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Romantic Literary Influences on M M Dutt's *King Porus*: An Analysis

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You may take my word for it, friend Raj, I shall come out like a tremendous comet and no mistake.

- M M Dutt

Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) is one of the greatest figures not just of Bengali but of modern Indian literature.

- William Radice

M M Dutt is a man with an Indian heart throbbing for Albion shore. Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873) –his longings for Albion shore and soil so influenced him that he embraced Christianity and added a prefix ‘Michael’ to his Hindu name. Walking on the path of Derozio and Kashiprashad Ghose, Madhusudan advanced Indian poetry in English with all new lures, desires, and strives for the West. It was a major advance in feelings and forms with portrayal of Nature under the Romantic and Western inspirations.

His ‘King Porus’ based on the display of an archetypal courage against victorious Alexander the great and his army by King Porus, a popular historical figure, whose bravery against Macedonians has become a part of folklore. It is possible that he exhibits the Romantic trait –Medievalism and Hellenism by selecting his poetic topics from the medieval or ancient time, but, of course in an Indian context. The poem, published in 1843 in the *Literary Gleaner*, like the previous one, betrays the influence of the Orientalists. Madhusudan, here, portrays a wonderful picture of bravery which has been one of the main threads in the web of ancient literatures but the way poem was written it is more of English Romantic one. Following the Romantic poetic traditions, poem is preceded by two quotations: ‘We ne’er shall look upon his like again!’ from Shakespeare, and ‘When shall such hero live again?’ from Byron (469). It is divided into six stanzas of approximately 20 lines each. Through Derozio Madhusudan recalls Thomas Moore. As Derozio’s ‘The Harp of India’ laments India’s fallen condition and reminiscences about its glorious past when the likes of King Porus breathed fire against its exploiters and compares it with the hopelessness that characterizes the present situation:

But where oh! Where is Porus not?



And where the noble heart that bled
For Freedom-with the heroic glow
In patriot bosoms nourished' d-
-Hearts, eagle-like that recked not Death,
But shrank before foul Thraldom's breath? (472)

In the quoted lines, Uddin also remarks the agonised lament of Madhusudan for the non-existence, in our midst, of men like Porus and the noble hearts that bled for freedom finds expression. This set of six lines recalls 'The Enchantress of the Cave' by Derozio: 'O! for the men of fledged time! / O! for the heroic hearts of old / To fire the souls that now are cold, / To lead them on to the deeds of worth, / And raise their glory yet on earth!' (Chaudhuri *Derozio* 131) This shows Madhusudan's lamentation progress through identical feelings of Derozio which, again (as discussed in the previous chapter) echoes the following lines from Moore's 'Oh for the Swords of Former Time!' (*Irish Melodies*): 'Oh for the swords of former time! / Oh for the men who bore them, / When arm'd for Right, they stood sublime, / And tyrants crouch'd before them!' (Thomas Moore *Poems* 69) The mention of the present situation continuous in the following lines as:

And where art thou-fair Freedom! -thou-
Once goddess of Ind's sunny clime!
When glory's halo 'round her brow
Shone radiant, and she rose sublime,
...
That glory hath now flitted by!
That crown that once had deck'd thy brow
Is trampled down - and thou sunk low:
Thy pearl, thy diamond, and thy mine



Of glistening gold no more is thine!

Also each conquering tyrant's lust

Has robb'd thee of thy very dust!

Thou standest like a lofty tree. (472)

The first stanza narrates Romantic like similes of destructive nature: 'This war of elements, was nurst,- / Like to an earthquake in the womb / Of a volcano,-deep and low- / A deadlier storm-on them to burst!' (470) The poem describes the Indians and the Macedonians in the midst of a fierce battle in which King Porus displays stature, dignity and awesome courage in battle. When the two kings meet face to face, Porus remains unbowed before the mighty Greek emperor, and asks to be treated as a king in royal pride: 'But stood – as stands an oak, / Unbent – in native majesty! / 'How Should I treat thee? ask'd / The mighty king of Macedon, - / 'Aye – as a king!' – respons'd / In royal pride Ind's haughty son.' (472) This can lead one to think 'King Porus' is exhibiting the trait of a Byronic hero. His appearance even after the siege reminds of Romantic warrior full of chivalrousness. Madhusudan, in his following lines, states about the nobly behaviour of King Porus: 'But when th' Emathian conqueror / Saw that with gaping wounds he bled, / Desist – Desist! –he cried- / Such noble blood should not be shed!' (471) Poem also narrates the spirit of patriotism probably inspired by Byron, Moore and Campbell through Derozio: 'Proud mountain oaks by thunders riven- / And for their country' freedom bled / And made on gore their glorious bed.' (470)

Thus, the influence of English Romantic poets is discernable at many places. In the poem, he 'follows Scott and Byron in using iambic tetrameter lines with occasional employment of alternate tetrameters and trimeters' (Bose 29), as in the following extract 'But dauntlessly there stood / King Porus, towering 'midst the foe / Like a Himala-peak / With its eternal crown of snow-' (472)



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