



Who Is the First Indian English Poet—Derozio or Jones?

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Centuries ago, India saw two poets celebrating India and its Indianness in their poems, one was a judge, the other a lecturer; the judge was a Briton, the lecturer a Eurasian. The Briton had come from England to become the Chief Judge at Calcutta Supreme Court, the lecturer taught English at Hindu College, Calcutta (now Kolkata). The judge was famous in his lifetime for knowing forty-one languages, the lecturer joined Hindu College to teach English literature when he was barely eighteen. The judge wrote poems in the second half of the eighteenth century, the lecturer in the first half of the nineteenth century. The lecturer was influenced by the Romantic poets of England, the judge was not. The lecturer was Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, the judge Sir William Jones.

Jones was popular with his countrymen and poets when he was alive, but he became a victim of incomprehensible neglect and indifference once he was gone, so much so that his achievements and contributions to poetry are still not known to the vast majority, both in England and India. The posterity has been unfairly unkind to him; he has been sidetracked, ignored and neglected; he does not figure in anthologies; readers of Indian English poetry do not know him; they have heard his name in different contexts, but they do not know that he was a poet also, and that he wrote poems years before Derozio started writing poems. Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-31), son of an Indo-Portuguese father and an English mother, is accepted as the first poet of Indian English literature, but the poems of Sir William Jones (1746-1794), who has many firsts to his





credit in the field of poetry as well as other branches of knowledge, have not caught the attention of even eminent and celebrated historians and critics of India. They are unaware of both his contribution to the growth of Indian English poetry, and his influence on Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, Gibbon, Byron and Tennyson. He is not an “Anglo-Indian writer” in the sense Forster and others are, he is an “outsider-insider” as Ruth Praver Jhabvala is, he is an “Indian writer” as Ananda K. Coomaraswamy is. He deserves to be discovered the way he discovered India and the East. He, and not Derozio, was the first Indian poet of Indian English poetry, and the first to use Indian myths and legends in his poems, but Derozio, and not he, is accepted and hailed as the first Indian poet of Indian English literature; the judge still waits for historians, critics and readers to judge his place in the history of Indian English literature. This paper proposes to initiate a debate on whether Jones deserves to be considered an Indian writer, and, if yes, does his poetry entitle him to become the first Indian English poet.

The paper is divided into two sections. In the first section, I have analysed William Jones’ status against the backdrop of those writers, both of Indian and foreign origins, who are accepted and hailed today as Indian writers. There are writers whom the historians of Indian English literature were initially reluctant to accept as Indian writers; there is another, whom M. K. Naik accepted initially as an Indian writer but sounds dismissive now following her assertion that she is an American and not an Indian writer. I have substantiated that if they can be called and accepted as Indian writers, William Jones has every right to be called an Indian writer; the historians should apply the same yardstick they have applied for those they call Indian writers for judging Jones’ status also; if they do that, they would find that he is also an Indian writer as others are. He is not an “Anglo-Indian writer” as they still hold and promote. Their acceptance of Jones as an Indian writer would change the course of the history of Indian English poetry.

In the second section, I have compared Derozio’s and Jones’ poetic qualities and their respective achievements and contributions to the growth of Indian English poetry. I have dwelt at length on Jones’ hymns





and others poems to substantiate that he had a lively poetic sensibility, and a feeling for form and felicity of expression. Whatever I have said about William Jones vis-à-vis Derozio is absolutely different from what the historians of Indian English literature have been saying to date about the origin of Indian English poetry. I know mine is the lone voice today, but tomorrow this will be the voice of many.

I

Sir William Jones, a great scholar and visionary, was regarded even in his own time as a phenomenon, and so he was. He was the first Westerner to study and write on Indian classical music, the first to work for the classification of Indian plants and animals, the first to compile books on Botany, Zoology, Astronomy, Philosophy, Anthropology, Archaeology, History, Law, Literature, Music, Geography, Physiology, Politics, and religion, and the first to suggest that Sanskrit originated from the same source as Latin and Greek, which laid the foundation of modern comparative philology:

The *Sanscrit* language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the *Greek*, more copious than the *Latin*, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine them all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists (Wikipedia 2).

His life and works teaches us that the path to understanding and appreciating art and literature of a great culture very different from our own is through devoted study, a tolerant spirit, and an unquenchably curious mind. Pinto alludes to his popularity in the nineteenth century and laments his neglect in the twentieth century:

The popularity of Jones's writings in the first decades of the nineteenth century is attested by the fact that besides these four editions of his poems a second edition of his collected works in 13 volumes appeared in 1807...The Cambridge History of English Literature dismisses him in





one short paragraph at the end of the chapter on “The Lesser Poets of the Eighteenth Century”. He is described as “more of an orientalist and a jurist than a poet”, and brief commendation is given to his “Ode in Imitation of Alcaeus” and his “Epigram from the Persian”. There is no mention either of his English works or his influence on English poetry. None of the shorter histories of English literature alludes to him at all, though they all devote a good deal of space to the so-called “Precursors of Romanticism” in the eighteenth century (686).

Hewitt also laments his neglect in his essay *Harmonious Jones*: “...recent histories of literature, though they still find room for James Macpherson, omit even the name of Sir William Jones, whose influence on poetry and on public opinion and general culture has been both more extensive and more permanent” (43).

The historians of Indian English literature accepted Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Margaret Chatterjee, Bharati Mukherjee, and Ananda Coomaraswamy as Indian writers; they accepted that Derozio is “an Indian English poet” (Naik 23), and that “he signalled the birth of Indian English poetry” (Naik 24), but they are still to acknowledge and debate Jones’s achievements and contributions to the growth of Indian English poetry.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala, born of Polish parents in Germany and educated in England, married an Indian, lived here for more than twenty-four years, and eventually left the country in 1975 to live abroad once again; she is considered an Indian writer today but there was a time when the historians of Indian English literature debated whether she could legitimately be called an Indian English writer. They eventually decided to call her an Indian writer though she herself had said that she should not be considered an “Indian writer”; she insisted that she should be considered “as one of those European writers who have written about India” (Quest: 36). M. K. Naik explains why she was considered an Indian writer:

But an important point of difference between Jhabvala and prominent Western writers such as Kipling and Forster is that she has lived in India much longer than they did and with far greater involvement; and more importantly, her marriage to an Indian gave her access to Indian society on terms radically different from those in the case of these writers.



Consequently, her best work reveals such inwardness in her picture of certain segments of Indian social life, that it is difficult not to consider her as an 'insider', who at the same time enjoys the privilege of being an 'outsider' in an obvious sense (233-234).

If Jhabvala is an "outsider-insider", so is Sir William Jones. If living in India for a considerable number of years, and with involvement is the yardstick the historians of Indian English literature used to establish that she should be considered an Indian writer, the same yardstick should be used for Sir William Jones also, who pioneered Sanskrit studies, told the world that "the Indians were the wisest of nations, and in moral wisdom they were certainly eminent" (Eminent 11), established that "a group of Egyptian priests had settled down in India and borrowed much from it" (Jain 35-36), held Hinduism in great esteem when it was quite fashionable to run it down, admired Indian thought and culture, believed that unless the East was known, the history of man could not be written, and postulated that whatever Newton said is already there in the Vedas: "I can venture to affirm, without meaning to pluck a leaf from the never-fading laurels of our immortal Newton, that the whole of his theology, and part of his philosophy, may be found in the Vedas" (Eminent 11).

Margaret Chatterjee, a foreigner by birth and an Indian on account of her marriage to an Indian, settled here following her marriage, and has been living in India for the last fifty years and more. She does not say like Bharati Mukherjee that she should not be considered an Indian writer. She wants herself to be considered an Indian; she gets annoyed if she is called a foreigner. This is what she said in a letter to O. P. Mathur, "I am completely assimilated in India and am annoyed if I am considered a foreigner" (as told by Prof. Mathur to this writer).

Bharati Mukherjee is also considered an Indian writer though she says she is not an Indian writer; she calls herself an American writer: "I am an American writer, in the American mainstream, trying to extend it. This is a vitally important statement from me- I am not an immigrant; my investment is in the American reality, not the Indian" (Naik 108).

The case of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy is equally interesting to note. He was born of a Sinhalese Indian father and an English mother; he was

neither an Indian citizen nor did he live in India, yet he is considered an Indian writer. M. K. Naik explains why he was considered an Indian writer:

Thus, there are exceptional cases like Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Ruth Praver Jhabvala. The former, born of a Sinhalese Indian father and an English mother, was neither an Indian citizen nor did he live in India; and yet the entire orientation of his thought is so unmistakably Indian that it is impossible not to consider him an *Indian English* writer (3).

If a person's orientation of thought is used as a yardstick for deciding whether he should be considered an Indian writer, William Jones deserves to be called an Indian writer. If a "deep study of Hindu religion and metaphysics" (Naik 92), and its correct projection to the world is what makes Coomaraswamy an Indian writer, William Jones's love for Hinduism, Vedas, Upanishads, Hindu literature, and his assertion that "Human life would not be sufficient to make oneself acquainted with any considerable part of Hindu literature" (Sarda 296-97), justifies his being considered an Indian writer. Despite his belief in Christianity, he admired the Hindus for their belief in the non-duality of God, and rebirth. He considered their belief in rebirth more rational than the Christian doctrine of punishment and eternity of pain. This is what he tells in one of his letters to Earl Spencer, in 1787, "I am no Hindu, but I hold the doctrine of the Hindus concerning a future state to be incomparably more rational, more pious, and more likely to deter men from vice, than the horrid opinions, inculcated on punishments without end" (Keay 28). He admired the Hindus because he considered them "a people with a fertile and inventive genius" who in some early age...were splendid in arts and arms, happy in government; wise in legislation, and eminent in various knowledge..." (Keay 28). He reaffirmed his admiration for the Indian culture in one of the letters he wrote to Wilkins in 1784: "I am in love with the gopis, charmed with Krishna, an enthusiastic admirer of Rama and a devout adorer of Brahma. Yudhisthir, Arjuna, Bhima and other warriors of the Mahabharata appear greater in my eyes than Agamemnon, Ajax, and Achilles appeared when I first read the Iliad' (Keay 28).

The novels and the short stories that Jhabvala wrote till the nineteen-

eighties, including the Booker Prize-winning *Heat and Dust*, were set entirely in India, but the novels she wrote in the nineties are not set in India. M.K. Naik seems to be disgusted with Bharati Mukherjee's claim that she is not an Indian writer. He cannot hide his scorn while evaluating her fifth novel. He declares that she is no longer an Indian writer: "Mukherjee's fifth novel, *Leave it to Me* (1977), is completely American. The only Indian touch is the prologue, which retells (very badly) the mythological story of Mahisasuramardini, the Devi (Goddess) who killed the Buffalo Demon... The book... is written in the kind of American English the average Indian would have trouble understanding... With *Leave it to Me*, her ambition is realized: she is no longer an Indian writer. But whether she has extended the American mainstream is a debatable point" (108).

The debate, whether or not Jones be considered an Indian writer, should centre around who we consider an Indian—the one who is born in India, the one who is not an Indian by birth but lives in India for a couple of years and then leave to live abroad as Jhabvala did, the one who does not like to be called an Indian as Mukherjee does, the one who does not live in India, but writes about India as Coomaraswamy did, or the one who is not an Indian by birth, but lives in India throughout and writes about India as Jones did.

II

Derozio published two volumes of poetry in his too brief poetic career that lasted hardly half a dozen years: *Poems* (1827) and *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems* (1828). Jones published a volume entitled *Poems consisting chiefly of Translations from the Asiatic Languages* in 1772, which included the nine hymns on Hindu mythology, a few poems not related to oriental studies that he wrote during 1780-1783, fragments of a projected epic and a tragedy, and some other short pieces, original and translated.

K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar considers Jones an "Anglo-Indian writer", and hails him as one of the Englishmen who once spent long years in India, and wrote in English:

The Englishmen who once spent long years in India and attempted creative

expression through English, in other words, men like Sir William Jones, John Leyden, Sir Edwin Arnold, Meadows Taylor, F. W. Bain—were a class apart; we shall not see their like again and there should be no harm in continuing to describe them as Anglo-Indian writers (2-3).

He is also recognized as the founder of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, and appreciated for his admiration of the Indian culture:

Warren Hastings, who established the Calcutta Madrasa in 1781, Sir William Jones, who organized the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784, and Sir Thomas Munro at Madras were rather impressed by the culture of the Hindus...

And men like Munro and Jones came to be called 'Brahmanised Britons', because they both admired Indian culture and deprecated the idea of introducing Western civilization or Christianity into India (24-25).

He is not forthcoming in recognizing his contribution to the growth of Indian English poetry though he recognizes that he wrote on "Indian Themes":

Sundry Englishmen in India wrote on Indian themes since the time of Sir William Jones, and the historians Robert Orme and Alexander Dow, in the latter half of the eighteenth century; and not many decades later were witnessed the first sure beginnings of Indo-Anglian literature (691).

George Sampson recognizes his contribution to "the birth of the science of comparative philology" while writing on "Classical and Oriental Scholars" in his celebrated "A Concise Cambridge History of English Literature":

The date of its appearance also marks the birth of the science of comparative philology, for in that year Sir William Jones declared the importance of Sanskrit and asserted that it had a common source with Greek and Latin... In 1786 Sir William Jones had pointed out the affinity of Sanskrit with Greek, Latin, Gothic and Celtic (565-567).

He lists his contributions in the field of Philology and translation, while writing on "Anglo-Indian Literature and the English Literature of India, Pakistan and South-East Asia". He says that he "wrote elaborate 'oriental' poems", but he does not elaborate:

Sir William Jones (1746-94) was already an oriental scholar when he went to India in 1783 as Judge of the Supreme Court. He founded the Bengal

Asiatic Society, became the first great English Sanskrit scholar, translated Kalidasa's masterpiece Shakuntala and wrote elaborate "oriental" poems of his own. Garland Cannon's biography Oriental Jones was published at New Delhi in 1964 by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. Jones's work was carried on by the Scots poet and orientalist John Leyden (1775-1811; p. 498), that "lamp too early quenched", as Scott lamented (735).

Jones' achievements and contributions have not caught the attention of M. K. Naik. He calls Derozio "the first Indian English poet of note" (22) but dismisses Jones in a sentence in his celebrated "A History of Indian English Literature". He remembers him as the founder of the Bengal Asiatic Society, and considers him as one of those representative white men in India who tried to rediscover India's past:

Sir William Jones, who founded the Bengal Asiatic society as early as 1784, H. T. Colebrooke, the author of *Digest of Hindu Law on Contracts and Succession* (1797-98), and James Prinsep, the discoverer of the clue to the Ashokan inscriptions, were some of the representative white men in India then whose burden was certainly not imperial.

While these Englishmen were rediscovering India's past, the gradual spread of English education and Western ideas brought forth a band of earnest Indians who drank deep at the fountain of European learning (8-9).

Derozio loved India, loved Nature, and loved his students. His love for the country, reflected in some of his poems like *To India-My Native Land*, *The Harp of India*, and *To the Pupils of Hindu College*, is a characteristic feature of his poetry. M. K. Naik finds his "burning nationalistic zeal" unusual for a Eurasian like him:

A noteworthy feature of Derozio's poetry is its burning nationalistic zeal, somewhat surprising in a Eurasian at a time when the average representative of his class was prone to repudiate his Indian blood and identify himself with the white man, for eminently practical reasons. Poems like 'To India-My Native Land', 'The Harp of India', and 'To the Pupils of Hindu College' have an unmistakable authenticity of patriotic utterance which stamps Derozio as an Indian English poet who is truly a son of the soil (23).

If Derozio's love is unusual, Jones' love for Indian thought and culture, when India was no more than a land of rope dancers and snake charmers

for the people in the West, and his endeavour to generate the right kind of attitude required for understanding India and its rich cultural heritage, is no less unusual. The system of transliteration that he invented (this took Sanskrit poetry and Kalidas to the West), the Asiatic Society of Bengal that he established with the help of Charles Wilkins and the journal (Asiatic Researches) that he started proved instrumental in generating the interest of the West in Indology. He was the first person to translate Kalidas's *Shakuntala* and *Ritu Samhara*, Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*, and the laws of Manu into English. The praise that Goethe had for Kalidasa after reading *Shakuntala* (he had read Jones' translation of the play; Jones spelt it as *Sacontala*) is well known, but what is still not known to many is that it was *Shakuntala* which prompted *Faust's* prelude, the work he is lauded and known for throughout the world.

Naik considers Derozio "a pioneer in the use of Indian myth and legend", (23) but the nine hymns that Jones wrote on Kamdeo, Durga, Bhavani, Indra, Surya, Lakshmi, Narayana, Saraswati and Ganga are still not known to many in India. Even serious students of history and literature have not heard of these hymns and hence, they accept what Naik says about Derozio being the first to use Indian myth and legend. His poems mark the beginning of Indian English poetry in India. He started writing poetry while still studying at Oxford. The two poems that he wrote when he was still a student at Oxford reflect his interest in Indian mysticism. *The Palace of Fortune* and *The Seven Fountains* are the two poems that he wrote more than fifteen years before he became the president of the Asiatic Society.

He sums up the theme of the hymn in the argument, which precedes each hymn. The first hymn, which he wrote the year the Asiatic Society was founded, is on Kamdeo, the god of love. He welcomes the Omnipresent Kamdeo in the opening stanza and concludes that he is the source of happiness of all beings in the cosmos:

*Hail, pow'r unknown! For at thy beck
Vales and groves their bosoms deck,
God of the flow'ry shafts and flow'ry bow,
Delight of all above and all below.*

He also describes how Lord Mahadeva burnt him to ashes:

*But, when thy daring arm untam'd
At Mahadeo a loveshaft aim'd,
Heav'n shook, and, smit with stony wonder,
Told his deep dread in bursts of thunder,
Whilst on thy beauteous limbs an azure fire
Blaz'd forth, which never must expire.*

The second hymn, which he has borrowed from Kalidasa's *Kumarsambhavam*, is on Durga. He uses the myth of the slaying of Taraka by Kumara, the son of Shiva and Parvati. Taraka was a demon. Lord Indra goes with other gods to Brahma and requests Him to destroy Taraka. He tells them that the son of Lord Shiva who is going to take birth very soon will destroy the demon. They know that Parvati wants to marry Shiva but they are faced with the problem of diverting His mind from penance to Parvati. Kamdeo is assigned the task of diverting His mind but he is burnt by Him. Ultimately it is Parvati's sincerity, which moves Him and they get married. A son is born to them who is named Kumara. He annihilates Taraka and the gods are thus protected. This is the myth Jones has used but he has made minor changes. The myth has it that Lord Shiva wants to test the genuineness and sincerity of Parvati's love for Him and hence He comes disguised as a Brahmin youth, and once satisfied, discloses His identity. Jones has introduced a minor change in this episode. Instead of saying that Lord Shiva came down disguised as a Brahmin youth, he says that Parvati reached a "mystic wood" where Lord Shiva disguised as a Brahmin youth stood before Her. The second change that he has introduced relates to the information that lord Shiva gets about the gods suffering at the hands of the demon. It is Agni who informs Lord Shiva in the myth known to us but in Jones' hymn it is Brihaspati who informs Him. He also describes the slaying of Mahishasura by Durga:

*For, when the demon vice thy realms defied,
And armed with death each arched horn,
The golden lance, O goddess mountain-born
Toch'd but the pest—He rear'd and died.*

The third hymn is on Bhavani. The birth of Lakshmi from the lotus has been very nicely described by Jones:

*Whilst on the placid waters blooming,
The sky perfuming,
An op'ning Lotos rose, and smiling spread
His azure skirts and vase of gold,
While o'er his foliage roll'd
Drops, that impearl Bhavani's orient bed.*

The fourth hymn is addressed to Lord Indra. He describes the abode of Indra, the feast thrown by him, and the fight between the gods and the demons for the nectar:

*When sapient Brahma this new world approv'd,
On woody wings eight primal mountains mov'd;
But Indra mark'd Suméru for his own,
And motionless was ev'ry stone . . .
Nor thought of man his awful height can reach:
Who sees it, maddens; who approaches, dies;
For, with flame-darting eyes,
Around it roll a thousand sleepless dragons;
While from their diamond flagons
The feasting Gods exhaustless nectar sip,
Which glows and sparkles on each fragrant lip.
This feast, in mem'ry of the churned wave
Great Indra gave, when Amrit first was won
From impious demons, who to Mayà's eyes
Resign'd the prize, and rued the fight begun.*

He also describes how Lord Shiva drank the poison and became Nilkantha:

*A vase of long-sought Amrit in his hand.
To soften human ills dread Siva drank
The pois'nous flood, that stain'd his azure neck;
The rest thy mansions deck,
High Swerga, stor'd in many a blazing rank.
Thou, God of thunder, satst on Méru thron'd,
Cloud-riding, mountain-piercing, thousand-ey'd,
With young Pulomaja; thy blooming bride,
Whilst air and skies thy boundless empire own'd;*

The fifth hymn is addressed to Surya. The hymn ends with his appreciation of God and His creation. The poem anticipated Hopkins'

appreciation of God's universe in *Pied Beauty*:

*Since thou, great orb, with all-enlight'ning ray
Rulest the golden day,
How far more glorious He, who said serene,
Be, and thou wast—Himself unform'd, unchang'd, unseen!*

This hymn reminds us of the hymns to Savitur and Surya in the *Rigveda*. It may not be out of place to mention here that Jones had studied the Vedas and was so much impressed that he even translated one of the riks, *The Hymn to Night*, into English.

The sixth hymn is addressed to Lakshmi. The description of Lakshmi's birth reminds us of the description in the *Shrisukta* from which he got his ideas for this hymn:

*Her eyes, oft darted o'er the liquid way,
With golden light emblaz'd the darkling main;
And those firm breasts, whence all our comforts well,
Rose with enchanting swell;
Her loose hair with the bounding billows play'd.*

Ha has very nicely presented the idea contained in the sloka *yada yada hi dharmasya* of the *Gita*, which fascinated him, in these lines of the hymn:

*And oft, as man's unnumber'd woes they mark,
They spring to birth in some high-favour'd line,
Half human, half divine,
And tread life's maze transfigur'd, unimpair'd.*

He also describes the incarnation of Lord Vishnu as Krishna and the stories related to His life. He also discusses the destructive power of Lakshmi and concludes the hymn with a prayer requesting her to be always benevolent:

*From ills, that, painted, harrow up the breast,
(What agonies, if real, must they give!)
Preserve thy vot'ries: be their labours blest!*

The seventh hymn, which is addressed to Narayana, is the best and this shows his deep understanding of Indian philosophy. Sir William Jones wrote *A Hymn to Narayena* in the spring of 1785 and published it later the same year in the first issue of *Asiatick Miscellany* (Calcutta). It was reprinted and praised in several London magazines over the next couple of years, and is generally considered to be Jones's best effort in a lyric

form (in this instance a type of Pindaric ode). Jones's lengthy "Argument" summarizes the content, which may be seen to have much in common with later expressions of mystical pantheism in Romantic lyrics by, among others, Wordsworth (*Tintern Abbey*, NAEL 8, 2.258–62) and Percy Shelley (*Mont Blanc* and *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, NAEL 8, 2.762–68).

The hymn which can be rightly called a poetic rendering of Indian philosophy tells us about the many names of the Omniscient, the Omnipotent and the Omnipresent Narayena whom he calls "Spirit of spirits". The universe is the manifestation of Narayena whom we cannot see but who is present everywhere and in all the objects:

*Spirit of spirits, who, through ev'ry part
Of space expanded and of endless time,
Beyond the stretch of lab'ring thought sublime,
Badst uproar into beauteous order syart,
Before Heav'n was, Thou art!*

He is the only reality and everything else that we see is simply a reflection of His reality and not the Reality itself. And hence, Jones calls meads, lawns, leaves, blossoms "unsubstantial":

*Smooth meads and lawns that glow with varying dyes
Of dew-bespangled leaves and blossoms bright,
Hence! Vanish from my sight:
Delusive pictures! Unsubstantial shows.
He is aware of "One abundant source":
My soul absorb'd One only Being knows,
Of all perceptions One abundant source.*

And hence he concludes that he is no more interested in "fading worlds":

*Whence ev'ry object ev'ry moment flows:
Suns hence derive their force,
Hence planets learn their source;
But suns and fading worlds I view no more
God only I perceive; God only I adore.*

If *A Hymn to Narayena* reflects Jones' understanding of Indian philosophy, *A Hymn to Sereswaty* his deep understanding of Indian music:

*Sweet grace of Brehma's bed!
Thou, when thy glorious lord*

*Bade airy nothing breathe and bless his pow'r,
Satst with illumin'd head,
And, in sublime accord,
Seo'n sprightly notes, to hail th' auspicious hour,
Ledst from their secret bow'r:*

His understanding of Indian *ragas* fascinates and amazes anyone who goes through the hymn, which talks of not only the time the *ragas* are to be sung, but also the sorts of persons entitled to sing them:

*While Ràgny's ever gay
Toss the light cordage, and in cadence sing
The sweet return of Spring:
Here dark Viráwter stands;
There Rámcarý divine
And fawn-eyed Lelit shine;
But stern Daysàsha leads her warring bands,
And slow in ebon clouds
Petmenjary her fading beauty shrouds.
Ah! where has Deipec veil'd
His flame-encircled head?
Where flow his lays too sweet for mortal ears?
O loss how long bewail'd!
Is yellow Cámód fled?
And blythe Cárnatý vaunting o'er her peers?
Where stream Caydar's tears
Intent on scenes above,
A beauteous anchorite?
No more shall Daysa bright
With gentle numbers call her tardy love?*

A Hymn to Ganga is the last hymn. This hymn also, like other hymns, ends on a note of benediction:

*What name, sweet bride, will best allure
Thy sacred ear, and give thee honour due?
Vishnupedi? Mild Bhishmasú?
Smooth Suranimnagà? Trisrótà pure?
By that I call? Its pow'r confess;
With growing gifts thy suppliants bless,
Who with full sails in many a light-oar'd boat*

*On thy jasper bosom float;
Nor frown, dread Goddess, on a peerless race
With lib'ral heart and martial grace,
Wasted from colder isles remote:
As they preserve our laws, and bid our terror cease,
So be their darling laws preserv'd in wealth, in joy, in peace!*

The nine hymns that he wrote during a span of four years should be resurrected not simply because they reflect his understanding of Indian philosophy but also because of their poetic qualities. They reflect his keen poetic sensibility and clear understanding of poetic forms. The images he has used in his hymns as well as other poems are apt, precise, vivid, clear, and exact in their applications. They also lend grace and charm to his poems. He uses the image of an eagle while describing the Ganga in the opening lines of *A Hymn to Ganga*. The image is not new but his handling makes it into something new:

*How sweetly Ganga smiles, and glides
Luxuriant o'er her broad autumnal bed!
Her waves perpetual verdure spread,
Whilst health and plenty deck her golden sides:
As when an eagle, child of light,
On Cambala's unmeasur'd height,
By Pótala, the pontiff's throne rever'd,
O'er her eyry proudly rear'd
Sits brooding, and her plumage vast expands,
Thus Ganga o'er her cherish'd lands,
To Brahmà's grateful race endear'd,
Throws wide her fost'ring arms, and on her banks divine
Sees temples, groves, and glitt'ring tow'rs, that in her crystal shine.*

His "Tir'd gales" and "panting clouds" (*A Hymn to Indra*) are as fresh as they were when they were first used. His "clear as speech" may not fascinate modern readers, but they would find his "as various as mind" still fresh and captivating:

*They drank the air; they came
With many a sparkling glance,
And knit the mazy dance,
Like yon bright orbs, that gird the solar flame,*

*Now parted, now combin'd,
Clear as thy speech and various as thy mind.
Young Passions at the sound
In shadowy forms arose,
O'er hearts, yet uncreated, sure to reign; (A Hymn to Sereswaty)*

*His hymns reveal his mastery of form as well as diction:
Joy, that o'erleaps all bound,
Grief, that in silence grows,
Hope, that with honey blends the cup of pain,
Pale Fear, and stern Disdain,
Grim Wrath's avenging band,
Love, nurs'd in dimple smooth,
That ev'ry pang can soothe;
But, when soft Pity her meek trembling hand
Stretch'd, like a new-born girl,
Each sigh was music, and each tear a pearl. (A Hymn to Sereswaty)*

This passage from *A Hymn to Ganga* will fascinate readers for Jones' simplicity of language as well as apt poetic description of Ganga's tributaries:

*Smoothly she flows, where Calinadí brings
To Canyacuwoja, seat of kings,
On prostrate waves her tributary flow'rs;
Whilst Yamunà, whose waters clear
Fam'd Indraprestha's vallies cheer,
With Sereswatí knit in mystic chain,
Gurgles o'er the vocal plain
Of Mathurà, by sweet Brindavan's grove,
Where Gópa's love-lorn daughters rove,
And hurls her azure stream amain,
Till blest Prayaga's point beholds three mingling tides,
Where pilgrims on the far-sought bank drink nectar, as it glides . . .
'A goddess comes,' cried Gumti chaste,
And roll'd her flood with zealous haste:
Her follow'd Sona with pellucid wave
Dancing from her diamond cave,
Broad Gogra, rushing swift from northern hills,*

*Red Gandac, drawn by crocodiles, (Herds, drink not there, nor, herdsmen,
lave!)*

*Cosa, whose bounteous hand Népalian odour flings,
And Mahanadi laughing wild at cities, thrones, and kings.*

His description of the loneliness of a man who has lost his love is poignant in its appeal:

*But me, for ever bath'd in gushing tears,
No mirth enlivens, and no beauty cheers:
The birds that warble, and the flowers that bloom,
Relieve no more this solitary gloom.
I see where late the verdant meadow smil'd,
A joyless desert, and a dreary wild:—
For those dear eyes, that pierc'd my heart before,
Are clos'd in death, and charm the world no more:
Lost are those tresses, that outshone the morn,
And pale those cheeks, that might the skies adorn.
Ah, death! thy hand has cropp'd the fairest flower,
That shed its smiling rays in beauty's bower;
Thy dart has lay'd on yonder sable bier
All my soul lov'd, and all the world held dear; (The Hindu Wife)*

He anticipates Thomas Hardy's views when he talks of "hard fate of man", "life of care", and "vain hopes":

*Hard fate of man, on whom the heaven's bestow
A drop of pleasure for a sea of woe!
Ah, life of care, in fears or hopes consum'd,
Vain hopes, that wither ere they well have bloom'd!
How oft, emerging from the shades of night,
Laughs the gay morn, and spreads a purple light:
But soon the gathering clouds o'ershade the skies,
Red lightnings play, and thundering storms arise!
How oft a day, that fair and mild appears,
Grows dark with fate, and mars the toil of years! (The Hindu Wife)*

He describes how a person's love changed his attitude and how he found the world once he was in love different but fascinating:

*I saw, I lov'd, and bade the world farewell.
Where'er she mov'd, the meads were fresh and gay,
And every bower exhal'd the sweets of May;*

*Smooth flow'd the streams, and softly blew the gale;
The rising flowers impurpled every dale;
Calm was the Ocean, and the sky serene;
An universal smile o'erspread the shining scene: (The Hindu Wife)*

There are many passages in *The Hindu Wife* that would move modern readers. His description of how a man feels when death separates his love from him conjures up an atmosphere of the void the man feels:

*'Where are those cheeks, and where those locks of gold?
'Where are those eyes, which oft the Muse has sung?
'Where those sweet lips, and that enchanting tongue?
'Ye radiant tresses! and thou nectar'd smile!
'Ye looks that might the melting skies beguile!
'You robb'd my soul of rest, my eyes of sleep;
'You taught me how to love, and how to weep.'*
*No shrub o'erhangs the dew-bespangled vale,
No blossom trembles to the dying gale,
No floweret blushes in the morning rays,
No stream along the winding valley plays,
But knows what anguish thrills my tortur'd breast,
What pains consume me, and what cares infest . . .
She comes no more: my pangs more fierce return;
Tears gush in streams, and sighs my bosom burn.
Ye banks, that oft my weary limbs have borne,
Ye murmuring brooks, that learnt of me to mourn;
Ye birds, that tune with me your plaintive lay;
Ye groves, where Love once taught my steps to stray;
You, ever sweet and ever fair, renew
Your strains melodious, and your blooming hue:
But not in my sad heart can bliss remain, (The Hindu Wife)*

His description of how love alone can make us happy reminds us of Shelley:

*Yet weak is our vaunt, while something we want,
More sweet than the pleasure which prospects can give;
Come, smile, damsels of Cardigan,
Love can alone make it blissful to live. (Fete Champetre)*

Derozio was influenced by the Romantics, but in the case of William Jones, it is completely different; it was not he, but the Romantics who were

influenced. The influence of the Romantic poets on Derozio can be seen in some of his shorter poems like *Sonnet; To the Moon*, *The Golden Vase*, *Sonnet: Death, my Best Friend*. The influence of Byron can be seen in *Don Juanics* and *The Fakeer of Jungheera* Iyengar calls “competent narrative verse with many Byronic echoes” (36). Both Naik and Iyengar talk of the influence of the Romantics on him. Iyengar concludes: “As a poet, Derozio was obviously influenced by the Romantics— notably Byron, Scott, Moore; but he knew his Shelley and Keats also very well” (35). Naik talks of the influence of Pope even on his works: “The shorter poems show a strong influence of British romantic poets in theme...sentiment, imagery and diction, with some traces of neo-classicism (e.g. ‘The heart...where hope eternal springs’, with its obvious echo of Pope)” (22-23). Pinto talks of Jones’ influence on the English poets of England when he explains why Jones deserves a place in the history of English literature: “Jones certainly deserves a place in the history of English literature, both for his own poetry and criticism, and for his influence on such great authors as Gibbon, Byron, Shelley, and Tennyson, as well as on general culture and literary taste for at least half a century” (686).

The seventh hymn inspired the opening lines of Keats’ *Hyperion*, and Shelley’s *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*; the similarity between Shelley’s *Hymn to Apollo* and the fifth hymn is too obvious. Shelley’s transition from the early atheistic materialism to the mystical pantheism of his mature works is chiefly because of the influence Jones’ hymns had on him. Shelley was so influenced by his *Hymn to Narayana* that he wanted to read his other hymns and works and hence, ordered the whole set of Jones’ work.

In an age when people are revered as NRIs, when diasporic writers find a respectable place in the histories of Indian English literature, when people detest being called Indians are treated as Indians, when we are nostalgic about the achievers whose ancestors left the country centuries ago and when a person’s ancestry does not disqualify him from being an Indian writer, Jones certainly deserves to be called an Indian writer. We must have a fresh look at the history of Indian English poetry, and declare him, and not Derozio, the first poet of Indian English literature.

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