

Symbolism in Toru Dutt's the Lotus and the Tree Of Life



Literature

KEYWORDS :

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ABSTRACT

One of the earliest writers in Indian Writing in English is Toru Dutt. As a young girl Toru developed a passionate love for nature. The Sonnet the The Lotus is interesting in the symbolic representation of flowers. The rose is projected as one that has been often used by poets as a powerful symbol. The lily is projected as a symbol of stateliness and majesty. The Tree of Life was four and half months before her passing away. The poem is excellent specimen of Toru Dutt's fully developed poetic style with its vivid evocation of the scene and expression that is impressive with a diction flawless and well chosen in the lines. And there is a transition in the poem from brilliant lyric depiction of images of nature and its grandeur to a spirit of holy pity and love divine.

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.

As a young girl Toru developed a passionate love for nature. Living between Rambagan at Calcuta and the country house at Baumaree, Toru gave a keener edge to her innate love for nature. The beautiful surroundings of Rambagan conducted her poetic instincts but the garden at Baumaree being more beautiful and lovelier gave a spurt to her imagination. The different objectives of nature proved to be a fine stimulus to her imagination. Her unflinching love of nature is revealed in her numerous letters in which she express her passion for flowers, birds, gardens, its flowers, fruits and birds.

THE LOTUS

The Sonnet the Lotus is interesting in the symbolic representation of flowers. The rose is projected as one that has been often used by poets as a powerful symbol. The lily is projected as a symbol of stateliness and majesty. In the symbolic projection the lotus surpasses both as it is a combination of beauty and stateliness, (the rose and the lily). It is perhaps because of this that the lotus is considered a symbol of the divine-divinity which is a combination of beauty and stateliness. As Toru Dutt describes; and 'lily-white',-the queenliest flower the blows. And flora gave the lotus, 'rose-red' dyed.

Love came to Flora asking for a flower
That would of flowers be undisputed queen,
Rivals for that high honour. Bards of power
Had sung their claims. "The rose can never tower
Like the pale lily with her Juno mien-
'But is the lily lovelier?' Thus between
Flower-factions rang the strife in Psyche's bower.
'Give me a flower delicious as the rose
And stately as the lily in her pride'-
'But of what colour?'- 'Rose-red,' Love first chose,
Then prayed,-'No, lily-white,-or, both provide;'
And Flora gave the lotus, 'rose-red' dyed,
And 'lily-white',-the queenliest flower that blows. (Toru Dutt, pp. 210)

The poem is a sonnet in the Petrarchan type. Toru's mastery

over the sonnet form is clearly evident in this poem. The sonnet The Lotus is divided in to two parts, the Octave and the Sestet. The Octave consists of eight lines and the Sestet of six lines. As the sonnet deals with a single idea, the Octave proposes, Toru raises a problem and the sestet resolves it in the sestet within fourteen lines of the poem.

The two sonnets The Lotus and Baumaree offer a comparison structurally in Toru's art. In the sonnets the structure is well-knit, the colour and the scenic beauty are brought out by an excellent choice of words and the rhythm is kept simple. Overall they are well constructed sonnets bringing out their symbolic meaning in plain terms as pointed out earlier. The poem The Tree of Life on the other hand has a mystic quality and the symbol emerges even as the mystic vision does. Here again we see Toru's excellent lyrical control. The difference is brought about when the poems are placed side by side.

The Tree of Life

The poem Tree of Life as Prof. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar points out "is the nearest to a 'mystic' experience in Toru Dutt's poetry." (P-17). Govind Chunder Dutt in his memorandum has-mentioned about the genesis of the poem.

Yester evening when the candles were delighted. Toru told me, in very low whispers and with some agitation a dream or vision which she had had the day previous about 9 or 10 am. She was not asleep at all but quite awake. I know now why she asked me where the text was, "And I will give thee a crown of life." (P-370) This was four and half months before her passing away. The poem is excellent specimen of Toru Dutt's fully developed poetic style with its vivid evocation of the scene and expression that is impressive with a diction flawless and well chosen in the lines

It was an open plain
Illimitable, Or stretching, stretching-oh, so far!
And o'er it that strange light,
A glorious light like that the stars shed over fields of snow.
In a clear, cloud less, frosty winter night.
Only intenser in its brilliance calm. (Toru Dutt. P. 208)
This brilliant lyric description is introduced the 'mystic' vision; and in the midst of that vast plain, I saw,
For I was wide awake,-it was no dream,
A tree with spreading branches and with leaves
Of divers kinds,- dead silver and live gold,
Shimmering in radiance that no words may tell!
Beside the tree an Angel stood!. (P. 209)

And there is a transition in the poem from brilliant lyric depiction of images of nature and its grandeur to a spirit of holy pity and love divine. There is a change in the atmosphere even as the beautiful angle is introduced and a luminousness that accompanies it. In a trance Toru is crowned by leaves (the olive or the thorn or both), and the fever in her limbs seems to vanish. Even as this happens in the vision she is back to reality with her father holding her hand. It recalls again the personal experiences of Toru. The joy and abandon she enjoyed in her sister Toru's company, her demise, being taken away and perhaps be-

coming an angel, and her own recovery which was largely due to the care and love her father bestowed on her, with his constant companionship and sharing Toru's interests.

The image of the father and Toru's realization is an excellent transformation of the vivid lyrical imaginary into a symbol of 'Pity and love divine'. This unfolding of the image into symbol, the lyrical to mystic, the real to the visionary impresses the reader when the poem is gone through in one sitting;

The sonnets *The Lotus* and *Baugmaree*, *The Tree of Life* and *Our Casuarina Tree* possess excellent lyrical qualities and at the same time there is the transformation of the image into a symbol. In the sonnet *The Lotus* there is the rivalry between the rose and the lily to be considered as the undisputed queen of flowers. However *Flora* gives the *Lotus* the pride of place. The image of the red rose suggests beauty while the lily stateliness, whereas the *Lotus* possesses both and above all divinity. The lotus is a flower that is used in worship and can be seen in portraits of gods and goddesses in a decorative way, thus suggesting a close affinity with divinity. The sonnet *Baugmaree* offers an excellent lyrical picture of the foliage in the garden. There is the sharp contrast of all colours, the light green tamarind, deeper green of mango, the grey colour of palms, the red colour of seemul birds. However all these are overtaken with glimpse of the lotus. The *Lotus* which suggests the primeval Eden. Here again Toru Dutt very delicately and gently transforms the various colours into symbols. In the poem *The Tree of Life* it is observed that Toru Dutt's fully developed poetic style with its vivid evocation of the scene and a diction that is flaw less. The poem begins with a brilliant lyric description of nature and its grandeur into this is introduced the beatific angel, in a trance. Toru is crowned by leaves and the suffering in her limbs seems to vanish. From this vision there is a transformation to reality with her father holding her hand. It recalls the personal experiences of Toru. The joy and abandon, she had enjoyed in her sister's company and after her demise the father who gave her solace and peace. There is the transformation of the imagery into a symbol of Pity and Love divine. *The Tree of life* is by far one of the best poems of Toru Dutt where the mystic quality is introduced and the symbol emerges even as the mystic vision does.

Our Casuarina Tree is by far one of the most discussed poems of Toru Dutt. The poem is not just a description of a tree, but it captures the past and immortalizes those significant moments. Thus the tree is one that is physically present in reality and at

the same time recalls experiences and would project them in the future. Thus becoming a symbol of immortality. Many a delicate biographical incidents are echoed in this poem and the poet hopes that it would remain a symbol of her poetic creation for all time and gain immortality. It is, to quote Dr. Narasingh Srivastava, "A longer and amore beautiful poem in witch her sense of form, the easy command of traditional metere and diction are fully evidenced. The change of her poetry is seen not only in the personal feeling but also in beauty of the form and texture that makes the lyric so moving." (P-64)

Toru Dutt in her life time had experienced many vicissitudes in the loss of her dear ones. She had also left the shores of her own country and lived in alien lands for many years. She had imbibed the idiom and culture of the alien countries. Yet, Toru Dutt was always an Indian at heart. Her poetry reflects the gentle and refined qualities of a feminine sensibility. There is no hooting and crying as in many expatriate Indian poets. On the other hand, through her artistry and sensibility she is able to create and immortalize the spirit of the ancient ballads and legends of Hindustan. It is hoped that this dissertation will be a modest contribution to Toru Dutt studies.

M.K Naik's assessment of Toru Dutt, "her best work has the qualities of a quiet strength and deep emotion held under artistic restraint and an acute awareness of the acute awareness, of the abiding values of Indian life," is very important in the context of *The Lotus* and *The Tree of Life*.

Toru Dutt possessed an inborn poetic talent which found its best outlet in English language. 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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