

Indianism in The Poems of Toru Dutt

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ABSTRACT: Indo-Anglian literature has occupied an outstanding place not only in India but in European countries also. Toru Dutt (1856-1877) was a remarkable Indo-Anglian Poetess who was like Keats.

Toru Dutt interpreted Indian life before the Western world. The poetry of Toru Dutt is notable also for the feel of Indian life that it has been able to convey in a foreign language. It was her Indianism that led to the publication of "Sanskrit Sheaf" in 1882 by Kegan Paul entitled *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*.

Toru respected the Gods of ancient India, and her praise of Yama and other deities is evident everywhere. In *Savitri* and *Sita* she brings out her great admiration for the true Indian wife. Apart from *Sita*, her collection of verses includes life – portraits of Lakshaman, Jogadhya Uma, The Royal Ascetic and Hind, Dhruva, Buttoo, and Sindhu. The present paper is an attempt to bring forth the elements of Indianism in the above mentioned famous ballads by Toru Dutt.

Keywords: Ancient Ballads, Indian Gods, Indian Culture, Indian Symbols. Legends

I. INTRODUCTION

Toru Dutt interpreted Indian life before the Western world. In **Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan** she wrote about the legendary past of India. Toru Dutt expressed the Indian belief of the supremacy of Fate in Human life. The poetry of Toru Dutt is notable also for the feel of Indian life that it has been able to convey in a foreign language.

On August 26, 1876 in a letter written to Mary Martin, Toru told her that she was translating some small Sanskrit pieces. She had planned a "Sheaf Gleaned in Sanskrit fields" as a companion to the French volume.

"There is something greatly moving, both heroic and sad, about the young poet's excited, passionate response to her Indian heritage while she coughs bloods and lies "Weak and prostrate", hiding her frail body from the sun, finding the effort of writing a dreadful but loving burden".

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II. PRESENCE OF INDIAN GODS

In **Ancient Ballads** the tales that Toru included were more than mere poems of action or character; they are "trafficked with the supernatural". The appearance of gods and goddesses is quiet normal in an Indian poem.

In **Savitri** for e.g. when Satyavan is dead and Savitri is holding anxious vigil by his side, Yama appears before him. Yama is the God of Death, and also the God of Dharma. He is a great upholder of Law.

In **Jogadhya Uma** Toru's love for delicate old fashioned folklore comes to the fore front. The ballad is based on a folk tale. It recounts the sudden appearance of the Goddess Uma to a simple pedlar than to a ritualistic priest. The poetess is at India here. Her originality finds its fullest expression in this poem.

In the poem the beautiful maiden who appears by the side of a tank buys bracelets from a pedlar who comes to Khirogram. In reality she is Goddess Uma. When the pedlar asks her to pay the price of the bracelet she directed him to her home for payment. She told the pedlar that the poor priest is her father. She tells him that in case he does not have money, the pedlar may ask him to make payment from the vermilion streaked box near the shrine.

The maiden plunges into the water and disappears. When the pedlar goes to take money from the priest, he comes to know that Goddess Uma has given glimpse to the pedlar. They both run to the tank but till then the maiden has disappeared. The priest sincerely implores the goddess to show some more signs of her divine presence. Then, there is some rustling in the midst of lotus flowers covering the watery surface of the tank and they see;

“Sudden from out the water sprung”
A rounded arm, on which they saw
As high the lotus buds among
It rose, the bracelet which, with awe.
Then a wide ripple tost and Swung
The blossoms on that liquid plain,
And, lo! the arm so fair and young
Sank in the waters down again.
They 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”.

Prahlad was a true devotee of God. His father, King Heerun Kasyapu was against the presence of God. He held himself superior to God and as such banned the study of the Vedas. Prahlad did not approve his father’s supremacy as he strongly believed in the almighty. Therefore King Heerun Kasyapu subjected Prahlad to various tortures.

Finally he made up his mind to get rid of Prahlad by killing him. The king Challenged Prahlad to prove the existence of God.

“Where are thy gods? I long have sought
but never found them, hapless youth”.

“Will they come down, to prove their strength,
will they come down, to rescue thee?
Let them come down, for once at length,
Come one, or all, to fight with me”.

Prahlad’s love and undying faith in the omniscient God is evident in the poem. He feared nothing – fire, sword, all the dangers, because he knew that God will take care of him.

King is angry over the proclamations made by Prahlad in favour of his enemy -Lord Vishnu and Challenges the omnipresent God.

“What! Everywhere? Then in this hall,
And in this crystal pillar bright?
Now tell me plain, before us all,
Is He herein, thy God of light?”

Prahlad said to the king that if God chooses he can appear before them at that very moment. From a pillar emerged a stately stable warrior with the head and eyes of lion and feet and hands like human beings. He killed the tyrant king and hailed Prahlad as king of the entire realm. There was a thunder clap and the mysterious warrior vanished into nothingness.

The presence of God Narsimha in this poetry justifies the element of Indianism in the poetry of Toru Dutt. Lord Vishnu incarnated as Narsimha came to rescue Prahlad from his tyrant father and proved that he is omnipresent and always there to help his devotees at the times of danger.

III. INDAIN SYMBOLS

The Lotus – a miscellaneous poem by Toru also proves her Indianness. The Lotus is the eternal flower of India.

Toru wanted to revive the glory of India by projecting this Indian symbol. Toru carried Lotus to Europe, beyond the boundary of India. The poem has three movements; first the problem posed by love to Flora who the 'undisputed queen among flower is? This leads to an age old rivalry between lily and rose. Lotus doesn't appear till the preceding 12 lines. It comes at the end like India Gods to solve the problem.

Despite her stay, education and bringing up in the West she always nourished her in born love for the Indian scene.

IV. INDIAN SPIRIT

Toru was fulfilling her duty towards her motherland by composing Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan. It brought about the style and spirit of Hindu puranas. It provides a snapshot of the soul of India. It deals with the Hindu metaphysics.

In Savitri Toru Dutt extols the virtues of love, dutifulness and obedience to parents.

In The Legend of Dhruva we find the sense of duty prevailing when Dhruva declares that the throne should be given to Uttama.

In Lakshman, Lakshman has been conferred a duty by Rama to take care of 'Sita'. Maricha falsely raised an alarm as per the instruction of Ravana. Sita became worried because she thought that Rama was in danger. She urged Lakshman to go and help his brother. But Lakshman knew that it was an act of treachery. His sense of duty could not let him go from there and leave Sita alone.

In Buttoo, though he is rejected by Dronachaya, Buttoo makes his statue and learns the art of archery. When Dronacharya demands his thumb as guru dakshina it is Buttoo's sense of duty that he doesn't even give a thought to it and chops off his right thumb.

“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”.

Buttoo is a wonderful picture of Indian life and thought. It is Indian in its very essence. It is a superb e.g. which shows the reverence of an Indian student for his master.

V. CONCLUSION

Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan is an eloquent testimony of Toru's Indianness. Toru's ardent love of Indian's glorious past is reflected in her ballads. Her conversion to Christianity, her European visit and her English education could not blur her love for India's ancient religion and mythology.

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