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POETRY OF TORU DUTT: A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF INDIAN LANDSCAPES WITH
DISTINCT PORTRAYAL OF FLORA & FAUNA

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ABSTRACT

Toru Dutt is one of the prominent writers of English literature who will be remembered for ages for the eternal charm in her works. She is a versatile genius- a poet, novelist as well as a translator. Being a great lover of nature she takes us to that almost Keatsian world where beauty and truth become each other's revelation. Toru presented her thoughts on flora and fauna in verse. She spoke from the heart and giving the Indian landscape a visual representation. A sunset or a rainbow in the sky, a fresh flower or a shaded grove sent her into raptures and she sang gaily of them. Present paper investigates the poems of Toru Dutt in the context of its natural description of Indian scenery along with its flora and fauna.

Keywords: Nature, landscape, flora & fauna, imagery, myths

Toru Dutt is one of the prominent writers of English literature who will be remembered for ages for the eternal charm in her works. She is a versatile genius- a poet, novelist as well as a translator. Toru Dutt is a great lover of nature and she takes us to that almost Keatsian world where beauty and truth become each other's revelation. Toru presented her thoughts on flora and fauna in verse. She spoke from the heart and giving the Indian landscape a visual representation. A sunset or a rainbow in the sky, a fresh flower or a shaded grove sent her into raptures and she sang gaily of them. Let us take the poems of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* in the context of its natural description of Indian scenery along with its flora and fauna. The volume comprises nine ballads and Legends - *Savitri, Lakshman, Jogadhya Uma, The Royal Ascetic and the Hind, Dhruva, Buttoo, Sindhu, Prahlad and 'Sita'*. Apart from these, the volume also contains a few personal poems in a separate section called *The Miscellaneous Poems*.

This is a pleasant portrayal of the sunset on a reddened Indian lake in *Sindhu*:

Upon the glossy surface fell
The last beams of the day
Like fiery darts, that lengthening swells.
As breezes wake and play.

Buttoo, another ballad of this volume chosen from the 132nd Canto of *Adiparva* of the *Mahabharata*, is a popular description of one of the episode of that epic. For its hero, it has a lowborn hunter's son who aspires to study archery in the *gurukul* of Dronacharya, the great master of magic and archery. After being humiliated by Dronacharya, in front of all the royals, he left the place and determined to live in a beautiful retreat and learn

nature's secret 'from beast, and fish, and birds with wings, and rock, and stream and leaves and fern'. There is a fascinating description of a forest scene:

What glorious trees! The sombre soul
On which the eye delights to rest,
The betel – nut, - a pillar tall,
With feathery branches for a crest,
The light – leaved tamarind – spreading wide,
The pale faint – scented bitter neem,
The seemul, gorgeous as a bride,
The flowers that have the ruby's gleam.

Ancient Ballads shows Toru at her best in displaying the mystic power of nature. 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..."

Mystic and dreamy, indeed, the poem is akin to that of Tennyson's story of the brand Excalibur, '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 story of Sita is taken from the forty-eight section of *Uttarkandam* of *Ramayana*. It describes a scene that was very common in Toru's childhood. After her exile, Sita used to live in a dense forest, which is hardly ever visited by the sunlight and in the center of that forest, there is a clear spot completely covered up with gigantic flowers on creepers that embrace tall trees. White swans were seen gliding on a quiet clear lake while the peacock rises, 'whirring from the brake,' and there was a herd of wild deer across the open space of the forest. The golden colour of the forest corn gleams in the distance, where the blue smoke rises lightly from the altars near the dwelling of Valmiki the 'poet -anchorite'. This is the background of the poem.

In this perspective, two of Toru Dutt's miscellaneous poems are quite noteworthy. Everyone has appreciated the two sonnets, *Baugmaree* and *The Lotus*. In the first memorable sonnet, the poetess describes the scenic beauty of the place where she passed a major portion of her life. It is about her Indian garden, girt round with its 'sea of foliage' of varying shades, with its vivid splashes of colour where the Seemuls lean above the pools:

Red, red and startling like a trumpet's sound.

In the midst of such natural beauty, one is sure to feel all fresh and cheerful. Toru calls her garden a *primeval Eden* to be seen only with amazement. Toru's love of nature is apparent in this sonnet.

The second remarkable sonnet is *The Lotus* and here Toru comes out as a genius and an innovator, no one to compare with. The poem is in the nature of a gift from one culture to another, a mature response to a challenge conceived by her as personal and racial.

The Lotus deals with the birth of that charming flower. To end the dispute as to whether the lily or the rose were queen, Psyche at last went to Flora and asked for a flower that should be delicious as the rose and stately as the lily in her pride: And Flora gives him :

" ____ The lotus, "rose red" dyed,
And "Lily – white, queenliest flower that blows."

Toru and her family spent the time before they sailed for Europe in the winter of 1869 entirely in Calcutta between their two homes in *Rambagan* and *Baugmaree*, near *Belgachia*. Toru especially loved the garden house and she described it in many of her later poems. She loved above all the majestic trees:

The sunset's beauty to disclose
 The bamboo boughs that sway and swing
 `Neath bulbuls as the south wind blows
 The mango-tope, a close dark ring,
 Home of the rooks and clamorous crows,
 The champac, bok, and South- sea pine,
 The nagessur with pendant flowers
 Like ear-rings---and the forest vine
 That clinging over all, embowers,
 The sirish famed in Sanscrit song
 Which rural maidens love to wear,
 The peepul gaint-like and strong,
 The bramble with its matted hair,
 All these, and thousands, thousands more,
 With helmet red, or golden crown,
 Or green tiara, rose before
 The youth in evening's shadow brown.

Only someone who had watched the beautiful trees of India for hours and loved them could have written so accurate a description of them. There are frequent descriptions of Indian scenery in her poems that make us realize how deeply she loved India and its natural phenomenon.

Our Casuarina tree, her best-known poem is rightly treated as the norm of her poetic achievement and potentialities. The tree is both: a tree and a symbol and it has implicated both time and eternity. It communicates the poet's sense of loss due to the deaths of her brother and sister as defined through the relationship between them and the old Casuarina tree in her garden. The poet evolves the relationship in three stages. The first two stanzas present a vision, which establishes the present changeless reality of the tree in its static – dynamic beauty.

The third stanza marks the strategic point of departure from the present into the past and links up the tree with Toru's memories of her lost brother and sister.

O sweet companions, loved with love intense.
 For your shakes shall the tree be ever dear!
 In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!

If the first two stanzas describe the tree's eternal identity, the next two explore its more authentic identity in the context of the poetess's personal life.

The poem sets in action a double process of commemoration. It commemorates the tree, which already commemorates the departed ones. The success of the poem lies in the concretization of something as amorphous as nostalgia, which is a common enough experience of all exiles. In this poem the intellectual element of poetic speech passes into an ecstasy of a spiritual vision. *Our Casuarina Tree* is worth remembering on account of its relation with Toru's past. The tree in the family home at *Baugmaree* where she lived till the age of twelve, is invested with the glamour of 'an Indian childhood, laced with thin reminiscences of English and French literature':

Her stay in England only increased her awareness of India she was familiar with: "In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay.....Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime. /I saw thee, in my own loved native clime. Toru, in the fourth stanza of this poem, humanizes the tree, for its lament is a human recordation of pain and regret. Her *Sonnet Baugmaree* is splendid as an evocation of tree in Toru's garden, no doubt Toru was deep in touch with her Indian background and excellently she connects herself with India through her verses. *The Lotus* and *Our Casuarina Tree* present Toru's deep affection towards Indian flora and fauna. It has a vivid imagery, as can be seen in the following lines:

Sweet were the roses, --- sweet and full,
And large as lotus flowers
That in our own wide tanks we cull,
To deck our Indian bowers.

Toru Dutt has weaved a fine pattern of the classical tradition, myths and legends of olden days on the background of nature in her *Ancient Ballads*. There are some splendid scenes and sights of the native land in her ballads which are outstanding in nature. Torn turns to nature with a pure sense of wonder and delight and are struck with its myriad beauties. She perceives the objects of nature with uncommon sensitivity so that her renderings are characterized by vividness, minuteness and accuracy. In her love for nature, Toru comes close to Wordsworth but she does not indulge in philosophizing it like him. The appeal of nature to Toru is emotional rather than spiritual or intellectual. Her love for nature is intensifying personal and there is an unmistakable depth of feeling for its aspects. More than other things, the calm aspects of nature appeal to her most. She is constantly drawn to the lonely aspect of nature; it touches her with the peace and power of beauty and whenever she describes nature, the tone is always one of solemnity. It is this healing touch and its calm that Toru renders and in this lies her characteristic attitude towards nature.

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