

Dr. Nabarun Ghosh
Assistant Professor
Department of English
Jagjiwan College, Ara

Topic: Critical Appreciation of Toru Dutt's "Lotus"

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 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
 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.

Toru Dutt (1856-1877) is one of the leading figures of Anglo-Indian literature. She had stayed in Europe for four years (1869-1873). During her stay she had learnt French and enjoyed the freedom, a woman could never imagine in India during the 1870s. She had translated a volume of poetry from French into English consisting 165 poems including one poem by her. She had also translated a few pieces of Sanskrit literature. She had written a complete novel in French and an unfinished novel *Bianca* in English in a very short life span of only 21 years.

N. Ghosh

“Lotus” is written in the Petrarchan form of sonnet consisting of fourteen lines with an octave (8 lines) and a sestet (6 lines) and the rhyming pattern being abbaabba cdcdcd. The poem shows Dutt’s expertise in mythpoetic imagination. As per Roman mythology, Aphrodite or Love is the beautiful Goddess of love whom Cupid, the God of love courted. Flora is the God of flowers. So far as the literal meaning of the poem stands, we see that Love asks Flora to give her a flower which deserves the honour of a queen. But she is in dilemma whether she should choose the white lily which stands for majestic quality or the red rose which symbolizes sweetness. Several poets have sung in favour of both the flowers. There is fraction among the renowned poets into two groups; one group adores lily and the other adores rose. Rose can never match the majestic look of lily as it looks like ‘Juno’s mien’, the wife of Jupiter, the God of thunder. On the other hand, a lily cannot match the loveliness of a rose. Finally, she asks Flora to give her a flower that is both charming and sweet like a rose and majestic like a lily. Flora, then, conceives lotus which is both red and white having qualities of both rose and lily.

If we look at the symbolic meaning of the poem it has a deeper meaning expressed through the symbol of lotus. Lotus, in Indian *Sanatana* or Hindu religion is considered as a symbol of peace and purity. It is the national flower of India. Through the symbol of lotus, Toru Dutt tries to exhibit the nature of *Sanatana* religion. As a lotus holds all its petals peacefully, *Sanatana* religion also stays in peace holding diverse opinions. In Hindu religion Goddess Lakshmi is depicted as sitting on a lotus. She is the Goddess of wealth and wisdom. God Vishnu is depicted in Hindu mythology as holding a lotus named *Paarijata* in his hand. He is the God of nurture. The God of all creation, Brahma also sits on a lotus. All these show the position that lotus flower holds in Hindu mythology. Thus, through the

N. Ghosh

symbol of lotus, Toru Dutt makes a way for the whole world to explore Indian culture and its beliefs.

It has already been mentioned earlier that Toru had a strong fascination for the European culture. After coming back to India in 1873, she realizes that Indian women have no freedom at all in comparison to their European counterparts. For a time, she was very upset to leave Europe. But finally she realizes that India is her home and she would lose her identity outside India. Then, she involves herself in the study of Sanskrit literature and realizes that no culture is better than the other. She is against creating any binary. On the one hand, Lily, because of its white colour, may represent white skin colour and white culture. On the other hand, rose, because of its red colour may represent Indian reddish skin colour and Indian culture. She, finally, finds a blending of both the white and the red in the symbol of lotus.

Please visit the following links for further study:

1. [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Bengali_Book_of_English_Verse/The_Lotus_\(Toru_Dutt\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Bengali_Book_of_English_Verse/The_Lotus_(Toru_Dutt))
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toru_Dutt
3. <http://www.englishcharity.com/the-lotus-by-toru-dutt/>
4. <https://commons.marymount.edu/sonnetthelotus/the-lotus/>

N. Ghosh