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TORU DUTT AS THE ENGLISH NOVELIST

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ABSTRACT



In this paper, I analyse Toru Dutt's only one English Novel, *Bianca*. Toru Dutt displayed her rare ability as a novelist in it. In weaving a tragic plot, in drawing subtle characters, in creating suspense, and in describing a person, place or thing, Toru shows a remarkable inventiveness and vigour '*Bianca*' is incomplete and ends abruptly.

Keywords: Autobiographical, betrothal, consonant, Inventiveness, linguist, morbidity, prototype, romance, suspense and tragedy.

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INTRODUCTION

Toru Dutt is one of the distinguished authors in Indian English Literature. Her work may be meagre, but it is lasting worth. Toru's literary development in interesting enough. She began with French and English and later drifted towards Sanskrit. She is one of the major Indian English poets. She produced a small body of poetry. Her well-known poetry volumes are- '*A Sheaf Gleamed in French Fields*' and '*Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustani*'. Her poetic output is meagre indeed, but it is of permanent value. Toru's poetry is essentially of her race and her land. She was fully soaked in Hindu myths and legends. Her poetic diction is mostly simple and clear. There can be no two opinions about the fact that Toru Dutt is a greater poet than a novelist. She is remembered today for her poetry,

her novels are small in output but significant in making yet another milestone in her artistic development.

Toru Dutt was born on March 4th, 1856 in a Hindu family in Rambagan, 12 Manicktollah Street, Calcutta. Toru was brought up by her parents in a fine cultural atmosphere. Her father, Govinchunder Dutt, was a good poet and linguist. Her mother, Kshetramani, was well-versed in Bengali and English. She as well as her husband wielded a profound influence on the daughters, Aru and Toru. Toru had only one brother, Abju who was the eldest child in the family. It was in 1862 that Dutt family accepted the Gospel of Christ, leaving Hindu religion. The conversion caused a temporary estrangement between Toru's parents. At that time, Toru was aged 6, Aru 8, and their only brother Abju 11. The children

had a private tutorat home, and the father also took care of their education.

In 1869, the Dutt family left for Europe and two girls attended a French school at Nice. A year later, the family went to Italy and England. Two years afterwards, the family returned to Calcutta. At the age of 20, Aru died of consumption on July 23, 1874. At the age of 14, Abju died too. Govin was so much upset of his children's death. By 1877, Toru's health had completely run down. She was obliged to keep within doors. At last on August 30, 1877, Toru paid her debt to nature, leaving her parents totally deserted and depressed.

On examine Toru's papers after her death at age of 22, her father, Govinchunder Dutt discovered among other writings, the manuscripts of two valuable novels, one in English and the other is in French. The English novel was entitled "*Bianca*" or '*The Young Spanish Maiden*' and the French one '*La Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers*'.

In this paper, I am concerning with her English Novel, "*Bianca*". It consists eight chapters and a portion of the ninth. It is an in complete romance. It appeared serially in "The Bengal Magazine" between January and April 1878. Never did it come out in a book form. It is a tale of romance. It is very tender and pathetic. The circumstances of the heroine, Bianca, have some touch resemblances" with those of creator (Toru Dutt) of the romance.

Plot and Theme of the novel:

Bianca opens with the death of Inez. Bianca's elder sister, and the funeral place on a dreary February day. Bianca and her father mourn the death with broken hearts.

'They lowered the coffin. The father stood, silent, his eyes half-closed, his lips trembling, was he praying? Was he weeping? Bianca's tears fell silently, drop by drop, sometimes a deep-drawn sigh shook her slight frame; she kept down the sobs in that way.' (Bianca, 265)

Bianca, now the only surviving daughter of her father, a Spanish gentleman who has settled in an English village, is overcome with gloom and grief until Martha, her Scotch maid, comes and persuades her to forget the loss. That evening she pays a

special attention to her father, forgetting her own intense grief. Her place in the household has been one of special esteem rather than of special affection; her father usually takes her counsel. This is how Bianca has been sketched by the writer:

'She was not beautiful; of the middle height; her slight figure was very graceful; her face not quite oval; her forehead was low; her lips were full, sensitive and mobile; her colour was dark; have you even seen an Italian peasant girl? When she blushed or was excited, the colour mounted warm and deep to her pale olive cheek; she was beautiful then; her dark brown eyes—just like Keeper's (the Dog's), her father would say, smiling—were large and full; in fact this pair of eyes and her long, black curls were her only points of beauty.' (Bianca, p.267)

The next day, her father catches fever, and she engages a doctor for him and nurses him carefully for a full week.

After the lapse of more than a year, Mr. Walter Ingram, Inez's fiancé, visits Bianca and seeks her in marriage. Mr. Ingram is sketched thus: "He was a rather handsome young man of about twenty-four, with a frank countenance, fair hair, and pale blue eyes; his lips were full, but they lacked firmness; in stature he was of the middle height." (Bianca, p.271) Bianca tells him plainly that she can give him nothing more than sisterly love and tries to console him. They meet a common acquaintance, Margaret Moore, the daughter of the widowed Lady Moore, who resides in the chief house of the village. Margaret, or 'Maggie' as Bianca calls her affectionately, urges Bianca to visit her home, and the latter agrees to this. In the evening, Bianca asks her father's permission to go to Moore's, but he is unwilling to consent to this visit until he hears that the grown up son of the house, Lord Moore, is away to London. Mr. Garcia is a self-respecting man and does not want that his daughter be accused of 'husband-hooking'. But Bianca is already in deep love with this young man.

Bianca goes to Moore's on the following day, and is received courteously by Lady Moore. The reader is, one by one, introduced to little Willie, a boy of four years, to Lady Moore, a frigid and

haughty woman, to Maggie, a girl of mirthful nature of the age of Bianca, and finally to Lord Moore, a lovable gentleman. Lord Moore unexpectedly returns home, enters into a dialogue with Bianca, and offers to escort her to her residence. He is very much pleased with Bianca's gentle manners and poetic talent, and decides to marry her despite the wishes of his mother. Meanwhile, Lady Moore enters his reading room, reminds him of his marriageable age, and proposes the name of Miss De Wilton as his bride. When Lord Moore shows no interest in her proposal, she begins to speak ill of Bianca, who may be penniless but full of womanly virtues and hence his would-be wife. He persuades the mother in this manner: "You always loved me; try to love her a little for my sake. You desire my happiness. I cannot be happy without her." (Bianca, p. 287)

More than a week afterwards, Lord Moore and Willie call upon Mr. Garcia, and later Mr. Moore talks to Bianca in the garden. When the servant John takes away Willie, Lord Moore is so much carried away by powerful feelings that he kisses her on the mouth. She feels it her moral duty to tell her father about the kissing incident, hearing which Mr. Garcia becomes very angry. Just then, Martha brings in a letter from the Hall which contains Lord Moore's definite offer of marriage. Mr. Garcia is, however, reluctant to grant his consent for marriage, and Bianca, quite dejected, goes slowly upstairs into her own room. In the evening, Lord Moore comes to Mr. Garcia to learn of his decision. Mr. Garcia, however, seems to be still undecided in the matter and points out that Lady Moore may not like the marriage. But when he sees that the young man's grief is so intense and genuine, he relents and sends for Bianca, who is found totally depressed and seized with fever and delirium. The father rushes upstairs, followed by Lord Moore. Finding her in a precarious condition, Lord Moore hastily returns home to ride for the doctor.

The Moore family notices Lord Moore's perturbation. Dr. Chambers is brought in. He prescribes the medicine, which Lord Moore immediately makes available. But the illness continues for weeks together, and Bianca's maternal aunt Dorothy, now Mrs. Cranly, who is a widow,

comes to take care of her. Even a London Doctor is engaged for the treatment of Bianca. Lord Moore comes to see her regularly. After a month, Bianca recovers. Her father informs her that he has begun liking Lord Moore for her sake. She becomes very happy to hear this.

In the next chapter, Lady Moore is seen talking to Mr. Owen, a cousin of the Mores and also distantly related through his wife to the Garcias. She has "a strong regard for his sense", (Bianca, p. 376) and latterly that feeling has been increased by Mr. Owen's regular attendance at her weekly prayer-meeting. She tells him that she is averse to her son marrying a dark, penniless girl, and Mr. Owen promises to help her in the matter. He talks to Lord Moore about it, but the latter rebuffs him. After a month, Lord Moore and Bianca have a delightful ride on two separate horses. They return, after the ride to the Moore hall. While they were playing with Willie, Mr. and Mrs. Owen and Margaret approach them. And when Mr. Owen salutes and speaks to Bianca, she scornfully scolds him, and asks Lord Moore to have no truck with persons like him: "My lord, take care of that man; he is a bold bad man. He mustn't come here often". (Bianca, p. 380) Thereafter, she goes away.

The next chapter, which is also the last one, tells of the parting of the two lovers, as Lord Moore is a captain in the army and England requires his services in the Crimean War. But before he goes away, he takes off a small ring and slides it on her marriage finger. Here the story breaks off.

Critique: This romance is apparently as unrevised fragment, and has some inconsistencies in it. Thus, Lord Moore is called 'Colin' in the earlier chapters and 'Henry' in the later ones. The rainy weather of the opening scene so quickly turns to snow; and Lady Moore does not apparently know about the actual engagement of her young son. In addition to these, there are some incidents in it which are not consonant with reality. For example, Bianca's sudden delirium and her quick recovery after a prolonged illness and Mrs. Cranly's departure from the home is overlooked. The novelist does not always succeed in reproducing the lisping language of a child, such as that of Willie's. It is strange that Bianca continues to address Lord Moore as 'my lord',

eventually their betrothal and establishment of intimacy. But the reader should not forget the fact that the story is not completed and has some threads still left hanging loose which need to be worked in.

The tragic plot is simple and straightforward. It moves through tragedy and suffering. It has a certain structure of its own. It is fraught with suspense and tragedy. It charms the reader and holds his attention unto the very last. The language of the romance is lucid and fluent, and the style is stirring and vigorous. The reader comes across one or two French sentences in the midst of beautifully written English. The story reflects Toru Dutt's talents, attainments, and character, her poetic imagination and powers of description, her intimate acquaintance with English and French literature, and above all, her deeply religious nature. Toru's art of characterization is full of economy and suggestiveness. She excels in portraying female characters and their inner secrets and longings. She reveals her characters not very quickly but in a gradual process, holding the reader's attention to the last. The recurrent motif of the novels is love. There are crises in love, but they are satisfactorily overcome.

There are some autobiographical overtones in the novels. The death of Aru clouds the writer's thinking and produces morbidity. The pure character and the boldness of the novelist have been passed on to the heroine, Bianca, who is extremely fond of her father. The heroine, like Toru herself, is aged simply eighteen. Aru is the prototype of Inez. The tragedy at home, it is obvious, seriously hurt the writer's sensibility, and an element of morbidity has entered into the novel.

Like her poetry, Toru's novel is sweet and simple. Her expressions are usually direct and undistorted, and show her remarkable command of English and French.

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