

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2017.2.5.59>

The Emergence of New Woman in Toru Dutt's *Savitri*

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Abstract

The New Woman is a modern term that opens its door ajar for penetration of those women, who have been acquiring the submissive position throughout the decade, to transform themselves anew. This 19th century's ray of hope radiates everywhere and Indian culture is not also exceptional. The idea of the modern women receives its content into the pens of Indo-Anglican writers and the purpose of this paper is to present this concept of new woman through the poem of Toru Dutt.

Keywords- *New Woman, Patriarchal, Ideology, Subjectivity, Traditionality, Modernity*

Introduction

The newish notion of 'New Woman' comes into existence as a fruit of longtime efforts. The struggle for woman's proper position in society begins centuries ago and finally takes its form in the 19th century England. This modern idea of 'New Woman' elevates in searching of a woman's true self. Their consciousness of their proper agency strikes their subconscious mind and impregnates their enthusiasm about education and economic freedom that erects them as an independent figure to demonstrate the exact womanhood. They challenge the ideology of 'Angel in the house' and come out as a strong, passionate one with the profound of standing shoulder-to-shoulder with their male counterpart. This woman questions the traditional gender norms and fights for equality in various spheres of life like economic, political, social, educational, sexual rights and duties in patriarchal societies. This very idea of women emancipation ameliorates at that century, indeed, but its seeds were sowed long ago which expanded during the Victorian century more and the propagation of it is from West to East. In India this modern thought flares itself with the writings of various male and female renowned, well-versed Indo-Anglican writers whose zeal presents themselves modern in their own manners. The concept of new woman works as a rescuer of submissive women who is always being positioned under the feet of male chauvinism. Violating the patriarchal ideology, that posits themselves as inferior, these women emerge with slogans of not being bound within the barrier of male anymore. The ideology that regards women as an asset of their husband is no longer tolerated by them. Realizing the necessity of education in

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their lives these women become desperate enough to sought against the norm. This stereotypical ideas about women predominate the postcolonial India also and well-known Bengali Hindu writers portray these picture of society, among them the name of Toru Dutt is quite famous. This trilingual poetess in her poem *Savitri* presents her protagonist Savitri as a new woman and my intention here to articulate those features layer by layer with which Savitri sloughs herself from the traditionality to modernity.

From the Dutt Family Album it is clear that Govin Chunder Dutt tries to construct a bridge with western culture to provide his daughters western education and his well-built acquaintance flourishes into Toru Dutt more. Her interest in mythologies and mythical characters drags her to the ocean of knowledge and posits her into the middle of it. The poem *Savitri* emits as a branch of that ocean but with a different meaning and interpretation. Her other poems like *Sita* shows the agony of the woman character but presentation of poem *Savitri* is the ecstasy of the female character. Perhaps aghast with the present societal condition of women Toru Dutt wishes to delve into the primeval days where women were much more free than today. They had freedom to roam, freedom to speak out even to sought their utmost. And in its consequence in this poem Toru Dutt reflects her romanticism and presentation of *Savitri* asserts how legging behind the cultural norms she tears all the ideologies which are created only for women. In this postcolonial India where women always are ready to veil themselves, Toru Dutt's *Savitri* removes that veil and negotiates the norms that are burden upon her. The ancient norm has created certain roles for female and women are bound to abide it as these are 'natural' for their position. This gender biased thought is not applicable to *Savitri* who in her 'boyish freedom' wonders here and there. Dutt writes,

In those far-off primeval days
Fair India's daughters were not pent
In closed zrenanas. On her ways
Savitri at her pleasure went
Whither she chose, (10)

The ideological belief of keeping women as the 'Other' is demolished throughout the character of her. Her very attempt to negotiate the norm of abiding the male members breaks her traditionality. She is not that 'situated' woman who according to Simone de Beauvoir already performs those roles that are given to her. Even her argument with the God of Death Yama shows her endavour to present herself anew. Throughout the character of *Savitri*, Toru Dutt transgresses the patriarchal stereotypical idea of veiling a woman. According to Luce Irigary "the woman always lacks subjectivity in discourses because she is constructed always as the other of the man, never as a free subject with her own identity. But this hegemony is interrupted by *Savitri* and she presents her subjectivity with her discourse with the others.

Savitri is not familiar with the idea of 'true woman' and therefore her attitude does not seem to provide her inferiority. She desperately builds her subjectivity through her

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rationality, her wit and her present sense of mind. She raises her voice to express her desire for freedom, for free love, for sexual desire and for authenticity. At that era when women body, sexuality, and desire is totally controlled by men, Savitri hands over the power and controls the male sexuality herself with dexterity. Sharad Srivastava said, "A new woman is 'new' if her basic concerns are deeper than merely seeking equality with men, asserting her own personality and insisting upon her own rights as a woman and as an equal being" (97). Thus Savitri in order to assert her subjectivity demands equality as well as the expression of her own personality. But the question may easily arise that without coming out of the institution of marriage that is actually intent to control women, why she vows the marriage life and how her marriage does not reflect compromising with traditionality. It is true that she gets married but this is not her surrender to patriarchy. She walks along with the tradition and modern culture. Moreover her loud voice of sexual desire widens her path. After seeing Satyavan for the first time into the forest, she falls for him and announces her desire to marry that 'tall and lithe' man. The utterance of these adjectives of Satyavan's physic really shows how Savitri is desperate to marry that guy. Even when her parents orders her to forget Satyavan she utters, "And why should I? / When I have given my heart away, though but in thought, am I take back? / Forbid it, Heaven (13)." And her marriage with him is her choice which in terms of the existential feminists the way to head towards authenticity. Actually Savitri is a perfect collaboration of both traditionality as well as modernity who is well aware about her true self. Sushie Tharur's words in that case is true when she said, "Toru Dutt located Savitri as 'reactive construction', of a free woman to counter the negative image projected by the British and to idealize pre colonial golden past of India" (254)

This pre colonial woman's capability of subjugation others idealizes Savitri into the modern concept. From the very beginning of Toru Dutt's fine description of her it shows how Savitri tames every male members of her life by impelling them to fall into the magical spell of her speech. Her courage to go beyond the rules of arranged marriage and announces her free love for Satyavan is quite imaginable at that time. But with her power of speech she compels her parents and gets allowance to walk into the path of her own choice. Again both her husband and her father-in-law become a prey of her deftness. She convinces her father-in-law to be a companion of her husband's into the forest in which Satyavan's father obstructs. Even the God of Death, the Yama Himself is not spared. After the death of Satyavan God Yama Himself arrives to take the corpse away with him, Savitri urges Him to bless her in getting her husband's life again. As pertinacious she is, Yama offers her three boons, which she accepts cleverly. In the first boon Savitri wants her father-in-law's wealth back and also his eye-sight, that is fulfilled. In the next one her desire is to become the mother of hundred sons and with this the picture of her rationality is beautifully portrayed. Getting the second desire fulfilled, Savitri now demands for the life of her husband which Yama has to return as he cannot get himself out from the tactics of

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Savitri. Thus Savitri's conscience, her subjectivity, her authenticity and sexuality truly construct her new woman notion outside her 'zenanas'..

Gaining her husband's life back and proving herself as a strong woman Savitri expresses her true agency, herself identity and acquiring identity uplifts her status as a new woman who can also acquire her equality in the society. She shows that through her power of knowledge she tames any male either it is her father-in-law or the Almighty Himself. We cannot deny that it is only because of her, King Doyutsman got his eyesight back and his ruling power again. Satyavan's death and with it the win of male curse may bring in her life the tag line of a weak character but she after returning Satyavan's life proves her power to control male and makes the patriarchy false. Keeping the patriarchy within her fist she impels every male around her to agree with her own decision. By making Savitri a modern and new woman Toru Dutt tries to express all her grievances which she feels towards the society of her time. This Indo-Anglican poetess being totally different from her predecessors left a remarkable mark through her descriptions of these mythological characters and presenting them as modern in the Renaissance Bengal of the 19th century India. According to Rosinka Chaudhuri again, "Her (Toru Dutt's) modernism is evident from the way the mythological content of her poems does not remain extrinsic to her work as in the case of her predecessors, but is internalized in a consciousness that she both invokes and interrogates as she creates her own style". (167)

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