Indian writing in English began much before the establishment of the British colonial rule in India and has survived the collapse of the Empire. The resilience of Indian writing in English is largely due to the English education provided by the Christian missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the high adaptability of the Indian mind to Western education. English was always seen as a language of the Indian elites, a language used not only to construct the Indian nationalist movement but also to deconstruct the hegemony of the Raj. In fact much of the muscular growth and modernization of the Indian vernacular languages, especially Bengali, in the nineteenth century was largely due to the dissemination of the English language amongst the elites, the Bengali bhadralok. It may be said that in the last two hundred years Indian writing in English has come of age. Indian writers have gained both the confidence and competence to express themselves in English thereby creating a typical and distinct idiom which is at once Indian and cosmopolitan. However the construction of national literatures in India has been a predominantly upper class project with clear ideological biases and intellectual predilections, which looked at literatures of a society rather selectively, at times ignoring Muslim, Anglo-Indian, Indian Christian or Parsee writers. The paper attempts to highlight some of the issues related to the development of Indian writing in English, the ideological biases, and the growth of a distinctively Indian literary culture.

The Politics of Nomenclature

Both the nomenclature and construction of Indian writing in English has changed over the decades. Since during the colonial period most writers using Indian themes in their writing were of English stock, Indian writing was called ‘Anglo-Indian.’ Though the term was broadened to include native Indian writers as well, after Indian Independence, the term carried negative racial implications; and it represented the English ‘sahib culture’ of decadent rulers or ‘Brown sahib’ culture of maharajahs and nawabs. In the 1970s this term was replaced by an equally dubious term “Indo-Anglian” which proved more baffling as it became falsely associated with the word Anglican with obvious references to the Church of England. Though debates on the taxonomy of the term were strident and polemical, many literary scholars saw English, and not any modern vernacular, as the preferred language of Indians in which they could acquire both spiritual and mental supremacy. Perhaps the association of English with the advent of the colonial administration gave rise to the false notion that Indian writing in English was a phenomenon of the nineteenth century. Recent researches have brought to light that Indian writing in English was rooted in the expatriate experience as early as the middle of the eighteenth century when a writer like Din Muhammad (1759–1851) traveled to Scotland and wrote travelogues in English.
Indian writing in English has always faced the contentious problem of nomenclature and the more polemical question of identifying its starting point, more so than vernacular literatures. The beginnings of Indian writing in English have been variously identified in the eighteenth, nineteenth or the twentieth centuries, beginning with Din Muhammad (1759–1851), Cavelli Venkata Boriah (1776–1803), Raja Rammohun Roy (1772–1833), Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809–1831) or writers of the post-1947 period like Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Khushwant Singh and others. The ideological underpinnings of a progressive, nativist, nationalist or secular constructions of Indian literature in English emphasize different aspects of style, sensibility and literary groupings that direct its literary history. Though the identity of English has evolved from being a ‘foreign’ language to ‘an indigenous vernacular’ the intellectual slippages based on ideological preferences and selective historical readings prevent a common consensus of its literary history. This problem has been further exacerbated by the sordid fact that the teaching of Indian writing in English in Indian universities has been controlled by departments of English, a colonial legacy, that have been both conservative and Anglophonic in designing their syllabi.

The term used to designate Indian writing in English has been varied and ingenuous—from “Anglo-Indian,” “Indo-Anglian,” “Indo-British,” “Commonwealth,” to “Indian-English,” and “Indo-English.” The racial and ideological suggestion these terms carry have not given them general acceptability. In recent times the phrase “Indian writing in English” or “Indian-English literature” has been more acceptable by literary scholars.

During the colonial period the term “Anglo-Indian” was quite commonly used to refer to English writers writing about India. E. F. Oaten of Cambridge University first used the term in 1908 to refer to only writers of English origin dealing with Indian themes, which was later broadened to include both English and Indian writers dealing with India in their works. After 1947 the term began to acquire a wider sociological reference and lost its literary significance.

Srinivasa Iyengar inadvertently popularized the term “Indo-Anglian” in his book Indian Writing in English published in 1973. He confessed that he lifted the term from a volume containing some “Specimen Compositions from Native Students” printed from Calcutta. The term could not gain general and wide acceptance both due to its artificial ring and confusion with a distinctly different word ‘Anglican’, which had references to the Church of England. The traditionalists did not object to the use of the term ‘Indo-Anglian’ but to the writing of such literature in English.

Serious-minded scholars like Suniti Kumar Chatterji and others rejected the criticism of the traditionalists by arguing that it was possible to acquire the best “mental and spiritual pabulum through English” than through other vernaculars like Hindi. Since English occupied a dominant and “neutral” status in the world it could establish a “balance” between various modern languages in India. English seemed to be in a position to embody the “total vision” of India and represent it not only within but also outside India creating both a national and pan-national or diasporic identities. Indeed Indian-English literature has emerged as the “de facto” literature representing India. The divisive politics of language did not allow any modern Indian language to play the role of unifying the nation. Hindi chauvinists might be cut to the quick by Chatterji’s or Iyengar’s candid opinions and might especially object to English as a “neutral” or “de facto” language” but the fact remains that vernaculars, especially the constitutionally priori-
tized national language Hindi has yet to become representative of different linguistic regions of India or of India in their entirety as English probably does. Works in Sanskrit of any substance or literary merit are not written anymore and Urdu, with the creation of Pakistan and the Hindi-Urdu religious divide that acquired religious overtones in the last century, has lost its literary versatility that it once possessed.

It is another paradox of the narrow Brahmanvad politics that Indian leaders who are eulogized as patriotic and nationalist, such as Rammohun Roy, Gandhi or Nehru, were effectively writing in English to create a new consciousness of freedom and revolt in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. English was not just a language of the colonial administration but also a language that confronted the British administration, something that Hindi chauvinists do not wish to highlight. Though Gandhi and Nehru occasionally gave in to the demands of the Hindi Sahitya Samitiwallahs to establish the supremacy of a Sanskritized Hindi (to the exclusion of Rekhta/Urdu or Hindustani), they did so rather reluctantly. Though Gandhi believed that the primary function of writing was communication and even a language like English would do, (advice he gave to young Mulk Raj Anand when the latter read out his Untouchable/1935 to Gandhi at the Sabarmati Ashram) he also saw the enslaving characteristics of English and the universalizing effect of Hindi in the Indian context. Both Gandhi and Nehru realized that Hindi was not ready to perform all the functions demanded of it by the new nation state of India. Therefore, upon Gandhi's advise the Constitution of 1950 while it granted 'official language' status to Hindi also declared that English "shall continue to be used for all the official purposes of the Union" for a period of fifteen years until 1965.

Indeed the widespread literary use of English in India has not only been contemporaneous with the rise of vernaculars, but English language itself has acted as a catalytic agent in the consolidation and modernization of the vernaculars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rise of the modern consciousness in the vernaculars began with writers like Rammohun Roy (b.1772), Sri Aurobindo (b.1872), Toru Dutt (b.1856), Tagore (b.1861), Bharatendu Harish Chandra (b.1850), Munshi Premchand (b.1880), Jai Shanker Prasad (b.1889) and Surya Kant Tripathi Nirala (b.1896) who were all born in the mid or late nineteenth century. Indian writing in English was able to mutate by combining typically Indian "feeling," "emotion" and "experience" with the "discipline" imposed by English. The transition from the old to the new consciousness in Indian literature was perhaps embodied most clearly in the genre of the novel—both in vernacular novel and Indian-English novel.

It is not India-English poetry but fiction that has captivated the imagination of both Indian and western readers right from the early decades of the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries. It would be interesting to study the dynamics of the spread of English literacy in the east, south and west India and the large concentration of Indian-English novelists in the pre and postcolonial periods till the 1980s. It is has been pointed out by many literary historians that the reader and writer of Indian-English fiction belong to the privileged classes of India who understand English and are exposed to European or western influences through their work, education, friendship or travel. Indeed the concerns and attitudes enshrined in these novels are the concerns of these classes and, therefore, do not represent the rest of the population. Obviously it is hard to find any literature in India, which in this narrow sense of the term represents the entire Indian population. The study of Indian writing in English could also be the study of the life and con-
cerns embodied in the works of Din Muhammad, Vivian Derozio Rammohun Roy, Tagore, Aurobindo, Gandhi, Nehru, Toru Dutt, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Anita Desai, Allan Sealy, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh or Hari Kunzru.

The term ‘Indo-Anglian’ also refers to the nativity or Indian origin of writers. Obviously we must exclude the works of Rudyard Kipling, E. M. Forster, Pearl S Buck or Louise Broomfield from the canon of Indian writing in English as they belong to the category of either English or American literature, though their themes might be Indian. In recent years the South Asian diaspora includes writers of mixed parentage who fall in the same category as Anglo-Indians, except that the former are nurtured in the country of their adoption and imagine their homeland whereas the latter living in India only imagine their fatherland or motherland aboard. These narrow categories of geography, race and nationality are either obliterated or ignored when building larger and more inclusive categories of Indian writing in English. The changing notions of national identity, transnationalism, the growing pride in the South Asian diaspora since 1965, Yankee Hindutva and pan-Islamic religious identity have all reinterpreted and redrawn the once narrow boundary of Indian writing in English.

R. C. Churchill narrows the reference area of Indo-Anglian literature to include only “Indo-British literature” produced since 1947 by “Indians, Pakistanis and others” who “emulate” the skills of their British predecessors. This narrow view excludes the pre-1947 Indian writers altogether. We need to expand the domain of “Indo-British” or Indian-English literature not only to include pre-1947 works but also works translated from Sanskrit or vernaculars into English either by authors themselves or independent translators.

The Coming of English

It has been commonly believed that the development of Indian literature in English has been the direct consequence of the introduction of English through the Charter Act of 1813 in the Indian sub-continent in the early nineteenth century, and the subsequent rise of an English educated middle class in urban regions, who incorporated the scientific and literary culture of the Empire, either to reform the antiquated indigenous social practices or to critique the Empire. Recent studies have pushed back this date by nineteen years as fresh evidence has surfaced of the growth of an English-speaking Indian trading community along the Malabar and Coromandel coast around 1660 when the East India Company set up factories in this region.

What can be said is that the development of linguistic proficiency, apart from other social and historical factors, later created the foundation for Indian writers in English to emerge. According to Dharwadker the factors that brought Indians in contact with Europeans and acculturated them to European culture prior to the establishment of colonial English education in 1813, could be divided into four broad categories—employment, marriage (and family), religious conversion, and friendship (and social relations). These four areas of contact with Europeans together with the prevalence of a cosmopolitan Mughal culture helped a select group of Indians to become familiar with the values, life style, thought, sensibility and expression of the English beginning as early as the middle of the seventeenth century. From the 1660 to 1760 a select group of literate and bilingual Indians entered these areas of contact with the English and became Anglicized, acquired a cultural familiarity and linguistic proficiency, producing Indian-English writers a century later.
The bilingual Indian middlemen also called *dubashis* (literally those proficient in two languages like English-Portuguese and Persian-Arabic), facilitated English business in India with the Persian-speaking Mughal bureaucracy and the marketplace in the port cities of Madras, Calcutta and Bombay, began to use English about 175 years ago, before the colonial government introduced it in Indian schools.\(^{xvi}\)

A high cosmopolitan culture had already developed by the middle of the seventeenth century under the three successive Mughal emperors—Jalaluddin Akbar (1556–1605), Jehangir (1569–1627) and Shah Jehan(1627–1658)—much before the colonial encounter, which accelerated the growth of a literate, and multilingual indigenous population.\(^{xvii}\) Most of them were able to acquire some degree of proficiency in English and other European languages without the help of formal schooling from family elders who were in menial service with Europeans. Obviously such proficiency in English with their native ability in Persian-Arabic and an Indian language would have helped Indians towards the end of the eighteenth century in their clerical work in the East India Company’s commercial, legal and political activities but would not have equipped them to become creative writers.

**Counter Discourse of Early Indian-English Writers**

So basically it was ‘on the job training’ that allowed Indians like Din Muhammad (1759–1851), Cavelli Venkata Boriah (1776–1803) and Rammohun Roy (1772–1833) to acquire proficiency in the English language and familiarity with the European culture to fuse it with their indigenous literary and religious traditions to become early Indian-English writers.\(^{xxviii}\) Boriah was a multi-linguist familiar with Sanskrit, Persian, Hindustani and English and wrote poetry in his mother tongue Telegu. An oriental bureaucrat, he joined the Madras Presidency in the late 1790s and became an assistant to Colonel Colin Mackenzie picking up English in the colonial workplace. He helped the Company in deciphering ancient coins and wrote an “Account of the Jains” in 1803, which was published posthumously with the help of Mackenzie in *Asiatic Researches* in London in 1809.

Rammohan Roy was also a multi-linguist familiar with Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Bangla, Hebrew, Greek and Hindustani. So it was not altogether difficult for him to learn English while working for the Company’s Revenue Department, especially during his posting in Rangpur in northern Bengal from 1809–1814 as assistant to the British revenue officer, John Digby. He took full advantage of the European print culture producing works in many languages such as Persian, Arabic and Bangla apart from English.\(^{xxix}\) From 1816 he published works in English including translations of the *Upanishads, Reply to the Attack of an Advocate for Idolatry at Madras* (1817) and *Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness* (1820) which initiated a theological debate between the Baptist missionaries of Srirampur and Rammohun Roy. It had far wider ramifications that the text could have possibly imagined. All the three writers produced prose texts with definitive social and political intentions subordinating the aesthetic component.\(^{xxv}\) Though neither Dean Muhammad’s *Travels* nor Boriah’s “Accounts of the Jains” directly question the British representation of India, they nonetheless present an Indian account of India, and in doing so, present a counter text subverting or repudiating the discursive representations of India by the British.\(^{xxvi}\) The reformist writings of Rammohun Roy was different. It questioned not only the British representations of India but also the conservative Indian understanding of India. These writers were able to estab-
lish a culture of covert and overt textual literary discourse that stood in antithesis to the English textual representations of India.

Just as employment created areas of interracial contact and acculturation for the Indians, marriage between seventeenth century Englishmen and women of Hindu origin—converts to Christianity, Luso-Indians, Hindu widows and mistresses—was instrumental in making a small section of the Indian society both literate and Anglicized. A host of Indian-English writers emerged from this group. C.A. Bayly believes that there were an estimated 11,000 mestizos by 1788 in the British coastal territories who were obviously brought up as Christians and identified themselves with the white European Christians sharing an Anglo-centric culture. The racial intermixing developed extensive communities of Luso-Indians in Portuguese India, Franco-Indians in South India and Dutch-Ceylonese Creoles in Sri Lanka. But in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as racial identities began to harden with the nationalist movement and created a gender disparity many English women like Adela Quested (in E. M. Forster’s novel A Passage to India) came to the subcontinent in quest of another conquest—to marry rich and powerful Englishmen. It was more difficult for Indian men, except the nobility or upper caste men, to marry European women. But the growth of the South Asian diaspora in the second half of the twentieth century in U.S. Britain and Canada has made it easier for the professional classes to marry European men and women. It is possible to see the emergence of writers from this area of interracial marriages making a significant contribution to Indian writing in English—writers such as Din Muhammad and Rammohun Roy towards the end of the eighteenth century, Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Henry Derozio (father Luso-Indian and mother English) in the colonial period Anita Desai, Dom Moraes, Aubrey Menen, Ruskin Bond, Eunice de Souza, Melanie Silgardo, Charmayne D’Souza, Santan Rodrigues and Raul D’Gama Rose in the post-Independence period.

Din Muhammad was a Muslim convert to Christianity, a service elite of Patna, who immigrated to Cork, Ireland in 1784, married an Anglo-Irish woman Jane Daly and found employment as a domestic supervisor of a large estate that belonged to his Anglo-Irish patron Lt. Godfrey Evan Baker. Din Muhammad wrote travel and epistolary works (The Travels of Dean Mahomet, A Native of Patna in Bengal, Through Several Parts of India, While in the Service of the Honourable East India Company, Written by Himself and In a Series of Letters to a Friend) in 1794 where he gave his version of life in India. Din Muhammad wrote against the tradition that he had inherited. Father Thomas Stephens also known as Father Estavam, who lived in Selsette and Goa for over three decades, wrote a Marathi-Konkani version of the Gospel called Christian Purana published posthumously in Goa, 1640. His friend Ralph Fitch who had traveled extensively through India from 1581–91 returned to England and wrote his account of his travels in India. It was printed in Richard Hakluyt’s Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation in 1599. Fitch was celebrated in Michael Drayton’s Poly-Olbion (1612) as a heroic explorer. The historical significance of these two travelers may be little but they did establish a British discourse on India through the genre of personal letter, epistolary and eyewitness account, all of which were available to Din Muhammad who attempted to write a counter text or his version of India from Indian eyes. It is possible to see most Indian writing in English as a counter text to the standard representation of India by the British. The counter discourse questions, corrects or displaces the British representation of India from the
mid-eighteenth century into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Another factor that quickly Anglicized a section of the Indian society and made them literate in English was religious conversions, which had an uneven history, as a dominant Hindu majority did not view proselytization and conversion favorably. Evangelical work by Catholic missions in Portuguese India began in the sixteenth century while that of the Protestant mission in the seventeenth century in different part of British India. As these missionary activities created violent reactions in India, the East India Company prohibited such activities till it was uplifted in 1813. Together with interracial marriages, Christianization of Portuguese and British India gave rise to many Indian English writers in the nineteenth century such as Henry Derozio, Madhusudan Dutt, Govind Chunder Dutt, Girish Dutt (brother), Toru Dutt, Aru Dutt and Pandita Ramabai Saraswati. In recent times we have Jayanta Mahapatra and Deba Patnaik. Even when Indians did not convert to Christianity the influence of Christian missionaries and missionary schools were quite influential in shaping the sensibility and upgrading their proficiency in English. In fact interracial friendships between English and Indians during the 1660–1760 period played a significant role in developing English prose in India. The interaction not only vitalized Indians intellectually but also acculturated them to English life style.

A New Self-Assurance

From the letters and travel accounts of Din Muhammad in the mid eighteenth century to the semi-autobiographical fiction of Siddharth D. Shanghvi (The Last Song of Dusk: A Novel), Kavita Daswani (The Village Bride of Beverly Hills) and Rupa Bajwa (The Sari Shop: A Novel) in 2004, Indian writing in English functions as a counter text though it has acquired a new self-assurance and facility with language never available to it before. After over one hundred and ninety years of the introduction of English in the Indian subcontinent by Thomas Macaulay, a host of South Asian writers—Indian (R. K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Shashi Tharoor, Manil Suri and Hari Kunzru) Pakistani (Bapsi Sidhwa, Sara Suleri and Kamila Shamie) Sri Lankan (Romesh Gunesekera), Bangladeshi (Monika Ali)—have twisted the tail of English language, mixed it with indigenous vernacular, colloquial speech and transformed it from a foreign language into a local vernacular. Two decades and a half ago the novelist Raja Rao concluded that whatever the nationalists might wish to believe the English language has been so thoroughly vernacularized in secular India that it has lost its status as a “superior caste” and has become a truly “representative language” of India.

Though all the nation states in the Indian sub-continent have produced literature in English in recent years, the richness and diversity experienced in India since the late 1960s and then again a “bumper crop” from the 1980s onwards has far outstripped literary production in any other nation of the South Asian region. Even South Asian writers from the diaspora in America, Canada, United Kingdom and the Caribbean Islands—Indian expatriates, first generation immigrants, people of Indian origin (PIO), technically all foreigners—are herded together with indigenous writers within the broad category of Indian-English literature despite their refusal to accept indigenous identities. In its enthusiasm, the nationalist construction of Indian-English literature now subsumes the writers of the entire South Asian diaspora within the grand category of “Indian-English” literature.

Many factors have contributed to the formation, evolution and maturity of Indian-English,
'Indo-Anglian' or Indo-English literature. Each generation, each historical moment and each literary critic has mapped and remapped the contours of Indian-English literature according to their own assumptions, personal convictions, priorities, ideology and beliefs. The construction of Indian-English literature like literatures in High Sanskrit and the vernaculars have moved through different stages ranging from the essentialist and exclusivist to nationalist and reactionary, but in all these readings of Indian-English literature one single fact stands out—English has, due to several reasons, developed an adversarial relationship with classical and vernacular literatures and has now come to occupy an exclusively unique and separate place in the composite body of Indian literatures. This adversarial relationship has to do in some measure with the formation of English Indian writing as a counter text to the European imagining of India, the identity of English as the language of the erstwhile colonial masters and the postcolonial angst that a postcolonial writer need must negotiate to be both creative and affirmative.

We must, however, not ignore the fact that since the 1980s the going has never been so good for the Indian writer in English not only in the west but also in his mother country. Most postcolonial writers are products of English missionary school education and, therefore, occupy a highly privileged social and intellectual position where they can critique the system that empowers them. Occupying the intellectual and geo-political space of privilege and dissent they can not only ‘write back to the Empire’ but also ‘write back to their mother country’ as the prodigal sons and daughters who no longer share the travails of the English-educated middle class population that reads them. It is, therefore, obvious that since Indian-English literature was primarily a middle class activity, as the experiences and expectations of the educated middle class changed, the literature they produced, also underwent a change. These changes were most significantly felt in the style and sensibility of writers and created a new “structure of feeling” across the literary genres. Both in the colonial and early decades of the postcolonial periods, Indian writing in English was imitative of canonical English writers of the Romantic or modernist traditions and tried to create an unrealistic Oxbridge idiom in their writing. The post-1950s generation experienced a new sense of self-assurance and cynicism that were linked to many historical, cultural and political factors such as student’s unrest, the Naxalite movement and political sleaze but also with the value based education provided by Christian missionary schools like Stella Maris, Loreto Convent Calcutta, St. Xavier College and Elphinstone College Bombay and St. Stephen’s College Delhi and the irreverent underground campus culture. The new generation that matured in the 1980s developed a distinctively new idiom, both colloquial and global, bringing about a renaissance in Indian-English writing. It is now possible to speak of the ‘Stephanian School’ of novelists and the ‘Elphinstonian School’ of poets who have tried to fuse the irreverent prose of the college rag with nativized Shakespeare, Restoration satire and modern discursive practices.

The Stephens factor rushed into the literary space opened up by the success of Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children and gave to Indian-English fiction a bold deracinated style till now dominated by the timid babu English and babu sensibility of novelists like R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. The Indian English novel seems to be evolving into a new kind of literary form that is shaped by the symbols, speech and sensibility of our Indian reality just as the katha recital molded the literary narrative of the past.
Imagining the Swaraj and Literature

After the 1857 Revolt when India came under the direct governance of the British Crown and became a colony, most Indian writing in English reacted to the strength and weakness of colonial rule and later became linked to the imagining of independence or swaraj. Apart from introducing English the colonial administration began to systematize and consolidate the vernaculars such as Bengali to facilitate the work of the British officers. As most of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the systematization of the vernaculars, it also experienced the growing proficiency of the Indian elites in English. As the imagining of swaraj gained ground, the Indian elites proficient in the English language used the literary and scientific cultures of English to enrich and refurbish their own vernaculars. Since the somewhat rich Bengali bahadralok participated in the process of westernization more quickly than the poorer Hindi middle class, the former were able to inseminate the Bengali literary tradition with English faster than their Hindi brethren. This is also seen as one of the reason for the slow growth and development of Hindi as a literary language.

If Dharwadker sees Muslim convert to Christianity Din Muhammad as the first Indian writer in English and through the chronological positioning privilege the role of the diaspora in creating the identity of the nation in print through a counter discourse, then Srinivasa Iyengar and M. K. Naik see Tamil Vaishnav Brahmin C. V. Boriah as the first initiator of Indian writing in English and privilege the multilingual ethnographic culture of pre-colonial Madras Presidency.87 But Iyengar acknowledges Henry Derozio as the first Indian to write fluently in English, mixing the traditions of the east with the west. Saumyandranath Tagore identifies the prose texts of kulin Bengali Brahmin Rammohun Roy as perhaps the greatest early prose texts that were used as reformist texts for overt social and political ends and challenged both the conservative Indian and British discourses on India.88 Alphonso-Karkala sees Luso-Indian Henry Derozio as the first Indian-English writer who created a new Indian aesthetics by writing on Indian themes and combining his “romantic passion” and “reformer’s zeal” with a wide range of literary devices—meters, rhyme schemes and images.89 It would be better to say that Din Muhammad provided the first expatriate narrative about India, while C. V. Boriah used the English language to provide an ethnographic interpretation of India. Rammohun Roy’s reformist writings gave a political and social dimension to the representation of India in English while Derozio represented the first nationalist voice in English and developed a typically Indian aesthetics for use by Indian writers in English. Together these four writers laid the national and transnational foundation on which each subsequent writer, either consciously or unconsciously, built or improvised his text or counter text. Undoubtedly Derozio and others like him (Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Toru Dutt, Manmohan Ghose and Sarojini Naidu) produced a literature in English which was distinctly different from that produced by the three early writers—Din Muhammad, Boriah and Rammohun Roy. The discursive space created by the first three writers in the absence of formal English education was more in the nature of expository writing though it unselfconsciously did possess literary and aesthetic merit. The prose and poetry that came after them in the early nineteenth century, embodied in the works of Derozio and others, was intrinsically original, literary and self-consciously aestheticized that later grew into the modernist and the progressive movements in the early twentieth century.90
Didactic Aesthetics of Henry Derozio

In the last twenty years there has been a reappraisal of Derozio’s position in the making of the Indian-English literary canon. Writers and literary critics as diverse as Srinivasa Iyengar, Arvind K. Mehrotra, Salman Rushdie, Vinay Dharwadker and Rukmini Bhiya Nair have noticed the incomparable contribution of Derozio in laying the foundation of Indian-English aesthetics, energizing contemporary writers like Allan Sealy or helping to develop a secular nationalist narrative while critiquing the imperial and Hindu nationalist discourses. Arvind Mehrotra commends Sealy’s Trotter-Nama for its references to Derozio in an attempt to reclaim a marginalized history and acknowledging the presence of a “literary forbear” something that happens but rarely in the tradition of Indian-English literature. Salman Rushdie too acknowledges his debt to Sealy having learnt “a thing or two” from him. Dharwadker devotes nearly four pages on the unmatched contribution of Derozio’s poetry on subsequent aesthetics in Indian-English writing. Nair develops a strange but interesting thesis on the close similarity between the imperialist narrative of Kipling’s Kim (1901), the nationalist narrative of Tagore’s Gora (1910) and the subalternist narrative of Sealy’s Trotter Nama (1990) as the last named “bitterly mimics in its textual structure” the tactics of official mythology. Obviously the connection between Sealy and Derozio, apart from the inter-textuality and interracial identity, is quite literary in nature. Derozio and Sealy subvert the grand narrative that has not only marginalized the social, political and religious identities of Anglo-Indians but also erased their literary contribution in the making of Indian literature in English.

In the Trotter Nama Sealy devotes a section to Derozio who appears in the novel as the fictional character Henry Luis Vivian Fonseca-Trotter, an indigo planter and a Hindu college lecturer who is thrown out for his unorthodox behavior with students, drinking wine and eating beef, something that could have happened to Sealy as a student at St. Stephen’s if he had emulated the behavior of his literary predecessor. Since the Anglo-Indians were identified more with the culture, religion and language of the British and were also direct beneficiaries of the economic largesse of the Empire many had built a façade of Englishness (both in dress and lifestyle) that resulted in their disdain for the indigenously Indian and adoration for everything English. The Anglo-Indians’ sense of superiority and aloofness further separated them from mainstream nationalist struggle. Though non-Hindus like the Muslims, Parsees, Sikhs and even Indian Christians were allowed to imagine a free nation, it was erroneously believed that Anglo-Indians would be less inclined to support the common people’s struggle for independence. This belief has prejudiced not only orthodox Hindus but also a range of liberals against the Anglo-Indians and has been to a large extent responsible for the marginalization of nineteenth century writers like Derozio and contemporary writers like Moraes and Sealy.

A rationalist, freethinker, nationalist, and an iconoclast, Derozio shook the foundations of the conservative Hindu society in the short few years of his literary and academic career, and gave to Bengal a national consciousness during a time when Rammohan Roy was only talking about social reform. Many of these things he learnt from his teacher, the Scots David Drummond. Derozio was admitted to the Dhurmatola Academy of David Drummond in the session of 1814–15. Derozio imbibed Drummond’s hunger for knowledge and his renaissance spirit of critical inquiry during his apprenticeship years between 1815 and 1823. A few years later in 1826–27, when Derozio was seventeen years old, a teacher’s post fell vacant at Hindu
College Calcutta (founded in 1817 and later called the Presidency College) and was appointed. The Hindu College was the first English seminary in Bengal and aimed at providing European knowledge with a command of English, History and Geography. Quite popular amongst his students for his new and spirited method of teaching, Derozio started a study circle and debating society that met at his house (later shifted to Manicktala and formalized as the Academic Association) to take the hunger for knowledge beyond the classroom. The parents of students objected to Derozio’s unorthodox ways and he was dismissed from his job on 25th April 1831. Eight months later he died of cholera on 23rd December 1931 and is buried in the old cemetery of Park Street, Calcutta. He was a teenager when he started teaching and less than 22 years old when his literary and academic career was cut short by death.

In the five years between 1927 and 1831 he had made a name for himself. The discussions and debates that he organized during this time were attended by a host of eminent public figures including the Chief Justice of Calcutta Supreme Court and Alexander Duff the famous missionary. Derozio’s voracious reading at the Dhurmatola Academy and after came to his rescue during these discussions and debates where he and his students referred to historians, philosophers, scientists, economists and poets such as Robertson, Gibbon, Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, Newton, Davy, Hume, Thomas Paine, Locke, Reid, Stewart Brown, Byron, Walter Scott and Robert Burns.

Derozio was a great teacher. He gave to his students the ability to think for themselves and break the chains of "antiquated bigotry". He taught them not to accept anything without proper scrutiny and judgment. He debated with them and gave references for theism and atheism. He taught them that a debate for and against was a must to arrive at the truth.

His views infuriated the custodians of Hindu College who sought his resignation. In a letter to H. H. Wilson, the sympathetic Vice President, Derozio answers the three questions posed by the latter in a letter dated April 25, 1831. To the first question: “Do you believe in a God?” Derozio answers: “I have never denied the existence of a god in the hearing of any human being. If it be wrong to speak at all upon such a subject, I am guilty.” To the second question: “Do you think the respect and obedience to parents no part of moral duty?” to which he answers: “For the first time in my life did I learn from your letter that I am charged with having inculcated so hideous, so unnatural, so abominable a principle. I have always insisted upon respect and obedience to parents.” To the last question: “Do you think the intermarriage of brothers and sisters innocent and allowable?” to which he responds: “‘No’ is my distinct reply; and I never taught such an absurdity.” In a biting criticism of the conservative Hindu and rumor-mongering Bengali society of the nineteenth century Derozio concludes: “That I should be called a skeptic and an infidel is not surprising, as these names are always given to persons who think for themselves in religion.”

After his resignation from the college his influence grew more rapidly. His disciples, now called Derozians, part of the ‘Young Bengal’ activism, carried his teachings with a relentless fervor to the next generation and laid the foundation of the Bengal Renaissance or Banglar Renaissance. The epithet “Young Bengal” was given to the students of Hindu College whom Derozio taught between 1826 and 1831. Derozio gave his students a critical approach to life. Through examples from history and philosophy, he taught them the process through which institutional practices and narrow parochial ideas take root in society. His slogan was to live and
die for truth." It is widely believed that the Young Bengal group contributed directly to the intellectual awakening of Bengal in the nineteenth century and sparked the Bengal Renaissance through their subsequent writings. Some have objected to the immaturity of the Young Bengal activists who in their enthusiasm accepted all western habits and summarily rejected all aspects of Bengali culture.

The early nineteenth century underwent an intellectual awakening in response to the newly acquired European knowledge in philosophy, history, sciences and literature. This was felt most strongly in Bengal, which witnessed the formation of debating and discussion societies, publication of newspapers and periodicals, religious reform movements, new stylistic experiments in literature, and rise of protest moments. The growth of a new socio-political consciousness affected life and beliefs both materially and intellectually. In the beginning it affected the bhadralok of Hindu society and subsequently the Muslim Bengalis as it spread to other parts of the country. Apart from Rammohun Roy, Derozio and Vidyasagar, there were other renaissance thinkers such as Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905), Akshay Kumar Datta (1820–1886), Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824–1873) and Bankim Chandra (1838–1894) who tried to transform the Indian ethos.

The Bengal Renaissance had two significant goals: first to revive Indian culture and second to accept modern European learning, both these themes are represented in Derozio’s life and poetry. His influence on subsequent English prose writers of Bengal was profound. Raja Rammohun Roy later introduced the glory of the classical Indian past and opened the way for the modernizing influence of Western knowledge and education. This was followed by Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar’s (1820–1891) popularizing the secular aspects of ancient Indian learning. Both Derozio and Vidyasagar in their own unique ways gave significance to the human being. Derozio represented western modernity just as Vidyasagar symbolized ancient learning. Derozio’s belief in the ability of human being to explore reality and improve himself makes him a nineteenth century Columbus who discovered the significance of man and heralded the Bengal Renaissance. If Rammohun Roy inaugurated a “spiritual humanism” then Vidyasagar and Derozio “introduced” a secular humanism in Bengal. The “critical traditionalism” of Derozio, Rammohun Roy and Sri Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghosh (1872–1910) initiated many reforms in Indian society.

Derozio’s poetic aesthetics was moral in nature. He believed that poetry should have a didactic function and help in individual development and social improvement. Poetry should not only refine and purify “the springs of life” but also become an “instrument” to elevate and improve man’s “moral and intellectual nature,” a duty that every poet must perform in society. His passionate exuberance in some of his unpublished poems and in “Ode From the Persian of Hafiz” (March 1926) with references to wine and music should not be construed as a celebration of unbridled hedonistic passion but tempered with love and commitment:

Say, what’s the rose without the smile
Of her I deem more fair,
And what are all the sweets of spring
If wine be wanting there?
The poems ends on a note of self negation:
And what’s my life? Perhaps a coin—
A trifling coin at best—
Unheeded e’en by passer-by
Unfit for bridal guest.

We should remember that in 1830 Indian-English poetry had no literary tradition and nothing of significance was written in verse. Some of Derozio’s love poems could also be an expression of his tender youth—he was only seventeen years old when he wrote Hafiz. But even in the early 1920s his poems reflect a surprisingly mature hold over his subject matter.

It is possible to see the maturity of thought and feeling and poetic mastery in the “Prologue” to a play he wrote for the performing students of Dhurmatola Academy on 20th January 1824:

As new fledged birds while yet
    Unused to soar,
Tremble the airy regions to
    Explore
Mistrust their pow’r, yet doubting
    Dare to fly,
And brave the dazzling brilliance of the sky.

The smooth flow of lines, the feelings of challenge and hesitation in the doubter’s position, the clear image of fledgling birds exploring the uncharted skies of knowledge, from a 15-year old teenager without formal schooling in English are quite remarkable. Some of the mature poets who came after him would not have been able to tie their shoelaces not to mention about writing mature poetry of dazzling brilliance. His continued to love his students at Hindu College evident in the poems he wrote for them especially the “Sonnet to My Pupils” a few days before his death:

Expanding like the petals of young flowers
    I watch the gentle opening of your minds,
And the sweet loosening of the spell that binds
    Your intellectual energies and powers,
That stretch (like young birds in soft summer hours)
    Their wings to try their strength. O! how the winds
Of circumstance, and freshening April showers
    Of early knowledge, and unnumbered kinds
Of new perceptions, shed their influence,
    And how you worship Truth’s omnipotence!
What joyance rains upon me, when I see
    Fame in the mirror of futurity,
Weaving the chaplets you are yet to gain—
The spirit of inquiry that Derozio imbibed from his teacher made him question outdated institutions of Indian society especially the practice of slavery and sati. Slavery was quite popular in the late eighteenth century in Calcutta and the Calcutta Gazette and Samachar Darpan told stories of cruelty to slaves by their masters. In 1829 slavery was made illegal in British India and in 1860 it was declared a criminal offence. In his poem “Freedom to the Slave” Derozio captures the feelings of a liberated slave who exults in the flight of birds, enjoys the running stream, rejoices in the air of ‘heaven’ and once again feels like ‘a man’. With such feelings the poem concludes:

Blest be the generous hand that breaks
The Chain a tyrant gave.
And feeling for degraded man
Gives freedom to the slave.

Though the poem is imitative of Henry W. Longfellow’s The Slave’s Dream, it confronts the sordid aspect of Indian reality squarely. Not only did Derozio confront the actual institution of slavery but also exhorted his students to fight their mental slavery and look at life based on reason and not blind belief.

The second theme that motivated Derozio was the abominable practice of sati, a medieval custom that continued into the nineteenth century Bengal. He attacked the practice of sati in The Fakir of Jungheera. In the ‘Notes’ to the poem Derozio explains the paradox of the cruel physical and psychological practice of sati:

The fact is, that so for (sic) from any display of enthusiastic affection, Sattee is a spectacle of misery, exciting in the spectator a melancholy reflection upon the tyranny of superstition and priest-craft. The poor creatures who suffer from this inhuman rite, have but little notion of the heaven and the million years of uninterrupted happiness to which their spiritual guides tell them (sic) to look forward.

This long narrative poem with Byronic overtones uses “different metres” to tell the story of Nuleeni, a Brahmin widow. The poet was fascinated by the inaccessible rock-like retreat in Munghyer (Bihar) where many fakirs or wandering monks lived in the early nineteenth century. He was able to interweave fantasy with reality by introducing the subject of sati, widow remarriage and uncompromising attitude of Hindu society of the time. When the beautiful Nuleeni is about to become a sati she is whisked away by her lover, the fakir of Jungheera to his stronghold who promises to keep her well:

And I would keep thee like a thought
Which Memory in her temple keeps,
When every sorrow sinks to naught,
And all the past of misery sleeps—
O thus should thy bright image dear
Above my heart's warm altar sit,
While every hope, affection fear
Of mine, like lamps were around thee lit.

But coming events do not auger well for the couple. The father-in-law decides to raid the fakir's stronghold and in the ensuing battle the fakir dies. As Nuleeni embraces the body of the dead fakir she realizes that his "eloquence had all burnt out." Indeed it is possible to see overt influences of the English Romantics like Byron, Scott, Moore and Keats and the emotion cloys at times, but the aesthetics of literary love mixed with mediaeval fantasy was not attempted so bravely in the nineteenth century. Derozio did live to see the abolition of sati when in 1829 Lord William Bentinck declared sati illegal.

The third theme that was close to Derozio's heart was the wonder that was once India and how to make the "fallen country" free. The poem, To India, My Native Land gives us a picture of the free India he imagines:

Well—let me drive into the depth of time
And bring out from the ages that have rolled
A few small fragments of those wrecks sublime,
Which human eye may never more behold;
And let the guerdon of my labour be
My fallen country! One kind wish for thee!

The pride in the greatness of India in bringing out "those wrecks sublime" from the "depth of time" is the "one kind wish" the poet has for his now "fallen country." Here Derozio anticipates the national fervor and aesthetic emotion of Tagore's Gitanjali Verse 35 that was to come in the next century. And again in "The Harp of India" Derozio writes:

Why hangs't thou lovely on yon withered bough?
Unstrung for ever, must thou there remain?
O! many a hand more worthy far than mine
Once thy harmonious chords to sweetness gave:
Those hands are cold, but if those notes divine
May be by mortal wakened once again,
Harp of my country, let me strike the strain.

The divine harp of India could represent the rich diversity of literary and performing culture now languishes on a "wither'd bough". The poet yearns to strike the divine notes of the chords to awaken the music/culture of the country. The first revolt against the British was forty years away and the fervor of nationalism was nowhere in the horizon, but Derozio strongly felt that colonization would not prove "beneficial" and result in "rebellion" unless the British legislature allows equal opportunities to "natives and Indo-Britons" at par with the British.

Even after sixty years a systematic study of Indian writing in English is still in its formative
stage. Literary critics and historians have occasionally branched out in their own preferred ideological directions, be it Marxist, postcolonial or conservative, but they have not been able to devise a clear method to study the subject. Most of us have not been able to develop a clear methodology to study the subject, nor have we acquired the critical tools to justify our choices. Now as India matures and Indian writing in English finds a laudable place in the literary markets of the world, we need to harness the tools of the new methodologies in literary theory, sociology, political science, economics and history to study the uniqueness of Indian culture and experience as represented in its literature composed in English. We need to ask new questions about the colonial and post-colonial subject and unravel the intricate working of the Empire, the relationship between knowledge and power, and the local hegemonies of caste and religion that also helped to create Indian literature in English. Finally we should be able to use the energy of the new discipline that we must create to redraw the boundaries of Indian literature in English and provide valuable guides to future generations.

NOTES

i In India various literary anthologies prescribed for the English departments at various universities imagined an upper class Hindu literature for the nation ignoring Muslim, Anglo-Indian, Indian Christian or Parsee writers. Since the last decade the works of Michael Foucault, Benedict Anderson and Edward Said have been widely used by scholars to understand the way national literatures are imagined by an educated elite and the ideology of constructing local and national identities along national lines. The construction of national literatures and through them national identities has been an ongoing project in many nations since the beginning of the twentieth century if not earlier. In Great Britain F. R. Leavis was clandestinely concentrating on the Arnold project to create a national literature while he was campaigning for the autonomy of the literary text in his critical writing. In the United States the production and dissemination of the Norton anthologies of literature privileged most white male writers eliding Black travel narratives, Native American folk and other minority literatures including Japanese American. As a selective literature was read by a large section of the public it forged a selective national identity where the dominant majority—be it white or upper caste Hindu—defined issues ranging from culture and politics to economics and education. This bias to some extent is being corrected by the publication of critical works on and about national literatures by literary historians like Stephen Greenblatt (United States), South Asianists like Chris Bayly (U.K.) and literary scholars like Vijay Dhardwadker, Gaytri Spivak Chakravorty (United States). New critical approaches have introduced critical literary readers like The Heath Anthology in two volumes which has now replaced the Norton anthologies in the United States now there are various literary anthologies that highlight the contributions of erstwhile elided minorities in the construction of national literatures.


iii The Anglo-Indian or Eurasian communities not only identified with the ruling British but also abhorred the vast Indian populace. The English felt that the special privileges to the Anglo-Indians were worth it as they strengthened British rule in India. The British Viceroy Lord
Canning (1856–1862) endorsed the British policy to favor the Eurasians in these words: “The Eurasian class have a special claim upon us. The presence of a British government has called them into being ... and they are a class which, while it draws little or no support from its connection with England, is without that deep root in and hold of the soil of India from which our native public servants, through their families and relatives, derive advantage.” H. Verney Lovett, “The Growth of Educational Policy” in The Cambridge History of India Vol. VI (New Delhi, nd.), p. 341.


v In Srinivasa Iyengar’s Literature and Authorship in India, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1943) the word ‘Anglian’ was mis-spelt as ‘Anglican’ provoking strong reactions from both reviewers and critics. For more details see Autolycus’s reaction in The Illustrated Weekly of India, 14 November 1943. Also see Amalendu Bose, Some Poets of the Writers Workshop, Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English, (Dharwar, 1972), p. 104. Bose objects to the “atrocious term” while Autolycus finds in appropriate the adjective ‘Anglican’ referring to the Church of England and not to English or Indian literature in English.

vi Sunit Kumar Chatterji, Languages and Literatures of Modern India, (Calcutta: Prakash Bhavan, 1963). Chatterji writes, “Indians, particularly those who have obtained a higher education through the English language, realize that the metal and spiritual pabulum which they can get so easily from English is not to be found through Hindi ... English satisfies the intellectual and even spiritual hunger of people who want to know the best that has been thought and said and done in the world, and no modern Indian language can approach English in this ... As a neutral language, English alone can hold the balance evenly among all the various modern languages of India, Hindi included, without special favour, or disfavour to any particular linguistic group” pp. 57–58.


ix Chandra Chatterjee, Surviving Colonialism: A Study of R. K. Narayan, Anita Desai, V.S. Naipaul, (New Delhi: Radha Publications, 2000). Chatterjee writes: “However, British education proved to be the biggest handicap to the British administration. It brought Indians in close proximity to western rationalist ideas and made them question the very basis of colonial imposition in India” (p. 29).

x For a detailed account of the Hindi-Urdu controversy see Ayesha Jalal’s Chapter 3 “Common Languages, Contested Scripts, Conflicted Communities: Shifting Identities of Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi” in Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850, (Delhi :OUP, 2001), pp. 102–38. Jalal writes, “Hindustan was a composite of dialects such as Brajbhasha, Khariboli, Awadhi and Bhojpuri, all linked to Sanskrit in varying measures. Mir and Ghalib had called this linguistic compound Rekhta before colonial discourse named it Urdu. Though drawing on all the regional dialects, its Muslim antecedents were underlined by a surfeit of Persian-Arabic vocabulary. This finds its best demonstration in Ghalib’s poetry, as he himself boasted:

If anyone asks how Rekhta can be the envy of Persian
Read him Ghalib’s discourse just once to show how.
(Jo yeh kaheye ‘Rekhta kiunkar ho rashk-I-Farsi’
Guftta Ghalib aik bar parh key usey soona ke ‘Youn’.)

Asserting Urdu’s distinctiveness and, for some, superiority over Persian was simpler to do than to locate the language in the social setting of north-western India. Incorporating Urdu into Hindustani without separating it from Hindi identified it with Persian and Sanskrit alike” (p. 105).

For more information about Gandhi’s views on language see Gandhi’s “Letter to Vasumati Pandit Dated November 12, 1924” in The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XXV, (Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, May 1967). In the letter Gandhi advises Pandit not to worry about mistakes as “Language is a medium for communication of thought. Everything is all right so long as there is nothing wrong in the thought. A demon sitting in an aeroplane is not worthy of our respect, but a sadhu sitting in a bullock cart is” (p. 309).

Gandhi felt that the vernacular languages and Hindustani should be used within the country as legal and administrative languages while English as the language of diplomacy abroad. In his “Presidential Address at Belgaum Congress December 26, 1924” in Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Vol. XXV, ibid., Gandhi said, “The official language for provincial governments, legislatures and courts, within a definite period, to be the vernacular of the province; of the Privy Council, the final court of appeal, to be Hindustani; the script to be either Devanagri or Persian. The language of the Central Government and of the Central Legislature to be Hindustani, The language of international diplomacy to be English” (p. 481).

We can see the influence of the English Romantics such as Shelley and Keats on the writings of Jai Shaker Prasad or Sumitranandan Pant. Premchand’s realism was undoubtedly reminiscent of Charles Dickens and Bankim Chandra’s Durgesh Nandini closely resembled, if not a plagiarized version of, Walter Scott’s Ivanhoe.

It is possible to argue that many Indian-English novelists use themes, characters and at times even locales that are essentially Indian but their choice of the English medium does not transform them into non-Indian writers. Mulk Raj Anand’s Private Life of an Indian Prince, Manohar Mulgonker’s The Princess, even Raja Rao’s The Serpent and the Rope (though located in England and France nevertheless has characters like Rama and Savithri are Indian) or R. K. Narayan’s Malgudi novels (South Indian life) are quintessentially Indian in theme and sensibility though written in English.


Obviously we must exclude the works of Rudyard Kipling (Barrack-Room Ballads, Plain Tales from the Hills, The City of Dreadful Nights), E. M. Forster (A Passage to India), Pearl S Buck (Come My Beloved) or Louise Broomfield (The Rains Came) from the canon of Indian writing in English as they belong to the category of either English or American literature though their themes might be Indian.


This seems to be the opinion of many literary scholars and writers like Aijaz Ahmad (In
The early eighteenth century also saw an increase in the political and economic fortunes of the British in India encouraging them to adopt a nabob-style large retinue of indigenous domestic help and after 1725 this quickened the Anglicization of a section of the Indian population. Secondly the Company's army began to recruit Muslim soldiers from the Mughal army in the mid-eighteenth century and an increasing number of lower caste Hindus, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, Sikhs, Gurkhas and Nepalis were also anglicized.


For a new reassessment of the use of English in India in the latter half of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries before the formal introduction of English in India in 1813 see Vinay Dharwadker, “The Historical Formation of Indian-English Literature,” in *Literary Cultures in History*, ibid., pp. 199–267.

For a detailed discussion of Indians learning Portuguese, Dutch, French and subsequently English in the seventeenth and eighteenth century to function as intermediaries in European trade centers see Burton Stein, *A History of India*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). Many of the *dubhasis* who became personal agents of company officials were later called baniyas or banyans in colonial Bengal. Most baniyas performed menial tasks taking care of household spending but there were rich and influential banias like Gokul Ghosal baniya to Harry Verelst or Cantu Babu (Krishna Kanta Nandy) baniya to Warren Hastings. When widespread corruption amongst Company officials forced Governor Generals Cornwallis and Wellesley to abolish the institution of *dubhasis*, the scholarly *dubhasis* became assistants to colonial administrator scholars helping the former interpret the Persian/Sanskrit/Dravidian or Indo-Aryan languages and tradition. For more information on the influence of *dabhiyas* see P. J. Marshall, *East Indian Fortunes: The British in Bengal in the Eighteenth Century*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 45 and Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 503.


For a detailed discussion of all three writers and their ideological positions see, Vinay Dharwadker, “The Historical Formation of Indian-English Literature,” in Literary Cultures in History, ibid., pp. 220-21.


Raja Rao, “The Caste of English,” in Awakened Conscience: Studies in Commonwealth Literature, C. D. Narasimhiah ed., (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1978). Rao states, “It would then be correct to say as long as we are Indian—that is, not nationalists, but truly Indians of the Indian psyche—we shall have the English language with us and amongst us, but as one of our own, of our caste, our creed, our sect and of our tradition” (p. 421). And again, “Hindi is our national language. It is spoken and understood by nearly three hundred and fifty million out of the six hundred million people of India. But then one could say and rightly: look at the Brahmins, they were not even proportionately as numerous as those who speak English and yet they were so powerful. Though this statement is strictly correct you should not, in all frankness use it, for India today is a secular state, and there is neither Brahmin nor non-Brahmin, Hindu or Muslim. We all are Sri. There is neither Pandit nor Maulana, nor that extraordinary combination of symbols represented by M. R. Sri (which meant Maharaja Raja Sri, a South Indian honorific), Thus Mr. Frank Anthony, the Anglo-Indian leader, is Sri Anthony. Likewise, since India is secular, the English language too loses its superior caste, and becomes the language of India” (p. 422).

K. Satchidanandan, Indian Literature: Positions and Propositions, (Delhi: Pencraft International, 1999). In “Introduction: Towards Positioning Indian Literature,” Satchidanandan argues that though Indian writing in English is a “legitimate product” it occupies a “peripheral region” of Indian literature there is a “disparity” between the hype and its real literary ability to reflect the Indian social and spiritual reality p. 14.

The term Indo-Anglian was probably first coined in 1883 to refer to specimen English composition of native students and was an inversion of the racially imprecise and sometimes pejorative term Anglo-Indian. Adil Jussawala categorically disapproved of Indo-Anglian as a term referring to Indian writing in English and suggested that Indians ought to kill that “nonsense term.” A. K. Mehrutra reiterated Jussawala’s sentiment in his book, but the term which earlier referred to Anglo-Indian writers like Corbett, Kipling and Forster now inexactely refers to a larger body of literary and cultural identity of Indian writers writing in English. Harish Trivedi refers to the dubious identity of Indo-Anglian literature as the “half caste” offspring of English literature. See Harish Trivedi, “Reading English, Writing Hindi: English Literature and Indian Creative Writing,” in Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language, History, ed., Svati Joshi, (New Delhi Trianka, 1991), p. 202. In recent criticism the term “Indian-English literature” seems to be more acceptable and more representative of such writ-
K. Satchidanandan believes that any essentialist attempt to construct Indian literature would only lead to creating a “parody” of the Indian reality, as it would ignore the rich multiplicity and plurality. See, K. Satchidanandan, “Signing in Different Scripts” in Authors, Texts, Issues: Essays on Indian Literature, (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2003).

Edward Said, Orientalism, (New York: Vintage, 1979). Said points out that, “Many of the most interesting postcolonial writers bear their past within them—as scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices—as urgently reinterpretable and redeployable experiences, in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory taken back from the empire ...” (p. 32).

Subha Rao believes that Indian writing in English represents the voice of the urban rich and educated combined with their aspirations to realize an “Un-Indian life”; and therefore it echoes the voice of the colonizer Prospero masquerading as the voice of Caliban (p. 12). Rao argues that the strong desire to succeed in an alien language such as English generates a false standard of success and mental development that will not allow the Indian writer in English to really succeed. (p. 14.) See T. V. Subha Rao, Indian Writing in English: Is There Any Worth in It? (Madurai: Koodal, 1976).

See Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, (Oxford: OUP, 1977) for a discussion on the relationship of class in relation to either the emergence of new structures of feeling as it happened in England from 1700 to 1760, break or contradiction in class norms for example in England from 1780 to 1830 or 1890 to 1930, pp. 134–35.

Svati Joshi, “Rethinking English: An Introduction,” in Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language, History, ed., Svati Joshi (New Delhi: Trianka, 1991). Joshi elaborates upon the lack of connection between the English text and the Indian material world. She writes “The question that have been pressing upon us have to do with the problematic status of teaching English in the post-colonial situation. The departments of English literature form a large and unified institution within the system of higher education in India. Liberal assumptions about English literature as ‘universal’ and ‘normative’, and orthodox critical methods that deny any possibility of connecting the English text with our material world, continue to inform much of our pedagogical activity” (p. 1).

Vinay Dharwadker, “The Historical Formation of Indian-English Literature,” in Literary Cultures in History ibid. Dhardadker also believes that Christian missionary schools like Loretto Convent Calcutta, St. Xavier College Bombay and St. Stephen’s College Delhi were quite “influential” both in the colonial and postcolonial periods providing education to Indian-English writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Adil Jussawalla, Amitav Ghosh and others (p. 215).


the eighteenth century downwards, I think we have, by and large, evolved a new kind of form shaped by our various habits of thought, our conscious and subconscious inheritances, speech, symbols and images, tested by our present-day living realities, as against the Katha recital or sermon-fiction of the past" (p. 49).


xlii For a discussion of Rammohum Roy's writings with a political and social intent see Saumyendranath Tagore, Raja Rammohun Roy, (New Delhi: Sahitya Akedami, 1966); for Roy's multilingual abilities see pp. 9–21, about his English texts see pp. 14–30.


xliv Vinay Dharwadker, "The Historical Formation of Indian-English Literature," in Literary Cultures in History, p. 222.

xlv Most conventional histories of Indian-English literature see Derozio's contribution more as an iconoclast fawning nihilists and not as a writer or poet. Though Srinivasa Iyengar devotes three and a half pages in praise of Derozio's works he dismisses derisively the Young Bengal movement initiated by Derozio in just one paragraph. See Srinivasa Iyengar, Indian Writing in English, rpt 2003, (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited, 1985), pp. 34–37. Iyengar concludes that the “Derozio men” were “nihilists, intoxicated with a sense of false importance; they were just rootless beings, with dark despair seated at the center of their lives” It is this reason together with the fact that most of them converted themselves to Christianity and waged “a ceaseless war against Hinduism” that forces Iyengar to dismiss Derozio’s contribution to Indian-English literature (pp. 40–41).


xlix See Allan Sealy, The Trotter-Nama: A Chronicle, (Delhi: Viking Penguin India, 1988), pp. 284–87 where Sealy not only refers to Derozio but also acknowledges his greatness calling him a “prodigy” (p. 284).


li In 1828 Derozio founded the ‘Academic Association’ to debate on various social, political and religious issues. He made his students do an intensive reading of Voltaire, Hume, Locke, and Thomas Paine to make the debates thought-provoking. In 1838 his students helped to
establish the Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge with Tarachand Chakravarty as the president and Pearychand Mitra and Ramtanu Lahiri as secretaries.


liii See Peary Chand Mitra, *A Biographical Sketch of David Hare*, (Calcutta, 1877), p 27 and Appendix B.


lv See the “Foreword” by Annanda Shankar Roy in *Complete Works of Derozio*, ibid., p. viii.

lvi A group of students inspired by his teaching went on to question the social and religious institutions of Hindu society. students such as Krishnamohan Bandyopadhyay, Rashik Krishna Mallik, Dakhinaranjan Mukhopadhyay, Ramgopal Ghose, Madhab Chandra Mallik, Ramtanu Lahiri, Maheshchandra Ghose, Sibchandra Deb, Harachandra Ghose, Radhanath Sikder, Govindachandra Basak, Amritalal Mitra and others. Some of them appreciated the opposition of Christian missionaries to the antiquated religious practices of Hindus and students like Dakhinaranjan Mukhopadhyay and Krishnamohan Bandyopadhyay became Christians.

lvii Between 1828 and 1843 Derozians floated many journals, such as the *Parthenon, Hesperus, Jnananvesan* (Quest for Knowledge), *Enquirer, Hindu Pioneer, Quill* and the *Bengal Spectator* to disseminate his views and principles widely.

lviii The dissemination of European ideas included in rationalism, humanism, utilitarianism, scientism, individualism, positivism, Darwinism, socialism and nationalism through Francis Bacon (1561–1626), Isaac Newton (1642–1727), Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), Thomas Paine (1737–1809), August Comte (1798–1857), Charles Darwin (1809–82) and John Stuart Mill (1606–73) not only affected the Bengal Renaissance but also gave rise to institutions such as the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784), Baptist Mission of Serampore (1800), Fort William College (1800), Hindu College (1817), Calcutta School-Book Society (1817), Calcutta Medical College (1835) and University of Calcutta (1857). The spirit of inquiry led the Bengal Renaissance through many confrontationist trajectories including imagining the nation and nationalism and in turn questioning the colonial rule. Some of the constructions on nationalism took religious overtones like in the works of Sri Aurobindo who saw nationalism in the early decades of the twentieth century as religion, as an avatar or shakti: In “The Life of Nationalism” (17–11–1907) Sri Aurobindo writes: “Nationalism is an avatar and cannot be slain. Nationalism is a divinely appointed sakti of the Eternal and must do its God-given work before it returns to the bosom of the Universal Energy from which it came.” See *Sri Aurobindo On Nationalism*, First Series, (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1965), p. 39.


lxi *Complete Works of Derozio*, ibid., “On the Influence of Poetry: India Gazette Friday January 22nd 1830. Extracted from the “Selections from the inedited Prose and Poetry of Derozio” by Thomas Edwards, *The Calcutta Review*, Vol. LXXV 1882), p .320. Derozio continues, “Let it be the aim of the present age to open news springs; let the mind engage in voyages for the discovery of happiness; let the poet abandon war, misanthropy, romances and false feeling and let his enthusiasm be on that side, which espouses man’s best interest; let it be his object to improve, while he delights, and to promote the advancement of society, while he scatters
flowers along its path; and he may rest assured that fame will not only await his steps but that he will attain a high rank among the best benefactors of mankind. Hearts that are now dead to the duties which they owe to society will spring, starting at his call, and sympathizing with the world while they take a more active and just part in its concerns will melt” pp. 321–22.

lxxvi Complete Works of Derozio, ibid, From “Hindu Widow” (Taken from the Notes of The Fakeer of Jungheera), p. 316.
lxxvii M. K. Naik, A History of English Literature, (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1982). Naik analyses rhythm and metrical style of “Fakeer” in the following lines: “In this fast moving tale, Derozio uses different metres to suit the changing tone and temper of the narrative. He makes the iambic four-feet couplet for straightforward narration, but adopts a slower line for the descriptive passages and the anapestic metre for the spirited account of the battle, while the choruses or the chanting priests and the women round Nuleeni’s funeral pyre are in trochaic and dactylic measure” (p. 23).
lxxviii Complete Works of Derozio, ibid. In the “Notes” on The Fakeer of Jungheera Derozio explains that the Jungheera’s rocks are “hoar and steep” and the waves of the Ganges are” broad and deep. “Since it was a truly beautiful and romantic spot he thought it to be an ideal setting for this exotic tale of love and hate and revenge. pp. 161–170.
lxxix Another poet from the same college Kashipradad Ghose (1809–1873) lived longer than Derozio but was not as impressive. For more detail on Ghose see Elena J. Kalinnikova, Indian-English Literature: A Perspective, (Ghaziabad: Vimal Prakashan, 1982), p. 14.
lxx Though Rammohun Roy campaigned against the institution of sati he opposed the move of William Bentinck to declare sati illegal through the Regulation XVII (4th December 1829). For more detail see the “Introduction” in Ajit Kumar Ghosh and others in Rammohan Rachnabali, (Calcutta: Haraf Publications, 1973), pages 20 and 589.
lxxi Complete Works of Derozio, ibid. The poem can be found in the beginning of The Fakeer of Jungheera, p. 99.
lxxiii Complete Works of Derozio, ibid. Derozio states, “On the Colonization of India by Europeans” written in August 1829 Derozio writes, “Upon the whole, then, we must draw the inference that colonization would not be beneficial, unless the British legislature interferes, and materially alter the present system of Indian policy, by admitting natives and Indo-Britons to a participation of privileges, on a similar footing, as far as practicable and expedient, with the Europeans. It is only by such a measure that discontent can be prevented from brooding into rebellion, and the arts and sciences, when established, can produce benefits both to the governors and governed, to Britain, and to this, at present our oppressed and neglected native country” p. 319.