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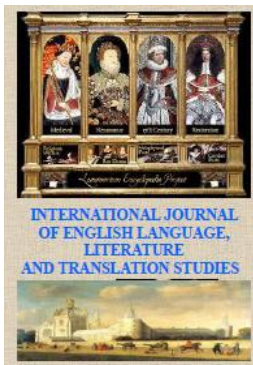
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POETIC EVOLUTION OF TORU DUTT FROM A TRANSLATOR TO TRANSCREATOR

Dr. SHEEBA AZHAR¹, Dr. SYED ABID ALI²

Assistant Professor, ^{1,2} Department of English, University of Dammam
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia



ABSTRACT

Language and the artist are reciprocating partners associated in a kind of wedlock, clashing, coalescing and creating. In the unconscious of the writer lies in latent form the collective unconscious of his race and his conscious is the active part of what he has acquired from his times and the world. It is in this sense that we may justify a distinct Indian variety of English. The success of Indian verse in English depends largely on acquiring a national gestalt of poetic style. The poets of the first crop never fell short of the poetic talent required. Each of them has an individual style and yet the style of each is distinctively Indian. In the context of Toru Dutt it may be noted that she is intensely conscious of language qua language and an effective use of English is one of her major achievements. Keeping in view the understanding and the interpretation of the nature of Toru's psyche and her worldview, a consideration of her poetic style is essential. Present research paper is an attempt to bring out the prominent features of Toru Dutt's poetry in the sense of her style and technique.

Key Words: translator, language, style, versification

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Process of evolution

The total literary output of Toru Dutt includes two books of poetry and two novels. A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields¹ contains poems translated from French into English while Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan² gives poetic translations from Sanskrit into English, along with some original pieces of her own.. The short poetic career of Toru Dutt may be interpreted as the process of development from a translator into a poet. The poems from her two volumes fall into convenient groups that mark the stages of the evolution. She is a faithful translator of the original text at the first stage of her poetic career. All translations from A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields and the two pieces – Dhruva and The Royal Ascetic and the Hind from Ancient Ballads belong to the first stage. She is almost exclusively concerned with finding the literal equivalents for the original Sanskrit expressions. In the course of the verse narrative, the Sanskrit poet describes the grass after the deer have grazed on it a beautiful simile:

ete lunasikhastasya dasaniracirodgataih

kusakasa virajante batavah samagaiva.(Sri Vishnupurana)

Toru Dutt translates it faithfully as:

The shaven stalks of grass,
Kusha and Kasha, by its new teeth clipped,
Remind me of it, as they stand in lines,
Like pious boys who chant the Samga Veds.
Shorn by their vows of all their wealth of hair. (p-104)

As a beginner in the field of translation her anxiety to provide a literal equivalent for the original often leads her to awkward expressions. For instance in the legend of Dhruva taken from the eleventh canto of the first section of Vishnu Purana she translates the Sanskrit words Sunityatmno Janma as thou art sprung from Suneete's Bowels (p- 108)

The translator grows into a transcreator in poems like Lakshman, Sindhu, Buttoo, Prahlad and Savitri from Ancient Ballads. Toru Dutt reaches the second stage of her poetic growth when she learns to submit her translative impulse to the guidance of her creative impulse. For instance a piece from the forty fifth canto of Aranya Kanda of the Ramayana chosen for translation in Lakshman contains the following speech of Lakshman:

Vakyamapratirupam tuna citram strisu maithili
Svabhavastvesa narinamevam Lokesu drsyate
Vimuktudharmascapalastikna bhedakarah striyah

.....
Striva dustasvabhavena guruvakey vyavasthitam.

Romesh C. Dutt echoes its sense faithfully in the condensed translation of the Ramayana:

Daughter of Vedeha's monarch – pardon if !
do thee wrong,
Fickle is the faith of woman, poison dealing
In her tongue. (p-102)

But Toru Dutt omits these remarks in order to chisel out a psychologically consistent portrait of noble hero. The conversational structure of the piece is however, the result of her attempt to imitate the original conversational pattern although critics like Harihar Das, P.C. Kotoky and Dwivedi seem to regard it as one of the welcome discoveries of Toru Dutt.

Savitri is the most significant expression of Toru Dutt's transcreative impulse. Technically Buttoo is 'one of the happiest and least affected of Toru's compositions'. (S. V. Mukerjea). In Prahlad, the technique of the poem is 'far in advance of that of the earlier poems' opines Harihar Das.

The transcreator matures into an original poet in Jogadhya Uma and Sita in the same volume. Jogadhya Uma marks the final stage of Toru Dutt's maturity as a poet. Sita, the last of the legends from Toru Dutt's Ancient Ballads and legends of Hindustan can be safely regarded as an original poem. The poem is also one of the earliest instances of the effective use of memory in Indian poetry in English. The poet's creative impulse is possibly activated by the only stanza from the forty eighth section of Uttarkanda of Ramayana:

Sa dukhabharavanta yasasvini yasodhara,
nathamapasyati Sati;
rurodasa bahirnanadite vane mohaswanam
dukhaparyana sati.

These lines transform the objective translator into a subjective poet. Toru's simplicity, vividness, pathos and felicity of idiom that characterize her style may be seen in the closing lines of Sita:

When shall ah me! as erst at eventide? (p-159)

At the end of Ancient Ballads, there are seven miscellaneous poems, which immediately display Toru's creative power at its best. Toru Dutt's sonnet Baumaree is perhaps, the first artistically satisfying example of those texts in Indian writing in English that occupy the space between translation and transformation. The last poem of the volume Our Casuarina Tree is one of the finest examples of her creative power.

Diction

Beauty of form in poetry depends on the style and diction of a poet. Toru's command of English language and the richness and variety of her poetic idiom are amazing. In her poetic volume *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* besides displaying a profound knowledge of English and French, Toru shows rare ability and promise of great achievements. The translator has furnished in this volume to lovers of literature some of the brightest gifts of the French muse in a neat, elegant and charming English dress.

In fact her translations are nothing but transcreations and reveal the force of her personality in its relatedness with greater cultural and literary heritage. There is elasticity in her verse, which makes it graceful and interesting. The modification of diction according to the need of the occasion may be easily found in it, she has thus used monosyllabic as well as polysyllabic diction with much success.

There are certain archaisms, inversions, and twisting, limping lines in her poetry. But such short comings are not remarkable. Toru has blended French words and expressions in her poetry without any hesitation, viz. *Va-nu-pieds* in the poem *On the fly-leaf of Erckman – Chatrian's Novel Entitled "Madame Therese"*. It must be admitted that she is not conversant with the colloquial turns of modern English. Edmund Gosse rightly praised: "Toru possessed the rare virtue of absolute and unaffected exactness..... Toru even at the expense of losing her poetic value made a true translation".

Rhythm

The most striking feature of Toru Dutt's poetry is its lyricism. There is no doubt, some of her renderings in the *Sheaf* and most of the poems in *Ancient Ballads* are marked by much force and fire. In her verses lyricism touches a high water mark at times. The following extract taken from *Ancient Ballads* presents a fine example of soothing rhythm in Toru's verse:

Past all the houses, past the walls,
Past gardens gay, and hedgerows trim,
Past fields; where sinuous brooklets small
With mother silver to the brim..... (p-49)

The repetitive use of 'Past', and 'i' and 'g' sounds produce an appealing rhythm. The simplicity of her verse reminds us of Keats and Shelley.

Her major stylistic peculiarities are the element of repetition and the use of hyphens as well as compounds. The poet seems to adopt repetition and hyphens by way of a technical strategy to overcome the difficulties of communication in an alien medium. Rarely, she gives loose constructions and awkward inversion for the purpose of rhymes.

Noted critic Harihar Das finds fault with Toru's repetitions of a word to fill up the requisite number of syllables in a line, and refers to the following instances:

"It was that fatal, fatal speech"
"A gleam of faint, faint hope is born."
"Pale – pale the stars above them burned."
"The clay long, long will not appear."

It is possible the repetitions are of deliberate imitation of Keats.

Toru was at ease in the handling of ballads and sonnets, and the reader feels delighted to read them. They are also free from the burdensomeness and flatness of her blank verse. What actually Toru lacked was "mellow sweetness" to perfect her as an English poet, and "of no other Oriental who has ever lived can the same be said.(Harihar Das) Speaking of her melodies, Anant says that they "were often foreign if not harsh to the English ear." And that they were "the melodies of Bengal, her native land, the melodies part of her very soul. Her lapses in rhythm can be easily traced in *Sheaf*, at least in some of her renderings.

Apart from her skilful management of pause and overflow, her internal rhymes in *Sindhu echo*¹³ the charm of Coleridge's *the Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:

Lord of my soul - what means my pain?"
The horried terror, - like
Some cloud that hides a hurricane;

Hang not, O lighting, - strike; (p-140)

As far as Miscellaneous Poems are concerned Near Hastings is the first poem; artistically the poem is not as fine as some other piece here, especially The Lotus and Our Casuarina Tree. The poem has Toru's characteristic clarity and simplicity of style. France—1870, Written in a strangely irregular, metre. This inspiring poem has verve of expression which makes us easily overlook the roughness of its metre:

Lo, she stands up,---stands up e'en now,
Strong once more for the battle-fray,
Gleams bright the star, that from her brow
Lightens the world. Bow, nations, bow,
Let her again lead on the way! (p-165)

This poem is full of passionate feelings, when the ear becomes habitual itself to the oddness. The charm of the poem lies in the great irregularity of the rhythm in which no two verses are alike. There is also "an exultant ring" in it.

The next poem, On the fly-leaf of Erckmann-Chatrian's Novel Entitled "Madame Therese", is marked by a greater irregularity of rhythm than that found in France 1870. It is not so easy to decide the metre of the following line:

Va – nu - pieds! When rose high your Marseillaise. (p-170)

Similarly, the rhyme 'point' with 'confront' is a case of excess in prosody.

Her Sonnet Baumaree is enriched with simple diction and free rhythm. This shows Toru's "native genius."¹⁵

A sea of foliage girds our garden round,
But not a sea of dull unvaried green. (p-171)

Among her shorter poems Our Casuarina Tree can claim its place with great, and immortal poems in the whole range of English language, by virtue of its structural beauty, rich and subtle and metaphoric design. The poem is written in the eleven-line stanza form. Rhyming abaa, cddc, eee. It was really a fresh experiment equivalent to Keats and Shelley.

Versification

In the very beginning of her literary career Toru's versification was found to be rough and impassive. 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."

Harihar Das contradicts the views of the critics and is of the opinion that "Toru's command of English is wonderful," and that "it is difficult to realize that the book is not the work of an English writer." The metrical skill of Toru Dutt is equally admirable. Although her metre, as pointed out by the critics, limps at times, it is often powerful enough to meet the occasion.

Sri. Aurobindo also supports the views of Harihar Das and observed: "Toru Dutt was an accomplished verse builder with a delicate talent and some outbreaks of genius and she wrote things that were attractive and sometime something that had a strong energy of language and a rhythmic force. Elsewhere he is said to have remarked that "she has written poetry not as an Indian writing in English but like an English woman." E. F. Oaten appreciates Toru's real creative and imaginative power and her almost faultless technical skill.²⁰

As far as the Sheaf, is concerned, we find the metre at least is smooth and suggestive of no extra effort or hard toil in its making. Usually, Toru tries and succeeds to reproduce for the most part the actual metre of the original (or a metre as closely associated as possible) and such diversity of metre as the book displays, only serves to emphasize her own talent and skill.

Toru tried her hand at blank verse too, but it seemed to be inexpressive and dull sometimes. Her lines are all end stopped and she felt not so much comfortable in the handling of blank verse, though a few lines in The Death of the wolf and some in the Ancient Ballads, especially The Royal Ascetic and the Hind, Dhruva, and

Sita lead us to believe that with more practice she would have been just as much adept in it, with the intention of form as in so many others, notably the sonnet.

She handles a variety of stanza pattern though she appears to favour sonnet in particular. K.R.Srinivas Iyengar is of the view that by the time Toru wrote *Ancient Ballads*, she was already “a good craftsman in verse, her feeling for words was impeccable, and eye and ear were alike trained for poetic description or dialogue” Padmini Sen Gupta maintains that Toru’s ballads “run much more smoothly and do not limp as much as her French translations and are at the same time almost inspired”.

These critical opinions of various scholars convince that all are one and the same in the praise of Toru’s poetic power and her master of balladry.

The ballad, the blank verse, and the octosyllabic stanza pattern, these particular verse forms are used by Toru Dutt in *Ancient Ballads*. Of course, she varies the length of a stanza from a quatrain to twelve lines according to the nature of the theme. Toru used the ballad form in *Savitri*, *Jogadhya Uma* and *Sindhu*. Other poems of the volume *Lakshman*, *Buttoo* and *Prahlad* are written in Octosyllabic stanza pattern.

As far as miscellaneous poems are concerned, poem *The Lotus* shows the poetess’s fine command of the sonnet form. The next sonnet *Our Casuarina Tree* is remarkable for its structural beauty.

Narration and Description

Ancient Ballads shows Toru at her best in displaying her narrative and descriptive powers. 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”. Her narrative skill can be seen in the style she adopts to tell the stories of the past; her descriptive power is evident in the depiction of natural scenes and sights, in the portraying of characters and their hopes and fears, their sorrow and distress. Here is Toru’s description of *Uma the Goddess* as she presents her arm to the pedlar of shell-bracelets:

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! (p-94)

And here, from *Buttoo* is the description of a forest scene:

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. (p-115)

The story of *Savitri* is originally derived from *Mahabharata* but there are digressions from the original at some points. Toru uses this technique not only to show her originality but also her creativity. Toru narrated the ancient stories in such a charming manner that they never lose their interest for us. From the very beginning to the end the legend of *Savitri* keeps us spell bound.

Lakshman, the second poem, is cast in dialogue form. Harihar Das finds fault with it in that “It is not narrative but conversational, with a touch of the epic spirit. The tone is dignified, rising something to the heroic, with its hint of impending tragedy:

The gradual working out of Sita’s passion forms the most interesting feature of the poem. This ballad shows a phase of Toru’s genius with which we might otherwise have been unacquainted.

Jogadhya Uma is a beautiful narrative having a tender charm for the ingenuous and the unlettered. Mystic and dreamy, indeed, the poem is akin to that of Tennyson’s story of the brand *Excaliber*, ‘clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful’. It resembles the illuminations of exquisite workmanship found in certain rare old Eastern manuscripts, wherein every detail stands out clearly, as well as the purity of every colour. The poem is like a succession of miniature and the narrative is vigorous and appealing

The Royal Ascetic and *the Hind* is more of a personal reflection than of a narrative. The legend of *Dhruva* also fails to create in the reader the right kind of impression about the young boy, as the narrative

hardly suggests the agitation in his heart and mind. The poem Buttoo has some delightful passages describing the beauty of nature. The narrative successfully brings out the answering determination of Buttoo to attain mastery in archery.

The ballad Sindhu recounts Shraavan kumar's unshakable devotion to his parents, who are blind and weak and helpless. In Prahlad, Toru has admirably succeeded in recapturing the spirit of an old legend.

Obviously, Toru's narratives are charged with lyric effusions of joy and pathos, anger and sorrow, hope and fear. But these effusions do not disturb the easy flow of the narratives. The reader's interest is not allowed to suffer and the art of narration keeps on moving. The narrator's eyes are set on the outlines of the stories; and not on decorative descriptions or lyrical effusions. The situations of suspense heighten the dramatic effects of the poems and render them all the more relishing.⁷⁷

In her stories of the past Toru usually remains detached and impersonal, K.R.S. Iyengar rightly says, "There are occasional unpleasant inversions ("Her heart rose opened had at last") and wrenched accents, no doubt, but as a body of narrative poetry, the first eight 'ballads and legends' are unquestionably and movingly articulate, and disgrace neither the originals, nor the language in which they are now rendered.

Imagery and Symbol

Toru has sometimes made a fine use of images and symbols in her poetry. It is to be seen in Ancient Ballads. Her imagery is often drawn with a masculine vigour and fearlessness. Though a fragile woman herself, she displayed a wonderful power in grappling with the sublime and the terrible. In her Savitri we have:

Pale pale the stars above them burned,
More weird the scene had grown and wild. (p-64)

and

My daughter, night with ebon wing
Hovers above; the hour is late. (p-64)

Here the darkness of the night is compared to the black skin of ebony. Another beautiful image is to be found in the following lines:

And then the inner man was tied,
No bigger than the human thumb. (p-74)

In it an abstract thing has been measured in terms of a concrete thing. This is yet another impressive image in Savitri:

I had a pain, as if an asp
Gnawed in my brain. (p-76)

The image of a gnawing 'asp' has been evoked herein to express the intensity of pain.

The following passage of The Royal Ascetic and the Hind is also very effective in covering a vivid imagery:

The shaven stalks of grass,
Kusha and kasha, by its new teeth clipped,
Remind me of it, as they stand in lines,
Like pious boys who chant the Samga Veds
Shorn by their vows of all their wealth of hair. (p-104)

The 'shaven stalks of grass' look like some hairless *brahmacharis*, and this is really a masterly stork of Toru's fertile imagination.

In Lakshman we find a beautiful image:

The lion and the grisly bear
Cower when they see his royal look,
Sun staring eagles of the air
His glance of anger cannot brook,
Pythons and cobras at his tread
To their most secret coverts glide,
Bowed to the dust each serpent head

Erect before in hooded pride. (p-83)

In Prahlad:

A terror both of gods and men
Was Heeran Kasyapu, the king:
No bear more sullen in its den,
No tiger quicker at the spring. (p-143)

And again:

He spurned the pillar with his foot,
Down, down it tumbled, like a tree
.....A stately sable warrior sprang,
Like some phantasma of the brain. (p-156)

Though a woman she could describe a gallant party with the passion and enthusiasm of Sir Walter Scott:

On gallant was the long array!
Pennons and plumes were seen,
And swords that mirrored back the day,
And spars and axes keen. (P-127)

This is the hunting party of great king of *Oudh*, *Dasaratha*. Toru's images are usually bold and startling yet pertinent and revealing and she "reveals a more complex poetic sensibility and poetic art, comparable at least at places to Hopkins." In sonnet Baumaree:

And o'er the quiet pools the seemuls lean
Red, red and startling like a trumpet's sound. (P-171)

One recalls Hopkins, description of the singing thrush:

Through the echoing timber does so rinse and writing.
The ear, it strikes like lightning's to near him sing.

In Toru a visual impression is conveyed by an aural image: in Hopkins an aural impression is conveyed by a visual image. (Krishna Nandan Sinha)

We don't find a systematic network of symbolism in Toru's poetry. Only very rarely has she used symbols. Thus in *Savitri* the night and its shades are associated with death and distress; in *The tree of Life* the 'tree becomes a symbol of life and 'Angel' of Jesus christ:

A tree with spreading branches and with leaves,
Of divers kind – dead silver and gold live,
.....

Oh the delicious touch of those strange leaves! (p-168)

And Our *Casuarina Tree* is more than the poetic evocation of a tree; it is rather recapturing the past and immortalizing the moments of time so recaptured. In the words of Dr.K.R.S. Iyengar "The tree is both tree and symbol, and in it is implicated both time and eternity".

Figures of Speech

In *Ancient Ballads* Toru has employed figures of speech to embellish the language and to convey ideas more effectively than in the normal course. Simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, personification, alliteration and hyperbole are frequently used by Toru in her poetry. Instances of Simile in *Ancient Ballads* are :

Fair as a lotus when the moon

Kisses its opening petals red. (p-37)
Nor melt his lineage like the frost. (p-45)
Her presence was as sunshine glad.(p-38)
Tall tree like pillars. (p-51)

Instances of Metaphor in it are :

His merit still remains a star. (P-45)

The pair look statues, magic bound. (P-60)

Savitri looked like the goddess of the land with her 'ravan hair' (hair as black as a crow). (P-62)

One beautiful instance of Onomatopoeia in Ancient ballads is !

But the good
God's purity there loved to trace,
Mirrored in dawning womanhood. (P-38)

The frequency of 'd' sound in it gives a sense of holy fear in god-fearing view. Another instance is, "whizzing the deadly arrow flow, / Ear-guided on the game; (p-131)

In Ancient Ballads a fine example of Personification is:

Rang trump and conch, and piercing life
Wake echo from her bed!
The solemn woods with sounds were rife
As on the pageant sped. (p-127)

Another example is:

As to the hermitage she went
Through smiling fields of waving corn. (p-40)

Here fields are personified. Instances of Alliteration in Ancient Ballads are:

Stern warriors, when they saw her smiled,
As mountains smile to see the spring. (p-37)

And

A stately sable warrior sprang. (p-156)

In the same poetic volume examples of Hyperbole are:

All these, and thousands, thousands more...rose before,
The youth in evening is shadow brown. (p-116)
Hundreds, Nay thousands on the went! etc. (p-127)

The sheaf is also not without these figures of speech but for Toru's original contribution to these areas of literary grace, one will have to go to Ancient Ballads.

Literary Criticism:

Toru competently handled the apparatus of translation, and successfully showed that the translator is also the creator. She has translated her work meticulously and tries to recapture the spirit of the original to the maximum extent.

Not that she has blindly followed the rules of translation to reproduce the same verse, in fact, she has changed words and phrases of the original and substituted them by more appropriate ones without showing any diffidence on her part that make her work literal and yet free. The verse co-relates with the rhythm of the original.

Speaking of the technical character of Ancient Ballads, Sir Gosse suggests that in spite of much in it that is 'rough and inchoate', it shows that "Toru was advancing in her mastery of English verse." Her poetical treasure is too valuable to sink into oblivion and she has exhibited, in her short life span, many of the essential qualities, including the technical ones, of a true poet.

The pleasing music of her poetry speaks of her ability to express a foreign tongue in an appropriate manner. She cannot be accused of lack of simplicity, thus R.W. Frazer's charge that in Toru's hand, the ballads and legends have lost their entire plaintive cadence, becomes misdirected and improper. On the contrary, the fact is that her poetry spontaneously comes out of her heart. One, who has read, Jogadhya Uma and Sita and Sindhu, cannot support the charge, there is a heart-touching rhythm and a delicate sensibility in these poems and together they bear testimony to Toru's flawless and polished poetic taste. She was simple and transparent in reproducing her verses. (V.K.Gokak)

English is a difficult language and one has to struggle hard with sentence and constructions but to Toru it comes as naturally as leaves come to tree and she uses its rhythm and diction with perfect skill and control. C. D. Narasimhaiah points out that Toru Dutt shows 'a rare feeling for words coupled with a reliance on speech rhythm'. Moreover, open any page of Ancient Ballads, and we will be in the midst of pleasant

stanzas. To give pleasure is a great thing in itself. Evocative and sententious utterances were also added to it by Toru Dutt. And when pleasure and meaning are to be found in one place, there is always a good, great poetry. Toru's poetry is certainly of this kind.

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