

An Analysis of Toru Dutt's Our Casuarina Tree

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This poem written by Toru Dutt is a type of a memoir or a nostalgic poem. The poet associates the Casuarina tree with her childhood memories and tells the readers about her siblings with whom she had played, spend her years in happiness underneath the same tree. Although all of them are dead at present, the tree still exists. It is hence at once the source of happiness as by looking at the giant tree, she remember those lost memories. At the same time, it brings fresh sorrow and pain and her eyes are moist with tears. The poem is a paean to those good old days and the poet has immortalized the tree forever through her verse. The poem **"Our Casuarina Tree"** is a beautiful symbolic poem harmonizing both matter and manner in accurate proportion. The tree stands for a symbolic representation of Toru's past memory. Apparently it symbolizes the rich tradition of Indian culture and philosophy which played an important role in shaping the poetic and aesthetic sensibility of the poets. In Keats' **"Ode to a Nightingale"**, the bird symbolizes the world of art and beauty. In Shelley's **"To a Skylark"**, the bird is the symbol of freedom and liberty. Similarly, in Toru Dutt's **"Our Casuarina Tree"**, the tree connotes the nostalgic feelings and memory of Toru Dutt. This is the tree under which she played with his brother and sister- Abju and Aru. So the very thought of the tree transported her to her golden past days.

Toru Dutt was one of the first native writers who wrote in English. Born to a wealthy family of Dutt's, she spent her childhood along with her siblings Aru and Abju in Europe and India. She died at a premature age of 22 when she was in the full bloom of her literary career. This poem is one of her most celebrated works as it combines in it a tone of romantic languor as well as a poignant sorrow, a mixture of sweet melodies of happiness and pain.

The poem opens with the use of the simile- "Like a huge python..." and the poet says that a huge creeper like plant has wound around the trunk of the Casuarina tree and has crept upto the mast of the tree. Immediately later she says that any other tree would have found it difficult to live under that stifling throttle. But the Casuarina wears it like a scarf on its head. At once a magnanimous appearance of the tree is envisioned. This giant tree is an abode of peace for all the birds, the flowers that blossom on the tree attract the bees. At night a sweet song of a bird would reverberate all around the garden. Thus in the first stanza, the poet establishes how beautiful and heavenly the place would seem like. The action described took place in the past.

In the second stanza too, the description of nature comes again. In the morning when the poet would look at the tree, she would see a gray baboon sitting on the top of the tree and experiencing the sunrise. His little baby would play in the branches. The scenic beauty is far beyond words to describe. In another part of the garden, the water lilies would bloom together underneath the shadow of the tree.

In the third stanza, the poet becomes personal and declares that not because of its beauty is the tree dear to her,

"But not because of its magnificence/ Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:" Rather she has spent a great number of her childhood years underneath this tree with her sweet siblings, those kindred souls whom death has untimely taken away. The beauty of the tree is no more than an added

gift. Its actual importance lies in the fact that it is a part of the Dutts' existence, a reminder of family ties, of the warmth shared by three siblings. The Abju-Aru-Toru bonding was indeed strong and in *Sita* Toru mentions, "**Three happy children...**" sitting in a dark room listening to a story and then sighs because she knows that they will never again "by their mother's side/Gather". Like Keats, she had to suffer a lot. She had seen bitter struggle for life and death, untold miseries after the death of her beloved brother and sister.

The fourth stanza is highly philosophical. The poet observes "**Unknown yet well-known to the eyes of faith**". Here the term 'unknown' denotes not simply the native home of the poet but also the world of the departed soul. A man who has the eye of faith can see the unknown as well-known. This is what exactly Toru Dutt feels here. Interestingly Toru's mystical and spiritual approach to poetry is centered to her profound knowledge of great Sanskrit epics and scriptures. The music which Toru refers here is not an ordinary music which we hear in our day to day life; it is music of the soul, which once it is attained, never dies and continues to vibrate with the highest percipience in the mind of the seeker. Toru Dutt is not like the "Skylark" of Shelley, "**the scorner of the ground**" but she is the "Skylark" of Wordsworth "**a pilgrim of the sky**" and does not despise the earth where cares abound.

At the end of the poem she absolutely transcends the mortal, materialistic and mundane frame of mind and attains the power of love to overcome the negative forces of life like death and darkness, terror and fear. In this stanza, the words and the phrases like 'trembling hope', 'love', 'death', 'the skeleton', 'and oblivion' are very suggestive. She means to say that a man of unflinching love and devotion never fears the blows of death. Toru does not express any desire to fade "**far away**" and "**dissolve**". Their Casuarina tree does not make her long for "**easeful**" death. Instead, even though its "**timelessness**" mocks the transience of the human world, the tree is to her a support, a reminder of the joy she once experienced with Abju and Aru. So, in the final stanza, Toru Dutt, aware both of **Druidism** and the customary tree-worship in India, wishes to "consecrate a lay" in the Casuarina Tree's honour.

To sum up, the poem "Our Casuarina Tree" shows a perfect blending of feelings and forms, matter and manner. It contains what Eliot means by his phrase "**unified sensibility**". It is a combination of both the East and the West. In form, it is very near to the Romantic and the Victorian poems. In theme it dives deep into the unfathomable ocean of the **Vedanta** and the **Upanishad** of body and soul, life and death.