

Toru Dutt's Concern for Indian Culture and Immortal Hindu Mythology in *Ancient Ballads*

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Abstract

Indian culture is embodied in the collective consciousness of the nation governed by *Sanatana Dharama* the ancient yet eternal religion symbolized by the *Vedas*, the *Upnishadas* and the *Gita*. The *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* of Toru Dutt is replete with all the Indian cultural trends such as the supremacy of the doctrine of *Karma*, non-attachment from worldly things, self-surrender, devotion, illusiveness of this world, love, fidelity and parental devotion. 'Savitri,' 'The Legend of Dhruva' and 'Sindhu' present the doctrine of *Karma*. In the poem 'Savitri', Savitri tells Yama the doctrine of *Karma*. Toru Dutt has an ardent eye to feel the transitoriness and nothingness of this life. For her, life is a bubble on water of the earth and when man glances at it, it dies at the very moment and exists no more. The Indian mythology speaks about the devotion to the parents and Guru. In India both of them are considered equal to God. For the attainment of God, one should whole-heartedly devote to Him. If one loses one's life in obedience to Him, his greatest obligation is done. Shraavan Kumar, an ideal son sacrifices his whole life for the service of his parents and also breathes his last in their service. Chastity and love is another name of Savitri and Sita, Savitri falls in love with Satyavan and decides to marry him. Toru Dutt who was the innovative poetess of India, following the determinate sense and wisdom of life through poetry, endured the base of truth where Hindu views and philosophy were subjected. Thus, her poetry is a journey into the gallery of Indian mythology and Indian culture.

Keywords- Peace, Chastity, Scriptures, Hinduism, Devotion, Sacrifice

The cultural and civilized history of India has been the product of the Vedic prophets, the vigil of the saints, the assumptions of the Hindu philosophers and the imagination of the poets of India. India is known by the total sum of the ways of living, made by human beings and conducted from one generation to another through the long practice. Dr. Mahashweta Chaturvedi observes, "The ancient scriptures and culture of the particular country or society have a remarkable influence on the life, education, business, politics, social fields." (Voice of World Peace in the Poetry of Dr. Kazuyosi Ikeda 48) All other in this wide world should take a lesson to lead the happy and contended way of life from the cultural leaders of this land

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Bharata. Dr. Pronab Bandyopadhyay says, “Culture aims at accepting a complete man with his integrated personality, by fulfilling all of his short-comings and improving upon his mental understanding.” (*Indian Culture and Heritage* 7)

Indian culture has an inherent vitality. It has been relieved, rekindled and re-integrated from age to age. Valmiki, Vyas, Manu, Buddha, Tulsidas, Chaitanya and a host of others are living influences eternally operating on Indian life. Indian culture is embodied in the collective consciousness of the nation governed by *Sanatana Dharama* the ancient yet eternal religion symbolized by the *Vedas*, the *Upnishadas* and the *Gita*. The *Ancient Ballads* is replete with all the Indian cultural trends such as the supremacy of the doctrine of *Karma*, non-attachment from worldly things, self-surrender, devotion, illusiveness of this world, love, fidelity and parental devotion. Dr A. N. Dwivedi says about the Indian epics, “These classics embody the highest ideals of culture and civilization in ancient India.” (Dwivedi 84)

The doctrine of *Karma* is an illustrious doctrine of India’s culture. The law of *Karma* is purely based on action. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction and reflection. C.W. Leadbeater states, “The first thing is to believe in the law of *Karma*. If you do good things, good will come out, if you do bad things, evil will come.” (The Noble Eight Fold Path 43) The law of *Karma* based on action and result, performance and consequence determines when, where, how and why one will have to suffer or get reward.

‘Savitri,’ The Legend of Dhruva and ‘Sindhu’ present the doctrine of *Karma*. In the poem ‘Savitri’, Savitri tells Yama the doctrine of *Karma*. Dr. Satish Kumar rightly observes, “Savitri tells Yama that man has to reap the consequence of his acts. Here we find the philosophy of *Karma*.” (Toru Dutt and Savitri 14-15) Savitri says that all have to suffer the results of their actions irrespective of the nature of their deeds. No one can take the burden of others good or bad actions and “he must bear their consequence.” (Dutt 67)

The doctrine of *Karma* dominates the story of Dhruva and the principle of *Karma* is told to Dhruva by his mother when his father’s second wife humiliates him. His mother Suneetee tells him that the misdeeds of the previous birth follow the man in the next birth also. So is the case with them. Perhaps, they might have done wrong to the people in their last birth, so, they are not the favourite of king and they are facing disfavor of the king and suffering a lot of discomforts in this life.

The sins of previous lives must bear their fruits

... who bear

Only the name of wife without the powers

But pine and suffer for our ancient sins. (Dutt 110)

She teaches a lesson of good actions and their outcome and also states as to how to deal with the crisis. She tells her son Dhruva that man must be satisfied with his fate or whatever he has got in the present life because, dissatisfaction is the mother of all miseries. Shae says that only that man can earn virtues in life who does not complain of his misfortunes and keep on doing good and virtuous actions. Dr. Annie Besant and Dr. Bhagwan Das say, “The only

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thing that can be done is to take it as it comes, bad or good, and work it out contentedly and patiently. In it we are paying our past debts and thus getting rid of many liabilities.” (Das 74)

In another poem ‘Sindhu’, Toru Dutt speaks about *Karma* through the story of king Dasarath and Shravan Kumar. Shravn Kumar has to face pitiful death owing to his past deeds. He says:

The curse of blood is on thee now,
Blood calls for red blood still;
And so I die – a bloody death. (Dutt 135)

Therefore, in the forthcoming life Dasarath has to bear the consequences of his deeds and he also dies in the memory of his son Rama like Shravan Kumar’s parents.

ToruDutt has an ardent eye to feel the transitoriness and nothingness of this life. For her, life is a bubble on water of the earth and when man glances at it, it dies at the very moment and exists no more. Toru Dutt expresses her feelings about this naught world. She says:

I know that in this transcient world
All is delusion, - nothing true;
I know its shows are mists unfurled
To please and vanish. (Dutt 66)

Eklavya also regards life as a vain shadow:

For life is a shadow vain,
Until the utmost goal we reach. (Dutt 115)

The desire for non-attachment from the worldly things is a notable trend of Indian culture. Man must liberate himself from attachment to fleeting things and grow strong and firm against temptations. It is a sense of attachment, which causes distress, sorrow, agony, and agitation. Toru’s poems speak strongly about non-attachment from worldly things. She had a special mode of non-attachment on worldly things when she was sorrowful, but she had the total devotion for God which was based on Hindu views and philosophy.

King Bharat, the great hermit king of Saligram leaves all worldly desires for money and power and dwells in forest to attain supreme bliss. Toru Dutt sings:

... But he lifts
His kingdom in the forest shades to dwell. (Dutt 101)
And changed his scepter for a hermit’s staff.

And he:

... Endeavoured to attain
Perfect dominion on his soul. (Dutt 101-102)

Dhruva also leaves worldly attachment in tender age after receiving ill-treatment from his second mother. His mother Suneetee tells him the nothingness of worldly desires and instantly decides:

Let Uttama, my brother, -not thy son, -

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My father pleases to confer on him. (Dutt 112)
He wishes to acquire the place in God's heart:

. . . Aye a place

Far, far above the highest of this earth. (Dutt 112)

Prahlad also realizes the lesson of non-attachment. Even the threat of his tyrant father Heerun Kasyapu to forget God and worship his father cannot resist him to become one with God. He says:

All, all are futile, - so I feel,
For me, O father, none of these,
That is true knowledge which can show
The glory of the living Gods, - (Dutt 149)

The attainment of divine nectar is the ultimate goal of man's life. So, he should not be heedless to it. Dr. Purnima Roy also wishes the same her poem 'In Search of a Spring Nectar',

Desires, longings, like water – hyacinths
Had been amassed in the pond of body.
And becoming worn out with senility
I proceed in search of a spring of nectar. (Mirza 27)

The God is omnipresent and omnipotent. He dwells in every atom of this universe. When Prahlad's father asks him about God, he says that God is the creator of this whole world; all creatures, vegetations, hills and dales. Without Him, the world cannot have the living life in it.

The Indian mythology speaks about the devotion to the parents and Guru. In India both of them are considered equal to God. For the attainment of God, one should wholeheartedly devote to Him. If one loses one's life in obedience to Him, his greatest obligation is done. Shravan Kumar, an ideal son sacrifices his whole life for the service of his parents and also breathes his last in their service. Even on the verge of death, he cares for his old parents and cries:

Oh God; it said – "I die, - I die,
Who, I'll carry home the pail ? (Dutt 131)

Though the father of Prahlad is a tyrant and does every attempt to crush him but he does not leave reverence for him. He says that even his father give him hard punishments for loving God and not loving him, but he will never leave his love and reverence for his parents. He says,

Let not my words, Sire, give offence
To thee (Dutt 151)

Savitri also goes in the same line concerning the devotion to the parents. She does not hide anything from his parents about his first love. She frankly tells her mother about this. Toru Dutt voices this as:

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Savitri's first care was all to tell

Her mother all her feelings new. (Dutt 42)

Eklavya is the true disciple of his teacher. He is a glorious illustration of *Guru Bhakti*. Dronacharya declines to teach him, then he makes a statue of the clay. Rohini Gupta says in her poem 'Eklavya':

the child's eyes smiled

Stooping to fill the curve

With water, he sat

Down to build a clay God. (R. Gupta 15)

When Dronacharya asks his right thumb in his preceptorial fee, he does not deny and severs the thumb with sharp knife:

Glanced the sharp knife one moment high,

The severed thumb was on the sod. (Dutt 124)

Rightly Padmini Sen Gupta observes, "But the gallant youth, because he promises his master something that is dearest to him, sacrifices his self-attained skill." (Toru Dutt : Makers of Indian Literature 86)

Women are the jewels of Indian culture. Women like Savitri, Sita, Gargi, Draupadi, Anusuya and Radha have glorified India and are basically known for their chastity and fidelity. H.H.Sri. Pandrimalai Swamigal says: "Indian culture lays great emphasis on the sacredness of the marriage tie. The wife is the *Sahadharmaacharini*. She is the co-partner in all the rites and actions performed by her husband." ('The Basic Tenets of Indian Culture' 87) Chastity and love is another name of Savitri and Sita, Savitri falls in love with Satyavan and decides to marry him. But when Narad Muni discards her marriage with Satyavan owing to the future disaster, she firmly declares:

Once and once only, have I given

My heart and faith – 'tis past recall;

* * * * *

Unwedded to my dying day

I must, my father dear, remain. (Dutt 47)

Indian woman cannot think of another man in her life and faces all the hurdles with her husband. Therefore, Savitri takes her husband out of the jaws of death. The other embodiment of love and chastity is Sita who also goes with Rama to the wood and observes an ordinary life. In the poem 'Lakshman,' Sita becomes much troubled to hear Rama's voice. She gets angry at Lakshman and starts abusing him. Indian women cannot resist her temper and emotions when her husband's life is in danger. So, also Sita wants to follow her husband even at the cost of her life. She says:

If fire can burn, or water drown,

I follow him: - choose what thou wilt. (Dutt 86)

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She decides to break her breaths in case of her husband's death. She chides Lakshman:

Learn this – whatever comes may come.

But I shall not survive my love. (Dutt 86)

The chief requisite of Man's life is to be human. Indian culture and Hindu mythology fulfill these requisites. Toru Dutt who was the innovative poetess of India, following the determinate sense and wisdom of life through poetry, endured the base of truth where Hindu views and philosophy were subjected. Thus, her poetry is a journey into the gallery of Indian mythology. Dr. S.C. Agarwal also asserts, "She had read the Indian classics in original Sanskrit, and absorbed the basic of Hinduism in her own nature. She had a deep knowledge of the ancient Indian myths and legends. (Toru Dutt's Lakshman 9)

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