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The Poetry of Toru Dutt with Special Reference to her Indian Thoughts

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Abstract:

Poetry is the representation of mental thoughts, it symbolize all the conflicts that dominate the poets mind either from childhood memories or impressions laid down by the society which is always in the process of gradual change. Every writer has something beforehand in mind which acts as an inspiration for his/her writing. Every poet after being inspired need to present his mental agony or bliss in a way that he be able to make his reader fathom the real and core meaning of the issues tossing in his mind. The poet revamps and tries to convey his message in the form of words which may or may not convey what he/she actually wants, so as at times vocabulary couldn't find the appropriate word for a feeling. The poets cannot claim and remain adamant to only one meaning (his own one) for his writing; it is true to say that the writing of a poet doesn't belong to him anymore after being exposed to the masses (readers).

Toru Dutt is one great poetess of India who from the very young age started writing. The love for learning was already in her blood which ultimately made her to learn three languages. She learnt English, French and Sanskrit languages and translated French poetry into English. Even though she was a Christian as the family had converted to Christianity when Toru was a small child her thoughts were never free from her origin. She never alienated herself from her roots, thoughts in the form of epics, mythology and legends of the Hindu religion always occupied her mind. The large portion of her appreciated high class poetry is dedicated to these thoughts which give us a clear picture of her liking and attachment to these contemplations. Her poetry has a great influence of Hindu legends and myths, the influence of which can be felt in the form of echoes of Hindu mythos and legends in her literary work. Her poetical collection '*A sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*' published in 1876 by her father after her death bought her recognition as a Bengali English poetess.

Keywords: Symbolize, Legends, Alienation, Hind Religion, Epic & Mythology.

INTRODUCTION:

Toru Dutt needs no introduction; this poetess of Indian is already in the great books of India literature. Toru who wrote many master pieces are still identifies as the source of inspiration. She had a god gifted talent for writing and she could have crossed all the barrier to reach the place where she could have been easily visible to everyone however, her much early death closed the literary chapter of one of the youngest and brilliant poetess of India. She is the first Indian women to write poetry in English. Undoubtedly there are diverse reasons for us to believe that

the intellectual power of Toru Dutt made her one of the most notable women that ever lived estimation of her literature.

Toru Dutt belong to the very first phase of Indian English poetry i.e. the Imitative phase, here the Indian English poets wrote under the direct influence of the British Romantics and Victorian Poets. It means her poetry was inspired and influenced by the British Romantics and Victorian Poets. However, even though her efforts were imitative and derivative of English poetry, her writing skills generated the new life to India English Poetry by writing on Indian history, legends and myths. Her poems like Savitri, Buttoo, Lakshman and many more clearly convey her fulfillment of duty towards India her motherland. Her deep and keen interest in the Hindu religious scriptures can well be understood as:-

*“Glanced the sharp knife one moment high,
The severed thumb was on the sod,
There was no tear in Buttoo’s eye,
He left the matter with his God”*

These lines are from Buttoo, Buttoo who has been rejected by his master Dronachaya, on one occasion Dronachaya asks Buttoo for his thumb as gure-dakshina and Buttoo without giving it a second thought offers his right thumb to the master. This poem presents the true Indian culture its true essence where a student always respects and admires his teacher. Buttoo is the representation of Indian life, culture and thought.

MAIN ARGUMENT:

Toru Dutt from the very beginning of her life was under the influence of music and art. She took birth in a well educated family already in deep love with literature. She grew with her two siblings, all of them were educated at home by a tutor. Her father also used to teach them and it is from him they learnt literarily studies and culture. The family belonged to the upper Hindu class but for some reasons converted to Christianity, it happened when Toru was very small. Toru learnt French and English and in late stages Sanskrit as well. Toru and her sister developed deep love for English and French literature after the family travelled to Europe and later to England. She translated French poems into English which reflects her clear understanding of both English & French languages. Toru the lover of her roots had Indian mythos and legends in her mind, she used to listen Hindu myths and legends form her mother in her childhood. All this happened to lay a marked influence on the poetry of Toru Dutt.

Perfection is directly proportional to growth i.e. time, Toru is no exception to this, a reader of her poems could inculcate that her initial poems suffer from some lacunas which eventually vanished with time and gave way to a promising legendary lady of Indian English poetry. However, her early death created an everlasting gap between her blooming career and the emergence of a transformer. Her early writing suffered from meter, rhyme and even grammatical mistakes but all this doesn't last for long so as her mature mind mastered and learnt things very fast. “The Sheaf has many inversions, archaic words and phrases, and twisted expressions, and also a discordant music her and there , as pointed out by the reviewers of The Examiner and The Englishman, but

the same cannot be said of Ancient Ballads and Miscellaneous Poems. If the Sheaf olds out a promise for an upcoming poetess, Ancient Ballads is, in a way, the fulfillment of that promise. This naturally leads us to construe that Toru Dutt's art constantly grew and was on trial until it gained in scope and depth towards the close of her life on earth." **1**

Toru Dutt was influenced by both the West and the East, the deep influence of Indian culture on her poetry becomes obvious from the beginning sonnets of '*Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*'. Another remarkable collection of poems '*A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*' which consists of the original translations of the French poems by Toru reflects the influence of the West. The magnificent work in '*A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*' inspired Mr. Gosse to review it in the *Examiner* (Journal) with many favorable remarks. "There are graphic sketches of Indian life and scenery, the forests and beautiful sights of nature. The beautiful cool night of the Indian forests has been described in a very effective language. Her heart is touched by the beauty of champak and lotus flowers. She is very sensitive to the sounds and sights of nature. She is keenly aware of different aspects of nature. Toru Dutt was influenced by the French and English romantic poets. Her treatment of Nature has no mystic touch like that of Wordsworth but like Keats it appeals to our senses." **2** Her clear understanding of the French is well explained by her translation of a patriotic poem by F. Berat '*My Normandy*': -

*"I've seen the hills of Switzerland,
Its chalets, and its glaciers dear,
I've seen Italia's sky and strand,
And heard, entranced, the gondolier,
But while I hailed each foreign spot,
I murmured to myself;- on earth'
A lovelier land existeth not
That Normandy that gave me birth"*

"Besides, patriotism, the theme of separatism, lineless and ultimately death were dear to her. In many of the poems, we find a plaintive note of frustration, dejection and bereavement. In Gantier's poem, there is a beautiful expression of autumnal atmosphere:- **3**

*"Leaves not green, but red and gold,
Fall and dot the yellow grass,
More and even, the wind is cold,
Sunny days are gone, alas!
Showers lift bubbles on the pool,
Peasants harvest-work dispatch,
Winter come apace to rule,
Swallows clusters on the thatch"*

Ancient Ballads is yet another masterpiece by Toru Dutt. The Ballads consists of number of Indian mythical stories which originally in Sanskrit are very faithfully being translated into English by this young girl. This work reflects another great quality of Toru as a storyteller. Her narrative and descriptive techniques are very well presented in Ancient Ballads. If we keenly go

through the poem *Savitri* which is the opening poem of the Ancient Ballads her understanding of the Hindu mythology and tales can be best noted here. This poem being very long is the message for entire women living on earth, it describes how the character of a women should be, the portrayal of Savitri is the portrayal of every women. Toru represents *Savitri* as an example for all the women, her qualities and virtues need to be followed by all the women. In the following lines Toru very beautifully describes the firmness of *Savitri* who remain adhered to her choice even though she knew the fate of her choice(her groom) :-

*“Once and once only, have I given
My heart and faith its past recall”*

Indeed without any doubt Ancient Ballads is the best literary activity of Toru Dutt. Here we face a young but mentally mature and expert poetess flooded with the power of narrative and descriptive techniques. Dr. A.N. Jha has rightly remarked: “indeed, it may be reasonably said that had she lived longer she would have attained distinction in narrative and descriptive verse ... but perhaps in descriptive poetry she is even superior”.

The following lines bring Torus descriptive power in limelight, look how she describes Goddess Uma:-

*“She stretched her hand,
Oh what a nice and lovely fit
No fairer hand in all the land,
No painter’s hand might hope to trace
The beauty and the glory there!”*

And how magnificently she has described the forest scene form Buttoo: -

*“What glorious trees! The sombre soul
On which the eye delights to rest,
.... The seemul, gorgeous as a bride,
The flowers that have the ruby’s gleam.”*

‘*The Lotus*’ poem conveys the marked influence of Hindu religion on her mind. Though she was a converted Christian but her mind was never free from the Hindu religious thoughts. Lotus is the national symbol of India and occupies an important place in the Hindu faith. “Hindus revere it with the gods Vishnu, Brahma and to a lesser degree Kubera, and the goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati. Often used as an example of divine beauty and purity, Vishnu is often described as the “Lotus-Eyed One.” 4

This poem revolves around the pride of Indian’s culture and Hindu religion. She was never far from her ancestry, through this poem she beautifully conveys her love for India and wants to make others feel her background.

“Love came to Flora asking for a flower

*That would of followers be undisputed queen,
The lily and the rose, long, long had been
Rivals for that high honour, Bards of power”*

We can see in the above line how remarkable Toru has mingled the Hindu culture with the western culture, she has used the Bards which in reality is associated with Gaelic spiritual power traditions of England, Scotland and Ireland. It's basically the idea used by Toru in order to create a western understanding of Hinduism its culture and its divine faith in the disguise of Greek and Roman goddesses.

Another beautiful poem 'Our Casuarina Tree' propagates the deep blow on her life due to the lost of her siblings. The poetess records her own impressions of the tree at different times of the day. She by her artistic skills humanizes the tree who as a friend shares her sorrows & griefs.

*“But not because of its magnificence
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:
Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear.
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!
What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,
That haply to the unknown land may reach.”*

She remembers her old days when she used to play with her siblings under this tree, her memories revolve around this gigantic tree which make her to love this tree very much. She also reflects the acceptance of this tree as her part now, a friend who shares her sorrows in the form of soft murmur by the branches. The tree mourns with her and is equally dejected with the loss of her childhood companions. This poem again proposes Toru's influence of the Western poets like William Wordsworth and Keats. The way Wordsworth has used the Yew trees of Borrowdale and *Darkling* by Keats, Toru under this influence somewhere in her mind has symbolically used Casuarina tree.

*“With one sweet song that seems to have no close,
Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.”*

CONCLUSION:

Thus each and every poet has an inspiration in the first case, this inspiration could come as a direct influence of the society s/he belongs to. Further the poet has his own taste while netting the threads of his poetry. Application of methodology in his poetry is the other tool which a poet applies while s/he is in the process of writing. Having different and varied sources of inspiration makes every poet to present his views in a different way and manner, had this not been the case every poet would write the same thing.

Even though we know that the descriptive power which turned Toru Dutt to a great poetess but the beginning of her literary career was not flawless. In this context Mr. Edmund Gosse quotes: “The sheaf Gleaned in French Fields is certainly the most imperfect of Toru’s writings, but it is not the least interesting... the English verse is sometime exquisite; at other times the rules of our prosody are absolutely ignored, and it is obvious that the Hindu poetess was chanting to herself a music that is discord in and English ear.” One of the great characteristics of her poetry was the love for her country. Her *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* is one of the best examples of her Indianness. Her visit to Europe and learning of English and French literature could never detach her from India’s mythology and ancient religious thoughts.

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