

STUDY OF MYTHOLOGY AND RELIGION IN THE POEM OF TORU DUTT

**DR. BINDU SHAH
GUJARAT, INDIA.**

Abstract

Indian epics, mythology and history were echoed in literature. The emergence of women poets is also significant in Indian English Poetry. Toru Dutt is one of the distinguished authors in Indian English Literature. Her work may be meager, but it is of lasting worth. The literary personality of Toru Dutt appears before us at least in three distinct forms- as a poet, as a prose writer and as a writer of letters. Her poetry is essentially of her race and her land. She was fully soaked in Hindu myths and legends. Though converted Christian, she had a deep respect for Hindu Gods and Goddesses. The Hindu doctrine of Karma is nicely enunciated in "The Legend of Dhruva," Of all poems contained in the volume, "Savitri" is the nearest to the Indian temper and the most articulate expression of Vedantic Philosophy. Toru sang the glorious vision of mother land in her Ancient Legends and Ballads of Hindustan, published after her death. This paper will elaborate the depth and understanding of our "Puranas", "Upnishadas" and Cultural values shown by Toru Dutt in her very short span of literary career.

Keywords: *Indianness, mythology, legends, female voice, religion*

STUDY OF MYTHOLOGY AND RELIGION IN THE POEM OF TORU DUTT

-DR. BINDU SHAH

India is a holy land of unity in diversity. Language forms one of the main elements in India's cultural life. It is said that Indian literature is one which written in many languages. It was indeed English language and literature that helped to modernize the Indian mind, build up the concept of Indian nationalism and inspired democratic ideals. Indian epic, mythology and history was echoed in literature. A great deal of Indian literature shows its Indian ness and universality because the modes of leaving and cultural heritage are basically the same all over the country in spite of their local variations. The emergence of women poets is also significant in Indian English poetry. Many of the women poets are weak voices and minor poets, but some of them are very powerful and have made a mark on horizon of Indian English poetry. Indian English female poets are sensitive, original, creative, personal and bold.

Toru Dutt is one of the distinguished authors in Indian English Literature. Her work may be meager, but it is of lasting worth. She is one of the poignant examples of those who before their proper time pass through the door of darkness. Her life is a mixed story of sunshine and sorrow, laughter and pathos, beauty and tragedy, success and failure. If her literary work fills us with joy and awe, her premature death leaves us sad and repenting.

Born on March 4, 1856, in a Hindu family in Rambagan, Toru was brought up by her parents in a fine cultural atmosphere. Her father, GovinChunderDutt, was a good poet and linguist. Besides contributing to *The Dutt Family Album* (1870), which also contained poems by Hur Chunder, Omesh Chunder and Greece Chunder, Govin Chunder published *The Loyal Hours* (1876) and *Cherry Stones* (1881), both containing fine English verses. Her mother, Kshetramoni, was well-versed in Bengali and English, and she translated *The Blood*

of Jesus from English into Bengali. She as well as her husband wielded a profound influence on the daughters, Aru and Toru.

In 1875, Toru along with her father started studying Sanskrit. She arranged for the private publication of *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*, and it came out in March 1876. Promoted by the success of the *Sheaf*, she declared her hope that she would be able to bring out another 'Sheaf', not gleaned in French but in Sanskrit fields. Toru's letters to Mary Martin tell an inspiring tale about the situation in which she began her readings in Sanskrit and about the courses which she undertook therein. They reveal also the fact that she mastered this intricate language within a space of only ten months. The classical Sanskrit works which she now read are: the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Sakuntala*, the *Vishnu Purana*, and the *Bhagavata Purana*. These readings gave her woman's imaginative free play, and she translated, despite her failing health, a few pieces from the original Sanskrit into English verse.

After her death, GovinChunder searched her papers and discovered the manuscripts of an unfinished romance in English entitled *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden* and a complete French novel *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* and *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. He made arrangements for their publication, supplying the missing links wherever necessary. Toru lived in a period of Indian History which was overshadowed by Macaulay's *Minute* and Lord William Bentinck's ruling of 1835, promoting European education among Indian masses and channelizing all educational funds towards the use of 'English Education alone'. The learning of English was made compulsory, and the people, not realizing the enormity of the 'crime' of foreign rulers forcing their tongue on the ruled, took it as a matter of course that all educated Indians should learn English. Toru Dutt also learned English, and learned it marvelously, but she, as contrasted to ordinary Indians, was quick to realize that her own Oriental background of literature was so precious that she would have to commingle it with her abundant European knowledge. This 'commingling' or cross-fertilization of Eastern and Western ideas is at the root of the Indian renaissance which took place in the nineteenth century.

In this 'renaissance' the Dutt - Michael Madhusudan, GovinChunder and his brothers, and Toru Dutt - played a prominent role. As for Toru Dutt, she rendered several

French poems into English and also several Sanskrit anecdotes and legends into delightful English verse. Thus, she interplayed the culture of her land with that of England and France.

The literary personality of Toru Dutt appears before us at least in three distinct forms – as a poet, as a prose writer, and as a writer of letters. As a poetess, she gave us two poetical collections and a few short poems; as a prose writer, two novels, two essays, and translation of two speeches delivered in the French Legislative Assembly; and as a writer of letters, 53 letters addressed to Miss Mary Martin and quite a few to Mlle. Clarisse Bader. And what is bewildering is the fact that she gave this much to us within a very short span of time towards the close of her life.

Toru Dutt is one of the major Indian English Poets. She produced a small body of poetry. Her well-known volumes are: *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* and *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. Her poetic output is meager indeed, but it is of permanent value. The literary world was somewhat reluctant in the beginning to acknowledge her, as in case of many others, as a genius, but by and by it had to yield to her genuine claim.

As a poetess, Toru compels attention. The most striking feature of her poetry is its lyricism. Some of her renderings in the *Sheaf* and most of the poems in *Ancient Ballads* are marked by lyrical fire. We may take up the following illustration from the *Sheaf* in which there is a sweep in these lines. A soft music rings in our ears while we are reading them.

*Love cheered for a while
My morn with his ray,
But like a ripple or smile
My youth passed away.
Now near Beauty I sigh,
But fled is the spring!
Sing – said God in reply,
Chant poor little thing.*

The poetess grows rapturous here in describing the joyous marriage procession marching along the streets of Madra. This is very clear in the repetitive device adopted in the use of words by her. The occasion of descriptive is such as renders the poetess lyrical

and effusive in the expression of her soft, secret feelings. The simplicity of her verse reminds one of Keats and Shelley.

In describing natural scenes and sights, Toru was an expert. The *champak* and the lotus and the *kokila* ever inspired her to sing melodious songs in utter abandon. In the face of natural beauty, she was deeply moved. It made her heart leap up with an unspeakable delight, and her lips, like Keats', quivered in a state of ecstasy.

Toru was keenly sensitive to Nature, especially to sound and colour. Her poems like "Baugmaree", "The Lotus" and "Our Casuarina Tree" bear it out. Toru had a remarkable faculty of observation. It is this that led her to comment on men, women and their manners. She presented sketches of Indian social life and reflections on social problems.

Toru's poetry is essentially of her race and her land. She was fully soaked in Hindu myths and legends; her mother was greatly instrumental in it. She aptly interpreted the culture of her country to foreign lands. Many Hindu ideals find room in her poetry. As a young girl of open heart and broad mind, Toru definitely gave utterance to her soft feelings about France and England; she was a connoisseur of the rich languages of these countries. But she remained an Indian at heart, and her poetry, especially *Ancient Ballads*, is steeped in Hindu thought and tradition.

Though a converted Christian, she had a deep respect for Hindu gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines. The ancient Vedic gods surely fascinated her. She uttered aloud the fatalistic doctrine of popular philosophy of her nation in the following lines:

*Death comes to all or soon or late
And peace is but a wandering fire;
[Ibid.]*

There is another passage typically Indian, bearing the unmistakable stamp of *Vedanta* and expressing a philosophy which she had inherited and a creed which she had naturally imbibed. This passage is:

*I know that in this transient world
All is delusion, - nothing true;
I know its shows are mists unfurled
To please and vanish. To renew
Its bubble joys, be magic bound
In Maya's network frail and fair,
Is not my aim!*

[Ibid.]

The Hindu doctrine of *Karma* is nicely enunciated in "The Legend of Dhruva". It is not that Toru is simply primitive and native, and nothing more. On the contrary, she gave a modern twist to some of her lays, and this adds flavor to them. The story of Prahlad suggests a political moral which might well have served as a motto for a Parisian mob during the French Revolution. In choosing the legends of the past, she was simply feeding, as the modern poet-critic T. S. Eliot believes, the present, for anything creative can be built only on the edifice of tradition. So we can say, in a way, that Toru was one of the 'modern' poets drawing for her sources upon the popular tales of the past.

It may be reasonably said that Toru had a rare gift of story-telling, of arousing interest and curiosity, of creating suspense, and of delineating memorable characters. She did attain some distinction in narrative poetry. She described the death of Satyavan with a masterly skill.

One may easily mark Toru's scholarly taste as reflected in her poetry. If *Ancient Ballads* indicates her background of Sanskrit, the *Sheaf* shows her sound knowledge of French. She also knew Bengali to some extent. The two volumes of her poetry reveal her vast readings in English Literature too. She showed discrimination in selecting the French poets for her renderings. Even as a translator, Toru earned tributes from her own land and from abroad. It is in her translations that the germ of her future poetry lies. It is in them that her scholarship is quite evident. Critics have invariably praised her notes appended to the *Sheaf*. She had the real worth of a literary critic.

Toru's imagery is often drawn with a masculine vigor and fearlessness. Though a frail woman herself, she exhibited a wonderful power in grappling with the sublime and the terrible. In her "Savitri", we have:

*Night with ebon wing
Hovers above.
And in "Prahlad":
A terror both of gods and men
Was HeerunKasyapu, the King:
No bear more sullen in its den,
No tiger quicker at the spring.*

Toru's images are usually bold and startling, yet pertinent and revealing.

Toru's poetic diction is mostly simple and clear. Occasionally, there is archaism in it. Toru occupies a prominent place, perhaps next to none, in Indian English Poetry. And there can be no two opinions about the fact that Toru Dutt is a greater poet more than for her prose. As in case of her poetry, her prose is small in output but significant in marking yet another milestone in her artistic development.

She as a prose writer has given us *Bianca, or The Young Spanish Maiden* and *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* as novels, besides the two essays on Leconte de Lisle and Henry Vivian Derozio, the two translations of original French speeches delivered by Victor Hugo and M. Thiers, generally known as *A Scene from Contemporary History*, and letters to Mary and Bader.

In the two novels, Toru displayed her rare ability as a novelist. In weaving a tragic plot, in drawing subtle characters, in creating suspense, and in describing a person, place or thing, Toru shows a remarkable inventiveness and vigor of mind. Of the two novels, *Bianca* is incomplete and ends abruptly, while *Le Journal* grows to moderate proportion and ends somewhat convincingly. Both the novels are dominated by female characters. *Bianca* dominates the action in the first novel and *Marguerite* in the second.

Rabindranath Tagore once remarked that only a handful of writers had been eminent as letter-writers and those few were women. This is especially true of Toru Dutt. In her delightful letters written to Mary and Bader, Toru reveals all that is feminine and childlike in her – rose berries, watermelons, mangoes, pine-apples, birds, cats, mares, even a white pony, and flowers that bring fresh memories. But what is surprising is that she suddenly emerges as a detached spectator amidst the pageantry of life glittering with the visual imagery of elephant processions, horse-races and boat-races. The reader's mind is arrested by the *leitmotif* of her letter, i.e., her artistic yearning and its incessant struggles with the prolonged illness. Her weak health, instead of deterring her from the joys in the scenes of life, acted as a stimulus for her to get involved in them.

It is through her letters that we form a true and complete picture of Toru's hopes and aspirations and of her day-to-day performance. For the preservation of these letters, thanks are due to her care-taking friends and to Harihar Das who helped a lot in revealing the real life-story of Toru Dutt. It is in her letters that Toru laid bare her heart – her deep

affection for England and France, her passion for her garden-house, its flowers and fruits and birds, her absorption in Sanskrit studies, and, like the refrain of a tragic chorus, her courageous hope that she would triumph over illness and disease.

While learning Sanskrit, Toru had forecast that she would soon be bringing out another 'Sheaf' gleaned in Indian fields. That 'Sheaf' is *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. The need for roots prompted the poetess to write *Ancient Ballads*. It is essentially native in genre and outlook. For all her western training and faith, Toru never ceased to be Indian. The ancient myths and legends were neither exotic nor alien to her. Now Toru could feel her feet on hospitable soil, and satisfy the secret longings of her soul for roots in the consciousness of the race. The *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Vishnu Purana*, and the *BhagavataPuran* gave her woman's imagination free play, and she could re-enact the inspiring stories of illustrious men and women of the past. She was attracted to Hindu myths and legends, and her Christian faith did not conflict with this attraction.

After all, she was an Indian woman writing in a foreign medium; she was, like her successor Sarojini Naidu, "autochthonous" and one with India's women singers of the past. There is no room now for artificiality or stimulated hot-house efflorescence. In this work Toru agreeably responds to the heart-beats of the antique racial tradition. As a child, she had heard the stories of the great Hindu epics and the *Puranas*, the stories of mystery, miracle and local tradition, from the lips of her own mother. Later studies in Sanskrit had given a keen poetic edge to the stories and legends of India. The ancient ballads really seemed to answer to a profound inner need for links with the living past of the country as well as they served her poetic purpose.

Ancient Ballads appeared in 1882 after the death of Toru Dutt, with an introduction by noted English critic Sir Edmund Gosse. It was, no doubt, written under the active influence of her parents. It has been the most popular of Toru's works. It has fairly drawn the attention of critics and annotators. One of the critics, T.O.D. Dunn noted that:

This volume, published by Kegan Paul, contains her latest best work. It is not large in quantity, but its value is undeniable. Unlike her predecessors, Toru Dutt did not wilfully anglicise her ideas. For the first time in literature of this kind, there is struck a genuinely

Indian note and through the medium of a perfect English expression there is conveyed something of the sincerity of a mind proud of the intellectual traditions of its native land ...

Each individual poem contained in *Ancient Ballads* has already drawn the attention of critics. The first poem is "Savitri", which is also the longest legend in the volume. It narrates the fortune of the princess Savitri and her courageous encounter with the God of Death. The constancy of the heroine, her chastity, and her extraordinary devotion to her husband Satyavan are still considered as the highest standard of conjugal love today. It is one of the most beautiful legends in the Mahabharata, for it describes in an impassioned language the persistence with which Savitri pleads with Death to restore her husband's life, and her pure and deep love for Satyavan is sufficient to overcome all obstacles. The story is recounted in an absorbing way, and it is with breathless anxiety that the reader awaits the final victory of Savitri. Toru is at home in ballad form.

The ballad is in five parts. In the first part, we get information about Savitri's birth and parentage, her unusual grace, her falling in love with Satyavan, and her parents' and Narad Muni's approval of her marriage with the youth of her heart. In the second, we have Savitri's marriage with Satyavan, her going to the hermitage, her constant devotion to gods and goddesses by keeping fasts and vigils and by offering prayers, Satyavan's departure for the forest along with Savitri, and the acute pain in Satyavan's head. In the third, the session in Death's court is shown and the decision of Yama to go himself for the soul of Satyavan is communicated. In the fourth, we are told about Yama's arrival on the death-scene, Satyavan's death proper, Savitri's persistent following of Yama, and the philosophical discussions of Savitri which please Yama so much that he grants the three boons, including Satyavan's life, to her. In the fifth, we learn about Satyavan's regaining of consciousness, his pleasant talk with his wife, their return to the hermitage, and their happy domestic life.

Of all the ballads contained in *Ancient Ballads*, "Savitri" holds a significant place by virtue of its length and quality. It is a wonderful poetic piece indeed. It expounds, on the one hand, the ideals of Indian womanhood, and on the other, the essentials of Vedantic philosophy. It has remarkable descriptions of natural scenes and sights, of the pompous marriage procession, of the hermitage and its surroundings. Even the wild nature is not spread, and the forest with its terror-striking silence in the dead of night is a notable

picture of this kind. Harihar Das is of the opinion that the poem seems to augur “great future possibilities in the development of Toru Dutt’s genius” [700].

“Lakshman” is in the form of a conversation between Sita; Rama’s wife, and Lakshman; Rama’s brother. Rama had incurred the wrath of the demons by refusing the advances of the sister of one of their chiefs. To avenge her wrong, Ravana, the chief, persuaded Maricha to assume the guise of a charming golden deer, which came roaming about the hermitage where Sita, Rama, and Lakshman dwelt. Deeply moved by the beauty of the deer, Sita begged Rama to get it for her, and despite Lakshman’s forebodings-for her suspected it to be Maricha in disguise-Rama went off in pursuit, leaving his wife in Lakshman’s charge, with strict instructions not to leave her at any cost. Lakshman’s suspicions proved correct. Rama, after a long pursuit of the elusive deer, eventually shot an arrow which pierced it to the heart. With a terrific bound, it sprang into the air, then fell to the ground roaring aloud, and assumed its natural form as it lay dying. But Maricha did not forget the revenge even in death, and as per Ravana’s injunctions began to imitate Rama’s voice crying out as if in mortal pain: ‘Oh Sita! Oh Lakshman!’ It is at this point that the poem “Lakshman” opens. Sita has heard the cry, and is urging Lakshman to go to her husband’s help.

He also tells her that demons, ghosts and gods are equally afraid of his might, and that the cry she had heard must be due to ‘some trick of magic by the foe’. But a woman’s doubts are too strong to be allayed, and Sita harps on the old tune and blames Lakshman on different grounds including cowardice. She, then, attributes his reluctance to go a baser motive, accusing him of desiring Rama’s death so that he may take possession of his wife and kingdom.

Harihar Das observes that the poem marks a departure from its predecessors in that “it is not narrative, but conversational”, and finds its tone “dignified, rising sometimes to the heroic” [333]. This is decidedly a correct estimate of the poem. For one thing, the poem opens casually and ends casually. For a full knowledge of the story, the reader will have to go to the original Ramayana.

“Jogadhya Uma” is a poem unique for its dreamy, mystic beauty. Its theme is not drawn from any of the great epics or Puranas of Sanskrit, but from folklore. It is a well-

known legend of the people, and was told originally to Toru by an old family nurse, Suchee, a staunch Hindu, 'of whom all the children were very fond'.

In writing the ballad, Toru shows the best kind of creative originality. How aptly she has turned a folk-story into a delightful poem! There is, indeed, an antique flavor about it. One can't fail to mark the translucent simplicity of touch in it.

This source is the Indian source, and it would be a folly to put it on 'an alien shore'. Harihar Das is certainly correct when he calls it 'a gem of art among the Ballads of Hindustan'. Toru gives the reader an insight into the simple piety of our ancient Indian folklore.

"The Royal Ascetic and the Hind" recounts the story of a failure of the life of asceticism. It describes the matchless asceticism of King Bharat of Saligram. Bharat left behind all the royal pomp to embrace the life of an ascetic in a forest. He practiced religious penances and rude privations and offered constant prayers and oblations in order to attain a perfect control on his soul. Suddenly a change came over his mind. He once went out to the river to take his bath, after which he sat down on the bank for musings and prayers. In the meantime, a graceful pregnant hind came there to quench her thirst. She leapt up to death on a lion's roar and her offspring tumbled from her womb into the rushing stream and struggled for its life. The hermit-king was deeply touched by the scene before him. He got up at once, drew the new-born creature from the wave, and brought it home. Thenceforth he developed deep love for it and cared little even for his devotions. After many years, when Death visited him, Bharat's heart was still filled with anguish at leaving his little fawn, and not with the problem of Death and Eternity:

*To it devoted was his last, last thought,
Reckless of present and of future both.
["The Royal Ascetic and the Hind"]*

The poem ends with a spirited defense of the hermit-king's conduct and a condemnation of the ideal of asceticism. In it Toru reads a little lecture to the ascetics for their renunciation of the world. Here she is altogether modern, and out of line with the past. She goes so far that she forgets altogether that she is dealing with an old legend-her main purpose. In so doing she is both naïve and interesting. She has been able to assert her individuality and modern outlook upon life.

Rich is moral tone, they are not without a fine poetic appeal. The ballad retains the dialogue form of the original – the Vishnu Purana, but it serves very little purpose.

“The Legend of Dhruva” is also taken from the Vishnu Purana (Book I, Chap. VI). It relates the story of a prince, the son of a less favored queen (Suneetee), who scorned the position of worldly power for the sake of spiritual greatness. That prince was Dhruva, an ambitious, indignant child, who was anxious to win his father’s love. Suruchee, the favored queen, did not like this because she wanted that the king’s love be solely reserved for her own son, Uttama. One day, she saw Dhruva sharing the king’s attention with her son and burst into fierce invective. She asked Dhruva to give up his proud ambition. At this Dhruva, trembling with rage and indignation, ran to his mother’s room where

*....with a swelling heart,
Repeated to his mother every word
That proud Surucheespoke, from first to last,
Even in the very presence of the king.
[“The Legend of Dhruva”]*

The helpless Suneetee heard all and sighed deeply and tried to console her son, explaining to him the Hindu doctrine of Karma. She also held out to him the prospect of future rewards in case he lived his present life well, and advised him.

“The Legend of Dhruva” is based on the Hindu theory of Karma. The treatment of the legend of Dhruva has failed to create in the reader the right impression of the young boy, who being rudely shocked at his royal father’s cruel neglect of him, retired to the forest and later became a great devotee of God.

“Buttoo” (or “Eklavya”) is a popular version of one of the stories of the Mahabharata, and has for its hero a low-caste hunter’s son. As Dronacharya, the matchless master of magic and archery, sat one day in the forest surrounded by his royal pupils, a youth of ‘kindling eyes’ came there and urged the master to instruct him also in archery. On being questioned, the youth disclosed his name, caste and parentage. He told the master that he knew no fear in the world. This is the gist of the ballad. The poem has a compact structure and a logical end. All through the poem we have been carefully prepared for Buttoo’s reverent devotion to Dronacharya, who had aroused in the boy an instinct almost of worship. Under the circumstances, the reader is little jarred by the unexpectedness of the description of Buttoo’s attitude at the crucial moment of his test for obedience.

“Sindhu” is the story of an ideal son. Sindhu was the only child of his sage-parents, who lived in the forest shades. The parents were blind, weak and helpless, and Sindhu was their sole prop. He devoted his whole life to ministering to their needs regularly. All the peevishness and querulousness of old age was met by patience and sweetness on his part, for he loved to be “their slave”. This is what we find in Part - I. In part II, King Dasarath’s hunting in the forest is described.

“Sindhu” deals with the eternal theme of parental love. Here again the Karma theory has been propounded – Sindhu had killed a dove and hence his punishment. Neither he nor his parents (barring the prediction) curse Dasarath.

The poem is in ballad meter and Toru has tried to keep her language as simple as possible. “Prahlad”, taken from the Mahabharata, is the story of King HeerunKasyapu, who had been ‘a terror both of gods and men’. His audacity reached the farthest limit when he tore the Vedas into shreds, forbade sacrifices to the gods, slew holy men, and ordered that all men should worship him, and him alone. The small remnant of Brahmins and pundits fled to the woods and caves, and there in secret carried on the worship of the gods, who, they hoped, would in due time assuage their wrongs. The tyrant’s one weakness was his love for his four children – Rahd, Onoorahd, Prahlad, and Sunghrad. He took some trouble to secure for them a suitable tutor.

In “Prahlad”, the story is successfully told. The technique of the poem is far in advance of that of the earlier poems. Very rarely do we meet the false rhyme (as in ‘heart’ and ‘thwart’) or a line which mars the poetic effect by its colloquialism (e.g., ‘Or there will come a fearful crash’). The poem reveals, too, a growing skill in selection on the poetess’ part. The phraseology employed by Prahlad in his defense sometimes smacks of a Biblical flavor. His speeches are, by all means, individualistic and interesting throughout.

The last legend in the collection is “Sita”, which is relatively short in length. It is a description of what was a frequent occurrence in the poetess’ days of childhood, when she and her brother and sister gathered near their mother in the twilight and listened to the old, sad story of Sita’s sufferings. These children see a dense forest where the sunlight scarcely penetrates. In the midst is a clearing around where gigantic creepers festoon the trees with flowers. White swans are gliding on a quiet lake, while the peacock rises

‘whirring from the brake’, and the wild deer bound through the glades. The gold of the forest corn glints in the distance, where the blue smoke rises from the altars near the dwelling of Valmiki, the ‘poet anchorite’.

The ancient myths and legends of Hindustan had an abiding charm for the poetess. She is thoroughly Indian in *Ancient Ballads*. There are some beautiful scenes and sights of the native land in it. The ballads are steeped in Hindu ideals and sentiments and give a vivid picture of Indian life and customs. They are fundamentally about Toru’s own race and country. No conscious attempt has been made at expressing thought or tradition alien to her people and culture. The sententious remarks interspersed in the ballads suggest Toru’s familiarity with the best expositions of the Hindu view of life.

Of all the poems contained in the volume, “Savitri” is the nearest to the Indian temper and the most articulate expression of Vedantic philosophy. The fatalistic doctrine of the popular Hindu philosophy is expressed in the following:

*It is my destiny,
O fear not thou, but pity one
Whose fate is thus to die.
[“Sindhu”]*

In this way Toru Dutt sang the glorious vision of mother land in her *Ancient legends and ballads of Hindustan*, published after her death. The volume has nine ballads or legends besides seven non mythological pieces. Out of nine legends two legends name *The legend of Dhruva* and *The Royal Ascetic of the Hind*, both translation from the *Vishnu Purana*. Other legends are completely based on religion and mythology of India. The legends like *Savitri*, *Laxmana*, *Jigadhyauma*, *Butto*, *Prahalad* and *Sita*

Works Cited

- Gosse, Edmund. “Introductory Memoir”. *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. [London: Kegan & Paul & Co., 1882]. Print.
- Das, Harihar. *The Life and Letters of Toru Dutt*. [London: Oxford University Press, 1921]. Print.
- Basu, Lotika. *Indian Writers of English Verse*.