Chapter Four

INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH ROMANTICISM ON THE POETRY OF

TORU DUTT
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It was Toru Dutt (1856-77) that Indian English poetry really graduated from imitation to authenticity.

- M K Naik

Toru Dutt is the first Indian woman poet and novelist in English who like her predecessor and contemporaries Michael Madhusudan Dutt and other Anglo-Indian poets converted to Christianity. Her writings are characterized by the changing dynamics of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized to incorporate the amalgamation of the modern trends and the ancient themes. She advanced Indian poetry in English at such a height that critics considered her the first ‘authentic Indo-Anglian’ and Indian English poetry a genuine and mature realm of literature since her poetry.

Born during the age of orthodoxies and complexities wherein women could not dream of formal education, Toru Dutt was educated in English and also attended the so-called ‘Higher Lectures for Women’ at Cambridge. It was her family and ‘a rich and respectable ancestry’ that helped her to acquire English, French and Sanskrit languages and literatures to shape her literary endeavour.

Dutt family was very renowned in Bengal. Toru’s great grandfather Nilmoni Dutt a distinguished resident of Calcutta who earned for himself the
name of broad-minded intellectual. He had three sons: Rasamoy, Harish and Pitamber. Among them, Rasamoy was well educated and had good reputation in society. He valued English language and literature at that time. He was Honorary Secretary of Hindu College Committee. It is because of him that his next generations received the gift of English education. From him, Toru acquired love for English literature.

Another factor that impacted Toru’s literary figure at some extent was the conversion of entire Dutt family to Christianity. It was Girish’s advise that entire family adopted Christianity. In 1862, the wives were against the conversion but agreed to stand by their husbands.

Toru Dutt was born on March 4, 1856 and died in August 30, 1877. She was brought up by her parents in such a cultural and educational atmosphere that from her early age she began to take interest in the western literature and she also cherished her love for Indian culture, myths and legends later in her life. Both Toru and her sister did not receive primary education at any school but they had private tutors at their home. Babu Sahib Chunder Bannerjee was the favourite tutor of Dutt family children. Her Anglisation and influence of this English teacher can be seen in her letter to Miss Martin wherein she says,

He (Babu Sahib Chunder) used to teach us English when we were quite young; he has been our English teacher ever so long; we, as children, were very fond of him...he was so gentle and
yet so firm during lessons. He is such a truly Christian man, and sympathizes so sincerely in all our joys and sorrows. (Lokuge 329)

Besides tutors, her father himself took care of his children’s education. Toru Dutt’s father was her mentor. As Toru Dutt confessed in the letter to Mary Martin dated 7 October 1876 as:

Without papa I should never have known good poetry from bad, but he used to take such pains with us when we were quite little ones...I wonder what I should have been without my father; nothing very enviable or desirable, I know without papa we should never have learnt to appreciate good books and good poetry. (Lokuge 310)

Her mother played a significant role to help Toru to envision her poetic themes through a kind of formative and informal education. Her mother used to tell stories of ancient India. It was her gentle influence in the home, her songs and gift of storytelling that Toru imbibed so deep love for the ancient ballads of India. This gave birth to milestone work Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan. Toru wrote to Clarisse Bader, her French friend ‘when I hear my mother chant the ancient lays of her country, I almost always cry.’ (Lokuge xl) Perhaps, such an urge would have given birth to her outstanding poem ‘Sita’.

Apart her parental influences, the books that she read had shaped her intellect and understanding. She was very fond of reading books whether it
was in French or English, and she had a good number of books. As she wrote to Mary Martin in the letter dated 19 September 1874 ‘we get the volumes from the Calcutta public library, of which papa is a shareholder – we can get as many books as we like at a time and keep them as long as it pleases us.’ (Lokuge 231) From her letters, one can comprehend that her whole life was devoted to reading and writing. It is wonder some to know that during the four years 1873 to 1877, Toru had read more than one hundred and fifty books, which seems quite impossible for anyone of her age. Also, The untimely death of Abju, Toru’s brother at the age of fourteen in 1865, brought a change in the family. For consolation, Aru and Toru repeatedly read Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’ and busied themselves in literary pursuits. This was the period when she was immensely and continuously in contact with western literature which laid inevitable influences on her works that were taken to mature heights.

In 1869, the family left Europe for France where both Aru and Toru attended school at Nice, France and learned French. They also learned French under a private tutor, Madame Schwayer. In France, Toru developed her love for French literature and its writers. Due to Aru’s health, their father decided to take family to England. But Toru’s love for France inspired her to translate and write in French. Even, in her Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan, two poems, i.e., ‘Near Hastings’ and ‘France, 1870’ are dedicated to France. After a
year, in 1870, Govin Chunder compiled the poems of all his brothers under the title *The Dutt Family Album*.

By 1871, the family was so involved in the study that once in her letter to her cousin Omesh Chunder Toru wrote:

First we practise on the piano from seven to half-past seven, then we have our Bible reading. It is generally over by half past eight. After that I read “The Times”, for I take great interest in the war… Then we generally read with papa at four, and on Fridays, Mrs. Macfarren comes to teach singing and on Mondays we go to have our music lessons from Mr. Pauer. (Lokuge 219)

At Cambridge, Toru and Aru attended Higher Lectures for Women with zeal and appreciation where Toru became friends with Mary Martin. Their friendship turned to a lifelong one leading to a memorable correspondence between them. These letters enable one to understand Toru’s personal life and her activities thoroughly.

In September 1873, the family sailed back to India where Toru published two essays on poets, Leconte de Lisle and Henry Vivian Derozio in the Bengal magazine which were published in 1874. During the time, Aru and Toru fell ill. Toru was gradually gaining her health but Aru’s health was getting worse. Then, all of sudden Aru died and whole family was surrounded by dark clouds of sorrow. After the loss of her only companion, it
became impossible for Toru to live in Calcutta. But in later period, she changed her mind and decided to live in Calcutta.

Toru found solace and comfort in her Baugmaree garden house. Like Wordsworth, Toru relished Nature. For her, Calcutta was a horrid place socially and morally. Lokuge notes one of the reasons of a talent like Toru to be attracted towards particular Romantic themes as:

…darkness of perception, the loneliness of Toru Dutt’s life, and the relentless confinement in her house, could have attracted her to the Romantic themes of disillusion with the world, and escape into nature. (Lokuge xxviii)

So, she escaped into Nature – Baugmaree garden, which was ‘free from every grievance so quiet and peaceful’ and ‘as good as England’. Baugmaree Garden was full of past memories; it is the place where Toru and her sister Aru had enjoyed their happy moments. Toru writes ‘Aru’s was such a lively and merry disposition, that she seemed to fill all the large garden House with life and animation’ (Lokuge 230) Toru even graphically explains all the details about the interior of the house with a photograph of Baugmaree to Mary Martin in her letter. Also, Toru immortalized Baugmaree in one of her sonnets.

After publishing ‘A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields’ in 1876, Toru and her father seriously took up the study of Sanskrit because they ‘had nothing
to do’ Toru Dutt was aware about the difficulty in learning Sanskrit but was not hopeless about her capability. She had also read *La Femme dans l’Inde Antique* by Clarisse Bader and *Iliad of the East* by Frederika Richardson. Toru commented to Mary Martin ‘Bader’s book will give insight into the old Hindu legends which I hope to read in a couple of years in the original Sanskrit’.

After reading Hindu legends, she adds to it:

...how grand, how sublime, how pathetic, our legends are. The wifely devotion that an Indian wife pays to her husband, her submission to him even when he is capricious or exacting, her worship of him as ‘the god of her life’, who followed ‘yama’ (Pluto of the Heathen) even to the lover regions and by her wisdom her constancy, her love, made him give back to her, her husband alive; the legend of Sacountala and Douchmanta that of Queen Gandharvi... And the last but not the least, the grand legend of Rama and Sita. (Lokuge 273)

This shows that Toru was impressed by Savitri’s legend much, which took shape of grand and charming poem in her *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. She learnt Sanskrit within the course of ten months. She read the *Ramayana* completely, most of parts of the *Mahabharata* and Kalidasa’s *Sakuntala*. She also started translating small poems of Sanskrit into English. In the letter to Mary on September 1876, she writes: I hope I shall be able to bring out another ‘Sheaf’ not gleaned in French but in ‘Sanskrit Fields’... I have only as yet gathered two ears, and my ‘Sanskrit Shear’ is far from being gathered
and complete.’ (Lokuge 302) This gave a birth to Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan, the greatest poetic achievement in English.

The work consists of sixteen poems. They show her deep love and respect for ancient Indian stories. Though she was very much fascinated by European literature her sensibility for Indian (Sanskrit) literature did not die. Indian culture was firmly planted in her by her mother with stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, in her early childhood. This is the plausible reason why she turned from European literature to Sanskrit literature. She was touched by Ancient India’s heroes and heroines – Lakshman, Nala, Sita, Eklavya, Prahlad etc. Initially, when she started reading Sanskrit along with her father, Sanskrit language appeared to her a difficult one but in a very short span of ten months she had gathered enough knowledge of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata that she wrote to Mary Martin that she would be able to bring out another ‘Sheaf’ this time in Sanskrit field. But because of her premature death she could not fulfil her desire. Govin Chunder after her death collected the poems for publication he found seven poems while Toru’s plan was to publish ‘A Sheaf’ of nine poems. So, to fill up the gap Govin Chunder had added two earlier translation of Sanskrit into the work. These two translations are ‘The legend of Dhruva’ and ‘The Royal Ascetic and the Hind’, which were published in her lifetime in the Bengal Magazine of October 1876 and the Calcutta Review of January 1877.
respectively. The first edition of ‘Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan’ was published in London in 1882 by Kegun Paul, London with an ‘Introductory Memoir’ by Edmund Ghose, since then the work has been gone to several editions which show popularity and importance of the poems.

**NOTE:** All the quotations of Toru’s poems are taken from Lokuge (2006).
4.2 INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH ROMANTICISM ON THE POETRY OF
TORU DUTT

The faults... writing in the languages of Europe, are weakness, languor,
conventionalism, and imitation.

- Toru Dutt

Among the sixteen poems in Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan, ‘Savitri’
is the first and one of the most famous poems. The legend or myth of Savitri
can be considered as remarkable in case of a young writer as Toru Dutt. Sita
and Savitri have been ideals for Indian womanhood since ages. Toru’s
attempt can be seen as a continuity in Indian literary tradition. It is Sri
Aurobindo who employs the myth of Savitri to relate it with the spiritual
reawakening of the nation. Before Toru no one attempted the story of Savitri
in English. She composed this story so effectively that it was well received by
the readers and critics as well.

It is the longest poem in the volume and is divided into five parts. It
narrates the story of Savitri’s fortune and her encounter with Yama, the god
of death. This ballad is divided into five part. In the first part, there are
information about Savitri’s birth, parents and Narad Muni’s approval of her
marriage with the love of her heart. The second part narrates Savitri’s
marriage with Satyavan, her going to the hermitage, her constant devotion to
gods and goddesses by keeping fasts and vigils and by offering them prayers, Satyavan’s departure for the forest along with Savitri, and the acute pain in Satyavan’s head. In the third part, Death’s court is narrated, and the decision of Yama to go himself for the soul of Satyavan is communicated. The fourth begins with Yama’s arrival, Savitri’s persistent following of Yama, and the philosophical discussion of Savitri which pleases Yama so much that he grants her three boons which also includes Satyavan’s life. In the fifth and last part is result of Savitri’s intelligence. It narrates Satyavan’s recovering of consciousness, a happy reunion of his with her wife and his pleasant talk with her, their return to the hermitage, and their happy domestic life.

Though, Toru referred to strike more originality in the composition of her poems, Romantic influences cannot be eschewed and so it can be marked at many places. In ‘Savitri’, Toru embraces some of the Romantic elements, in an Indian context, like supernaturalism, Romantic love, and images of death, and Nature with full zeal. The poem opens with the beautiful imageries of Nature for Savitri, following the Romantic imageries: ‘Stern warriors, when they saw her, smiled, / As mountains smile to see the spring, / Fair as a lotus when the moon / Kisses its opening petals red, / After sweet showers in sultry June!’ (131) Toru employs Natural imageries very romantically like when Savitri is talking about love at first sight: ‘Her heart-rose opened had at last –/
Opened no flower can ever shut.’ (133) Toru’s concept of pure Nature, i.e., made of without artistry of human represented at the end of the poem as:

Under the faint beams of the stars
How beautiful appeared the flowers,
Light scarlet, flecked with golden bars
Of the palasas, in the bowers
That Nature there herself had made
Without the aid of man. (157)

These lines and concept of Nature seem to be inspired by Romantic Nature. Quoted above lines are comparable Wordsworth’s when he writes in ‘Ruth, or the Influences of Nature’:

Nor less, to feed voluptuous thought,
The beauteous forms of Nature wrought,-
Fair trees and gorgeous flowers;
The breezes their own languor lent;
The stars had feelings, which they sent
Into those favour’d bowers. (as in Lokuge 364)

Savitri’s extraordinary charm is wonderfully described in the following lines:

‘The sweet simplicity and grace, / Abashed the boldest; but the good, / God’s purity there loved to trace, / Mirrored in dawning womanhood.’ (131)

Savitri’s beauty has been narrated by bestowing her simplicity and grace, i.e., ‘the bold’ and ‘the beautiful’ coinciding in her character as in the original myth where Savitri coming to an age which ventures to hunt for a match
herself when no young man dares to attend her *swayamvara* due to her dazzling beauty, purity and goodness. Very comprehensively Dutt here sketches these characteristics of goodness, beauty and purity as very natural by reflecting it through God’s purity to mingle the nature and supernatural in her who is the daughter of god – Sun.

Romantic love has been engendering from the beginning of the poem. When Savitri sees Satyavan royal in port, frank and noble, she cannot take her glance back from him and ponders ‘What was the meaning – was it love? / Love at first sight, as poets sing / Is then no fiction?’ (133) This Romantic love was fortified against Narad Muni’s advice when Savitri is firm to her decision to marry Satyavan and gives forceful reply to Narad Muni’s argument: ‘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.’ (137) Supernatural and mystical representations are integral parts of Indian mythologies and legends. Toru describes the supernatural being – Yama, the god of death mystically to personify death as:

...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 dight.
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. (146-147)

Thus, delineation of Yama’s approach creates the image of death with the words like ‘stranger’, ‘doubtful light’, ‘skin dark as bronze’, ‘eyes filled with fear’. It also mystifies the image of Yama with the words like ‘irradiate’, ‘severe’, ‘love’, ‘grace’, ‘glowed’, ‘bright’ and again ‘fear’. Structurally, each stanza is a set of twelve lines rhyming *ab ab* like many of Romantic poems.

The next poem which leaves a bit of traces of Romantic influences is ‘Jogadhya Uma’. Unlike her earlier poems, its source is not the Ramayana or the Mahabharata or any Purana but it is folklore. The poem is like Keats’s ‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’ based on the folk theme and powerful expression of a sense of loss, mystery and divine. Toru might have heard this folklore from her mother, for she says at the end: ‘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.’ (169) But it can be argued that the poem is a tribute to her roots and its source: the story was told to her by an old family nurse, Suchee, who was rooted in the Hindu tradition, and was a favourite of the children. In the last four lines of the poem Toru acknowledges her indebtedness to all those, probably including her mother, who in her childhood introduced her to the Hindu culture.
The story is of a simple Peddler and a Priest who are blessed with a vision of the goddess Uma. The Goddess makes the Peddler slip the shell bracelets on her hand and then directs him to priest, who she claims is her father, and asks him to collect the payment from him. The Peddler and the Priest realize the true identity of the Goddess and rush to the site where the Peddler had met her only to find her gone from there. On the request of the Priest, who was her ardent worshipper, she blesses them with the sight of her bracelet-adorned arm. The narration is however splendid and the picture of the Goddess Uma is pure, majestic and serene, a picture that inspires reverence:

And like a rose her beauty bared.
From all observances quite secure.
Not weak she seemed, nor delicate,
Strong was each limb of flexible grace,
And full the bust; the mien elate,
Like hers, the goddess of the chase
On Latmos hill… (165)

Here ‘the goddess of the chase on Latmos hill’ refers to Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt and the moon, who was attracted by Endymion, renowned for his beauty. She kissed him as he slept on Latmos, a mountain in Caria. The quoted lines show that like Romantic poets Toru also indicates the Greek connection in her solely Indian poem. In addition, it represents a slight
Romantic influences on Toru. She again like her earlier poems opens this poem by beautifully depicting natural serene of rural India – in Romantic way. For instance,

Through pasture-meadows where the kine,
In knee-deep grass, stood magic bound
And half awake, involved in mist,
That floated in dun coils profound,
Till by the sudden sunbeams kist
Rich rainbow hues broke all around. (163)

Toru mystifies the poem by introducing beauty of the mysterious lady for example ‘A fair young woman with large eyes, / And dark hair falling to her zone, / She heard the pedlar’s cry arise’ (164) Toru associates this mystic experience of Peddler to a kind of divine or of a high command as:

Oh she was lovely, but her look
Had something of a high command
That filled with awe.
They turned with saddened hearts to go;
Then from afar there came a sound
Of silver bells… (164)

In the words of K R Shrinivas Iyenger ‘A young and beautiful woman, yet a goddess too; without any self conscious iteration or elaboration. Toru has convincingly limned Uma’s divine human feature.’ (67) Further the experience was enhanced with the words like ‘beauty’, ‘glory’ and command
as in: ‘The beauty and the glory there! / Well might the pedlar look with awe, / For though her eyes were soft, a ray / Lit them at times, which kings who saw / Would never dare to disobey.’ (166) Toru narrates about the proof of Uma’s ‘mystic’ and ‘divine’ presence in the following word: ‘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.’ (169) While Lokuge writes in her introduction about influences on the poem along with borrowed images and lines:

    fair young woman with large eyes’ and long dark hair who was lovely, but whose ‘look…filled with awe’, to the delicate supernatural ending is as Indian as it is fleetingly reminiscent of Keats’s ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’. Toru also blends effortlessly into her poem other world images as for example, Echo, Artemis-Endymion, and even a line from John Collins: ‘Here smiling Peace and Plenty dwell’. The ballad is also Keatsian in the translation of landscape into mood: the ‘landscape [lies] in slumber’s chain’, the ‘pellucid spread of a lake-like tank’, and ‘blossoms on that liquid plain. (xlii)

The poem ‘Buttoo’ (Eklavya) has its root in the Mahabharata. It is the story of ideal Shishya who had not got the knowledge of archery from Guru Dronacharya; even then he was ready to give Guru Dakshina. It highlights the divisions based on caste, creed and wealth even by the most knowledgeable Guru. Toru herself could have experienced racial prejudices during her stay in
Europe and more so in India which has been portrayed in the poem being soothed by calm and serene Nature. Romantic influences on Nature can be traced in the description of it which seems unnecessary and unfit to the central theme of the poem to many critics. Buttoo’s lines in the far away forest that he goes after the insult from the teacher, where Nature welcomes him, could very well have been Romantic influences on the poem:

“They touch me,” he exclaimed with joy
“They have no pride of caste like man,
They shrink not from the hunter boy,
Should not my home be with them then?
Herein the forest let me dwell,
With these companions innocent,
And learn each science and each spell
All by myself in banishment. (180)

Such lines communicate sentiment similar to Shakespeare’s ‘As You Like It’ where Duke Senior in banishment in the Forest of Arden finds consolation in the myriad beauties of nature.

Many of concepts presented under the influence of Romantic description of Nature in the poem. Here, nature’s beauty soothed his wounded pride in the following lines anticipates Wordsworth: ‘Oh what a scene! How sweet and calm! / It soothed at once his wounded pride, / And on his spirit shed a balm / That all its yearnings purified.’ (178) These lines
remind of Wordsworthian nature – a cry of pantheism. Nature heals all kinds of pain. The broken heart and pride both are soothed by Nature. It enacts like a balm on the spirit: ‘On his spirit shed a balm’. (178) It also enacts like a Guru as in the following lines: ‘All creatures and inanimate things / Shall be my tutors: I shall learn / From beast, and fish and bird with wings / And rock and stream, and trees and fern.’ (180) In addition, the poem minutely delineates Nature, in an Indian context, from stanza seven to fifteen, description of trees, forest, rivers, rocks, and that are not connected to the theme of the poem led critics to think it an unnecessary description but possibly it may be a Romantic influence. Here is a fragment of that natural scenery:

The champak, *bok*, and South-sea pine,
The *nagessur* with pendant flowers
Like earrings, - and the forest vine
That clinging over all, embowers,
The *sirish* famed in Sanscrit song
Which rural maidens love to wear,
The peepul giant-like and strong,
The bramble with its matted hair. (178-179)

Moreover, the rich minute descriptions of calm and serene nature reminds of Wordsworth as in the lines: ‘What glorious trees! The sombre sal / On which eye delights to rest...The seemul, gorgeous as a bride, / With flowers that have the ruby’s gleam.’ (178) Nair speaks on Toru’s romantic predilection which are expressed in her letters to Miss Mary Martin. ‘Nature’s bounties
filled her senses and her soul. She was not a pedagogue, yet the effects of Nature were not lost upon her.’ (226) The beautiful lines on Baugmaree, her garden-house in Calcutta are expressed in the Petrarchan sonnet of the same name:

But nothing can be lovelier than the ranges
Of bamboos to the Eastward when the moon
Looks through their gaps, and the white lotus changes
Into a cup of silver. One might swoon
Drunken with beauty then, or gaze and gaze
On a primeval Eden, in amaze (210)

The poem ‘Buttoo’ is divided in equal lines of stanzas. Each stanza is of eight lines. It is in an octa-syllabic verse. The rhyme scheme $ab\ ab\ cd\ cd$ is followed throughout the poem.

‘Sindhu’ (Shravan) is the story of an ideal son. It is sectioned in three parts. The first part is like foundation introduces the character of Sindhu and his importance for his blind, old parents. The second part deals with the death of Sindhu by the hands of King Dasarath. The third and last part is reaction of the first two parts. The poem is in ballad form. In it, usually a stanza is made up of four lines, which is called quatrains. In Petrarcan ballad generally, first and third lines have four stresses and second and fourth line have three stresses. The second and fourth lines rhyme. In this poem, stresses are the same but first and second lines also rhyme along with second and fourth
lines. Part one of the poem exhibits a few traces of Romantic nature in the following lines: ‘A belt of Bela trees hemmed round / The cottage small and rude, / If peace on earth was ever found / ’Twas in that solitude.’ (185)

The next poem ‘Prehlad’ (spelled ‘Prahlad’ in A Writers Workshop Publication version of ‘Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan’ which was prefaced by Raja Rao, published by P. Lal in 1972) seems to be following the two Romantic characteristics: firstly, Medievalism and Hellenism – in which theme of the poem has been taken from an ancient or medieval life. Secondly, supernatural elements – which are already, part of ancient stories of India.

‘Sita’ is one of the finest fruits of Toru Dutt’s creative genius. This short poem written in a near perfect ballad form provides a flashback to Toru’s childhood, with Toru, Aru and Abju in a dark room, listening, to their mother mesmerized as she narrates the tragic tale of Sita. This relatively short and pithy poem conjures up a dream-picture of Sita, in a hermitage, surrounded by huge trees and beautiful flowers. The poem opens with the happy natural scene, which is seen by three children with wide-open eyes from the darkened room: ‘A dense, dense forest, where no sunbeam pries / …there, in a quiet lucid lake / The white swans glide; there, ‘whirring from the brake,’ (204) In the above lines, the last phrase ‘whirring from the brake’ is adopted from Pope’s ‘See! from the brake the whirring pheasant springs, / And mounts exulting on triumphant wings’ in ‘Windsor Forest’. (As in Lokuge 369) The
poem reveals the children’s emotional response to Sita and also the poetess’s romantic nostalgia for a happier past.

Another set of seven poems are additional poems under the heading ‘Miscellaneous poems’ in Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan. These poems are most significant because here Toru Dutt does not need to bind herself with the stories of legends. So, she has the greatest scope for a free play of her imagination and she takes that advantage very admirably. These poems, mostly autobiographical in theme, reveal her essential lyrical nature and show the direction that her genius was most likely to take off if she lived longer.

Among these seven poems, two are related to France. These are ‘France – 1870’ and ‘On the Flyleaf of Erckmann-Chatrian’s Novel Entitled ‘Madame Thérèse’; these poems show her love for France. Other three poems are celebrating the glory of nature – ‘Baugmaree’, ‘The Lotus’ and ‘Our Casuarina Tree’ of which first two are sonnets and the last one is an ode. These all three poems along with beautiful natural scenery are also related to Toru Dutt’s intimate life. Critics and readers immensely praise these poems. Remaining two poems are ‘Near Hasting’ and ‘The Tree of Life’. The first narrates the incident happened at the place called Near Hasting in England, and another ‘The Tree of Life’, shows Toru Dutt’s intimacy with her father.
‘France 1870’ is the poem about the Franco-Prussian war (19 July 1870 – 10 May 1871) in which France suffered humiliating defeat to the superior German Force. After the war, France had lost her earlier glorious state. Toru Dutt wants France to stand up again and regain the glory, as she believes France is able to do so. The poem opens with her faith in France as ‘Not dear, – oh no, - she cannot die! / Only a swoon, from loss of blood!’ These lines remind of Toru’s predecessors –Derozio and M M Dutt who expressed their patriotic feelings in an indirect way. Toru also possibly like them only expresses her love for her country through displaying her affection with France. She probably wants her country too to stand up again and regain the ‘lost glorious past’ reminding of Derozio. France seems to haunt Toru’s imagination the most in her Francine poems.

‘Madame Therese’ is in a same way a joyful expression of how a ‘slender, tall and brown’ (209) woman had contributed to salvage the fallen condition of France. It is about the reaction of reading this novel. Toru narrates how the story had affected her and expresses her wishes for the future of France: ‘I read the story and my heart beats fast! / Well-might all Europe quail before thee. France, / Battling against oppression!’ (209) Chakrabarti finds these two poems expressing love for France in a way written under the spell of Romantic effusions, especially of Byronic influences. He states,
Of the English Romantics poets she had the greatest affinity with Byron and Keats. Convulsed by the agony of a subjugated Greece, Byron went to fight in her War of Independence and lost his life on the way. Toru too felt a convulsing agony at the discomfiture of France 1870 during the Franco-German war... This emotional involvement with the misfortunes of the French is nothing less important than the volunteerism and ultimate martyrdom of the great English Romantic poet. (140)

The poem written on France about the disastrous year of 1870, when she was barely 15, betrays an optimism for the future of France which Byron had for the glory of Greece.

Lo, she stands up, -stands up e’en now,
Strong once more for the battle-fray,
Gleams bright the star that from her brow
Lightens the world. Bow, nations, bow,
Let her again lead on the way! (208)

‘Near Hastings’ is a memory poem which recollects a pleasant experience of the past – reminding of Wordsworth’s nostalgic poems describing nature and pleasant childhood days. It is also a tribute by Toru to Aru’s memory. It reflects Toru’s gratitude towards an English stranger who gave Aru some roses as a token of friendship.

‘The Tree of Life’ is an account of a mystical vision, which she had seen once when she lay awake with a sense of weariness with her father’s hand in
hers. Toru Dutt’s intimacy with her father was such that there was no need of exchanging any word; everything could be understood by feeling as in a highly intimated relation which requires no language reminding about Shelley’s theme of ‘platonic love’. This poem shows a close relation with her father. It seems to be incorporating with Coleridge’s ‘Frost at Midnight’ wherein a father composes the poem for his son and wishes for him to be nurtured in the lap of Nature so that no harm come to him. While here in this poem Toru being a daughter responds and thus narrates when she felt the fever in her limbs. She is having a mystic dream vision in which she writes ‘My hand was in my father’s, / and felt His presence near me.’ (205) She discerns as she wakes up:

    Aud o’er it that strange light, – a glorious light
    Like that the stars shed over fields of snow
    In a clear, cloudless, frosty winter night,
    Only intenser in its brilliance calm
    ...
    A tree with spreading branches and with leaves
    Of divers kinds, - dead silver and live gold,
    Shimmering in radiance that no words may tell!
    Besides the tree an Angel stood. (208)

This angel, as she observes: ‘...plucked / A few small spray, and bound them round my head. / Oh, the delicious touch of those strange leaves! / No longer throbbed my brows, no more I felt / The fever in my limbs’ (208) These lines
are representing Wordsworth and Coleridge’s concept of calm and serene Nature that can heal any pain and can provide nurturing atmosphere. Further, Toru feels holy pity and love divine in the form of her father as in ‘Never, oh never had I seen a face / More beautiful than that Angel’s, or more full / Of holy pity and of love divine.’ (208-209) Padmini Sen Gupta opines that:

This poem, verging on the mystic, is in my mind the best of Toru’s verse and the vision she sees is like Blake’s peep into the world of Divine Love. That she should in her supreme moment of happiness plead for her father also to be blessed shows how much she brooded on the fact that she would be taken from him and he would be left alone sorrowing, for his was not to be that divine vision – not yet. (52)

The theme of divine love seems to be reflecting Wordsworth and Coleridge both. Achieving God (Divine Love) through Nature is Wordsworth’s pantheism, while for Toru in this poem the divine love can also be gained through a man-woman relationship not necessarily confine to lovers but it can also be father and daughter as was the case of her. Coleridge’s famous ‘Ancient Mariner’ also speaks about the divine love of God but it echoes Christianity as it is to be achieved through repentance of wrong doings.

The poem also seems to be penned under the spell of the ‘Tree’ poems during the Romantics like Blake’s ‘A Poison Tree’, Wordsworth’s ‘Oak Tree’,
‘The Haunted Tree’ and ‘Yew-Tree’. The title of the poem also reminds Milton’s ‘Tree of Knowledge’ in ‘Paradise Lost’.

Toru has immortalized her affinity with nature in her sonnets. Her two sonnets ‘Sonnet-Baugmaree’ and ‘Sonnet-The Lotus’ are wonderful description of nature. The first sonnet, there is the description of garden that is surrounded by foliage gird. The leaves in the foliage are not of mere green colour but all sharp colour leaves are there. Amid the green mango trees tamarind leaves seem graceful. Palm trees arise like pillar amid the seemuls (silk-cotton trees). The scene very romantically creates visual imagery of moon peeping through bamboos when the moon as: ‘Looks through their gaps, and the white lotus / Changes Into a cup of silver. One might swoon / Drunken with beauty then or gaze and gaze / On a primeval Eden, in amaze.’ (210) This set of lines also ‘captures the exuberant local setting with a corresponding Keatsian sensuousness that is also tinged with a Wordsworthian spiritual intensity.’ (Lokuge xxvii) Thus the poem is full of romantic and sensual imageries, for instances, to show the abound foliage she had used the phrase, ‘A sea of foliage gird’, the high of palm trees suggested by ‘Palms arise like pillars’ the deep red colour of seemuls is well expressed: ‘Red – red and startling like the trumpet’s sound’. This has been a quiet unusual comparison but the effective one. At last, she calls Baugmaree garden ‘A Primeval Eden’ under the Miltonic influences to be seen only with
amazement. Thus, like Keats, Toru is self-disciplined in both the expression of feelings and her art of craftsmanship.

‘Sonnet-The Lotus’ is a patriarchal sonnet. This sonnet establishes the superiority of Lotus between rose and lily. The poem personifies the abstract emotion love who goes to find a flower, which should be delicious as rose and stately in her pride like lily. The whole sonnet is in dialogue between love and flora. Toru Dutt has celebrated lotus as ‘the queenliest flower’ in the poem.

The last of Toru’s poems ‘Our Casuarina Tree’ is the most picturesque ode. Harihar Das opines: ‘For its rich imagery, the music of its verses, and the tenderness and pathos with which it is instinct, we would place this poem second to none in the volume.’ (as in Nair 241) Toru Dutt recollects her ‘sweet companions’ with whom she once played in the serene atmosphere of their garden house at Baugmaree. The Casuarina Tree stands as the deathless witness of her joyful childhood. Toru nostalgically remembers those days, which would never come back. This poem definitely reminds of Romantic trait of going back to pleasant childhood days and recapturing childhood memories in expression. It also indicates the relations between happiness and melancholy, pleasure and pain, imagination and reality and death and eternity. This title, again, like the previous tree-poem, shows influences of the tree-poems written by Blake and Wordsworth. The poem begins with a Wordworthian description of the grandeur of the Casuarina Tree, its huge
structure as ‘Like a huge Python, winding round and round / The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars / Up to its very summit near the stars’ (211); the creeper that climbed upon its rough trunk as:

A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could live. But gallantly
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee; (211)

and it is an abode of myriad birds, bees and a grey baboon as ‘And oft at nights the garden overflows / With one sweet song that seems to have no close, / Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.’ (211) Such a calm and serene Nature has followed Wordsworth’s description which Toru assimilates in this poem. Thus, the emotions in the poem are not dwelling on but illustrated by careful chosen images. Chandani states about the assimilation and hybridity in a broad view: ‘There are more complex moments when the boundaries between European and Indian literatures dissolve to offer a rich symbolic hybridity. ’ (Lokuge xliii) The phrases ‘Huge Python’ reminds Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’ in which Satan is addressed thus ‘Huge Python, and his power no less he seemed / Above the rest to retain…’ ‘Dutt’s allusion to Milton’s Satan suggests an analogy between the casuarina tree and the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden (Lokuge 371). Another phrase ‘Crimson Clusters’ has a direct reference to Frederick Tennyson’s ‘Anaktoria’ wherein
he writes ‘The crimson clusters of the vine walk. Sung darkling’ again revealing influences of Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’, ‘as the wakeful bird / Sings darkling’. (Lokuge 371) In the fourth stanza, the poem again represents Romantic influence wherein ‘water-wraith’ probably remembered from William Wordsworth’s ‘Yarrow Visited September, 1814’. Even the lines in the last stanza of Toru’s ‘“Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton, / And Time the shadow’ are identical with Wordsworth’s ‘Yew Tree’ lines:

But worthier still of note
Are those fraternal Four of Borrowdale,
Joined in one solemn and capacious grove…
Perennially- beneath whose sable roof
Of boughs, as if for festal purpose, decked
With unrejoicing berries – ghostly Shapes
May meet at noontide; Fear and trembling Hope,
Silence and Foresight; Death the Skeleton
And Time the Shadow; - there to celebrate,
As in a natural temple scattered o’er
With altars undisturbed of mossy stone,
United worship. (Wordsworth 334-335)

The central idea and setting thus inspired and borrowed from the West, were, then, naturalized into ‘an Indian setting with the intimacy of an insider’s sensitivity to the unknown and the loved.’ (Lokuge xliii) Borrowdale, which also stimulated the poem, is the valley and lake, near Keswick, Cumbria, in the Lake district, of which Wordsworth writes in ‘Yew-trees’, it is a poem that
suggested this theme to Toru. E. J. Thomson commenting on the poem that it is:

The most remarkable poem ever written in English by a foreigner... But the poem’s strength is independent of this; and its blending of pathos and dignity of spirit, its stretching out of ghostly arms to hose other haunted trees of Wordsworth in ‘Borrowdale’. (As in Nair 243)

Iyengar writing about the simplicity of style in composing the poetry says that ‘the eleven-line stanza form with the rhyme scheme abba, cddc, eee is worthy of Keats himself.’ (73) Which also strengthens the Romantic influences on the poem. Toru’s assertion of individualism seems to be imitative of Wordsworth as Lokuge writes:

Toru’s love of French and English Romantics, of whom Victor Hugo and Wordsworth were particular favourites, is of course, natural. While their assertion of individualism would certainly have appealed, she also shared their appreciation of and was influenced by their mood-scape. (xxvii)

Toru had inspirations from and influences of her predecessors and so did her poetry. Her narrative verses were a step ahead of early Anglo-Indians. Thus, her poetry surely grew in Romantic veins but gradually it swayed away from the influence. With her poetic ingenuity in themes and composition, Toru speeded up the rise Indian poetry in English. With her poems, this realm
of Indian poetry in English developed from childhood to its adolescence reflecting tinge characteristics of the maturing tone of adulthood.