



CONTRIBUTION OF DEROZIO TOWARDS SCIENCE IN INDIA

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DEROZIO: THE RATIONALIST EDUCATOR

Henry Louis Vivian Derozio was born on April 18, 1809 in Calcutta (now Kolkata) to Francis Derozio and his wife Sophia. Derozio was of mixed heritage. His parents were Indo-Portuguese and British. The young Derozio was educated at David Drummond's Dharmatala Academy where he found children of different cultures and socio-economic status as classmates. He was a good student who studied poems by the latter Romantics and was influenced by liberal thinking during his school years. At fourteen years of age he began his working life – first at an office in Calcutta and then at a factory in Bhagalpur. While in Bhagalpur, he started penning poems. Being a poet of some merit he wrote poems such as 'To India – My Native Land', 'The Harp of India', 'The Fakeer of Jungheera' and 'Song of the Hindoostani Minstrel'. These poems bring out the patriotism of Derozio.

Aged seventeen years, in 1826, he was appointed a teacher of Literature and History at the Hindoo College (Now Presidency University) in Calcutta. Besides, in 1827 he began to edit journals and started his own newspaper – The Calcutta Gazette. Meanwhile Derozio's enthusiastic teaching and airing of liberal and rationalist ideas stirred the students at Hindoo College. He held debates and had lively discussions with students both inside the classroom and outside. He regularly met students at his home for these discussions which challenged the prevailing religious and social taboos and restrictions. Derozio did not believe in rote learning but encouraged students to question everything and not to accept anything without thorough

inquiry. As a result in 1828 a debating society called the Academic Association was set up by his students with active help from their mentor. The students of Derozio were known as Derozians and they were later christened the Young Bengal. Encouraged by Derozio, they attacked obscurantism and social inequalities. They relentlessly tried to supplant unreason by rationality and spread education among the masses particularly women and the subaltern. The students' onslaught on religious bigotry angered the conservative opinion. Soon in 1831 Derozio lost his job of teacher at Hindoo College. He died the same year at the tender age of twenty two years falling prey to Cholera, an enteric disease. With Derozio's death the champion of the Bengal Renaissance was gone and for the time being the movement became rudderless.¹

YOUNG BENGAL

The Derozians or the Young Bengal were former students of the Hindoo College. They were independent minded in their thought and action. Although their leader was Derozio, the Young Bengal drew into its fold Alexander Duff, the theologian. The Young Bengal under Derozio founded the Academic Association. After Derozio's death, the Young Bengal formed the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge in 1838. The Young Bengal movement was progressive in nature which promoted radical social reform and spread of education including women education. It was the forerunner of progress of Science in India. But the Young Bengal movement despite its merits was critiqued severely because of its radical nature which the Indian society then steeped in tradition could not accept. The Young Bengal movement led by Derozio played an important role in bringing about the Bengal Renaissance which further helped in the progress of Science in India. Among Derozio's followers was Radhanath Sikdar, a stalwart in measuring mountain peaks. Moreover, India's first cadaveric dissection in modern era took place in Calcutta in 1836 about five years after Derozio's death. This dissection was first conducted by an Ayurvedic practitioner turned student of Western Medicine namely, Baboo Pundit Madhusudan Gopto. This event of dissection was endorsed by the Young Bengal.^{1,2}

CONSEQUENT PROGRESS OF SCIENCE IN INDIA

The Young Bengal brought about an improvement in the education system in India. This ushered in an epoch of logical thinking which was important for progress in Science. There was now an enthusiasm for the study of modern concepts in Mathematics, Physics, Geography and Medicine. Two outstanding persons just mentioned embody the spirit of the Young Bengal and its impetus for scientific progress.

Baboo Pundit Madhusudan Goopto (1800 – 1856) was one such person. The spelling of his name can be simplified as Pandit Madhusudan Gupta. He performed the first cadaver (dead human body) dissection by an Indian according to the Western medical tradition in India. This was in 1836. It removed the bar on handling of dead bodies by persons of respectable families which was impeding scientific progress of Medicine in India for millennia. This first act of dissection according to the Western medical tradition was followed by those by others namely Umacharan Set, Dwarakanath Gupto, Rajkisto Dey, Gobind Chunder Goopto, Chummun Lal, Nobin Chunder Mitter, Nobin Chunder Mookerjee, Buddinchunder Chowdree and James Pote. Students of Calcutta Medical College followed these pioneers in dissection on a yearly basis. This led to the gaining of in-depth knowledge in human Anatomist's by Indians. Books of Anatomy by Western authors started to be better understood. To facilitate the learning of Anatomy by Ayurved practitioners Dr. Madhusudan Gupta translated Anatomist's Vade-mecum into Sanskrit. Meanwhile the Young Bengal faced the ire of the conservative society in India with quiet resolve. The group (Young Bengal) had formed in 1838 the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge with active interest of its members including Ramtanu Lahiri, Tarachand Chakravorty and Ramgopal Ghose. A talk on the Physiology of Dissection was delivered in one of the assemblies of the society by Prasanna Kumar Mitra.^{1,3}

Another luminary among the students of Derozio was Radhanath Sikdar (1813 – 1870), the famous surveyor who determined that Mount Everest was the tallest peak in the world. He was part of the Great Trigonometric Survey initially led by Sir George Everest. In 1831, Radhanath Sikdar was appointed to the post of Computer and in 1851 he rose through ranks to become the Chief Computer of the survey. Radhanath Sikdar was well versed in Geometry, Trigonometry, other branches of Mathematics as well as Physics. He devised a novel method of measuring height and came upon the measurement of Mount Everest (named after the former Surveyor General of India Sir George Everest) in 1856. Radhanath Sikdar was independent in spirit and often questioned the biased decisions of the British ruling class. Six years later he retired from his service at the Surveyor General's office and became a teacher of Mathematics at the General Assembly's Institute (now Scottish Church College) in Calcutta.¹

CONCLUSION

The First cadaver dissection and finding out the height of Peak XV that is Mount Everest were landmark events in the history of Science in India. These events had the stamp of Henry Louis Vivian Derozio.

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