stay in Europe, he wrote to his friend, Iswar Chandra

Vidyasagar, "come here and you will soon forget that you spring from a degraded and subject race. Here you are the master of your masters!" (*Rachanabali* 23). . . . "I wish to leave my children behind . . . . and I want them to be thoroughly Europeanised" (*Rachanabali* 22).

Madhusudan aimed at bringing Rama down a few notches from his divine stature to that of a mortal man, a brother or a husband. He simultaneously raised Ravana and his family from the degraded level they rested within our imagination to a standard of humaneness. It is thus that the Ravana we come across in *Meghnadbadh-Kavya* possesses features of a loving father, bereaved by the loss of his sons one by one. "Just as one branch after another is lopped off by the woodman in the woods before the tree is finally felled by him, so, behold, oh, God, am I being gradually made to sink in the hands of the terrible foe!" (*Western Influence* 70-71). Meghnad, viewed so long as a deadly foe, is cast by Madhusudan in a friendly light that bestows on him the qualities of love, courage and faithfulness which he truly possessed but which were marred by our attitude so far.

The death of Meghnad, the unspeakable sorrow of his father who is at a loss for words to comfort the mother, who is in turn made to witness the young daughter-in-law mounting the funeral pyre would move the hardest heart. In a war where God and man conspire to put down a great hero, our sympathy naturally goes out to the weaker side and even his failings, if there be any,

call for pity rather than contempt, for the fall of such a towering figure is as tragic as the fall of the great empire awful in its magnificence and looking all the more colossal in its ruins (H.M.Dasgupta, 86).

Taking note of these different aspects of this epic with relevance to the historical period in which this materialized, the *Meghnadbadh- Kavya* seems to be a perfect foil for the timbre of the time. The poem's freeing itself from the traditions of literature was just the mirror image of the society itself, as witnessed in the student community, in the Young Bengal movement, breaking away from the chains of orthodoxy. The poet's identification with Ravana, his glorification of Meghnad was nothing short of the reply of society itself to the mediocrity as represented by Rama with his weak nature. To the poet, Rama represented the conventional society tied by his unmanly nature to the orthodox and conservatist principles. *Meghnadbadh-Kavya* is a reflection of the ideological crisis the society was experiencing at the time. The conflict in the poem strikes a parallel to the conflict in the society between conventional principles and modern thought, the tension resulting out of the desire to break free from the orthodox beliefs and practices and at the same time not wanting to completely sever the bond with tradition. Ravana and Meghnad, Chitrangada and Pramila with their vitality, their "elemental power" represent the new middle- class of the society that emerged strengthened by Western learning to look anew into their own tradition and rediscover and cherish their heritage and their roots.

Madhusudan succeeded in presenting an unexpected dimension of our good old epic, he contributed in making the society rethink its values, to reconsider its sense of the right from the wrong, with relevance to the changing times. A weeping Ravana, an ungenerous Lakshmana and an emasculated Rama are liable to be condemned not because they are cut loose from history, and are therefore calculated to hurt our religious susceptibilities, but only because they are unfit for great actions as demanded by our epic (H.M.Dasgupta, 77-78). Those who cling to the rules and forms that define an epic, those who frantically search for some flaw to enable them to find fault with Madhusudan may find that as far as the definition for an epic hero goes, his epic falls far below the mark of perfection. Similarly the poet's style of writing might appear to be a weak imitation of the West. But the content of the poem reflects the social struggle in the country. The poet's interpretation of the past, of the history and the mythology of the country signifies the revolution, the redefinition of the poet's relation to his heritage. It denotes the change in the poet's mental framework from the earlier derision for the society to a desire for the social upliftment of the society. Eventually, our ideals in religion remain unshaken as ever, our devotion for Rama continues, but our sense of the good and the bad, our ability to view the essence of goodness in things evil too is renewed. Essentially what matters is that the "power of the poet's national heredity is allowed to pass into his work". Therein lies the merit of the work, of the artist.

Madhusudan's poetry is a class by itself in the history of Bengali literature. His poetry represents the dialectic between the Bengali heritage and the Western lyrical form, between a class's sense of inferiority towards indigenous beliefs and superiority for the indigenuous culture. His poetry was a reflection of the post colonial dilemma as seen in the lines of *Meghnadbadh-Kavya*. His experiments in English poetry, followed by his discovery of the essence of true poetry in his own native state, language, theme and thought resulted in "a sort of tortured renaissance in India's poetry," (*Awakening* 284). His inability to fully merge with the Indian spirit persisted till the end of his life.

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Chapter - VI

REFLECTIONS

Beneath the words our absentee masters have given us, there is an undermining silence. It saps our nerve. And beneath that silence, there is a raw welter of cadence that trembles and strains towards words and that makes the silence a blessing because it shushes easy speech. That cadence is home . . .

Dennis Lee

Looking back, almost two centuries later, we seem to have travelled a long way from those days of our early poets, from the period when the term "English" was envisioned as encircled with a virgin halo by our ancestors. "Far from enforcing the cultural centrality of its historical homeland, the language has proved to be a generous and accomodative traveller. It has been grafted on to different cultures, adjusted to local conditions, mutated and mongrelized. . . . the development of multiple literary and spoken Englishes illustrates the fecundity of post-colonial adaptation. It is a process which can also be termed cultural boomeranging or switchback, where the once-colonized take the artefacts of the former master and make them their own" (Boehmer,

210). The dust seems to have now settled down over the stormy actions and reactions of our pioneers of English learning. We appear to have gained a certain degree of complacency in the acceptance of our presence today which at the same time "is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the `present', for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current controversial shiftiness of the prefix `post' : post modernism, post colonialism, post feminism . . . " (Bhabha, 1).

The period when the British colonialists came to Bengal, the socially and culturally decadent state into which the society in Bengal had in this period degraded, the relentless hold of religion and superstitious beliefs on the society by the hegemony of the upper class over the suppressed, lower class, the effectual emergence of a new middle-class which equipped itself to oppose the extremities of orthodoxy and its dogmas by favouring atheism were just some of the factors which proved momentuous for the change that was to set in Bengal during the early years of nineteenth century.

Any attempt to overthrow an entrenched and unquestioned mode of social or religious practice naturally sets up a tumult of reactions. Thus while one section of the society took to atheism and to shocking practices bordering on the extreme, the orthodox section reconfirmed its hold on its own related beliefs and superstitions. It was thus consequential that English as a medium of instruction and as a literature reached Bengal when a particular

class was fast losing faith in its religion and its principles as a result of which, this class, especially its younger generation, became sensitive and susceptible to change.

The class-structure and the ensuing divide between the classes, the emergence of a new middle-class, the discoveries and developments in the academic and journalistic fields were different factors which coalesced together to make this class of the society look upon the English language as a superior entity, worth accepting and learning. As examples to emulate, this class had the literature and philosophy of the Romantic age of England which was offered by the colonialists as the ideal model. Along with this, there were several translations and writings on Indian themes written by the colonial writers like Sir William Jones who translated Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* and H.H. Wilson who translated the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharatha.*

The colonised society assimilated these writings and literature. Their inspiration to write originated in a new literature, the Indian Writing in English, a literature written on Indian subjects in the newly-learnt imperial tongue of the colonialists. One can perceive this only in the backdrop of the cultural ambivalence which envisaged a constant conflict in the dual allegiances of the colonized towards the colonizer and the native.

Narrowing down from the huge corpus of Indian literature in English to a study of the Indian poetry in English

brings one again to the early years of nineteenth century when this genre truly began, the period ranging from 1817 to the 1840s, a period which chronicled several epoch-making events like the opening of the Hindu College, the publication of Roy's *Defence of Hinduism*, the abolition of *sati*, the functioning of Duff's school General Assembly, and of course Macaulay's Minutes.

The beginners of the Indian poetry in English, represented by Ghose, Derozio, Toru Dutt and Michael Madhusudan Dutt had a definite poetic vision -- a vision of a reconstructed India, uniformly balanced by her rich tradition and culture on the one hand and the advantage of modernist philosophy on the other. The poets undertook the mission of socially rejuvenating their nation, of restoring back to the society the richness of the Indian spirit as perceived in the ideals of Indian mythology and Indian epics.

Thus, transforming this social mission to poetry, the poets naturally wrote on native themes, more precisely on mythological subjects. "The first Hindu poet to write in English", Ghose chose to versify on eleven Hindu festivals.

When critically or objectively viewed, these poems of Ghose give the impression of being very superfluous and redundant narrations where the power, the vigour, the vibrancy and splendour of the festivals fail to emerge anywhere in the verses. In the evolution and development of Indian poetry in English, Ghose

represents the "silencing and marginalizing of the post colonial voice by the imperial centre" (Ashcroft, 83) in his absolute acceptance of the superior English tongue, in his dutiful adherence to the principles of poetry as represented by the prevalent English poets like Byron.

But when viewed from a different angle, while his verses, thus lacked power, the themes he chose, the festivals he selected to write upon, reveal a significance to the period in which he wrote. 'Dasahara' represents the victory of good over evil, 'Durga Puja' hails the defeat of the demon Mahisasura at the hands of Durga, 'Janmasthami' heralds the birth of Krishna which signifies the end of the tyrannical Kamsa, 'Sri Panchami' is a celebration of learning and knowledge, 'Lakshmi Puja' honours fortune and wealth. Ghose sought to use the mythological symbols of good and evil in his poetical representations of gods and demons. He used the very myth itself of the right always winning over the wrong, of light destroying darkness, of knowledge clearing the mists of ignorance. Ghose's poems on Hindu Festivals thus emerge as celebrations echoing a promise of such victories to once again be restored to the society, thus establishing the poet's patriotic identity.

The poetry of this era also happens to be the first Indian verses in English written under a colonial power. These were the first records of the experience of a colonized society, the first poems which addressed to posterity the trials and tribulations of an entire generation, which portrayed the positive and the

negative dimensions of a colonized nation. The very concept of enshrining a native theme in an alien language reveals the spiritual dilemma of these poets who had to compromise between the East and the West.

Toru Dutt and Madhusudan Dutt give two excellent parallel studies from this angle, for both the poets experienced independently, the phased impact of colonialism in their lives, in their handling of the different languages and in their individual style of writing. Both the poets experienced the pangs of dislocation brought about by a change of place and a greater change of religion. Toru Dutt felt an instinctive association with the French ideal of liberty which motivated her towards her initial works of translations of French poems. Madhusudan Dutt experienced a similar attraction towards the West and the Western ideals of life and literature and a spurning of the subjected race of Indian community which in turn made him bring out a spate of English poems on subjects considered fashionable then. Both the poets had their basic Indianness suppressed during this phase.

In Toru Dutt, her latent Indian spirit and the influence of Indian philosophy surfaced prior to her return to India and actually brought about her return to her country. Her thirst for Sanskrit, her longing for knowledge of the local myth and lore reflect an acknowledgement of her country by her Self. The *Ancient Ballads* appears as a manifestation of this identification.

Primarily the *Ancient Ballads* is a contemporary reinterpretation of the mythological tales culled from Indian heritage. This revolutionizing of these eternal characters serves to reinstate the values represented by the mythological characters, values of liberty, progress, duty, love and obedience back in the society. They hope to remove the evils of casteism and untouchability from the society. The *Ancient Ballads* is the poet's answer and solution to the deterioration in the social values that was present during the period. The contemporary problems of the society concerning caste, untouchability, oppression of the lower classes and victimisation of women through child-marriage and bride-burning are dealt with in a very sensitive and pertinent style by the poet through a narration of the mythological ballads. The *Ancient Ballads* thus creates a modern awareness of the native myths by linking them to the social and cultural issues of the era. The work reveals the affinity of the poet for the native culture despite her Western outlook and education. In some of the poems like `Sita' and `Savitri', the feminist in the poet becomes very apparent. These poems reveal a strong feminist element which in turn arises as a direct outcome of the poet's own Western, independent outlook, the European education, her modern social background which could never withstand suppression or submissiveness at any level. Poems like `Sonnet Lotus' and `Our Casuarina Tree", reveal the struggle between the poet's Indian inheritance and her Western ideals. The strain of ambivalence arising out of their bilingual, bicultural backgrounds is present in all post colonial writers. Hence poems like 'Sonnet Lotus' and 'Our

Casuarina Tree', which very sensitively describe the complex struggle within the poet, become very significant.

Coming to the poetry of Madhusudan Dutt, a definite pattern of return to native themes and native mythology is manifested in the phase of the poetry following the initial phase which witnessed a total imitation of Westernism in the style and to some extent in the contents too. There was a distinct change in this adherence through a conscious introduction of the native content and style into poetry. This poetry revealed a return to the Bengali language from the English language, a recession of English poetry and an intimate understanding of the intrinsic worth of Sanskrit literature. By his unique representation of the good old scriptures, by his fresh focus on religion and by his creation of a new style of poetry in the epic form, a new style of song in the sonnet and a trend breaking rhyme-pattern in the blank verse, his poetry reached an ultimate acceptance of his self with his soil and his culture.

In Madhusudan's poetry too, one can witness the use of mythological characters and events, the utilization of the myths of good and evil to present a fresh, a renewed view of one of the oldest epics of the country, the *Ramayana.* Through *Meghnadbad-Kavya,* the poet changes the trend of the society and attempts to alter certain set notions and ideals of the society regarding the Indian myths and deities. The epic *Meghnadbad-Kavya* treats the episode of the killing of Meghnad, the valiant son of Ravana in a contemporary manner. The poem shatters our concept of placing

the good and the bad, the positive and the negative within water-tight compartments. The possibility of the presence of good in the bad, the positive in the negative, the plus in the minus is presented through this poem. This juxtaposing of values was the poetic expression of the upside-down belief in ideals prevalent in the society then.

The poem shifts the society's perception of Ravana and Meghnad from the demon king and his son to two primary human beings with human emotions. By raising the images of these two characters from their trampled, blackened, denounced levels to a higher plane of humanity and respectability, the poet questions the decadence of the society and reveals the possibility, the definite presence of the positive in all the ranks of the community. *Meghnadbad-Kavya* is the poet's attempt to bridge the rift in the society. The masculinity, the superiority, the glorification of Ravana and Meghnad and the emasculation, the inferiority, the unmanliness of Rama as portrayed in the poem denotes the rise of the new class in society, the fight of this class against the mediocrity of the society, against the conservatism of the practices indulged in by the society. The ideological shift of the poem is an image of a parallel shift in the ideology of the society, the change in the values which the class-structure of the society had hitherto sworn by and which it was perforce to change. Thus ultimately the poem which forms the ground for conflicting ideas, and the crisis resulting out of this, echoes a similar state of conflict in the ideas and thoughts of the poet, in the tension between the East and West

occurring within the poet, which remains a permanent mark given by colonialism, and which remains unresolved to a certain extent.

Derozio was a class unto himself, who defied the very scar of a mixed racial generation by his redoubled patriotism, by his radical efforts for freedom of thought, by his endeavour to guide an entire generation of students towards the road to liberation, a liberation affecting all strata of life. Though the Young Bengal movement attracted a lot of criticism, it succeeded in serving the purpose of bringing the cultural demoralization of the society to a standstill and turning the society towards an ascent of liberty through the new learning.

Derozio, though a Eurasian by birth, preferred and chose to be identified and recognized as an Indian. He regarded India as his motherland and was the first poet to express concern for his country by his poems. He was the first poet to write on nationalism, on the past glory of his country, on the nationalistic thinking that resulted in the Young Bengal movement.

At another level, his poetry, though typically Indian in content, imagery and spirit was also a poetry persistently reflecting the marginalisation brought about by his Eurasian background, his Western upbringing and attitudes. The native themes of his poems revolved around the ideals of love, death and hope. But simultaneously a sense of insecurity lurked within most of his poems, an element indicating the oppressive nature of a subjugated

existence, under a colonial power. His poems on freedom, freedom for the nation, freedom for the muse, freedom from life are a projection of the intense pangs for liberty experienced by an entire generation living in colonial suppression. Derozio's poems are an externalisation of the conflicting forces at play in the psyche of the poet. His poems evince a dialectical confrontation between the positive concepts of hope, love, freedom and the progress of life and its negative dimensions in despair, suppression and death. This crisis of principles, of marginality was apparent in every turn of the poetic career of Derozio.

An increasing range of development emerges in the poetry of these poets beginning with the poetry of Ghose, leading to Derozio's and culminating in the poetry of Toru Dutt and Madhusudan Dutt, a paradigm of the varying levels of synthesis of the Eastern and Western elements in their poetry, the degrees of changes in their differing attitudes and approaches to the changing socio-cultural scenario of the age.

To imitate, to vouchsafe for the ideals of one's peers with perhaps a refinement, an improvement, a polishing of the rough edges of the pioneering works is the course of art, the course of nature. This has been the course taken by Indian poetry in English too. The early stage of this poetry as seen in the verse of these poets is a project constructing India, socially and culturally. The ideological motivation with which they built India, the ideological constraints within which they had to work, the social

movements of the period as seen in Young Bengal, the efforts of these movements to bring about social reforms all point towards the poets' fascination for their own country. This is why they opposed obsolete social customs, this is why they fought for Westernization, this is why they took up the task of modernising India.

The poets' confrontation with colonial attitudes and their belief in the Western line of thought merge with their inherent native tradition varyingly in rising degrees from the first poet to the later poets. Ghosh's elementary efforts in versification, Derozio's poems on patriotism and nature, Toru Dutt's re-evaluation of Indian mythology, Madhusudan's reinterpretation of Indian tradition bear witness to this task. The "centring of margins" as seen in this poetry is actually a representation of the poets' experiences of their own different scales of alienation. The very enterprise of writing on India in English was an act of subversion. The tension between an English form and Indian material actually began with these poets.

The impact of colonialism is revealed in their poetry, in the very evolution and development of poetry from the phase of sheer imitation to the phase where the stamp of one's nationality, one's Indianness emerges in the lines of their poetry. It is colonialism with its various factors which enabled these poets to identify themselves with India. It is this synthesis of the two cultures, colonial and native, that enabled these poets to successfully handle the current social problems and cultural issues,

which made them, through the medium of their poetry, succeed in bringing those issues to the society, in enlightening the merits and demerits of these issues to the society. These poets utilized their poetry and the myths of their country for the social and cultural progress of their society. By a contemporary reinterpretation of the age-old myths in their poetry, they achieved the ultimate modernization of their heritage, their culture. This modernization of the ancient was the most significant result, the most remarkable outcome of the synthesis of the East with the West in these poets, an achievement despite the large and hitherto untackled unexperienced odds of alienation and marginalization and the ambivalence issuing out of such odds. The social enterprise of this first generation of Indian poets in English is seen thus balanced in their poetical enterprise.

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By

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