

**IN TRANSLATION: A CASE STUDY OF TORU DUTT'S  
*ANCIENT BALLADS AND LEGENDS OF HINDUSTAN***

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for the award of the degree of*



**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

submitted by  
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This may be placed before the examiners for evaluation for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy.

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This dissertation titled “*In Translation: A Case Study of Toru Dutt’s Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*”, submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.

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## **Contents**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter I : Toru Dutt</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Chapter II : Words and Worlds</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Chapter III : Silence: Signified and Translated</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Conclusion : the story continues...</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>An Afterword for Toru Dutt</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Works Cited</b>	<b>98</b>

*Dedicated to the loving memory of  
my Late Grandfather  
Sri Aditya Nand Prasad*

## INTRODUCTION

Toru Dutt was born to Govin Chunder Dutt and Kshetramoni Dutt in Calcutta's Rambagan in March, 1856. She was the youngest child, her brother Abju and sister Aru Dutt, both being older to her. She belonged to a Kayastha Hindu family, the Dutt family which was well respected in Calcutta. The general atmosphere of the house was intellectually stimulating and helped Toru in developing a keen interest in English literature. The family, including the children, got baptized in 1862 in Calcutta when Toru Dutt was six years old. The influence of English education and culture can be felt strongly in the poems of the *Dutt Family Album* (1870) published in England.

The Dutt's went to Bombay in 1863 but returned to Calcutta in 1864. A year later i.e. in 1865, Abju's death proved to be a major shock to the entire family and they moved to Europe where both the sisters attended school at Nice and learned the French language. In 1871, they went to Cambridge where Toru and Aru attended the "Higher Lectures for Women". This period also resulted in Toru's lifelong friendship with Mary E. Martin with whom she corresponded through letters even after her return to Calcutta in 1873. After coming back the family underwent another trauma as Aru died at the age of twenty, leaving Toru as the sole survivor amongst the siblings. These two deaths influenced Toru Dutt's psyche in a big way and she began to contemplate about the uncertainty of her own life as well.

Left solitary and isolated, Toru Dutt resorted to extensive reading and writing. Her life remained confined within the house and a few trips to Baugmaree, mainly because of her fragile health, and also as there were not many outing options available to women in the nineteenth century Bengal. This period of isolation is marked by her successful venture in the field of writing and literature. In 1876 a volume of poems called *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*, a joint venture of Aru Dutt and Toru Dutt, where they had rendered poetic translations from French into English got published. It received critical acclaim from various critics like Edmund Gosse, Clarisse Bader and James

Darmesteter who emphasized both her fluency in the language and her Indian identity. An impressed Edmund Gosse had commented in utter delight as well as disbelief:

When poetry is as good as this it does not much matter whether Rouveyere prints it upon Whatman paper, or whether it steals to light in blurred type from some press in Bhowanipore (426)

To James Darmesteter, her French critic, Toru Dutt represented a mixture of several qualities all of which “blended in herself three souls and three traditions” (Das 1).

Though Aru could not live to see such encouraging reception, Toru’s poetic voice found its first admirers with this work. Clarisse Bader, for example, suggested, “This Indian girl, so fond of our European civilization, instead of increasing the number of Indian poetesses of whom we have heard through the writings of M. de Tassy, has taken her rank and place among the writers of England” (Das 301). This was one of the few works which got published during her lifetime. Apart from this she had published essays on Leconte de Lisle and Henry Vivian Derozio in the *Bengal Magazine* in December 1874 after which she became a regular contributor to *Bengal Magazine* and *Calcutta Review*. In 1875, *Bengal Magazine* published another prose work called *A Scene from Contemporary Life* written by her. Toru Dutt wrote two fictional works - *Bianca, or the Young Spanish Maiden* (1878) and *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d’Arvers* (1879) but they were published only after her death. *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882) was the only collection of her original poems in English. Toru Dutt died of consumption in her Rambagan house in Calcutta on August 30, 1877. Her untimely demise was received with great grief by her critics - Indian as well as European, and in an ironical way it also became one of the reasons for the wide appreciation her poetry gained. Toru Dutt’s death in full youth evoked responses from various contemporaries. Her first biography called *Life and Letters of Toru Dutt* was written by Harihar Das and was published with a Foreword by H. A. L. Fisher in the year 1921. Das recounts in the “Preface” of his biography, the negligence that Toru faced in the hands of literary historians:



...forty-three years since Toru Dutt's death, no biography of her has yet been written. I feel, then, that no further apology is needed from me for this attempt to do honour to an Indian maiden, in view not only of what was lost to the world through her early death, but also of the comparative oblivion into which her name has sunk. (i)

Another biographer A.N.Dwivedi published *Toru Dutt* in 1977, which is much later than Harihar Das's work. Then Padmini Sengupta published another biography called *Toru Dutt* in (1968). These biographies included a critical appreciation of the works of Toru Dutt. Later, as it seems, Toru Dutt was forgotten and her works suffered from the lack of attention from worthy critics. Major historians of Indian English Literature like K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar and M.K.Naik praised Toru Dutt's works in relation to different standards of judgement, which included either overtly nationalistic or too sympathetic reading of her works. Although such works are important in locating the place of Toru Dutt in Indian writing in English, they often fail to look at the complex self-fashioning of subjectivity which Toru Dutt attempted by reinterpreting various social, cultural and historical factors. Much recently, Meenakshi Mukherjee and Malashri Lal have studied Toru Dutt from a feminist perspective. Significantly, the poems in the text of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* offer various opportunities to reinvestigate the basic tenets of identity construction and gender relations vis-a-vis national awakening and colonial subjugation.

Toru Dutt's works exhibit a strong movement towards resistance by self-fashioning. As a young woman writing in nineteenth century colonial Bengal, it was nothing but courageous on her part that she claimed a separate space for herself in the world of literature through her works. Her knowledge of English and French brought her closer to the European culture and lifestyle. In India she learnt Sanskrit and could read and write Bengali though not very comfortably. There were several influences on Toru Dutt's life and the memories of the language, culture and lifestyle of each one of these remained distinctly alive in her. She therefore tried to bring about a reconciliation of all the worlds that she had seen and began to translate them in her own words. The framework was provided by the ancient myths of India no doubt. Being fully aware of

the social roles that a woman had to play, Toru Dutt devised a way of locating her identity within the mythical past and many a times positioned herself against forces which were not in her control. Her poems reflect the tensions arising from a conflict between her creative world, the mythical/textual world and the real society. She was made to experience and inhabit this real space as a confined woman as C.T.Mohanty says “women as women are constructed, defined within and by the group” (57). A woman can perceive not only through her intellect but also through her body which is often at odds with many a customs and rules. This paper would therefore explore the possibilities of understanding the purpose and the medium by which Toru tried to diffuse these tensions in a creative manner. As Stephen Slemon observes, “subaltern peoples under colonialism are neither fully subjected to power nor fully agential...they somehow live out their lives between these two concepts of social subjectivity” (191).

Toru’s upbringing made her a part of many overlapping worlds which criss-crossed her life at different points. The influence of diverse cultural contacts provided her an insight into the working of cultures, yet, she could never belong to any of the worlds fully. Toru Dutt was an exile wherever she went and her alienated self engaged with the dynamics between several zones of real and fantastical, power and dispossession, closure and opening. Her poems show the possibility of ‘re’-visiting the conflicted nature of female experiences and various modes through which they find representation in literature.

My first motive in this dissertation would be to bring down Toru Dutt from her so called ‘elf-like’ existence (as described by her father, Govin Chunder Dutt) to that of a normal individual who was equally vulnerable to the current of thoughts that arose during her lifetime. What puts her apart from others is her unusual perceptivity and creative output which astonished the critics of her time and intrigues today’s reader alike. It can be said that she escaped the Orientalist trap by virtue of her insight into the working of culture and language. The language she used in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* demonstrates her level of comfort even when her poetic imagination stretches its limits. She does not simply rewrite the tales but also became a story teller in her own right. The poems of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* are written in English but

nowhere does Toru seem to extol “the centrality of and belief in the excellence of all things English” (Tiffin 145). She consciously rejects the temptation to accept traditional values and modernist assumptions uncritically. Her poetry is not an escapist retreat into the glorious past of India. Her poems show us Toru Dutt’s modern approach as she responded to the inert voice of the nation.

The first chapter in this dissertation is therefore devoted to a critical appreciation of her creative genius and the kind of responses her writings have evoked from her critics and contemporaries. Many critics like Malashri Lal, Meenakshi Mukherjee, Tricia Lootens and Natalie Philips now feel that the reputation of a writer like Toru Dutt will have to be reassessed in the present context even if in the current scenario her writings may not seem to make a great advancement. Adil Jussawala for example thinks it “fair to ignore the earlier work of such talented but tragically short-lived poets as Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt and her sister Aru Dutt...” (Walsh 76). R. Parthasarthy once said that “Toru Dutt’s poetry means little to us because our idea of poetry has changed since her day” (*Ten Twentieth* 3). Such dismissal can be extremely detrimental if one has to have a full idea of the roots of Indian-English poetry. Early writings are the foundations of Indian writing in English. It is only by appreciating the beginners that one can today appreciate verses which are so non-derivative, critical and Indian in all respects:

what is god  
and what is stone  
the dividing line  
if it exists  
is very thin  
at Jejuri  
and every other stone  
is god or his cousin

...  
scratch a rock  
and a legend springs

(Kolatkar 'A Scratch')

A land which is so rich in terms of culture can always offer unexplored dimensions to an imaginative mind. It is a place where these myths and legends have become a way of life expressing the joys, the sorrows, and doubts of a whole community. For sometime even Toru felt isolated amidst the Bengali community as her education and upbringing were different from others. India had become both home and exile for her. Her outlook can be called modern as she succeeded in what Vinay Dharwadkar calls "Indianizing European form and Europeanizing Indian voice in equal measure" (269). This ambiguous sense of belonging and alienation both at the same time produces a clear effect on her poetic vision.

The Second chapter evaluates the role of English language in the creation of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. There are many languages that one can count to the credit of Toru Dutt's ingenuity, but *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* being her only poetic work in English is of a special significance to a researcher who tries to go through the hidden layers of fact and fiction which bind together different strands of her creativity, consciousness and the choice of medium for expressing what is at once personal as well as political. A detailed examination of images, metaphors, rhythm and sounds that together make her poetry special and unconventional shall be undertaken. The study will include all the nine poems from *ABLH* as well as the seven *Miscellaneous Poems* written on different occasions. In *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* she had translated around two hundred French poems into English. This chapter will therefore include all the poems which Toru Dutt had composed originally in English.

The third chapter explores the aspect of "Translation" as has already been indicated by the title of this dissertation. The usage of the word 'translation' has been intentionally given a central focus in the title and it finds a justification in the third

chapter of this dissertation. Here I argue that Toru as a writer and as a woman was traversing many journeys in her mind. Her longings, her innermost desires, doubts and sorrows, all have given shape to her creativity. A translation of these many worlds lived by a single individual found an apt expression in her poems. This chapter finally maps her intellectual development in connection with the different worlds and selves which emerge and subside in her writings. Tricia Lootens says:

If English bards are imitation Welsh, Scottish, or Irish bards, what is an Indian bard? A female Indian bard who writes in English? In French? What might it mean to be a bard whose “nation” was already being moved to seek unity, in part, through processes of translation- including translation into an originally imperial language...? (297)

The analysis done so far will thus be helpful in condensing the views to draw a Conclusion which will look into the fluid identity of Toru Dutt just like any other Indian English Poet. It will also deal with the question of Toru Dutt as a distinct poet ahead of the time in which she lived and study the manner in which she attempted to create a self-fashioned identity for herself. An attempt will be made to chart the development of Indian poetry written in English, its meaning and purpose and examine the number of ways in which Toru’s writings help us to foray into different directions in this area. There are several issues which are of interest and concern for us. What does it mean to be an Indian writer in English? Is an “Indian” writing possible in “English”, which, thanks to the historical circumstances, was implanted in India as a foreign language- one which the colonial masters were born with? Is not Indian writing in English itself, in very clear terms, a site of contestation of cultural differences and ongoing negotiation. In his study of the response of India to colonialism Alok Bhalla draws attention to the “imaginative geographies” (8) which the European Orientalists envisaged in India was a dialogic process in which India’s role as an “active participant in its own recognition and awakening” (9) should not be overlooked. Recognising the differences and grappling with the process can prove to be highly productive especially in the field of literature which is concerned not only with what is in view but also with the “why’s” and “how’s” related to a particular point of view. It is in such moments of negotiation, sometimes also

leading to a crisis, that a deliberate translation of differences becomes a pursuit of Toru Dutt's life. Her writings pave the way towards a symbiotic co-existence in the context of late nineteenth century society so in the light of Bhabha's argument that the "'beyond' is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past...in the *fin-de-siecle*...space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion."(2), what are the possible strategies for reading the work of Toru Dutt's fluid identity? And last but not the least: Can one write in the imperial language without getting interpellated into the colonial agenda? Was Toru Dutt in any way able to move against the torrential flow of ideas which flooded the minds of all the Bengali intellectuals during the nineteenth century? If yes, what kind of filtering did she prefer in order to communicate herself. Answers to many of these fundamental questions do not come easily even after six decades of our independence and the writer who enters this space is already in a veritable battlefield of contesting ideologies.

As the title of the work suggests, the basic analytical premise will be modeled upon the study of poems with reference to theories of translation, post-colonialism and feminism. Toru Dutt's mind had already graduated into maturity when she had first published her *A Sheaf Gleaned from French Fields* a book of translations of French poems with critical notes on authors in the year 1876. It was the first step she had taken towards assembling a mixed cultural picture of the world through literature, though its initiation can be traced as early as 1874 which saw the publication of her first essays on Leconte de Lisle and Henry Vivian Derozio in the *Bengal Magazine*. Chandani Lokuge points out that both "these early essays reflect Toru's developing interest in mediating between cultures and literatures". (xxiv). As G.J.V.Prasad has said, "Both the poets seem apt choices for a pioneering Indian English writer to critique-for both are her predecessors in writing in European languages even while they were 'Asiatic half-caste poets' as she says in the article on ...[Leconte de Lisle] (xiii-xiv). She translated herself into her writings. A word can contain a whole world in itself and postcolonial studies have traced the relationship between them in more than one ways (Majumdar 108-115). Moreover, in Toru Dutt's rendering of the legends, words carry the weight of her perceptions on relative constructions of womanhood and patriarchy. The centrality of women in the discourse of nation is represented in Toru's poems. Her writings

demonstrate that “Woman must write her self...writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies”. (Cixous 245) The life of confinement and suppression of desires marks the writing of women. It is therefore all the more important to look at the alter-narratives which emerge from the works of women belonging to different time periods. Toru Dutt is a significant figure in this respect and by keeping her at the centre of this discourse “can transform the premises and blind spots of the dominant history that has marginalized women as actors and agents” (Betty Joseph 2).

The history of Indian Writing in English is linked with the history of the development of “India” as a “nation”. Many movements (both large scale and small scale), philosophical debates and socio-cultural changes create literature. A research on a writer of IWE therefore demands a thorough knowledge of such interlinked factors as often literature and history are intertwined and written into each other creating a conglomeration of discourses sometimes complimentary and sometimes contradictory. Indian English shows an inevitable and distinct affinity to be real in such a paradigm as its name itself is a contradiction in terms. This is because of its nomenclature-Indian Writing in English- as well as because its history begins with the arrival of the English and it is in English that the modern nation state arrives in our country. English, to be politically correct, was not an Indian language and therefore the literature termed as IWE is a storehouse of numerous factors which contributed to its destabilized status for a long time. Looking at the wide range and number of histories of IWE written by various critics like K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, M.K.Naik and others, it is not difficult to understand why a study of historical contexts in relation to literature is important. Thus, while reading Shakespeare, one reads about Queen Elizabeth’s reign, the developing mercantile economy and the rise of bourgeoisie in connection with the literature. Or to gain an understanding of the Romantic poets a prior knowledge of French revolution and Rousseau is required. However, to understand the complex structures which gave rise to characters like Caliban and Othello, one needs to go beyond the history of a single nation. Post-colonial studies has demarcated an extensive area of research by rummaging through ‘subjugated histories’ of colonized nations. It proposed to unravel the truth behind given strategies of grappling with the ‘Orient’ which was “almost a European invention , and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting

memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences.”(1) It follows that in this research work, the focus will definitely be on a close, detailed analysis of the first ripples in the history of Indian Writing in English which now incorporates big names like Salman Rushdie and Vikram Seth, and a huge corpus of literature produced by Indians not only in English but also translations from different Indian languages. It is from this fertile ground that many writers of merit have emerged and given rise to a wave of creativity.

Talking about the beginnings, one distinguished figure which demands attention is certainly that of Toru Dutt (1856-77). She was a writer who contributed to development of IWE in her own special way giving it a pan-Indian character. Despite her short life span and equally short but highly remarkable writing she has an appeal of her own as one of the most learned cosmopolitan women of her times. Though many biographies have been written on her life she still offers new avenues for further enquiry in the field of ‘Women’s Writing’ in India, while allowing us to probe deeper into the inner mechanism of colonial experience in India. Her eminent position in Indian writing in English needs no justification and the dissertation which follows will build upon these two areas specifically. The distance between the writer and a researcher of current era will not be a hindrance to this project. It will rather help in looking at the larger perspective while also taking into account new developments in the field of writing and literature. It does not necessarily mean an appropriation of currently developed theoretical paradigms to unrelated facts of history and people. Instead it will serve to incorporate new ‘knowledges’ (81) to borrow a loaded term from Foucault’s dictionary, leading towards a better understanding of literature, history, nation and identity formation.

Indian Writing in English embodies, as is suggested by the name itself, very many inflections while its roots run deep into the colonial history of India. It is therefore all the more important to understand first the associated realities which gave birth to IWE. Literature is invariably and closely linked with all the historical epochs. Yet in the face of continuous dilemmas, IWE has given voice to a whole treasure of varied experiences. The same holds true for the poems written during the colonial period also. V. K. Gokak’s



introduction to *The Golden treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry (1828-1965)* touches upon some vital features of the poems which qualify as “Indo-Anglian Poetry” :

With India, moreover, there was the additional fact of tremendous significance-the meeting of the East and the West....English came to India as the representative of ‘Bourgeois’ culture, art, and democracy. It introduced modern literary forms to the Indian people. This impact brought about a veritable renaissance in India and her men of letters were busy assimilating the new consciousness and the new literary forms for nearly a century.(22)

It is necessary to clarify that compared to Indian Writing in English or Indian Poetry in English, Gokak’s Indo-Anglian Poetry still indicates that one foot of this literature is still in England. It cannot be denied that it is difficult to judge as to what constitutes that very quintessential ‘authentic’ Indian experience, so I would first like to assert that despite all complications Indian writings in English language have honestly documented the response of the Indian society-its men and women both-at different time periods. On the other hand, especially in the colonial period, people from different sections of society responded and quite positively to the stimulus provided by the learning and knowledge which English bestowed. Newly introduced to the westernized concepts of modernity, nation and freedom created fissures through which subjugated voices began to emerge for the first time while the old traditional system was thoroughly shaken under the colonial influence.

... in their liberal rationalist and egalitarian content, the mid nineteenth century attempts in Bengal to “modernize” the condition of women, the period of nationalism is regarded as a clear retrogression. “Modernisation” began in first half of the nineteenth century because of the “penetration of western ideas.” (234)

No doubt, it is a space full of contradictions and to be an Indian English Writer has always raised serious issues of identity and displacement even today. First of all,

there is a whole range of definitions and titles that have been conferred by critics from time to time. But it is Indian, as K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar states:

How, then, about Indians writing in English? How shall we describe Indian creative writing in English? How shall we describe Indian creative writing in English? Of course, it is Indian literature, even as the work of Thoreau and Hemingway is American literature. But Indian literature comprises several literatures.... And Indian writing in English is but one of the voices in which India speaks.(3)

To a great extent, this spirit of interrogation and self introspection is something that has given both validity and power to IWE. It is through a constant exercise in criticism that it has been able to create a canon for itself. M.K.Naik on the other hand firmly opines, "Strictly speaking, Indian English Literature may be defined as literature written originally in English by authors Indian by birth, ancestry or nationality. (2) But then, he quickly adds, "...since literature is not a science, there will always be a no man's land in which all attempts at strict definition are in danger of getting lost in a haze."(3) Moreover, English by virtue of its foreign-ness is always linked and very often rightly so, with the discourse of power. The possibility of expressing what is specifically Indian is always under close scrutiny when the language concerned is none other than English. Thirdly, it also gets intermixed with the status quo or class factor which did play an important role in imparting English education to a selected few who have had access to good institutions, while a huge mass of Indian populace struggling for basic amenities of life still finds it a far fetched dream to be able to converse in English.

The observations made above are not unheard of, in fact they are some of the most repeated statements whenever the nature and future of Indian writing in English is discussed. Yet, it makes sense to contemplate and re-evaluate, to flog perhaps a dead horse in order to understand the current scenario of literature in a better fashion. It becomes all the more important then, that we revisit the past so as to understand the socio-cultural phenomena which forms the blueprint of ideological contests which keep this space charged constantly.

Literature functions as a major source of understanding the hidden undercurrents of the society- aspects which are often missed out in proper historical documents but are powerful indicators of the social psychology of people. The writer probably inhabits a space where these forces are felt more palpably and hence in his/her created world transgression itself becomes the norm. The power wielded by words is unusual and literature is the medium which facilitates the transition between the real and the imaginary. It gives us an idea of the inner landscape where abstract thoughts are put into the shapely container built of words. From the perception of the outer world, its impression on the writer's mind and the subsequent expression of the same with the help of a medium, the journey is more often than not, a rough terrain. As pointed out by Maurice Blanchot, the moment of "communication of the work lies not in the fact that it has become communicable, through reading, to a reader. The work itself is a communication."(198). This quotation stands absolutely true for Toru Dutt (1856-1877). Born in an affluent and well reputed Dutt family of Bengal, she is today recognized as one of the first Indian women who wrote in English and French with an astonishing grasp over both the languages, while she was also well versed in Bengali and Sanskrit. This outwardly unconnected mix of languages and cultures is what gives a separate place to Toru Dutt as an Indian English poetess. V.K.Gokak in his *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry* notices the growth of Indian English Poets between the two poems written by M.M.Dutt- *The Captive Ladie* and *Meghnad Badh* and says that 'Indo-Anglian verses' had finally started moving in the direction of "authentic and inspired writing" (23). About Toru Dutt he comments:

Once the forms of the song, the lyric, the sonnet, the elegy and the ode were assimilated along with those of ballad and romance, it was possible for poets to unburden their most intimate joys and sorrows in verse. This glory was reserved for Toru Dutt and for the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indian-ness of theme, utter authenticity and consummate self-revelation reach their high water mark of excellence in Toru Dutt's *Our Casuarina Tree*. (24)

Toru brings out the inherent paradoxes within this intricate framework of assimilation as her writings traverse through various kinds of pressures which did have an effect on the mind of a writer belonging to her class, age and nationality. She was pitched against various forces which pulled her in different directions. There were three very powerful ideological worlds which had sort of collided with each other in nineteenth century Bengal- the emerging nationalist movement in India, the Oriental scholarship taken further by Max Mueller and Edmund Wilson and the British feminist/colonialist concerns whereby colonized women were looked at as victims of a savage patriarchal race. She faced a hostile condition from all sides and regardless of Dutt's self-positioning, she is inevitably an outsider—in both Indian and British society by her gender, in British culture by her race and colonial status, and in Indian culture by her Christianity and English education.(Philips Issue 3.3). These factors are responsible for a sense of displacement and disjunction often felt by Indian English Writers as it is represented in their poetry and construction of identity. In the process it does engender an identity crisis for the writer who tries to cope up with the push and pull factors working simultaneously :

The problem for Indian English poets has been that because their attempt is to convey in a language not their own, they have to doubly emphasize that the spirit is their own. They have had to examine their attitudes to the language, its cultural configurations, its political position, as also the historical contexts in which they have chosen to write in English... Indian English Poetry has always been the poetry of the displaced. (Prasad 15)

Toru Dutt's experience of the colonial encounter of India shows that it was no one way traffic. The impact of this relationship could be felt on both the sides. Hence a much more pragmatic way to understand this twisted hierarchical relation between the East and the West is to look at both the sides of the coin and investigate closely the literary culture of this period in the light of socio-cultural milieu in which it took its first staggering steps. As far as the notion of 'nation' as a western idea is concerned, Harish Trivedi has said:

Like the “novel”, the periodical essay, or cricket, was the Nation too is an idea and a substance that we imported from the West?...If we grant that the nation was a western idea, we should perhaps also acknowledge, as a corollary, that colonialism was no less a Western idea in the first place, and further, that it perhaps needed one Western idea to counter another western idea. As a maxim in Sanskrit has it: *shathe shaathyam samaacharet*. Do to the wicked as they do unto you- preferably by turning their own weapons against them. (Mandal ix)

British colonialism gave a potent weapon in the hands of the subjugated Indians- that of language. This amoeboid creature called English has gone through different phases of development in India. In a huge, heterogeneous country like India, it certainly evoked varied responses. There were some like Raja Ram Mohun Roy who welcomed it as a medium of liberation and knowledge of unknown treasures while there were others for whom it implied pestilence and cultural anxiety. Gradually, the country learnt to look at it differently and a new search for identity began. India was redefining itself and so were its people. This phase of transition had its most enthusiastic participants in the Bengal of nineteenth century and we find a complex mind at work when we read Toru Dutt’s poetry. The author taken up for research here is one who shows the anxieties of such a diverse transitory phase as she herself tries to grapple with its problems and solutions. It is actually through her pioneering efforts that the new map of Indian writing in English is redrawn with the pen of a woman writer. Her experiences are skillfully infused into the fabric of poems which show a strong personal voice despite the use of traditional sources and themes. Based mostly on legendary characters and events which had been popular in India for ages, she brings out the ethos which lay at the bottom of all foundations of our society. Her poems are more than translations of Indian themes and great ancient texts into English. She cleverly puts the need for a change in outlook at the forefront without devaluing the inner significance of the ancient literatures. Ashis Nandy has criticized the attempt of early Indian writers to go back in time and recreate the glorious past which had existed once upon a time. He states, that the colonial ideology had postulated a clear disjunction between India’s past and its present. The civilized India was in the bygone past: now it was dead and ‘meuseumised’ (17). The early Indian writers seemed to have

internalized the position and looked back at the past. The reason behind going back to the ancient texts of India might also have been the demand for the so called 'Eastern' themes specially in England.

It thus seems obvious why Toru Dutt preferred the "free air of Europe" ( Lokuge, C. 230) over India initially or why she turned to Sanskrit texts in the mature phase of her life. What she creates or rather transcreates in her narratives is very much like a Derridean picture which assumes different meanings from different perspectives. At a time when English language had already gained the reputation of the tool of colonization as well as modernization simultaneously, there were some other important roles which it played out, well in the favor of our country. Rosinka Chaudhuri in her book *Gentlemen Poets in Colonial Bengal* studies the rise of Nationalism in India under the impact of English language:

Contrary to later nationalist assumptions, the literary atmosphere in early nineteenth-century Calcutta seems to have fostered a consciousness of national identity through the unlikely medium of English... From Derozio's homage to his country in his sonnets...to the Dutt's invocation of characters such as Shivaji or King Porus, or Toru and Romesh Dutt's recovery of the legends of Hindustan in their lyrics in the latter half, this realization of the importance and utility of writing something by the way of national poetry is remarkable in its manifestation as a continuous preoccupation in colonial poetry in English. (72)

It is all the more intriguing to see that Toru Dutt has been placed in a book which is meant for the "gentlemen" poets of Bengal. Her space in the literary map is confirmed and so is the rupture within the male dominated domain of literature. It is remarkable that she accomplished it by her English work as well as English-ness. Toru's work is therefore a manifestation of the duplicitous role of this very colonial language as it offered various avenues to grow even though its growing density weighed heavily on the hearts of those die-hard nationalists who considered its foreignness as an onslaught on the native traditions.

Toru Dutt is often heralded as one of the first great voice in Indian English Poetry, despite her short span of life she displayed a distinct capacity to express herself beautifully and find her place in the league of writers and poets like Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873). Toru Dutt hailed from a prosperous and well read family which was highly respected in the social circles. Dr. Richardson had named it 'the nest of singing birds' because of the prolific writings of its family members. Most of their works was collected and published in the *Dutt Family Album* (1870). Toru Dutt " had a rich and respectable ancestry...Her father Govin Chunder Dutt, was well-to-do, a good linguist, and a cultured man...Her mother was steeped in the Hindu myths, and was a woman of loving and sweet disposition. (Iyenger 55). Raja Rao in his Preface to *Toru Dutt: Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1972) ascribed the creative powers of Toru and Aru Dutt to the intellectual family atmosphere and an upbringing starkly different from other women of their time.

With so enthusiastic, learned, pious and cosmopolitan background it was impossible for Aru and Toru not to be poetic. Their Rambagan house was beautiful, but their country house at Baugmaree was even more lovely...They would be the first Bengali ladies to cross the oceans: that made it all the more exciting. One day they all sailed, the mother and father and the two daughters, first to France and then to England. Toru was then thirteen. (2-3)

This is undoubtedly a sympathetic observation, nevertheless it fails to do full justice to the writer's fecund potential. Similarly, Meenakshi Mukherjee's views on Toru in one of her significant books *The Twice Born Fiction* (1971), places Toru on a different platform in comparison to other writers of the era, as she makes the following statement :

A Toru Dutt here and a Manmohan Ghose there are chance products of an accidental concurrence of unusual environment exceptional opportunities, and , of course, an inherent creative urge...These were unusually talented and highly westernized families which sent their children to England for Education quite early in life so that England and English became a natural part of their mental set make-up. Theses writers could not constitute a

trend. They were not natural products of the general social and cultural conditions of their time, hence they cannot be evaluated against, nor related to, the history and geography of the India of their time. (17)

These arguments certainly have some amount of truth in them but they also show the recurring effort of the critics to place Toru Dutt in a picture- well framed and properly hung on the wall. The problem, therefore, with all these reinterpretations of is that after a certain point they all get lost in the mystery that Toru Dutt was due to her different character and life. The space of Toru Dutt as a woman writer is inevitably reduced and suppressed. Moreover, her dissociation from the 'history and geography' of India would lead to amount to a loss, an erasure- of the possibility of decolonization of memory. Toru Dutt has escaped the traditional strategies of 'thinking' the 'Postcolonial' and everytime, she has managed to slip out of the grasp of critics like a fish in water and falls out of the purview of framed narratives. This dissertation would therefore allow her the space to move around, instead of imprisoning her in her own narrative world.



## CHAPTER 1

### Toru Dutt

Besides the railway system, the civil service, the game of cricket, and a host of other distinctive aspects of Indian life today, the British bestowed upon us the aspiration for creating literature in the English language ...creative writing in English by Indians has had to struggle long and hard to obtain a separate identity. ( Sujit Mukherjee 3)

#### March 4, 1856 - Birth of Toru Dutt

Every writer is a product of his/her social and historical conditions - even a unique personality like Toru Dutt. She was a product of her time - of historical forces set in motion much earlier. I take her birth date as a frame of reference in order to analyse her position in this era of change. Keeping her at the central position seems much more meaningful in order to understand her point of view as reflected by her writings. If we go back a hundred years before Toru Dutt's birth, a change had already set in:

After the battle of Plassey (1757)... the British who had come to India to sell, decided also to rule. The business of ruling naturally involved the shaking of the Indian 'Pagoda tree' of its treasures...But those engaged in shaking the 'Pagoda tree' were also instrumental in planting the seeds of a modernization process in the eighteenth century Indian Waste Land - seeds which started burgeoning in the nineteenth century. The rise of Indian English literature was an aspect of this Indian renaissance. (Naik 8)

It took a full decade to accumulate all the discreet, disparate elements together and create a storm in that remarkable year of 1857, thus marking the beginning of a new wave of nationalism. For the first time in India's history, people from various parts of the country had consciously aligned themselves against the tyrannical hold of what was then the ruling power - the British Empire. This new consciousness was the seed of a larger movement that was going to change India's destiny in the future. After the 1857 revolt,

things changed very drastically - the British had crushed the revolt and established full control over the land and wealth of the area they occupied. On the other hand, this victory was tainted with a sense of fear of the native population whose rising discontent with the regime was felt with a greater propensity during the 1857 revolt. From 1757 to 1857 - it took a full century of British rule for creating the right conditions for the emergence of an Indian English woman poet like Toru Dutt. Introducing Toru Dutt in *Indian Writing in English* (1962), K.R.Srinivasa Iyengar has also mentioned her family background in order to show their social standing, "The Dutts were important people in Calcutta...Like other young men of the time, the Dutts too were attracted by the glamour of the West and the Gospel of the Christ, and in a body some members of the family embraced Christianity in 1862. Toru was six years old then..." (55).

Toru Dutt was in many ways a child of emerging India. She embodies all the signs of its nascent rebirth under the thralldom of the British, the ideas which were related to larger issues of identity and dilemmas which were nevertheless a part of the ongoing changes within the social, political and cultural mosaic of the country. Here, it is important to look in detail upon the concept of a 'nation' as it came to develop during this time and the responses of people whose minds were psychologically marked by a politically charged environment. As a matter of fact, Toru looks at India with the eyes of a woman who wished to have a free life in a free nation. Colonialism had stunted the growth of India and patriarchal oppression had taken a toll on the lives of women. Now that things had begun to change, these two struggles met each other in the life of Toru Dutt. Yet, it would be wrong to assume that she was a die hard feminist who fought for the rights of women suffering under an oppressive system. As far as her life was concerned there was not much that she knew about the real plight of Indian women, her own life already restricted to a walled existence. She had no formal education and she went to attend lectures only once when she was in Nice (France). In India what she missed was this freedom of movement. Her position was rather comfortably placed amongst loving parents, affluent family and a respectable social standing. Still, there were many factors which made her think about things she did not know or places she hadn't been to. Her extensive traveling to France and her stay in Cambridge, her lasting friendship with Clarisse Bader and Mary Martin, and her acute perceptivity for

knowledge equipped her with necessary insight on various practical issues. On an individual level these were the factors which shaped her being but other influences were at work also. The British rule, English education and spread of Christianity had already brought in the much needed confidence to create such a platform wherefrom women of India could speak up and reach out into the public domain. It is true that this platform was not open to women of all castes, classes and regions. Only a selected few who had both access and the means to acquire a taste of the changing atmosphere could avail the opportunity. Toru Dutt was unquestionably lucky with all of these. Early conversion to Christianity, an enthusiastic father who made English texts available to her, the benefits of exposure at France and England and of course the revival of ancient Sanskrit texts due to Bengal Renaissance - all had a lasting influence on her personality and she became one of the first inheritors of modern India. The Dutt family had quite a number of people who had converted to Christianity, though the women of family were still strongly anchored in the traditional religious beliefs. For those who had converted, English was a language which could open new vistas of knowledge for Indians. Harihar Das held the same opinion about the Dutt:

They did not share in the general belief that English education served only to undermine the deep-rooted ancient faiths and ideals of life cherished by the Indian people; they saw in it the hope of a new intellectual life and a means of gradually uplifting the whole nation. Poetry seemed to be as natural to them as songs to birds. Indeed, it was a happy expression of Professor Richardson's when he styled them 'the Rambagan nest of singing - birds.' (16)

Toru Dutt was born on an opportune moment in the history of India. It was a phase of change and Toru could absorb its goodness fully. Even if unconsciously, it can't be denied that she was aware of the possibility of the existence of a nation which was "India" itself, though during the course of time the whole concept underwent subtle changes as different groups of nationalist and anglicized Indians came to interpret it.

M. K. Naik in his enlightening study, *A History of Indian English Literature* draws attention to the relation between the spread of modernity in India during the British

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rule, the real intention behind English education imparted by the colonial rulers and the consequent rise of national identity through the same colonial tool, i.e. English. The literature written during this period reflects the dilemmas of a nation overpowered and subdued by a foreign master. Its people were trying to capture this mood in their writings, so as to create an identity which would be in keeping with the new influences of modernity while on the other hand searching for a nation which was rightfully theirs. With 1857 the nation had already emerged supported by the Bengali intellectual class, the *bhadralok*:

Thus, during the period from 1857 to 1920, the Indian ethos gradually underwent a sea-change from the shock of defeat and frustration and the trauma of inferiority feeling to a new found self-awareness and self-confidence. It is against this background that the work of prominent writers of this period must be viewed; and it now becomes clear why the diffident psittacism of Kashiprasad Ghose should now make room for the confident authenticity of Toru Dutt, Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore...Indian English literature really came of age after 1857, when India's rediscovery of her identity became a vigorous, all absorbing quest and when she had learnt enough from the west to progress from imitation and assimilation to creation. (Naik 35)

Toru was drinking deep from this highly volatile period of change and reformation in India even when she was far away from the country. The quest towards redefining identity in a creative manner indicates her progressive nature. Perhaps one can argue that the formative years of her life were outside India and most of whatever she knew of its past had come from her mother. But it is equally remarkable that after coming back to India, she learnt Sanskrit and made efforts to know about the ancient stories in original and then wrote about them with such power and confidence in her poems. Her identity as an Indian had already taken shape in the period of turbulence and exile. Like English, Christianity proposed itself as the only avenue for modernizing India. Dipesh Chakrabarty comments on the trend of acceptance of the European ideals of language, culture and religion among Indians:

The British rule put in place the practices, institutions, and discourse of bourgeois individualism in the Indian soil is undeniable. Early expressions...of this desire to be a “legal subject” make it clear that to Indians in the 1830s and 1840s to be a “modern individual” was to become a “European.” (434)

It was not supposed to be a religion which discriminated against its own people - at least this was the general understanding of the newly transformed Hindus who converted to Christianity. Toru had been to France and England. At a very young age she had understood what death was, what religious differences within a family meant and where it all led to. She sought refuge in religion and thus followed the Christian star like a ship lost in a stormy sea. Nevertheless her own identity was always in a flux because despite her efforts what was very evident was her Indian identity, at home and abroad. For example, H. A. L. Fisher in his “Foreword” letter written to Harihar Das for the biographical account of Toru Dutt’s life in the year 1920 appreciated her authentic voice and felicity in learning languages thus:

She mastered Sanskrit and wrote in French and English with a grace...Her ear, indeed, sometimes betrayed her. On points of diction she was not always beyond reproach. Here and there in the *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* or in her amazing renderings from the French poets, we come across a word, a phrase, a discord, which remind us that the poet was not of our race or speech...Yet when every deduction has been made for unessential blemishes, this child of the Green valley of the Ganges has by sheer force of native genius earned for herself the right to be enrolled in the great fellowship of English poets. (Das vii)

People wondered not only at her capacity to learn fast but also her understanding of the foreign cultures and literatures, which were not her own. Her translation, *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*, received favorable comments from distinguished critics and writers of France and England. There were the western critics like Edmund Gosse who couldn’t help appreciating this ‘native genius’ despite that note in “music that is discord in an English ear” (Gosse 428). There were Indian critics like Amarnath Jha who saw a

new dawn of Hinduism in the popularity that a text like *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* based on Hindu myths had reaped.

For all the western training and the faith under the influence of which she had been brought up, she never ceased to be an Indian...the ballads are interspersed with sententious remarks that suggest much deep thought and familiarity with the best expositions of the Hindu view of life. The call of the land and the call of her ancestors evoked a sympathetic response within her and she wrote of the old myths and tales without feeling or making her readers feel that they were effete, improbable, fantastic. (Dutt 33)

In an era when nationalist sentiments soared higher, the cause of India's fall from glory was often traced back to the era of Muslim invasions. It was not India but Hindu tradition which was at stake then. The British crown had at least replaced the enemy of their religion. The following observation made by *The Bengalee* of May 27, 1876 on Toru's *Sheaf* throws light on the connecting link between the hatred for Muslims, the position of Hindu women and the role of literature played in such a scenario.

There were learned ladies, like Gargi, Khona, and Lilabati in ancient and medieval India. But from the dark days of Mohammedan invasion, ignorance and seclusion became the lot of woman in this country. It is only of late that people have come to perceive the necessity of educating her....Some Bengali ladies have betaken themselves to the field of literature, and written poems and dramas of considerable merit in their native tongue. But Miss Toru Dutt ...has shown a culture very rare amongst our best-educated men. (Dwiwedi 27)

Here, very interestingly, religion, nationalism, literature and the writer collide with each other. Toru's unquestioned faith on the religious ideals of Christianity can be seen in the following comments that she makes for her grandmother who does not convert and was rather upset at her sons for moving towards what was for her an unacceptable mode of life. In one of her letters written to a friend, Mary Martin she

remarked “she is, I am sad to say, still a Hindu” (Lokuge 228). There developed a sense of alienation with the family which was still predominantly Hindu. They were looked down upon by their own community which now considered them as outcasts. There was a clear disjunction between her surroundings and the inner state of her mind which depended heavily on Christian doctrines. After Abju’s death in 1865, it is therefore not surprising that “for their consolation, the two sisters repeatedly read Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and busied themselves in literary pursuits” (Das 14). Not only her family but even Kshetramoni, Govin Chunder’s wife, was also disappointed due to his conversion and liking for the other culture. A child like Toru was sure to have understood these complications at quite a young age. In one of her letters she rues about the freedom and sense of belonging she had enjoyed in other countries, “The free air of Europe and the free life there are things not to be had here. We cannot stir out from our own Garden without being stared at, or having sunstroke. And the streets are so dirty and narrow, that one feels quite suffocated in them” (Lokuge 230).

On the other hand the thirst for English language and literature also reveals the inherent longing of the Indians to be able to converse in the language of power. The discourse of “Power” is central to the understanding of “English” as it was implanted and initially made to grow on the Indian soil. Macaulay’s famous *Minutes on Education* (1833) had put it down succinctly in words as to how literature had to become a mode of domination by making subservient the literature of the colonized races. Then even the British could possibly have not imagined the tremendous potential that a language possesses and its role in subverting normative paradigms. And henceforth Indians started experimenting with the given language. Its first steps were undecided and undetermined and yet strong enough to create a new platform for the upcoming voices of India. English was first adopted mostly by the Indian upper classes which shared and cherished its contacts with the British. While they were aware of their unequal racial status in the company of the British, it nevertheless gave them an upper hand and superiority amongst the Indians. Thus, English acquired a status of power amongst the people. Religion was employed as a tool for furthering the colonial agenda and the condition of women in colonized countries acquired new dimensions in this context. Malavika Karlekar reflects on the other roles that education in English language and manners played in transforming

the society, especially the lives of women belonging to the elite class. She says, “literacy (and the use to which some women put it) mediated between the private world of the *antahpur* and the public world of men” (Karlekar10). Education of women behind *zenanas* and its influence on women manifested itself in many ways and writings which came out of this space had a distinct voice of resistance.

If India was designated the exotic Orient, its literature was came under close scrutiny by the Orientalists who came back to it time and again for purposes which were not outside the purview of colonial domination. Ancient myths from India’s past were rediscovered and interpreted according to the Western standards. The texts written during this period therefore are not just stories; they are testimonies to lived realities and fantasies which emerged from the colonial interface. It embodies the cultural pressures and political forces which operated not only in the administrative sphere but also in the day to day lives of people as “intellectual history ought not to be read in isolation from emotional history” (Ray 5). Toru Dutt’s poems articulate the connection between intellectual and emotional history of women in the colonial period.

### **Language, Literature and Power**

Edward Said argues in *Orientalism*:

Out of that closeness, whose dynamic is enormously productive even if it always demonstrates the comparatively greater strength of the Occident (British, French or American), comes the large body of texts I call Orientalist... Orientalism derives from a particular closeness experienced between Britain and France and the Orient, which until the nineteenth century had only meant India and the Bible lands.” (4)

Studying Toru Dutt under the given circumstances can be helpful in locating the areas where such conflict ridden closeness is experienced. It cannot be assumed that being English educated and having led a well protected life, she was unaware of changes characterizing her era. Does she fit in the category of a ‘woman-child’ whose writings



were merely intended to interpret the soul of India to the West. She was well aware of her surroundings and the political turmoil around her.

Much before Toru enters the literary scene of Indian English poetry, there were other authors who had already started singing the first praise songs for the nation through their poetry. To start with, Henry L. Deozio (1809-1831) had sung his song for his nation and its current state of enslavement under the British in one of his significant poems:

Neglected, mute, and desolate art thou,

Like ruined monument on desert plain:

.....

.....-but if thy notes divine

May be by mortal wakened once again,

Harp of my country, let me strike the strain.

(“The Harp of India”, Gokak 53-54)

Gooroo Churn Dutt, who also hailed from the poetic Dutt family, had shed tears for the plight of his country which has now been “degraded low”, and says further:

On painted wings of fancy strive to soar,

And hail thee, India, from thy days of yore,...

.....

And though I’m born in this unlucky age,

Without the fire of any ancient sage,

Accept the tribute of a heart sincere.

(“Introductory Lines”, Gokak 60)

And just a few years before Toru Dutt, a bright star to have appeared on the horizon of Indian Poetry in English was Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-1873), who in his “The Captive Ladie” tried to recreate the past by blending historical facts of the war between the King of Kanauj and that of Delhi with a tale of romance set up in a dreamy sequence. Later on he also gave up English to write in his own mother tongue that was Bengali, in order to bring out the hidden potential and creativity of the Bengali language which could now be put to use for the service of the nation.

All these poets wrote about the glorious past of their ‘nations’ in order to show their allegiance to their motherland. This would generally mean a rebuilding of the glorious past of India as it existed before the Islamic influence. Susie Tharu writes:

The urge of transforming Indian society amongst its intellectuals was mainly due to the fact that they felt constrained at a personal level to *prove* their humanity in the eyes of those who doubted it. As Franz Fanon suggests, these intellectuals provided proof that they had assimilated the culture of the occupying power and could manipulate its categories with ease, even write creatively in it. (258).

Secondly, by general consent the space of the women was confined to a specific area, where they were more often than not, painted as picture perfect ladies devoid of all sins and connoisseurs of Indian culture. Their role therefore was to bring out the inherent purity and uncontaminated domain of Indian, or to be more specific, it was the Hindu culture and community whose pride was at stake. Women like Sita and Savitri were the role models of Indian womanhood advertised by both orientalist as well as nationalists.

Post-1830s in Bengal was an era of change and turmoil as several reforms and movements, under the influence of Bengal Renaissance, Young Bengal Derozians and Brahma Samaj activists had started taking shape. With these one of the important debates was regarding the position of women, their role and contribution to society was also under speculation. Partha Chatterjee raises a serious question on the manner in which the propaganda of women’s freedom was politicized under the rising influence of nationalism. He thus critiques the ‘Nationalist Resolution’:

The 'Woman's Question' was a central issue in some of the most controversial debates over social reforms in early and mid-nineteenth century Bengal—the period of the so-called 'renaissance'. Rammohun Roy's historical fame is largely built around his campaign against *satidaha* (widow immolation), Vidyasagar's around his efforts to legalise widow remarriage and abolish Kulin polygamy; the Brahmo samaj was split twice in the 1870s over questions of marriage laws and the 'age of consent'. (Chatterji 233)

Toru Dutt's selection of material for writing poems was no doubt conditioned by a consciousness of the market and its demand not only in India but also abroad, yet she introduced certain specific changes within the legendary tales which in retrospect can be studied as mutations within the structure. Her inner consciousness found a vantage point for expression and to be able to give an opinion about what she thought about the culture to which she originally belonged. Here she took up the role of a detached insider who knew the rules of the game pretty well, thus playing her cards carefully to bring out the flaws that she found within the system. The Bengali intellectual of the nineteenth century was "involved in interrogating power relationships within indigenous customs and traditions- especially gender norms....though there were definite patriarchal limits to this interrogation" (Sarkar 23). An agent of change, Toru Dutt reflects the basic anxieties of a struggling nation standing on the crossroad of tradition and modernity. This paper has extensively drawn on a reading of Toru Dutt's poems with respect to the development of nation. It should be noted that Toru Dutt's position is such that it necessitates a different conceptual framework of reference. Padma Anagol is of the belief that "'assertion' and 'resistance' are twin aspects of women's agency" (14), but again one should not be taken in by this highly misleading idea of "Western impact-Indian response paradigm" (3). Toru Dutt engages in an interrogation of these predetermined notions of womanhood and agency. Let us for example, look at the portrayal of Sita in one of the poems by Romesh Chunder Dutt. In his poem "Sita Lost", he introduces the character as:

Morning dawned; and with Valmiki, Sita to the gathering came,

Banished wife and weeping mother, sorrow stricken, suffering dame,  
Pure in thought and deed, Valmiki gave his troth and plighted word,-

Faithful still the banished Sita in her bosom held her lord!

(Gokak 91)

Sita's greatness is constituted not only by her own maidenly virtues but also because in the worst possible circumstances she has nothing but reverence for her lord. Compared to this unflinching respect of Sita for Rama, Toru's Sita has a dramatically different attitude. In the earlier poem Sita worships the love that Rama has for her despite her banishment from the palace. In Toru's poem titled "Lakshman", "Sita" reprimands Lakshman for his inaction and has a direct way of communication which adds to the strength of her character. She not only loves Rama, but is capable of a severe reproach and sarcasm when time comes. "Sita" on the other hand is a nostalgic retelling of the story that Toru had learnt from her mother and realized the distance from her own country. Toru Dutt rescued the English language and decolonized it on her own level, by the use of Indian stories in an English form. It is mixed interplay of language and identity that her verses represent.

The poems in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* can be treated as a part of postcolonial literature because Toru Dutt has been able to integrate many sensibilities into an organic whole which is highly experimental and modern yet well footed in the ground where it was born.

### **Crossing Lines: Myth, Resistance and Homecoming:**

Going back to the archaic, mythical past of India might not have been a naïve decision on the part of Toru Dutt. It appeared as a recurring trope in the works of British writers who manipulatively employed this image to justify their "civilizing mission" of the heathenish race of India. As early as 1791, James Cook had presented a pamphlet concerning the significance of the spread of Christianity among the non-Christians and its longish title can be enlightening in this respect "An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens in which the Religious State

of the different Nations of the World, the Success of Former Undertakings, and the Practicability of Further Undertakings, are considered” (Neill 188). The missionaries sent to India in the later half of nineteenth century came with the belief that they had to ‘reform’ the backward people whose women were actually the “protectress and zealous adherent of traditional heathenism” ( Forbes WS2). Teaching women in the zenanas was not just a reformative act but also a colonial propaganda.

Yet it says something about the way in which a dialogue of the poet and Indian populace was in process. It has been rightly said that “facts are really not like fish on the fishmonger’s slab. They are like fish swimming about in a vast and sometimes inaccessible ocean...History means interpretation” (Carr 23). Even if she was unable to interact with people in person, as a poet she reached out to an audience which could very well identify with the stories. Myths provided her that much needed shared frame of reference to have a dialogue with each other. For the poet Toru Dutt, who missed the freedom of mind and expression allowed by the West, these myths became a powerful way of connecting with the people of both English and non-English backgrounds.

She was later appropriated into the grand narrative of nationalism makes it evident that her work, despite its posthumous publication, was able to create a stir in the deep waters of a developing sensibility of nation as “India”. Mythology helped her to build ‘her’ nation, in a language chosen by ‘her’ and then further translating that myth of an Indian nation in the form of verses. Secondly, the orality inherent to the mythical traditions gave her immense scope to formulate her own idea of India as a nation and the subsequent construction of self identity that emerged as a result. M. Sivaramakrishna argues substantially about the significance of myths in poetry through three different modes creating a triadic relation between affirmation of milieu, myth/history and the quest for the self. He has concerned himself with more modern Indo-Anglian poets like Kamala Das, Ezekiel and A.K.Ramanujan but the basic tenets are still markers which throw light on the poetry of an earlier age as well. The inter-relatedness of these factors according to him, give rise to “authentic” poetry of some intrinsic value and thus he says:

Without roots in history and myth no poet can hope to make his aesthetic strategy other than merely cerebral...myth can be regarded as

indispensable for rediscovery of roots, for correlating one's personal stance with the historical one...affirmation of the environment and awareness of its mythical bases can hardly function in the absence of a pervasive personal quest, of significant personal emotion. (Sivaramakrishna 11)

These ancient stories facilitated her agency in reinterpreting a cultural history from a woman's point of view and they are not necessarily a translation 'for' the west. Instead it served a very serious purpose of dismantling the norm as Bhabha has drawn attention to in *The Location of Culture* (1994) thus "Under cover of camouflage, mimicry, like the fetish, is the part object that radically revalues the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, history (130). The apparel that she gives to the body is no doubt foreign but the soul is inevitably Indian. The role of her mother cannot be undermined in this regard as she was the one who taught her about the ancient stories and inspired her in great way.

Her mother exercised great influence over the formation of her children's characters, and the old songs and stories of the country recited by her had an irresistible attraction for Toru and fired her youthful imagination. At the same time Mrs. Dutt inspired in her heart a deep reverence for Christ. (Das 17)

There is no wonder then as to why Toru's poetry traverses a somewhat middle way between Hindu traditional beliefs and newly acquired but deeply influencing Christian ideals. Her poetry is a synthesis of these two outwardly divergent streams which finally yield themselves into the poetic flow of Toru's imagination.

Toru led a fairly short life and therefore her poems might at times appear simple and her thoughts naïve- but there is greater level of complexity which underlines the fairy like settings of "Savitri" or "Jogadhya Uma". Her own weltanschauung was in a rapid phase of development. At a young age she was introduced to many influences; this was a time when she simply received and hoarded information from all possible sources and

languages. By the time she started writing *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* she had reached a level of competence. All the knowledge she had acquired till now had begun to restructure itself according to the worldly wisdom and experiences she had as an individual. Her own persona had a sharp interrogative edge and now it had bloomed to full capacity. This also made her probe deep into the questions of identity as distinct and belonging neither to French nor Indians or British. There are several instances in Toru's poems where she made significant changes in the original format by adding her own opinion in the tales. For example in *The Royal Ascetic and the Hind* one gets a hint of what asceticism meant to her. What she valued was life itself and therefore renunciation of the worldly pleasures might be the prerequisite for salvation in the Hindu tradition but she deemed love as the highest religious achievement of human birth. Hence what follows is an unabashed redemption of love from the shackles of all religious ideals. These lines from the last stanza show her modern outlook and resort to love as the ultimate ideal in the face of all religions which preach their own doctrines and modes to achieve heavenly bliss.

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. (lines 127-132 )

Her resistance to the dominant ideology of the English is even clearer by the choice of her subject. At a time when the 'natives' themselves were looked down upon as indiscriminate, their literature could not be treated as worthy of respect either. After the famous Macaulay's *Minute of 1833*, the superiority of English was concretely institutionalized. Largely the British almost accused the Indian texts for exhibiting immorality and an unacceptable explicitness. Gauri Viswanathan has pointed out these contradictions within the English psyche and comments:

One of the great contradictions in early nineteenth-century developments is uncovered at the level of comparison of the educational histories of England and India...Kalidas's *Shakuntala*, was disapproved of as a text for study in Indian schools and colleges, and the judgment that the more popular forms of [Oriental literature] are marked with the greatest immorality and impurity" held sway. (*Masks*, 3)

The anglicized intellectual gradually and often unknowingly participated and then perpetrated such prevailing assumptions of the exoticised oriental. At the same time, Toru Dutt's anglicized Christian upbringing helped her in examining these assumptions critically. She could in fact understand the bright and the dark sides of the culture. The differences between people based on cultural and social backgrounds came to a close scrutiny under her discerning eye. This would at times result in a strange ambivalence in the narrative build of her poems. There are many issues which are raised but do not reach the point where one can clearly decide Toru's position. Natalie Philips has argued that for studying Toru Dutt's ambivalent positions one should first look at the manner in which she attempted a self fashioning of her own identity and defied the norms which have tried to give her a fixed location. This kind of reading has its own advantages and drawbacks.

On one hand, Dutt's subjectivity is largely an amalgamation of marginalized identities - Indian, female, colonized - and by imagining her in an 'in-between' space, we risk endorsing the oppressive notion that, in order for a marginalized speaker or writer to achieve agency, these identities must be hybridized, circumvented, or transcended. On the other, the slipperiness of the 'in-between' space enables us to avoid acknowledging that Dutt's identification with some Western institutions, such as the Christian Church or British educational system, caused her to impose her own interpretation upon that of the Hindu pundit in "The Royal Ascetic and the Hind."

A formal analysis of the ballad form also reveals that it allows a lot of scope for improvisation. Folk elements, personal feelings and several voices can be integrated within its structure. M. H. Abrams gives the following standard definition for a ballad:



...it is a song, transmitted orally, which tells a story. Ballads are thus the narrative species of folk songs, which originate, and are communicated orally, among illiterate or only partly literate people. In all probability the initial version of a ballad was composed by a single author, but he or she is unknown; and since each singer who learns and repeats an oral ballad is apt to introduce changes in both the text and the tune, it exists in many variant forms. (18)

### **Home is... where the Heart is?**

Toru Dutt and her poems are interesting precisely because it is not easy to locate her identity within a single paradigm. She was born in India, she travelled in France, studied at Cambridge and died in India. Her experiences at all the countries differed from each other and she traversed on a conflicted area where geographical boundaries mixed up with past memories and desire for freedom and a subsequent urge to write. Writing is an act of synthesis of what constituted her identity. It cannot be generalized but the colonial times did not offer many options for women to determine their lives. They could either be worshipped or declared fallen. The colonial space and its constraints have been articulated by writers in various ways. It transforms into a contact zone represented as a problematic arena where the meeting of the two cultures creates conflict. Writings coming out of this experience in its many ramified versions need to be looked at closely. Toru Dutt's poetry does not give a general idea of how women thought and wrote in her times but it definitely does not stand outside the purview of its context. The trajectory of her life soared high enough even if it was cut short by the death. Not only her life but even her death was claimed by three countries - France, England and India. The record of her life is a study in the individual journey which had its own complexities. At this point and especially in Toru Dutt's case it should be remembered that she never assumed a clear position on any one ideology or language or nation or literature. She was not an outcome of the colonial experience. She was actually a woman who began the dialogic process within the colonial domain in order to give a new perception of life and literature. Her efforts were on the level of literature but had far reaching effects on the literary map of India. The second chapter will therefore be an attempt to look at the spaces where such

transformations took place and how Toru Dutt played a major role in creating a favourable atmosphere for the commencement of change.

## CHAPTER 2

### Words upon Worlds

The main objective of this chapter is to trace the trajectory of Toru Dutt's life and her intellectual development with special reference to *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882). The dyadic movement of her life from an emerging individuality to that of a self-conscious woman marks her writings, especially the poems.

Nineteenth century India and the "women's question" can offer interesting ways of recognising the nature of colonial encounter vis-a-vis gender. It was a sphere which embodied the construction of hierarchies and operation of power within the domain of culture. The entire debate on womanhood acquired a Janus faced complexity of age old confinement and relative freedom; the specks of freedom clouded a lot more than it had actually permitted. The 'woman' was still trapped and appropriated in the pre-existing patriarchal norms. As Uma Chakravarti has pointed out, "Orientalism and Utilitarianism coalesced in the works of the early nationalist writers whose most enduring and successful construction was the image of womanhood in the lost past as a counter to the real existence of women in the humiliating present" (30). The *zenana* missions conducted by the Christian missionaries in India were aimed at 'civilising the heathen' and it more or less followed the footsteps of colonialism. A significant purpose of this chapter is to question the positions that Toru Dutt assumes in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* and to see how she chose to resolve "the issues of gender, language, identity and nation tangled in knots" (Mukherjee 89). The choice of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* in the above context, as it will be seen, is particularly apt for the purpose of studying the modes of 'translation' of - may be not linguistic texts, but definitely of memories, histories and subjectivities hidden under the narrative of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. There are several sub-texts and contexts in which *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*'s resonances can be studied. Toru Dutt's endeavour to recall the ancient Indian legends in her poems and then transform it by inserting changes based on personal experiences gives us an idea of her ideas on woman's agency and resistance.

In an interesting way, her poems often “incorporate Eastern as well as Western allusions, forms, and themes, she consistently and harshly critiques certain aspects of British ideology - most notably, imperialism” (Philips, Issue 3.3). As far as the textual whole is concerned, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* itself can be divided into two parts. If one section has its roots in the historical legends of India, the other part has complex personal undertones raising issues of nation and identity. At the same time it offers as many solutions as questions in the process of factual analysis combined with an interpretation of complex, ambiguous positions taken by Toru Dutt. This chapter opens with a general idea of Toru Dutt’s *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, its famed reception in different literary circles followed by a detailed analysis of the poems concerned and finally moving towards a critical analysis of the very premises on which her responses towards women’s emancipation were formulated.

The title *Ancient Ballads of Legends of Hindustan*, according to Meenakshi Mukherji, is “not especially marked by hoary antiquity” (105) Published posthumously by Govin Chunder Dutt in 1882 *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, by virtue of its name may suggest a return to the Orientalist themes. The poem gains originality especially by its skillful use of Indian mythological tales, classical Sanskrit sources and oral narratives heard in childhood to yield the thematic variety and the level of formal sophistication found in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. The collection consists of both mythological and non-mythological poems. The mythological part is based on several ancient popular legends of India and includes nine poems which are “Savitri”, “Lakshman”, “Jogadhya Uma”, “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind”, “The Legend of Dhruva”, “Buttu”, “Sindhu”, “Prehlad” and “Sita”. Of these “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind” and “The Legend of Dhruva” were published earlier in *The Bengal Magazine* (Oct 1876) and in *The Calcutta Review* (January 1877) respectively. The Miscellaneous Poems are related to some real life events in her life and are not based on any mythological setting or character as such. It includes the following pieces: “Near Hastings”, “France, 1870”, “The Tree of Life”, “Baugmaree”, “The Lotus”, “Our Casuarina Tree”, “On the Flyleaf of Erckmann -Chatrian’s novel entitled Madame Thérèse”. The date of composition of these poems is ambiguous and the only

chronological indication which can be assigned is that they were mostly written between 1870 to 1877.

The poems in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* are built upon the ancient tales taken from the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and *Vishnupurana*. Similar to the original tales where the real and unreal worlds merge into one another, Toru's narrative is also a playful but well planned combination of fantastical and real elements. Toru explores the mythical space to expand her horizon and transform it into an opportunity to enter the gendered public domain with the help of literary imagination. This was perhaps the reason why she preferred novels over history. Clarisse Bader once remarked about Toru Dutt's choice of subject for studying:

Toru was not so very attracted by history. One day, on visit to the Dutt family, Lord Lytton saw a novel in Aru's hand and told the two sisters that it would be worth studying history, instead of reading novels. Toru replied, 'But we prefer reading novels, Lord.' Questioned about this choice, she smiled pertinently and added: 'Because novels are true, and histories are false.' It was the epitome of a Nation's preference for mythology to history. (Lokuge 356)

The above statement leads to two essential facts - first, that Toru Dutt had her own standard of judgment regarding truth and false. Second, it highlights the pre-determined framework of an Indologist who could easily homogenize the whole nation by assuming Toru Dutt's "preference" as a representative of the 'nation's' choice. Toru Dutt's image was captivated in the colonial narrative of Clarisse Bader as her life and upbringing were different from other men and women of nineteenth century India. Clarisse Bader's comment is a proof of what Vasant A. Shahane has appropriately called the "misconceived stock image of Indian culture... as 'unchanging'" (Shahane 14).

About Toru Dutt's preference, it can be said that she gave full scope to her imagination and does not rely wholly upon facts for understanding life. If history can effectively capture factual data and past events works of fiction go beyond factual details to probe deeper into the human psychology. The element of imagination and scope for

subjective opinion distinguishes history and fiction but Toru seems to be walking on the fine line which divides the two genres. Many of the opinions which Toru Dutt had come from books she used to read, especially the ones which came from Europe. She used the ideas of history and fiction both to create a proxy world of her own. It was in the suspended state between the real and unreal that she could effectively work out the dilemmas of the mind. In her Letter to Mary Martin, she evokes sympathized with fiction saying:

I was lately reading Charlotte Bronte's *Life* by Mrs. Gaskell... to think of those three young sisters in that old parsonage, among the lonely wild moors of Yorkshire, all three so full of talent, and yet living so solitary...How sad their history is! How dreary for the father to see one by one all her children die, and to live on alone and infirm, in that solitary parsonage....In truth there is no greater tragedy in fiction than what happens in our real, daily life. (Lokuge 276)

Toru Dutt found her best friend in the world of literature. She could relate to the life history of Charlotte Bronte because for her, fiction and reality were not like two isolated spheres which never met each other. Toru Dutt's imaginative eyes could look clearly at the strange fashions in which the complexities of human mind were born. There is also a hint of association between the sad stories of the three talented Bronte sisters and Toru's solitary life. Aru and Toru could hardly go out of the home and mingle with people. It was partly because of their fragile health but it also made them feel restricted and out of place in a way they never felt during their stay in Europe. In India, Toru's life was confined to books, reading sessions and Church going. A well regulated, routine life dedicated to book reading sessions among family members, some music and learning languages like Sanskrit and German filled up their days and were largely responsible for the high degree of erudition she possessed. In a way she sought relief in these books searching for a glimpse of life which she expected for herself. These texts could belong to any culture or language but she never felt alienated in their presence and provided the medium through which she could transfer herself to the literary world of renowned writers and feel connected a part of the larger system of the world. Most of the times,

Toru Dutt felt out of place in the social circles of Calcutta city. Being better adapted to a reserved and retired mode of life, she could only say, “Sometimes I wish were out of Calcutta...Calcutta is such a horrid place, socially and morally; backbiting and scandal are in full swing. But the Garden, dear old Baugmaree, is free from every grievance, so quite and peaceful” (Lokuge 280).

Yet, these very circumstances played a major role in awakening her interest in what was then called the Oriental studies as well as literature in other languages. Padmini Sengupta brings out the reason for her development into a voracious reader by quoting Toru Dutt who had once admitted that “the reason why I can go through a book so fast is very plain and simple, it is simply owing to our quite and retired mode of life...and then I was always a book-worm, even when I was quite a child.” (Sengupta 43). It was through a process of gradual change and tolerance that she came close to the nuances of Indian way of life and culture as well. She had a mind well trained in English and French literatures but it did not stop her from appreciating the dignity of Sanskrit language either and hence she commented that “the Sanskrit is as old and as grand a language as the Greek” (Lokuge 264).

*Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* is not only a literary document; it serves many other purposes for the author. First, it shows her a way to resolve conflicts and come to terms with the inner crisis caused in a situation like hers. Her personality stood in stark contrast to other women belonging to the conservative Hindu community - she was unmarried, well literate in English and French, had traveled abroad and unlike other women she was extraordinarily talented. Once, she sarcastically commented on the Hindu marriage system and said:

Marriage, you must know is a great thing with the Hindus. An unmarried girl is never heard of in our country. If any friend of my grandmother happens to see me, the first question is whether I am married; and considerable astonishment, and perhaps a little scandal, follows the reply, for it is considered scandalous if a girl is not ‘wooded and married’ before she is eight years old. (Dutt in Lokuge, 276)

Secondly, it should be noted that Toru's health was deteriorating with every passing day and her life was slowly reaching a dead end. In her small life she had also seen the deaths of Abju and Aru. She was very conscious about the fact that in India, women do get married quite early. Almost like an exile, many a times she would find herself unable to connect to India (in her case Bengal) its people and its age old customs. In another letter to Mary Martin she hinted at this difference and her awareness of it in a slightly worried manner as she told her about a conversation with her father thus:

Let us return to England; where in Calcutta will you get such warm-hearted friends, Toru?' 'Where indeed', say I? How swift time passes. I was about sixteen then, 'in my life's morning hour, when my bosom was young'-now I am getting quite old, twenty and some odd two months, and with such an old-fashioned face that English ladies take me for thirty! I wonder if I shall live to be thirty. (Dutt in Lokuge, 277)

Fear of getting old and apprehensions about life had brought many changes in her. As time progressed, Toru evidently developed a sense of belonging for the country and this growth can be measured in terms of her own reading of India as she translated its past into the text of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. Her initial disapproval slowly graduated into an authentic urge to know her own origin. *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* is a crucial text for understanding the personality of Toru Dutt because it traces the trajectory of such a development. *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* can be treated as an event when she first began translating cultures in her own language creating a sort of synthesis between them. *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* written towards the end of her life reflects her anxiety to create a name for herself before the fire of life gets cold. It therefore helped her in transcending the immediate realities of life without degenerating into escapism. Thirdly, it also shows how she as a woman poet had progressed in recreating age old tales of sacrifice and gave them a contemporary feel by inserting her vision in them. The images, language and the content is build in such a manner that they all complement the dramatic moment of climax which every tale reaches even in the poetic form:



Now Toru could feel her feet on hospitable soil, and satisfy the secret longings of her spirit for roots in the consciousness of the race. The *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Vishnu Purana*, and the *Bhagvata* gave her woman's imagination free play, and she could reenact the ancient stories of star crossed men and women and deathless heroes and heroines. Her Christian faith doesn't conflict with her attraction or addiction to the "deep magics" of the Hindu epics... (Iyengar 63)

This observation made by Iyengar points out three key factors which contribute to the composition of this text: 'race', 'woman's imagination', and 'faith'. *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* exhibits a complex interplay of these forces in an outwardly simplified vision of past life. She probes into the inner longings of these great men and women, discovers a sea of emotional turmoil and their quest for the immortal being. Every character is on an individual journey slowly feeling his/her way towards that immortal truth which is so illusive, and they all have their own ways to achieve the goal. The search is directed towards a discovery of their own selves lost in the material world. The end is to achieve that divine self which inhabits the soul of every being. The search is actually the essence; the real theme of these poems is to surge over transient realities which might just come in the face of happiness or as obstacles. This characteristic feature is what successfully makes the legendary characters much more humane than divine. They exhibit an overall spiritual growth starting from initial obstacles to strong determination and before they could achieve their reward, it is the human nature of their struggle which comes to the fore. This undoubtedly is the reason why her Christian faith does not interfere with her Hindu origin. It is probably due to this reason that it has been argued that Toru 'interprets' Indian soul to the West. A.N. Dwivedi says, "This prestigious child of our culture was the first major Indo-Anglian author who forcefully interpreted the soul of India to the West, and thereby acted as a bridge between the East and the West" (10).

The use of 'forceful' in the act of interpretation is remarkable here. It points out the difficulty with which a poet of Indian origin would have had in establishing him/herself. What is more, in these poems Toru also liberates the right of soul search from being the

prerogative of men of higher caste or class only. It is an eternal quest where women like Savitri, and the shell bracelet seller of Jogadhya Uma come to share the same ground.

### **Poems : Reading the Unspoken Word**

The poems in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* and the *Miscellaneous Poems* explore different aspects of human relationships with respect to social and cultural practices. It has already been suggested that Toru was a keen observer of human behaviour; in her writings she tried to strike a balance between individual aspirations, social norms, and cultural ethos. She looks at woman as an index of power and this is evident in poems like “Savitri”, “Lakshman” and “Sita”.

“Savitri,” written in the ballad form, has five sections/parts and each of them deal with a separate situation but at the end they get condensed into one like a drama in five acts. First section begins with a description of Savitri’s inner beauty and physical attractiveness-

The sweet simplicity and grace,

Abashed the boldest; but the good

God’s purity there loved to trace,

Mirrored in dawning womanhood. (20-24)

On the other hand Satyavan’s description is based on his virtues as a brave and noble person belonging to a royal line of kings who have now adopted a hermit’s life. The idea of perfect match of Savitri and Satyavan therefore does not rest on outer manifestations of richness and power but on inner strength and qualities. In the first section itself all the major tenets of the story are laid down. Thus, Savitri meets Satyavan and gives her heart to him: “Her heart-rose opened had at last-/ Opened no flower can ever shut” (83-84) and despite earlier disagreement of her father over the proposal, Savitri’s firm headed will makes him reconsider and finally agree to say “My child shall wed the youth she loves” (264). Apart from the integrity followed in putting up the plot together in this part there

are other noticeable features as well. One finds that Toru has embedded her own perception of social relationships very skillfully in the narrative structure making it almost a part of the tale. She deals with the concept of a perfect marriage most clearly in this poem. Savitri and Satyavan match each other not in terms of richness or power as Madra's king (Savitri's father) tells Narad Muni

If wealth be gone, and kingdom lost

His merit still remains a star,

Nor melts his lineage like the frost.

For riches, worldly power, or rank

I care not, –I would have my son

Pure, wise, and brave.—(182-187)

even though the dilemma between whether to “select”(57) or “elect” (59) does occur in the hearts of Savitri's parents.

What is notable in the poem is the very carefulness with which each character is drawn - Savitri is ‘fair as a lotus when the moon/Kisses its opening petals red.’ (5-6). The comparison is not with an all white moon but with a lotus flower. The emphasis automatically falls on the lotus instead of the white moon which forms a background to her blooming reddish beauty. Satyavan also has a “sun-browned face” at the moment of “the dawn of love” (Iyengar 68), and he looks charming and noble by face. This description definitely does not accept “whiteness” as a mark of beauty; rather what gets highlighted is its Indian colour and character. In describing their beauty, Toru has taken care to depict the real complexion of Indians who might be fair but never pale white. In a suggestive manner Toru Dutt also foregrounds Savitri's loss of sexual innocence as she first set her eyes on Satyavan as she “looked and looked” (71) at him and “slackened suddenly her pace” (72).

Moreover it is not only the inhabitants or the landscape but the lineage of characters also plays an important role in situating them in a historical context valid in its

own right. The circulation of knowledge of people's past, their ancestors and lineages also gets a validation in the presence of a divine authority i.e. Narad Muni for whom "The sun's, the moon's, the planet's birth/ was not to him a mystery" (131-32). The west often linked the history of the east with mysteriousness, ambiguity and strangeness. Moreover, its unrecorded, oral historical details were inaccessible to them for a long time so it made them believe that it was not a valid epistemology at all going by the western standards. Toru's poem gives full references to the greatness of the race, the kind kings who ruled and the land to which Satyavan and Savitri belonged. In a way she brings them out from their mythical unreal existence and resituates them within the sphere of a lived reality. In "Savitri" one can also hear Toru's voice of dissent on the issue of widowhood. Here it is Savitri's father who speaks out the plight of a widow's life as a "dreadful curse...the vigils, fasts and penances; no life is worse than hopeless life" (205-208).

Yet as Savitri was determined to marry Satyavan, her passage from maidenhood to that of a wife is beautifully constructed in the second section where the refrain sounds over and again - Past all the houses, past the wall,/ Past gardens gay, and hedgerows trim,/ Past fields..past frowning hills, past pastures wild...Must live the fair and gentle bride (277-287). The difference between the past life and initiation into another is made clearer by the repetition of this word. The poem sketches out in detail, the jobs that were assigned to the couple after marriage. Savitri's "conduct as a wife" (340) is praised by all and the area of her work is strictly demarcated as she "discharged each household duty kind" (344) so that within this sphere "Savitri...Now ministered" ( 355-358). Earlier critics like Harihar Das found Savitri to be "a tender and beautiful picture of the ideal Indian wife" ( p331). Contrary to Savitri's duties, Satyavan's work is to go to the forest, gather wood, flowers, fruits and fuel for the family. The division of labour between the two reveals the socially determined nature of work between men and women of nineteenth century society also. Savitri from this perspective can be looked at as a highly subversive character who not only follows the tradition but also utilizes it for resolving a crisis. In the second part of the poem, her duties as a wife are praised by all. Savitri is the only one in the family who knows about the impending doom on Satyavan's life and she had decided to do all that she could to save him. On the crucial day, her old mother-in-

law tries to prevent her from going to the forest by saying that ‘The forest paths are hard to trace/ in darkness. The blind king joins the mother saying

My son is active, brave, and strong...

Weak and defenceless as thou art...

Thy recent fasts and vigils, child,

Make thee unfit to undertake

This journey to the forest wild. (437-450)

But Savitri’s firm will was such that they had to permit her believing that she would be looked after by Gods “who guard all women pure” (463). No matter how weak Savitri is assumed to be by her parents, her strength lay in her confidence to argue and speak up the truth even in the presence of Death. Society treats her physical fragility as a weakness but she manipulates her feminine qualities to argue and then to pursue Yama to relieve Satyavan from death’s clutches. Part II ends with a full pause in the action of the story as Satyavan breathed his last in Savitri’s arms:

Thus lies he. Hours pass. Still the same,

The pair looks statues, magic bound. (529-530)

The halt is specifically helpful in shifting the location from earth to Yama’s “palace” where he “holds his court” (531). The analogy between death’s kingdom as a court and Satyavan’s death as a “mandate with the seal” looks like it is taken straight from a contemporary scene of a court room proceeding. This is the smallest section with three stanzas describing *Yama* and the discussion of why his men couldn’t get Satyavan’s soul from earth and how Savitri’s presence kept them at a bay from touching Satyavan’s body. In Part IV the scene again goes back to where it was left in Part III where Satyavan is slowly moving towards death. This section gives the surest description of Savitri’s caliber as a woman and she manages to emerge victorious. Despite being “a woman frail, too sorely tried” (637) and as one who convinces Yama that to be “magic bound/In Maya’s network frail and fair,/ is not my aim” (646-648), she was fully aware that her fasts and

prayers were “but a vain pretence,/ Justice eternal strict requires” (665). She does not lose hope and follows Yama only to achieve the three blessings including Satyavan’s life. Yama insisted everytime that she had no strength to move on – “Thou feelest faint from weariness...Go home” (708-710). This was just after the first blessing that Yama granted. Again at the moment of second blessing Yama tries to convince her, saying, “Receive thy boon, and homewards start/’ For ah, poor child, thou art not strong” (748-749), but Savitri continues unfettered by difficulties, generally attributed to the feminine form. It is the socially constructed association of women with weakness and thus her vulnerability to dangers that Savitri challenges here by reasserting herself in the dialogues. Inverting the structures of oppression with a calm outspokenness gives her a chance to rework the patterns of subjectivity in a way not predetermined by outer forces. Her own idea of marriage is not like others who refer to their husbands as ‘lord.’ She instead wants him to be her “dearest friend” as calls him thus in Part V. Even after regaining life it is Savitri who guides his weakened self through the jungle. Susie Tharu connects this story to the larger narrative of the nation where Satyavan represents India itself (260). Savitri’s call to rise up against odds is clear and loud:

Arise! Be strong! Gird up thy Loins!

Think of our parents, dearest friend

...

Rise up and hasten homewards, sweet!

Dutt’s retelling casts Savitri as a dutiful daughter and wife, but also as a woman capable of re-appropriating the right to define her own sexual standards and of independently making and executing valid decisions about her own welfare and that of her family. Like Savitri, Sita in “Lakshman” is a character whose voice and conduct exude strength. The ‘*lakshman rekha*’ ( a protective line drawn by Lakshman for Sita’s safety) which was meant to prevent her from venturing out into the forest is also a metaphor which marks out the designation of women within the circumferenced domestic space of nineteenth century Bengali house. Sita’s response to Rama’s call was but natural. Iyengar is of the opinion that here she acts “foolish and cruel and perverse, but Lakshman is wise and

gentle and understanding” (68). The demarcation of opposing qualities in men and woman brings out the structured identity construction. Toru challenged and reversed them as they get cancelled out in the speaking authority that Sita exercised on Lakshman in the given situation. Sita turns the unpolluted, uncorrupted rhetoric of ‘home’ upside down by making it a politicized space highlighting the hidden, inner factions between two brothers who may fight for possession or property.

He perishes-well, let him die!

His wife henceforth shall be mine own!

Can that thought deep imbedded lie

Within thy heart’s secret zone! (80-84)

The heated argument between Lakshman and Sita hints at Toru’s perception of *Ramayana* as a text dealing with questions of kingship and family at the backdrop of which the entire drama takes place. Sita’s suspicion is not without reason or intellect. Her voice had a strange conviction when she pointedly criticized Lakshman:

Search well and see! One brother takes

His kingdom,- one would take his wife!

A fair partition! (85-88)

The story of *Ramayana* does not enjoy the same sanctified status as it did traditionally. Instead, it becomes a battle ground where brothers fight with each other but at the same time Sita’s stand is clear - unafraid, way ahead of sentimental melancholic heroine as Toru gave her a distinct identity which asserted itself even in the absence of Rama.

I know thee now,--and have no fear

She said and proudly from him turned,--

Was this the gentle Sita? No.

Flames from her eyes shot forth and burned,

The tears therein had ceased to flow. (112-116)

He nevertheless parted from her as “friends” (151), but the last stanza is full of unspoken warnings and premonitions of threats from unknown forces. His indulgent, silent look at Sita is then merged with the image of darkness and danger in the last stanza when “Hoarse the vulture screamed,/ as out he strode with dauntless air” (175-76). If at one hand it suggests the impending danger that Sita would face as Ravana would manipulatively enter the domestic space while she would be alone, it also brings out the fear of the patriarchal order to leave its women free in the rising influence of corrupt forces of modernity.

“Jogadhya Uma” is not based on ancient epics. Located in a calm, serene, idyllic atmosphere of a village Khirogram, it recounts the appearance of goddess Uma to a simple shell-bracelet seller who happens to be blessed by her presence during his daily routine of selling bangles. The poem abounds in local flavors hidden in the daily rituals of the common people. The sound of “Shell-bracelets ho!” with which the poem begins resonates with a familiarity of tone which Meenakshi Mukherjee aptly identifies as a “specifically Bengali tale, centering upon a pair of white shell-bangles, which are auspicious markers of a woman’s married status only in Bengal” (105). It also shows the cultural values attached to such markers of a woman’s status as bangles and vermilion. It also captures the simple process by which these beliefs are passed on from one generation to another in an agrarian society where they finally acquire a ritualistic status within the community becoming a part of the lived present. The pedlar tells the young maiden:

These bracelets are a mighty charm

They keep a lover ever true,

And widowhood avert, and, harm,

Buy them, and thou shalt never rue. (41-44).



By the last stanza of this poem the incident becomes concretized in the collective memory as a specific ritual so that even after the passage of years and centuries-

Descendants of the pedlar pay

Shell bracelets of the old design

As annual tribute. (231-233)

The last few lines in this poem give a slight indication of the after-effects of a mechanical, capitalistic world order on a traditional, agrarian society. It might be a reason as to why Toru stops abruptly after describing the prosperity of successive generations of the pedlar - "From that eventful day alone/ Dawned on their industry,--success..." (236-237). There is a sense of loss and sadness in the moment when Toru Dutt decides to end the tale, as if it was interrupted in the middle by some force. It is in a moment of loss and simultaneous transition from agrarian to 'industry' and 'success' but leading to 'absurdity' of tales (mainly as they become "ill-suited to the marching times" (237-238) merging into one another that the consciousness of the poet can be located. The old world charm built in the previous stanzas comes to a standstill and lies disrupted by the new one which renders many of its practices irrelevant. Toru decides to retain them and thus she writes:

I loved the lips from which it fell,

So let it stand among my rhymes. (239-240)

While these poems are centered on women characters, there is an interesting array of other legendary characters whom she has portrayed in *Ancient ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. "The Royal Ascetic and the Hind" describes the Saligram King Bharat's woe to lead the life of an ascetic - but eventually fails because he develops a very deep liking for a fawn which he had rescued from death as its mother lay dying along the river stream in the jungle. Bharat continued to live with it and doted after the fawn when one final day Death came to take the king away. His heart was still preoccupied with the Hind who was "at his side, with tearful eyes/ Watching his last sad moments, like a child/ Beside father" (92-94). There is a strange admixture of the image of a hermit and king in this poem as

she referred to Bharat as a “hermit-king” who had “changed his scepter for a hermit’s staff” (13) and renounced all material wealth as well as other joys of life like “wealth, and love, and fame” (21). But all his prayers yield nothing to his ascetic life as at the end he remained tied to earthly illusions due to his love for the small hind and he admitted that regardless of all other things

To it was devoted his last, last thought,

Reckless of present and of future both. (99-100)

At this point Toru Dutt gave her own opinion and argued that real devotion is not achieved through seclusion “but in the heat and bustle of the world,/ ‘mid sorrow, sickness, suffering and sin,/ Must he still labour with a loving soul” (129-131). There is a vehemence with which the critics refuse to accept the inclusion of personal views of Toru Dutt in the text. It will be seen in the current analysis that such deviations do serve a special purpose in Toru’s scheme of representation as she created a proxy world where she had full right to comment on events and characters. In the “Royal Ascetic and the Hind,” Toru Dutt has focused on the true love that exists between human beings and animals. She elevates this relationship to a higher plane by comparing it with father-child relationship of human beings. Significantly, it is not the legend itself that Toru Dutt depicts as carrying the wrong message. Her focus is actually on the misinterpretation of the scriptures by people who projected the ancient values as constricting. Natalie Philips draws attention to the fact that For Toru Dutt, it is an error by the Hindu interpreter - by the “Brahman sage” (110) who “would fain imply” (110) that for Bharat “it was a sin/To love his nursling” (113) - that has led to “centuries of widespread misunderstanding. The hind, Dutt suggests, is an intervention by the Christian God to save the hermit-king from living a life without love—a life that would be unholy. Toru Dutt has been extremely careful about the changes she made in the legends. She transformed them but did not overlook the inner value of the tales nor did she feel that the message of the tales were useless.

“The Legend of Dhruva”, “Sindhu” and “Prehlad” also explore the theme of father/parent-child relationship as it undergoes various trials and in different circumstances.

“The Legend of Dhruva” tells the story of a young prince who was ill-treated by his father and step mother. A disheartened child, he went back to his mother Suniti who encouraged him to achieve a higher position by firm determination. The crux of the poem lies in the conflict between Dhruva’s high ambition to reach a higher place (with the father) and the impediments put forward by rigid social structures (here represented by Suruchee) which obstructs the path of an individual.

Why hast thou, child, formed such a vain design?

Born from another’s womb and not from mine. (22-24)

Learn thy place (34)

The difference between the elder and the younger queen subsequently results into a rivalry for the rightful place by Dhruva. He recedes back to the hermitage to live the life of prayer and penance and then he achieves a place which is “far, far above the highest of this earth” to shine like a star in “the highest heavens”.

According to Harihar Das the poem fails because “the authoress has failed to keep in line with both the present and the past, but apparently has isolated the past, and thereby induced a wrong impression in the minds of her readers” (Dwiwedi 102). These critical remarks directly hint at the question of correct representation of scriptures following strict moral codes which seem to invade the domain of innovation and self-expression facilitated by literature.

The tale of “Buttoo” (popularly known as Eklavya) is taken from *Mahabharata*. It is based on the story of a faithful disciple who sacrificed his thumb as a gift to his Guru Dronacharya - one who taught archery only to the princes and children of higher lineage.

Buttoo managed to learn archery on his own but he idolized Dronacharya as his real master. Sadly, when Buttoo excels in archery, Dronacharya understanding his real potential thought of him as a threat to Arjuna and asked Buttoo for his thumb so that he could never practice the art again. Popularly believed to be an example of *guru-shishya* tradition prevalent in India, Toru Dutt's version runs against the grain as it focused not only on the episode of sacrifice but dealt deeper into the dynamics of caste oppression which is easily accepted in the name of tradition. As Meenakshi Mukherjee has pointed out this episode is a clever critique of "caste brutality" (107) prevalent in our country mainly because they come from the medium of culture. The cruelty of Dronacharya "great and wise" and the sheer simplicity of Buttoo's sacrifice when his

"severed thumb was on the sod

There was no tear in Buttoo's eye

He left the matter with his God (263-65).

It evokes aversion for injustice inflicted by the Guru himself. It is deeply implicative of the master-slave equation based on caste differences instead of a great Guru and his disciple. In opposition to Harihar Das's conviction that "the reader is a little jarred by the unexpectedness of the description of Buttoo's... obedience", Dwivedi's comment is more apt as he says, "the teacher in Dronacharya failed the moment he demanded Buttoo's thumb. The pupil was now disillusioned...For him it was a shock too deep for tears" (105). Toru Dutt has successfully captured the moment of Dronacharya's fall and Buttoo growing stature overshadows him at the same time.

"Sindhu" is another story where the devotion of an ideal son towards his blind parents is portrayed. The poem is written in simple ballad meter and the theme of a son's love is explored at length. Compared to "Sindhu", "The Royal Ascetic" and "Dhruva" are shorter in length. It is divided into three parts. The first part describes the peaceful "solitude" of their living abode which is surrounded by a "belt of *bela* trees". The second part ends with the same description but this time a tension is built as Sindhu is dead and his parents still await his return.

Down the steep lane - unto the hut

Girt round with Bela trees

Gleaned far a light – the door not shut

Was open to the breeze. (219-222)

In this section we again see the fall of King Dashrath due to the death of an innocent victim in his hands. The consequent death of both the blind parents in grief of their son's death is captured sensitively. The parents despite their blindness can feel even before it is uttered, that they have lost Sindhu:

Too much he loves us to forsake,

But something ominous,

Here in my heart, a dreadful ache,

Says, he is gone from us. (241-246)

They sensed also that 'There is blood upon thy hands-avow/ 'There is'. At the last moment of their lives they become seers and declare the fate of the King who "shalt like us die". Beyond this Toru refuses to tell anything suggesting that

A prophet's words can never fail

Go read the Ramayana. (321-322)

Dwivedi places this poem with the early immature period of Toru's writings considering the doggerel verses and inconsistency in the rhyme and rhythm. To an extent the criticism is true as the verses show lesser craft than some other poems in the same volume, though it does not suffer at the level of image creation and atmosphere building. The final instruction to "Go" and read the text itself can be read as a way of connecting individually with the past.

"Prehlad" shows Toru Dutt's gradual movement towards the pursuit of true knowledge and God's power. Prehlad's interest in "forbidden themes" (i.e. about the

supremacy of God over all earthly creatures, prayers, rites etc.) was dealt strictly by his master who preached him otherwise:

There are no Gods except the king,

The ruler of the world is he!

Look up to him, and do not bring

Destruction by a speech too free. (84-87)

The restriction on freedom of speech by tyrannical forces does not mean total absence of other contradictory voices. Prehlad's refusal to accept his father as the highest God also shows his ability to resist authority and his belief in a higher power. On an individual level it is definitely Prehlad's struggle against a tyrannical father, but Toru Dutt in the last stanza of this poem retracts his journey right into the middle of her present only to make a powerful declaration:

Tyrants of every age and clime

Remember this, - that awful shape

Shall startle you when comes the time,

And send its voice from cape to cape. (345-348)

The poem "Sita" interweaves two stories - one has a sympathetic portrayal of Sita's life when she was in the jungle as an exile; the second is a recollection of the act of narration where Toru Dutt's mother tells the story to her and other siblings. The opening line of the poem is noticeable as it bears references to Toru's own life, "Three happy children in a darkened room!"

This poem significantly brings these two voices on the same plane. Toru Dutt's relationship with the archetypal legend of Sita moves simultaneously with her recollection of childhood memories of Aru, Abju, and mother, thus reclaiming the fragmented family back in time.

Initially, the emphasis is on explaining the time and space gap between the past in which Sita existed and the present in which Toru is located. By a repetition of “there” she establishes the past - “There bloom/ Gigantic flowers.../ there in a quiet lucid lake/ There ...the peacock springs: there herds of wild deer race/ There patches gleam.../There blue smoke...rises light/ There dwells in peace, the poet-anchorite.(4-11) It is significant that the act of narration of *Ramayana* passes from Valmiki in the past to Toru Dutt’s mother in the present context. Thus the narrative of past is bound with the present through a woman. It is her mother who has “evoked sad Sita from the past” (17) and brought tears in the eyes of the three children. The archetypal woman (Sita), mother and Toru Dutt become participators in the long process of acquiring knowledge. They now begin to establish a tradition of women where knowledge of each others lives is passed from one generation to another to another. It is probably in this sense that Toru Dutt herself becomes an ‘inventor of tradition’ of generations of unknown women writers and poets.

#### **Nation, Exile and Poetry: Studying *Miscellaneous Poems***

The *Miscellaneous Poems* reveal another side of Toru Dutt’s poetic consciousness. It is mainly based on personal experiences and recollections of Toru’s childhood. Toru Dutt’s mother had vivid memories of her Bengali culture and land. Compared to Toru Dutt she was much more rooted and by retelling the stories she could rebuild her contact with the homeland. Toru Dutt on the other hand was a ‘Poet of Exile.’ She was on a perpetual quest for identity. The poems in this section, mostly autobiographical, are evidence to the growing bond between Toru and India on one hand and represent her love for France on the other. Out of the seven, four poems are based on India while the other three are related to her experiences in France which she considered as her second home. In “France 1870”, she tells in grief about the crashing defeat which France had faced in the war against German army. Its fallen state is thus mourned by Toru Dutt amidst tears:

Head of the human column, thus

Ever in swoon wilt thou remain?

Thought, Freedom, Truth, quenched ominous

,...

Whence then shall Hope arise for us. ( 11-14)

France is referred to as the 'Head of the human column' while the 'Levite England' who 'passes her by' is warned of the rise of France from its stupor. The use of "us" is a strong indicator of the presence of an 'other' side - a nation which was in need of those ideals. It sounds like she is asking for hope for people belonging to this other nation. If France is the giver of truth and freedom then who is the receiver here? In the present context it has to be India. She then invokes the spirit of France who after regaining strength

Lightens the world. Bow, nations, Bow,

Let her again lead on the way! (24-25)

"Near Hastings" is located in England and here Toru expresses her deep gratitude for an unknown lady. She gifted red roses to Aru and Toru when they were resting in a park as Aru's health was not fine. The lady understood that one of them was in 'pain' and Toru instantly recognized that they were looked upon as strangers:

Observing at a glance

That we were strangers; one, in pain,-

Then asked, - Were we from France? (18-20)

She offered red roses which 'seemed as wet with tears' to both the sisters and blessed them. Utterly touched by this gesture of the lady, Toru now held her in high respect. In an interesting comparison, Toru here compares the red roses with the lotus flower:

Sweet were the roses, - sweet and full,

And large as lotus flowers



That in our own wide tanks we cull

To deek our Indian bowers. ( 25-28)

The rose and the lotus make for a remarkable overlap of two different sensibilities, mixing on an imaginary plane the sweetness and largeness of rose and lotus respectively.

These lines evoke the image of India and Toru's sense of identification with it in more than one ways. First, she acknowledges her own position as a stranger, an outsider in England. Secondly, she constantly uses 'our' and 'we' to refer to Indian landscape. She is here superimposing the feeling of belonging over the strangeness and unstable identity within a recognized zone provided by her homeland. Thirdly, she also builds a relationship with the unknown lady by giving her a place in her memory. She says that "Her memory will not depart" (37) her even after many years and the roses shall remain fresh and blooming "in my heart! / And they shall never fade!" (39-40) E.J.Thompson had pointed out that these lyrics "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" (Dwiwedi 122). Toru had an uncanny sense of this difference and strangeness but her poems definitely take a step forward to create an understanding between the two cultures. The flowers act as symbols for conveying the otherness as well as suggest a way in which both could share the same ground. At least on an imaginary level Toru is able to reconcile the differences, though this aim is more fully realised in another sonnet called "The Lotus". Another poem "On the Flyleaf of Erckmann- Chatrian's Novel *Madame Thérèse*" is a poetic rendering of Toru's feelings on a particular incident of the novel. Like the poem "France 1870" here also she finds herself supporting France "Battling against oppression" (19) on its war against Prussia. It is a situation when the army was receding back but the falling standard of France is saved by a woman "slender, tall, and brown!" ( 9) when she had nobody but a drummer boy at her side. The next line again emphasizes that the woman is not only brown but has dark hair also and "In her hot haste tumbles her dark hair down." (11) The brown colour and dark hair had been prominent features in Toru's personality also. In a way she tries to prove her love for France through this character in the novel.

“Our Casuarina Tree”, “The Tree of Life”, “Baugmaree” and “Lotus” are the poems in which Toru’s maturity as a poet and her growing sense of belonging for India is fully visible. The memory of the nation, even in its imaginary form provides her the necessary route to explore her own identity during exile. She captures the natural beauty of the place and reflects upon it as inherently beautiful and constant. According to V.K. Gokak, nature is a helpful tool for Indian English poets to carry on with their philosophical quest. He opines that poems like “Our Casuarina Tree” and “The Lotus,” “reveal the various sights, sounds and other aspects of Nature that Indo-Anglian poets have loved to write about and also the philosophic or mystical attitude with which they have responded to nature” (Gokak 31).

Toru’s mind was in a constant search of a common ground between incongruent cultural boundaries. Leaving Bengal for France was a matter of choice for the Dutt family but being an exile they could feel the differences at close quarters. In her case, this life on the edge of several cultures opened several avenues. It made her aware of the world, of the power relationships, of otherness but simultaneously opened the possibility of traveling the distances and creating a dialogue. Writing became a vantage point for her and remained a way of communicating the most intimate of her feelings, agreements and disapprovals throughout her life. Chandani Lokuge feels that right from the beginning when Toru’s essays on Derozio and Leconte de Lisle reflect her “developing interest in mediating between cultures and literatures” (xxiv). She cites Prabhu S. Guptara in whose opinion these writings bring out the complexities of “being an exile, of writing in a language not one’s mother-tongue, about a place that’s not one’s motherland” (Lokuge, xxv).

“The Tree of Life” is the last poem written by Toru Dutt. It is a sensitive portrayal of a vision that Toru Dutt had once in

Broad daylight, with a sense of weariness!

Mine eyes were closed, but I was not asleep. (1-2)

The atmosphere is tinged with a half dreamy-half conscious state in the shining daylight and is followed by the silent presence of her father near herself. There is no such

“interchanging words’ (6) but they could fully understand each others emotions in a gloomy silence. In a moment then she had a vision in which there is “an open plain/ Illimitable” and on a frosty winter night she saw a tree

A tree with spreading branches and with leaves

Of divers kinds,-dead silver and live gold. (18-19)

There is a clear indication of the tussle between life and death. Death is symbolized by the coldness of silver and life is gold, yellowish, which indicates a new morning or warmth. The mystical experience of Toru Dutt is intricately associated with the difficulties she faced at the later phase of her life. The description of the touch of leaves on her forehead as “delicious” is beautiful and meaningful because she is able to get rid of the pain which she suffered.

No longer throbbed my brows, no more I felt

The fever in my limbs. (24-25)

The angel crowned her with a “few small sprays” and touched her father’s forehead with a single leaf. The intimacy of this moment is shared by the father in an unconscious manner as Toru found him sitting beside her just after the vision fled away.

The sonnet “Baugmaree” is a veritable feast of colours but has serious political implications which give a complex meaning to the poem. The images of the East and the West are linked with each other but the representation is not devoid of power struggles it is not. It is written in the typical octave-sestet format but abounds in images taken from her garden:

Sharp contrast of all colours here are seen.(3)

Within the predominantly English sonnet form, thus enters the familiar garden of her home. The green belt has “light green graceful tamarinds”, “mangoe clumps of green”, “palms...like pillars gray”, and “seemuls...Red,- red, and startling like the trumpet’s sound”, “bamboos to the eastward” and “white lotus...a cup of silver”. (4-12) The purity of this landscape is stressed in the rhyming couplet which ends the sonnet:

Drunken with beauty then, or gaze and gaze

On a primeval Eden, in amaze. (13-14)

In this poem Toru Dutt has created a 'hybrid form' as she superimposes the image of a vibrant Calcutta garden over the biblical Eden. In comparison to the "dull" (2) western garden the Indian garden has diversity and its startling colours make the diverse pattern all the more beautiful. The last couplet also suggests that for her "Christianity is certainly not the exclusive domain of the Western colonizers". She thus relocates Christianity from the West and makes it much more Indian. Anyone can "swoon" under the effect of the beauty and be amazed by the sheer purity in which the Eden could exist in this land. On the other hand being aware of the partial treatment of this Eastern Eden, she brings in the idea of "gaze and gaze" (13) which constantly haunts her endeavour to bring the two worlds together.

The sonnet "Lotus" offers a perfect blend of the East and the West as the inherent contradictions of both are cancelled out in such a way that they could coexist peacefully even if their individual qualities are retained. The sonnet is written in the traditional octave sestet form and all the fourteen lines are written in iambic pentameter. It narrates the story of the birth of the Lotus flower. Once it so happened that there was a strife in the "Psyche's bower" when

Love came to Flora asking for a flower

That would of flowers be undisputed queen (1-2)

Opinions were sharply divided over the lovely red coloured rose and the stately white Lily both of whom were "rivals" to each other. As the dispute went on and on, Flora devised a flower which had the best of qualities from both lily and rose. Finally a convincing resolution is found out

And Flora gave the Lotus, 'rose-red' dyed,

And 'lily-white', - the queenliest flower that blows. (13-14)

Theme wise this poem is structured into three sections- “problem, tension and resolution” (G.D. Barche 19) - and by the end “this tension is transformed into a harmonious unified vision” (G.D. Barche 19) of a lotus. Lotus is also the symbol of ‘yoga’ representing a life which is in perfect harmony. The success of the poem lies in an effective conveyance of the idea that “superiority lies in the simultaneous presence of opposing qualities” (G.D. Barche 19).

After reading “Lotus” and “Baugmaree”, “Our Casuarina Tree” provides another complicated version of Toru’s position as it vacillates somewhere between the nation and exile. The huge casuarina tree is surrounded by a deadly python “whose embraces bound/ No other tree could live”. The first stanza has strong visual impact as the description of the embrace of this poisonous snake is not only survived “gallantly” by the tree, it also wears the snake as an ornamental scarf around itself. Analysing the tree’s capacity to outgrow the effect of snake’s poison and its reappropriation for personal decoration, U.S. Rukhaiyar has called it an “ironic reversal” (3). This is certainly a “tense, dangerous, fruitful symbiosis” which seeks to “haunt the earlier poem - to infuse at once - familiar homeland with the ‘eerie speech’ of an English poetry whose ; imperishable empire can no longer be controlled by the “English” (Rukhaiyar 5).

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. (9-11)

The tree stands in the garden in all its “magnificence” but its significance in Toru’s life is mainly due to the memories of childhood attached to it. There is a particular incident and a time period which the tree symbolizes. She says:

Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,

O sweet companions, loved with love intense.

For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear. (25-27)

The companions she is talking about here must be Aru and Abju who are no more there but they still share a part of her emotion as it embodies the sounds and liveliness of a happy childhood, of playtime. Casuarina is at once a memory of happiness and at the same time of death. Just like the first stanza where the python's embrace is deadly and yet tolerated by the tree Toru has drawn an analogy between the stinging memories of past and the python. They both have poison and they are attached to the tree. It is a strange union where

Blent with your images, it shall arise

In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes! (28-29)

In the same stanza one wonders if the tree is a personification of Toru Dutt and its "lament" her own troubled heart. The poem leads to a strong declaration of Toru's heart felt desire to belong and to be remembered.

Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime

I saw thee, in my own loved native clime. (43-44)

Finally she claims the land of casuarina as her own though the reminiscences of France and Italy still linger on. It should be noted that the status of casuarina tree graduates from previous stanzas (in first and third where it is referred to as a 'tree') to that of the "Tree" in the last two stanzas. The figure gains prominence and individuality. Its presence in the memory is affirmed by this transformation. The last line strikes a note of sympathy address to the tree and she comments:

May love defend thee from Oblivion's curse. (56)

Tricia Lootens is right in suggesting that this is a poem which deals with issues of "possession, identification, affiliation and 'our' identity never becomes entirely clear" (300). It is probably a part of Toru's poetic project that she maintained a meaningful silence on many issues and letting the reader understand the precarious condition of an Indian English poet of late nineteenth century. If on one hand the poems provide an insight into Toru's nostalgic longing for home, it has to be realized that Toru Dutt's

language shows other positions that she took in an attempt of self-fashioning. Keeping in mind such ambivalences in Toru's subjectivity it would be rather unfair to compartmentalize her in a given ideological paradigm. Instead, an open ended view point in her works is more helpful in understanding the discourses with which she engaged. Her life and works refuse all sorts of generalizations.





## CHAPTER 3

### SILENCE: SIGNIFIED & TRANSLATED

In this chapter I propose to examine three interlocking themes which are central to the understanding of Toru Dutt's subversive writing style. Starting from the development of a feminine consciousness as reflected in Toru Dutt's poems, I wish to analyse this "risk – ridden, in-between yet productive space"(Knippling 213) which she occupies in literature. The main objective then is to look at the nature of resistance and processes of translation of "thresholds" (Lal 12) which she encountered. I have used the premise of 'translation' as a metaphor for conveying the ambiguity as well as the possibility of resistance.

In an erudite Bengali-Indian family like hers, Wordsworthian 'preludes' and Keatsian "odes" sank easily into the minds of young and the old. This is one of the reasons why there are so many references to the English romantic poets in the early period of Indian English Poetry. In *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* there are several instances where she has drawn extensively from William Wordsworth, John Keats, and P. B. Shelley. For example, in Toru's "Our Casuarina Tree" two lines in the last stanza are "Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton, / And Time the shadow." A comparison with lines from Wordsworth's "Yew Trees" can be helpful here:

May meet at noontide; Fear and trembling Hope,

Silence and Foresight; Death the Skeleton

And Time the Shadow; - there to celebrate. (Lokuge 372)

These lines which follow Wordsworth from line to line draw our attention to yet another unique feature of Toru Dutt's style. "Our Casuarina Tree" is believed to be a poem written by Toru in the memory of her homeland. It definitely does remind one of her home in Calcutta and create a pictorial vision of her childhood days. On the other hand one does question the motive of borrowing the exact words from the poem by William Wordsworth. These lines serve a specific purpose and cannot be treated as mere derivations from the English model. Close examinations of the images created in the

poem indicate that Toru was in the process of overcoming the obstacles in the way of appropriation of English language to Indian themes. Moreover it also proves that she had developed a true voice as a poet. In this way she crossed the hurdles of self expression as a colonial subject and a poet. Toru creates the literary platform, the actual zone of contact where English and Indian sensibilities join each other to give birth to a fruitful combination. As in translation, Toru searches for an appropriate idiom for bringing the two spheres together. There is a reflection of her personal world in the literature that she writes. Her writings can be treated as a hybrid variety; just like the casuarina tree which has leaves from different cultures. France, Italy, England and India –all are represented in the same tree. It is an idea for sure, and this idealism is realized as reality in the poems wherein memory becomes a mode of envisaging the picture of coexistence.

Being a hybrid the tree can actually tolerate the strangulating embrace of the python. Bhabha feels that resistance is an essential feature of hybridity and his question is pertinent to our understanding of such ambivalences as Toru Dutt's work exhibits: "Would such an ambivalent borderline prevent us from specifying a political strategy or identifying a historical event?" (297) Toru's reinterpretation of historical legends involves a critical engagement with the socio-cultural ethos from which they are produced. Wherever she deviated from the original version of the tales, she opened a possibility for transformation. Another good example in this respect would be of 'lotus'. It gains superiority over the two basic and pure colours- red and white. The Lotus flower has both beauty and purity.

### **Reconstructions: Family, Nation, the *Bhadramahila***

A comparison of the role of women in the past and present reveals how much natural it was for woman and man to take up their respective domains of household duties- as for women it was that of a nourishing and caring for the family; for men it was to earn for the family. Nineteenth century Bengal similarly had strict demarcations of working spaces for men and women. Especially during the colonial phase there were two remarkable strains that were observed among Indians in relation to domestic virtues, family and rules outlined for women. There was a section of people who believed that women and family represent the final bastion which had to be kept uncontaminated by

foreign influences, thus it served as a locus where patriarchal power was justified and upheld in the name of tradition and culture. Meredith Borthwick has argued that it was during this period that the society closed up for women as “many *bhadramahila*, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, experienced a greater seclusion. Control over women’s behaviour was an additional means of determining social status in the fluid and uncertain social atmosphere of the city. Women’s behaviour was brought under closer scrutiny. (5-7) Yet the glory of British rule had managed to capture the imagination of a large chunk of the Bengali intelligentsia. Education within zenana quarters, widow immolation and upliftment of women topped the agenda of Christian missionaries as well as feminists. The so-called Bhadrlok or “middle class colonial intellectual men” as Samita Sen points out “were locked in a contradiction- they had to defend tradition against the intrusion of the colonial state but they also had to redefine that tradition to meet the new compulsions of professional and service employment.”(57). Issues related to the degree to which women should be allowed to enjoy freedom in such a precarious position suddenly acquired the centre stage and yet in both the ways her submission to patriarchal forces and role as a passive colonial subject was affirmed in the nineteenth century. A glance at Toru Dutt’s narrative takes this debate further by implicating that women, despite their socially muted roles cannot be treated as unthinking, unresponsive accepters of oppression. Even if their identity was appropriated by several narratives concerning womanhood, they created a possibility of change and answered back by negotiating between the terms of both tradition and modernity, accepting neither fully. Toru’s Savitri is an ideal woman not only as an upholder of tradition. She is an ideal character because she knows how to fulfill her emotional needs while also managing it by reasoning. She does not wallow in tears or melodrama when destiny plays its cruel joke on her. She faces the situation tactfully only to win Satyavan’s life back. She is remembered for her strength and gracefulness so that the parents in future could tell their daughters to be like her “in heart and head” when they get married. Sita is another subversive character blending sarcasm as she provokes Lakshman into action, true love for her husband Rama, and determination to face crisis. She can mould her gentle self and “words” into “poisoned swords” (120). A strong hearted soldier like Lakshman was astonished as he said “thy grief/ And language , wild and wrong, allow/ No other course.”

Jogadhya Uma, the goddess breaks her stone captivated image confined within the premises of the temple and makes an appearance to the pedlar who observed that in her lovely feminine features she had “something of a high command/ That filled with awe.”(54-55). All these women were new constructions of feminine consciousness which Toru Dutt engaged with and tried to redefine the identity of women in nineteenth century Bengal. The sphere of her influence was no doubt small, as Iyengar says “she lives in literature as one of those little significant ‘commas’ or ‘hyphens’ we cannot do without whose power of suggestion could be potent and immense!”(60). This comment is significant and it draws our attention to the fact that perhaps we need to go through the suggestions in Toru’s work again. It is time to question the hyphens and to look ‘beyond’ the obvious.

The cultural ethos reproduced in Toru Dutt’s poems has its roots in the Indian soil. During the colonial period Indians did not have military or administrative reins in their hands therefore these values demarcated a separate domain for rebuilding their lost strength. A whole nation was declared effeminate by a racist, overpowering regime and the colonized began to retrace the glorious traditional past to reconstruct a powerful, masculine identity. Modernity with its various ambivalences ensured that the colonial identity thus formed was both a response to and resistance against colonial encounter. Susie Tharu has argued that characteristics of Indo- Anglian literature should be read as “a literary sub-culture that owes its existence to the British presence in India.” A sense of unstability accompanied this nascent rebirth creating the ‘conflicted individual’ ( Tricia Lootens) who spoke English but could not shed his/her naturally acquired identity. G.J.V Prasad has convincingly written about the reasons behind the ambiguity of the poets writing in this era:

“Forced to declare their commitment to their motherland, they construct an Indian context for themselves, a context that will accommodate their displaced sensibilities...Forced to justify themselves and their culture(s) by the very fact of writing in English, they go on to appropriate English for their most personal and hence most un-English writings... But the pre-independence poets do not make their conflict or

alienation itself the subject matter of their poetry. This was their motivation and the site they had to negotiate and negotiate from..." (31).

Other characters depicted in the poems were also people who defied authority and went against social norms to create their identity- Bharat, Prehlad, Buttoo and Dhruva- all were on a journey of rediscovery of their hidden potential and talents. Sindhu's death by Dasratha's arrow indicates an origin, a new beginning of the great legendary tale i.e. *Ramayana*. Toru Dutt's narrative is an attempt to reconstitute the ideal Indian family which was fragmented not only because of a sudden invasion by foreign forces but also because there were certain restrictions within the cultural mosaic which curtailed individual aspirations and encroached upon personal freedom. Men and women, culture and traditional beliefs- all seem to undergo a process of transformation in Toru's narrative world. To a great extent, Toru's works can be said to be still in the process of making. Whatever she wrote is a translation of her own perceptions and experiences as a woman. She was translating the dilemmas, the aspirations and the longing which manifested itself in the form of writing.

In the world of translation, 'original' has always enjoyed a superior position in comparison to the translated work. If we look at Toru Dutt as a translator, we can see that her task was not restricted by the demands to "reveal the Soul of India through the medium of English poetry." (Dwivedi 10) As a translator, perhaps Toru would fail to satisfy the critics because her aim does not seem to be only a faithful representation of facts of one period or culture to that of another. While narrating the incidents she interweaved her own comments into the grand narratives of past, thus deviating from the original script. These deviations can be studied as a way of redefining tradition. Toru advocated for freedom and individuality of women but in a very subtle manner. She grudgingly comments that "In those far-off primeval days/ Fair India's daughters were not pent/ In closed zenanas." (25-27). Even for a learned woman like Toru, freedom was a commodity which came as an associate of masculinity. It is because of this popular association that Toru portrayed Savitri as free but yet "...she wandered where she pleased/ In boyish freedom" (49-50). It would probably be unfair to look for radical feminist stands in Toru's world of literature but her concern for the condition of Indian

women is evident in the creation of women characters that are strong, passionate creatures full of determination. As a writer Toru did chart a new role for Indian women and in her special way she was rethinking a new map of nation. One of the reasons why nineteenth century Indians developed a new interest in reforming society can be very well traced in the Victorian influence whereby education of Indian women inside 'zenanas' was undertaken by British missionaries as a part of their 'civilizing' mission. She derived inspiration from her friend Clarisse Bader who was an Indologist and had written a book called *Women of Ancient India: Moral and Literary Studies* (1925) in French, and it was later translated into English by Mary Martin. Both Clarisse Bader and Mary Martin were on very good terms with Toru Dutt and their influence in evoking her interest cannot be ruled out completely. Among the Europeans, Indian women were like victims who needed help from their European sisters. The Zenana missions stand proof of the fact that how Christianity, womanhood, and colonialism crossed each other in creating this idea of a subjugated and victimized oriental woman subject. They came to instill the belief that it is through the bible that "life and salvation is free, absolutely free, to them also" (H. Lloyd 47). Lloyd's statement confirms the presence a victimized other ("them also") and considers salvation of colonized women a privilege provided by Christianity. Toru Dutt's faith in Christianity was much more liberal and inclusive. On the personal level she was a follower of Christ. She was convinced that in the eyes of God there is no difference between men and women, white and black, European and non-European. It can be said that in due process women were able to liberate the Christian religion from an exclusive European paradigm and were also "Indianising Christianity to suit Indian women's needs" (Anagol 20).

Toru Dutt's versions of Ramayana and Mahabharata rebuild the legendary characters. She visualized the subjugation of Indian women under patriarchy but subverted the emotional, passive woman stereotype into a balanced individual who can respond to the demands of 'heart and head' both. In "Savitri" for example, Toru Dutt has been able to demonstrate these ideas most effectively. Savitri's consciousness about her own sexuality is not curtailed by the ideal nature of womanhood she represents, but her outspokenness in taking decisions about her own life is worthy of attention. Toru highlights the spirit of defiance present in Savitri. Susie Tharu comments that Toru's response to Savitri is

conditioned by the Victorian myth that ‘a pure woman excites no sexual response’ ( 260) and thus Toru is trying to recreate a Savitri - pure, virtuous, a model of sexual refinement - something that “the British insisted Hindu society lacked”( 260). This is not true of Toru Dutt because she does not project Savitri as an asexual being. Savitri’s sexual purity is described in the first five stanzas. She is “childlike and innocent and fair/ No man with thought impure or base/ Could ever look” (18-20). But in the sixth stanza there is for the first time as Natalie Philips points out a “vivid depiction of her physical response to Satyavan” as she went away leaving “her virgin heart behind”. Here Philips comments further that “Dutt implies no sexual impropriety, Savitri’s “look[ing]” and her consequent sexual desire for Satyavan occasion the forfeiture of her “virgin heart.” Toru’s Savitri is beautiful and awe inspiring but fully at ease with her feminine side. Toru’s Savitri does not prioritise sexual purity over articulation of her desires. She is able to subvert patriarchal expectations by exhibiting the independence and agency to defy and/or overturn the decisions of three male figures of the highest social and even divine authority—her father, father-in-law, and Yama, God of death (N.Philips Issue 3.3. Winter 2007). There can be little doubt now that Toru’s view point differed radically from the conventional. It is very easy to think about Toru Dutt as an anglophile who had a nostalgic longing for nation and also that her writings were influenced by Victorian or Oriental or Colonial constructs. As it stands proven by now, Toru Dutt managed to come out of these structured walls successfully. Her poems reflect the tension caused by a constant struggle between the homogenizing language of the empowered vis-à-vis that of the marginalized voices and this conflict is located right “At The Heart of the Empire” ( from the title of Antoinette Burton’s book published in 1998).

### **‘Doing’ the Remix**

Toru Dutt was one of the first poets to have used the English language suitably for depicting Indian themes, landscapes and socio-cultural attitudes. The usage of archaic words like “sate” (line 58, stanza 5), “lithe” (line 66, stanza 6), “blithe” ( line 68, stanza 6) and “hight” (line 89, stanza 8) is probably an attempt to retain the original cadence of ballads as they were written in Britain. This also shows, that at the initial level Toru was

introduced to the models of poetry received from her English education. The inspiration for rewriting a tale as quintessentially Indian as Savitri or Lakshman, Prehlad or Buttoo deployed a form and language which was not Indian. The space between alien form and content is full of contradictions but Toru's vision created suitable means to bring them together. It is not only by an insertion of proper nouns and Indian names like Satyavan, Savitri, Narad, or Shiva that the so called 'Indianness' is achieved. The appropriation actually lies in understanding the significance of words which she has kept in the narrative without substituting them by their English equivalents. "Muni" (line 33, stanza 3, Savitri) might have been translated into 'hermit' or 'saint' or 'priest' but it is only once in part II that "old hermit" (line 285, stanza 24) is used. Her loyalty towards the English form and Indian content remains intact as these words offer an alternative reading of the texts concerned. Sanskrit words like 'Apsara' (line 140 stanza 12), 'Joysree' (383), 'Palasa' (958) are there in "Savitri". In "Jogadhya Uma" Toru named the village as 'Khirogram'. There are words which have been retained and they enter the English world in their unadulterated form- 'Valkala, 'Maya' ("Savitri"); names of places like 'Dhamaser Ghat' and 'Sankha' in "Jogadhya Uma"; 'Saligram', 'kusha', 'kasha', 'Samga Veds' in "The Royal Ascetic and the Hind", 'Dronacharya', 'sirish' in "Buttoo"; 'seemul', 'bulbuls', 'mango- tope', 'champak', 'bok', 'nagessur', 'vizier', 'peacock throne' ("Prehlad"); 'Bela' in "Sindhu"— give a very Indian feel to the poems. All these words evoke images of a culture and the systems of belief shared through the linguistic code adopted by a specific group of people. This is where a space for negotiation is demarcated; it is where the 'nation' as "ancient and nebulous – the *natio* – a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging" is born. (Brennan 45). If words of Sanskrit origin locate her Indian/ Bengali lineage it must not be forgotten that there is a whole world of words and images which specifically belong to European or non-Indian mythical, cultural traditions and surroundings. Toru Dutt remixed the structure of form-content divide to make it compatible and progressive.

In the light of these arguments one might commit the mistake of reading these poems as forwarding the cause of 'Indian nationalism' in any way. Had it been so, there would have been no scope for the presence of 'hedgerows trim', 'manse' and 'Arcadian love' in "Savitri", 'Pampas' in "Dhruva", 'Latmos hill' in "Jogadya Uma", and 'Wishmo'



in "Buttoo". The *Miscellaneous Poems* are even more ambiguous in construction. The kind lady in "Near Hastings" gifted Toru and Aru roses which were as "large as lotus flowers" and were cultivated in "our Indian bowers". "France, 1870" shows an exultant Toru as she visualizes France as the "Head of the human column". "The Tree of Life" has 'fields of snow', 'frosty winter nights' and where 'snow lies deep upon the ground'. In the poem "On the Flyleaf of Erckmann- Chatrian's Novel Entitled *Madame Therese*" the sound of *Marseillaise* (national anthem of France) is heard and the woman protagonist leading the protest is surprisingly 'brown' and has 'dark hair'. "Sonnet Baugmaree" draws a sharp comparison between the garden of home and dull looking English gardens. In the sonnet "Lotus" the dispute over the best flower is resolved by "Love" (popularly known as Cupid), "Flora" (a Roman Goddess), Juno (Roman Goddess) and "Psyche" (lover of Cupid in Greek mythology).

All these poems have vivid images which belong to a variety of cultures. When Toru Dutt imitates the English models it is marked by an ambivalence which marks the language with double meanings. 'Nation' itself was in the making and the search for an appropriate medium was emerging slowly but steadily. The poems in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* and *Miscellaneous Poems* demonstrate the process through which Toru as a woman was connected with the construction of nation. "Whatever the factor that makes it possible to imagine the nation, there is in the concept of the nation a constructed or invented element" (Ray 6). Toru was definitely a part of this element of invention. Her writings move through different worlds and all of them find an expression in her poems. She herself is like the great casuarina tree which could evade the ill-effects of colonialism to give equal space to all cultures that she had been a part of.

### **The Historical Connection- Refracted Selves**

Toru Dutt was a woman of "several histories" (Cixous 252). She was born as an Indian but at times she would become a patriotic French woman and at the same time she had the manners of the English ladies of the Victorian period. As far as her religion was concerned her Hindu birth did not deter her from becoming a true Christian after the conversion neither did her loyalty towards India changed. Moreover the fact that she was a convert cannot be held against her to prove that she was colonized. True, the wave of

anglicisation conditioned the lives of Hindu converts but it is not essentially meant “for either preserving or erasing identity but is associated with a deconstructive activity central to modernity itself” (G.Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold* 76). If we look at her as an agent of deconstruction achieved through modernity, many aspects of her poems become clear. Thus there is no wonder why she is able to appreciate and relate so well with the tragic incidents of Charlotte Bronte’s life or that of Sita or of Savitri. Considering the twenty-first century version of feminism, one might find it difficult to discover a radical feminist perspective in this work. Yet a close analysis reveals the layers within the textual code which is constantly built and rebuilt to make way for an alternative order, an inclusive space where Butto, the hunter’s son and Bharat, the King share the same narrative space. Toru Dutt, in many ways does “un-think” the “unifying, regulating history that homogenizes” ( Cixous 253). Her approach is very modern, owing to which, her narratives excel in “herding contradictions into a single battlefield.” ( Cixous 253). The poetic world of *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* has been constructed in such a manner that it ensured the dialogue between cultures, between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’.

### **Engaging with the Self/Other**

A woman writing from India was sure to create ripples and evoke responses from different quarters of European as well as Indian critics. Toru was writing in a period when the identity of European woman had slowly begun to change and the “woman’s point of view” was slowly coming into existence. In relation to India the European ideas of woman empowerment was tainted by colonial practices. It is a significant issue then to realise, the forces which actually developed Toru’s sensitivity towards issues concerning Indian women.

The most popular photograph of Toru Dutt shows her in an English dress popular in the Victorian period. She is dressed in a long frock, her hair is tied neatly at the back and her posture is slightly towards one side and she looks resembles the English women by the get up. It is a captivating image no doubt, but it speaks about the role which traditional

values played in her life. She belonged to a family which was supposedly modern and anglicized but still “femininity implied chastity, obedience and docility” ( Karlekar 12). Toru Dutt’s training in English manners and customs is clearly visible in this picture where she stands holding a part of the chair. It is intriguing to see her standing beside the chair. It looks like a vacant position for which she aspired for but her journey did not reach its destination. Toru Dutt’s photographed image as a woman seems to be directly in conflict with the poetic self that she had constructed. She looks straight into the eyes of the onlooker and there is no sign of inhibition in her. Her attire explains that the Englishness was a part of her conscious self; but this consciousness must have been tainted with a sense of falsity and was a constant source of disturbance in a society which never accepted them fully. The English social circle of which she wanted to be a part of, was rather hostile and unreceptive as they looked down upon her Indian birth. As an Indian woman she acquired a disadvantaged position in the hierarchy of power. Moreover, her right to enter the structure which was completely regulated by the colonial power did not leave much space for speculation. Antoinette Burton has rightly commented upon the differential treatment of Indians amongst the Anglo- Indians who

“thoroughly despised 'natives' as a class, though they were friendly enough to those whom they thought had money and position." If Indians wished to gain access to European society in India they had to adapt themselves to English manners and culture, though this was not necessarily a guarantee of social intercourse. (6)

Even the most elite and privileged sections of Indians would have felt the cold response of English men and their acceptance within the English circle of power was a twisted affair. There is no wonder then that she tried so hard to be in the good books of her European friends as Toru wrote to Clarisse Bader that her (Bader’s) “affection for my countrymen and my country touches my heart.”(346). The voice of an Indian often went unheard and was treated with severe displeasure. In a letter to Mary Martin Toru Dutt narrated an incident of unfair judgement passed by an English judge on an Indian defaulter- “You see how cheap the life of an Indian is in the eyes of an English Judge.” (295). This awareness of partiality went a long way in shaping her critical faculties. In

another letter addressed to Mary, Toru retaliated with severe sarcasm over the “indignant” way Anglo-Indians treated the Indians and wrote with enthusiasm about the 1857 revolt in which her father Govin Chunder Dutt wanted to participate (283). After living in India Toru Dutt had begun to see such differences very closely and later recognized India as her ‘patrie’, as home (321). These circumstances forced her to live a life of exile. It resulted in a crisis where she was trapped from all sides. Her interaction with people was minimized to letter writing and a visit to the relative’s homes at times. But this was not a source of happiness for her as she felt alienated within her own community. She once wrote:

We do not go much into society now. The Bengali reunions are always for men...and Europeans are generally supercilious and look down upon Bengalis. (271)

It is evident that she could not find an anchorage in any one culture or community. She lived the life of an exile, be it Europe or Calcutta. The only form of reconciliation available to her was of reading and writing. “Writing” as Karlekar has pointed out “was often an act of catharsis in an unequal society and helped the women to reflect on gender roles and the superficialities of their lives. Education, in whichever form, was instrumental in facilitating self-expression” (13). It was only in the family that Toru found some consolation in the love and care of her parents. She used to listen attentively to the tales that her mother told in her childhood. These oral tales were recollected and gradually manifested in a genuine interest that she developed for learning Sanskrit language and studying *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Sakuntala*. If on one hand, she took pride in the traditions she inherited, the restricted access to freedom and self-expression tormented her. The Western education that she received helped the Bengali *bhadralok* in their quest for power as it was used to enhance their “status ambitions and partly to create a manageable bicultural space or an interface with the modern world within the family..”, (Nandy 66). It was only by reimagining her past in the present that she could respond to the crisis in a creative fashion. Her poems therefore bring out the tussle between the ‘self’ which was unstable and the ‘other’ which kept haunting her mind in different faces- the fear of death, patriarchy and alienation. All these anxieties are neatly interwoven into the

fabric of her poems. Ania Loomba has rightly maintained “race, gender and sexuality work together and develop in each other’s crucible” (172). A complex situation of simultaneous enclosure and the urge for expression hinders full expression of the female experience.

It is therefore a remarkable achievement that Toru Dutt had displayed in her short life. Her novels, poems, essays, and translations speak on her behalf. Her experiences as a woman vis-à-vis nation are valuable in more than one ways. Toru’s narratives show a glimpse of multiple voices which were in search of recognition in an emerging India of nineteenth century. The consciousness of having a self-governed nation emerged only after the non-cooperation movement (1921). It is therefore inappropriate to search for a zealous appeal for “India” and its “freedom” in Toru’s work. In these earlier narratives what one finds is not a clear revolt from traditions or tyranny, but a constant longing for initiating a dialogue between emerging voices of resistance. The Indian writers tried to recollect the memory of their past which was disrupted by the trend of modernity. The first generation of Bengali poets represented by Kashiprasad Ghose, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, and Michael Madhusudan Dutt were gifted but also heavily influenced by the British Romantic poets like Keats, Shelley, Byron and Scott. With the second generation of poets like Toru Dutt and the rising wave of nationalism, the exclusive English sphere began to reflect changes and Toru Dutt’s verses embody the processes of negotiation between the ‘self’ and ‘other’. With her the flavour of Indian Writing in English also changed from that of imitation to creativity. Rosinka Chaudhury has argued that Toru Dutt was “arguably the first modern Indian poet in English, she brought the personal and cultural dimensions of her experience into her writing” and her works exhibit a “gentle subversiveness in the context of polite social interaction.” (Mehrotra 65). Alpana Sharma Knippling reasserts this statement by adding that Toru, by “refus[ing] to settle neatly into only one side of any number of binary relationships: female/male, colonized/colonizer, Indian/Western, original/imitative, young/old, sheltered/free,” could “seriously play...with the patriarchal norms of her time” (Knippling 225).

## The Crisis

Situated in the middle of contesting ideologies of the nineteenth century, the image of a stable identity does not emerge clearly. At the most, there can be efforts to construct the subjectivity in view of the competing selves which inhabited the world of an individual. As for women it was all the more difficult to achieve a clear notion of the self, exposed as it was to different contradictory forces of suppression. R.Parthasarthy's observation concerning Indian English Writers stands doubly true if Toru Dutt's fractured identity is put to examination. He says that "It is not surprising ...that writers of Indian English are conscious of their Indianness because, at the bottom of it all, one suspects a crisis of identity. (*Ten Twentieth Century* 3-4). This is the reason why there are so many ambiguities regarding Toru Dutt's location in the matrix of events. It has been increasingly difficult to put her in a particular ideological mould mainly because she consciously defied the normal definitions of being a woman, an Indian, and a Christian. What is much more interesting is that her search for a voice challenged the notions of being a European as well. Her education and her proficiency in English and French languages seen in conjunction with her declaration that she was first and foremost a French woman signify the nature of self fashioning of Toru Dutt's subjectivity. She inversely attacks the identification of European with the whiteness of skin. It is by questioning her Indian self that she was able to successfully subvert the notion of purity of blood in order to belong to a given culture or nation. Hers is a complex awareness of all these issues and for solution she gradually shifted to the notion of a 'hybrid' identity. Considering the maturity of her consciousness it would be wrong to assume that she was a child whose powers of comprehension of such larger issues was defective in any way. This also implies that her poems were not simple translations from the past. They are loaded with several meanings, signs and revisions which make the text a proper document recording the major shifts in her consciousness of time and space. Stuart Hall has rightly argued that "identities are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (*Cultural Identity and Diaspora* 225). Toru Dutt's identity then cannot be located in a single sphere but is defined by her position within different mediums of language, culture, history and nation.

The identity crisis reflected in Toru Dutt is deeply reflective of a similar feelings embedded in the minds of the Anglo-Indians as well. Benita Parry and Michael Sprinker's *Delusions and Discoveries* () explores the very dimensions of the colonial encounter arguing that the roots of colonialism were located not only in the cultural sphere but also in the material forces of relations and the flow of capital from East to the West for both profit and power. This resulted in a sense of dislocation amongst the Anglo-Indians who had to respond to the interpole and the colony while at the same time justifying their hegemonical control over the subjects.

When British rule over India in the late nineteenth century took on the ideology of an Anglo-Saxon mission to the dark peoples of the globe, the British-Indian encounter became a battle expressed as a political struggle and experienced as a psychic crisis. (30)

The crisis in fact characterizes the response of the colonizer and the subjects. The crisis itself gives rise to strategies of resistance. In Toru's case, it yielded a rich harvest of

### **The event called Threshold**

Toru's life was an example of constant relocation of cultural and national identities. The dynamics of her relationship with each of them were different and significant in developing the poetic self of Toru Dutt. In such a situation as hers, words do not remain innocent carriers of straight forward meanings. They carry many openings in which glimpses of passage from one phase of existence to another are codified. They have the potential to hide as well as expose many realities which Toru had experienced. The final outcome of such transformative processes in the case of Toru Dutt has been extraordinary indeed. Between the moment of perception and that of expression also, there are many stages through which the 'word' passes through- constantly negotiating and absorbing some essence from all the experiences. Toru Dutt as a poet is one such individual whose life itself was a journey between half known and half unknown worlds. She could never belong to any of them completely and remained in a flux of cross-currents which not only created differences but also provided her with tools to tackle circumstances. "From origin

to exile, thus, translation wanders in diverse reincarnations, crossing the boundaries of cultures, languages, civilizations, allowing plurality of perceptions to co-exist in the needs of contemporaneity.” (Majumdar 108). There is an instability which marks Toru Dutt’s life but its representation in the poetic world of Toru Dutt gets intermixed with history, memory, identity and nationality. It is then inevitable that her writings can have several meanings instead of one. Her poems can evolve into new meanings, as Bill Ashcroft has argued that “writing” itself “‘becomes’ the new event” (*Postcolonial Transformations* 63). She translated her anxieties and the urge for self-expression the dynamics of which were located in the power centric discourse. It is true that she “gave a status to translation” (A. Dasgupta). She traversed a very slippery plane as she tried hard to breach that irreconcilable difference between coloniser and colonised. (Guha 211-212). Pitched in the battlefield of competing nationalisms and otherised as a woman Toru was bound to have an identity which fluctuated between the local and the global. She based herself within the local traditions but broadened her horizon by critiquing certain tenets of the West. She created a separate space for women-the “Poet’s Corner”- and confirmed the participation of women in the public discourse. She gave a new voice to the learned woman of nineteenth century and established herself as a successful Indian writer of English. She was a translator of ideas and currents which shapes the life of an individual. Sujit Mukherjee has said:

Until the advent of western culture in India, we had always regarded translation as new writing... ‘writing’ in this context is not divorced from the act of original composition...New literary texts derived from *itihasa* or *purana* sources are obvious examples of this process. (77)

As a poet she has travelled far from the past annals into the light of the present. The poems in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* carry the testimony of her life which is always in translation and in a process of rediscovery in the present context. In the picture of clash imaginations which her poems represent, race, class, gender and Empire created a concoction of ideas and Toru Dutt acquires an emblematic status for investigating the causes of a fragmented self through which an Indian writer of Poetry



· speaks through. It is in her works that our awareness of the stages by which the personal sphere gradually meets the social, the cultural and the national identity.

## Conclusion

### **The Story continues...**

This study of Toru Dutt has focused on studying the consciousness of Toru Dutt in relation to the late nineteenth century Bengal. I look at her as a part of the continuum which binds Indian English literature to its colonial past as well as looks forward enthusiastically towards a formulation of new theoretical discourses which have enriched it from within. To categorise Toru Dutt as a feminist or a nationalist or an Orientalist would be too straight forward an explanation of difficulties faced by writers and 'women writers' of colonial India. I have emphasized the idea of a 'woman' and 'Indian' writer as a special case of study because the conditions in which she chose to write were radically different from those of her male Indian counterparts as well as the British sympathizers which includes both men and women. She was allowed to move in a direction predetermined by her cultural moorings and social restrictions. It is therefore even more challenging to look at the modes of resistance and the fissures through which such subjectivities could be studied.

As is clear from the arguments placed in the previous chapters, Toru Dutt's poems are way ahead of their time. Her poetry moves towards a sort of reconciliation of differences, though it cannot be denied that at some place or the other the differences appear too stark to be bridged. A compromise if at all was the need of the hour and not a choice. If at one point of time she seems to be disgusted by the 'scandalous' city of Calcutta, at other times she confesses her love for Baugmaree, and the gaiety and colours of its Casuarina lined landscape. Her faith in Christianity continued unabated by her liking for Sanskrit epics and folklore rhythms. Traversing between several worlds of confinement and relative degrees of liberty the creative part of her consciousness reflects the transitions and negotiations which helped her cope up with the stresses of her life. The India of her imagination reveals those subterranean currents which influenced the intellectuals of eighteenth century. As a woman, her perception of nation-building also comes to the fore.

When a nation becomes a sign, a projection of something else, then language becomes a potential carrier of the shadows and brightness of the lives lived by its people. The narratives are inhabitants of the world of language.

The Indian nation became a space to be known and conquered. It was a curiosity for the outsiders who saw various possibilities of exercising control and power on a mythical land which had existed in their imaginations for ages. Benita Parry for instance studies the Anglo-Indian narratives written by authors like Flora Annie Steel to show how an imagined India existed in the British minds:

“The romantic writers...reveal a community’s norms and troubled apprehensions of India, and are principally interesting as symptomatic of Anglo-Indian attitudes...What they did know about India- and they knew very little-these writers guessed, and these guesses and half-truths disclose obsessions and fantasies” (32-33)

On the other hand there were diverse groups of indigenous Indian population who shared a common history but the thread of identification with each other as ‘one nation’ was missing. Between Hindustan and India there were gaping abysses which required bridges. The long colonial era in the country ensured that this distance be traversed not only through victory and fall of empires, but also by a clash of ideas, a sudden collusion of the European enterprise and Indian subcontinent. The historical circumstances were such that it influenced the ideology of a whole generation though in different ways. Literature captured those emerging nation-narratives in its myriad forms. Toru Dutt’s life and poetry were subjected to an eclectic mix of influences which conditioned her response towards society and culture.

There are two narratives which run simultaneously in the poems. The history of India was in a state of reinvention as increasing number of scholars from India and all over the world began to read its history in their own ways. The main objective of the British scholars for studying India was intertwined with their endeavour to rule their object of desire.

At one side was the unchanging, universalizing and traditional worldview of a bygone past. On the other was an indigenous move to resuscitate the mythical past to gain strength. In *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* one finds a voice from the far away past still haunting the channels of consciousness of the Bengali *bhadralok*. Its glory, its grandeur, its pathos and beauty captured the imaginations of Indians and Colonialists alike and Toru derives her substance from there. Where she seems to make a difference is the realm of disintegrating strait jacketed associations of women, with gender differences and political positions with regard to a flawed perception of the East and West as two binary oppositions. The category of 'woman' had acquired political undertones in the nineteenth century India. Whether educated and polished or domesticated within the family, her life came to constitute a major block in the jigsaw puzzle of the responses towards colonialism.

I would also like to redeem the Indian writer in English from its negative association with the colonial past. The British ruled India by means of force as well as a generated consent among the people. This also means that apart from historically created necessity of knowing English, somewhere down the line there was a great enthusiasm for English education, culture and life among Indians. These perceptions might have been influenced by the superior status enjoyed by English but it was not necessarily always regulated by the colonial masters. "Colonialitis", as R.Parthasarthy ( in Srivastava 41) has called it, was a symptom of an ailment which partly affected the first generation of Indian writers, and before they could get a hang of its poison, it had already passed on to the next generation for redemption. Several social-historical contexts determine the nature of representation in literature. Situating Toru Dutt in the late nineteenth century society therefore is a yardstick which leads the way to understand the development of her consciousness in relation to the first writers of IWE also. As more and more new

'contexts' surface up within a given framework, readings and interpretations of literature tend to change accordingly. The conceptual framework of her text might have been decided by Toru Dutt and the era to which she belonged, but the incidents and experiences of her personal life interwoven with the textual is like a DNA strand which gave vitality and individuality to the dead world of heroes and queens. It is a defining factor for studying what we call post-colonial literature. No doubt, today post-coloniality has embraced as many definitions as it has countered negations and criticism. Its own status has been questioned by G.C.Spivak as she has convincingly argued that the 'subaltern' cannot speak. Yet it is not in the absence of an available theory that the application of Post-colonial theories gain validity. It should be treated simply as a move, an approach or a platform to look at other avenues of redefining history and subjectivity in different contexts and changing epochs. Hence history shall give way to histories and subjectivity to subjectivities. We do have and we shall rediscover various "Histories" of Indian English literature in order to recreate, translate, and transcreate the given idiom. Studying Toru Dutt is one of the many answers that can be given in the favour of creativity, invention and resistance.

### **Translation: A case for Reconsideration**

Probably, looking at Toru Dutt as a translator in her own right adds a further complication to the issue of redefining her location. However, this dissertation does not include the study of *A Sheaf* for making a case for revisiting Toru Dutt as a translator. *A Sheaf* is actually the work of translation where she translated poems from French to English. So, under normal circumstances that should have been the text for research and not Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan. Again, as *A Sheaf* has already been deemed as one of the best works of translation from French to English ever attempted by an Indian author, the subject does not require much brain storming. Alokranjan dasgupta for instance said that She gave a status to translation (7) while James Darmesteter, a French critic praised Toru by saying that:

This daughter of Bengal. So admirably and so strangely gifted, Hindu by race and tradition, an English woman by education, a French woman at heart, poet in English, prose writer in French; who at the age of eighteen

made India acquainted with the poets of France in the rhyme of England, who blended in her three souls and three traditions, and died at the age of twenty, in full bloom of her talent and on the eve of the awakening of her genius, presents in the history of literature a phenomenon without parallel.(Das 1)

These souls and traditions speak different languages and they need to be revived from antiquity. By undertaking *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* as the text for the current research what is emphasized here is the need to look at translation as an activity which involves not only words but worlds which are inscribed within the text; not only linguistic signs which constitute the textual rubric but also worldviews which redefine identities and cultures. It is an ongoing process where change is the norm as very subtle play of reality and imagination offers unlikely solutions. It is like opening a Pandora's box full of new questions and confusions as it sets to dismantle not only her (Toru Dutt) image as a poet/writer but also the very idea of translation itself. For translation (in the highly oversimplified sense) would generally mean a transfer of meanings and linguistic signs from one source text to the target text. If this be the perspective, what exactly is under translation here- is it the 'ancient' exoticised makeup of India, or the anxiousness to identify with the centrally visible site of power that Europe was, or a record of resistance to colonialism at the minutest level, or a channel into the myriad spectrum where various versions of India were rehearsed, or simply an expression of inherent dilemmas which led to a division of selves of the intellectuals of Bengal? Or as I would like to argue all of these constitute the very core of the response towards change? Then Toru Dutt emerges as a figure capable of strange metamorphosis

If yes then Toru Dutt's involvement in all these issues makes her study all the more important in the current context. She was responding to and thereby translating the reified versions of a subtle game of power. Amid all these forces she projected herself, though veiled behind the poetic diction borrowed from eighteenth and nineteenth century English classics as well as traditional sources of India. A link between the two was definitely intended and achieved through various means and poetry is one of them.

Now, the questions have changed. The object of study has been redefined; what is studied is a text embedded in its network of both source target cultural signs and in this way Translation Studies has been able to both utilize the linguistic approach and to move out beyond it. (Bassnett and Lefevere 12)

role of such endeavours in an interdisciplinary field of translation does not only reveal the numerous possibilities of understanding the interface between history and the individual, but can also be used to detangle the knots which lie at the core of Post-colonial studies. G. C. Spivak's forceful argument that the "subaltern cannot speak" puts forth a question of primary importance as to whether it is us who refuse to listen to such voices unless they come to us in an advertised package. A denial to study an early Indian English writer like Toru Dutt under the common assumption that this area has been well explored and exhausted by now can prove to be detrimental to the whole purpose of studying literature.

Toru Dutt's relationship with her 'homelands' requires some more discussion here. It has already been proved that she was not writing in isolation. Her shifting allegiances and vacillations between Europe and India are significant markers of the dilemma of a whole generation. Here it should be remembered that For Toru Dutt Bengal and its limits defined the limits of her nation, her India also. As Meenakshi Mukherjee has pointed out, Toru was rather unaware of the nationalist project of nineteenth century India. To Mukherjee "Toru Dutt seems quite innocent of the desirability of a 'national' projection of Indian culture to counter colonial hegemony." (105-106). She further adds that the "employment of a pan-Indian idiom for the purposes of national projection was far from Toru Dutt's mind, whose India remained centred in Bagmaree and Maniktola Street, in and around Calcutta."(106). Considering that 'India' as a single nation began to find its footing only in the late nineteenth century Mukherjee's argument seems to be true specially for a woman like Toru Dutt whose world was confined to Calcutta and its suburbs. In terms of political awareness also India came into existence after the demise of Toru Dutt. There are contradictory notions of nation and womanhood which come into play when such observations as Mukherjee's are reanalysed. For a moment let us stop here and have a look at the major events of the mid-nineteenth century. The year 1857

saw the first expression of the discontent of Indians with the British rule. Its unorganized local character, its religious grounding and subsequent failure has often been emphasized by historians and critics, but as M. K. Naik has suggested, this uprising resulted in several changes in the equations between Indians and the British. Following the rebellion, in 1858 Queen Victoria proclamation declared absolute non-interference in religious matters of the country. The Indian Penal Code was formed in 1860 and came into action in 1862. In 1872 The Native marriage Act III came into existence. In May 1885, Allen Octavian Hume formed the Indian National Union (which became the Indian national Congress later on). From 1857 to 1885 there is a whole range of events which suggest the degree to which India was subjected to diverse changes in the colonial regulation of law, administration, marriage and religion in a short time period. Keeping Toru Dutt in the middle of these affairs, it can be understood that she was pretty much a part of the transforming social arena. Natalie Philips has rightly pointed out that “Dutt was truly at the nexus of the many determining ideologies—nationalism, imperialism, gender binarism, and racism—that shaped the lives and literary work of indigenous female intellectuals in nineteenth-century British India”. (Philips Issue 3.3) Treating her as an exceptional and alienated figure would take away her right of participation in the public discourse. Such a view also poses a threat to the historicity of the subject under colonial rule. Whether colonized or not, the agency of the ruled cannot be undermined even if there are very light streaks of resistance exhibited by them. This dissertation has put forth an argument for reconsidering this opinion suggesting that India had begun to exist in the imaginative realms of the society. Its limits were unclear but its presence cannot be questioned, as all the debated and literary articles of this period suggest a move towards the India of their minds. The introductory part of the dissertation has already described how it figured in the poems of the first generation of Indo-English poets. Toru Dutt’s *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* is a testimony of its formation.

It should also be remembered that Bengal in the nineteenth century was a cradle of various movements which were historically important and it gave a new direction to the entire nation. The elite, educated, anglophile Bengali bhadralok had its own means for adjusting to the changing trends of domination and rule. Joya Chatterjee has pointed out this tendency of the intellectuals, towards maintaining their hegemony and the status quo



within their social circles. She has called it the “schizophrenia of the intellectual in British Bengal” and comments:

The Bengali Hindu Persona that emerges out of renaissance writing is thus full of contradictory essences: it is simultaneously courageous and timid, vigorous and passive, other-worldly and venal, spiritual and hypocritical, cultured and imitative. ( Chatterjee 163).

Within this transforming sphere of social hierarchies, Toru Dutt and her family were again alienated mainly because they were converts who were generally treated with severe critiques leveled against the ‘babu’ culture. The general atmosphere was such that Toru Dutt could not find a friend in Bengal and she resorted to correspondence for communication to Mary Martin and later Clarisse Bader. Bengal was another ‘alien homeland’(as Tricia Lootens has argued) for her. She compensated for the loneliness by reading and writing letters, remembering happy days and visualizing a world where there were no boundaries.

The journey of Toru Dutt’s life and the passage of her death into the pages of literary annals indicates that she was a an inventor who directed the way of Indian Poetry in English. She was initially hailed as the shining star of India during the emergence of nationalism. For the European, she was the “wonder- woman” (Mukherjee 91 ) who could converse with them in their language and create poetry. This was an achievement not of Toru Dutt but her faith i.e. Christianity and training in languages which were European. She became a justification, an exemplar per excellence of the advantages of the English civilizing mission in the undeveloped East. In the middle of all these narratives of applause and praises, her individual worth and the woman’s self was lost somewhere. Later on she was reinvented, her trajectory was charted again when Harihar Das decided to write her biography. He acknowledged that there was not much material which could be readily accessed and since his was the first attempt, “the idea of writing myself what I could not find elsewhere began to take shape in my mind” (Das xii). A. N. Dwivedi also points out that the “revival” of interest in Toru Dutt was part of India’s assertion of “nationhood”. Padmini Sengupta remarked that “Toru was a ‘linguistic prodigy’, and performed the tricks of a magician by the use of three languages,

translating into one from another” (9). Despite all these comments, one comes across Malashri Lal’s essay on Toru Dutt where she thoughtfully wonders that “Toru soon faded into obscurity again should be a matter of concern for feminist critics because she is historically significant and her literary reputation deserves enhancement through better knowledge of her unread works” (34). Reading all these comments, one would wonder about the processes through which Toru was first appreciated, then appropriated and finally forgotten from the memory. Today she is survived by her works which bear the proof of the extremes of adulation and negligence that she went through. This work is an attempt to bring her back from the folds of constricting narratives and let her breathe the fresh air which she so craved for during her lifetime. We have many translated versions of Toru Dutt the person. This work is connected with the kind of translation Toru Dutt was engaged in with the help of her writings.

By taking up Toru Dutt’s role as a speaking subject also means that she has acquired an agency, the central stage. She speaks through the channels of time and is able to stand through adversities. Her works have been revived and interpreted from time to time. Most recently, feminist criticisms by different critics have helped in creating a space for her. Years ago Padmini Sengupta had spoken about the association of Toru Dutt with death and literature. It needs to be quoted at length here in order to understand what happened to Toru Dutt.

In judging Toru Dutt one always thinks of her whole life, with its tragedies and brief years, her poetry and scholarship, as part of a whole poem...Her poems without being associated with her life, may not have stood the test of time; but the two together certainly presented a young woman of exceptional worth...Toru’s ‘poetry is in the pity’ of her life (9)

Probably yes, at least from the perspective of earlier critics it seems to be true. There was a very fine line which divided her life, death and literature as it was created by the critics who chose to see her living self intermixed with her poems and treated her death as an occasion to put forward their sympathetic observations on her. The above comments hold contradictory elements within themselves. If we read the poems in conjunction with her life, she herself emerges as a very strong character. She does not

remain as pitiable as she is made to be. She was the one to remake Savitri and Sita, who transformed Dhruva's cry into a firm determination to win and Buttoo's act of sacrifice hint at the oppressive aspect of our traditions. Where does she portray a weakling? Nowhere. "Our Casuarina Tree" and "The Lotus" are reminders of the time to which she belonged and her emotions capture the very essence of her life. Not only in literary world but also in her own life she emerges as a very courageous woman who paid no heed to approaching death and continued writing and reading till the end. Her life was dictated by various social cultural forces but her inner self continued to follow its own dictates. One cannot deny this voice to her. Dr. Edmund Thompson had given her a place with Sappho and Emile Bronte ( Jha 23), to which Amarnath Jha had responded by saying "...such a personal utterance Toru never attempted. Nor is there any indication that she would have grown in such wise as to express herself as Emile Bronte...one may question if the feminine reserve and shyness of the East would have permitted the outspokenness associated with Sappho"(Jha 23-24). As has been argued in this paper such "utterance" was always present but went unheard in the course of time. This essay raises questions related to gender vis-à-vis nation especially in a country where the natives were trying to assert their distinct identity in comparison to the foreign power. It highlights the conflict within the Indian mind: whether to rebuild the past in complete opposition to the foreign power or to adopt the means of transformation from the colonizer himself, assimilate it as a strategy and then strike back at the empire with its own weapon. Language acquired a huge significance as it served as a tool of resistance to the existing structure and in the narratives of Toru Dutt it achieved an edge which cut through the colonial and patriarchal structures.

The nature of translation attempted by Toru Dutt traversed on the delicate balancing line between interpretation and transcreation. While simple interpretation could have made her account of so called Indian soul much like an Oriental enterprise to understand the exotic East, she deviated for the sake of creation. *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* is not just a poetic rendering of ancient Indian stories. It brings into perspective the 'other' side of the picture-the periphery where the relations between ideological tools and cultural otherness are destabilised by the actual moves of resistance. This periphery is always teeming with the voices which have been neglected so far-

people struggling to come out of the folds of patriarchy, caste oppression and cultural determination. Amarnath Jha believed that Toru Dutt “could have interpreted to the West the spirit of India and could have brought about a closer and more sympathetic understanding” (36). There is no denial that she could have done so, but she did it on her own terms and projected varying struggles in a subtle manner. The inclusion of a personal voice therefore ensured not a mere translation but an act of transcreation or to be more specific what Rumina Sethi has called “stylistic transcreation”(40) . Toru Dutt was leading the way towards expressing Indian myths in a language which had to be appropriated to the cultural patterns of Indian society. As has already been discussed, how skillfully she had interwoven the two ends into a single strand is well represented by her poetry. There seems to be no dichotomy between the two, though she does retain the differences between them by keeping non-english words within the structure. The model of understanding she proposed did not let the other get subsumed into the dominant structure. Instead her writings brought in manipulations let the other speak and coexist within the circuit of the powerful. She played around the powerful language and alien forms just like Savitri managed to persuade Yama to grant her the wishes on her own terms, she thus created an idiom for Indian English Poetry. Toru Dutt’s life and her opinions seem to be full of ambivalences but as Homi K. Bhabha has argued there is always “ a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it.”(1). Toru Dutt reflects these ambivalences within herself and her poems are translations which were necessitated, a natural outcome emerging from such ambivalent positions.

### **An Afterword for Toru Dutt**

The choice of Toru Dutt for this work does not come out of sympathy or pity. Toru refuses to fit in the mould of a pitiable character. The main objective was to look at the events, keeping her at the centre, and to analyse her writings with reference to what was happening around her. This is precisely the reason that Chapter I starts with ‘March 4, 1856- Birth of Toru Dutt’. It acts as a reminder of the time period to which she belonged and the centrality of the discourse with which she had so passionately engaged

herself with. It has been rightly observed that “In woman personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history.”(Cixous, 253). Everywhere else, a consciously designed framework is chosen to discuss her writings as she embodies the dilemma, the fragmentation and the streak of resistance peculiar to her era. The aim here was not to give another version of Toru Dutt- as a translated subject. It was to decipher the codes of self and other as they are related to each other on the plane of literature and are represented by the subjects that she chose to translate.

## An Afterword for Toru Dutt

A child

I borrowed terms

From a worm-infested book.

A woman

I sought life

Behind walled gardens.

For all that you gave and did

I owe my speaking to you.

Alive

And still.

Moments of death and despair

Trickle down the clock's throat.

But

I have learnt to fly

Away from instructions.

Walls crumble away into patterns

Merging with river and soil

Flowers and hills

Voices I can hear.

Words pile upon words

Piled up in the memory

Lie a hundred worlds.

Far across the sky

I see the clouds darkening

Lightning and thunder

Scatter my thoughts.

I speak in fragments.

Dying, I have realized,

is a painful act.

Someday I hope

You may find me.

Someday, may be,

You will find my words

Resting on the casuarinas of time.

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