

Toru Dutt's "Our Casuarina Tree" : An Exploration of Its Significance to Global Ecological Harmony

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Abstract

The 21st century, since its dawn, has been encountering the degradation of the global environment as a consequence of humans' own anthropocentric conducts towards the natural resources which are limited to the Earth's stock.

The ecocritics and other literary personalities through the means of their eco-sensitive works in any literature of the world have selflessly exploited their literary potential to pinpoint/expose the bitter truth of the environmental destruction in name of the unfulfilled humans' cravings of the technological and material prosperities.

The present paper explores how Toru Dutt in her eco-sensitive poem entitled 'Our Casuarina Tree' has wholeheartedly and successfully made the entire humanity aware of the significance of trees for global ecological harmony.

Keywords: Toru Dutt, Ecology, Global, Environment, Biosphere.

Introduction

It was the German zoologist, Ernst Haeckel who did make the word 'Ecology' come into its existence in 1869. Haeckel defined 'ecology' as "the study of all environmental conditions of existence". (Worster, 192)

According to BYJUS (an Indian multinational educational company), " Ecology is the study of organisms, the environment and how the organisms interact with each other and their environment. It is studied at various levels, such as organism, population, community, biosphere and ecosystem". (Web)

William Ruckert did a commendable work in bringing the term 'Ecocriticism' into its full limelight across the globe in his eco-sensitive essay entitled 'Literature and Ecology: An

Experiment in Ecocriticism'. Ecocriticism touched the zenith of its worldwide recognition in 1996 with the publication of a very authentic and eco-sensitive anthology of well researched ecocritical essays jointly edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm.

Cheryl Glotfelty writes: It is the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of mode of production and economic class to its reading of texts, Ecocriticism takes an earth centered approach to literary studies". (The Ecocriticism Reader, XVIII)

Lawrence Buell is a very eminent professor of American literature, rendering his active teaching service at Harvard university. He is very much recognized as well as appreciated in all parts of the world and is called a pioneer in the domain of ecocriticism or ecocritical theories.

Being an ecocritic Lawrence Buell writes about the definition of ecocriticism as follows:

" as a study of the relationship between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis". (Buell, 430)

Toru Dutt was an established poetess of Indo-Anglian literature; she was well versed in composing poems in English and also contributed her creative writings to Bengali literature.

She was born on 4 March, 1856 in a well cultured Bengali family and her father's name was Govind Chandra Dutt. She was the youngest of the three offsprings of her parents. She was also called as Tarulata Dutt and her brother and sister's names were Abju and Aru respectively.

Toru Dutt's contribution to the enrichment of Indo-Anglian literature is very much remarkable as well as commendable and she is placed in the category of Vivian Derozio, Sarojni Naidu, Henry Louis, Manmohan Ghosh, etc.

Toru Dutt's 'Our Casuarina Tree' is a very unique as well as elevated kind of poetical composition which consists of fifty-five lines. Each line is drenched in the reverence or hymn of this magnificent tree which is adjacent to the poetess' window. The ecological relevance of the poem is grounded on the fact that the Casuarina tree played an important and decisive role in making the poetess strengthen her mutual relationship with her siblings. The tree proved to be the sole mentor for them as they freely used to gather/ assemble together under the cool shade of the tree .

Toru Dutt is a very special poetess and the fabrication of the words in this particular poem uplifts the humans' perception towards the evergreen value and blessings of any kind of tree which survives on the Earth.

The Casuarina tree symbolizes the motherhood for mammals, ants, bees, birds, etc., for this sacred tree provides shelter to all living things without discriminating their origins, shapes and colors.

In the poem, Our Casuarina Tree, the poetess blends an enchanting scene of a gray baboon's immense joy in the winter. The tree is not an ordinary tree in the poetess' eco-sensitive eyes; it provides the best moments to the baboon who is sitting on its main branch while her offspring on its lower branch.

" A gray baboon sits statue-like alone

Watching the sunrise;

While on lower boughs

His puny offspring leap

About and play"; (Web)

The baboon herself and her family are indebted to this tree for permitting them behold the heavenly scenery of the sunrise. In other words, the tree connects them with the captivating and soothing world of the natural environment.

Toru Dutt is really excited to portray each and every aspect of the tree which in one way or other sets a perennial example of kinship among the God's creations.

According to Frederick Suresh, " A perfect ecology is one in which plants, animals, birds and human beings live in such harmony that none dominates or destroys the others".(Frederick, 147)

In the opening lines Toru Dutt unravels how the creeper has overlapped the trunk of the Casuarina tree and induced wounded marks around it. The most interesting point to decipher here is the poetess' gratitude and appreciation of the tree. Despite the tight hold/clutch of the creeper(seems like a python), it does not surrender itself to its supremacy. Toru Dutt conceives the tree as an alive soul, for it denotes unity and healthy bond between a domestic tree and a family.

The poetess feels herself blessed for being very close to the tree; she attributes it as a warrior.

"Like a huge python,winding round and round.

The rugged trunk,indented deep with scars,

Up to its very summit near the stars,

A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound
No other tree could live.
But gallantly the giant wears the scarf,...." (Web)

A warrior never accepts anyone's dominance even at any crucial situation; he or she remains gallant in his/her physical actions. That is why even the suffocating scarf around its trunk never deviated it from accommodating the baboon, nightingale, etc., on its branches. The melodious voice of the nightingale is unparalleled which begins during the night time and continues till the dawn.

" And oft at night the garden overflows
With one sweet song that seems to
Have no close,
Sung darkling from our tree,
While men repose".(Web)

Toru Dutt in this particular stanza is overwhelmed with the divinity of her natural surrounding as there is an analogy between the voice of a nightingale and that of a devotee's sacred chanting in praise of God. This stanza of the poem is very special in the sense that the poetess expresses her hearty thankfulness to the tree including birds (especially the nightingale) and bees for shaping her childhood and poetical career with bunch of motivations/ inspirations so that she could compose fruitful poems, especially *Our Casuarina Tree*, in anticipation of humans' humanitarian services to the natural landscapes, wherein different kinds of plants and trees would flourish and survive for a healthy global ecology.

The trees always stand for bringing vigor, meaning, peace, and prosperity in the humans' lives; they happily provide fruits, shelter, etc., to them without expecting the same sort of service in gratitude by the humanity. But it is the universal truth that they can never exist without timely care and conservation by the human race.

The poem, *Our Casuarina Tree* is loaded with eco-sensitive feelings as Toru Dutt herself proclaims an unbreakable as well as evergreen significance of this tree in her life, for it helped her in recalling the memories of her childhood days. Whenever the poetess is in front of it, she automatically enters into a world of interrupted happiness and freedom and she finds herself playing with her brother and sister under the guardianship of this magnificent tree.

Plunging deep into the poem one gains the ecological wisdom of the manifold utilities of all kinds of trees for humans' healthy lives on the Earth.

For Toru Dutt, the Casuarina tree remained an inspiration in all phases of her life. Even during her prolonged stay in France and Italy for pursuing her higher studies, the tree acted as a bridge or pool to connect her both with her siblings and motherland.

Toru Dutt's Poem, 'Our Casuarina Tree' is intertwined with the stanzas of the environmental awareness in order to conserve the trees from their untimely disappearance from the Earth. The poetess has artistically exploited her poetical talent to showcase the important incidents of her life which successfully inculcate in the readers' mind with respect to how even a single tree is capable of nourishing her life with both eco-sensitive wisdom and humanitarian values. The poem is definitely one of the best examples of an Indian eco-poetry as J. Scott Bryson says that an eco-poetry has to deal with the eco-centric perspectives in defense of the natural environment which is superior to humans.

The tree never makes her feel alone despite the physical absence of her brother and sister; it plays a very strong part in letting her come out of boredom and to concentrate herself fully on her poetical journey, a journey which completed through bringing her accolades in the literary horizon of Indo- Anglian poetry in English.

The modern generation has to contemplate on their ongoing technological aspirations which distract them from nature. Before the advent of modernization, the people of any society used to assemble under the shelter of shadowy trees of peepal, banyan, neem, etc., for discussing the important plans or topics related to domestic peasantry such as, the procurement of the best quality of seeds for the healthy production of crops and fodders for themselves and their cattle. The majority of people consisted of farmers headed by the head/chief of their village. They also used to lay emphasis on the water conservation for an unbreakable supply of water for harvesting and drinking even at the time of drought. Suitable to this context, it is quite relevant to quote Frederick Suresh's eco-sensitive words with regard to sustainable development as he says that "the most common measure to tackle environmental crisis is sustainable development". (128)

Toru Dutt's 'Our Casuarina Tree' is definitely her magnum opus, for it inspires the humanity to a great extent with respect to showing compassion and love to the entire trees of the world.

Conclusion

Toru Dutt's 'Our Casuarina Tree' has successfully established an undeniable significance of trees in any part of the world as they are undisputedly part and parcel of humans' daily lives. They provide the human beings fruits, flowers, air, shelter, etc.

Over the years, the modern people have neglected mother Earth's urgent call of making her pollution free through paving the way to the protection of wild forests. Even the domestic people have to ensure the satisfactory number of shadowy trees nearby the vacant space or field of their houses.

The twenty first century has faced global warming, climate change, unseasonal rainfall, extinction of trees, etc., more frequently than the previous century. The solution in this regard is practical as well as simple, that is to stop the destruction of trees and create social awareness through distributing healthy seeds and plants across different societies of the world in order to make them enjoy and smell the real fragrance of a harmonious and blissful global ecology.

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