

Symbolism in Toru Dutt's Savitri and Bhutto



Literature

KEYWORDS : Hindustan, Posthumously, Narada, Soul, Incarnations, Psyche, Legend, Myth and Alien

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ABSTRACT

Toru Dutt is one of the earliest writers to compose poetry in Indian Writing in English. Though composed her poetry in France, her nostalgia for Indianness is seen in her poetry. Rich Indian Methodology with reference to The Ramayana and The Mahabharata is shown symbolically in her poems. The legend of Savitri is a long poem divided in to five parts. Sita stands as symbol of the simple and trusting wife. In Indian mythology 'Shakti' or the Indian woman is projected in various moods as is seen in the incarnations of the female psyche in terms of various incarnations (Avatars) of Durga. Dhruva symbolises the importance of quest for truth. A life devoid of material is anchoring but devoted to virtues like meekness, sincerity, friendship and love.

INTRODUCTION:

Poetry in Indian Writing in English has occupied a limited area, perhaps because English is not the mother tongue. Therefore the nuances and intricacies of the Phonetic Values of English words, the native English idiom are difficult for the Indians to follow however, there have been some significant practitioners of poetry who can claim recognition as artists in their own right. One of such earlier practitioners is Toru Dutt. It was with Toru Dutt that Indian English poetry really graduated from imitation to authority. The third and youngest child of Govin Chundur Dutt, Torulata, born Hindu, was baptized along with the other members of the family in 1862. She learnt English at early age and reading books and practicing music were her chief hobbies. Sailing for Europe in 1869, she spent a year in France studying French, and was thereafter in England for three years. Returning to India in 1873, unfortunately she died of consumption for four years later, at the age of twenty one. Though she died in the early age Toru carved a niche in Indian Writing in English as an earliest writer. *A Sheep Gleaned in French Fields* (1876) comprises 165 lyrics by about hundred French poets appeared in her life time. *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882) published posthumously shows the progress achieved by Toru

The legend of Savitri is dealt with by Toru Dutt in a long epic poem divided into five parts. The character most important in the poem is Savitri. In her epic Toru Dutt presents the main character in her own dimensions. The poem opens with the childlike Savitri who is beautiful and at the same time very bold. In her playfulness and wandering about she comes across Satyavan who is also striking in his figure and forbearance. Savitri is moved by the sight of this young man and wonders if he is a mortal or god. In the meanwhile the sage Narada is passing that way and he is impressed by the attraction between Savitri and Satyavan. In her conversation with Narada, Savitri learns about the details of Satyavan. Into this age old legend and simple framework, Toru Dutt fits in characters who are bordering on the symbolic rather than the real world. When we consider the character sketch of the protagonist of the poem, Savitri, certain interesting symbolic qualities associated with a heroine are revealed.

The childhood of Savitri is spent among the beauties of nature. She is a very sweet child and is described as:

- Fair as lotus when the moon
- Kisses its opening petals red,
- After sweet showers in sultry June (Toru Dutt P.131)

The charm of Savitri is again described in terms of childlike innocence, sweet simplicity and grace. Wherever Savitri went there was an infective happiness. Savitri's father gave her full freedom to wander in nature and learn the lessons of nature. It reminds us of William Wordsworth's education or the making of a poet's mind through interaction with nature, as when he says "fair seed time hath my soul". In the course of her wanderings one summer morning she saw a young boy and was taken

in by the beauty of his physique, and she found that the image of the youth was wrecking in her mind. Shortly after this the sage Narad visited Savitri's father. Savitri's father was for a long time thinking over the problem of finding a bridegroom for Savitri. He enquired of Narada if he knew of a suitable match. But then Savitri was already in love and wanted to marry the youth she had seen, whose name was Satyavan. On enquiry, Narad said that he knew the young man and he came from a descent family and his father's throne was taken away. By his enemies, the father therefore fled from his kingdom and now lived in the forest. The one big negative factor was that, according to Narad the boy would die one year after marriage. Savitri's father tried to dissuade Savitri. But Savitri insisted on marrying Satyavan or else she would remain a spinster. The marriage finally was settled and Savitri accepted Satyavan as her husband. A long time passed and the day of Satyavan's death arrived. Yama came to earth to take away Satyavan. When Yama was taking away the soul of Satyavan, Savitri followed him. Yama gave Savitri strict warning to go away and not follow him. But Savitri did not listen to Yama but continued to follow him. Here the readers can see the determination and courage of Savitri to regain her husband's release from death. She finally succeeds in her effort to save her husband. It is clearly evident that in this legend the character of Savitri as having a good balance and achieving what she wants. Savitri is almost a symbol at this juncture.

When the reader wants to observe the character of Sita, it is quite different. Sita is portrayed as a devout and humble young lady waiting for her deliverance. She is waiting to be delivered by Rama and unlike Savitri; she is not bold and defiant but meek and submissive in her solitude. Where Savitri wages a wordy battle with Yama, Sita is full of faith in her husband to deliver her, but is sad because of separation. Sita stands as symbol of the simple and trusting wife. In Indian mythology 'Shakti' or the Indian woman is projected in various moods as is seen in the incarnations of the female psyche in terms of various incarnations (Avatars) of Durga ranging from Dhanalaxmi, Vijjalaxmi, Dhanyalaxmi, Adilaxmi and Vijjalaxmi.

The Legend of Dhruva appeared originally in the Bengal magazine in October 1876. The legend of Dhruva is taken from *Vishnupurana*. According to Toru Dutt's poem Manu had two sons Pryarata and Uttanapado. Uttanapado married two wives, Suruchee, was the mother of Uttama and Suneetee's son was Dhruva.

King Uttanapado gave Uttama importance over Dhruva. Dhruva was angered and wanted to share the love of the king equally. The king however did not encourage Dhruva even as he saw his first wife Suruchee coming into the hall. Suruchee admonished Dhruva and made it clear to him that he could never occupy the place of her own son Uttama in the affection of the king.

Having been repulsed Dhruva ran to his own mother full of anger. The mother was gentle and enquired of the reason for his anger. Dhruva narrated what had happened. Being helpless Su-

ruchee his mother replied.

Oh son, to lowly fortune thou wert born,
And what my co-wife said to thee is truth;
No enemy to Heaven's favoured ones may say
Such words as they step-mother said to thee.
Yet, son, it is not meet that thou shouldst grieve
Or vex thy soul. The deeds that thou hast done,
The evil, haply, in some former life,
Long, long ago, who may alas! annul,
Or who the good works not done, supplement!
The sins of previous lives must bear their fruit. (174,175)

Dhruva was inspired by what his mother said. He said that there was a crown above his father's crown and he would obtain it at any cost. Dhruva asserted that he would not be content with the crown that Uttama received. He did not covet another's property. So saying Dhruva left his father and mother went into the forest and after great meditation he reached the highest level of achievement. He became a bright star in the heavens, which is eternal. Hence Dhruva cast away the material and mortal glory to achieve spiritual and eternal glory. Dhruva symbolises the importance of quest for truth. A life devoid of material is anchoring but devoted to virtues like meekness, sincerity, friendship and love. This symbolization of Dhruva is well brought out in the concluding stanza of the poem:

Well kept the boy his promise made that day?
By prayer and penance Dhruva gained at last
The highest heavens, and there he shines a star!
Nightly men see him in the firmament.(177)

It is needless to say that Toru Dutt had leaded a highly emotional packed short life. In her childhood she had experienced the joy of playing with the Dutt siblings and at the same time was

biased with the insecurity of being ostracized from Hindu society because of the conversion to Christianity. There are a number of passages in her poetry which reflect this. Toru Dutt was a sensitive young girl with a remarkable command of diction both English and French.

Toru Dutt very skillfully blended the eastern images and symbols with the western stylistics to produce poetry that is remarkable in its nature. A study of some of the poems of Toru Dutt clearly brings out this artistic fusion.

Absurd may be the tale I tell,
Ill- suited to the marching times,
I loved the lips from which it fell,
So let it stand among my rhymes.

Toru Dutt was deeply impressed and aware of Indian legends and myths through her study of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Vishnupurana along with her father and a Sanskrit Pandit. One of the interesting aspects of Toru Dutt's poetry is the use of Indian legends and myths and turning them into symbols. This can be illustrated from some of her poems.

CONCLUSION

Toru Dutt possessed an inborn poetic talent which found its best outlet in English language. Dunn has rightly described Toru as 'the founder of modern school of English poetry. (Dunn, *The Bengali Writers*, p-20) In portraying the inner feeling and the complex modes of the characters, Toru has adapted the device of dramatic speeches in her poems. The ancient legends of Hindustan were neither exotic nor alien for her. The stories of past stirred her and touched a responsive chord within her. Her brier career has enabled Dutt to carve out herself a permanent place on the Indian Writing in English poetic mount.

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