

A Forgotten Anglo-Indian Poet

**Henry Louis Vivian Derozio**



Kaiser Haq

Henry Derozio: drawing by Dipa Haq

FEW outside the Indian subcontinent are likely to know that Indo-Anglian poetry goes back to the early nineteenth century, when the so-called Bengal Renaissance, a product of Western education, brought India's medieval age to a close. Indians who received the new education in English had no taste for the writings of their immediate forebears, and their first creative response to this change in sensibility was to essay into English verse. According to one view, subscribed to by Rabindranath Tagore, the historical role of Indo-Anglian poetry ended with the rise of new literatures in Indian languages that took on board the new learning. This is confuted by the continuing vitality of Indo-Anglian writing, evidence that English has put down roots in the subcontinent. Interestingly, contemporary Indo-Anglian poets dismiss their predecessors as pasticheurs of British poets who exploited the exotic East, but a more sympathetic view will acknowledge the old Indo-Anglians' closer acquaintance with their 'exotic' material and recognize their biographical interest, which derives from the fact that they were the most adventurous participants in the East-West interaction whose product is the subcontinent's 'hybrid' modern culture. I find particularly interesting five poets who, incidentally, represent the main literary trends of their times: Derozio (Romantic), Toru Dutt (Victorian), Manmohan Ghose (Aesthete), Suhrawardy (Modern), Furtado (Contemporary).

The following discussion focuses on Henry Derozio.

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-31) is best remembered as the guru of 'Young Bengal'. In a historic stint at the Hindu later renamed Presidency College, India's oldest institution of Western higher education, he fired these enfants terribles of the Bengal Renaissance with iconoclastic zeal, with so un-

affectionate step-mother, Anna Maria nee Rivers, also English, and evidently quite accomplished: following the demise of husband and step children she advertised offering instruction to young ladies in eleven subjects ranging from English, French and math to needlework.

Henry was baptised on 12 August 1809 in Calcutta's St. John's Church by the Rev. James Ward, who at the same font three hears hence baptised William Thackeray. At six Derozio was put to school at David Drummond's Academy at Dhurrumtollah (now spelt Dharmatolah) and became an instant favourite with master and fellow-pupils alike. Drummond, the shaping spirit behind Derozio, was a remarkable personality. A hunch-backed poet, polymath and Humist free-thinker, he wrote a few popular songs in Scots before leaving his native Fifeshire for good. His school was the most advanced in Calcutta, its accent on the modern distinguishing it from more classical-oriented institutions. When a Phrenological Society was founded in Calcutta in 1825 Drummond quietly sat through its sessions for two years, then published a 210-page objections to Phrenology. Thomas Edwards, whose Henry Derozio: The Eurasian Poet, Teacher and Journalist (Calcutta 1884) is the chief source on Derozio and his times, notes that Drummond's critique put paid to the prospects of the pseudo-science in India. Soon after, Drummond was laid out by a nervous illness from which, till his death in 1843, he never fully recovered. His dying wish was that the poems he had written in India should be sent home for publication, but the ship carrying the MS sank without trace. This might well have been a grievous loss to Scots literature, for readers of the MS had invoked comparisons with Burns.

Derozio was taken out of school at fourteen and put to clerking for his father's employer. After two years he left for the more congenial atmosphere of a maternal uncle's indigo plantation, close to romantic Jungheera, a rocky isle in the Ganges, then a favourite haunt of fakirs. He began placing poems in Calcutta journals and was persuaded by an editor to return to Calcutta and collect his work. Poems, privately published in 1827, which was favourably noticed in London, made him a local celebrity, and was followed a year later by the Fakeer of Jungheera, metrical tale and other poems. (Calcutta: Samuel

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**Kalighat Painting**

**W. H. Archer and the "Englishness" of Kalighat Painting**

The Kalighat school of painting emerged around the 1830s and petered out in the early decades of the 20th century. The term 'Kalighat' is derived from the locale of the painters at Kalighat (on the bank of Hoogly in Calcutta) where the famous Kali temple is situated. The painters are popularly known as patuas (picture-makers) and their artistic productions are patas (literally, pictures). The patas were done mostly on thin, cheap paper in water colour and were sold cheaply to the numerous pilgrims who came to visit the Kali temple. The necessity of rapid mass production as well as the long tradition of scroll painting in rural Bengal gave the school its distinctive style: bright colours, clear outlines, bold sweeping strokes with shaded contours and simplification of forms.

Subject matter includes gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, popular religious figures, men and manners, dramatic contemporary events (the sensational Mohonto-Elokeshi affair) and Indian flora and fauna. Only a handful of Kalighat paintings are now available in India, scattered in various museums and some private collections. A fairly large collection is in England and some in museums in Europe.

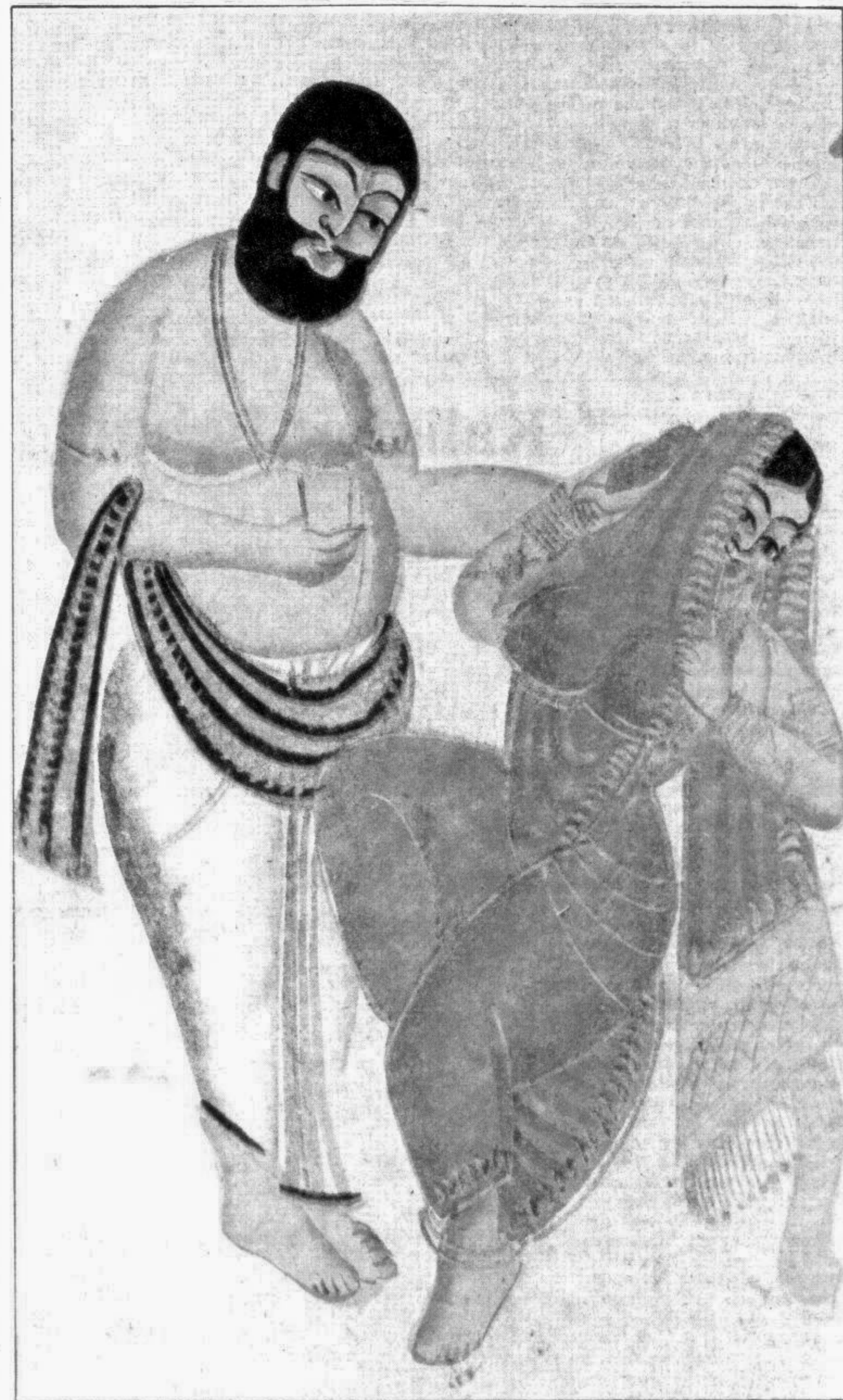
Shawkat Hussain

IN the first issue of an Indian magazine of art, Rup, published in 1988, W G Archer's well-known essay on Kalighat painting (1962) was reprinted as an introduction to the Patuas of Kalighat temple. Both the choice of Kalighat Patuas as the theme of the inaugural issue, as well as the choice of Archer's piece on Kalighat painting seem most appropriate. For W G Archer (sometimes in collaboration with Mildred Archer) has written extensively and expertly on all the different regional manifestations of Indian art before, during and after the period of the British Raj. Archer is the acknowledged expert whose depth of analysis and breadth of knowledge on our art and its tradition forces us to keep referring to him as the authority.

Although Rup's reprint is predictable and to some extent inevitable, the innocence of Rup's editor four decades after the independence of India, and the absence of innocence in Archer's critique is disturbing. Rup's uncritical deference to the authority of Archer not only reinforces the truth of what Marx has said over a century ago: "They cannot represent themselves; they have to be represented," but also points to our continued tendency to accept these representations by others as truth. So even if the choice of Archer's article on Kalighat painting seems appropriate, particularly in the absence of other authoritative critiques, what does not seem appropriate anymore is the unquestioning acceptance of the truths of such a critique.

Edward Said and Michel Foucault, amongst others, have awakened us to the realization of the connection between knowledge and power, to the fact that literature and cultural discourse are seldom politically and historically innocent, and that too often, unfortunately (like the Editor of Rup), we presume cultural critiques to be ideologically neutral. When one group analyses (or fictionalizes) another group either through an anthropological project or a critique of its cultural productions (as in Archer's case), the knowledge that is produced tends

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The Tale of Elokeshi and Mahanta, Kalighat Pata, C. 1875

**Second Solo Exhibition of Prints, Paintings and Mixed Media-1995**

**Laila Sharmeen by Laila Sharmeen**

YOU wanted to know and spelled it out, 'how are you?' Wars, wars and wars and the fatiguing time and an irresistible dream to grow lilac on a wasteland had ripped my heart off. I am not well.

It came to me by way of realisation that, after reading Stephen W Hawking's Black Holes and Baby Universe and

Madame Sosostris like God will seal the gateway to the land of all perfection.

I should and must go to Utopia Now in answer to the question why I paint I would only say without making big polemical statements or going deep into theories of art presented by Plato, Read or

Oscar Wilde that beauty resides in me. That is why art flows in my vein and that is also the reason of my giving birth to paintings etching and mixed media.

Anthropologists say art originates from the womb's of necessity — dance from war-preparations, poetry from

the abracadabra of which-doctor, and painting from hunting. In a more advance stage of civilization we have seen art's ties to religion.

But in the twentieth century art is only a game of the intellectuals, that is to say art is a mirror and if an ass looks

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20th October to 2nd November, 1995

Other Essays, we, the humankind are not far from a total catastrophe when the demonic nuclear power would perform the extinction of the whole human species on the planet Earth.

Well, the inevitable question now is which way we are heading. At present, it is not possible on my part to untie the knot of the question and that is not my intention either. I only know and believe that I have to reach the dream land — Utopia. On my way to Utopia I intend to collect all the ugly pains, all the poverty of the planet, greenhouse problem, uneven distribution, nuclear war-heads and dump them into black holes. And I also know at the bottom of my heart that the mother earth has to be saved from the God's indifference. Or, otherwise, the



The Rhythm of Love. 1995. Equatint

**A History of Music in Sound**

THERE is a box of audio-cassettes tucked away in my file cabinet. I treasure it and wouldn't dream of parting with it. But off and on I have an impish urge and bring the box out and place it on my writing desk at my newspaper cubicle. Visitors come to me in a steady flow. The box distracts them. Some start frowning it involuntarily and waking up to the contents of the box they start shooting questions. Others, more

not from Bengal proper but from the adjacent Saket or Oudh, Goudapada, the celebrated mentor of Shankaracharya of Kerala — the seventh century builder of the mainstream subcontinental religion now loosely, and perhaps wrongly, called the Hindu or Sanatan Dharma, was no doubt a Bengali. This deltaic people were perhaps one of the greatest metallurgists among nations, as surely as those great canons of the subcontinent or the stainless steel pillar near Qutb in Delhi were the work of the Bengali genius, both — or as surely as they were leaders both in literature and music of the time Mahmud of Ghazni was pillaging western India and William the Norman was conquering England, a fact celebrated by the brilliance of the 11th century

master Jaydev. As a token of the Bengali people's pre-eminence in these areas a Sanskrit literary style was dubbed the Gaudi Reeti and till as late as Tansen in the 16th Century a most elevated musical form was called the Gaudiya Vaani — the form in which Tansen himself excelled.

About a millennium later Bengal was again to lead the rest of India and carve a niche in the gallery of the world's best in both music and literature, mostly by virtue of the great work of Rabindranath Tagore. The Mahabharata character Kacha knew how to revive the dead but, cursed by his rejected lover Devyani, was able only to teach it and not practice it himself. The Bengali people seem to be burdened with an equally strange affliction.

Who of us can render any of Jaydev's exquisite songs of the Geeta-Govinda — so much adored by the Tamils or Marathis or Manipuris of the modern times? The aesthetically unexcelled lyrics of the Vaishnav mahajans do not any more constitute a part of the living memory of even the literate ones which they did till only fifty years back. Alauddin Khan definitely represents a high point of achievement in high and secular music.

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punctilious, seek my leave to examine the box and minutes after become all exclamation. I simply love the reactions.

The Bengalis are an old race of people. They have also been very numerous down the ages. And at present they should count no less than 200 million souls. Although this ponderous national presence for at least 20 centuries could never excel as a state power pouncing on other peoples' habitat, it is conceded that they were builders of fine textile, growers of fine and fragrant rice, fashioners of exquisite jewellery specially in gold and silver, very reliable tenders and doctors of, yes, elephants and weavers of, together with the Chinese, of the first silk raiments.

When Sanskrit literature bloomed, the Bengali genius was found no less adept in creations and constructions in the aesthetic and spiritual realm. If Ashvaghosha, who anticipated Kalidasa, came

