

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio: The Supreme Patriot

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About the poet

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was born on 18th April 1809 in Calcutta, India. He belonged to the Anglo Indian community. His father was Portuguese while his mother was English. Derozio left school at the age of fourteen and joined his father's company as a clerk. Inspired by the scenic beauty of the banks of the River Ganges, Derozio started writing poetry.

The 1820's were a period of turmoil in Bengal. In 1928, Raja Ram Mohan Roy established the Brahmo Samaj which promoted Hindu ideals but forbade idolatry. This resulted in a backlash within the orthodox Hindu society.

At the tender age of 17, Derozio, considered to be a great scholar and thinker, was appointed a teacher at Hindu College. It was here that he encouraged young boys to think freely to question and not to accept anything blindly. He instilled in his young students, the spirit of liberty, equality and freedom. His activities brought about the intellectual revolution in Bengal. It was called The Young Bengal Movement and his students, also known as Derozians, were fiery patriots of the group.

His ideas had a profound influence on the social movement that came to be known as the Bengal Renaissance in early 19th century Bengal. Derozio's revolutionary spirit against the British rule, brought about a new awakening of national consciousness with new thought and new light.

Despite his foreign roots, Derozio, born in India, considered himself to be an Indian in body, mind and spirit. And it is this Derozio, that we wish to appreciate and talk about.

Keywords: Patriot, patriotic fervor, revolutionary spirit.

Aim of the Paper

The paper is an attempt to analyze the deep rooted patriotic fervour of Derozio. Young as he was

, Derozio's heart and mind seemed to be in the right place. Despite coming from a family of foreigners, Derozio believed that India was his and that he had to do something for his 'native' land.

The paper intends, to highlight Derozio's passionate love for India and his subsequent claim to be a patriot.

The Bengal Renaissance

Society in India, and Bengal in particular, was experiencing a dilemma. The old order was changing and it was being replaced by a new order. The Brahmo Samaj, with its new idea, was accepted by a few, but others seemed to be skeptical about the veracity of the new religion. The British government continued to exploit and expand and in such a scenario, a Renaissance or a reawakening was the inevitable outcome.

The Renaissance was a revolt against the British Raj. It resulted in the awakening of national consciousness of people with new light and new thought. It was a kind of socio-cultural change which was the outcome of the union of two cultures- the eastern and the western. The light of the Renaissance ignited nationalism and secular humanism and encouraged people to rediscover the world with a new outlook. It urged people to fight against social ills and develop an intellectual vision to seek and adopt what they felt was the 'truth'.

This awakening, spread seeds of patriotism and a national movement was set afoot. It created a national interest in the minds of poets, writers and thinkers, who in turn would change the way people felt and responded.

Derozio's mission to awaken patriotism

Derozio's scholastic aptitude had instilled in him, the makings of an analytical thinker and a seeker of truth.

The exploitation the Britishers made his heart go out to his fellow Indians. Derozio had this burning passion for freedom and an intoxicating urge for liberation from all kinds of bondages. This, in turn, changed him into a powerful analytical agent of massive socio-cultural change that took place under the influence of the Renaissance.

Derozio's mission now was to awaken patriotism and nationalism in the minds of the young Indians. This mission, Derozio decided, would be accomplished through his poems.

Derozio's works, a reflection of his patriotic fervour

M.K.Naik in his book, 'A History of Indian English Literature' remarks, "A noteworthy feature of Derozio's poems is its burning nationalistic zeal." His poems have an unmistakable authenticity of patriotic utterance which stamps Derozio as an Indian English poet who is truly a son of the soil.

The Harp of India

The poem is an address to the 'harp' which is symbolic of the Indian ethos, the culture and the tradition of the country. Derozio grieves at the lost glory of India and desires to reclaim the golden past. The poem tells the decadent and sorry condition of the Harp, which lies unstrung on a lonely withered bough bound in the fatal chains of silence.

In the sestet that follows, the poet invokes the musicians of the past, whose worthy hands once created many sweet melodies. He concludes the poem by offering to his country, his services as a poet who may be able to strike the strain of patriotic fervour in his countrymen and revive once again, feelings of patriotism for the country.

"but if thy notes divine
May be by mortal wakened once again,
Harp of my country, let me strike the strain!"

To India My Native Land

The poem is in two distinct parts. The first part is a glorification of India when India was revered as a goddess and worshipped.

My country in thy day of glory past
A beauteous halo circled round thy brow
And worshipped as a deity thou wast.
The subsequent lines show Derozio lamenting for the lost glory. Using rhetoric, Derozio asks his country questions like
Where is that glory, where that reverence now

Thy eagle pinion is chained down at last
And groveling in the lowly dust art thou.

He further presents the dismal state of his country by using the image of musicians who once sang about the glory of the country but now only sing about its fallen state.

The creation of a pitiable picture of India, and a comparison with its bright and glorious past, serves to excite from the readers, sympathy for their 'fallen country'.

He then offers his humble help to salvage the image of his country.

Well let me dive into thme depths of time
And bring from out the ages that have rolled
A few small fragments of those wrecks sublime
Which human eyes may never more behold
And let the guerdon of my labor be
My fallen country
One kind wish for thee.

Commenting on Derozio's sonnet, R. K. Dasgupta writes, that the significance of the sonnet is in that "it is more than paen of our ancient glory; it is also a vow of service to the country".

Conclusion

To conclude, it is easy to recognize the Indian patriot in Derozio. He is out and out, a patriot and patriotism courses through the lines of many of his poems. He is the first to sing of freedom that lights the altar of the soul with everlasting flame. His poetic outburst during the Bengal Renaissance helped him plant the seeds of patriotism in the minds of his fellow country through his poems, which are pregnant with patriotism and nationalism.

References:

Derozio, HenryLouisVivian
Harp of India
To India my Native land.