

**COMPANY POETRY, 1800-1868:
CONSTRUCTING 'INDIA'**

**Thesis Submitted to Jadavpur University
for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Arts**

**By
Anwasha Dutta Ain**

**Faculty of Arts
Jadavpur University
West Bengal**

2018

CERTIFICATE

*Certified that the thesis entitled **Company Poetry, 1800-1868: Constructing 'India'** submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the supervision of **Dr. Sayantan Dasgupta** and that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/elsewhere.*

Countersigned by the Supervisor

Dated:

Candidate

Dated:

for

Sandip,

the man who taught me

how to live,

how to love,

and rendered meaning to my life,

the man who has beautifully woven the magic of poetry

into the tedious work of this research

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I extend my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Sayantan Dasgupta, who has provided me with the guidance I needed, believed in my abilities and has given me the space to pursue my own ideas. He has shown great patience throughout the prolonged tenure of this project, and I am still in awe of the meticulous revisions he suggested.

This seeds for the idea of this research germinated in the M.A. and M.Phil. Students' Seminar, "India through British Eyes", organised in 2007 by the Department of English, University of Calcutta, in collaboration with British Council, Kolkata Chapter. I am indebted to Prof. Krishna Sen, who had inspired me to write a paper for that Seminar, which first ignited my interest in searching through the colonial archives.

My teachers in Presidency College, who had initiated me into literature, I can never thank enough. I owe my understanding of poetry and my sensitivity to the fineries of *belles lettres* to the enthralling lectures by Prof. Samir Mukhopadhyaya, Prof. Deblina Bandyopadhyaya, and Prof. Ranjit Kumar Sarkar.

I owe special thanks to Prof. Swapan Chakravorty for his interest in my work. Discussions with him have provided me with insightful ideas and have even opened new avenues of thought. I am indebted to Prof. Sumit Chakravorty for his encouragement and helpful suggestions.

The Department of Comparative Literature has provided an excellent cross-disciplinary exchange that fed my thinking. I thank Prof. Kavita Panjabi and Prof. Sucheta Bhattacharya, who, in and outside the classrooms, have shaped my thinking on matters of language, culture, power relations and research methodology. Their suggestions have been invaluable to my research. Interactions with the fellow researchers in the Department have been academically and mentally stimulating.

I remain especially indebted to my friend Claire Chambers of York University, who have helped me immensely by providing certain books and essays which were otherwise not available to me. I am thankful to Soumyarup Bhattacharya, who, even in the face of his personal difficulties, never failed to rush to my help whenever I needed it.

I am grateful to the staff of the libraries and archives, without whose constant support this work would not have been possible. Smile never fainted away from their lips, even as they painstakingly catered to my persistent requests for old and rare books.

I thank Debasish Chakraborty and other staff at Right-Type, Jadavpur, for typing my dissertation from the hand-written manuscript.

I express my gratitude to the Director of Techno International New Town (formerly Techno India College of Technology) and my Head of the Department for granting me generous leave of absence during the course of my research. Without their support, I could not have completed my dissertation. My colleagues in the Department of Basic Science and Humanities have helped me in myriad ways. To them, I owe a thousand thanks.

I am deeply thankful to Arpita Chattopadhyay, a great friend and a fine human being. The sessions of 'adda' with her has relentlessly provided me with ideas, argument, encouragement, and a profound understanding of human nature. I must especially mention that the Bangla script in my dissertation was set in type by her.

This research and myself were sustained in great measure by the reassuring friendship and sympathetic understanding of Mala Mitra— the best of friends, the best of confidantes, the best of teachers, the best of human beings. She has helped me in more ways than I can ever acknowledge. For rescuing me from a thousand difficulties, I am most grateful to her.

I thank my parents, for being a constant source of support and encouragement. They have done their best to run the chores and keep the family going through all these years that I was occupied with this project.

I will never know how to acknowledge the contribution of my little son, Rehan, who has endured long periods of suffering in the crucial formative years of childhood, as his mother was busy with her research. He has put up with playing alone and with doing his homeworks without support, and even with staying indoors at times when his friends were enjoying outside. Yet, he has never failed to cheer me on in his own sweet ways.

Words will always fall short for expressing my gratitude to my husband, Sandip— incisive theorist, encouraging teacher, loving companion. He has contributed to my research in more ways than he will himself ever know. I owe my understanding of literary theories greatly to the discussions I have had with him. He has tolerated my obsessions, laughed me out of my errors (as many as he could), and infused me with his enthusiasm for lifelong learning. In too many ways to count, he has made this a better work than it could be.

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Introduction

The classes in Presidency College, Kolkata, during my undergraduate course of study, instilled in me the passion for poetry. Nonetheless, my special paper on Post-colonial Literary Studies in the postgraduate course offered me only prose as texts. Since then I had been looking for a bridge between my passion and my specialisation. The opportunity presented itself to me in the most unusual of circumstances. After completing my post-graduation, I engaged myself in recuperating the letters and books of my grandfather, Late Sri Kshirod Kumar Dutta, who had actively participated in the Indian freedom struggle, was a founding member of the revolutionary society, Anushilan Samiti, had served as the editor of *Anandabazar Patrika* from 1942 to 1969, had authored a number of books, and had translated into Bangla literary works from as many as thirteen different languages. While digging through his archives in the attic of our old house at Dixon Lane, Sealdah, I stumbled upon this letter neatly folded away among the pages of one his diaries. It was addressed to my grandfather, and was signed “Bhupen-da”. The writer was none other than the revolutionary sociologist, author and editor of *Jugantar Patrika*, Sri Bhupendranath Datta, who was a close associate of my grandfather. The letter was dated 14th July, 1946, and Bhupen Datta expressed in it his high hopes for achieving independence of India from the British rule by dint of organised militancy. While talking about the aggressive oppression of the British over the Indians which, he said, had continued for almost two centuries by then and had to be stopped immediately, Datta referred to a few lines from a poem by Warren Hastings, the first Governor of the Presidency of Fort William. He mentioned that he had come across that untitled poem on the domineering power of the East India Company in *The Calcutta Review* (Vol. XXVI,

January - June, 1856), while carrying out research work at the Library of the Asiatic Society for his book, *Bharater Dvitiya Swadhinata Sangram: Aprakshita Rajneetik Itihaash* [*History of the Underground Activities in Indian Freedom Movement*]¹. He quoted from the poem, and wrote:

“And her courage attemper’d with wisdom conspir’d
To aggrandize her pow’r, till at length she acquir’d
Of an empire entire the surrender.”

১৮১০ সনে রচনা এই কবিতায় হস্টিংস সাহেবের লেখনীতে য়ে ঔদ্ধত্য প্রকাশ পাইয়াছিলি, বগিত দুই শতাব্দী ধরিয়া ব্রিটিশ রাজ ভারতবর্ষকে সেইরূপ দম্ভ ও উন্মাসকিতার সহতি শাসন করিয়া আসতিছে। অবশ্য, শাসন না বলিয়া ইহাকে নপীড়ন বলিলি বোধ করি যথাযথ শব্দ প্রয়োগ করা হয়। তবে ব্রিটিশ সূর্য অস্ত যাইবার সময় ঘনাইয়া আসিয়াছে। আমি স্পষ্ট দেখিতে পাইতছি, আমাদগিকরে সশস্ত্র ও সম্মিলিত প্রচেষ্টায় ব্রিটিশ এদেশে হইতে বিতাড়িত হইতছে। সেই দিন আর বেশি দূরে নাই। ব্রিটিশ-রাজের অত্যাচারে পরাস্ত হইলে চলবি না, সশস্ত্র সংগ্রাম এবং বিপ্লব আমাদগিরে চলাইয়া যাইতে হইবে।

[The insolence that was explicit in this poem written by Sir Warren Hastings in 1810, is the same arrogance and disdain with which the British has been ruling India for the last two hundred years. By all means, the more appropriate use of word, I feel, should have been oppression rather than rule. However, the time for the setting of the British sun is approaching fast. I can clearly envision that the British are being driven away from this country by our integrated militant efforts. That day is not very far away. We cannot let the oppression of the British Raj defeat us, we shall have to continue our armed protest and rebellion against them.] (translation mine)²

The clarion call for armed revolution against the British was nothing unexpected in a letter from one freedom-fighter to another. What intrigued me were the lines quoted from the poem by Hastings. It was quite fascinating to find an East India Company administrator and militant, one of the founding fathers of British imperialism in India, Hastings, engaged himself in writing poems. Curiosity got the better of me, and I started

¹ Datta, Bhupendranath. *Bharater Dvitiya Swadhinata Sangram: Aprakshita Rajneetik Itihaash* [*History of the Underground Activities in Indian Freedom Movement*]. Kolkata: Naba-bharat Publishers, 1983.

² Datta, Bhupendranath. “Letter to Kshirod Kumar Dutta.” 14th July, 1946. [Personal Collection.]

digging through the archives at National Library, Kolkata, hoping to find more poems by English men and women who had served the East India Company. Before long, I came across T. D. Dunn's *Poets of John Company*³ and D. L. Richardson's *Selections from the British Poets from the Times of Chaucer to the Present Day*.⁴ These two books were my first window to the world of English language verse composed by the British in India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Little did I realise then that my primary research question has already been framed: why did the formidable coloniser, confident of both his martial and commercial fortitude as he was, devote so much time and energy to the pursuit of poetry, which was apparently of no profit to him? And, after writing and publishing those poems and after actively participating in the vibrant literary culture of nineteenth century British India, why were they neglected in the critical discourses on colonialism? The coloniser— in this case, the British reviewer of *The Calcutta Review*— himself answered the first question:

... in India, where literary pursuits so often serve, to dissipate the tedious idleness of camp life, and to soothe the soul harassed by busy intercourse with the world.⁵

Although *The Calcutta Review* did offer an answer of sorts to my question, my investigation into the complex poetics of Company Poetry reveal answers that indicate far more sinister motives than an apparently harmless leisure activity presents.

Defining the Research Question

British imperial machinery was assisted and sustained by a prolific literary output which was authored by the white men and women settled in India. During the consolidation of the power of the East India Company, the British in India produced

³ Dunn, Theodore Douglas, ed. *Poets of John Company*. Calcutta, Shimla and London: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1921.

⁴ Richardson, David Lester, ed. *Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1840.

⁵ Anon: "Songs of the East. By Mrs. W.S. Carshore, Calcutta, 1855." *The Calcutta Review*. Vol. XXIII, Jul-Dec., 1854, pp. xxi-xxiv. p. xxii.

copious volumes of poetry, much of which has not been exhumed till date, but which embody the trepidations and the interdictions of early British imperialism. Colonial poetry or Company Poetry, as this body of texts is often called, were composed between the years 1757 to 1857 by poets like Warren Hastings, William Jones, Horace Hayman Wilson, John Leyden, James Atkinson, Anna Maria Jones, John Horsford, Bishop Reginald Heber, John Lawson, Thomas Medwin, David Lester Richardson, Emma Roberts, Henry Meredith Parker, Honoria Marshall Lawrence, Henry Page, Mary Seyers Carshore and many others. Volumes of Company Poetry were printed in England or in India often at the expense of the authors themselves or that of a generous, friendly patron. In addition, most of these verses written in India were published regularly in the Indian periodicals — literary journals, annuals, monthly registers, newspapers and such other local publications. It is interesting to note that the periodical press also copiously published reviews, criticism as well as advertisements of these poetical effusions by the British in India. Around the middle of the nineteenth century in India, these verses were also collected and published in anthologies, which is an exceedingly potent literary marker that unify a culture⁶. Judging by the purchase records of book-clubs and literary societies, the records of the library holdings, and the catalogues of printed books,⁷ these poems courted wide readership during the times that they were written. However, unlike the essays, diaries, letters, travelogues, and even pamphlets produced during this period, which have been painstakingly dug up from the dungeons of history, these poems, far from commanding the interest of scholars and critics, has suffered unusual but evident neglect both in the development of English language literary culture and in the academia. Not only are these poems never included within the circuit of canonical texts, but they are mostly considered to be bad verse. Company Poetry, therefore, remain marginal texts,

⁶ Kittler, Friedrich A. *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*. Trans. Michel Metteer, with Chris Cullens. California: Stanford University Press, 1990. p. 149.

⁷ I have analysed these records in my first chapter.

apparently because they do not satisfy either the aesthetic standards or the dominant political paradigm implicit in the choice of texts that merit revival of readership through critical revaluations. A close analysis of these poems, however, show that they were not written merely for the entertainment of enterprising administrators, military officers and their friends and family; rather they reveal a somewhat disturbing picture, suggesting sinister political motive and dark ideological intentions behind the corporate poetics of John Company, as the East India Company was often fondly called by its servants and patrons.

I have tried to investigate in the course of my research the reasons which account for this prolific poetical output and its subsequent neglect. Another question that I have attempted to address in my dissertation is how such 'bad' verses were so influential during the times in which they were composed. These questions will entail comprehensive analysis of the historical background and the social perspectives of the writers as well as the readers of these poems: how did the Englishmen relate to India in private, and how did the reception of the Indian cultures figure in their poetry? I consciously use the plural suffix in 'cultures' as a way to indicate the diverse ethnic and cultural practices of the different regions of India. These poems are not only the expressions of the persons who were directly involved in the formulation of imperial strategies and the execution of the consequent activities, but they are uninhibited ones at that. By this I refer to two situations: one, that there was practically no censorship exercised by the state authority on published materials for most part of the early nineteenth century; and, two, that often these poems were published privately at the expense of the authors or their friends and patrons, and read in close private circles. Therefore, there was little or no reticence working on the part of the authors about the things they wanted to write. So, reading between the lines, it is found that these poems

subtly reveal the ideas which were at work behind the consolidation of the colonial power and the propagation of the cultural and intellectual hegemony of the British over the Indians. In more ways than one, these poems form a sub-text of the negotiations of the English men and women with the ‘natives’ in an ‘alien’ land, when they were still struggling to settle in India, and garner profits out of their imperial endeavours. The poems also speak volumes about how the failings and successes in the personal lives of the administrators and officers actually affected the formulation and execution of the colonial policies of the East India Company. A careful scrutiny of these poems uncovers an interesting dialogue between the coloniser and the colonised: the reception of the Indian cultures by the British, and how, in turn, the Indian cultures were affected by theirs. This perspective takes into account the rise of the English-educated middle class in early nineteenth century India, their poetic expressions in English language and the reception of those poems by the British. I focus particularly on the Bengali intelligentsia in that part of my study which deals with the reception of Company Poetry, as Calcutta was undeniably the most significant centre of literary culture and political activities in nineteenth century British India. I attempt to find out what bearing the reading and circulation of Company Poetry had on the English-educated Bengali middle class, and in the process, I study, in comparison to Company Poetry, selected English Poems by such Bengali poets, as Kasiprasad Ghosh, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Shoshee Chunder Dutt.

Questioning Nationalist Parameters of Shaping English Language Literary Canon

Nationalist parameters have mostly defined the historiography of English language literature, as a result of which there have emerged academic institutions like Indian English literature, African English literature, American literature, Australian

literature and so on and so forth. In the context of India, I question such formation of canons along nationalist lines, as I seek to bring together the poets who were composing English language verse during the early nineteenth century in India, and study their poems in close conjunction with one another. The socio-cultural circumstances under which these verses were composed, published, and read, made both the Britain-born and the India-born poets to participate in a small but complex web of literary culture, and they shared intricate relationships of influences and acknowledgements. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, born in Kolkata of an English mother and a father who had both Portuguese and Indian ancestry, for instance, acknowledged the influence of Horace Hayman Wilson and wrote a sonnet to pay homage to Henry Meredith Parker's translation of the legendary episode of sea-churning from the Indian epic, *Mahabharata*, and both Wilson and Parker were British civil servants working for the East India Company and writing poetry in India. Kasiprasad Ghosh, the first Indian to have his English poem published, dedicated his verses to Wilson, and, some years later, E. L., who was an American lady writing English poems in India during the mid-nineteenth century, commended Ghosh in her poems, while also openly admitting the inspiration she had had from the latter poet's works. Emma Roberts, who was not directly serving John Company, but was a British woman who stayed and wrote poems in India, and was arguably the first woman journalist to have worked in this country, dedicated her volume of verse to Derozio and shared much of his political opinions and ideals of liberal education and free thinking. The poems of Henry Page, who was born to an English father and an Indian mother and was brought up in Bihar in India, reverberated with the same defence of India as a free political state as was distinctive of Derozio's political ideals. Clearly, national identities or ethnic origins were not determinants that shaped the poetic practices of these poets. It is necessary, therefore, to re-read these poems in the socio-cultural context in which they

were written, and re-construct the vibrant literary culture in which the English language versifiers in early nineteenth century India worked.

Most scholarship on the history of English language poetry in India regard Derozio as “the father of Indian English Poetry”,⁸ and records only the influence of the British Romantic poets on the India-born poets writing English language poetry in pre-independence India:

Indian Poetry in English initiated with Henry Derozio in the later part of the eighteenth century. The pre-independence poets like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, Manmohan Ghose, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini Naidu wrote under the influence of English romanticism.⁹

Although the poets mentioned in the above quotation span across a very large chronological bracket, and defy any sort of generalisation, yet it gives us an idea of the scholars’ common conception of the poetic lineage of what is today understood as Indian English literature. There are a number of anthologies on Indian English poetry — that is to say, English language verse, written by Indians — which will attest this poetic lineage.¹⁰ While the canon of Indian English literature is being thus framed, the history of English literature, as in the sense of British literature, classify the literary developments in Britain based on the cultural and political history of Britain, focussing particularly on such Augustans as Alexander Pope, James Thomson and Edward Young; on the great Romantics, namely William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats and Lord Byron; on the Victorian

⁸ Halder, Deb Dulal. “Henry Louis Vivian Derozio.” *Virtual Learning Environment*. Institute of Lifelong Learning, New Delhi. <vle.du.ac.in/mod/book/view.php?id=9915&chapterid=16187> 23.04.2018.n. pag.

⁹ Kapil, Gunjan. *Representation of Deities in Attipat Krishnaswami Ramanujan’s Poetry*. Ph.D. Thesis. Maharishi Markandeshwar University, Haryana, 2011. p. 1.

¹⁰ De Souza, Eunice, ed. *Early Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology, 1829-1947*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Gokak, Vinayak Krishna, ed. *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry, 1828-1965*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1970.

Diwedi, A. N., ed. *Indian Poetry in English: A Literary History and Anthology*. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980.

poets, like Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Matthew Arnold, and the eminent Victorians, like Lord Tennyson, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Thomas Hardy. Although I have mentioned here a catalogue of only a few of the representative poets of the respective ages through the middle of the eighteenth to that of the nineteenth century, yet it is evident that the Britain-born poets, who were writing poems in the British colonies of India, Africa or Burma during this period, were excluded from participating in the formation of the British literary canon. Yet, these are the poets who introduced the great works of English literature, like those of Milton, Shakespeare, Scott, Southey and Byron, to the Orient, and again it is their accounts of the Orient that shaped the literary imagination of most of the British Romantic poets, such as Coleridge, Southey and Byron. But, as history of literature books and anthologies informed the “canonical formations that they propose[d] and the possible political and cultural directions in which they implicate[d] their subject matter”,¹¹ these poets were rendered invisible on either side of the literary bridge. If the literary progressions in a particular language is perceived as a great drama being enacted on a world stage, then one half of the dialogue was always missing in the critical evaluations and the attempts to historicise English language literature. Reconstructing the dialogue in the English language literary world is of significant import to the understanding of the early nineteenth century English language literature, as it was taking shape both in Britain and in its colonies, in a complex pattern of affiliations, acknowledgements and influences. I work here to bring back to visibility the poets who kept the bridge between British English literature and Indian English literature.

¹¹ Di Leo, Jeffrey R. “Analyzing Anthologies.” *On Anthologies: Politics and Pedagogy*. Ed. Jeffrey R. Di Leo. London and Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. p. 2.

The Question of Anxiety

Ranajit Guha, in his exceptionally brilliant essay on the dominant mood and ethics of colonialism, “Not at Home in Empire”, has argued that conventional historiography has always excluded the question of anxiety in the coloniser, as he engaged in the process of building the empire. Colonial discourse has always promoted courage, fortitude, enthusiasm, strength and determination as the unwavering attributes of imperialism. As Guha says:

The result has been to promote an image of the empire as a sort of machine operated by a crew who know only how to decide but not to doubt, who know only action but no circumspection, and, in the event of a breakdown, only fear and no anxiety.¹²

The poems which I read in this dissertation, however, present a picture which is a striking contrast to the image of the unwavering coloniser, as is found in the “official”¹³ colonial discourses. In the essays, articles, travelogues, history books and in most documents that had recorded the social and cultural circumstances of British India during the long nineteenth century, “a whole range of rhetorical, analytical, and narratological devices”¹⁴ have been utilised with extreme caution, so as to promote a picture of the empire that excluded anxiety, fears and taboos from both the emotional and cerebral disposition of the coloniser. Guha’s rhetorical question —“Can we afford to leave anxiety out of the story of the empire?”¹⁵ — is the perfect starting-point of my inquiry into the ethos and rationale of early colonialism. The anxiety of the empire can be read, even sharply felt, in between the lines of literary narratives, which deal with the experiences of individuals, which focus on the microcosm of the life of a few members within communities, and thus shifts away from the macrocosm of the grand narratives of history. The novels and stories

¹² Guha, Ranajit. “Not at Home in Empire”. *The Small Voice of History*. Ranikhet: Ashoka University and Permanent Black, 2009. pp. 441-454. p. 447.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

which use the Indian or African colonies of Britain as the backdrop often portray the white man in the colony caught in his dilemma of moral and political doubts. Guha has shown, in his remarkable analysis of George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant",¹⁶ how the sub-divisional police officer in Burma is "[t]rapped in the image of the sahib fabricated by sahibs themselves in order to impress the natives" and how "[s]eized by anxiety, he ha[d] to decide whether to throw off his mask or continue to wear it".¹⁷ Homi Bhabha, in his essay "Signs taken for Wonders", has interpreted another canonical text dealing with the experience of the empire, namely, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*,¹⁸ in the perspective of his theory of 'the ambivalence of colonial discourse'. He has expounded how Marlow, the protagonist, is caught "between the madness of 'prehistoric' Africa and the unconscious desire to repeat the traumatic intervention of modern colonialism"¹⁹ and how "the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference".²⁰ The coloniser's anxiety is implicit in the literary texts that deal with the experience of colonialism in one form or another. Close analyses of these texts, which are part of a canon, reveal that they present "neither an untroubled, innocent dream of England nor a 'secondary revision' of the nightmare of India, Africa, the Caribbean".²¹ These stories are narrated by master story-tellers, like Orwell or Conrad, who were proficient in the art of literary representation of life. So, the feeling of anxiety in the white man, which is a carefully guarded paradox of the European historiography of the empire, is couched gracefully in the craft of words and camouflaged artfully in the manipulation of circumstances. The

¹⁶ Orwell, George. "Shooting an Elephant". *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1950. pp .3-12.

¹⁷ Guha. p. 447.

¹⁸ Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. New York: Dover Publications, 1990.

¹⁹ Bhabha, Homi K. "Signs taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a tree outside Delhi, May 1817." *The Location of Culture*. New York and London: Routledge, 1994. 2nd Indian reprint 2009. pp. 145-174. p.151.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 153.

²¹ Ibid.

anxiety of the empire in such texts can only be unearthed by the intrigues of theoretical interpretations, as offered by Guha or Bhabha. When we step outside the canon, there emerges from the archives an array of marginal texts that were authored by those men and women who were directly involved in the imperial endeavours as administrators or soldiers or their family. These were authors who were not professional men of letters, but engaged in writing as a way of documenting their unique experiences and also as a means of propagating and consolidating the ideology of the empire through the written word. One such body of texts is the primary object of my research — the poems written in India by the administrators, civil servants, military officers and soldiers serving the English East India Company, and the members of their families who came and lived with them in India. These poems, which are collectively referred to as Company Poetry, were written with an amateur literary pen, which easily gave way to feelings of anxiety, fear and the sense of exile in the coloniser — dominant tropes that are writ large across the texts of Company Poetry. In other words, here we have on offer accounts by Orwell's sub-divisional police officer or Conrad's Kurtz writing about their own experiences by themselves without the artful intervention of the skilled author, who always wrote from the advantageous perspective of the omniscient narrator. Company Poetry, therefore, offers a literary scape where the uninhibited expressions of the coloniser himself is open to analysis and revaluation.

The Question of 'Othering'

In his insightful critical monograph, *A Sketch of Anglo-Indian Literature*, Edward Farley Oaten has identified five dominant tropes in the texts of Company Poetry:

The first is an ever-present sense of exile, the second an unflagging interest in Asiatic religions as well as in general religious speculation, the third consists of the humorous side of the Anglo-Indian official life, the fourth in Indian life and scenery, the last and perhaps the most important is

the ever-varying phases, comic, tragic or colourless, of Indian life.²²

While Oaten conclusively sums up the subject matters that are reiterated through the corpus of Company Poetry, I argue that the purpose of these verses was not as simple as is apparent from a description of the common themes by Oaten. The British versifiers in India resorted to poetry not merely as a means for documenting their social, cultural and political life in this country; they took recourse to the written word, which has a certain degree of primacy over any other form of representation, as a methodical and organised tool for the ideological construction of the ‘other’, which is essential to the discursive strategy of colonial discourses. I follow here the formulation of the concepts of ‘other’ and ‘othering’, as is propounded by Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in their significant works.²³ Spivak argues that appropriating the colonised land and the colonised people to the image of the ‘other’ for the white coloniser — a process she terms as ‘othering’ — occurs not just in official documents or high culture, but also in everyday interactions between colonialists and the indigenous population in India during the nineteenth century.²⁴ Poetry, which was produced in copious volumes and could often be published anonymously in the periodical press or under pseudonym in a collection, quite adequately provided the colonisers a space in the form of the printed word, where they could “construct [...] the colonial subject in discourse, and ...exercise ... the colonial power through discourse”.²⁵ I engage in close textual analysis of the Company verses in order to find out how the British colonisers, who were directly engaged in the process of empire building, and thereby also engaged in the constant efforts of ‘othering’ India and

²² Oaten, Edward Farley. *A Sketch of Anglo-Indian Literature*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1908. p. 3.

²³ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “The Rani of Simur: An Essay in Reading the Archives.” *History and Theory*. Vol. 24. No. 3. Oct., 1985. pp. 247-272.

Bhabha, Homi K. “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism.” *The Location of Culture*. pp. 94-120.

²⁴ Spivak. p.254.

²⁵ Bhabha. “The Other Question.” p. 96.

the Indians, actually gave shape to their ideas, fantasy, fears and anxieties in the uninhibited expressions that poetry offered. I argue that these representations of “India” were, in most cases, removed from the actual experiences of the white men, and yet it is this idea of India that gained currency in the Western consciousness as well as in the Western episteme. Consequently, there generated more discourses — both political and literary — based on the idea of “India” in particular and the Orient in general, which these early colonisers documented in their travelogues, essays, and chiefly, their poems. As Andre Gingrich points out:

These are the ‘others’ that typically represent Spivak’s colonial and postcolonial subjects, who only exist through, or against, the powerful gaze of colonial discourse.²⁶

I read Company Poetry in this dissertation primarily as a crucial sub-text for the necessary tool of ‘othering’ and constructing “India”— necessary to the process of creating a political ideology and cultural hierarchy that enabled the coloniser to believe in his civilising mission. Bhabha contends that it was not only important, but also necessary for the coloniser to render veracity to his own ideas of racial and cultural superiority, and this entailed that the coloniser create an elaborate discourse which viewed the colonised not with rationality and common sense, but with explicit difference and derision. He writes:

In order to understand the productivity of colonial power it is crucial to construct its regime of truth, not to subject its representations to a normalizing judgment.²⁷

The Company poems are amongst the first texts which constructed this “regime of truth”.

²⁶ Gingrich, Andre. “Conceptualizing Identities: Anthropological Alternatives to Essentialising Difference and Moralizing about Othering.” *Grammars of Identity/Alterity: A Structural Approach*. Ed. Gerd Baumann and Andre Gingrich. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006. pp. 3-17. p.11.

²⁷ Bhabha. “The Other Question.” p. 96.

The Question of Alterity

The poems that I read in the course of my research offer an interesting insight into the complexities of representation. The Englishman, who was denied recognition of his capabilities in Britain and had come to India with an aim for pecuniary success and social prominence, was encumbered with a double-edged burden. On the one hand, he had to create the distance between himself and the subjects he colonised, and, on the other hand, he had to project the colonised subject as an object of fantasy and desire, so that his position inspired awe and envy amongst his friends and family in Britain. Bhabha has theorised the many facets of the ‘ambivalence’ of empire and he has identified colonial discourse as one such site where this ambivalence is explicit:

...the *productive* ambivalence of the object of colonial discourse — that ‘otherness’ which is at once an object of desire and derision, an articulation of difference contained within the fantasy of origin and identity.²⁸

Company Poetry is an essential part of the early colonial discourse that built the premises of ‘othering’ and constructed “India” in the sense in which Said had said that “[t]he Orient was almost a European invention”,²⁹ and that is the primary reason why these texts merit a renewed readership and induce critical interest. This almost forgotten genre of literature had played a crucial role in assisting the coloniser to believe in his civilising mission, and the imperial ideology that posits itself on the construction of the ‘other’, who is represented as far inferior, racially, culturally and intellectually, to the self. In the process, it was imperative that the coloniser created and promoted his own imaginative idea of “India”, as he was reflexively struggling to settle down in this alien territory that confronted him with a harsh tropical climate and unfamiliar terrain. “India” in their poetry was not a geographical area on the earth’s surface, nor was it a political territory

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*: London: Penguin, 2003. p. 1.

governed by a set of laws, neither were the Indian people bound by a shared national feeling or united by common cultural values. “India” was rather an ideological construct, a frame within which language manipulated memory, a frame that made the colonial experience at once ennobling and alluring for the coloniser. I find my claim is attested by Spivak in her analysis of the social and historical documents of nineteenth century British India:

The records I read show the soldiers and administrators of the East India Company constructing the objects of representations that becomes the reality of India. On a somewhat precious register of literary theory, it is possible to say that it was the construction of a fiction whose task was to produce a whole collection of “efforts of the real” and that the “misreading” of this “fiction” produced the proper name “India”.³⁰

I situate Spivak’s contention within the body of the texts of Company Poetry, and investigate how this literary body of colonial discourse constitutes an outstanding specimen of Orientalist discursive formation concerned with the Englishman’s proclamation of intellectual and cultural hegemony and control over India: bad poetry, but formidable and authoritative political strategy. Textual analysis lay bare the tools that were employed by the Company poets to construct what Edward Said called “imaginative geography”³¹ and to misappropriate the social treasures and cultural abundance of the Indian sub-continent in the rhetorics of this poetry. In the course of my research, I further investigate in what ways the “mass, density, and referential power”,³² to use Said’s terms once again, of these marginal texts constructed an “India” that perfectly fulfilled the psychological requirements of the early colonisers. To formulate the hypothesis borrowing Bhabha’s postulates, it can be said that Company Poetry was a “form of

³⁰ Spivak. p.249.

³¹ Said. p. 49.

³² Ibid. p. 20.

discourse crucial to the binding of a range of differences and discriminations that inform the discursive and political practices of racial and cultural hierarchization”.³³

An essential feature of the process of ‘othering’ is the systematic silencing of the voice of the ‘other’, and denying him any scope or space to speak for himself, and instead ascribe to the ‘other’ qualities and opinions that always has to be understood and recognised in a way of a binary reference to the coloniser’s own culture and identity. Often, the poet assumed the role of the omniscient narrator or spoke in the person of the ‘other’, thus shutting out all possibilities of rendering a voice of his own to the ‘other’. The Company poets operated under this principle of binary oppositions, which instead of describing the ‘other’, actually defined the self against that ‘other’, and this was carefully and methodically constructed through the corporate poetics of John Company. The British coloniser was also relentlessly engaged in the acts of knowing the ‘other’. There were reiterated attempts at magnifying the grandeur of the British colonial act by drawing analogies from early Roman and Greek history of conquests and victories. Comparison of Indian mythological stories and figures with their own stock of classical European (Roman and Greek) mythology is a common trope that can be found in the poems of almost all these poets. Images of various Greek and Roman gods and goddesses always hovered in the middle distance of their poetry, and their shadows loomed large on the Indian folklores and tales of Hindu mythology. In the earlier poems, that is, those written towards the end of the eighteenth century and those written at the beginning of the nineteenth century, there can be discerned a certain feeling of veneration, however slight, for the age-old heritage and customs of the Indian religious practices. However, as the years progressed and the British imperial power gradually consolidated in the Indian sub-continent, the white man steadily became more inclined than ever in establishing his own

³³ Bhabha. “The Other Question.” p. 96.

racial and cultural superiority over the Indian; their poems started disparaging the Indian rites and rituals, and continually took more rigorous shapes of representation that can be unhesitatingly described as expressions of disgust and abhorrence. This is exactly where the first tools of ‘othering’ were at play in the amphitheatre of the British imperial enterprise in India. Frequent, although often inappropriate, analogies were drawn between the colony and the metropole, that is to say, for example, between Calcutta and the Ganga on the one hand and London and the Thames on the other. I analyse the poems following the chronological order of their composition, thereby seeking to address the issue of appropriating these images of binary opposition that laid the foundation for the construction of the ‘other’. I argue that topographical reference points were carefully and systematically turned into symbols of power and powerlessness, and the connotations of these symbols gradually changed through the course of the nineteenth century in the manner they were used in these poems, and that manner always was designed to suit the immediate purpose of the British coloniser.

The Question of Familiarity: Composing Poems in a Linguistic Polyglossia

As the discourse of Orientalism gathered political and epistemological strength, it became ever more necessary for the Englishmen in India to demonstrate his familiarity with the Orient to his Western audience. I use the term ‘Orientalism’ here, taking after Said’s “third meaning of Orientalism”.³⁴ In the Introduction of his book, Said defines Orientalism in three different but “interdependent”³⁵ ways. While my argument on Company Poetry takes into account all the three definitions categorically, as I shall demonstrate hereafter, I am particularly concerned in this context with that meaning of Orientalism, which is manifest in the following quotation:

³⁴ Said, p. 3.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 2.

Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient — dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, selling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.³⁶

In establishing his authority over the Orient, the Englishman in India resorted to formulate both political and literary discourses in a manner that evinced his knowledge of the Orient, and also in several ways attested the veracity of that knowledge. Company Poetry was a major form of that literary discourse as were translations of classical texts from Oriental languages, like Sanskrit and Persian, into English.

One of the tools employed by the Englishman in India to document his comprehension of the Orient was the abundant usage of words and phrases from Indian languages in their poems, even in such cases where English equivalents referring to the same meaning were common enough. Language is an important marker of cultural and social positioning of its user. When a person is concerned with using language that is foreign to him, the quality and manner of its usage is suggestive of the degree of familiarity of that person with the foreign language in question. In the context of the British colonial enterprise in India, the usage of Indian language words and phrases, especially with copious notes accompanying such words, was additionally indicative of the extent of authority that the coloniser exercised over his subjects. It was important, I argue, for the Englishman to augment his intellectual and social position both to himself and his fellow colonisers in India as well as to his peers back in Britain, in order to overcome the sense of failure that pervaded his consciousness. This sense of failure stemmed from his inability to realise his potential on the soil of his homeland — which

³⁶ Ibid. p. 3.

Rukimini Bhaya Nair calls the Englishman's "impotence at home"³⁷ — and his efforts to make a fortune for himself in the unfamiliar territory of the East compelled by the turn of circumstances. Francis Hutchins comments on the situation:

India's function was to turn Englishmen into instant aristocrats ... British Indian aristocrats had nothing more substantial to support their claims than pretence. Their aristocratic posture was not transferable; they could only live like aristocrats in India, and they could neither live like nor pretend to be aristocrats in England itself. The British living in India took their standards from home, adhering to them with a strenuousness that attempted to compensate for the refusal at home to admit their pretensions.³⁸

Whatever be the extent of the Englishman's failings at "home", ascribing the linguistic plurality of these poems solely to the Englishman's desire for attestation of his acculturation with the Orient would delimit the scope of the reader by overlooking the socio-linguistic context in which these poets operated. It is important to understand that the common literate man in the nineteenth century was expected to have facility in more than one modern European language and in at least one classical European language. At the same time, the Englishmen who came to India had a decent education, and undertook the learning of at least one classical language being used in India, which was either Sanskrit or Persian in most cases and Arabic in some cases. In addition, the Indian sub-continent reverberated with an enormous variety of languages that were used in different parts of the country both in the spoken and in the written form. Bangla, Hindustani (which is now distinctively separated as Hindi and Urdu), Marathi, Tamil, Konkani and Marwari are just some of the dominant languages that the British in India, especially in the three presidencies of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, encountered in their daily

³⁷ Nair, Rukmini Bhaya. "Reading Texts, Resurrecting Cultures: Colonial Poetry in India (1757-1857)." *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch: The Idea of Difference*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002. pp. 3-40. p. 10.

³⁸ Hutchins, Francis. *Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967. p. 108.

interactions with the Indians.³⁹ So, their poetry emerged from a complex situation of linguistic polyglossia, which accounts for the frequent code-switching and code-mixing that are found in these poems. In the poems that I read, I have tried to situate the politics of using Indian language words and phrases in the context of the individual poet and the particular poem in question. Thus my dissertation is an attempt at identifying the vicissitudes and subtleties that shaped English language poetry in nineteenth century India and recuperating the individual voices of these minor poets which had been blotted out by the erasures of the grand narratives of literary historiography.

The Question of Psychological and Ideological Negotiations

Most historians and literary critics⁴⁰ are of the opinion that the writings of the colonial period, especially those during the first half of the nineteenth century, can be read and classified based on the author's position and his views regarding powerful and protracted contestation over the political ideology and strategy to govern India. In order to offer a brief idea on the nature of the debate, I quote excerpts from Percival Spear's illustrative account of the history of nineteenth century British India:

There followed on the great debates of nineteenth century Britain, carried on not so much in Parliament as by publicists, minute-writers at their desks, and public men around dinner tables. What was to be done with India now that Britain controlled it? ...

The first answer was a conservative one whose [...] distinguished proponents were ... the orientalist[s]. Essentially, it was to leave things as they were. The

³⁹ Gibson, Mary Ellis. *Indian Angles: English Verse in Colonial India from Jones to Tagore*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011. p. 6.

⁴⁰ Spear, Percival. *A History of India*. Vol. II (From the Sixteenth Century to the Twentieth Century). Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1965.

Hutchins. *Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India*.

Dyson, Ketaki Kushari. *A Various Universe: A study of the Journals and Memoirs of British men and Women in the Indian subcontinent, 1765-1856*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Mukherjee, S. N. *Sir William Jones: A Study in Eighteenth Century British Attitudes to India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

Viswanathan, Gauri. *Masks of Conquest*. London: Faber and Faber, 1989.

Bearce, George Donham. *British Attitudes towards India, 1784-1858*. New York Oxford University Press, 1961.

Company should govern in the Mughal and general Indian tradition, that is, providing a framework of security beneath which traditional society could continue its wonted course. Peace would promote trade and trade would be to Britain's advantage. ...When the Evangelicals looked to India their reaction was quite differentTheir programme was, bring the Christian west to the East, and India will reform herself as a flower turns to the sun.

The other pressure group was that of the Radicals and Utilitarians. Their trade views ... secured the free entry of private merchants ... [and] missionaries. They believed passionately in the superiority of the western world, and in the indefinite progress with the release of the principle of reason as the mainspring of development. All other civilizations were static or in decay; ... Could western enlightenment and reason be withheld from India where they would certainly cause all who came in contact with them to abandon their superstitions and abuses? ⁴¹

But, significantly, Spear also pointed out the existence of another group, whose opinion mattered. They were the young civil servants of the East India Company who were facing the practical situation of administering India in reality. They were advocates of free trade and liberal ideas, but at the same time they were also keenly aware of the agencies of power and influence that operated beneath the surface of the Indian society. They argued for a cautious and unhurried change in the British strategy of governance of India, one that would take into consideration the Indian sensitivities and responsiveness.⁴² My contention is that theirs was the voice which negotiated the practical experience of exercising imperial control over India, and, therefore, mattered the most. It is their poems that I read in my dissertation, and these poems, being expressions of the colonial masons rather than that of the colonial masters, are of significant import to the understanding of the process of empire building and its ideological constructions. The distinction between colonial masons and colonial masters in my own formulation is thus: with a vague appropriation, I choose to call those British men who actually lived in India for some

⁴¹ Spear. *A History of India*. pp. 120-122.

⁴² *Ibid.* p 122.

time and took active part in the affairs of the Company, either civil or military, colonial masons; while, those British scholars, politicians and theorists, who proposed ideas and strategies from the precincts of the British Parliament, but never actually participated in any action to execute those strategies, I propose to call colonial masters. I am concerned here more with the voice of the masons than that of the masters.

The debate, which is of significant and fundamental import to the understanding of the political and social history of British India, started in 1818, and lasted for nearly two decades. Spear, in his historical study, *India: A Modern History*, has aptly called the year 1818 “a watershed in the history of British India”.⁴³ He explains the reason for ascribing such a tall claim to 1818:

In that year the British dominion *in* India became the British dominion *of* India ... Subsequent annexations were mere additions to a whole and did not radically alter the situation.⁴⁴

After 1818, India witnessed a major shift in the political attitude of the British; but, I am concerned with the significant changes in the demeanour of the white man, as he engaged in his daily interactions with the Indians. Individual officers and soldiers, who were eager now more than ever to gain glory for themselves, were inclined towards exercising their authority over the ‘natives’ in all *matters*, trifle or significant, and thereby their attitude became more and more marked with contempt and disregard towards the Indian religious rites and social customs than ever before. Over the years, as the power of the East India Company consolidated its control over India, the Englishman finally dismissed Indian customs as savage, primitive and irrational, and Indians as licentious, corrupt and dishonest. This is what dominant historiography narrates.

⁴³ Spear, Percival. *India: A Modern History*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 1961. p. 225.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

The texts of the Company poems, when read carefully and individually, however, reveal a different picture. I argue that the representation of India and Indians in the poems of these Company men were not so much influenced by the political and ideological contestations of times or the poets' individual opinions of it as they were mediated by the poets' daily experiences as they lived their life in India. Rather these were the texts that contributed significantly in the formation of the ideology of the empire in the nascent state of British colonialism in India. It was a complex process of negotiation, where the colonisers were engaged in the process of cultural, intellectual and racial hierarchisation through their texts, while, in certain ways, their perspectives were fraught with the affectations that the process of empire building inflicted upon them. I read the poems written by the British men and women in India during the first half of the nineteenth century primarily as a text where such complex psychological and ideological negotiations were being foregrounded.

The Question of Reception

It is essential to acknowledge the complex intellectual and cultural vicissitudes and vacillations that the British in India were subject to, as they were faced with the new environment. Not only did they effect change in the ideas and culture of the society that they came to, but they were also themselves influenced by it. Ketaki Kushari Dyson, in her reading of the journals of the British in India, offers a brilliant checklist of the social, cultural and intellectual susceptibilities that mediated the texts of these authors:

On the one hand these authors share a European sensibility, a common cultural heritage, and a common stock of preconceptions, such as a deference to the codes of European classical art, or an emergent romanticism, a cultural relativism characteristic of the Enlightenment, or later, the superiority complex growing with the success of technological revolution, the conviction of the superiority of Christianity to other creeds, or a strong sense of political or religious mission. On the other hand, they share a

common Indian world of travel and adventure, of delights and horrors, of shocks and surprises, where their beliefs are confirmed or assailed, their sensibilities enriched or bruised, their minds broadened or saddened, according to the variations in their experiences and the preponderating tendencies of their temperaments.⁴⁵

My reading of the poems would initiate an inquiry into the trajectory of English language poetry in India during the first half of the nineteenth century. In this context, my dissertation includes a study of some of the poems by the English-educated Indians, such as Kasiprasad Ghosh, Shoshee Chunder Dutt and Michael Madhusudan Dutt. Although natives and females were systematically debarred from participating in the corporate poetics of John Company, which the British liked to believe was an essentially masculine affair, there were instances when the English-educated Indian youths shared space on the printed page with the Company poets. Kasiprasad Ghosh was the first Indian whose English language verse was published in the Indian periodical press, and also the first Indian to have his English language verse included in an anthology of English poems edited by a British. I am referring here to Ghosh's poem, "The Boatmen's Song to Ganga" that was printed under the rubric "Poem by a Hindu" by Richardson in his very significant anthology titled *Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day*. Kasiprasad was also the first Indian to have to his credit an entire volume of English language verse published, which was *The Sháir, and other Poems*⁴⁶. Michael Mudhusudan Dutt was another influential poet in mid-nineteenth century India, who exhibited a great degree of affinity for Western learning and British manners and ways of life. He displayed a flair for writing and considerable literary talent early in his life, and employed all his skills to pursuing literature in English language. He produced copious volumes of English verses in his early life, of which *The Captive Ladie*⁴⁷ is

⁴⁵ Dyson. p. 8.

⁴⁶ Ghosh, Kasiprasad. *The Sháir, and other Poems*. Calcutta: Scott, 1830.

⁴⁷ Dutt, Michael Madhusudan. *The Captive Ladie*. Madras: Advertiser Press, 1849.

arguably the most significant one. Of this, Theodore Douglas Dunn, critic and editor, who compiled two notable anthologies of English language verse produced in British India, wrote:

The Captive Ladie is the most considerable verse production in English from the pen of a Bengali writer. For this reason alone it deserves more lengthy representation than other works.⁴⁸

I read the English poems of Michael primarily with an intention to find out how the poetic output of the author was shaped by the multitudinous expressions in verse that were written and published in India by the British during the first half of the nineteenth century. I also read the poems of a lesser known poet, Shoshee Chunder Dutt, in order to seek minor voices who offered readers a prolific literary output in English language, but did not merit much critical interest insofar as the studies of reception of English language literature in India is concerned. Dutt is the only Indian poet whose verse was included by Thomas Philip Manuel in the anthology of English language poems written in India that he edited, namely, *The Poetry of our Indian Poets*.⁴⁹ There were, of course, other Indian poets, like Rajnarain Dutt, Govin Chunder Dutt, Greece Chunder Dutt, Hur Chunder Dutt, Omesh Chunder Dutt, Nobo Kissen Ghosh, who were also writing English language poems in the second half of the nineteenth century, and are included in Dunn's *The Bengali Book of English Verse*. But, as my study proposes to focus on the first wave of reception of the Company poems and the teaching of English literature among those Indian youths, who wrote and published poems in English language, I choose to focus on Kasiprasad Ghosh, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Shoshee Chunder Dutt. Another reason to select these poets for the study on the reception of Company poems is their inclusion in anthologies of English language poetry edited by Englishmen and published

⁴⁸ Dunn, Theodore Douglas, ed. *The Bengali Book of English Verse*. Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1918. p. 8.

⁴⁹ Manuel, Thomas Philip, ed. *The Poetry of our Indian Poets*. Calcutta: D'Rozario and Co., 1861.

in India during the middle of the nineteenth century. I study their poems primarily as texts of reception, and analyse the texts in conjunction with the circumstances of their personal life.

It is important to explain why I have taken only Bengali poets, and not poets from any other province of India, into consideration in my study of the reception of Company Poetry. It was in Bengal that the most prominent response to British culture and education could be discerned. In addition, the literary output of Bengal in English language was the most abundant amongst all the Indian states and regions. It was in the classrooms of Hindu College that the first lessons of English language literature were imparted to the Indian students by teachers, such as David Hare, H. L. V. Derozio, and H. H. Wilson, and Shakespeare was first introduced to the Indian students by D. L. Richardson. Bengal thus awakened to British culture and European ideas primarily through literature, and, interestingly, the response of such exposure also flowed back predominantly through the channel of literature in the same language, although there were other sociologically relevant instances of response to the reception of Western education, like the ideas of reform advocated by Rammohan Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. Bengal was undeniably the most responsive to the changes that were affected by India's contact with Britain. In the "Foreword" to Dunn's *The Bengali Book of English Verse*, Rabindranath Tagore writes:

... We can safely assert that she [Bengal] is the only country in the Orient which has shown any distinct indication of being thrilled by the voice of Europe as it came to her through literature. ... it was through her sensitiveness to ideas that Bengal has been deeply moved from the time of her first acquaintance with Europe. ... Bengal's response through literature to the call of the West is something unique in the history of the modern East.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Tagore, Rabindranath. "Foreword". *The Bengali Book of English Verse*. pp. xi-xiii.

In the light of this remark by Tagore, it is only natural that the dominant focus of any studies on the reception of Company Poetry in particular and British culture and European education in general would be the literature produced in English language by the Bengali intelligentsia in the nineteenth century.

The Question of Paratext

As I have argued earlier, the texts of these poems created an “India” that is far removed from the real India, as the British settlers, in their relentless struggle to project India as the most precious jewel in the crown of imperialism, were trying to represent “India” as an ‘other’ — dark, mystic, primitive and debauched — and yet an entity that could be fully comprehended and explained to the Western world in terms of Western knowledge and sensibilities. These poets selected and manipulated their environment, and methodically documented their idea of “India” by listing, referencing and recording the culture and history of the country. It is through these conventional indicators of documentation that these poets propagated their “idea” of India as being authentic knowledge about the country as a social, political and cultural space in the Western consciousness. Bhabha argues, it was “crucial to its exercise of power [that] colonial discourse produce [...] the colonized as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible”.⁵¹ In order to create what Bhabha calls “social reality”, it was necessary that the poets create a sub-text of the poems which would render veracity to their information on Indian history and culture. In the process of doing so, these British poets also constructed the historical past of India by the way they singled out events from history, especially those occurring in the immediate past before the British annexation of the country, and orchestrated those events in a manner that perfectly suited their purpose of constructing “India”, that was “on the one hand a topic of learning, discovery, practice

⁵¹ Bhabha. “The Other Question.” p. 101.

[and] on the other ... [was] the site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions and requirements".⁵² It was essential for the Company poets to strike a balance between these two opposing ideas of "India" — the dream and the discovery, the imaginative and the real — and thereby the negotiations of representing "India" in their poems became increasingly complex and intricate. This is precisely why the paratexts of these poems are, I contend, more important to the critic and more interesting to the reader than the main body of the verses. By paratext, I refer to the copious volumes of notes, glossaries, footnotes, epigraphs, forewords, dedications, prefaces and inscriptions that accompany almost all the poems in the corpus of Company Poetry. In his pioneering work,

Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation, Gerard Genette define paratexts thus:

... the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold*, or — a word Borges used apropos of a preface — a "vestibule" that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back. It is an "undefined zone" between the inside and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world's discourse about the text), an edge, or, as Philippe Lejeune put it, "a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text."⁵³

In my inquiry into the texts of Company Poetry, I follow Genette's definition of paratext as a liminal device which plays an important role in the complex process of the mediation of a text between the author and the reader. I attempt, therefore, to decipher the paratexts of these poems as literary elements with specific but intriguing function as the author's voice that interacts with the reader in situating the piece of literature in question as a cultural institution in the particular historical circumstances of nineteenth century British India. In the paratexts, the poets offered elaborate explanations of the meanings of the

⁵² Ibid. p. 102.

⁵³ Gerard, Genette. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. pp. 1-2.

Indian language words and phrases they used in their poems, although in many cases, no such explanation accompanied the Indian language words. However, no definite pattern can be identified in their selection of words and phrases that they chose to gloss. Often there were attempts to go beyond the literal meanings that the conventional dictionaries offered, and situate the usage of the word in the context of the local culture and linguistic practices. In most cases, the poets used Indian names while referring to the Indian flora and fauna, and the accompanying notes were comprehensive commentaries on their habits, habitat, occurrence, description, and, most significantly, their mention in mythological stories and folklores of the East, if any such were known to the poet. Furthermore, there were the paratexts which offered elaborate accounts of the social practices, the cultural habits and the religious rituals of the Indians, which were seldom described with even the slightest tone of regard. Not only were the customs and manners of the Indians disregarded, they were often dismissed as fallacious, irrational, lecherous and primitive. The political history of India was also presented in the paratexts of these poems selectively in such a manner that the representation almost always inevitably glorified the British. What is implicit in such representations is the derision and disparagement of “India”, that was essential to the strategy of colonial discourse. A part of these paratexts dealt with the geographical, scientific or linguistic elucidation of Indian language words and phrases, and, therefore, it seemed that they presented such information which was verified and verifiable. Or, rather, those paratexts appeared to embody empirical truth. This lent an air of authenticity to the other paratexts on Indian history and culture, which were more about interpretations than about information. The poets often quoted from or cited contemporary books of other British historians and sociologists, like James Mill’s *History of British India*⁵⁴ and James Tod’s *Annals and*

⁵⁴ Mill, James. *History of British India*. London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1817.

*Antiquities of Rajast'han*⁵⁵. The paratexts were also in a way used to exhibit the poet's range of reading and his extent of knowledge about the Orient. It made the author's claims more susceptible to the belief and acceptance of the reader, especially the Western reader, as the truth about India. In addition, the ideology of the empire which pervaded the consciousness of the British reader, whether in Britain or in India, additionally facilitated such acceptance and made him only too ready to completely believe in what he was reading without question or verification. Such images of "India" not only matched his colonial imagination, but also singularly assisted in the propagation of the imperial ideology. Additionally, these poets often narrated in minute detail their own personal experiences of Indian occurrences — be it natural phenomena or social experiences — in the paratexts in prose in their earnest efforts to legitimise the poetic truth that they had presented in the body of their poems. It is, of course, a different matter that I find most of these descriptions of their Indian experiences dubious and questionable, when read in conjunction with other social and historical documents of that period. I have dealt with this issue in my detailed discussions on the individual poets in the Second Chapter of my dissertation. It is important to mention here that the paratexts of these poems often served another purpose: they embody acknowledgements, appreciations and open statements of influences amongst poets, both British and Indians, writing English language verse in nineteenth century India. I have analysed these paratexts in detail to show that these poets engaged in complex webs of associations and prohibitions, acceptance and exclusions. Although Mary Ellis Gibson reads the paratexts of Company Poetry primarily as indications of the "poets' insecurities about the very audience"⁵⁶ of their poems, yet she also points out that these paratexts "both deflect and invite criticism, both justify the

⁵⁵ Tod, James. *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han, Or the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India*. 2 vols. London: Smith, Elder; Calkin and Budd, 1829-32.

⁵⁶ Gibson. *Indian Angles*. p. 9.

poetic undertaking and excuse its failings”.⁵⁷ My reading of the paratexts try to situate the intended audience of the poems, and takes a step further, in interpreting these paratexts as a potent literary device skilfully used by the Company poets with the purpose of establishing such forms of knowledge as were essential in propagating the colonial ideology and consolidating the British empire in India. In a way, the Company poets may be said to have carried on elaborate political debates and literary contestations in the paratext of their poems, and, as such these paratexts are exceedingly crucial in any reading of Company Poetry.

Defining the Chronological Reference Frame of my Research

For the purpose of close scrutiny and research, I narrow my focus down on the poems written between 1800, the beginning of the century, and 1868, the date of publication of the last significant anthology of Company Poetry edited by Thomas Benson Laurence and printed in Calcutta under the title, *English Poetry in India, Being Biographical and Critical Notices of Anglo-Indian Poets with Copious Extracts from their Writings*.⁵⁸ I shall hereafter forward my argument for concentrating primarily on the poems published in anthologies and that would justify the date of closure of my reference frame in the context of my topic of dissertation. It is, I feel, necessary to explain my choice of the year, 1800, as the opening date of the chronological reference frame for the inquiry into the colonial archives that my research entails. I choose this year particularly because it was in this year that the Fort William College was established in Calcutta. In the last two decades of the eighteenth century, the British Government, with the mediation of the East India Company, worked towards systematic institutionalisation of

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Laurence, Thomas Benson, ed. *English Poetry in India: Being Biographical and Critical Notices of Anglo-Indian Poets, with Copious Extracts from Their Writings: to which is Prefixed a Preliminary Essay on Anglo-Indian Poetry*. Calcutta: Messrs. Thacker, Spink, and Company, 1869.

Orientalism as an academic discipline, wherein “[a]nyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient — and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist — either in its specific or in its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism”.⁵⁹ At the level of social, political and cultural manifestation, Orientalism was a way of creating a repertoire of knowledge about the Orient, as the British imperial ideology promoted it. However, at a level latent beneath the surface of academic discipline, Orientalism was a fundamental premise that was essential for the foundation and propagation of the ideology of the Empire. And, yet another level, that was mostly related to the personal experiences of the British in India in his daily interactions with Indian culture and society, Orientalism may be defined as “a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience”.⁶⁰ The establishment of the Calcutta Madrassa in 1781 by the British Government under the patronage of Warren Hastings, the first de facto Governor General of India from 1773 to 1785, was the first step towards the formal institutionalisation of Orientalism. The Calcutta Madrassa, or the Madrassa Aliya, promoted the study of Persian, Arabic and Islamic law. Three years later, in 1784, Sir William Jones, celebrated as the most remarkable Orientalist scholar of British India, with the help of Hastings and the complete support of the Company and the British Governments, founded the Asiatic Society (which became The Asiatic Society in 1872) in Calcutta with the aim of facilitating the progress and development of Oriental research. The objective of the Society, as was stated by Jones in a memorandum of Articles of the Asiatic Society, was to engage in sincere and extensive research on anything that was related to or connected with Asia:

⁵⁹ Said, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 1.

The bound of investigations will be the geographical limits of Asia, and within these limits its enquiries will be extended to whatever is performed by a man or produced by nature.⁶¹

Furthering the cause of Oriental research and scholarship was of paramount importance to Hastings, who was instrumental in publishing the English translation of *Bhagavadgita* by Charles Wilkins in 1785. It was the first work of translation of a classical Sanskrit text in a European language, and was a very important landmark in the development of Orientalism as an academic discipline that professed to “know the Orient”.⁶² Finally, in 1800, the Fort William College was founded in Calcutta by Lord Wellesley, the then Governor General of India, with the purpose of imparting training to the British civilian officers on Indian languages and Oriental cultures in order for them to develop a comprehensive knowledge of the land that the British desired to govern. The Fort William College soon became one of the main centres that promoted research and publication of Oriental texts and their translations. Swapan Majumdar, in his essay on the development and nature of literature in old Calcutta, explains:

The College of Fort William emerged as both a centre of research and a publication unit, a cradle of creativity as well as scholarship. Planned originally to train probationer British civilians in the languages and cultures of the subjugated country, the College rendered services tantamount to those of university in promoting modern Indian literatures, Bengali in particular ... Under the leadership of William Carey, the College could also claim credit for drawing together Sanskrit pundits and Perso-Arabic munshis to reshape Bengali prose ... The variety of the College’s publication also deserve note. From colloquies to popular stories, chronicles and legends, to definitive editions of literary texts.⁶³

⁶¹ Chakrabarty, Ramakanta. *The Asiatic Society: 1784-2008, An Overview in Time Past and Time Present: Two Hundred and twenty-five Years of the Asiatic Society*. Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 2008. p. 2.

⁶² Said. p. 123.

⁶³ Majumdar, Swapan. “Literature and Literary Life in Old Calcutta.” *Calcutta, the Living City*. Vol. 1. Ed. Sukanta Chaudhuri. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990. pp. 106-129. pp. 107-109.

Clearly, Fort William College was the institution that opened the door for prolific translations from Indian languages into English, and vice versa at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It singularly facilitated Oriental research and related publications to an incredible extent. It may be surmised that the establishment of Fort William College in 1800 was an important marker of the completion of the first phase of institutionalising Orientalism in India, particularly in Bengal, and paved the way for Calcutta to emerge as the most important intellectual and cultural centre of India during the colonial period. In order, therefore, to reconstruct the dialogue between the British-born and the Indian-born poets writing English language poetry in India during the nineteenth century, it is crucial that I consider as the starting chronological reference point of my research, the establishment of this seat of learning and culture that was fraught with too many political debates and decisions.

Methodological Principles: Thrust on Anthologies

I have primarily focussed on those poems that were included in anthologies of English language verse written in India and published in the nineteenth century, although my study does include numerous other poems that were published in the Indian periodicals, literary journals, monthly registers, annuals, and also in volumes that contained poems by singular authors. As the British in India struggled to participate in the cultural and academic dialogues of the metropole, here defined as London, they sought several different ways to define a canon for themselves, especially in literature. From the early stages of colonial discourse, the pattern of publication and the thrust of the publishing industry indicated the perception of those practising and promoting literature in British India: their policy of rendering prominence to anthologies as “a pervasive and

dominant part of academic culture” had a “formative role ... in shaping canons”.⁶⁴ As I have elaborated in the First Chapter with historical and archival evidences, poetry was the principal belletristic genre that was practised in British India during the first half of the nineteenth century. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, verse anthologies were published as a manifestation of the “generic textual method for representing solidarity and containing difference”.⁶⁵ The first collection of English language poems written in India appeared as a small section — all of forty-seven pages, from page 1473 to page 1520 — under the rubric “British Indian poetry: Specimens of British Poets Once or Still Resident in the East Indies” in the mammoth 1640-pages compendium edited by Sir David Lester Richardson in 1840. The book was titled *Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day*, and was published by the Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta. Richardson was an important figure in the cultural and academic circles in British India for most part of the nineteenth century. He held the prestigious post of the Principal of the Hindu College during the time that he compiled this anthology at the request of Thomas Babington Macaulay, who was then the President of the Committee of Public Instructions. As is stated by Richardson in the Introduction, this volume was intended to be used as a “Poetical Class-book for the more advanced students of the Hindu College and other similar institutions”.⁶⁶ The inclusion of the English language poems written in India in this anthology, which also contained classical poems by Chaucer, Milton, Shakespeare and Pope, was a significant marker of the anxiety of the Englishman in India with regard to his participation in the formation of the canon of English poetry. The segregation of sections and sub-sections under different rubrics as “Poem by an East Indian” and “Poem by a Hindu” is, at the same time, suggestive of his anxiety in expanding this canon to include poets from other ethnicities and other national

⁶⁴ Di Leo. p. 6, p. 15.

⁶⁵ Nair. pp. 10-11.

⁶⁶ Richardson. p. 3.

affiliations other than Britain. The innumerable reviews and references of this anthology published in the literary journals and newspapers both in India and in Britain clearly indicate that it played an exceedingly important role in giving shape to English language literature in India, and promoted to a great extent the teaching of English language poetry in this country, especially in Calcutta. The other two anthologies of English language poetry in India were *The Poetry of Our Indian Poets* (1861) edited by Thomas Philip Manuel, and *English Poetry in India, Being Biographical and Critical Notices of Anglo-Indian Poets, with Copious Extracts from their Writings* (1868) edited by Thomas Benson Laurence. Of these two volumes, Dunn, who himself edited and compiled two anthologies of English language verse in India, wrote:

The work of Thomas Philip Manuel ... does not extend appreciably the range of Richardson's collection. The Poems of this book are few in number and have been unskilfully chosen; but there are brief introductory biographies of the authors, and these are useful to the investigator. [Benson's] work ranks with that of Manuel, and is of equal value to the student. ... [T]hey have been so badly produced and so inadequately edited, that for all save the lover of the curious, they are utterly without value.⁶⁷

In order to read the poems without any prejudice, I have purposely not taken heed of Dunn's opinion of these two books; at the same time, in order to give primacy to the judgment and criteria of selection of the anthologists who operated under the actual circumstances of the literary scene in nineteenth century India, I have concerned myself with the poems included in these anthologies as the primary focus of my research. Clearly, the poems in these anthologies were legitimised by authoritative claims of the editor, through the gesture of inclusion, as being representative texts of the genre which they were part of.

⁶⁷ Dunn. *Poets of John Company*. p. xi-xii.

The closing date of reference for the study of Company Poetry is 1868; however, poems that recorded the Great Revolt of 1857 or directly reflected its effects on the British or on the Indians have been excluded from this study. The Revolt of 1857, which has been variously called the Sepoy Mutiny, the Indian Mutiny, the Great Revolt of 1857 and the first significant Indian war of independence from the British rule, is undeniably *the* event that marked the most crucial turning-point in the political and social history of both India and Britain, as well as in the relationship between the two countries. The Revolt of 1857 was the culmination of a growing discontent amongst the Indians against the British, and the event itself or the years following it were torn with myriad strife and tension. So, in a way, the Revolt, being a manifestation of the acrimonious Indo-British relations, reflected continuity, while, in numerous other ways, it marked very significant changes in the attitudes of the British towards India and vice versa, although the Revolt did not itself induce those changes. Therefore, the poems that were written after the Mutiny, recording its experiences, were distinctly different in their representation of India from those in the poems written before it. The body of that work, being huge and extending for over a large period of time, has been conveniently left out of the scope of this study. In some cases, where I have included poems written or published after 1857, especially those included in the anthologies edited by Manuel and Laurence, the experiences recorded in those poems are strictly and distinctly related to the period before the Great Revolt.

Literature Survey

After the publication of Laurence's anthology in 1868, these poems by the officers and administrators of East India Company were excluded from poetry collections, which now were shaped more than ever in accordance with nationalist parameters. It was only in the third decade of the next century that T. D. Dunn made a

serious attempt at collecting these poems and give them a fresh lease of life. He published *Poets of John Company* simultaneously from Calcutta, London and Shimla, the summer capital of British India, in 1921, and in the Introduction to that volume, he lamented:

No complete anthology of verse written by Englishmen in India has ever been compiled; ... [only] [t]hree attempts have been made to rescue from neglect our English poets in India.⁶⁸

Dunn, however, had published only three years earlier, the anthology titled *India in Song: Eastern Themes in English Verse by British and Indian Poets*,⁶⁹ which carried poems by James Hutchinson, Edwin Arnold, Henry Meredith Parker and Reginald Heber besides those by Toru Dutt, Kasiprasad Ghosh, H. C. Dutt and Sarojini Naidu among many others. Dunn included in this collection primarily such poems that dealt extensively with Indian social customs, cultural practices and religious rites. Then, after more than two decades of India getting Independence from the British Rule in 1947, Brij Mohan Sankhdher edited the volume titled *India: A Nineteenth century study of British Imperialism in Verse*⁷⁰, which contained a long poem by an anonymous British poet written in India in 1833. The poet, who was a young civil servant of the East India Company, presents in his verse a severe excoriation of the policies and attitudes of the British imperialists in India. Sankhdher, as an editor, lauded the outstanding aesthetic quality of the poet's expressions, and lamented that such a brilliant piece of literary work had remained unpublished for over a hundred years.

The first critical attention to the English language poems written by the British residing in India, years after they were written was drawn by Edward Farley Oaten in 1908, when he published *The Le Bas Prize Essay for 1907* in the form of a book, "in

⁶⁸ Ibid. p. xi.

⁶⁹ Dunn, Theodore Douglas. *India in Song: Eastern Themes in English Verse by British and Indian Poets*. Bombay: Humphrey Milford, 1918.

⁷⁰ Sankhdher, Brij Mohan, ed. *India: A Nineteenth Century Study of British Imperialism in Verse*. New Delhi: Rajesh Publications, 1972.

accordance with the rules governing the scheme”⁷¹ of that Essay Prize instituted by Cambridge University. In the Prefatory Note, Oaten admitted his own limitation in the critical judgement of the literature of the British in India, for which, he quite rightly said that “a lifelong acquaintance with India and Indian authors were necessary”.⁷² Oaten also expressed his indebtedness to *The Calcutta Review*, a periodical that regularly published dependable reviews and criticism of the English language literary works produced in India. What is noteworthy is that Oaten acknowledged in no dubious terms the wide range and the vastness of the body of work under his scrutiny, and mentioned the lack of comprehensive critical material on that body of work. He preferred to call that body of literary work ‘Anglo-Indian literature’. His Prefatory Note began:

The subject for the Cambridge University Le Bas Essay Prize for 1907 was as follows: “An Appreciation of the chief Productions of Anglo-Indian Literature in the Domain of Fiction, Poetry, the Drama, Satire, and Belles-Lettres, during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, with an Estimate of the Chief Writers in those spheres, and a Consideration of the specially Anglo-Indian Features of the Literature.”

The subject ... was a wide one, too wide, perhaps, for the subject of a mere essay. ... Not only was the field vast; but he [the author] could obtain little help from predecessors in the field. No book exists that deals comprehensively with the subject. Histories of modern English literature are singularly destitute of any allusion to Anglo-Indian productions.⁷³

In dealing with not only poetry, but the entire body of English language literary works produced by the British in India, Oaten identified the gap in the historiography of English literature as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. That gap has remained ever since, and the scant critical attention to this body of literature never adequately filled the gap. My dissertation seeks to redress this omission by bringing back to visibility the poets who actively participated in the literary culture of early nineteenth century British India.

⁷¹ Oaten. p. xiiij.

⁷² Ibid. p. xij.

⁷³ Ibid. p. xj.

The Company poems again hosted some serious scholarly and critical attention in the twenty-first century. It was only in 2011 that Mary Ellis Gibson compiled these poems and published a comprehensive anthology with a fair amount of editorial notes. It is titled *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India, 1780-1913*,⁷⁴ and also carried English language poems written by Indians during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, like Kasiprasad Ghosh, Shoshee Chunder Dutt, Manmohan Ghosh, Toru Dutt, the Dutt Family Album, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Aurobindo Ghosh, and even Rabindranath Tagore. The original paratexts by the authors have not in all cases been retained by Gibson, who has also added her own annotations to the poems, especially in explaining the meaning of Indian language words and phrases. It is interesting to note here that an unidentified American poet, E.L., who had spent some time in India during the middle of the nineteenth century and published a verse collection from Calcutta, also found place in Gibson's anthology. It indicates an attempt on the part of the anthologist to reconstruct the dialogues that took place among the poets, irrespective of their national or ethnic origin, who practised English language verse in India. It was accompanied by a critical monograph, *Indian Angles: English Verse in Colonial India from Jones to Tagore*, which contains essays that focus on some poets of this period, such as Sir William Jones, Sir John Horsford, Anna Maria, H. L. V. Derozio, Emma Roberts Captain David Lester Richardson, Kasiprasad Ghosh, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Mary Carshore, in that order. Although the essays focus on only the particular authors indicated in their titles, mention must be made of one particular essay, "Books, Reading, and the Profession of Letters: David Lester Richardson and the Construction of a British Canon in India",⁷⁵ which deal extensively with the explosion of print culture in early nineteenth

⁷⁴ Gibson, Mary Ellis, ed. *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India, 1780-1913*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011.

⁷⁵ Gibson. "Books, Reading, and the Profession of Letters: David Lester Richardson and the Construction of a British Canon in India." *Indian Angles*. pp. 101-135.

century Calcutta, the publication of poetry in the periodical press here, the inclusion of poetry in academic curricula during that time, and the “conventions of exile”⁷⁶ that is commonly found in these poems. The essay also situates Richardson as the most important literary figure of that period who tried to attach primacy to the poetical effusions of the Company men.

Another collection of English poems written by the British in India, which did not include any poem by poets of other nationalities, was published in the same year, that is, 2011, and was edited by Máire Ní Fhlathúin. It is titled *The Poetry of British India, 1780-1905*⁷⁷ and includes within its whopping two volumes of 800-odd pages the most number of poets amongst all the anthologies mentioned here. It is fairly exhaustive in its range of poets and retains in most cases the original notes or glosses that were written by the authors. Fhlathúin, however, like Gibson, elaborately annotates the poems, chiefly with the purpose of better comprehension for American and European readers. Both Gibson and Fhlathúin have printed excerpts of longer poems in cases where the scope of the anthology did not permit the inclusion of the whole. Both the anthologists were engaged in an attempt to recuperate these lost poetic voices that were part of a vibrant literary culture in nineteenth century India.

Critical study on Company Poetry, apart from that one volume by Gibson that I mentioned which included in its purview only a few poems that were necessary to situate the argument of the scholar, and the brief introductions by Fhlathúin to the two parts of her anthology, is scattered and piecemeal. There are a few essays that, although excellent in their analyses, engage either with one or two poets or with any one particular trope of writing. Shyamal Bagchee’s essay, “Writing Self/Writing Colony in situ: Expatriate

⁷⁶ Gibson. *Indian Angles*. p. 27.

⁷⁷ Fhlathúin, Máire Ní, ed. *The Poetry of British India 1780-1905*. 2 Vols. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011.

British Poetry in India”⁷⁸ is an excellent analysis of the trope of alienation in the writings of John Leyden, Reginald Heber and Ronald Ross. Apart from the poems by Leyden and Heber, Bagchee also studied their prose writings along with that of Ross’s.

Nigel Leask has engaged in a brilliant reading of the poems by Leyden, Thomas Medwin and Charles D’Oyly, and has tried to map these poems in the lineage of English poetry written in Britain, especially those during and after the Romantic revival. Leask, in this essay, “Towards an Anglo-Indian Poetry? The Colonial Muse in the Writings of John Leyden, Thomas Medwin and Charles D’Oyly”,⁷⁹ has also made an excellent analysis of the elements of Orientalism that were present in their poems, and the influence that they had on the Romantic poets writing poetry in Britain.

Although this essay reads only one poem, mention must be made of Rosinka Chaudhuri’s ““Young India: A Bengal Eclogue”: Or Meat-eating, Race, and Reform in a Colonial Poem”.⁸⁰ It offers a brilliant analysis of the Englishman’s attitude towards the progressive youths of Calcutta who had freshly received Western education and, inspired by the ideals of liberal thinking and Western science, had revolted against the conventions and structures of the Hindu society. Chaudhuri considers only one poem by H. M. Parker, the name of which is included in the title of her essay, but her essay includes within its scope the British response towards their own influence on the Indian society in extensive detail.

The essay “Poems of Mary Carshore: The Indian Legacy of L.E.L. and Tom Moore”⁸¹ by M. E. Gibson is an exhaustive interpretation of the influence of Letitia

⁷⁸ Bagchee, Shyamal. “Writing Self/Writing Colony in situ: Expatriate British Poetry in India.” *Ariel: A Review of English Literature*. Vol. 23. No.4. October 1992. pp. 7-32.

⁷⁹ Leask, Nigel. “Towards an Anglo-Indian Poetry? The Colonial Muse in the Writings of John Leyden, Thomas Medwin and Charles D’Oyly.” *Writing India, 1757-1990*. Ed. B. Moore-Gilbert. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996. pp. 52-85.

⁸⁰ Chaudhuri, Rosinka. ““Young India: A Bengal Eclogue”: Or Meat-eating, Race, and Reform in a Colonial Poem.” *Interventions*. Vol. 2. No. 3. 2000. pp. 424-441.

⁸¹ Gibson, Mary Ellis. “Poems of Mary Carshore: The Indian Legacy of L.E.L. and Tom Moore.” *Victorians Institute Journal*. No. 32. 2004. pp. 63-74.

Landon and Thomas Moore on the poems of Mary Carshore, a lady who was born of Irish parents in Calcutta and spent the whole of her life in India. Gibson presents here a unique case where the process of writing and publishing English language poems in India was mediated by the complications of gender and the poet's lack of access to both classical European learning and literacy in any of the Indian languages she was exposed to in her everyday interactions.

M. Ní Fhlathúin's essay, "India and Women's Poetry of the 1830s: Femininity and the Picturesque in the Poetry of Emma Roberts and Letitia Elizabeth London"⁸² is an exploration of domestic and colonial femininity in the poems of these two women. Fhlathúin foregrounds the quality of domesticity in the poems she reads, and shows how the picturesque mode of these poems were disrupted by the complex negotiations of the white female in British India.

In his essay, "Poetic Flowers/Indian Bowers",⁸³ Tim Fulford chiefly draws on the pastoral elements in the poems of William Jones, and suggests that the allegorical gardens of the Persian poetic tradition found reflection in the imagination of the English Romantic poets in the form of the exotic, unspoilt and idealised Orient as opposed to the familiar West. He argues that the bowers of the Orient were actually the products of the fantasy of these poets, and its geographical position mattered little.

An essay that deals with the English language poems written in Calcutta both by the British and the Indian poets during the long nineteenth century is T. D. Dunn's "English Verse in Old Calcutta" published in the journal *Bengal Past and Present*⁸⁴, which is a valuable but rare source of information on Bengal under the British rule. In

⁸² Fhlathúin, Máire Ní. "India and Women's Poetry of the 1830s: Femininity and the Picturesque in the Poetry of Emma Roberts and Letitia Elizabeth London." *Women's Writing*. Vol. 12. No. 2. 2005. pp.187-204.

⁸³ Fulford, Tim. "Poetic Flowers/Indian Bowers." *Romantic Representations of British India*. Ed. Michael J. Franklin. London: Routledge, 2006. pp. 113-130.

⁸⁴ Dunn, Theodore Douglas. "English Verse in Old Calcutta." *Bengal Past and Present*. Vol. 24. December, 1922. pp. 53-97.

this essay, Dunn engages with the English versifiers living and publishing their poetry in Calcutta, and apart from a critical reading of their poems, he also elaborates on the way the explosion of print culture facilitated the publication, circulation and readership of English language poems in nineteenth century Calcutta.

The most recent critical work that concerns itself primarily with colonial poetry, and has been instrumental in giving currency to the term ‘Company Poetry’, is Rukmini Bhaya Nair’s essay, “Reading Texts, Resurrecting cultures: Colonial Poetry in India (1757-1857)”, which is actually the First Chapter of her remarkable critical monograph, *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch: The Idea of Difference*. Nair has quoted copiously from the texts of the Company poems, and has tried to situate her reading of those poems in the theoretical framework of the “scenography of waiting”,⁸⁵ as propounded by Roland Barthes in *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*.⁸⁶ Her essay is an excellent analysis of how India is represented as the dark, seductive female in the imagination of the British poets, who have, in the texts of their poems, continually engaged themselves in a geo-political rape of “India”, if Barthes’ definition of rape is to be followed. Nair, however, discusses only such poems as are necessary in the context of developing and establishing her argument. It may be surmised that no elaborate and exhaustive critical study of Company Poetry has hitherto been published.

Defining the Scope of my Dissertation

I must mention here that I have focussed solely on the poems written by the British men and women in the first half of the nineteenth century in India while studying the representation of “India” by the West, although other texts of such representation in the form of paintings, engraving and the vast repertoire of prose literature from the same

⁸⁵ Nair. p. 9 and p. 12.

⁸⁶ Barthes, Roland. *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Penguin Books, 1990.

period is available in plentitude. The inclusion of such texts would have pushed the dissertation to unmanageable extents.

Further, the scope of this dissertation has also prompted me to exclude detailed discussion on the translations of texts in Indian languages into English by the British in India, the study of which would require a different range of critical tools concerned with the theories and politics of translation as a method of negotiating cross-cultural comprehension. The exclusion of the translated texts was also because of the fact that the body of such works is huge, and would present itself as enough material for another research project. There are, of course, references to certain translated poems and war songs of Indian tribes in the course of discussion, as was required to situate my argument in the context of Company Poetry.

It is also essential to explain why I have primarily focused on the poems published in Calcutta or those printed in the literary annuals and journals and the English newspapers published from and circulated in Calcutta. An obvious explanation is that Calcutta was the administrative capital of British India during the period with which I am concerned, and, as a result, the print culture and the industry of publication flourished in this city to a greater and more vigorous extent than in any other part of British India.⁸⁷ Further, the most important civil servants and military officers of the East India Company were either based in Calcutta or its suburban areas or had spent most part of their stay in India in this city. Again, it was Calcutta where not only the trade of book publishing flourished, but where the readership and circulation of these texts was most conspicuous. Calcutta was the home to a number of private and public libraries that first opened its gates to the general readers. The city also witnessed the rapid growth of literary societies and book-clubs in the wake of the explosion in print culture in India during the early

⁸⁷ Dunn. *The Bengali Book of English Verse*. pp. xv-xvii.

decades of the nineteenth century. I have documented the proliferation of the print culture and its subsequent effect on circulation and readership of texts in the First Chapter of my dissertation. In short, Calcutta was the centre of cultural and intellectual activities during most part of the nineteenth century in British India, and, so it is only logical that my study on the poetics and politics of Company Poetry is centred on the poems written and published in Calcutta, although I have discussed a number of poems that were written by Englishmen settled in other different parts of India.

A Note on the Choice and Usage of Key-words

It is important here that I explain the principles behind the usage of certain key words in my dissertation, which I have adopted as methodological strategies. To begin with, I have not maintained very strict distinction between India and Orient, while using these words, primarily because constructing the idea of India in particular can be, and has been in critical discourse, extrapolated to the construction of the Orient in the Western imagination, when Said's fundamental definition of the Orient as an essentially "European invention"⁸⁸ is to be followed. In numerous cases, I have written India within scare quotes as an indication to the British idea of India that I am talking about, as opposed to such instances where I had referred to India simply as a country, and have not used scare quotes.

Further, the words 'English' and 'British' have often been used interchangeably without much regard to their distinctive meanings referring to England and the whole of the United Kingdom respectively. However, in such cases where I refer to the issues of internal colonialism within the empire, the distinct identities of English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish poets are of paramount importance; and the words 'British' and 'English' in those cases have been used with caution in accordance to their separate affiliation to

⁸⁸ Said, p. 1.

political, geographical and cultural identities. In most other instances in my dissertation, the ‘Englishman’ could as well be the Scotsman or the Irish man or the Welsh man. For the ease of syntactical usage, I have overlooked the distinctiveness of their identities in such cases where it was redundant to my discussion.

I have, as a principle, referred to the language as ‘Bangla’ and not ‘Bengali’, and to the river as ‘Ganga’ and not ‘Ganges’, as my own way of trying to avoid the Anglicisation of Indian language words by the British colonisers.

Following the practice of the poets whom I discuss, I have avoided the use of diacritical marks while writing Indian language words. There were, of course, few exceptions, like Kasiprasad Ghosh and E.L.; I have kept the diacritics of their poetic texts intact in my discussions on those poems.

As the source of most biographical information on these poets, I have referred to *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*⁸⁹, unless otherwise some other source is cited in my writing. I have used Hobson-Jobson⁹⁰ in my understanding of the meanings and usage of the Indian language words and phrases or the adaptation of an English word in an Indian language, as was used by the British in India in the texts of their poems.

My use of the rather cumbersome and inconvenient phrase ‘English language poetry’ in India does demand an explanation of sorts. I use this phrase as a pointer to the socio-political and cultural contestations that are internalised in the terms ‘Anglo-Indian Poetry’, ‘Indo-Anglian Poetry’ and ‘Indian English Poetry’, all three of which are conventionally used. ‘Indian English Poetry’ is the most commonly used phrase in critical and academic discourses; it generally includes poets of Indian national origin

⁸⁹ Mathew, H. C. S. and Brian Harrison, ed. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. Online edition: Lawrence Goldman, ed. <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article>> May, 2006.

⁹⁰ Yule, Henry, A. C. Burnell and William Crooke, ed. *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*. New Delhi: Rupa, 1986.

writing poetry in English language. Within the corpus of this phrase, one would find poets like Kasiprasad Ghosh, Michael Mudhusudan Dutt, Govin Chunder Dutt, Shoshee Chunder Dutt, Toru Dutt, Manmohan Ghosh, Sarojini Naidu, Aurobindo Ghosh and even H. L. V. Derozio; but poets such as William Jones, John Leyden, Henry Meredith Parker, Emma Roberts, Reginald Heber, D.L. Richardson, Mary Carshore, and Henry Page are generally excluded from participating in the poetics that ‘Indian English Poetry’ designate, although a few among these poets, like Page and Carshore, were born and spent their entire life in India. The term ‘Indo-Anglian Poetry’ is obviously a subset of the term ‘Indo-Anglian literature’ which “was given to Indian writing in English by James H. Cousins”⁹¹ even earlier than 1883 in order to denote the writings of the Indians in English language. The term, however, gained currency through the efforts of K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, who used it as the title of his book, *Indo-Anglian Literature*⁹², that contained critical discussions on the English literature produced by the Indians after they received formal English education, a process insinuated by Macaulay’s Minutes (1835). Iyengar’s book included readings of English poems written by Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu. Iyengar, however, points out in another book, that the term was actually used in 1883 “to describe a volume printed in Calcutta containing “Specimen Compositions from Native Students””.⁹³ It may, therefore, be surmised that ‘Indian English Poetry’ and ‘Indo-Anglian Poetry’ are both terms that exclude the English poems of the British who were writing and publishing in India.

The term ‘Anglo-Indian’ however, has a complicated history of usage. Before India’s independence from British rule in 1947, the term was plainly used to designate the British men and women residing in India. After 1947, the situation changed: ‘Anglo-Indian’ then and even now refers to those people who were of mixed descent as in being

⁹¹ Rao, Chalapathi. “The Indo-Anglians.” *The Illustrated Weekly of India*. May 26, 1963. p. 45.

⁹² Iyengar, K. R. Srinivasa. *Indo-Anglian Literature*. Bombay: The P. E. N. Books, 1943.

⁹³ Iyengar, K. R. Srinivasa. *Indian Writing in English*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 2009. p. 3.

born of British or European parent on one side and Indian parent on another. As a result, 'Anglo-Indian poetry' includes poems by Derozio, but leaves Leyden, Heber, Roberts and others out of its scope. So, in order to bring back into conversation all the men and women writing Poems in English language in India during the first half of the nineteenth century, without regard to their national identity or ethnic origin, I have chosen to use the apparently awkward and redundant phrase 'English language poetry' in India.

A Note on the Division of Chapters

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. The First Chapter deals with the various anxieties that were experienced by the writers as well as the readers of English language poetry in the first half of the nineteenth century in India. I have carried out a research on the trade of book printing and book consumption during this period. The catalogues of several libraries, especially that of Joykrishna Public Library in Uttarpara, have been extremely helpful in this regard. I have also attempted a brief survey of the advertising of books and literary periodicals that were published in Calcutta and London during this period. My analysis of the records available have led to the argument that book, and particularly poetry, was more of a product that could be produced, sold, and consumed or displayed, like any other marketable commodity than being anything else. I have furthered this line of inquiry into the reviews and prefaces of poetical works that were published in the periodical press in Calcutta. I have showed through copious extracts from those articles that there was a tremendous sense of anxiety amongst the British in India over the aesthetic merit of the poems being written here, and that there were earnest attempts amongst them to participate in the formation of the canon of English language poetry. Thereafter, the Chapter analyses the currents of internal colonialism amongst the English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish poets, whose written word attempted to preserve their own distinctive provincial identities, yet all of whom were

representatives of the British imperial machinery. In short, the First Chapter of my dissertation foregrounds the psychological tensions of the British society in India within which these poets operated.

The Second Chapter deals with the politics of using Indian language words in the poems written by the Company poets. I argue that they used Indian language words and phrases, and at times alluded to Indian mythology, or even wrote whole poems narrating Indian customs and Indian folklore, not only to contribute to the vast pool of knowledge which was conventionally termed ‘Oriental studies’, but because there was always a psychological necessity to foreground the process of their acculturation with Indian cultures and languages, so that they could project their learning to the large European audience. However, I have analysed a number of poems to show that in the process of writing about India, these poets were actually engaged in a more sinister process than what apparently met the eye: their poems present an “India” that is dark, despairing, mystic, savage and primitive, yet shrouded in a thin veil of exoticism. The disparagement of “India” was important in creating the cultural and racial hegemony that is implicit in the ethos of early colonialism, while the exotic “India” fulfilled the desires of the British who had chosen or were forced to choose this country as a ground for fortune-hunting. However, as the century progressed, there emerged a number of British voices amongst these poets, who questioned the representation of “India” by their fellow Company poets: these poets painted happy and glorious pictures of “India”, and even claimed not to have framed or forced any distortion or exaggeration to their experiences of India. All these poets engaged in complex webs of affiliations and influences with the Indian poets who were also writing English language poetry in India during that period. The Company poets together with their Indian counterparts created in nineteenth century colonial India

a vibrant literary culture, understanding the nuances of which is of significant import to the study of colonial history and literature.

The Third Chapter of my dissertation analyses the reception of the poems of the John Company amongst the English-educated population of India, with particular focus on Bengal. I have read in detail a few poems by Kasiprasad Ghosh, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Shoshee Chunder Dutt in order to study the effects that the English poems written and published in India by the British had on them. The first response to Western education emerged from amongst the Bengali intelligentsia. The young men in Calcutta, who were introduced to English literature by David Hare, Derozio and then more profoundly by Richardson in the precincts of the Hindu College, responded with remarkable enthusiasm to the emergence of Oriental scholarship, which was marked by the discovery of the past of India in the language of the coloniser and the revival of the classical Sanskrit and Persian texts through the translations by the British. The interactions between the British and the English-educated Indian youths acquired the proportions of being shaped into movements, which can be easily denoted as renaissance in the history of Bengali literature and culture.⁹⁴ Through my reading of the poems by Ghosh, Michael and Shoshee, I have attempted to study how the first waves of literary renaissance emerged in Bengal, the ripples of which are palpable even today.

My dissertation is an attempt to recuperate the lost poetic voices of British India. The grand narratives of the theory deal with the colonial discourses as one single body of text, and ascribe general attributes to it, thus ironing out any heterogeneity of expression. I work here with these marginal texts from the colonial period with the purpose to find out how individual versifiers negotiated with the process of acculturation and hierarchisation. I attempt to recover the individual voices of these minor poets, who

⁹⁴ Dyson. p. 2.

suffered homogenisation by the erasures of the grand narratives of postcolonial historiography and theorisation.

CHAPTER 1

The Anxiety of Constructing “India”: Participating in the Literary Culture of Early Nineteenth Century India

What was the purpose of poetry? Who would read it? What would be the next big thing after the deaths of Byron, Keats, Shelley, Hemans, Scott, Coleridge, and Landon, the poets who formed the pantheon of English-speaking India in the early decades of the nineteenth century?¹

Mary Ellis Gibson, in her scholarly survey of English verse in colonial India from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries, poses these questions and thereby engages the readers’ thoughts and the researchers’ quest further and deeper into the realms of colonial poetry and its poetics. This chapter would try to answer these questions; it would be an enquiry into the institutions and practices that shaped the English literary culture in India during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Poets from differing religious, social, political and ethnic backgrounds participated in the formation of the English language poetic canon in early nineteenth century India. It is important to understand how institutions of book production and book consumption worked and developed — periodicals, annuals, monthly registers, libraries, book printing, book selling, reviews of published poetical works, reception of the poems in Britain as well as among the native English-speaking Indians — all these factors rendered the process of the formation of an English language poetic canon essentially complex and contested. Two most important developments that influenced how poetry was written and how poetry was read during this period were the proliferation of print and printing technology in India, and the consequent establishments of libraries, English-

¹ Gibson, Mary Ellis. *Indian Angles: English Verse in Colonial India from Jones to Tagore*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011. p. 102.

medium schools, literary clubs, and other voluntary organisations, where a large number of books were archived, lent, sold and where the English-speaking population of the colonial metropole often engaged in elaborate discussions and comparative discourses, both careful and casual, on the quality and quantity of the poetic produce in colonial India. Thus, English language poetry in India broadened and was commodified.

Another major shift in the linguistic practices in India was effected by Macaulay's Minutes on Education (1835). It was a shift from education in classical languages like Sanskrit and Persian to English-medium and vernacular education. This was when official government policy was falling in close consonance with actual linguistic practices of the people. The linguistic oeuvre of the learned population in nineteenth century India was multifarious. It was common and ordinarily expected that a man of average learning had facility in more than one vernacular languages (Bangla / Urdu / Marathi), at least one classical language (Sanskrit / Tamil / Persian / Greek / Roman) and more than one modern European languages (English / French / Italian / German). Therefore, it was a complex polyglot linguistic culture in which poetry emerged. That is precisely why it never surprised the reader or struck them as singularly odd when they encountered words and phrases from as many as four to five languages in any single poem of even a lesser known author. Chestnut Owen, for example, used words and phrases from Persian, Latin, French, Urdu and Bangla in his English poem "Frederick and Flora: A Romance of To-day"² which was published in the October, 1831 issue of *Calcutta Magazine and Monthly Register*.

There was understandably much difference in the character as well as in the reception of English verse written in England and that written in colonial India — although both types of verses were penned by Englishmen and at about the same time.

² Owen, Chestnut. "Frederick and Flora: A Romance of To-day." *The Calcutta Magazine and Monthly Register*. Vol. III. Bengal General Register. Calcutta: Samuel Smith and Co., 1831. pp. 593-598.

The trope of bardic nationalism, the Oriental tale with its elements both mystic and fantastic, the conscious tone of satire and the constant engagement with the elite men of letters in the society, the traveller's encounter with a magnificent ruin, and the ever-pervading sense of exile coupled with a liberal sprinkling of the desire of "home-coming" — these are all common patterns, one or more of which is manifested in each of the poems under my corpus of study. However, in spite of these anxieties or despite them, it were *these* poems that gave shape to English language poetry in India. The poets were conscious of their role — or rather the lack of it — in the formation of the canon of English poetry, as was and still is largely understood by the rest of the world. This implies that there was always an underlying tension running through these poems that were written by such poets, as D. L. Richardson, Henry Meredith Parker, John Leyden, Emma Roberts, to name only a few, who were eager to define their participation in the literary scene of Britain. Thus the poets writing English language verse in nineteenth century India were faced with such challenges as were unique to their condition: agreeably enjoying the privileges and position of an elite in a foreign land, and perceived by the larger British population in their home country as a struggling mason of the colonial edifice.

Print Culture in mid-nineteenth Century Calcutta

The history of book printing and print culture of nineteenth century India is documented in detail in the works of Mofakhhar Hussain Khan, C. A. Bayly, Graham W. Shaw and other scholars.³ A careful study of these works reveal two primary facts: one, a

³ Bayly, C. A. *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1879*. Cambridge Studies in Indian History and Society I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Khan, Mofakhkhar Hussain. *The Bengali Book: History of Printing and Book Making, 1667-1866*. 2 Vols. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Bangla Academy, 1999-2001.

Shaw, Graham. W. *Printing in Calcutta to 1800: A Description and Checklist of Printing in Late 18th-Century Calcutta*. London: Bibliographical Society, 1976.

considerable portion of English literature written in India in the nineteenth century remained outside the printing press — especially English verses were often read and circulated in manuscripts, pamphlets, letters, diaries, memoirs, placards and sometimes through oral dissemination; at the same time, it is also true that these verses were read within small closed groups of English men and women and sometimes English-educated Indians. These people were aware of and had full knowledge of each other's position, privileges and limitations. They met often in closed circles, discussed their conditions of living and commented on the verse they wrote.⁴ Understandably, these verses abound in references and cross-references, the implications of which can only be realised through a study of the life and character of these poets and the men and women who participated so closely in this literary culture.

The other fact that is evident from the history of the print culture is that English language print was only a small subset of the enormous amount of printed materials in Indian languages, such as Bangla, Urdu, Hindi and Tamil. It would not be an exaggeration to say that early nineteenth century India witnessed an explosion in print culture and subsequent book consumption. Reverend James Long, who was given the responsibility of making a survey of books, registers, almanacs and all other materials in print in mid-nineteenth century in Bengal, recorded that 571,670 books were printed in 1857 for sale in Calcutta alone — and this number was a remarkable leap from that in 1853, which was only 302,804.⁵ Although technological advancement was the most obvious factor which made this explosion in print possible, there were other accountable

⁴ This fact may be concluded from the circumstantial evidences present in the way Anglo-Indian life is depicted in the following books.

Farrell, J. G. *The Siege of Krishnapur*. London: Orion Books, 1990

Mason, Philip. *The Men who Ruled India*. Calcutta: Rupa Paperback, 1990.

⁵ For a detailed list of the number of books printed in separate categories, see

Ghosh, Anindita. "An Uncertain Coming of the Book: Early print Cultures in Colonial India." *Book History*. Vol. 6. No. 1. 2003. pp 23-55;

Roy, Tapti. "Disciplining the Printed Text: Colonial and Nationalist Surveillance of Bengali Literature." *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*. Ed. Partha Chatterjee. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995. pp 30-62.

agents as well. Around and after 1840, a large number of Baptist Mission Presses were set up in and around Calcutta and its suburbs, as well as in the other two presidencies, namely Bombay and Madras. The notable fact about the print culture in these presses is that they were not only printing for the purpose of missionary activities, but also largely accounted for the printing of all types of books, registers, periodicals and pamphlets.

I have drawn here a list of the different categories of printed materials that were available at Uttarpara Joykrishna Public Library in 1859, when the library was first opened to the public. It is interesting that this was originally Joykrishna Mukherjee's personal collection which he bought from the funds of the Devottara Trust set up by his father, and most of the books were procured from the Bengal Harkara Library and China Bazar.

Number of Titles, by Subject.

Dictionaries – 35	Greek poetry – 3
Economics – 8	Art – 3
Law – 133	Biography – 56
English Tales – 34	Bible - 55
English Poetry - 244	Medicine – 57
History – 105	Rhetoric – 5
English Drama – 18	Astronomy – 6
English Grammar – 31	Genealogy – 26
Nature Studies/ Botany – 5	Philosophy &
	Moral Science – 93
Italian tales – 1	Tantra – 5
Urdu Poetry – 2	Religion – 24
Muhammadan religion – 43	Aesthetics – 1
Kalidasa – 8	Norwegian tales – 9
Upanishad – 4	Physics – 10
Agriculture – 11	Purana – 43
Sports – 4	Arithmetic – 17
Christian Religion – 138	Letter Writing – 6

Ganga – 3	Technical Education – 3
Home Science – 3	Zoology – 8
Ballads – 5	Nature Calamities – 13
Bibliography – 2	French tales – 1
Persian Tales – 22	Persian Poetry – 4
Ramayan – 18	Lecture/Speeches – 3
Mahabharata -19	Bengali Tales – 140
Folk Tales – 14	Bengali Poetry – 250
Chemistry – 1	Bengali Humour, Sketches, Parody – 13
Sanskrit Tales – 8	Bengali Drama – 225
Sanskrit Ballads – 1	Bengali Proverbs – 3
Sanskrit Language and Literature – 3	Bengali Essays – 11
Sanskrit Poetry – 37	Bengali grammar – 49
Sanskrit grammar – 14	Bengali Language – 3
Education – 87	Linguistics – 3
Music -52	Trade – 1
Social Issues – 113	Science – 8
Shakespearean Literature – 3	Algebra – 3
Hindi Poetry – 4	Brahmo Religion – 87
General Knowledge/ Miscellaneous - 18	Bhagavat Gita – 2
Smriti – 20	Indian Hindu
Hindi Religion – 174	Philosophy – 33
Unspecified – 162	Geography/Travel - 42

The source of this list is Jatindramohan Bhattacharya's *Pañji*⁶, which was posthumously published in 1993 for the first time. Apart from this detailed listing, I have found a consolidated list in the opening catalogue which is archived in the Public Library itself. I reproduce here the list as I found it:

⁶ Bhattacharya, Jatindramohan. *Mudrita Bangla Granthera Pañji, 1853-1867*. Kolkata: Paschimbanga Bangla Akademi, Tathya o Sanskriti Bibhag, Paschimbanga Sarkar, 1993.

Utilitarian and Political publications:

Registers, Government Publications, and Military Regulations	-	100
Almanacs and Calendars	-	81
Useful Subjects (Arithmetic, Travel, maps, Medicine, Economics)	-	70
Indian and European Affairs, Politics	-	24
Total	-	275

Cultural Publications:

Translation from Persian and Sanskrit Historical texts	-	14
Translations from Persian and Sanskrit Poetry, Prose and Drama	-	10
Religion, music and artworks	-	15
Creative Literature in English mostly poetry	-	22
Total	-	61

Volumes of Periodicals (both cultural and utilitarian) - 12

The two lists are arguably different in the presentation of data. Although it cannot be ascertained when and how and by whom they were prepared, and whether the second list accounts for only a particular section of the collection, it is important to note here that there is no date of drawing up the second catalogue. So it may be concluded that this perhaps was a catalogue of Joykrishna's personal collection which was open to researchers since 1851, much earlier than it was housed in the library and opened for the public. Whatever the two lists might represent, one fact that is evident from the catalogues is that there was a wide variety of printed materials available for reading and circulation in Calcutta in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Another striking feature that I have singled out from the first catalogue is the number of titles of English poetry, i.e., 244, which is only equalled by the number of titles of Bangla poetry and Bangla drama, which are 250 and 225 respectively. These figures indicate that poetry was by far the most read genre of literature and also that the most

number of printed books clearly were of verse. A few more interesting observations may be made from these figures. It is natural that poetry and drama written in Bangla would be widely read in Calcutta, where the majority of population were Bengali people. But, when we find that English verse was also equally popular, if not more, it comes to light that school curricula, both formal and informal, which included a considerable portion of English poetry, shaped the reading habits of the English-educated Indian population and thereby contributed to the formation of English language poetic canon in mid-nineteenth century India. When I referred to English poetry in school curricula, I must clarify that this largely refers to the English poems that were written in Britain by poets like Milton, Shakespeare, Pope, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, Byron, Landon, Scott and others, who participated significantly in shaping the British poetic canon, which is what is normally understood when anyone refers to ‘English poetry’ offhand.

Going back to the catalogue of Joykrishna Public Library, I would like to state a crucial fact here: that among the 200-odd titles of English poetry listed there, most of the books were those written in Britain by such major English poets as I have mentioned above. Under these circumstances the question that stares us in the face is, what then happened to the large number of English language verse written in India by English men and women who had settled here. Many of them were contained in small local vessels like newspapers, periodicals, gazettes and registers; many were published in thin volumes from England, often printed at the author’s own cost or with a small fortune from a patron or friend; and some were anthologised in large volumes that contained copious biographical notes on the authors included in that particular volume. The few titles on English language poetry written in India that we find at the Joykrishna Public library are these volumes edited by prominent figures residing in India.

The “Calcutta School” of English Verse

During this period, most of the newspapers, gazettes and registers had some space reserved for poems, some sort of a poets’ corner, it may be called. This space witnessed the publication of mostly occasional poems, translations from Persian and Sanskrit verses, acrostics or other types of play on word, verse satires, lines composed on recent occasions, and sometimes serious original poems. This type of verse publication in periodicals greatly facilitated those who wanted to pull a satire on any aspect of administration of the East India Company or any aspect of the life of the Indian people, but at the same time wanted to remain anonymous. The *India Gazette*, which had a wide circulation, was the periodical of choice for publication amongst most aspiring poets, as it dedicated a broad strip of column of its very first page to English verse. Certain tropes identified this typical poems, and these were often referred to as “Calcutta School” of English verse on many occasions by commentators and poets alike. At the same time, I must mention that this classification was mostly made on a note of parody rather than on any note of appreciation or classification based on location.

I would talk here in detail on one such writer who identified himself as “The Proser” or “M”. His verse was published under the title “Stanzas by Rory Bombshell, Esq., Fireworker” in the twenty-ninth column of the *India Gazette* dated 5th August, 1822. The poem offers a portrait of his friend, after whom the verse got its name. It is indeed amusing to note that this friend, Rory Bombshell, is an artillery officer. A student of English literature is here inevitably reminded of Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*,⁷ Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock*,⁸ Wildblood in Dryden’s *An Evening’s Love*,⁹ Sir Martin

⁷ Shakespeare, William. *The Merry Wives of Windsor. With the humours of Sir John Falstaffe, as also the swaggering vaine of ancient Pistoll, and Corporall Nym.* Newly corrected. London: T. H. for R. Meighen, 1630.

⁸ Pope, Alexander. *The Rape of the Lock. An Heroi-Comical Poem.* In Five Cantos. Dublin: J. Henly, 1714.

⁹ Dryden, John. *An Evening’s Love; or, the Mock-Astrologer. A Comedy.* London: Jacob Tonson, 1735.

Mar-all in *The Feigned Innocence*,¹⁰ Lady Booby, Mrs Slipstop, Fanny Goodwill and Peter Pounce in *Joseph Andrews*,¹¹ and many other such names in the realm of English literature — all characters with names that have obvious connotations of either the person's demeanour or profession. Such naming of character, therefore, is a marker of the well-read author. Rory Bombshell luxuriates in poetical and philosophical effusion when his gardener's mule ate the huge thistle that he was trying to grow. The poem has a rather long epigraph where Bombshell reveals how the meticulous task of growing a thistle has given "birth to reflections, the nature of which, as a Scotchman and a man earning his bread by the sweat of his brow, must be immediately apprehended by you".¹² Then this prized thistle is eaten by the gardener's mule and Bombshell draws two analogies — one from the Persian way of life, and the other from Scottish popular poems: he compares his rage at having found his thistle destroyed to that of a Persian gardener whose rose-beds have been plundered; he further asserts that the beauty of his thistle by far surpassed that of all the roses of Damascus. These comparisons and the naming of the character clearly points to the wide range of reading of the poet — from canonical British texts of literature to Scottish patriotic and popular poems and even to the Persian poet, Hafiz, whom he might have read either in translation or in original. It may be mentioned here that there were innumerable translations by Englishmen of Hafiz and other major Persian poets since the last decades of the eighteenth century. During eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most poets writing English language poetry in India engaged in epigraphs, footnotes, references, glossaries, and such other tools that offered explanation to their verses. This elaborate apparatus, which I collectively refer to as paratext, is crucial to the understanding of the poems. More often than not, they render and even alter the meaning

¹⁰ Dryden, John. *Sir Martin Mar-all: or, The Feign'd Innocence. A Comedy*. London: Jacob Tonson, 1735.

¹¹ Fielding, Henry. *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, and his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams*. In Two Volumes. London: A. Millar, 1743.

¹² Proser, The, or M. "Stanzas by Rory Bombshell, Esq., Fireworker". *India Gazette*. August 5, 1822. p. 1.

of the verses. Here, Bombshell gives a declaration before starting his poetical effusion: this declaration appears to be modest, but has certain elements of sarcasm that provoke the reader. The poet writes in the person of Bombshell:

My effusion will not, I am assured, bear a comparison with the ordinary productions of the Calcutta School, and both in point of elegance, of diction, harmony of numbers, or the happy introduction of pathetic interjections, must be considered by all Savants to be immeasurably deficient and inferior to the common run of fugitive pieces inserted in our India prints. Indeed having a desire to write only what I understand, and understand always what I write, I have not, since my emancipation from school, been in the habit of making verses either sense or non-sense.¹³

The disclaimer in the form of epigraph continues further. This anonymous poet identified the “Calcutta School” of English verse in 1822 without much difficulty, and under a veil of modesty, parodied it profusely. The poet tried to give a taste of the causticity of his satire to the readers through familiar conceits. The poem is written in the person of Rory Bombshell who entreats his lost thistle with much passion:

How oft, oh how oft, while thy stern crest surveying
As it martially waved the sunflowers among,
Has my heart still its fond strong attachment betraying
For my dear native Scotland sighed sorely and long.
How oft, too, when sunk in poetical dreamings
My reason was wont her frail seat to desert,
Have thy apropos prickles recalled me from seemings
To parade, post the guards, or put on a clean shirt.¹⁴

The tone of the poem is a reminder of the mock heroic satires of Butler and Byron, although the strain is much weaker than that of the poems of both the poets. If a survey is carried out of the poems published in the periodicals of London during the same time, one would unmistakably come across the satirical poems of Thomas Hood, who regularly wrote for *The London Magazine*, the *Athenaeum*, and *Punch*. However, the exalted tones of the Byronic satire or the literary tone of the Hudibrastic satire or even the humorous,

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid. pp. 1-2.

reflective tone of Hood's satire — none can be drawn in comparison to Rory Bombshells's sentimental effusion. The poem clearly fails the aesthetic criterion of judgement.

Three other significant conceits that emerge out of the text are the allusion to Persian ghazal, the trope of the exile, and the myth of the “pathetic interjection”. It is important to state here that when I use the term ‘text’ while referring to these poems that are the primary focus of my study, my reference is inclusive of the paratexts that accompany the verses in most cases. Coming back to the poem under discussion, the trope of exile is exploded in the theme of the poem itself: the English (or, Scottish for that matter) artillery officer posted far away from home in India moans the loss of a thistle that he was trying to grow, probably in a futile attempt to recreate the familiar Scottish landscape, and makes out an entire verse out of the sentiments he experiences, and goes as far as getting it published. The other two conceits are almost intertwined: in fact, repetition of “pathetic interjections” along with the mention of the rosebuds in a Persian garden in the epigraph contribute significantly to the allusion to Persian ghazal. However, the satirist's conviction about the familiarity of these conceits to his readers speak volumes about the cultural markers of that period, as was experienced in the colonial metropole.

Poetry in the Periodical Press

A pertinent question that kept my thoughts occupied as I was attempting a critical reading of this poem is, what kind of poetic tropes can one ascribe cultural power to. The answer I try to seek in the poems that were published in the periodicals. Registers, anthologies, newspapers and annals, and also in those that were included in school curricula in early nineteenth century Calcutta. It was common practice, as I have mentioned earlier, to publish poems in newspapers, annuals and other periodicals. I must

also mention here that these gazettes, registers, newspapers and, of course, the literary annuals also engaged in reviews of poetry, discussions on poetic trends as well as poetic controversies of all sorts. Anthologies and small volumes of verses printed often at the author's own cost were regularly advertised in the newspapers and the literary annuals and even subscription lists were published to prove acclaim in the hope of registering more subscribers. Since the Thomas Noon Talfourd's copyright bill did not become law until 1842 in Britain, so poems from British publications were also often re-printed alongside original poems composed in India. So, newspapers and annuals not only served as a platform for publication of English language verse in India, but also provided access to poems published in Britain, thereby familiarising the English men in India with the poetic trends and practices that were current in Britain at about the same time.

In his informative monograph titled *A History of Indian Journalism*, Mohit Moitra specifies that there were thirty-three English language dailies and periodicals in Bengal in 1833, and that there also were thirty-five Bangla newspapers and periodicals.¹⁵ These are impressive numbers at a time when the technology of printing was still in its developing stage. The numbers also indicate that there was wide circulation of these dailies and periodicals, both English and Bangla, and that they were regularly read by a large section of the population. Before 1857, when the extremist attitude of 'othering' by the English language press furthered the vernacular press from them, there was considerable mutual cooperation and involvement between the presses of the two languages.¹⁶ Therefore, it may be concluded that the English-educated Indians were also readers of the English newspapers and annuals and the Englishmen, in turn, even if they could not read Bangla, had access to and knowledge of the contents that were printed in the Bangla newspapers and periodicals.

¹⁵ Moitra, Mohit. *A History of Indian Journalism*. Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1969. p. 91.

¹⁶ Parthasarathy, Rangaswami. *Journalism in India: From the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1989. pp 38-39.

The most interesting aspect that newspaper and periodical press had to do with the poetic scene in nineteenth century India was that it printed literary controversy and kindled the same by printing provocative reviews and facts. British poetry and the economic and political situations in Britain and in India fuelled such controversy all the more. I must observe here in passing that poems and discussions on poetry in more ways than one were important tools to popularise and increase the number of subscribers of these newspapers and annuals. Thus poetry here is commodified in the crudest commercial terms.

I shall presently consider the example of the *Calcutta Journal* in order to find out how the periodical press provoked literary controversy and how there were earnest attempts to be part of the British literary scene of England. In the second decade of the nineteenth century, a long discourse on Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*¹⁷ was published in the *Calcutta Journal* in numerous parts spread over the years; Byron's biographical narrative poem in four cantos, published in 1812 through 1818, was *the* literary work of the early nineteenth century British literature:

[t]he effect... [of its publication] ...was electric... 'Childe Harold' and Lord Byron became the theme of every tongue.¹⁸

Within just three days after its publication, the five hundred copies of the quarto edition were completely sold out, and, the popularity of the text was never on a decline, as we find that in the next three years it ran into ten subsequent editions.¹⁹ Therefore, publishing discussions on *Childe Harold* was evidently a conscious undertaking to evince active participation in the British poetic canon. These attempts of the English language press in

¹⁷ Byron, Lord George Gordon. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage. A Romaunt*. London: John Murray, 1842.

¹⁸ Moore, Thomas. *The Poetical Works of Lord Byron with Explanatory notes, and a Comprehensive Life of the Author*. Philadelphia: William T. Amies, 1878. p. viii.

¹⁹ Chalk, Aiden. "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt and the Influence of Local Attachment." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*. Vol. 40. No. 1. Local habitations. Spring, 1998. pp. 48-77. JSTOR. <www.jstor.org/stable/40755139>. p. 48. 22/05/2015.

India continued with much enthusiasm throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. If we continue to survey the subsequent issues of the *Calcutta Journal*, we would come across elaborate and vaunting reports published on the contribution of the British in India to the Burns memorial in Edinburgh in page 777 of its 1818 issue; further, on page 143 of its March 18, 1832 issue, we would find articles which glorified and lauded the funds raised in India to support blind Irish musicians. The *Calcutta Gazette* went as far as quoting the *Belfast Newsletter* (March 5, 1832 issue), and wrote that the British in India were working with every effort, earnest and sincere, with the purpose of reviving “our national instrument, the Harp”.²⁰ The use of the possessive personal pronoun ‘our’ in the plural number is a pointer to the attempt of the Indian poets to empathise with and be a part of British literary politics.

The editors also kept abreast of the literary developments in the other two presidencies, namely Madras and Bombay. The proceedings of the literary societies of Madras and Bombay were reported regularly with applause and honour. At the same time, the editors engaged in constructive criticism about the literary works and journals published from Calcutta: they encouraged the establishment of such societies in Calcutta that engaged in literary activities. Clearly they regretted the course of the Asiatic society, as the nature of their activities were far too obscure and remote to kindle the general interest of the masses. It is amusing that the *Calcutta Journal* called itself a “Political, Commercial, and Literary Gazette” — a phrase that would allow it to publish almost anything and everything that was of any significant import in nineteenth century British India. Notwithstanding the use of such elaborate phrases, all other periodicals, like the *India Gazette* and the *Bengal Annual* also published articles related to commerce, politics, literature as well as other social issues. The *India Gazette* was later, in 1833, taken up by

²⁰ *Calcutta Gazette*. March 18, 1832. p. 143.

Captain David Lester Richardson, a prominent man of letters and administration in British India, who began editing it as a weekly literary supplement and renamed it *Calcutta Literary Gazette*. With the emphatic inclusion of the adjective “Literary” in its title, the periodical concentrated on publishing texts of literature and reviews thereof and news related to literary developments, and consequently matters related to politics and commerce occupied lesser space until they were not printed any more. Richardson’s *Gazette* closely followed the footsteps of the literary annuals published in London and at the best of times, even had high hopes of vying with them in terms of aesthetic standard and popularity. Many of the poems and reviews that Richardson published in the *Calcutta Literary Gazette* were later reprinted by him in *The Bengal Annual* and *The Orient Pearl*. Apart from the original compositions in English language in India, Richardson also printed excerpts and sometimes whole pieces from British publications. This was again a double-edged move — to situate English language versifiers on the same platform, whether they were composing in Britain or in India, and a way to keep the Englishmen in India abreast of the literary proceedings in Britain.

Poetry as Commodity

I had earlier mentioned in passing why and how I think poetry was commodified in nineteenth century India. A close analysis of the advertising and sellers’ market estimates found in these periodicals, reveal that not only poetry, the book, especially the annuals, became a commodity by themselves. The wholesale takeover of the book-market by consumers of refined taste may be ascribed mostly to the beautiful engravings and plates that these annuals contained, not to mention their literary content. Their presentations in the annuals and the way they were projected in the advertisements, which for obvious reasons exaggerated their importance and the goodness of their quality, made them commodities which the learned population considered a prized possession — a

symbol of class and status — to be displayed on the drawing-room coffee-table. Among some of the noted men of letters who pursued these literary annuals were H. L. V. Derozio and Emma Roberts, as is noted in the subscribers' list at St. Andrews' Library. This library also meticulously advertised the annuals that were on offer in a particular year. The list for 1834, which was published in the month of February, was rather long. Some of the annuals listed there were:

<i>Ackermann's Forget-me-not</i>	<i>The Amulet</i>
<i>Bengal Annual</i>	<i>Biblical Annual</i>
<i>The Bijou</i>	<i>The Botanic Annual</i>
<i>The Christmas Box</i>	<i>Daniell's Oriental Annual</i>
<i>Falstaff's Comic Offering</i>	<i>Fisher's Drawing Room Scrap-Book</i>
<i>Friendship's Offering</i>	<i>Hood's Comic Annual</i>
<i>Juvenile Forget-me-not</i>	<i>The Juvenile Keepsake</i>
<i>The Keepsake</i>	<i>Landscape Annual</i>
<i>The Literary Souvenir</i>	<i>The Missionary Annual</i>
<i>The Oriental Annual</i>	<i>The Orient Pearl</i>
<i>The Remembrancer</i>	<i>The Talisman</i>
<i>The Young Lady's Book</i>	

The annuals mentioned here are just some of the most notable ones from the long list which was arranged in alphabetical order. Some of these titles were the annuals that had arrived from London. A little after the Christmas of 1832, some of the London annuals were every year sent to the three presidencies in India, namely, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. There was understandably quite some interest among the literate population in India and the Englishmen settled here regarding these annuals from London. They were usually published in November and were sent to India with the aim of optimising the

sales during the Christmas season. The passage over the seas took around a little over two months, hence the advertising in February, when they were already available in this country. It is interesting to note that in their advertisements, the merchants included — in fact, highlighted — the details of the engravings and the plates that were included in the annuals. Sampling the February, 1834 advertisement of St. Andrew's Library, which I had referred to earlier, it is found that there was a detailed listing of the plates appearing in Daniell's *Oriental Annual*, Ackermann's *Forget-me-not*, *Friendship's Offering* and *Landscape Annual*. Arguably, these engravings were tools to reap the best of commercial profits possible from these annuals. It is quite intriguing that the legacy of these literary annuals and related advertising continue even to this day in Calcutta: *The Statesman*, *The Telegraph*, *Anandabazaar Patrika* (*Patrika*, *Sananda*, *Anandamela*, *Anandalok* and others), *Bartaman*, *Pratidin* and many other newspapers and weekly magazines publish a voluminous annual number containing art as well as literary pieces around September, preceding the Durga Pujas, which is the greatest festival celebrated in this part of the country. And, advertisements with detailed listings of authors and painters are regularly printed in the corresponding newspapers and magazines from at least two months before the actual publication of the annuals.

Prefiguring the Desire to Participate in British Literary Culture

Going back to the world of English language literary periodicals that were published and circulated in Calcutta in the third decade of the nineteenth century, I would closely examine the purpose and nature of their publication and the intent of the editors, as would be evident from the prefaces, the presentation of the volumes, and the selection of the contents of the two most significant productions of the times, namely, the *Bengal Annual* and the *Orient Pearl*. Technically, both these Annuals were edited by D. L. Richardson, who played a significant role in the formation of the English language poetic

canon in nineteenth century India. Although the name of William Kirkpatrick, an East Indian and close friend of H. L. V. Derozio, appeared as the editor of the volume on the title page of the 1835 issue of the *Orient Pearl*, a mention about the change in editorship in the Preface suggests that the actual selection, arrangement and production of the volume was in practice done by Richardson:

The Change in the Editorship of the present work being of recent date, almost the entire merit of composition is due to its former editors.²¹

It is evident that Richardson transferred the editorship shortly before the publication, whatever might be the reason for such a transfer.

The *Bengal Annual* ran into six issues from 1830 to 1836, while the *Orient Pearl* had only three issues, one each in 1832, 1834 and 1835. Even a casual reading through the prefaces of these nine volumes reveal that Richardson was trying his best to be at par with the literary annuals that were being published in London. He made an emphatic statement to this effect in the Preface of the very first issue of the *Bengal Annual*:

A strong claim upon the indulgence of the reader may also be advanced on the simple fact, that this is the first and only attempt of the kind, to keep pace in some measure with the lighter literature of our native land.²²

Such a bold and ambitious declaration arguably was not the intention of the editor speaking alone; rather it was the hope of all men writing English language verse in India during that period, and it was this common shared dream that they all aspired to and lived for. Of the many aspirations that the British in India harboured, situating themselves on parallel and comparable, if not better, planes with British artists, painters and poets in the literary and cultural spheres was apparently an important and prominent one. Therefore, every collective step taken here in India to assert the claim of equivalence met with

²¹ Editor [Kirkpatrick, William]. "A Note." *The Orient Pearl for 1835*. Ed. William Kirkpatrick. Calcutta: T. Ostell, 1835. p. iii.

²² Richardson, David Lester. Preface. *The Bengal Annual: A Literary Keepsake*. Ed. D. L. Richardson. Calcutta: Samuel Smith and Co., 1830. p. v.

considerable applause and instantly gained popularity among the British residents of India. These literary annuals were such a collective step, and a very significant one: it produced a book, a commodity, which could be displayed, circulated and preserved. So, when Richardson made that emphatic declaration in the Preface of the opening issue of his literary Annual, it served as one of the most effective strategies to increase the popularity, hence the subscription, of the periodical.

What followed in the next paragraph immediately after this ambitious claim was an interesting plea to the reader with regard to the quality of the engravings in the volume:

There being no professional engravers in India, the embellishments of this volume are the friendly contributions of Amateurs — and are among their first efforts. It will be acknowledged, however, that though hasty and unpretending productions, they are very far from deficient in taste and spirit.²³

This appeal on the part of Richardson attests any doubt that he might have had as to the quality of production of his Annual and the readers' response to it. This may be interpreted by an innocent reader as the praise for and acknowledgement of the "friendly contributions" of amateur engravers in India; but a critical mind would never fail to discern the careful step of Richardson, whereby he made room for any criticism that the engravings in the periodical might court. This separate mention of the engravings in the Preface is also a pointer to the degree of importance of engravings in the literary annuals of those days. Richardson had hopes that these literary annuals published in India would also witness fair circulation and considerable readership in Britain. Hence, the comparisons and the consequent defence.

There are farther comparisons between the periodicals published in India and those in London by the editors here. And, each of these comparisons testifies their efforts

²³ Ibid.

to be at par with the literary publications of Britain. It is intriguing to note that not only the quality of the contents, but also the manner of presentation was of utmost importance in the determination of the class of publication. Daniel E. White, in his monograph, *From Little London to Little Bengal: Religion, Print and Modernity in Early British India 1793-1835*, records in detail the presentation of *The Bengal Annual's* 1830 and 1831 issues. He notes that the 1830 issue of the Annual was octavo in 4 signatures, but it was neither bound in silk nor gilt-edged. He further notes that the 1831 issue of the Annual was printed in a smaller format, duodecimo and was “covered in purple watered silk (still visible on BLPP. 6892) with red endpapers and gilded edges”.²⁴ In between the publication of these two volumes, there must have been suggestions, remarks and criticism to improve the appearance of the Annual towards a more lavish presentation. There is conclusive evidence to this effect in Richardson’s own declaration in the prospectus of the 1831 issue of the *Bengal Annual*:

It having been suggested to us, from various quarters, that the binding of the last year’s Annual was not sufficiently ornamental, the next will be bound in coloured silk and be gilt-edged in the manner of the most elegant of the London Annuals. This improvement could not have been effected without a great additional expense, if we had not resolved on a change in the form of the book, from an octavo to a duodecimo.²⁵

Hence it may be surmised that the presentation of a volume, be it a book or a periodical, mattered greatly to the reading public, who are the ultimate consumers of the product.

The Book as Cultural Marker, And Poetry as the Dominant Literary Form

When one looks at the different volumes of the *Bengal Annual* together on a bookshelf, say in a library archive, their sizes vary, and the appearance does not impress

²⁴ White, Daniel E. *From Little London to Little Bengal: Religion, Print and Modernity in Early British India 1793-1835*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013. p. 218.

²⁵ Qtd. in Ibid.

upon the onlooker as a premium series of literary annual. This is so, as the volumes after 1831 became smaller in format and less ornamental in appearance, depending on the kind of binding for each volume. Even at the time of its publication, the *Bengal Annual* did meet with criticism on the ground of its varying appearance. I would quote here from a review of the Annual that was published in the *Government Gazette* in 1832 and was reprinted by Richardson in the issue of his *Calcutta Literary Gazette* dated January 1, 1833:

[T]hey all differ in their proportions. This, we think, is a pity — since, on a library shelf, instead of agreeing in form — they appear, like the three degrees of comparison, large, less, least.²⁶

The anonymous reviewer also complained of the absence of a nice acceptable flyleaf for inscription. The emphasis on form and the nature of the remarks speak volumes of the reviewer's approach to these literary annuals and consequently, the standing of these annuals in the views of the general literate population of nineteenth century India: they were items to display, markers of cultural position and social status — in fact, to quote the exact words of the reviewer, “gift books understood to become part of a permanent library”.²⁷

When the book itself becomes a commodity and a cultural marker, the writer evidently faces dilemma and predicaments of the highest degree. An understanding of this proposition will make the modern scholar appreciate the unique situation of the English language versifiers in nineteenth century India — I refer here categorically to the disadvantages that British-born poets in India faced and also to the constraints in English language publishing in India. However, the impossibility of the situation actually saw in print some of the best poetic compositions of the British in India. And, the reviewer

²⁶ Anon. “Review of the *Bengal Annual*.” *Calcutta Literary Gazette*. Jan 1, 1833. p. 11.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

acknowledged that too: there were generous commendations for some of the poems printed in the 1832 issue of the *Bengal Annual*, especially the compositions of Henry Meredith Parker, Emma Roberts and Horace Hayman Wilson. The reviewer did appreciate the quality of the literary productions included in the volume, even though the publication and presentation of it was pressed for want of funds:

[I]nstead of being pinched as to his means of eking out a volume, [he] has absolutely been rather perplexed by the abundance of materials pouring in upon him. In a word, the vein has been merely opened, and the volumes that have appeared, are only, it strikes us, specimens of inexhaustible literary ore, that lies in the Indian mine.²⁸

The reviewer, however, laments that the common man in Britain “do view India with a cold askance and step mother like regard”.²⁹ Yet, the reviewer expresses in clear terms the high hopes that these literary compositions, which are of commendable merit, will ignite interest about India and all things related to India in the mind of the common man in Britain. There is mention of the possibility of this Annual and its likes being given as gifts to friends or family residing in Britain. The prospect of these annuals as gifts is again a pointer to the book as a commodity. Further, it is evident that the editors, authors, reviewers — in fact all Englishman related to the production of these books in India — did wish for considerable readership in Britain and did aspire to attain recognition in the British literary world.

Not only Richardson’s annuals, but almost all the English language literary annuals that were produced in the press of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay were widely circulated amongst these three presidencies, apart from sending a considerable number of copies to London. A careful survey of some of these periodicals, reveal that verses and

²⁸ Ibid. p. 10.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 11.

prose pieces — both articles and stories, and sometimes reviews — were often reprinted in more than one periodical, after being published in another. Mary Ellis Gibson notes:

... [N]ewspapers in the presidencies regularly took note of each other and of the latest news from London and Edinburgh and, to a lesser extent, Irish and American Press. Newspapers and Literary annuals were, then, intertwined in readership, advertising and reviewing.³⁰

These printing trends indicate that English literature in mid-nineteenth century Calcutta was read and circulated within closed groups and the period witnessed some of the most ardent efforts to give shape to English language literary culture in India.

The efforts did not all go in vain. A simple fact will attest my claim: some of the most notable poets of that period, namely, Henry Meredith Parker, D. L. Richardson, Emma Roberts, H. L. V. Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Kasiprasad Ghosh, Mary Carshore, and even William Jones and John Horsford before them, published their first poems in newspapers and literary annuals.³¹ A few poets among them, namely, Emma Roberts, Kasiprasad Ghosh and H. L. V. Derozio, were even published in the *London Annuals*.³² The newspapers and literary annuals had a significant role to play in the formation of the English language literary canon in India in the second quarter of the nineteenth century;³³ and poetry, judging by the numbers in print in Indian publishing and the nature of imported books at that time and also judging by the volumes in private and

³⁰ Gibson. *Indian Angles*. pp. 107-108.

³¹ Most of the first few poetic compositions of these authors and many others were published in local newspapers and other periodicals. A detailed description is available in Darnton, Robert. "Literary Surveillance in the British Raj: The Contradictions of Liberal Imperialism." *Book History*. Vol. 2. 2005. pp. 133-176; and Ghosh. "An Uncertain Coming."

³² Comprehensive information on the poems of authors writing in India that were published in London literary periodicals is available in: Shaw. *Printing in Calcutta to 1800*.

³³ Ghosh, Anindita. *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778-1905*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Anindita Ghosh has analysed the readership and circulation of literary annuals in minute detail from the records of lending and borrowing in different public and private libraries of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay at that time, and has also studied the subscribers' lists of the periodicals that were available in those libraries. Her conclusion from these analyses clearly draws a picture of the importance of the literary annuals and newspapers in English language literary culture in nineteenth century India.

public libraries, was the most preferred and, hence, the most important genre in the world of belles lettres.

The case for poetry as the most preferred and the most dominant form of literary writing among the English language literate population of India during this period is also favourably argued and established by Mathew Adams, who has made a statistical analysis of the kind of books owned by Englishmen in India from 1780 to 1850.³⁴ He has painstakingly analysed the data available in the probated wills of those Englishmen who had died in India, leaving behind considerable wealth. He has sifted through more than a thousand such wills that were probated in India, and has drawn his conclusions, one such important observation being the dominance of the verse amongst all other forms of literature.

Further, there is another type of document which provides a detailed listing of the things in possession of wealthy Englishmen in India: that is the auctioneer's advertisement. The possessions of the Englishmen were often auctioned when he had to pay back his debts or when he was leaving India or when he died leaving behind no kin in this country. The auctioneers published detailed listing of their possessions, which often included veritable libraries. Such advertisements were published in newspapers and registers. Messrs. Tulloh and Co., for example, can be found to put up copious advertisements in the *Calcutta Gazette* from 1820 to 1830. I have found, on scrutiny of such detailed listings of private collection of books, that the number of volumes of poetic works — mostly those written and published in Britain and some productions of the English language press in India — by far exceeds the number of any other literary genre or other works on humanities. There was also considerable interest in the life of some of the famous poets, as the lists abound in biographies of such literary personalities as Lord

³⁴ Adams, Mathew. "Furnishing the Colonial Mind: Book Ownership in British India, 1780-1850." Conference Paper. Economic History Society. 2006. < <http://www.ehs.org.uk/events/academicpapers-2006.html> > 23/7/2013.

Byron, Walter Scott, Alexander Pope and Robert Burns. Poets and poetry, in brief, were arguably the markers of the finest taste for literature.

Analysis of the Reading Public for English Language Verse in India

In order to have a fair understanding of the reading public, three social practices of the times under discussion need to be brought to focus: reading to the public, book-clubs and subscription libraries. I shall briefly explain what I mean by these terms and why were they important. Srinivas Aravamundan estimates:

In India maybe 3 to 5 percent of the population speaks English fluently..., an especially significant minority constitution most of the elite and a section of the urban upper middle classes. If passive comprehension of the English vocabulary were included, the figures would increase considerably.³⁵

It is the section of the population with passive comprehension of English that constituted a large section of passive readers of English language verse. Although women in India were barely literate in English language in the nineteenth century — women constituted less than 1 percent of the English literate native population of India even in 1881³⁶— there were book reading sessions, which were regularly organised, especially in urban upper-class houses, for the enrichment and entertainment of the women of the house, their neighbours, their friends and their relatives. It was considered an elite practice. From a detailed discussion on these reading sessions in Priya Joshi's *In Another Country*³⁷, it is evident that poetry, especially by poets from Britain, i.e., the volumes that were imported from London, were mostly read in those small gatherings, albeit those gatherings were often not so small. In any given book reading session in 1830s, or 1840s, in a Kolkata

³⁵ Aravamundan, Srinivas. *Guru English: South Asian Religion in a Cosmopolitan Language*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006. p. 3.

³⁶ Sen, Indrani. *Woman and Empire: Representations in the Writings of British India (1858-1900)*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009. pp. 52-53.

³⁷ Joshi, Priya. *In Another Country: Colonialism, Culture, and the English Novel in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. pp. 40-42.

upper-class household, there could be found some 50-odd women, mostly belonging to similar class and ethnicity.

There are interesting mentions of book-clubs in the list of subscribers printed along with most of the volumes of poetic compositions in the 1820s and the 1830s. Emma Roberts' *Oriental Scenes*,³⁸ James Atkinson's *The City of Palaces*,³⁹ and Mary Seyers Carshore's *Songs of the East*⁴⁰ are just some of the books that mention several book-clubs in the subscribers' lists. As books remained relatively expensive before the 1840s — for that matter, all printed materials were — so purchasers of books often formed book-clubs, where they could share, circulate and read, and sometimes loan each other's purchases. Gibson states that regimental book-clubs, mostly comprising of officers rather than enlisted men, were common among the military establishments in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, and this practice of pooling resources in purchasing books continued well beyond 1850, when subscription publishing was on the decline and prices of books had relatively come down.⁴¹ Therefore, the presence of these book-clubs and their active participation in the book trade indicate the wide readership of the volumes of poetry that were written and printed in India.

Then there were the subscription libraries and some public libraries and quite a few private libraries operating actively in India before 1857, the year after which most of the established public libraries in this country were set up. There were veritable libraries in most of the private clubs, among them were Bengal Club, Calcutta Lyceum, Mechanics Institute and Dalhousie Institute, which were established in the years 1827, 1830, 1839 and 1859 respectively. One of the most significant library in Calcutta was, of course, the Calcutta Public Library, which was set up in 1836, and which held the largest holdings of

³⁸ Roberts, Emma. *Oriental Scenes, Sketches, and Tales*. London: Edward Bull, 1832.

³⁹ Atkinson, James. *The City of Palaces: A Fragment, and Other Poems*. Calcutta: Government Gazette Press, 1824.

⁴⁰ Carshore, Mary Seyers [Mrs. W. S. Carshore.] *Songs of the East*. Calcutta: D'Rozario, 1855.

⁴¹ Gibson. *Indian Angles*. p. 289.

volumes — both in print and in manuscript, and which also boasted of the highest numbers of subscribers.⁴² The manner in which the Calcutta Public Library flourished paved the way for setting up quite a substantial number of public libraries in the outskirts of Calcutta within the following two decades; these include public libraries established in Barishal, Bogra, Krishnagar, Hooghly, Konnagar, Midnapore, Rangpur, Jessore and Uttarpara.⁴³ The holdings of the last one mentioned, Uttarpara Joykrishna Public Library, I have discussed earlier in this chapter. There were also the Bombay General Library and the Madras Literary Society which were active in both purchase of books and their circulation by loan or subscription since the third decade of the nineteenth century. In addition to these public and subscription libraries, there were also private collections of wealthy men having refined taste — like that of Joykrishna Mukherjee in Uttarpara or George Addison in Murshidabad — which offered books on loan to scholars and intent readers alike. Dennis Kincaid notes that books were also loaned by subscription by some of the booksellers in Calcutta, for instance, Thacker Spink and Co., and also the British Library.⁴⁴

The Anxiety over the Quality of Verses Produced

The moot point in surveying the varied manners of book reading and book circulation is to drive home the matter of wide readership, and hence, the importance of English language literary compositions, especially poetry, in the first half of the nineteenth century in India. When such was the print culture and people's reading habits at the outset, there was anxiety in writing as well as reading English language verse in India during that period: anxiety that could be read in between the lines of the verses,

⁴² Mitter, Partha. *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. pp 28-29.

⁴³ Joshi. p. 54.

⁴⁴ Kincaid, Dennis. *British Social Life in India, 1608-1937*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1993. p. 97.

anxiety that was discernible in the manner of book presentation and publication, anxiety that was evident in the reviews and notices of poetic compositions, anxiety that was lying latent in the manuscripts circulated only within closed private groups, anxiety that was borne as a burden in the purchase and loan of poetry volumes, anxiety that was very much woven into the texture of the poems themselves.

These anxieties may be broadly described as being related to class, ethnicity and gender; and most significant however was the anxiety related to the aesthetic quality of the compositions: this tension was always already present in the consciousness of the poets, the reviewers and the readers. A close analysis of the poems reveal that these anxieties often overlapped and manifested themselves in terms of one another. I would begin my discussion with the anxiety related to the quality of the verses. Previously in this Chapter, I have engaged in elaborate discussions on how there were continuous attempts at paralleling and competing with the poetic compositions written and published in Britain. The poets, editors and reviewers here in India were painfully conscious of their role — or rather the lack of it — in the formation of the canon of English poetry, as was understood by the world at large, i.e., mainstream English Literature of the nineteenth century. Here I would extrapolate the earlier discussion and survey a few instances where poets and reviewers scorned at or lamented the poor quality of the English language verse being composed in India.

In *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan* (1835), Emma Roberts draws a comic picture of the book trade in Calcutta, but that picture makes pronounced comments on the pathetic quality of the English language books produced here:

... [C]ertainly, in the streets of Calcutta those, who run may read; for books are thrust into the palanquin-doors, or the windows of a carriage ... by natives, who make a point of presenting the title-pages and the engravings upside down. Some of these books seem to be worthy of the Minerva press in its worst days; and it is rather curious that novels,

which are never heard of in England, half-bound in the common pale blue covers so long exploded, and which do not figure in any of the advertisements ostentatiously put forth on the wrappers of magazines, & c., are hawked about in the highways and byeways of Calcutta.⁴⁵

In no unclear terms, Roberts talks of the abysmal quality of the English language books written and printed in India vis-à-vis those produced in England. But there is something more intriguing in the passage quoted above: one cannot help but note the use of the adverb “ostentatiously” while Roberts refer to the advertisements of literary productions in newspapers and other periodicals. This indicate that there was general consensus at least among the Englishmen in India about the inferior quality of not only the English language literary compositions in this country, but also that of the overbearing advertisements that promised to enrich and entertain the reader with ‘brilliant’ works of art comparable to the best produced in the language. However, I must mention in passing here that Roberts also noted the availability of the “most expensive standard works”⁴⁶ of literature besides these volumes about which Roberts did not have a high opinion.

There were further complaints or laments — whichever way one chooses to look at it — about the state of printing, publishing and circulating any volume of poetry in Calcutta, or, for that matter, in India. An anonymous review of the poem titled “India, a Poem in three Cantos, by a Young Civilian of Bengal” was published in the issue of *Calcutta Literary Gazette* dated August 23, 1834. The reviewer writes:

...any volume of poems *printed* in Calcutta (it could not be *published* in the true sense of the word) is quite ‘as good as manuscript’. The only way to circulate poetry here, is to print it in the periodicals.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Roberts, Emma. *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan, with Sketches of Anglo-Indian Society*. In Three Volumes. Vol. 3. London: W. H. Allen, 1835, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 13.

⁴⁷ Anon. “Review of “India, a Poem in Three Cantos, by a Young Civilian of Bengal”.” *Calcutta Literary Gazette*. August 23, 1834. p. 127.

The critics and reviewers in nineteenth century India were, however, divided in their opinion about the circulation and readership of English language verse in this country. Just as Emma Roberts and the anonymous reviewer I mentioned above were lamenting the wretched state of book trade, at about the same time, there were others who celebrated the continuous supply of books and other printed matters from both Indian and British press, the well-stocked book-clubs and book-sellers, and the prevalence of extensive reading habits among literate people in India. In the essay titled “English Literature in India”, which was printed in the *Calcutta Review* in 1846, John Kaye wrote:

Now the stream of intelligence pours in with the utmost regularity. We were often before disheartened by the failure of our endeavours to keep pace with the current of European Literature... We may proceed, if we will, *pari passu*. Every month brings to our shores a fresh supply of European literature scarcely six weeks old. The counters of our active and enterprising booksellers are covered with all the best productions of the English, Scottish, and Irish press. These soon find their way into circulation. People have time to read and they do read...

...There is scarcely a remote station in India, which has not its well-supplied Book-club. Some of these are furnished, direct from London: others receive their supplies from the Booksellers at the Presidencies. There is scarcely a regiment or detachment, whether in cantonments or on the march, which has not a good store of books available to the officers attached to it, in addition to the newspapers and periodicals with which they are regularly supplied.⁴⁸

The rather long extract that I quoted above indicates that Kaye was indeed pleased to note the flourishing book trade and the keen interest taken by the literate population in India in reading books. He was particularly happy about being able to read the literary productions of the British press that were imported to India. Although it appears at the outset that Kaye was only concerned about the availability of printed materials from the British press, a close reading of his entire essay would suggest otherwise. From his survey of English language literature in India during the first half of the nineteenth century, it is

⁴⁸ Kaye, John. “English Literature in India.” *The Calcutta Review*. Vol. V. Jan-Jun, 1846. pp. 204-205.

evident that Kaye was enthusiastic about the quality of the English language literature being written, printed and read in India at that time. Even the extract quoted above is suggestive of that concern in Kaye: the careful reader never fails to see through the hope and affirmation in the words “We may proceed, if we will, *pari passu*”. However, the use of the subjunctive phrase —“if we will” — speaks volumes of the anxiety that Kaye, or for that matter, the Englishman in India experienced in their attempt to parallel the standards of the literary works produced in Britain.

Two years later, in 1848, we have Dr. John Grant writing in no uncertain terms about the mediocrity of English language verses being written in India — both by the Englishmen and the Indians alike — and the pathetic taste and equally pathetic sense of appreciation of the Indian reading public. I must mention here that this Dr. John Grant was not the same John Grant, who was the chief editor of the *Indian Gazette*, where a number of Derozio’s poems and their favourable reviews were published; he was also a close friend and patron of Richardson and encouraged English language poetry in India, especially by the young men of Hindu College; Grant supported the cause of the Young Bengal movement which was led by radical young men inspired by the teachings of Derozio. It is necessary to understand that I am speaking of a different person here, Dr. John Grant, who was the son of John Peter Grant, and was Secretary to Macaulay’s Indian Law Commission and then was appointed as Secretary to the Government of Bengal in 1848. Grant expressed his contempt for poetry in general and his strong denunciation of the poetic practices of “young Bengal pretensions” in his review of Richardson’s *Literary Leaves*,⁴⁹ *Literary Chit-Chat*,⁵⁰ and *Notices of British Poets*.⁵¹ This

⁴⁹ Richardson, David Lester. *Literary Leaves; or, Prose and Verse*. Calcutta: Samuel Smith and Co., 1836.

⁵⁰ Richardson, David Lester. *Literary Chit-Chat: Miscellaneous Poems with an Appendix of Prose Papers*. London: J. Madden; Calcutta: P. S. D’Rozario, 1848.

⁵¹ Richardson, David Lester, ed. *Selections from the British Poets: From the time of Chaucer to the Present Day, with Biographical and Critical Notices*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1840.

review was published in the 1848 issue (Vol. X) of *The Calcutta Review* under the title “Literary Labours of D. L. Richardson”. Grant wrote:

There wants a *vis a tergo*; and until there is a *vis a tergo* of native life, energy and regeneration, we shall have no literature in India, worthy of the name. Notwithstanding young-Bengal pretensions — there is really no demand for literature in its various branches — and this is one grand difficulty in the path of the literary man in India. Nevertheless, the pursuit has been beneficial for many. It is a noble refuge, from ennui, and temptation to idleness and vice.⁵²

Grant understandably harboured staunch anathema towards literature in general and poetry in particular. His vituperative review was not an exceptional case: there were other such men who held similar views, especially on the merit of the English language verse produced in India. So, here we have one man putting forth the quintessential question: What is the purpose of literature? Is there any need at all for any literary pursuit in mid-nineteenth century India? He himself answers this question, albeit with his Benthamite utilitarian ideas. He finds literature only slightly serves as a harmless form of engagement, a mental distraction that keeps its pursuers away from depression, boredom and corruptions. Grant, however, distinguishes between the effect of literature on British men and that on Indian men. A careful reading of the long review — it runs from page 22 to page 143 in the octavo — reveal the racist bent of Grant’s pen. I would quote here an excerpt which speaks deplorably of the young aspiring poets of Calcutta:

‘Fire in each eye, and paper in each hand,’ our Calcutta juvenile aspirants, do indeed — ‘rave, recite, and madden round the land.’ Of varied race and complexion, they deem themselves perfect masters of English composition. Some of them *never* see the towering Alps of learning at all — and several do but grope their way through jungly dingles of mediocrity. Embarked on a little catamaran of school knowledge, like boys disporting in a punt, they deem that they have made the voyage round the world of literature,

⁵² Grant, John. “Literary Labours of D. L. Richardson”. *The Calcutta Review*. Vol. X. July-Dec, 1848. pp. 22-143. p. 28.

when they have only made the circuit of a tank. They are satisfied that immense stores of acquired knowledge have been stowed away in the hold of their intellectual Argosy, when they have exhausted sundry shelves of their own, or their neighbour, dignified with the title of 'library'. Perched on this heap, they conceive themselves on the Mount-Blanc of erudition — look down condescendingly from the Lilliputian Parnassus, to which self-conceit has raised them; and afterwards descend into obscure graves, satisfied that there is nothing more for them to learn, on this side of the Styx.⁵³

This particularly long excerpt evidently lays out the derision and disparagement towards the Indians in the attitude of the Englishman, and it would not be preposterous to suggest that the seeds of 'othering' were being sown in the ideas of the white man through such texts of vilification. Grant not only expresses scorn at the erudition of the young men of Calcutta, he also ridicules their seats of learning and manners of acquiring knowledge. Commentary on the Indians and their manners and customs in such derogatory terms was not uncommon in the nineteenth century; but one phrase that is disconcerting to the scholar in the above excerpt is "[o]f varied race and complexion". I would attempt to examine the indication of this phrase further.

The Anxiety of Inclusion/Exclusion

In Grant's essay, there are forty-six instances when he has referred to young Bengal, among which only seventeen times he has spelt 'young' with 'y' in the upper hand. The term 'Young Bengal'— by which we now understand a particular group of free, radical thinkers of Calcutta emerging especially from the Hindu College since about the third decade of the nineteenth century, enthusiastic young men who were keen followers of Derozio, were inspired by his teachings and revolted against the existing social and religious structure of the Hindu society — was yet to gain currency in relation to its well-defined group or Movement. In 1848, when Grant was writing this Review, the

⁵³ Ibid. p. 57.

term was loosely used in parallel to Mazzini's "Young Italy", and often social and literary commentators used it to refer to "the radical westernised young men who had been a source of consternation in Bengal since the time of Derozio".⁵⁴ It may, therefore, be surmised that Grant's "young Bengal" did not merely indicate the group of Derozio's followers, but was used as an attribute to all young men of Calcutta who had received English language education. There are other instances in letters and articles printed in newspapers and journals during that period, where the term "Young Bengal" was used to refer to such young men of India, especially Calcutta, who had received Western education in the then recently established Colleges, for instance, Hindu College, Bishop's College and Fort William College, were well-versed in English language as well as in one or more other European languages, considered themselves ahead of their times, spoke with scorn and contempt towards those who had no knowledge of the English language, belittled Indians and their social habits and customs, eulogised the British and everything British, and, most importantly, believing that living a hedonistic life is the marker of true progress, led their life that way. In 1848, the same year in which Dr. Grant was writing his Review, an anonymous letter was published in the *Bengal Hurkaru*, where the writer referred to the English educated youths of Calcutta:

[Y]oung men of wit, intelligence, quick perception and great influence in the community to which [they] belong ... [they] still seem indifferent to the public weal, totally heedless of what misery befalls [their] priest-ridden country.⁵⁵

Alex Tickell, in his monograph, *Terrorism, Insurgency and Indian-English Literature, 1830-1947*, observes:

Young Bengal was a collective term for Derozio's student-followers, although in subsequent decades it

⁵⁴ Gibson. *Indian Angles*. p. 119.

⁵⁵ Qtd. in Derozio, Henry Lois Vivian. *Derozio, Poet of India: The Definitive Edition*. Ed. Rosinka Chaudhuri. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008. p. lx..

became the (often pejorative and loosely defined) label for any youthful group that challenged traditional mores.⁵⁶

Another tale-tell instance of the use of the term “Young Bengal” is found in Shoshee Chunder Dutt’s essay, “Young Bengal, or the Hopes of India” published in 1854 in *Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects*. Dutt explains that in order to understand what the term actually referred to, it is important to make a distinction between the sub-sections of the group of young men:

Young Bengal, itself a division, is sub-divided within itself; and those sub-divisions stand almost as apart from each other, as the aggregate whole does from the old orthodox school. Young Bengal, liberal and magnanimous, is quite a distinct body from Young Bengal, insolent and profligate; Young Bengal hard-reading, has no affinity with Young Bengal hard-drinking. And this will require carefully to be discriminated.⁵⁷

So, it may be inferred that during the middle of the nineteenth century, the term “young Bengal” was frequently used— more so with admonition— to refer to those English-educated young Bengali men who “waddled to liberalism through tumbles of beer”.⁵⁸ From this survey, a fair idea may be formed of Dr. Grant’s “Calcutta juvenile aspirants”. But why would they be “[o]f varied race and complexion”? This indicates that Grant included men who were not of Indian origin in his group of “Calcutta juvenile aspirants”. The first name that occurs to the scholar is, of course, H. L. V. Derozio. Born in Calcutta of an English mother and a father who had Indian as well as Portuguese ancestors, Derozio was a radical thinker and one of the first Indian educators to disseminate Western learning and science among the young men of Bengal. As a social reformer and in his position as the Assistant Headmaster of Hindu College, Derozio had many friends and patrons. Among them, Emma Roberts, Henry Page, T. W. Smyth had published poems in

⁵⁶ Tickell, Alex. *Terrorism, Insurgency and Indian-English Literature, 1830-1947*. London: Routledge, 2013. p. 57.

⁵⁷ Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. “Young Bengal; or, the Hopes of India.” *Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects*. Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1854. pp. 1-48. p. 3.

⁵⁸ Sarkar, Sumit. *A Critique of Colonial India*. Calcutta: Papyrus, 2000. p. 107.

1848, in local newspapers, periodicals and, most significantly, in Richardson's anthologies, which Grant was reviewing. Both Page and Smyth— poets whose verses I would read in detail later in this Chapter— were writing such poems which clearly disapproved the colonial enterprise and severely critiqued British imperialism. The young Indian men, who were publishing significantly in English during the 1840s, were Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Kasiprasad Ghosh and Krishnamohan Banerjee— all of them either friend or former student of Derozio. Madhusudan had his poems published in various periodicals; Kasiprasad not only published poems, but was also the editor of the *Hindu Intelligencer* during this period; and Krishnamohan was the most famous high-caste Christian convert at that time, and also published his poems in small local vessels, like the newspapers. So, when Grant talked about “our Calcutta juvenile aspirants”— one cannot but notice the use of the possessive personal pronoun— he might have referred not only to Indian men practising literature in English language during that period, but also must have indicated such Europeans, as Henry Page and T. W. Smyth, and such Eurasians as Derozio (although Derozio died almost more than a decade ago in 1831), all of whom engaged in fierce critique of the empire. Hence the use of the phrase “[o]f varied race and complexion”.

The Anxiety of Critiquing the Empire

I would read in detail a few poems by Smyth and Page in order to seek an explanation to the anxiety Dr. Grant expressed in relation to the poems in which they “grope[d] their way through jungly dingles of mediocrity”. The only volume of Smyth's poem I found was at the Carey Library in Serampore College. It was bound at the back of Henry Page's *The Land of Poesy* and is titled *Ella, or A Tale of the Waldensian Martyrs; and Other Poems*. The title page says it was published in 1843 from Calcutta by W. Thacker and printed by Calcutta Schoolbook Society Press. The poem that is of particular

interest in this volume is a scathing critique of not only the empire, but even of Queen Victoria herself; it is titled “On the Late Attempted Assassination of the Queen”. Such an apocalyptic view— if I may use the word— of the empire from an Englishman, who had come to India to serve as an assistant to the Church Missionary Society in the middle of the nineteenth century, is intriguing to the reader reading the poem in the twenty-first century. It is evident that Smyth’s evangelical zeal was fraught with radical and anti-establishment ideas, and his connection to the Calcutta Baptist Mission is a clear indication of the dissent against the Catholic Church, and this dissent even finds its way into his verse. Smyth holds responsible the Queen, or rather the Crown, for the mindless bloodshed, cruelty, torture and numerous other barbaric atrocities committed towards the Indians by the British Empire. Smyth implores the Queen to consider as a warning the Afghan disaster and the failed attempts on her life. It may be noted here that Queen Victoria escaped two assassination attempts on herself in 1840 and in 1842 respectively. Smyth writes:

See India groaning under countless ills,
 Cathay well-drugg’d with opium and with blood,
 The heathen martyr’d, while the Christian kills,
 With war and havoc roaring in a flood;
 Oh! Sin out-sinning persecution’s sin!
 The brand of double infamy burnt in!⁵⁹

Of the “countless ills” of the British, Smyth only mentions the opium trade and the opium wars related to it, which arguably was one of the most eloquent “manifestations of a sinister and immoral purpose to exploit and encourage a human weakness, for purposes of revenue ... [and] a subtle attempt of British imperialism ... to corrupt British dominion in the East by poisoning the people of the Orient with this most deleterious of drugs”⁶⁰. Critics and historians have argued that “[p]olitical motives and pecuniary greed ... [were]

⁵⁹ Smyth, T. W. “On the Late Attempted Assassination of the Queen.” *Ella, or A Tale of the Waldensian Martyrs; and Other Poems*. Calcutta: W. Thacker, 1843. p. 153.

⁶⁰ Bajpai, Girija Shankar. “India and the Opium Trade.” *The Atlantic Monthly*. June, 1922. pp. 740-743. <libweb. Hawaii.edu>asia>opium>text> p. 740. 25/06/2015.

the true mainsprings of this monopolistic policy”.⁶¹ Smyth takes a further bold step in voicing the possibility that it was probably God’s design to spare the Queen, so that she might get the time and opportunity to redress the wrongs perpetrated by the British Crown. There is discerned in Smyth a slight hint of patriotic fervour when he expresses his concern about the shameful history of the British Empire. He is worried about what kind of history of the land would the English children come to know. The poem reads:

Look on Cabool! — and in Victorious reign?—
 Shall this be told posterity, ev’n this?
 Oh sov’ reign sacred! lov’d and honour’d Queen!
 Be not thy name a mark for history’s hiss!⁶²

However, the final strong statement made by Smyth against the English Crown is made when he draws a picture of Queen Victoria on the day of her last judgement. The poem happily reduces the Queen to “a thing of dust,— a worm”⁶³ when she is summoned before the Lord after her death. There is severe reproof of the entire imperial enterprise in the expression where Smyth says that Queen Victoria is “nothing now” and would be “less than nothingness” after her death.⁶⁴ It is no wonder that Grant chose to dismiss Smyth and other such poets who were writing against the empire, or, were, in the least, expressing doubts about the ethics and moralities of the British imperial machinery. Grant clearly could see that even engaging in any critique of these poems, even if that is of the harshest kind possible, would only cause unwelcome repercussions by drawing the attention of the public towards these poems. He, therefore, drowned these poems and these poets in the “jungly dingles of mediocrity” chiefly on the pretext of aesthetic criterion of judgement, which again is always subjective — thus leaving room for doubt for the present reader. Surprisingly, such expressions of disparagement and dismissal of British imperialism was not uncommon in the poems included in the corpus of Company Poetry.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Smyth. “On the Late Attempted Assassination.” p. 153.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

The curious case of Henry Page, who hailed the country of India with the possessive personal pronoun — “India, my country!”⁶⁵ — would require a detailed study of his ancestry, lineage and upbringing. For the biographical information on Page, I have relied on Andrew Leslie’s *Memoirs and Remains of the Late Captain H. E. Page of the Service of the Hon. East Indian Company; and Fort-Adjutant at Monghyr*⁶⁶, which is a memoir of Page’s father, Henry Edwin Page. It may be mentioned here that Henry Page and his sister, Charlotte, contributed elegiac poems to their father’s biographic volume, which talks in detail about the life of Senior Page, his association with the Church, the way he brought up his children, and, most significantly, elaborates on his “dissipated”⁶⁷ life. Henry Edwin Page was born in the west of England in 1784-5. His was a pious Anglican family and he came of socially respectable parents. However, in his youth, in 1803, he was transported to India, where he joined the services of the East India Company as a cadet of infantry. This was when he gave up his academic pursuits and gave in to the follies and dissipations of people who surrounded him. He married Jane Morgan in 1812 in Calcutta. Jane was probably born of mixed ethnicities — of a British father and an Indian mother. Page Senior and Jane together gave birth to five children, of whom Henry Page — the poet of our discussion — was the eldest. Later on in his life, Page Senior was “touched by the Divine Spirit”,⁶⁸ when he was stationed at Dinapore in 1814. Certain turn of events in his life reminded him of his early childhood days spent in piety, and he started to live a religious life devoid of the frivolities of the past ten years of his life. He turned to religiosity in a way that shamed him of most of his earlier deeds of pleasure. He insisted that his wife Jane also practise the kind of piety he instilled in his own life, and ensured that his children were also brought up in this religious atmosphere

⁶⁵ Page, Henry. *The Land of Poesy*. Book I. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1842. p. 7.

⁶⁶ Leslie, Andrew. *Memoirs and Remains of the Late Captain H. E. Page of the Service of the Hon. East India Company; and Fort-Adjutant at Monghyr*. 2nd ed. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1840.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 12.

of a pious and devoutly Christian family. In 1816, specifically on the 20th of February, Page Senior and his wife Jane were baptised in the Baptist Mission Church. While narrating this incident of change in the nature of beliefs and ideas in Senior Page, his biographer Leslie writes:

Of the particular process of mind by which Capt. Page was led to change his opinions on Baptism and Church government, the writer is entirely ignorant.⁶⁹

However, I am particularly interested in his son, Henry Page, who was just about two years old then. Page understandably was brought up with immense religiosity and ideas that led to a draconian exegesis of British imperialism, ideas that were intrinsic to the Baptist Mission Church of Bengal in the early nineteenth century. On the other hand, there is also strong evidence in Leslie's account, indicating that the Page children spoke mostly in Bangla and in Hindustani in their daily life, although they knew English well. This is probably because Jane, their mother, was born and brought up in India and was more familiar with using the Indian languages, especially at home. We find Page Senior, in a letter he wrote to Jane on March 13th, 1817, expresses his wish that Charlotte, their daughter, learn to read the Bible and say her prayers in English.⁷⁰ Therefore, it is not surprising that Henry Page, born in India and brought up in this milieu of mixed ethnicities and linguistic practices bordering on native Indian, would later in his life identify himself as Indian. The family's close association with the Baptist Church of Calcutta explains the anti-establishment views that Page so strongly expressed in his poems. He denounced the British imperial enterprise and tried by all means to render such a position of pride to poetry that it would, with a noble vision, inspire the social and political revival of the people of India. This idea of Page was closely aligned to that of Derozio, and Page acknowledges his indebtedness to the radical social reformer's ideas

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 30.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 39.

and teachings. In her brief biographical notice on Page which precedes his poems in the anthology, Gibson writes:

Certainly Page viewed Derozio as a model for poetry and as a champion of India; Page is likely to have identified with his famous contemporary on ethnic as well as intellectual grounds.⁷¹

Page's "Land of Poesy" is a rather long poem that runs into three books. The poem conceives of India as the land of poesy and there are detailed narratives of the country's glorious past. Page laments the present state of India where the British have overpowered the Indians and are inflicting all sorts of economic oppression, social torture and political atrocities on the Indian people at large. The poem, however ends with a renewed hope that poetry and the patriotic fervour latent in it would awaken the masses from their deep slumber, so that they rise to protest against the imperial violence and injustice, thus restoring the grandeur and opulence that the country once boasted of. This perception of the role of poetry in national awakening is very much in line with Derozio's ideas. Page makes a strong statement in declaring India as his own country:

India, my Country! Once how bright,
 How spotless was thy fame!—
 Not brighter heav'n's ethereal light!—
 And oh! How matchless was thy might!
 Ere yet thy victors came,
 From Albion, o'er the tossing wave,
 In England's pow'r array'd,
 And to the summer breezes gave
 Their banners, while each warrior brave
 Drew forth his battle blade,
 And, hapless, laid thee grov'ling low
 Upon a field of endless woe.⁷²

Page's uncompromising attitude and his fierce disapproval of British imperialism could not have found a better expression than the one couched in this lament: "...hapless [,] laid

⁷¹ Gibson. *Anglophone Poetry*. p. 189.

⁷² Page. *The Land of Poesy*. p. 7.

thee grov'ling low / Upon a field of endless woe". The sincerity and the earnestness of the poet's lament is evident in the very next stanza:

Oh! I would drop a burning tear
 Upon the listless breast
 To rouse the pride that slumbers there,
 And passions wake which should not share
 So long inglorious rest; —
 I'd tell thee what thou once hadst been —
 A nation great and free! —
 ...
 I'd speak of all that was once dear
 To thee, in happier hour,
 And all thou didst but late revere —
 Glory's enchanting, bright career,
 And honour, virtue, power! —⁷³

Page did go on to sing what the nation, India, had been in the past, its greatness and glories, albeit in a poetic fashion which is typical of most Englishmen writing poetry in India during the first half of the nineteenth century. Further, Page takes recourse to epithets and allusions from Greek and Roman mythology, and such similes and metaphors abound in the rest of Book I and the whole of Book II. This kind of poetic practice by Page, who was born and educated in India, is an indication of the English language education of the times — those who were literate had facilities in English, Greek, Latin and even a few other European and Indian languages, as the school and university curricula included classical texts from all these language literatures. I shall quote one stanza from Book II of "Land of Poesy" to illustrate the use of markers from classical learning:

This is Poeta's land — Behold!
 The mighty Tiber here
 Still flows along her banks of gold
 In crystal stream, as sung of old,
 And Rome, proud empire, there,
 Yet unsubdued, now lifts her head
 With dazzling honours crown'd;
 There two Olympus, mountain dread,

⁷³ Ibid.

And Tempe's sweet and flow'ry mead
 Are blossoming around —
 The calm retreat where gods had stray'd
 To drink the breath of cooling shade.⁷⁴

The listing of the topography with proper nouns, thus alluding to the grandeur of the great Roman and Greek empires of yore, makes it evident that Page — and other English educated men of that period — were tutored to hold these ancient Western civilisations in high esteem. Although there is apparently no devious design in such tutoring, but I am tempted to ask why were the ancient south-eastern and African civilisations, like Mesopotamia, China, Babylonia, Egypt, kept outside the periphery of school and university curricula. The answer, of course, is seeded in the white man's mammoth task of establishing his supremacy over any other race in the world whatsoever.

The Anxiety over the Variation in Cultural Signification of a Single Poetic Trope

Another significant trope that Henry Page uses in this poem is the poet's harp that symbolised bardic nationalism. A little before the long poem ends, Page invokes Derozio by name and wishes that his spirit may again revive and break the long silence of "India's harp":

Tis he — Derozio, bent in pray'r
 That India's harp too long
 Has silent hung — Oh! Could we bare
 That heart, and only witness there
 Emotions which no tongue,
 Nor mortal language, can reveal, —
 Reviv'd, full well I know,
 All India would awaking feel
 A pride it could not then conceal,
 All India's bosom glow
 With fire to strike the harp again
 He oft had woke to happy strain.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 58.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 89.

The trope of the bardic harp was first used by Derozio on more than one occasion in his poems, “The Harp of India”, “To India — My Native Land”, “Here’s a Health to Thee, Lassie!”, to mention a few. He also quoted directly from Thomas Moore’s *Irish Melodies*. The silent harp hung upon the willow was by then a hackneyed symbol which had been used numerous times as a metonymy for the torment and torture meted out to the Welsh poets after the English conquered Wales.⁷⁶ The trope of the silent harp had come to represent cultural nationalism by Scottish and Irish poets. However, I want to point out here in passing how cultural and literary symbols evolve in ways strange to man: the English poets, including the poets born in England, who were writing poetry in English in nineteenth century India, used, without restraint or hesitation, the trope of the bardic harp as a marker of nostalgia. In the process, arguably, the internal strife between England, Scotland and Ireland was overwritten by a strong sense of belonging to the British nation, which may again be read as a trope of exile that found various manifestations in the corpus of Company Poetry. Returning to my point of discussion on the use of the trope of the bardic harp in Derozio’s poems and thereafter by the other poets following him, the silent harp symbolised “the cultural power of an imaginary future India”⁷⁷ for Derozio. The bardic harp was a very common trope in the poems of Letitia Landon, who was one of the most popular poets of that period, she published regularly in the gazettes and annuals being published in London. I must mention here that she never came to India. However, in poems such as “The Violet”, “Glencoe”, “Stanzas” published under the section “Original Poetry” in *The Literary Gazette* in 1824, in “Home”, a ballad published in *Friendship’s Offering* in 1825, and in many others, the reader is always confronted with the harp hung upon the willows — untuned or otherwise:

Is this the harp you used to wake,

⁷⁶ Gibson. *Anglophone Poetry*. p. 17.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

The harp of other days?
 ...
 No! the same harp to the same hand
 Yields up its melody.⁷⁸

Again, in “Home”, Landon writes:

Where, veil'd by leaves, the wild wind harp
 Breathes forth its lonely sound.⁷⁹

As I have already mentioned earlier, these literary periodicals and other books of verse published in London regularly made their way to India, and were widely circulated and read. So it is not hard to imagine Derozio and other poets of that period being influenced by Thomas Moore,⁸⁰ Letitia Landon, James Beattie⁸¹ and such other poets. Apart from Derozio, other poets — both those born in Britain and those born in India — adopted the symbol of the harp. Henry Page, whom I have quoted previously, used the harp in his lament for Derozio’s death, again, drawing a picture of free and glorious India as the “land of poesy”. He wrote an elegy separately on Derozio’s death, where he invokes the leader of Young Bengal as “Pride of the East!” and “Minstrel of the East!”⁸² Mary Carshore had titled her elegy for Letitia Landon as “The Ivied Harp” and made oblique references to the bardic harp in her other poems. Kasiprasad Ghosh, interestingly, adds another fascinating dimension to the trope of the bardic harp. In his poems, the harp is reconstructed as an explicitly Indian musical instrument, the *veena*, which is woven into the narrative structure of the poems as a synecdoche for the poet who is ill-fated and whose voice has been silenced, much like the untuned harp. The anxiety of silence —

⁷⁸ Landon, Letitia Elizabeth. “Stanzas”. *The Minerva, or Literary, Entertaining, and Scientific Journal: Containing a Variety of Original and Select Articles, arranged under the Following Heads: Popular Tales, The Gleaner, The Traveller, The Drama, Biography, Arts and Sciences, Literature, Poetry, etc.* Vol. I.— New Series. Ed. George Houston and James G. Brooks. New York: E. Bliss and E. White, 1824. p. 336.

⁷⁹ Landon, Letitia Elizabeth. “Home.” *Friendship’s Offering, or the Annual Remembrancer: a Christmas Present, or New Year’s Gift, for 1825.* London: Lupton Relfe, 1825. pp. 200-202. p. 200.

⁸⁰ Moore, Thomas. *Irish Melodies.* London: J. Power, 1822.

⁸¹ Beattie, James. *The Minstrel; or, The Progress of Genius.* (Two Volumes, 1771 and 1774) published later in a bound volume titled *The Minstrel in two books with some Other Poems.* Philadelphia: Hopkins and Earle, 1809.

⁸² Page. *The Land of Poesy.* pp. 96-97.

being unheard — is, therefore presented in the garb of the bardic harp in the corpus of Company Poetry. This anxiety of the poet is increased manifold when the same harp represents bardic nationalism in some other contemporary poems and as a form of nostalgia in still others.

The Anxiety of Influences and Affiliations

Assuming that a fair idea of the poets of “varied race and complexion” as hinted by Dr. Grant has now been formed, I would now consider the text of the review as a whole. Dr. Grant was reviewing the three volumes of verse written and edited by D. L. Richardson, and he used irksome remarks and harsh comments. It may be useful here to have a sneak peek into the exchanges amongst the important men in Calcutta at that time — educators, administrators and churchmen. There was some controversy — the exact nature of which is not clearly recorded anywhere — related to Richardson’s role as the Principal of Hindu College. He had reportedly been the cause of ire of John Drinkwater Bethune, who was the then President of the Council of Education. Richardson also got embroiled in serious ideological dispute with Sir Alexander Duff, who was the minister of the Scottish Free Church during that period. These controversies forced Richardson to put in his resignation from the post of the Principal of Hindu College in 1849. Hindu College during this period was, of course, the most important centre of education in India and its Principal undoubtedly had much influence over society in general, and intellectuals in particular. At this time, Dr. Grant was serving as the Secretary to the Council of Bengal and he accepted Richardson’s resignation. It is imperative that Dr. Grant would seek every opportunity he could in order to secure his own position and further his pecuniary interests. Incidentally, Alexander Duff took up his position as the editor of the *Calcutta Review* after John Kaye. It is not difficult to read the unwritten text of Duff publishing Grant’s caustic review of Richardson’s volumes in his literary periodical. Such were the

equations of influences and affiliations that men of letters in Calcutta engaged in during the first half of the nineteenth century!

I would study some of the poems by Richardson in order to understand his engagement with the aesthetics of literature in general and poetry in particular. The first striking note in this regard are the three titles that Richardson had chosen for his anthologies — *Literary Leaves* (1836), *Literary Chit-Chit* (1848) and *Literary Recreations*⁸³ (1852). These titles, unlike those of the other verse anthologies of this period, suggest that Richardson was intent on charting the poetic landscape of aesthetics and emotions rather than engage with contemporary political debates and incidents in his poems. He was instrumental in making the canon of English poetry take up a substantial part of the syllabus for the students of the Hindu College. Shakespeare, Milton, Gray, Young, Campbell, Thompson, Cowper, Crabbe, Goldsmith, Southey, Dryden, Pope, Keats, Shelley, Wordsworth and Byron were rigorously taught in the classrooms⁸⁴ and, most importantly, regularly discussed in libraries, book-shops, book-clubs and literary societies. In the Introduction to the first volume of verses he published, *Literary Leaves*, Richardson wrote at length on how poetry purifies the heart and ennobles the soul.⁸⁵ He further engages in a discourse on adopting sensible attitudes towards pedagogy: he severely condemned the conventional pedagogic approach of the times, which laid emphasis on practical subjects, like science and mathematics, thereby neglecting literature. Richardson advocated a pedagogy that would inculcate the aesthetics and usefulness of studying poetry in the students.⁸⁶ He wanted this pedagogic practice to “enforce[s] attention and accustom[s] the youthful reader to think for himself..., [so that

⁸³ Richardson, David Lester. *Literary Recreations; or, Essays, criticisms and Poems: Chiefly written in India*. London: Thacker, [Printed in Calcutta], 1852.

⁸⁴ Anon. “Reports of the Examination Questions and Answers of the Students of the Hindu College and the Free Church Institution.” *Calcutta Review* Vol. 5. 1846. pp. xxiii-l.

⁸⁵ Richardson. *Literary Leaves*. pp. 9-11.

⁸⁶ Richardson. *Selections from the British Poets*. pp. 13-16.

the] sense of intellectual beauty”⁸⁷ is instilled in the student not by force or rigour, but by congenial reading and passionate tuition. He was, however, careful to declare that:

Indian students read our English poets, as English Collegians read the poets of Greece or Rome, not only to familiarise their minds with beautiful images and pure and noble thoughts, but to acquire a thorough knowledge of the language in which the poetry is embodied.⁸⁸

This kind of comparison between English and Indian collegians on equal terms reveal the idealist bent of mind in Richardson, who was a free and radical thinker. Although he might not have engaged in severe denunciation of British imperialism, like Smyth or Page did, Richardson did distance himself from commenting on political situations and imperial motives. Understandably, not all his discourses or commentaries or teachings glorified the Empire.

This analysis may apply to the larger part of the body of Richardson’s works; but, there were occasional poems which show that even the idealist educator could not wholly escape the political tensions of the times. He writes from the perspective of an ordinary soldier in “Stanzas on a Late Attempt to Shoot the Queen”, a poem that is dated “Calcutta, July 18, 1842”, and was published in *Literary Chit-Chat*:

The Queen’s luckless soldier for twelve-pence a day,
As a butt for a bullet must stand, —
But he’s not of the same flesh and blood you will say
As the lady that rules o’er the land.

But the fair one herself, though she sits on a throne,
Is exposed to an enemy’s lead;
Each pot-boy that sports an old gun of his own
Can take a pot-shot at her head.

Yet where’s the great difference ’twixt Soldier and Queen?
The difference is all in the pay;
He is less than two guineas a month it is seen,
And her’s is a thousand a day!⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 19.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p.16.

⁸⁹ Richardson. *Literary Chit-Chat*. p. 416.

Such strain of satire directed towards the Queen is unusual in Richardson's poems, just as is his engagement with contemporary politics. The sharp edge of satire, however, is blunted, almost expectantly from a careful man like Richardson, towards the end of the poem, when he affirms that the Queen deserves what she gets, as she "displays / A courage that charms the beholder".⁹⁰ It is evident to the modern reader how the free thoughts of the poet imagined and squirmed under the unseen fetters of the British Crown.

Poets writing English language verse in nineteenth century India operated in more complex networks of influences and dissociations than is apparent. H. L. V. Derozio, in his volume of verse published in 1828, dedicated one of his sonnets to Henry Meredith Parker, "a man of rare talents and brilliant attainments",⁹¹ who worked in the Bengal Civil Service and is remembered today for his oratory and acting skills. Among the poems Parker had published— and he published vigorously during the first half of the nineteenth century in newspapers, journals as well as in monographs and anthologies — was a translation of the legendary episode of the churning of the ocean from *Mahabharata*. It was titled "The Draught of Immortality" and was first published in the *Oriental Herald and Journal of General Literature* in its May, 1827 issue. Though Horace Hayman Wilson's rendition of this episode from *Mahabharata* is arguably more erudite in eloquence and more aesthetically pleasing in its manner of presentation than Parker's, Derozio was evidently impressed with Parker's work. He wrote:

The following tribute of admiration is respectfully inscribed.

Delicious minstrelsy alone can bring
Down to this earth the rainbow hues of heaven;
And Oh! To fly upon an angel's wing,
To highly favoured bards alone is given —
To weave a deathless wreath of "leaves and flowers"
None but the gifted poet's hand may dare;

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Stocqueler. J. H. *Memoirs of a Journalist*. Bombay and London: Times of India, 1873. p. 90.

To gild with sunshine this bleak world of our's,
 And chase its darkness, is the minstrel's care.
 Bard of our sunny land, and golden sky!
 My heart has gladdened o'er thy magic lay;
 'Tis like the hymn of seraphim on high,
 That once awakened never dies away—
 My soul hath drank it — and it is to me,
 Sweet bard! “a draught of immortality!”⁹²

Derozio, who was the celebrated leader of the Young Bengal movement, and Principal of the Hindu College, held no bar in his highest praise for Parker as a poet. He even went as far as calling Parker the “[b]ard of our sunny land”, which, of course, was India, the nation whose revival and glory Derozio envisaged “in the mirror of futurity”.⁹³ He imparted lessons of liberalism and radical thinking to his students, whom, he believed, were the true messiahs of the country. Not only was Derozio greatly admired by his students, he was respected and loved in a wide circle of friends and followers. It is often presumed that the coterie of learned men, being a very small fraction of the entire population, engaged with each other through societies and other institutionalised forms of fraternity.⁹⁴ This conjecture does not appear to hold true always: at least not in the case of Derozio and Parker. For, Parker, writing only three years later, pilloried the Hindu College, and the members of Young Bengal, thereby mocking the very institutions with which Derozio's name was associated most closely. Not only did he satirise the institution by calling it the “Anglo-Indian College”, he also upbraided the students of the College, lampooning them with the aid of two characters he invented for poetic purpose— Hari Mohan Bose and Shyam Chand— whom he called Hurry and Sam respectively. The

⁹² Derozio, Henry Louis Vivian. “Sonnet to Henry Meredith Parker Esq.” *The Fakeer of Jungheera, A Metrical Tale; and Other Poems*. Calcutta: Samuel Smith and Co., Hurkaru Library, 1828. p. 203.

⁹³ Derozio, Henry Louis Vivian. “Sonnet to the Pupils of the Hindu College.” Qtd. in Edwards, Thomas. *Henry Derozio, The Eurasian Poet, Teacher and Journalist. With Appendices*. Calcutta: W. Newman and Co., 1884. p. 121.

⁹⁴ Kejriwal, O. P. *The Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past, 1784-1838*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988. pp. 67-68.

Bhattacharya, Tithi. *The Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal, 1848-85*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005. pp. 129-132.

Chaudhuri, Rosinka. *Gentlemen Poets of Colonial Bengal*. Calcutta: Seagull, 2002. pp. 189-197.

distortion of the names indicate Parker's mockery at the obvious attempts of a section of the young men in Calcutta to anglicise Indian names, which was only a part of blindly following Anglican culture. His ridicule often was pronounced with caustic remarks about the habits of the English-educated youths and the utter failure of their learning. Parker disparagingly spoke of the exhibitionism of the English-educated young Indians, who, according to him, were only occupied in proving the superiority of their learned self to each other and to the world, and, in the process, only exposed themselves as imbeciles occupied with tumblers of shoddy beer and teams of vulgar women. Parker even parodied the manner in which they literally gorged on mutton chops and beef-steaks— essentially British food— denying their own religious customs. The entire poem is a severe excoriation of the manners of the students of Hindu College, and is written in the form of a dialogue between Hurry and Sam. Here is an example of how Parker ridiculed their 'mangled' knowledge of British literature and Roman history:

I offer glory, empire and renown;
 Excellent dishes, and a laurel crown,
 Freedom, like some bright garment to be put on
 If you'll eat beef— you answer, you'll eat mutton.
 Degenerate Sam— ah, what would Cato say,
 If his great spirit now could walk this way?
 Would *he*, d'ye think, have fallen on his sword,
 If eating could Rome's freedom have restored?
 No! he'd have eaten any kind of food,
 Well cooked, with pickles, for the public good.
 Is this alas! the fruit of all the knowledge
 We gather'd at the Anglo Indian College?
 Was it for *this* we learned the world was round,
 That twenty shillings sterling make a pound;
 That spinning jennies, Sam, were not young ladies,
 And what a science is, and what a trade is?
 Was it for *this* my essay, proved, (signed JUSTUS),
 That Dryden wrote his Virgil for Augustus?
 Was it for this we thought Crabbe's Pensoroso
 And Sampson Agonisthes, rather so so;
 Scott's Comus dull, but Milton's song divine
 Of Johnny Gilpin, very, very, fine?

Alas my Sam! you know not what I feel.⁹⁵

It would, however, be wrong to conclude that Parker's disparaging view of India and its people was the vein of satire that ran through all his works.

Parker's political ideas underwent dramatic change in his later life. He strongly opposed the dissolution of the East India Company after the 1857 Revolt; he held the missionary zeal of the British and the failure of the British government in Ireland responsible for the Mutiny in India in 1857. He juxtaposes the Christian missionary to the devout Hindu: the latter, who does not have any intention of converting men from other religions to his own, is sure to conclude that the fervent zeal of the former for conversion "proceeds from motives which have for their aim and end the advancement of our own worldly interests".⁹⁶ These words are quoted from Parker's collection of "sermons", titled *Short Sermons on Indian Texts, Concerning the Empire of the Middle Classes*; and his sarcasm even coloured the text of his dedication: "that devout, earnest, and conscientious body of Englishmen, whose fervent zeal for Conversion has clearly helped to create a fearful Mutiny, and will probably excite a National Rebellion in India".⁹⁷ Not only is Parker's scepticism about empire evident in this short dedicatory text, but it also reveals Parker as a man of great practical sense and political wisdom, who predicted the national uprising and the subsequent freedom movement of India nearly three decades before even the Indian National Congress was formed in 1885. Shifting allegiances is only too frugal a word to talk of such heterogeneous poetic practices.

⁹⁵ Parker, Henry Meredith. "Young India: A Bengal Eclogue." *Bole Ponjis, Containing the Tale of the Buccaneer; A Bottle of Red Ink; The Decline and Fall of Ghosts; and Other Ingredients*. Vol. I. London: W. Thacker, 1851. p. 227.

⁹⁶ Parker, Henry Meredith. *Short Sermons on Indian Texts, Concerning the Empire of the Middle Classes*. London: W. Thacker, 1858. p. 17.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* n. pag.

The Anxiety of Preserving the Ethnic Identity of the Self

Company poets operated in a linguistic polyglossia. Language and dialects played a vital role in defining individual identity. I have talked a little about how learned men in the nineteenth centuries had facilities in classical languages as well as modern European and native Indian languages. Delving deeper, I find that dialects too were significant markers of preserving one's ethnic identity. Considering only English — as I am primarily concerned with English language poetry — the poets writing during that time spoke in various dialects depending on their place of origin, as in Scottish, Irish and Welsh. Although most of them wrote verses in the Standard English in which they had received their formal education, their spoken language was a complex matter. John Leyden, for instance, composed his verses in Standard English, but was proud and possessive of his “Borders Scotch”. He held it too dear to himself to lose in the process of learning Oxbridge English:

‘Learn English! He exclaimed, ‘no, never; it was trying to learn that language that spoilt my Scotch...’⁹⁸

This is what Leyden said to John Malcolm, when the latter entreated him to “learn a little English”⁹⁹ upon his arrival in Calcutta in 1805. Leyden’s was definitely not a singular case: the descriptions of the conversations in the monthly meetings of the Andrews Society in Calcutta speak volumes for the internal strife between the Scottish and the English men in India.¹⁰⁰ The society was named after St. Andrews, the patron saint of Scotland, and it was meant for gatherings of learned Scotsmen in Calcutta, like Leyden, George Anderson Vetch, James Ross Hutchinson, and others. Michael Hechter has made a dedicated analysis of the “internal colonialism”, as he calls it, among the Scottish, Irish,

⁹⁸ Morton, Rev. James. *The Poetical Remains of the Late Dr. John Leyden, with Memoirs of his Life*. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1819. p. lxxix.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Palit, Chittabrata. *Social History of Colonial Bengal*. Kolkata: Avenel Press, 2017. pp. 119-123.
Singh, Jyotsna G. *Colonial Narratives / Cultural Dialogues: “Discoveries” of India in the Language of Colonialism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996. pp. 61-63.

Welsh and Celtic civil servants, soldiers and administrators in the various colonies of Britain during the long nineteenth century. He has shown how the process of internal colonialism was always a strong motivating force behind all criticism of British imperialism.¹⁰¹ Poets too felt the current: while some were anxious about preserving their ethnic identity, there were others who took advantage of the situation and found a ready list of subscribers among their Scots brothers and Irish countrymen. The idea of ‘Britishness’ as against ‘Englishness’ amongst the East India Company men gained complex currency with significant number of their recruits coming from Scotland, Ireland and Welsh. There were others too — the French, the Germans, the Spanish, the Portuguese, who further identified themselves in terms of white communities.

I would particularly examine the case of “Scottishness” within the imperial trope of “Britishness” in India, as the East India Company was often resorted to by the British Parliament to manage Scottish affairs within the British Empire. The imperial ambition of Scotland since the end of the seventeenth century to carry on ventures in Africa and the Indies suffered a setback with the Darien disaster.¹⁰² They were not able to compete with the English, the French, the Spanish and the Dutch companies. After the Union in 1707, the Scots were admitted to participate in the imperial ventures of Britain and this had significant political and economic significance for both Scotland and England: England was able to contain the dissensions in Scotland, such as the movement of the Jacobites, and manage political control over Scottish affairs by providing them with patronage of the East India Company in India and in Africa.¹⁰³ On the other hand, the Scots were able to eke out good business out of this admittance and bolstered their own economy. The Scots utilised to the fullest extent the opportunity of employment in the flourishing

¹⁰¹ Hechter, Michael. *Internal Colonialism: the Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966*. London: Taylor and Francis, 1975. pp. 75, 100, 120, 256.

¹⁰² Donaldson, Gordon. *The Scots Overseas*. London: Robert Hale, 1967.

¹⁰³ Smout, T. C. “The Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707— the economic background.” *Economic History Review*, 2nd Series. Vol. 16. No. 3. 1964. pp. 455-467.

British colonial enterprise, both in the administration and in the military. Comprehensive data on the origins of the highly placed civil servants in British India is presented in R. S. Neale's *Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century*. Neale has analysed the information available and has concluded that the most frequent region of origin was lowland Scotland, whereas lesser number of recruits came from highland Scotland.¹⁰⁴ Successive ministries in England used this patronage system to manage political control over Scotland both during the time of the East India Company and during the period of the Raj.

The presence of John Drummond, an administrator of Scottish origins, in the directorate of the East India Company from 1722-1734 facilitated the inclusion and participation of the Scots in the colonial endeavours to a large extent. During the Seven Years' War, from 1756 to 1763, the Scots were required in large numbers to join the military. Many Scots were significant stock-holders in the Company as well. The Scots gained further administrative powers when Henry Dundas, a Scottish advocate, became the President of the Board of Control of the East India Company in 1784. During his tenure, huge numbers of Scots were brought in to assist in various ways the Company's endeavours and most of them were then recruited as civil servants. Scottish names abound in the records of the three presidencies, namely, Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. The Scots were powerful players in the trades of indigo, opium, sugar and cotton — commodities that defined the economic equations of imperial Britain and its colonies. George K. McGilvery points out:

By the late eighteenth century, countless numbers of Scots from the privileged orders were providing superb, efficient service in administrative-military spheres, within the EIC,

¹⁰⁴ Neale, R. S. *Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Routledge, 1972.

upto the Indian Mutiny of 1857, and throughout the days of the Raj thereafter.¹⁰⁵

The effect of the Scottish involvement in the British imperial enterprise was two-fold: the Scots working in India as well as the fervently patriotic Scotsmen back in Scotland were proud of their imperial achievements;¹⁰⁶ on the other hand, the political parties in Scotland believed that they benefitted from the Union primarily because of these imperial opportunities.¹⁰⁷ Besides the English, the Scots represented the largest group among the Company men, and became an inevitable part of the British Empire in India. C.R. Wilson commented:

George Smith (a free merchant and native of Fordyce, Banffshire) was moved to think that John Fergusson, then probably the largest and most capable merchant in Calcutta and an Ayrshire man, had provided for hundreds of his countrymen, in so much that I might almost say, that all the inhabitants of Ayrshire have migrated to Bengal.¹⁰⁸

Evidently the Scottish men not only gained prominence in the imperial administration, but they also amassed huge wealth. The pecuniary proceeds, as I have found through close analysis of the poems, was a significant factor that embalmed the pain of exile from home. William Hamilton, from whose memoir I just quoted, was a Scot surgeon who, while working in the Bengal establishment, visited, as a part of the East India Company delegation, the royal court of Mughal Emperor, Farukshiyar, in Delhi in 1715. He secured the Emperor's confidence by successfully curing him of his diseases and was personally rewarded with generous gifts aplenty. But, most importantly, he earned for the East India Company the "farman", which was an order from the Emperor providing the Company

¹⁰⁵ McGilvary, George K. "The Scottish Connection with India. 1725-1833". *Études écossaises*. No. 14. (Empires – Recherches en cours) 2011. pp. 13-31. Available on <<http://etudeseccossaises.revues.org/239>> 18/05/2016. p. 21.

¹⁰⁶ Buettner, Elizabeth. "Haggis in the Raj: Private and Public Celebrations of Scottishness in Late Imperial India". *The Scottish Historical Review*. Vol. 81. No. 212. Part 2, Oct 2002. pp. 212-229. p. 213.

¹⁰⁷ Mackenzie, J. M. "Essay and Reflection: On Scotland and the Empire." *International History Review*. Vol. XV. 1993. pp. 714-739. p. 738.

¹⁰⁸ Wilson, C. R. "Personal History of Dr. William Hamilton, Benefactor of Kolkata." Extract from a paper read before the Asiatic Society of Bengal, printed for private circulation. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1898. Later printed in *Calcutta Review*. April, 1903. pg. ccxxxii.

the right to carry out duty free trade in Bengal. This ‘farman’ was instrumental in setting up business and colonisation in the province of Bengal, thus paving the way for what was to follow — the imperial domination over the whole of India. There can actually be a long list of the significant achievements by Scotsmen in colonial India: Alexander Kydd, who created the Botanical Gardens in Calcutta, was a Scot; Alexander Duff, a Scottish evangelist, played a prominent role in the advancement of education in Bengal; John Macpherson and Lord Minto were Scottish men who were eminent Governors of the Presidency of Fort William (Bengal); even Indian Railways were also primarily fed by engines manufactured in Glasgow, a port city in Scotland’s western Lowlands. Despite such prestige and influence which the Scottish men enjoyed in the British empire of India, they were always eager to retain their distinctive Scottish identity, as is indicated by the pomp and grandeur with which they celebrated St. Andrew’s Day every year in Calcutta and elsewhere in India. The celebrations were marked by typical Scottish culture — in food, in discussions, in dress, in customs, in manners — and strictly excluded Indian natives and such white men who were not of Scottish origin.¹⁰⁹ In every way possible, in their day to day affairs, they maintained a strong awareness of the distinctive traits of Scottish culture. On the one hand, they were proud to uphold their “Britishness” in India and, on the other, were equally persevering their “Scottishness” in scoffing at the English lifestyle and glorifying the Scottish customs. This anxiety of belonging to one’s homeland, and yet being at home elsewhere, is clearly revealed in the literature produced by the Scots working in India during that period. Ranajit Guha, in his article, “Not at Home in Empire”, have argued that modern colonial empires

...rules by a state which does not arise out of the society of the subject population but is imposed on it by an alien force. This irreducible and historically necessary otherness

¹⁰⁹ Phillips, C. H. *The East India Company, 1784-1834*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961. pp. 35-36.

was what made imperialism so un-canny for its protagonists in South Asia.¹¹⁰

The colonial enterprise is, therefore, always mediated on the premise of a sense of difference and a sense of isolation. Like most other men on the colonising mission, the Scotsmen also ventured to India in search of wealth, and prospered — and yet Elysium was always back home.

The Anxiety of Pecuniary Greed: Leyden’s “vile yellow slave!”

The Scotsmen — John Leyden, G. A. Vetch and J. R. Hutchinson — whose poems I shall analyse hereafter, were all born in Scotland and later came to India to work for the East India Company. They often drew on images from diverse cultures, such as images from their home country and images from their place of settlement, thus weaving a very complex tapestry, and moving to and forth in an equally complex topography. Their poetry at times reveals the tension of the nationalistic ideals and fervour that gained currency in their homeland, as a consequence of which their writings sometimes critique the Empire. Even back home in Scotland, this ambivalence was noticeable in the scholarship of the time. William Robertson’s *An Historical Disquisition Concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India*, published in 1791, in spite of the evident prevalence of elements of Orientalism in the choice of its subject, posits a favourable opinion of ancient India and classical Hinduism, as against the complete denunciation of Indian history and culture in James Mill’s *History of British India* published in 1817.

Arguably the most famous poem written by Leyden in India, “Ode to an Indian Gold Coin, written in Cheral, Malabar” is an excoriation of colonialism that is frequently found in literature of sense and judgement. This poem “written at the

¹¹⁰ Guha, Ranajit. “Not at Home in Empire.” *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 23. 1997. pp. 482-493. p. 482.

beginning of the nineteenth century, was much anthologised over the next hundred years.”¹¹¹ Of this poem, Nigel Leask writes:

...Leyden’s sentimental nostalgia for home is combined with an indictment of imperialist greed worthy of the attack on British rapacity in India contained in his friend and fellow-Scot Henry Mackenzie’s sentimental novel *The Man of Feeling* (1771); ‘when shall I see a commander return from India in the pride of honourable poverty?’¹¹²

Leyden adopts an unflattering view of the imperial greed and suggests that it is indeed for the “vile yellow slave” — gold and guinea — that he, and for that matter, others of his countrymen, had come to India, sacrificed the comforts of home and the warmth and companionship of their friends and family. Most scholars read this poem of Leyden’s as his attitude of being “appalled at British materialism”¹¹³ for which he uses the metonym of the gold coin. Leyden writes:

Slave of the dark and dirty mine!
 What vanity has brought thee here?
 How can I love to see the shine
 So bright, whom I have bought so dear? —
 ...
 By Cheral’s dark wandering streams,
 Where cane-tufts shadow all the wild,
 Sweet visions haunt my waking dreams
 Of Teviot lived while still a child,
 Of castled rocks stupendous piled
 By Esk or Eden’s classic wave,
 Where loves of youth and friendship smiled,
 Uncursed by thee, vile yellow slave!¹¹⁴

The trope of exile, although present in the poem with its own contradictions, would later become a recurrent motif not only in Leyden’s poems, but would also transform into the leitmotif of unhomeliness in much of the verse written by Company men. I would discuss

¹¹¹ Gibson. *Indian Angles*. p. 13.

¹¹² Leask, Nigel. “Towards an Anglo-Indian Poetry? The Colonial Muse in the Writings of John Leyden, Thomas Medwin and Charles D’Oyly.” *Writing India, 1757-1990*. Ed. B. Moore-Gilbert. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996. pp. 52-85. p. 60.

¹¹³ Gibson. *Anglophone Poetry*. p. 65.

¹¹⁴ Leyden, John. *Poems and Ballads*. Introduction [“Supplementary Memoir”] by Walter Scott. Kelso, Scotland: J. and J. H. Rutherford, 1858. p. 312.

the trope of exile in the corpus of Company Poetry in detail in my next Chapter, where I would also attempt to critically analyse a number of the poems, this being one of them, from the perspective of linguistic plurality. However, I cannot but note the obvious echo of the great Romantic poets, especially Wordsworth and Coleridge, when Leyden speaks of his nostalgic childhood in Teviotdale, much in the like of Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood",¹¹⁵ or when he uses words like "sweet visions" and "waking dreams", which are infallible reminders of Coleridge and his "esemplastic power" of imagination".¹¹⁶ I have engaged in further discussions on the influence of the Romantic poetry on the Company poets in my next Chapter.

To proceed further with the bone of contention in this Chapter, and my present discussion — the anxiety of being an integral part of the imperial machinery and yet critiquing its very basic tenets and ulterior motives — Leyden was indeed writing with a bold pen. For him, this anxiety of belonging to the British colonial enterprise was only further complicated by his fervent attempts to retain his Scottish-ness. It is important to consider Leyden's biographical detail here in order to read more meanings into the "vile yellow slave". Leyden was, at the time of writing this poem, suffering from a liver disease, which had yellowed his appearance. He might have likened his own face to the guinea he so toiled to earn, and it is this relentless toil in an alien clime which had made him sick. So, he bids farewell to the gold coin by saying:

"Vile slave, thy yellow dross I scorn,
Go mix thee with thy kindred clay!"¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Wordsworth, William. "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, D.C.L., in Seven Volumes*. Vol V. London: Edward Moxon, 1849. pp. 337-345.

¹¹⁶ Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria; Or, Biographical Sketches of my Literary Life and Opinions*. Two Volumes in One. New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co.; Boston: Crocker. p. 167.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 313.

There may be hidden between these lines a longing to return to his family in his native land, or there might be an oblique allusion to the poet's own health which was gradually getting more and more afflicted, finally betraying him to his death, when his mortal remains would mix with clay. Máire Ní Fhlathúin only slightly hints at this biographical interpretation when she analyses that the “pessimistic vision of a ‘grave / Dark and untimely’ might also be considered as a response to the life threatening illness the author suffered at the time.”¹¹⁸

The Anxiety of Aspiration to Poetic Fame: Vetch's “bitter fruit”

Another prominent Scottish man of the times, who had served in the Bengal army for a long period of time, was George Anderson Vetch, who published four book-length collection of poems and prose — *Sultry Hours*¹¹⁹ (1820), *Dara, or, the Minstrel Prince: An Indian History*¹²⁰ (1850), *Milton at Rome, A Dramatic Piece*¹²¹ (1851), and *The Gong; or, Reminiscences of India*¹²² (1852) — apart from regularly publishing verses, letters and essays in newspapers and literary annuals. A close reading of his works reveal that Vetch delighted in associating himself with a poetic tradition which he defined as being uniquely Scottish, as opposed to English. Not only was his poetic landscape dotted with the topography of Scotland, his poetry even invoked the “harp” of his fellow Scot poet, Leyden. In his poetic tribute to Leyden, Vetch writes:

But thou, lov'd Minstrel of my native land!
 Sound is thy sleep on Java's blazing shore;
 First of the Sons of song who graced our strand,
 And shall we hear thy thrilling Lyre no more?

¹¹⁸ Fhlathúin, Máire Ní, ed. *The Poetry of British India 1780-1905*. Vols 1. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011. p. 68.

¹¹⁹ Vetch, George Anderson. *Sultry Hours: Containing Metrical Sketches of India, and Other Poems*. Calcutta: David Brown, 1820.

¹²⁰ Vetch, George Anderson. *Dara, or, the Minstrel Prince: An Indian History*. Edinburgh: James Hogg, 1850.

¹²¹ Vetch, George Anderson. *Milton at Rome, A Dramatic Piece*. Edinburgh: James Hogg, 1851.

¹²² Vetch, George Anderson. *The Gong; or, Reminiscences of India*. Edinburgh and London: James Hogg and R. Groombridge, 1852.

'Tis said, in ancient lines, that still before
 Its Master's death, his Harp, untouch'd, would swell;
 But ne'er aerial lyre, in days of yore,
 Did breathe so sweet, so sad a passing knell,
 As that in anguish pour' from thy prophetic shell.¹²³

Although the *Edinburgh Magazine* "poured measured praise on Vetch's Scottish Lyre",¹²⁴ the *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Miscellany* derided Vetch's first poetic endeavour with severely caustic remarks:

...[W]e have no doubt of his military merits; and among the circle of private acquaintance, he may possibly pass for a very pretty poet...[B]ut we would earnestly advise the young gentleman to return again to his place, and rest his pretensions to fame on his sword, or his canary birds, or anything he pleases rather than his pen... we would recommend to this young gentleman, when a sentimental or scribbling fit comes upon him again, to divert his mind, if possible, by fondling his baby, or sit down quietly and take a moderate cup of tea with its nurse.¹²⁵

Though the anonymous reviewer expressed hope that such a scathing review of his first volume of verse would "deter him [Vetch] from the publication of further nonsense",¹²⁶ Vetch continued to write and publish poems. However, the anxiety of finding fame through poetic endeavours was definitely confronted with the unfavourable reception of his poems. The vicissitudes of the poet's mind manifested itself when Vetch replied with a letter objecting to the tone and content of the review. This letter was published in the *Calcutta Journal* dated 4th May, 1822.

In his pursuit of poetic fame, Vetch paid tribute in the highest order of praise to Leyden, one who had similarly and successfully traversed his way to being a notable poet from a civil servant in the Company. There was this constant sense of anxiety which haunted Vetch that most of his fellow mates had resigned themselves to their fate or had

¹²³ Vetch, George Anderson. "Metrical Sketches of India— XXXIII." *Poems: Containing Sultry Hours and Songs of Exile*. Calcutta: David Brown. 1821. p. 17.

¹²⁴ Gibson, *Anglophone Poetry*. p. 91.

¹²⁵ *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Miscellany*. Vol. XII. July-December, 1821. p. 454.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 454.

adopted other methods to acclimatise themselves to their surroundings, whereas he had taken recourse to poetry to seek escape from the mundane and sordid environment around him. He draws inspiration from his poetic muse and resorts to poetry in order to achieve fame and nobility. In this poem that pays homage to Leyden, Vetch also compares Caledonia (the Latin name for Scotland) to Hindustan and suggests that it is a journey from the blessed “Elysium fields” to the hopeless river of hate, the “Stygian”,¹²⁷ which is the underworld of Hades in Greek mythology. He, however still seeks to acculturate himself when he is in Nepal, as the mountains of Nepal reminds him of his native Scotland:

’Midst scenes as his own Grampians wild,
 Here lies the Virtuous and the Brave —
 On Hills sublime the Cairn is pil’d
 Where torrents dash — and pine-trees wave.¹²⁸

Even the casual reader cannot help but take note of the mention of the Grampian mountains, one of the major mountain ranges in the highlands of Scotland, and that of Cairn, which is a mound of stones marking a grave in Scotland. The careful selection of Scottish imagery throughout his poems distinguishes Vetch as a typical Scotch in the British colony.

“The Gold Coin” or the “vile yellow slave” in Leyden’s poem becomes a sort of “bitter fruit” for Vetch, the desire of which had made the Company men relinquish the “Northern bloom” and replace it with “burning Hindoostan”:

Say, did your Maker ere intend to suit
 Your Northern bloom with burning Hindoostan?
 No; — than except to reap the bitter fruit,
 If thus presuming you reverse his plan:¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Vetch. “Metrical Sketches— XXXVI.” *Poems*. p. 19.

¹²⁸ Vetch, George Alexander. “On Visiting the Grave of Lieut. Kirk, in Nepal.” *Poems*. pp. 47-48. p. 47.

¹²⁹ Vetch. “Metrical Sketches— XLII.” *Poems*. p. 22.

The ideology of the empire undeniably surfaces in the poem, as Vetch criticises the bloody line of the Mughals and compare them with Satan, by quoting directly from Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

But lo, Imperial Delhi's mighty scene;
 "In regal splendor wan," the eye surveys:—
 ...
 Deep stain'd with kindred slain, then sank with blood
 imbued.¹³⁰

This comparison of Satan with the bloody lines of Mughals is to highlight the monstrosity of the Mughal rule, implicitly juxtaposing their terrifying reign with the benevolent dominion of the British — a potent rhetoric of 'othering' used by Vetch. He draws an analogy between the British colonisers and the pilgrim, hinting at the beneficial and civilising influence of the colonial rule on the Indians. However, the imperial endeavours, Vetch says, also claims its own hard toil and, in a severe indictment of the British imperial pursuits, Vetch repents the situation in which the coloniser is described as "poor pilgrim":

But thou, (poor pilgrim) who may'st hither roam
 Art but the bird that wanders from its nest,
 And here for thee, there is no place of rest
 Well may'st thou envy, e'en the lowliest swain
 That ere thy sire's paternal meadows dress'd,
 Who ne'er was tempted by the lust of gain,
 To leave the heartfelt joys that crown his native plain.¹³¹

But the mind of the poet, who is also a tool in the imperial machinery, is fraught with contradictions. It is as though the pilgrim must toil hard to reach his goal: the British man must willingly undertake all the hardships in order to accomplish his mission of civilising the 'barbaric natives'. At the same time, Vetch cannot but bear in mind that the British coloniser must confess to his Christian self that he could not overcome the temptation of "the lust of gain". This anxiety of pecuniary greed coupled with that of carrying the

¹³⁰ Vetch. "Metrical Sketches— XLV." *Poems*. p. 23.

¹³¹ Vetch. "Metrical Sketches— LIV." p. 28.

‘white man’s burden’¹³² is clearly reflected in Vetch’s poems. He endorses the civilising mission in the very next stanza of the poem under discussion:

Fulfilling Heaven’s Mandate, Mission’d band,
For you shall smile in peace these awful skies;
Your steps are beautiful along the land,
To teach the Hindoo bliss that we despise,
The joy that in Domestic virtue lies:—
And this with Truth’s pure light alone can come
Yes, future generations shall arise
And call you bless’d, who were content to roam
That they might learn the charm that dwells in happy
Home.¹³³

As one reads through the other poems of Vetch, it is evident that Vetch took recourse, like Leyden, in implanting a spatial affinity of native Scotland with the landscapes of the country of his “exile”. It is, Vetch asserts, in death that the white man’s exile will be finally over and he can reclaim his native land:

And now thy years of exile o’er,
Thy breast beat high at Scotia’s name:
Prepar’d to seek her happy shore,
A son she might be proud to claim.¹³⁴

It is again the anxiety to preserve and glorify the Scottish identity that becomes conspicuous in the mention of “Scotia’s name”, and not Britannia, the name commonly attributed to the female personification of the British Isles, while writing from an ‘exiled’ country, where he is on service in the British imperial enterprise. In his nostalgic remembrance of the Scottish landscape in “The Exile’s Tribute”,¹³⁵ it is the songs of Robert Burns that endear him and bolster his patriotic feelings, as is evident in his

¹³² Kipling, Rudyard. “The White Man’s Burden.” *McClure’s Magazine*. Vol. 12. No. 4. February, 1899. pp. 290-291.

This phrase has gained currency from Rudyard Kipling’s 1899 poem of the same name and is often used to indicate the justification that European imperial endeavours in Africa and South-east Asia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was motivated by a benevolent intention of the white man to uplift the social and moral conditions of the people of the colonised territories.

¹³³ Vetch. “Metrical Sketches— LV.” *Poems*. p. 28.

¹³⁴ Vetch. “On visiting the Grave.” p. 48.

¹³⁵ Vetch, George Anderson. “The Exile’s Tribute”. *Burns Centenary Poems: A Collection of Fifty of the Best written on the Occasion of the Centenary Celebration*. Ed. George Anderson and John Finlay. Glasgow: T. Murray, 1859. p. 186-188.

mention of Robert Bruce and William Wallace. In addition, there are elaborate comparisons of the harsh climate of India against the pleasing atmosphere of Scotland, which is echoed in many of his poems. It finds eloquent expressions in two comparable poems — “May in India”¹³⁶ and “May in Scotland”.¹³⁷ Vetch writes that his gaze has suffered:

“O once I gaz’d in gladness...
But now I gaze in madness”¹³⁸

Throughout the body of his works, it is found that Vetch recreates his yearning for Scotland, and firmly believed that it is only through poetry that some degree of pleasure can still be dearly bought in exile.

The Anxiety of Imperial Ideology: Hutchinson’s “Vast Upas Tree”

James Ross Hutchinson, another Scottish man in nineteenth century India, had served for long tenures as a surgeon in the Bengal Establishment, as Secretary to the Medical Board in Calcutta Presidency, and then finally as the Private Secretary to the President of the Council of India. Unlike Vetch and Leyden, Hutchinson celebrated the beauty of the Indian landscape without always drawing parallels from the Scottish topography. In “Moonlight Scene”, Hutchinson uninhibitedly sang the praise of the beauty of the moonlight on the streams of the Ganga, and this suggests that he had successfully found himself in such an accultured position with the ‘exiled’ country that he could effortlessly appreciate the beauty of the settled land:

On Ganges’ stream the moon shines bright,
And swift the skiff glides on its breast;
The waves are rippling in its light,
And all is fair and still, at rest.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Vetch, George Alexander. “May in India.” *Poems*. pp. 59-62.

¹³⁷ Vetch, George Alexander. “May in Scotland.” *Poems*. pp. 31-32.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 31.

¹³⁹ Hutchinson, James Ross. “Moonlight Scene.” *The Sunyassee, an Eastern Tale, and Other Poems*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1838. pp. 201-202. p. 201.

However, the first edition of Hutchinson's first published volume of poetical works, *The Sunyassee, and Eastern tale, and Other Poems*, from which the poem mentioned above has been quoted, included a page of dedication, and the text on that would have one believe otherwise: it reveals Hutchinson as a patriotic Scot throughout life despite spending long years of his life in the British colonies of India and Africa, where he lived the final years of his life after retirement. He dedicated the first edition of *The Sunyassee* to "The People of Scotland: My distant Friends!" and declared in a fervently patriotic tone:

The Following poems were written, with the hopes
of doing credit to myself, and consequently to you; to
whom then could I dedicate them with so much propriety?

Should these aspirations be, in any wise, realised,
will you remember? And should they not, will you forget,
that,

I am,

or was,

YOUR

COUNTRYMAN?¹⁴⁰

I would briefly look at two aspects of the poem "The Sunyassee": the first one has to deal with the extensive paratext of the poem, and the second one has to do with the internal conflicts of the Scottish mind of the British coloniser. In the poem, Hutchinson draws a detailed picture of Indian landscapes, history and culture, and while doing so, he frequently uses names and terms in Indian vernacular languages, especially Bangla. But, the poet evidently had in mind the Scottish people back in his home country as his primary audience, for he adjoins elaborate and comprehensive glossaries — mostly, in the form of footnotes — in order to assist the reader in understanding the history, the culture and the geographical terrain of India, the place the poet is writing about. In fact, the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. n. pag.

paratexts are so frequent and so meticulous that collectively they might as well form a text by themselves. Máire Ní Fhlathúin observes:

The extensive use of paratextual notes also enables the author to produce a double-voiced text, where the protagonist is endowed with a nationalist rhetoric of liberty and freedom from oppression, while the authorial commentary sets that moment of insurrection firmly in the past.¹⁴¹

So, here is a classic example of the anxious poet who laments the ills of imperialism, and yet cannot be free of the fetters of its empowering machinery.

The inner contradictions of internal colonialism in Hutchinson is evident, when he speaks in the voice of the patriotic sanyasi:

What? Shall this great, and glorious land
Be always swayed, by foreign hand,
And shall her sons, for ever yield,
To crouch, beneath a stranger's shield?¹⁴²

Hutchinson, even after being a part of the colonial administration, voices the nationalistic concerns of the Indian *sanyasi*, and this is where the contradiction between the poet and the coloniser manifests itself. The poem narrates in detail, almost in a picaresque manner, the life of the “sunyassee”, initially an ill-fated lover who then turned to being a part of the armed rebellion against the British forces, and failing in the protest, takes to banditry as a Pindaree raider, before he finally denounces the pleasures of life and leads the life of a Hindu ascetic, the *sanyasi*, or the pilgrim. The *sanyasi* in the poem laments the rise of the British power and the fall of the Marathas. He hopes that there will certainly be a time in the future when the “traders”, implying the British, will be driven back home. In fact, Hutchinson makes his protagonist compare the rise of British imperialism to “[s]ome vast Upas Tree”,¹⁴³ which, if legends are to be believed, is a tree that grows fast and spreads

¹⁴¹ Fhlathúin. *Poetry of British India*. Vol II. p. 28.

¹⁴² Hutchinson, James Ross. “The Sunyassee. Canto III.” *The Sunyassee*. p. 73.

¹⁴³ Hutchinson, James Ross. “The Pilgrim of India. Canto Second.” *The Pilgrim of India, an Eastern Tale; and Other Poems*. London: William Pickering, 1847. p. 30.

poison. So strong are the assertions of Hutchinson's "Sunyassee" — he writes in the first person in the voice of the protagonist — that any nationalist Indian poet of the late nineteenth century would have been proud to have written these lines concerning the condition of India:

Shall India's sons, with souls of fire,
Be vassals still, from sire to sire;
Or what is worse, the slaves of those,
Would lull them, in a dull repose;¹⁴⁴

The way the poem ends, however betrays Hutchinson's independent spirit: the poet wishes that his hero, the 'sunnyassee' knew Christian consolation: only if he converted to Christianity, could his soul have eventually known peace.

As I mentioned earlier, paratexts in Hutchinson's poems run parallel to the texts; and a close analysis of the paratexts reveal that Hutchinson's voice against the British imperial policies was not as unwavering as might appear from an apparent reading of his poems. Apart from offering explicit accounts of Hindu and Muslim religious rites and social customs practised by the Indians, the elaborate notes attached to the poems brazenly sing the glories of the British forces and their conquest of Indian territories. In the way of narrating details of the political history of the Indian states, the poet takes pride in citing the instances of British supremacy. The victory of the British troops is exalted by a simple trope: Hutchinson begins by chronicling the gallantry and fortitude of an Indian prince or Rajah or Nawab, and the vigour of their armed forces, and then quickly moves on to relate how effortlessly the British soldiers vanquished them and annexed their territory under the able guidance of such imperial masters as Lord Clive or Wellesley. This trope of magnifying and ennobling the colonial achievements of the British, as is apparent in the paratexts of Hutchinson's poems, has been neatly outlined by Rukmini Bhaya Nair:

¹⁴⁴ Hutchinson. "The Sunyassee. Canto II." *The Sunyassee*. p. 37.

In poem after poem, a chief rhetorical device is to collapse, conflate, the complex movements of history to make place for towering male figures, like huge cutouts found dominating skylines today in political campaigning and/or in advertising...A triumphant Clive might be substituted by a proud Wellington or a Wellesley victorious in battle over “locust swarms” of Marathas, but each stands invincibly blocking historical passageways in this poetry.¹⁴⁵

Concluding Remarks

Nair interprets Warren Hastings’ verse, “John Company”¹⁴⁶ — it was coincidentally the lines of this very poem that initiated me into this archival enquiry — as a representative poem of the ethos of early colonialism. She points out the generalisations that Hastings had made in his poem: the complex mercantile and military enterprises of the East India Company is inadvertently condensed into the phrase “the Company traffick’d unheeded” and the ubiquitous John Company is used as a metonym that encompasses every British soul associated with the imperial endeavours, be it the soldiers or the tradesmen or the administrators or even the independent fortune-hunters. Hastings’ verse decisively attested the distinguishing qualities of all British men — “courage”, “wisdom”, and “pow’r” — and thus paved the way for the written word of the coloniser to give currency to the ideas that engendered colonial hegemony between the coloniser and the colonised in the later years.

The purpose served by the copious volumes of Company verses produced in India during the initial decades of the nineteenth century is aptly explained by Nair:

Company Poetry turns out to serve the function of a magic mirror in the initial years of British entry into India. In it, the images of the founding fathers of the empire are first merged, then magnified — and the illusion confounds not

¹⁴⁵ Nair, Rukmini Bhaya. “Reading Texts, Resurrecting Cultures: Colonial Poetry in India (1757-1857).” *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch: The Idea of Difference*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002. pp. 3-40. p. 7.

¹⁴⁶ Hastings, Warren. “John Company.” *The Poets of John Company*. Ed. Theodore Douglas Dunn. Calcutta, Shimla and London: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1921. p. 13-14.

because its routines are so difficult to work out but because, despite its obviousness, it somehow manages to fulfill the psychological requirements of early colonialism perfectly.¹⁴⁷

I cannot agree more with Nair. I take a step further to investigate how the illusion confounded both the writers and the readers of Company verses. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Company poets shared an ambiguous relationship with the ideas of imperialism, colonial domination and civilising impetus. On the one hand, they portrayed India in terms of common derogatory stereotypes, so that the civilising mission seemed justified; while, on the other, they privileged the position of the Indian, in extolling Indian rulers, like the Marathas, Tippoo Sultan, the Rani of Jhansi and others, who had put up strong fight against them. There were several instances when Company men, British men within the Company, revolted against the censorship of press or any other method of curbing the freedom of the individuals or their expressions. Although many of the verses written by Company poets may not merit literary appreciation, yet they are historically important, as they reveal the different complex facets of the ideological machinery of the British Empire.

¹⁴⁷ Nair. p. 7.

CHAPTER 2

The Poetics and Politics of Constructing “India” in a Polyglot Literary Culture: Reading the Verses of John Company

Then, insidiously, illusion began to lay its snares. I wished I had lived in the days of *real* journeys, when it was still possible to see the full splendor of a spectacle that had not yet been blighted, polluted, and spoilt; I wished I had not trodden that ground as myself, but as Bernier Tavernier or Manucci did ... Once embarked upon, this guessing game can continue indefinitely. When was the best time to see India?¹

Indeed, it is a question that never finds an answer, as was realised by Claude Lévi-Strauss when he was visiting Lahore. When, for that matter, is the “best time” to see a foreign land? Is it ever possible to “see” a thing without affecting change in that “thing”? Perhaps not. For, there cannot be any “pure” observation; as the person is observing a “thing”, he is simultaneously interacting with it as well, thereby affecting change in it. Also, at the same time, the observer is changing because of the effect of his observation on himself. Then, there is the obvious intervention of the intellectual and epistemological and, not to mention, the psychological apparatus with which he is mediating or trying to understand his observation. Hence, the enormous difficulty on the part of the historian or sociologist or anthropologist to record the picture of the culture, society, people and land that he is observing and trying to interpret.

Lévi-Strauss offers a remarkable elaboration on the question of the traveller’s difficulty in *Tristes Tropiques*. He argues that every five years that he travels back in

¹ Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Tristes Tropiques*. Trans. Doreen Weightman and John Weightman. London: Jonathan Cape, 1973. p. 43.

time, he might “save a custom or, gain a ceremony or share in another belief”², but in the process he infallibly loses a significant part of the intellectual tools and apparatus that is required to understand it. The anthropologist draws on another significant question of the traveller’s observation: as the traveller, in this case the anthropologist, Lévi-Strauss, complains of confronting only a shadow of the past or yearns for a wider and fuller glimpse of the “unadulterated” state of the land and its people, or even as he wonders whether at all such a state ever existed, he is, in all probability, turning insensitive to the reality that is happening around him at the very moment. He realises that in order to attain any significant level of understanding, it is imperative that the observed and the observer reach a certain depth of dialogue; and no sooner than this dialogue starts that mutual influence and change begins to occur in both subjects.

It is primarily this bone of contention on which the premise of the present Chapter rests. As the Englishman was confronted with the land, the culture and the people of the sub-continent, not only did he affect enormous changes in his subjects, but simultaneously were influenced to a significant extent by their experiences of the Orient. The influence of the Orient — of the harsh terrain, of the hostile climate, of the rituals and customs of the religions, primarily Hinduism and Islam, of the habits and varying cultures of the people of the sub-continent, and especially that of the gamut of Indian languages — was so deeply and widely pronounced on the Englishman that it percolated into his thoughts, ideas, imaginings and, therefore, into his writings. Neither could he fully understand the meanings and significations of the customs and cultures in the context of the deep-rooted cultural heritage of thousands of years, nor could he escape from the monumental effect of it on his life.

² Ibid. p. 43.

There was a small but significant population of Indians who were receiving education in the English language, and was therefore, exposed to reading texts, both literary and otherwise, written in English by English officers, administrators and their family members residing in India. They were also exposed to literary texts that were produced in England at that time: the readership extended to the great Romantic poets, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, Shelley, Scott among others. This reading practice can be attested by the book-lending and book-borrowing records of the libraries that were being set up at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the three presidencies, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. The English-educated population in India were also contributing significantly to the literary scene in the country by writing chiefly poems, and occasionally prose pieces. It is worthwhile to mention here that poetry was the belletristic genre of this period, mostly because of the significant influence that the Romantic poets, or as such, the influence that the literary scene in England had on the writers writing in English language in India at that time. Therefore, as is quite easily discernible from this discussion, that the English language poets in India in the early nineteenth century — both British and Indian — participated in a complex web of affiliations, influences and acknowledgements.

Poetry flourished in a cosmopolitan society with a polyglot culture. Although literacy spread within a very small section of the population, but this small section, most of whom took to creative writing in some form or the other, were well-versed in classical languages as well as modern European and Indian languages. School curricula often made it compulsory for students to learn Latin, Sanskrit, French besides English and the modern Indian languages. Poets, therefore, operated among multiple languages — Sanskrit, Persian, Latin, Greek (among the classical languages), English, French, Italian, German (among the modern European languages), and Hindustani [now split distinctly

into Hindi and Urdu], Bangla, Tamil (among the Indian languages). It may be mentioned here that although no given poet was conversant with all the languages I just mentioned, almost all of them were learned in a number of these languages. Unlike in the recent times, when the faculty of a multifarious language education among literate people is limited, in the nineteenth century, those who received education, although the number of such people was not appreciable, were commonly expected to have considerable knowledge of a number of languages, one of which definitely belonging to the classical family of languages.

In such a multilingual milieu, translations flourished. Sanskrit and Persian texts were often translated into English, and English texts were regularly translated into Indian languages. These translations ensured that most literate people in India had access to both classical and contemporary texts, even if they did not know a particular language. The access to these varied texts opened up another wonderful opportunity: the world of mythological stories, the tales of yore from great poets like Kalidasa or Firdousi, the great epics of Homer, Virgil, Aeneid, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, the huge stock of European folktales and the rich tradition of Indian folklores served a delectable platter to the poet's imagination.

An interesting practice can be noticed in the poems written in English by the Britons who had settled in India in the first half of the nineteenth century. Many of them used words or phrases from Indian languages without translating them into English, even in such cases where English expressions were not uncommon to find. One might look back to William Jones, who substantially indulged in this practice. It was especially in the listing of the flora and the fauna of India that the poets, Jones included, used the names and terminologies of Indian languages. Although Anglicised spellings were used, but these Indian words were printed in Italics with certain exceptions. There were copious

footnotes which explained the meanings of the Indian words for the Anglophone readers in India and for the audience back in Britain. However, not all Indian words were glossed by the poets. And this is precisely what intrigues the modern reader. I shall quote few lines from Jones' "The Enchanted Fruit" in order to illustrate this practice:

Light-pinion'd gales, to charm the sense,
 Their odorif'rous breath dispense;
 From Béla's pearl'd, or pointed, bloom,
 And Málty rich, they steal perfume:
 There honey-scented Singarhár,
 And Júhy, like a rising star,
 Strong Chempá, darted by Cándew,
 And Mulserly of pale hue,
 Cayora, which the Ranies wear
 In tangles of their silken hair,
 Round Bábul-flow'rs, and Gualchein
 Dyed like the shell of Beauty's queen,
 Sweet Mindy press'd for crimson stains,
 And sacred Tulsy, pride of plains,
 With Séwty, small unblushing rose,
 Their odours mix, their tints disclose,
 And, as a gemm'd tiara, bright,
 Paint the fresh branches with delight.³

Jones glosses "Béla", "Málty", "Singarhár", "Júhy", "Cayora", "Bábul" and he scarcely explains "Mindy" and "Tulsy". He does not elucidate "Chempá", "Mulserly" or "Cándew". Either Jones expected his readers to possess the ability of understanding these Indian language words or he had a different motive, which I shall later throw light on. The first possibility seems quite hard to believe, given that the name of the poet here is Jones, who "was at once an eclectic genius and a systematic thinker, a jurist and an artist, and a man whose insatiable curiosity allowed him to feel more awe than condescension towards the cultures he encountered in eighteenth-century Calcutta".⁴ It is quite improbable that a man like Jones would expect his readers in Britain or his Anglophone

³ Jones, William. "The Enchanted Fruit; or, the Hindu Wife: An Antediluvian Tale. [Written in the Province of Bahar.]" *Sir William Jones: Selected Poetical and Prose Works*. Ed. Michael J. Franklin. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995. pp. 84-85. Lines 107-124.

⁴ Gibson, Mary Ellis. *Indian Angles: English Verse in Colonial India From Jones to Tagore*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011. p. 19.

subscribers in India to have intelligence of these Indian words, unless, of course, he also expected his readers to have read his “Hymn to Camdeo”⁵ and “Botanical Observations”.⁶ Now, therefore, the alternative motive I mentioned earlier emerges as a probable one. Jones, I suspect, tried to create an exoticism with regard to the Orient. The several translations of poems by Indian authors, for example, Kalidasa’s *Abhijñāna Shākuntalam* translated by Jones or John Horsford’s translations of Persian poems by Hafiz, and poems such as “The Enchanted Fruit” and Jones’ famous Hymns to Indian deities, especially with their extensive paratexts — by paratexts, I include all kinds of footnotes, glossaries, epigraphs, subtitles and dedications — essentially create a mystic, exotic and sensual Oriental world, while at the same time, authenticate their existence in the real lived experiences of the Britons in India. The very sound of these words from the Indian languages was enough to strike up a world of mysticism and exoticism in the imagination of the British readers in England. Garland Canon comments on a similar vein in *The Life and Mind of Oriental Jones: Sri William Jones, the Father of Modern Linguistics*:

Jones partly evokes the sensuous, delicate Indian atmosphere by transliterating place-names and other proper nouns. Though usually phonetically accurate, these strange words constitute stumbling blocks ... Sometimes Jones had added a stanza simply to present more epithets, thereby making his subject culturally remote for most Western readers.⁷

In fact, it might be argued that this quality of unfamiliarity and the partial but ardent attempt at orientalising the English language is what contributed to the fame and popularity of Jones’ poems.

⁵ Jones, William. “Hymn to Camdeo.” *The Poetical Works of Sir William Jones, with the Life of the Author*. Vol II. London: Cadell and Davies; Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1807. pp. 55-59.

⁶ Jones, William. “Botanical Observations on Select Indian Plants.” *Asiatick Researches*. Vol. IV. 1795. pp. 237-312.

⁷ Canon, Garland. *The Life and Mind of Oriental Jones: Sri William Jones, the Father of Modern Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. p. 237.

My argument, however, is a little more intrapolated into the deeper intentions of the poet. In order to present India as the final jewel in the crown of the Company, so as to make a position in India appear covetable, it was necessary to render an aura of exoticism to the country—to its topography, to its cultures, to its people and to enwrap in a halo of the fantastic the lived experiences of the Englishman settled in this country. This rendering of the Orient, which bordered on the fantastic and at times even stepped across its limits, was an extremely necessary tool for the Englishman reflexively struggling to settle in the native country and promote their own imaginative idea of “India”. The paratexts to these poems reveal that the Englishmen were engaged in a relentless struggle to select and manipulate their new environment, to shape it in a way that captures their imagination, becoming the apotheosis of desire. Continuing the practice of this great poetic forefather, Sir William Jones, is a procession of English men and women, most of whom were serving the East India Company or were family-members of such men and had come and settled in India during the first half of the nineteenth century.

In the process of negotiating with the foreign culture, land, and people, the Englishman played varying roles at different points of time in history. The shift in the perception of the Englishman with regard to India as a land has to be understood in the context of the transition of British power and related activities in India: from the commercial pursuits of the East India Company in the eighteenth century to the political control of the land initially by the Company and then by the Crown in the nineteenth century. When one studies the complex, and often paradoxical, pictures of India that the Englishmen painted in their poems, letters, memoirs and diaries written during that time, it becomes apparent that there were intriguing questions related to the process of empire building within the Englishmen themselves. They had to adapt their ideas and thought process to the necessary changes, in order to believe in and justify the civilising mission.

Jyotsna G. Singh lays out the juxtaposition quite eloquently in her monograph, *Colonial Narratives / Cultural Dialogues*:

On the one hand, popular literary and cultural texts often represented India as a site of Eastern decadence and despotism, breeding corruption and dissipation among Company functionaries who assumed roles of Eastern despots or “nabobs” and exploited the hapless natives. On the other hand, another perspective of India came out of the Orientalist studies of the first generation of British civil servants in India, such as Sir William Jones and H.T. Colebrooke. This view entailed a “discovery” of India’s classical past as a Hindu golden age, or a pristine Aryan society which had fallen into decline and decadence.⁸

In the process of consolidating their power in India, the British were effecting change and were also being affected in the realm of ideas, beliefs and attitudes; and, in most cases, the British mind encountered varied ideologies that overlapped and were at conflict with each other. Although the British were conscious to a very great extent of the purpose of their endeavours in India, yet the texts of their poems and journals reveal that they were relentlessly engaged in a striking act of balancing their attitudes of tolerance and conservatism, thereby essaying a continual critique of the empire, the nature and tone of which was as diverse as could be. G. D. Bearce studies in detail the major currents in British thinking in relation to the perception of India in his monograph, *British Attitudes towards India, 1784–1858*.⁹ Bearce argues that the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, which found eloquence in the French Revolution of 1789, the post-Renaissance principles of homocentrism, and the ideology of the Enlightenment, which propounded the basic equality of all men and the rationality of all occurrences, thereby questioning and finally negating the ubiquitous claims of Christianity, were the three primary factors that shaped the attitude of the British towards India in the latter part of the eighteenth

⁸ Singh, Jyotsna G. *Colonial Narratives / Cultural Dialogues: “Discoveries” of India in the Language of Colonialism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996. p. 53.

⁹ Bearce, G. D. *British Attitudes towards India, 1784-1858*. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.

century.¹⁰ The “intellectual discovery of the non-European, non-Christian world”¹¹ of India, China and the New World, and the accounts of these foreign lands by the British travellers were important tools in disseminating information about and familiarising the West with the ideas of Oriental cultures and societies, thereby enveloping the Orient in a halo of the exotic and the mystic. Ketaki Kushari Dyson points out that “[t]he ‘wisdom of the East’ and the ‘noble savage’” were the instruments which the European traveller, who later became the coloniser, used to “chastise European civilization”.¹²

When this attitude of the European traveller to the Orient is appropriated in the case of the British coming to India, it transpires that the Englishman felt an immediacy to come to terms with and comprehend the social and political institutions of the land, and, in the process, they also made an earnest attempt at unravelling the mysticism of the Hindu and the Islamic religions and their different sects that they encountered here. Hence, Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of India (1772-1785), patronised the scholarship related to Hindu and Islamic studies; established an Arabic College in Calcutta in 1781; commissioned the first translation of *Bhagavadgita* from Sanskrit to English by Charles Wilkins in 1785;¹³ and encouraged Sir William Jones to set up the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784. It also justifies Jones’ enormous work on Oriental learning and Sir John Horsford’s uninhibited appreciation of the Indian customs, society and religion. However, shifts in perspectives and attitudes were already happening: the figment of defence of the British conquest of India, which was apparently absent in Jones’ work, can be discerned quite easily in Horsford’s verses and prose pieces, which were published later than those of Jones, almost towards the closing of the eighteenth

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 55-56.

¹¹ Hutchins, Francis G. *Illusion of Permanence: British Imperialism in India*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967. p. 8.

¹² Dyson, Ketaki Kushari. *A Various Universe: A study of the Journals and Memoirs of British men and Women in the Indian Subcontinent, 1765-1856*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978. p. 19.

¹³ Wilkins Charles, ed. *The Bhagavat-geeta or Dialogues of Krishna and Arjuna*. London: Nourse, 1785.

century. The more we move forward through the years of the long nineteenth century, the more we come across disparagement and scathing criticism of the Indian people and their customs in the writings of the British. Francis Hutchins writes:

British attitudes toward India were ... never a monolithic orthodoxy. The British throughout their connection with India engaged in a dialogue amongst themselves, and if certain approaches and attitudes were dominant at different times they were constantly under attack by those who preferred other approaches and attitudes. When experience and inclination dictated the need for a change of policy there were always formulated alternatives from which to choose.¹⁴

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, both the administrators, soldiers and the missionaries of the British Isles who came to India, felt that India was an irretrievably degenerate society and reform was the most pressing need of the hour. Even those who did not ever have any direct experience of India, and were writing about this country from Britain, severely disparaged India and her people and their customs, habits and religions. James Mill, who had never been to India, published *History of British India*¹⁵, which embodies a complete denunciation of Indian history and culture. He considered Indian culture to be even inferior to that of the European Middle Ages. Mill's severe indictment of Indian civilisation has been described by Eric Stokes as "a *tour de force*, more formidable in its relentless piling of evidence than even Grant's treatise".¹⁶ The treatise drafted by Charles Grant for private circulation in 1792, which Stokes referred to in relation of Mill's monograph, was a tract called *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respect to Morals; and on the Means of Improving it*.¹⁷ With the purpose of winning support in the British Parliament

¹⁴ Hutchins. pp. xii-xiii.

¹⁵ Mill, James. *The History of British India*. In Three Volumes. London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy. 1817.

¹⁶ Stokes, Eric. *The English Utilitarians and India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963. p. 53.

¹⁷ Grant, Charles. *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, particularly with respect to Morals; and on the Means of Improving it*. Parliamentary Paper. 1812-13 and 1831-32.

for granting permission to carry out missionary enterprise in India, Grant wrote this treatise, where he drew a picture of India as a sink of inequity, wherein its people are abysmally submerged in hideous corruption and licentiousness; they are, grant said, so morally and ethically degraded in character that they are not even capable of filial, parental or conjugal affection. A close study of the British social life in India during the nineteenth century reveals that there was, in practice, a certain degree of tolerance for the customs and cultures of India amongst the British who lived here. Dyson points out:

In practical policy ‘customs of the country’ were tolerated. British Officials attended some religious festivals and pilgrim taxes were collected for the maintenance of temples. This attitude of tolerance went with the social lives of the expatriate British, their attendance at nautches, smoking of hookahs, enjoyment of Persian Poetry, and living with Indian mistresses.¹⁸

D. L. Richardson added appendices to his edited anthology of poems titled *Selections from the British Poets: From the time of Chaucer to the Present Day, with Biographical and Critical Notices*,¹⁹ which was published from Calcutta by the Baptist Mission Press in 1840, a task that he undertook at the request of the Committee of Public Instruction. One of the last sections, or appendix, in his book is titled “British-Indian Poetry: Specimens of British Poets Once or still resident in the East Indies”. This was the first collection of its kind that included English language poems written by British men living in India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, defying the title of the section, this appendix also included poems by Henry Louis Vivian Derozio and Kasiprasad Ghosh, appearing as the last three poems of the Section under the rubric “Poems by an East Indian” and “Poem by a Hindu” respectively. This section on “British-Indian Poetry” ran from Page 1473 to Page 1520 — a mere 47 pages space was allocated to English language verse being written in India in the whopping 1640 page double-

¹⁸ Dyson. p. 20.

¹⁹ Richardson, David Lester, ed. *Selections from the British Poets: From the time of Chaucer to the Present Day, with Biographical and Critical Notices*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1840.

columned anthology which included major poems from the canon of English literature, namely by such great poets as Chaucer, Milton, Shakespeare, Dryden, Pope, Tennyson, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Southey, to name a few. However small this collection might have been, it was the first Company Poetry anthology of any significance to be published; it included poems by John Leyden, Reginald Heber, Horace Haman Wilson, Henry Meredith Parker, John William Kaye, James Atkinson, Emma Roberts and Richardson himself among others. A survey of the poems published in the newspapers, literary gazettes and literary annuals reveal that these were the poets whose poems were printed and re-printed the most number of times during the first four decades of the nineteenth century. It may be concluded from these facts that they were the most widely publicised poets writing English language poetry in India at that time.

I shall present data from two other verse anthologies that were published in the middle of the nineteenth century. *The Poetry of our Indian Poets*²⁰ was published from Calcutta in 1861 by D' Rozario and was edited by Thomas Philip Manuel. This volume was a thin one, which ran for only 112 pages and contained about a little over 40 poems. The significant difference of this volume from that of Richardson's is that it contained brief biographical information about the authors whose verses were included there. Some useful information about the Company poets with regard to their positions, associations and daily practices is available in these short biographical introductions to the poems. In the 43 poems contained in this book, the word "Brahma" appears eleven times.

The other anthology of English language verse written by the British in India was published in 1868 from Calcutta. It was edited by Thomas Benson Laurence, who himself had to his credit one other volume of poetry, a collection of prose pieces in the form of journal entries, and an edited literary annual. The title of the anthology, *English Poetry in*

²⁰ Manuel, Thomas Philip, ed. *The Poetry of our Indian Poets*. Calcutta: D' Rozario and Co., 1861.

India, Being Biographical and Critical Notices of Anglo-Indian Poets with Copious Extracts from their Writings,²¹ speaks volumes about the contents of the book. In fact, the “biographical and critical notices” occupy more space than the “copious extracts” of verses. In this 168-page volume, the word “Brahma” appears thirteen times in the texts of the included poems.

The reason for listing the tedious count of the word “Brahma” in these anthologies is to draw attention to the frequent use of words and terms from Indian languages, Oriental tales and Eastern mythologies. I would, in the course of this Chapter, elucidate numerous other examples of such references and, at times, long listings within the texts of the poems. But, at the onset, I would analyse the intention behind such frequent use of words from Indian languages and Eastern stock of mythological tales. I argue that the acts of ‘discovery’, ‘scholarship’ and ‘reconstruction’ were all directed towards the ‘construct’ of an “India” which was far removed from their lived experiences of the land— an “India” that would qualify as an unfeeling subject, cloaked in the unravelled halo of mysticism, a halo that is translucent enough for the Englishman in India to pervade within, but opaque enough for the Englishman in England to gape at without; an ‘India’ that would produce sufficient inducements for the Englishman to perpetuate his desire for discovering the exotic; and ‘India’ that, at the same time, would present itself as “low-lying land” with “low, lying people”,²² so that the Englishman can justify his ‘civilising mission’, thereby glorifying himself in being able to accomplish the ‘noble’ task; an “India” that the Englishman could portray in such derided conditions that it would serve a delectable platter for the tools of ‘othering’. In order to fulfil these conditions, it was necessary for the Englishman to use words, terms, phrases from the stock of Indian

²¹ Laurence, Thomas Benson, ed. *English Poetry in India: Being Biographical and Critical Notices of Anglo-Indian Poets, with Copious Extracts from Their Writings: to which is Prefixed a Preliminary Essay on Anglo-Indian Poetry*. Calcutta: Messrs. Thacker, Spink, and Company, 1869.

²² Bignold, Thomas Francis. “On a Station in Lower Bengal.” *Poets of John Company*. Ed. Theodore Douglas Dunn. Calcutta, Shimla and London: Thacker, Spink and co., 1921. p. 127.

languages and references, and allusions from the stock of Indian mythological tales. Often, the Englishman is found to make room in his poetic texts to incorporate names of Indian places, names of Indian rulers, typical names of Indian posts in the king's court or the landlord's (Zamindar's) territory. The poets make such frequent use of these proper nouns from the Indian languages, that it sometimes may be described as a parade of characters with Indian names or, in other cases, an array of Indian cities, districts and states. The very sound of these proper nouns invokes a sense of the exotic, much in the manner of 'Xanadu', 'Kubla Khan', 'Christabel' or 'Geraldine' in Coleridge's poems, which constitute the moment of poetic faith by inducing in the reader a "willing suspension of disbelief".²³ I am aware that it is sheer insolence and gross ignorance to draw any semblance of parallelism between the great Romantic poet and these Englishmen writing verses in India, and I make no attempt of doing so; yet I refer to Coleridge's use of these proper nouns in order to elucidate how the sound of such names, that are uncommon to the English ear, may, and unfailingly does, invoke a sense of the exotic about the people and places described in such texts. It is also true that these Company poets intended their audience in Britain to suspend their belief of India, as might have already been formed from letters, journals, diaries and the travellers' accounts, so that the idea of 'India' could be shaped in their imagination in exactly the way that the coloniser wanted it to be. It had to suit his purpose of making "India" appear a fantastic land of barbarous people, wherein, the English coloniser wallowed in the elements of the grotesque, while, at the same time, engaged himself in the 'noble' task of civilising the barbaric tribe of people residing there. In her essay, "Reading Texts, Resurrecting cultures: Colonial Poetry in India (1757-1857)", Rukmini Bhaya Nair writes:

²³ Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria; or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*. Two Volumes in One. New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co.; Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1834. p. 174.

Naming, referencing, listing, and most important of all, signing with a flourish, constitute tantalizingly obvious features of the poetic texts of this period. The problem for a contemporary reader is to decode these provocative signatures satisfactorily.²⁴

Reading these poetic texts in the twenty-first century, I inevitably fit the bill of Nair's "contemporary reader". And, I would make an attempt to interpret the "signatures" of these Company poets that I came across in their texts.

"Curry and Rice" served on Forty Plates to the British Gentleman

As the starting check-point of my readings I have chosen "Indian Impressions", a poem by George Francklin Atkinson, which offers an excellent catalogue of "impressions" — the essential experiences that chiefly impress upon the Englishman during his residence in India. Captain Atkinson was in the service of the Bengal Engineers from 1840 to 1859. During this period he captured the ethos of colonial life in his sketches. These paintings — a total of forty in number — were published from London in 1860 as lithographic plates contained in a volume that also offered brief descriptions of the sketches. These works were composed in the wake of the Great Revolt of 1857, and the Indians here are depicted as perfidious, licentious and incorrigible, from whom the British are persistently making elaborate endeavours to distance themselves, so as to preserve the "Britishness" of their identity. Atkinson portrayed the British colonial officers with a generous dose of humour and traces of irony; he clearly announced in the Preface addressed to his "Gentle Reader", that he had "singled out the faults and absurdities of our [British] race" — but his purpose was "not to illustrate perfection, but

²⁴ Nair, Rukmini Bhaya. "Reading Texts, Resurrecting cultures: Colonial Poetry in India (1757-1857)." *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch: The Idea of Difference*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002. pp. 3-40. p. 7.

to afford amusement, by dwelling upon the sunny side of Indian life”.²⁵ The book presents vignettes of the social life of the colonisers and their acquaintances in an imaginary village, Kabob, which Atkinson refers to as “our station”. Before I read the poem which immediately follow the Dedication and precedes the Preface, the lithographs and their descriptions, it is hard to overcome the temptation of quoting from the closing paragraph of the Preface: such fine satire and such skilful play on words was not common among the English men in India, who took to writing as an activity that attested their learning, upheld their aristocracy, and, at the same time, recorded their Oriental adventures tinted with the colours of their own fanciful comprehension, and gave currency to their belief of the ‘civilising mission’. Atkinson’s volume is titled “*“Curry and Rice,” On Forty Plates; Or, the Ingredients of Social Life at “Our Station” in India*”; the use of the words “curry and rice” within quotes is itself suggestive that the book smacks off typical Indian flavour in every sense of the word. Further, Atkinson indulged himself in a play on the word “plates”, as if to give the impression that the curry of the Indian social life of the English coloniser is being served to the reader on forty plates, whereas, in literal meaning, the “plates” referred to the lithographic plates of the sketches. The closing paragraph of the Preface reads:

... if in the Plates of “Curry and Rice,” now set before you, the flavour is found to be a little too spicy and a little too pungent, and, to many perhaps, a thought too hot, remember that it is the nature of curry to be so. ... [I]t will prove to be a dish of your liking ...”²⁶

Atkinson, in the opening poem in this book, has provided a categorical list of the elements that impress upon the Englishman’s consciousness upon his arrival in India. Intentionally no particular order has been maintained; Atkinson intended his readers — he imagined most of them to be residents of Britain, who never have set foot on the Indian

²⁵ Atkinson, George Francklin. *“Curry and Rice,” On Forty Plates; Or, The Ingredients of Social Life at “Our Station” in India*. London: Day and Son, 1860. p. vii.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. viii.

shores — to undertake, with him, a voyage to India through his sketches, and thereby encounter all these elements in a disarrayed fashion throughout the course of his social interaction in this country. An essential part of Atkinson’s design was to give a taste of the “Indianness” of the experiences to his readers; so, he used a gamut of Indian elements, almost bombarding his readers with them, as if to give him the opportunity to soak in the Indian experience:

What varied opinions we constantly hear
Of our rich Oriental Possessions;
What a jumble of notions, distorted and queer,
Form an Englishman’s “Indian Impressions!”

First a sun, fierce and glaring, that scorches and bakes;
Palankeens, perspiration, and worry;
Mosquitoes, thugs, cocoa-nuts, Brahmins, and snakes,
With elephants, tigers, and Curry.

Then Juggernât, punkahs, tanks, buffaloes, forts,
With bangles, mosques, nautches, and dhingees;
A mixture of temples, Mahometans, ghâts,
With scorpions, Hindoos, and Feringhees.

Then jungles, fakeers, dancing-girls, prickly heat,
Shawls, idols, durbars, brandy-pawny;
Rupees, clever jugglers, dust-storms, slipper’d feet,
Rainy season, and mulligatawny.

Hot winds, holy monkeys, tall minarets, Rice,
With crocodiles, ryots or farmers;
Himalayas, fat baboos, with paunches and pice,
So airily clad in pyjamas.

With Rajahs — But stop, I must really desist,
And let each one enjoy his opinions,
While I show in what style Anglo-Indians exist
In her Majesty’s Eastern dominions.²⁷

So, here on offer we have a spate of words from the Indian language, Bangla, used in a thoroughly English poem — written in English language, by an Englishman, and printed in England. Of the Indian language words used in this poem — “palankeens”,

²⁷ Ibid. p. v.

“Brahmins”, “Curry”, “Juggernât”, “punkahs”, “nautches”, “dhingees”, “ghâts”, “Feringhees”, “fakeers”, “shawls”, “durbars”, “mulligatawny”, “baboo”, “pyjamas”, “Rajahs” — some have been later accepted in the English language and are now in use as proper English words, much in the manner in which a living language keeps on adding new words as loan words from other modern languages into its own stock. Most of the words, however, remain outside the periphery of English language even now. And, in the nineteenth century, all these words were uncommon to the Englishman; so, when these were used to describe a particular place and its people, naturally the usage lent an aura of strangeness to that land and those people —strangeness that is adept to exoticism. One may argue that Atkinson could have used “fans” in place of “Punkahs”, “banks” or “steps” in place of “ghâts”, “kings” in place of “Rajahs” and so on. But, then those English words would never have given the reader the very feel of India, and that is what the poet intended to do. Another striking feature of the usage of these Indian language words is the suffixing of the ‘-s’ to implicate plurality. This, in a way, anglicised the words, making them fit the bill of the English vocabulary, and, at the same time, invoked a sense of the many, suggesting the vastness and overwhelming nature of India to the Englishman. To the Englishman reading Atkinson’s poem in nineteenth century England, it was a matter of amazement to realise how familiar the poet was with the Oriental elements of Anglo-Indian social life, for the use of Indian language words had in it obvious suggestions of familiarity and, therefore, knowledge. The Indian language words in the Company poems thus, in many senses, hinted at the Oriental learning and the knowledge of the Orient of the author in question. And, being an Orientalist, especially for the educated section of the population, was in vogue in the nineteenth century.

Company Poetry, as Nair so deftly observes, “somehow manages to fulfill the psychological requirements of early colonialism perfectly.”²⁸

Principle of Selecting Poems for Discussion

Now that I have presented the rudimentary tenets of my contention, I shall read select poems written by the Englishmen in India during the nineteenth century, and analyse the texts with a purpose to further my argument. The principle that I have adopted in selecting the poems is to focus on those that were included in anthologies, as an anthology is the most potent literary tool to consolidate and canonise any particular corpus of literary expression. Apart from the three anthologies that I have already mentioned in this Chapter, I shall also consider the poems included in the collection titled *Poets of John Company*²⁹ (1921) wherein the poems were selected and arranged by Theodore Douglas Dunn, noted Oriental scholar and minister of education in Bengal for a brief stint in 1924, as well as some poems from two anthologies of English Poetry of colonial India that were published very recently — *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India, 1780-1913*³⁰ edited by Mary Ellis Gibson and *The Poetry of British India, 1780-1905*³¹ edited by Máire Ní Fhlathúin — both published in 2011. This principle of selection of the poems included in anthologies does attest the editors’ claim that these verses were important during those times in which they were composed, and reflected in the best possible manner the cultural, social and intellectual traditions that were current during that particular period. This claim by the editors editing anthologies in the nineteenth

²⁸ Nair. p. 7.

²⁹ Dunn, Theodore Douglas, ed. *Poets of John Company*. Calcutta, Shimla and London: Thacker, Spink and co., 1921.

³⁰ Gibson, Mary Ellis, ed. *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India, 1780-1913*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011.

³¹ Fhlathúin, Máire Ní, ed. *The Poetry of British India 1780-1905*. 2 Vols. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011.

century might be questioned on the assumption that selecting poems to be published in anthologies might have been influenced by the personal affiliations of the poets, the positions of the poet and the editor in the colonial bureaucracy and the complex relationships of Orientalists, Utilitarians and Evangelists vis-à-vis the editor's sympathies, not to mention, the occasional favour shown towards a particular poet in order to settle personal scores. On the other hand, with regard to the anthologies published in the twenty-first century, although such webs of affiliations and disaffiliations of editors and poets might not have influenced the selection of poems, but attaching primacy to the poems contained therein would imply an obvious agreement on my part to the rationale of selection by the editors. I must mention here with clarity that I have chosen to focus on these poems not because I find fascinating the judgment of the editors in choosing the particular texts, but because I could not find any information, for example, borrowing records of libraries or number of copies of a book sold, that could question their selection. It is indeed difficult to find out which poems were most widely read or talked about or written about or even most cited during the first half of the nineteenth century in India. This is chiefly because many poems were published in small local vessels, like journals, pamphlets and souvenirs, and were privately circulated. Many of the texts are not available anymore; only mention of such texts are found in the accounts of some other writers, in letters and journal entries. In addition, not all newspapers and periodicals, which enthusiastically engaged in literary criticism and discussion, are now available. Therefore, in the absence of comprehensive information, I have chosen to give primacy to those poems included in the anthologies, although I may not always agree with the editor's judgment.

Another important principle of the order of choosing the poems for analysis is chronology. Instead of choosing to categorise the analyses on thematic similitude, I have

chosen to discuss the poems in order of the dates of their authors. While considering the dates of the authors, I have given more importance to the dates of their residence in India rather than their dates of birth and/or death. This is because in that way, an approximate chronological mapping of the idea of “India” in the British eyes and its gradual change in conception might be possible, and I would make an attempt to do the same. However, such a mapping is not a simple task; because, at any given point of time in history, there existed multiple ideas of “India” in the British imagination, and this idea was shaped by various factors, like the person’s immediate circumstances, his ulterior motive, his pedagogical slant of learning, his exposure to the already existing literature on the Orient, his gender, his position in the corridors of colonial power, to mention a few. Therefore, no fixed idea of “India” can be ascribed to any given decade or any given year, nor to any given British man or woman, for it is not true that the idea of “India”, once it was formed in the imagination of an Englishman, remained unaltered throughout the rest of his life. In fact, this idea of “India” constantly kept shifting its paradigm because of the change that was affected in the person owing to the circumstances he was exposed to and the learning he underwent. However, a major perception — in the sense of being the perception of the majority of people — or the idea of “India” during a particular span of time, short as it may be, is discernible through close scrutiny of the poems written during that period, just as it is possible to ascribe a general characteristic to the idea of “India” in any given Briton’s mind. I shall try to be careful not to miss either the typical or the aberrant in an attempt to analyse these poems — an attempt that carefully tries to avoid any stance of homogenising the diverse perceptions of “India” in the British eyes.

John Horsford

Although the scope of this dissertation limits the dates of this survey — from 1800 to 1868 — I shall begin by analysing the poems of John Horsford who spent a considerable time in India, from 1772 till his death in 1817, and published in Calcutta two volumes of poetry, titled *A Collection of Poems, written in the East Indies*³² (1797) and *Poems in Three Parts*³³ (1800). Gibson, in her biographical note on Horsford in her edited anthology, informs us that Horsford’s poems were popular in the first two decades of the nineteenth century — a statement that is attested by the fact that Horsford “managed to pre-sell 170 copies of his first volume and 196 of the second”.³⁴ Apart from the poems included in these two volumes, Horsford also occasionally published in the journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Calcutta and in other newspapers and periodicals. Reading Horsford’s poems will render a taste to the reader of the social, cultural and linguistic polyglossia in which Englishmen writing poetry in the first decades of the nineteenth century operated.

“Epistle to Sir William Jones”, a poem that was written by Horsford in 1790, and has the subtitle, “Written to Him during the Late War with Tipoo”, begins thus:

Tho’ haughty pow’rs against us turn their rage,
 Let not the fate of war your mind engage,
 Be from our bosom such ideas far,
 To vet’ran Meadows leave the cares of war:
 But ah! to Persian lore devote the hour,
 You Lord in Poesy’s inspiring bow’r;
 Khakani’s thought t’ admiring ears express,
 On your lov’d Hafiz bring in English dress:
 With Khoosru sing how gentle pangs t’ assauge,
 And trace pure Sadi thro’ his moral page;
 But if fatigu’d in this too tender field,
 Then seek the joys Gillaliden can yield,
 With Altar join in philosophic taste,
 Th’ enlighten’d Rochfoucault of half the East:

³² Horsford, John. *A Collection of Poems, written in the East Indies. With Miscellaneous Remarks, in Real Life*. Calcutta: Joseph Cooper, Telegraph Press, 1797.

³³ Horsford, John. *Poems in Three Parts*. Calcutta: Thomas Hollingbrey, Hircarrah Press, 1800.

³⁴ Gibson. *Anglophne Poetry*. p. 45.

Their daring works to justly understand,
I'd give thy wealth, O golden Samarcand!³⁵

The opening stanza of this poem vividly strikes up a socio-literary environ in which an Englishman indulges in the pleasures of reading Persian poetry and philosophy, and he entreats another of his countryman to do so. Persian was one of the prominent legal languages in northern India until 1830, and Horsford trained himself in the Persian language shortly after his arrival in India. Here, he refers to and expresses his admiration for William Jones' translation of the works of the Persian classical poets, most of which were published in *A Grammar of the Persian Language*.³⁶ Although Horsford attached footnotes to each of the names of the Persian poet he mentioned and also glossed Rochfoucalt and Samarcand, yet, as the British reader in Europe, or even in India, reads the poem, the very mention of so many names of Persian classical poets — Khakani, Hafiz, Khoosru, Sadi, Gillaliden (who is actually Jalal-ad-Din Rumi) — and Samarcand (which Horsford explains was a “city of legendary wealth and culture often invoked in Persian poetry”³⁷ in the beginning of the poem itself adds to the text a touch of that quintessential exoticism attached with the image of the Orient. Other proper nouns upon which the British reader stumbles are found aplenty in the rest of the poem — “palanquins”, “Moselay”, “Cassimere”, “Hyder” and “Ganga”. Horsford includes explanatory footnotes to each of these words, with the exception of “palanquin” and “Ganga”. He was, of course, correct in gauging the standard of comprehension of Indian words amongst the Englishmen at the beginning of the nineteenth century. By this time, the English reader was somewhat familiar with Ganga, the great river that defined the life of people in the vast Indo-Gangetic plains of northern India, and was thus mentioned, described, even eulogised in most of the accounts of Englishmen who wrote about their

³⁵ Ibid. pp. 47-48.

³⁶ Jones, William. *A Grammar of the Persian Language*. London: W. and J. Richardson, 1771.

³⁷ Qtd. in *Anglophone Poetry*. Ed. Gibson. p. 48.

time spent in this country. The English reader also knew what a palanquin was: the early writings of the Englishmen visiting this country had described in detail this mode of transport, which to them was an object of wonder and amazement, and which they attached with luxury travel of the Indian landlords, kings, princes and women. I shall refrain here from examining how ‘palki’ or ‘palankeen’ or ‘palanquin’ came to be a symbol of such misplaced conceptions of Indian travel or whether such appropriation was justified. I shall not examine these points precisely because they are besides my point of argument, and would invite an elaborate survey of seventeenth and eighteenth century travel literature related to India. My dissertation does not allow me the scope of such digression, which would have a possibility of diluting my chief point of discussion. However, following the footsteps of Horsford, I too shall not henceforth mention ‘Ganga’ or ‘palanquin’ as Indian words or names used in the poems that I analyse hereafter. I shall, like Horsford, assume these two words to be part of the vocabulary of the British reader in the nineteenth century. As I had mentioned earlier, footnotes, glossaries, dedications, epigraphs, inscriptions — all sorts of paratexts were crucial to the understanding of Orientalist poetry written in the nineteenth century. Paratexts sometimes rendered meaning to the text beyond the apparent and sometimes served as platforms for elaborate social and political debates, or even as markers of the authors’ intentions, expectations and understanding — all these functions apart from the obvious function of the paratext to assist in comprehending the meaning of the text. In this particular poem, Horsford’s footnotes do speak highly of him as a learned scholar of Oriental literature. And, making such claims of Oriental scholarship was of significant import in the socio-cultural scene of nineteenth century English writing.

In another poem, “Ode to My Infant daughter, Eliza Howrah”,³⁸ Horsford mentions “Champak” and “Bela” as flowers which would adorn the child’s hair or be strewn playfully before her feet. He also talks of “Whampee-scented grove” which refer to “huang pi” in Chinese and means an evergreen tree of South-east Asia; the white flowers and the fruits of this tree, which has a very strong scent, are used both for culinary and medicinal purposes. The English words for “Champak” and “Bela” are magnolia and jasmine respectively; neither are they hard to find nor were they unknown to the learned poet, as is evident from his explanatory footnotes to these words; what then was the reason for using Indian language words for referring to the flora of India? The answer lies in the author’s eagerness to draw the readers’ attention to his knowledge of Indian languages and his familiarity with Indian botany. Such attempts, as I shall illustrate, were not uncommon among poets writing English language poetry in India during that period.

Another instance of almost a parade of names of Indian cities, rivers and districts is to be found in the third stanza of “The Prospect”:³⁹

From where Cambaya’s ever verdant side,
 Ingulphs the Tepta and Narbuddah’s tide,
 To Comorin’s Cape, the men of Malabar,
 In proud array move forth to seek the war,
 While Coromandel’s num’rous sons convene,
 To fill the glories of the mighty scene.⁴⁰

The entire stanza is glossed in one single footnote by Horsford. He writes:

The Tepta [Tapti] and Narbuddah [Narmada] rivers flow into the Gulf of Cambaya [Khambat]. This and the other locations named in these lines mark the west, south and east coasts of southern India, surrounding Tipu’s domain.⁴¹

³⁸ Horsford, John. “Ode to My Infant daughter, Eliza Howrah.” *Anglophone Poetry*. Ed. Gibson. p. 51.

³⁹ Horsford, John. “The Prospect. Written during the Late War with Tippoo.” *Poetry of British India*. Vol. I. Ed. Fhlathúin. pp. 49-51.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 49.

⁴¹ Qtd. in *Poetry of British India*. Vol. I. Ed. Fhlathúin. p. 381.

The modern spellings of the names of the rivers and the Gulf included within brackets are my insertion for better understanding. Here, again, we come across a poet who has a thorough knowledge of the geography of the country he found himself exiled in. In this poem only, Horsford refers to the Indians as “[t]he sons of Brahma”⁴² and to Tipu Sultan as “Bahader”.⁴³ While the reference to Brahma indicate Horsford’s knowledge of Hindu mythology, it is, at the same time, a marker of the exclusivist attitude of the poet: he makes sweeping generalisation of all Indians as Hindus, and thus leaves no room for the inclusion of a large section of the Indian population comprising of Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jews, Parsis and people from other religions. “Bahader” or Bahadur was a common term and was frequently used to refer to a strong, brave man, especially warrior or king, and it was among the few Indian language words that were in colloquial usage among the Englishmen residing in India.

In the poem “The Contrast”,⁴⁴ which first appeared in *The European Magazine and London Review*, Horsford calls the city of Benares “this far-fam’d Oxford of the East”,⁴⁵ with a tone of reverence for Varanasi, the seat of Sanskrit learning. As the nineteenth century progressed, this tone of veneration for Oriental establishments gradually turned into one of deploration and derision in the general tone of writing about India by the Englishman. This change in attitude will be manifest in the poems that I read hereafter. Horsford, in this poem, uses the word “zenana” without offering any explanation thereof. Either he expected his English readers to have knowledge of the different parts of the Muslim household in Persian/Urdu terms, or he imagined his readers to comprehend the meaning of the word in the context of his description, or perhaps he wanted not to dispel the aura of the Eastern mysticism that is created through the use of

⁴² Horsford. “The Prospect.” p. 50.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 51.

⁴⁴ Horsford, John. “The Contrast.” *The European Magazine, and London Review*. Vol. 26. July-December, 1794. pp. 142-143.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 142.

such foreign words. Horsford's scholarship in Persian literature is again evinced in his mention of "Great Kerim's Acts",⁴⁶ who is acclaimed as a heroic figure in *Shahnama*, the illustrious tenth century Persian epic by Firdausi. The most interesting paratext of this poem is the footnote Horsford attached with the lines "... Aurengzebe, thy minarets tow'r on high, / And their exalted tops hide in the sky".⁴⁷ Here, instead of referencing from the history of the Mughal empire in pure factual terms, Horsford chooses to quote Warren Hastings, the then Governor-General of India, to give his readers an impression of the Mughal Emperor's prowess. The footnote reads:

Mr. Hastings says, 'Aurangzebe has effectively displayed to posterity, the power and sovereignty he exercised at Benares, by a magnificent mosque which he erected on the site (and even admitted into his plan a considerable part of the edifice,) of an ancient superb Hindoo temple.' This mosque continues perfect to this day, and with its high bounding minarets (which he also erected) overlooks the whole city.⁴⁸

The mention of Hastings' words in the footnote to Aurangzeb might have been a political ploy to gain favours from the corridors of power. As I shall further analyse in other poems, the paratextual strategies of these poets are particularly revealing.

It is tempting to quote the entire poem titled "Ode to Benares",⁴⁹ for it abounds in the use of Indian language words, and most of the words are explained elaborately in the footnotes. But, the scope of this dissertation is limited: so, I shall just present a sort of catalogue of the Indian language words, spellings unaltered, that Horsford had used in his description of the city of Benares: "Crishna", "Gopia", "Matra", "Pundits", "Beids", "Bramins", "Tulsey", "Lecshmy", "Poojah", "Bela", "Brahma", "Sershutta", "Methilla", and "Mahabaret". Although there are certain names of places, epics and goddesses which had to be used, if at all, from the Indian languages (it is a different matter that they are

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Qtd. in *Poetry of British India*. Vol. I. Ed. Fhlathúin. p. 51.

⁴⁹ Horsford, John. "Ode to Benares." *Poetry of British India*. Vol. I. Ed. Fhlathúin. pp. 53-54.

part of the vocabulary that constitute Eastern mythology), the other words could have been replaced with English language equivalents. However, in that case, the English words could never have created the mystic aura or the magnificence of the heritage city of Benares, neither would have the use of those English words testify to the successful process of acculturation that Horsford underwent in India. It is quite intriguing that Horsford drew parallels from classical Roman mythology in order to explain the ideas of Goddess Lecshmy (Lakshmi) and Goddess Sershutta (Saraswati), whom he elucidates as the Indian Ceres and the Indian Minerva. This strategy of interpreting by comparing the newly acquired intelligence of the British with the already existing stock of knowledge of the European was an excellent and easy way, which became hugely popular with the readers, as we find that most poets in the nineteenth century adopted this practice. Another two footnotes that draw the readers' attention are the ones attached with the "rising sun" in line 26 and that with "Bela" in line 31. Horsford's footnote for "... ope ... their tender besom to the rising sun" reads thus:

Abul Fazel says, the Hindoos in all their prayers, implore blessings of the sun.⁵⁰

This is an indication that Horsford gathered knowledge of Hindu religions and social customs more through the Persian literature he read than through his actual lived experiences in India; or, at least that he relied more on the former for authenticity. It may be mentioned here that Abul Fazal, the Grand Vizier of the court of Emperor Akbar, wrote on Hinduism at the request of the Mughal Emperor. Horsford also writes a little "extra" — if it may be called so — while glossing "Bela". He does not stop at just saying that it is a "fragrant and beautiful species of Jasminum", he also adds that with this flower "Hindus form *Haars* ["haar", Indian word for necklace] or chaplets which they ornament

⁵⁰ Qtd. in *Poetry of British India*. Vol. I. Ed. Fhlathúin. p. 53.

themselves with, at the time of bathing and devotion”. Thus the footnote serves as a commentary on the religious practices of the Hindus.

Other Indian language words that Horsford had used in his rather long poem, “The Art of Living in India”⁵¹ are “hoqqu” (popularly spelt as “hookah”), “lakhs” (as in a hundred thousand), “Cama” (alluding to Kamadeva, the Hindu god of love and desire), “Gopia” (the milkmaids who are the minions of Lord Krishna), “Chubdars” (referring to servants attending on a dignitary), “punkas” (a common word among Englishmen in India, meaning the fans hanging from the ceiling), “da’ees” (talking of the Indian nurses or midwives), and “Houri” (a common Persian word, that implies a beautiful woman who awaits the faithful in the Muslim paradise). It might seem a feat to the modern reader to find the mention of the elements of Hinduism, Islam as well as Christianity— “Cama”, “Gopia”, “Houri”, and “Valhalla” (Odin’s Hall in Norse Mythology)— by a catholic Christian poet within the space of one single poem; but the socio-cultural space within which these poets operated offered them a linguistic polyglossia that enriched their experiences and their writings without having to put in much effort.

John Leyden

The next poet under my scrutiny is John Leyden, about whom Mary Ellis Gibson, a scholar on Anglophone poetry in her own right, writes:

Leyden lived the contradictions of English internal colonialism and British imperialism, just as he lived the contradictions between learning for its own delights and learning as an arm of imperial conquest.⁵²

Leyden had expressed in several of his letters to his friends that, once he was destined to find his fortune in India, his ambition was to parallel the linguistic competence of Sir

⁵¹ Horsford, John. “The Art of Living in India.” *Poetry of British India*. Vol. I. Ed. Fhlathúin. pp. 54-59.

⁵² Gibson. *Anglophone Poetry*. p. 65

William Jones. Leyden had facility in Latin, Greek, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, ancient Icelandic, Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam, Bangla, Hindustani, Urdu, and a number of Indo-Chinese languages, including those spoken in Malaysia, Java, Philippines, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Bali.⁵³ The catalogue indeed appears stupendous. In fact, his first appointment in Madras in 1802 as a medical surgeon was only a matter of formality; he was actually called on service of the East India Company (with the help of William Dundas, who was then an influential member of the Board of Control for the Company), so as to put into use his great facility with languages. He had already studied the classical European and modern European languages during his university years at Edinburgh; his friend and fellow poet, Walter Scott, mentioned in Leyden's memoir that he was also familiar with the languages of the ancient scriptures and that he gained mastery over the Indo-Chinese group of languages while he was in India and during his travels to Indonesia, Malaysia, Batavia (Jakarta) and other South-Asian countries. Although he travelled once on doctor's advice with the purpose of regaining his health and the other time on an official assignment to assist Lord Minto, in both the cases, Leyden's personal motive was to collect manuscripts and further his knowledge of languages and the history of languages. After he returned from his first journey to South India and onwards to Malaysia, he published an elaborate and informative essay, "Dissertation on the Languages and Literatures of the Indo-Chinese Nations"⁵⁴ in the *Asiatick Researches*. This publication earned for him the prestigious membership of the Asiatic Society, and he was later appointed as Professor of Hindustani at Fort William College. A particular incident in Leyden's life attests his passion for

⁵³ The source of this and all other biographical information related to Leyden is the excellent memoir on Leyden written by Sir Walter Scott.

Leyden, John. *Poems and Ballads, with a Memoir of the Author by Sir Walter Scott, Bart.* Kelso, Scotland. J & J. H. Rutherford, 1858.

⁵⁴ Leyden, John. "Dissertation on the Languages and Literatures of the Indo-Chinese Nations." *Asiatick Researches*. Vol. X. Calcutta, 1808. pp. 158-289.

antiquity and poetry. While Walter Scott and Leyden were working together collecting old ballads and songs for *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*,⁵⁵ there was this one typical ballad which they both wished to include, but could not locate the whole of it. Scott recounts with much fondness and admiration how Leyden had happily taken the pain of walking almost fifty miles to reach “an old person who possessed this precious remnant of antiquity” and returned two days later singing the whole of the ballad in his characteristic borders “saw-tones”. In the late hours of the evening, Leyden’s ballad, Scott tells us, sounded like the “whistling of a tempest through the torn rigging of a vessel”.⁵⁶ The point I want to drive home through these backgrounds of Leyden’s life and his works is the penchant of the poet for delving deep into the studies of the historical and cultural evolution of any particular language or body of literature. Even the circumstances of his death are shrouded in stories that resonate with Leyden’s ardent passion for retrieving the archives and the zeal with which he pursued this passion to exceptional extents. Leyden visited the Indonesian island of Java in 1811 as an assistant and linguistic interpreter of Lord Minto, the then Governor-General of India who went on this expedition to seize Java. The Dutch settlement of Batavia (modern, Jakarta) was infamous for deadly diseases. While Leyden was visiting this place with a purpose of archival research, he contracted fever and died within a matter of three days. James Morton, Leyden’s biographer, later wrote in 1819 that the cause of Leyden’s fever was the “pestilential air” of the ill-ventilated library store-room, where Leyden was exploring a collection of manuscripts.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Scott, Walter. *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border: Consisting of Historical and Romantic Ballads, collected in the southern countries of Scotland; with a few of Modern Date, founded upon Local Tradition*. Kelso, London: J. Ballantyne, T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, 1802.

⁵⁶ Leyden. *Poems and Ballads*. p. 29.

⁵⁷ Morton, James. “Memoirs of Dr. Leyden.” *The Poetical Remains of the late Dr. John Leyden, with Memoirs of his Life*. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1819. p. lxxi.

It is expected, therefore, to find in Leyden's poems his mastery of multiple languages; but what strikes the modern reader is Leyden's thorough knowledge of the Hindu and Islamic religious lore, the stories and characters from the Indian epics (*Mahabharata*, for instance), and the political and cultural history of the land he found himself exiled in. "Verses written at the Island of Sagur"⁵⁸ offers a sensational account of how a mother sacrificed her innocent, beautiful infant in the deep waters of the Ganges apparently without mercy or remorse:

To Glut the shark and crocodile
A mother bought her infant here,
She saw its tender playful smile,
She shed not one maternal tear;
She threw it on a watery bier,
With grinding teeth sea-monsters tore
The smiling infant which she bore, —
She shrunk not once its cries to hear.⁵⁹

These lines shows Leyden's and, for that matter, the British man's scornful retrieval of the Hindu superstitions and the acts of brutality (for instance, the custom of Sati) associated with them. This poem made some of the strongest statements against the "wicked, shameless, impudent, and obscene"⁶⁰ practices of Hinduism, as expressed in Leyden's letters. The scholarship on the poetics and politics of colonialism has now established that the texts authored by the colonial masters abound in such scathing judgmental comments on the practices and customs of the Indians, often without any regard for traditions or beliefs that inspired such habits. Leyden, my poet in question here, was no exception. The remarkable aspect in this particular poem occurs in its twenty-fifth line:

Dark goddess of the iron-mace,
Flesh-tearer! Quaffing life-blood warm,

⁵⁸ Leyden. "Verses written at the Island of Sagur, in the Mouth of the Ganges, in 1807." *Poems and Ballads*. pp. 351-352.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p.351.

⁶⁰ Morton. p. lxxv.

The terror of thine awful face
The pulse of mortal hearts alarm.⁶¹

Leyden glosses these lines as “Dark Goddess, Kali”, as is found in all the versions of the poem’s publication. However, in one particular instance — this poem was printed several times and was almost always included in anthologies as a representative poem of Leyden’s poetic oeuvre — there is a rather long description of the Hindu goddess and the significance of Kali as a symbol of gory destruction in the footnote associated with the lines quoted above. This version of the poem is available in the form of a thin pamphlet printed in octavo and probably meant for private circulation among Leyden’s Scottish friends in Calcutta — I found only one copy of this particular pamphlet in a very poor shape in the archives of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata. There are numerous instances of the mention of Narayena or Brahma or even some occurrences of Saraswati and Lakshmi in the texts of the English poems written by British men and women in India during late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; but, the reference to Goddess Kali is hard to find. Leyden’s verse is only the second such instance after William Jones’ brief reference to the Goddess in his “Hymn to Durga”. Leyden’s elaborate description, however, deviates from Jones’ poetic discourse, and it is clear from the close scrutiny of the hymn and the footnote that the source of Leyden’s information is definitely not the elder poet’s verse tribute. It may, therefore, be concluded, that unlike most other men writing verses at this time in India on Oriental subjects, Leyden went far beyond Jones’ Orientalist works in the process of gathering information on Indian religions and customs. Exactly which scriptures or books he sought is not clear though. There is also another possibility of obtaining intelligence on such matters from his Indian acquaintances both in Calcutta and in the districts, places where he was posted at different times during the tenure of his service in India.

⁶¹ Leyden. “Verses written at the Island of Sagur.” p. 352.

Another remarkable poem in Leyden's poetic oeuvre is not a composition of his own, but his work of translation from the Kannada language. The poem is titled "The Dirge of Tipoo Sultan"⁶² and the authorial commentary just after the title explains that it is translated "From the Canara".⁶³ Leyden, as is expected from a linguistic enthusiast like him, elucidates, though briefly, the Canara language in an attached footnote, probably for his British readers. He writes:

Canara is the language of Mysore and Bednore, as well as
of the Canara province, and the neighbouring districts.⁶⁴

I shall quote the first four lines of the poem before I make my point on the phonetics of the proper nouns that crowd the beginning of this poem:

How quickly fled our Sultan's state!
How soon his pomp has pass'd away!
How swiftly sped Seringa's fate
From wealth and power to dire decay!⁶⁵

One can hardly help but notice how the train of proper nouns at the very onset of the verse, including those few in the footnote, created an effect of phonetical exoticism in the ears of the Englishman in Britain, who was trying by all means available to him to taste the flavour of the Orient through the texts that flowed back from India. Another such instance of a long march of Indian names — place names and people's names — occur toward the middle of the poem, when Leyden makes a list of the significant warriors who defended Tipu's kingdom:

Great Kummer, chief of soul elate,
And stern Sher Khan of deathless name.

Meer saduk too, of high renown,
With him what chieftain could compare?
While Mira Hussen virgins own
As flowery-bow'd Munmoden fair.

⁶² Leyden. "The Dirge of Tipoo Sultan." *Poetical Remains*. pp. 277-285.

⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 277.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Soobria Mutti, Bubber Jung,
 Still foremost in the crush of fight;
 And he whose martial glory rung
 From realm to realm, for dauntless might.

Khan Jehan Khan, who stood alone,
 Seid Saheb next, himself an host:
 The chief's round Indra's angel-throne
 Could ne'er such mighty prowess boast.

Pournia sprung from Brahma's line,
 Intrepid in the martial fray,
 Alike in council formed to shine:-
 How could our Sultan's power decay?"⁶⁶

Leyden does also mention other characters in the course of the poem: Runga, Sri-Munt, Crishna, Vishnu and even Duryoden (I keep the spellings unchanged) from *Mahabharata*, but he chooses to offer no explanatory paratext for these characters. It is unlikely that Leyden expected his European readers to have knowledge of Indian political proceedings or Indian epics in such vivid detail so as to recognise these characters in his poem. There might then be a possibility that Leyden expected his European readers to develop an understanding of the circumstances of Tipu Sultan's fall and the allusions he used to describe the event in this poem through the text of the poem itself. And, only in such cases as he deemed necessary, where the text of the poem did not offer further description, did he gloss few names in brief notes: among them are Mira Hussen, Soobria Mutti, Bubber Jung, Khan Jehan Khan and Said Saheb. However, there is one elaborate footnote referenced at the end of the eighty-fourth line, which I shall quote here in full:

The translator is perfectly sensible that the Asiatic names in this stanza have somewhat of an uncouth effect, but he nevertheless judged it proper to adhere to the Canara original, which enumerates accurately the chiefs most approved in the popular opinion. Besides, those names which have a ludicrous sound to an European ear, have often a very different effect on an Asiatic. Bubber Jung means "the tiger of battle". The romance of Emir Humsa

⁶⁶ Ibid. pp. 281-282.

celebrates a dreadful combat between that hero, the Arabian Hercules, and Bubber biab-an, “the tiger of the desert,” a monster, almost as formidable as the famous Nemean lion. Heng-i-Ishâk, the famous horse of the warrior, takes fright when he scents the tiger, and deserts his master, who courageously seizes the monster by the paws, swings him round in the air, and crushes him to pieces by dashing him on the ground. — Emir Humsa Persic MS.CX.⁶⁷

This elaborate footnote spread over two pages and occupying considerable space below the main text of the poem shows that Leyden was acutely conscious of his position as a British in India writing a poem on an Indian hero, and his scope and limitations as a translator. It also shows that Leyden made certain conscious choices in using names from the original Kannada poem, the reason for which might not always be the learned translator’s faithfulness to the original text, as Leyden would have his readers believe; on the contrary, it might as well have made the task of the poet easier in weaving the tapestry of exoticism by creating “a ludicrous sound to an European ear”. The appendage of this note, which talks in detail about how certain names might have very different connotations to an Indian or an Asian from that to a European, for that matter, is, I argue, an extrapolation which was purposefully added. An obvious purpose was to create an impression of the poet’s mastery of the vast repository of Oriental knowledge, his knowledge of Persian manuscripts and reading those in original included; but another oblique purpose of Leyden, I argue, might have been to leave his European readers wondering in amazement as to what other unexplained significances of words or phrases might remain hidden in between the lines of Leyden’s poems, and, therefore, unread and unreadable by them. Hence, again, a cause to marvel at Leyden’s knowledge of Oriental subjects. I advance this argument, which is somewhat inimical to Leyden’s motives, because he explains the connotation of an Indian name / term so elaborately only in this one instance; in the rest of the poem, or even in the other poems that he had written,

⁶⁷ Ibid. pp. 281-282.

nowhere did he offer to explicate the shades of meaning associated with an Indian name or word, he had used. It is as if to say that he could have kept on explaining, but the poetic canvas limits his scope, as the details would rather be too long and complicated. Máire Ní Fhlathúin makes an important observation regarding the general tenor of this poem where, in the act of translating, a coloniser adopts the voice of the colonised and speaks with deference, thereby widening farther the gulf between the British and the Indian:

It [the poem] might also be regarded as an early instance of a trope that would become common in the literature of British India: the adoption of an Indian voice and Persona, enabling the poet to inhabit, briefly, the role of racial and linguistic ‘other’, while maintaining in his capacity as translator and annotator a colonial mastery of the subject.⁶⁸

“The Adventures of Qui Hi?”

One of the most remarkable poems in the corpus of Company Poetry is titled “The Grand Master; or Adventures of Qui Hi? in Hindostan: A Hudibrastic Poem in Eight Cantos by Quiz.”⁶⁹ Although the authorship of the poem could be ascribed to any particular writer till date, yet it has been determined that the amusing caricatures that accompanied the poem was done by Thomas Rowlandson, a renowned British cartoonist of the times. Because Rowlandson provided the engravings which made this satirical verse ever more palatable for the reader, it is generally believed that the poem was written by William Combe, the British poet and satirist who lived from 1741 to 1823, and most of whose works were accompanied by Rowlandson’s illustrations. It was also a common practice for Combe not to put his name to many of his works; instead, he sometimes used

⁶⁸ Fhlathúin. Vol. I. p. 68.

⁶⁹ Quiz. *The Grand Master; or Adventures of Qui Hi in Hindostan: A Hudibrastic Poem in Eight Cantos by Quiz*. London: Thomas Tegg, 1816.

pseudonyms. There are a few other poems which were published later in the nineteenth century under the pseudonym Quiz, but textual analysis of those works makes it clear that none of those poems were written by the same hand. However, there are strong reasons to question the authorship of Combe on the poem in question, namely, “The Grand Master & c.” Combe himself prepared a catalogue of his own works just about two weeks before his death, and it was published in *Gentlemen’s Magazine*.⁷⁰ The poem under consideration is not among the titles listed here. It is most unlikely that the author himself would choose not to include a particular poem of his in the exhaustive list, or even miss one title. In addition, neither did Combe ever visit India nor did he have any “obvious connection to or knowledge”⁷¹ of the country. And, the poem, just as the title itself suggests, had a number of idioms and slangs and typical local cant from Indian languages, especially Hindustani. So, it is quite improbable that Combe was the author of this poem. In connection to the question of its authorship, the declaration that accompanied the listing of the poem in its 1862 Booksellers’ Catalogue is pertinent:

The intention of this work was to hold up the opprobrium the Marquis of Hastings, who was Governor-General of India, and also Commander-in-Chief, from Oct. 1813 to Jan. 1823. It was probably written by W. H. Ireland.⁷²

Later scholarship, however, established no such probability of W. H. Ireland being the author of this poem. Instead, it was widely accepted to have been written by Combe, which, as I have already argued, is highly improbable.

Whoever be its author, the poem marked an important set of attitudes in the coloniser during the first decades of the nineteenth century. I shall now briefly analyse the poem, and while doing so, I shall refer to its author as Quiz. The poem is about a young Englishman who seeks his fortune in the colonial shores of India, sets sail from England

⁷⁰ Combe, William. “The Late W. Combe, Esq.” *Gentlemen’s Magazine*. (December 1824) pp. 643-644.

⁷¹ Fhlathúin. Vol. I. p. 119.

⁷² Qtd. in *Anglophone Poetry*. Ed. Gibson. p. 373.

with high hopes only to find his dreams thwarted and himself in deplorable conditions in this country. The poem is a critique of the East India Company, which underpaid the British youths serving the Company in India. The youth, our protagonist, is a typical Company servant who finds himself in no good company in India; his honest industry and terrible hardships in the hostile climate and unfamiliar terrain do not reward him with the luxuries of life he had sought. Instead, he is neck-deep in debts and is exploited by his fellow Company men, to such an extent that he finally ends up in a debtor's prison. Quiz engages in harsh criticism of the then Governor-General of India, Lord Moira, who invited much controversy owing to his personal and political fealty to Prince Regent. A section of the British in India never approved of Lord Moira's profligacy and social flamboyance.⁷³ Quiz, in the form of the Hudibrastic satire as he explicates in the subtitle of the poem, ridicules Lord Moira, attacks the imperialist policies of the East India Company, and paints a caustic picture of the entire colonial enterprise. But, since, in the tradition of Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*,⁷⁴ he uses the tool of the mock-heroic verse, the pictures he paints are highly amusing, at the same time being satiric. Rowlandson's engravings make the text all the more hilarious. The protagonist of the poem is called "Qui Hi?" which can be easily read as "Koi Hai?" — this literally means "Is anybody there?" in Hindustani. It was commonly used by the British to call out to their Indian servants. It is interesting to note that the Indians often mockingly referred to the British man by this same phrase, "Qui Hi?" As the title of the poem suggests, the entire work deals with the colonial experience of a British youth in India. There is a preface of sorts to the main body of the work. It is in the form of a verse and is titled "Invocation to Butler", where Quiz pays homage to Samuel Butler as the master of the mock-heroic poems:

⁷³ Nelson, Paul David. *Francis Rawdon Hastings, Marquess of Hastings: Soldier, Peer of the Realm, Governor-General of India*. Madison, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005. p. 157.

⁷⁴ Butler, Samuel. *Hudibras. In Three Parts. Written in the Time of the Late Wars. Corrected and Amended: With Additions. To which is added Annotations, with an extra Index to the Whole*. Dublin: S. Powell, R. Gunne, G. Risk, G. Ewing, and W. Smith, 1732.

For surely satire's pointed pen
 Was ne'er required by viler men,
 Than those the muse has painted.⁷⁵

The verse invocation identifies the narrator of the poem as a fish, who is recounting its former identity to the people who have caught it. The fish speaks to its captors on board the ship:

I'm all that's left of poor Qui Hi
 For twelve long years in Indian wars,
 I gain'd misfortunes; and some scars;
 Lost both my health, and all my money,
 And died at last with brandy pawny.⁷⁶

This identification of the fish as Qui Hi? in its former life adduces to the Hindu doctrine of transmigration of souls. The narrative of the poem, quite interestingly, represents Hinduism and Hindu culture in a positive light, unlike many other poems by the Englishmen written in India during this time. In this connection, I would mention a particular incident in Qui Hi?'s life, that is described in detail in the Fifth Canto of the poem. Quiz tells us how Qui Hi? is saved from his debtors by an "Old Hindoo". This "Old Hindoo" here, Quiz elaborates, is thus repaying his debt to Qui Hi? who had earlier saved his daughter from a burning building. The imagery of saving a young girl from a burning building readily recalls to mind the familiar situation of the British man rescuing young Hindu maidens from the funeral pyres of Sati. Quiz carefully avoids any mention of Sati here, so that he includes no condemnable Hindu superstition or no sordid description of cruel Hindu rituals in the poem. Quiz also portrays Indian women in favourable circumstances as being morally upright and faithful, as against Eurasian or Anglo-Indian women who are presented as scheming and jealous characters. Qui Hi? marries Goulab, an Indian woman, and has a child with her; she always supports him in whatever ways she can and stands by him till the end, when Qui Hi? finally meets his

⁷⁵ Quiz, p. ix.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. vii.

death under miserable conditions in a debtor's prison. In contrast, Quiz introduces the character of Miss Indigo, who is a woman of mixed race, probably the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy, extortionist English indigo planter and the wife of one of his oppressed servants. Miss Indigo is shown to harbour jealousy against Goulab plainly because of her marriage to Qui Hi? and hatches a plot to ruin him and his family. Such portrayal of these two women characters, especially coupled with the critique of the Company and the favourable representation of Hindu culture, actually turns on its head the much discussed tools of 'othering' used by the British throughout the long nineteenth century. This makes the "Adventure of Qui Hi?" a remarkable and extraordinary poem which was written by a British in the early phase of its imperialist activities in India, and yet defied the poetics of colonialism. It is evident, then, that there were cross-currents, and quite strong ones, against the ideas of imperialism and colonial policies amongst the British themselves.

In the poem, Quiz often refers to the British officers placed in high administrative and military ranks as "Burra Sahibs", which is what the Indians often called these officers. The author himself offers an explanatory note to these words in a footnote:

the term "Burra Sahib" or Grand Master, is used commonly, in India, from the natives, to European Gentlemen.⁷⁷

Similarly, Quiz provides his readers with elaborate glossaries and notes throughout the poem. He does not always use the paratexts for explaining meanings of Indian language words; more often than not, he gives detailed descriptions of the habits of the British officers or the customs of the Indians. He even comments on the significance of certain places in Kolkata, like Chowringhee or Burra Bazar, trying to give his readers an essence of the city, and sometimes comments on the curious classification of people based on

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 92.

their trade or profession and the social prestige or lack of it attached to them. It is indeed interesting to note that Quiz almost always writes these notes in the third person editorial voice, as in “Quiz says ...” which is not a common feature of the paratexts of the poems written during this period. This technique adds to the humour of the narrative besides implicating a disclaimer for the truth expected to be contained in the authorial voice. At the same time, the paratext becomes as important, or perhaps more so, as the poem, because it is a telling commentary on the social and cultural practices of the period. One of the footnotes quite crisply sums up the financial circumstances of the young Englishman in India:

This is too often the sad effects of young men getting into debt in India. The Parsees, and others, advance griffins cash, to any amount, on their bond, to pay them one hundred per cent. This engagement the unfortunate debtor has seldom an opportunity of performing; and the consequence is, he cannot leave the country, even for the benefit of his health, and very often perishes in a jail.⁷⁸

At another instance, Quiz attaches a little description of Chowringhee, saying that it is “a very handsome street in Calcutta, facing the Esplanade, where the public military offices generally are”.⁷⁹ He clearly intended his European readers to get a feeling of the places he mentioned rather than only understanding its geographical location, as is also evident in the manner he glosses the Indian language word, “bazar”: he writes, “[T]he bazar is the market-place in all Indian towns.” He further adds, “[M]ost of the native merchants have their houses there; and the combustible materials that form these buildings often occasion fire”.⁸⁰ The latter part of this description is an attempt on the author’s part to offer practical attestation of his description in the poem of a building in a bazaar catching fire. That the author had good knowledge of Indian language argot is evident in the use of such words as “chit”, “rea”, “chola chokree”, “Ballata”, (“bilet’), “Salaam” and others, all of

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 98.

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 97.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 104.

which he explains in brief footnotes. One passage from the Fifth Canto of the poem is particularly interesting: it mocks the disparaging manner in which the Englishmen in India treated the Indians:

Qui Hi?, with candour, now intreated
His old acquaintance to be seated;
Not like those domineering Neros —
Those petty Asiatic heroes —
Who think a native, plac'd beside
Their sacred chair, would hurt their pride.
Their consequence thus to secure,
They make them sit upon the floor.
Our youth, indeed, was better taught
Than most young Ensigns lately caught,
And knew that youth should always shew
That deference to age they owe.⁸¹

It is indeed a scathing remark from an Englishman about the kind of attitude the other, supposedly respected, fellow countrymen of his harboured towards the Indians. Following soon enough, the reader stumbles on a footnote that is, in all the texts of the period that I surveyed, arguably the most harsh comment on the position of the British in the perspective of the Indian:

The Hindoos sometimes make apposite and very just observations on the resident colonists: they consider the British part of the population as nearly uncivilised.⁸²

What we have here is reason enough for the author to conceal his true identity behind an odd pseudonym: he was himself a young Englishman who had come to India to seek his fortune, and, hence could not probably risk losing the favours of the Company officials who were already walking the corridors of power. The very next footnote is testimony to the author's observation and knowledge of the caste system and the malice of untouchability that was operative in the Hindu society. He observes:

Of all trades, and descriptions of men, in the East-Indies,
the unfortunate shoemaker is the most degraded. It is

⁸¹ Ibid. pp. 107-108.

⁸² Ibid. p. 109.

considered the worst degradation, to be touched, even, by a gentlemen of the last.⁸³

It is quite amusing to continue reading the poem further from this point: Quiz mockingly goes on to expose the unscrupulousness of those that are placed much higher in the social order of power and prestige, so decided by their profession. He nevertheless fails to point out how the English were actually responsible for the corruption that some of the attorney engaged in, and that, he says, was just one of the many “curses” of the British rule in India. The tone of mockery is at its caustic best in the adjectives he uses to describe the English rule:

Of all curses that the munificent and parental consideration of England conferred on India, nothing can certainly be worse than the execrable tribe of attorneys; perhaps, with one or two exceptions.⁸⁴

The paratexts of this poem never ceases to be amusing — amusing in a way that its object of ridicule is described in the least inane manner. When the author talks about the possibility of Qui Hi? “Put ... safely in the trunk”, he immediately attaches a footnote to explicate further:

Our readers are assured, that trunk is, literally, the Indian term for a jail: and though Quiz has made some allusions by pettifogging lawyers, he only means those unprincipled fellows who disgrace the profession: to the honour of many he bears testimony.⁸⁵

In the First Canto of the Poem, Quiz offers elaborate glossaries to throw light on the manner in which the service men in the military conducted themselves. He is particularly vocal about the paltry pay in the army and the meaningless flamboyance. The mock-heroic style that he has adopted for the narrative of the poem offers him enough scope to comment on the vanity of tall oaths that the individual soldiers are sworn to. While the protagonist wonders if he has made a mistake by making such a promise which he doubts

⁸³ Ibid. pp. 109-110.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 115.

⁸⁵ Ibid. pp. 115-116.

he cannot live up to, the author inserts a comic note for his readers in the third person editorial voice:

Quiz says mistake here. He repeats it; because he is perfectly aware that the most honourable young men in the army of India are placed under such pecuniary embarrassments, that they are *obliged to promise*, without the hope of performing the promise.⁸⁶

The narrative of the poem as well as other notes that accompany it suggests that the meagre allowance of the soldiers in the Indian army was a major concern of the author. It also indicates the possibility of the author himself being a serving member of the army who have suffered considerably because of such poor and unjust wages. He attaches a footnote to the line “Riches attend the paltry quill” in order to elaborate how the undeserving young Englishman enjoys a fortune even in the position of a Clerk:

Pro bono Publico. — I shall just observe, that ensigns have remained for seven years on their paltry allowance; while a young gentleman, who comes out a writer, or kind of clerk, has been almost immediately put in a situation of no trouble, and in the possession of an allowance of one thousand or two thousand rupees a month!! The latter description of people generally return to England with a fortune.⁸⁷

Another excellent example of satire is at the point where Quiz ridicules the needless show of pomp in the uniform of the soldiers. In the poem, he mockingly says that “[T]hey pay for breakfast with their lace”, and in the note attached to this line, he writes:

The Indian army is magnificently dressed; indeed, rather too much so, for the scanty pay of an ensign — 130 rupees a month. Some of those young gentlemen, from the loads of lace with which their jackets are covered, appear, at a distance, not unlike a *sideboard* of plate: they, consequently, very often have more silver on their jackets than in their pockets; and an old jacket is a *valuable* commodity.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Qtd. in Gibson. *Anglophone Poetry*. p. 374.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 375.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

I shall end the discussion on this brilliant piece of poetical satire from the corpus of Company Poetry with an example of how Quiz almost looked through the vanity of the entire colonial enterprise. He ridiculed the very institution of British imperialism in the following lines:

Let her examine, and she'll find,
That certain people are inclin'd
To give rewards where *none* are due,
Unto a servile, stupid crew.⁸⁹

The footnote which elaborates these lines are at once caustic and hilarious. Quiz exclaims in the note:

Everyone knows about the annual distribution of god medals, and *thousands* of rupees, at Calcutta college!!! while the distributor, and, of course, *judge* cannot understand a syllable that is *said*; but concludes, that the youth who *talks most* is most learned.⁹⁰

Metonymically, the farcical prize distribution ceremony fantastically sums up the vanity of British colonialism in India: the Englishman, who actually could comprehend little or no part of Indian culture, languages or customs, claimed to have superior knowledge and owner over the Indians, by dint of which they judged the latter, punished or rewarded them, as they would dim fit in their judgment, and all this in the mask of educating and ennobling the 'uncivilised' Indian. This poem demanded elaborate reading because it is a remarkable departure from the conventional tropes of the poems written by the Englishman in India during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Henry Barkley Henderson

Henry Barkley Henderson, who had spent almost three decades in India, wrote a number of poems, although most of them were written during the first decade of his stay

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 376.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

in this country, i.e. from 1813 to 1825. His poems abound in Indian language words, and, surprisingly, most of those words later became part of the Standard English vocabulary, and were included in Oxford English Dictionary. In fact, a gamut of loan-words that were adopted in English with little or no modification from Indian languages, first started being used by the British during this period in India. Words like “dacoit”, “seapoy”, “Sahib”, “Nabob”, “curry”, and “hookah” are regular occurrences in Henderson’s texts. The soldier enlisted in the Bengal army, who practised poetry in copious volumes, also used other Bangla words in his poems: examples are “Singha” (a kind of trumpet), “pyke” (infantry or footman), “burkundoss” (soldier armed with a matchlock), “tulwar” (sabre), “buggy” (a light horse-drawn carriage), “punkah” (fan), and “ayah” (nursemaid) amongst others. The use of certain English words by the Indians, adopting its meaning to the immediate context, as is reflected in these poems, is indeed intriguing. One such instance is the word “tiffen”,⁹¹ which is used by Henderson in “Satire IV” which was published in the volume *Satires in India*⁹² in 1819 from Calcutta. This word came into use in the early nineteenth century, and is probably a dialectical derivation from the English word “tiffing”, which meant “sipping”. In English, the word “tiffin” was used to mean a cake or a dessert made with biscuits and chocolate and often served chilled. However, this word was readily adopted by the Indians during the early decades of the nineteenth century, but surprisingly it came to mean a light meal or snack. Initially, the word was used with varying spellings, as in “tiffen”, “tiffin” or “tiffun”, unless “tiffin” became the standardised form of usage in Indian English much later in the nineteenth century.⁹³ Therefore, Henderson, like many other poets writing English language poetry in India during that tenure, was neither writing in British English nor merely thrusting a few

⁹¹ Henderson, Henry Barkley. *The Bengalee: Or, Sketches of Society and Manners in the East*. London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1829. p. 181.

⁹² Henderson, Henry Barkley. *Satires in India*. Calcutta: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1819.

⁹³ For details on “tiffin”, refer to *Hobson-Jobson: A Glossary of Anglo-Indian Words or Phrases*. Col. Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell. New Delhi: Rupa, 1986, pp. 919-921.

Bangla nor Hindustani words in his English poems, but was writing a very interesting hand: an argot in which the British in India spoke, which had in its vocabulary a number of Indian language words as well as some adopted English words which were Indianised — if I may say so — in spelling and also in meaning. These poets tried to create through the vocabulary they used in their texts the feel of the very world they inhabited in practicality. However, Henderson does indicate in his texts that the British men and women in India, with their limited vocabulary of Indian language words, were apprehensive of using those Indian terms or, more particularly of being spoken to in Indian languages, while communicating with the Indians. This was probably because the British had already assumed that the Indians, especially those in their service, did not think highly of their masters and would not miss a chance of jeering at them. This presumption of the British had in itself the latent consciousness on their part of meting out unjust, and sometimes, brutal treatment to their Indian servants. The following lines bear testimony to such notions and behaviour of the British:

Her *Ayah* she chided, scolded, beat, abused
 And frantic ire her angel-face suffused.
 Good heav'ns — what language! if Metissa guessed
 One half the meaning, her abuse expressed,
 She'd shrink in shame, and inly conscious pain,
 And never dare an Eastern term again.⁹⁴

The British in India, therefore, harboured a double-edged attitude: on the one hand, they used Indian argot in their texts with the intention of expressing their familiarity with Indian languages and cultures to the European audience; while, on the other hand, they were apprehensive, and at times fearful, of the hostile terrain, harsh climate and the unfamiliar social customs and rituals of the Indians, which they relentlessly tried to comprehend the full significance of in the tenure of the 200-odd years of their stay in this country.

⁹⁴ Henderson. *The Bengalee*. p. 181.

The tools of ‘othering’ were at work in this nascent stage of colonial culture, as is manifested in the use of derogatory adjectives and imagery in the description of Indian habits and customs. The “vile” hookah was imagined as a “monstrous snake” and described as a “pest of social hours”, while the lip “besmeared with *Curry*” presented a “hideous” and “fearful sight”.⁹⁵ These disparaging descriptions in a poem written in 1814 were among the very beginnings of expressing the Orient in terms of derision — untruthful, debauched, licentious, corrupt, lowly, and even bereft of conjugal or filial affection. This is what David Kopf referred to as the ‘anti-Orientalist’ tendency of some of the poems written during this period. Kopf distinguishes between the attitude of the elite officers of East India Company and that of the servicemen in the lower ranks of the Company: while the former were expressly vocal about their knowledge of Indian languages and their acculturation with Indian cultures, the latter found these unacceptable and forthwith dismissed them.⁹⁶

The ‘Calcutta School’ of English Verse

Quite a number of poems, mostly anonymous were published in the *Calcutta Journal*, which was founded by James Silk Buckingham together with Raja Rammohan Roy. In its short life span of only five years, from 1818 to 1823, the *Calcutta Journal* published essays, articles, reviews and copious volumes of poetry — all of which were anti-establishment in their outlook. The pieces criticised the policies of the East India Company and expressed liberal views even on such grave affairs as parliamentary reform. Being a contributor or editor, therefore, of *Calcutta Journal* ran the risk of earning the disapprobation of the ubiquitous John Company:

⁹⁵ Ibid. pp. 181-182.

⁹⁶ Kopf, David. *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1969. pp. 221-222.

[S]everal gentlemen have been deprived of lucrative official situations, in consequence of their being suspected of favouring the *Calcutta Journal*.⁹⁷

Even much later in the century, J. H. Stocqueler, a renowned journalist and historian, remarked that any act of association or support to the *Calcutta Journal* was considered “a service of danger”.⁹⁸ Understandably, many of the contributors to *Calcutta Journal* used pseudonyms or wrote anonymously. Consequently, here surfaces an interesting body of anonymous poems. Surveying these poems closely, I have listed a few Indian language words which occur frequently: they are “manges” (majhee, a sailor or boatman), “Zillah” (district), “cutcherry” (the courthouse), “salam” (salute), “mofussil” (rural or sub-urban areas) and “hookah”. Most of the words were not glossed by the poets, neither was a footnote attached to them. There was, however, one particular contributor who signed off as “a jolly old writer”. He used Indian language words in his poems to a far greater extent than his other fellow poets and, unlike them, he attached glossaries to almost all the Indian language words he used. The catalogue, which is not exhaustive, of the words and phrases along with their explanations offered by the poet that I furnish below bear testimony to the poet’s sound knowledge of Urdu and Hindi: “Omlah” is described as “The Native Officers [of the court]”; “Nuzur” is explained as “an offering by an inferior to a superior”; “oil from the tree” is glossed as “the coconut tree, whence the oils is extracted”; “Misil-Khoond” is defined as “the person who reads over the proceedings”, “Hookm Shood” is explicated as “ordered, after these words the sentence awarded is written”, and “Ghureeb purwur Salaamur!” is rightly translated as “Hail! Cherisher of the Poor!”⁹⁹ Such good knowledge of Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, Persian, Bangla or Tamil was not

⁹⁷ Bannatyne, Colin. “The Indian Press.” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. Vol. XII. No. LXVII. (Aug 1822). pp. 133-139. p. 139.

⁹⁸ Stocqueler, J. H. *Memoirs of a Journalist*. Bombay and London: Times of India, 1873. p. 90.

⁹⁹ [A Jolly Old Writer]. “Rinaldo, or The Incipient Judge: A Tale of Writers’ Buildings.” Canto Third. *The Calcutta Journal*. Feb 16, 1822. p. 488.

uncommon among the British residents of India in the polyglot culture of the early nineteenth century.

Thomas D'arcy Morris

A common practice among these British writers was to pluralise a Bangla or Hindustani word by suffixing ‘-s’ or ‘-es’ with it — as in, “punkahs”, “bazars”, “ghauts”, “Omlahs”, “nabobs”, “doorgs” and many other such words. These words occur so frequently in the corpus of Company Poetry that one might turn to any random page in a collection of Company verses, and one is sure to stumble across more than one such pluralised Indian language word.¹⁰⁰ One other practice with regard to the uses of Indian language words was, however, not so common — and that is, using a word as a gerund or participle by suffixing ‘-ing’ or ‘-ed’ to it. One such example is the word “salaaming” found in the poem “The Griffin”¹⁰¹ by Thomas D’arcy Morris: “The Brahmin low salaaming bent his head ...”.¹⁰² Such usage of Indian language words, although not very common, was not unusual among these poets. It indicates the intention and attempt on the part of these poets to familiarise themselves with Indian languages, and consequently with Indian cultures. Such practice is, in many senses, a way of claiming the language as their own property, which they could use to their own purposes in any manner they pleased. Just as this proprietary attitude of the British was true for Indian resources and Indian labour, similarly it also held good for their usage of the Indian languages.

Morris is no exception when it comes to thrusting names of Indian places into a stanza of the poem, so that the train of names create a phonetically exotic effect on the

¹⁰⁰ The frequent recurrence of these words is precisely the reason why I choose not to furnish a long list of citations to each of the words mentioned.

¹⁰¹ Morris, Thomas D’arcy. “The Griffin.” *Bombay Gazette*, 1820. The poem was serially published in the following issues of the *Bombay Gazette*: 30 August, 6 September, 20 September, 25 October, 6 December, 27 December— all in the year 1820.

¹⁰² Morris. “The Griffin.” *Bombay Gazette*. 6 September 1820. Stanza 48, Line 111.

European reader back in the continent. It is a typical practice not only of Morris, but also of his other fellow poets, to mention Indian place names in quick succession — in most cases they are used in order to mark a boundary of a region or to give an idea of the geographical extent of the region which the poet is describing. It may be assumed that most of those names would not signify or carry much geographical information for the European readers unfamiliar with the Indian topography. So, there might be a possibility that the poet intended to create an effect of exoticism on his European readers.

I would quote two stanzas from Morris' "The Griffin" in order to substantiate my argument:

Land of Muskeeto's, Buffaloes and Bugs!
 For all Commodities the great Bazar
 Steeds from Arabia and from Persia and from Persia Drugs
 Carnelians from Cambay and other spar
 From China, Beads and Bird's nests! Rice and Rugs
 With long, dull stupid tales from Malabar
 Tales, long enough to frighten any body
 Of Kotiote, Wynnad and Manantoddy!¹⁰³

This is the first stanza from the Second Canto of the poem. The way mosquito is spelled as "Muskeeto" resembling the way the Indian tongue pronounced the newly learnt English word, speaks volumes of the disparagement with which the English spoke of the Indians. It may be noted here that the pronunciation of "muskeeto" is more or less similar to the pidgin dialect used by the gypsies or lower class, mostly illiterate, population of the British rural areas. There is then a significant conscious effort by the poet to place the Indian native at a social station which is far below the one at which he places himself. The adjective used by Morris to describe Malabar Tales also tell tales of the colonial tool of 'othering'. The celebrated traditional folklores of the Malabar region of South India are "dull" and "stupid" and frightening — judgments pronounced by an Englishman who had been in India for less than two years at the time of writing this poem in 1819, and

¹⁰³ Ibid. Stanza 1, Lines 1-8.

probably had little or no knowledge of what those tales contained. From the biographical information and other writings of Morris, there is no evidence that he ever read these folktales. Another stanza where he uses Indian names in quick succession also appear in the Second Canto of the poem:

And 'mid the horizons azure mist, a gleam,
Of radiant glory tipp'd Bhowmullin's brow,
Gilded Kurnulla, with his splendid beam,
Whose funnel'd fort belonged to Bajee Row,
The golden light then kissed the Panwell stream,
Dancing along its rippling wave, 'till now
Swift as the footsteps of an Atlanta
It play'd on Caranja, Salsette and Elephanta.¹⁰⁴

This practice of drawing comparisons from Greek or Roman mythology — as in this case the journey of the golden rays of the rising sun is compared to the Greek goddess of hunting, Atlanta, who is noted for her swiftness — was common among the Company poets. They probably engaged in such comparisons from their pre-existing stock of knowledge in order to understand the unfamiliar and the unknown in terms of the familiar and the known. Here we find Morris uses the space of one whole stanza just for the description of the rising of the sun: although that may be poetic, and descriptions of nature are mostly so, and there may be no reason why one should doubt the inclusion of poetic descriptions in a poem, I argue that in the scheme of the long, narrative poem spread over five cantos, there is rarely such elaborate descriptions of nature, and so this might have been included here in order to opportune the poet to mention Indian names following each other close on the heels, so that an exotic phonetic effect is created on the European audience. As I would closely examine other prominent poets while travelling along the first half of the nineteenth century, I would cite more examples of such mention of Indian names without much purpose or function in the central theme of the poem

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. Stanza 44, Lines 101-108.

concerned; I would also talk of more instances where comparisons have been made with elements from classical mythology with an intention to demonstrate erudition.

Among the other Indian language words that Morris uses in the course of this poems are “musnuds” and “Bundér”, which respectively mean thrones and port or dock; “pachees”, meaning girl or woman of twenty-five; and “nerrick” meaning tariff or market rate. The occurrence of these last two words is indeed notable. Morris here shows his knowledge of the social customs and practices of the Indians, while commenting on the right age of the girl desirable for finding a suitable husband in India:

And as for ages in this husband Mart
Sixteen, bright eyes with figure good, may catch
A Senior Merchant or a Colonel’s heart
The *teens* are all a marketable batch
But two and twenty must look dev’lish smart,
Pachees must jump at any she can snatch
For twenty-six is woman’s climateric
And this, I’m told, is still the Bombay Nerrick!!!¹⁰⁵

There is quite a touch of humour in the above passage. However, though the poem may actually be intended to be humorous and satiric, there is little or no humour at all in the gross descriptions of “the Natives in a lump”:¹⁰⁶

And many the Residents of this Isle, you see
The long debauch’d mustachio’d Moosulmaun
The Armenian sallow, the hi-bred Portuguee,
The Dera, of other castes the scoff and scorn,
The industrious, wealthy overgrown Parsee
Christ’s dingy worshippers in pig-sties born,
And last the smiling Hindoo, in his Chariot rolled
Appears in state, “decked in barbaric pearl and gold”.¹⁰⁷

The description stereotypes the races of people who comprised most part of the Indian population during that period, and is, at the same time, a vivid reflection of the British perception of the Indian society in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Such stereotypes recur frequently in the texts of the British colonisers.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. Stanza 7, Lines 49-56.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. Review (in prose) preceding Stanza 38.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. Stanza 38, Lines 85-92.

Thomas Medwin

Thomas Medwin, who is introduced by Ní Fhlathúin as occupying “a peripheral role in literary history”¹⁰⁸ in the short biographical note which precedes the extracts from his poem in the anthology *The Poetry of British India 1780-1905* edited by her, spent only five years, from 1813 to 1818, in India in the service of the British army and lived mostly in Cawnpur (now Kanpur) and Bombay. During this period, he took copious notes of his experiences in India, especially in a travel diary that he wrote while he was making his inland passage from Uttar Pradesh to Bombay. These notes offer a vivid and detailed description of the Indian flora and fauna, the rites and rituals of the Marathas, and the social customs in place in that part of northern India.¹⁰⁹ Although Medwin did not write any poem during his short stay in India, all his later works draw heavily on these travel notes. After he left India, he wrote his first long narrative poem, “Oswald and Edwin”¹¹⁰ (1820), while he was living in Geneva with his old compatriots, Edward E. Williams and his partner Jane, both of whom were his colleagues in the British Indian Army. Most part of this poem is about a lion-hunt from which ill-fated Edwin never returns; the poem also tells the tragic story of Oswald and his love for an Indian woman. Both Williams and Medwin often engaged in hunting as a sport in the deep, dark jungles of North India during their period of service in the regiment,¹¹¹ and many of these experiences were woven into the narrative of the poem. It is this engagement with hunting which equipped both the English men with thorough knowledge of the Indian flora and fauna, as is vividly

¹⁰⁸ Fhlathúin. Vol. I. p. 163.

¹⁰⁹ Mazzeo, T. “Travel Writing and Empire in the Shelley/Byron Circle: Introduction to Edward Ellerker Williams’s *Sporting Sketches*” *Romantic Circles*. <<http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/sketches/sketches-intro.html>> [accessed 17th July 2015] Par. 23-25.

¹¹⁰ Medwin, Thomas. *Oswald and Edwin. An Oriental sketch and other Poems*. Geneva: J. J. Paschoud. 1820.

¹¹¹ Lovell Jr., Ernest J. *Captain Medwin: Friend of Byron and Shelley*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962. p. 29.

reflected in the extensive footnotes that accompany Medwin's poems. The incidents narrated in "Oswald and Edwin" were adapted and reworked into Medwin's other poems several times over. In the very next year, Medwin published *Sketches in Hindoostan, with Other Poems*,¹¹² where he revised the materials from "Oswald and Edwin" into two separate poems — one on the lion-hunt and the other on the Pindarees, the Indian bandits from whose clutches Oswald rescued his lady love, a high-caste Indian woman. This incident of saving the distressed damsel is again reworked in his later work, *The Angler in Wales*,¹¹³ where Oswald saves the Indian woman from sati where she was going to be burnt on her deceased husband's funeral pyre. It may be mentioned here that this motif of the Englishman rescuing the Indian woman from sati is a recurrent motif in the texts written by the British in India during the first half of the nineteenth century.

There are ample autobiographical elements in the characterisation of Oswald, Edwin and Julian, the protagonist in the *The Angler in Wales*. Nigel Leask argues that Medwin's characters also largely owe themselves to Shelley's characterisation of the romantic poet, who is the protagonist in *Alastor*¹¹⁴ and also to the persona of Shelley himself.¹¹⁵ The first adaptation of *Oswald and Edwin* into two different poems for *Sketches in Hindoostan* was suggested by Percy Bysshe Shelley, the great Romantic poet, who was Medwin's cousin and childhood friend. Medwin had intimate and long associations with both Shelley and Byron, and he is mostly remembered by posterity, not for his poems, but for his biographical accounts of these great Romantics.¹¹⁶ In fact, his tombstone at Horsham, Sussex, has these words engraved on it: "Friend and Companion

¹¹² Medwin, Thomas. *Sketches in Hindoostan, with Other Poems*. London: C and J. Ollier, 1821.

¹¹³ Medwin, Thomas. *The Angler in Wales: or, Days and Nights of Sportsmen*. London: Bentley, 1834.

¹¹⁴ Shelley, Percy Bysshe. "Alastor." *Alastor; Or, The Spirit of Solitude: And Other Poems*. London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1816. pp. 1-49.

¹¹⁵ Leask, Nigel. "Towards and Anglo-Indian Poetry? The Colonial Muse in the Writings of John Leyden, Thomas Medwin and Charles D'Oyly." *Writing India, 1757-1990*. Ed. B. Moore-Gilbert. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996. pp. 52-85. pp. 66-70.

¹¹⁶ Medwin, Thomas. *The Life of P. B. Shelley*. 2 Vols. London: Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847.
Medwin, Thomas. *Journal of the Conversations of Lord Byron: Noted During a Residence with His Lordship at Pisa, in the Years 1821 and 1822*. New York: Wilder and Campbell, 1824.

of Byron, Shelley, and Trelawney".¹¹⁷ The influence of both Shelley and Byron are apparent in Medwin's poems, as are his readings of translations of Oriental texts and the conventions of Anglo-Indian life. Gibson remarks that "Byron and Shelley combine in Medwin's poetic conceptions of his Indian subjects."¹¹⁸

What is of utmost interest in the poems of Medwin is the paratext: the prefaces and dedications always acknowledge the poet's debt to the experiences he had had and the travel diaries he had written in those five years in India, and also to Edward Williams' notes on his hunting expeditions in India. The footnotes here are numerous and extensive, and offer more than just the immediate meaning of the innumerable Indian language words used by Medwin. With so many Indian words and phrases woven into the narrative of the poem, Shelley found it to be "an exotic vocabulary".¹¹⁹ Shelley advised his friend to revise the texts and reduce the Indian words; he was also of the opinion that the reading of the poems will suffer lack of continuity because of the footnotes, which constantly interrupt and intrude. The European audience will have to fall back on the footnote every time he wanted to find out the meaning of an unknown word or phrase from a different language. Medwin, however, did not pay heed to his cousin's advice, and retained the footnotes. On the other hand, Shelley was certain of the "popularity" that the poem would achieve, when published, as the British in particular and the Europeans in general had by then already developed a certain fascination for texts with Orientalist subjects, and were enthusiastic about reading and owning personal copies.¹²⁰ Medwin was at that time residing with Edward Williams and Jane, who had also had a considerable degree of familiarity with the Indian language words, and, like Medwin, they felt that using those words was necessary in conveying certain nuances of meaning, to which English

¹¹⁷ Lovell. p. 331.

¹¹⁸ Gibson. *Anglophone Poetry*. p. 116.

¹¹⁹ Jones, Fredrick L., ed. *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. 2 Vols. Vol II. Oxford: Clarendon Pres, 1964. p. 184.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 183.

equivalents would not do justice. For instance, “Shaster” or Shastra would conjure up an image of the mystic old texts of the Hindus, which are not easily comprehensible, but the word “holy scriptures” in its place would not really associate the reader’s imagination with the aura of mysticism, and would perhaps give the reader an idea of some divine book of the Hindus, akin to their own Bible. Although there may be arguments as to the real interpretation in the reader’s imagination of the significance of the words used, I shall consciously avoid such theories of translations and readers’ response, as they are not the central point of my argument. What I am trying to say is just that the Williamses and Medwin had thought in this way, as is evident from the accounts of the conversations.¹²¹ What we have as a result is an interesting text complete with prefaces, acknowledgements, dedications, and substantial footnotes. The footnotes provide a running commentary on the flora and fauna of northern India, and on the social customs and religious rites of the Hindus. Reading the footnotes by themselves without any reference to the poem they accompany is rewarding in the sense that they offer a storehouse of information on India to the European audience, and help us to understand how Medwin, himself a British, interpreted and understood the Indian topography and the Indian society. It is tempting to quote most of the footnotes of *Oswald and Edwin* and *Sketches in Hindoostan* here, but I shall choose only a few footnotes which bear testimony to Medwin’s comprehension of the hostile Indian terrain and the unfamiliar Indian culture.

In “The Lion Hunt”,¹²² the poet glosses a number of Indian birds, animals and plants, always using their Indian names in the poem, even when English translations were common enough to find and use. For instance, Medwin talks about the “Hurrial”, the “Googoo”, the “Teetur”, the “Nyl Ghau”, the “Naga” and the “Saumur” instead of the

¹²¹ Lovell. pp. 65-67.

¹²² Medwin. “The Lion Hunt.” *Sketches in Hindoostan*. pp. 1-44.

“green pigeon”, the “ringdove”, the “black partridge”, the “blue bull”, the “Cobra” and the “thrush” — all of which he glosses in the footnotes. Medwin goes well beyond just offering the English names in the footnotes. For instance “Teetur” is glossed as

partridge. The black one is here signified, remarkable for the beauty of its plumage and for its peculiar call, which the natives superstitiously construe into the words *Soubani tere Kodarat* — praised be the Lord.¹²³

When the poet mentions the “creepers” or the “clambering vine” in his poems, he attaches footnotes to offer his readers a comprehensive idea of the Indian vegetation. The footnote attached to the line “we wind along — where many a creeper trails”¹²⁴ reads:

Nothing can exceed the variety of the *parasite* tribe in most parts of India. They are mostly of the *Convolvus* genus, and blue the predominant colour particularly in the eye of the flower.¹²⁵

The footnote attached to the phrase “the ringlets of the clambering vine”¹²⁶ reads:

The vine is not generally known to be a native of India. The falls; in Rewa are covered with them, and they abound in those immense forests that stretch across the Continent, from the Gulph of Cambay, to Cape Comorin.¹²⁷

A fine example of code-mixing occurs in the text when Medwin uses “Dukhin and western division”¹²⁸ instead of ‘southern and western divisions’ in a footnote, where he is talking about the trade relations between India and the other South-Asian countries. Similarly, other footnotes convey information on Indian Rajahs, Nabobs and even tradesmen and common people as well as their rituals and practices. I argue that not only Medwin, but most British in India gathered knowledge about the Indian flora and fauna, the Indian history, the cultures and social rites of the people of India, and this information was used to construct the Orient in the Western imagination. As I have already pointed

¹²³ Ibid. p. 40.

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 15.

¹²⁵ Ibid. p. 39.

¹²⁶ Ibid. p. 15.

¹²⁷ Ibid. p. 39.

¹²⁸ Medwin. “Notes to the Pindarees.” *Sketches in Hindoostan*. p. 86.

out at several instances, and shall cite further examples, these information almost always was coloured by the author's imagination and purpose: that is to say, the presenter of information, in this case, the author, in whatever mode he presented information about the Orient to the Western audience — be it poem or diary or letter or sketch / painting — always did so by adding or altering some part of the information, the way they comprehended it, so that the Orient could be portrayed as a mystic, enigmatic place on earth, where the Englishman travelled to fulfil his lust for adventure, to make fortune and, most importantly, for the exalted purpose of edifying the 'barbaric natives'. But, I also want to put it forward that much of this information about the Orient is what supplied the great English poets, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, Scott and Keats, to name a few, with materials they used in their work, when they wrote about the East — that was both exotic and barbarous at the same time.

John Lawson

The most extensive and most informative footnotes, however, are to be found in John Lawson's poems. Lawson arrived in India in 1812 as a Baptist missionary, preached successfully in Serampore and Calcutta as an ordained priest and co-pastor of Lall Bazar Chapel, studied Bangla and Chinese, contributed largely to the expansion of print technology, especially wrote copious volumes of poetry and composed hymns, before finally dying of a liver disease in 1825 in Calcutta. Lawson was an engraver by profession, and his vocation engaged him with missionary activities in Calcutta, but, poetry had always remained his "delightful recreation", to which he devoted so much of his time that, as he lay on his deathbed, he "confessed it as one of the errors for which he

hoped to be forgiven".¹²⁹ His verses, nevertheless, met with positive reception from the reviewers and the public: a review of *Elegy to the Memory of Henry Martyn* published in *Quarterly Oriental Magazine* remarked that the poems in the said volume "far surpass[ed] ... the common run of Indian [i.e., poetry written by the British in India] effusions" and it went on further to comment on the position of the author, i.e., Lawson, as having achieved "a certain standing in public estimation as a poet".¹³⁰ Lawson's poems as well as his descriptions of Hindu deities, rites and rituals is elaborate and extensive, but, at the same time, the accounts are "remarkable for the distinctive and blackly comic tone of his writing".¹³¹ Lawson drew most of his information on Hindu idols and rituals from William Ward's *A View of the History, Literature, and Mythology of the Hindoos*.¹³² Ward and Lawson were intimate friends and colleagues at the Serampore Baptist Missionary Press and Ward's work on Hinduism was at that time widely read by the Europeans and was also considered an authoritative text on Hindu idols, myths and rituals.¹³³ Lawson, in a number of his footnotes, does acknowledge Ward's work as his source of information. There are other instances where Lawson is citing Buchanan's *Researches*¹³⁴ as his source; but I want to note here that all those passages from Buchanan's work were actually quoted in Ward's *A View of the History, Literature, and Mythology of the Hindoos*; and this implies that Lawson had read only Ward's book in original and that it was his only repository of knowledge on Hindu mythology.

¹²⁹ Holmes and Co. *The Bengal Obituary; Or, A Record to Perpetuate the Memory of Departed Worth: Being a Compilation of Tablets and Monumental Inscriptions from Various Parts of the Bengal and Agra Presidencies. To which is added Biographical Sketches and Memoirs of Such as have Pre-eminently Distinguished themselves in the History of British India since the Formation of the European Settlement to the Present Time*. London and Calcutta: Thacker, 1851. pp. 215-218.

¹³⁰ C. "Review — An Elegy to the Memory of the Rev. Henry Martyn." *Quarterly Oriental Magazine*. Vol. 1. (March & June, 1824) pp. 87-96. p. 90.

¹³¹ Fhlathúin. Vol. I. p. 78.

¹³² Ward, William. *A View of the History, Literature, and Mythology of the Hindoos*. 2nd abridged ed., Vol. 2. Serampore: Mission Press, 1815.

¹³³ Marshman, J. C. *The Life and Times of Carey, Marshman and Ward: Embracing the History of the Serampore Mission*. Vol. I. London: Longman, 1859. pp. 56, 73, 108, 171.

¹³⁴ Buchanan, Claudius. *Christian Researches in Asia*. Cambridge: Deighton; London: Cadell and Davies, 1811.

I shall briefly survey the subject of some of his selected poems, before moving on to analyse the nature of his portrayal of Hindu idols and mythological stories. In “The Hindoo’s Complaint”,¹³⁵ Lawson writes in the first person, and the narrator is a dying old man, who has been left on the banks of the Ganga by his friends and family. The subject of the poem echoes one of the most common tropes of missionary writing,¹³⁶ that is, the Hindu superstitions belief that one who dies on the banks of the Ganga is delivered of all sins and will earn an easy passage to heaven. Ward offers an elaborate description of this practice in his book on Hinduism, and Lawson quotes that passage in a footnote to one of his poems in *Orient Harping*:¹³⁷

The Hindoos are extremely anxious to die in sight of the Ganges, that their sins may be washed away in their last moments. A person in his last agonies is frequently dragged from his bed and friends, and carried, in the coldest or in the hottest weather, from whatever distance, to the river side; where he lies, if a poor man, without a covering, day and night till he expires. With the pains of death upon him, he is placed up to the middle in water, and drenched with it.¹³⁸

Although Lawson does not add much substance to Ward’s account, his representation of the dying man’s “complaint” is essentially far from what a religious Hindu would ever think, let alone complain. The man in the throes of death in Lawson’s poem regrets that he has to endure such prolonged pain in such hostile circumstances, lying bare on the river bank, awaiting death; he wishes death to have come upon him in “one swift glancing leap / [that] Would have blasted the bud of ... [his] woes”.¹³⁹ I argue that this is essentially the poet’s perception of minimising the suffering to a possible extent and end the pain of the sufferer, if necessary, by death, on the rationale that death is inevitable and the

¹³⁵ Lawson, John. “The Hindoo’s Complaint: Supposed to be spoken by one left to die on the Banks of the River Ganges”. *The Maniac, with Other Poems*. Philadelphia: Hellings and Aitkin, 1811. p. 79-82.

¹³⁶ Other common tropes of missionary writing during this period are the Hindu rituals of sati, infanticide, and the practice of self-immolation under the wheels of Jagganath’s chariot during the festival of ‘Roth’.

¹³⁷ Lawson, John. *Orient Harping: A Desultory Poem, in Two Parts*. London: Samuel Lawson, 1821.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 211.

¹³⁹ Lawson. “The Hindoo’s Complaint.” p. 81.

sufferer will finally die. However, a religious, God-fearing and, if I may say, superstitious Hindu, who believes that the water of the sacred river will wash away his sins before death, may be assumed to be a firm believer of Hindu doctrines, who is ready to court pain and suffering based on the pious belief that endurance and suffering will help him attain salvation. Therefore, it may be concluded that although Lawson rendered no deriding quality to the description, his portrayal of a dying Hindu's thoughts on the banks of the River Ganga was a construct of the imagination of a British, and not the representation of India and its people, as perhaps he has practically experienced it.

Lawson attached extensive notes¹⁴⁰ to the poem, "Descent of Ganga",¹⁴¹ published in *Orient Harping*. In the notes, he borrows substantial descriptions from Ward's book on Hinduism, where he narrates the story of how Bhagiratha (spelt as 'Bhagu-ratha' by Lawson) brings the sacred river from heaven to earth. It is indeed fascinating to find a British man tell a story from *Mahabharata* in such minute and accurate detail. In another note, Lawson talks about the Hindu superstitions associated with Ganga and its sacredness. Here again, he is meticulous in his descriptions and acknowledges Ward's volume as his source of information. Although the narrations are neither satiric nor disparaging, yet the description of the beliefs and rituals of one religion in one part of the world is in itself enough to evoke the sense of awe in the minds of the people of another religion in another part of the world. In other words, Lawson was writing traveller's tales in poems, describing the strange things he came across in the land which he visited, and the accounts beautifully conjured up an image of a mystic country and its people with esoteric beliefs and practices. This strangeness, however fascinating it might have been to the poet, was expressed in terms of and in comparison to, the known, that is, the common stock of knowledge of classical Greek and Roman mythology which the author shared

¹⁴⁰ Lawson. "Notes on Descent of Ganga." *Orient Harping*. pp. 213-216.

¹⁴¹ Lawson, John. "Descent of Ganga." *Orient Harping*. pp. 58-67.

with his intended readers. The comparison of the passage of the descent of the Ganga with other rivers of Europe and America is striking. The same trope of expressing the unknown in terms of the pre-existing knowledge of the poet and his readers in the Western part of the world is utilised here:

... the forms
 Fairest in earth and heaven, were here in one
 Concentrated! What were the dribbling spout
 Of western Niagra purling down
 The gutter of her rocks? what were the streams
 Of the fair Rhone sequester'd midst her hills
 And placid plains? of the bold marching Rhine
 Washing her blood-stained regions? the dark Po,
 Slothful and solitary? the Wolga drear,
 Creeping in icy chains, and desolate?
 What were their waves united, could they roll
 From the hoar summit of th' amazing Alps,
 Or heights (astounding mortal energies)
 Of thi' Appenines, compar'd with thy descent
 Ganga, from heaven to earth? ...¹⁴²

Another remarkable poem in *Orient Harping* is “Jägānnātha”,¹⁴³ to which Lawson has attached copious notes.¹⁴⁴ Most of the poems in this volume are representations of the beliefs and practices of Hinduism, and Lawson wrote with a purpose of “form[ing] a contrast” to the “prominent things in the practice, faith, and prospects, of the heathens” “by introducing a brief view of the nature and effects of the Christian religion”, which are “in opposition to the whimsical fables of the Hindoos” and the author “immediately selected [this contrast] as a theme well calculated to relieve the attention so long detained amongst the prodigies of the Shasters”.¹⁴⁵ The use of the words, “heathens” and “whimsical”, while talking of the Hindus and the stories of their mythology strike an obvious derogatory note; what is more disconcerting to me than that disparaging portrayal is the design of the author to dispel the precepts of the thousands of years old Shastras

¹⁴² Ibid. pp. 64-65.

¹⁴³ Lawson, John. “Jägānnātha.” *Orient Harping*. pp. 35-45.

¹⁴⁴ Lawson, John. “Notes on Jägānnātha.” *Orient Harping*. pp. 209-213.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. pp. ix-x.

with little or no knowledge of its actual contents. Such disrespectful and pejorative attitudes towards Hindu beliefs and doctrines were common among the Evangelists in nineteenth century India, and, more often than not, such expressions of offensive criticism were made with a tone of authoritative power of judgement. It is this power of judgement that the British exercised in their construct of “India” through their texts. In the poem, “Jāgānnātha”, the elaborate description of the idol of Jagannatha is immediately followed by the grisly account of the death of an old man. The incongruity in the transition of subject-matter may be explained by Lawson’s “mock dignity of diction”, as he himself stated in the Preface:

In portraying the effigies of some Eastern idols, a mock dignity of diction seemed necessary. To have described their puerile greatness without a vein of raillery would have given them too much importance, and to have sung their names and attributes without an air of gravity would have ill suited the genius of “the lofty verse”.¹⁴⁶

The tone of mockery and derision in writing about Hindu idols and practices was present more in the texts authored by those Englishman who came to India with an Evangelical purpose than it was in the writings of those Englishman whose primary focus was administrative or pecuniary. Lawson, however, offers a remarkable description of how Viswakarma (spelt “Vishnu-kurma” by Lawson) left the idol of Jagannatha unfinished, when he was interrupted by King Indradhumnya (spelt “Indru-dhoomno” by Lawson), who impatiently went to enquire of him the progress of the work. In the same note, Lawson also narrates the practice of the Brahmins of making a new image of Jagannatha after every three years and transferring the bones of Lord Krishna from the belly of the old image to that of the new. The poet also informs his readers that it is considered sacrilegious for a common man to set his eyes upon the sacred relic of Krishna’s bones, and cites the example of the Rajah of Burdwan who died a short while after he had bribed

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. pp. viii-ix.

the Brahmins to see those bones. At another instance in the poem, Lawson draws a picturesque description of a dying man and his friends and family on the banks of the Ganga. In his explanation to the line, “A passport granted o’er the Hindoo styx”,¹⁴⁷ Lawson explains the Hindu belief of crossing the “Voiturunee” safely and easily “by laying hold of the tail of the black cow which they offered in order to obtain a safe passage”.¹⁴⁸ In all these notes and others, the element of story-telling is unmistakably present, and it does render a feeling of reading fantastic tales to the readers, especially the European readers of the nineteenth century, who were unfamiliar with the stories of Hindu mythology. At the same time, there are gruesome accounts of death which has a dark, black comic tone in the narrations. Almost all the representations of the Hindu rituals are ghastly and macabre in nature, thus evoking both repulsion and horror, akin to that of the Gothic tradition. Much in the same fashion as the Gothic culture, such black and weird descriptions of the people of India also presented India as a country that held a certain uncanny fascination for the European readers. One of the notes describing the “valley of death”, which, Lawson says, is “the vestibule to Juggernaut”¹⁴⁹ reads thus:

Juggernaut, 21st June. I beheld another distressing scene this morning at the place of Skulls; a poor women lying dead, or nearly dead, and her two children by her, looking at the dogs and vultures which were near. The people passed by without noticing the children. I asked them where was their home. They said, ‘they had no home but where their mother was.’¹⁵⁰

It is presented in the manner of reporting true experiences, lending a tone of reality to the description. To the careful readers, however, these paratexts, supposed to attest veracity, which are in a way forcefully interjected within the text, do actually raise a doubt as to the

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 39.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 212.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 213.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

authenticity of such experiences. “India” thus was more a construction of the poet’s imagination than a representation of his true experiences.

“Shigram-Po” and “James Lovewell”

Sarcasm was one of the most commonly used trope of the Company poets in their description of the life in India. As a rhetorical tool, sarcasm scaled great heights in the hands of the author of *The Life and Adventures of Shigram-Po* (1821). It was an anonymous publication, and all that is known of the author is that he also later published another poem titled *The Life and Adventures of James Lovewell* (1829). From the dedicatory text of the latter publication, it may be assumed that the author was probably an officer in the civil service of the Company. The publication is dedicated to

the Civil Service of India ... [for the] ... very friendly ...
intercourse, of which I have partaken, with many members
of the service whom I am now addressing, during the
extended period of 30 years.¹⁵¹

No further information on the author is available. The notice of this publication was published in *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and Foreign India, China and Australia* in its first volume of the year 1830. A close look at that notice offers a fair idea of the contents of the poem. I reproduce the notice here in ditto:

The Life and Adventures of James Lovewell, Esq., of the
Bengal Civil Service, from the period of his Nomination
and proceeding to Haileybury College to his retiring from
the service twenty years afterwards; in Eight Cantos. To
which is added various occasional Poetical Pieces, on Love,
Law and Physic. By the author of “Shigram Po.” 8vo. 16
Rs.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ [Author of “Shigram Poh” and “Occasional Poems”]. *The Life and Adventures of James Lovewell Esq.: of the Bengal Civil Service, from the Period of his Proceeding to Haileybury College, to the Time of his Retiring from the Service of the Honourable East India Company, as Judge and Magistrate*. Calcutta: Indian Gazette Press, 1829. p. ii.

¹⁵² *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and Foreign India, China and Australia*, Vol. I. Parbury, Allen and Company, 1830. p. 328.

In a similar vein, the author's first publication also narrates the experiences of a young British officer posted in India in the early decades of the nineteenth century. But, unlike James Lovewell, who was a civil servant, our protagonist, Shigram Po, is in the military service. The poet traces the incidents of this army officer's life from his nomination to cadetship and his aspiration to fame and fortune through his voyage to India, to his experiences in this country in a hostile terrain and harsh climate amongst unfamiliar people with customs and rituals, which the young English officer could not fully comprehend, and finally to his thwarted ambition and frustrating realisation of slow promotion, poor pay, debts and living life with unforeseen adversities. The narration abounds in Hudibrastic satire, as the very title and the name of the protagonist indicate. "Shigram-Po" literally means "go faster", a command used for animal-drawn carriages in Marathi and Hindustani language; it is a common term for a small carriage or a kind of rattle-trap vehicle in Bombay, which actually moves very slowly. The sarcasm in the naming of the slow animal-drawn carriages is unmistakable. Very often, this was amongst the first Indian language words that a British learn in his first few months in India:

We said all we could in English to get rid of these pests, but finding it of no avail, Howard tried them with Hindustani; this, however, was Greek to them, and he was compelled to fall back upon his only two words of Malabar, "Shigram Po — Shigram Po!"— literally, "Go quickly."¹⁵³

The naming of the protagonist as Shigram Po might mock the little knowledge that the British actually gather about India and its people during their stay in this country, wherein their accounts of the land claim deep and judgmental comprehension of the Orient. On the other hand, the name might as well be meant to ridicule the slow realisation of the young English officer's misfortune and frustrated ambition in the face of his high hopes of attaining quick fortune, once he had taken voyage to take up his appointment in India.

¹⁵³ Bacon, Thomas. *First Impressions and Studies from Nature in Hindostan*. Vol I. London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1837. p. 99.

Even the notice that advertised the publication of the poem in the Calcutta Press was couched in satire:

A Hudibrastic Poem, dedicated to “Nobody”. ... [The] profits (should there be any from this publication of which the author feels considerable doubt from the present reduced value of poetry), will be given to one of the Calcutta Charities.¹⁵⁴

The incidents that the young officers — the protagonists, namely Shigram Po and James Lovewell, in the two different poems — encounter are almost similar, just like the similar circumstances of fate they find themselves in. The social rites and rituals of the Indians, which are represented as being macabre, irrational, and also exotic, evoke in them a sense of horror and grief simultaneously. The author narrates how Lovewell is appalled at the ritual of Sati, and how generously and nobly he made earnest efforts to save a young Hindu bride from sacrificing herself on the burning pyre of her dead husband. This was the most frequently reported event in the corpus of Company Poetry: numerous poems described how the virtuous British tried, and sometimes succeeded in, rescuing a young maiden from Sati. There are also several poems that present the argument put forward by the superstitious Hindu woman, who believed she would attain heaven by committing herself to Sati, and any lapse thereof would be considered blasphemy. The manner in which the incident is reported in this poem, like in many others, upholds the righteousness of the Christian religion as opposed to the irrational and ghastly practices of the Hindus:

But all was vain, by prejudice enthralled,
Her mind disdained to hear a Christian plead,
Casting contemptuous looks around, she called
On heaven t’ assist her, in th’ unhallow’d deed,
And give her strength, to meet death unappall’d!
“What,” she exclaim’d, “shall I forsake my creed?
And break my vow, when heaven’s refulgent ray,

¹⁵⁴ *Asiatic Journal*. June 1820. p. 594.

Cheers me with hopes, and beckons me away?"¹⁵⁵

The sentimental reaction of Lovewell to the burning of the young woman is juxtaposed by the seemingly unconcerned remark of his Muslim servant Buxoo, who nonchalantly exclaims "plenty womans left!" The 'humane' British officer could not but be shocked and appalled at such an indifferent comment; the author goes on to the extent of announcing that the entire phenomenon of Sati was a "tamashah" to the Hindus, which literally means a jocular mockery:

Buxoo, who placed his hopes on the Khoran,
And smiled at the religion of Hindoos,
Tho' he thought burning was a foolish plan,
And not a death he wish'd his wife to choose,
'Twas a *tamashah*, which in Hindostan,
However horrid, always would amuse;
Thus when Koomârèe was of life bereft,
All Buxoo said was, "plenty womans left!"¹⁵⁶

I argue that however ridiculous the rituals and practices of the Indians might have appeared to the British, they were in no position to judge a situation or comment on it with any authority, simply because they did not have full comprehension of the social practices and religious rites of the Hindus or the Muslims.

The knowledge of Indian languages of this author was, however, particularly significant, as is evident in the use of the Indian words and phrases in his poems. Apart from the appropriate usage of words like "Chako" and "Raggies" (which meant uniforms caps and jackets), "Juwaub", "Koomârèe", "Murdung" and "Kurtaul" (which referred to specific musical instruments), "tamashah", "ghaut" (meaning, steps to a river) and full phrases like "Gungâ mâi ke jaî" (an invocation to the River Ganga as a mother figure), it is remarkable that the author uses, unlike most other Company poets, diacritical marks to effect correct pronunciations of the Indian words, and, at least on one occasion, plays on

¹⁵⁵ *The Life and Adventures of James Lovewell*. p. 169.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 171.

the meaning of Indian words, much in the manner of a pun. The particular line in *The Life and Adventures of Shigram Po* reads: “Now scarce a Dak, arrived good lac, but letters came by scores Sir”.¹⁵⁷ “Dak” refers to the postal system by which letters and parcels were sent and received while at the same time, it also referred to the tree that produces a particular type of resin, known as “lac”, which is used to seal envelopes. Such mastery of the usage of Indian language words was not common among the Company poets. The word “Koomârèe”¹⁵⁸ in *The Life and Adventures of James Lovewell* was, however, used inappropriately by the author to refer to the wife of the deceased man, whereas, in all Indian languages, it is used to denote a woman who is yet to get married. Therefore, I argue that the knowledge of the Orient that the British acquired, however remarkable it might appear at certain sporadic instances, was incomplete and inappropriate — whether it pertained to social customs or religious rituals or even Indian languages. The accounts of the Orient by the British, consequently, presented misconceptions and fallacious pictures of “India” to the Western population.

James Atkinson

One of the poets to have lived in India for a considerably long period of time was James Atkinson: he spent over thirty-five years in India from, 1805 to 1847, returning to England on an extended leave for a brief period of five years from 1828 to 1833. Atkinson was also briefly appointed as superintending surgeon with the British forces of Indus in Afghanistan from 1838 to 1841. The excellent painter and travel-writer that he was, Atkinson’s years in Afghanistan produced two remarkable works — a journal of

¹⁵⁷ [Author of “Occasional Poems”.] *The Life and Adventures of Shigram-Po, Cadet in the Service of the Hon’ble East India Company on the Bengal Establishment, from the First Dawning of his Military Mania to his Retirement on the Half Pay of Lieutenant, after Sixteen Years Service in the Hygeian Climate of India*. Calcutta: Government Gazette Press, 1821. p. 302.

¹⁵⁸ *The Life and Adventures of James Lovewell*. p. 170.

travel and a sketch book, which remains a collector's item even to this day. The journal, *The Expedition into Afghanistan; Notes and Sketches descriptive of the Country, Contained in a Personal Narrative during the Campaign of 1839 & 1840, up to the surrender of Dost Mahomed Khan*¹⁵⁹ was published in London immediately after his return to India from Afghanistan. But the sketchbook, titled *Sketches in Afghanistan*,¹⁶⁰ which was also published in London at about the same time, far surpassed the journal in popularity and brilliance. Mary Ellis Gibson notes:

The popularity of Atkinson's sketches is unsurprising, as they constituted scenes of travel and news of a conflict both distant and, eventually, disastrous. But Atkinson's drawings in Afghanistan were also skillful.¹⁶¹

Atkinson also drew pictures of scenes he encountered in India, especially in Bengal, and produced a number of portraits of East India Company officials and administrators. Many of these portraits, which also included a self-portrait by the artist, are preserved in the National Portrait Gallery in London. The two paintings of Atkinson that are held by the British Library are on such subjects which were popular as well as sensational in the oeuvre of British texts of representation of India: one is a portrayal of a double Sati, while the other is an image of a religious ritual mostly practised during the festival of "Charakh" or Bengali year-ending, where a man is swung aloft from a hook and pulley. It is obvious that like most of his other countrymen in India, Atkinson also presented "India" as a land of strange, barbaric rituals bordering on the mystic and the irrational. Gibson remarks that although his paintings are "competent ... they were clearly designed to portray popular and controversial subjects".¹⁶² The disparaging tone in Atkinson's

¹⁵⁹ Atkinson, James. *The Expedition into Afghanistan; Notes and Sketches descriptive of the Country, Contained in a Personal Narrative during the Campaign of 1839 & 1840, up to the surrender of Dost Mahomed Khan*. London: W. H. Allen, 1842.

¹⁶⁰ Atkinson, James. *Sketches in Afghanistan*. Lithographed by Lois and Charles Haghe. London: Longman Brown, Green and Longmans, 1842.

¹⁶¹ Gibson. *Anglophone Poetry*. p. 72.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

works on India is clearly discernible in one of his most famous poems, “The City of Palaces”,¹⁶³ which I shall discuss here. His sincere and continual effort, although always laced with derision, to record his experiences in the foreign lands is evident in his attempt to publish *Calcutta Annual Register*, while he was in charge of the Gazette Press and superintended the publication of the *Government Gazette*. The *Calcutta Annual Register* — although it had a very short life from 1823 to 1825 — was “intended to furnish a contemporaneous record of passing events in our Indian empire”.¹⁶⁴ During his service in the East India Company as a medical surgeon and as an assistant assay master at the Calcutta mint, Atkinson engaged himself in the study of Persian language and literature, and also collected Persian manuscripts. It may be mentioned here that he served as a Professor of Persian at the Fort William College for one year. Most of his publications are translations from Persian literature, the majority of which were in verses. Some later works of Atkinson’s translations were sponsored by the Oriental Translation Fund. This indicates that the study of Persian and subsequent translations of Persian poets into English were not undertaken by Atkinson merely with an interest in Persian literature, but were part of the British imperial machinery of empire-building in being a tool of knowledge of the Orient. Some of the noteworthy works of translations by Atkinson include *Hatim Ta’ee*¹⁶⁵ (1818), a popular Persian romance; and two different versions of translations of Firdausi’s *Sháh Námeḥ*— the earlier version, *Sohrab*¹⁶⁶ in 1814 and a later extended version in 1832; and *Lailí and Majnún*¹⁶⁷ (1836), a tragic Persian tale of doomed lovers by Nizāmī. It is interesting that he had also translated a Persian

¹⁶³ Atkinson, James. “The City of Palaces: A Fragment.” *The City of Palaces: A Fragment, and Other Poems*. Calcutta: Government Gazette Press, 1824. pp. 5-35.

¹⁶⁴ *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*. 15 (1855) pp. vi-ix. p. viii.

¹⁶⁵ Atkinson, James. *Hatim Ta’ee, an old romance in the Persian language*. Calcutta: Hindoostanee Press, 1818.

¹⁶⁶ Atkinson, James. *Sohrab, a Poem: Freely Translated from the Original Persian of Firdousee; being a Portion of Shahnamu of that celebrated poet*. Calcutta: Hindoostanee Press, 1814.

¹⁶⁷ Atkinson, James. *Lailí and Majnún*. London: A. J. Valpy / Oriental Translation Fund, 1836.

manuscript, which was published under the title *Customs and Manners of the Women of Persia, and their Domestic Superstitions*¹⁶⁸ in 1836 and was sponsored by the Oriental Translation Fund.

Among his original works of poetry, I have selected two poems, namely “The City of Palaces” (1824) and “Odes to a Punkah”¹⁶⁹ (1836) for detailed study of the modes and manner in which Atkinson constructed “India” through his verses. The first poem, as Máire Ní Fhlathúin describes it, is “an extended mediation on the city of Calcutta, and the moral and material condition of its inhabitants, as seen through the eyes of an embodied narrator, who begins his narrative on the day of his first arrival in India”.¹⁷⁰ The poem is what gave Calcutta its common nickname — the city of palaces — and it is one of the most popular poems in the corpus of Company Poetry. Atkinson’s poem presented Calcutta as a flourishing and beautiful city, which teems with dingy slums, but also has magnificent public buildings, splendid mansions, and ample greenery in open public spaces like gardens and lakes. At the same time, the poem also characterised the city as a “nurse of opulence and vice”.¹⁷¹ It presented a sceptical view of Calcutta and its Indian and British inhabitants, and it was aptly dedicated to Diogenes the Cynic, the celebrated Greek philosopher. The epigraph of the poem reads:

Philomenes. Then begin thy Diogenes-strain
In the true moralizing vein.
Mask of the Cynics.¹⁷²

Although the poem begins with an exalting description of Calcutta, comparing it with the legendary cities of Babylon, Carthage and Rome, the poet makes his readers aware of the

¹⁶⁸ Atkinson, James. *Customs and Manners of the Women of Persia, and their Domestic Superstitions*. London: Oriental Translation Fund, 1836.

¹⁶⁹ Atkinson, James. “Odes to a Punkah.” *Poetry of British India*. Vol. 1. pp. 217-223.

¹⁷⁰ Fhlathúin. Vol. I. p. 212.

¹⁷¹ Atkinson. “The City of Palaces.” p. 14.

¹⁷² *Ibid.* p. 5.

“bitters ... [u]nder attractive seeming”¹⁷³ in the very second stanza of the poem. The poem quickly moves on to paint pictures of loathe, debauchery, licentiousness and corruption of the inhabitants of the city, and images of their dark, demonic, barbarous and ghastly religious rituals. Goddess Kali is referred to as “[f]ierce ... Demon-God”, an “imperious dame” who moves “[w]ith Amazonian stride, and head awry”¹⁷⁴; the religious rites performed by the Hindus are unabashedly called “midnight orgies” which have been continuing for “[t]housands of years” with the “Brahmins” as guardians, who

... sinks
The heathen to the earth, by laws divine
Miscalled, such laws break nature’s kindly links,
And social, reasoning man, from the foul system shrinks.¹⁷⁵

Atkinson describes, almost with frightful vividness, the “monstrous exhibition” in “the Cherukh Pooja”, where a man is “full pleased to shew / the quivering flesh torn up, — the blood devoted, flow”, when thousands “gaily” watch him “[w]hirl ... rapidly” with “[t]he iron in his body and fast, /suspended by the sinewy back” , his arms outstretched “revolving round the mast”.¹⁷⁶ One would certainly remember the same picture in the holdings of the British Library painted by Atkinson, which I mentioned earlier. Descriptions of Hindu customs abound in the poem, and the manner of their description invariably evokes in the European readers a sense of horror and strong contempt for India.

The social habits of the Calcuttans are narrated with equal, or even more, cynicism and derision. The poem is provided with copious notes by the author to explicate Indian social customs and religious rituals. One of the notes illustrates the lecherous and profligate nature of the gentlemen (“Baboo”, or “bhadrakok”) of Calcutta:

¹⁷³ Ibid. p. 6.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 16.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 17.

It is not uncommon for a Calcutta Baboo to lavish a lack of rupees upon the marriage festival of his son. It is his ambition to surpass in prodigality both his contemporaries and predecessors. The nuptials of Vizier Ally at Lucknow in 1795, cost 25 Lakhs of rupees! Or about 300,000! The funeral of this man, who murdered Mr. Cherry, and who was after-wards kept a close prisoner in Fort William, where he died, cost only a few rupees! Such are the vicissitudes of human life.¹⁷⁷

Reading this sardonic remark in the paratext of a poem by a nineteenth century British poet in India, I feel tempted to ask Atkinson to provide an average estimate of a wedding and that of a funeral of a member of gentility in nineteenth century London. Atkinson perhaps turns in his grave, but, of course, does not answer. So, I seek my answer in books that record social practices of Britons in the nineteenth century. R. A. Houston, in his study on weddings in early modern Britain, offers an estimate of how much only the cash contributions of guests in a wedding in Brecknockshire amounted to:

David Williams married the daughter of a local farmer in 1805. The day before the wedding the women of the area brought useful gifts to the couple's new home, and at the wedding itself cash contributions from numerous guests amounted to £100. The author of a county history published just after this said that most weddings followed the same form.¹⁷⁸

I find Atkinson's cynicism unjustified and exaggerated, when compared to such estimates of wedding gifts or expenses, as is found in Houston's study. However, in order to be fully convinced of the poet's unjust and biased cynicism, I look for answers to my question concerning expenses of ceremonies in other parts of the world too. James Barrett remarks that a family ceremony, like a wedding or a funeral, in the working-class families

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 32.

¹⁷⁸ Houston, R. A. *Bride Ales and Penny Weddings: Recreation Reciprocity, and Regions in Britain from Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. p. 105.

in nineteenth century Chicago could occasion “stark privation”¹⁷⁹ in the family. His research offers dependable figures:

A proper wedding was estimated to cost about \$200, a child’s funeral about \$35.¹⁸⁰

Once again, Atkinson’s exclamation and ridicule on the difference in expenses in weddings and funerals in India, appear unreasonable and disproportionate. Atkinson’s portrayal of India, I believe, reaches its height of disrespect, when he condemns the “Bards of the East” who praise the “dimpled smiles / and all ... [the] witchery of gaze and tongue” of the “Nautch-girls”,¹⁸¹ whose character and movements are depicted by him with utmost scorn and disgrace. I argue that such generalised comment of derogation on other poets by a poet himself either lays bare the condemnable moral values of the author in question; or, when compared to such other representations of India by his other fellow British poets in this country, speaks volumes of the ulterior motive of the imperial machinery, that is, of disparaging the ‘other’ so as to glorify the self in contrast with the aim of establishing a hegemony over the ‘other’.

Good sense of humour, however, also prevails in a few of the Company verses, one such being Atkinson’s “Odes to a Punkah”. It is actually a collection of three different poems on “punkah”, the hand-pulled fan that gives respite to the English in the hot, humid weather of India. They were published separately and each more than once in different Calcutta periodicals during the 1820s. The collection in its entirety was reprinted by D. L. Richardson in the *Bengal Annual* (1836) as an example of local literary text written in English in Calcutta. All the three poems are signed to have been written in Calcutta in 1825, the specific dates being August 26, October 10, and October 12. There

¹⁷⁹ Barrett, James R. *Work and community in the Jungle: Chicago’s Packinghouse Workers, 1894-1922*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990. p. 91.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p. 113.

¹⁸¹ Atkinson. “The City of Palaces.” p. 19.

is an intriguing and unique paratext attached to the first poem: as the poet signed off, he recorded the temperature of the city:

Calcutta, August 26, 1825.
Thermometer 90¹⁸²

Seldom does a poet record temperatures at which he wrote a poem. I read this as an attempt on Atkinson's part to justify "[t]he Poet's gratitude and loftiest song"¹⁸³ sung for the hand-pulled fan. It was the only means that did bring some relief and comfort to the Englishman in the hot and sultry city of Calcutta. The poems lament that the importance of the "punkah" had long been overlooked, and assert that the Poet would dedicate his most generous praise to this device of "[i]ncomparable boon".¹⁸⁴ All the three poems, especially the first one, bear testimony to Atkinson's skilled use of rhetoric and poetic diction:

Punkah! Thou long hast merited an ode,
Giving thyself, as well as others, airs;
Thou swing'st aloft in every man's abode,
As if in scorn of him and his affairs;
Viewing him, "grunt and sweat," as Shakespeare says,
(Coarse language used in ancient days.)¹⁸⁵

I point out the use of rhetoric especially, because in the entire oeuvre of Company Poetry, such expertise of poetic diction is not very common. Atkinson's knowledge and application of Indian language was also exceptional, and it was probably because of his long stay in India that he masterfully used both Bangla and Hindi phrases in his poems. He used such words as "muskeetos"¹⁸⁶ and "tiffin",¹⁸⁷ so as to give a feel of the local colloquial English to his readers. The phrase "Zor se tán"¹⁸⁸ that the English 'sahib' often used to shout at the Punkah-puller, bidding him to pull it faster and harder, is repeated in

¹⁸² Atkinson. "Odes to a Punkah." p. 219.

¹⁸³ Ibid. p. 222.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 217.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. pp. 218, 219.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 222.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 217, 221.

the poems— much in the same manner that the ‘sahib’ repeats it at irregular intervals to his weary servant. The poet was aware of the qualitative difference between “clashee”¹⁸⁹ (“Khalashi” in Bangla) and “Khidmut-log”¹⁹⁰, which is evident in the way he has used these words in his poem. Although both the words in Bangla mean servant or labour, they are not and cannot be used as replacements of each other: the former is associated with such labourers who lift or pull heavy objects, while the latter is used to refer to servants or attendants. Atkinson rightly used “clashee” while talking about the man who pulls the heavy punkah, and he describes the labourers dining together in the “burrah-khanas”¹⁹¹ (large dining halls for the labouring class people) as “khidmut-log”. Another unusual use of a Bangla word by Atkinson is in the phrase, “Quaffs blushing Lal”,¹⁹² where “lal” in Bangla is red, and the phrase immediately reminds the Bengali reader of the Bangla phrase “lojja e lal”. The Company Poets often used nouns from Indian language words, the insertion of which in a sentence of another language (in this case, English) is comparatively easier and uncomplicated than using adverbs or adjectives from Bangla or Hindi in an English sentence, as is the case here. Atkinson’s mastery over Indian languages reaches its height in the third poem of the set:

“Kooch roasted goose, or pasty,”
 “Kooch *switbread*, *sahib ke wastee*;”¹⁹³

The poet presented the order for food in the exact manner that the Indian waiter at the diner would pronounce. He meticulously spells pastry as “pasty” and sweetbread as “switbread” in order to tell his European readers the poor level of English literacy among the Indians, and the vain effort of the Indians to imitate the English. It was as if Atkinson

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 221.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 222.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid. p. 218.

¹⁹³ Ibid. p. 222.

wanted to say that the superiority of the British in the Indian psyche manifested itself implicitly in such circumstances where the Indians were trying to mimic them.

In the second poem, Atkinson talks in detail about the theatres in Calcutta, the English actors and the parts they played in the English plays that were staged. He refers to them only by names or character-names they used to play in the main text of the poem, and suggests that their brilliant performances would not have brought joy to the audience, if it were not for the “magic Punkah”.¹⁹⁴ It is only in the extensive notes attached to the names — and these notes appear at the end of the poem — that Atkinson offers detailed descriptions and comments on the actors and their roles in developing the English drama in the Calcutta theatres. It might have been designed to familiarise the European readers with the Calcutta stage and draw parallels to the London stage, trying to equal the quality of the British theatre in London with that in Calcutta. I argue so, because I find no necessity of thrusting the names of so many theatre personalities and the details of their work in a poem on “Punkah”. To the reader of the twenty-first century, the poem sounds like an Englishman in Calcutta yelling to his friends in England, and telling them about the little “microcosm”¹⁹⁵ of Britain that they have created in India: “thou’rt a little London in Bengal”.¹⁹⁶

Horace Hayman Wilson

One of the most distinguished Orientalists of the day was Horace Hayman Wilson, who lived in India from 1808 to 1832. He engaged himself in the study of Sanskrit language and literature, and admired Indian cultures. During his stay in India, he served as surgeon, as assay-master and, most importantly, as the Director of the Royal Asiatic

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 221.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 214.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

Society in India, and actively participated in and promoted theatre on the Calcutta stage. Most of his works were English translations of classical Sanskrit texts of which *The Cloud Messenger*¹⁹⁷ (first Calcutta Edition, 1813) was the most popular and important one. It is a remarkable translation of *Meghaduta*, the masterpiece of the legendary Sanskrit poet, Kalidasa. This was the first English translation of the renowned lyric poem, and Wilson clearly intended his European readers to comprehend the text to the fullest possible extent, for he annotated the text with extensive notes. In fact, the texts of the notes, combined together, are longer than the main body of the text itself. Wilson offers elaborate explanations of the words and phrases that allude to stories from Hindu mythology or to common social practices of the Hindus. Wilson expresses the alterity in the text in terms of the familiar: he frequently quotes from Milton, Horace, Byron, Ovid, Catullus, Quintillion, Seneca, Virgil, Terrence, and many other European poets in order to draw a picture, as vivid as possible through words, of the world of Hindu myths, Indian folklores and the social practices and religious customs of the Hindus. I refrain from engaging in detailed discussion of Wilson's translated poems, as my primary focus, as already stated in the Introduction, is on the original poems produced by the British in India during the first half of the nineteenth century. Even, in the few original poems that Wilson had written, the names of flowers and plants are written using Bangla or Sanskrit words. The poems show that Wilson was familiar with the social customs and the caste system of the Hindus, although he was not critical of either. It must be mentioned that Wilson was the first person to compile a Sanskrit-English dictionary,¹⁹⁸ and he supported the learning of Indian classical languages, Indian literatures and the publication of school

¹⁹⁷ Wilson, Horace Hayman. *The Megha Dūta or Cloud Messenger: A Poem in the Sanskrit Language, by Kālidāsa. Translated into English Verse, with Notes and Illustrations.* Calcutta: Hindoostanee Press, 1813.

¹⁹⁸ Wilson, Horace Hayman. *A Dictionary, Sanscrit and English: Translated, Amended and Enlarged, from an Original Compilation Prepared by Learned Natives for the College of Fort William.* Calcutta: Hindoostanee Press, 1819.

and college textbooks in Indian languages. He worked as members of several local committees to promote the cause of education that combined training in Indian literatures and languages with Western science and English. However, his biographer in ODNB, Paul Courtright, points out that Wilson strongly believed in the superiority of Western education in particular, and Western civilisation in general.¹⁹⁹

Charles D'Oyly

The attitude of the British in India towards Hindu religion and mythology defies all kinds of generalisation, for while some Company men like Wilson and William Ward were reasonably tolerant of the Hindu customs and mythological stories, and some, like William Jones, and James Tod even glorified such rituals and myths, there were many others, like James Atkinson and Charles D'Oyly, who were severely critical of the Hindu religious practices and idolatry. D'Oyly made the stories of Hindu mythology, which he narrated through the texts of his poems, appear hilarious and absurd. D'Oyly's most famous work, which was printed and re-printed several times and remained popular throughout the nineteenth century, *Tom Raw, the Griffin*,²⁰⁰ was actually composed on popular request to accompany the painting of the hero, Tom Raw.

D'Oyly was best known as an amateur painter who produced considerable number of drawings in various media like lithograph, water-colour and oil-paint, to name a few. It was he who set up the Behar Amateur Lithographic Press to promote and practise the art of lithography during his posting in Patna as Commercial Resident and Collector. The subject of most of his paintings was the scenes of Dacca and Calcutta, cities he was

¹⁹⁹ Courtright, Paul B. "Wilson, Horace Hayman (1786 -1860)", *ODNB. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press, 2010 <<http://www.oed.com>>. 20/04/2016.

²⁰⁰ [D'Oyly, Charles]. *Tom Raw, The Griffin: A Burlesque Poem, in Twelve Cantos: Illustrated by Twenty-Five Engravings, Descriptive of The Adventures Of a Cadet in the East India Company's Service, from the Period of his quitting England to his obtaining a Staff Situation in India. By a Civilian and an Officer on the Bengal Establishment*. London: R. Ackermann, 1828.

posted at during his tenure as civil servant in the Bengal Civil Service from 1808 to 1812 and from 1812 to 1820 respectively. He published fifteen plates in a folio-size book titled *Antiquities of Dacca*²⁰¹ from London in 1814. The fifteen engravings in that volume depicted the Mughal ruins in the city of Dacca. This volume was reprinted several times from 1823 onwards. Each of these volumes was appended by brief historical accounts of the city of Dacca, and these were written by Atkinson, who was a close friend of D'Oyly and who collaborated with D'Oyly in producing texts on more than one occasion. The volumes, *Antiquities of Dacca* in its several reprints, later came to be regarded as major social documents that presented important information about Dacca and its inhabitants during that period. Later, in 1848, a collection of D'Oyly's drawings on Calcutta was posthumously published from London — again in a large folio-sized book titled *Views of Calcutta and its Environs*.²⁰² These were pictures mostly drawn between 1833 and 1838, when D'Oyly was serving the Company as a member of the Board of Customs, Salt and Opium in Calcutta. The engravings showed various buildings and streets of Calcutta, and is still considered an important record of the city in the mid-nineteenth century.

D'Oyly invented a character, Tom Raw, who, he said, was a griffin, which was the Company slang for a young Englishman newly arrived in India. Since 1818, he was working on a series of aquatint prints that presented Tom Raw in various situations — all ludicrous and risible — through his misadventures in India. From the Preface of the book published in 1828, it may be assumed that these sketches were in private circulation amongst D'Oyly's friends and his extensive circles of acquaintances in Calcutta and Dacca since the time that they were produced.²⁰³ It was only in 1828 that twenty-five of these engravings were published together as plates included in the volume titled *Tom*

²⁰¹ D'Oyly, Charles. *Antiquities of Dacca*. London: John Landseer, 1814-1827. The first of the folios was published in 1814; he others followed in 1817, 1826 and 1827.

²⁰² D'Oyly, Charles. *Views of Calcutta and its Environs*. London: Dickinson & Company, 1848.

²⁰³ Abbey, J. R. *Travel in Aquatint and Lithography 1770-1860*. Vol. I. London: Dawsons, 1972. p. 125.

Raw, the Griffin. It was to accompany these sketches that the verse was composed on popular request. The situation presents a unique case where verse is composed to complement paintings, unlike the more common situation where sketches are drawn later as illustrations to the verses already composed. The cover page of the book read:

TOM RAW, THE GRIFFIN:

A BURLESQUE POEM,

IN TWELVE CANTOS:

ILLUSTRATED BY
TWENTY-FIVE ENGRAVINGS,

DESCRIPTIVE OF

THE ADVENTURES OF A CADET
IN THE EAST INDIA COMPANY'S SERVICE,

FROM THE PERIOD OF HIS QUITTING ENGLAND TO
HIS
OBTAINING A STAFF SITUATION IN INDIA.

BY A CIVILIAN AND AN OFFICER
ON THE BENGAL ESTABLISHMENT.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR R. ACKERMANN,
96, STRAND.
M. DCCC. XXVIII.²⁰⁴

Evidently, the work was a collaboration of more than one man — a civilian, and an officer — both of whom were serving the Bengal Regiment. The Preface identifies the writer of the text as “Mr. Quilldrive”,²⁰⁵ who was a translator of Persian poems. This description and D'Oyly's close friendship with James Atkinson establish the latter poet as the probable author of the verses accompanying the engravings. A close analysis though of Atkinson's own poems and those in this volume reveal differing styles and patterns of

²⁰⁴ D'Oyly. *Tom Raw, the Griffin*. n. pag.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p. v.

writing in some parts of the lyric poem; so, it may be assumed that D'Oyly also made substantial contribution in writing the verses. The anonymous reviewer in the *Oriental Herald* in 1827 identified with conclusive proof the two men — the civilian and the officer — who were behind the making of this book:

It is said to be written by a Civilian, and an Officer, on the Bengal Establishment. From internal evidence we conclude that the civilian is Sir Charles Doyly, Bart., equally distinguished for his skill as an artist and his taste as a poet. The Officer, we presume, from the same evidence to be Mr. James Atkinson, a surgeon (and therefore an officer) in the Bengal army, also well known in India as an amateur of painting, and a successful cultivator of the sister art of poetry.²⁰⁶

The poem, spread over twelve cantos, draws moderately on Indian language words and phrases; but it does offer a host of characters from Hindu mythology and the stories surrounding them. Only in the Seventh Canto itself, the reader is introduced with “Madam Doorga”, “Shivu”, “Doorgu”, “Parvutu”, “Kalu-Ratree”, “Brahma” (spellings unchanged), and the deities are painted in a most ludicrous manner. The story of the battle between Durga and Asura, the most famed and scared triumph of the good over the evil in the precincts of Hindu mythology, is portrayed with satire and disdain. It is reported in the poem that the protagonist, Tom Raw, “hugely longed for Hindoo nonsenses / As children do for cakes and gingerbread”²⁰⁷, so his friend, Randy, “will recite [it] / But hope, in doing so, I may not sin, — for it / Unrobes Idolatry’s unhallowed rite”.²⁰⁸ At the same time, Randy is aware that the recitation of this “wild tradition / Of Madam Doorga — ’twill my prowess shew / And of my learning be an exhibition”.²⁰⁹ It is evident that the authors [I use plural keeping in mind the collaboration in authorship] are dismissive of idol worship, and the knowledge of Hindu mythology and rituals was a tool that the

²⁰⁶ Anon. “The Adventures of a Cadet in India.” *Oriental Herald*. Vol. 15. October-December 1827. pp. 537-562. p. 537.

²⁰⁷ D'Oyly. *Tom Raw, the Griffin*. p. 168.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

British used to show off their accomplishments in learning. The current of the British intelligentsia in nineteenth century India is laid bare here. In other words, knowledge of and about the Orient was an important cultural marker in more senses than one could possibly imagine. However, at the same time, the attitude of utter disparagement with which most of the British spoke of the Orient is conspicuous in phrases like “Hindoo nonsenses”. Lack of proper glossary, and even wrongful glossing, is noticeable in the notes attached to the names of the Hindu deities, even though the authors might take pride in their Oriental scholarship. Shivu is glossed as “The king of heaven”, Parvutu as “His queen” and Kalu-Ratree as “The goddess of beauty”.²¹⁰ The first note to Lord Shiva does not adequately describe Shiva’s position in the world of Hindu deities, and the description of Kaal-ratri is grossly incorrect. Such fallacious scholarship easily passed off as authentic information on the Orient — Oriental mythology in this particular case — documented by the British residing in India. Among the many descriptions of Goddess Durga, one is particularly offensive:

Of female legs we sing — since we must sing ’em,
 In spite of all our readers may observe,
 Since Madam Doorga will before us bring ’em
 In a most graceless, unbecoming curve,
 From which — like tailors’ legs they never swerve.
 She sits — as natives sit in this hot climate,
 Cross-legged, which quite as well as couches serve,
 Saved from the bare ground by a soft and high mat,
 Which ’twould be great pollution, e’en in us to climb at.²¹¹

It is indeed unfortunate and alarming that a text containing such derogatory and obnoxious commentaries about the Hindu religion was one of the most popular books to be reprinted several times during the whole of the nineteenth century; or, may be, it was so because of such crude, pejorative portrayal of India. The authors also express their surprise at the ritual of immersion of the idols in the Ganga at the end of all festivities.

²¹⁰ Ibid. p. 188.

²¹¹ Ibid. p. 186.

In more ways than one, the text offers a repository of social and cultural information on nineteenth century Calcutta. It includes graphic descriptions of the “squalling nautchnees”²¹² and the various forms of their movements, narrated nevertheless with tones of oddity and hilarity. A comical description of saree, which is the most common and also most graceful garment of most Indian women, is offered, spanning the length of one whole stanza:

An ample robe of fine transparent muslin
 Encircling their slight forms, dependent flows,
 O'er silken trowsers, hanging loose and rustling.
 That scarce a little foot expose.
 Then, from the head — down to the very toes,
 A cobweb veil descends in many a fold,
 (Those, you may say, are curious kinds of clothes)
 Trimmed with deep borders of refulgent gold,
 Which now they droop, and now, fantastically hold.²¹³

The social practices of the inhabitants of Calcutta are presented in minute detail, thus making the text a significant document of life in Calcutta during the early nineteenth century. The authors talk about Dame Balmanno,²¹⁴ who is described as a “celebrated milliner in Calcutta for the last twenty five years”;²¹⁵ she dealt in dresses, millinery and haberdasher's goods. The poem mentions “Tullah's sale”,²¹⁶ which is actually Tulloh and Co., a famed and popular auction-house in Calcutta about which detailed descriptions were provided by Emma Roberts in *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan*.²¹⁷ The “Town Hall of stock of Gunter's”,²¹⁸ which referred to the Calcutta business of Gunter and Co., is also featured in the text. The poem describes Nob Kishen,²¹⁹ a typical Calcutta Baboo, and his habits in minute details. The narration, of course, portray Nob Kishen as a

²¹² Ibid. p. 180.

²¹³ Ibid. p. 181.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid. p. 107.

²¹⁶ Ibid. p. 60.

²¹⁷ Roberts, Emma. *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan, with Sketches of Anglo-Indian Society*. In Three Volumes. Vol. 3. London: W. H. Allen, 1835. pp. 12-15.

²¹⁸ D'Oyly. *Tom Raw, the Griffin*. p. 87.

²¹⁹ Ibid. p. 176.

debauched, licentious individual who indulges in wines and ‘nautchnees’. The vivid picture of the Calcutta social life also includes the not-so-brief references to characters like Major Longbow,²²⁰ an important British military officer of the Bengal Regiment who frequented the social circles of the city; Nickie and Munoo, who are described as “[a] very celebrated native singer of the present day” and as “a celebrated dancer” respectively²²¹, and Mrs. Lacy to whose name an extensive note is attributed:

A celebrated professional singer, who has for the last five years enchanted us with her warbling. It is said that some of the most opulent Baboos in Calcutta made her and her husband large offers to sing at their sets of nautches, and that their assent was only withheld by their following the advice of some of their Indian friends. Mr. and Mrs. L. sometimes engaged in the establishment of the King of Oude; but his majesty, according to report, getting very tired of harmony unsuited to his unpolished ear, and profession the rude squalling of his own singers, made them a present, and a request that they would depart.²²²

It was the typical attitude of many among the British residents of India to speak, as I have shown, on many accounts in derogatory terms about India and its people. However, making the remark of having an “unpolished ear” i.e., on the crudeness of taste, of an Indian king, is outrageous and speaks of the seemingly poor taste of the authors themselves, not to mention their outright slanderous approach. The frequent use of Indian language words and phrases throughout the poem along with their meaning explained in the appended notes reveal the familiarity of the authors with Indian languages, and also sometimes their skill in using them. For instance, when the authors compare the sweetness of a tone or a metre to that of “dil pur tukea”,²²³ literally meaning a pillow comforting the heart, it is evident that the authors have a clear and deep understanding of the allegory hidden in most common phrases in Indian languages. They talk about

²²⁰ Ibid. p. 177.

²²¹ Ibid. p. 190.

²²² Ibid. p. 191.

²²³ Ibid. p. 179.

“purdahs” and “cannauts”²²⁴ in descriptions of rooms, and offer adequate explanations of their meanings; even the different uses of the two types of curtains are glossed in the notes. The authors also use “tumashas”, “mussauls”, “Paun”, “tepoys”, “gwallors”, and “manjees”, to mention only a few Indian language words used within a span of a few printed pages.²²⁵ They also refer to “Taza be taza”,²²⁶ which, as the notes tell us, was “[a] favourite song in common use among the professional native singers. There is a translation of it by Sir William Jones.”²²⁷ They even provide a detailed account of the offerings to Goddess Durga, in the length of which there is a host of Indian language words:

And here, in varied hues, and rich perfume,
Garlands of flowers mix with luscious fruits,
The guava’s fragrance, and shereefa’s bloom,
And Khela, which the vulgar palate suits,
(The season is too early, yet, for toots),
With sesamum and rice, and koosha grass,
Pig-nuts, and other sorts of tender roots,
Before fair Doorga in high heaps amass.
What use to her, — a poor thing of wood? —
But let that pass!²²⁸

The caustic tone of absurdity and the dismissive treatment of idolatry are unmistakable in the closing line. What is far more interesting here than the habitual derision in the narration, is the accurate elucidation of the Indian fruits. “Shereefa” is glossed as “[t]he custard apple, a very delicate fruit”; “Khela” is explained as “[t]he plantain, or banana”; “toots” is simply glossed as “[t]he mulberry”; and to “koosha” is attached a longer explanation which says that it is “[a] soft, wiry and fragrant grass, forming part of the usual votive offering made to Hindoo Deities”.²²⁹ It is hard to say why the authors chose

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid. pp. 179-187.

²²⁶ Ibid. p. 183.

²²⁷ Ibid. p. 192.

²²⁸ Ibid. p. 185.

²²⁹ Ibid. p. 193.

to attach a detailed gloss to guava, for it is unlikely that the fruit was not known to the British in the nineteenth century. The note reads:

A high-flavoured fruit, with a most powerful scent, the taste resembling in some degree, strawberries. It makes an excellent jam; and baked with claret, resembles the pear in the same predicament.²³⁰

Among all the glossaries with accurate explanations, there are a few like “gwallors” which is wrongfully translated as “cowherds”.²³¹ It may, in all probability, refer to ‘gowala’, which means the dairyman or the milkman or the cowherd. But, in the case in question, which reads “Alas ! for ghee / How many gwallors annually pine”,²³² the appropriate meaning would be the milkmen or the dairymen, and not cowherds. Again, we have evidence here that the knowledge of Indian languages of the British was not flawless; yet they claimed mastery over Oriental languages, which was a marker of their academic intelligence of and cultural familiarity with the Orient. That the authors were adequately aware of common literary practices in English literature, is apparent in the coinage of the name “Lady Killtime”²³³ in the casual naming of a character in London, a fashionable female member of a wealthy clan, who wallows in compliments for her extravagant arrangements of a ball, which is her chief occupation for most of her time.

The currents of European poetry were not unknown to the authors either, and in the note attached to the rhyming of “plates” and “contemplates” in stanza XXXIII, it is apparent that they not only made efforts to match the high standards of the European poetic practices, but even believed that they were at least partially successful in doing so:

Plates, *contemplates*. The author has to apologise for many such rhymes as these, which, although allowed in French verse, are scarcely legitimate in English. Still as Boileau says, “*La rime est une esclave, Et ne doit qu’obeir.*”²³⁴

²³⁰ Ibid. p. 192.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid. p. 135.

²³³ Ibid. p. 178.

²³⁴ Ibid. p. 190.

Such claim to fame, although not very pronounced, is nonetheless presumptuous. However, as this text, like other graphic texts of D'Oyly, offered vivid details of the social life of nineteenth century Calcutta, the many inaccuracies of the accounts were conveniently overlooked by readers and critics alike.

Reginald Heber

Reginald Heber spent very little time in India — from October, 1824, to April, 1826 — and is mostly remembered as the first Bishop of the Diocese of Calcutta, the appointment that implicated the responsibility for the church in the whole of India and Ceylon (now, Sri Lanka) and parts of Africa and Australia as well. He was the first Bishop in India who was allowed to ordain native priests, and he did show exemplary work in both episcopal administration and evangelical missionary activities. The numerous hymns that he wrote — “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains”, “The Son of God goes forth to War”, “Brightest and Best the sons of the Morning” and “Holy, holy, holy” being among the most celebrated ones — during his residence as the rector, parson and squire at Shropshire were published posthumously in 1827 under the title *Hymns Written and Adapted to the Weekly Church Service of the Year*,²³⁵ and they are sung even to this day in Anglican and Protestant churches the world over. The hymns in this volume were collected and put together within the covers of the book by Heber’s wife, Amelia Heber. She had unofficially worked for her husband almost as his private secretary during their married life. It was she who edited the letters and journal entries that Heber wrote during his brief stay and travels in India; she finally published the collected works in a volume titled *A Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India, from Calcutta to*

²³⁵ Heber, Reginald. *Hymns Written and Adapted to the Weekly Church Service of the Year*. London: John Murray, 1827.

*Bombay, 1824-1825 (with Notes upon Ceylon)*²³⁶ in 1828 after his death. Amongst the published volumes by Heber, this one arguably is the most popular and influential one. Although it is primarily a work in prose, it does contain some poems, two of which I shall discuss here.

Heber had also engaged in translations of some poems from Indian languages. Translations of some fragments of the Persian poem, *Gulistan* by Saadi,²³⁷ a poem titled “Translation of a Sonnet by the Late Nawab of Oude, Asuf ud Dowla”,²³⁸ and a few other translated fragments were included in *The Poetical Works of Reginald Heber*, which was also a posthumous publication. Upon his arrival in India, Heber settled down in Calcutta with his family; but, within a few months, he undertook a series of journeys across India and Ceylon in order to address Anglican congregations in the sub-continent. He travelled through North India along the Ganga, and even went as far as Bombay in the West and Madras in the south. He kept a journal of his travels and recorded his experiences of India in graphical detail. These journal entries also contained some emotional effusions, mostly on occasions when he missed his wife and children, whom he had left in Calcutta. It was especially on these occasions that he took recourse to poetry, while most parts of the journal entries related to his travels are written in prose. These are the journal entries that were subsequently published together in *Narrative of a Journey* by Amelia Heber. This book and Bishop Heber himself became quite prominent and popular in Orientalist literature and culture, as it was practised by the British residing in India throughout the nineteenth century. Máire Ní Fhlathúin points out:

²³⁶ Heber, Reginald. *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India, from Calcutta to Bombay, 1824-1825. (with Notes upon Ceylon), An Account of a Journey to Madras and the Southern Provinces, 1826, and letters written in India.* In Three Volumes. London: John Murray, 1828.

²³⁷ Heber, Reginald. “From the Gulistan.” *The Poetical Works of Reginald Heber*. London. John Murray, 1841. pp. 406-407.

²³⁸ Heber, Reginald. “Translation of a Sonnet by the Late Nawab of Oude, Asuf ud Dowla.” *The Poetical Works*. p. 409.

It continued to be widely read throughout the rest of the nineteenth century: both Emma Roberts and Mary Jourdan ... had recourse to Heber's work for inspiration for their own poetry. The extent of its influence is apparent, if perversely so, in the number of writers who feel impelled to comment on or correct Heber's representations of India, from Roberts' objection to his remarks on indigo-planters (*Scenes and Characteristics*, Vol. 2. p. 333), to Charles Davidson's Strictures on his ignorance of the indigenous languages, and general naiveté (*Travels in Upper India*, Vol.2, pp. 322-3).²³⁹

The Bishop of Calcutta was also glorified as a heroic figure in later poems and prose accounts of India written by the British men and women residing here. These accounts, more often than not, did not adhere to the true experiences of either Heber or the writers themselves. One common trope of portraying the nobility of British character and the chivalry of British men was to draw a picture of a British male rescuing the Indian female from the pyre of Sati, often risking his own life and happily willing to accept the hapless maiden as his wife in order to establish her in the mainstream of society with some respect. This is also a frequent image in the pages of Company Poetry. Clare Midgley discusses in detail Mrs. Phelps' poem "The Suttee",²⁴⁰ where Heber is portrayed as the man who saves a young Indian woman from Sati:

Mrs. Phelps' poem *The Suttee* (1831) represents the abolition of *sati* as story of the rescue of a young widow from the funeral pyre by Reginald Heber, Bishop of Calcutta. Bishop appears before the 'passive victim':

And dashing from his check the manly bears,
Bids the attendants raise the wretched wife
And stops the fiery brand, and quells the murderous
strife.

Gives to her arms the helpless babes,
And from the fire the destined suttee saves.

It fact, Heber had died prior to the prohibition of *sati* and his description of how he had failed to stop a *sati* whilst Bishop of Calcutta in the 1820s had stressed his

²³⁹ Fhlathúin. Vol. 1. p. 272.

²⁴⁰ Phelps, Mrs. "The Suttee." *The Suttee, and Other Poems*. Thame: H. Bradford, 1831. pp. 1-22.

feelings of impotence: ‘I felt very sick at heart, and regretted I had not been half an hour sooner, though probably my attempts at persuasion would have had no chance of success.’ But Phelps, of course, is not connected with literal truth: her description drew on an eighteenth-century literary tradition of the *sati* as a tragic victim rescued by a chivalrous British man, reshaping it to create in Heber the ideal of evangelical manhood: sensitivity combined with steadfastness and moral authority. The poem is an example of what Rajan has described as the use of the ‘trope of chivalry’ by the ‘colonial imagination’ to represent the administrative abolition of *sati* — in other words, to draw on the words of Gayatri Spivak ..., Heber and Bentinck are represented as white men saving brown women from brown men.²⁴¹

From this discussion, it is apparent that as the Bishop of Calcutta, Heber commanded respect and authority, and, more importantly, through his evangelical work and literary pursuits, had made lasting impressions on the British residents in India.

Shyamal Bagchee has argued that Heber’s accounts of his experiences of India are free from the “fervid imperial pride”;²⁴² however, a close analysis of the following lines would reveal otherwise:

My course be onward still,
O’er broad Hindostan’s sultry mead,
O’er bleak Almorah’s hill.

That course, nor Delhi’s kingly gates,
Nor wild Malwah detain,
For sweet the bliss us both awaits
By yonder western main.²⁴³

The lines are quoted from an untitled poem written by Heber in fond remembrance of his wife in Calcutta while he was on his journey through the northern parts of India. The desire to be blissfully reunited with his wife in the western mainland that is, England, is tinted with little more than nostalgia: the experience associated with the West is described

²⁴¹ Midgley, Clare. *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1865*. Routledge: London and New York, 2007. pp. 87-88.

²⁴² Bagchee, Shyamal. “Writing Self / Writing Colony in Situ: Expatriate British Poetry in India.” *ARIEL: A Review of English Literature*. 23: 4 (October 1992) pp. 7-32. p. 26.

²⁴³ Heber. *Narrative of a Journey*. Vol. I. p. 241.

as “sweet”; while, at the same time, the hills of Almorah are “bleak”, the plains of Malwah “wild”, and the entire breadth of Hindusthan are full of “sultry” meadows. The poet had chosen his adjectives carefully, and they reflect the common imperial self-conceit of associating the noble and the pleasurable with Britain, and the dark and the licentious with India. That Heber, like most other British in India, was predisposed to such imperial tools of ‘othering’ is evident even in the other poem I discuss here.

In “An Evening Walk in Bengal”,²⁴⁴ Heber entreats his beloved wife to take a leisurely stroll through the jungles of Bengal “on Gunga’s breast”,²⁴⁵ but, as it turns out, the experience is not so relaxed: the jungle is “dark and rude”,²⁴⁶ and is infested with horrors of all kinds, like the “tyger” and the “venom’d snake”.²⁴⁷ Heber, however, assures the terrified lady that he would protect her and that the hostility of the Indian terrain would easily be conquered by gallantry of the “English gun”.²⁴⁸ He then goes ahead to describe the common flora of the Bengal landscape, and in doing so, hints at their exoticism. The attempt to present the Orient not only as dark and dangerous, but also as exotic and coveted, speaks volumes for the Englishman’s reflexive struggle to settle in a country that offers excitement only when the inducements are sufficient. It is indeed enticing to sense the danger that lurks at the corners of descriptions of Oriental exoticism: “[t]he peepul spreads its *haunted* shade” [italics mine],²⁴⁹ the tree is “fragrant” but the flower is “giant”,²⁵⁰ the “*dusk* anana” has “*prickly* blade” [italics mine],²⁵¹ “the jackall’s cry / Resounds like sylvan revelry”;²⁵² “[t]he flashes of the summer sky / Assume a

²⁴⁴ Ibid. pp. 245-247.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 245.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 246.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

deeper, ruddier dye” [italics mine];²⁵³ and finally, the poet heartily thanks “the bounteous Sire” for “[e]v’n here may be happiness”²⁵⁴ — at which he exclaims. The exclamation of the Bishop in experiencing happiness in the unfamiliar and harsh territory of India questions the veracity of such a felling in the Bishop’s mind in the first place.

Heber was only somewhat familiar with Indian languages — perhaps because he stayed in the country for a very short period of time, or perhaps because he did not stay long enough at any single place to acquire some words and phrases from any particular local language. I say so because he scantily uses words from Indian languages in his writings. In “An Evening Walk in Bengal”, he uses, although not always correctly, few Bangla words, among which are “Dhatura” to refer to the flower by that name, and “cigala” to talk about the cicada. The most striking error is in the usage of Indian word in the note he attached to the line, “the bird of hundred dyes”, he writes:

The bird of “hundred dyes” is the mucharunga, “many coloured”. I am not sure whether I mentioned the fact before, but I learned at Dacca, that while we were at peace with the Burmans, many traders used to go over all the eastern provinces of Bengal, buying up these beautiful birds for the Golden Zennanah; at Ummerapoorah it was said that they sometimes were worth a gold mohur each.²⁵⁵

The “muchrungha” in Bangla is the kingfisher, and, when one breaks up the two parts of the word, “much” literally means fish, and “rungha” means red-coloured. Although because of the flamboyant colours on its wings and beak, the kingfisher may be poetically called the bird of “hundred dyes”, yet the explanation of the Bangla word as many coloured is erroneous, and reveals Heber’s poor knowledge of Indian languages as well as his earnestness in evincing his familiarity with the Orient. I argue that Heber extended the note to exhibit the intelligence he acquired from Dacca on these birds; it was a tool that could be used to hint at the exoticism of the Oriental fauna, and emphasise on his own

²⁵³ Ibid. p. 247.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. pp. 247-248.

proficiency in Oriental knowledge at the same time. I would conclude my discussion on Heber with some lines from “An Evening Walk in Bengal”, which arguably could be one of the finest examples of the trope of exile and nostalgia in the corpus of Company Poetry:

Yet who in Indian bow’r has stood,
But thought on England’s “good green wood?”
And bless’d, beneath the palmy shade,
Her hazel and her hawthorn glade,
And beneath’d a pray’r, (how oft in vain!)
To gaze upon her oaks again?²⁵⁶

The parenthetical phrase expressing the vanity of prayers to go back to England tragically proved prophetic for the Bishop, when he died on one of his evangelical travels in Trichinopoly (Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu) only at the age of forty-two in April, 1826.

Henry Meredith Parker

The *Dictionary of Indian Biography* catalogues Henry Meredith Parker as “an accomplished musician, clever draughtsman, fluent speaker, a versatile writer, capital actor, adept in modern languages”²⁵⁷ — quite an accomplished personality indeed! Parker lived for a considerably long period of time in India, and from humble background of being a violinist at Covent Gardens Theatre and son of a celebrated danseuse and a notable pantomime actor, Parker — through the intervention of his friend, Lord Moira, who was the then Governor-General of India — obtained a clerkship in the Bengal Civil Service, and gradually rose in rank and influence till he retired as a prestigious member of the Calcutta Board of Revenue. Parker’s undistinguished origins might be one of the reasons behind his critique of the empire: he voiced his dissent in relation to the British government’s decision of abolishing the East India Company and the acquisition of India

²⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 246.

²⁵⁷ Buckland, C. E. *Dictionary of Indian Biography*. New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1968. p. 329.

by the Crown in no unclear terms in his collection of essays titled *The Empire of the Middle Classes*.²⁵⁸ Parker in his characteristic irony of voice, called these essays “sermons” that were dedicated to “that devout, earnest, and conscientious body of Englishmen, whose fervent zeal for Conversion has clearly helped to create a fearful Mutiny, and will probably excite a National Rebellion in India”.²⁵⁹ Parker’s understanding of British imperial politics in the context of India was decidedly profound and, in a certain sense, prophetic. In a similar vein, the experiences of India that Parker records in his poems and prose writings reveal a great degree of cogent and deductive analysis of the condition of India under the imperial rule: however, his ideas are not entirely free from the colonial predilection, and are always predisposed to the dynamics of colonial hegemony in positioning the British and the Indian. Two of the most prominent books that Parker published while he was in India are *The Draught of Immortality*²⁶⁰ and *Bole Ponjis, Containing the Tale of the Buccaneer; A Bottle of Red Ink; The Decline and Fall of Ghosts; and Other Ingredients*.²⁶¹ Although both these works are actually reprints of collections of verses and prose pieces that Parker published in the various literary journals of Calcutta, their dates of publication are quite some good twelve years apart. Analysis of the poems included in these two volumes reveal a marked change in Parker’s approach and attitude in writing about India. In the earlier collection, the idea of “India” is somewhat romanticised and the Orient is presented as bordering on the exotic, the poet being clearly influenced by the works of William Jones, Thomas Moore and even Robert Southey. But, by the time *Bole Ponjis* was published, Parker had not only matured in years and thoughts, but had also experienced India more closely — the practical experiences of living in this country brought him home to the mundane and

²⁵⁸ Parker, Henry Meredith. *The Empire of the Middle Classes*. London: W. Thacker, 1858.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.* n. pag.

²⁶⁰ Parker, Henry Meredith. *The Draught of Immortality*. London: J. M. Richardson, 1827.

²⁶¹ Parker, Henry Meredith. *Bole Ponjis, Containing the Tale of the Buccaneer; A Bottle of Red Ink; The Decline and Fall of Ghosts; and Other Ingredients*. London and Calcutta: W. Thacker, 1851.

common aspects of the Orient, which was not removed from the ordinary and the expected. In the second volume, Parker designates a separate section, which he calls “Orientalisms”, for the poems written about India; he begins this Section with a brief introductory note, almost a warning to “the benevolent occidental, or accidental, reader”:

If I permitted that respected person, in short to wander on into the realms of Orientalism such as mine are, under an impression that she or he would there be amidst regions resembling, however faintly, those made glorious and gorgeous by Lord Byron and Thomas Moore, Anastatius Hope, Eothen, and the melo-drama of “Bluebeard”.

The succeeding pages are of the East Easty; but of no such East as the reader has, probably, been familiar with. No “Gardens of gul in her bloom.” No lands “Where all but the spirit of man is divine,” — but the simple prosaic East of this every day world, from whence comes salt petre, and the King of Oude’s favourite sauce, retired Company’s servants with orange-tawney countenances, Bengal indigo, and heroes from the banks of the Indus or Sutlej, all over glory and mustachios.²⁶²

There is a sincere attempt on the author’s part to dispel the aura of mysticism that the Orient was believed to be enshrouded in, as was represented through the texts (both writings and paintings/engraving) of most British men who had taken up residence in this country at some point of time or another. The ideological drift in perspective from the romanticised to the mundane in representing the Orient is not common amongst the Company poets. J. H. Stocqueler developed close acquaintance with Parker, who introduced him to the Calcutta stage. Stocqueler, in his *Memoirs of a Journalist*, remarked that Parker exhibited remarkable “readiness with which he adapted himself to all the changes of ‘many-coloured life’ as presented on the stage”.²⁶³ Stocqueler further informs us that Parker’s friends and admirers fondly called him ‘Proteus’ for his admirable quality of effortlessly adapting himself to change. Not only was Parker fervently associated with and contributed to the development of the Chowringhee Theatre, but at the same time, he

²⁶² Ibid. p. 139-140.

²⁶³ Stocqueler. p. 90.

also made copious literary contributions to the Indian journals, literary annuals and newspapers. His verses and prose pieces regularly appeared in the *Oriental Herald*, the *Bengal Annual*, the *Oriental Sporting Magazine*, the *Oriental Pearl*, and, most importantly, in the *Calcutta Journal*, which was a platform for voicing protests against the imperial policies, like censorship of the press, and championed the cause of liberal politics. The *Calcutta Journal* was suppressed by the East India Company in 1823, only after five years after the publication of its first issue, and its editor, James Silk Buckingham, was deported back to England, and tried before a select committee in the House of Commons. During its short print life of five years, the *Calcutta Journal* was ardently supported by Parker, who regularly wrote for this radical newspaper and expressed his liberal sympathies in no uncertain terms. However, he used the pseudonym ‘Bernard Wycliff’ for publishing his early writings. In admiration of his liberal political views and his multifarious talents, Stocqueler writes:

Parker was a zealous officer; a poet, a musician, an actor, and an ardent advocate of public liberty. He had been among the warmest supporters of Buckingham’s *Calcutta Journal*, when to be so was a service of danger; and now lent all the weight of his ability to uphold the liberal policy of Lord William Bentinck.²⁶⁴

Parker had a wide range of acquaintance with prominent figures in the Calcutta social circle by dint of his important position in the Calcutta Revenue Board and by way of his involvement with the Chowringhee Theatre and also by way of business pursuits, including the Assam Tea Company and the Union Bank of Calcutta. Noted personalities, like Governor-General William Bentinck, Lord Moira, and Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, were close associates of Parker, and this ensured that his voice was heard and considered important. At the same time, Parker’s influence and popularity in the literary circle of Calcutta is conspicuous not only because he widely published in journals of all sorts, but

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

mostly because notable poets on the other side of the ethnic origin, that is, Indian and Eurasian, paid tribute to him through their verses. Derozio showed his respect for Parker in his poem, “Sonnet to Henry Meredith Parker, Esq.”, where he expressed his overwhelming joy and gratitude to the “[s]weet bard” for “glid[ing] with sunshine this bleak world of our’s”.²⁶⁵ Kasiprasad Ghosh, the first Indian to have his English poem published in a journal, dedicated to Parker the Third Canto of his long lyric poem, “The Shāir”.²⁶⁶ Clearly, Parker’s voice was one that made ripples in the social and literary circles of nineteenth century Calcutta, and I shall attempt analyses of only few of his significant poems in this perspective of notable social influence.

“The Indian Day” is an apparently innocent description of the poet’s experiences of the clime of this country from the “calm silvery mantled dawn” through the “rich and glorious” sunrise, the “blazing ... sultry” noon, the “dark ... grimly” evening to the “calm ... silent ... perfumed” night.²⁶⁷ The poem, written in the early years of Parker’s poetic career, paints a romanticised picture of “the gorgeous East” where the “ocean roll’d / In waves of ruby, amethyst and gold”,²⁶⁸ and yet constantly reminds the reader of “the shadowless ... white glare”, “the lurking Python and the fierce tiger”, “the dark Toofaun”, “the sinking sun” and “the murky river” of the East, where “the heavens scowl; /Earth shakes” and the forests groan.²⁶⁹ So, here on offer we have a staple picture of the dark and mystic Orient which lures the Englishman with its abundant riches and yet presents him with fearful threats. The close of the poem, however, betrays a sense of exile that is so common in Company verse:

... What to him are these,

²⁶⁵ Derozio, H. L. V. “Sonnet to Henry Meredith Parker, Esq.” *Derozio, Poet of India: The Definitive Edition*. Ed. Rosinka Chaudhuri. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008. p. 264.

²⁶⁶ Ghosh, Kasiprasad. *The Shāir, and Other Poems*. Calcutta: Scott, 1830.

²⁶⁷ Parker, Henry Meredith. “The Indian Day.” *The Draught of Immortality, and Other Poems: With Cromwell, A Dramatic Sketch*. London: J. M. Richardson, 1827. pp. 121-124.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 122.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 122-123.

The East's resplendent skies and fragrant trees,
The clime of flowers and stars? alas! 'tis not his own.²⁷⁰

The poem from which the title of the volume is taken, “The Draught of Immortality”,²⁷¹ is a narration of an episode from the *Mahabharata*. Although one would tend to mark it a work of translation, it does have figments of the poet’s own imagination woven into the story of the churning of the Ocean for “Amreeta”, the potion of immortality. The lucid manner in which the episode has been rendered and the extensive notes attached to the various lines of the poem, which explicate in detail the allusions and references to the stories and characters of *Mahabharata*, bear testimony to Parker’s comprehensive knowledge of Hindu mythology and epics.

Another poem in this volume titled “The Prophecy of Timoor”²⁷² revealed Parker’s profound learning of the history of South East Asia, especially political history, and his familiarity with the Koran and the classic tales of the religion of Islam. The poem is prefixed by a short epigraph which serves as a kind of exposition for the text that narrates the story of conquests of Timur or Tamerlane, the founder of the Timurid Empire in Central Asia and Persia, and celebrated military leader of the fourteenth century. A number of plays and poems in different languages across the world have been written about this legendary conqueror, who vanquished half the world from West and Central Asia through Egypt and Russia to the city of Delhi, despite his debilitating injuries. Parker annotates that the epigraph to his poem is a “[t]ranslation of a Persian Manuscript on the Wars of Timoor”.²⁷³ This indicates that Parker had facility in the Persian language and that he could also translate from Persian into English. In the text of the poem, he refers to the “Garden of Irem”,²⁷⁴ the “dark-hair’d Houri”,²⁷⁵ the “golden vaults of

²⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 124.

²⁷¹ Parker, Henry Meredith. “The Draught of Immortality.” *The Draught of Immortality*. pp. 1-22.

²⁷² Parker, Henry Meredith. “The Prophecy of Timoor.” *The Draught of Immortality*. pp. 33-45.

²⁷³ Ibid. p. 33.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 36.

Chehil-meenar”, the “magic treasures of Jamsheid”,²⁷⁶ the “Sassir’s deadly blast”,²⁷⁷ and the history of Asian conquerors from Attila the Hun to Genghis Khan, the military genius and great founder of the Mongol Empire.²⁷⁸ Parker was well-versed, as it appears from this poem, in the stories of Koran and could deftly use allusions to the Islamic elements of divinity. There is a detailed narration of a human sacrifice in the person of an innocent child to Goddess Kali with descriptions of the frantic chants, the wild revelry of the devotees and the sacred rituals performed by the holy Brahmin chief. It is indeed astounding that Parker, an Englishman, had intelligence of the Hindu rituals and chanting and Hindu mythology as well as that of the customs of the Muslims, their shrines and prayers of worship, and the stories of the Koran. The appropriate use of Arabic words like “sassir” (meaning, ‘cold wind’), “Attabal” and “Zel”²⁷⁹ (meaning, kettledrum and cymbal) indicate that Parker knew Arabic, Persian and other Oriental languages well enough to use words and phrases from these languages in his English poems. At one point in the poem, Parker mentions the embalming properties of “baubul”,²⁸⁰ which is the Bangla word for the mimosa shrub. Apart from bearing testimony to the poet’s familiarity with these languages, these words and phrases also render an aura of the mystic to the poem, which is about the history of the Orient.

The poem titled “Pindarry War Song”²⁸¹ first appeared in the *Oriental Herald and Colonial Review*.²⁸² It was printed under the title “Indian War Song”, was a shorter version of the poem than what appeared in Parker’s 1827 anthology, was signed “C. J.” and, most importantly, was preceded by a brief introductory note. It also had glossaries of

²⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 37.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 38.

²⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 44.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 37.

²⁸¹ Parker, Henry Meredith. “Pindarry War Song.” *The Draught of Immortality*. pp. 79-81.

²⁸² Parker, Henry Meredith. “Indian War Song.” *Oriental Herald and Colonial Review*. Vol. 2. Ed. James Silk Buckingham. May 1824. p. 62.

a few Indian language words attached at the end of the poem; not all these notes were carried to the 1827 longer and revised version that appeared in *The Draught of Immortality*. The introductory note informs the readers that it is actually a work of translation from the Brij Bakah language:

Paraphrase of an Indian Song, or Ode, written in the Brij Bakah language, and discovered in the cummerbund or sash of a Pindarrie chieftain, who had fallen during a night skirmish between the freebooters and a detachment of our cavalry in India, during the last campaign.²⁸³

In this version, “nukura” is glossed as “Indian drum”, whereas in the 1827 version, it is glossed as “the state drum”; “Buehram’s red star” is glossed as “the planet Mars” in both the versions; in the 1827 version, “Rajpoot” is simply glossed as “Rajh Poot — King’s Son” in accordance with the literal meaning of the word and without any reference to the race or clan it is used to mean; but, in the earlier version printed in the *Oriental Herald*, there was a more detailed explanation of the word: “The Rajpoots are the kingly and warrior *caste* among the Hindoos: and from the men of this class, the British Army in India is principally supplied”.²⁸⁴ The word “Durrah”, although not glossed in the earlier version, is explained as “[d]ivisions of about 500 men each”²⁸⁵ in the version printed in the anthology. On the other hand, the word “Kaffers”, although not explained in the latter version, has an explanatory note attached to it in the 1824 print of the poem: “Literally unbelievers, infidels, a term of reproach mutually applied by Christians, Mohammedans, and idolaters, to the enemies of their respective creeds.”²⁸⁶ Furthermore, the 1827 version had an addition of three more stanzas in the middle of the poem, and this interpolation was simply a catalogue of the warring races and their heroic chieftains — it talked about the Paishwa and Sevajee, Holkar’s Devān and Ameer Khan, Nazarene, Scindia, the

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Parker. “Pindarry War Song.” p. 81.

²⁸⁶ Parker. “Indian War Song.” p. 62.

Birmahn, the Seik, the Goorkah and the Rajah of Berar²⁸⁷ (I have kept the spelling unchanged) — without any footnote delineating the background of any of these historical figures. The reason of the author's intention for this interpolation or the alteration in the pattern of glossing the Indian language words cannot be rationally ascertained; although it is evident that Parker intended to refashion what he called the Indian war song, which he must have felt, should sing the glories of the legendary war tribes and brave fighters. Hence, the change in the title of the poem and the deletion of the introductory note on paraphrasing.

I argue that the purpose of translating passages from the *Mahabharata*, the paraphrasing of the war song inscribed on the waistband of the Pindarrie chief, or such other poems on Indian history and mythology was masked with a more sinister purpose than was apparent to the aesthetics of literature or plain inquisitiveness about the country in which one had settled. In order to strengthen the cultural hegemony of the British over the Indians, it was imperative that the Englishman had comprehensive knowledge of the history of the land and a thorough understanding of the tales of the religions associated with its inhabitants. For, unless the Englishman was well-versed with the historical legends and tales that constituted the past of the people of India, it would have been rather superficial and sometimes easily questionable to have attached glory to such lore and then disparage them, in accordance with whatever interpretation suited their immediate purpose. In the long run, of course, the white man wanted the brown man to believe in the former's supremacy over him and the nobility of his intention to enlighten him. Therefore, Parker's work of translations or paraphrasing — whatever he chose to call them — was part of a larger design to strengthen the Englishman's knowledge of the Orient in order to exercise cultural hegemony over the Indians.

²⁸⁷ Parker. "Pindarry War Song." p. 80.

I shall now analyse two significant poems from *Bole Ponjis* (1851), the work that was published in two volumes, containing both verse and prose pieces, many of which were earlier published in the Indian journals and newspapers. The tone of satire, although palpable in the poems contained in the two volumes, is not caustic. However, in some of the poems, such as “The Adjutant”²⁸⁸ and “Young India”²⁸⁹ both of which bear the subtitle “A Bengal Eclogue”, Parker had taken recourse to wry humour in his portrayal of the Oriental subjects and the experiences of the Orient. One might remember here that Parker had claimed to present the Orient in its mundane everyday colour — without any element of the fantastic or the exotic; so, the reader, and I am referring to the Western reader here, would assume that the pictures of the Orient presented in these writings are true to reality and without exaggeration. If Parker sprinkled these pictures with generous amounts of derision and ridicule, the unsuspecting reader would likely ingrain in his conscious ideas such derogatory and pejorative impressions of the Orient. And, fabricating the idea of the Orient as a “low-lying land [of] the low, lying people”²⁹⁰ was one of the chief ideological tools of the imperial machinery. The very title of the poem, “The Adjutant: A Bengal Eclogue” is a twisted pun on “adjutant”, and, as if to lay emphasis on his apparent innocence, Parker attaches a footnote to the title:

This has no allusion to any gentlemen of the Regimental Staff, who prepares aspiring heroes for the field of Mars, but to that venerable, sad, not to say austere bird, which ornaments in so remarkable a manner, the house tops and monuments of Calcutta. The *Arden Dubia* or Gigantic Heron of Bengal.²⁹¹

A careful reading of the long poem would reveal that the descriptions are so artfully couched in words that they might either refer to the bird or the Regimental Officer, and, in the second case, would prove satiric. One fine example might be:

²⁸⁸ Parker. “The Adjutant: A Bengal Eclogue.” *Bole Ponjis*. pp. 165-180.

²⁸⁹ Parker. “Young India: A Bengal Eclogue.” *Bole Ponjis*. pp. 223-228.

²⁹⁰ Bignold. p. 127.

²⁹¹ Parker. “The Adjutant.” p. 165.

Dids't thou behold those heroes who of yore
Batter'd Budge Budge, and took Chandannagore?²⁹²

Both Budge Budge and Chandangore are sites along the banks of the Hooghly River, where Lord Clive and his British forces had won prominent battles in the eighteenth century. The poet might enquire of the heron, a bird which is commonly found on river banks, if it had witnessed those great battles; or, on a sarcastic note, the civil servant might ask the trainee Regimental officer whether he had knowledge of the successful wars won by the British and how. Both are adjutants, and Parker himself was both a civil servant and poet. This poem too bears testimony to Parker's extensive knowledge of India's political history and the contemporary political proceedings; for, not only Alexander and Porus, Timoor and Lord of Ghizni, but Parker also mentions Bulwant Singh and Jaffier Ally Cawn (spellings unchanged) and even J. J. Zoffany, the painter who drew portraits of British and Indian political figures towards the end of the eighteenth century.²⁹³ The numerous references to the place names in and around Calcutta, like Esplanade, Saugor, Chinsura, Budge Budge, Barrackpore, Chandannagore, the James and Mary's shoal at Hooghly's mouth and their fairly accurate descriptions show that Parker was a man who had widely travelled around the nineteenth century British capital of India; at the same time, it also renders veracity to the other accounts of India as a country that is presented through the poems. For instance, when Parker compares the Island of Saugor to Golgotha,²⁹⁴ the site where Christ was crucified, and which literally translates as "place of the skull", it evokes in the mind of the European reader a similar sense of horror and sacrilege that is associated with Golgotha in the Christian ideology. Such a ghostly picture of the Island of Saugor is, of course, exaggerated to fit the bill for the dark mysteries of the East.

²⁹² Ibid. p. 178.

²⁹³ Ibid. pp. 176-177.

²⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 173.

The range of Parker's reading is stupendously wide. He refers to King Sudraka and Vasantaséná,²⁹⁵ the ancient Sanskrit playwright, and the character from his play, *Mrichchakatikam*. There are several reference to the stories of the *Arabian Nights* and even mention of Scheherazade, the folkloric character who narrated those tales. Parker was versed in European literature — modern as well as classical — and also in travel literature, especially accounts of travel to the British colonies. He talks about “Lyon quot[ing] Murzouk's horrors, Denham, Shary's”,²⁹⁶ which are direct references to George Francis Lyon's *A Narrative of Travels in Northern Africa*²⁹⁷ and another book titled *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa*²⁹⁸ written by Denham, Clapperton and Oudney. The poem that abounds in most references to European literature is “The Decline and Fall of Ghosts, with the History of Certain Apparitions which Afflicted the Author”,²⁹⁹ the concluding poem in the first volume of *Bole Ponjis* and appended by an open letter to Dr. John Grant, a surgeon in the Bengal Medical Service with whom Parker had then recently developed friendly acquaintance. Parker's poem actually presents a long catalogue of European works on ghosts, spirits and apparitions through references — Ann Radcliff's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*,³⁰⁰ Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*,³⁰¹ the romance novels of Rosa Matilda aka Charlotte Dacre, Mathew Lewis' Gothic novel, *The Monk*,³⁰² William Beckford's *Vathek*,³⁰³ Lady

²⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 175.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 166.

²⁹⁷ Lyon, George Francis. *A Narrative of Travels in Northern Africa*. London: John Murray, 1821.

²⁹⁸ Denham, Dixon, Hugh Clapperton and Walter Oudney. *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa*. London: John Murray, 1826.

²⁹⁹ Parker, Henry Meredith. “The Decline and Fall of Ghosts, with the History of Certain Apparitions which Afflicted the Author” *Bole Ponjis*. pp. 293-326.

³⁰⁰ Radcliffe, Ann. *The Mysteries of Udolpho, A Romance; Interspersed with some Pieces of Poetry*. In Four Volumes. London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1794.

³⁰¹ Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Trans. Daniel Malthus. [*The Sorrows of Werther: A German Story*.] London: J. Dodsley, 1779.

³⁰² Lewis, Matthew Gregory. *The Monk: A Romance*. In Three Volumes. Waterford: J. Saunders, 1796.

³⁰³ Beckford, William. *Vathek, An Arabian Tale; Or, The History of the Caliph Vathek*. Trans. Reverend Samuel Henley. [*An Arabian Tale, from an Unpublished Manuscript: With Notes Critical and Explanatory*.] London: J. Johnson, 1786.

Morgan's *The Missionary*,³⁰⁴ and Walter Scott's works in general. Although such impressive levels of erudition was not entirely uncommon among the men of letters in nineteenth century India, Parker's use of these wide-ranging references to ancient as well as modern works of literature actually strengthens the basis of the ideas he intended to propagate through the written word.

One of the most striking poems in *Bole Ponjis* is "Young India: A Bengal Eclogue". The title of the poem is an allusion to the Young Bengal Movement which was a platform of radical Bengali thinkers promoting free thought and Western education as well as revolting against conventional Hindu beliefs and superstitious customs. They were mostly young students of the Hindu College led by their iconic teacher, H. L. V. Derozio, who was himself an epitome of radical thinking, patriot, poet and responsible for the dissemination of Western science and learning among the English-educated Bengali youth. A number of young students, including Krishna Mohan Banerjee, Ramtanu Lahiri, Peary Chand Mitra, Dakshinaranjan Mukherjee, Radhanath Sikdar and Ramgopal Ghosh, were greatly influenced by the teachings of Derozio, and actively participated in the social movement. They led their personal lives in radical ways: Krishna Mohan Banerjee converted himself to Christianity amidst great controversy, Ramtanu Lahiri removed his Brahminical sacred thread in public, Rasik Krishna Mallick ran away from his orthodox home and openly questioned the sanctity of the holy waters of the Ganga; Ramgopal Ghosh denied to undergo the traditional ritual of penance; Radhanath Sikdar stirred up a social storm by refusing to marry a child bride. Apart from such radical acts which defied the conventions of Hindu orthodoxy, the members of Young Bengal were prominent social figures of nineteenth century Bengal, were established in their professions, and contributed largely to social causes in various ways. For some of them, however, the need

³⁰⁴ Sydney, Lady Morgan. *The Missionary: An Indian Tale*. In Three Volumes. London: J. J. Stockdale, 1811.

to defy conventions acquired eccentric proportions. Many of them believed that the pursuit of English literature was a prerequisite to free and liberal thinking; there were others who presumed that drinking wine or whiskey was essential to achieve true liberation of the spirits. Several newspaper reports and articles were published, that expressed contempt at the youth of Young Bengal for “cutting their way through ham and beef and wading to liberation through tumblers of beer”.³⁰⁵ Radhanath Sikdar, for one, held the idea that eating beef or veal would actually prove that he is free of Hindu orthodoxy and, therefore, would pave the way for moral as well as physical improvement. This belief can be understood in the context of the Hindu orthodox practice of venerating the cow as a holy animal; having beef was conventionally considered as an act of blasphemy. Parker wrote his poem with an aim to ridicule these eccentric conjectures; he even lampooned the study of English literature by these Indians, who, he felt, did not have the intellectual calibre to understand the great works of Milton, Dryden, Pope or Scott:

Was it for *this* my essay, proved, (signed Justus),
That Dryden wrote his Virgil for Augustus?
Was it for this we thought Crabbe’s Pensoroso
And Sampson Agonisthes, rather so so;
Scott’s Comus dull, but Milton’s song divine
Of Johnny Gilpin, very very fine?³⁰⁶

It may be assumed that the Englishmen in general were predisposed to such derision and sarcasm towards the academic and intellectual abilities of the Indians, and, in a certain sense, tried to impose a sense of ownership and belonging on English language literature. The Englishmen made every attempt possible to create and widen the gulf between the ‘noble, rational, upright, intelligent’ white man and the ‘ludicrous, savage, superstitions, debauched’ Indian. The two characters of the poem, Sam Chund and Hurry Mohan, are

³⁰⁵ Mitra, Peary Chand. *A Biographical Sketch of David Hare*. Calcutta. W. Newman, 1877. p. xxviii.

³⁰⁶ Parker. “Young India.” p. 227.

presented in conversation with each other, and the entire poem revolves round the persistence of Hurry Mohun on eating beef as a measure to liberate the body and the mind. In the dialogue, there are continuous references to prominent social reformers and dissenting figures, like Cato, John Knox, Prophet Muhammad, Confucius, John Calvin, Martin Luther, John Huss, Michael Servetus, John Hampden, Richard Cobden, William Tell, Raja Rammohan Roy, Marcus Brutus, the slaves of Haiti and the rebels associated with the French Revolution — these allusions exalt the tone of the poem, and, thereby, heightens the satire. The character of Hurry Mohan Bhowse is loosely based on one of the notable members of the Young Bengal Movement, namely Radhanath Sikdar, who, as Cedric Dover described him, was “a mathematician and free-thinker with a somewhat satirical faith in the efficacy of beef as a factor in national development”.³⁰⁷ His close friend and compatriot, another Young Bengal member, Peary Chand Mitra also noted Sikdar’s obsession with beef-eating, which must have been infamous enough for Parker to have heard of it:

Radha Nauth Sickdar had an ardent desire to benefit his country. His hobby was beef, as he maintained that beefeaters were never bullied, and that the right way to improve the Bangalees was to think first of the *physique* or perhaps *physique* and *morale* simultaneously.³⁰⁸

Parker readily picked up on the comic element of Sikdar’s obsession, and parodied his zeal for liberal thinking in the poem. The concluding lines of the poem would illustrate the degree of lampoon that is apparent throughout the length of the poem:

Until at length, prepared for greater things,
Your mind shall flutter its unshackled wings,
Spring upward, like an eagle when he wakes,
And soar at once to Freedom and Beef Steaks.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁷ Dover, Cedric. “Henry Derozio: Eurasian Poet and Preceptor.” *The Poetry Review* 27(2): 1936. pp. 107-121. pp. 110-111.

³⁰⁸ Mitra. p. 32.

³⁰⁹ Parker. “Young India.” p. 228.

Rosinka Chaudhuri has analysed this poem and the socio-cultural background of its composition in her essay, “‘Young India: A Bengal Eclogue’: Or Meat-eating, Race and Reform in a Colonial Poem”. She interpreted the politics of beef-eating as a tool for the construction of the dichotomy between the masculinity of the Englishman and the effeminacy of the Indian, and stressed on the importance of the Young Bengal Movement as one of the main cultural currents of the nationalist movement:

Radical and yet imitative, the [Young Bengal] movement incorporated paradoxes that continue to inhabit Indian public life. Certainly its main impulses found a continuum in the nationalist movement; Gandhi, typically, subverted one of its principles of heresy, the consumption of beef in order to overthrow the hefty English, into a mantra of vegetarianism. Its imitative element was instantly material for satire; Bengalis themselves lampooned the follies of Young Bengal mercilessly in various media; as did Parker in his poem. Also implicated in the politics of meat-eating in the nineteenth century was the construction of the manly Englishman in contrast to the Indian male whose effeminacy was invariably linked to his education³¹⁰

The ridicule of Parker’s poem was understandably targeted at the young generation of the whole of India rather than a small group of radical thinkers in Calcutta. The subversion in the title of the poem from Young Bengal to “Young India” can, therefore, be interpreted in the perspective of the social and cultural construct of the chivalrous and knowledgeable Englishman as opposed to the effeminate and ignoble Indian who, at best, mimics the former and, Parker’s was one voice that could be heard loud and clear in nineteenth century colonial India. It may even be said to have reflected the general view of the British on most Oriental subjects. Lord Bentinck, Governor-General of India from 1828 to 1835, spoke admiringly of Parker, which implies that Parker’s voice was favoured by governmental and social sanction:

³¹⁰ Chaudhuri, Rosinka. “‘Young India: A Bengal Eclogue’: Or Meat-eating Race, and Reform in a Colonial Poem.” *Interventions*. Vol. 2. No. 3. 2000. pp. 424-441. p. 424.

Parker was another example of this admirable faculty; and that “great utilitarian,” Lord William Bentinck, who admired him (H.M.P.) for his versatile genius, was forced to admit “what he had hitherto considered impossible, that literary attainments and excellence in dry official routine were qualifications which admitted of a happy combination.”³¹¹

Parker’s poems, in more ways than one, served quite effectively its sinister purpose as a tool of ‘othering’ in the grand design of the British imperial machinery.

David Lester Richardson

Captain David Lester Richardson is decidedly the most influential personality in the corpus of Company Poetry. One of the leading English dailies of the nineteenth century, *The Calcutta Courier*, remarked that Richardson was “the only man in India who has made literature a profession”.³¹² However, his contribution to the development of English literature in general and English language poetry in particular in nineteenth century India was not so much shaped by his poetry as by his endeavours as editor of several prominent periodicals and his influential positions as Principal and Professor of English Literature in the Hindu College. He also served as the Principal of Krishnagar College and that of Hooghly College. *Calcutta Literary Gazette*, the *Bengal Annual*, the *Calcutta Magazine and Monthly Register*, the *Calcutta Quarterly Magazine* and *The Orient Pearl* were just some of the literary periodicals published from India that Richardson was the editor of at different points of time during his stay in in this country. At the same time, he was a prolific versifier, and can be credited with the publication of the single highest number of poetry collections of singular authorship in the first half of

³¹¹ Laurie, William Ferguson Beatson. *Sketches of Some Distinguished Anglo-Indians: With an Account of Anglo-Indian Periodical Literature*. London: John B. Day, 1875. p. 186.

³¹² *Calcutta Courier*. 28 December, 1835. n. pag.

nineteenth century India. His books include *Miscellaneous Poems*³¹³ (Calcutta, 1822), *Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems, partly written in India*³¹⁴ (London, 1827), *Ocean Sketches and Other Poems*³¹⁵ (Calcutta, 1833) *Literary Leaves; or, Prose and Verse*³¹⁶ (Calcutta, 1836), *Literary Chit-Chat, with Miscellaneous Poems and an appendix of Prose Papers*³¹⁷ (Calcutta, 1848) and *Literary Recreations; or, Essays, Criticisms and Poems: Chiefly written in India*³¹⁸ (London, 1852). The poems Richardson composed were far less influential than his works of criticism and editorial endeavours. The poems at best embody the common tropes of expatriate literature that was being written in that period. I shall briefly engage in analysing these clichéd tropes that were present in Richardson's poems. His poems glorified the imperial enterprise, sang impressively of the colonial forefathers, refused to acknowledge the charms and beauty of the Indian life or nature, repudiated the intricate complexities of living in India as a British coloniser, and engaged in attempts of homogenising the Oriental culture and lifestyle, representing it as an entity of rigid dichotomy between the East and the West. But the most prevalent strain that runs through almost all of Richardson's poems is the lament of the exile — the constant pain he felt at the long separation from his wife and children in England, the home and hearth of English countryside that he missed. He had returned to England on several occasions during the tenure of his service in India, before finally going back to London in 1861. These journeys inspired many poems on the subject of exile, such as "Consolations of Exile, or an Exile's address to his Distant Children"³¹⁹ and "The Return

³¹³ Richardson, David Lester. *Miscellaneous Poems*. Calcutta: Scott, 1822.

³¹⁴ Richardson, David Lester. *Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems, partly written in India*. London: Jones, 1827.

³¹⁵ Richardson, David Lester. *Ocean Sketches and Other Poems*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1833.

³¹⁶ Richardson, David Lester. *Literary Leaves; or, Prose and Verse*. Calcutta: Samuel Smith & Co., 1836.

³¹⁷ Richardson, David Lester. *Literary Chit-Chat, with Miscellaneous Poems and an Appendix of Prose Papers*. Calcutta: D'Rozario, 1848.

³¹⁸ Richardson, David Lester. *Literary Recreations; or, Essays, criticisms and Poems: Chiefly written in India*. London: Thacker, [Printed in Calcutta], 1852.

³¹⁹ Richardson, David Lester. "Consolations of Exile, or an Exile's address to his Distant Children." *Literary Leaves*. 2nd ed. London: W. H. Allen, 1840. pp. 37-39.

from Exile”.³²⁰ Many of his allegories were borrowed from Milton, as in calling his absent children “phantoms of delight”,³²¹ but the English poet whose influence was most pronounced in his poems was arguably Wordsworth. The echoes of the great Romantic poet’s “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Early Childhood”³²² or “The French Revolution as It Appeared to Enthusiasts at its Commencement”³²³ were unmistakable in the concluding lines of “Consolations of Exile”:

Dear Boys! upon remembered bliss to dwell,
 And here your pictured lineaments to greet!
 Till Fancy, bright Enchantress, shifts the scene
 To British ground, and musical as rills,
 Ye laugh and loiter in the meadows green,
 Or climb with joyous shouts the sunny hills!³²⁴

While reading the opening line of Richardson’s “Sonnet: Evening, on the Banks of the Ganges”³²⁵ — “I wandered thoughtfully by Gunga’s shore”, even a casual reader of English poetry is reminded of Wordsworth’s “The Daffodils”, where the poet wrote “I wandered lonely as a cloud”.³²⁶ Another interesting editorial change was noted by Mary Ellis Gibson, who collected English language poems written in India during this period, in her anthology, *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India, 1780-1913*. She appended an editorial note to the lines, “The cheerful songs of British birds, that rose from British trees” in the poem, “The Return from Exile”. Gibson’s footnote reads:

Richardson shifted this stanza from nostalgia for England to
 nostalgia for Britain; the last two lines of the previous edition

³²⁰ Richardson. “The Return from Exile.” *Literary Leaves*. 1836. p. 98.

³²¹ Richardson. *Literary Leaves*. 1840. p. 37.

³²² Wordsworth, William. “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Early Childhood.” *Poems, In Two Volumes*. Vol. I. [This is where the poem was first published under the title “Ode”; it was later renamed by Wordsworth in the 1815 collection titled *Poems*.] London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, 1807. pp. 147-158.

³²³ Wordsworth, William. “The French Revolution as It Appeared to Enthusiasts at its Commencement.” *Poems, In Two Volumes*. Vol. II. [The poem was first published in *The Friend* (edited by S. T. Coleridge in 1810.) London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1815. pp. 69-71.

³²⁴ Richardson. “Consolations of Exile.” p. 39.

³²⁵ Richardson. “Sonnet: Evening, on the Banks of the Ganges.” *Literary Leaves*. 1836. p. 53.

³²⁶ Wordsworth, William. “The Daffodils.” *The Golden Treasury of the Best songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*. Selected and Arranged with Notes by Francis Tuner Palgrave. [The poem was first published without the title in 1807 in *Poems in Two Volumes*.] London: Macmillan and Co., 1867 p. 254.

read, “Of English birds the cheerful songs that rose from
English trees — / From blossomed hedge, the fragrances fresh
that came of every breeze —” [1840]³²⁷

Although this would have been a significant editorial change in Richardson’s part, suggesting an inclusive attitude towards the many strife of internal colonialism between England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, and although there do exist several editions of *Literary Leaves*, I could not find substantial evidence corroborating Gibson’s claim in the editions of the poem that were available for reference.

Richardson’s use of varying spellings for the River Ganga even within a single volume and sometimes within a single poem show that there was no standardised way of spelling the Oriental proper names. He has spelt the river as “Ganges” in the title and as “Ganga” in the text of the poem “Sonnet: Written on the Banks of Ganges”,³²⁸ again he has also used “Gunga” as the spelling of the river in his poem, “Sonnet: Scene on the Ganges”³²⁹. The argument I put forth here might be loosely based on my conjectures about canonisation, but it is my presumption that, if the Oriental names of places, peoples, rivers, mountains etc. were of any significant import to the British culture and academics, then by the middle of the nineteenth century, after almost one hundred years of the British staying in this country — that is about the time Richardson was writing — there would have been devised a standard lexicographic tool for spelling the Oriental proper nouns in English, and readers in Europe would not have to combat with such frequent lexical variations of names referring to the same entity. Each man writing about the Orient was free to spin a spelling out of his fancy, when it came to the mention of a proper name in any of the Oriental languages; seldom would that be the case with British writers, if they were referring to proper nouns in other European languages. In fact, Richardson, given his single most important role as educator and teacher of English literature, could have

³²⁷ Gibson. *Anglophone Poetry*. p. 157.

³²⁸ Richardson, David Lester. “Sonnet: Written on the Banks of Ganges.” *Literary Leaves*. 1836. p. 114.

³²⁹ Richardson, David Lester. “Sonnet: Scene on the Ganges.” *Literary Leaves*. 1836. p. 119.

been the man to standardise lexical devices in English for naming proper nouns in Oriental languages. Instead, he chose to use any spelling at his own free will for the purpose of referring to peoples or places related to the Orient. What is apparent in this practice of lexical variation is the negligence in attitude of the British towards anything associated with the Orient.

Like most other British writers composing verse or prose in India, Richardson too attempted to unveil the mysticism of the East albeit only to such a measured extent that would sufficiently evince his knowledge of India, and yet not entirely remove the veil from the face of this country and its people, so that it still held the enticements to lure the young, promising Englishmen to participate in the workings of the imperial machinery. In the footnote attached to the poems, Richardson had, wherever applicable, offered substantial glossaries to elucidate a Hindu or a Muslim ritual, or even the nature and distribution of Indian flora and fauna. The poem titled “Sonnet: Scene on the Ganges” in *Literary Leaves* (1836) was earlier published in *The Oriental Herald, and Journal of General Literature* (Vol. XI, October to December, 1826, London) edited by James Silk Buckingham. In that version, the poem was titled “Sonnet, written in Benares, in the East Indies”,³³⁰ it was mentioned in a footnote that this poem was earlier published in Ackermann’s *Forget-me-not* for 1827; and, most importantly, it carried a short prose epigraph that served as an exposition to the poem that painted the picture of a Hindu ritual:

The following Sonnet contains an allusion to a well-known custom in the East Indies. When a female is separated from her lover, she repairs in the evening to the banks of the Ganges, (or holy river,) and launches a small floating lamp. Should the lamp sink, or the light be extinguished, before it has passed a certain distance down the stream, it is

³³⁰ Richardson, David Lester. “Sonnet: Scene on the Ganges.” *The Oriental Herald, and Journal of General Literature*. Vol. XI. Ed. James Silk Buckingham. October to December, 1826. p. 589.

considered emblematical of the fate of the absent lover,
who is supposed to have met with an untimely death.”³³¹

The poet, however, moves forward in the poem with cautious steps, lest he demystifies the enigma associated with this beautiful custom of the people of the East. The closing couplet of the sonnet in half-rhyme reads:

The cold wave quenched the flame — an omen dread
The maiden dares not question; — *he is dead!*³³²

It is hard to comment on the final tone of the poem: was it one of curious wonder at a superstitious Hindu custom, or was it one of deploring criticism of an irrational faith followed by the Hindus. Richardson chose not to sound outright judgmental.

A less elaborate example may be cited from the poem, “An Indian Day”,³³³ where a note is attached to the concluding lines, “The Dead repose, the Mourner’s hands illumine / The consecrated lamp o’er Beauty’s hallowed tomb!”³³⁴ The appended note at the end of the volume reads:

These lines allude to a custom, prevalent among the Mahometans, of illuminating the tombs of those lately deceased; the nearest surviving Relatives sitting up every night, for a week or fortnight, to trim the Lamps and protect the Graves.”³³⁵

The explanatory notes were clearly targeted at the British readers, and reveal that Richardson had some understanding of the rituals of the Hindus and the Muslims alike. Richardson also had intelligence of the current social trends and cultural practices of the Indians. While explaining the ritual of Sati in a note he attached to his sonnet on that subject, he writes:

This sacrifice is not explicitly enjoined by the shasters or sacred writings of the Hindoos as actually necessary to

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Richardson, David Lester. “An Indian Day.” *Sonnets, and Other Poems*. London: Thomas and George Underwood, 1825. pp. 58-60.

³³⁴ Ibid. p. 60.

³³⁵ Ibid. p. 150.

salvation. Many well-informed Natives, among whom is the learned Brahmin, and ardent philanthropist, Rammohun Roy, have objected to the practice, as not only abhorrent to humanity, but as altogether contradictory to the fundamental doctrines of their faith.³³⁶

Richardson was a cautious man, who neither disparaged India vehemently nor glorified the colonial masters with absolute praise. The sonnet presents a graphical description of the ritual of Sati, yet the poet carefully refrains from making any judgmental observation. The text along with the paratexts make it clear though that he feels grief and horror for the widow at such an inhuman practice:

While fiercely burning rafters fall around
And shroud her form from Horror's straining eye!³³⁷

The conventional subject of 'sati', that is decidedly the most common theme in the oeuvre of Company Poetry, is here presented in Richardson's characteristic style of apparent objectivity, free from colonial prejudice. This trope was highly effective in putting forth a convincing portrayal of "India" as a country. The situation was further assisted by the extensive notes that Richardson attached to the Indian language words he used in his poems to describe the Indian flora and fauna. For instance, in his "Sonnet: Written in India",³³⁸ he glosses "Minah" not simply as a bird, but provides a detailed description of its size, colour, distribution, habitat, and its favoured position among the ladies. Further, in this sonnet, which draws the picture of a storm in India, Richardson attaches a rather long note giving an account of a storm that he had experienced on the Ganga. He even quotes from his journal entry which, he says, he had "kept of [his] little Indian adventures"³³⁹ along with the accompanying footnotes explicative of the Indian place names and Indian language words. Such an attachment to a poem renders the quality of

³³⁶ Richardson, David Lester. "Sonnet X: The Suttee." *The Oriental Herald and Monthly Register*. Vol. XII. January to March, 1827. p. 511.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Richardson, David Lester. "Sonnet: Written in India". *The Oriental Herald, and Journal of General Literature*. Vol. XII. p. 509.

³³⁹ Ibid.

veracity to the experiences of the author expressed in the poem. Since Richardson deployed this trope in numerous poems, he had successfully created an image of himself as a poet who narrated the true impressions of India without the prejudices of an imperial entrepreneur. And, in this garb, he did present, through some of his poems and much of his prose, an image of India which is shrouded in a thin veil of mysticism, an image of India which is far removed from the rational, judicious, truthful and glorious land of the Britain, an image of India that was far removed from the true experiences of this country.

It is understandable that the Englishman in India was still struggling to negotiate with the hostile climate in this country: we come across numerous poems which offer detailed accounts of how the Englishman woefully drudged himself through the passage of an 'Indian Day'. Like Parker, Richardson also wrote a poem titled "An Indian Day" and, again like Parker, he too divided his poem into different sections, like "Morn", "Noon" and "Night", according to the time of the day he was talking about. Richardson's obsession with poetry as the preferred form of English belletristic writing is evident in the war lyrics that were "versified from literal prose translations of genuine Khoond poems".³⁴⁰ Richardson was here referring to the two lyric poems "To Laha Penoo: The God of War — A Khoond War Lyric"³⁴¹ and "To Bera Penoo: The Earth Goddess — A Khoond Invocation"³⁴² that were published in *Literary Chit-Chat* (1848). Both the poems are songs that are part of the customs of the Kandh tribes of Orissa, who were overpowered by the British in 1835. The second poem is specifically mentioned to have preceded the ritual of human sacrifice. Richardson rendered in verse the literal translations of these two Kandh songs in prose mentioned by S. C. Macpherson in his

³⁴⁰ Richardson. *Literary Chit-Chat*. 1848. p. 348.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.* pp. 348-350.

³⁴² *Ibid.* pp. 350-352.

essay “An Account of the Religion of the Khonds in Orissa”³⁴³ published in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain*. In the note attached to these two poems, Richardson did mention the Kandh ritual of human sacrifice and he also did speak about the British Indian Government’s efforts to stop that practice; however, in his characteristic style of apparent neutrality, Richardson carefully avoided the use of any adjective —derogatory or otherwise — in his description. Rather, he cited as his source of information *Lieut. Macpherson’s Report upon the Khonds of the Districts of Ganjam and Cuttack*,³⁴⁴ and the review of this report that was published in the *Calcutta Review*.³⁴⁵ Hence, freeing himself from any prejudiced information that might have occurred in his poems. I quote Richardson’s note, which serves as a brilliant example of objective information:

I refer the reader to Captain S.C. Macpherson’s Report upon the Khoonds of the district of Ganjam and Cuttack, and to the interesting articles upon the subject, in the *Calcutta Quarterly Review*, for curious and valuable information respecting this most singular people. The Khoonds still offer up human sacrifices to one their deities, (the Earth Goddess) a custom to which the British Indian Government are endeavoring to put a stop by earnest remonstrance and persuasion. There is every reason to believe that this laudable object will be speedily attained, by a continuance of the same mild but steady and determined policy which has hitherto influenced the intercourse of our Political agents with the Khoonds.³⁴⁶

Richardson’s slight but pronounced support and laudation of the British Indian Government is unmistakable in the above narration.

³⁴³ Macpherson, S. C. “An Account of the Religion of the Khonds in Orissa”. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain*, Vol. 13. 1852. pp. 216-274.

³⁴⁴ Macpherson, S. C. *Lieut. Macpherson’s Report upon the Khonds of the Districts of Ganjam and Cuttack*. Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1842.

³⁴⁵ Anon. “Review of Lieut. Macpherson’s Report upon the Khonds.” *Calcutta Review*. Vol. 8. July-December, 1847. pp. 1-51.

³⁴⁶ Richardson. *Literary Chit-Chat*. p. 348.

While writing the “Lines to the Memory of David Hare”,³⁴⁷ Richardson cautiously safeguards himself against any probable accusation of endorsing dissent in any form. It must be mentioned here that David Hare, the Scottish philanthropist who was the first Briton to promote English education in India, especially in Calcutta, and was Richardson’s friend and colleague in the Hindu College, was refused a place in the Christian cemeteries of Calcutta after his death, as he was a non-believer. Hare was also the chief inspiring force behind Derozio’s radical thinking and liberal education. Richardson was careful to maintain distance from any form of radicalism. Although he wrote the poem that commended Hare, he mentioned in the paratexts that it was “[w]ritten at the request of several Native gentlemen” and that it was “to be recited by a Hindu”.³⁴⁸ As Gibson rightly points out, Richardson was considered one of the authoritative voices of nineteenth century India, not only by the Indians or by the British Government, but also by the other poets who were writing English language verse in India during that period:

... a young poet such as Mary Carshore viewed Richardson as an authority worth both impressing and opposing when she argued that he and the Irish poet Tom Moore were mistaken in their romantic representations of young Indian women. Such women, she said, were unlikely to gad about at night in the way Moore described in his poem *Lalla Rookh*, and her cheeky dismissal of this and other evidence of ill-informed orientalism provoked Richardson’s strictures in his review of her work. Carshore naturally took note of the opinions of the man whom they called “the Bulbul of India”.³⁴⁹

It is evident that the poets writing English language verse in nineteenth century India engaged in a complex web of affiliations and disaffiliations amongst themselves and their counterparts in Britain; at the same time, it is of significant import that there were debates

³⁴⁷ Richardson. David Lester. “Lines to the Memory of David Hare.” *Literary Chit-Chat*. pp. 395-396.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 395.

³⁴⁹ Gibson. *Anglophone Poetry*. p. 150.

and contestations as to the true representation of “India” amongst these poets who have had lived experiences of this country.

Emma Roberts

Emma Roberts stayed in India for a short period of time — initially for four years from 1828 to 1832 and later for a year in 1839-41 before her death in Pune. Within this brief span of her stay, she had experienced “India” to considerable extents and even during her years in London, she “exhausted all [her] information concerning [India], which [she found] a marketable commodity”.³⁵⁰ She engaged in fierce criticism of the imperial policies, and most of her prose writings embodied severe excoriation of British racism and arrogance. Hers was one of the strongest voices that questioned the representations of “India” in the writings of the British expatriate. In her travelogue, *The East India Voyager*, Roberts unreservedly speaks of the Company officers and the Queen’s servants, and express contempt for their brazen racist attitude:

Officers belonging to the Queen’s Service who go out to India, ... usually look upon it as a place of temporary sojourn, and trouble themselves very little concerning manners and habits which are very uninteresting in their eyes. The society of their brother officers renders them in a great degree independent of that of the resident community, and each is apt to underrate and disparage the other. [They] remain for years in India without conquering a single prejudice, or without seeing more than the mere external surface of the very small portion of the country and the native community, coming beneath their notice.

...

It has been too much the custom for Europeans resident in India to despise native opinions, and to treat every class of persons with whom they may come into contact, with rude indifference, or with studied contumely. In many instances the contempt, imbibed without just cause, and cherished in consequence of ignorance, has degenerated into hatred, and

³⁵⁰ Roberts’ letter written from Bombay, dated December, 1839. Qtd. in Johnson, George William. *The Stranger in India; or, Three years in Calcutta*. Vol. II. London: Henry Colburn, 1843. p. 166.

without having any justifiable excuse for their enmity, a considerable portion of Anglo-Indians entertain the strongest aversion to the people whom they have alienated by their haughty and imperious manners. A black fellow, the invidious epithet with which they designate every native, however high in the scale of intellectuality, is, according to their opinion, scarcely superior to the brute creation, and may be treated accordingly and idea which must always be unjust and absurd, and is now more than ever impolitic.³⁵¹

The purpose of such a long quote is to emphasise on the nature, extent and severity of Roberts' critique of the empire and its servants. Roberts wrote both her prose pieces and her poems from an ironic distance, as she, unlike her male counterparts, was not even enlisted in the Company's service nor was she dependent on any wage paid by the Company or the Queen to their regimental or bureaucratic servants in India. She had come to India initially as company to her sister whose husband was posted as a military officer in this country; she came from a rich Welsh family, and was financially independent; she furthered her pecuniary assets from sales of her books and her editorial ventures. So, Roberts' engagement with India was not directly shaped by imperial interests. In a number of her poems in *Oriental Scenes, Sketches, and Tales*,³⁵² she speaks in the voice of a woman, Indian or English, through dramatic dialogues, and refrains from assuming the role of a spectator or that of the omniscient narrator, which were common tropes deployed by the British versifiers in India. Any analysis of Roberts' poem requires an understanding of this position of hers as an ambivalent representative of the British empire.

Roberts published only one volume of poetry, and most of the poems included in that volume were already published earlier in British or Indian periodicals. This volume, *Oriental Scenes, Sketches, and Tales*, was first published from Calcutta by P. S.

³⁵¹ Roberts, Emma. *The East India Voyager, or the Outward Bound*. London: J. Madden, 1845. pp. 45-46, 105-106.

³⁵² Roberts, Emma. *Oriental Scenes, Sketches, and Tales*. London: Edward Bull, 1832.

D’Rozario in 1830, whence it carried poems on such topics that were not related to India along with the poems on Oriental scenes and tales, as the title suggested. Later, in 1832, a second edition of this volume was published from London by Edward Bull, and this time it was meant only for poems that dealt with India as a subject. This second edition was received well by the readers and the critics alike; the *Athenaeum*, a prestigious London literary journal, published a commendatory review in its issue dated 20th September, 1832.³⁵³ The subjects of her poems constitute mostly commiserating descriptions of Indian scenery, situations and the customs of the inhabitants of India; and this was quite unlike most of the poems in the corpus of Company Poetry, which either bemoan the exile’s desolation or voice protest or sympathies related to political controversies current in British India, or at best decry and execrate the rites and rituals practised by the Hindus. The only exception to the common characteristic features of Roberts’ verse is the poem titled “Stanzas: Written on the Banks of the Ganges”,³⁵⁴ where she says that she “languish[es] for a cottage home / Within [her] native land”.³⁵⁵ The intriguing part of this poem is not to be found in the body of the main text, but is pronounced clearly in the paratext. Roberts attached a brief note to this poem, where she states in no equivocal terms, that the “passionate regrets experienced by the exile” is embodied in his nostalgic longings for the “humblest” of objects even “in the midst of the most gorgeous scenes”.³⁵⁶ She recognises the common trope of British expatriate literature in trying to comprehend the unfamiliar in terms of alterity, but at the same time, realises that such comparisons do not “do justice” to the beauty of the land, and should not be encouraged, if India as a country has to be truly appreciated:

³⁵³ Anon. “Reviews: *Oriental Scenes, Sketches, and Tales*. By Emma Roberts, author of ‘Memoir of the Rival Houses of York and Lancaster,’ & c. London: Bull.” *Athenaeum*. No. 260. October 20, 1832. p. 676-677.

³⁵⁴ Roberts, Emma. “Stanzas: Written on the Banks of the Ganges.” *Oriental Scenes*. pp. 130-132.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 132.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 198-199.

... many persons will, like the author, in a fit of despair, contrast the Ganges with some obscure rivulet, the magnolia with the daisy, to the disparagement of the mighty river and the monarch of flowers. To do justice to the sunny land of India; its visitors should have the power to leave it for Europe at pleasure.³⁵⁷

It is evident that there were British voices, however minor in number they might be, that condemned the attitude of derision and disparagement that their fellow expatriates harboured and expressed towards Indian scenes, peoples and cultures. There are a number of poems in *Oriental Scenes* that offer vivid descriptions of Indian landscape, Indian climate, and the social life of the Indians, especially Indian ladies.

Curiously Roberts uses a number of Indian language words in her poems, but she seldom glosses any of those words. On the other hand, she attaches notes to the poems in order to corroborate her accounts with her real experiences of living in India. In “The North-Wester”,³⁵⁸ Roberts uses Indian language words, such as “gooleah”, “peepul”, “neem”, “Nazim” (probably misspelt from “Nizam”), “ghaut” and “Bulbul”, but the meanings of none of these words are explained in the footnotes. The poem is signed off as having been written in August, 1828, at Moorshedabad (presently, Murshidabad), and the paratext of the poem constitutes a paragraph³⁵⁹ which provides a detailed account of the author’s experience of a nor ’wester during her stay in that city. “The Land Storm”³⁶⁰ and “An Evening Scene in Hindoostan”³⁶¹ are two other notable examples of the picturesque mode of narration that Roberts prefers, especially in her description of nature. There are a number of Indian language words, like “topes”, “mhuts”, “Serais” and “jheel”, that Roberts uses here — all without any explanation of their meanings in the paratexts, save in the case of “kafila” which she glosses as “caravan” in a footnote in the same page that

³⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 199.

³⁵⁸ Roberts, Emma. “The North-Wester.” *Oriental Scenes*. pp. 42-45.

³⁵⁹ Ibid. pp. 173-174.

³⁶⁰ Roberts, Emma. “The Land Storm.” *Oriental Scenes*. pp. 65-68.

³⁶¹ Roberts, Emma. “An Evening Scene in Hindoostan.” *Oriental Scenes*. pp. 101-103.

it appears on.³⁶² The convention of the British versifiers writing English language poetry in India at that time of adding the suffix ‘-s’ in order to pluralise an Indian language word, is also found in Roberts’ poems. It is my conjecture that Roberts felt that by the end of the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, most readers of English language verse written in India would be familiar with quite a number of the Indian language words that were commonly used in poems and prose writings that were produced in copious volumes by British men residing in this country. Additionally, she might have also recognised Indian language vocabulary to be an integral part of writings, especially in the verse form, on any subject related to India, for words carry within them much more than just their literal meanings and often allude to certain social and cultural practices and beliefs, which are almost impossible to convey through dictionary meanings of those words or through translations of those words in another language. Roberts herself does not offer any explanation in any of her writings as to the reason she deviated from the common practice of British versifiers in India, and chose not to gloss the literal meanings of the Indian language words she used in her texts. Both “The Land Storm” and “An Evening Scene in Hindoostan”, however, carry, like most of her other poems, notes³⁶³ that offer vivid accounts of Roberts’ own experiences of the situations described in the poems. To the later poem is attached further notes that describe the habits of Indian nomads and the manner of their temporary lodgings which are “very picturesque” and “seem always to fall into graceful forms”.³⁶⁴ The tone that inevitably strikes the twenty-first century reader of Roberts’ poems is the absence of any form or hint of derision and disparagement of Indian people or Indian life or even Indian nature. Another note throws light on the taste

³⁶² Ibid. p. 102.

³⁶³ Roberts. *Oriental Scenes*. Notes to “The Land Storm”: p. 179; Notes to “An Evening Scene in Hindoostan”: pp. 187-189.

³⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 188.

of the Indians for good music, and the author expresses her delight at the happiness that even the poorer classes of people in India derive from simple things:

The Indians, generally speaking, delight more in noise than harmony, but some of the native wood notes wild, heard in the evening, are very melodious; even the rude accompaniments of the tom tom, or still more still more discordant gong, when mellowed by distance, come with not unpleasant sounds upon the ear. At any rate, it is delightful to see so much happiness as that which the poorer classes of Hindoostan enjoy. They seem to be thoroughly sensible of the blessings of a good Government, where each man holds his own in peace.³⁶⁵

Even though much of Roberts' texts embody severe excoriation of British imperial policies, and the general British attitude of arrogance and their derision of the Indians and India, yet she did exhibit prudence as a British citizen when on more than one occasions — like the one quoted above — she expressed commendation of the good governance of the British in India. Roberts, however, was keenly aware of the “distance from the views of her fellow expatriates, which was certainly shaped by her unusual position as a single professional woman and was probably also formed by a Welsh scepticism about claims of English superiority”.³⁶⁶ In one of the paratexts to her poem, “The Hindoo Girl”,³⁶⁷ she expressed concern over the probable disbelief of her fellow British readers at the pictures of “domestic happiness in India” that she painted in the poems contained in *Oriental Scenes*. She writes:

The domestic happiness existing in India, as portrayed in the present volume, may appear to many persons to be exaggerated, but the author can only say, that the pictures have either been drawn from actual observation, or taken from authentic sources.³⁶⁸

She takes a step further in order to render veracity to her accounts of Indian life: on numerous occasions, she cites as source of her information significant works on history,

³⁶⁵ Ibid. pp. 188-189.

³⁶⁶ Gibson. *Anglophone Poetry*. p. 122-123.

³⁶⁷ Roberts, Emma. “The Hindoo Girl.” *Oriental Scenes*. pp. 93-95.

³⁶⁸ Roberts. *Oriental Scenes*. p. 185.

travel and social life related to India and written in the nineteenth century. In this particular poem, “The Hindoo Girl”, she mentions Alexander Dow’s *The History of Hindostan*³⁶⁹ and James Tod’s *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*³⁷⁰ as bearing testimony to the emotions of the Hindu girl that her poem talks about.³⁷¹ She provides a detailed description of the peepul tree, comparing it with the poplar which the British readers are familiar with, and also explaining its significance in the social and religious life of the Hindus.³⁷² Her eagerness to authenticate her narration reached such inordinate proportion that she even cited multiple sources for one particular poem, or for one particular situation she described. At the end of the poem, “The Hindoo Girl”, Roberts attaches a note which refers to “Bishop Heber’s Journal”,³⁷³ where he talks in detail about the particular superstition of the Hindus that Roberts has narrated in her poem.³⁷⁴ I argue that such zealous citation of source materials for a creative work like a poem by a professional writer like Roberts can only be explained as a foil to the other largely inaccurate and fabulous descriptions of India and its people by her fellow Company poets.

Another striking feature of Roberts’ writing is her preoccupation with graves and funerals. She had written an entire chapter on “Cemeteries and Funeral Obsequies” in the Second Volume of her celebrated book *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan*,³⁷⁵ and she had also composed several poems on this topic — “The Dying Hindoo”,³⁷⁶ “The Rajah’s Obsequies”,³⁷⁷ “The Moosulmaun’s Grave”,³⁷⁸ “The Tomb of the Faithful”,³⁷⁹

³⁶⁹ Dow, Alexander. *The History of Hindostan: from the Earliest Account of Time, to the Death of Akbar, Translated from the Persian of Mahummud Casim Ferishta of Delhi*. London: Becket and De Hondt, 1868.

³⁷⁰ Tod, James. *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast’han, Or the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India*. 2 vols. London: Smith Elder; Calkin and Budd, 1829-32.

³⁷¹ Roberts. *Oriental Scenes*. p. 185.

³⁷² Roberts. *Oriental Scenes*. pp. 185-186.

³⁷³ Heber. *Narrative of a Journey*. Vol. I. p. 125.

³⁷⁴ Roberts. “The Hindoo Girl.” p. 95.

³⁷⁵ Roberts, Emma. “Cemeteries and Funeral Obsequies.” *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan*. Vol. II. pp. 34-65.

³⁷⁶ Roberts, Emma. “The Dying Hindoo.” *Oriental Scenes*. pp. 39-41.

³⁷⁷ Roberts, Emma. “The Rajah’s Obsequies.” *Oriental Scenes*. pp. 46-61.

and “Indian Graves”.³⁸⁰ The poems can be read as Roberts’ response to the fear of diseases and untimely death that most British in India suffered from. David Arnold dubbed her “[a] connoisseur of graveyards”³⁸¹ and placed her in the canon of the British expatriate literature in India with regard to writings on graveyards and funerals:

While the physical evidence of their mortality was, for many Europeans, a significant and visible presence in the Indian landscape, the “melancholy” it occasioned (melancholy and sensibility being “close sisters”) seemed to call for sober reflection rather than constituting a rationale for a hasty British retreat from India. Rather than avoid any mention of cemeteries, crowded with their dead countrymen, writers found them “deeply affecting”, and seemed to regard it as part of their responsibility to report on them (much as they did on the state of jails and European orphanages), and thus to reflect on what they implied about British rule and residence in so foreign a place.

This was notably the case with Emma Roberts ...³⁸²

Although Arnold later situates Roberts’ preoccupation with graves in her personal tragedies — losing her father at a young age, and then losing her mother in London, her sister shortly after their arrival in India, and the death of her young brother in the British regiment in India — the poems on graves and funerals betray a keen sense of pain and awareness of the inexorable condition of the English man in India: faced with the inevitability of suffering and probable premature death, and yet working relentlessly to prove to herself and her countrymen in England the invaluable treasure that “India” was to the British.

Arguably the most significant and the longest narrative poem by Roberts, “The Rajah’s Obsequies”, like other poems by British expatriates in India, deploys the common trope of Sati — but, unlike others, not with the purpose of portraying the Hindus as a

³⁷⁸ Roberts, Emma. “The Moosulmaun’s Grave.” *Oriental Scenes*. pp. 69-74.

³⁷⁹ Roberts, Emma. “The Tomb of the Faithful.” *Oriental Scenes*. pp. 96-100.

³⁸⁰ Roberts, Emma. “Indian Graves.” *Oriental Scenes*. pp. 115-119.

³⁸¹ Arnold, David. *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape, and Science, 1800-1856*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2006. p. 51.

³⁸² *Ibid.* pp. 50-51.

barbaric race. “The Rajah’s Obsequies” engages with the reformist debates centring round the position and rights of women that were current in mid-nineteenth century Calcutta. The poem begins at the death of an Indian King in Benares (now, Varanasi), it then moves on to give a brief description of the elaborate funeral procession of the King, before the narration centres on the Sati of the two wives of the king, which is the locus of Roberts’ argument in this poem. She does use numerous Indian language words here — the “Rajah” in the very little of the poem instead of the common English word for it, the King, “ghaut”, “Zenana”, “sitars”, “dal”, “ghurrees”, “bazars”, “Chobedar”, “Tulwar”, “Peons”, “Chuprassies”, “Chowries”, “Palanquin”, “Syah”, “Ornee”, “dhole”, “cittaras”, “chumayla”, and “Mussaul” — and glosses, as is her practice, none of these words, save “Chobedar” and “ghurrees”. As she mentions “Chobedar”, “Peons” and “Chuprassies” in quick succession, she inserts a footnote that reads “attendants on great men”.³⁸³ Roberts attaches an endnote to the line, “The *ghurrees* chime the evening hour”,³⁸⁴ wherein she explains how time is measured in India with the help of a brass vessel and a pot of water; she further mentions that “a person appointed for the purpose strikes the hour on a ghurree or gong”.³⁸⁵ Again, while talking of the Brahmins, she scornfully tells the readers that they are “[p]roud only of the triple thread”,³⁸⁶ assuming that her European readers will not be able to understand this social custom, she clarifies in the endnote that “[a] string of three threads passed over the shoulder and under the opposite arm, forms the distinguishing mark of the Brahmin caste”.³⁸⁷ The poem is set in Benares, and Roberts offers her readers a fascinating graphic description of the holy city and its heritage in the endnotes to the poem. She talks about the crowded bazars, the streets populated with humans and animals alike, the imposing minarets, mausoleums and other religious

³⁸³ Roberts. “The Rajah’s Obsequies.” p. 50.

³⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 49.

³⁸⁵ Roberts. “Notes to *The Rajah’s Obsequies.*” *Oriental Scenes.* pp. 175-176.

³⁸⁶ Roberts. “The Rajah’s Obsequies.” p. 51.

³⁸⁷ Roberts. “Notes to *The Rajah’s Obsequies.*” p. 176.

structures, and, most significantly, people's belief in the sacredness of almost every animal and every object that is part of the city of Benares. Her description of the city begins with an emphatic comment on the feeling of veneration attached with Benares:

The city of Benares is esteemed so holy, that the pious suppose it to be a jewel or excrescence, placed on, and not a part of, the world.³⁸⁸

The text of the poem together with the paratexts do offer a powerful and authentic picture of the social and religious life in the city of Benares, much of which remains unchanged even in the twenty-first century.

However, what is of far more significant import in the poem is the reformist debate over the ritual of Sati, the position of women in the society, her claims to her deceased husband's property, and her social rights to exercise her own choices. The discourse on this strong social issue is presented through the last "songs" of the two wives of the Rajah, which are supposed to be "oracular" words relating to the "transmigrations" of the "parting spirit".³⁸⁹ This ploy of dramatic speech allows Roberts to adopt a stance of distance and disengagement from both the characters in her poem and the point of debate itself. The element of radicalism is emphatically ingrained in the discourses of both the wives. The younger bride expresses her desire for her soul to "pass to happy things, / With dainty, plume and glittering wings, / A Peri bird",³⁹⁰ even when it was considered to be a penance to be re-born as an inferior life-form for the sins of one's past life. She was, however, fully aware of and took pride in the fact that she was blessed to be given the opportunity "[t]o ope the saffron gates of heaven"³⁹¹ for her beloved husband. Robert writes an elaborate note on the younger wife's song:

Although to re-enter life in an inferior grade of society, is generally considered the punishment of crimes

³⁸⁸ Roberts. "Notes to *The Rajah's Obsequies*." p. 174.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 176.

³⁹⁰ Roberts. "The Rajah's Obsequies." p. 55-56.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.* p. 55.

committed in the previous state of existence the poetical license here taken is not without authority; one of the wives of the late Rana of Oodeypore, when ascending the funeral pile, expressed a wish to return to the world in a less exalted station. ... [T]hough the suttee is said to facilitate her husband's admission into beatitude, it does not appear that she expects to derive any immediate benefit herself, by a compliance with a barbarous rite."³⁹²

The note, apart from providing an authentication to her poetic claim, also serves as a strong voice that defies the conventions of superstitious presumptions.

The elder wife, on her part, is more of a rebel figure who scorned openly the inhuman, impious ritual of Sati and boldly defied both male patriarchy and the hierarchy of the Brahminical caste as the “guardian of five thousand years of oral incantation and three thousand years of literary codification”.³⁹³ Roberts' protagonist, Mitala, the elder wife, takes a further bold step to raise her voice for the rights of a woman to exercise her choice and free will. Roberts compares her to an “offended goddess”,³⁹⁴ which is in itself an extremely powerful simile that exalts the position of women; her song is described as the “indignant” lay, and it can be read as bodying forth Roberts' own ideals of women empowerment and emancipation. Mitala emphatically voices her final declaration:

“Think not, accursed priests, that I will lend
 “My sanction to these most unholy rites;
 “And though yon funeral pile I may ascent,
 “It is not that yourn stern command affrights
 “My lofty soul — it is because these hands
 “Are all too weak to break my sex's bands.

“I from my earliest infancy, have bowed
 “A helpless slave to lordly man's controul,
 “No hope of liberty, no choice allowed,
 “Unheeded all the struggles of my soul;
 “Compelled by brutal force to link my fate
 “With one who best deserved my scorn and hate.”³⁹⁵

³⁹² Roberts. “Notes to *The Rajah's Obsequies*.” pp. 176-177.

³⁹³ Nair. p. 27.

³⁹⁴ Roberts. “The Rajah's Obsequies.” p. 57.

³⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 58.

Not only did Mitala defy male patriarchy, she also vehemently upheld women's rights and her position in society, by questioning the conventional pattern of arranged marriage in Indian society. The woman, more often than not, is married to a wealthy and socially powerful man by her clan, who pay no heed to her choices or will; it is considered a prized 'catch'. One can very well imagine the single professional British woman in India, Emma Roberts, who was financially independent and made her own choices in life, writing Mitala's song in the middle of the nineteenth century. Roberts, however, inserts a very long note here which asserts that such examples of defiance among Indian women were not uncommon, and was not a figment of her poetic imagination. She strongly grounded her claim to veracity by citing the example of the two wives of the father of Juan Singh, who was the "reigning sovereign of Oodeypore".³⁹⁶ Roberts recounts how Ranee reasoned with the British resident of the state of Udaypur as to why she chose to immolate herself through the ritual of Sati:

The distinguished favourite, Ranee, a woman of very superior attainments, assured the British resident, who endeavoured to dissuade her from her purpose, that she was not actuated by superstitious motives, and that she did not believe that there was any religious merit in the sacrifice. She had only chosen the least of the two evils, preferring an untimely and painful death, to a life of bitter penury and constant degradation.³⁹⁷

It is evident that Roberts relied on James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han* (1829-32) for much of her knowledge on the history and legends of India. Roberts offers a brief account of the menial and punitive life that a Hindu widow had to live, if she chose to live after her husband had passed away: she would be bereft of even the minimum luxury of food and dress, severe restrictions would be imposed on her movements, and she would have to live a dependent life at the mercy of her jeering

³⁹⁶ Roberts. "Notes to *The Rajah's Obsequies*." p. 177.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 177.

relatives. Roberts justified the choice that some of the Indian women with strength of character made by preferring Sati over the penuries of a widowed life. However, Roberts advocated an extremely significant correctional measure for the respectful sustenance of a Hindoo widow. She proposed:

The women of India will derive little benefit from the abolition of the rite, unless it be followed by the settlement of some specified portion of the property of the deceased upon his widow.³⁹⁸

The independent English woman in India championed the cause of Hindu widows in the mid-nineteenth century and recommended legal amendments and change in social attitude, both of which were put to practice with full force in India in later years.

In a similar vein, Roberts' insight and judgement of the political situation of British India deserves commendation. Some of her poems like "A Scene in the Doab"³⁹⁹ and "Sunset at Agra"⁴⁰⁰ embody a narrative of reformation of Indian progress. The images of ruins in her poems bespeak the stories of the Muslim conquests of India at one level; at a deeper level, the ruins of the mausoleums obliquely draw the reader's attention to the imperialist historiography of the Muslim subjugation of India. Implied in the narrative in no unequivocal terms is the fall of the Muslim empire in India, which inevitably induces the reader's suspicion and the poet's certitude as to the downfall of the British colonial powers in India. A few lines from "A Scene in the Doab" will illustrate this point:

Unheeded now the scorpion crawls,
And snakes unscathed in silence glide,
Where once the bright *Zenana*'s halls
To woman's feet were sanctified.

No trace remains of those gay hours
When lamps, in golden radiance bright
Streamed o'er these now deserted towers

³⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 178.

³⁹⁹ Roberts, Emma. "A Scene in the Doab." *Oriental Scenes*. pp. 24-27.

⁴⁰⁰ Roberts, Emma. "Sunset at Agra." *Oriental Scenes*. pp. 133-136.

The sunshine of their perfumed light.⁴⁰¹

Roberts' insightful understanding of imperial politics is evident in her anticipation of the inevitable overthrow of British imperialism in India, the speculation she expressed in much of her prose writings. In *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan*, Roberts writes:

... unless they [the natives of India] should obtain the respect, consideration, and importance, which seem so justly their due, it can scarcely be expected that they will continue to give their support to a Government, whose servants are resolutely opposed to their interest.⁴⁰²

The paratext⁴⁰³ to the poem, "Sunset at Agra", carries with it a picturesque description of the city of Agra, refers to its glorious past as a city beautified by the Mughal rulers, hints at its religious sanctity as the birthplace of the Hindu god, Vishnu, and offers a fair estimate of the proportion of its Hindu, Muslim and Christian inhabitants. The text draws a striking picture of communal harmony between the Muslims and the Hindus. It is in the same city that

To heaven their prophet's name the moslems raise,
And Hindee priests are hymning Vishnu's praise.⁴⁰⁴

Such delightful description of India as a country is a refreshing change from the innumerable pictures of derision and disparagement painted by most of the other poets in the oeuvre of Company Poetry. It is significant to note the immense popularity of Roberts' verse in nineteenth century British India. Gibson tells us that *Oriental Scenes, Dramatic Sketches and Tales*, Roberts' only volume of verse, when it was first published in 1830 from Calcutta, "was sold in advance to more than 350 subscribers both in Calcutta and "up-country"⁴⁰⁵. The figures represent substantially decent sale for a first anthology of a poet. Roberts' poems therefore, were of significant import in the literary

⁴⁰¹ Roberts. "A Scene in the Doab." p. 27.

⁴⁰² Roberts. *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan*. Vol. I. p. 87.

⁴⁰³ Roberts, Emma. "Notes to *Sunset at Agra*." *Oriental Scenes*. pp. 199-200.

⁴⁰⁴ Roberts. "Sunset at Agra." p. 133.

⁴⁰⁵ Gibson. *Anglophone Poetry*. p. 121.

scene in Calcutta, where writers of English verse — both Indians and British — participated in a vibrant literary culture, and formed small but dominant literary circles.

Robert Calder Campbell

Robert Calder Campbell spent considerable time in India, from 1817 to 1839, as a British military officer, stayed mostly in the southern part of India, especially Madras and Beejapore (now Vijayapura), took part in the Burma Wars, and wrote copious volumes of both prose and verse. Much of his work was recollections of his experiences in India and South West Asia, the camp life that he led as an army man, descriptions of the places he had been to, and a recording of sorts of the Indian social and religious customs that he came across. Campbell regularly contributed to the periodical press both in Britain and in India. Campbell's portrayals of Indian landscape and Indian folklores, like many other Company poets, were tinged generously with bushes of wilderness, savagery and dark mysticism. "Sonnets amidst the Ruins of Beejapore"⁴⁰⁶ is one particular example where accounts of the hideous and the arcane relating to the habits of the Indians are most pronounced. It is a sequence of four sonnets which narrate the author's "dreams / [o]f a bewildered fancy" before "the pensive beauty of the moon" erased the "grief and fear" arising out of such a ghastly "vision". Campbell sordidly recounts how a young lover, whom he calls a "vampire-ghoul", feasted on the "dreary cor[p]se" of a pretty damsel, who had once been his beloved. There are grisly descriptions of the bleeding limbs strewn all around the "haunted caves" and the fiery eyeballs and gory lips of the "ghoul".⁴⁰⁷ In short, India is presented as a place where the British poet's fancy is often host to frenzy

⁴⁰⁶ Campbell, Robert Calder. "Sonnets amidst the Ruins of Beejapore." *The Oriental Herald, and Colonial Intelligencer: Containing a Digest of Interesting and Useful Information from the British Indian Presidencies and the Eastern Nations*. Vol. IV. July-December, 1839. London: Madden & Co. pp. 100-101.

⁴⁰⁷ The words used within quotes in these two sentences appear in, Campbell. "Sonnets amidst the Ruins of Beejapore."

visitations bordering on the gruesome and obnoxious. Such a macabre incident was also reported by Campbell in his book, *Rough Recollections of Rambles, Abroad and at Home*,⁴⁰⁸ which is a collection of quasi-autobiographical poems and essays. In the First Chapter of that book, Campbell talks in detail about coming across an old woman who, in a fit of mad frenzy, imagined that she was cooking the broth of the flesh and blood of her dear child, Sooliman, and, relishing every bit of her meal, invited her dead son to come and share it with her:

... The mother who bore you, who suckled you at her breast
when you were living, now feasts upon your dead limbs,
and invites your ghost to join in the meal ... I am the
madur-i-ghowl — the mother of the ghowls!”⁴⁰⁹

Her “indistinct chaunt” appeared to the author’s ear to be “a witch’s incantation”.⁴¹⁰ Campbell went on to narrate that the “venerable Muezzin” at the mosque later told him how after losing both her husband and her son during the terrible famine, “insanity took possession of [the] mind”⁴¹¹ of the woman in question, and how since then she raved in “the deplorable exhilaration of incurable madness”,⁴¹² while cooking nothing but plain boiled rice. Many of Campbell’s poems contained such matter which is attested as his experiences in India by his prose writings.

Although he never makes any direct statement related to any broad categorisation of “India” as a country, yet these images presented so graphically through both his poems and his prose construct an image of “India” that abounds in “unhallowed” spirits, “wild despair”, “pale horror”, “gloomy scenes in darker shade”, “traitor-lover[s]” with “venomed fangs”, “scorpions with insidious sting” and “tyrants [who] ... shout [...] their

⁴⁰⁸ Campbell, Robert Calder. *Rough Recollections of Rambles, Abroad and At Home*. In Three Volumes. London: Thomas Cautley Newby, 1847.

⁴⁰⁹ Campbell. *Rough Recollections*. Vol. I. pp. 173-174.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 172.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 180.

⁴¹² *Ibid.* p. 181.

signals of mirth”.⁴¹³ It was necessary for the agents of the nascent colonising culture, the British, to construct such an ignoble, lugubrious and brutish idea of “India” and Indians, so that they could justify the ‘civilising mission’ of the white man— enlightening and ennobling the coloured natives with Western education and culture, even while sacrificing the comforts of his English cottage and willingly courting the “sultry ardour”⁴¹⁴ of India’s rough terrain. “[F]rangible justification[s]”⁴¹⁵ these were, to quote Walter Benjamin’s beautiful phrase! Because, they were based on such constructs as were far removed from the truth, the real experiences that the man had had in this country. The “dark despair”⁴¹⁶ of exile might be one possible explanation of Campbell’s poems of gloom and morbidity. However, that too does not suffice as a reasonable pretext for presenting a narration on “India” that engendered fallacious notions about the country in the imagination of the European readers. I would borrow here Benjamin’s argument on the dissemination of information through literary texts. While postulating the theories of why the art of story-telling gradually became rare, Benjamin argues that the written word on the page of a work of literature is the author’s communication with his readers, and it is loaded with information. He surmises that “[t]his new form of communication is information”.⁴¹⁷ He further illustrates this hypothesis:

“... it is no longer intelligence coming from afar, but the information which supplies a handle for what is nearest that gets the readiest hearing. The intelligence that came from

⁴¹³ All these phrases are words that were used by Campbell in his poems about India:

“unhallowed”, “gloomy scenes in darker shade”, “traitor-lover”, “venomed fangs” — words and phrases used in “Sonnets amidst the Ruins in Beejapore”.

“wild despair”, “pale horror”— phrases used in the poem, “The Cholera.” *The Oriental Herald, and Intelligencer*. Vol. IV. p. 110.

“scorpions with insidious sting”— phrase used in the poem, “Camp Lyrics.” *The Oriental Herald, and Intelligencer* Vol. IV. pp. 82-83.

“tyrants have shouted their signals of mirth!”— phrase used in the poem, “Madras Mohurrim Song.” *Rough Recollections*. Vol. I. pp. 118-119.

⁴¹⁴ Campbell. “Camp Lyrics.” p. 83.

⁴¹⁵ Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohn. Edited with an Introduction by Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 2007. p. 88.

⁴¹⁶ Campbell. “Sonnets amidst the Ruins in Beejapore.” p. 100.

⁴¹⁷ Benjamin. p. 88.

afar — whether the spatial kind from foreign countries or the temporal kind of tradition — possessed an authority which gave it validity, even when it was not subject to verification. Information, however, lays claim to prompt verifiability. The prime requirement is that it appear “understandable in itself.”⁴¹⁸

If Benjamin’s hypothesis is mapped onto the context of Company Poetry, it can be easily discerned that the poets of John Company used their position of power as colonial administrators and soldiers to speak in an authoritative voice, and communicated to their readers back in Britain, information about India, the land that they were living in; and this information was readily accepted by the British as verified knowledge which, in turn, constructed “India” in the imagination of the white man.

Although Campbell regularly used Indian language words, such as “sepoy”, “nulla”, “serai”, “Fakeer”, “Almehs”, “Muezzin” and many others in his poems, one poem that stands out is the “Madras Mohurrim Song”, which is an English paraphrase of a popular Mohemmedan song sung to celebrate the festival of Muharram. The author heard it being sung by the Fakeer, Ibrahim Sha, whom he had met on one of his encounters in Beejapore. Before the translation of the song begins, Campbell writes:

Ibrahim Sha’s voice was well modulated, and a solemn awe filled my mind as he chanted with expressive vehemence and wild feeling the following words, — by me inadequately tortured into English:⁴¹⁹

What strikes the reader in this short note is not the awareness on Campbell’s part of his shortcomings of translating into English a Mohemmedan song, but the use of the words “vehemence” and “wild feeling”, which induce a sense of horror and ferocity about the Fakeer in particular, about the Muslim religion in general, and both are related to Campbell’s experiences in “India”. The poet, who had spent quite a number of years amongst the Muslim population of Beejapore, had little difficulty in transliterating into

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. p. 89.

⁴¹⁹ Campbell. *Rough Recollections*. p. 118.

English the Urdu refrain of the song — “Bismilla hir Ruhman nir Ruheem” — and the Islamic invocations — “Hossain! Hassan!”, “Julalia! Julalia!” and “Alminnatu-lillahi-lillahi! Mohammed Russool!” Campbell uses many Urdu words, like “Allah”, “Hoori”, “Mursia” and such others, relating to common terms of the Muslim religion in his other poems as well.

Campbell is known to posterity chiefly as a close associate of the Pre-Raphaelite poets in London, especially, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Christina Rossetti, and is “credited with introducing them to the work of Keats”.⁴²⁰ After his retirement in 1839, he went to London and devoted himself completely to the pursuit of literature and became a prolific writer of both prose and verse. However, not much of Campbell’s writing was related to India, but, those which were, created an “India” that is dark, mysterious, gruesome and savage.

Honorina Marshall Lawrence

Honorina Marshall Lawrence’s poems can be read in sharp contrast to Campbell’s verses on India. The lady who spent considerable time in India — initially from 1837 to 1845 and then again from 1848 to 1854 — as a close companion and assistant of her husband, presented through her poems and journals a picture of “India” that was “cheerful”, “charming” and “glorious”.⁴²¹ Most of her writings are in the forms of journals, letters and poems that were privately circulated, and they reflect the intimate experiences of the domestic life of a British woman in India, who lived here as the wife of

⁴²⁰ Fhlathúin. Vol. I. p. 365.

⁴²¹ All these words were used as adjectives to describe life in India or the nature of the country by Lawrence in her poem, “A Day in the District”. *Real Life in India, Embracing a view of the Requirements of Individuals appointed to any Branch of The Indian Public Service; The Methods of Proceeding to India; and the Course of Life in Different parts of the Country.* [By an Old Resident.] London: Houlston and Stoneman, 1847. pp. 128-134.

an army officer of the East India Company. Frédéric Regard effectively outlines the predicament that Lawrence faced in writing about her experiences in India, and comments on the nature of those writings:

... although Lawrence's journals show how an Irish Officer's wife desperately sought to conform to an orthodox image of British respectability, they nevertheless evince her simultaneous temptation to refashion herself into an unorthodox, emancipated literary woman.⁴²²

Lawrence contributed poems to Calcutta periodicals, and her journals also contain some verses — all of which relate her accounts of travels in India and her experiences of living life as an expatriate in this country. The poems generally embody happy and picturesque descriptions of Indian topography, Indian villages, and talk about Indians in a tone that is far from derogatory. Although Lawrence uses very few Indian language words in her poems, yet the fact that she accultured herself with Indian culture and languages is apparent in naming her first daughter 'Mooniah', which is an essentially Indian name.

I shall particularly focus on one of her poems, "A Day in the District", where the author recounts her experiences throughout a typical day spent in the Indian countryside. She begins the poem with a clarion call to the soldiers, entreating them to awake and begin the march: "Awake, awake, the stars are bright".⁴²³ Lawrence talks about how she relished her "fragrant coffee" in their "sheltering Camp" with the "docile elephant" kneeling down before them.⁴²⁴ The first two epithets speak of domestic happiness and calm; and it is important to note that life in India is here projected by a British woman as cheery and peaceful, which is a marked departure from the gloom and ghastliness of India presented in the poems of most of her fellow British countrymen writings poems in India during that period. However, the epithet of the "docile elephant" may be interpreted in

⁴²² Regard, Frédéric. "Conflicts Afar and Within: The Irish, the British and the Indians in Honoria Lawrence's Journals: India Observed 1837-1854." *Contact in Context*. Ed. Sandhya Patel. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013. pp. 47-64. pp. 48-49.

⁴²³ Lawrence. "A Day in the District." p. 128.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

two different directions. At one level, it does present a paradox of a robust animal like an elephant to be described as docile, and some readers might interpret it as an attempt to domesticate the virility of the Indian man by the forces of British imperialism. At the other level, a completely antithetical reading of the same epithet is possible: the quality of being docile is in sharp contrast to the wild and savage imageries always associated with “India” by the other Company poets, and hence, presents to the readers an idea of “India” that can be described as soft, amenable and cooperative. I argue in favour of the second interpretation, for the rest of the poem and the images of “India” presented therein, would point towards that direction.

The second part of the poem commences with an ode to the “pleasant, pleasant ... hours [spent in] these forest bowers”.⁴²⁵ Lawrence invites the readers to come and experience with her the “forest home! /... [which is] [w]ith many a charm ... gilt”.⁴²⁶ She eulogises “maternal nature” which seems to be “[g]reeting [them] with her aspect fair”.⁴²⁷ She even stretches the attributes of the Indian landscape to describe it as God’s “perfect gift”.⁴²⁸ She urges the reader to take a look around this image of the Indian terrain that she has painted through her poem, and asks rhetorically “if ’tis not fairy ground?”⁴²⁹ The poet repeatedly uses the adjectives “pleasant”, “joyous”, “cheerful” and “bright” in her descriptions of Indian nature; and when she talks about the “rhyming fit”⁴³⁰ that has overcome her in those tranquil forest bowers, it is a potent hint at the harmony that she is trying to associate with the idea of “India”. Lawrence’s celebration of “India” as a country reaches the zenith when she dubs the “glorious sight” of “[t]he everlasting hills”,

⁴²⁵ Ibid. p. 131.

⁴²⁶ Ibid. p. 131.

⁴²⁷ Ibid. p. 131.

⁴²⁸ Ibid. p. 132.

⁴²⁹ Ibid. p. 132.

⁴³⁰ Ibid. p. 131.

“Creation’s diadem”,⁴³¹ and sings in praise of “India’s dark, but graceful daughters”⁴³² in the third part of the poem.

The point I would like to drive home here is that the response of the British to India as a country cannot be, and should not be, homogenised, neither is a generalised categorisation of the Company poets possible. Although certain common traits and tropes are prevalent in their poems, yet India elicited mixed response in the consciousness of the British expatriates. Hence, the idea of “India” that was tailored through their texts was also variegated. The response of the individual was evidently shaped by the nature of their personal experiences of living in this country. What makes Lawrence stand out among the imposing figures of the poets of John Company is that even after her personal experience of India was, like those of her other fellow countrymen, mitigated by pain, loss, death and suffering, she, unlike them, never drew dark, gloomy, despairing pictures of India as a country. It is to be noted here that Lawrence’s mother died shortly before she departed for India, she lost her young brother in one of the campaigns in India, her first daughter suffered and died at infancy in this country, and Lawrence herself lived in constant fear of any ill luck befalling her husband who was enlisted in the British Indian army. The closing of the poem that I was discussing, “A Day in the District”, betrays a longing on the part of the poet for her home and hearth in Ireland:

There will we talk of bygone times,
Send back our thoughts to western climes
And dream that distant home is near,
And wish the absent loved ones here;
And then, in fond and thankful prayer
Commit them to our Father’s care.⁴³³

Although the poet experienced sharp pangs of pain that an exile’s heart feels, yet it did not induce in her bitter tones of repulsion, despair or darkness about India; hence, the

⁴³¹ Ibid. p. 133.

⁴³² Ibid. p. 134.

⁴³³ Ibid. p. 134.

“cheerful” and bright “India” that emerges through her poems. Many Ellis Gibson includes excerpts from the poem, “A Day in the District” in the anthology, *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India*. She mentions in a footnote to the concluding lines of the poem:

To those lines Lawrence appended a note: “Take these lines as what they are, an attempt to describe what I have seen, and the overflowing of a happy heart.”⁴³⁴

Another footnote attached to the opening line of the excerpt reads:

Immediately preceding this poem she [Lawrence] wrote, “By way of variety, you shall have a chapter of stanzas ‘warranted genuine,’ that is, the objects therein described are those we really see.”⁴³⁵

Lawrence’s notes, as was quoted by Gibson, emphasise on the reliability and accuracy of her accounts of India; in addition, she consciously used the adjective “real” in the title of her journal, *Real Life in India*. There is, however oblique, a strong hint at the ‘imaginary’ or ‘unreal’ narratives of India presented in the texts of other British expatriates living in this country. It is this unreal construct of the idea of ‘India’ that constitutes the central/dominant premise of my argument. I have attempted to show through the analysis of some of the representative poems in the corpus of Company Poetry that the “India” that was projected through these texts was a construct of the British exiled consciousness, and the construct, as I have identified, fulfilled both the emotional and intellectual *sine qua non* of early colonialism almost perfectly.

E. L.

Honoraria Lawrence was not the only British writer during the mid-nineteenth century who presented pictures of “India” as cheerful and pleasant; she was joined in this league by other poets as well, and one such poet was E. L., who is supposedly an

⁴³⁴ Gibson. *Anglophone Poetry*. p. 168.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 165.

American lady settled in Calcutta during the 1840s. Not much biographical information is available about her, not even her full name; whatever little idea can be had about her life and her attitude towards India is surmised from the only book she published, if the poems in that book can be trusted to have arisen from the author's own experiences, which is in all probability the case. This book is a collection chiefly of poems and some writings in prose; it is titled *Leisure Hours; or, Desultory Pieces in Prose and Verse*⁴³⁶ and was printed at the Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta in 1846. The Cover Page said that it was written “[b]y E. L.”, and that it was “[a] Private Edition”.⁴³⁷ The authorship of this book is generally attributed to Lydia Lillybridge, another American lady who had spent some time in Burma and India. She embarked for India in July, 1846, while the book in question was signed by E. L. with the dateline that read “Calcutta, April 14, 1846”.⁴³⁸ The anomaly in the dateline is conclusive evidence that Lillybridge could not have written the book. In addition, the poems show that the author had fair knowledge of Indian languages, especially Hindustani and Bangla; reasonable understanding of the local botany of India insofar as to be able to add explanatory notes on them to her poems; and an admiration for the poems of Kasiprasad Ghosh published from Calcutta in 1830 in his verse collection titled *The Sháir, and Other Poems*. These facts suggest that the author of the book had spent quite some time in India before 1846, the date of publication of the book, which is something Lillybridge could not have done, as multiple sources inform us that she left America with the Judsons family only in 1846. It is the dedicatory text of the book which confirms that the poems were written by an American woman, who disguised herself as E. L.:

TO
AMERICA,
THIS VOLUME IS AFFECTIONATELY

⁴³⁶ E. L. *Leisure Hours; or, Desultory Pieces in Prose and Verse*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1846.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.* n. pag.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*

AND DUTIFULLY INSCRIBED
BY
ONE OF HER ABSENT DAUGHTERS.⁴³⁹

Close reading of the poems reveal that though E. L. frequently used the trope of exile by reflecting on her home and family in America, and lamented the high rate of mortality in India, yet she cherished her association with her Indian friends, and loved India as the country she had wilfully adopted. Gibson, in her biographical introduction to E. L.'s Poems, observes:

Perhaps most affecting — and unusual — is E. L.'s strong personal attachment to Indian friends and places, reflected clearly in her poem and prose on Vrindaban (which she calls Gupta-Brindiabon). E. L. seems to have loved India, even while missing her American friends and family. Before a Projected departure to America, she lamented more than she rejoiced. "India's a hallowed spot to me," she wrote. India, E. L. said, was her "adopted soil!"⁴⁴⁰

To consider a typical example of a happy leisure in India, I refer to the poem titled "To the Koil".⁴⁴¹ The poet hails the Cuckoo as "[s]weet Koil" whose "loveliest notes" of the "welcome song" she enjoys at the advent of "sweet May". The poem begins:

Sweet Koil! On my "Champá" tree,
Oh sing thy loveliest notes to me;
See! Here I sit all isolate,
And for thy welcome song I wait.

Monotonous then sing away,
Just on the threshold of sweet May;⁴⁴²

The picture painted a happy time of a contented soul in a peaceful surrounding of nature's bounty, similar in manner to the serene and beautiful images of the English countryside present in Wordsworth's poetry. I specifically point out the use of the possessive personal pronoun in the phrase "my "Champá" tree", which clearly indicates that the poet felt a

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Gibson. *Indian Angles*. p. 205.

⁴⁴¹ E. L. "To the Koil." *Leisure Hours*. pp. 95-96.

⁴⁴² Ibid. p. 95.

deep sense of belonging to the Indian landscape. This was a rare instance in Company Poetry, where an expatriate not only admires the nature of India, but also expresses her attachment to India in close personal terms. Furthermore, it is to be noted that she talks about “sweet May”, unlike most of her other fellow Company poets who had written innumerable lines on the sultry hours and the scorching summer of India. An adjective as cheerful as “sweet” to describe the month of May in India can flow, I contend, only from the pen of a poet who truly loved India and was intent on projecting pleasant, optimistic ideas about the country. She ends the poem by eulogising the voice of the “dear bird” which, she says, is “all but divine”⁴⁴³ — the poem thus concludes with a note on the divine quality of the song of an Indian bird, and is thus an echo of Honoria Lawrence’s voice where she hailed the Indian Himalayas as “Creation’s diadem”. It may be surmised that there were Company poets, more than one, of course, who attached the quality of divinity with India’s landscape or Indian fauna, and, thereby, exalted the idea of “India” in the imagination of the Western readers.

I shall focus on the poem, “Kádambiní”⁴⁴⁴ in order to elucidate E. L.’s use of and mastery over Indian language vocabulary. The poet attached copious footnotes to the Indian language words she used in the poem. The very title of the poem, which is not a very common Bangla word of usage in everyday conversation and is mostly found in literary texts, is correctly glossed as “[a]n assemblage of clouds” along with the words ‘kadambini’ written in Bangla script.⁴⁴⁵ The mention of Calcutta as “the far-famed / “City of Palaces”⁴⁴⁶ shows E. L.’s acquaintance with Atkinson’s works, and hence with the larger body of the works of other poets writing in English during the first half of the nineteenth century in India. She compares the lovely face of a child with the “Chandra” in

⁴⁴³ Ibid. p. 96.

⁴⁴⁴ E. L. “Kádambiní.” *Leisure Hours*. pp. 281-283.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 281.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 282.

“Purnimá”,⁴⁴⁷ clearly indicating that not only did she know the meanings of these Bangla words, which are the moon and the full moon respectively, but she also was keenly aware of the literary allusions of these Bangla terms. The poem then recounts an incident where an American lady, probably the poet herself, teaches English to an Indian child, the girl named Kadambini. It is a unique example where both the teacher and her pupil are beginners who are making efforts to learn each other’s language — the American lady struggling with her little knowledge of Bangla vocabulary, and the Bengali girl yet to get introduced to her first lessons in learning the English language. As the lady presents an English children’s book of stories and pictures to the child, she tells her, “Here is an English Pustak, dear,” to which the girl replies blithely, “Bahut khush, do ham ko”.⁴⁴⁸ The child then shies away and hides behind the curtains from where she lisps a few words either in Bangla or in Hindi, which the teacher cannot yet comprehend. All that she could make out was that the little girl addressed her as “Bibi”, and so she puts a few asterisk marks within quotes indicating the missing part of the child’s words.⁴⁴⁹ The teacher’s reply, however, is a perfect example of linguistic code-switching, as she mixes English, Bangla as well as Hindustani, as is typical of language learners at the beginners’ level. The lady says:

“Bahut achchhá, dear, very well,
Han, bánán kara, you shall spell.”⁴⁵⁰

E. L. then goes on to give an account of the beautiful and calm natural environs of the child’s study-room, and this description abounds in Bangla words, as if to suggest that a true accounts of a Bengali landscape is incomplete without the usage of the Bangla words that are rooted in its location. The room’s surroundings is described thus:

With roses blushing, sweet to see,

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 283.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

Is my own Padma Karabí!
 On branches of the Dálim-phul,
 Rest the sweet Koil and Bulbul;
 The sacred “Bata-gách” is there,
 With incense filled of Hindu prayer;
 The rites performed with Gangáá-jal,
 By Bráhman priest, at Sandhyá-kál;⁴⁵¹

Almost each line contains a Bangla word, and the meanings of three among them are explained in the footnotes along with the Bangla script of those words: E. L. had rightly glossed “Dálim-phul”, “Gangáá-jal” and “Sandhyá-kál” as “Pomegranate”, “Water of the Ganges” and “Sunset” respectively.⁴⁵² It is not clear why she had chosen not to gloss the rest of the Bangla words used in the poem.

The copious use of Indian language words and the extensive notes attached to the poems are typical features of Company Poetry; but, what is unusual in E. L.’s poems, is her use of diacritical marks in the English transliterations of Bangla and Hindustani words, and her reproduction of those words in Bangla script in the footnotes. These linguistic practices suggest that E. L. was deeply and soulfully engaged in learning Indian languages, particularly Bangla and Hindustani. The poem closes with the narration of the feeling of awe, adulation and affection that the American lady felt toward her Indian pupil:

Biní begins to read and chat,
 ...
 Her dark eyes beam with lustre rare,
 Like brilliant diamonds in the dark,
 Lit up with the immortal spark.
 The lady loves her pupil-child,
 And gazes on those orbs so mild,
 Which an undying mind reveal,
 Bearing the stamp of Heaven’s own seal.⁴⁵³

Such ebullient description of an Indian girl, or, for that matter, anything related to India is not found elsewhere in the corpus of Company Poetry. E. L., as an American, might had

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

had her thoughts free from the fetters that the burden of imperialism bind the imperialist with, and that might be one explanation for her feeling of affection toward her Indian pupil. But, the remarkable degree of adulation that she held for the child, as is evident in her allusion to the angelic gaze of the child, is clearly the voice of the soul that felt a deep attachment with India. E. L. may be said to have borrowed the happy picture of “India” from Lawrence, and rendered to it qualities of serenity and divinity.

Mary Seyers Carshore

Honoraria Lawrence’s oblique hint at the un-‘real’ narratives of “India” assumed a distinct assertion in the Preface to *Songs of the East*⁴⁵⁴ (1854) by Mrs. W. S. Carshore. Writing in the third person about herself as the “Authoress”, Carshore declares in no uncertain terms that:

Born and reared on Indian soil, she cannot boast an extensive or intimate acquaintance with the literature of the West, and her only object in publishing the following tales and songs has been, to give a more correct idea of native customs and manners, than she has yet observed Europeans to possess, seconded of course by that instinctive thirst for fame implanted in the human breast.⁴⁵⁵

The author was Mary Seyers Carshore, who was born of Irish parents in Calcutta, lived all her life in India, and was married to William Carshore, a civil officer of the East India Company. She had a very short life from 1829 to 1857 (she was killed in the massacre at Jhansi during the Mutiny of 1857), and has to her credit only a single published volume of verse, from the Preface of which I quoted above. Mary Seyers Carshore was writing with hesitation, which stemmed from the lack of formal education: she did not receive any formal training either in India or in Britain. Considering that it was customary for

⁴⁵⁴ Carshore, Mary Seyers [Mrs. W. S. Carshore.] *Songs of the East*. Calcutta: D’Rozario, 1855.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.* n. pag.

children born of British parents in India to be sent back to Britain for their formal schooling, Mary felt that she lacked the expertise and proficiency required of a poet. However, her texts reveal that far from being inadequate, Mary's knowledge of Indian language and social customs, as well as her familiarity with the works of the great English writers like Milton or Shakespeare or even the more contemporary Romantic poets, were far more profound and substantial than most of the other Company poets making verse in India during that time. Máire Ní Fhlathúin's comment in her biographical note on Carshore is remarkable:

... she displays a willingness to set her personal experience in India in opposition to the Orientalist knowledge of her most successful predecessors. Her access to the indigenous languages and cultures of India is also apparent in what might be regarded as her own act of orientalist appropriation: the inclusion of several 'Hindustanee' Songs,' most of them 'translated to the original air'.⁴⁵⁶

As has rightly been pointed out, *Songs of the East* contains an appreciable number of translations of Hindustani songs that were traditionally sung during Hindu festivals, like certain wedding rituals, or just songs that celebrated some sort of a long-cherished lore.

Although the translations are commendable, I shall discuss here the poems, which were the original compositions of Carshore. Her poems present beautiful pictures of the Indian landscapes, portray the Indians as virtuous, brave and graceful, and renders a note of pleasure and geniality to the experiences that the poet had had in India. They reveal Carshore's keen understanding of Indian social rites and rituals as well her exceptional knowledge of local botany. Even though her usage of Indian language words is comparatively lesser than other Company poets, yet the glossaries to those words show that her grasp over the Hindustani language was unprecedented, and that she could be credited for having a comprehensive awareness of the nuances of that language. The

⁴⁵⁶ Fhlathúin. Vol.II. p. 112.

paratexts of her poems is intriguing not because they display a great degree of Oriental scholarship, but because they defy and challenge the representation of “India” by her other fellow poets, such as D. L. Richardson and Thomas Moore.

I shall focus particularly on two notes attached with the poems, “The Tale of Cashmere”⁴⁵⁷ and “The Beara Festival”⁴⁵⁸ respectively. The first poem mentioned here begins with a picturesque description of the beautiful valley of Kashmir (here spelt, Cashmere), which carries within the manner of its narration, witty repudiation of “false” representations of the minstrel’s song, thereby alluding to Moore’s “The Light of the Haram” in *Lalla Rookh*⁴⁵⁹ and “The Vale of Cashmere”.⁴⁶⁰ I quote the opening lines of Carshore’s poem:

There’s a valley so bright in the beautiful east,
Where the roses bloom wild ’neath the wanderer’s feet.
O! a breath of that vale is to pilgrims a feast,
The flowers are so fragrant, the air so sweet;
And the maids are so fair, that the spirits of bliss
Have deserted Elysium to win but their kiss;
And the sons of the west pause in glory’s career,
To look back with sighs on the vale of Cashmere.
Thus sang the sweet minstrel of Erin one day,
And how sweet and how precious, tho’ false in his lay;
Yes, false tho’ still sweet, for the valley so blest
Is trampled with scorn by the sons of the west.
And the maidens, tho’ beauteous, are dusky, not fair;
And the roses, tho’ bright, not uncultured, grow there;
Yet all is not false that the minstrel has sung,
Save the veil of poetic enchantment he flung.⁴⁶¹

After the brief exposition laying out the enchanting beauty of the valley of Kashmir, Carshore directs a mocking tone towards the “sons of the west”, that is, the British in India, when she describes their colonial enterprise as “glory’s career”. In a manner that is

⁴⁵⁷ Carshore, Mary Seyers. “The Tale of Cashmere.” *Songs of the East*. pp. 3 - 29.

⁴⁵⁸ Carshore, Mary Seyers. “The Beara Festival.” pp. 114-116.

⁴⁵⁹ Moore, Thomas. “The Light of the Haram” in *Lalla Rookh. The Poetical Works of Thomas Moore, including his Melodies, Ballads, etc.* Paris: A. and W. Galigani, 1827. pp. 51-54.

⁴⁶⁰ Moore, Thomas. “The Vale of Cashmere”. *Poems of Places. An Anthology in 31 Volumes*. Ed. By H. W. Longfellow. Boston: James R. Osgood and Co. 1876-79. <www.bartleby.com/270/11/281.html> 28/07/14.

⁴⁶¹ Carshore. “The Tale of Cashmere.” p. 3.

both authoritative and assertive, Carshore laments that the pristine beauty of Kashmir has been disregarded and contemptuously damaged by the British imperialists. The use of the imagery of trampling over the sweet and blessed valley evokes a powerful statement against the derision and disdain which by then had arguably become the hallmark of British attitude towards India. Carshore then publicly debunks the ideas about Kashmir that Moore had presented in his poems. Her obvious reference to the Irish poet, Thomas Moore, in the phrase “minstrel of Erin” is further attested in the note that she attached to these lines. Her description of roses that are “bright, not uncultured” and that of the Indian maidens who are “dusky, not fair” is a striking rebuttal of Moore’s depiction of the valley of Kashmir. It is not clear though whether Carshore, in describing Moore’s poem as “false tho’ still sweet”, was trying to express her humility by way of appreciation, or was strengthening the tone of sarcasm by way of irony. In the note attached to these lines, Carshore again makes an attempt not to discredit Moore as a poet; she lays the blame for such inaccurate descriptions on Moore’s sources. The note reads:

The natural beauties of the valley are of course here alluded to: the climate is one of the finest in the world, and the rare birds, the rich fruits, and the delicious flowers, cannot sufficiently be extolled; but as to “young people” meeting in “cool, shining walks” by moonlight, after having slept out the day” and waked to moonlight and to play,” and “maids and matrons” leaving their “veils at home” and wandering about at night to amuse themselves, it is all as little like truth as the tales of the Arabian Nights, though it sounds very sweet in a poetical romance. It is marvellous how travellers delight in misleading people with their incredible “facts” of other countries, and above all, it is wonderful with what facility these monstrous facts are received when they relate to the east. This class/that is the travelling are to be blamed of course, not Moore, for any mistakes of the above kind.⁴⁶²

In more ways than one, Carshore was casting aspersions not only on Moore’s representation of Kashmir, but was engaging in a bold critique of the representations of

⁴⁶² Carshore. “Notes to the Tale of Cashmere.” *Songs of the East*. p. i.

“India” by the British poets, which she plainly accused of being false. She resorted to no rhetoric bombast and unpretentiously stated that the European readers mindlessly receive such “monstrous” descriptions of “India” with a great deal of ardour and reliance, as if they were only too happy to have had their own ideas of the ‘dark’ and ‘exotic’ Orient further fed by accounts pouring in from the East. Carshore’s excoriation of the British construct of “India”, therefore, was not confined to the representations alone, but also extended to the European reception of those representations. Carshore, as she had already made evident in the Preface to her volume of poems, was genuinely concerned with the problem of the misleading image of “India” that was being projected by the British in India to the West at large.

In the note attached to her poem, “The Beara Festival”, Carshore engages in a scathing criticism of not only Moore, but also D. L. Richardson who was an authoritative and influential figure in the literary circle of mid-nineteenth century India. Both Richardson and Moore, as well as a few other Company poets, had composed poems on the ritual of a lady floating a lamp in the Ganga, the flame of which was linked to the fate of her absent lover. Richardson had also inserted an elaborate note describing the custom and hinting at the credulity of Indian women and the irrational practices of the Indians in general. (I have discussed this particular poem, “Sonnet: Scene on the Ganges” by Richardson earlier in this Chapter.) Carshore wrote a much longer poem than either of the two poets and also included a translation of sorts of the song that is sung by the women during the festival. Her note reads:

Much has been said about the Beara or floating lamp, but I have never yet seen a correct description. Moore mentions that Lalla Rookh saw a solitary hindoo girl bring her lamp to the river. D.L.R. says the same, whereas the Beara festival is a Moslem feast that takes place once a year in the

monsoon, when hundreds and thousands of females offer their vows to the patron of rivers.⁴⁶³

The powerful and aggressive questioning of the authoritative figures like Moore and Richardson was not readily accepted by the literary fraternity in India. Critics and reviewers lauded her poems only for the quality of sweetness and grace in the manner of rendering; they launched scathing attacks on Carshore in relation to the subject matter of her poems and her claim of depicting the truth about “India”. Richardson himself wrote at length in defence of both Moore and himself. He went on to the length of citing the sources of his information and other Indian and British acquaintances who attested the veracity of the representations of “India” by Moore and himself. Richardson wrote with copious citations and included long quotations from relevant passages. In support of Moore, he quotes from *Lalla Rookh*, and writes:

Moore prepared himself for the writing of *Lalla Rookh* by “long and laborious reading”. He himself narrates that Sir James Mackintosh was asked by Colonel Wilks, the Historian of British India, whether it was true that the poet had never been in the East. Sir James replied, “Never.”... Sir John Malcolm, Sir William Ouseley and other high authorities have testified to the accuracy of Moore’s descriptions of Eastern scenes and customs.⁴⁶⁴

In his own defence, Richardson quotes from Horace Hayman Wilson, whom he describes as “a high authority on all Oriental customs”,⁴⁶⁵ and also reproduces in print a personal letter from “an intelligent Hindu friend”.⁴⁶⁶ He then puts forward his argument in order to free himself of Carshore’s accusation of “erroneous Orientalism”:⁴⁶⁷

Mrs. Carshore it would seem is partly right and partly wrong. She is right in calling the *Beara* a *Moslem* Festival. It is so; but we have the testimony of Horace

⁴⁶³ Carshore. “Notes to Miscellaneous Pieces.” *Songs of the East*. p. iii.

⁴⁶⁴ Richardson, David Lester. *Flowers and Flower-Gardens, With an Appendix of Practical Instructions and Useful Information respecting the Anglo-Indian Flower Garden*. Calcutta: D’Rozario, 1855. pp. 119-120.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 121.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 122.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 121.

Hayman Wilson to the fact that *Hindu maids and matrons also launch their lamps upon the river*. My Hindu friend acknowledges that his countrymen in the North West Provinces have borrowed many of their custom from the Mahomedans, and though he is not aware of it, yet it may be the case, that some of the Hindus of *Bengal*, as elsewhere, have done the same, and that they set lamps afloat upon the stream to discover by their continued burning or sudden extinction the fate of some absent friend or lover. I find very few Natives who are able to give me any exact and positive information concerning their own national customs. In their explanation of such matters they differ in the most extraordinary manner amongst themselves.⁴⁶⁸

It is interesting to note that Richardson relied on Wilson, a British who had spent some time in India, for authentic information on Indian customs, whereas he expressed his doubts that his Indian friend, whoever that might have referred to, might not have had complete information on the social and religious practices of his fellow Indians. Furthermore, Richardson speaks in a derogatory tone of the poor and ambiguous knowledge of the Indians about their own rites and rituals. This is one remarkable instance where both the Indian male and the British female are dismissed from participating in the act of contributing to a repository of knowledge, while at the same time, the British male is attributed the supreme authority on information on India. Richardson, as we find here, was justifying and giving currency to the Western male gaze on the East, thereby objectifying the East and establishing the power of the coloniser over the colonised. The dynamics of this power-relation may be understood in the constant efforts of the Western male to effeminise the East. The dichotomy was rooted in the texts, written word or image, authored by the male colonisers: the East was always projected as sensual, traditional submissive and irrational, which are stereotypical female traits, whereas the West was presented as dynamic, innovative, rational and proactive, which are typical male attributes.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid. pp. 122-123.

Richardson was not alone in his refutation of Mrs. Carshore's assertion of offering accurate descriptions of "India". The reviewers in the *Bombay Quarterly Magazine* opined:

... the pretty warbling of Mrs. Carshore, whose "Songs of the East" are very bulbul strains. Moore has evidently been her favourite teacher in the art of Song. She is imbued with his diction, and shows herself an apt and graceful follower in his path of minstrelsy.⁴⁶⁹

It is shocking and contemptible that the reviewers, who are evidently the male editors of the periodical, positioned Mrs. Carshore as a follower of Moore, the very poet whose representations she vehemently questioned in her text. The reviewers carefully avoided any comment on the question of authenticity in representations of "India", and engaged in a long and useless discussion on erroneous punctuation in Carshore's poems. Their silent gesture made an overt statement which almost shouted aloud that such claims of offering "correct ideas"⁴⁷⁰ of India by a female is best disregarded. A review of Carshore's volume of verse was also published in October, 1854 issue of the *Calcutta Review*. The anonymous reviewer fiercely criticised the poet for failing to live up to the tall claims she made and the legitimate longing for fame she expressed in the Preface. The reviewer, again a British male member of the coloniser's society, writes:

She does not add much to the stock of even a stranger's knowledge of Indian manners and customs. The poems that at all relate to India are few, and her allusions in them to Orientalism still fewer. Exception may be taken even to her not on the *Beera Festival*, in which she tries to correct Tom Moore, who had at least more book-knowledge and more heart-knowledge of the East than herself. The man who wrote *Lalla Rookh*, had more vividly realized the actual places, and knew more accurately unimaginative poetasters, who have since striven to copy him.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁹ Anon. "Anglo-Indian Poetry." *The Bombay Quarterly Review*. Vol. 3. January-April, 1956. pp. 78-112. p. 92.

⁴⁷⁰ Carshore. Preface to *Songs of the East*, n. pag.

⁴⁷¹ Anon. "Songs of the East. By Mrs. W.S. Carshore, Calcutta, 1855." *The Calcutta Review*. Vol. 23. July - December, 1854. pp. xxi - xxiv. p. xxii.

We find relentless attempts by British male reviewers to dismiss and disregard Carshore's poems, and also to establish Moore as far more superior to her in both poetic diction and knowledge of the East. Although the reviewer acclaims Moore of having superior intelligence of "India", he offers no conclusive evidence of his statement. It is only through the pomposity of words, such as "unimaginative poetasters", that he scathed the sweetness of Carshore's articulation as well as the brilliance of her images.

Disregarding the intention of the reviewers, Carshore's poetry met with a wide readership both in India and in Britain despite such bitter reviews, or rather because of them. In a way, it was rather the intent reviewers whose zealous reviews drew attention to Carshore's single published volume of verse. It is important to understand why Richardson or other literary critics were vigorous and ardent in their attempts to undermine and repudiate such a potent voice as Carshore's. The politics of gender might be a plausible reason for the fierce attacks against Carshore, all of which were aimed at discrediting her claims of depicting the "true" "India" and subjugating her authority over that of Moore or other male poets. But the microcosm of gender discrimination was largely overshadowed by the greater and more sinister motive of empire building. I argue that the actual reason for such scathing reviews of Carshore's poems was the colonisers' desperate attempts at safeguarding the circuit of discourse on "India" that they had built through the written word and the painted engravings so intricately for over almost a century by then. These discourses embody the ideas that engendered the notion of cultural hegemony: the supremacy of the 'enlightened' West over the 'primitive' East, to which the colonised happily consented. These were the ideas that were essential to sustain the empire, and the construct of "India" was the mainstay of that imperial ideology.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, it might be said that Company Poetry defies all sorts of generalisation of its tropes and features. Ketaki Kushari Dyson has identified the tensions present in British expatriate literature written in nineteenth century India:

... there was a psychological proximity to the problems and modes of these authors: as an Indian in Britain I could sympathize with the dilemmas of the British men and women in India; my own life had given me an insight into their homesickness, difficulty in acclimatization, yearning for familiar festivals, the sorrow of prolonged long-distance separation from loved ones, the special difficulties of 'émigré' authorship in writing for a distant public, and, above all, the task of coming to terms with a cultural 'Other', which brings us to an important aspect of these works, their recording of a memorable cultural encounter.⁴⁷²

Although this is an extensive checklist of the common tropes that are to be found in the corpus of Company Poetry, it does not encompass the internal problems that individual authors felt in composing English language verse in the polyglot literary culture they were faced with in India. It was an integral part of the colonising mission for the British in nineteenth century India to establish the primacy of the written word that sustained the ideology of the empire. Language functioned not only as a construct, but also as a tool for the acculturation of the self. The texts of their poems acknowledged the heterogeneity of the linguistic culture in India, while at the same time, relentlessly trying to attach supremacy to the English language.

⁴⁷² Dyson. p. 2.

CHAPTER 3

The Reception of Company Poetry:

Kasiprasad Ghosh, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Shoshee Chunder Dutt

It has a future, for it is quickened with life, and it carries within itself a hope that one day it will become a great channel for communication of ideas between the adventurous West and the East of the immemorial tranquillity.¹

This is Rabindranath Tagore commenting on “Bengal’s [unique] response through literature to the call of the West”,² as he was drawing a conclusion to his Foreword to the anthology, *The Bengali Book of English Verse* (1918) edited by Theodore Douglas Dunn. Indeed, the nineteenth century, especially the first half of it, witnessed in India an encounter between two cultures, whose influence and impact both on the British coloniser and the Bengali intellectual were too complex for a monolithic or deterministic analysis. David Kopf, in his brilliant monograph, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, writes:

What develops in nineteenth century Calcutta is a two-sided process of acculturation, or the merging of interests and identities by representatives of civilizations in encounter.³

The effect of Bengal’s contact with the West had created many waves worthy to be called the Renaissance, the ripples of which can be felt even today. I would here focus on the reception and influence that Company Poetry had on the young poets of Calcutta, who had then recently learned the English language and were composing English verse during the first half of the nineteenth century. Of the many changes in cultural and intellectual

¹ Tagore, Rabindranath. “Foreword”. *The Bengali Book of English Verse*. Ed. Theodore Douglas Dunn. Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, London and New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1918. p. xiii-xiv.

² *Ibid.* p. xii.

³ Kopf, David. *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773-1835*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969. p. 5.

currents that these Bengali poets may have had experienced, the most dominant ones, which were also the *raison d'être* for the proliferation of poetry, were the re-discovery and translation of ancient Sanskrit texts by the British Orientalists, the availability of and access to Western literature in terms of the books that were regularly imported from England, the explosion of print culture and, last but not the least, the literary engagement of the colonisers themselves, by which I am referring to their practice of writing poems as an apparent diversion to their administrative and military endeavours. The critical studies on the verses of poets such as Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Kasiprasad Ghosh, Shoshee Chunder Dutt have discussed in detail the influence on them of the of ancient Indian Hindu literary tradition, the British Romantic tradition as well as their introduction to European classics — the factors which had considerable effect on their poems. However, the immediate socio-political context and the influence of the Company poets, who were not only writing and publishing poems in Calcutta at that time, but were also engaged in a complex network of affiliations and influences with the English-educated Bengali intelligentsia, seems to have merited scant critical attention from scholars. Commenting on the social and cultural interactions between the Bengali intelligentsia and the British in Calcutta during the early nineteenth century, Kopf writes:

[It] is a history of two civilizations in contact, of the institutional innovations that served as networks of interaction between them, and of the unique patterns and universal processes of culture change that resulted from them.⁴

Rosinka Chaudhuri, in her D. Phil. dissertation titled *Orientalist Themes and English Verse in Nineteenth Century India*,⁵ has talked about how the Orientalist project, which involved the recuperation, revisiting and translation of ancient Sanskrit texts, had influenced the English poetry written by the Bengalis during the nineteenth century. Her

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Chaudhuri, Rosinka. *Orientalist Themes and English Verse in Nineteenth-Century India*. D. Phil. Dissertation, Somerville College, Trinity, 1995.

focus in analysing the factors of impact is, however, not so much on the Company poets, who provided the environment in which such verse could flourish, as on the other agents of social, cultural and literary changes that Bengal had witnessed during that period. Her thesis primarily showcases the Orientalist project of translation of Sanskrit texts, which, according to her, had greatly influenced the contemporary Bengali intelligentsia. She shows how, in their poetry, the influence of this revival of Sanskrit past is more pronounced as opposed to the immediate past that was heralded by the Muslim rulers. The translation of these ancient Sanskrit and Persian texts ranged from literature, linguistics, mythology, philosophy, science, medicine, botany and even law treatises. Although my analysis of the poems in this Chapter talk about the ideological import that this revival of old Sanskrit tradition had on the Indian poets writing in English, but the mainstay of my argument is grounded in the literary milieu created by the British in early nineteenth century India: the spurt in the engagement with poetry as the belletristic form of writing, and the ideology that they sought to promote through the poetic texts, or, in a broader sense, engaging with literature as a form of art that demanded great intellectual faculties as a necessary impetus to the rendering and ushering in of a scholastic cultural atmosphere.

It is obvious from the various paratexts that appear in the poetry of Derozio, Kasiprasad, Madhusudan, Shoshee, Manmohan Ghose and those of several other prominent members of the Bengali intelligentsia that the literary endeavours of the Company men had a significant impact on them. Being influenced by the literature of Europe with which they became lately acquainted and by being inspired by the revival of the literary heritage of their own past, the literary ambitions of the Bengali poets writing in English shifted its course from emulating the literary forms of the West in the first quarter of the century to gradually advancing towards the idea of nationalism in the final

decades of the nineteenth century. The beginning of the twentieth century showed definite signs of the development of nationalism, and this is evident even in the later poems of Madhusudan and Shoshee. The early seeds of dissent, which I shall explore in detail in this Chapter, were ingrained during this period, as in the poems of Kasiprasad, in a complex response to the colonial experience that they were undergoing— a response which entailed both adoration for the Western learning and manners and resistance against the oppressive colonial regime. That the British in India were also considerably influenced by the poetic effusions in English by the English-educated Bengalis is apparent in the Company poems written during the middle of the century and its last two quarters. Homi Bhabha theorises the attempt of the colonised to mimic the coloniser and the effect of such attempts on the colonising culture in the Chapter, “Of Mimicry and Man” included in his book, *The Location of Culture*. He writes:

The effect of mimicry on the authority of colonial discourse is profound and disturbing. For in ‘normalizing’ the colonial state or subject, the dream of post-Enlightenment civility alienates its own language of liberty and produces another knowledge of its norms.⁶

The desire for the shores of Albion that these Bengali poets had in them resulted in the contrary pull of the desire towards embracing the shores of Ganga.

Interestingly enough, Company Poetry engaged in a complex web of affiliations and influences with the Bengalis writing English language poetry during that period. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, in the book, *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India*, had chosen to call these poets, who preferred to write in English, “alienated insiders”⁷ —a term that was clearly inspired from the title of P. Lal’s monograph, *The*

⁶ Bhabha, Homi K. “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse.” *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 2009. p. 123.

⁷ Rajan, Rajeswari Sunder, ed. *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992. p. 2.

Alien Insiders: Essays on Indian Writing in English,⁸ published a few years before Rajan's book. These "alien insiders", however, had set up a set of institutions that fostered the learning of English in Calcutta. They created an environment that promoted a multi-cultural, multi-lingual exchange of ideas, which, though restricted by the coloniser's ideology, was yet instrumental in setting up the quest for nationhood. The primary question that I would seek to address in the course of my analysis of the reception of Company poems, as evinced in the texts of English language poems by Kasiprasad, Madhusudan and Shoshee, is, how did such poetry of exile create per contra impulses of nationalist poetry in the Indians?

Company Poetry and the Shaping of Aesthetic Judgement

It is important to analyse how far Company Poetry was instrumental in promoting and shaping critical thought and aesthetic judgement catering to the ideology of white supremacy among the Bengali intelligentsia. There is a complex permutation of power that operated between the coloniser and the colonised, and within the colonised themselves; and this long and protracted contestation was in relation to the learning of English and the re-discovery of the classical Sanskrit past as well as the dissemination of Western education among the Indians. What was the criterion of aesthetic normativity by whose standards the Indians who were fluent in English were judged? Was the criterion of aesthetic judgement modulated along the same lines for both the coloniser and the colonised? Or, were there different standards of judgement involved in evaluating poems written by the Company men and those written by the Indians? Was the obvious and stark difference in perception of elements by the British and that by the Indians taken into consideration by the reviewers and critics commenting on English language poetry in India in the vastly influential periodical press? The dimension of a particular element that

⁸ Lal, P. *The Alien Insiders: Essays on Indian Writing in English*. Kolkata: Writers Workshop, 1987.

was, for instance, mundane and real to the Indian, could be, and, in all probability, was, romantic or exotic to the British. There was then the added facet of the coloniser's judgement of the moral, ethical and intellectual standing of the colonised: for example, a text highly regarded by the Europeans, such as Kalidasa's *Abhijñāna Shākuntalam*, was considered inappropriate for being read by Indians, all of whom were generally perceived as morally naïve:

[W]hile Englishmen of all ages could enjoy and appreciate exotic tales, romantic narrative, adventure stories, and mythological 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. A play like Kalidas' *Shakuntala*, which delighted Europeans for its pastoral beauty and lyric charm and led Horace Wilson, a major nineteenth-century Sanskrit scholar, to call it the jewel of Indian literature, was disapproved of as a text for study in Indian schools and colleges, and the judgement that “the more popular forms of [Oriental literature] are marked with the greatest immorality and impurity” held sway. The inability to discriminate between decency and indecency was deemed to be a fixed characteristic of the native mind, a symptom of the “dullness of their comprehension.”⁹

It was a complex attitude of paternalism — of selectively exposing one's child to the morally pertinent texts — and it also served its function of propagating the ideological hierarchy in the complex web of interaction. In fact, in order to evolve a comprehensive understanding of the ideology of empire building, it is imperative to consider the subtle and personal delineation of the same in the poetry of the empire. The comprehension of these intimate aspects of the empire may be facilitated by appropriating the concepts of “secular criticism”¹⁰ and the idea of “worldliness”¹¹, as is advocated by Edward Said— that the works are not greeted with abstract intellectual endeavours, but are rather related

⁹ Viswanathan, Gauri. *Masks of Conquests: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. pp. 5-6.

¹⁰ Said, Edward W. *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983. p. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 34.

to the society and culture of the time during which they are composed. During the period when Warren Hastings was the Governor-General of India, i.e., from 1774 to 1785, the policies of the East India Company were framed in such a manner that the divide between the knowledge and education of the West and those of the East was more subtle and often indistinguishable. But as the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth, this division became more and more prominent and the ideology of dominance and discrimination had its manifestation in almost all layers of the society. Remarkable teachers, such as David Lester Richardson, and others who were involved in the process of designing the curricula in schools and colleges, were involved in instituting such moral imperatives that would regulate the mind of the elite, English-educated Indians in a manner that it would remain subservient to and yet appreciative of Western literature and Western culture in particular and the West in general.

Parallel Culture Texts

English language poetry written by the Indian poets during the nineteenth century, I argue, may be read as a parallel culture text to that of Company Poetry, and not in isolation of one another, as the two bodies of literature engaged with each other in a relation of complementarity and contrariness, thereby revealing the multifarious enactments of power within and outside the literary text. The beginnings of Indian literature in English is intricately entangled with the inherent agendas of the Orientalist project and the Company Poetry. At the outset, there emerged a class of Indian intelligentsia—the case was especially prominent in Bengal; so, henceforth I shall refer to it as Bengali intelligentsia—armed with the newly acquired knowledge of English language and Western education, and also having a great facility with multiple other languages. These young Bengali intellectuals came to believe that anything and

everything pertaining to the West was superior to the Indian equivalents, and advocated their preference for Western literary forms.

Additionally, the Orientalist project of translation, which encouraged the translations of numerous Sanskrit and Persian texts, led to the revival of the Sanskrit past, and this had several ideological implications — it purposefully silenced the present as derogatory, discredited the immediate past of the Muslim rulers and immediately ushered in an ideological *divide et impera*. The Bengali intelligentsia was thus tutored by the British coloniser to feel and think in a manner that propagated the cultural and intellectual hegemony of the British over the Indians. Company Poetry together with the Orientalist translation project created a convoluted ideology of adoration for the past, a sense of degradation for the present and the possibility of a future through the enlightenment that would be ushered in by Western education and India's contact with Britain. It was again a justification in guise of the 'white man's burden' of the civilising mission. The massive Orientalist translation project coupled with the print versions of these translated texts, which were made available aplenty through cheap printing technology as opposed to the few and scarcely available original Sanskrit or Persian texts which were not reprinted at the Baptist Mission Press in Serampore or the Hindostanee Press under the Fort William College Council or the P.S. D' Rozario Press or the Calcutta Orphan Press or the Scott's Press, often led to indigenous scholars and the Bengali intelligentsia approaching Sanskrit and Persian texts not directly, but through the works of translations done by the British. They thus viewed their own past through 'alien' eyes. If the light of their rich literary and cultural heritage were travelling to them, and it did, then it did so not in a straight line of reflection, but in a broken, mediated frame of refraction. Thus the Bengali intelligentsia, in practice, read and interpreted the classical Sanskrit texts the way the British wanted them to, without the latter directly instructing them to do so. And the politics of the print

culture ensured that the Indians admired the British for revealing to them their own glorious past.

The Bengali poets writing in English almost always felt the necessity to relate and compare Indian texts to Western literary forms and mythologies, accepting the Occident as authoritative and as the benchmark of quality for all literary endeavours. The trope of attempting to recognise and identify the ‘other’ in terms of the known, as I have shown in the detailed analysis of the poems in my Second Chapter, is a prevalent practice amongst the Company poets. Both in the original works as well as in the translated texts, as in those by Sir William Jones, the Hindu deities are compared to and explained in terms of the Greek and Roman Gods: Lakshmi was equated with Ceres, Surya was called the Indian Phoebus and Camdeo was compared with Eros. The poets of the John Company often drew themes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*: Henry Meredith Parker wrote a brilliant piece titled “The Draught of Immortality”¹² and John Lawson offered a beautiful description of Bhagiratha’s invitation of the River Ganga in “Descent of the Ganga”;¹³ poets like Jones composed hymns addressed to various Hindu deities, like Camdeo, Parcriti, Durga, Bhavani, Indra, Surya, Lecshmi, Narayena, Seraswaty, and Ganga¹⁴ (I have used the spellings in the names of the deities as was done by Jones); and many poems were written on the traditional Hindu festivals, like Lawson writing on Rathayatra in “Jāgānnātha”,¹⁵ and James Atkinson writing on Kali Puja and Charakh in “The City of Palaces”.¹⁶ These practices were replicated by the Indian poets who were writing English language poetry during that time, albeit with all the paratextual devices

¹² Parker, Henry Meredith. “The Draught of Immortality.” *The Draught of Immortality, and Other Poems: With Cromwell, A Dramatic Sketch*. London: J. M. Richardson, 1827. pp. 1-22.

¹³ Lawson, John. “Descent of the Ganga.” *Orient Harping: A Desultory Poem, in Two Parts*. London: Samuel Lawson, 1821. pp. 58-67.

¹⁴ Jones, William, “Hymns.” *The British Poets. Including Translation. In One Hundred Volumes. Vol. LXXIV. Sir William Jones*. Chiswick: J. Carpenter et al, 1822. pp. 151-226.

¹⁵ Lawson, John. “Jāgānnātha.” *Orient Harping*. pp. 35-45.

¹⁶ Atkinson, James. “The City of Palaces: A Fragment.” *The City of Palaces: A Fragment, and Other Poems*. Calcutta: Government Gazette Press, 1824. pp. 5-35.

that the British poets used to explain the references to Hindu mythology, deities and the Oriental epics to the Western readers, who, of course, were their primary target. The paratexts were also obvious tools with which they were illustrating the Oriental allusions to themselves, as well as exhibited their knowledge of the Orient. The original compositions, the translations, together with the paratexts, were creating the vast repository of knowledge— albeit, mediated knowledge— of the Orient, for the West to use it for its devious purpose of exercising cultural and intellectual hegemony over the East, or for whatever other ulterior motive it might have had from time to time. But, when the Bengali poets made attempts to explicate these references in the texts of their poems, the reader must probe the reason: was their aim to reach excellence also regulated by the reception of their poems in the Western world? Were they consciously trying to appease the Western readers? Why, at all, did the Bengali poets, who were rooted in the culture and society of which these mythologies and epics were an essential part, feel the necessity to offer detailed elucidations of the references and allusions to the stories and characters from *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* or even the Hindu mythology? I seek the answers to these questions in the detailed analysis of the selected poems of Kasiprasad Ghosh, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, and Shoshee Chunder Dutt.

Amongst them who did not have facility with the English language, a strong resistance to Western literature was brewing; consequently, all the Indian scholars and teachers, possessing the knowledge of English or not, became more rigid in their admiration of Sanskrit. The beginnings of Indian literature in English are laid out in these intellectual cross-currents and fluid cultural traffic, and, therefore, cannot be understood in isolation to the social context in which it germinated.

Kasiprasad Ghosh: “[S]omething by way of national poetry”¹⁷

Kasiprasad Ghosh was the only Indian whose poem was included by Captain David Lester Richardson, the then Principal of Hindu College and arguably the most authoritative figure in the literary circles of nineteenth century Calcutta, in the anthology of English poetry titled *Selections From the British Poets*,¹⁸ which was intended to be used as a text-book for the advanced students of the Hindu College. The volume consisted of 1600-odd pages, and, as the title suggests, Richardson anthologised the representative poems of a host of poets, all British, and mostly prominent contributors to the development of British literature, as we know it. The editor, however, included several sections at the end of the book, namely sections on American poetry, on translated poems from Latin, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, German, French, Spanish et al, and, most significant for my discussion, a section on the poems written by the British in India, which Richardson preferred to call “British-Indian Poetry”.¹⁹ This section, after carrying the poems by Company poets, like John Leyden, Reginald Heber, James Atkinson, Horace Hayman Wilson, Henry Meredith Parker, Emma Roberts, and a few others, included two sub-sections, both of which were significant departures from the practice of segregating the ‘elite’ British from the ‘ordinary’ or ‘lowly’ Indians. The first section, “Poems by an East Indian”, contained two poems by Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, and the other section, bearing the sub-title “Poem by a Hindu”, contained a poem, “The Boatmen’s Song to Ganga” by Kasiprashad Ghosh (spelling unchanged; as was used by Richardson in his book).²⁰ The fact that Kasiprasad’s poem was the only poem written by an Indian to have appeared in that significant anthology, suggests the recognition and readership that Kasiprasad as a poet had acquired by that time. It may be mentioned here

¹⁷ Ghosh, Kasiprasad. Preface. *The Shâir, and Other Poems*. Calcutta: Scott, 1830. p. ii.

¹⁸ Richardson, David Lester, ed. *Selections from the British Poets: From the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day, with Biographical and Critical Notices*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1840.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 1474.

²⁰ Ibid. pp. 1590-1520.

that the poet had first published his independent collection of poems *The Sháir* in 1830, which is considered “the earliest work of Indian poetry in English to have been reviewed in England.”²¹ The different categorisation, however, under which the poems of Derozio and Kasiprasad appear, curiously attest Bhabha’s theory of the ‘mimic man’, wherein “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.*”²² Thus it may be said the Richardson’s gentle gesture of inclusion of a Indian in his anthology indicate that the British perceived Kasiprasad’s literary ventures as an equal, and yet not equal, endeavour to that of the Company poets, or, as Richardson classified them, British-Indian, poets to imitate the white man. However, all said, in the scheme of the complex process of canonisation in an anthology produced by the British coloniser, whose obvious intent was to promote the superiority of the Western knowledge systems, such an exception *is* quite extraordinary.

Besides Derozio, who was a Eurasian (he was born in India of an English mother and a father who had Portuguese and Indian ancestry), Kasiprasad was perhaps, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the only Indian poet to whom a Western woman had dedicated her verse and had also written a poem eulogising his poetic genius. I am referring here to the poem, “Lines: On reading the “Sháir and Other Poems by Kasiprasad Ghosh””²³ by E. L., the unidentified American lady, who had lived in India and had also published a volume of verses, *Leisure Hours; or, Desultory Pieces in Prose and Verse* (1846) from the Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta. In the Second Chapter of this dissertation, I have analysed a few poems by E. L.; and my analysis shows that she expressed favourable opinions on India as a country, had received substantial education, and had facility with multiple languages— her poems contain words from Greek and

²¹ Bose, Amalendu. “Some Poets of the Writers’ Workshop.” *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English*. Ed. M. K. Naik, S. K. Desai, G. S. Amur. Madras: Karnataka University, 1968. pp. 31-50. p. 31.

²² Bhabha, p. 122.

²³ E. L. “Lines: On reading the “Sháir and Other Poems by Kasiprasad Ghosh.”” *Leisure Hours; or, Desultory Pieces in Prose and Verse*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1846. pp. 153-154.

Latin as well as from Bangla and Hindi, and the texts are appended with elaborate footnotes. It is also evident from her poems that during her stay in India, she had closely acquainted herself with the literary endeavours of the Indians writing in English during that time. She was fascinated with the poetry of Kasiprasad, and celebrated her experience of reading *The Sháir* in her poem, “Lines”, which was essentially a homage to him:

To thee I bring this humble votive lay,
 Accept the offered tribute, and may Fame
 Extending far and wide, my friend esteemed,
 “Each passing year add honors to thy name.”²⁴

She not only paid tribute to the poetic genius of Kasiprasad, but also treasured their friendship; this is quite a unique gesture by a Western poet towards an Indian in the nineteenth century, as the general tendency of admiration was almost always directed towards the Westerner from the Indian. At the same time, dubbing the Indian poet an “esteemed friend” was an unusual occurrence in the corpus of English language poetry being written by the Western men and women in India during those times. This gesture by E. L. indicates that she had placed Kasiprasad as a poet on the same platform of literary merit and cultural enrichment that they believed was the hallmark only of the Western civilisation. Achieving such proportions of admiration and acknowledgement from the Western literary circles was no mean feat for an Indian poet writing poetry in English at a time when the West was all too inclined to establish their intellectual and cultural superiority over the Indians.

In yet another instance, Captain M’Naghten, an officer of law serving the Bengal Regiment of the East India Company as Advocate-General, who also produced copious volumes of verses, mentioned Kasiprasad in a very commendable tone in a footnote attached to his poem, “The Love-Suit.” In this poem, which was first published in the

²⁴ Ibid. p. 154.

1835 issue of *Forget Me Not*,²⁵ M’Naghten painted the image of a bee in love with a lotus flower— “Like that bee which seeks with amorous strain the lotos every day”— and remarked in the footnote that he was indebted to Kasiprasad for this image:

I gather from a poetical volume by Kásiprasad Ghosh, a young and high-caste Hindoo, of Calcutta (who, long before he had attained his twentieth year, had written English poetry of a superior order,) that a species of bee, called the *brahmar*, is fabled by his countrymen, to be enamoured of the lotos flower, as the bulbul is said by the Persians to be of the rose.²⁶

This instance of intertextuality, and a few others that I have discussed in the Second Chapter, clearly indicate that despite the limiting atmosphere of colonialism, the possibility of mutual exchanges and enrichment amongst the Western and the Indian poets was very much present, and was even explored by those practising poetry, in the vibrant literary culture of nineteenth century British India. It brings to light the complex interaction between the coloniser and the colonised, the powerful elite and the overpowered native, as well as the politics behind the publication and readership of their literary endeavours in English.

Kasiprasad Ghosh was born at Khidderpore in Kolkata in 1809 in an upper-class Hindu family. He was quite a pampered child and hardly received any education before the age of fourteen. He studied in the Hindu College from 1821 to 1828 and showed remarkable and rapid progress as a student. Kasiprasad had as his teacher both Derozio and Richardson, and they exerted a tremendous influence on him. Kasiprasad soon developed a flair for both Bangla and English languages, courtesy his formal education in the College. I would narrate an incident here which shows that Kasiprasad stood out of the rest of the students in his College. In the year 1827, Horace Hayman Wilson, who was then a teacher at the Hindu College and was himself an accomplished poet, had asked his

²⁵ M’Naghten, Captain. “The Love-Suit.” *Forget Me Not; A Christmas, New Year’s, and Birthday Present for MDCCCXXXV*. Ed. Frederic Shoberl. London: Ackermann and Co., 1835. pp. 195-200.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 198.

students to compose a poem. Kasiprasad, who was only eighteen years old at that time, was the only student who successfully wrote a verse in the poetry competition at the College — his poem was titled “The Young Poet’s First Attempt”. Although Kasiprasad later dismissed the poem from being included in his collection of verses, saying that it was a “juvenile effort”,²⁷ yet at the time of its composition, he earned accolades for that poetic piece from Wilson and others at the Hindu College. On the request of Wilson, Ghosh also wrote a review of the first four chapters of James Mill’s *History of British India*; this indictment of Mill’s *History*, titled “Critical remarks on the four first chapters of Mr. Mill’s *History of British India*”,²⁸ was written by Ghosh a good eleven years before Wilson wrote his famous refutation of Mill’s book. Wilson’s repudiation, in the form of Notes and Comments appended to Mill’s 1840 edition of *History of British India*,²⁹ was much more widely publicised than Ghosh’s essay, as was expected, courtesy the position of the two authors on opposite sides of the power equilibrium. Ghosh’s essay was, however, at the time that it was written, considered brilliant and portions of it was consequently published in the *Calcutta Gazette* dated February 14, 1828, under the title “Essay on Mill’s British India”,³⁰ and was later reprinted in the *Asiatic Journal*.³¹ It was a most significant essay strongly repudiating Mill’s notorious attacks on the Hindu religion written at a time by Kasiprasad when his other fellow classmates in the Hindu College, inspired by the radical ideas of Derozio, were expressing contemptuous views on Hindu customs and rituals. Kasiprasad’s essay received rave reviews even from the British

²⁷ The autobiography of Kasiprasad Ghosh in the form of a letter written by him was reproduced by Rev. James Long in his book, *Hand-Book of Bengal Missions*.

Ghosh, Kasiprasad. “Appendix D: Autobiography of Kasiprasad Ghose.” *Hand-Book of Bengal Missions, in Connexion with the Church of England. Together with an Account of General Educational Efforts in North India*. Rev. James Long. London: John Farquhar Shaw, 1848. pp. 506-510. p. 508.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

The title of this essay was mentioned by Ghosh in this autobiographical letter.

²⁹ Mill, James. *History of British India*. 9 Vols. Ed. H. H. Wilson. London: James Madden, 1840.

³⁰ Kopf. p. 263.

³¹ Sharma, Ritu. *Toru Dutt: A Precursor of Indo-Anglian Poetry*. Haryana: Unistar Books Pvt. Ltd., 2013. p. 24.

editors and reviewers of the periodical press in India. The anonymous reviewer in the *Asiatic Journal* bestowed unreserved praise on him:

When Mr. Mill wrote his *History of British India*, he very probably never suspected that the pages of his work would be critically examined by a Hindu, distinguished for his acquirements in the English language, and familiar with the classical and recondite learning of the west; and many of our readers will no doubt be surprised to meet with an attempt of the kind at so early a period as the present day. For this sudden revolution in the intellectual qualities of the natives of this country, we are mainly indebted to the establishment of the Anglo-Hindu College...³²

However, the point that I would want to drive home here is that Kasiprasad's refutation of Mill's argument did not evince any reading of original Sanskrit texts, as the Vedas and the Upanishads, or the understanding of the Hindu customs and rituals elaborated therein; it rather spoke volumes of the Orientalist education that was imparted to him in the precincts of the Hindu College, through the critical literature authored by the British Orientalists, such as Jones, Wilson and H. T. Colebrook, and made available to the students in the form of translations and commentaries.

Kasiprasad, like Madhusudan, was one of Richardson's favourite pupils of. He was, most importantly, a representative of the upper-class Bengali of the period, who not only received Western education at the Hindu College, but were so inspired by English literature that they engaged themselves zealously in composing verse in the English language. Other such students of the Hindu College whose names may be mentioned in this connection are Rajnarain Dutt, Govin Chunder Dutt, Hur Chunder Dutt, Greece Chunder Dutt, Hur Chunder Dutt. In the case of Kasiprasad, the influence of his teachers and the contemporary publications of English language poetry by the poets of John Company in collected single-author volumes as well as in the periodical press, is clearly

³² Anon. "English Compositions by Hindus." *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies*. Vol XXVI. Jul-Dec, 1828. London: Parbury, Allen, & Co., 1828. pp. 317-320. p. 317.

discernible in the shaping of his poetic genius. He achieved considerable reputation early on in his career, so as to be noticed even by the elitist colonisers even before he was twenty. Significantly, Kasiprasad also owned an English press and published a weekly newspaper, *Hindu Intelligencer*, of which he himself was the editor. Such were the beginnings of the development of the intellectual Bengali gentry— ‘bhadralok’ having facility with the English language and fascinated with the Western culture and literature— who were later famously called ‘baboo’. Reading into the poetics of the ‘baboo’ culture, I argue that the emergence of the Bengali ‘bhadralok’ was an integral and deliberate part of the colonial machinery aimed at sustaining the intellectual hegemony of the British over the Indians.

Since 1829 Ghosh was publishing poems and prose regularly in the Calcutta periodicals. *The Calcutta Literary Gazette* and *The Calcutta Monthly Magazine*, both of which were edited by D.L. Richardson, published quite a few poems by Kasiprasad. I shall engage in the analysis of a few of his poems included in *The Sháir*, with the focus on the elements of influence of the Company poets on him. Ghosh’s poem, “The Viná; or the Indian Lute”³³ has a very close resemblance to Derozio’s “The Harp of India”³⁴ and to Thomas Moore’s “Dear Harp of my Country”.³⁵ The poem opens thus:

Lute of my country! why dost thou remain
Unstrung, neglected, desolate, and bound
With envious Time’s and Ignorance’s chain?
Ah lonely lute! who heareth now thy sound?³⁶

The lament for the music of the lute is similar to that of the harp, with the exception that the lute is a more traditional Indian instrument. In literature, this longing for the glory of the past has often been expressed in terms of its music; Kasiprasad localised this desire by

³³ Ghosh, Kasiprasad. “The Viná; or the Indian Lute.” *The Sháir*. pp. 185-186.

³⁴ Derozio, H. L. V. “The Harp of India.” *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry*. Ed. Vinay Krishna Gokak. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1970. pp. 53-54.

³⁵ Moore, Thomas. “Dear Harp of my Country.” *Irish Melodies*. London: J. Power, 1822. pp. 148-149.

³⁶ Ghosh. “The Viná.” p. 185.

transposing the ‘harp’ into the lute, which he elaborated as the ‘veena’, thus obliquely implying the Hindu quest for knowledge. Kasiprasad illustrated the nature of the Indian musical instrument, “viná”, in the accompanying footnote:

The *Viná* or Indian Lute is a fretted instrument of the guitar kind, usually having seven wires or strings and a large gourd at each end of the finger board; the extent of the instrument is two octaves; it is supposed to be the invention of the NAREDA (the greatest of celestial saints and the son of BRAHMA) and has many varieties, enumerated according to the number of strings, &c. *Am. Co.— Mr. Wilson’s Sanscrit Dictionary. Page 841.* For a more particular account of this instrument, see *Asiatic Researches Vol. 1. Page 295.*³⁷

The impact of the Orientalist learning on Kasiprasad, like in numerous other instances, is prominent here too: he referred to the accounts of two British scholars, Wilson³⁸ and Jones,³⁹ in connection with the explanation of the ‘veena’, which is essentially an Indian musical instrument, and not to any Sanskrit texts. It is to be noted here that the ‘harp’, when it is approximately translated as ‘veena’ or a musical instrument with strings attached to it, had long been an integral part of the culture of India and particularly Bengal: for example, the ‘veena’ is the musical instrument that is played by Saraswati, the goddess of learning, in all images of this Hindu deity. Kasiprasad’s search for the Hindu past was thus mediated through the teachings of the British colonisers. The classical Sanskrit past of India revealed itself to these English-educated young Bengali intellectuals through the arbitration of the British Orientalists, through their accounts of the history of the country and their works of translation.

³⁷ Ghosh. “The Viná.” p. 185.

³⁸ Wilson, Horace Hayman. *A Dictionary, Sanscrit and English: Translated, Amended and Enlarged, from an Original Compilation Prepared by Learned Natives for the College of Fort William.* Calcutta: Hindostanee Press, 1819.

³⁹ Jones, William, ed. *Asiatick Researches: Or, Transactions of the Society instituted in Bengal, for inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Arts, Sciences and Literature of Asia.* [*Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.*] Vols. 1-20. Calcutta: Manuel Cantopher, 1788-1839. (Jones had edited only the first four volumes.)

In Western literature, especially with reference to Britain, the trope of the ‘harp’ was consistently adapted by the poets into a metonym for the Welsh bards who were persecuted at the time when the English conquered Wales.⁴⁰ In the poetry of the Irish and Scottish poets, the ‘harp’ evolved into an important symbol representing poetic nationalism, as Ireland was continuously struggling against British imperialistic designs during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In Moore’s poem, “Dear Harp My Country”, the harp serves as a synecdoche for disdain and resistance to the British domination of Ireland:

DEAR Harp of my Country! in darkness I found thee,
The cold chain of silence had hung o’er thee long,
When proudly, my own Island Harp! I unbound thee,
And gave all thy chords to light, freedom, and song!⁴¹

Derozio appropriated the trope of the harp in his poems to represent cultural nationalism. His poem, “The Harp of India”, opens with an invocation of the ‘harp’, which is visibly inspired by Moore’s poem, and is characterised by similar images of silence, loneliness and desolation:

Why hang’st thou lonely on yon withered bough?
Unstrung for ever, must thou there remain;
Thy music once was sweet — who hears it now?
Why doth the breeze sigh over thee in vain?
Silence hath bound thee with her fatal chain;
Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,
Like ruined monument on desert plain:⁴²

Though Derozio was born and brought up in Calcutta, yet he had Portuguese lineage, and elements of Portuguese culture was very strongly present in his household, and, consequently, in his life. The ‘harp’ interestingly forms a part of Portuguese cultural heritage as well, as the Arpa Juan Lopez harp was a crucial feature of the Portuguese

⁴⁰ Gibson, Mary Ellis. *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India, 1780-1913*. Ed. Mary Ellis Gibson. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011. p. 17.

⁴¹ Moore. p. 148.

⁴² Derozio. p. 53.

culture from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century.⁴³ It is, therefore, difficult to determine Derozio's source of inspiration for using the 'harp' as a trope in his poems. What, however, is evident in both Derozio's and Kasiprasad's poems, is the nationalistic aspiration that the trope of the 'harp' came to symbolise. Kasiprasad transposed the 'harp' into a 'veena', which echoed the same strains of loneliness and silence, as the silent harp hung upon the willow did.

Kasiprasad took after the Company poets in his usage of Indian language words, such as "Surya" and "Bulbuls" used in the poem "The Lover's Life".⁴⁴ He indulged the same practice of the Company poets—that of pluralising Indian language word by adding the suffix '-s'. However, unlike the Company poets, Kasiprasad celebrated Indian nature as well as the Hindu customs and rituals. In his poem, "Song of the Boatmen to Ganga",⁴⁵ Kasiprasad eulogised the River Ganga as the "gold river" and offered a brilliant description of the natural beauty of the Gangetic landscape. He was arguably the first Indian poet writing in English who depicted the authentic Indian experiences in his poems. He had written eleven poems extolling the Hindu festivals— "Dasahará", "Rás Yátrá", "Kártik Pujá", "Janmáshtami", "Sri Panchami", "Durgá Pujá", "Dola Yátrá", "Kojágara Purnimá", "Jhulana Yátrá", "Káli Pujá" and "Akshayá Tritiyá".⁴⁶ The poems describe the rituals elaborately and the tone is unmistakably that of veneration. In the Preface to *The Sháir*, Kasiprasad himself explained the circumstances in which he wrote these poems:

The Author's motive of writing the "Hindu Festivals," almost all the principal ones of which will be found in the subsequent pages of this volume, is nothing else but this: Being one day in conversation with a friend on the subject of publishing his poems, he was suggested the importance

⁴³ Anon. "The Harp of India Summary." *All Answers Ltd.* ukessays.com. November, 2013.

<<https://www.ukessays.com/essays/english-literature/the-harp-of-india.php?vref=1>>. 21/08/2017.

⁴⁴ Ghosh, Kasiprasad. "The Lover's Life." *The Sháir*. pp. 115-119.

⁴⁵ Ghosh, Kasiprasad. "Song of the Boatmen to Ganga." *The Sháir*. pp. 183-184.

⁴⁶ Ghosh, Kasiprasad. "Hindu Festivals." *The Sháir*. pp. 125-160.

and utility of writing something by way of national poetry; and having then no other Indian subject at hand which he could make a choice of, but the Hindu Festivals; an account of which he had promised to write for the *Calcutta Literary Gazette*; he versified them into small pieces of poetry, which were published in that journal.⁴⁷

These poems, therefore, collectively assert his identity as an authentic Hindu and a true Indian. The search for “national poetry”, as was espoused by Kasiprasad in this Preface, was to render one’s culture in terms of poetry; it was an attempt to record the localised experience of the poet’s native land rather than being inane imitators of the West. This poetic gesture by Kasiprasad was thus an advancement towards appropriating the English language for the Indian poet’s own design and intentions, although it might not seem ‘national’ in the sense that we would understand the term today. Nevertheless the spirit of the Orientalist Jones,⁴⁸ his teacher Wilson, and that of the other British writers, like Henry Meredith Parker and Walter Hamilton, who were publishing poems and essays on Oriental themes, hover in the middle distance of Kasiprasad’s poems on the Hindu festivals. To these poems, he appended copious notes,⁴⁹ especially while referring to Indian Gods and Goddesses and to the stories of the Hindu mythology. The notes are so extensive that they collectively form a narrative of Hindu mythological lore by themselves. An occurrence, on the other hand, of a Western poet offering detailed narrations of the stories from Greek or Roman mythology as appendices to their poems on such subjects, as Apollo, Daphne, Tithonus, Ozymandias, Ulysses, Prometheus, Oedipus, is not to be found in literature. In a similar vein, it was natural of an Indian poet, emulating the British writers, to illustrate the references to Greco-Roman mythology, and not provide explanations for the references to Eastern tales or the Hindu customs. That, as we know, was unfortunately not the case with the Indian poets composing verse in the

⁴⁷ Ghosh. Preface. *The Shâir*. p. ii.

⁴⁸ I borrow this phrase from Franklin, Michael J. *Orientalist Jones: Sir William Jones, Poet, Lawyer, and Linguist (1746-1794)*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

⁴⁹ Ghosh, Kasiprasad. “Notes to the Hindu Festivals.” *The Shâir*. pp.189-201.

English language during the nineteenth century. Their attempt to mimic the white man was so pervasive and so mindless, that the English-educated Indian writers followed the latter's poetic style and practice in toto. Kasiprasad felt that the significance of the bow used by Kamadeva would be best understood by his readers in reference to Jones' "Hymn to Camdeo".⁵⁰ However, he did not directly quote from or refer to Jones' "Hymn"; it is intriguing to note that Kasiprasad quoted a footnote from Wilson's *The Méga Dúta, or Cloud Messenger*⁵¹ while citing Jones' "Hymn":

"The weapons and the applications of the allegory will be best explained by a verse in Sir W. Jones's hymn to the deity—

He bends the luscious cane and twists the string,
With *bees* how sweet but ah! how *keen* their sting:

...

And last to kindle fierce the scorching flame,
Love shaft which god's bright *Bela* name."

*Annotations to the Cloud Messenger, page 109.*⁵²

The complex intertextual references is an indication of the orientation of learning that the young Bengali intellectuals were experiencing: they were probably encouraged to study the works of their teachers as texts, and read other Orientalist works by the British only as references. Kasiprasad further referred to other texts translated by Wilson, such as *Malati and Madhava*⁵³ and *Vikrama Urvasi*,⁵⁴ while describing the image of Goddess Durga⁵⁵ and while forwarding an explanation, almost in an apologetic tone, that his poem "The Hero's Reward" treats the story of the union of King Pururavas and Urvasi "too much in the spirit of Hindu poetry".⁵⁶ He mentioned *Asiatic Researches* (Vol. VIII, page 75) with

⁵⁰ Jones. "Hymn to Camdeo." "Hymns." pp. 151-155.

⁵¹ Wilson, Horace Hayman. *The Megha Dúta or Cloud Messenger: A Poem in the Sanskrit Language, by Kálidása. Translated into English Verse, with Notes and Illustrations.* Calcutta: Hindoostanee Press, 1813.

⁵² Ghosh. "Notes to the Hindu Festivals." p. 193.

⁵³ Wilson, Horace Hayman. *Malati and Madhava, or, The Stolen Marriage. A Drama. Translated from the Original Sanscrit.* Calcutta: V. Holcroft, Asiatic Press, 1826.

⁵⁴ Wilson, Horace Hayman. *Vikrama and Urvasi, or The Hero and the Nymph. A Drama. Translated from the Original Sanscrit.* Calcutta: V. Holcroft, Asiatic Press, 1826.

⁵⁵ Ghosh. "Notes to the Hindu Festivals." p. 201.

⁵⁶ Ghosh, Kasiprasad. "The Hero's Reward." *The Sháir.* p. 79.

specific volume number and page number while drawing up a comparison between the Egyptian Minotaur and Mahisasura, the demon whom Durga slayed;⁵⁷ and directly quoted from the Journal (*Asiatic Researches* Vol. VIII, page 74) while explaining the awakening of Cártica from his four months' slumber on the eleventh day of the bright half of the lunar month.⁵⁸ He referred his readers to Hamilton's Gazetteer⁵⁹ for a comprehensive understanding of the significance of Mathura as a religious place,⁶⁰ and to Parker's poem, "The Draught of Immortality"⁶¹ for a detailed account of the emergence of Goddess Lakshmi from the sea after the churning of the Ocean,⁶² the last text being published by Parker only three years before *The Sháir*. In the final note of the Section, Kasiprasad commented:

For a more particular account of the nature and character of the Hindu Festivals, the reader is requested to see the "Hindu Kalendar" published at intervals in the Government Gazette of 1827, by its Editor, or Asiatic Researches, vol. 3 Page 521.⁶³

That Kasiprasad, despite being a Hindu himself, chose to authenticate and authorise his poems with persistent references to the British Orientalists, points the cursor to the underlying politics of intertextuality that was being played out by most of the Bengali authors writing in English during the first half of the nineteenth century. As I have shown in detail in this Chapter, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Soshee Chunder Dutt followed similar patterns of references and citations in the paratexts of their poems, and this complexity in the poetic representation suggests that there was no escape from the circuit

⁵⁷ Ghosh. "Notes to the Hindu Festivals." p. 196.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 197.

⁵⁹ Hamilton, Walter. *The East India gazetteer; containing particular descriptions of the empires, kingdoms, principalities, provinces, cities, towns, districts, fortresses, harbours, rivers, lakes, &c. of Hindostan, and the adjacent countries, India beyond the Ganges, and the Eastern archipelago; together with sketches of the manners, customs, institutions, agriculture, commerce, manufactures, revenues, population, castes, religion, history, &c. of their various inhabitants*. London: John Murray, 1815.

⁶⁰ Ghosh. "Notes to the Hindu Festivals." p. 198.

⁶¹ Parker, Henry Meredith. "The Draught of Immortality." *The Draught of Immortality, and Other Poems: With Cromwell, A Dramatic Sketch*. London: J. M. Richardson, 1827. pp. 1-22.

⁶² Ghosh. "Notes to the Hindu Festivals." p. 199.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 201.

of literary discourse of the Calcutta Orientalists. It may be interpreted as the way of the colonised elite of authenticating his own experiences in the newly acquired light of Western education.

At a different level of interpretation, it is also possible that by portraying the ‘authentic’ Hindu way of life, Kasiprasad engaged in an attempt to critique his peers, who, in the wake of being influenced by Western education and by Derozio’s liberal ideals, were condemning their own culture as primitive and their own religion as superstitious and prejudiced. This attitude of decrying the Hindu religious and cultural practices was unfortunately the predominant fashion among the Bengali ‘bhadralok’ of those times. Kasiprasad’s poetry is significant in the sense that it reveals the complexity of emulating one’s imaginative endeavours in an ‘alien’ tongue. His poems appear at the threshold of the transition in the tenor of Indian English poetry from a mimetic attempt to a nationalist awakening.

Kasiprasad’s intended readership of his poems, as may be surmised from the Anglicisation of Indian language words and the elaborate footnotes appended to particular words and lines for explaining Indian words and Indian rituals, was evidently the British public and the Western world at large. The different sections of the poem, “The Sháir”⁶⁴ is categorically dedicated to Company poets, such as Horace Hayman Wilson, Henry Meredith Parker and James Young. Further, the poet relentlessly cited comparable instances from Greek and Roman mythology while explaining the stories and rituals of the Hindu religion. This practice is not only similar to that of the Company poets, but is also an attestation of the fact that Kasiprasad aspired to be applauded by the white men. Much of his poetic style was consciously maintained along the lines of the tradition of the

⁶⁴ Ghosh, Kasiprasad. “The Sháir.” *The Sháir*. pp. 1-78.

Orientalist verse and the translations of the Indian texts produced by the British during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

A particular footnote attached to the words “[t]he regal swans” in “The Sháir” reads:

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.⁶⁵

Strikingly noticeable here is the manner of usage of the two terms— “Indian poets” and “European bards”— which ostentatiously elevates the European writers composing verses to a position of superiority, when compared to the Indian authors. Such seemingly unimportant references, I argue, indicate the subtle politics involved in the rhetoric and presentation of the poetic compositions in the atmosphere of colonialism.

“The Sháir”, which is decidedly the most substantial verse produced by Kasiprasad, is more an Oriental tale of love and lament than an Indian romance— a poem that lacks the spatial or incidental familiarity that could have rendered it a true Indian spirit. Its composition follows the tradition of the English Romantic poetry— more exotic than localised. The poem narrates the story of a Sháir, a poet with an exceptional insight, whose unflinching love for his beloved Armita gifted him a life of love, ecstasy, poetry and songs. Destiny, however, took away Armita, and the Sháir had to live alone, pining for his beloved. Unable to bear the loss of Amrita, he plunged into the depths of the ocean. The Persian motif in the poem, especially laid out by Hassan, the protagonist who narrates the tale, nonetheless loses its edge in the poet’s style of versification, which is very much Romantic in its diction.

“The Sháir” is followed by “The Hero’s Reward”,⁶⁶ to which Kasiprasad added a brief epigraph, saying that the poem was written in response to “Dr. Wilson’s translation

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 6.

of the “VIKRAM URVASI, or the Hero and Nymph.”⁶⁷ The intertextuality evinced here, it is to be noted, is not between the poem and the Sanskrit text, but between the poem and the English translation of the Sanskrit text in question. This complex intertextuality has a definite pattern of rendering primacy to the English translations by the British Orientalists in relation to all the Indian poets writing English language poetry in the first half of the nineteenth century. The politics involved in such works of translation would never really be brought to the fore by these Indian poets, who, being tutored the way they were, unknowingly carried forward that cultural and intellectual politics to the texts that they produced, even when they were talking about elements of their own cultural heritage. Hence a circuit of discourse in favour of the coloniser, as was, may I say, designed by the imperial machinery.

Among the poems in Kasiprasad’s volume, poems such as “The Hero’s Reward” and the poems on Hindu festivals, unlike “The Sháir”, bespeak a claim to intimacy, an authenticity that is acquired with the sense of belongingness to one’s own culture. Although the paratexts and the act of writing in English itself may be perceived as forms of cultural translation, yet Kasiprasad’s poems can be recognised as the nascent steps towards the sense of a nationalist poetry. Nevertheless, quite paradoxically, it is also true that the evocation of a pre-Muslim cultural heritage of India in the nineteenth century undermined the immediate past in order to construct a longing for the distant past. This longing in the young English-educated Indian intellectuals was constructed by the Orientalists with an intention to facilitate the establishment and exercise of the colonial hegemony. An essential part of the design of this policy of the colonisers was to discredit the immediate Muslim regime— a regime that they had overthrown in order to colonise India. The British colonisers fashioned their literary and intellectual endeavours in a

⁶⁶ Ghosh, Kasiprasad. “The Hero’s Reward.” *The Sháir*. pp. 79-108.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 79.

manner that would always ennoble the white man, who, it would seem, had been benevolent enough to take up the onus on his shoulder of revealing the glorious past of India to the Indians, who, they made it appear, were, because of the ‘notorious’ Muslim domination, reduced to being primitive and savage, and were then in much need of the education and enlightenment that the Englishman provided them with. This attitude of retracing the classical past was in consonance with the Neo-classical age in England, that also looked back to the Greco-Roman culture with great pride, and endeavoured to revive the lost glory. These two cultural propensities, located in separate temporalities and in separate spatiality and also driven by completely antithetical intensions, somehow seemed to have a strange kind of affinity with each other in their manner; and this parallelism in the cultural attitude of their own land and the colonial design of their exiled land bolstered the ideology of the men of the John Company.

Kasiprasad Ghosh’s contribution to the development of Indian English poetry, as we understand it today, is thus enormously significant; and yet most modern anthologies of English poetry written by the Indians or books dealing with the history of Indian English literature hardly mention his achievements.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt: “[S]omething of a foreign air about my drama”⁶⁸

Michael Madhusudan Dutt represents the crisis of the quintessential anglicised Bengali ‘babu’ in nineteenth century colonial Bengal. In a way his life and works reflect the shifting temper of his age. He began his journey as a poet writing in English, admiring everything that is English, consequently leading him to the study of Greek, Latin, Italian,

⁶⁸ Dutt, Michael Madhusudan. “Letter to Gour.” n.d. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. Ed. Kshetra Gupta and Prafulla Kumar Patra. Kolkata: Patra’s Publication, 1986. p. 478.

French and German, besides, of course, the English language and literature. Bhabha rightly suggests:

... 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 . . .⁶⁹

Madhusudan's literary endeavours can be divided into his English and Bengali phases of writing. His English phase can be suggestive of what Frantz Fanon says "the black soul is a white man's artefact".⁷⁰ Madhusudan received an English education and developed a tremendous sense of admiration for Western literature; his poetry presents a curious blend of the Sanskrit classical tradition and the Western poetic traditions. His works in various ways essentially reflect the transition from colonial to national literature.

Critics and scholars have highlighted the influence of British canonical literature on Madhusudan, but the Company men, whose occasional forays both in composing literature and encouraging literature had greatly influenced Madhusudan, have hardly merited any critical attention in relation to the discussions on Madhusudan's works. The significant impact that the poets of the John Company had on him is visible in the poems that he dedicated to them as well as in the correspondences that he had had with his friends about them. One of the major influences in his life was David Lester Richardson, who taught English literature in the Hindu College during the period that Madhusudan was studying there. It must be noted here that Richardson was an influential figure in the literary circles of Calcutta by dint of being the Principal of the Hindu College, a position he enjoyed for quite some time. It is found in Madhusudan's correspondences with

⁶⁹ Bhabha, pp. 62-63.

⁷⁰ Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto Press, 1986. p. 16.

Gourdass⁷¹ (spelling unchanged), arguably his most intimate friend and the prominent nineteenth century Bengali writer, that he often refused to attend the college when Richardson was not present:

I believe you recollect my once hinting to you of a resolution or rather desire of keeping away from College during D.L.R's absence. Now I have made up my mind to it, that is, I will not go to College, until D.L.R.'s return, be it of whatever duration, I don't care.⁷²

Madhusudan studied in the Hindu College when the Young Bengal movement was gaining strength in the precincts of the Institution; however, Richardson as a teacher remained a potent influence on Madhusudan's life. In his correspondences one can find frequent references to D. L. R. (David Lester Richardson), H. Wilson (Horace Hayman Wilson), Karr (Walter Scott Seton-Karr) and such other Company men of his times. Wilson was a noted Orientalist scholar who translated the most number of Sanskrit texts into English after Sir William Jones, and had also prepared the first Sanskrit-English Dictionary. Madhusudan had made numerous references to Wilson's works of translations in the texts of his English poems. By Karr, Madhusudan was referring to Walter Scott Seton-Karr, Secretary to the Governor of Bengal and President of the Indigo Commission, at whose behest Madhusudan had, under the supervision of Reverend James Long, translated the controversial Bangla play, *Nil Darpan* originally written by Dinabandhu Mitra, and had agreed to publish it anonymously with the cover page vaguely mentioning the translation having been done "By a Native."⁷³ Seton-Karr had also extended his help later to Madhusudan by securing for him bureaucratic and financial help at times. In one of his letters to Gangooly, who was the noted actor Keshab Chandra Ganguly of the Calcutta theatres, Madhusudan talked about the difference of the dramatic

⁷¹ I am referring here to Gour Das Bysack. In case of proper nouns, I will hence use the spellings, mostly anglicized in a peculiar way, that Madhusudan himself used in his personal correspondences.

⁷² Dutt, M. M. "Letter to 'My dear Friend'." 25 November, 1842. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 461.

⁷³ [Dutt, Michael Madhusudan]. *Nil Darpan. The Indigo Planting Mirror, A Drama, Translated from the Bengali. By a Native*. Calcutta: C. H. Manuel, Calcutta Printing and Publishing Press, 1861.

traditions of the East and the West. He said that the Indian tradition of drama is that of the romantic one and the European tradition is marked by its realism. He then referred to Wilson as an authority:

Ours are dramatic poems; and even Wilson, the great foreign admirer of our ancient language, has been compelled to admit this.⁷⁴

After his conversion to Christianity, Madhusudan had to shift his studentship from Hindu college to Bishop's College, where he learnt the classical European languages along with English. He had a natural flair for languages and was quick to pick up several European and Indian languages. Later in his life, he spent a significant amount of his energy and time in further learning other languages when he was staying in Madras and also during his stay in France. His love for English as a superior language and as representing a superior culture lured him away from Hinduism to Christianity, and from pursuing Bangla literature at the beginning of his literary career. Of the many reasons behind his conversion to Christianity (he was baptised on 9th February, 1843), the immediate one was his father's attempt to get him married to a girl he did not know. He was concerned with the plight of his mother, as she had to share her "husband's affection with three other fellow-wives".⁷⁵ With Reverend Krishna Mohan, who was himself a convert to Christianity and caused great anxiety amongst the upper-class Bengali Hindus, Madhusudan shared a feeling of disgust for the prevalent superstitions of the Hindu religion of that time. Madhusudan, it may be said, was trapped in the coloniser's ideology of the civilising mission, as he vociferously advocated in the last paragraph of his essay titled "The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu":

⁷⁴ Dutt, M. M. "Letter to Gangooly." n.d. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 506.

⁷⁵ Dutt, Romesh Chandra. *Cultural Heritage of Bengal: A Biographical and Critical History from the Earliest Times closing with a Review of Intellectual Progress under British Rule in India*. Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1962. p 129.

It is the glorious mission, I repeat, of the Anglo-Saxon to renovate, to regenerate, or—in one word, to Christianize the Hindu.⁷⁶

In this essay, he opined that the boon of this Anglo-Saxon dominance is that they have bestowed their language to the Indians. He lamented that “[t]he Hindu is an aged, a decayed race”.⁷⁷ I shall borrow Bhabha’s term as well as his theory here to suggest that colonialism had deeply ingrained in Madhusudan the desire to become a ‘mimic man’.⁷⁸ His marriage, he felt, would also have been an impediment to his aspiration to go to England so that he could become a renowned poet on the Albion’s shores:

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!⁷⁹

To illustrate how strong the poet’s desire to flourish and live in England as an English poet was in his early life, I shall quote part of a sonnet written in 1842, titled “Sonnet to Futurity”:

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 is exquisitely sweet;
For those fair climes I heave the impatient sigh,
There let me live and there let me die.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Dutt, M. M. “The Anglo-Saxon and the Hindu.” *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. pp. 552-567. p. 566.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 561.

⁷⁸ Bhabha. pp. 121-131.

⁷⁹ Dutt, M. M. “An Acrostic — II.” *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 385.

⁸⁰ Dutt, M. M. “Sonnet to Futurity.” *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. pp. 394-395. p. 395.

It is a compelling expression of the desire to inhabit the famed superior space of the coloniser, where science and genius, Madhusudan believed, would thrive with equal opportunities. My analysis of the Company poems has shown that those texts speak of a continuous longing in the Englishman in India to return to his native land, that is, England; Madhusudan, the quintessential Bengali intellectual, expressed the same desire to go to England, but in his case, it was not the longing for home, it was rather the aspiration of the enlightened colonised man to reach that land which he believed was the pinnacle of civilisation. The fascination of the real ‘home’ for the coloniser and that of the fabulous ‘home’ for the colonised evoked similar longings for the shores of Albion, and it manifested itself in the poems that they wrote. The situation may be perceived as the desire of the colonised to appropriate as well as to internalise the culture of the coloniser in terms of spatial familiarity. Madhusudan had a very fascinating conversation on this issue of his fervent wish to go and settle in England with his closest friend, Gour Dass Bysack, as is revealed in the letters that he wrote to him. These letters and all other communications as well as the writings of Madhusudan are compiled in the *Madhusudan Rachanabali* edited by Kshetra Gupta, which paints an interesting picture of the life and times of Madhusudan. When he was in Tumlook (now, Tamluk), in the October of 1842, he explicitly and passionately expressed his desire to go to London in the letter written to his Gour:

I am come nearer that sea which will perhaps see me at a period (which I hope is not far off) ploughing its bosom for “England’s glorious shore.” The sea from this place is not very far: what a number of ships have I seen going to England!⁸¹

Such letters which contained in words his sighs for the shores of Albion are aplenty. In the meantime, the city of Calcutta and the language Bangla were gradually losing their

⁸¹ Dutt, M. M. “Letter to ‘My dear Friend’ .” n.d. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 461.

claim and their charm on him. He became, if I may say so, acted upon by the forces of imperialism. In a letter to Gour in 1849, he wrote from Madras:

I say old Gour Dass Bysack! can't you send me a copy of the Bengali translation of the Mahabharut by Casidoss as well as a ditto of the Ramayana, —Serampore edition. I am losing my Bengali faster than I can mention.⁸²

Ironically, Madhusudan was able to go to England only after he had already succeeded as a Bengali poet. Yet when he was in England, he was faced with starvation, deprivation and humiliation, as he zealously pursued his aim to become a barrister. In fact, poverty had forced him and his family to seek refuge in France, for it was easier to survive there and at a cheaper cost than in London. In letter after letter written to his friends, and primarily to Vidyasagar, he sought monetary help. In one of the letters dated 26th October, 1864, Madhusudan wrote to Gour from France, suggesting that the one thing good about being in Europe was that he was not treated as somebody belonging to a subject race:

Come here and you will soon forget that you spring from a degraded and subject race. Here you are the master of your masters! ... Every one, whether high or low, will treat you as a man and not a “d—d nigger.”⁸³

After striving to succeed to become a barrister in utter deprivation and difficulties, Madhusudan finally was able to return to India with the help of Vidyasagar. The letters during this period hardly discussed his literary endeavours, but a careful study of his communication with his friends and family reveal the various nuances of feeling that the poet had experienced that later shaped his poetry and the personality of the fascinating man that he was.

An understanding of the life and career of Madhusudan offers an insight into the intricate ways in which the poet had internalised the ideas of the coloniser. However, his continual endeavour to study Western literature had enabled him to master several

⁸² Dutt, M. M. “Letter to ‘My Dearest Friend’.” 14 February, 1849. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 469.

⁸³ Dutt, M. M. “Letter to Gour.” 26 October, 1864. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 524.

Western lyric and dramatic forms, such as the sonnet and the blank verse, and consequently introduce them in his native language, Bangla. Madhusudan is hence hailed as a modern Bengali poet. In a letter to Gour, dated 26th January, 1865, written from France, Madhusudan realised the futility of writing in a language foreign to the writer, in this case, English, and acknowledged the importance of writing in one's mother tongue:

I pray God, that the noble ambition of Milton to do something for his mother-tongue and his native land may animate all men of talent among us. If there be anyone among us anxious to live a name behind him, and not pass away into oblivion like a brute, let him devote himself to his mother-tongue.⁸⁴

Madhusudan appreciated the beauty and sweetness of Bangla only after he miserably failed to make a name for himself writing English poems; the futility of the aspirations and ideals ingrained in his thought and imagination, as a result of being tutored with Western education and colonial ideologies, eventually dawned on the great poet. It was like a revelation to himself when his conviction in the superiority of the Western culture and English language over his own was defeated by the practical circumstances of his life:

Believe me, my dear fellow, our Bengali is a very beautiful language, it only wants men of genius to polish it up. Such of us as, owing to early defective education, know little of it and have learnt to despise it, are miserably wrong. It is or rather, it has the elements of a great language in it.⁸⁵

Teachers of the Hindu College and the Bishop's College, like Richardson, whom Madhusudan had once held in deep veneration, thus were now the same tutors who had imparted "defective education" to him.

In order to further understand the influence that Company Poetry and the Company men had had on Madhusudan, I shall presently engage myself in analysing

⁸⁴ Dutt, M. M. "Letter to Gour." 26 January, 1865. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 531.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 532.

“The Captive Ladie”,⁸⁶ decidedly the most influential and most acclaimed poem in the poetic oeuvre of the author. The poem along with its elaborate footnotes suggest that Madhusudan was following the same pattern of allusions and references as was done by Orientalists like Jones, Wilson and Richardson. It was a time when the Orientalists were busy in recovering, recuperating and translating Sanskrit texts and thus making it available to the world. Madhusudan claimed that the poem, which consists of around twelve hundred lines in octosyllabic verse, was written in less than three weeks.⁸⁷ In “The Captive Ladie”, Madhusudan used Indian words with anglicised spellings, such as Kokil, Chandra, Vin, Seraswatti etc. The words were in most cases accompanied by explanations in the footnotes or in some cases elaborated within the text itself, with the purpose of offering readers a better understanding. Obviously, Madhusudan aspired for a European audience for his poems, much in the same manner that the Company poets did so. In the lines I quote below, the poet, following the lexical practice of Jones in his “Hymn to Camdeo”, described “Cama”, whose Bangla equivalent is Kamadeva:

He rose — that bard — and you might deem
'Twas Cama — God of Love's gay dream!⁸⁸

There are numerous instances where Madhusudan drew parallels to the Hindu gods and goddesses from those of the Greco-Roman world. In a footnote included in the First Canto of “The Captive Ladie”, he wrote:

The Hindus have no regularly constructed theatres. All their Dramatic performances are displayed in the open air under awnings put up for the occasion.—This will, no doubt, remind the classical reader of the ancient roman custom. — Vide Lucret: iv. 73. vi. 108. Plin. xix, 1-6. xxxvi 15-24. For further information see Sir W. Jones' preface to ‘Saccontola’ and Wilson's Hindu-Theatre.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Dutt, M. M. “The Captive Ladie.” *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. pp. 402-431.

⁸⁷ Dutt, M. M. “Letter to ‘My Dearest Friend’.” 14 February, 1849. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 469.

⁸⁸ Dutt, M. M. “The Captive Ladie.” p. 408.

⁸⁹ Dutt, M. M. “The Captive Ladie — Notes to Canto I.” *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. pp. 429-430. p. 429.

It is intriguing to note that Madhusudan did not refer to any Sanskrit or Bengali text even when he was describing a situation that was supposed to be familiar to the Bengalis of Calcutta in particular and to the Indians in general; rather he is continuously cross-referencing Orientalist texts translated or written by the British as his authoritative sources of information. At the same time, he was directly referring to Greek or Latin classical texts, which are also part of European classical literature and are apparently unrelated to the Sanskrit or Bangla body of literature.

Further, Madhusudan unquestionably followed the poetic trope of the Company poets: Hindu mythological characters were continually mentioned and placed in comparison to the figures from Roman and Greek mythology. These poetic practices, separately as well as together, bring to fore the natural question: whom did Madhusudan expect to be the readers of his poems? A few instances from his footnotes, where he drew analogy between the Indian mythological characters and the Greek gods are: hailing Sita as the Indian Helen— “the abduction of Seeta— the Indian Helen, and wife of Rama”,⁹⁰ likening Shiva to Neptune— “Like Neptune Sheva wears a trident called in Sanscrit “Trisulum”;⁹¹ describing the Brahmin as “something like a “Seraphic doctor” amongst the Hindus”;⁹² and, illustrating “Swerga’s bow’rs”⁹³ as “[t]he Hindu Olympus”.⁹⁴ In a footnote to his poem, “Visions of the Past”,⁹⁵ he described Mount Sumeru with a similar trait of comparison:

The mountain Sumero (which according to Hindu mythology is of pure gold) is the Olympus of the Hindus.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Dutt, M. M. “The Captive Ladie — Notes to Canto II.” *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. pp. 430-431. p. 430.

⁹² Dutt, M. M. “The Captive Ladie — Notes to Canto I.” p. 430.

⁹³ Dutt, M. M. “The Captive Ladie.” p. 411.

⁹⁴ Dutt, M. M. “The Captive Ladie — Notes to Canto I.” p. 430.

⁹⁵ Dutt, M. M. “Visions of the Past.” *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. pp. 448-455.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 455.

Often in the footnotes attached to the poems, Madhusudan referred to the Hindus as heathens, as if in complete negation and oblivion of the fact that he himself was a Hindu before he converted to Christianity. One such occasion is a footnote attached to the Second Canto of the poem, “The Captive Ladie”:

The three worthies — Cali, Sheva and Sri — are supposed to be the guardian deities of royal families.— I have, in introducing them here, availed myself of the popular belief, *common amongst all heathens*, that when misfortune is about to befall a family its Penates desert it. [*italics mine*]⁹⁷

He even unabashedly called Bhoodeb Mukhopadhyay, the distinguished nineteenth century intellectual, writer and ardent nationalist, who was also one of his very close friend and confidante, a “Heathen rascal.”⁹⁸ Furthermore, Madhusudan had made several references to Hugh Murray’s *Historical and Descriptive Account of British India*,⁹⁹ published in three volumes in 1832, and, interestingly, also to its several editions that were published thereafter over the next two decades. It is intriguing to find an Anglophile Indian, like Madhusudan, questioning the fallacy of certain comparisons and descriptions that Murray had written in his book. One such occasion is when Madhusudan pointed out the inaccuracies in the descriptions of Goddess Kali, as was offered by Hugh in the Second Volume of his book:

This is the Goddess Cali. —“She (Cali) is black, with four arms, wearing two bodies as ear-rings,—a neck-lace of skulls, and the hands of several slaughtered giants round her waist as a girdle.” &c. *British India*— Vol. II. There are some inaccuracies in this description. Cali does not “wear two dead bodies as ear-rings.” I have in my description omitted the circumstances of her having four arms.¹⁰⁰

Madhusudan, in his descriptions of Indian culture and Indian topography, persistently referred to texts that were authored not by the Indians, but by the British. Mentioning

⁹⁷ Dutt, M. M. “The Captive Ladie — Notes to Canto II.” p. 431.

⁹⁸ Dutt, M. M. “Letter to Bhoodeb.” 27 May, 1849. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 472.

⁹⁹ Murray, Hugh. *Historical and Descriptive Account of British India: From the Remote Period to the Present Time*. In Three Volumes. Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd; New York: J. J. Harper, 1832.

¹⁰⁰ Dutt, M. M. “The Captive Ladie — Notes to Canto II.” p. 430.

them as his sources of information, Madhusudan quoted frequently from books written by the Company men on Indian history and mythology, or those that were translated by them from Sanskrit and Persian. The British in India and their books had such a deep impact on Madhusudan that in his writings he never mentioned or quoted from the original Sanskrit or Persian texts, even though he knew the languages. In a footnote to “The Captive Ladie”, while speaking of a Hindu custom, he quoted directly from Alexander Dow’s *The History of Hindostan*,¹⁰¹ which is an English translation of the original Persian text written by Mahomed Kasim *Ferishta*:

“It was in those days a custom of the Hindus, that whatever Raja was twice worsted by the Mussulmen, should be, by that disgrace, rendered unfit for further command. Jeipal in compliance to this custom, having raised his son to the Government, ordered a funeral pile to be prepared upon which he sacrificed himself to his Gods.” Dow’s *Ferishta*, Vol. I. 45. (Third Edition).¹⁰²

Dow, who is referred to in this footnote, was born in 1735 in Scotland and died in India in 1779. He served the Bengal infantry during the 1760s, and was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel and then quickly to that of Captain by the end of his military career. He was an Orientalist in spirit, wrote a number of successful plays, and had translated several works from Persian to English, of which the one mentioned in the footnote, was a hugely successful publication. After being first published in 1769, the book ran into several editions, with the 1772 edition containing two additional dissertations titled “On the Origin and Nature of Despotism in Hindostan” and “An Enquiry into the State of Bengal”, both written by Dow. Madhusudan, who was only too inclined at that point of time in his life to sing eulogies of the British, and fervently believed in their superiority over the Indians, unsurprisingly used Dow’s well-known text for information on his own country and its people. He dedicated his most elaborate poem, “The Captive Ladie”, not

¹⁰¹ Dow, Alexander. *The History of Hindostan, Translated from the Persian*. In Three Volumes. London: John Murray, 1792.

¹⁰² Dutt, M. M. “The Captive Ladie — Notes to Canto II.”p. 431.

to his Indian friends or patrons, but to George Norton, Esq., the then Advocate-General of the Presidency of Madras, whom he described as “a great encourager of Literature”.¹⁰³

James Tod was another Orientalist scholar, who worked for the East India Company as a military officer, and published several works related to Indian history and geography, primarily related to his travels in Rajasthan. In a letter to Raj Narain, Madhusudan openly admitted borrowing the well-known story of the unhappy princess, Kissen Kumary, from James Tod’s *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast’han*¹⁰⁴ for writing a tragedy in prose, namely *Krishna Kumari*.¹⁰⁵ He even specifically mentioned the volume and the page number where the story of Kissen Kumary was mentioned in Tod’s book.¹⁰⁶ The romantic nationalism that Tod espoused in his works inspired some significant works in Bangla literature, other than that of Madhusudhan’s; such works are Jyotirindranath Tagore’s *Sarojini ba Chittor Akraman*¹⁰⁷ and Girishchandra Ghosh’s *Ananda Raho*¹⁰⁸ and Rangalal Bandyopadhyay’s *Padmini-Upakhyan*.¹⁰⁹

In a letter to Bhoodeb Mukhopadhyay, dated 27th May, 1849, Madhusudan appealed to him to modify the notes, illustrating the portions on Hindu customs and rituals with quotations from original Sanskrit texts— all because he intended to re-publish “The Captive Ladie” in London. He was prudent enough to gauge the accolades and critical appreciation he would have received from the British men of letters, had he included original Oriental texts as sources of information besides quoting from the English translations. He wrote:

When you get my poem, I hope, you will re-write the Notes
and enlarge them. I trust much to your knowledge of Hindu

¹⁰³ Dutt, M. M. “Letter to ‘My Dearest Friend’.” 19 March, 1849. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 470.

¹⁰⁴ Tod, James. *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast’han, Or the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India*. 2 vols. London: Smith, Elder; Calkin and Budd, 1829-32.

¹⁰⁵ Dutt, Michael Madhusudan. *Krishna Kumari. Natok*. Calcutta: Arunoday Ghosh. 1860.

¹⁰⁶ Dutt, M. M. “Letter to Raj.” n.d. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 490.

¹⁰⁷ Tagore, Jyotirindranath. *Sarojini ba Chittor Akraman*. Calcutta: Kalidas Chakraborty, 1881.

¹⁰⁸ Ghosh, Girishchandra. *Ananda Raho*. Calcutta: Girishchandra Ghosh, 1881.

¹⁰⁹ Bandyopadhyay, Rangalal. *Padmini-Upakhyan*. Calcutta: Aswini Kumar Haldar, 1858.

Antiquities. I have some intention of republishing it in London with my new Poem. Can't you quote Sanscrit authority for all I say? Do write a learned Essay "garnished with Sanscrit and other quotations on the Rajshooya Jujnum." I shall acknowledge it publicly.¹¹⁰

The poet's wish, however, was never fulfilled, and the poem was not republished in London. Nonetheless, it may be surmised that Madhusudan's knowledge on Hindu rituals and customs was primarily vicarious, derived from the Orientalist translations of those times. The case with Madhusudan offers a fair idea, although quite generalised, about the kind of Western education that the youths of the Hindu College or Bishop College were receiving in the nineteenth century.

In a letter written to Gour, Madhusudan explicitly talked about his intended audience and his purpose of writing plays in English:

I am aware, my dear fellow, that there will, in all likelihood, be something of a foreign air about my drama; but if the language be not ungrammatical, if the thoughts be just and glowing, the plot interesting, the characters well maintained, what care you if there be a foreign air about the thing? Do you dislike Moore's poetry because it is full of Orientalism? Byron's poetry for its Asiatic air, Carlyle's prose for its Germanism? Besides, remember that I am writing for that portion of my countrymen who think as I think, whose minds have been more or less imbued with western ideas and *modes of thinking*; and that it is my intention to throw off the fetters forged for us by a servile admiration of everything sanskrit.¹¹¹

Madhusudan's ideas and intentions legitimately reflect the ethos of the rich and upper-class Bengali 'babu' or 'bhadralok' (roughly translated as 'gentleman') of nineteenth century British India, who were receiving Western education: they admired the Western culture, Western literature, Western thoughts and ideals, and, above all, Western civilisation, while at the same time, were tutored to hold in disgust "everything sanskrit". This current of thought was contrary to that of the Sanskrit pundits and other group of

¹¹⁰ Dutt, M. M. "Letter to Bhoodeb." 27 May, 1849. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 472.

¹¹¹ Dutt, M. M. "Letter to Gour." n.d. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 478.

Bengali intellectuals, like Rammohan Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, and later Rabindranath Tagore, who relentlessly worked towards and strongly advocated the marriage of Sanskrit heritage with liberal Western education.

Madhusudan in his letters recurrently acknowledged the philanthropic endeavours of John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune, and often solicited his opinion on his poems.¹¹² Bethune was the eminent British barrister and member of the Governor-General's Council, who actively engaged himself in pioneering women's education in nineteenth century British India. In fact, it was Bethune who had pointed it out to Madhusudan that he better write poetry in his own language, Bangla, thereby enriching it, than to try his hand unsuccessfully at composing English verse. After Madhusudan turned to writing in Bangla, and particularly after the success of *Sharmista*,¹¹³ he gained a tremendous confidence as a poet, which he lacked when his English literary endeavours were not well-received. A few days after the publication of the play from Calcutta, he wrote to Gour:

This *Sharmista* has very nearly put me at the head of all Bengali writers. People talk of its poetry with rapture.¹¹⁴

The excitement of the poet in having revealed to himself the beauty and richness of the Bangla language, is evident in his letter dated 24th April, 1860, which he wrote a year after the successful publication of the play, to Raj Narain Basu, the eminent nineteenth century educationist, litterateur and nationalist intellectual. He celebrated the use of blank verse in Bangla in unconditional terms:

I do not know what European told you that I had a great contempt for Bengali, but that was a fact. But now— I even go the length of believing that our Blank Verse “thrashes the Englishers” as an American would say! But joking

¹¹² Dutt, M. M. “Letter to Bhoodeb.” 27 May, 1849. p. 473; “Letter to Gour.” 6 July, 1849. pp. 474-475. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*.

¹¹³ Dutt, Michael Madhusudan. *Sharmistha. Natok*. Calcutta: Iswar Chandra Basu Co., 1859.

¹¹⁴ Dutt, M. M. “Letter to Gour.” 19 March, 1859. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 480.

apart, is not Blank verse in our language quite as grand as in any other?¹¹⁵

Madhusudan himself realised and acknowledged his earlier abhorrence for Bangla, but only after practical circumstances untutored him of his Anglophile inclinations. But, by dint of his vast knowledge and avid reading of Western literary works, he gifted Bangla literature the lyrical influences of the world's greatest litterateurs, and introduced the sonnet and blank verse to the rich repertoire of Bangla poetry. It would not be an exaggeration to say that with Madhusudan, Bangla poetry seems to have gained the grandeur of Miltonic verse.

Although he remarked that he cared not a "pin's head" for the Hindu religion, he also acknowledged that he relished and relied on the tales of Hindu mythology to spin his poetic yarns.¹¹⁶ It, however, is imperative that in order to appreciate Madhusudan's experimentation with verse in the Bangla language, one needs to have a comprehensive understanding of the Western influences on him— the Western education he received in Hindu College and Bishop's College, his admiration of the English language, and, his exposure to and acquaintance with the literary endeavours of the Company poets.

Shoshee Chunder Dutt: "[A]venue to truth and rectitude"¹¹⁷

Shoshee Chunder Dutt was the only Indian poet to be included amongst the eighteen versifiers by editor and anthologist, Thomas Philip Manuel, in the volume, *The Poetry of our Indian Poets*.¹¹⁸ Manuel, however, himself provides a sort of apology for the introduction of the Indian poet:

¹¹⁵ Dutt, M. M. "Letter to Raj Narain." 24 April, 1860. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 483.

¹¹⁶ Dutt, M. M. "Letter to Raj Narain." 15 May, 1860. *Madhusudan Rachanabali*. p. 484.

¹¹⁷ Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. "Young Bengal; His Position and Importance." *Stray Leaves; or, Essays, Poems, and Tales*. Calcutta, D'Rozario & Co., 1864. pp. 95-112.

¹¹⁸ Manuel, Thomas Philip, ed. *The Poetry of our Indian Poets*. Calcutta: D'Rozario and Co., 1861.

... Manuel is apologetic about the inclusion, pleading that the work of the youth, Shoshee Chunder Dutt, shows promise, though, naturally, much sophistication cannot be expected of a mere Bengali.¹¹⁹

The anthology also included the poems of two women, namely Emma Roberts and Mary Seyers Carshore. The anonymous reviewer in the *Calcutta Review* made derogatory comments on the presence of these two women poets:

We think Mr. Manuel has made a serious mistake in including these two lady rhymesters in his list, inasmuch as the friendliest reviewer would fail to prove them ever endowed with one single poetic ray of inspiration.¹²⁰

The reviewer nowhere in the review mentioned Shoshee or his poems, thus categorically ignoring the presence of the Indian poet in the anthology. This silence on the part of the reviewer was a potent way of negating the contribution of the Indian as something inferior, in the opinion of the reviewer, even to the poems of the white women, something below the dignity of the white male reviewer to talk about. The white female had thus been ‘otherised’ and barred from participating in the accepted literary discourse; but the Indian male then had been doubly ‘otherised’. Yet it is this silence about the Indian poet that draws the attention of the scholar in the twenty-first century; it turns out to be that particular marker which is perhaps more eloquent than words. That in spite of such compelling tendencies of ‘othering’ in the English language literary circuit of British India, Shoshee Chunder Dutt had found a place in the anthology speaks volumes of the merit of his writings.

Unlike Kasiprasad Ghosh and Michael Madhusudan Dutt, both of whom are still remembered as the first Bengali poets venturing out to compose poems in English in the nineteenth century, very little information is available on Shoshee Chunder Dutt, although

¹¹⁹ Nair, Rukmini Bhaya. “Reading Texts, Resurrecting Cultures: Colonial Poetry in India (1757-1857).” *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch: The Idea of Difference*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002. pp. 3-40. p. 11.

¹²⁰ Anon. “*The Poetry of our Indian Poets, edited by Thomas Philip Manuel. No. 1 and 2. Calcutta. 1860.*” *The Calcutta Review*. Vol. XXXV. September-December, 1860. pp. vii-ix. p. viii.

he remains an important literary figure of the time. Some biographical information is available in the Preface he wrote to the first volume of *The Works of Shoshee Chunder Dutt, Second Series: Imaginative, Descriptive and Metrical*.¹²¹ He was born on the 26th of April, 1824, in the affluent Bengali family of the Dutt's, descendants of the acclaimed Nilmoney Dutt (spelling unchanged), who had established himself as a man of important social standing in Calcutta. Shoshee received formal education only for a period ten years. Unlike the sons of his uncle, Rosomoy Dutt, Kishen, Kylash, Govin, Hur, and Greece, who converted to Christianity, Shoshee and his family remained Hindu. Most of the members of four consecutive generations of the Dutt family contributed substantially to both English and Bangla literature during that period. The Dutt family of Rambagan became so significant as versifiers that Richardson called them "Rambagan nest of singing birds".¹²² However, the impact of the difference in religion professed by the two branches of the family is perceptible in the literature produced by them:

Though relationships between the Christian and the Hindu branches of the family remained cordial as ever, the conversion did result in a slight difference in outlook, which noticeably affected their literary productions.¹²³

While in the literature of the converted Dutt family— the poems being together published in the volume, *The Dutt Family Album*¹²⁴— there are distinct traces of admiration for the West and the white man is almost always eulogised, the writers of the Hindu side of the Dutt family evinced nationalist sentiments in their writings. Shoshee, for instance, used the term "nation" as early as 1845 in his fictional piece, "Republic of Orissa: Annals from

¹²¹ Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. *The Works of Shoshee Chunder Dutt, Second Series: Imaginative, Descriptive and Metrical*. In Six Volumes. London: Lovell Reeve and Co., 1885.

¹²² Das, Harihar. *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*. London: Oxford University Press, 1921. p. 16.

¹²³ Huq, Kaiser. "Introducing South Asian Poetry in English: The Dutt's of Rambagan." *The Daily Star*. Vol. 5. No. 315. April 16, 2005. n. pag.

¹²⁴ *The Dutt Family Album*. London: Lopngmans, Green, & Co., 1870.

the Pages of the Twentieth Century”,¹²⁵ where he imagined a fanciful tale of rebellion of the Kingarees who would come out victorious in the twentieth century war against colonial rule. Similar imaginings of nationalist feelings are echoed in his poems, such as in “India”:

I dreamt a dream of strange and wild delight,
Freedom’s pure shrine once more illumed did seem,
...
Science again aspired to the sky,
And patriot valour watch’d the smiling strand:
A dream! A dream! Why should a dream it be?
Land of my fathers! canst thou never be free?¹²⁶

These nationalist sentiments are overtly striking in his poems, because Shoshee served the East India Company as a ‘kerani’ (clerk) for a very long time and finally rose to the rank of Head Assistant of the Bengal Secretariat. He had a long service life of thirty-four years and had received the coveted title of ‘Raibahadur’— it was a title conferred by the British Government to distinguished civil officers.

From the 1840s onwards, Shoshee started publishing in newspapers, magazines and journals under two different pseudonyms, J.A.G. Barton and Horatio Bickerstaffe Rowney. The noms de plume were, however, used primarily for the publications in Britain, thus appropriating the coloniser’s name and religion, at least in the realm of literature, with the purpose of positioning himself on equal footing. His first published work, *Miscellaneous Verses*¹²⁷ (1842), Shoshee proudly said, merited attention from significant British officers, like Cecil Beadon, Secretary to the Board of Revenue, and Arthur Hobhouse, Assistant Sub-treasurer.¹²⁸ This collection was later further expanded

¹²⁵ Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. “Republic of Orissa: Annals from the Pages of the Twentieth Century”. *The Saturday Evening Hurkaru*. May 25, 1845. p. 114.

¹²⁶ Dutt, Shoshhe Chunder. “Sonnets. India—III.” *Mapping the Nation: An Anthology of Indian Poetry in English, 1870-1920*. Ed. Sheshalatha Reddy. London, New York, Delhi: Anthem Press, 2013. p. 10.

¹²⁷ Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. *Miscellaneous Verses*. Calcutta: F. Carbery, 1842.

¹²⁸ Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. Preface. *The Works of Shoshee Chunder Dutt. Second Series. Imaginative, Descriptive, and Metrical. In Six Volumes*. Vol. I. London: Lovell Reeve and Co., 1885. p. vi.

and reprinted as *Vision of Sumeru and Other Poems*¹²⁹ in 1878. Shoshee had gifted early Indian English literature some of the brilliant essays,¹³⁰ such as “Vedantism”, “An Essay on Hindu Caste” and “Young Bengal”, all of which were awarded prizes and met with congratulatory reviews in the *Blackwood’s Magazine* in 1854.¹³¹ From 1870 onwards Shoshee’s works were published simultaneously from London and Calcutta. Shoshee’s use of ethnographic as well as historical modes in his prose writings appropriated the subject position of the coloniser in his interpretive authority, and thus he created for himself, besides the noms de plume he used, multiple subjectivities— a position from where he could interrogate social and political realities and possibilities beyond the reality of the colonial regime. Shoshee’s appropriation of such multiple subjectivities rendered the dynamic of binary opposition between the coloniser and the colonised extremely complex, and at the same time, problematised his identity and allegiance.

Like Madhusudan Dutt and Kasiprasad Ghosh, Shoshee too took to English as his medium of expression for his literary endeavours, but, unlike them, no record has been found that he had ever written in Bangla. Shoshee, like all the other young Indians who had received Western education in the first half of the nineteenth century, was influenced by such teachers as Richardson, and advocated the need to express oneself in English:

If Young Bengal is in uprightness, fidelity and truth, superior to his ancestors, he owes it entirely to the culture of European education, from which he has imbibed ideas which exist not in the storehouse of Oriental learning. A knowledge of the English language is certainly not to be considered as a standard of individual excellence; but it throws open every avenue to truth and rectitude, and the best specimens of the Young Bengal class are certainly to be found amongst those who have cultivated it well.¹³²

¹²⁹ Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. *Vision of Sumeru, and Other Poems*. Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, and Co., 1878.

¹³⁰ Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. *Essays on Miscellaneous Subjects*. Calcutta: Military Orphan Press, 1854.

¹³¹ Anon. “Young Bengal.” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. Vol. LXXV. January-June, 1854. pp. 648-657.

¹³² Dutt, S. C. “Young Bengal; His Position and Importance.” *Stray Leaves*. pp. 95-112. p. 104.

Shoshee felt that imitating the British was essential for progress, and he lauded the Young Bengal group and the Parsees for standing up to the task:

... two classes were called forth into existence, both imbued with new ideas and aspirations, both determined to assert their right to be even with the times. These two classes are the Pársees of Bombay, and Young Bengal— both at present mostly aping their conquerors, not only in their virtues, but also in their vices; but both destined in time to work great ends, and especially to promote knowledge and enlightenment in the land.¹³³

However much Shoshee might have looked towards the West for progress, he was at the same time a staunch critic of the colonial administration and the colonisers' way of life.

Shoshee's most substantial poem, "The Vision of Sumeru", was first published in 1854 in *Miscellaneous Poems*, and was subsequently republished in 1878 in his collection of verses, *A Vision of Sumeru, and Other Poems*;¹³⁴ this republication of the poem was primarily intended for the British readers. The poem treats its subject in a complex manner: there is a contest between the traditional Hindu Gods and Christianity, in which Christianity finally prospers. The concern of the Hindu Gods are expressed in terms of the lament for and loss of the glory of yester years:

That from the Earth and Sea
Nor vows are offer'd us, nor prayer.
It was not thus in days of yore;¹³⁵

And this situation was ascribed to the 'powers' of the "alien gods", which allude unmistakably to the imperial powers and the Christian missionary activities:

This is no time for us to fret;
When alien gods earth's homage claim¹³⁶

¹³³ Dutt, Shoshee Chunder. "The Pársees, Young Bengal, and the Bráhmós." *India, Past and Present; with Minor Essays on Cognate Subjects*. London: Chatto and Windus, Piccadilly, 1880. pp. 158-175. pp. 159-160.

¹³⁴ Dutt, S. C. "A Vision of Sumeru." *Vision of Sumeru*. pp. 1-79.

¹³⁵ Dutt, S. C. *Vision of Sumeru*. p. 11.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 19.

Shoshee's poem seems to be inspired by Milton in its form and style of versification, but the description of the Hindu Gods is akin to that found in the poems of the British Orientalists and the Company poets whose texts were widely circulated in Calcutta. Like his poetic predecessors, Shoshee also referred to Henry Meredith Parker's poem, "Draught of Immortality."¹³⁷ Although Shoshee did not draw frequent analogies between the Hindu deities and the Greco-Roman gods, there were occasional references, in the manner of the Orientalist poetry by the British, to the characters of Greek and Roman mythology in his poems. He described Ganesa (spelling unchanged) as "the child of Umá without a father, as Mars of Juno";¹³⁸ compared Hiranyabáhoo (spelling unchanged) to "[t]he Soane, the Eranoboas of the Greeks";¹³⁹ and reminded his readers the deceiving of Alemena by Jupiter while talking about Brinda who was deceived by Vishnu in the Hindu mythology.¹⁴⁰ Such allusions to and comparisons of the myths of the East and the West indicate that he aspired for a wide readership not only amongst the British in India, but also amongst the Europeans. Despite the brilliant description of the Hindu Gods that Shoshee offered in his poem, the text bespeak the triumph of Christianity, and the entire poem is steeped in the Orientalist's argument of the superiority of Christianity over Hinduism:

...To worship Him
Of whom so loudly trumpets fame;
Jehovah, Jesus, this His shrine;
 But where's His form divine?
 Or where His throne?
 They pray'd, they sung;
Such prayer devout, such pious lay,
 Kindling with heavenly fire,
On Pavan's ears had never rung;
And yet they worshipp'd but a name,
A God unseen, a God unknown!¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Ibid. p. 8.

¹³⁸ Ibid. p. 18.

¹³⁹ Ibid. p. 50.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 63.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p. 55.

A striking feature of the poem is that the reference to the Muslim rulers and their rule in Bengal had been completely effaced from the narration of the poem. As I have pointed out earlier in this Chapter, it was an essential strategy of the imperial machinery to invoke the Hindu past as an age of glory, and silence the Muslim rule of the immediate past as one of massacre and notoriety; and Shoshee, like the other English-educated Bengali intellectuals of the time, expressed a similar sentiment in his writings.

Shoshee demonstrated a comparable attitude in the very next poem, “Address to the Ganges”,¹⁴² with which the Second Section of the book, “Indian Ballads” opens:

Canst thou forget the glorious past?
 When, mighty as a god,
 With hands and heart unfetter'd yet,
 And eyes with slavish tears unwet,
 Each sable warrior trod
 The sacred shore; before the blast
 Of Moslem conquest hurried by;
 Ere yet the Mogul spear was nigh.¹⁴³

The poem persuasively harped on the idea of freedom and the present state of shame in which the Indians were, but the contempt was not directed against the British.

Shoshee, as was expected from the students of the Hindu College at that time, borrowed themes from other Orientalist works for his poems. In the biographical Preface to the collected volume of his *Works*, Shoshee mentioned that he had used as subjects for his writings very many passages from Malcolm's *Memoir of Central India*,¹⁴⁴ Duff's *History of Mahrattas*¹⁴⁵ and Tod's *Annals of Rajast'han*.¹⁴⁶ For instance, the story of “Jeejee's Bridal”,¹⁴⁷ as mentioned by the poet at the very beginning of the poem, had

¹⁴² Dutt, S C. “Address to the Ganges.” *Vision of Sumeru*. pp. 80-84.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 81.

¹⁴⁴ Malcolm, Sir John. *A Memoir of Central India, including Malwa, and adjoining Provinces. With the History and Copious Illustrations, of the Past and Present Condition of that Country*. In two Volumes. London: Kingbury, Parbury, and Allen, 1824.

¹⁴⁵ Duff, James Grant. *A History of the Mahrattas*. In Three Volumes. London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1826.

¹⁴⁶ Dutt, S. C. Preface. *The Works*. p. vi.

¹⁴⁷ Dutt, S. C. “Jeejee's Bridal.” *Vision of Sumeru*. pp. 89-92.

been borrowed from Duff's *History of the Mahrattas*. The poet, in the particular case of the poem "Prithu Rái",¹⁴⁸ even acknowledged that Horace Hayman Wilson had published "a much nobler effusion"¹⁴⁹ on the same subject, but humbly admitted that he was not aware of it when he had composed the poem. In numerous poems, as in "The Warrior's Return",¹⁵⁰ "Go Where Glory Calls Thee",¹⁵¹ and "Prithu Rái", Shoshee celebrated the valour of the Marathas and the Rajputs in their battle with the Muslims, thus invoking the same sense of pride for the Hindu past. It were these poetic endeavours to revive the glorious past that later infused a strong sense of nationalism in Indian English poetry written in the beginning of the twentieth century.

Concluding Remarks

The thrust on Orientalist learning and English education had created an atmosphere in nineteenth century British India that sustained the ideology of the empire even in the writings of the Indians who were educated in the institutions governed by the British. It is, therefore, quite intriguing that the seeds of cultural nationalism in Indian literature were germinating in the texts of these very writers who were educated by the British. Thus the amazing paradox of literary history presents itself in a fascinating way in the trajectory of Indian English literature, as we understand it today. However, as I have shown on numerous occasions, the English language literary compositions of the Indians, especially the Bengalis, were so compelling that even the coloniser had to acknowledge the merit of the achievements of their colonised subjects. The most remarkable instance perhaps is the text of dedication written by the prominent British

¹⁴⁸ Dutt, S. C. "Prithu Rái." *Vision of Sumeru*. pp. 104-108.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 104.

¹⁵⁰ Dutt, S. C. "The Warrior's Return." *Vision of Sumeru*. pp. 120-122.

¹⁵¹ Dutt, S. C. "Go Where Glory Calls Thee." *Vision of Sumeru*. pp. 112-115.

litterateur, Theodore Douglas Dunn, for his edited anthology, *The Bengali Book of English Verse*, in the twentieth century:

To
His Excellency
The Earl of Ronaldshay
This Memorial of Bengali Achievement
in
the Language of the British Empire.¹⁵²

¹⁵² Dunn, Theodore Douglas, ed. *The Bengali Book of English Verse*. n. pag.

CONCLUSION

Company Poetry: Texts of Desire and Texts of Ideology

The reader who desires some acquaintance with the poetry produced by Englishmen in India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has no conveniently single book of reference. Unless he is prepared to spend hours of investigation in a few selected libraries, he will read none but the best known authors. He will not discover the delightful *Letters of Simpkin the Second*, nor revel in the Hudibrastic nonsense of *Qui Hai. Tom Raw, the Griffin*, will be unknown to him; and all that occasional writing, often coarsely realistic, that belongs to an age when the trick of pleasing expression in verse came as easy to the gentlemen of England as the nimble handling of a rapier. He may come across the gentle verse of Reginald Heber, and learn something of the vigour of John Leyden; but he will not make the acquaintance of Henry Meredith Parker, whose delicate humour illumines historical and topical themes. He will miss the scholarly work of David Lester Richardson, whose varied career as soldier and teacher brought him into touch with every phase of Anglo-Indian life in the first half of the nineteenth century. Sir Alfred Lyall's verse may lie to his hand, along with the *Departmental Ditties*. But, unless he has unusual good fortune, he will not easily find the *Leviora* of Thomas Francis Bignold, nor delight in that unexampled quatrain that has immortalised Eastern Bengal. In short, he will be deprived of a great amount of the pleasure to be found in the occasional verse written in and about India throughout the first three quarters of the nineteenth century.¹

Researching the poets of John Company nearly a century after Theodore Douglas Dunn expressed his eagerness for resurrecting the poetic voices of Englishmen in India and lamented the inadequate availability of those texts, my dissertation has been an attempt to uncover the poetic treasure that lay hidden in the dust-smitten and mould-ridden archives of nineteenth century British India. These texts, as I have shown in my analysis, can be

¹ Dunn, Theodore Douglas. Introduction. *Poets of John Company*. Ed. Theodore Douglas Dunn. Calcutta and Simla: Thacker, Spink & Co; London: W. Thacker, 1921. p. xii.

read simultaneously as texts of desire and as texts of ideology. On the one hand, the British colonisers in India wanted to project “India” as dark yet desirable, hinting at the difficulty of their task of carrying out the imperial mission and also obliquely drawing attention to the thrilling sense of excitement and victory at having been able to accomplish that task successfully. On the other hand, literature, especially poetry — because that is the genre of literature which abounds in most allusions and illusions — served as the perfect medium through which the cultural and racial distancing of the self from the ‘other’ was made possible; and, in the process, this ‘distance’ could be ingrained without coercion in the psychology of the readers, which included not only the British but also the English-educated intelligentsia of the colonised society. Poetry offered the Englishman in India a space where he could freely voice the desolation of exile, the dissipations of expatriate life, the dissent over the political strategies of governing India, and give shape to an “India” the contours of which immaculately fitted his imperial imagination and colonial ideology. It is this idea of “India” in particular and the Orient in general formed through the texts of the minor poets that played first fiddle to the writers of the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries in Europe and America, who never came to India in person, but were writing about or obliquely referring to India or the Orient, or any of its obvious qualities. It is, therefore, important to deconstruct the poetics of this construct of “India”, the foundation of which was rooted in the imperial ideology. The later texts, which continued the literary tradition of alluding to or speaking about India, were, therefore, in some way or the other, building on that unreal and imaginary construct of “India”, and thus sustained the dreams and motives of the British colonisers.

The emphasis on teaching English literature to the educated Indians, the marginal allowance that they enjoyed to participate in the English language literary culture, their almost imperceptible access to the English stage of the Calcutta theatres — all these

gentle gestures of inclusion may actually be interpreted as extrapolations of that imperial ideology which was contained in the texts of the poems written by the colonising entrepreneur themselves in the nascent stage of the colonising culture. For the colonial mission to be successful, it was essential for the colonised society to acknowledge the superiority of the coloniser, while at the same time, admitting their own subservient quality, thus enlarging and enforcing the ‘distance’ between the two societies. Jyotsna G. Singh has drawn our attention to this “hegemonic activity”:

Several recent studies, most notably by Gauri Vishwanathan, have persuasively argued that both the Anglicists and the English Orientalists partook of the notion that cultural values moved *downward* from a position of power. Thus, in introducing English literature to the elite Indians — or in allowing them access to Calcutta theaters — the colonial rulers were not being egalitarian, but rather engaging in a “hegemonic activity” by which, in Gramsci’s terms, “the consent of the governed is secured through intellectual and moral manipulation rather than through military force.”²

It was, however, equally important, or perhaps more so, to ingrain the ideology of cultural and racial hierarchisation in the psychology and consciousness of the colonisers themselves. The British should not only believe in the subservient quality of the Indians, but must also have faith in their own superiority, if any form of hegemonic control were to be exercised by them over the Indians. Poetry offered them just the vessel they needed to contain these differences: in it, the images of the founding fathers of British colonialism could be magnified and eulogised, frequent analogies could be drawn between the greatest conquests in European history and the victories of the British forces over Indian territories, India could be portrayed as sensuous, exotic and primitive, Indians could be described as debauched, licentious and corrupt, the knowledge about India and

² Singh, Jyotsna G. *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: “Discoveries” of India in the Language of Colonialism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996. p. 123.

its people could be exhibited, and thus “the white man’s burden”³ of civilising and ennobling the colonised society could be justified. And, all these pronouncements could be negotiated within the textural space of poetry without vociferous advocacy of the dominance or the excellence of the self. Gauri Viswanathan, in her critical monograph, *Masks of Conquest*, elucidates how the need of English language and British literature in the curricula of education in India was literally invented for colonial purposes, she also emphasises the necessity of “the imperial mission of educating and civilising colonial subjects in the literature and thought of England, a mission that in the long run served to strengthen Western cultural hegemony in enormously complex ways”.⁴ I have argued in my dissertation that the construction of the idea of “India”, as was presented in the texts of the Company poems, was essential to the formulation of this hegemonic discourse and the consolidation of the British colonial power.

**Dunbar’s “The Regeneration of India”:
A Classic Example of Orientalist Discourse**

My contention that the texts of these poems which I read are vehicles of the British coloniser’s desire as well as his ideology may be theoretically foregrounded by the concepts of latent Orientalism and manifest Orientalism, as was defined by Edward Said. In his book, *Orientalism*, Said identifies two distinct traits of Oriental discourse:

The distinction I am making is really between an almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity, which I shall call *latent* Orientalism, and the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology, and so forth, which I shall call *manifest* Orientalism.⁵

³ Kipling, Rudyard. “The White Man’s Burden.” *McClure’s Magazine*. Vol. 12. No. 4. February, 1899. pp. 290-291.

⁴ Viswanathan, Gauri. *Masks of Conquest: Literary study and British Rule in India*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. p. 2.

⁵ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001. p. 206.

My reading of the Company poems has evinced that a given text cannot be interpreted as embodying solely latent Orientalism or solely manifest Orientalism. These two forms of colonial discourse, far from being mutually exclusive, are rather inter-dependent and inter-related in complex ways. They present themselves in any given text of Company Poetry in varying degrees and in differing forms. The elements of latent Orientalism prefigure the desires of the Englishmen at large, and sometimes align the text with apparent humanitarian sympathies for the Orient, allowing the poet enough space to negotiate his emotions and political opinions; while the elements of manifest Orientalism ostentatiously contribute to the repository of the European knowledge about the Orient. I shall presently discuss John Dunbar's Poem, "The Regeneration of India",⁶ which is a classic text that typifies the essence and attribute of both latent and manifest Orientalism. The poet at once tacitly admits the exploitation and plunder of India's wealth and natural resources by the British forces and merchants, and yet fervently advocates the vision of an India that is resurrected from the heathen practices of idolatry by the Christian doctrines and faith to be instilled by the British. The conscience that is only slightly perturbed by the loot and plunder carried out in India by the British, almost immediately seeks solace in the dream of a Christian India, thus attesting both Britain's supremacy and the primitive, ignoble character of India. The poem begins with the Englishman's desire to project "India" as a site of fantasies and myths bordering on the exotic:

It has been said, and truly said,
That India is the brightest gem,
In England's royal diadem —
Yes — this remark was wisely made.⁷

The emphasis of the poet on the attributes of truth and wisdom contained in the statement is an obvious hint at the psychological requirement of the Englishman in India to believe

⁶ Dunbar, John. "The Regeneration of India." *Poems*. Calcutta: Thacker and Spink, 1853. pp. 174-176.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 174.

in the supremacy of his colonial enterprise. The poet is also painfully conscious of the British exploitation of India:

And what return shall England make,
For all the gold, and silk, and spice,
And countless things of costly price,
Which, year by year, these vessels take?⁸

This feeling of political consciousness and apparent compunction coupled with the portrayal of “India” as a rich and exotic site, unknown yet knowable, conjure up the perfect illustration of what Said called latent Orientalism. However, Dunbar almost instantaneously provides an answer to the rhetorical question he asked in the sixth stanza quoted above. The answer in a way puts the unease of the colonial entrepreneur to rest, and additionally justifies his colonial mission. The poem continues:

The tree of knowledge she shall plant; —
...
The soul imprison'd disenchant
... the rich science of the West
Spreads all its blessing o'er the land.

And it shall come, in God's good time,
That old idolatries shall fall,
And India's millions, prostrate, call
Him only Lord — the Lord sublime.⁹

The implicit statement made in the above lines is obvious: “India” is presented as primitive, savage, heathen, irrational, superstitious and degenerate. It is because “India” is encumbered by all these ignoble and subservient qualities that the question of civilising and ennobling the Indian eventuates, and has to be addressed. In addition, the pronouncements on the characteristics of “India” become more potent and convincing, because it appears from the presentation of the text that Dunbar's purpose was not to comment on the qualities of “India”, but to express an essentially Christian vision of salvaging the colonised land. So, here on offer are the perfect ingredients of what Said

⁸ Ibid. p. 175.

⁹ Ibid. pp. 175-176.

called manifest Orientalism in the form of Dunbar's tacit contribution to the Western receptacle that contained information and knowledge about the Orient, as fettered through Western consciousness and learning. Homi K. Bhabha offers a brilliant corollary to Said's concept of latent and manifest Orientalism, that proposes to integrate these two diachronic aspects of Orientalism, as is commonly found in the texts under my scrutiny. If the Company poems are read as texts that form part of colonial discourse — and this is the determinant that is of fundamental import to my argument — then the text of the Company poems

... in initially setting up an opposition between these two discursive scenes, finally allows them to be correlated as a congruent system of representation that is unified through a political-ideological *intention* which ... enables Europe to advance securely and *unmetaphorically* upon the Orient. Said identifies the *content* of Orientalism as the unconscious repository of fantasy: imaginative writings and essential ideas; and the *form* of manifest Orientalism as the historically and discursively determined, diachronic aspect.¹⁰

I have thus appropriated Bhabha's conceptualisation of engaging “with the alterity and ambivalence of Oriental discourse”¹¹ as an extrapolation of Said's concept of latent and manifest Orientalism, and have applied it to the poems of John Company, which, I have argued, can be interpreted as texts that were an essential part of the Orientalist discursive formation concerned with exercising hegemonic control over India by the British.

Deviations from the ‘Stereotype’: The Heterogeneity of Company Poetry

Bhabha has also contended that one of the most important strategies of this discursive formation is fabricating and reinforcing stereotypes, which, describes “India” or, for the matter, the Orient, with certain fixed attributes, which are all dismissive and

¹⁰ Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 2009. p. 102.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

disparaging. In the essay, “The Other Question: Stereotype, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism”, Bhabha writes:

An important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness. ... likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated.¹²

My reading of the Company poems has, however, presented a picture of colonial discourse that makes infrequent but distinct deviations from the fixed ideological stereotype of “India” that the rest of the poems in this body of literature so meticulously construct.

I have analysed the poems in detail in the Second Chapter titled “The Poetics and Politics of Constructing “India” in a Polyglot Literary Culture: Reading the Verses of John Company”. Consequently, the “India”, that emerged as an ideological construction from the collective texts of most of the poems, using Dyson’s words, may be described as “sink of inequity, its people sunk in appalling degradation, licentiousness, and corruption, bereft of honesty and even of filial, parental, and conjugal affection”.¹³ The authors of these poems, who were themselves working in some capacity or other in the process of building the colonial edifice, reiterated these themes in their poems through various images. The strategy of continual repetition of the primitive and demonic descriptions of India was, as identified by Bhabha, an effective tool with which the early colonisers instated and endorsed the “otherness” of India. So, reiteration was a necessary and deliberate tool for the validation of the colonial ideology.

Interestingly enough, there are a number of poems within the corpus of Company Poetry, which not only deviates from the collective strategy of constructing stereotypes,

¹² Ibid. pp. 94-95.

¹³ Dyson, Ketaki Kushari. *A Various Universe: A study of the Journals and Memoirs of British men and Women in the Indian Subcontinent, 1765-1856*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978. p. 22.

but also question such construction by other poets. The poems along with their associated paratexts that were written by Honoria Marshall Lawrence, Emma Roberts, the unidentified E.L., and Mary Seyers Carshore present delightful departures from the dark, disparaging images of “India”. These poets speak of an “India” that is happy and cheerful, has a glorious past, offers comfort and solace to the expatriate soul, abounds in natural beauty and natural resources, has a rich cultural heritage, and is inhabited by graceful maidens and industrious men with agreeable demeanour. In the paratexts, these poets, as I have shown towards the end of the long Second Chapter of my thesis, engaged in rigorous critique of the representation of “India” in the poems of other authoritative political and literary figures, such as D. L. Richardson and Thomas Moore, while, at the same time, also advancing severe excoriation of the British imperial policies. These poems, especially the paratexts associated with them, enunciate very strong indications at the ‘unreal’ images and experiences of India depicted in other colonial poems. Since these poems were written by white women residing in India as part of families of British colonial officers and mercenaries, and since they were also writing about their experiences in India and thus offering an image of the country that emerged from their texts, so I consider these poems very much a part of the Orientalist discourse. Under this consideration, these poems present a unique case of defying and questioning the ideological stereotype that has often been identified as a discursive strategy of the colonial discourse. What is amazing is that these poems can neither be read as texts of desire nor as texts of ideology: rather they can be interpreted as expressions of such writers who spent some time in India, but was not directly involved in the exercise of colonial power or hegemonic control over it. By saying this, I am by no means implicating that these poems offered a true image of “India”: in fact, I have argued in my thesis that even these poems are intricately engaged with “the politics and ‘aesthetics’ of

spectator-positioning”.¹⁴ Analysing these texts simply as the representation of the domestic Anglo-Indian life is an oversimplification of the process of the formation of the subjects of Orientalist discourse — the coloniser and the colonised, the self and the other.

Bhabha has argued:

My reading of colonial discourse suggests that the point of intervention should shift from the ready recognition of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the *processes of subjectification* made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse. To judge the stereotyped image on the basis of a prior political normativity is to dismiss it, not to displace it, which is only possible by engaging with its *effectivity*; with the repertoire of position of power and resistance; domination and dependence that constructs colonial identification subject (both colonizer and colonized).¹⁵

So, the Orientalist discourse embodied in the texts of the poems of John Company is stupefyingly heterogeneous: they offer ideological constructs of “India” that are in contrast to each other, questioning and critiquing such constructs within the discourse itself. The processes involved in the formation of this discourse are understandably complex, defy any kind of generalisation, and resist all “prior political normativity”.¹⁶ Although there are common tropes that can be identified within this body of literature, yet to read the poems as a collective text of colonial stereotype concerned with the formations of the self and the ‘other’ is to dismiss the nuances of individual voices, poetic practices, and the complex but vibrant little world of literary culture in early nineteenth century British India. In the course of my research, it has been fascinating to read each poem within the context in which it was written and place it within that vast and variegated body of literature which is conventionally called colonial discourse.

¹⁴ Bhabha, p. 100.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 95.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The Dominant Determinant of the ‘Humour’¹⁷ of the Poems

As I went along and fashioned my own critical apparatus for evaluating the poetical output of the British in nineteenth century India, it was engaging to adopt an interdisciplinary approach that took into account the social, cultural and political circumstances in which these poets found themselves. They were undergoing, willingly at certain instances and reluctantly at others, an intricate and elaborate process of assimilating themselves to a different culture, and in establishing the dominance of their own culture over the other cultures that they came in contact with. Some of the significant and recurrent motifs in the text of the Company poems deal with the response of the poet to the Indian topography and the tropical climate; the extensive use of Indian language words, phrases and idioms; the frequent analogies between the British colonial endeavours and the grand conquests of Roman empire; the continual attempts at knowing the ‘other’ in terms of alterity by comparing the Hindu epics and mythical figures with the stories of Greek and Roman mythology and the classical European deities; the moral and aesthetic response of the poets to the experiences they had had in India; the dialectics of power that the individual poet was negotiating; the political situation of the British in India; the ethical response of the individual poet to the imperial policies; the nostalgia and patriotic fervour of the expatriate poet; the influence on them of the cultural and social changes that they effected amongst the Indian intelligentsia; the psychological obligation of the poet to construct “India” as a veritable image of the other; and the emotional requirement of the coloniser to render an aura of exoticism to this “India”. These responses that I mentioned were further conditioned by the events that shaped the social and intellectual history of that period. Ketaki Kushari Dyson has prepared an extensive

¹⁷ I use the word ‘humour’ here in the sense of temperament or mood.

checklist of the factors that determined the structure and nature of the writings of the British men and women in nineteenth century India. She mentions:

[T]he British reaction to Indian art, architecture, music, and dancing, and to the role of women in Indian society; the British discovery of Hinduism and the resulting theological upheavals; the influence of the Orientalist researches on the growth of skeptical philosophy in Europe; the blending of poetic vision and a mercantile optimism; the growth of evangelical anti-Hinduism and Utilitarian progressivism and the entente between the two; the retreat of Orientalism and conservatism and their continuation as significant threads of thinking; the imperial-missionary alliance and conflict; the ecological and economic crises in India; the persistent search for an imperial rationale; the obsession with the comparative assessment of the achievement of different civilizations; the simultaneous strengthening and undermining of Europocentrism; the technique of combining acculturation with the retention of the original identity: the list could be extended.¹⁸

My reading of the Company poems has evinced that although it is ridiculous to expect the influence of all the factors in any one single given text by a British in India, yet none of these conspicuous determinants ever operate in exclusion to the others, and are dependent on each other in quite an intriguing manner. A given poem can be read within the space that the most dominant factor influencing it allows; but neglecting the other factors would simply render the reading incomplete. I have approached these poems with an essentially non-restrictive and flexible perspective that allowed the texts to speak to me in their totality.

In her analysis of the writings of the British residing in India during the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, Ketaki Kushari Dyson has suggested that the political currents, especially the debates related to the formulation and implementation of the imperial policies, were the major factors that shaped these writings; and the changing characteristic of these writings can be understood in relation to the changes in the dominant political ethos of that particular period of time in which a

¹⁸ Dyson. pp. 7-8.

given text was written. This contention implies a simplistic mapping of the variation in the nature of these writings according to chronology and in particular relation to the political atmospheres of Britain and India. Dyson's analysis suggests that the writings of the British in India towards the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries were primarily shaped by the Orientalist "impulse to *conserve* rather than to *destroy* the cultural heritage peculiar to India".¹⁹ She argues that the Evangelical zeal to uphold the Christian doctrines and convert India into a Christian nation was the chief factor that governed the writings of the British during the second decade of the nineteenth century after the Charter Act of 1813 granted the Church free access to India for carrying out its missionary activities. The "socio-political radicalism"²⁰ of the Utilitarian ideology propagated by Thomas Paine and Jeremy Bentham, had significant impact on the British social order and greatly influenced, as Dyson contends, the imperial policies in Britain, as "the conflicts and tensions within British society were carried over to India and mirrored in British activity there".²¹ Dyson argues that the Publication of James Mill's *History of British India*²², was one of the most influential factors that affected the thoughts and the writings of the British in India, and, as such, most of their writings during the third decade of the nineteenth century were shaped by the Benthamite and Utilitarian principles which "emphatically rejected virtually all of Indian culture, considering it to be inferior even to that of the European Middle Ages".²³ Dyson then traces the progression of the political current of British India towards a long drawn debate between the Evangelicals and the Utilitarians, which, she suggests, coloured most of the writings of the British in India during the fourth decade of the nineteenth century. Unlike the Evangelicals and the Utilitarians, both of whom "saw in India a hopelessly decadent society in urgent need of

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 20.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 22.

²¹ Ibid. p. 23.

²² Mill, James. *The History of British India*. In Three Volumes. London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy. 1817.

²³ Dyson. p. 23.

reform”,²⁴ the Orientalists and the Conservatives “saw the folly of tearing out local institutions ‘root and branch’ in the service of an alien ideology”²⁵ and they put up a fierce opposition. It was *the* most important political contestation in British India during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, especially between 1835 and 1857, the two dates marking the watershed events of British Indian history, namely, Macaulay’s Minutes on Education (1835) and the Great Revolt of 1857, the last one also being the date at which Dyson stops her reading of these texts. Dyson suggests that the writings of the British in India during this period were primarily governed by this ideological contentions.

My reading of Company Poetry, however, reveals a slightly different picture. I have argued in my thesis, with copious extracts from the texts, that although the changes in the political atmosphere of British India always affected the perspectives of the poets in considerable ways, but the political parley was by no means the chief determinant in shaping their poetry. My analysis of the poems evinces that although poetry sometimes served as the vehicle for carrying the opinions of the individual poets in relation to the ideological debates concerned with governing India and although it offered them the free space that they were in much need of in order to openly express their argumentations and dissents, the process of writing these poems was for the most part negotiated by the individual experiences of these poets, which had a widely varying range. It were the circumstances of the poet’s life, the scruples of exile, the amusing incidents in the complex process of acculturation that the poet was undergoing, the obsessive urge to propagate the imperial ideology, and the slight or substantial compunction that the poet felt on actually implementing those ideas in his daily life, that were the crucial factors

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 24.

which mediated the texts, and gave shape to that literary discourse, which is defined as Company Poetry.

Western Approaches to Understanding India

In reading the Company poems, especially in analysing the British gaze on India as it was reflected through these texts, I based my contestation on Amartya Sen's discussion in his essay, "Indian Traditions and the Western Imagination".²⁶ Sen offers three distinctive categories in identifying the "several contrasting and conflicting Western approaches to understanding India".²⁷ In the essay, Sen acknowledges that the ideas and images of India that have been constructed by the West are fundamentally contrary to each other, although all these varied and varying interpretations do have an overlapping impact in the context of their effects on the "internal identities of Indians"²⁸ and on the image of "India" in the Western imagination. Sen clearly states the shift of his argument from the contentions of Edward Said on the "internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient".²⁹ He argues that the diverse conceptions of "India", as constructed by the West in a range of discourses, do not conform to any notion of "internal consistency", and the recognition of these fundamental differences in the Western idea of "India" is of significant import to the understanding of the categorisation that he makes. The formulation of Sen is lucid and explicit:

Attempts from outside India to understand and interpret the country's traditions can be put into at least three distinct categories, which I shall call *exoticist* approaches, *magisterial* approaches and *curatorial* approaches. The first (exoticist) category concentrates on the wondrous aspects of India. ...

²⁶ Sen, Amartya. "Indian Traditions and the Western Imagination." *The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian Culture, History and Identity*. London: Penguin Books, 2006. pp. 139-160.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 141.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Said. p. 5.

The second (magisterial) category strongly relates to the exercise of imperial power and sees India as a subject territory from the point of view of its British Governors ...

The third (curatorial) category is the most catholic of the three and includes various attempts at noting, classifying and exhibiting diverse aspects of Indian culture.³⁰

I have found this categorisation of Western approaches to India helpful in reading the Company poems. However, no single poem can be strictly straitjacketed into one particular category, nor can the 'gaze' of a given poet be fixedly defined by any of the parameters associated solely to one category. There are obvious overlapping of interests and perspectives.

In my analysis of the Company poems, I have shown that there are instances in the texts which warrant a genuine interest in India and the concerned poet is neither predisposed to exhibit the strange or the exotic "India" nor is he weighed down by the coloniser's burden of evincing the primitive or the degenerate "India". This is the perspective that Sen defines as the curatorial approach. However, since "knowledge is often associated with power",³¹ so it is sometimes inevitable that the British poet's attempt to systematically catalogue knowledge of and about India was inextricably linked to the imperialist's manoeuvre of power and hegemonic control over India. Such a situation presents itself as the poets themselves were members of the imperial ruling class.

There were innumerable examples, as I have brought to the fore in the Second Chapter, of my dissertation, where the texts of the Company poems contained such elements or manners of description that insisted on describing India as being essentially different from the West, as being strange and exotic. In a way, this manner of constructing "India" may be perceived as the primary step towards the formation of

³⁰ Sen. pp. 141-142.

³¹ Ibid. p. 143.

“India” as the image of the ‘other’ to the Western self. Sen defines it as the exoticist approach and cites Hegel, who said that such an image of India as strange and exotic “has existed for millennia in the imagination of the Europeans”.³² The Company poems, being amongst the early texts by the British that recorded the impressions of India, in more ways than one, were validating that Western imagination, while at the same time, shaping it.

There are such occasions in the poems that I have read in my dissertation where the poet evidently felt the need to pass judgement on the nature and characteristics of India, and in most such cases, the poet’s judgement was fraught with the burden of engendering and propagating the imperial ideology. This kind of presentation, as I have extensively argued in the Second Chapter essentially projected the image of a corrupt, lecherous and subservient “India” in urgent need of reform; hence, justified the ‘civilising mission’ of the white man, and ennobled the British. It is this attitude of ‘understanding’ India with an “outlook that assimilates a sense of superiority and guardianhood”³³ that Sen defines as the magisterial approach, and it is this approach which is most frequently found in the texts of Company Poetry.

However, as I have argued earlier, these categories of Western approaches to India are not mutually exclusive, and a poem or a poet cannot be understood within the stern ambit of one particular category. Sen rightly points out that “[t]hese different approaches have had very diverse impacts on the understanding of Indian intellectual traditions in the West”,³⁴ but concludes judiciously that “their overall impact has been to exaggerate the non-material and arcane aspects of Indian traditions compared to its more rationalistic and analytical elements”.³⁵ Sen’s argument that all these Western approaches to India have

³² Ibid. p. 141.

³³ Ibid. p. 142.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 153.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 159.

accentuated the contrasts rather the commonalities between the West and India also finds attestation in the texts of the Company poems. Sen observes that “[e]ven though the Raj is dead and gone, the impact of the associated images survives”.³⁶ My study of the early nineteenth century Company Poetry has relevance to the present day Western understanding of “India” specifically in the light of this remark, and also because the perception of India in the Western imagination is, like any other perception, a continuous process that builds up on all the previous images and impressions.

Formulating New Approach to Reading Company Poems / Colonial Narratives

A useful paradigm that may be employed in reading Company Poetry (or, for that matter, any colonial narrative written and published during the first half of the nineteenth century in India) is the pattern that I have tried to establish in the course of my dissertation: the dominant attitude present in a poem of any given poet may neither be bracketed according to the stage of the colonial development in which the poet was living, nor may it be classified according to the distinctive categories of Western approaches to India, but the analysis may engage with the dialectics of power in relation to the individual poet; that is to say, the outlook that governed the composition of a poem may be understood in the perspective of the poet’s position in the power structure of the imperial enterprise, and the material advantages that he hoped to gain by expressing in the poems his views and opinions which, in turn, ought to assist the imperial machinery. I shall try to illustrate my argument with the examples of such poets whom I have discussed in my dissertation.

Poets like Henry Meredith Parker and Robert Calder Campbell, who joined the services of the East India Company in minor positions either as a civil servant or as an

³⁶ Ibid. p. 153.

army cadet, and aspired to rise in rank so as to wield more power and influence in the society, used poetry as the medium to express their support of the colonising mission by propagating the imperial ideology. They not only presented “India” through images of savagery, corruption, lechery and duplicity, but also emphasised on the need of urgently reforming that hopelessly decadent society. In most cases, the voices of these poets were heard loud and clear in the corridors of power, and they reaped the benefits of reiterating the ideology of the colonising mission — benefits in the form of higher ranks and greater political power as well as enhanced social prestige. I have shown in detail in the Second Chapter of my dissertation how the experiences of such poets in and of India were often projected in untruthful manners in their poems, so as to fit the bill for the propagation of the imperial ideology. Another notable feature of their poetry was that they never engaged with any sort of critique of the empire. Their immediate motive can hence be surmised as material and pecuniary gain.

At the other end of this spectrum of greed and power, poets such as Honoria Marshall Lawrence and Mary Seyers Carshore can easily be located. These were the poets who were not actively participating in the British colonial enterprise, but were very much a part of it by way of having their immediate family members — father or husband or brother — working in the civil service or military force of the John Company. They did not have anything to gain or even to lose because of what they wrote in their poems. So, their poems, I have argued, were not governed by political motives, although I have also made it clear that the image of “India” presented in their poems is not the only or the entire truth about the country. Yet, it is observed that the “India” which they speak of is cheerful, gracious, diligent and beautiful. These poets engage in fierce criticism of the images of India presented by other poets in their poems, and often challenged the veracity of those images. Practically they question the very basis of the ‘civilising mission’ that is

fundamental to the imperial ideology. Considering these images of India that are in striking contrast to each other, a pattern, though not very neat, can be drawn by mapping the poets who drew these images and their position in the dialectics of power in British India.

Inbetween the two ends of this spectrum, I have discussed such poets as Bishop Reginald Heber and Captain David Lester Richardson, who found themselves in comfortable and authoritative positions from the beginning of their career in India, and did not have to struggle for or depend on favours from the Englishmen in power for acquiring offices of significance. Their poems critique the empire, sometimes even turn out to be a severe excoriation of the imperial policies, and present such images of India that are dark and gloomy, may be irrational and superstitious, sometimes exotic, but not entirely barbaric or licentious. I have analysed in detail how there are subtle but obvious and crucial differences in the shades with which poets like Campbell and Parker painted “India” and those with which poets like Heber and Richardson presented the picture of the country.

The corpus of Company Poetry thus offers a dazzlingly heterogeneous representation of “India” that hovers in the middle distance between the real experiences of the British poets in this country on the one hand and the projected construct of the country or the idea that is “India” on the other, which served as a perfect foil to the ‘glorious’ West.

Company Poets and the Bengali Intelligentsia: The Story of ‘mutual enrichment’

The Third Chapter of my dissertation has focussed on the influence that these English language poems written in India by the British had on the English-educated youth of India, with particular attention to Bengal. The need to study the literatures produced in

different languages in conjunction with each other was felt as early as 1785 by none other than Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of India, when he introduced a comparison in the brilliance of literary quality of the French translations of *Iliad* or *Odyssey* or the 1st and 6th Books of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the English translation of *Mahabharata*.³⁷ The remarkable scholar that he was, Sisir Kumar Das, in his iconic essay, "Comparative Literature in India: A Historical Perspective", points out:

In the College of Fort William, which was established in 1800 for the General Education of Young Civil Servants, many British Scholars were exposed to Oriental literatures, and some of them raised interesting questions relating to the problems of inter-literary relationship of divergent literary cultures.

...

With the spread of English education and the growth of an English educated community in India also grew a new critical awareness which prompted the Indian scholars to evaluate the emerging literatures, and in some cases the ancient texts written in Sanskrit or Tamil, with reference to English literature in particular and European literature in general.

... how 'pure' a literature can remain and how to keep literature free from the impact of other literatures. These questions were raised in India in mid-nineteenth century by the makers of modern Indian literature which drew heavily upon European literature. [It] actually pleaded for a new critical model and a new methodology as opposed to the model sustained by the idea of exclusiveness of national literatures.³⁸

I have taken a step backwards from Das' position, and have, engaged in studying the literatures, specifically poetry, in the English language by the British in India as well as those by the English-educated Indians in India. This is how I have chosen to question the "exclusiveness of national literatures", and have sought to address this gap in the literary historiography defined by nationalist parameters. As Das had acknowledged, it were the founding fathers of modern Indian literature who had first intellectually and

³⁷ Hastings, Warren. "Introduction." *The Bhagavat-geeta or Dialogues of Krishna and Arjuna*. Charles Wilkins. London: Nourse, 1785. p. 10.

³⁸ Das, Sisir Kumar. "Comparative Literature in India: A Historical Perspective." *Sahitya: Journal of the Comparative Literature Association of India*. Vol. 1. No. 1. February, 2011. pp. 18-30. pp. 22-24.

critically responded to the emergence of the new literature in the context of India, which was the English language literature that was being produced here. Das had also rightly pointed out that modern Indian literature draw heavily upon English literature in particular and European literature in general. Hence, it is essential to study the first responses of these founding fathers of modern Indian literature. These appeared in the form of poetry, the most significant belletristic literary form of early nineteenth century India, and these poems were written in the English language. I have analysed a few English language poems by Kasiprasad Ghosh Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Shoshee Chunder Dutt in the Third Chapter of my dissertation, and my reading has been focussed on how the English language poems by the British in India influenced them, how their compositions in turn affected the British who came in close contact with them, how these poems became exceedingly important in the nascent stage of the modern Indian literature not only in English, but across all Indian languages, and how these poets together with the British poets created a vibrant literary culture that had little regard for nationalist boundaries in mid-nineteenth century Calcutta.

The reading of Company Poetry would have remained incomplete, had I not taken into consideration the English language poems by these Indian poets, who operated in the same polyglot culture as their British counterparts. As the British uncovered for themselves the rich cultural heritage of India, Oriental scholarship flourished. In their discourses, the British reconstructed the history of ancient India and drew attention to the Indo-European family of languages. The Indians, on their part, introduced themselves to Western education and ideals, and there were remarkable responses to the European learning amongst the Indians, especially amongst the Bengali intelligentsia. These responses in the academic, cultural, social and political spheres took to such monumental proportions and had such enormous and extensive effects, that historians have identified a

cultural revival in India during the middle of the nineteenth century, and have specified it as the Bengal Renaissance.³⁹

In my reading of the poems by Kasiprasad Ghosh, Michael Madhusudan Dutta and Shoshee Chunder Dutt, in the Third Chapter of this dissertation, I have shown that the relationship between the British and the Indian poets — both writing English language verse in India — did not always follow the stereotypical pattern of derogation and exploitation between the coloniser and the colonised. There was mutual respect, admiration and constructive criticism, and they engaged in complex webs of influences and affiliations. Dyson's remark in this relation is an attestation of my argument:

[In the context of] Indo-British relationship, ... [e]xploitation was real enough, but so was mutual enrichment, and the various renaissances [in India] are as much the facets of reality as the wealth drain, the growth of imperialism, or the entrenchment of ethnocentric prejudices.⁴⁰

In my reading of the poems by the three poets belonging to that part of the society which is conventionally called the Bengali intelligentsia, I have traced the influence of their exposure to Company Poetry alongside their learning of canonical British poetry and classical European literature. I have further tried to map the influence on these poets of their daily interactions with the British men of letters in India, sometimes in the form of a teacher, sometimes in the form of a learned friend, and sometimes in the form of a fellow member of a literary society or book-club. In a way, I attempted to reconstruct the dialogue between the Britain born and the India-born poets who were composing and publishing verse in English language in mid-nineteenth century India.

My approach is a steady shift from conventional historiography of Indian literature in English, as the latter in analysing the emergence of English language poetry

³⁹ Dyson. p. 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 25.

by Indian authors, only deals with the formal learning of British poetry and European literature that these poets received, and overlooks the obvious experience that they had of reading and engaging in productive criticism of the English language poems being written and published during that time in India. I have argued in the Third Chapter of my dissertation that this immediate exposure of the first Indian poets composing verse of some significance in English language to the intense and stimulating English language literary culture around them had considerable impact on their compositions. In addition, the revival of the classical Oriental texts, that the British Orientalists had engaged in since the latter half of the eighteenth century, also contributed in major ways in shaping the themes, subject matters and rhetoric styles of these poets. My research reveals that the history of English language literature in nineteenth century India was indeed a story of ‘mutual enrichment’.

The Relevance of Revaluating Company Poetry in the Twenty-first Century

As I have tried to establish in my dissertation, the relevance of studying these poems today is two-fold: at the contextual level, a revaluation of these poems helps in the understanding of the process of formation of the imperial ideology, as it actually happened, by those very people who translated that ideology into the practical action of governing India; and, at the level of historiography, a renewed readership of these poems seek to redress the gap in the development of English language literature in India by recuperating the individual voices of the minor poets whose literary output, put together, had a major impact on the emergence and shaping of what we today understand as Indian English literature. Mary Ellis Gibson remarks:

[T]hese poems move us away from official discourse and into the drawing rooms and school rooms, clubs and booksellers’ establishments of India and Britain. They arose

from a global circulation of texts, tropes, ideas, and arguments. And if we look at them, not merely through the dyad of metropolis/colony (or, say, London/Calcutta) but transperipherally, we can identify the complex relations of developed and nascent nationalisms that now patrol the boundaries of literary canons.⁴¹

It is this transperipheral outlook that has governed both my reading of and my argumentation related to these poems that I discussed in my dissertation.

The contention that I have attempted to foreground in my dissertation is that Company Poetry perfectly served the function of a “mask” for the ideology of the Empire, and, in the process, perfectly fulfilled the psychological requirements of the masons of the Empire. James Farish, the acting Governor of Bombay for a year during 1838-39, had emphatically stated:

The Natives must either be kept down by a sense of our power, or they must willingly submit from a conviction that we are more wise, more just, more humane and more anxious to improve their condition than any other rulers they could possibly have.⁴²

Most of the Company poets, I have argued with veritable extracts from their texts, tried in every possible way to induce in the ‘natives’ that ‘willing submission’ to the British forces of politics and economy. It was, therefore, necessary that the texts of their poems created the image of a culturally and intellectually superior Englishman in contrast to the superstitious and dissipated Indian. My dissertation has been an enquiry into how these poems constructed the image of the “other” in such a convincing fashion that the aesthetically deficient literary texts metamorphosed into impressively cogent political strategy. Gauri Viswanathan, at the very outset of her iconic monograph, *Masks of Conquests*, lays out the importance of imparting selective and organised education in exercising hegemonic control over a group of people, or even a whole country:

⁴¹ Gibson, Mary Ellis. Introduction. *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India, 1780-1913*. Ed. Mary Ellis Gibson. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011. p. 26.

⁴² Qtd. in Viswanathan. p. 2.

The importance of moral and intellectual suasion in matters of Governance is readily conceded on theoretical grounds as an implicit tactical maneuver in the consolidation of power.⁴³

What better way than poetry, the literary genre that is most dependent on allusions and illusions for its meaning, was available to the colonisers to cause both the Indians and the British believe firmly in the truth of the latter's superiority and the former's abysmal state? This construct of "India" in a direct manner and that of Britain in an implicit manner was in itself a well-grounded justification of the white man's 'civilising mission'. At the same time, a number of poets classified under the rubric 'Company Poetry' questioned and critiqued such constructions of "India" by their other fellow poets, and offered dignified representations of "India" that, they claimed were 'real'. Hence, a reevaluation of these poems would immensely facilitate the understanding of the poetics of the colonial enterprise, as it was in its nascent stage, and bring to the fore marginal colonial narratives that sharply deviated from the 'stereotype'.

Identifying the Possibilities of Further Research

I have explicitly stated in the Introduction that I have concentrated on such poems that have been included in anthologies or those that had courted a fair amount of critical discussion during the times in which they were published. I have also explained the logic behind my choice of the texts: my research concerns with the production of these texts, their ideological identity, and the circumstances that controlled their circulation and readership, and the fundamental theoretical tenet that foregrounds my choice of texts is that "a canon is many times strongly determined by anthologies and anthologists".⁴⁴ There are other poems which were published in collected monographs at the author's own

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Di Leo, Jeffrey R. "Analyzing Anthologies." *On Anthologies: Politics and Pedagogy*. Ed. Jeffrey R. Di Leo. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. pp. 1-30. p. 15.

expense and were not further printed or discussed elsewhere; my research excludes such texts, as I felt that they did not have impact of any considerable proportion on the reading public of those times.

Further, such poems, which do not significantly contribute to the construction of the image of “India”, but deal with other concerns of the poets, have been excluded from my study. There is obvious scope for new researches which engage with reevaluation of those poems, and such criticism might provide deeper insights into the understanding of the social and political aspects of nineteenth century British India.

I must also state here the limitation of my proposition: the alternative paradigm proposed by me in approaching the poems included in the corpus of Company Poetry, intends to understand the texts of these poems in relation to the circumstances of the poet in his personal daily life and his position in the dialectics of power. But I do not claim that this proposition is a definitive or absolute postulate; other organising principles may be propounded which may reclassify the approaches to these texts.

Company poems were often written in conjunction with paintings and engravings, sometimes by the author himself, sometimes by another Company man who collaborated in the work. In fact, there exists a whole gamut of paintings and engravings done by the British in India during the same time as the poems which I have studied were composed and published. All these works of art contributed to the construct of the image of “India” in the Western imagination. They were popular commodities for the consumers, and books and literary journals were often advertised highlighting the number of plates they included. The subjects of these paintings varied from depictions of Indian sceneries to portrayal of the humorous side of the Anglo-Indian life. At times, a series of paintings centred on a character that the artist had imagined, and it would recount incidents from the life of that character. In some cases, that character would be a griffin, which was the

Anglo-Indian slang for a young British newly arrived on the shores of India in the service of the Company. Often, the sale by subscription of the volumes containing poetry and other literary pieces would be dependent on the inclusion of plates of paintings and engravings; and this was not because the audience were better equipped with the critical tools to appreciate paintings than they were with poetry, but simply because paintings have more exhibit value than poems; and the Western audience were always predisposed to ostentatiously display the curios related to the Orient. My research, however, does not focus on these paintings, often called the Company paintings (much in the fashion of Company Poetry), which were crucial in the construction of the image of “India”. This exclusion is as much a matter of the limited scope of a dissertation as it was of a demand for an entirely different set of theoretical and critical apparatus suited to appreciate paintings. New research questions may be framed which may carry out systematic inquiries into these paintings and read them as texts — in conjunction with the poems they were connected with in some cases, or as a distinct entity of colonial discourse in their own merit. Such analyses, I believe, will offer fresh insights into the poetics and politics of Oriental discourse.

The British in India had notably engaged themselves in translating classical Sanskrit and Persian texts into English since the last quarter of the eighteenth century; and their efforts continued till well after the middle of the nineteenth. The first Sanskrit text to be translated into English was *Bhagavad-geeta* by Charles Wilkins, which was first published in 1785 with considerable encouragement from and under the patronage of Warren Hastings, the first Governor General of British India. Sir William Jones, the most celebrated British Orientalist translated a great many number of Sanskrit and Persian texts into English, among which are *Manusanhita* by Manu, *Abhijnyana Sakuntalam* by Kalidasa, *Shahnamah* by Firdausi and poems by Hafiz. After the establishment of the Fort

William College in 1800, the young British civil servants who were enrolled in that Institution, were introduced to systematic dissemination of knowledge on Oriental literatures and Oriental cultures in order to facilitate the process of governing the British Empire in India by way of comprehensive familiarity with the Orient. The students of Fort William College also engaged in copious translation of classic Oriental texts into English. A few decades later, in 1828, the Oriental Translation Fund was established under the auspices of the Royal Asiatic Society and with the patronage of such important political figures as King George IV of England, the Duke of Wellington, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Kings of France, Belgium, Naples and Netherlands. Large number of Oriental texts relating to law, medicine, religion and literature were translated by the British in India with assistance from this Fund. Clearly, the activities of translation were carried out with official and political sanction; so, it may be surmised that the British had some kind of ulterior motive in expending such huge amount of money and such abundant labour on the English translation of the Oriental texts. My research, in order to narrow down the focus on a sizeable and manageable aggregate of primary texts, deals only with original compositions of this period and excludes the translated texts. Although I have referred to a few translations that needed referencing or discussion in the process of substantiating my argument, yet I have not studied them from the perspectives that involved the obvious politics of translation. Some such translated texts that I have only partially looked at are Horace Hayman Wilson's *The Méga Dúta, or Cloud Messenger*, which is a translation of Kalidasa's epic poem, *Meghadutam*; Henry Meredith Parker's "The Draught of Immortality", which is a translation of the episode of sea-churning from the *Mahabharata*; Robert Calder Campbell's "Madras Mohurrim song", which is a translation of the popular Muslim song sung during the festival of Muharram; and Parker's "Pindarry War Song", which is a translation of the war song that was found in

the waistband of a Pindarrie chieftain who had fallen in an encounter with the British forces. Future researches may be directed towards extensive study of this whole gamut of translated texts, so as to usher in fresh perspectives on the literary culture of nineteenth century British India. Such studies may look into the politics involved in the translation of these Oriental texts, the ideology that worked behind these works of translation, and the ideas that they tried to propagate. These translated texts arguably played a major role in the construction of the idea of “India” or, for that matter, that of the “Orient”, in the Western imagination. There is immense possibility of new research questions being framed in relation to these translated texts.

Furthermore, I have identified another omission in my research: the question of diaspora and the issue of the identity crisis of those poets who were born of British parents in India, some of them educated in Britain and then returned to India to join the services of the Company, while others spent their entire life in the Indian subcontinent and yet never felt a sense of belonging to this country. Such poets include Henry Page, Mary Seyers Carshore and a few others. An analysis of their poems in relation to the questions of identity and belongingness would require the scholar to engage with critical theories of diaspora and nationalism, as evinced by such works like Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*,⁴⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s *In other Worlds*,⁴⁶ Clifford Geertz’s *The Interpretation of Cultures*,⁴⁷ and Stuart Hall’s “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”.⁴⁸ Although I have read a few poems by these poets in my dissertation, yet I must state here that I have only dealt with such issues in the texts which were of significant import to my argument; and this approach has excluded questions related to

⁴⁵ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.

⁴⁶ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. New York: Methuen, 1987.

⁴⁷ Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

⁴⁸ Hall, Stuart. “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” *Identity, Community, Culture and Difference*. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence and Wishart Limited, 1990. pp. 222-237.

diaspora and cultural identity. An enquiry into these poems may open new avenues leading to critical discourses on the psychological anxieties of these displaced poets during the early stages of British colonialism. Such studies would facilitate the understanding of the various nuances of diasporic literature in relation to power. Researches on this perspective will foreground the unique case of these poets, who were displaced, either by circumstances or by birth, were always, unlike most diasporic authors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, affiliated to the agency that exercised control and held political and economic power in the land where these poets found themselves displaced. The social and cultural negotiations that mediated the poems written by these authors offer an excellent opportunity for further research.

The Necessity to Preserve the Archives of Company Poems

The most crucial issue that I felt concerned about as I sifted through the dust-smitten and mould-ridden archives of the libraries was the wretched condition in which these texts now exist. It is indeed appalling that the books and journals that once adorned the coffee-tables of the most powerful people in India, would now rot in the derelict shelves of the libraries, abandoned by readers and scholars alike. As a matter of fact, some of the books and some volumes of the journals and registers have been digitised, and are now available as open online sources in the public domain. But, most of these texts are torn and tattered, and are being eaten away by bugs. I apprehend that in another fifty years, most of the original copies of these texts will no more be extant. These books not only reflect the social and cultural ethos of the times in which they were composed, but are of utmost importance in the understanding of how the imperial ideologies were formulated, propagated and practised by the early British colonisers. Furthermore, the importance of these books increase manifold in the perspective of such discourses that deal with the invention and construction of the Orient by the West. These texts constitute

the primary documentation in the analyses of the image of India in the Western imagination. These books, journals, newspapers and registers, when brought back to visibility, has the potential to recreate the vibrant literary culture that was an essential part of nineteenth century India, and will thus facilitate the enquiries into the society, politics and culture which were prevalent during those times. These texts are thus indispensable in the study of the history of ideas related to the Orient.

In the introductory note to *A Sketch of Anglo-Indian Literature* (1908), the first ever critical study to be published on the body of these works, the author, E. F. Oaten, had quoted the 1855 issue of *The Calcutta Review*, as saying:

Gradually, year by year, the ranks of our Anglo-Indian writers swell, and new works are thrown with eager anxiety on the wide sea of literature and authorship. We have often wished that a full list of them all could be made out and continually supplemented as occasion required. A dictionary of Anglo-Indian writers, or a history of Anglo-Indian literature, would form a subject of immense interest and instruction, not merely to the griffin or the *littérateur*, who makes India and Indians his interested or idle study, but to the student who wishes to turn over a new page in the history of the human mind and the English language and thought in a country where circumstances, associations, and ties are so very different from those of every other land.⁴⁹

It is a pity that the deplorable scarcity of critical study on this body of work has not been addressed since this lament; in fact, the situation has worsened. In addition to the scant critical attention that these works have received till date, now there is the added problem of the unavailability of these texts and their inaccessibility to the public. Very few libraries have limited number of copies of these titles — in most cases only one or two copies exist, and that too in dilapidated conditions. Further, almost all the libraries require the readers to get special permission from competent authorities, which in certain situations also involve obtaining letters from the bureaucracy, a cumbersome and tedious

⁴⁹ Oaten, Edward Farley. *A Sketch of Anglo-Indian Literature*. London: Kegan Paul Trench Trübner & Co. Ltd., 1908. p. vij.

process in itself, in order to gain access to these old and rare sections of the archives, and that too is limited only to the library reading room. Consequently, these texts are becoming more and more obscure to the scholars, as a result of which this body of literature continue to suffer from striking neglect.

The prominent anthologists, Edward Farley Oaten, Theodore Douglas Dunn, Mary Ellis Gibson and Máire Ní Fhlathúin, who have so far undertaken the commendable task of identifying these poems and publishing them in anthologies, have all commented on the dearth of published volumes of compilations of these poems. While Dunn in 1921 begins the Introduction of his edited anthology by saying that “[n]o complete anthology of verse written by Englishmen in India has ever been compiled”;⁵⁰ Gibson in 2011 notes that “[i]n the metropolitan centers of Britain and the United States, the nuances of Indian English Poetry were easily missed, and after their first publication the poems themselves were often lost to view”.⁵¹ Ní Fhlathúin identified her purpose of “offer[ing] a way into an extensive body of poetry, written from and about India by British poets” “as an attempt to map out this relatively unexplored field”.⁵² She observes:

Despite the advances in scholarship on British India over the last several decades, much important primary material still remains largely unknown. Electronic publishing is making an increasing number of texts available, but others still exist only in a small number of paper copies, sometimes only a single one.⁵³

My own search through the library archives has only confirmed Ní Fhlathúin’s statement. The situation with this body of literature presents itself as appallingly lamentable, and stresses on the urgent need of preserving these texts, and make them easily accessible to the readers.

⁵⁰ Dunn. p. xi.

⁵¹ Gibson. p. 25.

⁵² Fhlathúin, Máire Ní. “Introduction.” *The Poetry of British India, 1780-1905*. Vol. I. Ed. Máire Ní Fhlathúin. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011. p. xi.

⁵³ Ibid.

The importance of Company Poetry, as I have argued, cannot be underrated; and efforts should be directed at promoting such activities that aim to preserve these works, either in the form of the original volumes that they were published in or in the form of fresh compendia that are more extensive and more elaborate than the ones that have already been published.

The Problem with Silent Corrections and Annotations in the Recent Anthologies of Company Poetry

Before I add more detail on the measures that can be taken to preserve these books, I must point out the problem with silent corrections in the anthology edited by Gibson. This volume was published in the United States by Ohio University Press in 2011, and, possibly as a House Policy to follow the American conventions in spellings, many words such as ‘honour’ and ‘colour’ have been printed as ‘honor’ and ‘color’ respectively, without any commentary or remark annotating such alterations of spellings from the original texts. I had checked back with the original publications — sometimes numerous editions and versions of texts published over decades — and found that the British writing poems in India during the nineteenth century had, as is expected of them, followed British conventions of spellings. In fact, the American conventions in spelling English words started with the 1828 Dictionary⁵⁴ compiled by the lexicographer, Noah Webster, who formulated the way for spelling English words differently from the British, in order to assert the cultural independence of America from Britain through language.⁵⁵ It was, therefore, unusual for the British poets in India, whom Gibson has included in her anthology (with the possible exception of the American lady, E. L.), to have used American conventions in spelling words. It can hardly be appreciated that the editor, who

⁵⁴ Webster, Noah. *An American Dictionary of the English Language*. New York, S. Converse, 1828.

⁵⁵ Scragg, D. G. *A History of English Spelling*. New York: Manchester University Press, 1974. pp. 43, 86, 105.

is a learned scholar herself, to have permitted such silent alterations to be made to the texts without the mention of it anywhere in the book. The practice is misleading, and does direct readers and scholars alike towards flawed inferences and interpretations. It is rather expected that these works be re-printed from the originals in exact.

Further, both in Gibson's and Fhlathúin's anthologies, the distinction between the notes and commentaries originally made by the authors and the annotations added by the editors themselves is not always clear. Explicit demarcations need to be made on such issues which constitute deviations from the original texts, so that the reader is not misled. It is essential that these texts are reprinted or digitised in accurate detail following the original form of publication.

Methods of Preserving the Texts

Digitisation of the volumes is, of course, the best method to ensure that the texts last in soft versions. It also makes the books available online, thanks to the absence of issues related to copyright concerning these books. The digitised books available on the internet are easily accessible to the public the world over, and they have additional helpful features, like quickly locating any word or phrase through the 'search' option. Additionally, a simple search on any of the available Search Engines, like Google or Yahoo, promptly leads the readers to the book or the particular portion of the book that they are interested in. Google Books, the largest web-business magnate, and Internet Archives, a non-profit organisation, have made remarkable contributions in creating online open archives of old books, have supplemented it with an open library catalogue, and have made them available in the public domain. The books can be easily read on the screen of the web-browser in the device used to access the internet; additionally, the books digitised by Internet Archive, which is available on <<http://archive.org>>, are also offered in other digital formats, like PDF, Kindle and EPUB, in order to facilitate readers

and encourage reading habits. The move towards digitisation of the books has increased readership of these works by the poets of John Company to a certain limited extent, and further initiatives need to be taken in order to engender considerable critical interest on these texts. Web-based open archives need to work in collaboration with libraries and state archives and invest in developing book-scanners with advanced technology, so that more old and rare books may be added to the valuable online collections. It is important that funds are properly utilised in preserving the past, thus making information accessible and useful.

The conventional manner of working towards a renewed readership of the poetical works of British in India is to publish and re-print these poems in anthologies and compendia. Mary Ellis Gibson⁵⁶ and Máire Ní Fhlathúin⁵⁷ have already pioneered such projects and have both published separate collections of the poems of British India in 2011. Each editor has laid down the methodological and editorial principles and the factors governing the selection of the poems in their respective anthologies. However, as I have pointed out earlier, there are editorial interventions — at most times, pronounced, but at other times, silent — within the texts, and this alters the presentation of the texts to the readers. The editorial interventions in both the anthologies are intended for American and European readers. Thus the books are slanted towards the Western half of the world in their manner of presentation and in their nature of editorial practices. Often, a poem had been published during the nineteenth century several times, reprinted in different versions and at times under different author names or pseudonyms. Both the anthologies I am talking about have reprinted only one version of such poems, without assigning any reason for the exclusion of the other versions, and the problem with authorship in such cases is paramount. Sometimes, the other versions contain such changes to the text, which

⁵⁶ Gibson, ed. *Anglophone Poetry in Colonial India, 1780-1913*.

⁵⁷ Fhlathúin, ed. *The Poetry of British India, 1780-1905*. 2 Vols.

alters, however slightly or significantly, its meaning. So, it is important that the editor/anthologist makes the readers aware of the existence of the other versions, if not print them along. I must also mention that both the anthologies preface short biographical information on the authors to the works of the individual poets. This approach, unlike the editorial methods, is useful to the readers and helps them to place the poets and the poems in their own socio-political context. In order to ensure that the Company poems court renewed readership, it is important that more collections of these poems are published with authentic information on the sources from which the texts are obtained and with minimal editorial interference.

A major role in encouraging the interest of the scholars in the poets of John Company has to be played by the educationists and the policy-makers involved in allocation and designing of scholarships and other funded research projects. Under the present circumstances in which these texts are, it requires enormous industry, considerable time and substantial funds in order to access the old and rare sections of a few selected libraries in India and the United Kingdom, which house these volumes. Travelling and lodging costs in a foreign country, like England, for the Indian scholar is also exorbitant; support may be provided by state agencies and governments in the form of scholarships, sponsorships and funded projects to scholars working on these texts. Directing the financial resources towards archival research and laying stress on the studies related to such texts produced in nineteenth century British India, that are yet not part of the canonical colonial discourse, will encourage scholars to pursue these minor texts, which were not so minor during the times in which they were written and published. Much research in the literary academia is preoccupied with the search for the curious; instead scholarships may be designed to fund such researches which propose to seek out individual voices that have suffered neglect and often omission from the grand

narratives of history. Archival research aims to reconstruct the literary culture of a particular period which is considered to be important in the history of ideas, thus substantially contributing to the knowledge base of the civilisation as we know it. In order to preserve the archives and promote archival studies, it is indeed necessary that the allocation of funds for literary and cultural researches is designed to support these scholars. Apart from fostering critical interest in these texts, such a step in re-designing scholarship policies, as I propose here, will also strengthen cultural ties and exchanges of mutual enrichment between Britain and India.

A Cursory Epilogue

The enquiry that began with my discovery of the lines quoted from Hastings' poem in a letter to my late grandfather has indeed uncovered for me a treasure trove of ideas; the attic of our old house in the by-lanes of Sealdah has actually opened up for me a world of possibilities in the perspective of the relations between the largest democracy and the strongest constitutional monarchy in the world.

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