A History of Indian English Literature

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CHAPTER 1

The Literary Landscape

The Nature and Scope of Indian English Literature

INDIAN ENGLISH literature began as an interesting by-product of an eventful encounter in the late eighteenth century between a vigorous and enterprising Britain and a stagnant and chaotic India. As a result of this encounter, as F.W. Bain puts it, 'India, a withered trunk...suddenly shot out with foreign foliage.'[1] One form this foliage took was that of original writing in English by Indians, thus partially fulfilling Samuel Daniel's sixteenth century prophecy concerning the English language:[2]

> Who (in time) knows whither we may vent
> The treasures of our tongue? To what strange shores
> This gain of our best glory shall be sent
> T'enrich unknowing nations with our stores.
> What worlds in th'yet unformed orient
> May come refined with th'accents that are ours.

The first problem that confronts the historian of this literature is to define its nature and scope clearly. The question has been made rather complicated owing to two factors: first, this body of writing has, from time to time, been designated variously as

'Indo-Anglian literature', 'Indian Writing in English' and 'Indo-English literature'; secondly, the failure to make clear-cut distinctions has also often led to a confusion between categories such as 'Anglo-Indian literature', literature in the Indian languages translated into English and original composition in English by Indians. Thus, in his *A Sketch of Anglo-Indian Literature* (1908), E.F. Oaten considers the poetry of Henry Derozio as part of 'Anglo-Indian literature'. The same critic, in his essay on Anglo-Indian literature in *The Cambridge History of English Literature* (Vol. XIV, Ch. 10) includes Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore and 'Aravindo [*sic*] Ghose' among 'Anglo-Indian' writers along with F.W. Bain and F.A. Steel. Similarly, Bhupal Singh's *Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction* (1934) deals with both British and Indian writers on Indian subjects. V.K. Gokak, in his book, *English in India: Its Present and Future* (1964), interprets the term 'Indo-Anglian Literature' as comprising 'the work of Indian writers in English' and 'Indo-English literature' as consisting of 'translations by Indians from Indian literature into English'[3]. In his massive survey, *Indian Writing in English* (1962), K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar includes English translations of Tagore's novels and plays done by others in his history of Indian creative writing in English, while H.M. Williams excludes these from his *Indo-Anglian Literature 1800-1970:* A *Survey* (1976). John B. Alphonso Karkala (*Indo-English Literature in the Nineteenth Century*) (1970) uses the term 'Indo-English literature' to mean 'literature produced by Indians in English.'[4]

Strictly speaking, Indian English literature may be defined as literature written *originally* in English by authors Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality. It is clear that neither 'Anglo-Indian Literature', nor literal translations by others (as distinguished from creative translations by the authors themselves) can legitimately form part of this literature. The former comprises the writings of British or Western authors concerning India. Kipling, Forster, F.W. Bain, Sir Edwin Arnold, F.A. Steel, John Masters, Paul Scott, M.M. Kaye and many others have all written

about India, but their work obviously belongs to British literature. Similarly, translations from the Indian languages into English cannot also form part of Indian English literature, except when they are creative translations by the authors themselves. If Homer and Virgil, Dante and Dostoevsky translated into English do not become British authors by any stretch of the imagination, there is little reason why Tagore's novels, most of his short stories and some of his plays translated into English by others should form part of Indian English literature. On the other hand, a work like *Gitanjali* which is a creative translation by the author himself should qualify for inclusion. The crux of the matter is the distinctive literary phenomenon that emerges when an Indian sensibility tries to express itself originally in a medium of expression which is not primarily Indian. There is, of course, that infinitesimally small class of Indian society called the 'Anglo-Indian', i.e., the Eurasians, who claim English as their mother tongue; but with notable exceptions like Henry Derozio, Aubrey Menen and Ruskin Bond, few of them have tried to express themselves creatively in English. But even in their case, the Indian strain in them is bound to condition the nature of both their artistic sensibility and their way of expression. (In fact, the poetry of Derozio is a copybook example of this.) However, since literature is not a science, there will always be a no man's land in which all attempts at strict definition are in danger of getting lost in a haze. Thus, there are exceptional cases like Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala. The former, born of a Sri Lankan Tamil 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. As for Jhabvala, she is virtually an international phenomenon. Born of Polish parents in Germany, she received her education in English, married an Indian, lived in India for more than twenty years, and has written in English. This daughter-in-law of India (though a rebellious one, in her later work) shows such close

familiarity and deep understanding of Indian social life (especially in her earlier work) that she has rightly found a place in the history of Indian English literature. On the other hand, V.S. Naipaul's Indian ancestry is indisputable, but he is so much of an outsider when he writes about India and the Indians and so much of an insider while dealing with Caribbean life and character, that there can be no two opinions on his rightful inclusion in the history of West Indian writing.

It is obvious that Indian English literature, thus defined is not part of English literature, any more than American literature can be said to be a branch of British literature. It is legitimately a part of Indian literature, since its differentia is the expression in it of an Indian ethos. Its use of English as a medium may also give it a place in Commonwealth literature, but that is merely a matter of critical convenience, since the Commonwealth is largely a political entity—and, in any case, this does not in the smallest measure affect the claim of Indian English literature to be primarily a part of Indian literature.

Another problem which the historian of this literature has to face is that of choosing from among the various appellations given to it from time to time—viz., 'Indo-Anglian literature', 'Indian Writing in English', 'Indo-English literature' and 'Indian English literature'. The first of these terms was first used as the title of the *Specimen Compositions from Native Students*, published in Calcutta in 1883. The phrase received general currency when K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, the pioneer of this discipline, used it as a title to his first book on the subject: *Indo-Anglian Literature* (1943). He, however, now agrees that 'Indo-Anglian' strikes many as a not altogether happy expression.'[5] He adds, "I know many are allergic to the expression 'Indo-Anglian', and some would prefer 'Indo-English'. The advantage with 'Indo-Anglian' is that it can be used both as adjective and as substantive, but 'Indo-Englishman' would be unthinkable. 'Indo-Anglian' is reasonably handy and descriptive." But a major flaw in the term

'Indo-Anglian', as pointed out by Alphonso-Karkala, is that it would suggest 'relation between two countries (India and England) rather than a country and a language.'[7] 'Indo-Anglian' is thus hardly an accurate term to designate this literature. Apart from that, 'Indo-Anglian' also appears to be cursed with the shadow of the Anglican perpetually breathing ecclesiastically down its slender neck, and threatening to blur its identity. (In fact, Professor Iyengar has noted how, in his book, *Literature and Authorship in India*, 'Indo-Anglian' was changed to 'Indo-Anglican' by the enterprising London printer who, puzzled at so odd an expression, transformed it into something familiar.[8]) For his first comprehensive study of the subject, published in 1962, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar used the phrase, 'Indian Writing in English'. Two pioneering collections of critical essays on this literature, both published in 1968, also followed his example: *Indian Writing in English: Critical Essays* by David McCutchion and *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English* edited by M.K. Naik, S.K. Desai and G.S. Amur. But the term 'Indian Writing in English' has been accused of having a rather circumlocutory air, and while 'Indo-English literature' possesses an admirable compactness, it has, as noted earlier, been used to denote translations by Indians from Indian literature into English. The Sahitya Akademi has recently accepted 'Indian English Literature' as the most suitable appellation for this body of writing. The term emphasizes two significant ideas: first that this literature constitutes one of the many streams that join the great ocean called Indian literature, which, though written in different languages, has an unmistakable unity; and secondly, that it is an inevitable product of the nativization of the English language to express the Indian sensibility. Nevertheless, by whatever name Indian English literature is called, it remains a literary phenomenon worthy of serious scrutiny.

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5. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English* (Bombay, 1973), p. 3.
6. *ibid.*, p. 4.
7. *op. cit.*, p. 2, footnote.
8. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Indian Writing in English*, pp. 3-4.

CHAPTER 2

The Pagoda Tree: From the Beginnings to 1857

THE BRITISH connection with India was effectively established in the beginning of the seventeenth century, though the first Englishman ever to visit India did so was early as A.D. 883, when one Sigelm, as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* notes, was sent there by King Alfred on a pilgrimage, in fulfilment of a vow. The discovery of the sea-route to India by Vasco da Gama in 1498 brought the Portuguese and the Dutch to India long before the British. In early and mid-sixteenth century, British interest in India mostly remained in the formative stage. A petition addressed to King Henry VIII in 1511 reads: 'The Indies are discovered and vast treasures brought from thence everyday. Let us therefore bend our endeavours thitherwards.'[1] Finally, the East India Company which was to link India's destiny firmly with Britain for almost two centuries was granted its first charter by Queen Elizabeth I on the last day of the last month of the last year of the sixteenth century, as if to usher in a new era in the East-West relationship with the dawn of the new century.

The East India Company, whose original aim was primarily commerce and not conquest, however, soon discovered its manifest destiny of filling the vacuum created in the eighteenth

century India by the gradual disintegration of the Mughal empire. In Kipling's words,[2]

> Once, two hundred years ago, the trader came/Meek and tame./Where his timid foot halted, there he stayed,/Till mere trade/Grew to Empire,/And he sent his armies forth/South and North,/Till the country from Peshawur to Ceylon/was his own.

After the Battle of Plassey (1757) which made the Company virtually master of Bengal, the British who had come to India to sell, decided also to rule. The business of ruling naturally involved the shaking of the Indian 'Pagoda tree' of its treasures. (One recalls Clive's famous reply to his detractors after the sack of Murshidabad in 1757: 'I stand astonished at my own moderation.') But those engaged in shaking the 'Pagoda tree' were also instrumental in planting the seeds of a modernisation process in the eighteenth century Indian Waste Land—seeds which started burgeoning in the nineteenth century. The rise of Indian English literature was an aspect of this Indian renaissance.

As Sri Aurobindo points out, the Indian renaissance was less like the European one and more like the Celtic movement in Ireland, 'the attempt of a reawakened national spirit to find a new impulse of self-expression which shall give the spiritual force for a great reshaping and rebuilding.'[3] The awakening of India, as Jawaharlal Nehru observes, 'was two-fold: she looked to the West and, at the same time, she looked at herself and her own past.'[4] In the rediscovery of India's past, some of the early officials of the company played a significant role. Many of them were scholars with a passion for oriental culture and it was not unusual in those days to find an East India Company official fully equipped to discuss the Koran with a Maulana Mohammad Ali and a Purana with a Viswanath Sastri with equal competence. 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 Asokan 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. This consummation was not, however, achieved before the British policy concerning the education of Indians had passed through two diametrically opposed stages. To begin with, for almost a generation after the East India Company had virtually become the *de facto* ruler of Bengal, the Government had no official education policy, probably because at that time, even in Britain itself, education had not yet been accepted as a responsibility of the Government. But soon, practical considerations stressed the necessity to evolve such a policy. There was a pressing need for suitable pundits and *maulvis* to help judges in the administration of justice. It was, therefore, decided to revive the study of Sanskrit and Persian among the Indians. This led to the establishment by Hastings of the Calcutta Madarasa for teaching Persian and Arabic in 1781 and that of the Sanskrit College at Benaras by Jonathan Duncan in 1792. The Orientalists among the Company officials naturally supported this policy enthusiastically. By the turn of the century, however, second thoughts began to prevail. First, there was an equally pressing need for Indian clerks, translators and lower officials in administration and a knowledge of English was essential for these jobs. Furthermore, with the rise of the Evangelical movement in Britain, the ideal of spreading the word of Christ among the natives assumed vital importance for some Englishmen. Even before the close of the eighteenth century, Mission schools which taught English besides the vernacular had already been functioning in the South, while the beginning of the nineteenth century saw the establishment of similar schools in Bengal and Bombay. The missionaries believed that in imparting Western education to Indians, every teacher was 'breaking to pieces with a rod of iron the earthenware vessels of Hinduism.'[5] The imperialists also championed the cause of English, which for

them was a potent instrument to civilize 'the lesser breeds without the law'. They also thought that the spread of English education among the natives would lead to the assimilation of Western culture by the Indians and that this would make for the stability of the empire—a view strongly advocated by Charles Grant, who argued: 'To introduce the language of the conquerors seems to be an obvious means of assimilating a conquered people to them.'[6]

The Orientalists were seriously alarmed at this growing support to English. Their stand was forcefully expressed by H.H. Wilson, who observed: 'It is not by the English language that we can enlighten the people of India. It can be effected only through forms of speech which they already understand and use.... The project of importing English literature along with English cotton into India and bringing it into universal use must at once be felt by every reasonable mind as chimerical and ridiculous.'[7] It was, however, obvious that the Orientalists were fighting a losing battle. As K.K. Chatterjee notes, 'The Home Office despatches from 1824 onwards went on being increasingly insistent on re-orienting Indian education to teach the useful science and literature of Europe.... All the presidencies in the 1820s were headed by Governors who were generally inclined to English education, though with varying emphases (Elphinstone in Bombay, Thomas Munro in Madras, and above all, the reformist Bentinck in Bengal).[8]

As for the Indians themselves, there was no doubt in the minds of most of their intellectuals as to which way the wind was blowing. Perhaps the most adaptable of people, they had whole-heartedly taken to Persian some centuries earlier, with the Muslim conquest, and had mastered that language. It was obvious to them that a similar strategy with regard to English was now called for. As early as 1816, we find a Calcutta Brahmin named Baidyanath Mukhopadhyaya telling the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court that 'many of the leading Hindus were desirous of forming an establishment for the education of their children in a liberal manner,' meaning obviously English education.[9] A

strong prejudice against Western education was indubitably rampant in the conservative circles. It is on record that the office of the Inspector-General of Schools at Patna was at one time popularly known as 'Shaitan ka daftarkh"an"a'[10] (i.e., the Devil's Office). Nevertheless, the more forward-looking among the Indians were convinced that English education was not the Devil's wine but a Godsend. So enthusiastic was especially the younger generation in its desire to learn English that, as Trevelyan has noted, an Englishman coming to Calcutta by steamer was pressed by eager boys clamouring for English books: 'He cut up an old *Quarterly Review* and distributed the pages.'[11] As the same writer points out, on the opening of the Hughli College in August 1836, 'there were 1200 applications for admission within three days.'[12]

The cause of English education found its ablest Indian champion in Raja Rammohun Roy. In his persuasive *Letter on English Education* addressed to the Governor-General, Lord Amherst in 1823, he argued most forcefully against the establishment of a Sanskrit School in preference to one imparting English education:

> If it had been intended to keep the British nation in ignorance of real knowledge, the Baconian philosophy would not have been allowed to displace the system of schoolmen, which was the best calculated to perpetuate ignorance. In the same manner, the Sanskrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep this country in darkness, if such had been the policy of the British legislature. But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing... useful sciences, which may be accomplished by employing a few gentlemen of talents and learning educated in Europe and providing a college furnished with the necessary books, instruments and other apparatus.[13]

Even before this letter was written, Rammohun Roy had already been active in the cause of Western education. Together with David Hume, the British watch-maker turned educationist and Edward Hyde-East, the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Bengal, he established in 1816 an Association to promote European learning and science. This was the first step towards the founding of the Hindu College at Calcutta on 20 January 1817. Rammohun Roy also founded at his own expense a school in Suripara (near Calcutta) to teach English to boys (1816-17). ... Rammohun invited the best among them to his house for advanced coaching by English instructors. He also founded another school in Calcutta called the Anglo-Hindu School (1822).[14]

With the tide running so strongly in favour of English, the *coup de grace* was delivered by Macaulay's famous Minute on Education of 2 February 1835, which clinched the issue. Macaulay, who combined in himself the spirit of staunch Evangelism, Messianic imperialism and Whig liberalism, was richly endowed with a boundless courage of conviction, which admitted no possibility of there being another side to the question at all. He stated emphatically that it was both necessary and possible 'to make the natives of this country good English scholars' and that 'to this end all our efforts ought to be directed.'[15]

In a passage entirely typical of his cast of mind and his style (which made Lord Melbourne once exclaim: 'I wish I could be as cocksure of any one thing as Tom Macaulay is of everything') he declared:

'The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach this language, we shall teach languages in which by universal confession there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own; whether when we can teach European science, we shall teach systems which by univeral confession, whenever they differ from those of Europe, differ for the worse, and whether, when we can patronize sound philosophy and true history, we shall countenance at public

expense medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farrier, astronomy which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school, history abounding with kings thirty feet high and reigns 30,000 years long and geography made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter.'[16]

Macaulay did not rest content with championing the cause of English so strongly; he even threatened to resign from his position as President of the Governor-General's Council, if his recommendations were not accepted by the Government. Lord Bentinck, the Governor-General, immediately yielded and the Government resolution of 7 March 1835 (a red-letter day in the history of Modern India) unequivocally declared that 'the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science among the natives of India, and all funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone.'[17]

The extremism of this policy was sought to be corrected some time later by Sir Charles Wood, a member of the Select Committee of the British Parliament in 1852-53. In his well-known Despatch of 19 July 1854, while reiterating the necessity to 'extend European knowledge throughout all classes of the people', he observed that 'this object must be effected by means of the English language in the higher branches of instruction, and by that of the vernacular languages of India to the great mass of the people.'[18] The logical outcome of Wood's Despatch was the establishment of the three first Indian universities—those of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras—in 1857. These universities soon became the nurseries of the resurgent Indian genius, which within hardly a generation thereafter ushered in a renaissance in the political, social, cultural and literary spheres of Indian life.

Early Prose

More than two decades prior to Macaulay's Minute of 1835, Indians had already started writing in English. Cavelly Venkata Boriah's 'Account of the Jains' published in *Asiatic Researches*

or Transactions of the Society instituted in Bengal for inquiring into the History and Antiquities, the Art, Sciences and Literature of Asia, Vol. IX (London, 1809, written in c. 1803) is perhaps the first published composition in English of some length by an Indian. Boriah (1776-1803), an assistant to Col. Colin Mackenzie (1753-1821)—the first Surveyor General of India and well-known in South Indian history for the collection, *Mackenzie Manuscripts*—was described by Mackenzie as 'a youth of the quickest genius and disposition.'[19] A master of a number of languages including Sanskrit, Persian, Hindustani and English, he studied mathematics, astronomy and geography; wrote poetry in Telugu; discovered ancient coins and deciphered old inscriptions. His 'Account of the Jains' has been described in the essay itself as 'collected from a priest of this sect at Mudgeri' and 'translated by C. Boria' [*sic*] This essay of twenty-eight pages is not, therefore, an original composition, though it remains of historical importance as probably the first considerable attempt by an Indian to write in English. Raja Rammohun Roy's essay on 'A Defence of Hindu Theism' (1817) may be regarded as the first original publication of significance in the history of Indian English literature. Raja Rammohun Roy (1772-1833), aptly described by Rabindranath Tagore as 'the inaugurator of the modern age in India'[20] was indeed the morning star of the Indian renaissance. The casual Western reader of today who perhaps remembers him best as the original of the absurd Rummon Loll in Thackeray's *Newcomes*, certainly does him less than justice. A pioneer in religious, educational, social and political reform, he was a man cast in the mould of the Humanists of the European Renaissance. Born at Radhanagar in the Hooghly district (which was also to produce Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Aurobindo) of Bengal in 1772, Rammohun was the son of a rich landlord. Going to Patna at the age of nine to study Arabic and Persian, he steeped himself in Muslim theology, Islamic culture and Persian poetry there. Under the influence of the doctrines of the Mutazalis school, he developed a rationalistic approach to religion, which he lost no time in applying to Hinduism. Expelled from his father's

house for his iconoclasm at the age of sixteen, he travelled far and wide and is supposed to have lived in Tibet for sometime to study Buddhism there. This was followed by a sojourn at Benaras, where he mastered orthodox Hindu theology and philosophy. Restored to his father's favour in 1794, he returned home and joined the East India Company service in 1804. Resigning his post in 1811, he settled down in Calcutta in 1814 and till the end of his life carried on a crusade for social, cultural, religious and political reform. Plunging into journalism, he edited periodicals in three languages—*The Brahummunical Magazine* in English (1821-23), *Samb"ad Kaumudi* in Bengali (1821) and *Mirat-ul-Akhbar* in Persian (1822-23). In 1828, he founded the Brahmo Sabha or Samaj, which was the earliest attempt of its kind in the nineteenth century to revitalize Hinduism. Sailing for Britain in 1830 as the envoy of the Mughal emperor who conferred on him the title 'Raja', he continued his mission there until his death at Bristol in 1833.

Proficient in about half a dozen oriental and an equal number of occidental languages, Rammohun Roy wrote extensively in Bengali, Persian, Hindi, Sanskrit and English. [His collected writings—*The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy* (6 vols., 1945-51) were edited by Kalidas Nag and Debajyoti Burman. *Selected Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, issued by the Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, appeared in 1977]. Of his English works, as many as thirty-two are original essays on various subjects. The earliest of his writings on religion were in the form of translations: 'An Abridgement of the Vedant' (1816) and renderings of the *Kena* and *Isa Upanishads* (1816). An attack on the 'Abridgement of the Vedant' by one Sankara Sastri prompted Rammohun Roy to write his first original essay in English: 'A Defence of Hindu Theism' (1817)—a masterly vindication of monotheism. This was followed by 'A Second Defence of the Monotheistical system of the Vedas in reply to an apology for the present state of Hindoo Worship' (1817).[21] Next, embarking upon the study of Christian theology, he read the scriptures in

Hebrew, Greek and Latin and compiled 'Precepts of Jesus: The Guide to Peace and Happiness, Extracted from the Books of the New Testament ascribed to the Four Evangelists with translations into Sungscrit [*sic*] and Bengalee' (1820). 'The translations, however, if they were ever issued, have never been traced. The probability is that they were never issued.'[22] Here, boldly 'separating from the other matters contained in the New Testament, the moral precepts found in that book', Rammohun Roy tried to place before his 'fellow creatures the words of Christ'. When the book was bitterly attacked as heretical by Christian missionaries, Rammohun Roy wrote in succession three rejoinders: 'An Appeal to the Christian Public, in Defence of "The Precepts of Jesus" ' (published under the pseudonym, 'A Friend of Truth') (1820); 'Second Appeal to the Christian Public, in Defence of "The Precepts of Jesus" ' (1821); and 'Final Appeal to the Christian Public, in Defence of "The Precepts of Jesus' " (1823). In these 'Appeals', Rammohun Roy reiterates the necessity to reject Christian myth, miracle and dogma in favour of the actual teachings of Christ; chastises the missionaries for the un-Christian spirit shown by them in the controversy, and emphasizes the need for a 'religion destructive of differences and dislike between man and man and conducive to the peace and union of mankind.' Dr. Lant Carpenter found the 'Second Appeal' 'distinguished by the closeness of his (Rammohun Roy's) reasoning, the extent and critical accuracy of his scriptural knowledge, the comprehensiveness of his investigations and the acuteness and skill with which he controvents the positions of his opponents.'[23] This comment would fit the other two appeals equally well.

Social reform was equally dear to Rammohun Roy. Here, the plight of women in orthodox Hindu society became his special concern. His broadsides against widow-burning include: 'A Conference between an Advocate for, and an Opponent of, the Practice of burning Widows alive' (1818); 'A Second Conference between an Advocate for, and an Opponent of, the Practice of burning Widows alive' (1820); 'Abstract of the Arguments

regarding the burning of Widows Considered as a Religious Rite' (1830), 'Address to Lord William Bentinck' (1830); and 'Anti-Suttee Petition to the House of Commons' (1832). In his 'Brief Remarks regarding Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females According to the Hindu Law of Inheritance' (1822) he attacks polygamy and shows how ancient Hindu laws have been misinterpreted to deny women equal rights to inheritance. Rammohun Roy's famous 'Letter on English Education' (11 December 1823), which has already been mentioned, is a document of so great importance that it could very well be called 'the manifesto of the Indian renaissance'.

The most significant of Rammohun Roy's political writings are the two 'Petitions Against the Press Regulations' (1823) drafted by him and signed along with him by his supporters. These petitions were occasioned by the passing of a Government ordinance in March 1823 suppressing the freedom of the press, known as 'Adam's gag' after John Adam, the acting Governor-General. In the first petition, described by Miss Collet as 'The Areopagitica of Indian history'[24], Rammohun Roy argues:

'Every good Ruler, who is convinced of the imperfection of human nature, and reverences the Eternal Governor of the world, must be conscious of the great liability to error in managing the affairs of a vast empire; and, therefore, he will be anxious to afford to every individual the readiest means of bringing to his notice whatever may require his interference. To secure this important object, the unrestrained liberty of publication is the only effectual means that can be employed.'[25]

When the petition was rejected, and the Press Regulation Act was promulgated, Rammohun Roy appealed to the King-in-Council. In the second petition, he tells the King:

'If your Majesty's faithful subjects could conceive for a moment that the British nation, actuated solely by interested policy, considered India merely as a valuable property and nothing but the best means of securing its possession and turning it to advantage, even then it would be of importance to ascertain

whether this property be well taken care of by their servants..., therefore, the existence of a free Press is equally necessary for the sake of the Governors and the governed.'[26]

Rammohun Roy's 'Exposition of the Practical Operation of the Judicial and Revenue Systems of India' (1832) represents the evidence given by him before a Parliamentary Select Committee in London in 1831. This document, which embodies Rammohun Roy's views on administrative reform, is specially remarkable for its spirited protest against the economic drain in India under the East India Company rule and the exploitation of the peasantry by the rich landlords.

During the last year of his life, Rammohun Roy wrote a short autobiographical sketch at the request of his friends. (Its authenticity has been questioned, but not conclusively.) This sketch, though all too brief and written in a somewhat matter-of-fact manner, is of interest as the first exercise in Indian English literature in a form which was to be handled with conspicuous success by later writers like Nehru and Nirad C. Chaudhuri.

Rammohun Roy's writings obviously belong to the category of 'Literature of Knowledge', rather than 'Literature of Power', yet, he is a master of a distinguished English prose style. In a personal letter, Jeremy Bentham complimented Rammohun Roy on 'a style, which but for the name of a Hindoo, I should certainly have ascribed to the pen of a superiorly educated and instructed Englishman.'[27] In the same letter, praising James Mill's *History of India*, Bentham added, 'though as to style, I wish I could with truth and sincerity pronounce it equal to yours.'[28] Rammohun Roy's style is reminiscent of Burke's eloquence, though it does not possess the English master's colour and splendour. Nevertheless, clear thinking, soundness of judgement, comprehensiveness of views, forceful and logical argumentation and moderation and dignity in refuting the criticism of his adversaries are the outstanding features of Rammohun Roy's prose style, which indubitably makes him the first of a long line of Indian masters of English prose. The father of Bengali

prose writing, he is also the first 'begetter' of Indian prose in English.

Apart from Rammohun Roy's work there was not a little prose writing of note during mid and later nineteenth century in metropolitan centres like Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. Most of this writing was on religious, social, historical and political subjects and some of it in the form of journalism and pamphleteering.

In Bengal, Krishna Mohan Banerji (1813-85), a pupil of Henry Derozio, the poet, and one of the prominent Christian converts of the day, wrote strong articles exposing the errors and inconsistencies of Hinduism in *The Enquirer* in 1831. His *Dialogues on Hindu Philosophy* (1861) is a potted handbook for missionaries and his *Aryan Witness* (1875) seeks to prove that the Prajapati of the Vedas is Jesus Christ. Another pupil of Derozio, Ram Gopal Ghose (1815-68) was actively associated with many literary, cultural and political organisations in Calcutta. Connected with journals such as *Agyananashun*, *Durpan* and *The Spectator*, he was an enthusiastic pamphleteer and a forceful speaker, eulogised as the 'Indian Demosthenes'. His pamphlet, 'Remarks on the Black Acts' (1851) in defence of the so-called 'Black Acts' of 1849, which abolished some of the privileges of Europeans in India, caused a furore in that community. *The Times* described his speech on the Charter Act as 'a masterpiece of oratory' and his oration on the Queen's Proclamation made the *Indian Field* comment that 'If he were an Englishman, he would have been knighted'.[29] His *Speeches* were published in 1868. Hurish Chunder Mukerji (1824-60) edited *The Hindoo Patriot* from 1854 to 1860 with a passionate sense of mission, championing widow-remarriage, counselling reconciliation after the Mutiny and exposing the iniquities of the British planters. Rajendra Lal Mitra (1824-91), Assistant Secretary and Librarian, Bengal Asiatic Society, and hailed by Tagore as 'Sabyasachi' (i.e., ambidextrous) was one of the earliest Indian antiquarians, Indologists and historians. His numerous studies, including *Antiquities of Orissa* (1875, 1880) and

Buddha Gaya (1878) earned him Max Müller's praise in *Chips from a German Workshop.* His *Speeches*, edited by R.J. Mitter, appeared in 1892. Girish Chunder Ghosh (1829-69) founded in 1849 *The Bengal Recorder Weekly*, which became *The Hindoo Patriot* in 1853. He also founded and edited *The Bengalee* (1861-68) and fearlessly advocated social and political reform. His vigorous pleading in *The Bengalee* led to the appointment of the Famine Commission in 1866. *Selections from the Writings of Girish Chunder Ghosh*, edited by his grandson, Manmath Nath Ghose, appeared in 1912. Raja Ram's *Essays on the Architecture of the Hindus* (Calcutta, 1834), is perhaps the earliest attempt at art criticism.

The first name that comes to mind when one turns from Bengal to Bombay is that of Bal Shastri Jambhekar (1812-46), a great pioneer of the new awakening in the Bombay presidency. Perhaps the first Sanskrit pundit of note to study English, he became the teacher of such men as Dadabhai Naoroji, Bhau Daji, and K.L. Chattre. Linguist, educationist, translator, antiquarian (he contributed frequently to the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*), Jambhekar is best remembered as the founder of the first English-cum-Marathi journal in Maharashtra, *The Durpan* (1832), the aim of which as described in its Prospectus was, to encourage among their countrymen the pursuit of English literature and to open a field for free and public discussion'. The journal sought to 'please, to convey information on passing events, and to point out the means and opportunities for improvements.' His contemporary, Dadoba Pandurang (Tarkhadkar) (1814-82), scholar, educationist, religious and social reformer, and author of the earliest standard Marathi Grammar, wrote 'A Hindu Gentleman's Reflections respecting the works of Emanuel Swedenborg' (1878)—an enlightened study in comparative religious thought. Bhau Daji (1822-74), a physician by profession, was active in many causes. A founder secretary of the Bombay Association, he became the first sheriff of Bombay. Apart from conducting investigations in Indian medicine, he wrote numerous articles on antiquarian research and social and political

problems. His 'Essay on Infanticide' appeared in 1847. His *Writings and Speeches* (1974) have recently been edited by T.G. Mainkar.

In the Madras presidency, apart from Boriah's 'Account of the Jains', another noteworthy early document is Vannelakanti Soobrow's (He was, significantly enough known as 'English Soobrow') report on the 'State of Education in 1820,'[30] submitted to the Madras School Book Society of which he was a nominated member. Written on 22 November, 1820, it was published in the *First Report of the Madras School Book Society for the year 1823*. Soobrow's report contains interesting bits of information such as that *The Arabian Nights* was one of the prescribed school texts then and that 'Among the Natives, English school masters at Madras, there are... very few who have a knowledge of grammar.' In 1844, Gazulu Lakshmi Narsu Chetty (1806-68), a public-spirited businessman and founder of the Madras Native Association, started *The Crescent*—a newspaper dedicated to 'the amelioration of the condition of the Hindoos.'[31] He was also instrumental in drawing up several memorials and petitions to the Government on issues such as the grievances of the people and the need for transferring the administration of India from the Company to the Crown. The Madras presidency also enjoys the distinction of having produced the first work of literary biography in Indian English literature. This was Cavelly Venkanta Ramaswami's *Biographical Sketches of the Dekkan* [*sic*] *Poets* (1829). Ramaswami (1765-1840), the elder brother of C.V. Boriah (the author of the *Account of the Jains*) describes in this book the lives of more than a hundred Indian poets, both ancient and modern, in Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil and Marathi. The accounts vary in length and accuracy and are written in a rather pedestrian style, there being no attempt at critical comment on the poetry. But to have written in English a work of this nature and with this scope in early Nineteenth century India is itself no mean a feat.

In contrast with the Bengal, Bombay and Madras presidencies, the north India of the period shows little sustained interest in

Indian English writing, but as if to compensate for this, it can boast of having produced the first extensive Indian English autobiography (Rammohun Roy's autobiographical sketch is an all too brief affair): *Autobiography of Lutufullah: A Mohamedan Gentleman and His Transactions with his fellow creatures: Interspersed with remarks on the habits, customs and character of the people with whom he had to deal* (1857). The son of a Muslim priest, Lutufullah (b. 1802) served in the states of Baroda and Gwalior, and later, having learnt English, became a tutor in Persian, Arabic and Hindustani to British officers. He travelled widely over India and also visited England. Part travel diary and part autobiography, Lutufullah's book is the expression of a man who was well read (he quotes from Shakespeare, Bacon, Prior and Rowe), enterprising, observant and broad-minded. His boldness of judgement is revealed in his description of the character of the English. Though he admires their civility, respect for law and spirit of patriotism, he is highly critical of what he calls their 'obedience, trust and submission to the female sex' which, according to him, 'are far beyond the limit of moderation'.

Early Poetry

Cavelly Venkata Ramaswami's English rendering of 'Viswagunadarsana' of Arasanipala Venkatadhvarin, an early seventeenth-century Sanskrit poem, is probably the earliest (1825) book of verse in English by an Indian, though being a translation (and not an original work) it cannot properly form part of Indian English literature. An interesting point about the book is that it was published in Calcutta, with the help of donations, and the list of donors given on the last page includes the names of Rammohun Roy and Dwarakanath Tagore.[32] In his *Biographical Sketches of Dekkan Poets*, Ramaswami also gives a competent translation in heroic couplets of passages from *Vasu Charitra*, a Telugu epic by the sixteenth century poet, Bhattu Murti.

The first Indian English poet of note, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-31) was the son of an Indo-Portuguese father and

an English mother. A precocious child, he had already taken to writing in his teens. After completing his school education, he worked for sometime as a clerk in Calcutta and on an indigo plantation at Bhagalpur, and also tried his hand at journalism before joining the Hindu College, Calcutta, as a lecturer. Here, his fearless spirit of inquiry, his passion for ideas, his reformistic idealism and his romantic enthusiasm fired the imagination of many a student. Under his leadership, a debating club ('The Academic Association') and a magazine (*The Parthenon*) were started to discuss all subjects under the sun, including Hindu religious practices, the rights of women and political issues. Orthodox Hindu society in Calcutta was seriously alarmed at these activities which wild rumour painted in the darkest colours. For instance, Derozio and his pupils were accused of 'cutting their way through ham and beef and wading to liberation through tumblers of beer.'[33] It was also said that 'some Hindu boys, when required to utter mantras at prayers, would repeat lines from the *Iliad* instead (and) that one student, asked to bow down before the goddess Kali, greeted the image with a "good morning, Madam". '[34] The mounting pressure of hostile public opinion finally compelled the College authorities to dismiss Derozio from service in 1831 on the charge of corrupting the minds of youth. Undaunted, he started a daily, *The East Indian*, but suddenly died of cholera six months later.

In his all too brief poetic career lasting hardly half a dozen years, Derozio published two volumes of poetry: *Poems* (1827) and *The Fakeer of Jungheera: A Metrical Tale and Other Poems* (1828). The shorter poems show a strong influence of British romantic poets in theme (e.g. 'Sonnet: To the Moon'; 'The Golden Vase'; 'Sonnet: Death, My Best Friend'), sentiment, imagery and diction, with some traces of neo-classicism (e.g. 'The heart...where hope eternal springs', with its obvious echo of Pope). His satirical verse (e.g. 'Don Juanics') and the long narrative poems (*The Fakeer of Jungheera*) clearly indicate his special affinity with Byron. In sharp contrast to the wilting sentimentality