



TORU DUTT: NARRATIVE OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN INDIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT:

Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu are the Jewels in the world of Indian writings in English. They tried their best to interpret the Indian life in their works. Toru Dutt, in spite of her western influence, depicts Indian culture and Hindu traditions in her own way. Sarojini Naidu's poems are also the best exposition of Hindu culture, Hindu traditions and Hindu ideals. Sarojini Naidu and Toru Dutt are the true portrait of the Indian culture, set in Indian background.

INTRODUCTION

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 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 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. The Grand Work A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields is inspired by Edmund Gosse to review it in The Examiner (Journal) with many favourable remarks.

There are graphic sketches of Indian life and scenery, the forest and beautiful sights 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 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. 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. Yama was greatly pleased with Savitri and told her to ask for a book but the life of Satyavan.

Savitri was very much aware about 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. Among all the ballads contained in Ancient Ballads, "Savitri" holds a significant place by virtue of 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 Mahabharata. Harihar Das is of the opinion that the poem seems to augur "great future possibilities in the development of Toru Dutt's genius."¹

"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 religion beliefs. Lotus is the national symbol of India and occupies an important place in the Hindu faith. "Hindu reveres 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 round 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. In the above lines, Toru's mingling of the Hindu culture with the 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 basically the idea used by Toru in order 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 lost of her siblings.

The poetess records her own impressions of the tree at the 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 34 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."

Toru Dutt's dilemma is being torn because the traditional and the modern, the East and the West the old and the New emerge 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. 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 35 sole prop now, and devoted, he stays at their back and call, unambitious for worldly cares or fame, in the midst of a forest. The poem focuses on the ‘Karma’ in every Indian life. For having unwillingly killed a dove, Sindhu is cursed to be accidently 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. Basically Dutt had transferred certain incidents of Indian mythology from Sanskrit to English, her translations, her interpretations, her narrations, were absolutely independent, and stamped with her own style of creation. The fact that the poems are in English offers an interesting angle of study. Basically during this period, the major books written in the vernacular were those prepared by the Christian missionaries.²

Toru Dutt grew up in an atmosphere of the best of the eastern and the western worlds, this is all the more complex as the conversion of this influential Hindu family was welcomed by the British Community in Kolkata. Dr. W.S. Mackay had been sent for to attend on Kishen, the eldest of the Dutt brothers who was dying. Although Mackay could not go at the time, he gives full detail of the events in a letter home dated 29th June 1854: It gradually came out that their dying brother had a dream or vision of the other world; that he professed not only belief in Christianity, but his desire to be immediately baptized and desired me to be sent for objections were made to this and then 36 he asked them to send for Mr. Wylie. This also was evaded; and at last, Girish offered to read the baptismal service, to put the questions, and to baptize him; and thus the youngest brother (himself not yet a Christian) actually baptized the other in the name of the father, the son,

and the holy spirit of God. (Das, 8) Harihar Das also cities ‘Mrs. Barton, widow of the well known CMS missionary the Rev. J Barton, who knew the family intimately in Calcutta from 1865 to 1870 who wrote: They were all Christian and family and highly respected by their town people. All spoke English well and were educated in European literature for above the average of other Bengalis of their generation. These Dutt families were the backbone and mainstay of the Christian church and congregation which was in Cornwallis square.

Toru Dutt’s Poem “Buttoo” set on Indian tone, theme and style, expresses devotion of a disciple for his guru, his teacher, his master. The poem depicts that the west would do well to learn something from the East in this, and it would be difficult to find a parallel for the act related in this poem – “an act of supreme obedience even to the point of absolute self-renunciation and self-maiming on the part of the pupil towards a master who had but made him a jest and a laughing stock before others” (336) The poem describes the sense of casteism and its evils. It is much like untouchability. The manner in which the chief character is introduced to the readers as 37 “the hunter’s low-born son” indicates the relegation of the occupation of hunting to somewhere in the lowest rungs of society. The poem shows the racial prejudice against Buttoo and fills the poem with natural colors.

He was scorned and made fun of before the royal Pandava and Kaurava princes. The exotic descriptions that follow of the trees in the woods have been quoted in full by many writers. Nature is also occupied place in the poem. Toru had a special place in her heart for nature and nature’s bounty in woods and trees is easily surmisable, because it is not this once that we experience the sheer beauty of the Indian forest. In her letters Toru expresses about the trees as: The seemul, gorgeous as a bride, With flowers that have the ruby’s gleam. With here and there a little rent, The sunset’s beauty to disclose, The mango-tope, a close dark ring, Home of the rocks and clamorous crows, (Dutt, 80) The respect and reverence that the boy had for his teacher Dronacharya, who had but refused to accept him, remains throughout unflinching.

He expresses the absolute respect one bestows on one’s teacher or guru in the ancient Indian system of learning. Harihar Das has observed about this poem thus: “All through the poem we have been carefully prepared for Buttoo’s reverent devotion to guru Dronacharya, who has around in the boy an instinct almost of worship”. But this attitude is not unexpected since it is only normal behavior to react thus to a demand which revealed nothing but a spirit of mean vengeance. The teacher in Dronacharya failed the moment and he begged Buttoo’s thumb.³

The pupil was now disillusioned, for he now 38 realized that the man of his worship was really incapable of rising above petty considerations. For him it was a shock too deep for tears. It is, however, doubtless that politics was held above morality in those days, Buttoo’s gave a superb example of patience and

faithfulness by leaving the entire matter to his God, who alone was competent to judge the right from the wrong. The poem “Lakshman” reveals Dutt’s remarkable sense in the handling of Indian theme and tone. Setting on the handling Indian context and the material has drawn from the Ramayana, the great Hindu epic, the poem expresses the character of ‘Lakshman’ an ideal brother of Lord Rama, the king of Ayodhya. The poem begins dramatically introducing Sita making anxious appeal to Lakshman, like an ideal Indian woman, persuading him to go to Rama’s help.

The poem depicts the pain and stress of an Indian wife of (Sita) about her husband (Lord Rama) who he is got caught in trouble, the poem achieves the objectivity of the balled as the entire story is told by means of dialogue with no attempt to analyze the characters or the action of the story. Toru is interested in exploring the emotions associated with the predicament of the characters. As the poem develops, we get a vivid and impressive portrayal of Sita’s passions. The expectancy the simplicity of the trusting heart with which she opens her pleadings with Lakshman, and the lofty anger of her injured innocence, her agony and her indignation are all depicted with amazing skill. We see Sita with her changing feelings stands out before our imagination. The final effect of the poem is seen more influenced by the shifting of attention from the characters to the atmosphere which is tragic one. The poem “Prahlad” has been taken from one of the great Indian Puranas Vishnu Purana the poem depicts the story of the boy ‘Prahlad’ who is a firm believer in God. But his 39 father, the king does not believe in god and considers himself as the final authority and all powerful, ill treats the boy for his belief upon God. The father challenges the son to produce God in the pillar in the court room. The father then spurns the pillar with his foot. From within the pillar appears ‘Narasimha; the half-man, half-lion, God. The God then tears the king into pieces and hails Prahlad. What is highlighted here is that Prahlad does not ignore his filial duty. He does not go against the almighty. He affirms his devotion to the so called “higher duty”. To thee, and to my mother, both I give as due all reverence, And to obey thee am not loth. But higher duties sometimes clash With lower,- then these last must go.

Toru Dutt is herself an ideal woman so she talks about Sita, the wife Lord Rama in her most celebrated poem “Sita”. The subject matter of the poem has drawn from the great epic of Hindus The Ramayana. Here, Toru Dutt presents Sita as the picture of an ideal woman. The story of Sita is reminisced as told to her, her mother: It is and old, old story, and the lay Which has evoked sad Sita from the past Is by a mother sung.⁴

The delicacy, tenderness and purity and the untold sufferings of women got shape in the Uttar Ramayana. Like an unflickering lamp it throws light on the quality of their hearts. 40 The poem “Jogadhya Uma” has been taken from Indian folklore. It depicts a bangle-seller tramping along the road in the early hours of the morning calling out it was so early that there were few to hear his cry. Soon the paddler comes to a lonely spot where lay a “lake-like tank” shadowed by fruit trees. On one side, a wide flight of marble steps

ran from an arched entrance to the water's edge and a fine picture of a beautiful maiden with "large eye and dark hair falling to her zone is seen there. The paddler stops for a while to display his bracelets to the fair maiden. Here it becomes a humorous atmosphere.⁵

As the maiden stretches out her hand, the paddler slips the bracelet on the "father hand". As the paddler stood 'dazzled' by her beauty, she bade him seek payment at her home. He asked where that was. She said that her father, who would pay for the bracelet, was an old priest and lived in the temple, whose "lofty gilled spire" appeared in the distance. Both the priest and the paddler hostility set out for the tank, but they did not find anybody there. As they turned unhappy away, the chime of the temple bells rang out, and the priest once more turning towards the tank pleaded for some sign of her presence. Then, there was a sudden stir among the lotus buds covering the surface of water and a beautiful round arm wearing the white bracelet appeared for a moment. The paddler and the priest "bowed before the mystic power". And as they home returned in thought, Each took from thence a lotus flower In memory of the day and spot. Years, centuries, have passed away, And still before the temple shrine Descendants of the peddler pay 41 Shell-bracelets of the old design An annual tribute.

In this way, the poetess makes an end of the tale by proffering hints about the sources of the poem thus: Absurd may be the tale I tell, Ill-suited to the matching times, I loved the lips from which it fell, So let it stand among my rhymes.

A reader of Toru's poetry can see working a revolution in narrative characterization. In the eighteenth century poetry, the pictorial treatment of character was formulated and formalized into set verbal portraits. It set a tradition of characterization where we find only rhetoric without any attempt at the psychological delineation of character. When the narrative literature came into contact with western literature, the possibility of representing thought realistically in the narrative idiom was opened up. We see emerging the new depths of characterization which were accessible to the narrative artists and once again they felt the need to dramatize the inward life.

Toru Dutt offers a striking contrast to the portraits of classical poetry. Stern warriors, when they saw her, smiled, As mountains smile to see the springs. With happier heart, and lighter tread, Chance strangers, having met her, past, And often would they turn the head 42 A lingering second look to cast, And bless the vision ere it fled. The eighteenth century writers could tell the 'pure sensuous beauty' in their works.⁶

CONCLUSION

Toru Dutt excels in depicting the charms of personal beauty, "the finger grace and nobler attractions" of womanhood. The manly Satyavan is also described with the strong and statue ability: And one among them

tall and lithe Royal in port, - on whom the years Consenting, shed a grace so blithe, So frank and noble, that the eye Was loth to quit that sun-browned face; "The Royal Ascetic and the Hind" depicts the story of a failure of the life of asceticism. It tells us the matchless asceticism of King Bharat of Saligram. King Bharat left behind the entire royal pomp to embrace the life of an ascetic in a forest. He practiced religious penances and rude privations and offered constant prayer. To it devoted was his last, last thought, Reckless of present and of future both. Toru Dutt is a firm believer in Karma, which is one of the parts of Hindu philosophy. The poem "The Legend of Dhruva" is based on the Hindu theory of Karma. The treatment of the legend of Dhruva has failed to create in the reader the right impression of the young boy, who being rudely shocked at this royal father's cruel neglect of him, retired to the forest and later became a great devotee of God thus; Toru Dutt depicts the picture of Indian life in her poems faithfully. All the 43 poems of Toru Dutt are based on Indian background and life and activities of the people described in them typically Indian.

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