Umo Rao “Writing in colonial space: A critical evaluation of the early nineteenth century Indian poetry in English” Thesis. Institute of English and Foreign languages, University of Calicut, 1999
Chapter - IV

TORU DUTT : REDEFINING MYTHOLOGY

(The) 'intolerable wrestle with words and meanings' has its aim to subdue the experience to the language, the exotic life to the imported tongue.

D.E.S. Maxwell

Toru Dutt was one of the two poets who represented a very crucial period of Bengal, a poet whose poems reflected a decisive turning point in the literature and culture of Bengal, the other poet being Michael Madhusudhan Dutt. Both the poets belonged to post colonial Bengal. Their poetry shared the quality of being "distinctively post colonial", of having "emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization" (Ashcroft, 1-2). Dutt was the product of the great interaction of cultures and religious faiths that occurred in Calcutta following the cultural and social reawakening heralded by Raja Rammohun Roy. The Bengali culture was enriched by a powerful language, a deep and colourful literature, art and music which could reach out and touch those deep chords within a person. Culture, like a living organism, can sustain and progress only when it shows adaptability to changing situations (Prasad, 1). The vibrant culture of Bengal was no doubt
very open to the changes that the social rebirth wrought and it moulded itself intricately to the new influences, the new tempers of the age. The manner in which the Bengali sense and sensibility encouraged the absorption of new ideas and trends which gave birth to native poetry written in a foreign language has been discussed in the previous chapter. The lively and vivacious Bengali nature, well-nurtured by its own rich art and culture, as seen in the bhadralok of Bengal, was quick and eager to pick up and discover new forms of art and culture which the gateway to European education offered. The European influence in Bengal which prompted the youth there to westernize mentally, socially and spiritually is described as the "jettisoning of India in favour of a foreign culture", by Dr.H.M.Williams, "ultimately self-unfolding whose impulse comes from the centre of its own being" (Galaxy 14). Dutt was aptly the daughter from the marriage of "the adventurous West and East of the immortal tranquility" (The Bengali Book xiii-xiv).

Dutt was born into a family distinguished for its literary talents, the renowned Dutt family of Rambagan on March 4, 1856 to Govin Chunder Dutt and Kshetramoni. Theirs was one of the aristocratic families of Bengal with Govin Chunder Dutt himself being a philanthropist, a very well-read man, deeply interested in literature and poetry. He was also one of the early poets of Bengal and had brought out along with his brothers a volume of poems called The Dutt Family Album. This was one family that responded whole-heartedly to the winds of change sweeping the religious facet
of society. Deeply attracted towards the ideals of Christianity, the entire Dutt family converted itself to Christianity in the year 1862 and left for foreign shores.

In India and African countries the dominant imperial language and culture were privileged over the people's tradition (Ashcroft, 26). Thus Dutt's birth into perhaps the most talented family in Bengal and the education obtained in French and English first-hand from France and England were two important factors that moulded and developed the innate poetic talent and literary taste residing in this young girl's mind and heart.

The impact of postcolonialism can be very vividly envisaged in the flowering of the young poet's life and works. The migration to a superior and advanced country had resulted in "the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior racial or cultural model ..." (Ashcroft, 9). A major displacement in various aspects had occurred: a change of religion, a change of place, an introduction into two alien and apparently superior languages - French and English. This led to an involuntary suppression of the latent Indianness within the poet. This in turn brought about an identification with French people, French poets and French literature which enthused the young poet to translate into English the poetic works of about twenty French poets. The work covered almost all the well-known poets of the French literature and some
lesser-known poets too. The translations were done by Dutt and her elder sister, Aru, a major part of it by Dutt herself. Without any explicit avowal, Toru's translations assume the character of 'transcreations', which is not surprising because of her own temperament being attuned to that of French - a temperament that expresses one's nostalgia for the unceasing quest for love, freedom and beauty or the dilemmas of Self (B.Gupta, 14). The work was A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields, the only book published during the lifetime of the poet and a book that brought Dutt a lot of well-deserved international acclaim. Edmund Gosse in his Introductory Memoir to Dutt's later and posthumous work Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan declared:

To the end of her days, Toru was a better French than English scholar. She loved France best, she knew its literature best, she wrote its language with more perfect elegance. Indeed some of the pieces translated strike us for their reflection on the young poet's personality as the one below:

My Vocation - Beranger

A waif on this earth,
Sick, ugly and small,
Contemned 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.

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 grasses that ring,
Still - still comes that reply,
Chant poor little thing

(The Hindu Patriot, April 3, 1876)

The opening lines of this poem are reminiscent of Govin Chunder Dutt's own description of Dutt:

Puny and elf-like, with dishevelled tresses,
Self-willed and shy, ne'er heeding that I call,
Intent to pay her tenderest addresses
To bird or cat, - but most intelligent.

(Life and Letters 11)

Another poem which brings forth the duality of the bicultural impact on the poet, is the concluding sonnet 'A mon Pere':

The flowers look loveliest in their native soil,
Amid their kindred branches, plucked, they fade,
And lose the colours Nature on them laid,
Though bound in garlands with assiduous toil.
Pleasant it was, afar from all turmoil,
To wander through the valley, now in shade
And now in sunshine, where these blossoms made
A Paradise, and gather in my spoil.
But better than myself no man can know
How tarnished have become their tender hues
E'en in the gathering, and how dimmed their glow!
Wouldst thou again now life in them infuse,
Thou who hast seen them where they brightly blow?
Ask memory. She shall help my stammering muse.

(The Hindu Patriot, April 3, 1876)

One finds it difficult upon perusing this piece to believe that this is but a translation. The sheer fact that this poem among others was published in many magazines and dailies (The Bengalee, May 27, 1876; The Indian Ladies Magazine, No.7, Vol.X, January, 1911) shows the extent of attention received by Dutt's A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields in India and abroad. It was no doubt this work that expressed through its pages the promise, the talent, the rich poetic quality that coursed through the poet's veins. The work received rave reviews in many of the leading Indian journals.
The extensive knowledge she displays and the command she shews over the English tongue appears to us simply marvellous, when we learn that the accomplished authoress is yet in her teens. Occasional quotations and references in the work under review shew that she has some knowledge of German and Sanskrit. The work of translation has been so well done that the spirit of poetry breathes through every line. While the original has been followed very closely, there is no slavish adherence to the letter at a sacrifice of the true spirit of song.

(The Bengalee, May 27, 1876)

As though in representation of the citizens of Bengal, most of these dailies culminated their lines of acclaim and praise for Dutt with a hope that some day she might return to her own country and render an equally brilliant or even more spirited work of translation of our own Sanskrit verses into English or hopefully in the native Bengali tongue itself.

The intrinsic value of Ancient Ballads lies in the fact that this volume can be picked up, read and enjoyed by any generation of people, be they young or old. The ballads in this volume deal with the most oft-heard stories of Hindu mythology -- those of Savitri, Lakshman, Dhruva, Buttoo, Prahlad, Sindhu, Sita, and Bharat. The success of this volume lies in the narrative talent
of the poet, her power to entice the reader, get hold of the reader's mind and soul and keep the reader captive. The ultimate success of the poet lies in her individual style of taking the well-known mythological characters from the Hindu epics and Puranas to tackle certain burning contemporary social issues of the time.

The poet's choice of these subjects tell upon the poet's own personality, individuality and attitude towards life. On studying these poems individually, one would perceive that Dutt on selecting these particular immortal characters of Indian mythology has in reality, sought to present those innate, inherent, humane qualities which always stand the test of time and form the essence of life, literature and art. Above all, one would realize that at a deeper scale, Dutt has sought to revolutionize these immortal mythological characters through a current and very relevant reinterpretation of the values they stand for. Hence, as an outcome of this evaluation, the poet confirms the immortality, the permanence of these representatives of Hindu mythology and the qualities they stand for. This also forms a reply to the many twisted interpretations of the Hindu epics and Puranas made by the colonialist writers. All the while, the duality within the poet and the tug between the East and West express themselves in most of her poems. For, even after her return to India and to the myths of her native land, it was but natural that at least some strains of her Western upbringing surfaced in her poetry.
'Savitri' as the title denotes, takes the reader to an age where Sthri denoted a liberated personality. 'Savitri' is a mythological tale which showed that:

In those far-off primeval days
Fair India's daughters were not pent
In closed zenanas . . . .

What strikes the reader immediately is an echo of Dutt's own voice, because she was born unto an age that exhorted the social freedom of woman. In Savitri, Dutt must have envisaged another "child of a society of freedom" who was "the first Indian feminist" (Mukherjea, 61). The poet in retelling the well-known story of Savitri in English has a greater cause to serve than a mere translation of this tale from the original Sanskrit to English. As has been noted earlier, the period during which Dutt wrote this poem was a time of abject deterioration in the social values of people, a period when woman was a highly victimized person inflicted with child-marriage and bride-burning. The abolition of sati was a much discussed and talked-about topic. 'Savitri' is Dutt's effort, Dutt's manner of effectively dealing with one of the important issues of the period. Savitri thus becomes a symbol of not just eternal love but of liberty too. In the delineation of Savitri, one observes a total unity of the poet with the subject.

Savitri's confrontation with Death for the cause of her husband has been etched superbly by Dutt. It seems as though the
poet has merged with her subject, Savitri, in charming Death to give up Satyavan. At the very outset, by the unusual description of Death, Death himself is caught unawares. The portrayal of Death is memorable:

Upon his head he wore a crown
That shimmered in the doubtful light;
His vestment scarlet reached low down,
His waist, a golden girdle tight,
His skin was dark as bronze; his face
Irradiate, and yet severe;
His eyes had much of love and grace,
But glowed so bright, they filled with fear.

Dutt is the only poet to have afforded "love and grace" to the eyes of Yama. It is indeed a paradox to offer a touch of humanity to Death. The attitude of Savitri on setting her eyes upon Yama makes Yama himself taken aback, for Savitri asks,

... in obeisance bent her brow,
"No mortal form is thine", - she said,
"Beseech thee say what god art thou,
And what can be thine errand here?"

knowing fully well what Death's intentions were. Undaunted, she follows Death, speaking of the illusory world and the humanity in
it, of human duties, till death grants her the desire of Satyavan's life regained.

In the interaction between Savitri and Yama, at a secondary level, one can visualize an interaction between the positive and negative features of society, between the demand for freedom for woman and the suppression of this freedom.

In Savitri's address to Death, Dutt has literally softened the harsh contours of Death's awesome countenance with 'patience, kindness, mercy, love'.

... and they abhor

The Truth which thou wouldst aye instil,

If they thy nature knew aright,

O god, all other gods above!

And that thou conquerest in the fight

By patience, kindness, mercy, love,

And not by devastating wrath,

They would not think in childlike fright

To see thy shadow on their path,

But hail thee as sick souls the light."

The picture of Savitri and Satyavan presently returning overjoyed to the cottage is exquisite.
In one fair hand, the saw she took,
The other with a charming grace
She twined around him, and her look
She turned upwards to his face.

Dutt, in sketching this picture, has immortalized the
timeless image of man and woman, arm in arm as life-partners that
enshrines the many precious love-stories of Indian mythology.
'Savitri' is the best-composed ballad by Dutt where her narrative
power, the simple but extremely lyrical lines and the energetic and
spirited verses are in their elements, where in a very subtle but
firm manner, the poet gets the message across to the society that to
move ahead with the times, to achieve progress in the community,
oppression at all levels must be put to an end.

A factor that cannot be overlooked in most of the lines
of this poem is the repetition of words one comes across in the poet's
composition, as in,

It was that fatal, fatal speech
To-day, - to-day - it will be seen

Again, earlier in Savitri's justification of her choice of her mate,

"Once, and once only, all submit
To Destiny, - 'tis God's command;
Once, and once only, so 'tis writ,
    Shall woman pledge her faith and hand;
Once, and once only, can a sire
    Unto his well-loved daughter say, . . .

and finally in,

This, this is death . . . .

It appears that Dutt has brought about a deliberate repetition to complete the rhyme. But the flaws pale into insignificance in the wake of the graphic beauty of the woods, the hermitage and:

Of the late risen moon that lines
    With silver all the ghost-like trees,
Sals, tamarisks and South-Sea pines,
    And palms whose plumes wave in the breeze.

If 'Savitri' is a poem that brings home to our minds a progressive period when the ideal of liberty was held in high esteem, if this poem reinforces those innate qualities which form the epitome of a chaste, virtuous woman whose love for her husband was akin to devotion, 'Lakshman' symbolises the absolute loyalty of one for his brother. The poem is an interesting departure in poetic craft (Sethusavitri, 38). Lakshman is "the portrait of the ideal
brother, a splendid picture of chivalry and self control" (Das, 333). In 'Lakshman', Sita comes across not just as a mythological character as the wife of Rama but as a human being, a woman to be particular, prone to human emotions and human provocations. Again, as a woman, Sita comes across not as a meek and submissive character but as an authoritative and dominant person, one aware of her rights, one capable of battling for her rights and getting her demand accomplished. The title of the poem, 'Lakshman' is misleading since it is Sita who plays the dominating role, Sita who controls the situation.

In the portrayals of both Savitri and Sita, the concept of feminism is at the forefront. The feminist dimension of the poem bears a direct relevance to the Western educational and social background of the poet. The aristocratic family to which Dutt belonged, the European education at its best quality that she had received, the independent attitude that she had acquired as a result, blended with the knowledge of her own country's heritage and its epics which have always spoken of the superior status of woman in her different roles. These factors, which are very deeply embedded in the poet's psyche, get projected in the feminist sketches of Savitri and Sita.

The ballad depicts Sita who is worried, excited and upset all at once on hearing the voice of her husband Rama, calling out for help. There is an attempt at psychological delineation of
character and the story is not in narration but in dramatic dialogue (Sethusavitri, 38). Taunts and scorn, mockery and sarcasm, -- Sita employs all these weapons at random to mobilise Lakshman into action. But though aghast at Sita's accusations, Lakshman emerges as the downright loyal and devoted brother that he is. Unable to retort to any of Sita's accusations and hurt deeply by Sita's strong words, he is perforce to break his principle, to disobey Rama's orders and leave Sita alone. With a keen knowledge of the dangerous step he has but no choice to take, Lakshman calls out to

... ye sylvan Gods, that dwell

    Among this 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 unto our own,
    I and my brother, arm in arm.

A sense of foreboding descends as Lakshman leaves Sita to venture in search of Rama,

... Hoarse the vulture screamed,

    As out he strode with dauntless air.

A striking aspect of this ballad is no doubt the style in which Sita's accusations and Lakshman's heart-rending responses
to them are dealt with at an emotional and psychological level by the poet. The poem, from a different perspective, is an eye-opener. The tug between Lakshman and Sita, her taunts thrown at Lakshman to rouse him to move, his final decision to go and the eventual results could well signify the status of nineteenth-century Bengal with the tug between the East and West, the bend of society towards the West due to the latter's superiority, the resultant discarding of values of the East in order to ape the West, with the eventual chain of results that continue till date. The psychological picture presented through 'Lakshman' offers an unmistakable parallel in the stream of thought existent in nineteenth-century Bengal, during the period Dutt wrote the poem.

India, a colony "of intervention and exploitation had traditional, precolonial cultures which continued to coexist with the new imperial forms" (Ashcroft, 26). It was this precolonial culture that was beckoning Dutt. The Sanskrit language, the scriptures, the mythology, the music, the folklore which assimilates the indigenous culture, the essentially Indian spirit were very vibrant in Bengal and had aroused in the poet's mind the dormant rhyme and rhythm of her native soil.

What the poet was undergoing was nothing short of a post colonial crisis of identity where the native culture which so long had been suppressed by a presumably superior language and culture, now came to the forefront and moved the poet to utilize or
appropriate the superior language to express her own Indian
tradition and heritage. In a parallel plane, the deterioration in the
values of the rich native culture might have urged the poet to
socially reconstruct these ideals, to reinstate these principles once
again in the society which she endeavoured to achieve through the
Ancient Ballads.

Dutt offers one of the best studies of a poet who lived,
 Experienced and wrote in a post colonial ambience. Beginning with
her life, the dichotomy was prevalent in practically every sphere.
Toru's own room was furnished half in English and half in Bengali
style (P. Sengupta, 162). Having learnt and almost mastered French
and English, she involuntarily turned towards her root language,
Sanskrit. Her desire to learn this language was natural and
expected while it was merely a question of time and precedence that
qualified her return to the origin. The very fact that she handled
two foreign languages adeptly made it more imperative for her to
get back to her roots.

An identical attraction, a pull towards the native soil
was experienced in the other spheres too - religious and cultural.
Though for all purposes she formally accepted Christianity, the
potent streak of Hinduism constantly stirred within her and was
aroused by the songs and myths of the yore. It should be obvious
that Christianity while mellowing her sensitivity, has sharpened
her perceptions of the need for rediscovering, if not recovering, her
half-forsaken traditions of Hinduism which could possibly cure her of ruptured cultural consciousness (B.Gupta, 11).

The Ancient Ballads was first published in 1882 with an Introductory Memoir by Sir Edmund Gosse. It is in Ancient Ballads that we see the great interaction in the life of Toru Dutt, her deep bond with her roots in Bengal, her family background, her childhood days marked by the age old Vedic and Upanishadic tales told and retold to her by her mother, the serene atmosphere of her garden house, 'Baugmaree' and the intense presence of nature all around it. Toru's own readings in Sanskrit as well as her mother's instructions enabled her to perceive the ethical meaning with which many of the ancient legends were charged ... (A.Bose, 20).

A typical example is 'Jogadhya Uma' which is perhaps the best-told tale in the entire collection. The poem possesses an ethereal aura. On reading it, memories of a typical Bengali village come rushing to one's mind. The poem attracts us further because it does not form a part of any famed epic but comes from the Indian folklore, heightening the native flavour of the poem. It is a tale Dutt heard from her favourite old family nurse, Suchee.

The poem opens with the break of dawn at Khirogram. The very name of the village is musical and seems to denote, abundance and fertility, indicating, "here's God's plenty". The mud road of Khirogram,
... a red, red line,

the meadows veiled in mist, the trees kissed by dew suggest the
beginning of a new day with the pedlar winding his way through,
singing out,

"Shell bracelets ho! shell bracelets ho!
Fair maids and matrons come and buy!"

Past the village road, the simpleton pedlar reaches the
bathing-ghat of the tank, where a fair lady sits, eager to buy the
bracelets. She lifts her hand against the sun to examine the
bracelet round her wrist and guides the pedlar to the village temple,
where her father is the priest. The pedlar is requested to approach
her father for the price of the shell bracelets. Should it be that there
were no money with her father,

... - then reveal,

"Within the small box, marked with streaks
of bright vermilion, by the shrine,
The key whereof has lain for weeks
Untouched, he'll find some coin - 'tis mine.

The portrait of the vermilion - streaked box kept by the shrine is
that of a typical Hindu bhandar, essentially Indian in idea.
The meeting of the pedlar and the priest, the latter rather puzzled at first by the pedlar's report, followed by the dawning revelation of the vision who had blessed the pedlar with her Divine sight is very skilfully related by Dutt.

The conversation between the saintly priest and the simple and timid pedlar is very easily imaginable in Bengali. The gradual realization of the actual meeting with the goddess at the Dhamaser Ghat reveals itself on the pedlar's countenance. The manner in which he suddenly drops the basket of bracelets to make a dash to the Ghats again for one more divine Vision, with the priest following closely at his heels is very graphically expressed.

The Goddess then answers their prayer by showing the white bracelet - adorned hand.

And still, before the temple shrine
Descendants of the pedlar pay
Shell-bracelets of the old design
An annual tribute . . . .

The poem's beauty lies in its unalloyed simplicity. It is typically Bengali in expression and in location, except of course for the oft-pointed "manse" of the priest which indeed is quite a flaw in an otherwise lovely song. The white shell-bracelets described in the poem, even today adorn the wrists of the married ladies of Bengal.
The folk element in "Jogadhya Uma" and in its rustic Indian expressions make the poem all the more appealing and outstanding in the midst of the poems on the well-known heroes, kings and queens present in *Ancient Ballads*. It definitely is the best-loved piece in the entire volume.

Dutt's dilemma in being torn between the traditional and the modern, the East and the West, the old and the new emerges in every poem. Examining the tones of the three poems, "Savitri", "Lakshman" and "Jogadhya Uma", one winces the poet's upholding the virtue of liberty in depicting Savitri's character on one hand, while on the other she extols the duty of a woman to follow her husband with a love akin to devotion. Once again "Lakshman" depicts the inability to choose the best path out of two given options, the trauma wrought by this tension and the crisis that results from the ultimate choice. It also portrays the conflict between feminism and masculinism, between dominance and submissiveness. In "Jogadhya Uma", the poet finds qualities of beauty and an old-world richness in the very simplicity of an age-old myth. In the very style of treatment of the subject, there is a dialectical trend evinced by the poet which is the externalisation of the inner duality conferred on the artist by colonialism. This factor makes itself inescapable and at the same time involuntary. It manifests in the product of every post colonial artist. Thus, so far one observes a certain pattern of development in Dutt's psyche.
In the next poem, 'Royal Ascetic and the Hind', "the extent to which Christian piety liberalised her outlook can be seen in her argument in defence of the royal ascetic... (Kotoky, 22) that brought her to disagree,

With what the Brahman sage would fain imply
As the concluding moral of his tale,
That for the hermit-king it was a sin
To love his nursling... 

Critics like C.F. Andrews and E.J. Thompson chose to give a Christian aura to her efforts and vouched for the Christian religion to be the basic source of inspiration for her to come forth with such moving and poignant verses. C.F Andrews believed that "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 (Kotoky, 18).

The poem relates the story of King Bharat who, renouncing all worldly ties and pleasures, retires to a hermitage only to find his senses of love and pity aroused anew by the sight of a newborn hind which he then takes under his care. Dutt in etching the saintly life of Bharat in the forest, shows that man is basically human be he a king of the past or a sage of the present period. Being human, the human feelings of love, pity, companionship and joy would be inherent in any person. The poet's expression of the
acceptance of the human world with all its joys and sufferings may be taken as a legacy of Western humanism (Kotoky, 22). It is merely in vain that the *Vanaprastha* stage exhorts one to denounce all the natural emotions present in a person. Thus in reality,

... 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;
For that was to abandon duties high,

Finally, studying the poem, we are also made to share the poet's declaration, that,

Not in seclusion, not apart from all,
Not in a place elected for the peace,
But in the heat and bustle of the world,
'Mid sorrow, sickness, suffering and sin,
Must he still labour with a loving soul
Who strives to enter through the narrow gate.

In 'The Legend of Dhruva', contrary to her independent attitudes in the other poems, Dutt appears to be actually favouring the doctrine of Karma. Dhruva, the son of the less favoured queen Suneetee of King Uttanapado is deeply injured by Suruchee's pronouncement:
Knowst thou not,
Fair prattler, thou art sprung, - not, not from mine,
But from Suneetee's bowels? Learn thy place.

A child's mind is very delicate and easily affected. When Dhruva, hurt to the quick, hastened for consolation to his mother's side, it was only to learn of Karma and the fruits of Karma which is little consolation for a tender child! One wonders why Dutt has here merely related the legend without offering her impression on the event. Ot is it that through Dhruva's reply Dutt also echoes that,

... Thy words of consolation find
Nor resting-place, nor echo in this heart

Is it an echo of the disturbance in the poet's own heart, an echo of her ambivalence? Were not the rigours of 'the woods where hermits live', and the 'prayer and penance' too harsh a method to 'collect a large sum of the virtues' for such a young and tender child? Dhruva embodies the ideals of self-denouncement in one's devotion to duty (B.Gupta, 12).

'Buttoo' is a poem which is very much Indian in its tone, its theme and its style. 'Buttoo' holds aloft the utmost veneration and devotion that a disciple possesses for his guru, his teacher, his master. The West would do well to learn something
from the East in this, and it would be difficult to find a parallel for the act related in this poem - an act of supreme obedience even to the point of absolute self-renunciation and self-maiming on the part of the pupil towards a master who had but made him a jest and a laughing stock before others (Das, 336).

The concept of casteism and its ensuing evils like untouchability are brought to the forefront in 'Buttoo'. The manner in which the chief character is introduced to the readers as "the hunter's low-born son" indicates the relegation of the occupation of hunting to somewhere in the lowest rungs of society. It also signifies the impossibility of such a class of people to even desire to acquire knowledge of an art which definitely was meant for the upper echelons of the society. 'Buttoo' once again makes the society realize the extreme negativity of the belief in untouchability which the society could rather do well without. Untouchability and the segregation of castes into water-tight compartments were indeed rampant during the early years of nineteenth century. The poem votes for equality for all through the story of Buttoo and its moral. This once again reveals the impact of Westernism on the poet, the absolute assimilation of the French ideals of equality and liberty in the poet which induces the poet to raise arms against such a feudal practice that prevailed in the society of her era. The poem mouths the revolt against such a shameful practice and emerges with victory for the "child of a lesser god".
'Buttoo' shows how in those days, aeons back, caste and colour were given undue value. Buttoo, "a hunter's low-born son" had no seat as a disciple under the famed Dronacharya's tutelage. He was scorned and made fun of before the royal Pandava and Kaurava princes. And so he proceeded towards the woods, where he was determined to attain the art of archery by dint of hard practice. The exotic description that follows of the trees in the woods have been quoted in full by many a writer. That Dutt had a special place in her heart for Nature and Nature's bounty in woods and trees is easily surmisable, because it is not this once that we experience the sheer beauty of the Indian forest. We are brought to share the wonder of trees in many of Dutt's poems and Dutt's letters.

What glorious trees! The sombre saul
On which the eye delights to rest,
The betel-nut,- a pillar tall,
With feathery branches for a crest,
The light-leaved tamarind spreading wide,
The pale faint-scented bitter neem,
The seemul, gorgeous as a bride,
With flowers that have the ruby's gleam,
The Indian fig's pavilion tent
In which whole armies might repose,
With here and there a little rent,
The sunset's beauty to disclose,
The bamboo boughs that sway and swing
'Neath bulbuls as the south wind blows,
The mangoe-tope, a close dark ring,
Home of the rooks and clamorous crows.

The Champac, bok and South-sea pine,
The nagessur with pendant flowers
Like ear-rings, - and the forest vine
That clinging over all, embowers,
The sirish famed in Sanscrit song
Which rural maidens love to wear,
The peepul giant-like and strong,
The bramble with its matted hair.

All these, thousands, thousands more,
With helmet red, or golden crown,
Or green tiara, rose before
The youth in evening's shadows brown.

One may argue against the possibility of the entire collection in a single forest; or the unnecessarily long and winding diversion from the subject of the poem. But the splendour of the scene before the reader, the perfection of detail, the art of very subtly painting the picture with just the right stroke which Dutt has excelled in leaves one breathless with wonder.

The "sombre saul", "the seemul, georgeous as a bride",
"the Indian fig's pavilion tent", the swaying bamboos, the clinging
vines, the giant peepul together form a very heady presentation indeed. The striking element of the passage is that there is nothing blatant about the lines. It is soft and subtle or majestic and awe-inspiring in keeping with the Nature that unravels before the reader.

Again, as Buttoo goes deeper and deeper into the forest and dusk descends, Buttoo's forehead is gemmed with pearls! It is definitely an original style of depicting a brow dotted with perspiration. The utterly pure atmosphere of the forest, of the animals residing there make Buttoo revel:

"They touch me", ... 
"They have no pride of caste like men, 
They shrink not from the hunter-boy, 
Should not my home be with them then?

The reverence which the boy possesses for his teacher Drona, who had but refused to accept him, remains throughout unflinched. The poem reveals the absolute respect one bestows on one's teacher or guru in the ancient Indian system of learning. This reverence is the elemental principle imparted to the disciple and becomes the highest form of the *dakshina*, the gift which the disciple offers his guru. A glimpse of the *guru shishya parampara* which forms the basis of learning in Indian philosophy is brought before the reader's view. Thus when Drona asks for his due as *dakshina*, Buttoo readily offers,
"All that I have, O Master mine,
All I shall conquer by my skill,
Gladly shall I to thee resign,
Let me but know thy gracious will."

and at Drona's behest of 'thy right hand thumb' the young boy does not think twice of cutting it off to offer his guru. The poem shows how in Indian culture, the disciple shows utter devotion for his tutor. Buttoo is essentially Indian in thought and spirit and has been dealt classically by Dutt.

The influence of the childhood days could never be overlooked, when sitting by the fireside in the evenings, three pairs of eyes would be brimming with tears, listening to the mythological tales and folklore narrated by their mother. "The genius of man dives deep into the dreams of childhood. Children's stories form the real basis of any heart-inspired poetry," wrote a French critic; and ballads are in essence the child-literature of the past (Life and Letters, 330).

It was the memory of those tales, deeply imprinted in Dutt's mind, which caused her to take up Sanskrit and read for herself the epic-stories of Ramayana and Mahabharatha with its manifold entwining tales and sub-tales. Harihar Das, in his essay "The Classical Traditions in Toru Dutt's Poetry", declares : "These classics embody the highest ideals of culture and civilization in
ancient India . . . it seems prophetic that Toru Dutt should have been the first of her sex to interpret the soul of India to the West . . . 

"(Asiatic, 696). Dutt while familiarizing herself with the antique culture, observed that Sanskrit was as old and as grand a language as the Greek, and the legends selected by her for the collection, were as traditional for Indian culture as the Greek myths were for Hellenism (Kalinnikova, 32).

The poem 'Sindhu' shows a fundamental aspect of Indian culture that one's first and foremost duty is towards one's parents. Filial obligation is a fundamental and crucial aspect sought for in every Indian's character. It is a very relevant aspect of the close-knit Indian family system where parents, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts possess a very close bond -- an affinity one hardly comes across in the West, where the independent streak is more prevalent. Dutt portrays how old age makes one ill of health and trying in nature. Sindhu, the only son of such a pair of old parents is their sole prop now, and devoted, he stays at their beck and call, unambitious for worldly cares or fame, in the midst of a forest.

The poem emphasizes once again the powerful role of Karma in every Indian life: "as you sow, so shall you reap". For having unwittingly killed a dove, Sindhu is cursed to be accidentally killed and for having killed Sindhu, though unknowingly, and for making his parents grieve to death, Dasarath is also cursed to die
unable to bear the loss of his son. The rule of *Karma* is that the fruits of one's deeds, be they good or bad, follow one to the deserved goal. The poem as such cannot be judged as outstanding as some of Dutt's other poems. One can sense a lack of maturity in the style which makes one surmise that this must have been one of Dutt's earlier sketches.

'Prablad' portrays a child's unflinching faith in God even at the face of a tyrannical father.

The description of Narasimha in the poem is given a deliberate, hazy effect,

A stately sable warrior sprang,
Like some phantasma of the brain

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!

Eastern ... is the denouement wherein the tyrant is miraculously struck dead by the direct intervention of the Gods, and his son proclaimed king in his stead (Das, 337). Dutt has done justice in portraying the picture of a cruel, oppressive king that appears often in several instances in Indian mythology. Dutt has
also succeeded in transferring "some potency of Sanskrit tradition to English language" (Prasad, 18).

In all these ancient themes, "the vocabulary is just enough archaic to distance the story from our times - it is the dim antiquity of India that is evoked here but the tone of voice makes it sound as something which happened but the day before" (Narasimhaiah, 26). This remark of Professor C.D.Narasimhaiah, though made with reference to 'Savitri', is applicable to all the legends and ballads narrated by Dutt. 

'Sita', the last poem of the series, is a dream-picture conjured up by 'three happy children in a darkened room' who are listening to the sad story of Sita as it falls from their mother's lips in song (Das, 337). 'Sita' is the only example of the sonnet-form in this series. The poem has an old-world charm. The lines seem to be suspended by illusive chains over a dream-like sylvan spot, a forest "where no sunbeam pries", where quiet flows the lake in which swans glide smoothly. One almost feels the hush descending over this hauntingly divine area where fair Sita weeps. The poem tugs at the heart-strings of any reader. It is definitely one of the best creations of Dutt where without narrating any tale as such she has succeeded in creating a breathtaking atmosphere. The picture of three keen pairs of eyes captured by the sad and lovely tale sung softly by their mother as the pale light of dusk descends on to the
scene comes very vividly to the reader's mind. Unknowingly, the reader's eyes also often fill with tears.

... 'Tis hushed at last
And melts the picture from their sight away.

The culminating lines of the poem,

When shall those children by their mother's side
Gather, ah me! as erst at eventide?

are the most tender and touching lines written by Dutt; they are, to quote Iyengar, a "poignant elegy on the early death of Abju and Aru" (Indian Writing 71).

Could these culminating lines further be questioning those who had deserted, who had cast away all the inherent values and heritage of their motherland, as embodied in the Sita of the poem? Could it be a plea to them to come back to those basic, innate principles that formed the essence of India? Could it be a reminder of the presence of the spark of Indianness within them which was momentarily dimmed by a blast of Westernism? Bearing in mind the social and cultural circumstances in which the poet wrote, keeping track of the path chosen by the post colonial natives, one cannot help but ask these questions. Despite and beyond all these queries, there remains no doubt that this poem is above all a
dedication to the poet's mother, for the lovely tales she narrated during the childhood days of the three children, for the impact it had made in the poet, lasting all this while.

The literary atmosphere of her home provided all the necessary impetus for the poet. The prevailing social conditions exhorting the freedom of women created a deep impact in Dutt's heart. The socio-cultural hue of Bengal reflected itself in Dutt's poetry. The timeless traditions of her native country gave Dutt rich food for poetry. She was the first poet to dive into the mythology of India and emerge with certain priceless, immortal gems. Enshrining them in her poems in her own individual style, she offered the world a glimpse into the rich legends and folklore of her country. Defining the quality of Indianness, M.K.Naik stresses the fact by stating the manner in which "the poetry of A.K.Ramanujan shows how an Indian poet in English can derive strength from going back to his roots" (Studies 74). Dutt doubtless is one of the earliest and most outstanding example of the true Indian poet.

Technically most of the poems are perfect, mostly rendered in rhymed octosyllabic lines. "The technical skill of this poetess is superior to that of any of her predecessors and this in view of her extreme youth, is little short of amazing" (Dunn, xxv). Repeating what K.R.S.Iyengar comments, "Toru is reasonably at home in them all," (Indian Writing 70) "them" being the four-line
ballad stanza, the eight-line octosyllabic stanza and the blank verse.

Following these ballads and legends in *Ancient Ballads* are added seven 'Miscellaneous Poems'. But the very term "miscellaneous" belies the contents. These poems were discovered amongst Toru's papers after her death (Das, 338). "Of far higher poetical value and deserving much more attention than they have received, are the half-dozen intensely personal poems which follows the Ballads," says Thompson (*Life and Letters* 343). The poems immortalize certain incidents in Dutt's life which created a deep impression in her mind and heart and were unforgettable. Dutt has, through these poems, passed on its nature to be shared by the reader. Some of them contain truly touching and tender lines, moving the reader's heart.

The first poem of the series, 'Near Hastings' is one such poem. The poet recalls the autumn when Aru was suffering from the baneful cough. The two of them were walking down the beach near Hastings, Aru under the tender care and protection of her sister.

A lady passing them observed that the two girls were strangers to France. She noted that Aru was ailing. She then offered the girls a bunch of beautiful red roses. The love with which the gift was offered moved the girls to the core. 'Near Hastings' forms a tribute to the lady from Dutt,
Her memory will not depart,
Though grief my years should shade,
Still bloom her roses in my heart!
And they shall never fade!

'France 1870' brings out Dutt's passionate love for France and the ideals of liberty and equality she embodies. Though Dutt had spend a mere few months in France, so intimately did she identify herself with everything that was French that "French became her favourite language and France the country of her election" for ever in life (Madhavananda and Majumdar, 400). She is full of grief at the fall of France.

Head of the human column, thus
Ever in swoon wilt thou remain?
Thought, freedom, truth, quenched ominous,
Whence then shall hope arise for us,
Plunged in the darkness all again?

Dutt was such a devout Christian, that she believed that France had falled into bad times due to the bad deeds of her citizens. Now that they had learnt from their deeds, she was confident that France would rise up again.

"Alas! thousands and thousands of men," says she in her diary, "have shed their hearts' blood for their
country, and yet their country has fallen into the hands of their enemies. Is it because many were deeply immersed in sin and did not believe in God? There have been, however, and there are still, thousands among them who fear God. O France, France, how thou art brought low! Mayst thou, after this humiliation, serve and worship God better than thou hast done in those days - poor, poor France, how my heart bleeds for thee!" (Das, 38)

This was written in 1870 as also this poem on France where Dutt sees the proverbial silver lining for France.

... Bow nations, bow,
Let her again lead on the way!

The emotions in the lines of France 1870 are close to an ardent devotion.

'The Tree of Life' has an ethereal aura about it. The dreamy quality of the poem has a notable cause behind it.

With reference to this poem, Mr. Dutt copied as follows from his memorandum books for Miss Martin - it is dated as far back as April 16, 1877 -
Yester evening when the candles were lighted, Toru told me, in very low whispers and with some agitation, a dream or vision which she 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 the evening before, where the text was "And I will give thee the crown of life". (Das 339)

Obviously the poem was a result of the vision Dutt had. The poem begins with 'a sense of weariness' in the poet, indicating the approaching end. The poem is hauntingly lovely, bringing tears to our eyes as we watch the ailing poet lying on her bed with eyes closed.

The bond between father and daughter needed no words. Our hearts go out to the father, who is well aware of the presence of death in the atmosphere.

As she lay thus she suddenly became wide awake, for, 'a strange light' shone on an open plain. It is of interest to note that such visions come, very, very occasionally to certain people, with a blinding light, which people often choose to believe to be an indication of the divine presence. Dutt too saw:

... 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.

Dutt saw a tree whose branches had leaves of silver and gold. Beside the tree stood an Angel who placed a few of those leaves on her fevered brows. The soothing touch of those magic leaves made the pain and fever vanish. The effect of the touch made Dutt request the Angel to place these leaves on her father's brow too. The Angel moved to touch his brow "...and then gently whispered 'Nay!'" and bestowed a divine look of love and pity on Dutt. Thus ended the vision. It was almost a hint that the time for her father to leave this earth was yet to arrive. Dutt woke up to find,

My father watching patient by my bed,
And holding in his own, close-prest, my hand.

'The Tree of Life' is Dutt's most exquisite creation, on reading which one is left behind with a sense of having experienced the lesser known strata of divinity.

The *Ancient Ballads* presents before the reader the rich harvest of "a Bengali adventure in the realm of English poetry" (Dunn, xxvii). Toru Dutt was the first to find in her own land an inspiration for her genius (Dunn, xxvii). The poet's true literary activity began after her return to India, in those last four years, when she was well aware of the hold of the disease on her too and when she was spurred on by a voice saying, "What thou doest, do
quickly!" She diligently pursued the study of Sanskrit with her father. Death was "a guide leading her back to childhood and back to India" (Williams, 17).

Dutt loved her country house (or the garden house as it is better known) 'Baugmaree'. The acres of fertile land were filled with a variety of fruit bearing trees, "yellow or vermilion mangoes, red leeches, white jumrools and deep violet jams (Life and Letters 61-62). The poet's special affinity with nature is reflected in the two extracts given below:

"The morning are so pleasant in the garden. Very early at about three in the morning, the Bheemraj, a little bird, begins his song; half an hour afterwards, all the bushes and trees burst into melody, the Kokila, the Bow-Kotha-Kow - which means, 'Speak, O bride' the Papia and c. And the gay little humming - birds, with their brilliant colours drive into the flowers for honey with busy twitters. Oh, it is so cool and pleasant in the morning till ten o'clock, when the warmth increases; from noon to about four in the afternoon, all is quite still, except some lone woodpecker tapping at some far off tree, Then in the evening, all the birds are astir again, till it gets dark, when, like wise little creatures that they are, they go to bed! (Life and Letters 86)
If the mornings were so spectacular the nights at 'Baugmaree' were still more breathtaking.

The night was clear, the moon resplendent, one or two stars glimmering here and there, before us stretched the long avenue bordered with high Casuarinas very like the poplars of England; dim in the distance the gateway; around us the thick mango groves; the tall betel-nut trees, straight "like arrows shot from Heaven"; the coconut palms with their proud waving plumes of green foliage and all wrapt in a sweet and calm silence. (Life and Letters 154)

'Baugmaree' was a priceless bit of Heaven lent to Dutt which stirred the poet within her into writing those beautiful verses one comes across in Ancient Ballads.

'Sonnet Baugmaree,' is an offering to that lovely serene garden-house which was a source of inspiration for Dutt with its powerful presence of Nature all around. She knew intimately each shade, tree and shrub that blessed her garden. The entire picture has been captured life-like within the sonnet for posterity. The various shades of greens have been perfectly painted in the word-pictures of this sonnet -- 'The light-green graceful tamarind,' 'the mangoe clumps of green profound,' 'palms, arise, like pillars gray, between'. Amidst these greens,
And o'er the quite pools the seemuls lean
Red, - red, and startling like a trumpet's sound.

This line is most outstanding, fusing colour and sound together through a virtual magic with words. It is an original style of expressing the vibrant red of the seemul tree by comparing it with the vibrancy of the trumpet's sound. The lines that follow portray a typical Eastern full-moon night where

But nothing can be lovelier than the ranges
Of bamboos to the eastward, when the moon
Looks through their gaps, and the white lotus changes
Into a cup of silver . . . .

The effect is really intoxicating as the poet herself feels,

. . . One might swoon
Drunken with beauty then, . . .

The poem echoes Dutt's sentiments on nature, a parallel of which has already been expressed earlier in 'Buttoo'. Dutt's letters also reveal her closest friends to be her pet horses, cats, canaries, guinea-pigs, the roses, lotuses, asters, shoe-flowers, water-lilies and practically all oriental fruit-trees one could think of. The poem signifies that despite the thousands of miles that physically distance the poet from the garden-house, mentally and spiritually, Dutt is constantly drawn towards 'Baugmaree', towards the tropical beauty of its surroundings which have essentially been
a continuing source of inspiration for her to write. It is thus that we see reflected in the poems the almost regular, rhythmic descriptions of the wonders of nature, the trees, the flowers and the birds of her country. Despite having praised Dutt's similar graphic descriptions of Nature earlier, one's eyes involuntarily get rivetted to 'Sonnet Baugmaree' owing to its very perfection.

Another very significant poem is 'Sonnet Lotus' a poem unique in the sense that the theme is very unreal but natural. The poet appears to have created something out of nothing. Dutt has devised a difference of opinion amongst the flower family as to who the flower-queen is. The very concept has "a fairy-tale" aura about it. Dutt declares that though the beauty of the rose has been sung incessantly by many poets and the pristine loveliness of the lily vies with that of the rose, it is the rose-red and lily-white lotus,

\[
\ldots \text{delicious as the rose} \\
\text{And stately as the lily in her pride -}
\]

that remains the queen of all flowers.

The sonnet is specially remarkable for the glimpse it offers the reader into the poet's mind. Dutt shares her dilemma with the reader. The Indian tradition, its ancient spirit, the hoary tales from its mythology are bound very intricately within her. It is an inherent part of the poet's being which she carries with her even
when she is far away from her country. Even as this rich heritage throbs within, winds of Westernism, of liberty brush against her, touch her, affect her and question her allegiance, her ultimate love. The poet's maturity, the evolving of her self emanates in the final lines of the poem where with

... the lotus, "rose red" dyed,
And "lily - white," ... 

she offers her country and the world the rich blend of the East and West, a balanced spirit of the old and the new. Finally, the inherent quality as present in the Lotus reigns supreme, gently dyed rose-red with subtle hues of Western learning. Dutt's poetry manifests the fusion of the richness of Bengali culture and the highly refined techniques of the Western literature.

One can feel the impact of post colonialism on this young poet, where she experiences the agony of the tussle between the native Indian culture and the foreign culture that ultimately results in a hybrid creation, rather the retention and consecutive expression of the native culture but through the foreign medium. In "Toru Dutt: The Mona Lisa of Indian Poetry in English", G.S. Balarama Gupta tends to compare Dutt with Mona Lisa: Like the celebrated painting, 'Mona Lisa', Toru Dutt in her poetry and in her life presents the ambivalence that characterises Mona Lisa's enigmatic smile (Perspectives 16).
"Our Casuarina Tree", the last poem in the series is one of Dutt's best poems thematically, lyrically and structurally. It is a memoir to her childhood, her lost brother and sister, her bond with the tree and finally a tribute to the tree itself. It is a sort of virtual homecoming of the poet. Structurally it is formed of the eleven line stanza the rhyme scheme being abba, cddc, eee. It seems a symbolic representation of the bountiful Nature itself, offering food, refuge and nourishment to all the birds of the area.

Dutt's poems often reveal an uncanny resemblance to Keats' poetry especially to the odes composed by Keats. The "restrained intensity of language and versification" which Walter Jackson Bate observes in Keats' odes (John Keats 520) can be seen in "Our Casuarina Tree". In this poem Dutt exhibits her typically condensed but lucid style in paying homage to the tree, transforming the casuarina tree into a strong symbol of the heritage of her country.

The tree was all the more precious to Dutt as it evoked nostalgic reminiscences of those good old days when many an hour had been whiled away playing beneath the tree with Aru and Abju. The memories of her childhood days were intricately woven with this dear tree, the thoughts of which moved the poet to tears.

The poem literally depicts the extent to which the poet misses her motherland, it voices the sorrow of separation from one's culture, even when she is in the distant shores of France.
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!

The Casuarina embodies the benign, bountiful heart of her country, the generous love that spreads into an infinite aura, the light of which draws the poet across the miles. The Casuarina is love and constancy incarnate. The poem forms an obeissance to the culture of the poet's 'own loved native clime'.

May love defend thee from Oblivion's curse.

This one line, one of the Dutt's best-written lines shows how precious the tree, embodying the ideals of her country and her culture, remains to the poet. Once again there is proof of Dutt's palpable skill in expression, formed of an illusive blend of brevity, lucidity and simplicity, which resulted in memorable lines.

Describing Keats' "Nightingale" and "Grecian Urn", Bate stresses that "a direct assertion of belief, whatever else may be said of it, can hardly be dramatic unless there is either some form of debate or else a developing discovery by the poet of what he really believes" (John Keats 521). Dutt fully succeeds in transferring her
beliefs and hopes into her poetic compositions be it in the depiction of the tree and the values it signifies, be it in the picture of "the lotus "rose red"dyed,/And "lily -white",..." or be it in the vivid and meaningful portrayals of the characters culled from Indian mythology.

Appropriation is the process by which the language is taken and made to 'bear the burden' of one's own cultural expression, or as Raja Rao puts it to 'convey in a language that is not one's own, the spirit that is one's own' (Ashcroft, 38-39). Such an appropriation is clearly the most significant feature in the emergence of modern post-colonial literatures (Ashcroft, 6). Dutt was thus in the threshold of a stage of appropriation and creation of new literature, different from her earlier work of translation of the French poets. A bilingual position poised between cultures allowed access to two kinds of rhetoric, at least two traditions of public speech. "Mixing and crossing languages, forms and styles, colonized writers evolved polysemic - truly creolized - modes of expression", says Elleke Boehmer (Colonial 117-118). This bilingual and bicultural influence can thus be very lucidly traced through the different stages of the literary development of the poet, in Bhabha's words, a "traumatic ambivalence of a personal, psychic history", (Location 11) a dislocation that was reflected on her works, her style, her choice of subjects, her choice of medium, her ultimate decision of identifying herself with India, with Sanskrit, with the native literature. Considered in this perspective, Toru's Ancient
Ballads and Legends of Hindustan appears as her way of ending her cultural alienation engendered by her upbringing and spiritual conditioning (B.Gupta, 11).

Dutt's literary life is the shortest ever in the world of literature -- a mere four-year period into which was packed some of the best-written verses, ringing notes of Indian philosophy, culture, rusticity, a passionate love for Nature, an inimitable art of graphic description. At this point, the striking similarity in the poetry of Dutt and Keats, the poignancy of their lyrics, their successful efforts in making their poetry mirror their philosophy and their ideals, their reverence for Nature and her powerful beauty, the short span of life which both the poets filled with some of the most memorable lines in English poetry becomes very remarkable. Some of the best verses give the reader a glimpse into her personal life, the bond of love uniting her to her father, the joyful childhood spent with her brother and sister. The beauty is heightened when one realizes that they were written with the spectre of death hounding her fragile life, when pain became an inevitable part of her life. That such a beautiful gift to posterity could be created from pain is by itself a paradox.

Edmund Gosse declared Ancient Ballads to be "Toru's chief legacy to posterity" (Introductory Memoir, v) because they exhibited the evolving development in the poet's verse, because here the verses were her own and not translations as in the previous
work and primarily because the work signified the poet's return to her motherland. She was pure Hindu, full of typical qualities of her race and blood, and ... preserving to the last her appreciation of the poetic side of her religion - though faith itself in Vishnu and Siva had been replaced by a pure faith (Gosse, 11).

Dutt's essentially Indian poems mark her as the first notable poet to reach out to native roots, expressing an "allegiance to the indigenous culture" (Prasad, 4-5). Though basically Dutt had transferred certain incidents of Indian mythology from Sanskrit to English, her translations, her interpretations, her narrations, were absolutely independent, stamped with her own style of creation. Dasgupta rightly declares that Dutt was indeed "the first of major Indian writers who proved that the translation is not an isolated phenomenon, but an index of personality meaningful in its relatedness with a greater heritage, cultural and literary. She gave a status to translation" (Indian Literature 8-9).

Dutt entered the literary scene in Bengal at a crucial phase where she proved to be one of the first modern Indian poets to buoy up the drooping literary spirit of Bengal. Despite the many disadvantageous factors like her failing health, her young age, the lack of peers in her field in her own country, Ancient Ballads was indeed an outstanding achievement. It was her final contribution to her race and its literature, after having spent an entire, though short, lifetime in foreign shores. In depicting the ancient ballads of
her country, which the poet naturally chose to write in English, her basic intense Indianness surfaced in the themes, the images coming out of the rich repository of her heritage.

The fact that the poems are in English offers an interesting angle of study. Basically during this period, the major books written in the vernacular were those prepared by the Christian missionaries. The age created an aura of duality where there existed an initial stage which witnessed the waning or the native literature and the resulting wait for the rise of a new stream, a new style. This gap was filled up by a thirst for the new learning. The later stage signified the realization that followed Westernism and with that there occurred the return to the native land and the native language, effecting an upsurge of native literature. During this stage, the resultant native literature tended to be coloured, affected and tinted with the impact of the Western learning which thus gave a new approach to the subject dealt with. In short, the return was not a total return to the age-old literature of the native country, but a return imbued with an application of a present day, relevant touch to the same age-old literature, thus transforming it and giving it a new entity.

No one who has perused *Ancient Ballads* would have found them shoddy or ill-kempt or incomplete in any way. Dutt has used her liberty in choosing instances from the legends and tales of yore and in narrating them in a manner she found most fitting. Her
choice of ballads and legends is significant in that they all centre on
the Hindu conception of Duty considered in its broadest sense,
which is at variance with the Western in that it is compounded of
self-abnegation and selfless commitment to what can only be
referred to as 'dharma' that does not admit of any deviation or
variation whatever the circumstances (B.Gupta, 11).

The Ancient Ballads is the poet's social allegiance to
her country. The choice of ballads mirror not just the richness of the
poet's heritage but its relevance to the social and cultural milieu of
the poet. The success of the poet is in her ability to choose events
from mythology which could be transcreated to coalesce with the
times, to be meaningful to the crisis the society was passing
through at the moment and by which a social justification could be
established. The temper of the age, the positive attitude which
made the crisis to be just a passing phase out of which the society
would emerge better-moulded, better-conformed to the progressive
ethos are factors impressed on all Dutt's poems. For the first time in
literature of this kind, there is struck a genuine Indian note . . .
(Dunn, xxv).

Again, she was not merely a poetess but a poet. Her
poems despite its feminine touches do not call for any leniency with
which one is usually inclined to treat lady poets or poetesses
(A.Dasgupta, 6-7).
Finally she was no doubt a poet born of the age of romanticism, a poet full of life, vivacity and vibrant feeling. To call her melancholic would be to misunderstand her totally. No statement could be more wrong in declaring as Y.N. Vaish says that "this young melancholic poetess did never laugh in the short period of her life" (*Modern Review* 437). Dutt's letters are a living example of the quiet humour that coursed through her veins. There is no humour in her poetry (Vaish, 437). But then she has not dealt with humourous incidents in her poems. Her poems have themes of love, patience, pity, loyalty, courage and these have been dealt with deservedly. There is definitely no tinge of melancholy in her verses. In fact, for a young girl of her age who had to come to terms with the knowledge of Death being just round the corner, she has been far from being pessimistic or melancholic which one could otherwise naturally be in similar circumstances. Her frail health, instead of deterring her from the joys in the landscapes of life, acted as a stimulus (A.Dasgupta, 12).

But God had destined otherwise
And so she gently fell asleep
A creature of the starry skies
Too lovely for the Earth to keep. (*A Sheaf Gleaned*)