

Quadrant II – Notes

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Unit: III

Module Name: H.L.V. Derozio's *Freedom to the Slave*- Part I

Module No: 11

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Notes

In this module, we are going to look at H.L.V. Derozio's *Freedom to the Slave*- Part I. In the course of the module, we will be looking at the Aesthetics of Indian Poetry. Next we will get introduced to the poet Henry Louis Vivian Derozio and then we are going to look at the analysis of Derozio's Poem *Freedom to the Slave*- Part I.

At the end of this module, you will be able to understand H.L.V. Derozio as a poet through the context of Indian Writing in English vis a vis Indian English poetry and analyze the first part of the poem *Freedom to the Slave* by H.L.V. Derozio.

At the outset, let us take a look at the aesthetics of Indian English poetry. The term Indian English poetry denotes the English poems written by the poets born in India. Aesthetics involves a set of principles concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty. With regard to poetry, it explores the styles and nature of poetry.

Indian poetry has had its own style before the arrival of English as language in India. With the introduction of English education by the British colonisers, there was a pervasive engagement with English language and literature in India, especially amidst the elite classes. Many of the individuals amongst these Indians went on to become poets and began to write poems in English. Since the Western model of poetry was the only model available in English poetry, the earliest Indian English poets often imitated the style of Western poetry. Yet, since this process began during the colonial period,

the poets did bring in several themes such as nationalism, patriotism in their poems. Since they were largely influenced by the liberal thoughts of the West, the impact of liberalism can be also seen in early Indian English poetry.

Some of the major figures of the early Indian English poetry are Rabindranath Tagore, Toru Dutt, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, Michael Madhusudan Dutt. These poets may be anointed as the initiators of English poetry in India. We see that there have been transitions in the styles and themes reflected in the poems of these poets as well. Although the style and forms which they adopted were inspired by Western models, their poems reflected Indian imagery and themes relevant to the Indian psyche. One poet who contributed greatly to the initiation of English poetry in India was Henry Louis Vivian Derozio.

At this juncture, let us take a look at the life of H.L.V. Derozio. He was born in Calcutta in the year 1809. His father was an Indo-Portuguese Christian and his mother was an Englishwoman, thus he belonged to the early generation of Anglo-Indians, the children of mixed marriages. Derozio started writing poetry at an early age. He was influenced by Indian culture and Western philosophy. His poetry reflects themes such as patriotism, liberalism, progress, cultural richness etc.

The poem by Derozio that we are going to look at today is *Freedom to the Slave*. The background of this poem is that of Pre-Independence India. Derozio was a key figure of the famous Bengal Renaissance. A new wave of idea had begun to spread amongst the educated individuals. The thought of liberalism was quite popular and educated Indians were taking to it. The call to end slavery and significance of freedom was being promoted. These exact thoughts are seen in Derozio's poem being discussed in this module.

The poem begins with a quote by Campbell- "As the slave departs, the man returns". This quote summarizes the theme of the poem where the poet is speaking about the feelings of a slave who has realized that he is free. The narration about how a slave feels after being free. The tone of the poem is emotional, overwhelming and thought provoking. The poet has used 'slave' as a motif. He might be also speaking about the country as a whole which was not independent when the poem was written. Thus, the major theme of the poem is also freedom.

In the first part of the poem, the poet explains how the slave felt when he first realized he was free. The slave can be anyone: an individual who was deprived of his freedom or a country that was facing foreign rule.

The poem expresses the emotions of the slave who has realized that he is now free from the clutches of slavery. Further poet notices that once one is free, they start to feel like their original self. Because, in slavery one has to follow the rules and orders of the master. It is often exploitative and cruel and thus this poem describes how a person who has become free feels.

The poet says that the slave had a realization that they don't need to bow down in front of anybody.

In the poem Derozio had used the imagery from nature such as sky, birds to symbolize the freedom. We see that a lot of this has been influenced by the Western model of poetry. He expresses the emotion of happiness on being free by using this imagery. Some other Imagery from nature used by the poet is stream, wind, birds, flood etc. These are the symbols from nature that symbolize the freedom which is the major theme of the poem. The poet compares the state of the mind to the all things free.

With this, we finish the discussion of the first module on Derozio's poem *Freedom to the Slave*. We will be looking at the next part of the poem in the coming module.

Glossary of terms/words:

- **Indian Writing in English-** Works of Indian writers writing in English.
- **Nationalism-** Identification with one's own nation and support for its interests, especially to the exclusion or detriment of the interests of other nations.
- **Liberalism-** A political and social philosophy that promotes individual rights, civil liberties, democracy, and free enterprise.
- **Imagery-** Visually descriptive or figurative words which often represent something in a literary work.
- **Motif-** A dominant or recurring idea in an artistic work.

Possible misconceptions/Clarification:

- H.L.V. Derozio was influenced by the form and techniques of the Western model of poetry since it was the only model available through English education for Indian writers. Yet, the themes which he chose for his poems were very much rooted into Indian thought and its well-being.

Case Studies and Additional Examples/Illustrations:

- The first phase of Indian poetry was the period of literary renaissance in India. Derozio's poems, Kasiprasad Ghose's *The Shair or Minstrel* and other poems, Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *The Captive Lady*, Manmohan Ghose's *Love Songs and Elegies* are a testimony to the creative upsurge occasioned by the romantic spirit kindled by the literary renaissance.