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A Literary Review on Toru Dutt's *Savitri*

Dr. Jignesh Upadhyay

Dharmendrasinhji Arts College, Rajkot.



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Among the sixteen poems in *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, 'Savitri' is the first and one of the most famous poems. The legend or myth of Savitri can be considered as remarkable in case of a young writer as Toru Dutt. Sita and Savitri have been ideals for Indian womanhood since ages. Toru's attempt can be seen as a continuity in Indian literary tradition. It is Sri Aurobindo who employs the myth of Savitri to relate it with the spiritual reawakening of the nation. Before Toru no one attempted the story of Savitri in English. She composed this story so effectively that it was well received by the readers and critics as well. It is the longest poem in the volume and is divided into five parts. It narrates the story of Savitri's fortune and her encounter with Yama, the god of death. This ballad is divided into five part. In the first part, there are information about Savitri's birth, parents and Narad Muni's approval of her marriage with the love of her heart. The second part narrates 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 them prayers, Satyavan's departure for the forest along with Savitri, and the acute pain in Satyavan's head. In the third part, Death's court is narrated, and the decision of Yama to go himself for the soul of Satyavan is communicated. The fourth begins with Yama's arrival, Savitri's persistent following of Yama, and the philosophical discussion of Savitri which pleases Yama so much that he grants her three boons which also includes Satyavan's life. In the fifth and last part is result of Savitri's intelligence. It narrates Satyavan's recovering of consciousness, a happy reunion of his with her wife and his pleasant talk with her, their return to the hermitage, and their happy domestic life. Though, Toru referred to strike more originality in the composition of her poems, Romantic influences cannot be eschewed and so it can be marked at many places. In 'Savitri', Toru embraces some of the Romantic elements, in an Indian context, like supernaturalism, Romantic love, and images of death, and Nature with full zeal. The poem opens with the beautiful imageries of Nature for Savitri. Savitri's extraordinary charm is wonderfully described in the following lines:

'The sweet simplicity and grace, / Abashed the boldest; but the good, / God's purity there loved to trace, / Mirrored in dawning womanhood.' (131)

Savitri's beauty has been narrated by bestowing her simplicity and grace, i.e., 'the bold' and 'the beautiful' coinciding in her character as in the original myth where Savitri coming to an age which ventures to hunt for



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a match herself when no young man dares to attend her *swyamwara* due to her dazzling beauty, purity and goodness. Very comprehensively Dutt here sketches these characteristics of goodness, beauty and purity as very natural by reflecting it through God's purity to mingle the nature and supernatural in her who is the daughter of god – Sun. Romantic love has been engendering from the beginning of the poem. When Savitri sees Satyavan royal in port, frank and noble, she cannot take her glance back from him and ponders 'What was the meaning – was it love? / Love at first sight, as poets sing / Is then no fiction?' This Romantic love was fortified against Narad Muni's advice when Savitri is firm to her decision to marry Satyavan and gives forceful reply to Narad Muni's argument: 'Once and once only, have I given / My heart and faith – 'tis past recall; / With conscience none have ever striven, / And none may strive, without a fall.' Supernatural and mystical representations are integral parts of Indian mythologies and legends. Toru describes the supernatural being – Yama, the god of death mystically to personify death as:

...a stranger slowly glide
Beneath the boughs that shrunk aghast.
Upon his head he wore a crown
That shimmered in the doubtful light;
His vestment scarlet reached low down,
His waist, a golden girdle dight.
His skin was dark as bronze; his face
Irradiate, and yet severe;
His eyes had much of love and grace,
But glowed so bright, they filled with fear. (146-147)



Thus, delineation of Yama's approach creates the image of death with the words like 'stranger', 'doubtful light', 'skin dark as bronze', 'eyes filled with fear'. It also mystifies the image of Yama with the words like 'irradiate', 'severe', 'love', 'grace', 'glowed', 'bright' and again 'fear'. Structurally, each stanza is a set of twelve lines rhyming *ab ab* like many of Romantic poems. This is how Dutt could create an extra ordinary work of literature. Her poetic genius and romantic influence made this poem masterpiece.



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