CHAPTER 2

The Divided Soul
Indian writing in English has for its background resource, the works of such Anglo-Indian writers as Sir William Jones, Sir Edwin Arnold, John Leyden, David Richardson, Alfred Lyall, Lawrence Hope, William Waterfield, and others. These administrators and orientalists spent long years in India and derived their poetic inspiration from traditional Indian themes. It was from such orientalists, as well as the great masters of English poetry like Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and Tennyson, that early Indo-Anglian writers drew their sustenance. However, the early Indo-Anglian writers were in a spiritual mist. They had a hazy past and their future was nebulous. By and by, the mist cleared, and the Indo-Anglians discovered anew the timeless fount of their oriental tradition. In this exploration, there have been successes and failures, and as Prof. Iyengar says, "the failures are perhaps more numerous than the successes. All the same there are men and women (necessarily few) who have bravely run the race and reached the goal and they deserve due recognition."

2.1. The Child of International Spirit

Among the few women "who have bravely run the race," the name of Toru Dutt stands first. Though she will always be identified with India and as a child of "the green valley of the Ganges," she traversed borders—both national and linguistic, to gather a rich harvest. True to her calling and educated in the tongues of the East and the West, Toru was truly an international child. Toru was born in a period when a structured system of English education, following the lines of
Macaulay's Minute, and following the review of Wood's Despatch, was established in India. Acquaintance with the English language and literature excited the newly emerging elite which lapped up its treasures eagerly. Toru too learnt the language, and learnt it as few of her contemporaries had ever done. Along with the study of English and French, Toru realised the need to discover her roots, so she set out to familiarise herself with the classical language of her ancestors and delved deep into its literatures. In all her writings, whether The Sheaf, or the Ancient Ballads, or her novels, Toru spoke in a private voice and revealed to the West the soul of India. Toru had a perfect command over English, French, and Sanskrit. However, her vehicle of expression was chiefly English. While in France, she acquainted herself with the works of poets belonging to the literary society of Parnass. In England, she devoted herself to the study of English novelists like Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, George Eliot, and Bronte sisters, as well as the English Romantic poets.

Though contemporary critics may tend to reject even the existence of pioneers like Toru Dutt, as when Amalendu Bose says, "There was hardly any such phenomenon till 1947 as Indian poetry in English;"3 sober consideration makes one realise that Indo-Anglian poetry would still be floundering aimlessly but for the work of its pioneers. In this context, it is well to remind ourselves of T.S. Eliot's assertion, "No poet, no artist of any sort, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation, is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists."4 A revaluation of the poetry of Toru Dutt should thus prove a fruitful exercise in the process of assimilation of the new and the old, the East and the West; paving the way for a truly global literary culture.
A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields, the only work published during Toru’s lifetime, is mainly a translation of the poetry of such eminent nineteenth century poets like Victor Hugo, Leconte de Lisle, Theophile Gautier, Charles Baudelaire, Pierre Jean Beranger, Alfred de Musset, Andre Chenier, and others. She also gives us a glimpse of the works of poets from earlier periods like Parny and de Florian of the eighteenth century, Scarron and P. Corneille of the seventeenth, and du Bartas and du Bellay of the sixteenth. The field of literature from which Toru gleaned her "sheaf" may be broadly characterised as the 'Romantic School of French Poetry.' The Romantic Movement corresponded in the realm of literature to the Revolution in the realm of politics. Seventeenth century was the classical period of French poetry; symbolised by a servile attitude towards the Grecian model. Eighteenth century was the age of reason; nineteenth century Romantic School gave free play to feeling and imagination. As regards language and metre, the Romantic School gave preference to vividness and simplicity over high-sounding phrases.

Toru Dutt had great fascination for Victor Hugo and his poems occupy the place of eminence in the Sheaf with thirty-one pieces. These poems are chiefly taken from two of his later works—Les Chatiments and L’Annee Terrible. The translations reproduce the vigour and metre of his poetic diction. Toru’s enthusiasm for Victor Hugo is displayed in her notes which accompany the translations. She wrote, “His name is among the great of this earth. Along with Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Goethe, Schiller, and others, his place has long been marked in the Valhalla of poets.” The poems selected by Toru display multifaceted aspects of Hugo’s poetry—his grandeur of style, descriptive powers, lyrical beauty, patriotism, and humanitarianism. The translations also show Toru’s
sensitive handling of the English verse. As an example, first stanza of the translated version of Hugo's poem "The Political Prisoner" is quoted below:

—Paths that from trees dark shadows borrow!

Green vale and wood and pebbled shore!

Wherefore this silence and this sorrow?

—A step that came here, comes no more.6

F. de Gramont and J. Soulary are given the next place of importance by Toru; probably because they were excellent sonneteers and Toru was rather partial to the sonnet form. Gautier and Sainte Beuve are represented by six and five translations each. Lamartine, Leconte de Lisle, Barbier, and Mme. Valmore are represented by four poems each. Works of other important poets are limited to two or three pieces. The Sheaf embodies in its pages translation from seventy-five poets many of whom are not known to the average reader of French poetry.

A perusal of Toru's English translations of French poetry suggests that she did not go about her work in a premeditated fashion. Obviously otherwise, she would have accorded the poets their place according to accepted norms of literary criticism. Rather than a conscious process, the Sheaf seems to be a collection wholly determined by predilection of the young poetess. A poem may have attracted her because of its rhyme and metre; another may have caught her attention due to its intensity of expression. A number of poems have patriotic themes, while others speak of homely joys and simple everyday scenes, kindness and bravery, childhood and ideal manhood. Mlle. Clarisse Bader, Toru's pen friend from France, who also helped publish her French novel Le Journal de Mademoiselle D'Arvers posthumously, thought that it was her oriental upbringing that caused her to be attracted towards the poetry of Romantic School. She
wrote, "What attracts this young girl is the poetry of the nineteenth century. In it she finds what her compatriots have always liked—the bright and dramatic reproduction of the movements of the heart, an abundance of images, and richness of colour."  

The Sheaf was received enthusiastically by critics both from India and abroad. In the Examiner, eminent critic Sir Edmund Gosse wrote:

The "Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields" is certainly the most imperfect of Toru's writings, but it is not the least interesting. It is a wonderful mixture of strength and weakness, of genius overriding great obstacles, and of talent succumbing to ignorance and inexperience. [...] On the whole, the attainment of the book was simply astounding. [...] Occasionally she showed a profundity of research that would have done no discredit to Mr. Saintsbury or "le doux Asselineau." She was ready to pronounce an opinion on Napolé Pyrenean or detect a plagiarism in Baudelaire. But she thought that Alexander Smith was still alive, and she was curiously vague about the career of Sainte-Beuve. This inequality of equipment was a thing inevitable to her isolation, and hardly worthy recording except to show how laborious her mind was, and how quick to make the best of small resources.  

The Englishman paid glowing compliments to Toru in these words:

There is evidence of rare ability, promise of great achievements, in this volume of poetry by a young Bengali lady. To expect translations made from one foreign language into another by one so young, as we understand Miss Toru Dutt to be, would be expect a
miracle. Yet there are pieces in the work before us, which, though they must have presented considerable difficulties to the translator are almost perfect.⁹

A discerning critic, E.J. Thompson spoke of Toru's poetic skills in these words:

The verses grip most of all for the vehement soul that they reveal, a soul which has had few fellows throughout time. Toru Dutt remains one of the most astonishing women that ever lived, a woman whose place is with Sappho and Emily Bronte, fiery and unconquerable of soul as they; […] The remarkable verses in which she chronicles the dream that foreran death go to strengthen this same conviction of power and fire. […] These poems are sufficient to place Toru Dutt in the small class of women who have written English verse that can stand.¹⁰

The Friend of India, besides praising Toru's skill as a versifier, saw in her a hope for the country's future. Its appreciation ran thus:

The versification is generally good, and the translations we believe, intelligent and faithful. […] We take the book as a good omen for the future of women in India. We have been told that the fair sex in India is gifted, not only with a strong love for poetry but also a love for poetical composition, and that in some parts of the country the women are the song and ballad makers of the districts. When child marriage is abolished, and young girls are properly educated, and woman once more assumes her rightful position in India, we may expect that the influence of the sex on literature, and through literature, on the elevation and refinement of the people, will be
great indeed. We trust Miss Toru Dutt’s high example will not be without effect on her countrymen, and we trust the book will be widely circulated among native gentlemen, that they may see what education may do to their wives and daughters.\textsuperscript{11}

The \textit{Sheaf} being the work of a girl still in her teens may not have perfect versification. Yet, we observe in them a delicate feminine touch and a firm hold on the subject. Harihar Das says:

> One is astonished at the wealth and variety of vocabulary and at many instances of real poetic expression. [..] She reproduces for the most part the actual metre of her originals (or a metre as closely allied as possible), and such diversity of metre as the book displays only serves to emphasize her own talent and skill. Her translations are fairly close as a rule, though not uniformly so. In some of her versions, the ideas rather than the actual expressions of the French poem are reiterated and elaborated, and occasionally one meets with slight deviations and omissions.\textsuperscript{12}

As an example of the above statement, last stanza of Victor Hugo’s “Napoleon le petit” and Toru’s English rendering of it may be quoted side by side:

\begin{align*}
\text{Quand il tomba, techant le Monde,} & \quad \text{Dark, dark archangel—but he fell,} \\
\text{L’immense mer} & \quad \text{Earth felt the sound,} \\
\text{Ouvrit a sa chute profonde} & \quad \text{And ocean opened by a spell} \\
\text{Le goufre amer;} & \quad \text{Its gulf profound.} \\
\text{Il y plongea, sinister archange,} & \quad \text{Down headlong—but his name} \\
\text{Et s’engloutit—} & \quad \text{through time}
\end{align*}
Toi, tu te noyeras dans la fange,  Shall overcome—
Petit, petit!  Thou too shalt drown, but
drown in slime,
Tom Thumb, Tom Thumb!¹³

Regarding the above poem, Harihar Das has noted that though the poem is largely a free translation, with individual stanzas frequently expressing a different thought from the original; it reproduces the swing and sarcasm of Hugo's verse, and her substitution of 'Tom Thumb' for 'Le Petit' is a happy and ingenious rendering.¹⁴

Some of Toru’s translations display both her faults and merits at the same time. As an example, we may quote “The Memories of the People,” a verse from Beranger:

In the hut men shall talk of his glory,

With pride, not unmingled with tears;

And the roof shall not ring with a story

But that grand one, for fifty long years.

There villagers in evenings cold,
Shall haply beg some gossip old,
By stories of a former day,
To while the livelong hours away.

“Some may say that he has done us wrong,

But the people love him yet;
Mother, sing of him a song;
We love him, though his sun be set.”¹⁵
Critical "Notes" appended by Toru at the end of the volume has been invariably praised by critics. The *Examiner* noted that:

The notes supply very considerable learning, combined with some odd omissions. For instance, Miss Dutt has no idea of death concluding the lives of any of her favourites. She will grieve, we are sure, to learn that neither Charles Baudelaire nor Alexander Smith are in a position to profit by the prim little advice she gives to each. [. . .] In short, her book, taking for granted that it really is what it seems to profess to be, a genuine Hindu product, is an important landmark in the history of the progress of culture.\(^{16}\)

E.J. Thompson expressed his view that:

The *Notes* are astonishing beyond anything in the text. It seems impossible that an Indian girl, at such an age, should have such knowledge of French literature. And in the *Notes*, while never merely foolish even when boldest, she deals with French masters as one assessing the work of equals, and it seems hard to tell which to admire more—the range of reading, or the independence and masculinity of criticism. These Indian girls—[. . .] knew their own minds, and could express those minds with precision and strength that compels respectful attention.\(^{17}\)

Famous scholar, Dr. Brajendranath Seal was of the view that if for the notes alone, the *Sheaf* merits republication.\(^{18}\) About the "Notes," B.K. Talookdar says, "In them we see so clear as day light that had Toru lived to a greater age she would have bid fair to rival that very Sainte-Beuve whom she so praises for his critical qualities."\(^{19}\)
Now, a look at the “Notes” should give us a glimpse of the depth of reading and wide understanding of the young poetess. Translating Gramont, Toru felt that he was among the best of modern French poets and that he had also written many poems in Italian. Unpublished translations of some sonnets by Gramont were found among Toru’s manuscripts after her death. According to Toru, Victor Hugo was “the greatest of living poets” (235). In a letter to her friend Mary Martin, she wrote, “Sometimes Victor Hugo gets rather difficult [. . .] Without Littre’s Dictionary, it would be hard to understand all the technical terms, but his French is so good.” About Joseph Soulary, Toru noted that his sonnets were among the best in the language, and were elaborated with great care. Each sonnet was a pastoral picture, or a little drama of exquisite beauty. Soulary was deservedly called the Petrarch of France (235).

Toru correctly commented that Charles Nodier’s strength lay “in prose more than in poetry” (237). To her, his stories were very interesting and reminded of Washington Irving. His “Souvenirs” appealed to her much. A graphic account of Nodier’s life and works has been given by Alexander Dumas who was a personal friend of his. Nodier travelled to England and Scotland, and some of his verses addressed to Sir Walter Scott is to be found in one of the earlier numbers of Blackwood’s Magazine. Regarding Andre Lemoyne, she says that he has not written much, but whatever little is there is worthy of high praise. Pierre Dupont is “the poet of sorrows and joys of the poor” (238). His poetry lacks art but it is compensated by his great natural gifts.

Born at Bonn in Germany, the poetry of Nicholas Martin is permeated with the grand style of German poetry. His mother was a sister of Karl Simrock, the translator of Nibelungen, which Victor Hugo considered one of the three greatest
epics of the world— the other two being the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Martin's landscapes are very beautiful, and his German leanings have not spoiled his French at all. Emile Deschamps, like his brother Antoni Deschamps, has paid much attention to foreign literature (239). His translations from Goethe and Schiller are close to admirable originals. He belongs to the Romantic School founded by Hugo and Lamartine. Of Antoni Deschamps, Toru remarks that his poetry is stiff, cold, austere, and sometimes sublime; unlike Emile's poetry which is varied, supple, changing and graceful. Antoni has written little or no prose, Emile has written a great deal of prose as well as verse (265). Antoni devoted himself to the poetry of Italy, Emile hovered from the poetry of Germany, to that of England, Italy and Spain.

Toru writes about Lamartine, "he was born in the most sombre period of French history, and in a respectable religious family. [...] In fancy, in imagination, in brilliance, in grandeur, in style, in all that makes a poet—excepting purity,—he must yield to Victor Hugo. In purity he yields to none. His mind is essentially religious" (245-246). Sainte-Beuve was "one of the greatest literary authorities and critics in France, and his review of a new book often sealed its fate" (247). But he was not a poet of the first order. His prose had to some extent, done harm to his poetry. Still, it must not be supposed that he was a bad or even a mediocre poet. Though he did not belong to the first class, and had no title to be ranked with the Hugos and the Lamartines, he took "a high place in the second" (248).

Victor de Laparde, Toru says, was "one of the great poets of France, and may take rank with the greatest names of the time" (249). Alfred de Musset was one of the most popular poets of France, and his countrymen regarded him as their Byron. He possessed "the spirit, the power, the wit, the brilliance, and the
love of nature sometimes real and sometimes affected which mark the writings of the English poet" (251). Like Byron, his epigrams sparkle, and his pathos is sometimes profound. Like Byron, he had no great depth of thought, and was sometimes eccentric and wild. His landscapes, like Byron's, seem to have been elaborated often more in a study, under the fumes of wine, than in the open air and under the blue sky. Toru judges Jules Lefevre-Deumier as "one of the most fertile and preserving of the French poets of the nineteenth century" (253). He was brother-at-arms and friend of the valiant phalanx consisting of Victor Hugo, Larmartine, de Vigny, and several others, who after many heroic battles established the Romantic School of Poetry, which is now admitted to be the best in France. He has written much and admirably well, but his name has never come out of the shadow which seems to be the unfortunate lot of so many poets worthy of distinction.

About Madame Ackermann, Toru says that "no English authoress, not even Elizabeth Browning, is her equal in point of erudition" (254). Toru sums up Louis Bouilhet as "a great poet of the order of Victor de Laparde, only not so religious" (255). Auguste Vacquerie is a very pure poet, pure both in his life and his works (256). André Theuriet's pieces show a great love for the beauties of nature and a very high talent for description. They also have in them much tenderness and feeling (269). Reboul, is neither a man of great genius nor of high education. "He resembles some of the peasant poets of England and Scotland, Clare or Thom,—not Burns for that was a Master-Spirit. In his more ambitious efforts he utterly fails" (285). A.N. Dwivedi writes, "Throughout her notes, Toru continues to be peculiarly frank, naïve, and critical, and the reader can scarce relinquish the volume until he has reached the last page."22
Taken as a whole, the Sheaf represents a fairly varied panorama of French poets and their poetry. Harihar Das made the following comment:

We see in her pages the secret of Beranger's popularity with the masses and the plaintiveness that helps to make the lyrics of Mme Valmore so attractive. We get a glimpse of de Musset's unrequited love and acquaintance with philosophic thought, as well as of the ties that bound Brizeux to Brittany. The two poems that bear de Vigny's name represent himself as well as his work. He was the thinker among the poets of his time and stood to some extent apart, and his picture of Moses climbing Pisgah's height is the personification of the burden of loneliness that often has to be borne by genius. Barbier's admiration for Italy and its artists, Gautier's proclivity for unusual words, not infrequently associated with the orient, de Nerval's idealism and admiration for the past, de Lisle's recourse to foreign climes or literature for his subjects, and Dupont's sympathy with rural toilers—all these are reflected, and much more. Names of poets not so familiar out of France are thus brought before the English-reading public.23

However, Toru was apologetic about her own calibre and expressed her inequity in handling the verses of French masters in the concluding sonnet titled "A Mon Pere." Truly, her maiden humility was not among the least of her graces.

2.2. Aru—The Unremembered Partner

It is likely that in the upsurge of one's emotional enthusiasm for Toru, one loses sight of her elder sister Aru. However, such an attitude would be
lamentable in view of the sterling quality of Aru's work, and in view of the fact that the two sisters were shadow companions, and thus their influence on each other's work must have been considerable. Born in 1854, Aru was a meek and fragile child. Govin Chunder Dutt described Aru as:

My next, the beauty of our home is meek;
Not so deep-loving haply, but less wild
Than her dear brother;—brow and blushing cheek
Her nature shows serene, and pure, and mild
As evening's early star.

In the "Prefatory Memoir" to the Sheaf, Govin Chunder compared the two sisters and wrote the following:

Toru had read more, probably also thought more, and the elder sister appeared to follow the lead of the younger; so that I have often been asked by strangers which is Miss Dutt? And yet there was no assumption of superiority on part of Toru. It seemed perfectly natural to Aru to fall in the background in presence of her sister. The love between them was always perfect. [ . . . ] the great ambition of the sisters was to publish a novel anonymously, which Toru should write, and Aru who was far more deft at the pencil should illustrate. Toru's part of the contract has been faithfully fulfilled. I have before me her manuscript. It is in form of a diary written in French by a young lady. The scene is laid in France, and the characters are all French men and women. I shall publish it probably hereafter. Aru did not live to complete her part of the undertaking.
Aru died in 1874 at the tender age of twenty, and the novel referred to by her father is *Le Journal de Mademoiselle D'Arvers*. Toru speaks of Aru's poetical contribution in the *Sheaf* in these words, "The author of these pages has only to add that the pieces signed just A. are of her dear and only sister's [. . .] Had she lived, this book with her help might have been better, and the writer might perhaps have had less reason to be ashamed of it, and less occasion to ask for the reader's indulgence."  

Aru's total output stands at eight pieces. Meagre though her harvest is, whatever she touched with her pen became aglow with spurt of intense feelings and lyrical abundance. In her translations, one finds extraordinary lyrical quality. Like a true romanticist, she loved to indulge in the transient and pathetic elements of life. It may be noted that Aru seems to have kept her translations more closely to the originals than Toru did. However, due to the lack of sufficient work, it is difficult to form a very decided opinion on the matter. Poetical translations of Aru are as follows: "The Young Captive," "The Emigration of Pleasure," "Romance of Nina," "Morning Serenade," "Chanson," "My Village," "The Mother's Birthday," and "The Captive to the Swallows."

The first translation, "The Young Captive," is of Andre Chenier's "Le Jeune Captive," the heroine of which, Toru informs us, was beautiful Aimee de Coigny, Duchess de Fleury. The Duchess fell victim to the forces of the French Revolution. Dextrous pen of Aru competently describes the longing of the captive. The poem abounds in pathetic touch; romantic imagination reaches its climax in the penultimate stanza:

A prisoner myself broken-hearted and crushed,

From my heart to my lips all sympathies rushed,
And my lyre from its slumbers awoke;

At these sorrows, these wishes of a captive, I heard,

And to rhyme and to measure I married each word

As softly and simply she spoke. (p. 5)

Next poem, "The Emigration of Pleasure," highlights the sorrows of France at the time of its war with its European enemies. Pleasure is personified and the poem is steeped in misery and helplessness:

Affrighted by ills that war

Had drawn upon unhappy France,

Pleasure sought in regions far,

Encouragement and countenance.

Through Germany and Spain to pass

Was weak work for miles and miles,

The Spaniard never jokes, alas!

And the German never smiles. (p. 8)

A short poem, "Romance of Nina" was very popular when it first appeared in print. Luxuriance of lyricism seeks to imprint on memory and deserves full quotation:

When back the well-loved shall return

To her who pines though once so dear,

The spring from its abundant urn

Shall scatter blossoms far and near.

I watch, I wait;—in vain, in vain,

The loved and lost comes not again.
Ye birds far sweeter shall ye sing
When ye shall catch his tender tone;
Then haste the well-loved back to bring,
I'll teach ye songs of love alone.
I watch, I wait;—in vain, in vain,
The loved and lost comes not again.

O echo whose repose I mar
With my regrets and mournful cries,
He comes,—I hear his voice afar,
Or is it thine that thus replies?
Peace! hark he calls! In vain, in vain,
The loved and lost comes not again.

There is the piercing cry of the beloved in it. From her stung heart springs sorrow and every line of the poem is soaked in it. The next poem is “Morning Serenade,” the first on which Sir Edmund Gosse’s eyes fell when the book was thrust into his unwilling hands by Prof. Minto, editor of the Examiner. The poem filled the eminent English critic with “Surprise and almost rapture.” The piece stands super-eminent in the Sheaf.

Next three poems, “Chanson,” “My Village,” and “The Mother’s Birthday,” though of not as high order as “Romance of Nina” or “Morning Serenade,” lyrical beauty and lucidity of expression therein are in no way of an inferior quality. “Chanson” is a translation of Victor Hugo’s poem, and is full of lovelorn dreams. “My Village” is yearning of an exile to breathe his last in the land of his birth:
An exile from my earliest prime

Benumbed and chilled with cold,

I long to warm myself again,

Beside the hearth of old.

Arise each day—my native land,

In memory's longing eye!

In thee began my course of life,

In thee I wish to die. 

"The Mother's Birthday," by an anonymous poet, celebrates the birthday of "Mamma." Toru informs us, that it was found together with "My village," in a little book entitled Nos Souvenirs. The poem stirs up heartfelt love for mother:

O! what is there so, good or precious

As a gentle mother's love!

On this earth, the only treasure

Sent us from the heavens above.

"The Captive to the Swallows" is a well known song of Beranger. Theme of the poem is captivity of a soldier. The captive has no one to talk to; he welcomes swallows from afar reflecting that some might have been born upon the roof beneath whose shade he first beheld the light of morn. He longs for some news of his beloved France, his friends, and his loved ones. Last two stanza of the poem is quoted below:

'Speak of them all, the loved, the lost,

My sister, is she married now?

And have they e'er your wanderings crost

That were my playmates long ago?
Of all the friends that came of yore
   With me, to win a soldier's praise,
How many have beheld once more
   The cherished scenes of earlier days?

'Who live there yet? And who have died?
   O speak, dear birds, for you must know,—
Who slumber happy side by side?
   And who, as exiles, live in woe?
My country's birds, your tidings tell.
   As high ye circle in the air,
Though never heart for me may swell
   Nor ever rise the mother's prayer. (p. 44)

In reviewing life and works of Aru, we are reminded of Bronte sisters—
Anne and Emily. Anne was subdued; she lacked the fire and the originality of her sister, but she was endowed with her own quiet virtues. Aru, like Anne, was more reticent and subdued, but was a gifted child nevertheless. Considering the works of Aru in totality, one may surmise that pathos and romantic pining gripped Aru's responsive mind readily. Her imagination was set afire by tender sympathies. In her renderings, she displayed a brilliant command of English and French, and a variety of verse forms. In her versification, Aru shows smoothness of movement and perfect rhythm. Compared with Toru, Aru is less original; yet her poetic renderings are equally lyrical and emotionally charged. Toru paid the ultimate tribute to her sister, "Of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these,—it might have been."
2.3. **Romantic Exile Returns Home**

While learning Sanskrit, Toru had predicted bringing out another "sheaf" gleaned in Sanskrit fields. The "sheaf" was published posthumously in 1882 under the title *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. The need to discover her roots of poetic anchorage impelled Toru to compose this book of verse. *Ancient Ballads* is "essentially native in genre and outlook." For all her Western training and faith, Toru never ceased to be a true daughter of India. Unlike as supposed by Sir Edmund Gosse, Vishnu and Shiva never were infantile things for Toru. The ancient myths and legends were neither exotic nor alien to her. With the study of Sanskrit, "Toru could feel her feet on hospitable soil, and satisfy the secret longings of her soul for roots in the consciousness of the race." Past stories and legends touched her deeply and she responded agreeably to them.

The Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Vishnu Purana, and the Bhagavata Purana, gave free play to her imagination and she sang with full throated ease about illustrious men and women of past. Her Christian faith did not interfere with her appreciation of the legends of old; after all, she was an Indian writing in a foreign medium. She was like her successor Sarojini Naidu, "she was 'autochthonous', she was one with India's woman singers." In her poetry there no room for "artificiality or stimulated hot-house efflorescence." As a child, she listened to the wonderful stories of our hoary tradition from her mother; later, her studies of the classics in original gave a keener edge to her poetic sensibilities which had remained untapped yet. The ancient stories provided her with a link between the past and the present and she clung tenaciously to it. She would not let go of that precious link even if the orthodox Christians carped. She wrote to her French pen-friend Mlle. Clarisse Bader, "Can there be a more touching and
lovable heroine than Sita? I do not think so. When I hear my mother chant, in the evening, the old lays of our country, I almost always weep.\textsuperscript{34} This statement brings out the essentially romantic and child-like simplicity of Toru's mind.

When it first appeared, \textit{Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan} won many critical accolades. The first edition of the book was published in London by Messrs Kegan Paul, Trench and Co. with an "Introductory Memoir" by Sir Edmund Gosse. Since then, a number of editions have been printed. The latest Indian edition was printed in Calcutta by Writer's Workshop in 1972, with a "Preface" by Raja Rao. The seven miscellaneous poems have curiously been excluded from the volume. In his "Introductory Memoir" to the first edition, Sir Gosse wrote:

If Toru Dutt were alive, she would still be younger than any recognised European writer, and yet her fame, which is already considerable, has been entirely posthumous. [. . .] her genius has been revealed to the world under many phases, and has been recognised throughout France and England. Her name, at least, is no longer unfamiliar in the ear of any well-read man or woman. But at the hour of her death she had published but one book, and that book had found but two reviewers in Europe. One of these, M. Andre Theuriet, the well-known poet and novelist, gave the "Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields" adequate praise in the "Revue des Deux Mondes"; but the other, the writer of the present notice, has a melancholy satisfaction in having been a little earlier still in sounding the only note of welcome which reached the dying poetess from England.\textsuperscript{35}
Commenting on her talent, T.O.D. Dunn wrote:

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. Her verse is finely knit, vigorous and of a pleasing variety. It is never obviously imitative, and moves with such freedom and independence which are inseparable from genuinely creative work.\(^{36}\)

Regarding the work, Harihar Das noted that it "shows how Toru’s intellect, while thoroughly assimilating the spirit of French and English literature, found eventually its truest expression in Sanskrit literature; and this was the final phase in the evolution of this intensely Indian poetess."\(^{37}\) Noted scholar B.K. Talookdar made the following remark:

The most striking thing about the *Ancient Ballads* is that Toru is going back into her own nation after having been alienated from it for a long while by two foreign literatures. One year’s work at Sanskrit and the inspiration of her earliest recollections of stories told by her mother bring her back to the very heart of India. Here all artificiality is banned, all superficiality has disappeared, only Toru remains, with roots which have just begun growing into her own land. To ask how these roots would have grown is a matter of vain and melancholy speculation; it is enough to know that they are healthy and strong roots.\(^{38}\)

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar is of the view that when Toru wrote these verse tales, she was "already a good craftsman in verse, her feeling for words was impeccable, and her eye and ear were alike trained for poetic description or
dialogue. But these tales—some of them, at least—were more than mere poems of action or character—they trafficked with the supernatural." Padmini Sengupta records her impression thus:

When Toru wrote her *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* a hitherto half-open lotus was able to blossom out in the rays of the Oriental sun in full bloom. However much Toru loved England and France, she was subconsciously never at home in writing about these countries or in translating their literature, and it was only when she gathered a Sheaf in Sanskrit fields that her real poetic worth awoke.

Eminent advocate of Indian writing in English Amaranatha Jha says:

As one reads the ballads printed in this volume one is struck with the large space covered by descriptions of nature. Indeed, it may be reasonably said that had she lived longer, she would have attained distinction in narrative verse and in descriptive verse. She has a rare gift of story telling, of arousing interest and curiosity, of creating suspense, and of drawing character. But perhaps in descriptive poetry she is even superior.

These critical opinions of various scholars should convince the reader of Toru's poetic prowess and her mastery over the ballad form. Unfortunately, this shooting star of Indo-Anglian poetry blazed a trail of brilliance and disappeared even before the world could take a full note of her. Had she lived longer, she should have ranked among the great romantics of English literature. The verses of the *Ancient Ballads* are a clear revelation that she belonged to the Romantic tradition. Dominance of lyrical note in her poetry may be attributed to an outcome
of multitude of influences upon her. It is partly the result of a musical instinct inherited from her illustrious father and uncles—who themselves were pioneers of Indo-Anglian poetry on one hand, and on the other hand there is undoubtedly the impact of her study of Sanskrit, which is a lyrical tongue. Her gentle nature and her intimate study of French Romantic Poetry also contributed to it. The poetry of Toru Dutt is also notable for its feel of Indian life which it is able to convey in an alien tongue.

Toru’s ballads present thematic novelty. The treatment of Indian myths and legends are not unnecessarily anglicised. Toru recreates the ancient Indian ethos in her descriptive and narrative verses. She is largely Indian in her theme and outlook. In the beginning, she was a romantic exile—an exile from her culture, her language, and her heritage. However, she was not totally alienated by her stay abroad. Consequently, when she returned to India and started studying Sanskrit, her innate Hindu impulses were awakened. In this regard, Amaranatha Jha’s remark is pertinent:

For all her Western training [. . .] she never ceased to be Indian. The ancient legends were not exotic for her; their atmosphere was not alien. The stories of the past stirred her and touched a responsive chord within her. The call of the land, the call of her ancestors evoked a sympathetic answer within her and she wrote of the old myths and tales without feeling or making her readers feel that they were effete, improbable, and fantastic.42

In her Ancient Ballads, Toru has recounted the ancient stories with a force and vigour, presenting before her audience the essentials of Hindu life and character as envisaged by sages of yore. Toru’s ballads show that she found the
right material for the expression of her genius in Sanskrit literature. In reciting the stories of her ancient land Toru quickly re-invented herself. She became an Indian at heart and in her imagery. According to Sir Edmund Gosse, "She was a pure Hindoo, full of the typical qualities of her race and blood, and as the present volume shows us for the first time, preserving to the last her appreciation of the poetic side of her ancient religion." He further adds:

No modern Oriental has given us so strange an insight into the conscience of the Asiatic as is presented in the story of "Prehlad," or so quaint a piece of religious fancy as "Jogadhya Uma." The poetess seems in these verses to be chanting to herself those songs of her mother's race to which she always turned with tears of pleasure. They breathe a Vedic solemnity and simplicity of temper, and are singularly devoid of that littleness and frivolity which seem, if we may judge by a slight experience, to be the bane of modern India.

Toru Dutt clothed her themes in sublime apparel and adorned them with romantic flavour, felicity of expression, and lyricism. Artistry of Toru's narratives lies in smooth diction and character portrayal. P.C. Kotoky says, "The poet's narratives are charged with lyric effusions of joy and pathos, anger and sorrow, anguish and hope. But these effusions do not disturb the easy flow of the narratives." The ballads narrated by Toru enjoy a special place in the history of Indo-Anglian poetry, they being the first in their class to convey in a foreign language, the sum and substance of Indian life. Now, for an individual consideration of the ballads, that should reveal their real poetic worth to us.
2.3.1. **Savitri**

"Savitri," which is the first poem of the volume, is also the longest. It is an epic in miniature; but without the mystic and metaphysical treatment of Sri Aurobindo. Toru Dutt has handled the theme with exclusion, condensation, and abridgement. The method of narration is dramatic, its action being presented mainly through dialogue. We know the characters directly as they speak for themselves. The poem narrates the vicissitudes of princess Savitri and her pluck in facing the God of Death, from whom she wrests her husband's life. Toru's "Savitri" is pre-eminently a poem of love. The legend of Savitri is one of the most beautiful episodes in the Mahabharata. Constancy, love and devotion of Savitri to her husband, are still considered "the highest standard of conjugal love today."\(^4^6\)

The ballad is divided in five parts. The first part deals with Savitri's parentage, descriptions of her grace and beauty, her falling in love with Satyavan, and the reluctant approval of her marriage with Satyavan by her parents' and Narad Muni. The second part contains Savitri's marriage, her going to the hermitage where Satyavan lived with his old parents', her constant devotions to gods and goddesses by keeping fasts and offering prayers, arrival of the day when Satyavan was to die according to Narad Muni's prediction, and Satyavan's departure for forest along with Savitri. In the third section, the court of Yama, the God of Death is shown. When his messengers are unable to bring the soul of Satyavan, Yama himself decides to go for it. In the fourth section we are shown Yama's arrival at the scene where Satyavan is lying supported by Savitri. Yama's possession of Satyavan's soul, Savitri's persistent following of Yama and her philosophical discussion with him, and his grant of three boons to Savitri—including the life of Satyavan. In the fifth part we see Satyavan regaining his
consciousness, his pleasant talk with his wife, their return to the hermitage, and their blissful domestic life.

In the ballad, Toru sticks by and large to the original. However, she abridges the original story to give it a dramatic appeal, and herein lies her maturity as a poetess. Toru does not make any mention of the birth of Savitri with which the story begins in the Mahabharata. Her poem begins with Savitri's dawning youth and her falling in love with Satyavan whom she saw in a hermitage. In the original story, Savitri, on her return to the palace, speaks her mind to her father in presence of Narad Muni. Toru makes Savitri confide her feelings to her mother, thus she preserves feminine modesty and bashfulness of her heroine. Toru curtails Savitri's marriage preparations. In the Mahabharata, the wedding takes place in the hermitage, in Toru's poem, the wedding is performed at the king's palace and Savitri and Satyavan go to hermitage in a procession. Peaceful domesticity which followed the marriage, Savitri's prayers and penances for sake of Satyavan, and her accompanying of Satyavan to the forest on the fateful night are close to the original. In order to make the flow of narrative smooth, Toru improves upon the description of Yama. In both—the original as well as Toru's poem, Savitri remains steadfast and persuasive to the last. In the Mahabharata, Yama grants Savitri five boons, Toru condenses them into three.

Savitri was the only child of the king of Madra who lived in "those far-off primeval days [when] fair India's daughters were not pent in closed zenanas." Beautiful of face and form, sunny and sweet of nature, Savitri's beatific presence was a benediction to all. Her presence was such that:
Chance strangers, having met her, past,
And often would they turn the head
A lingering second look to cast,
And bless the vision ere it fled. (p. 1)

It was not just physical graces, which are common among maidens of high birth, but her matchless purity that made Savitri unrivalled. She is described thus:

— upon her face

Childlike and innocent and fair,
No man with thought impure or base
Could ever look; — the glory there,
The sweet simplicity and grace,
Abashed the boldest; but the good
God's purity there loved to trace,
Mirrored in dawning womanhood. (p. 1)

As Savitri grew into womanhood, her father anxiously pondered the question of her marriage; but he could think of no "fitting mate for one so pure" (2). He yielded at last to the persuasion of his dear wife that the matter best be left to God. She also suggested that some day Savitri may herself choose her husband.

Months passed by, and one summer morning, as Savitri wended her way through cornfields, to a hermitage, she saw some youth engaged in sport. Among them, there was one "tall and lithe [and] Royal in port" (2). Savitri looked on, gave a sigh, and slackened her pace. Toru's comment on the situation is remarkable:

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

Savitri's choice was now made. Reaching the hermitage, she inquired about the youth and learnt that he was Satyavan, son of Dyoumatsen—the rightful king of Salva. Dyoumatsen, now old and blind, and deposed by his enemies, was living with his wife and only son as a hermit. Savitri returned home with joy in her heart and confided her feelings to her mother. The king and the queen were put in a piquant situation as they could not ascertain Satyavan's lineage and hence to proceed in such a delicate matter was difficult for them.

Not long after, as if to allay the royal parents' doubts, Narad Muni, the venerable son of Brahma, came to the palace. To the omniscient sage for whom "The sun's, the moon's, the planets' birth / Was not to him a mystery" (4), the king of Madra explained his own predicament regarding the wisdom of his daughter's choice. To his dismay, Narad became strangely troubled. Upon the king's insistence, Narad declared: "Upon this day as rounds the year / The young Prince Satyavan shall die" (6). The prophecy of Narad shook the king, and the two tried to persuade Savitri to choose for herself another husband. With grave dignity, Savitri refused saying that it was sin to pledge herself to someone else when her mind was once made up:

Once, and once only, have I given
My heart and faith — 'tis past recall;
With conscience none have ever striven,
And none may strive, without a fall,
Not the less solemn was my vow
Because unheard, and oh! the sin
Will not be less, if I should now

Deny the feeling felt within.

She further said that if fate decreed her the miseries of a widow's life, then it was beyond mortal powers to alter it. She says philosophically:

None have on earth what they desire;

Death comes to all or soon or late;

And peace is but a wandering fire;

Expediency leads wild astray;

The Right must be our guiding star;

Duty our watchword, come what may;

Seeing the unalterable resolve of Savitri, Narad and the king consented to the marriage:

"Bless thee, my child! 'Tis not for us

To question the Almighty will,

Though cloud on cloud loom ominous,

In gentle rain they may distil."

At this, the monarch — "Be it so!

I sanction what my friend approves;

All praise to Him, whom praise we owe;

My child shall wed the youth she loves."

The marriage was celebrated with great rejoicings and the wedded pair set out for their hermitage home. Savitri was graciously welcomed by Dyoumatsen and his wife. Though overjoyed, the old, exiled king and his queen were troubled by the thought that fragile Savitri may find life at the hermitage too strenuous. Soon however, their fears were put to rest as Savitri accommodated herself
wonderfully to new life. Months of quiet happiness followed in fulfilment of homely duties. Inwardly however, Savitri was deeply troubled by Narad's prophecy. With a hope of warding the impending doom, Savitri kept fasts, offered prayers, and fed Brahmins. At last, the fateful day arrived, and Savitri intensified her prayers and vigils. The day passed by uneventfully. As twilight approached, Satyavan expressed his desire to go jungle to collect fruits and flowers. Savitri realised that Satyavan was going to meet his death as fate willed. Her philosophical musings at this point is noteworthy:

"He goes then," thought Savitri, "thus

With unseen hands Fate draws us on

Unto the place appointed us;

We feel no outward force, — anon

We go to marriage or to death

At a determined time and place;

We are her playthings; with her breath

She blows us where she lists in space. [...]" (p. 12)

Savitri too accompanied Satyavan. She stood by anxiously as Satyavan gathered flowers and fruits. While cutting the branches of a tree, Satyavan felt sudden, acute headache, his axe dropped and he staggered. With exemplary calm, Savitri supported her dying husband on her lap. Hours passed by and the couple remained like "statues, magic-bound" (15).

In the meantime, there was disquiet in the court of Yama as prince Satyavan had not yet arrived. Emissaries of Yama informed him that they could not accomplish the task as Satyavan was protected by one who was such that:
[Her] brow permits

In its austerity of grace
And purity, — no creatures foul
As we seemed, by her loveliness,
Or soul of evil, ghost or ghoul,

To venture close  

(p. 16)

Yama then decided to personally go and fetch the soul of Satyavan. As Savitri sat still beside her dying husband, she saw:

a stranger slowly glide

Beneath the boughs that shrunk aghast.

Upon his head he wore a crown

That shimmered in the doubtful light;

His vestment scarlet reached low down,

His waist, a golden girdle light.

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.  

(p. 17)

Yama revealed his identity and the purpose of his visit. Then carrying away the soul of Satyavan “no bigger than the thumb” (17), he moved slowly towards his dim dominions. Savitri softly laid down the body of Satyavan and followed Yama, heedless of his warnings not to do so, and to carry out the funeral rites as enjoined in scriptures. She held that wifely duty instructs her to be always with her husband, whether he went somewhere of his own free will or whether he was carried by someone else.
This was followed by a philosophical conversation between Yama and Savitri. Savitri spoke in terms of Vedantic philosophy:

I know that in this transient world  
All is delusion, — nothing true;  
I know its shows are mists unfurled  
To please and vanish. To renew  
Its bubble joys, be magic bound  
In Maya’s network frail and fair,  
Is not my aim! The gladsome sound  
Of husband, brother, friend, is air  
To such as know that all must die,  
And that at last the time must come,  
When eye shall speak no more to eye  
And love cry, — Lo, this is my sum. (p. 19)

She further spoke:

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! (p. 19)

Pleased with majesty of her thoughts, Yama desired Savitri to ask for a boon except the life Satyavan. To this, Savitri said:

“Well, be it so. My husband’s sire  
Hath lost his sight and fair domain,
Give to his eyes their former fire,
And place him on his throne again." (p. 20)

Yama granted the boon. Savitri again entered into conversation with Yama and interpreted death in a wholly new light— that death is brimful of love:

"Men call thee Yama — conqueror,
Because it is against their will
They follow thee, — 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 shrink in childlike fright
To see thy shadow on their path,
But hail thee as sick souls the light." (p. 21)

Greatly pleased, Yama favoured Savitri with another boon, but with the same condition attached as before. Savitri asked:

My sire the king
Beside myself hath children none,
Oh grant that from his stock may spring
A hundred boughs. (p. 22)

The boon was readily granted and Savitri continued to speak with gentle persuasions. She pleaded that Yama should let her always be in the company of the good, and since there could be no better company than Yama's, she should
be permitted to be with him. This gladdened the heart of Yama and he condescended to give her one more boon before he left for his own kingdom. This time Yama laid no conditions. Taking the cue, Savitri asked:

Let my Satyavan live again
And children unto us be born,
Wise, brave, and valiant. (p. 23)

Yama then loosened the knot that bound Satyavan's soul, blessed Savitri, and vanished in a flame. Savitri took Satyavan's soul and rushed where Satyavan lay dead. Kneeling down, she placed the soul upon his heart. Satyavan woke with a sudden start and spoke of his experience thus:

"I had a pain, as if an asp
Gnawed in my brain, and there I lay
Silent, for oh! I could but gasp,
Till someone came that bore away
My spirits into lands unknown:
Thou, dear, who watchedst beside me, — say
Was it a dream from elfland blown,
Or very truth, — my doubts to stay." (p. 25)

Savitri promised Satyavan "Tomorrow I shall thee all" (25). The couple then marched slowly back to hermitage where anxious parents' awaited them. In due course of time, Yama's boons fructified. The name of Savitri has become immortal and her name is invoked in every Hindu marriage:

to this day

Her name is named, when couples wed,
And to the bride the parents say,

Be thou like her, in heart and head. (p. 28)

"Savitri" is a piece of poetic brilliance, it is an epitome of the ideals of Indian womanhood on one hand, and on the other, it embodies the essentials of Vedantic philosophy. In the opinion of Harihar Das, the poem augurs "great future possibilities in the development of Toru Dutt's genius."48 Regarding its technique, he says: "So far as the versification goes, Toru's advance in technique in this poem, as compared with its predecessors, is little short of marvellous."49 Lotika Basu avers that "Savitri is the finest of the poems dealing with epic legends. […] Toru's Savitri claims an individuality and personality distinct from her husband, but this idea is quiet alien to ancient Indian thought."50 Lotika Basu's assertion is based on the following speech of Savitri:

"He for his deeds shall get his due

As I for mine: thus here each soul

Is its own friend if it pursue

The right, and run straight for the goal;

But its own worst and direst foe

If it choose evil, and in tracks

Forbidden, for its pleasures go. […]"

(p. 20)

But the above passage should be read in the light of the preceding stanza, and then it would be clear that by this utterance Toru's Savitri does not claim an individual personality, but in it Toru only sought to clarify the implications of karmic law.

The ballad is greatly merited because of its successful re-creation of the immortal character of Savitri. In Savitri, Toru created a luminous amalgam of
virtues striding over petty world of death and evil, brightening the path of mortal existence with perennial grandeur of soul. She rises over gloom and remains invincible, attaining Herculean stature. The story of Savitri captivates the mind and heart of the reader as he anticipates with breathless anxiety the final victory of love over the forces of death.

2.3.2. Lakshman

Coming to the next legend, “Lakshman,” we are presented with a portrait of the ideal brother, and a picture of splendid self control and chivalry. The ballad is in form of a conversation between Lakshman, Lord Rama’s brother, and Sita, Lord Rama’s wife. Rama had incurred the wrath of demon king Ravana by rebuffing the advances of one of his sisters. To avenge her wrong— for her nose was mutilated by Lakshman to teach her a lesson, Ravana sent Maricha in the guise of an alluring golden deer. Charmed by its beauty, Sita begged Rama to get it for her. Despite Lakshman’s forebodings, Rama went in pursuit of it, leaving Sita in charge of Lakshman. After a long chase, Rama shot an arrow which pierced the heart of the elusive deer. It fell and lay dying shorn of its assumed appearance. Even in his death throes, Maricha did as per the dictates of Ravana; imitating the voice of Rama as if in mortal pain; Maricha’s cries ‘Oh Sita! Oh Lakshman!’ pierced the jungle. Sita heard the cry and urged Lakshman to rush to the rescue of Rama. It is at this point the poem commences.

Urging Lakshman to go to Rama’s succour, Sita is vexed at what she perceives his lethargy. Her heart wrings out in anguish and she cries out:

Is this a time for thought, — on gird

Thy bright sword on, and take thy bow!
He heeds not, hears not any word,
Evil hangs over us, I know!
Swift in decision, prompt in deed,
Brave unto rashness, can this be,
The man to whom all looked at need?
Is it my brother that I see!

(p. 29)

However, Lakshman knows his gallant brother well and tries to convince Sita that her fears are ill-founded. He tells her that no beast or serpent can brook his anger; neither demons nor ghosts or gods can equal his might. Lakshman waves aside any thought of Rama coming to any harm knowing him to be an incarnation of God. He says:

He call for help! Canst thou believe
He like a child would shriek for aid
Or pray for respite or reprieve —
Not of such metal is he made!
Delusive was that piercing cry, —
Some trick of magic by the foe;
He has a work, — he cannot die,

Beseech me not from hence to go.  

(p. 30)

Lakshman also reminds Sita that he has been commanded by Rama to be with her since the woods are full of dangers. But this only arouses Sita’s ire and she ascribes Lakshman’s reluctance to go to his cowardice and even to the dishonourable intention of letting Rama die so that he and Bharata may take possession of Rama’s wife and kingdom. She humiliates him with her declaration:
Learn this, — whatever comes may come,
   But I shall not survive my love, —
Of all my thoughts here is the sum!
   Witness it gods in heaven above.
If fire can burn, or water drown,
   I follow him: —

Unable to bear Sita's lacerating remarks any longer, Lakshman decides to leave. But before leaving, he tells her that she has cruelly wronged him and asks if he deserved such a treatment for his lifelong loyalty. In leaving her alone, Lakshman says, he disregards the plainest orders of his chief, but he will take on all the responsibility for such a crime. Before leaving, he draws a magic circle with his arrow around the hut and instructs Sita not to go beyond its confines come whatever, lest she should come to harm. Toru imparts a rare depth of feeling to Lakshman's farewell speech:

"And now farewell! What thou hast said,
   Though it has broken quite my heart,
So that I wish that I were dead —
   I would before, O Queen, we part,
Freely forgive, for well I know
   That grief and fear have made thee wild,
We part as friends, — is it not so?"
   And speaking thus, — he sadly smiled.

Then, invoking the blessings of God on Sita, he leaves. His departure is attended by ill omens. Sita's fitful anger is contrasted with Lakshman's restraint:
Kind,—nay, indulgent,—was his look,

No trace of anger there was seen,

Only a sorrow dark, that seemed

To deepen his resolve to dare

All dangers. Hoarse the vulture screamed,

As out he strode with dauntless air.

Lakshman, as delineated by Toru, is a picture of perfect chivalry. While in the Ramayana, Lakshman cannot refrain, in response to Sita's wild accusations, from saying that women are by nature crooked and fickle; Toru's Lakshman weathers the storm with unshakable calm. On the other hand, Toru's Sita is not the Sita of the Ramayana, the embodiment of virtue, but a woman who is intensely human and of the common rank. The poem is not narrative but a dramatic dialogue. The tone is dignified, rising to the heroic in the last stanza. Gradual working of Sita's passion forms the most interesting aspect of the poem. The opening verses convey a vivid impression of Sita's anxiety. Intensity of her appeals to Lakshman is also well caught by the poetess. Lakshman's unqualified faith in unassailability of Rama and his gentle reproach to Sita for her lack of faith only serves to ignite her and causes her to rend the one who only meant to comfort. The ballad is a skilful attempt at "psychological delineation of character, simple and experimental, but still showing a phase of Toru's genius with which we might otherwise have been unacquainted." The poem is a sensitive outlook into the character of an Indian family; to this effect, Harihar Das remarks, "Nowhere, we think, outside Indian thought, could we get so perfect a picture of brotherly loyalty, or so vivid an insight into the strength of the bonds that bind the members of an Indian family, the one to the other."
2.3.3. Jogadhya Uma

The following ballad, "Jogadhya Uma," is unique for its "dreamy, mystic beauty, and gains rather than loses from the fact that its theme is drawn not from any of the great epics or puranas of Sanskrit, but from folklore." It was told to Toru by her old nurse Suchee, of whom Toru and her siblings were very fond. A peddler of shell-bracelets was tramping down the road to Khirogram calling:

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

(p. 35)

Few heard his cry in that early hour. As he walked along, a bend in the road brought him to a lonely spot where lay a beautiful tank shadowed by fruit trees. On one side of the tank was an entrance arch leading to a wide flight of marble steps down to water's edge. There, facing the morning sun, sat a beautiful maiden with lovely large eyes and long hair. The peddler stopped by to display his wares advertising them thus:

These bracelets are a mighty charm,
They keep a lover ever true,
And widowhood avert, and harm,
Buy them, and thou shalt never rue.

(p. 36)

The maiden quietly stretched her hand and the peddler slipped a bracelet on her slender wrist, marvelling at her beauty. Exquisite beauty of the maiden is effectively sketched by Toru in a few lines:

Not weak she seemed, nor delicate,
Strong was each limb of flexible grace,
And full the bust; the mien elate,
Like hers the goddess of the chase
On Latmos hill, — and oh, the face

Framed in its cloud of floating hair,

No painter's hand might hope to trace

The beauty and glory there!

(p. 37)

As the maiden raised her arm up against morning light, an indescribable air of dignity filled the peddler with awe. Tossing aside stray curls from her face, the maiden asked the price and then bade the peddler to go to her house and ask her father for payment. On his enquiry, she indicated gilded temple spire visible from a distance and said that her father was the priest. She directed the peddler to a house to the east of the temple, where he should ask her father for money, telling him that his daughter at Dhamaser Ghat has purchased shell-bracelets from him. The maiden further said that should he say he had no money, the peddler was to ask him to open the vermilion streaked box near the shrine and there the money would be found. Charmed with the sweet music of her voice, the peddler went to do as told, and the maiden prepared to plunge into the waters.

Following the directions given to him, the peddler reached the house where "Sleek cattle, flowers, a tingling bell, / Spoke in a language sweet and plain" (38). As was his wont, the peddler cried out "Shell-bracelets ho!" A kind, old, hospitable priest, came out in response and invited him to partake the temple feast. The peddler gratefully accepted hospitality and then explained the errand on which he came; hearing which the priest laughed aloud and said:

"I shall not put up, friend with that;

No daughter in the world have I,

An only son is all my stay;

Some minx has played a trick, no doubt."
But cheer up, let thy heart be gay,
Be sure that I shall find her out.” (p. 39)

At this, the peddler re-assured the priest that a maiden with such a divine face could not possibly lie, and repeated the maiden’s directions concerning the vermillion streaked box. Thoughtfully, the priest fetched the box and on opening it found the exact price, “No surplus over, and no lack” (39). In a flash, the old priest realised that the simple peddler had beheld the goddess herself, whom he had sought so long. The peddler too realised the purport of his vision and dropping his basket of bracelets ran swiftly for the tank, followed by the priest; but they were disappointed in their quest, all was quiet there. A hush seemed to envelope the nature over which a solitary heron stood a sentinel. They received no answer to their repeated calls and as they turned to depart with saddened heart, chime of the temple bells pealed out. Turning once more towards the tank, the priest beseeched the goddess for some sign of her presence and then:

Sudden from out the water sprung
A rounded arm, on which they saw
As high the lotus buds among
It rose, the bracelet white, with awe.
Then a wide ripple lost and swung
The blossoms on that liquid plain,
And lo! The arm so fair and young
Sank in the waters down again.
They bowed before the mystic power,
And as they home returned in thought,
Each took from thence a lotus flower
In memory of the day and spot. (p. 41)

Ever since that day, descendents of the peddler have annually paid shell-bracelets of old design as a tribute to the goddess who on that eventful day crowned their industry with success. In the end, Toru suggests the possible source of her tale:

Absurd may be the tale I tell,

Ill-suited to the marching times,

I loved the lips from which it fell,

So let it stand among my rhymes. (p. 41)

In composing the ballad, Toru shows creative originality of the highest order. She has turned a folktale into a delightful poem. There is an antique flavour and translucent simplicity about it. Harihar Das comments, “There is throughout the poem a delicate, old-world and Indian flavour. It resembles the illuminations of exquisite workmanship fond in certain rare old Eastern manuscripts, wherein every detail stands out clearly, as well as the purity of every colour.”54 It is difficult to accept verbatim, Lotika Basu’s assessment that “The Indian atmosphere of the poem is sometimes split by the rather jarring introduction of the priest’s house which is anything but a scene that seems more English than Indian.”55 It would not be proper to call it ‘English’ only on the basis of the word “manse.” Probably Toru could not shake off her English associations totally, yet, the content, theme, atmosphere, and treatment are essentially Indian. Harihar Das fittingly calls the poem “a gem of art among the Ballads of Hindustan.”56 In this poem, Toru gives her Western readers an insight into unpretentious piety of our ancient folklores.
2.3.4. The Royal Ascetic and the Hind

The following legend, "The Royal Ascetic and the Hind," is taken from the Vishnu Purana, Book II Chapter XIII. The ballad centres round matchless asceticism of king Bharat of Saligram. King Bharat left behind his royal luxuries to become an ascetic and led an austere life in forest where he practised penance and underwent privations with the aim of attaining mastery over soul. He spent his days thus:

At morn,

Fuel, and flowers, and fruit, and holy grass,

He gathered for oblations, and passed

In stern devotions all his other hours;

Of the world heedless, and its myriad cares,

And heedless too of wealth, and love, and fame. (p. 42)

A change however came over him when one day, sitting by the river bank, engaged in his prayers, he saw a beautiful pregnant hind jump to her death hearing the roar of a lion; its offspring tumbled down from her womb into the rushing stream and struggled for life. The hermit king was deeply touched and rescued the tiny creature from the swollen river and brought it to his hut. With patient care and nursing, the foundling hind grew in strength and stature. So deep was Bharat's attachment for the orphan, that all his thoughts, all hours of day and night, were bestowed on it; caring little even for his devotions. Toru describes the situation succinctly:

But whether near or far,

Wandering abroad, or resting in its home,

The monarch-hermit's heart was with it still.
Bound by affection's ties; nor could he think
Of anything besides this little hind,
His nursling. (p. 43)

Many years after, when on his death bed, Bharat's mind was filled with anguish at leaving his "dumb, weak, helpless foster-child" (43), and not on the problems of life and death, and eternity as befitting an ascetic.

In this poem, along with narrating the legend, Toru also shows her penchant for didacticism by introducing her own spiritual and moral sense. Dwelling on the importance of love, she declares:

God is love, and not to be adored
By a devotion born of stoic pride,
Or with ascetic rites, or penance hard,
But with a love, in character akin
To his unselfish, all-including love. (p. 44)

Concluding as it does with an animated defence of the hermit-king's conduct, and a lecture to ascetics in general for renouncing the world, Toru is "altogether modern, and out of line with the past." Though Toru misreads the implications of the original, she is able to assert her individuality and bear upon the readers her own modern outlook. This is the sum and substance of her harangue:

Not in seclusion, not apart from all,
Not in a place elected for its 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. (P. 45)
2.3.5. The Legend of Dhruva

Like the previous legend, "The Legend of Dhruva" is also taken from the Vishnu Purana, Book I Chapter XI. It relates the story of a prince, the son of less favoured queen Suneetee, who spurned power and pelf for sake of spiritual glory. Anxious to win his father's love, Dhruva was disdained by Suruchee, the favoured queen; because she wanted the king's love to be solely reserved for her own son Uttama. One day, seeing Dhruva seated on the king's lap along with her own son, Suruchee burst into fierce invective:

Oh thoughtless! To desire the loftiest place,

The throne of the thrones, a royal father's lap!

It is an honour to the destined queen,

And not within thy reach. (p. 46)

Trembling with rage and indignation, Dhruva ran to his mother's chamber and upon receiving kind ministrations, he told her:

With a swelling heart

Repeated to his mother every word

That proud Suruchee spake, from first to last,

Even in the very presence of the king. (p. 47)

The hapless Suneetee heard all, sighed deeply, and then tried to console her son. Expounding to him the Hindu doctrine of "Karma:"

The deeds that thou hast done,

The evil, haply, in some former life,

Long, long ago, who may alas! annul,

Or who the good works not done, supplement!

The sins of previous lives must bear their fruit.
The ivory throne, the umbrella of gold,
The bed steed, and the royal elephant
Rich caparisoned, must be his by right
Who has deserved them by his virtuous acts
In times long past. Oh think on this, my son,

And be content. (p. 47)

Suneetee also held out to him the prospect of future rewards should he live his present life well. She advised him:

Be meek, devout, and friendly, full of love,

Intent to do good to the human race

And to all creatures sentient made of God;

And oh, be humble, for on modest worth

Descends prosperity, even as water flows

Down to low grounds. (p. 48)

Finding little consolation in his mother's words, Dhruva proclaimed his unflinching resolve to attain the acme of spiritual realisation:

I shall try

The highest good, the loftiest place to win,

Which the whole world deems priceless and desires.

There is a crown above my father's crown,

I shall obtain it, and at any cost

Of toil, or penance, or unceasing prayer. (p. 48)

So saying, Dhruva left the palace, to live ever among the hermits in the woods. Steadfast even unto death, Dhruva realised his heart's desire by prayer and penance, and gained his place in the heavens where he "shines a star" (49).
Based on the theory of "Karma," the ballad has failed to win admiration of the critics. A.N. Dwivedi remarks, "The treatment of the legend of Dhruva has failed to create in the reader the right impression of the young boy, who, being rudely shocked at his royal father's cruel neglect of him, retired to the forest and later became a great devotee of God." However, it must be borne in mind that the legend itself presents little scope of originality and hence the poetess cannot be entirely faulted at for not presenting interesting character delineation or an aspect of old world morality.

2.3.6. Buttoo

The next legend "Buttoo," is a story from the Mahabharata. Buttoo, (otherwise known as Ekalavya) the son of a low born hunter, was rejected and humiliated by Dronacharjya—the matchless master of archery. One day, as Dronacharjya sat surrounded by the Pandava and the Kuru princes, Buttoo approached him and urged him to instruct in secrets of archery. To the master's questioning, Buttoo revealed his name and parentage, and asserted that he knew no fear. At this, the great master unleashed a magic shaft which felled Buttoo without hurting him. Amid laughter and scorn, and glowing red with shame, Buttoo bade a proud farewell. Here Toru gives a modern twist to an ancient tale; as Buttoo resolved to master the secrets of archery of his own, he resolved to himself:

"My place I gather is not here:
No matter, — what is rank or caste?
In us is honour, or disgrace,
Not out of us," 'twas thus he mused,
"The question is, — not wealth or place.

But gifts well used, or gifts abused." (p. 51)

The spirit of equality and the indomitable will of the low and oppressed are discernible here. Resolving to attain perfection, Buttoo retreated to the densest forest to live among its inhabitants and unveil the secrets of nature. There in the forest, Buttoo built a hut for himself and stored it with forest corn, fruits and nuts. He then made a life-like statue of Dronachariya, and placing steel-tipped arrows wreathed with wild flowers at its feet, began his practise. Perseverance, clear conscience, and humility, culminated in Buttoo, and his toil bore fruit. In time, he mastered all secrets of archery.

One evening, as Buttoo honed his skills, to his consternation, his arrows went astray again and again. At the same time, he heard the wailing of a wild dog portending ill-omen. He tried to shoo away the dog, but to no avail. It continued to howl at a distance. At last, he shot a magic arrow which silenced the dog without hurting it, but it also proved to be his undoing. On that very day, Dronachariya and his royal pupils were in the woods hunting. While intent on hunt, Pandava prince Arjuna chanced upon the wild dog. Desperate Arjuna sought Dronachariya and accused him of betrayal of faith as the great master had promised that none besides him shall ever learn the secret of magic shaft. Dronachariya re-assured Arjuna that there was no betrayal on his part, and accompanied him to Buttoo’s hut. On being asked, Buttoo revealed the story of his diligence and ultimate mastery over the craft. He credited Dronachariya to be his sole inspiration. Listening to this, Dronachariya asked that if this was so, then, whether Buttoo was ready to give him a pupil’s due. Buttoo replied with eager avowal:
"All that I have, O Master mine,
All I shall conquer by my skill,
Gladly shall I thee resign,
Let me but know thy gracious will."

Dronacharjya cautioned Buttoo against making rash promise. However, Buttoo only reiterated his stand to please his master at all cost:

"Thou art my Master, — ask! Oh ask!
From thee my inspiration came,
Thou canst not set too hard a task,
Nor aught refuse I, free from blame."

Having received his word, Dronacharjya, seeking to keep his pledge made to Arjuna, asked from Buttoo his right-hand thumb. Buttoo did not falter from his path of loyalty even at this cruel demand, and in a flash his severed thumb lay at the master's feet. Touched by his incomparable loyalty, Dronacharjya blessed Buttoo:

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

"Buttoo" has a neat structure leading to a logical end. There are very few weak lines in it. Critics have complained about "comparatively long and not too truthful description of the forest scenes." However, it must be remembered that long decorative passages, though they may jar the aesthetic sense of the English reader, are not so uncommon in Sanskrit classics. Furthermore, long descriptive passages in the poem serve to underline the strength and inspiration man draws
from nature when living in close communion with her. Another objection raised by Harihar Das is that:

All through the poem we have been carefully prepared for Buttoo’s reverent devotion to Dronachariya, who had aroused in the boy an instinct almost of worship. Under the circumstances, the reader is a little jarred by the unexpectedness of the description of Buttoo’s attitude at the crucial moment of his test for obedience:

There was no tear in Buttoo’s eye,

He left the matter with his God.  

But, such an attitude is only human. It also starkly contrasts the attitude of unquestioning loyalty of Buttoo to that of mean vengeance of Dronachariya. The teacher fell from his high pedestal when he demanded such a “sad recompense,” while the pupil was raised to glorifying heights.

2.3.7. Sindhu

The ballad “Sindhu” is a well-known story from the Ramayana. Retold in three parts, it is the story of an ideal son; the only stay of an old sage couple who lived in forest shades. Attentive and devoted, Sindhu ministered to the needs of his blind, old parents cheerfully. He met their peevishness and petulance with patience and sweetness.

One day, Dasarath, the great king of Oudh, organised a hunting expedition in the forest. As his hunting party went through the forest with blaring of trumpets and conch shells, a good deal of destruction and confusion ensued. Toru’s descriptive ability is at its best when describing the scene:
Uprooting fig-trees on their path,
And trampling shrubs and flowers,
Wild elephant in fear and wrath,
Burst through like moving towers.

As the day closed in, Dasarath was separated from his train and stood alone at the bend of a river. While he stood watching the approach of night not knowing which way to go, he heard a sound as of a roebuck drinking. Immediately, the king shot an arrow in the direction of the sound. He was startled to hear “A feeble human wail” which cried, “I die, — I die, / Who’ll carry home the pail?” (63). Filled with remorse, Dasarath rushed to the spot. There he saw a child mortally wounded, lying on grass with a pitcher by his side; it was Sindhu. Placing Sindhu’s head on his lap, Dasarath splashed his face with cold water, and tried his best to resuscitate the dying boy. As Sindhu opened his eyes, the king was filled with fear because:

In all this universe
What is so dreadful as to hear
A Brahmin’s dying curse!

Sindhu clearly read fear writ large upon the king’s face and absolved him of all guilt saying that he accepted his fate as just punishment for a sin committed long ago. Sindhu then told Dasarath that once he had wantonly killed one of a pair of doves that rested in a peepul tree. As the male bird fell down dead, the female looked at Sindhu reproachfully and seemed to say:

‘A widowed life I cannot brook,
The forfeit thou must pay.
"What was my darling's crime, that thou
Him wantonly shouldst kill?
The curse of blood is on thee now,
Blood calls for red blood still." (p. 65)

For his own part, Sindhu was not loath to die. His last thoughts were on his old parents who had been fasting since the day before and now the time to break their fast and partake food and water had come. As the last favour, Sindhu begged the king to carry the pitcher of water to his parents, and then he died. The king took up the corpse and the pitcher and went towards the hut.

The final section of the poem begins with anxious parents wondering at their son's inordinate delay. As the king drew near, a presentiment of evil loomed large over the mother and she spoke to her husband thus:

"Lord of my soul — what means my pain?
This horrid terror, — like
Some cloud that hides a hurricane;
Hang not, O lightning, — strike!" (p. 67)

On hearing the rustling of leaves, the old sage exclaimed joyously to his wife:

"Lo, here he is — oh wherefore grieves
Thy soul, my partner dear?" (p. 67)

Hearing this, the king stopped dead in his tracks, while the old parents thinking the footfall to be their son's, threw a volley of questions at him. As stifled sobs of Dasarath reached their ears, the old couple became convinced that it was not Sindhu. Placing the dead body of Sindhu in their arms, Dasarath briefly narrated the event. The couple was heart-broken and desired to live no more and asked the king to guide them to their bed of moss. The king led them where they
desired, and watched them as they let go their slender hold on life. Before dying, the old sage predicted that like them, Dasarath too should one day "Die — for a son's untimely loss! / Die — with a broken heart!" (68). The king had the three dead ones brought to the banks of river Sarayu, where their funeral rites were performed with royal honours. In due course of time, the old muni's prediction came true. To know the sequel of the tale, the poetess suggests us to read the Ramayana.

As with "The Legend of Dhruva," the poem "Sindhu" too contains an exposition of "Karma" theory. Sindhu died as a result of his sin of killing one of a pair of doves, and Dasarath died heart-broken, as a result of the sin he incurred by killing Sindhu. The poem is also a beautiful illustration of the theme of parental love. Commenting on the poem, P.C. Kotoky is of the view that omission of the last stanza would have created "a better poetic effect and a deeper sense of completeness." It is possible that the last stanza was written by Toru with western readers in mind, and as such it is a good guide for them. Harihar Das says, "Judging from the style, which is distinctly inferior to that of other poems, we should place it as an early attempt with 'The Legend of Dhruva' and 'The Royal Ascetic and the Hind.' The metre chosen (the rhymed quatrain 8.6.8.6.), is one that can most easily degenerate into doggerel, and the poem as a whole suffers badly from this fault." Though there are crude inversions for sake of rhyme in the poem, Toru displays genuine poetic faculty in her description of forest scenes and the scene of hunt. Toru also shows her maturity in the touching finale of the death of the old couple. There is no wild exhibition of grief or wrathful curses, only a solemn dignity as they accept the death of their son and realise the futility of their own existence.
2.3.8. Prahlad

"Prahlad" is a story from the Mahabharata. It is the story of clash between theism and atheism, and ultimate victory of the former over the latter. King Heerun Kasyapu was "A terror both of gods and men" (70). He was audacious in courage and unequalled in strength. He affronted gods, tore the holy Vedas, prohibited worship and sacrifices, and slew Brahmins. He ordered that all men should worship him and him alone. Remnant of Brahmins and pundits fled to the woods and caves and there in secret carried on with the worship of gods and clung to the hope that in due time all wrongs would be assuaged. The king had four children—Rahd, Onooradh, Prahlad and Sunghrad. When the time came for them to be educated, the king chose a tutor named Sonda Marco. He was:

A man
Among the flatterers of the court
Was found, well-suited to the plan
The tyrant had devised. Report
Gave him a wisdom owned by few,
And certainly to trim his sail,
And veer his bark, none better knew,
Before a changing adverse gale. (p. 71)

He was to teach the princes all that they needed to know but they were never to be told "of the soul, / Of vows, and prayers, and rites revered, / And of the gods who all control" (72). The princes were quick to master their lessons, but Prahlad was most thoughtful among them. One day, the tutor heard Prahlad discussing forbidden themes among his siblings. Terrified at the thought of consequence, the teacher tried to dissuade Prahlad from dwelling upon such things, telling him:
Worthy of worship, honour, praise,
Is thy great father. Things unseen,
What are they? — Themes of poets' lays!
They are not and have never been.  

Prahlad declared his unflinching faith and refused to be cowed down. Not long after, the king summoned the princes to his court for a test. All went well till Prahlad's turn came. He was asked to explain "the cream of knowledge" (74). Devout and full of religious fervour, he answered:

That is true knowledge which can show
The glory of the living gods, —
Divest of pride, make men below
Humble and happy, though but clods.

"That is true knowledge which can make
Us mortals saintlike, holy, pure,
The strange thirst of the spirit slake
And strengthen suffering to endure.
That is true knowledge which can change
Our very natures with its glow;
The sciences whate'er their range
Feed but the flesh, and make a show."

Hearing the reply, the king was greatly enraged and commanded Prahlad to bow down and worship him or else he should forfeit his life. Undaunted, Prahlad boldly proclaimed his views:
The gods who made us are the life
Of living creatures, small and great;
We see them not, but space is rife
With their bright presence and their state.
They are the parents of us all,
'Tis they create, sustain, redeem,
Heaven, earth and hell, they hold in thrall,
And shall we these high gods blaspheme?

Angered beyond reconciliation, Heerun Kasyapu commanded the chief of his bodyguards to take Prahlad to the dungeon to await the executioner. Outside the court, the chief pleaded with the prince to recant his statement, but Prahlad remained unswerving in his convictions. Before long, report came that the executioner's sword had refused to do its work. The king summoned his council in great hurry, and the "wily-tongued vizier" (77) attributed failure of the sword to some magic exercised by Prahlad. The king then ordered Prahlad to be thrown down a precipice or buried alive in sand; but when these and several other devices failed to accomplish the desired purpose, Prahlad was once again summoned to the court where his proud father threw a challenge to the gods to come and fight with him and rescue Prahlad. To this Prahlad espoused his faith and revealed the truth manifested to him in the dungeon:

There is one God — One only, — mark!
To him is all our service due.

"Hath he a shape, or hath He none?
I know not this, nor care to know.
Dwelling in light, to which the sun
Is darkness, — He sees all below,
Himself unseen! In Him I trust,
He can protect me if He will,
And if this body turn to dust,
He can new life again instil.

"I fear not fire, I fear not sword,
All dangers, father, I can dare;
 Alone, I can confront a horde,
For oh! My God is everywhere!"

Infuriated, and seeking to ridicule Prahlad, Heerun Kasyapu asked if his God was present in the pillar on which he leaned. To this, Prahlad replied in affirmative, and the king gave a mighty blow to it, as it came tumbling down, out of it leaped:

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!

The strange warrior gave a tremendous roar and struck down the king on the helm and ripped him down. It then proclaimed Prahlad the king of all realms and vanished in a thunder clap. A king lay stiff and dead, and another ascended the
throne. Trumpets blew loud and long to mark the end of tyranny. Toru ends the poem with a lecture to tyrants in general on the victory of good over evil.

Regarding the poem, Harihar Das says, “We think the poem would have finished more fittingly at the picture of Prehlad, the new-crowned king, bowing his head reverently on the throne amidst the plaudits of the people; leaving out the apostrophe to tyrants in general; but this may be just a matter for individual taste.”63 though phraseology employed by the young prince has a Biblical flavour, his speeches are individualistic and interesting throughout. A.N. Dwivedi holds a high opinion about the poem and says, “Very rarely do we meet the false rhyme (as in ‘heart’ and ‘thwart’) or a line which mars the poetic effect by its colloquialism (e.g., ‘Or there will come a fearful crash’).”64 The story is well narrated and reveals Toru’s growing maturity in selection of ballads.

2.3.9. Sita

The final ballad in the volume “Sita,” is short in length. It conjures a dream picture of “Three happy children in a darkened room” (81), who are listening to the story of Sita’s unmerited suffering at the hands of Rama, who exiled her on flimsy ground of a slanderous rumour. The poem has autobiographical elements in it. The three children are Toru and her siblings, who during their early childhood, used to gather around their mother in twilight hours to listen to her as she recited the old Hindu legends.

In the ballad, Sita is seen living in the hermitage of sage Valmiki. In their mind’s eye, the children can visualise a dense forest which sunbeam can scarcely penetrate. In its dark, gloomy interiors, there is a clearing around which creepers with gigantic flowers swathe the trees. In there is a placid lake which is
the hub of activities for denizens of the forest. Toru describes the scene with a delicate touch:

The white swans glide; there, “whirring from the brake,”
The peacock springs; there, herds of wild deer race;
There, patches gleam with yellow waving grain;
There, blue smoke from strange alters rises light (p. 81)

In the midst of such beautiful setting, is the hermitage of “poet-anchorite” (81) Valmiki. There in seclusion, Sita sheds tears over her fate. The picture of Sita weeping, arouses deepest sympathy of Toru and her brother and sister and they too shed tears:

Not in vain
She weeps, — for lo! At every tear she sheds
Tears from three pairs of young eyes fall amain,
And bowed in sorrow are the three young heads.
It is an old, old story, and the lay
Which has evoked sad Sita from the past
Is by a mother sung . . . (p. 81)

Rich in pathos, and with strong autobiographical touch, artistically, the poem is one of the best composed by Toru. Closing lines of the poem show the young poetesses yearning for the return of good old days, “When shall those children by their mother’s side / Gather, ah me! As erst at eventide? (81). We know however, that such a scene was never to be recreated again; the poetess lost her brother and sister quite early in life and her own life was tragically cut short by the pestilence which repeatedly struck the Dutt family of Rambagan.
2.3.10. **Miscellaneous Poems**

The seven "Miscellaneous Poems" at the end of the volume display Toru's creative genius at its best. They span the whole of Toru's creative period extending from 1870 to 1877. They were found among her papers after her death. Autobiographical in vein and style, their quality has led scholars to observe that but for her short life, Toru might have written 'beautiful lyrics or powerful sonnet-sequence or poetic tragedy.'

The poem "Near Hastings" is written in a nostalgic mood. About the poem E.J. Thompson says, "Near Hastings is a lyric which brings a lump to the throat, and should convince the most careless and supercilious of the grace and wisdom, the political expediency even, of receiving with kindness these strangers with whom destiny has so strongly linked us and who so often find our manners, like our northern climate, cold." Written in a strangely irregular meter, "France 1870" hails France as the "head of the human column" (462). It is an assertion of Toru's conviction that despite its defeat in Franco-Prussian War, France will rise again. There is much passionate feeling in the poem and when the ear has accustomed itself to the strangeness of its metrical quality, there is a charm about the irregularity of rhythm. "On the Fly-Leaf of Erckmann-Chatrian's Novel, Entitled Madame Therese," records the impression on Toru's mind by an incident detailed in the novel. When the French lines were wavering before relentless Prussian onslaught, a great heroic woman—tall, slender, and brown, hurled herself on the Prussians. Irregular of meter like "France 1870," the poem is a reiteration of Toru's love for France. E.J. Thompson is of the view that the two poems discussed above are a consequence of Toru having misread the political situation then brewing in France. He comments, "Her love for France was passionate, a
second patriotism; but no one is likely to quarrel with her enthusiasm for the generous nation that has so long and so signally served civilisation. “The Tree of Life” is an account of a mystic vision Toru had shortly before her death. Chronologically, it is the last poem composed by Toru.

The two sonnets, “Baugmaree” and “The Lotus,” have been praised by one and all. The first is an eloquent description of the scenic beauty of the garden of her family house at Baugmaree. Toru calls the garden “a primeval Eden” (465). In describing the garden, Toru adopts a simple diction and free rhythm. The sonnet is distinguished for its startling appositeness. “The Lotus” is a much appreciated poem in a lighter vein. The grand finale of the book is “Our Casuarina Tree.” It is more than mere poetic evocation of the tree. It is recapturing of the past and immortalising the moments of time so captured. The tree is both a tree and a symbol; in it are implicated both time and eternity.

In its entirety, Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan contains narratives charged with lyrical effusions of joy and sorrow, anger and pathos, hope and dejection. Such profusion, however, do not retard the easy flow of the narratives. Toru is completely at home in Ancient Ballads. Steeped in Hindu ideals and sentiments, they give us a quaint, idealised picture of Indian life and customs. The ballads are fundamentally about Toru’s own race and people; in it she makes no conscious attempt to express thoughts alien to her. From a critical standpoint, the nine ballads show Toru’s growing maturity in handling various verse forms as well as her exceptional Knowledge of Hindu philosophy; the seven “Miscellaneous Poems” attest to her essentially lyrical temperament. Philosophical expositions and personal reminiscences combine in the volume to make for a sublime poetic celebration. That deep philosophies and pathetic
aspects of life appealed to the poetic sensibilities of Toru Dutt more than joyous countenance, is obviously an offshoot of the tragedies the young poetess had to witness in her own short life. She verily reminds us of the great Romantic poet John Keats. Not only in her pathetically short life, but also in her poetic creed, Toru resembles Keats. Critics have pointed out certain stumble in diction and rhythm in Toru's verses. To this, it only needs to be mentioned that though her prosody might falter occasionally, but her themes do not, and this, in some one so young as Toru, composing poetry in a foreign medium, is indeed laudable. Despite a few shortcomings, the ballads do no injustice—neither to the originals nor to the language in which they are rendered.
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