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NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

Indian Poetry in English

Lecture 03: Toru Dutt

BINOD MISHRA

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Socio-Political Conditions

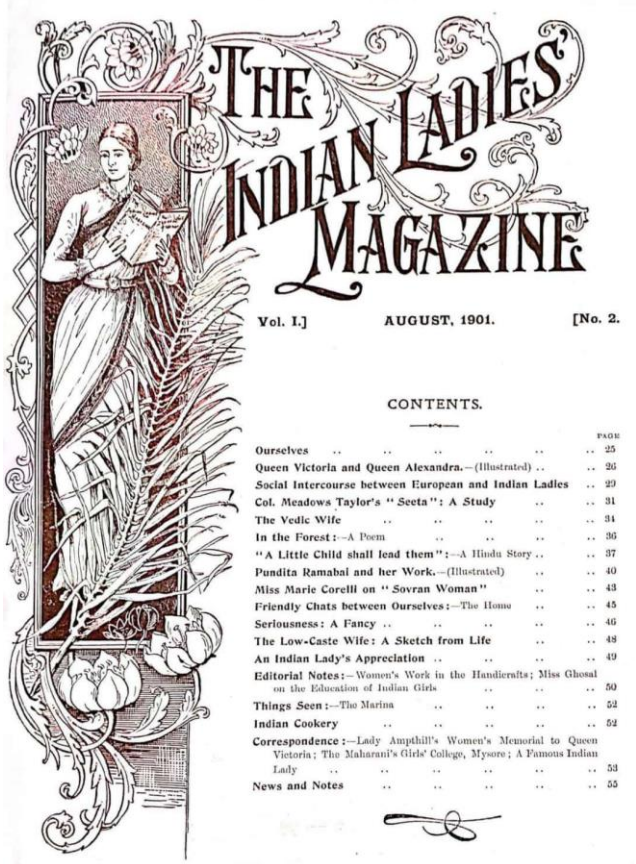
- Indian ethos undergo great changes politically and culturally.
- The rise of confident authentic poets: Toru Dutt, Shri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore.
- India rediscovering her identity.
- Revolution for right to education for British Women.
- While the Dutt men converted to Christianity, the women of the family remained Hindoo (Indian Mythology).



'a scar was drawn across IndoBritish relations deeper than any which had been inflicted since the Mutiny.'

Condition of Women Poets

- British Women poets namely, Anna Maria, Adela Cory Nicolson, Mary Carshore, Mary Eliza Leslie, Emma Roberts etc.
- Gendered maintenance of poetic canon.
- Poetess: Daughters of Christian converts, members of *Bhrahmo Samaj*, daughters of progressive and reformist fathers.
- Education of Women
- Subscription publication allowed anonymous publication.



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What Women Poets Wrote?

- Domestic life
- Oriental tales
- Christian devotional verse
- Retelling of traditional stories

The Rájá brings to her his child,
A lovely one, with face as mild
As Chandra, whom some castes address,

In Purnimá the hand they kiss.
The lady spake: – the child came near,
"Here is an English Pustak, dear,
With pretty stories, pictures too,
Brought from America, for you."
"Bahutkhush, do ham ko," lisped the child.

(Kadambini)

Introduction to Toru Dutt

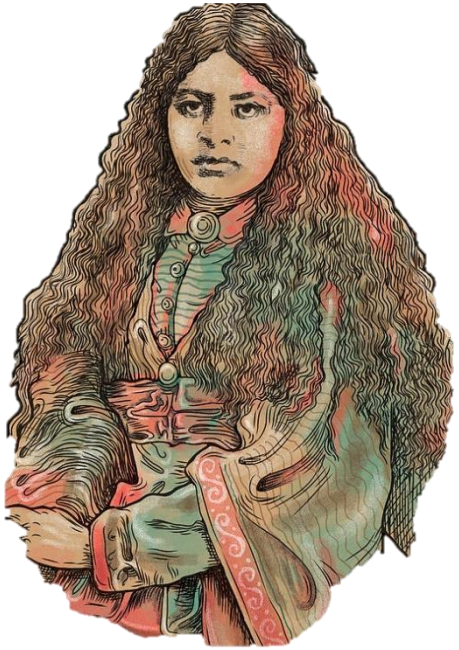
- Born on 4th March, 1856 in a rich family in Calcutta.
- Siblings: Aru Dutt and Abju
- Elite Europhile Bengali family.
- Dutts left for Europe in 1869.
- Alienated in society as Christians.
- Died of consumption at the age of 21 in 1877.

"Puny and elf like, with dishevelled tresses
Self willed and shy…
Intent to pay her tenderest addresses
To bird or cat,---
But most intelligent." (Govin Chander Dutt)



Contd…

- Went to French school at Nice.
- Moved to Cambridge in 1871, befriended Mary Martin.
- True authentic poet
- Wrote in French and English. (One letter in Bengali)
- ‘Brown English woman?’ or ‘Bengali Ladies?’
- Influence of Victor Hugo
- Heir to English and French Romantics.

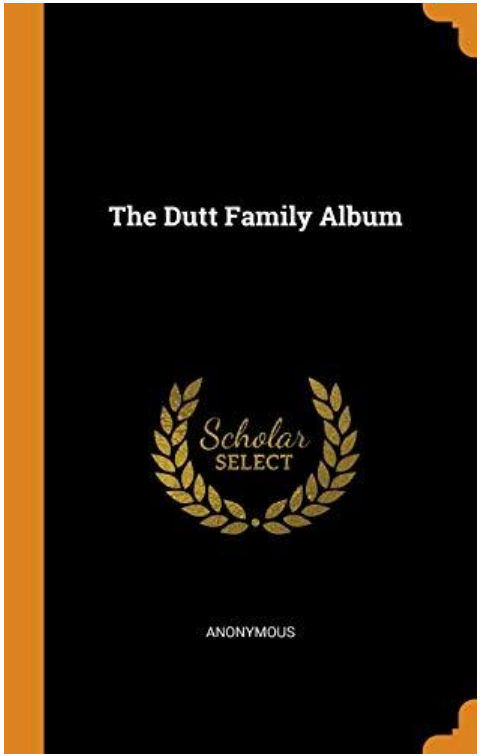


Contd…

Domestically overdetermined, yet culturally alienating, Toru and Aru Dutt's turns to Western languages helped shape an Indian literature whose power seems to spring "not from the site of a monolithic 'truth' and 'native' authenticity, but from the infinitely more fascinating site ... of reinvention and improvisation."

(As quoted in Tricia Lootens' "The Locations and Dislocations of Toru and Aru Dutt")

Poems by the Dutt Family



- *The Dutt Family Album*(1870) – the only family anthology.
- It exemplifies adopt phase.
- ‘Mere technical excellence’
- Medieval history of Indian in English.
- Lyric, ballad, sonnet

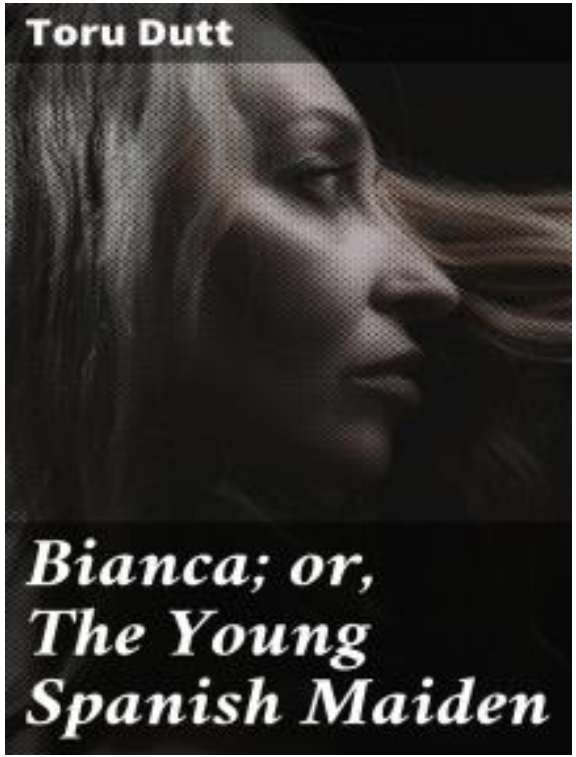


Poets of *The Dutt Family Album*

"of one family, in whom the ties of blood relationship have been drawn closer by the holy bond of Christian brotherhood. As foreigners educated out of England, they solicit the indulgence of British critics to poems which on these grounds alone may, it is hoped, have some title to their attention."

(Preface to *The Dutt Family Album*)

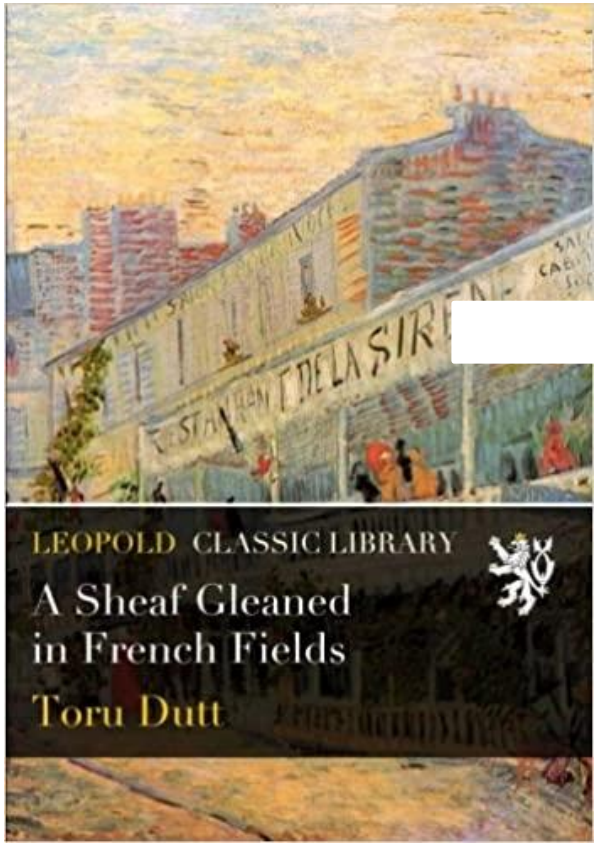
Toru Dutt's Works



Sheaf gleaned in French Fields(1875)

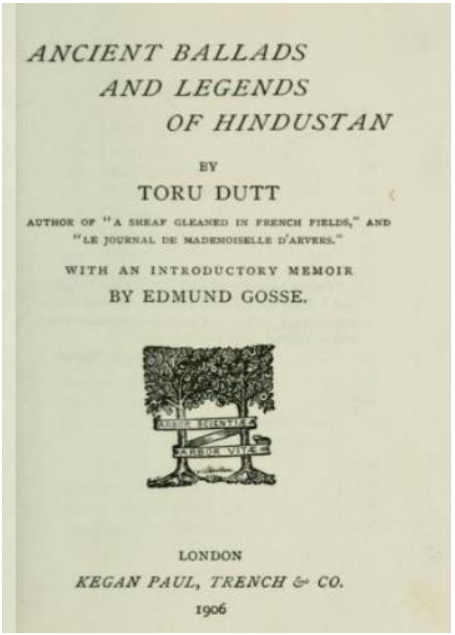
Bianca or the Young Spanish Maiden (1878)

Le Journal De Mademoiselle D' Arvers (1879)



Poems by Toru Dutt

"Literature has no honours which need have been beyond the grasp of a girl who at the age of twenty-one and in languages separated her own by so deep a chasm, had produced so much of lasting worth." –Edmund Gosse


ANCIENT BALLADS
AND LEGENDS
OF HINDUSTAN

BY

TORU DUTT

AUTHOR OF "A SHEAF GLEANED IN FRENCH FIELDS," AND "LE JOURNAL DE MADEMOISELLE D'ARVERS."

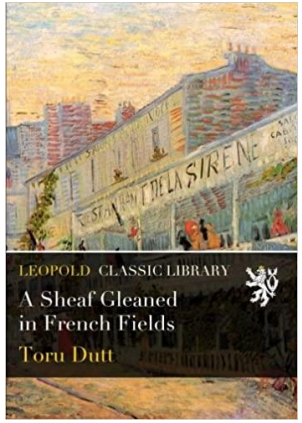
WITH AN INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR
BY EDMUND GOSSE.

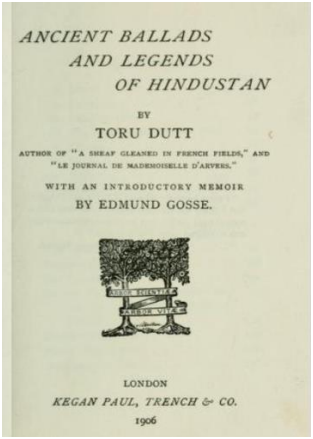
LONDON
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH & CO.
1906

Poems Published in:
Bengal Magazine

Early Translations

- *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields (1875)*
- *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan (1882)*




ANCIENT BALLADS
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BY

TORU DUTT

AUTHOR OF "A SHEAF GLEANED IN FRENCH FIELDS," AND
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Characteristics of Toru's Poems

- 'A wonderful mixture of strength and weakness'- Edmund Gosse.
- Archetype of Indian womanhood- Sita, Savitri
- Extensive use of Indian myth and legend.
- Victorian romantic school
- Evocative use of local colour.
- She made Hindu epics accessible to Western readers.
- Domestic morality through an appeal to Christian virtues.

“Our Casuarina Tree”

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 embraces 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.



Contd…



When first my casement is wide open thrown
At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;
Sometimes, and most in winter,—on its crest
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;

And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast
By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,
The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

Contd…

But not because of its magnificence
Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:
Beneath it we have played; though years may roll,
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear.
Blent with your images, it shall arise
In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!
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.



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Contd…

Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!
Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away
In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,
When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith
And the waves gently kissed the classic shore
Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,
When earth lay trancèd in a dreamless swoon:
And every time the music rose,—before
Mine inner vision rose a form sublime,
Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime
I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.



Contd…

Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay
Unto thy honor, Tree, beloved of those
Who now in blessed sleep for aye repose,—
Dearer than life to me, alas, were they!
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.

Characteristics of Poem “Our Casuarina Tree”

- Indian Setting and imageries
- Picturesque
- Keatsian romanticism
- Traumatic recollection
- Rhythmic and musical



“The Lotus”

Love came to Flora asking for a flower

That would of flowers be undisputed queen,

The lily and the rose, long, long had been

Rivals for that high honour. Bards of[F]power

Had sung their claims. "The rose can never tower

Like the pale lily with her Juno mien"--

"But is the lily lovelier?" Thus between

Contd…

Flower-factions rang the strife in Psyche's bower.

"Give me a flower delicious as the rose

And stately as the lily in her pride"--

"But of what colour?"--"Rose-red," Love first chose,

Then prayed,--"No, lily-white,--or, both provide;"

And Flora gave the lotus, "rose-red" dyed,

And "lily-white,"--the queenliest flower that blows.

An Authentic Indian Voice

- ✔ Free from imitation of her predecessors.
- ✔ Blends personal and cultural dimensions of her experience.
- ✔ 'Crafted out of an individual life and a sensibility that belongs to modern India'(Mehrotra).
- ✔ Her vision radiates beyond the boundaries.
- ✔ Extensive use of Indian myth and legends.
- ✔ Use of archaism and octosyllabic stanza and verse forms.

" Her best work has the qualities of a quiet strength, of deep emotion held under artistic restraint and an acute awareness of the values of Indian life." (Naik).

"Can there be a more touching and lovable heroine than Sita? I do not think so. When I hear my mother chant , in the evening, the old lays of our country, I almost always weep. The pliant of Sita, when banished for the second time, she wanders alone in the vast forest, despair and horror filling her soul, is so pathetic that I believe there is no one who could hear it without shedding tears." (Toru in a Letter to Clarissa Bader)

Thank You

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