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### THE LIFE AND TIMES OF HENRY LOUIS VIVIAN DEROZIO: A LEGEND AMONG ANGLO-INDIANS (INSTALMENT NUMBER 2)

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When a student at Delhi University in the 1960s, I was conducting research in the national archives about the history of the Anglo-Indian Community. While doing this work I came across several pieces that were published in the 1880s by Thomas Edwards in which he wrote at length about the life and writings of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio. In 1997 I produced a brief manuscript in which I quoted one poem written by Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, "The Legend of the Shushan." (see "The Anglo-Indian Community's Fight for Cultural Identity" in the *International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies*, 1998). That article should be called "Instalment Number 1" about the life of Derozio and Anglo-Indians during the years surrounding and including the 1830s. I would like to continue with a bit more about this man who is one of the major figures in the legacy of the Anglo-Indian Community. Although he died a very young man, at the age of 23, Derozio left a rich heritage of poetry that serves as a major footnote in the history of the community.

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was born on April 18, 1809 and died on December 26, 1831. The cause of death is debated, but according to Frank Anthony, cholera is suggested. Whatever, during his very short lifetime Derozio produced several important works of poetry and was on his way to becoming one of the major legends of India. According to chroniclers, Derozio was raised in economic and social repression which typified conditions surrounding the Anglo-Indian Community even though his father worked for the mercantile house of J. Scott and Company in Calcutta, owned his own property, had a home of good size, and educated his children in some of the best schools to which Anglo-Indian children were permitted to attend. His father was a mixture of India and Portuguese and his mother was

English. The Portuguese family name was originally DeRozario, but was changed by his father. Even though Portugal was a dominant colonial power in the Goa region of southwest India, several persons who shared that ancestry migrated to Calcutta and remain important to this day.

Derozio was influenced because of a number of persons and events that had a major impact upon him and his time. His father, married three times, appears to be well respected in the community. He was the son of his father's first wife and had two brothers, Fran and Claudis, and a sister, Amelia. Little is known of his mother or siblings, other than what Edwards wrote about Fran ... "who seems to have led a worthless life, and ultimately went to the bad." About Claudis he noted that little is known other than the fact that he moved to Scotland for his formal education "... and returned with a broad Scottish accent that stuck to him for many a day." Edwards commented that his sister moved to Serampore where she married. Beyond that the only other relative mentioned is an aunt, Derozio's aunt on his father's side of the family, who married a European "gentleman" whose profession was being an Indigo planter in Bhaugulpore.

Derozio received his formal education at the Dhurumtollah Academy of David Drummond. The Drummond program was well known throughout India as being of high Scottish tradition with an emphasis on the classics from a European heritage. Drummond was well known for his scholastic efforts and poetic endeavors, both of which Derozio came to accept as a part of his personal life-style. Typical of persons during his lifetime, he left school at the age of 14 and between then and his death he composed verse that appear to have been reviewed favorably in the London press.

The 1830s, those years in which Derozio penned his major works, was a decade of major world-wide change. In the United States we call it the Jacksonian Era, those years in which major institutional changes were happening around the world. In the United States that collectively called government was entering the life of men and women and working to control their behavior in a way that had never before been visioned. Four fundamental institutions were created during that decade: the prison (as a place where one could be sent as a form of punishment), the poor farm (a

place where those in destitute could be sent to work for their keep), the juvenile institution (we did not separate children completely from adults, but did develop a place where juveniles could be sent to be "reformed"), and the mental institution (a place where those who society deemed to be "insane" could be sent). These institutions signaled major changes in the nature of society, how government and the society would deal with its citizens, and ultimately how we came to view the role of the individual and his/her relationship with the community.

Thomas wrote about Derozio's writing of "The Fakir of Jungeerah" Edwards wrote, "... There is no one in Bhaugulpore to-day who knows anything about [Henry Louis Vivian Derozio] ... On frequent occasions visits were paid [by Derozio] to a married aunt; and there, on a rock in the middle of the river, the boy Derozio saw the fakir which was the first suggestion to his fertile imagination of the longest and most sustained flight of his muse, The Fakir of Jungeerah, an eastern tale which to this day stands unrivaled amongst indigenous Indian poems in excellence and thoughtfulness of delineation and in beauty and fertility of poetic imagery. At an early age Derozio went to the school kept by David Drummond at Dhurrumtollah, the site of which is now bounded by Goomghur on the north, Hospital Lane on the west, Dhurrumtollah on the south, and the livery Stables opposite Crump and Abbott's Deispensary on the east, form each of which directions, gates entered the compound of the school. Here he received all the education that schools and schoolmasters ever gave him. Drummond was a Scotchman, a good example of the bet type of the old Scotch Dominie, a scholar and a gentleman, equally vested and well read in the classics, mathematics and metaphysics of his day, and trained, as most Scotch students of the close of last century and beginning of this were, less in the grammatical niceties and distinctions of verbal criticism, though these were, less in the grammatical niceties and distinctions of verbal criticism, though these were not neglected, than in the thought of the great writers of antiquity in the power of independent thinking." These writings capture the culture and background which influenced Derozio as he endeavored to make place his thoughts on paper.

It seems that Drummond had a major impact on Derozio, following the moral philosophy and tradition of such intellectuals as David Hume. Derozio studied in the Drummond School from the age of six to fourteen, a total of eight years. Edwards

notes that by the age of twenty he was well schooled in the classics and tradition of western intellectuals. Edwards writes " ... His chief delight, his sole pursuit outside of the cricketing, the amateur theatricals, and other sports natural to boys of his years, was the literate and thought of England, as he found these embodied in the poets, novelists, dramatists, and philosophers of that country. Till the latest day of his short life, poetry and philosophy were the chief charm of his existence. There were two places in India where the most recent works issued from the press of Britain could be found. These were the shelves of the most enterprising book-sellers, and the library of Derozio, frequently the later alone. The boy companions of Derozio were, almost without exception, in after-life note-worthy men ... the old East Indian, a newspaper planned, edited and successfully carried on by Derozio till his death. Kirpatrick [W.] also edited and wrote for the Orient Pearl, an annual, something after the style of the Republic of Letters, and which contains many articles that were interesting reading to this day. Charles Pote, the Eurasian painter, was another boyhood companion of Derozio."

Thus, the intellectual career of Anglo-India's most famous poet rises. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio enjoyed the life of a young man living in a major colonial center of the British Empire, Calcutta. As youths he and other Anglo-Indians participated in the Cricket Club and other Anglo-Indian community activities. Edwards continues "... On leaving school in the year 1823, Derozio became a clerk in the firm of Messrs. J. Scott and Company [where his father was employed] ... In this firm his father had long held a highly responsible position. There was no fascination for Derozio in the drudgery of the desk, to which so many men of his race have clung, and are clinging [writing in the 1880s], rather than strike out for themselves independent sources of living. Notwithstanding the earnest and eloquent appeals that have been made by such eminent men of their own community as James Kyd, the Kidderpore ship-builder, and others such his day." Derozio quit this job and went to Indigo planting with his uncle Johnson, and his mother's sister. Here he wrote the Jungheera poem of the Gangees, the major lines which read:

'Jungheera's rocks are hoar and steep  
And Gangeswaveis broad and deep.'

As he journeled about his experiences that led him to write one of his most famous works, Derozio wrote that, "... Although I once lived nearly three years in the vicinity of Jungherra, I had but one opportunity of seeing that beautiful and truly romantic spot. I had a view of the rocks from the opposite bank on 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 acquaintance with the scenery, introduced me to form a tale upon both these circumstances. From 'Forests Tour' along the Ganges and Jumna, I submit to the reader the following description of Jungheera. The foliage he speaks of did not strike me, probably in consequence of the great distance at which I saw the island, which is a subsequent part of the poem I have called bleak and bare: - At some distance from Monghyr, we saw on the river Ganges on our right, a singular mass of rock standing in water, and somewhat resembling those of Colgong. It is distant about two hundred yards from the right bank immediately opposite to the village of Sultangunge. It rises about seventy feet above the level of water, towering abruptly from its bosom; there is one place only at which a boat can be put in, and where there is a landing-place, and a very steep and winding path leads to the summit. Here is found a small building, Madrissa, or village of Fakirs, or wandering monks who reside in it ... The whole forms a pretty object, as you run past in a boat and the thick and luxuriant foliage which crowns the summit adds much to the effect of the picture."

#### Going Into Darkness by Henry Louis Vivian Derozio

"It is that hour when dusky night  
Comes gathering o're departing light,  
When hue by hue and ray by ray,  
Thine eye may watch it waste away,  
Until thou canst no more behold  
The faded tints of pallid gold  
And soft descended the shades of night,  
As did those hues so purely bright;  
And in the blue sky, star by star,  
Shines out, like happiness afar;

A wilderness of worlds! - To well  
 In one, with those we have loved well  
 Where bliss indeed! - The waters flow  
 Gurgling, in darkest hue below,  
 And 'gainst the shore the ripple breaks  
 As from its cave, the east wind wakes,  
 But lo! where Dian's crest on high appears,  
 Faint as the memory of departing years.

#### NIGHT (Derozio.)

The moon is gone; and thus go those we love;  
 The night winds wail; and thus for them we mourn;  
 The stars look down; thus spirits from above  
 Hallow the mourners' tears upon the urn.  
 Some thoughts are all of joy, and some of love;  
 Mine end in tears - they're welcome - let them flow  
 ... .. We look around,  
 But vainly look for those who formed a part  
 Of us, as we of them, and whom we wore  
 Like gems in bezels, in the heart's deep core.  
 Where are they now? - gone to that "narrow cell"  
 Whose gloom no lamp hath broken, nor shall break  
 Whose secrets never spirit come to tell: -  
 Oh that their day might dawn, for them they would awake

#### DAY (Derozio.)

Derozio was living with his uncle in Bhaugulpore when he sent the above poetry to John Grant of the India Gazette. It appears that Grant was favorably disposed to the poetry and encouraged Derozio to continue his work and produce a collection of his for publication.

The following year, 1826, when he was 17 his first publication saw the light of day. It appears that these works quickly saw Derozio become sub-editor of the India Gazette, editor of the Calcutta Gazette, and contributor to the Literary Gazette. For a person of such young age, his rise in literary stature, sponsored by these important outlets, gave great promise for his future. In a short time he was an assistant-master in the senior department of the Hindoo College, being a teacher and mentor to the next generation for students.

It was not long until his second volume was published and his name became well established in Calcutta as a rising star. Many things were happening to the members of the Anglo-Indian Community during these years. They were increasingly marginalized by the British, not being allowed trial by jury and other rights granted citizens. Yet, they were expected to be first and foremost loyal to the Crown. These and other trials and tribulations greeted members of the community daily, but this is a good place to end this saga. In the next article I will pick up the new writings of Derozio, the place of the community in the 1830s, and take a look at changes in society and culture that were impacting upon both the group and individuals who formed the Anglo-Indian Community of India.

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#### FOOTNOTES

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