Symbolism in Toru Dutt’s The Lotus nd the Tree Of Life

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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 Tou 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 Baugmaree, Toru gave a keener edge to her innate love for nature. The beautiful surroundings of Rambagan conducted her poetic instincts but the garden at Baugmaree 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 unfailing 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  
Rivals for that high honour. Bards of power  
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,  
And in the midst of that vast plain, I saw,  
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,  
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 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 askep 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)

The poem 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.

And it was an open plain

And the other that strange light,
A glorious light like that the stars shed over fields of snow.
In a clear, cloudless, 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)
Thus the tree is one that is physically present in reality and captures the past and immortalizes those significant moments. Our Casuarina Tree is by far one of the most discussed poems and it emerges even as the mystic vision does. Love divine. The Tree of Life is by far one of the best poems of Dutt's fully developed poetic style with its vivid evocation of the symbols. In the poem The Tree of Life it is observed that Toru Dutt possessed an inborn poetic talent which found its text of The Lotus and The Tree of Life.

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 statelessness, 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 flawless. The poem begins with a brilliant lyric description of nature and its grandeur into this is a transformation of the image 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. Narasinh 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 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 the 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.

**REFERENCE**