

The Impact of Memory and Sentimental Feelings in Toru Dutt's "Our Casuarina Tree"

Dr Shamala M. Ratnakar

Professor, Dept. of English, Karnatak University, Dharwad
Karnataka State

ABSTRACT

Toru Dutt is an Indian English poet and translator from British India. Her full name was Tarulatta Satta. She was born on March 4th, 1856 in Calcutta. She is regarded as one of the founding figures of Indo-anglian literature. Her poem Our Casuarina Tree is regarded as one of her best works. This paper describes Toru Dutt's memories and feelings connected with a Casuarina tree from her childhood home. The poems reveal about eternal friendships and vanished childhood. It is a physical thing and a psychosomatic individual of the poet's mind. Toru Dutt has conveyed the ideas of natural history as great that contribute to feelings with creature. She rejoices her evocative remembrance of childhood in India with her beautiful siblings. The tree appears to represent the authenticity, the influence and the unending value of her memories. The tree, which once stood proud and enthusiastic, it is at present devoid of life, with only its strong trunk enduring.

Keywords: Nostalgia, moments, childhood, darkling, reminiscent, emotional. Memories and feelings

Toru Dutt is an Indian English poet and translator from British India. Her full name was Tarulatta Satta. She was born on March 4th, 1856 in Calcutta. She is regarded as one of the founding figures of Indo-anglian literature. She has brought out many volumes of poetry in English. Our Casuarina Tree is a poem which celebrates joyous moments of her happy childhood memories and the reminiscent experiences she spent during childhood with her siblings. The prominent elements of the poem are nostalgic moments, yearning and memories associated. The majesty of Casuarina tree symbolising unparalleled beauty loaded with bundle of memories of childhood and it gets as a treasure house of poet's past, cultural heritage and splendour.

Toru Dutt is one of the distinguished Indian English poetess. She was born in a highly cultured Hindu family. Even after the family embraced Christianity she remained a Hindu by heart. Between 1869-73 she lived in France and England and acquired mastery over French and English. She wrote poems in both French and English. She wrote poems in French and brought out their English version

under the title *Sheaves Gleaned in French Fields*. For most of her poetry she drew the theme from Indian source. Sir Edmund Gosse, the renowned critic, has edited Toru's work under the title *Ancient Ballad and Legends of Hindustan*.

In the present poem the poet describes the magnificence of the tree and alludes to its solemn significance to her. The tree being linked up with the poet's own memories of the past the poem is more than an objective description of it. It is a symbol of both time and eternity. Writing about the poem a contemporary critic says, 'In its mastery of phrase and rhythm, in its music of sound and ideas, *Our Casuarina Tree* is a superb piece of writing'

Our Casuarina Tree, the most well-known of Toru Datta's poems was included in her *Miscellaneous Poems* published at the end of the *Ballads*. It is considered as the most revealing of Toru's verse with its nostalgia for the past and an inner vision of sublime beauty. The first stanza presents an objective description of the tree which is pictured as giant wearing the huge scarf of a python-like creeper holding him in his tight but blossomy embrace. The next stanza describes the narrator's enjoyment of the sight of the tree at different hours of the day while the third stanza recalls many tender memories of her past, especially the childhood days spent with her sister and brother. The fourth stanza which takes the form of an apostrophe to the tree is a kind of lament, a human recordation of pain and regret. The last stanza, like that of Keats. 'Ode to a Nightingale' is a tribute to immortality of the tree. "Her poems explore themes of loneliness, longing, patriotism and nostalgia" (Chapman, Alison, 395)

The Poem 'Our Casuarina Tree' is more impressive. Dr Iyengar writes about this poem, "it is more than the poetic evocation of a tree; it is recapturing the past, and immortalizing the moments of time so recaptured. The Tree is both tree and symbol and in it are implicated both time and eternity" (Iyengar, 342)

"Like a huge python, winding round and round
The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars
Up to its very summit near the stars,
A creeper climbs, in whose embrace bound
No other tree could live. But gallantly
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung

In crimson clusters all the boughs among,
Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;
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.
When first casement may is wide open thrown
At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;
Sometimes, and most in winter, - on its crest” (Dutt, 30)

The python refers here to the huge and heavy creeper which, by coiling round the giant tree, keeps it in an almost stifling embrace. ‘Up to its very summit near the stars’, this refers to the great height of the tree. The Casuarinas of Toru Dutt is a tall tree with its peak touching the stars. Its trunk is rugged and there are deep scars on it, either naturally formed or carved by the winding of the wild creeper, which is huge and massive like a python. This huge creeper has so tightly embraced the tree, from foot to head, that any other slender tree would have been crushed down. But the Casuarina is strong. It wears the huge creeper as if it were a narrow strip of cloth worn for the sake of ornamentation. And really there are flowers in crimson clusters all over the tree adding beauty to it. Unto these flowers are attracted the busy buzzing bees throughout the day and onto those boughs gather birds both day and night. Often it is so happens that endless sweet music fills the whole garden during night time emanating from the Casuarina tree. The opening part of the poem is thus an objective description.

Sung darkling from our tree’. This obviously refers to some sweet-singing bird which pours forth its melodies from its dark habitat in the tree. The word ‘darkling’ is reminiscent of Keats ‘s use of it in his ‘ Ode to a Nightingale’ . The ideas of the garden is overflowing with the song poured forth by an unseen bird is itself very reminiscent of the Romantics.

“A gray baboon sits statue-like alone
Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs
His puny offspring leap about and play;
And far and near kokilas hail the day;
And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows” (Dutt, 30)

The sight of a lone baboon sitting statue like on a tree top, the Indian Kokilas hailing the day and our sleepy cows wending their way to their pastures is typically Indian. The poetess has sweet memories and lasting impressions of the tree. She refers to them in second stanza. Every morning when her window is flung open, the first thing she sees rapt in delight is the Casuarina Tree. Her eyes rest there for a while calmly watching the prodigies it presents. Most often during the winter season, a gray baboon, sitting like a statue and welcoming the dawn is a regular sight while her young ones play on the lower boughs beneath. The birds are heard hailing the day in excitement. The drowsy cows are heading their way to the green pastures. In the lucid

wide lake beside the heavy tree, there are white lilies appearing like enmassed snow in the shadow of that tree.

“ And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast
By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast, (Dutt, 31)
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed”

The beautiful spectacle of water-lilies enmassed like snow in the beautiful and vast shadow cast by the hoary trees on the board tank is a striking instance of the transformation wrought on the Indian scene by a Romantic imagination which is now Keatsian and Shelleyan.

“But not because of its magnificence
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul;
Beneath it we have played; though years many roll;
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes shall the tree be ever be ever dears!
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!”(Toru Dutt 31)

The third stanza links up the tree with Toru’s memories of her lost brother and sister. It is not because the tree is so magnificent and beautiful that is dear to the poetess, but because of its association with her childhood when she played there with her brother and sister. Abju and Aru. But they are now no more. The tree shall ever remain dear in her memory for their sake. Whenever she remembers them, hot tears roll down her eyes. The soft murmuring noises of the tree appear to the poet as its lament, a strange, weird speech that may perhaps reach the unknown land where the erstwhile companions have reached. Such phenomenon is unknown to the common sense of man. Yet it is familiar experience to those being who have undaunted faith in them. The Casuarina tree becomes more a symbol than a tree, a symbol, like Keats nightingale, of timelessness and eternity and like Wordsworth’s rainbow a link between the past, the present and the future. While Wordsworth looks back upon the past to realize the way in which the days are bound each to each natural piety, young Toru visualizes a similar continuity by thinking of the future when the tree will continue to be dear to her.

“What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?
It is the tree’s lament, an eerie speech,
That haply to the unknown land may reach.”(32)

The sea breaking on a shingle beach that is on a pebble. Covered beach produces a ringing, rattling sound which sounds dirge-like. The lines are reminiscent of Arnold’s ‘ Dover beach’ while the last two lines echo a sentiment similar to that which finds expression in the Nightingale Ode: The dirge-like murmur sent forth by the tree becomes again symbolic of a universal wail, the still sad music of humanity which has been heard for centuries across many

alien shores. This idea is fully developed in the stanza that follows.

“ And the waves gently kissed the classic shore
Of France or Italy, beneath the moon
When earth lay tranced in a dreamless swoon:”
A beautiful image which is at once Shelleyan and Arnoldian.
“ Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,
They form, O Tree, as in my happier prime” (Dutt, 32)

The tree which had been a physical and emotional companion in her childhood is no longer a mere tree in her memory but a sublime form, a symbol of time and timeless eternity. The poet believes so; and she herself had heard the mournful music of the tree from far of France and Italy, during a moonlit night when the whole earth was calm as if in a trance. And whenever she heard the music she saw a sublime form before her mind's eye- that was the form of the Casuarina as she remembered it when she saw it in her happy childhood.

“ I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.
Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay”
An obvious reference to her dear Aru and Abju who had died very early.
“Unto thy honour, Tree, beloved of those
Who now is blessed sleep for aye repose,
Dearer than life to me, alas! Were they !” (Dutt, 33)

Thus, the fourth stanza humanizes the tree, for its lament is a human recordation of pain and regret. The reference to the trees of Borrowdale makes it clear that equality tender and nostalgic are her memories of the English Landscape. A careful reading of the poem should reveal that even her portrayal of the Indian landscape is often coloured by such memories of familiar English rural scenes.

Mayst thou be numbered when my days are done?
With deathless trees-like those in Borrowdale,
Under whose awful branches lingered pale
Fear, trembling Hope and Death, the skeleton,
And time the shadow; and though weak the verse
That would thy beauty fain, oh fain rehearse,
May Love defend thee from oblivion's curse?”(Dutt, 33)

About the Author



Dr Shamala M. Ratnakar, Professor, Department of English, Karnatak University, Dharwad. Her areas of specialisation are Indian English Literature, Gender Studies, Dalit Literature, Translation Studies, Subaltern Studies and Higher Education.

In the last stanza the poetess stresses as it were on the immortality of the tree. The main reason in consecrating a song for the trees is that it was loved by those departed souls who are for her more than her life. The poetess wishes that her casuarina also should be counted among those trees, which immortalized in literature, like the yew trees of Borrowdale of whom Wordsworth sang eloquently. Toru Dutt's allusion to Wordsworth's yew tree of Borrowdale those trees of vast circumference and gloom profound, symbols of eternity reflect her wish to immortalize the Casuarina tree, the companion of her childhood, and thus to seek an indirect self-fulfillment. The poet knows her limitation and humbly wishes that though her poetry is weak by which she wanted to immortalize the tree, her love for it at least would make it remembered for ever.

Though in simple and clear terms, Toru Dutt has been able to strike the right note. Her sensuousness is amazing. It is not a mere recollection, but a mystic apprehension. Casuarina is not a mere peg to hang feelings on, to loosen her feelings on, and to loosen her heart. The poem gives us an idea of the tragedy that Toru's life was. In the context of the poet's life, the poem gain power and poignancy. It is constitute enough evidence of Toru's capacity as a poet-unmistakable autobiographical element, pathos-elegiac note, outpourings of soul's sense of tragedy and loss.

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