CHAPTER 5

Towards a Brave New World
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Attainment of perfection is the cherished goal of every artist and yet, few are inclined to put in the constant application which is so vital for realisation of that goal. Toru Dutt was a conscientious artist who put herself wholeheartedly in the development of her poetic art. It is this desire for growth and consequently her complete application towards it that is so conspicuous in her works. It is this aspiration that makes her restless to experiment with a great number of themes and verse forms, and explains the dynamism and substantiality of her poetry. However, even with much assiduous exertion, development of art and vision comes with the passage of years and gradual maturity of mind. The reader of Toru Dutt can recognise that her early poetry suffers from certain shortcomings of metre, rhythm, and grammar, but they disappear in her later poetry as she matures. A Sheaf has many inversions, archaic words and phrases, and twisted expressions; there is even discordant music here and there, as pointed out by her reviewers in the Examiner and the Englishman. The same criticism cannot however be levelled against Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan. If the Sheaf holds out the promise of an upcoming poetess of great merit, Ancient Ballads is, in a way, the fulfilment of that promise. Similarly, growth and maturity of mind, and consequent widening of artistic scope of Toru’s creations, may also be noted in her novels. While Bianca gives us a glimpse of a precocious mind, in Le Journal, we witness the blossoming of that young genius. It is thus easy to construe that Toru put her art on vigorous trial and as a result, it gained in scope and depth towards the close of her life.
4.1 Diction & Rhythm

As an Indo-Anglian poet of the first generation, Toru's principal achievement lies in effective mastery over the medium. The diction that one comes across in her poetry is usually simple, clear, and sweet. Though, this is not literary true in case of all her poetic renderings. As an example of her simple, sweet diction, we may quote the following from "Savitri:"

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 lightning flash;

We play, — we jest, — we have no care, —

We hark a step, — there comes no crash, —

But life, or silent slow despair.

Their eyes just met, — Savitri past

Into the friendly Muni's hut,

Her heart-rose opened had at last —

Opened no flower can ever shut. (p. 3)

As an illustration of her obtuse diction, the following lines may be quoted:

Dante, old Gibelin! When I see only in passing

The plaster white and dull of this mask so puissant

That Art has bequeathed us of thy features majestic,

I cannot help feeling a slight shudder O poet;

So strongly the band of genius and that of misfortune

Have imprinted upon them the dark seal of sorrow.
In the above example however, Toru is not her usual self. In many of her translations she writes with a force that seems to emanate from within. In this connection one may cite “To Those Who Sleep” by Victor Hugo:

Lo; He lifts up his hand,
And the tigers fly howling through deserts of sands,
And the sea-serpents crawl
Obedient and meek; He breathes on idols of gold
In their temples of marble gigantic and old
And like Dragon they zall:

You are not armed? It matters not,
Tear out the hinges of the door!
A hammer has deliverance wrought:
David had pebbles from the shore (p. 87)

In her poetry, Toru displays a fine sense of rhythm and diction. Indeed, so remarkable is her diction and rhythm, that she was regarded by many as an Englishman writing under the pseudonym of ‘Toru Dutt.’ She employs a variety of diction according to need of the occasion and this imparts her poetry an amazing grace and suppleness. She used both monosyllabic and polysyllabic diction with success. As an instance of monosyllabic diction, we may consider the following from “Sindhu:”

Ah me! What means this? — Hark, a cry,
A feeble human wail,
“Oh God!” It said — “I die, — I die,
who'll carry home the pail?” (p. 63)
Of polysyllabic diction, we have the following from “The Legend of Dhruva."

"Mother, thy words of consolation find
Nor resting-place, nor echo in this heart
Broken by words severe, repulsing love
That timidly approached to worship. Hear
My resolve unchangeable. (p. 48)

Toru's ingenuity at the utilisation of a variety of diction is something to be marvelled at someone so young. She did not hesitate even to employ French words and expressions in her poems if she felt the need for it. For instance, “Va-nu-pieds! When rose high your Marseillaise” (434) used in the poem “Madame Therese.” Though such usage in some places, and archaism, inversions and twists in others, slightly mar the overall beauty of her verses, quality inherent in them cannot be disregarded merely because of a few inconsistencies of language. Balancing the great many qualities of her poetry against their flaws, Sir Edmund Gosse wrote:

It must frankly be confessed that in the brief May-day of her existence she had not time to master our language as Blanco White did, or as Chamisso mastered German. To the end of her days, fluent and graceful as she was, she was not entirely conversant with English, especially with the colloquial turns of modern speech. Often a very fine thought is spoiled for hypercritical ears by the queer turn of expression which she has innocently given to it. These faults are to be found to a much smaller degree in her miscellaneous poems. Her sonnets seem to me to be of great
beauty, and her longer piece, entitled "Our Casuarina Tree," needs no apology for its rich and mellifluous numbers.²

As with diction, rhythm employed by Toru Dutt has generally been favourably received by critics. She succeeds to a large extent in conveying to her English readers the mood and often the rhythm of original French or Sanskrit. Melody and rhythm may be noted in passages such as those describing joyous wedding celebrations of Savitri and Satyavan:

The doors of every house are hung
With gay festoons of leaves and flowers;
And blazing banners broad are flung,
And trumpets blown from castle towers!

Slow the procession makes its ground
Along the crowded city street:
And blessings in a storm of sound
At every step the couple greet.

Past all the houses, past the wall,
Past gardens gay, and hedgerows trim,
Past fields, where sinuous brooklets small
With molten silver to the brim
Glance in the sun's expiring light,
Past frowning hills, past pastures wild (p. 8)

Toru was at home handling the ballad metre and the sonnet; they are free from burdensomeness and dullness of her blank verse. Edmund Gosse paid a rich and befitting tribute to her when he wrote:
That mellow sweetness was all that Toru lacked to perfect her as an English poet, and of no Oriental who has ever lived can the same be said. When the history of the literature of our country comes to be written, there is sure to be a page in it dedicated to this fragile exotic blossom of song.³

Speaking of the melodies she sought to impart, Anant says that they “were often foreign if not harsh to the English ear,” and that they were “the melodies of Bengal, her native land. The melodies which she drank in so often that they now formed part of her very soul.”⁴ As for her lapses in rhythm, examples may be cited especially from some of the pieces in the Sheaf like “The Forts of Paris:"

They are the watch-dogs, terrible, superb,

Enormous, faithfully that Paris guard.

As at each moment we could be surprised,

As a wild horde is there, as ambush vile

Creeps sometimes even to the city walls  (p. 137)

Nothing to speak of rhyme, there is hardly any rhythm in it. Toru’s use of blank verse has not been a happy one. In a note to a piece by Louis Bouihet, she writes, “Although a Frenchman would faint away at the idea of blank verse, we have not hesitated to render this piece in that form, as well as others.”⁵ Regarding her use of blank verse, it may however be said that though she was never at ease with this form of versification, it may be gathered from some of her poems notably, “The Death of the Wolf,” “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind,” “Dhruva,” and “Sita,” that given time and practice, she might have been equally competent in the use of blank verse as she was with the ballad and the sonnet.
4.2 Versification

Critics have been divided in their opinion on Toru's proficiency in the art of versification. The *Englishman*, while praising the *Sheaf*, also added that:

Miss Dutt's metre often limps, her grammar is not always faultless, and her expressions are sometimes quaint or tame. But faults of this kind were inevitable; and it is in the highest degree creditable to her that they are not more frequent. If the translations were arranged in the order in which they were written they would probably show a rapid progressive improvement in all these respects.6

E.J. Thompson remarked:

It is easy to feel that, in the work done, she never escaped from the influence of her favourite poets, such writers as Mrs. Browning, whose work did not furnish satisfactory prosodic models. The metres used by Toru Dutt are nearly always of the simplest, and her use of them is marred by much crudity. Yet against this must be set many signs of haste and lack of opportunity to finish. The punctuation of the *Ballads*, for example, is chaotic. She heard, as Lowell surmises that Keats did, a voice urging 'What thou doest, do quickly'; and especially after her sister's death, she plunged into work with energy and restlessness. Yet, even amid the many marks of immaturity and haste, there are signs that she would have escaped before long from many of her prosodic limitations. 'Our Casuarina Tree,' surely the most remarkable poem ever written in English by a foreigner, shows her already possessed of mastery.
over more elaborate and architectural forms of verse. In any case, there is enough to show that experience and practice would have brought release from the cramping and elementary forms that she used [...].

Contrasted to this, Sri Aurobindo observed, “Toru Dutt was an accomplished verse-builder with a delicate talent and some outbreaks of genius and she wrote things that were attractive and sometimes something that had a strong energy of language and a rhythmic force.” He also noted that “she has written poetry not as an Indian writing in English but like an English woman.”

Even though the Sheaf has been noted by critics for its crudity and inversions, it has a number of poems in it which we find that “the metre at least is smooth and suggestive of no labour or hard toil in its making.” Here, instances may be cited of such poems as Berat’s “My Normandy” or Peyrat’s “Roland.” The last stanza of “My Normandy” is quoted below as a reiteration of the point:

> There is an age, alas! in life,
> When every idle dream must end,
> An age of introspection, rife
> With memories that cross and blend.
> When such an age arrives for me,
> And folds her wing, my Muse, to rest,
> May I behold my Normandy,
The favoured land I love the best. (p. 36)

Here we find the same kind of smooth rhythm as in Aru’s rendering of “Morning Serenade,” which has so often been praised by critics. So far as versification is concerned, the Sheaf is curiously uneven in merit. There are poems which read
like bad prose translations, their closeness to the original being their sole worth, but a number of others are real products of genius.

With growing maturity, Toru handled different verse forms with felicity. In Ancient Ballads we come across distinct verse forms such as the ballad, the blank verse, and the octolined stanza. Toru used the first technique in “Savitri,” “Jogadhya Uma,” and “Sindhu,” the second form in “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind,” “Dhruva,” and “Sita,” and the last in “Lakshman,” “Buttoo,” and “Prahlad.” It was however in the use of ballad form that Toru excelled. As an example, a stanza from “Savitri” is quoted below:

“I know in such a world as this

No one can gain his heart’s desire,

Or pass the years in perfect bliss;

Like gold we must be tried by fire;

And each shall suffer as he acts

And thinks, — his own sad burden bear!

No friends can help, — 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. (p. 19)

In this stanza consisting of three quatrains, sense glides along without interruption. It has a beautiful metrical pertinence. A final point of note regarding Toru’s use of various poetic forms is her partiality for the sonnet form. In Ancient
Ballads we have two charming sonnets “Baugmaree” and “The Lotus.” A Sheaf too has a good number of sonnets, including an original one “A Mon Pere.”

4.3 Imagery & Symbolism

Use of imagery and symbols in Toru Dutt’s poetry is worth a study. Her imagery is often drawn with masculine vigour and boldness. ‘Puny and elf-like’ though she was, she displayed a wonderful power in grappling with the sublime and the terrible. Thus, we have the following from “Savitri:”

My daughter, night with ebon wing
Hovers above; the hour is late. (p. 13)

Another beautiful image from the same ballad:

She took the soul,
No bigger than the human thumb.

Then placed his soul upon his heart
Where like a bee it found its cell. (p. 24)

In it, an abstract thing has been measured in terms of a concrete one. Yet another impressive image drawn with deft strokes is the following:

I had a pain, as if an asp
Gnawed in my brain (p. 25)

The image of a gnawing asp effectively evokes the intensity of pain. Also remarkable is the pen-portrait of the demon king in “Prahlad:”

A terror both of gods and men
Was Heerun Kasyapu, the king:
No bear more sullen in his den,
No tiger quicker at the spring.
In strength of limb he had not met,
Since first his black flag he unfurled,
Nor in audacious courage, yet,
His equal in the wide, wide world.  

And Toru successfully stirs up awe in the climatic appearance of God in the incarnation of man-lion:

And from within, with horrid clang
That froze the blood in every vein,
A stately sable warrior sprang,
Like some phantasma of the brain.

He had a lion head and eyes,
A human body, feet and hands,
Colossai, — such strange shapes arise
In clouds, when Autumn rules the lands!
He gave a shout; — the boldest quailed,
Then struck the tyrant on the helm,
And ripped him down; and at last, he hailed
Prahlad as king of all the realm!

A strikingly evocative image is the following from "The Royal Ascetic and the Hind."

The shaven stalks of grass,
Kusha and kasha, by its new teeth clipped,
Remind me of it, as they stand in lines
Like pious boys who chant the Sama Veds

Shorn by their vows of all their wealth of hair. (p. 44)

The comparison of “shaven stalks of grass” with shaved noviciates is a masterpiece of Toru’s fertile imagination. She could also describe a gallant hunting party with the zeal and gusto of a Walter Scott:

Oh gallant was the long array!

Pennons and plumes were seen,

And swords that mirrored back the day,

And spears and axes keen. (p. 60)

As can be seen, Toru has made extensive use of imagery in her ballads. There is however, no sustained use of symbolism in her poetry. Limited though her use of symbols is, they make for interesting observation. In “Savitri,” night and its dark shades are associated with death and distress. In “The Tree of Life,” tree becomes a symbol of life, and the angel, a symbol of Lord the saviour. In “Our Casuarina Tree,” the tree is a link between the past and the present. Its spreading branches hold out the promise of a future which shall not be bereft of the love and companionship of the loved ones, and wherein will stand the grand old tree as a mark of eternal love of the poet for her siblings.

4.4 Figures of Speech

Figures of speech adorn the language and convey ideas more effectively. Toru has employed them for both purposes. Simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, personification, alliteration, and hyperbole are the figures of speech which Toru has used frequently. Instances of each are cited below:
4.4.1 Simile

a) When glided like a music-strain

Savitri's presence through the room. (p. 4)

b) Nor melts his lineage like the frost.

(p. 6)

c) Tall trees like pillars

(p. 9)

d) It came as chainless as the wind

(p. 14)

e) His throat and chest seem iron-bound,

He staggers, like a sleepy child. (p. 15)

f) His skin was dark as bronze

(p. 17)

g) The dreadful sword

Like lightning glanced one moment dire (p. 17)

h) They lacerate my inmost heart

And torture me, like poisoned swords. (P. 32)

i) the lion's roar,

Feared by all creatures, like a thunder-clap

Burst in that solitude from a thicket nigh. (p. 42)

j) Unseen the magic arrow came,

Amidst the laughter and the scorn

Of royal youths, — like lightning flame

Sudden and sharp. (p. 50)

k) Upon the glassy surface fell

The last beams of the day,

Like fiery darts, that lengthening swell,

As breezes wake and play. (p. 61)

l) The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed. (p. 466)
4.4.2 Metaphors

a) His merit still remains a star  (p. 6)

b) The pair look statues, magic-bound.  (p. 15)

c) We left her leaning on her hand,

Thoughtful; no tear-drop had she shed,

But looked the goddess of the land  (p. 16)

4.4.3 Onomatopoeia

a) but the good

God’s purity there loved to trace

Mirrored in dawning womanhood.  (p. 1)

b) Whizzing the deadly arrow flew,

Ear-guided, on the game!  (p. 62)

4.4.4 Personification

a) Rang trump, and conch, and piercing fife,

Woke Echo from her bed!

The solemn woods with sounds were rife

As on the pageant sped.  (p. 60)

4.4.5 Alliteration

a) Stern warriors, when they saw her, smiled,

As mountains smile to see the spring.  (p. 1)

b) A stately sable warrior sprang  (p. 80)
4.4.6 Hyperbole

a) All these, thousands, thousands more,
   With helmet red, or golden crown,
   Or green tiara rose before
   The youth in evening's shadow brown. (p. 52)

b) Hundreds, nay thousands, on they went! (p. 60)

Thus, we can infer from the above examples that Toru was adept in the use of various figures of speech to match the tone and tenor of themes at hand. Though the Sheaf is not without these adornments, but for Toru's original contribution to these literary graces, we will have to turn to Ancient Ballads.

4.5 Themes

Subjects that attracted Toru the most were pathetic. A large number of poems in the Sheaf dealing with the pathetic confirm this view. "The Young Captive," "The Lost Path," "The Death of a Young Girl," "The Captive to the Swallows," and many others, are full of pathos and tender feelings. The captives, the vanquished, and the downtrodden, easily caught her imagination and moved her to write. Seldom does she speak of love, and when she does, it is invariably pure and sublime. Patriotic themes were also dear to her. Of all the events, Franco-Prussian War and the humiliation of France consequent thereof, touched her profoundly. Her two poems, "France 1870" and "Madame Therese," celebrate the glory of France in a grand manner. Many of her ballads too are couched in patriotic instincts and Indian traditions. Stories from past evoked a sympathetic response from her. Toru drew upon the timeless fount of ancient classics such as the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the Vishnu Purana, to find the right
material for expression. Like the great English dramatist Shakespeare, Toru too shows little originality in inventing new themes for her poetry. Her originality lies in the execution of those themes. In this regard, opinion of Y.N. Vaish is pertinent; he says, “Toru was less original in themes but she was original in versifying them.”

4.6 Elements of Influence on Toru’s Mind—As Revealed in Her Works and Her Letters to Miss Mary Martin

'This fragile exotic blossom of song,' is a beautiful, descriptive phrase which Sir Edmund Gosse applies to Toru. It is a phrase which one involuntarily calls to mind after reading her letters and poetry. All through, she remained a fragile blossom, a rose bud half-unfurled, filling the little world of her Indian home with fragrance.

She is throughout a woman-child—pure, sweet, modest, and essentially loveable, with an abiding love of home and country. This dual, woman-child aspect runs right through her letters. The child, full of Stevenson's "Happy Thought:"

The world is so full of a number of things,
I am sure we should all be as happy as kings!'

The woman as Wordsworth pictures her:

A being breathing thoughtful breath,
A traveller between life and death."

It is as a happy child we see her getting up very early so as to be able to pat and caress the horses; running gaily along their side when they are being exercised; brimming over with delight when they learn to come at her call, or take a fancy
daintily to eat the roses at her belt; playfully bestowing fine French names on them and on the favourite cat. It is a child's tender heart that demands mosquito curtain for poor little canaries, and is at rest when they, like herself, are safe from their bloodthirsty tormentors. Eagerly as a child too, does she go everyday to her uncle's garden to play with the cats "Day" and "May." It is the little child that at night just before:

Each little Indian sleepy head
Is being kissed and put to bed

she turns to her mother with the eternal cry of a child, 'Mother, tell me a story.' Then, she listens with eyes wide with wonder or with tears, to the old stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, thrilling like the strings of the Aeolian harp in the wind to every call of beauty and pathos. A tender hearted little child indeed, merging imperceptibly into the woman. A woman of tender heart, seeing eye, and listening ear, but a woman made thoughtful by seeing 'into the life of things.'

Toru moved among people to whom the beauty of a homely life was apparent, and in a setting where even the barrier of faith could not spoil tender affection between Toru and her Hindu grandmother. So it is always when she writes of her relations; she reveals the spirit of love which was the life blood of that cloistered circle. It was however, the love and affection which she bore for her father which remained supreme. Her father's thoughtful, un-wearying care is referred to again and again in her letters. His eyes seem to have followed her livelong day; it is he who orders wraps for her at the slightest cold breeze, and tells her when it is time for the busy pen to rest awhile, and she laughingly protests that he had better keep her in a glass case.
Her father however did much more than look after her physical well-being; it was from him that Toru learnt to put her steps upon the road to literary horizon. The Dutt family of Rambagan, which pulsed with an atmosphere of learning and rich literary culture in those days, nurtured innate poetic gifts of Toru. Publication of *The Dutt Family Album* in 1870, an anthology of poems by her father Govin, uncles Hur and Greece, and cousin Omesh, which was a landmark in the cultural history of the Dutts, must have provided the young genius the impetus to launch on an adventure of a literary kind of her own. An encouraging assistance was always at hand in form of her father, who remained her unfailing companion till the last day of her life. We get a glimpse of this wholesome camaraderie in her last poem “The Tree of Life:”

Mine eyes were closed, but I was not asleep,
My hand was in my father’s, and I felt
His presence near me. Thus we often passed
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? (p. 463)

It was her mother however, who exercised a benign influence on her in the early stage of her life and implanted a deep and abiding respect for the Hindu scriptures and ancient lores of India. It may be mentioned here that when Govin and his brothers, along with their families were baptised in 1862, the Dutt wives were at first vehemently opposed to conversion, “but Kshetramoni later became a most ardent Christian, and as a family, Govin Chunder, his wife and children practised the deepest faith in Christianity.”

Thus, Toru was indoctrinated in both
Hinduism and Christianity, and though after her conversion, Toru remained a staunch Christian to the end of her days, Toru had a secular education and this did not let her look askance at the ancient lays while she plunged into the treasures of European literature. It is obvious then, that an education begun on such sound lines should continue, as all true education does, throughout the whole of her brief life. Father and daughter continued their studies together in French, English, and Sanskrit. It is only when it got a suggestion that they should proceed with algebra and geometry, did the daughter confess her dislike of mathematics by declaring herself “too thick-headed for them!”

Their fondness for and acquaintance with French literature is borne out by the constant reference to their reading. Toru was in fact, in a position to act a counsellor to her English friend Mary Martin in that matter. Her letters are a record of the arrival of latest works of French literature. Life of Napoleon, sold by an itinerant bookseller is a source of great delight and attests to Toru's admiration for the great general. As has been mentioned earlier, even household pets were given French names, it is also notable that Toru and her activities—her absorption in books, her play, and her relentless creative urge, were the subjects of many French couplets by her father. With all her love of French literature, Toru was nevertheless not blind to its faults, and she exercised the same fine discriminating taste in this, as in all her reading, which was by no means confined to French; Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle, Byron, Tennyson, Thackeray, Mrs. Browning, the Brontes—there are references to them all. She had intimate acquaintance with their works as also the works of many other English men of letters. “I was always a book worm,” Toru says of herself, and her verdict is correct. If a list were compiled of the books mentioned as read, from
her correspondence covering a period of about four years (1873-77), its variety and completeness for one so young would astonish all who reflect on it. Moreover, when her health began to fail and she was compelled to desist from study, she had a mind so well stocked with treasures that she could accompany her father in "repeating pieces of poetry, English or French, or else it is a stray Sanskrit line." All this from a girl who barely crossed her teens. Yet, for all her love of English and French literature, her love for the great ancient classics of her country remained unshakable. Many times she exhorted her friend to become acquainted with the immortal classics of India:

You would then see how grand, how sublime, how pathetic, our legends are. The wifely devotion that an Indian wife pays to her husband; her submission to him even when he is capricious or exacting, her worship of him "as her god."

No less keen than her interest in literature was her interest in contemporary events both home and abroad. She had her own opinions on the Lieutenant-Governor's fitness for his post, on career aspiration of the Indians, on sanitation, on Victor Hugo's speech for the liberation of the French communists, on the government of Turkey, on the education of Indian girls, on art, and on civil service examination. In her letters there are criticisms on contemporary social mores, as in the controversy over the wearing of ladies' trains at the parties at Government House, she writes, "People who could not afford trains might as well have stayed away from the lordly parties at Government House. What a fuss we make about nothing!" Or again, "What on earth do we care to hear whether the Raja of Burdwan got a salute of twelve or thirteen guns, or who got certificates of honour or silver medals?" Then, there are stern criticisms of Bengali Christian
society, the manners of which, she says, "would sadden the merriest heart, and dishearten the most hopeful." The incident of the fine of thirty rupees being imposed upon the English lawyer who violently assaulted his syce and caused his death, and the sequel to the case, are related with a moderation that makes the indictment all the more forcible and convincing. Her remarks on judicial matters are equally penetrating, and still more startling is her comment, "We have no real English gentlemen or ladies in India, except a very few."

Nothing could escape those keen, perceptive young eyes. However, gifted as Toru was, with a fine power of discerning the true and the false in those around her, and in life generally, she was never bigoted. Toru was modest in her own demeanour and in her self-estimate. Her account of her interview with Sir William Hunter is characteristic, "Dr. Hunter wished to make my acquaintance and also that of my family. Just fancy! "My family!" Why, I am getting quite an important personage." And after the visit she wrote, "Dr. Hunter made much of me and my abilities. Indeed, I felt quite ashamed, for, after all, it is only a book of translations, and Dr. Hunter himself has written such a great number of books." It was in this modest way that she always spoke of her achievements.

Next to her interest in literature, what constantly preoccupies Toru's mind is her illness; in March 1874 she writes, "I have been ill with a bad fever and cough. I was laid up in bed and could not go a step beyond my bedroom for more than a month; for last four or five days I am feeling much better and am allowed to stir about a little. The hot weather has set in, and I hope to be quite well in a few days." In May the same year she writes, "for last two days I have had a very bad cough, with spitting of blood." In November she says, "I have still got a slight cough, but there is no blood spitting with it now." and in December, "We
are all well at present, only my cough troubles me; I hope I shall soon get rid of it, for it's a long time that I have had it." In January 1875 she lets her friend know, "I have had another attack of fever last week, but I am much better now; I am happy to say that both Papa and Mamma are keeping well." The following month too she complains of her sickness; then afterwards, we do not hear her speak of her ailment for a whole year. In February 1876, she writes, "it is a fortnight or more that I have been obliged to keep in my bed. Now I am able to get up and move about a little and take a drive in the afternoon, according to the doctor's orders." Even amid terrible recurrence of the vile disease, Toru retained her humour; so in the same letter she goes on to speak of other things saying, "Now that my health-bulletin is written, I shall go on to other things."

So full of lively interest in all that went around her, so full of joy of living, that it is with something of a shock we read in one of her letters of May 1876, "it is four years since we last met! 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." It seems as if the young genius had a premonition of her own approaching end. She must have realised that the disease would prove fatal for her as it had proved fatal for her sister Aru. In November 1876, Toru put to pen these words:

You must have guessed by my not writing to you last week that I was unwell; I was so indeed. [...] You know I always suffer from an increase of cough, spitting blood and congestion of the lungs, every winter since our return to India. I kept pretty well last winter, but last
week it all came back again. I, of course, felt too weak and ill to write. I am better now, though.33

Thus, off and on Toru informed her dear friend of her health and of sickness. In her penultimate letter dated 17 July 1876, which is a short one, she wrote:

I am so sorry, dear, to have made you anxious by my long silence. But indeed I have been very, very ill, but under God's blessing I am better now, though still unwell and weak; you will guess how ill I have been, when I tell you that I have to be taken downstairs in a chair when I go out for a drive. The fever has not left me quite; but it is not so intense as it was before, and I am strong enough to walk from one end of my room to the other. My hair has been cut off short, and Dr. Charles says I may be mistaken for a boy! Do you know, dear, three blisters were applied under my right collar bone all within a fortnight; they were so very, very painful, I felt quite mad with pain; one has hardly healed up yet. [...] I only write this to reassure you. I am better, and in a fair way to get well; so don't be anxious any longer.34

As a result of recurrent attacks of fever, cough, and blood-spitting, Toru died the next month, on 30 August 1877. How pathetic indeed is the life story of this remarkable young poet.

Toru's life was full of pain and suffering latterly, but despite pain and suffering, she never quite lost her sunny disposition, and as soon as any respite came, the old humour was flashing out again, and so when hot weather comes she parodies the Psalmist's wish, "Oh that I had the fins of a fish!"35 With an
unshakable faith in her Lord, Toru bore all the pain with patience. In a letter to Mlle Clarisse Bader, after Toru’s death, a heart broken Govin Chunder wrote:

   She has left us for the land where parting and sorrow are unknown. Her faith in her redeemer was unbounded, and her spirit enjoyed a perfect peace—the peace beyond all understanding. “It is the physical pain of the blister that makes me cry,” said she once to the doctor; “but my spirit is in peace. I know in Whom I trust.” There was never a sweeter child, and she was my last one. My wife and I are left alone in our old age, in a house empty and desolate, where once were heard the voices of our three beloved children. But we are not forsaken: The Consoler is with us, and a time will come when we shall meet in the presence of our Lord, not to be parted again.³⁶

Toru’s letters reveal her deeply affectionate nature, her sweet temperament and obliging nature. Through them we learn of her joys and sorrows, studies and longings, and losses and acquisitions. In them are also revealed her pride in her country’s great heritage. In fact, it was this love for her country, that made her correspond with Mlle. Clarisse Bader, and it is to her that perhaps we owe the best possible summary of Toru’s character.

   Her letters revealed a candour, a sensitivity, a charm of goodness and of simplicity that had made her dear to me and that showed me the native qualities of the Hindu woman developed and transformed by the Christian civilization of Europe.³⁷
4.7 The Skylark & The Nightingale— A Comparison Between Toru Dutt & Sarojini Naidu

At this point, it would not be out of place to make a brief, comparative study between Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, the two exotic plants in the rich, variegated garden of English muse, who appeared in the scene in the later half of the nineteenth century. Together, they brought a new colour and a strange beauty to the realm of Indo-Anglian poesy, to which it was hitherto unfamiliar. They took to an alien medium for the expression of their essentially native sentiments, and contributed substantially in displaying to the West the beauty of the East. Their literary activities demonstrated to the world what the Indian woman was capable of achieving despite hurdles. Sponsored by Sir Edmund Gosse, the noted English critic, to both whom he wrote fine introductions, the two attained fame in the English speaking world in a short time. Lamenting Toru's early death Sir Gosse wrote:

It is difficult to exaggerate when we try to estimate what we have lost in the premature death of Toru Dutt. Literature had no honors which need have been beyond the grasp of a girl who at the age of twenty-one, and in languages separated from her own by so deep a chasm, has produced so much of lasting worth.38

About Sarojini Naidu he remarked:

Mrs Naidu is, I believe, acknowledged to be the most accomplished living poets of India—at least, of those who write in English, since what wonders the native languages of that country may be producing I am not competent to say. But I do not think that any one questions the supreme place she holds among those Indians who
choose to write in our tongue. Indeed, I am not disinclined to believe that she is the most brilliant, most original, as well as the most correct, of all natives of Hindustan who have written in English.\textsuperscript{39}

To impart the metaphor of the skylark and the nightingale— the two celebrated songbirds in English poetry, Toru Dutt may be compared to the skylark which is the:

\begin{verbatim}
blithe Spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from heaven, or near it,
Pourrest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.
\end{verbatim}

Waking or asleep

\begin{verbatim}
Thou of death must deem
\end{verbatim}

We look before and after,

\begin{verbatim}
And pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{verbatim}

As has been already discussed, Toru was gripped with a sense of fatalism and this gave her poetry a melancholic strain. Sarojini, on the other hand, is a voice like the nightingale's:
light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full throated ease.

In discussing the poetry and the personality of the two, we might consider that, while Toru Dutt was chiefly a narrative poet with epic intentions, Sarojini Naidu was a lyrical poet with a natural lilt in her song. While Toru was cut off in the prime of her life and will ever remain the “inheritor of unfulfilled renown,” Sarojini, in the hectic throes of nation building, exchanged the lyre of the poet for the sword and shield of the patriot. Both wrote in English, had their audiences in England as well as in India; both were children of Bengal and a result of socio-cultural, literary ferment; both were products of cross fertilisation of the East and the West; both had for their mentors Sir Edmund Gosse; and finally, both were precocious in their intellectual development. While Sarojini began to write poetry at the age of eleven, Toru had attained considerable mastery in English and French by the age of fifteen. While both Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu sang of India, Toru sang of its ancient past, whereas Sarojini went into lyrical ecstasy describing the panorama of Indian life—corn grinders, snake charmers, palanquin bearers, Wandering singers, bangle sellers, Indian dancers, and a host of other such.

Toru Dutt had a rare gift of story telling, of arousing interest, of creating suspense, and of drawing character; she excelled in narrative and descriptive art. As an example, the opening stanza from "Lakshman" may be quoted:

Hark! Lakshman! Hark, again that cry!
It is, — it is my husband’s voice!
Oh hasten, to his succour fly,
    No more hast thou, dear friend, a choice.
He calls on thee, perhaps his foes
    Environ him on all sides round,
That wail, — it means death's final throes!
    Why standest thou, as magic-bound? (p. 29)

Sarojini Naidu, on the other hand, was not so well endowed with descriptive powers and the gift of character delineation, her forte lay in lyrical poetry. In charm and lilting melody, and in spontaneity of musical verse, Sarojini has no peers and no followers; she stands supreme as a lyric poet in the realm of Indo-Anglian verse. Here is first stanza of “The Pardah Nashin” to reiterate the point:

    Her life is a revolving dream
    Of languid and sequestered ease;
    Her girdles and her fillets gleam
    Like changing fires on sunset seas;
    Her raiment is like morning mist,
    Shot opal, gold and amethyst. 42

Both Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu have dealt with the theme of love in their poetry, but, their approach towards love is radically different. Toru’s conception of love is spiritual after the classical tradition of India; Sarojini’s love poetry is more inclined towards the Bhakti tradition. Sarojini’s love poetry has a personal touch in it, yet without neo-modernist’s Freudian analysis. It reflects her varying moods and feelings; in it one witnesses her hope and despair, rapture and irony, and fulfilment and loss. In her early poetry, love is treated with intense romantic fervour, which gave way to an expression of serenity and peace with the
advancement of years. When considered in entirety, Sarojini is sentimental in her response to love. The heart rather than the head predominates her love poems. The opening stanza of “If You Call Me,” reinforces the statement:

If you call me I will come
Swifter, O my love,
Than a trembling forest deer
Or a panting dove,
Swifter than a snake that flies
To the charmer’s thrall...
If you call me I will come
Fearless what befall.

As Sarojini’s love poems are a natural outburst of her heart, it would be futile to outline a definite philosophy in them. Following the tradition of saint-poets like Mira, Vidyapati, and Chandidas, she rendered her poetry colourful, romantic and sensuous. Full of ornamental verbiage, she has been taken to task for maudlin sentiments. Dr. Dastoor considers Sarojini’s love poetry as mostly extravagant, needlessly wordy, or merely pretty, and that still it reveals a sensitive and passionate spirit. A point worth the note in a comparative approach to the theme of love in the poetry of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu is that while only a few poems of Toru Dutt deal with the theme of love, nearly a third of Sarojini’s poems—66 out of a total of 184 are love poems. While to Toru, love is an experience bordering on the mystic, Sarojini conceptualised love as an intensely human phenomena; unconditional, self-surrendering, and self-abnegating in its aspect. Sarojini’s conception of love has a wider and ampler sweep than Toru’s. Sarojini was keenly aware to rapture of union and pathos of separation.
In the poems of both Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, nature descriptions occupy large space. In Toru Dutt's poems, nature serves as a canvas for the play of human drama. Her descriptions are characterised by sharp powers of observation and sensitiveness to colour. After her conquer over the God of death, through steadfast love, in the midst of tranquil environs, Savitri and Satyavan enjoy Arcadian love:

Under the faint beams of the stars
How beautiful appeared the flowers,
Light scarlet, flecked with golden bars
Of the palasas, in the bowers
That nature there herself had made
Without the aid of man. At times
Trees on their path cast densest shade,
And nightingales sang mystic rhymes
Their fears and sorrows to assuage. (p. 28)

Sarojini's nature poems are written on seasons and flowers. Like Toru's sketches on nature, Sarojini's too are marked with sensitiveness to colours and scents of the natural world. However, there is a marked difference between the two, to understand this, we may consider a stanza from “Champak Blossoms:”

Amber petals, ivory petals,
Petals of cavern jade,
Charming with your ambrosial sweetness
Forest and field and glade,
Foredoomed in your hour of transient glory
To shrivel and shrink and fade!45
It is clear that Sarojini filled up the gaps with words and phrases, whereas, Toru is profuse and luscious in revealing the beauties of nature.

Sarojini never quite excelled in portraying human nature. "Her characters are usually clothed in dreamlike vagueness, in religious symbolism, and in flowery phrases and glowing similies." Toru has, however, presented subtle character portrayals. In her Ancient Ballads, we have such ideal representatives of Indian womanhood as Savitri, Sita, and Jogadhya Uma. These characters are drawn with feminine grace and nobility. Like true Romantic poets, both Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu sang songs of freedom and patriotism. Toru expressed her patriotic sentiments for the nation of her choice—France. Her poems, "France 1870," and "Madame Therese," bear out her love for that great nation. In her introduction to Le Journal, Clarisse Bader remarks:

Toru Dutt did not just strive to like our language, our literature. She loved our country, and showed her love at precisely that moment when France was dying. In pages that did not see the light of day, this young child who had not yet turned fifteen, this Asiatic, retraced our patriotic sufferings with an anguished accent that anyone would say belonged to a French girl.

One of the shining stars in the history of Indian freedom struggle, Sarojini wrote a number of impassioned poems dedicated to her motherland and its great leaders. In this connection, mention may be made of poems like "To India," "The Gift of India," "The Lotus," and "Awake!" The opening stanza of "Awake!" is given below:

Waken, O mother! thy children implore thee,
Who kneel in thy presence to serve and adore thee!
The night is aflush with a dream of the morrow,
Why still dost thou sleep in thy bondage of sorrow?
Awaken and sever the woes that enthrall us,
And hallow our hands for the triumphs that call us!
Are we not thine, O Belov'd, to inherit
The manifold pride and power of thy spirit?
Ne'er shall we fail thee, forsake thee or falter,
Whose hearts are thy home and thy shield and thine alter.
Lol we would thrill the high stars with thy story,
And set thee again in the forefront of glory.48

It may be said, that if Toru Dutt was an epic poet in making cut off before
fulfilment, Sarojini Naidu was a lyric poet in fullness of her efflorescence. Toru
Dutt, with her Victorian code of morality, was restrained in expressing personal
sentiments. Sarojini Naidu was an uninhibited romantic in her response and her
appeal is more decorative than emotional; this is the reason why she is so
successful in shorter pieces like "Palanquin Bearers," "Indian Weavers," and
"Bangle Seller," she is able to capture the melodies of Indian folk music in
English tongue. Toru Dutt, Bengali by birth, was English in her intellectual
development and French in her political sympathies. The soul of both however,
was Indian, dressed in the garb English language. As one among the founders of
Indo-Anglian poetry, Toru's place is assured in history, and so is Sarojini's place
as a song bird of that school of English poetry. Finally, literature was a whole-
time vocation for Toru, but it was mostly a matter of diversion for Sarojini. During
her short, but intensely active life, Toru never parted company with the Muse,
whereas, Sarojini left her in a huff just at a time when her poetry was being
recognized and applauded in distant shores.
It is time for retrospection, a time to recall the legacy of Toru Dutt and other early Indo-Anglian poets. Toru's life was chequered with beauty and tragedy. Her greatness as a human being was that she went through the shaky phases of her life with passion, fortitude, and serenity, yet retaining the splendour and poise of her spirit. Her greatness as a poet was that she touched the cord of our racial and religious ethos by her inimitable rendering of the deathless stories of our heritage and made them known to the West. Her efforts in poetry were complementary to the efforts at social and religious reformation initiated by the stalwarts of Indian Renaissance. Though Toru's literary output is small, it is not insignificant. Even her small output gives us a taste of what she might have been had not the race of her life been so quickly run. Amaranath Jha's comment is significant in this context:

There are few poetic glories which, given maturity, she could not have achieved. She could have interpreted to the West the spirit of India and could have brought about a more sympathetic understanding. She might have developed into a novelist or a writer of lyrics breathing grace and sweetness.49

Speculation and promise apart, Toru's actual record as an Indo-Anglian poet and author of the first generation, does compel recognition. H.A.L. Fisher is no more than just when he writes, "this child of the green valley of the Ganges has by sheer force of native genius earned for herself the right to be enrolled in the great fellowship of English poets."50 In the end, we may confidently say that the worth of Toru's poetic achievement is such as to defend her forever from proud 'Oblivion's curse.'
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