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Toru Dutt's Great Work *Lakshman* : A Thematic and Literary Interpretation



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Abstract

The great poetic creation which Toru Dutt has given to the world is Lakshman. This poem is based on the story of 'Panchvati in the Ramayan. In the Ramayan, Lord Rama, along with wife and brother went to forest namely Panchvati where they made a cottage in the lap of nature. It happens that one day 'Marich' took the form of a golden deer and began to graze grass near the cottage. Its beauty was so charming that it attracted the attention of Sita. Thereafter Sita requested Rama to kill this golden deer. Rama flew to catch the deer.

In the meantime, Rama killed the deer with his arrow and consequently the deer became a giant and made a huge cry calling the name of Sita and Lakshman. Sita heard the cry and asked Lakshman to go near her husband immediately. There starts a dialogue between Sita and Lakshman that forms part of the nucleus of this poem.

Keywords

Lakshman, Ramayan, Aranyakand, Poetry, Metaphor, Rootedness, Indianess, East-West Encounter, Memory, Savitri.

RESEARCH PAPER

Form and Technique play a very important role in any poetic work. It is the technical aspects of the poet that distinguish she/he from the other discipline of knowledge like Philosophy, History, Psychology and Sociology. A philosopher or a social thinker generally expresses his thoughts and visions in an objective and impersonal manner with the help of his mind or reason. He/She generally presents the society, men and manner in a straightforward manner. But the activity of a poet or an artist is a bit different from the aforesaid philosophers and social scientists. The poet or the literary artist expresses his thoughts and visions not in direct forward manner but with the help of imagination and emotion. He/She “turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing/ A local habitation and a name.” (Shakespeare, 16)

Poetic form and technique give a good shape and structure to any poetic creation. As matter of fact what matters most in any great work of art is not simply the presentation of facts and figures or the autobiographical and social criticism of contemporary society but metaphors, symbolism, images, design and pattern. However thoughtful and profound an idea or philosophy may be, it presents a very little significance to the mind and heart of the readers. In another words in any great work of art there are several poetic devices and poetic craftsmanships which give a shape and form in a beautiful manner. The great poet generally weaves his philosophical thoughts, autobiographical element, social consciousness with the

help of sound, rhythm, rhyme, figures, connotations, images and symbols. H. Coombes in his famous critical book *Literature and Criticism* rightly observes:

The poet's thought in his poetry is felt through the way his words work. Ideas existing in the abstract and for their own sake do of course interest him and have significance for him, but if they are incorporated into his writing they find embodiment in expression that comes home to mind and senses and feelings with strength, clarity, precision, vivid immediacy. It will be obvious by now that rhythm, sound imagery, diction, feeling, are inseparably bound up with discussion of poetic thought; and the further we proceed with our examination of the various elements, the more shall come to realise the organic quality, fusing all elements, of the finest writing. (Coombes, H, 108)

A true art or any literary piece is a record of man's motives and passions, observations and experiences, his dreams and ideals, his aspiration and wishes and, above all his disappointments and failures. Actually it appeals to the very literary core of sensibility and human emotions. A true art is never bound by any caste, class, creed and nationality. It is generally associated with the elementary passion of human being. If we analyse the great writers we find that poets like Shakespeare and Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley, Browning and Tennyson, Yeats and Eliot, have mostly dwelt upon the theme of the elementary emotion of the human being like joy and sorrow, faith and fear, hatred and love. So far as the emotions are concerned, they come spontaneously. In great literature, the emotions are not laboured but they come naturally and spontaneously. It generally comes out of life and satisfies its fundamental desires for truth and beauty. George Eliot rightly observes:

It is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending out contact with our fellow men beyond the bounds of our personal lot. (Mundra, J.N., 37)

It is interesting to note that poetry is the essence of literature. In poetry the whole business of literature is concentrated to its utmost intensity. In other words the language which is capable of communicating the peculiar character of writer's experience is the most penetrating vigour on the part of their writer. R. Abercrombie in his book *The Principles of Literary Criticism* rightly says:

The end or aim of that art is to express, to represent, to communicate. Literature is not composed in order to be beautiful: we judge it to be beautiful when it has succeeded in its aim. Just as we judge the pure experience of looking at a landscape to be beautiful, so do we judge the pure experience of receiving the communication of literature: for the experience of receiving the communication and the experience communicated are indistinguishable. (Abercrombie, 45)

The most significant visions and thoughts of psychologists, anthropologists and philosophers seldom become poetic by virtue of their concepts and visions. But on the other hand the poet uses language which more than conveys his thoughts; it enforces it by its movements its sound, its imagery. In this way the poet presents vividness with wealth of meaning. The language is the sure evidence of his particular grasp of the thought. If one alters his language, it means altering and impairing his thought. H. Coombes says:

The poet is giving clear and vivid utterance to most subtle and ambiguous feelings; and it is the union of clearness of vision and complete simplicity of language with the profound ambiguity of his attitude that gives the poem its power. The poet is both good and evil; he is good and wise to speak openly to his friend, he is evil to use his wisdom, which degenerates into cunning, to overcome his foe. (Coombes, H., 101)

Her other legendary story 'Lakshman' is in the dialogue form. Harihar Das says that it is not narrative but conversational. But a deep and profound study shows that Toru Dutt has a very fine narrative skill. When Lakshman is hesitant for going out in search of his brother, Ram, Sita says:

He perishes-weel, let him die!
His wife henceforth shall be mine own!
Can that thought deep imbedded lie
Within the heart's most secret zone!
'Search well and see! One brother takes
His kingdom, - one would take his wife!
A fair partition ! But it makes
Me shudder, and abhor my life. (Lakshman – 141)

Her other work 'Lakshman' also contains some appropriate animal imaginary which very well suit the sentiment of the situation. While describing the dense forest where Ram with Lakshma and Sita resides in a hut. Toru Dutt takes the image of some cruel and venomous animal images which shows the coming event of the story:

Sun-staring eagles of the air
His glance of anger cannot brook
Pythons and cobras at his tread
To their most secret coverts glide,
Bowed to the dust each serpent head
Erect before in hooded pride. (Lakshman-140)

The image of sun staring eagles is very appropriate and suggestive. It seems to suggest the hunter Ravan who stares Sita like an eagle. As an eagle drops down from the sky and falls upon the prey similarly Ravan comes to Sita and kidnaps her. So through this powerful image the poetess expresses the coming events. In drama it is called a dramatic irony. The other image of python and cobra is also very suggestive. It also shows the bad intention in the heart of Ravan. The last of this poem ends with the other carnivorous bird vulture. It again shows ill design and imbecility of the great Rakkshasha Ravan. The poetess observes:

Only a sorrow dark, that seemed
To deepen his resolve to dare
All dangers. Hoarse the vulture screamed
As out he strode with duntless air. (Lakshman-143)

The poem *Lakshman* by Toru Dutt begins with the repetition of the term 'Hark' and 'it is'. This shows the impatience and restlessness in the mind of Sita. When Ram went to kill the golden deer, Sita heard the noise of Ram though articulated by the devil. Sita, being a woman, becomes very fearful and restless. She says:

Hark! Lakshman! Hark, again that cry!
It is, — it is my husband's voice!

Oh hasten, to his succour fly
No more haste thou, dear friend, a choice
(Lakshman-139)

It is interesting to note that the diction of Toru Dutt is very simple and clear. She seems to believe the great theory of diction of William Wordsworth. Sometimes we see that her poetry is very powerful enough to suit the sentiment of the situation. Her blank verse is also very fine. Had she lived longer she might have attained some more heights in the field of art and style. A.N. Dwivedi rightly observes:

Toru's poetic diction is mostly simple and clear. Occasionally, there is archaism in it. Sometimes we come across twisted phrases and expressions. But on the whole, her diction is often in accordance with the theme. (Dwivedi, A.N., 135)

The Use Cacophonous and Euphonic Sound: A great poet always possesses the use of sound in order to create some sort of positive and negative aspects of life. Generally in poetry the sound 'L', 'M', 'P', 'G', 'S' are considered as Euphonic sound, on the other hand, the sound 'R', 't', 'd', 'k', are supposed to be cacophonous sound. We know that in literature, particularly in poetry the 'unified sensibility' is needed, that is, feeling and thinking together. In the process of poetic creativity, the poet's heart feels and his mind thinks. So in order to present the feelings and emotions, the poet generally takes the help of his mind to create sound.

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