

Culture and Society in the poems of Toru Dutt

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Abstract

Toru Dutt, from the very beginning of her life, was under the influence of music and art. She was born in a well-educated family, already in deep love with literature. She 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’ her another remarkable collection of poems *A sheaf Gleaned In French Fields* which consists of the original translations of the French poems which reflects the influence of the west.

Keywords- Culture & Society, Traditions, Hindu Philosophy

Introduction

Toru Dutt, being an Anglo Indian poetess was very much influenced by western culture and art. She depicts much about the culture and society of India. The grand work *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* is inspired by Edmund Gosse to review it in the *Examiner* (Journal) with many favorable remarks,

There are graphic sketches of Indian life and scenery, the forest and beautiful rights of nature. The beautiful cool night of the Indian forests has been described in an 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 the different aspects of nature. Toru was much influenced by the French and English romantic poets. Her treatment of nature has no mystic touch like that of words worth but like Keats, it appeals to our senses. (Prasad)

Toru Dutt demonstrated her full faith in ancient Indian philosophy and wisdom when she made tell death that the world was transient and all delusion, that all life was entangled in the ‘Frail and Fair’ web of Maya, that everything was perishable, and “. . . Love cry, Lo, this

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is my sun. . ." (67). She then pointed out save her husband by performing them, and that perfect bliss was an illusion and we must be tried fire like gold. However, she gave vent to her belief that love was invincible if it was embedded in virtue, duty, and goodness. Since such was Savitri's lofty love for her spouse, she was able to argue successfully with death without making him angry and was able to follow him indefatigably. The lines cited below fully bring out her sublime concept of love:

No weariness, O Death, I feel,
And how should I, when by the side
Of Satyavan? In woe and weal
To be a helpmate swears the bridge;
This is my place; by Solemn Oath wherever thou conductest him
I too must go, to keep my troth.... (Savitri, P.69)

Yama was greatly pleased with Savitri and told her to ask for a book but the life of Satyavan. Savitri was very much aware of the discussion between Yama and her. So she said:

Well, be it so. My husband's sire
Hath lost his sight and fair domain,
Give to his wyes their former fire,
And place him on his throne again. (P.68)

Among all the ballads contained in Ancient Ballads, "Savitri" holds a significant place by its length and quality. It is a wonderful poetic piece indeed. It expounds, on the one hand, the ideals of Indian womanhood, and on the other, the essentials of Vedantic philosophy. It has remarkable descriptions of natural scenes and sights, of the pompous marriage procession, of the hermitage and its surroundings. Toru Dutt has taken the story originally from the Mahabharat. Harihar Das thinks that the poem seems to augur "great future possibilities in the development of Toru Dutt's genius." (Harihar Das, 695-96)

'The Lotus' poem conveys the marked influence of Hindu religion on her mind though she was a converted Christian her mind was never free from the Hindu religious beliefs. Lotus is the national symbol of India and occupies an important place in the Hindu faith. "Hindu revere it with the Gods Vishnu, Brahma and to a lesser degree Kubera, and the goddess Laxmi and Saraswati. Often used purity. Vishnu is often described as the "Lotus-Eyed one." (Wikipedia.org)

The poem 'Lotus' 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 flowers be undisputed queen,
The lily and the rose, long, long had been
Rivals for that high honor, Bards of Power (172)

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In the above lines, Toru's mingling of the Hindu culture with western culture can be, seen clearly. She has used the Bards which in reality is associated with Gaelic spiritual power traditions of England, Scotland, and Ireland. It is the idea used by Toru to create a western understanding of Hinduism and its culture and its divine faith in the disguise of Greek and Roman Goddess.

We have another beautiful poem "Our Casuarinas Tree" which propagates the deep blow on her life due to the loss of her siblings. The poetess records her impressions of the tree at different times of the day. It is the finest object on which Toru's eyes rest as she flings wide her window at dawn. And sometimes in her early light 'a grey baboon sits statue-like alone/watching the sunrise.

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 its 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 few trees of Borrow dale and darkling by Keats, Toru under this influence somewhere in her mind has symbolically used casuarinas tree:

"With one sweet song that seems to have no close,
Sung darkling from our tree while men repose." (P.174)

Toru Dutt's dilemma is being torn because the traditional and the modern, the East and the West the old and the New emerges in every poem. By examining the tones three poems, 'Savitri', 'Lakshman' and 'Jogadhya' one witness the poet's upholding the virtue of liberty in depicting Savitri's character on one hand. While on the other she extols the duty of an Indian woman to follow her husband with a love akin to devotion. Once again 'Lakshman' depicts the inability to choose the best path out of the two given options; the trauma wrought by this tension and the crisis that result from the ultimate choice. It also portrays the conflict between feminism and masculinism, between dominance and submissiveness. In 'Jogadhya' 'Uma' the poet finds qualities of beauty and an old-world richness in the very simplicity of an age-old myth. In the very style of treatment of the subject, there is a dialectical trend evinced by the poet which is the externalization of the inner duality conferred on the artist by colonialism.

The poem 'Sindhu' shows a fundamental aspect of Indian culture that one's first and for most duty is towards one's parents. The filial obligation is a fundamental and crucial aspect sought for in every Indian character. It is a prime aspect of the close-knit Indian family system where parents, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, uncles aunts, possess a strong bond – an affinity one hardly comes across in the west, where the independent streak is more prevalent. Dutt portrays how old age makes one ill of health and trying in nature. Sindhu is the only son of such a pair of old parents is their sole prop now, and devoted, he stays at their back and call, unambitious for worldly cares or fame, amid a forest.

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The poem focuses on the 'Karma' in every Indian life. For having unwillingly killed a dove, Sindhu is cursed to be accidentally killed and for having killed Sindhu, though unknowingly, and for making his parents grieve to death, Dashratha is also cursed to die unable to bear the absence of his son, Lord Rama. Hence, we can say that the rule of Karma is that the fruits one's deeds. Be they good or bad follow one to the deserved goal.

Toru Dutt's essentially Indian poems mark her as the first notable poet to reach out to native roots. Dutt had transferred certain incidents of Indian mythology from Sanskrit to English, her translations, her interpretations, her narrations, were independent, and stamped with her style of creation.

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