Chapter Four
Writings of Toru Dutt

The literary career of Toru Dutt can be distinctly divided into three phases - translator, transcreator and original poet. Toru nevertheless has used different literary mediums to express her thoughts. She wrote essays and a great many letters. The journal she kept during her European travels and the letters written home to her relatives in Bengal, had been almost lost. Here let us examine the chief phases of her career.

I. Translator

*A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* and *A Scene from Contemporary History* are Toru's translated works. Before coming to the *Sheaf*, mention has to be made on the two prose translations in English that bear the general title of *A Scene from Contemporary History*. They are translations from two speeches delivered in the French Legislative Assembly by Victor Hugo and M Thiers in 1851 and 1870 respectively. In the summer of 1851, Victor Hugo, that ardent French democrat, delivered a speech condemning any move by the constitution that would re-establish monarchy. Louis - Napoleon Bonaparte, nephew of the great Napoleon Bonaparte was then the president of the Legislative Assembly of the republican form of government. Hugo vehemently opposed the cancellation of a special clause that would eventually restore monarchy. His speech was fiery and adamant and Toru has faithfully captured the inner spirit of Hugo in the translation.

The second translation also deals with another stormy period in the history of France. M Thiers spoke in the French Legislative Assembly against involving the country in a Franco-
Prussian war. Tom translated the whole of this speech and both were published in 1875 in the June and July edition of the Bengal Magazine. A specimen of the poetry of Hugo was also added. It is titled *Napoleon Le petit*.

Toru's translations are far from being slavish or literal. She brought her own spirit of strength and equanimity in the renderings. She also preserved the spirit of the original.

Toru's choice of these speeches speaks of two aspects

a. She was a fiercely independent spirit

b. She longed for a free India, unaware of the path in which it lay

Through these renderings Toru was giving vent to her suppressed desire for freedom, equality and opportunity. The sample of Hugo's *Napoleon Le petit* is her derision for petty leadership and extravaganza, which she came in contact with in Calcutta.

*A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* was the monumental work in translation that won accolades for Toru. It remains one of the finest pieces of translated material from one foreign language to another, written by an Indian. Around two hundred and nine poems are contained in the volume and Aru had contributed eight pieces. The poet here had followed her heart's desire in the selection. The Romantic School of poetry, especially Hugo, got the predominance in the collection. Toru's romanticism is evident here. The pessimistic side of life appealed to Toru's sensibility. Loss of her beloved elder sister Aru, sometime during her work in the *Sheaf*, must have affected her poetic vision. Alienation, despair, premature death, insecurity, longing and
nature's violent twists form the subjects of Toru's choosing. F.de Gramont's *Sonnet-Freedom* speaks in no uncertain terms, Toru's sense of being "Chained" in her own native land.

"By iron bars the lion proud hemmed round,
The sovereign lion with the terrible eyes,
Vanquished, yet still invincible, defies
Not by vain effects but a calm profound.

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"'Tis sometimes only, when he snuffs the storm
Sweeping afar, he stirs and lifts his form,
Savage, magnificent. Then to hear his roar
The gaolers tremble, - but he drops anew;
Not long has he to pine on dungeon - floor;
He chokes for freedom: death must soon ensue." ¹

A N Dwivedi in his *Toru Dutt* - "The subjects, however, which were the dearest to Toru were pathetic ones - those that spoke of separation and loneliness, exile and captivity, illusion and dejection, loss and bereavement, declining seasons and untimely death. In many poems, there is a note of frustrations and longings. No doubt, Toru's innate susceptibility to the pathos of life has manifested itself. ............. One can have also a glimpse of de Musset's unrequited love and acquaintance with philosophic thought." ² and he quotes from the poem, *The Hope in God*.

"'There exists, it is said, a philosophy
That needs no revelation, but unlocks
The gates, with ease, that guard life's mystery,
And safety steers between the dangerous rocks
Indifference and religion. Be it so. 3

Josephin Souulary, a latter day romantic poet's *The Two Processions* speak of the two
great aspects of life - Death and Birth. Toru's choice of the sonnet is not mere coincidence.

"The processions met on consecrated sod,
One was sad, - it followed the bier of a child,

The other way was gay, - a mother who trod
Triumphant, friends, and a babe undefiled

And then prayer's mighty work was seen achieved,
The women barely glanced at one another,
But oh, the change! - in both the glad and grieved.
One wept by the bier, - 'twas the joyful young mother,
And one smiled at the babe, - 'twas the mother bereaved." 4

Here Toru is being reconciled with Death. The poem probably was translated after Aru's
death.

And there is Beranger's *My Vocation*. Beranger belongs to the transitional period. The
poem could remind Toru of her own vocation. It is both a consolation and a tragic vision for her.
"A waif on this earth,

Sick, ugly and small.

Condemned from my birth

And rejected by all,

"From my lips broke a cry,

Such as anguish may wring,

Sing, - said God in reply,

Chant poor little thing.

"Love cheered for a while

My morn with his ray,

But like a ripple or smile

My youth passed away.

Now mar Beauty I sigh,

But fled is the spring!

Sing-said God in reply,

Chant poor little thing.

"All men have a task,

And to sing is my lot -

No meed from men I ask

But one kindly thought.
My vocation is high -
'Mid the glasses that ring,
Still-still comes that reply,
Chant poor little thing." ⁵

Reminiscent of this piece, is her letter to Mary, which says, "How swift time passes. I was about sixteen then, 'in my life's morning hour, when my bosom was young' - now I am getting quite old, twenty and some odd two months, and with such an old fashioned face that English ladies take me for thirty! I wonder if I shall live to be thirty." ⁶

The social norms of Bengal were hard to be written off even by an emancipated woman of Toru's stature. At the early age of twenty, she felt old and the dreadful disease that claimed the lives of Abju and Aru was fast creeping upon her. It is less surprising then that the sad and the pathetic features of existence appeal to her sensibility. Love must have crossed her way once - we never know.

Victor Hugo's *The Grandmother* bears reference to her own Hindu grandmother whom she loved and cherished - "I wish you knew my grandmother; a kinder, or gentler, or more loving woman never breathed. How all her dear face lights up when we go to see her! I wish she would become a Christian. She is so much better that many who profess to be Christians, but whose conduct is anything but so." ⁷

"Sleep'st thou? Awaken mother of our mother!
We love thee-thee alone-we have no other!

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Did a lone traveler, through the doorway see
The mother, and the Book, and the Children at her knee?"  

This maternal grandmother was one of the few relatives who loved Toru and her family in spite of the differences in faith.

Alphonse de Lamartine's *Loneliness* captured Toru's attention, though he was a transitional poet. Her original poem, *Our Casuarina Tree*, a sad piece of memory could have been inspired by these lines.

"There shall I drink of the clear fountains I want,
There encounter the sisters long-sought, Hope and love,
Ideal-where emblems on the earth are but scant,
There, there shall I greet thee for thy home is above"

"The reign of green foliage in the wood is but brief,
Falls the leaf and is whirled by the wind in its play,
Alas! I resemble but too much the poor leaf;
Stormy wind of the north, bear oh! bear me away."  

Andre Theuriet's *A Mon Mere* could have inspired Toru's own concluding sonnet of the volume, *A Mon Pere*. Theuriet's poem is long and though at first, a pale, self-sacrificing picture of a mother is painted, the poem ends bearing the noble aspects of her beloved child.
The mother active, pale, 
And thoughtful, as a mother always seems, 
Covers a canvas wide with brave designs 
Of variegated colours ............

And both contemplate with wet eyes the pearl, 
The richest pearl their jewel - casket holds, 
The pride of all the family, - the life, 
The joy and sunshine of the house, - their child." 10

The child in the poem bears touching resemblance to Toru. A N Dwivedi quotes Parney's 
*On the Death of a Young Girl* and says that it "is of special interest to us, as it seems to have been 
written as the poetess' obituary notice." 11

"Though childhood's ways were past and gone, 
More innocent no child would be, 
Though grace in every feature shone, 
Her maiden heart was fancy free. 
A few more months, or haply days, 
And Love would blossom, - so we thought, 
As lifts in April's genial rays, 
The rose its clusters richly wrought. 
But God had destined otherwise,
And so she gently fell asleep,
A creature of the starry skies,
Too lovely for the earth to keep.
She died in earliest womanhood,
Thus dies, and leaves behind no trace,
A bird's song in a leafy wood,—
Thus melts a sweet smile from a face."  

Dwivedi adds, "This poem is mainly autobiographical and highly revealing. It is, however, not applicable to Toru that she left behind 'no trace' of herself; her lasting work in the form of the Sheaf belies this assertion. And, as Das points out, "if she had left behind her no other work save this volume of translation, she would have left behind her something that will not soon die away."

James Darmesteter, the French critic's fitting tribute to Toru runs thus, "This daughter of Bengal, so admirably and so strangely gifted, Hindu by race and tradition, an Englishwoman by education, a French woman at heart, poet in English, prose-writer in French; who, at the age of eighteen, made India acquainted with the poets of France in the rhyme of England, who blended in herself three souls and three traditions, and died at the age of twenty in the full bloom of her talent and on the eve of the awakening of her genius, presents in the history of literature a phenomenon without parallel."

II. Transcreator

*The Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* is a transcreated volume of ballads from old folktales and legends of ancient India. There are nine ballads and the initial ones are more
translations than transcreations. The volume taken as a whole is also a tale of Toru's awakening from the shackles of translation to the freedom of a poet.

*The Royal Ascetic and the Hind* and *Dhriva* are from the *Vishnu Purana*, Book two, Chapter thirteen and Book One, Chapter eleven respectively. They appeared in print during Toru's lifetime, in *The Calcutta Review*, January 1877 and *The Bengal Magazine*, October 1876.

The Royal Ascetic and the Hind

It is one of her early attempts written in blank verse. The ballad ends with a Christian philosophy. The reading of the ballad strikes one that Toru is experimenting here with the ballad-form. But her choice of the ballad, as in her *Sheaf* is one of personal inclination. She too, like the hermit-king, is fond of pets and kept many of its kinds in her Calcutta home. She speaks of her favourite horses, Jeunette and Gentille with doting pride. Christian liberalism strikes deep and Toru adopts the garb of a Christian preacher and repudiates the ancient philosophy of the Purana. To Toru, Christ's philosophy of the Gospel is more acceptable. Christ speaks of the abundance of life He shall give to his followers in the present life and for all eternity. Similarly, she does not distance herself from the daily care of home-life. She found time to study Sanskrit, write letters, and fondle her pets. She strongly objects to the king's conduct. In her isolation from the mainstream of social Bengal, she firmly believed that a leader's place lay among his followers.

"Thus far the pious chronicle, writ of old,

By Brahman sage; but we, who happier, live
Under the holiest dispensation, know

That God is love, and not to be adored

By a devotion born of stoic pride,

Or with ascetic rites, or penance hard,

But with a love, in character akin

To his unselfish, all-including love.

...........................What! a sin to love!

A sin to pity! Rather should we deem

Whatever Brahmans wise, or monks may hold,

That he had sinned in casting off all love

By his retirement to the forest-shades;"  

P C Kotoky observes, "the extent to which Christian piety liberalized her outlook can be seen in her argument in defense of the royal ascetic who, in his dying moments thought not of the Beyond but of the helplessness of his pet hind when he would not be there to look after it. The poet holds it no sin for the ascetic to love his nursling, though he had renounced the world to 'attain perfect dominion on his soul.' "

b. The Legend of Dhruva

This is also an early attempt at blank verse, shows the success of penance and prayer where as the previous legend reveals the failure of it. In Dhruva's story, Toru does not moralize. She leaves the reader to make a judgement. Toru may be attempting to prove that in the case of the young prince Dhruva, penance is rewarded because the child Dhruva has a reason for his quest
for greatness. In King Bharat's case, it failed, because the king left his place of duty, to embrace asceticism.

Her pity for Dhruva must have sprung from her own personal life. From her fragmentary and autobiographical novel Bianca, it is obvious that Mr. Govin Chunder Dutt was more affectionate towards Aru who was delicate and needed to be protected. Toru was seen as a stronger and more intelligent character, capable of meeting people at their own level. Though the legend was written after Aru's death, Toru must have seen some personal reflections in it. On few occasions she has referred to her maternal uncle's two wives, whom she playfully called Suneetee and Suruchee.

Still, it is strange that Dhruva succeeds in the asceticism that arose from grudge and ambition, to show his father that there is

"........................ a place
That would not know him even, aye, a place
Far, far above the highest of this earth." 17

For to attain spiritual bliss, one does not follow the path of vengeance. Toru's Dhruva fails because he was created from Toru's own personal antagonism towards the Karma theory. Her philosophy of perseverance amidst grievance is also there.

The legends of Buttoo, Sindhu, Prahlad and Sita show a mature handling of the blank verse. Here we have the ideal pupil, the ideal son, the ideal devotee and the ideal queen.
In this legend, Toru’s sympathy was with the dark, hunter boy. How strongly Buttoo must have felt the sense of alienation when Dronachariya, the mighty master of archery refused to tutor him!

"As down upon the ground he fell.
Not hurt, but made a jest and game;-
He rose, - and waved a proud farewell,
But cheek and brow grew red with shame.
And lo,- a single, single tear
Dropped from his eyelash as he past,
.......................... I shall try
To realize my waking dream,
And what if I should chance to die?
None miss one bubble from a stream." 18

Did Toru also feel the pang of the hunter’s son? Did she have a waking dream of becoming a great poet? Did she feel somewhere, in the inner recesses of her mind that she will not be long here on this earth? Did she realize her dreams through her chanting of these ancient ballads and legends of an ideal pupil, son and others? The last line quoted need not necessarily refer to Toru’s immediate family who loved her well, but could be taken in the larger context of the Bengali society.
When the forest animals came to soothe Buttoo, he cries

""They touch me"; he exclaimed with joy
They have no pride of caste like men
They shrink not from the hunter boy,
Should not my home be with them then?" 19

This recalls Shakespeare's comedy *As you like it* where Duke Senior in banishment in the Forest of Arden, finds consolation in the myriad beauties of nature.

The beauties of nature never failed to attract Toru. In her letters to Miss Mary Martin, there are wonderful descriptive passages on nature and its effect upon her. Her Baugmaree garden was described by Mrs. Elizabeth Colton who visited the site, as an Eden and was surprised that they even brooked the thought of settling down in England. The Garden House with its acres of land and its flowers and fruit trees was soothing to Toru living in the Calcutta of her day. *Buttoo* contains beautiful versions on nature:

"It soothed at once his wounded pride,
And on his spirit shed a balm
That all its yearnings purified."

"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."  

The most touching lines in the whole of the Ancient Ballads is Ekalavya's rendering of his fee due to Dronacharya.

"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."  

The God here is Tom's own sole-supreme God in whom she believed and to whom she attributes the beliefs of all.

Did she also feel lonely and become her own teacher due to the lack of an extended formal education? Tom received much learning compared to her female contemporaries of Bengal. But did she feel it wasn't enough for her keen, diligent mind?

A N Dwivedi adds, "The teacher in Dronacharya failed the moment he demanded Buttoo's thumb. The pupil was now disillusioned, for he now realized that the man of his worship was really incapable of rising above petty considerations. For him it was a shock too deep for tears."

Though Tom manifests the integrity of the ideal pupil, she does not altogether let down the master in Dronacharya. Buttoo was a rash and honest youth and Drona, a steadfast teacher.
In those days of yore, promises are kept staking even human considerations. It is not without pain that Drona utters.

"I promised in my faithfulness
No equal ever shall there be
To thee, Arjuna, - and I press
For this sad recompense - for thee." 23

Toru's Drona indeed rose above the Kshatriya principles of teaching and obedience when he blessed Buttoo saying,

" "For this," - said Dronacharya - "Fame
Shall sound thy praise from sea to sea,
And man shall ever link thy name
With Self-help, Truth, and Modesty." 24

Buttoo's qualities of head and heart could well be Toru's own.

"A Calm, Calm life, - and it shall be
Its own exceeding great reward!

All creatures and inanimate things
Shall be my tutors;"
A conscience clear. - a ready hand,
Joined to a meek humility,
Success must everywhere command,
How could he fail who had all three!" 25

The Biblical influence on Toru is unmistakable in the second line.

d. Sindhu

The dutiful son of blind and aged parents, Sindhu bears likeness to Toru.

"A bright - eyed child, his laughter gay
Their leaf-hut filled with joy." 26

The tale of Sindhu could have evoked in Toru a similar thought. She was not without thought of the plight of her parents in their advanced age, without their dear children. When Toru exclaimed to her best friend Mary, about the Bronte sisters, it is not without thought of her own approaching end - "........To think of those three young sisters in that old parsonage, among the lonely wild moors of Yorkshire, all three so full of talent, and yet living so solitary amid those Yorkshire wilds! ............... How sad their history is! How dreary for the father to see one by one all his children die, and to live on alone and infirm, in that solitary parsonage in Yorkshire! In truth there is no greater tragedy in fiction than what happens in our real, daily life." 27
There is the doctrine of Karma here. Sindhu’s untimely death is the result of his wanton killing of a male dove for sport. The pair had been living near their hermitage. The female dove curses the boy.

"The curse of blood is on thee now,
Blood calls for red blood still." 28

The broken-hearted sire of Sindhu does not curse King Dasaratha, but prophesies his end,

"The future is no longer hid,
Thou too shalt like us die.
Die - for a son's untimely loss!
Die - with a broken heart!" 29

It is Toru’s Christian message that leads her, while she transcreates this old legend. The Christian theory of unconditional forgiveness dominates the Karma theory of the original.

c. Prahlad

The legend is a profound example of the dominance of true faith. The poet shares the isolation of Prahlad. The legend is well told, with close adherence to the original. But Toru never leaves the telling without propounding her strong Christian faith. Through the tale of Prahlad, Toru aptly intermingles the old and the new faith and brings out the finest theory of faith. At first
the boy Prahlad ponders on the mysteries of the Universe and realizes that true knowledge lies in believing that

"The gods who made us are the life,
Of living creatures, small and great;
We see them not, but space is rife
With their bright presence and their state." 30

He is punished cruelly by his mighty and tyrannical father, Heeranya Kashyapu, by resorting to various methods of torture - steel, gall, heat, vapour and vicious animals. Prahlad hails to the royal presence, untouched by malice and wrongs to speak to his royal father thus,

"For I have in my dungeon dark
Learnt more of truth then e’er I knew,
There is one God-One only, - Mark!
To Him is all our service due.” 31

The passage of faith that Prahlad travels through and reaches is also Toru’s own journey from the old to the new. She was but a child when her family received baptism. The transition still left indelible marks upon her sharp imagination. After the spurning of the crystal pillar by the tyrant king, the god Narasimha springs forth and destroys the infidel and enthrones the young Prahlad on the Peacock Throne.

"He had a lion head and eyes,
A human body, feet and hands,
Colossal, - such strange shapes arise
In clouds, when Autumn rules the lands!"32

The last two lines open a vista of Toru's eventual unbelief in her old faith. She is not intolerant here, but bears the legend to its end with creditable respect. The last stanza, which gives an advice to tyrants in general, could have resulted from her isolation due to the political situation in Bengal.

A N Dwivedi, | “the phraseology employed by Prahlad in his defence sometimes smacks of a Biblical flavour. His speeches are, by all means, individualistic and interesting throughout. The poem would have finished more fittingly at the picture of Prahlad, the new-crowned King, bowing his head reverently on the throne amidst the plaudits of the people, and leaving out the apostrophe to tyrants in general. The apostrophe displays Toru's propensity for didacticism.” 33

f. Savitri

The longest legend in the volume bears more originality and the ballad-form has attained more perfection in this legend. Savitri seems to be the most beloved heroine of Toru. The charm and grace of Savitri bear touching resemblance to the creator of this legend. It seems that this legend claims a freedom in its telling than the previous legends because of Toru's affinity with the heroine. For what can be visualised upon Toru's strong comment when Savitri saw the prince Satyavan for the first time when “she looked and looked, - then gave a sigh and slackened suddenly her pace?”
“What was the meaning - was it love?

Love at first sight, as poets sing,

Is then no fiction? Heaven above

Is witness, that the heart its King

Finds often like a lightening flash;

We play. - we jest, - we have no care, -

When hark a step, there comes no crash, -

But life, or silent slow despair.”

How well Toru portrays the pangs of first love! They resound as first-hand information and an autobiographical tone runs in these lines. In Bianca, written assuredly before this ballad, the pangs of love are not so well traced as in Savitri. Moreover, Toru’s poetic genius has yet to ripen in Bianca, to leave it complete. Savitri’s speech is far beyond her years and shows a fuller blooming of Toru’s understanding through Vedantic philosophy. The adamant, yet gracious tone of the princess, when she stood her ground to marry only Satyavan in spite of the impending doom brings Toru’s nature to mind as pictured by Govin Chunder Dutt in his Prefatory Memoir. It may be assumed that due to her study of Sanskrit for a year, she was aware of Vedantic philosophy. The lines promise a strength and truth about them.

“Once, and once only, have I given

My heart and faith - 'tis past recall;

With conscience none have ever striven

And none may strive, without a fall.
Not the less solemn was my vow
    Because unheard, and oh! The sin
Will not be less, if I should now
    Deny the feeling felt within." 35

The spirit of freedom in Savitri is emphasised by Toru to show the contradiction in contemporary Bengal.

“In those far-off primeval days
    Fair India’s daughters were not pent
In closed zenanas. On her way
    Savitri at her pleasure went
Whither she chose, - and hour by hour
    With young companions of her age,
She roamed the woods..............” 36

Toru’s own longing for such freedom is unmistakable in these lines

Govin Chunder Dutt is again acknowledged in the following lines

“Her father let her have her way
    In all things, whether high or low;
He feared no harm; he knew no ill
    Could touch a nature pure as snow.
And so she wandered where she pleased
In boyish freedom.............”⁵⁷

Tortures meted out to a young Hindu widow in the garb of penance and sacrifice is captured with accurate intensity.

“And think upon the dreadful curse
Of widowhood; the vigils, fasts,
And penances; no life is worse
Than hopeless life, - the while it lasts
Day follows day in one long round,
Monotonous and blank and drear;
Less painful were it to be bound
On some bleak rock, for aye to hear -
Without one chance of getting free-
The ocean’s melancholy voice!” ⁵⁸

(Here rock is a biblical symbol as well as the tortures of Prometheus. Toru unifies beautifully the Christian and the pagan element to enact a Hindu philosophy)

Toru’s spurning of the vigils and penance of a widow is echoed here.

“...................... his sins are facts
That nothing can annul or square,
And he must bear their consequence.
Can I my husband save by rites?
Ah, no - that were a vain pretence
Justice eternal strict requites.” 39

S V Mukherji in his Disjecta Memtra refers to Toru as a feminist - “She was the first Indian feminist. Her devotion and her chastity were alike the product, not of slave mentality, but of an austere and virile civilisation founded on social justice and free development of personality.”

Lotika Basu suggests “Savitri is the finest of the poems, dealing with epic legends. Toru’s Savitri is however different from the Savitri of Indian legend, for while the latter was a part of her husband, the former claim an individuality and personality distinct from her husband” and quotes the line,

“He for his deeds shall get his due...
As I for mine ....................”

“Such an idea is quite alien to ancient Hindu thought. Modern ideas like this however can be found in almost all poems.” 41

Toru’s Savitri does not claim an individuality nor personality different from that of Satyavan. The traits were true and inborn in Toru’s heroine as much as they were with Toru
herself. Her faith was such that marriage is binding only till "death do them part" which is poignantly Christian. Even to be true to her beloved heroine of the Puranas, she does not alter her belief. A N Dwivedi points out that "it should be read in the light of the preceding stanza" and realise that it bears only "the ethical implication of the Karma theory."^42

g. Lakshman

It is a dramatic dialogue that challenges the pure, delicate, long-suffering picture of Sita. Her unscrupulous behaviour towards her doting brother-in-law Lakshman looms large before the reader.

Sita accuses Lakshman of dark motives for failing to assist Rama. Lakshman has a clearer vision and a better understanding of his royal brother; Insulted by Sita's harrowing accusation, he disobeys Rama's order to remain beside Sita. He absolves his sister-in-law and draws a protective magic circle around her before departure.

In the choice of this dialogue, Toru is resurrecting Lakshman who is generally forgotten in the saintly presence of Sita. The close bond between siblings in an Indian family is also conveyed.

"For here beside thee, as a guard
'Twas he commanded me to stay,
And dangers with my life to ward
If they should come across the way."^43
In *Lakshman*, there are three members of one family, in a particularly distressing situation. Rama's fortunes are left unsaid, yet all the three figures are isolated from one another by a peculiar circumstance. Sita's gentle nature is nowhere seen here and it is with Lakshman we sympathise and admire. Sita falls a prey to the cunning vices of mistrust and doubts in the extreme, which appears natural, given the singular setting. Lakshman is given an unbelievable godly stature. It is sure that Toru's intention is to give Lakshman some share in the glory of Sita and Rama and she achieves this through the total degradation of Sita. The dialogue is a failure.

Note the extremities in the lines where Sita recklessly fumes,

"He perishes -well, let him die!

His wife henceforth shall be mine own!

Can that thought deep imbedded lie

Within the heart's most secret zone!

Search well and see! One brother takes

His kingdom, - one would take his wife!

A fair partition!....................."

and the invocation of Lakshman,

"And oh ye sylvan gods that dwell

Among these dim and sombre shades,

Whose voices in the breezes swell

And blend with noises of cascades,

Watch over Sita, whom alone

I leave, and keep her safe from harm,

Till we return into our own,"
I and my brother, arm in arm.” 44

The poetic description for the gods sounds artificial in the grief-filled situation.

K R Srinivasa lyengar observes, “Yet another difficult situation is the colloquy between Sita and Lakshman. Sita is foolish and cruel and perverse, but Lakshman is wise and gentle and understanding. Against his better judgement he leaves her alone in the forest -

“He said, and straight his weapons took

His bow and arrows pointed keen,

Kind, - nay, indulgent, - was his look,

No trace of anger there was seen,

............................"

“Toru scores again through the simple sufficiency of her clear understanding of the tragedy at the heart of this old world drama.” 45

h. Jogadhya Uma

The only legend that is drawn from folklore, it is a lengthy dream-picture conjured up by Toru’s imagination. A tribute to her roots developed from her mother’s story- telling is told at the close of the ballad. (Absurd may be the tale I tell) 46
The picture of Uma is pure, majestic and lonely.

"While she, left lonely there, prepared
To plunge into the water pure,
And like a rose her beauty bared,
From all observances quite secure,
Not weak she seemed, nor delicate,
Strong was each limb of flexible grace;
And full the bust; the mien elate,
Like hers, the goddess of the chase
On Latmos hill, - ..........................." \(^{47}\)

Toru, though a Christian, was charmed by the ancient religious theme and gave it due respect.

"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,

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." \(^{48}\)
K R Srinivasa Iyengar observes, “As children, she and her brother and sister had heard the stories of the Hindu epics and Puranas, stories of mystery, miracle and local tradition, from the lips of her own mother. Later exploration in the original Sanskrit had given a keener poetic edge still to the stories and the legends. They really seemed to answer to a profound need for links with the living past of India, and she cared not if Christian or sceptic cavilled at her.”

I. Sita

It is a relatively short and pithy poem that conjures up the dream-picture of Sita, the heroine of the Ramayana. This requiem-like poem vindicates the Sita of Toru’s earlier poem Lakshman. To Mademoiselle Clarisse Bader, she wrote, “Can there be a more touching and lovable heroine than Sita? I do not think so. When I hear my mother chant, in the evening, the old lays of our country, I almost always weep. The plaint of Sita, when banished for the second time, she wanders alone in the vast forest, despair and horror filling her soul is so pathetic that I believe there is no one who could hear it without shedding tears.”

Toru has perfected the ballad-form here. It evokes an old vision of a hermitage in the forest. Three happy children are listening with rapt attention to their mother who paints the picture of a peaceful abode in the forest. There, Sita’s sad plight is depicted and the three little children shed tears with their heroine.

The picture fades as the children fall asleep.

“............... ’Tis hushed at the last
And melts the picture from their sight away,
Yet shall they dream of it until the day!
When shall those children by their mother's side
Gather, ah me! as erst at eventide?"  

Toru's loneliness and thoughts of her impending death and the memory of a lost brother and sister leaves the poem in a touching and nostalgic state.

Srinivasa Iyengar adds, "Sita stands apart, however. It begins with the nature description, but presently strikes the pure elegiac note - .......... Valmiki's hermitage stands vivid before our eyes, but even more vivid and haunting is Sita in her sorrows, and the three children - Abju, Aru, Toru herself-weeping.......... because Sita is weeping. This almost perfect poem is a tribute to Toru's mother's genius for story-telling, poignant elegy on the early death of Abju and Aru. Never had Toru written more feelingly or evoked a scene or an emotion as unforgettably."  

Charles Freer Andrews is full of Christian missionary zeal when he exclaims, "Only in a Christian home, in the middle of the last century in Bengal, could such a perfect blossom of song as that of Toru Dutt have shed forth its fragrance. The Christian spirit is all pervading; at the same time her faith itself causes her to love more deeply than ever the ballads and songs of her own Hindu past."

III. Original Poet

We have seen the various phases of Toru as a translator and transcreator. She has also given us many glimpses of her own native genius in some of her original works. She used different literary mediums to express herself - as a poet, novelist, essayist and writer of letters.
At the end of the ballads, there are seven personal poems added to the volume. They present certain experiences, which are autobiographical. These short lyrics were written over a period of seven years, from 1870 to 1877 that covers the whole of her brief literary career. They were written on particular occasions and each has a thought-provoking sentiment, unmistakably poignant and artistically crafted.

a. Near Hastings

Toru remembers a bygone incident when her sister Aru was alive. In her sub-conscious mind, thoughts of her own impending death lingers. Through the narration of a touching incident when a stranger was kind to the two sisters, Tom brings out a sharp contrast to the social isolation she faced in Calcutta in these lines.

"The lady's name I do not know,
Her face no more may see,
But yet, oh yet I love her so,
Blest, happy, may she be!"  

b. France 1870 and On the Fly leaf of Erckmann-Chatrian's Novel Entitled "Madame Therese"

The poems reveal Toru's empathy for France. France had become her chosen land. Though her sojourn in France was brief, she was enthralled by its culture and spirit of liberty and
throughout her life, her love and interest in its fortunes is evident. In France 1870 her sympathies belong to the fallen French army.

"Lo, she stands up, - stands up e'en now,
Strong once more for the battle fray,
Gleams bright the star, that from her brow,
Lighten the world. Bow nation, bow,
Let her again lead on the way!" 55

In Madame Therese, the exultation over a woman's courage to uphold the fallen standard of France is potentially painted. Here Toru proved what she had written in her diary, that she was an "indomitable and steadfast French Woman."

"I read the story and my heart beats fast!
Well-might all Europe quail before thee, France,
Battling against oppression! . . . . . .56

She also believed that the misfortunes of France, are due to her irreligious nature- "Oh France, how thou art brought low! Mayest thou, after this humiliation, serve and worship God better than thou hast done in those days - . . . . . .57 Toru was fifteen when she comprised these lines on France's miseries and it is little surprise that she was blissfully unaware of the political situation of her native country, while she pursued ardently the waves of political anarchy of a foreign nation.

109
Mademoiselle Clarisse Bader in her preface to the novel, *Le Journal de Mlle d'Arvers* observes, "Tom Dutt loved not only our language and literature, but also our country, and gave proof of her affection when France was dying. The child who was barely fifteen at the time, the Asiatic girl has drawn and written our patriotic sufferings with an anguish worthy of the heart of a French woman." 58

The Tree of Life

The last poem composed by Toru, it is a dream vision of the ailing poet. After the death of Aru, father and daughter had become close, much more through literary companionship, through the study of Sanskrit. A touching poem that reveals Toru’s longing for poetic fame that she knew would come if she were spared a few more years. In total resignation to the will of the Divine, she dreams her vision of hope

"Beside the tree an Angel stood; he plucked
A few small sprays, and bound them round my head
Oh, the delicious touch of those strange leaves!
No longer throbbed my brows, no more I felt
The fever in my limbs - "59

In her isolation and physical pain, learning, writing and publishing soothed her lingering fatigue.
The gentle and encouraging influence of her father, Govin Chunder Dutt is expressed in the lines,

“My hand was in my father’s and I felt,  
His presence near me. Thus we often past
In silence, hour by hour. What was the need
Of interchanging words when every thought
That in our hearts arose, was known to each,
And every pulse kept time?...........” 60

Padmini Sen Gupta observes, “This poem, verging on the mystic, is in my mind the best of Toru’s verse and the vision she sees is like Blake’s peep into the world of Divine Love. That she should in her supreme moment of happiness plead for her father also to be blessed shows how much she brooded on the fact that she would be taken from him and he would be left alone sorrowing, for his was not to be that divine vision - not yet.” 61

d. A Mon Pere

The concluding sonnet in the Sheaf is an apt tribute to Govin Chunder Dutt’s “assiduous toil” in shaping her poetic career.

“The flowers look loveliest in their native soil
Amid their kindred branches; plucked, they fade,
And lose the colours, Nature on them laid,
Would'st thou again new life in them infuse,
Thou who hast seen them where they brightly blow?
Ask Memory. She shall help my stammering Muse.”

e. The Sonnets - *Baugmaree* and *The Lotus*

Written in the Petrarchan rhyme scheme, the final couplets in both have imperfect rhyming scheme. They nevertheless reveal Toru’s susceptibility to Nature and its colours. Here we see her as a poet who revels in nature’s variegated colours of silver, yellow, red and green.

“And o’er the quiet pools the seemuls lean,
Red, red and startling like a trumpet’s sound.” (*Baugmaree*).

“Give me a flower delicious as the rose
And stately as the lily in her pride”


Then prayed, - “No, lily-white, -or, both provide,” (*The Lotus*).

Amaranatha Jha in his poetic volume writes that Toru is very sensitive to nature and specially to ‘colour’. But R E Khanna in his article on *Toru Dutt: Trail-blazing Poetess* reveals that except for the *golden bars* in her description of the palasa flowers, we do not have in her description of flowers words suggestive of any colour besides white and red.” 

112
They are delightful sonnets where Toru feels at home in her own native soil with its mystic beauty.

f. Our Casuarina Tree

A Memory poem filled with sorrowful nostalgia for a lost brother and sister. The tree is immortalised because it bears the memory of her childhood when she played with Abju and Aru beneath the casuarina. The first stanza describes the majestic bearing of the tree itself.

“Like a huge Python, winding round and round,
A Creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could live. But gallantly
The giant wears the scarf, .............”

It is followed by a delightful picture of life that surrounds the tree.

“Sometimes, and most in winter - on its crest
A gray baboon sits statue-like alone
Watching the sunrise, while on lower boughs
His puny offspring leap about and play;
And far and near kokilas hail the day;

Childhood memories follow thick and fast and Toru is caught between utter dejection and resignation to the Will.
"But not because of its magnificence

Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:

Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,

O sweet companions, loved with love intense,

For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear!

Blend with your images, it shall arise

In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!"

The fourth stanza personifies the tree in memory of her brother Abju who died before she and Aru went to Europe. The wailing of the tree is like a requiem song for Abju

"Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away,

In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,

When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith

And the waves gently kissed the classic shore

Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,

When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon;

And every time the music rose, - before

Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,

Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime

I saw thee, in my own loved native clime."

The final stanza is immortalising the tree with other "deathless trees" of Borrowdale.
Toru is a brief companion to the majestic and lonely tree outside her casement. She knew that soon she too must flit and add to the lament of the tree. So before her final parting, she consecrates a poem to the eternal symbolisation of the immortal tree. Nowhere in the other poems is seen a perfect blending of calm repose and mild urgency as in this poem. Though the sentiments of the Romantic and Victorian poetry are echoed, Toru's purpose is clear. She was coming into her own style and form, fully aware of its unfulfilment. Hence transferring her ambition to the image of the tree.

IV. Novels

Toru's two novels Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden and Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers are of biographical interest. Both were probably written after the death of Aru. These novels bear autobiographical touches and are artistically feminine in character. They deal with the beauty and pathos of life in young souls. Bianca and Marguerite bear touching resemblance of Toru, their creator. Through the portrayal of these characters, pure and simple, we see the universally loved nature of Toru herself, simple in giving and gracious in receiving the joys and miseries of life.

It is clear that the novels were written immediately after the death of Aru. This domestic and personal tragedy affected Toru's sensibility to a greater degree than conceived. The sad aspects of life, of death and ailments, dominate the tales. The death of Aru and thoughts of her own end was never far from the novelist's mind.
Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden

The novel opens with the funeral of Inez, the elder daughter of Mr. Alonso Garcia, a Spanish Gentleman, settled in an English village. In the cold drizzling February weather, Garcia and his only surviving daughter, Bianca, attend the funeral.

After the severe mourning by father and daughter for their beloved Inez, their bond became closer. Bianca nurses him back to health following his illness after the great loss. Toru compares the two sisters - Bianca is "as good as a son to him; beneath her girl’s bodice beat a heart as bold as any man’s; beneath her wavy curls was a head as sharp and intelligent as any mathematician’s .......Inez wants to be looked after; she is so loving, no wonder he loves her best. I should not be jealous.; I am strong; I can take care of myself." Bianca’s unselfish nature is evident in these lines.

A year later, Walter Ingram, Inez’s fiancé proposes to Bianca who rejects him. Eventually she falls in love with Lord Moore. Their love is opposed vehemently by Lady Moore. Mr. Garcia also opposes it with misgivings and insecurity. When their fervour is revealed, Garcia consents too late, for Bianca has already fallen grievously ill. She recovers slowly and spends a few weeks of bliss in Lord Moore’s company before the Crimean War took him away to the warfront. The novel breaks off here- “It was their last day. He was sitting beside her in the garden covered with dead leaves. She held his hand in her small brown one, firmly, tenderly; her eyes fixed on Lord Moore’s face. Every lineament of that dear face was being engraved in her heart. He must go, but the parting was hard, very hard. Presently he took off a small ring from his
watch-guard, and glided it on her marriage finger. "You will wear that for my sake, darling, and if I never return - "Her downcast eyelids quivered: -". 64

The casual dismissal of the novel by Govin Chunder Dutt in his Prefatory Memoir does not answer the profound and crystallised autobiographical notes in the novel. As earlier said, Toru must have intentionally put an end to the progress of the story. Mention of the novel is never made to her best friend Mary. Inez’s nature reflects the character of Aru - “We feel lonely without her, who was the life of our small family. She was so cheerful and happy always." 65 Mr. Garcia again is more or less a prototype of Govin Chunder Dutt. Bianca’s assessment of Garcia’s ways of affection for his daughters is reflective of Govin’s sonnet on his family, written in an earlier happy time when all his three children were alive and healthy. Here we see the difference between the two sisters.

“My next, the beauty of our home, is meek;
Not so deep-loving haply, but less wild
Then her dear brother; brow and blushing cheek
Her nature shows serene, and pure, and mild
As evening’s early star. And last of all,
Puny and elf-like, ..................
Self-willed and shy, ..................
” 66

Old Mr. Garcia’s smothering, obsessive care of Bianca after Inez’s death reveals to Bianca that though he expressed his love for Inez while she lived through occasional caressing gestures, it was for Bianca that he reserved his deepest respect, for he saw his younger daughter

117
even superior to him in courage and intelligence. He disliked Walter Ingram as a husband for Bianca, but he had accepted him as Inez’s fiancé - “You did well, child; he is a worthy boy, very good and frank; but I would not like you to marry him; he was well matched with Inez. I should have given her to him gladly; but I look for a different man for you.” But the scene drastically changes when Lord Henry Moore asks the hand of Bianca in marriage. He replies when Bianca says how miserable she shall be if he refuses her to marry the Lord, “So should I be if you left me to marry this Lord Moore.”

The novel in its unfinished and unpolished state with its apparent inconsistencies, can reveal another side to the gentle, caring father figure of Govin. Did a touch of selfishness enter his mild domain? But Toru’s gnawing and brooding physical weakness that never let off after her return to India was another cause, for Govin must have had misgivings about Toru’s delicate physic to bear the strains that accompany any happy marital bliss.

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119
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