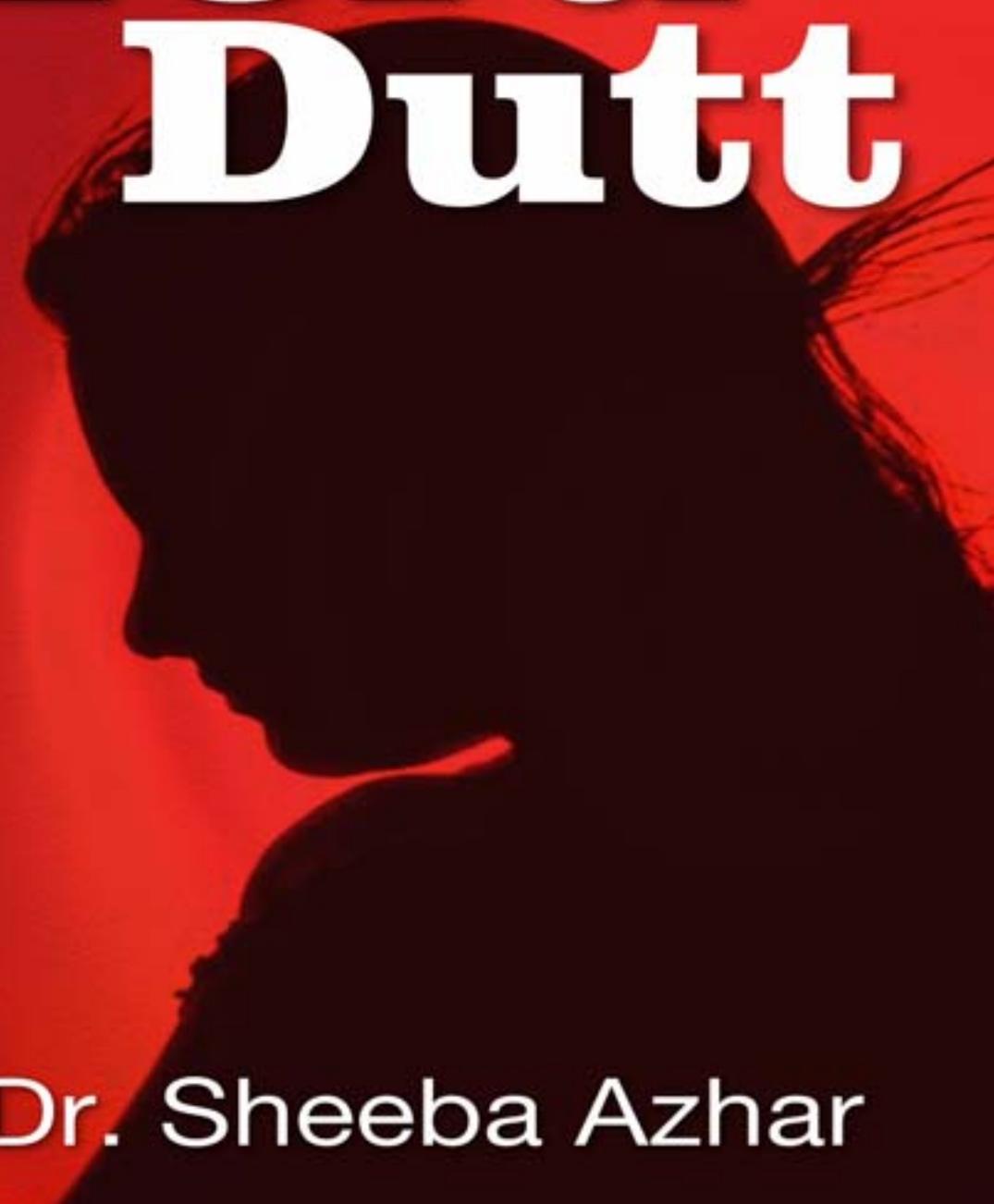


# Toru Dutt

A black silhouette of a woman's head and shoulders is positioned in the center of the cover, facing left. The background is a solid, vibrant red. The silhouette is detailed, showing the hair and the contours of the face.

Dr. Sheeba Azhar

# ***Toru Dutt***

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*Dedicated to  
my husband Dr. Syed Abid Ali  
and  
my loving son Atif & daughter Haadiya.*



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## Preface

The subject of the present study is an Indian girl who, dying at the age of twenty-one, has left behind her a legacy in verse and prose which, quite apart from its true and delicate poetic quality, constitutes an amazing feat of precocious literary craftsmanship. Toru Dutt, 'the fragile exotic blossom of song' is undoubtedly the first authentic Indo-Anglian poet. A Hindu convert Christian, she put the emphasis back on India. Her poetic sensibility accomplishes the miraculous synthesis of the two apparently independent aspects of Indian poetic psyche on the one hand and the English for creative writing on the other. Toru Dutt's ideal was to interpret the East to the West and she succeeded in her mission. She wrote:

I long to pour immortal lays  
Great paeans of perennial truth.

Indian English literature has grown from a sapling to a strong rooted tree in full bloom. Indians, however, did not start writing in English in a day. It took several historical events and distinguished personalities to bring Indian writing in English to its present eminence. Toru Dutt is one of such prodigies. Many universities in India and abroad have included Toru Dutt for class room studies in their syllabi, therefore a fresh approach to her poetic art is required not only in India but in other countries too. The various aspects of Toru Dutt's poetry have been studied earlier. The purpose of present study is to make a detailed analysis of the themes and technique of her poetry separately, in order to bring out her scholarship as well as her poetic craft.

The subjects that Toru chose for writing poetry were not only relevant to her time, but their importance cannot be denied in the present as well. Her ballads and legends are significant not merely as cultural and philosophical anthropology, but also as a political or religious, or moral instrument. This study seeks to ensure her place among Indian English poets because in matters of chronology and quality she is at the head of Indo-Anglian poets. Concisely, this study is made to furnish the original contribution of the poetry of Toru Dutt to ensure her place in the galaxy of Indo-English poets, so that the coming generation would always remember her as an extraordinarily gifted poet, whose whole life was dedicated to the cause of literature.

It is unfortunate that today she is merely regarded as a translator and remembered only for her Savitri or some small poems. This study attempts to prove that she is not

only a translator but a transcreator also. In her translations Toru achieves the height of emotions and communicates not only an original poet's sensibility but also her own.

It is strange that even today, her name is not much familiar among literary masses and critics give fewer acknowledgements to her work. It is my humble effort to bring out properly the themes and technique of this extraordinarily gifted poet, who by all norms of justice deserves a better treatment than that meted out to her so far.

I feel, no further justification is needed for this attempt to do honour to an Indian maiden, in truth an 'inheritor of unfulfilled renown', in view not only of what was lost to the world by her early death, but also of the comparative oblivion into which her name has sunk.

In the end, I want to thank Mr. B. Maria Kumar for taking out his valuable time and writing a foreword for this book

*(Sheeba Azhar)*

## Foreword

It is a great privilege for me to introduce the book 'Toru Dutt' written by Ms Sheeba Azhar which is an out of the ordinary account of Toru Dutt, the first Indo-Anglican poet.

Author has given a biographical account of Toru's life and psychic springs of her spiritual and creative energies. This book is an essential read especially for a proper understanding and evaluation of her poetic achievements. What makes this book unique is that, the author has in great detail showcased the themes and techniques of Toru's poetry in a much simpler type. I congratulate the author for bringing out the scholarship as well as the poetic craft of Toru Dutt in a true manner.

As described, Toru Dutt was a prodigy and Ms. Sheeba Azhar has in clear terms, done a proper justice to this genius. The reading is so interesting that it will surely appeal to both categories - the experts as well as new researchers on Toru Dutt.

The author has done this work in a lucid style. The narrative begins with an introduction of Toru Dutt, her childhood in Kolkata, her background and soon effortlessly dwells on her work and her themes. Later on, follow the myths and legends associated with Toru. As the reader proceeds ahead, he comes to know, how the free and fresh atmosphere of England helped the poet develop her intellectual and imaginative powers. In the latter part of the book, author describes Toru Dutt's isolation and alienation due to her conversion of faith from Hinduism to Christianity and the impact this isolation had on her poetry.

The most significant aspect of writing of this book is its flow. The story of the poet has been woven in such an attention-grabbing way that author Ms. Sheeba Azhar has given a vivid account of poet's work and as the book progresses, the reader not only gets a grip of the story but just wants to read more and more.

Lastly, I compliment Ms. Sheeba Azhar for doing such an extraordinary piece of work on Toru Dutt and convey my best wishes to her for the success of this book.

*B. Maria Kumar*  
Additional Director General  
of Police  
Police Headquarters,  
Bhopal



## *Chapter – I*

# *Milieu and Formative Influence*

Matthew Arnold writes in his *Study of Poetry*: “For successful creation both the power of man and the power of moment must concur, and the man is not enough without the moment.”<sup>1</sup> Power of man equal to will power, inner potential and inner strength. The power of moment refers to three things at a time; the mental state of the author, the situational and contextual reality and his immediate environment. In order to fully appreciate the work of an artist, it may be pertinent to suggest the organic relationship of the person, the moment and the milieu.

Every writer is the product of his or her time and the society he or she inherits from her birth. No writer is able to distance himself in a work of art so completely as to eliminate all traces of his own private dreams, ideals and anxieties. To quote Mario Praz, “If the merging of a work of art into the general history of culture results in losing sight of the individual artist, it is impossible... to think of the latter without recurring to the former.”<sup>2</sup>

In his **Golden Codgers: biographical Speculations**, **Richard Ellmann** argues convincingly in favour of tapping “the subsurface life” of the writer concerned in order to understand the creative complexity of a work of art. In the preface of this book he observes: Ultimately what the biographer seeks to elicit is less the events of a writer’s life, than the ‘mysterious armature’ which binds the creative work. But writer’s lives have their mysterious armature as well. Affection for one leads to interest in the other, the two sentiments tend to join, and the result of affection and interest often illuminate both the fiery clay and the wrought jar.<sup>3</sup> The uncovering, therefore, of the biographical hinterland of Toru’s life and psychic springs of her spiritual and imaginative energies is essential for a proper understanding and evaluation of her poetic achievements.

Among the poets whom the gods have loved there are, surely, few more remarkable than Toru Dutt. Writing in a foreign language, seeking her models in a foreign literature, interpreting a foreign religion, she built up in three years an eternity of fame. Her name, at least, is no longer unfamiliar in the ear of any well-read man or woman.<sup>4</sup> This is however the present situation. In tracing the various

influences which help to form people's characters in this world, it is sometimes necessary to go far back in order to estimate the value of the forces acting on future generations.

When Toru Dutt started her literary career, India was under British rule. In the early nineteenth century, there set in a movement in this country towards a new life and a new thought that is generally characterized as the Renaissance in India. This renaissance, this new birth in India became, in due course of time, a thing of immense importance to herself and to the world, —to herself because of all that is meant for her in the recovery or the change of her time old spirit and national ideals, to the world because of the immense possibilities involved in the reasserting of a force that is in many respects unlike any other and its genius very different from the mentality and spirit that have hitherto governed the modern idea in manhood.

The term 'Renaissance' carries the mind back to the turning point of European culture to which it was first applied; that was not so much re-awakening as an overturn and reversal. That is decidedly not a type of renaissance that is all possible in India. There is closer resemblance to the Celtic movement in Ireland, the attempt of a reawakened national spirit to find a new impulse of self expression which shall give the spiritual force for a great reshaping and rebuilding and in India something of the same kind of movement appeared and took a pronounced turn.

In his book **The Renaissance in India (1918) Cousins** puts the question, whether the word 'renaissance' at all applies in the Indian context since India has always been awake and stood in no need of re-awakening. There was beyond doubt, a period, brief but full of complacency and superficial advance and inner stagnation and decay. The spirit's light receded, the intellect dissipated itself in grandiose nothing, and the will to live suffered a strong attenuation. And the series of disasters on the political and economic fronts only hastened the process and completed the national catastrophe.<sup>5</sup> It was that moment and the pressure of a superimposed European culture which followed it and made the reawakening inevitable.

Sri Aurobindo, while considering the question of the renaissance in India takes three factors into account; the great past of Indian culture and life with the moment of in adaptive torpor into which it had lapsed, the first period of the western contact in which it seemed for a moment likely to perish by slow decomposition and ascending movement which first broke into some clarity of expression<sup>6</sup> Another prominent critic J. H. Cousins put emphasis on Indian spirituality which has always maintained itself even in the decline of the national vitality, and which has saved India always at every critical moment of her destiny. It

was certainly her spirituality, which has been the starting point of her renaissance. In other words the spirit, the intellect, and the life impulse, all-functioning at the highest pitch and yet working in the closet collaboration.<sup>7</sup> Any other nation under the same pressure would have long ago perished soul and body. But India kept her essential spirit through a great change over took the body. The shaping of a new body, of new philosophical, artistic, literary, cultural, political, social forms by the same soul rejuvenescent was the type Indian renaissance.<sup>8</sup>

By the beginning of the 19th century Britain-or the East India Company –was more or less master of the situation in India. But what a situation:

Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves,  
Waited for rain, while the black clouds,  
Gathered for distant, over Himvant  
The jungle crouched, humped in silence. <sup>9</sup>

Indian renaissance created a feeling of nationalism and spiritual forces started to assert it. It sharply reacted against the imperialistic [powers, especially the British rule. The Britishers were brave people, and had come to India in the sixteenth century mainly for commercial expansion. Taking advantage of the then shaky Mughal rule the Britishers subjugated India and changed the tools of trade for the implements of war. Gradually they had established their reign over a vast sub-continent consisting Aryans, Dravidians, Semites and others.

At last, in 1813, the commercial monopoly of the Company was ended, and the British in India assumed, besides political functions, educative and civilizing functions as well. Thereafter, the Governors of the Provinces and successive Governor-General showed little interest in Hindu or Islamic culture, and hence they did not tackle boldly the problem of illiteracy among the Indian masses. There were at that time, four types of educational institutions in India:

1. Pathshalas of Hindus
2. Madarssas of the Muslims
3. Persian Schools and,
4. Schools teaching through the modern Indian languages <sup>10</sup>

It was **Sir William Jones**, who brought a new phase of expansion in India in the field of education. Sir Jones founded **The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal**. He had respect for the sacred literature of India He prompted not only his countrymen but also Indian people ‘to study the sacred Indian literature reverently, to bring it to the notice of the masses and to help the Indian renaissance towards fruitful blossoming in the fullness of time.’<sup>11</sup> **Lord Warren Hastings** indeed founded and

liberally endowed the Calcutta Madarssa in 1781. Earlier James Augustus Hicky had founded “Hickey’s Bengal Gazette” India’s first newspaper, at Calcutta.

Jones and his comrades in oriental scholarship were definitely inspired by a stern, missionary zeal. But the burning question before them was how to communicate the message of the renaissance to the illiterate masses. In the meantime, Jonathan Duncan started the **Sanskrit College** in Banaras, still no appropriate conclusion was drawn out over the issue of medium; neither Charles Grant’s **Observations** nor Lord Moira’s **Minute**, nor the British Parliament’s initiative in 1813, nor yet the formation of the committee of Public Instruction in 1823, attempted any far-reaching solution of the educational problem.

The three factors that emerged now and acted as a solvent of the doubts and perplexities in the course of education in India for the next one hundred years and more, were as follows:

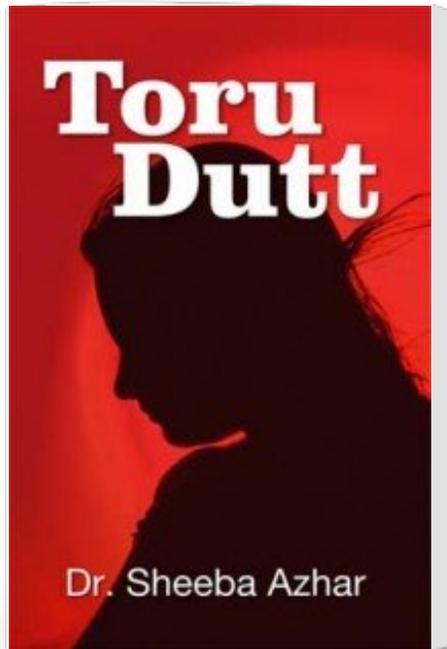
1. The new intellectualism and renascent ardour among the Indians, as symbolized by Raja Ram Mohan Roy.
2. The perseverance of the Christian missionaries,
3. The perseverance and metallic clarity of McCauley’s English prose style.<sup>12</sup>

Among the leading Bengali gentlemen in Calcutta at that time were Raja Ram Mohan Roy, founder of Brahma Samaj, one of the earliest fruits of the new educational movement and; Dwarkanath Tagore and his cousin, Prosunno Kumar Tagore; Ram Komal Sen; Ram Gopal Ghose; and Rasmoy Dutt. The last mentioned was the most distinguished of the three sons of Nilmoni Dutt, great-grandfather of Toru Dutt. With the help of two Englishmen David Hare and Sir Edward Hyde East, Ram Mohan Roy inaugurated the **Calcutta Hindu College**, which later developed into the **Presidency College**; the premier educational institution of Bengal, later on Madras and Bombay followed the enterprising and energetic Bengal.

The second factor that determined the course of education in India was the advent and activities of Christian missionaries. They did considerable work in the field of education and social service. Carey, Ward and Marshman the three missionaries founded the **Serampore College** in 1818 mainly with a view to Christian enlightenment

In the meantime by the efforts of the missionaries, the two great charters of the company, viz those of 1813 and 1838, were passed. The education of Indian people was now included within the duties of the Company and a grant was sanctioned for establishment of English schools, thereby laying the foundation of the modern educational system.

# Toru Dutt By Dr. Sheeba Azhar



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