

## **A Comparative study of Toru Dutt's "Our Casuarina Tree" and John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale"**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is a new addition to research in the area of comparative literature to explore the 'Indo-Anglo' literary relations. This research work compares John Keats (1795-1821) the English romantic poet with Toru Dutt (1856-1887) a great Indian poetess and makes an analogical study of their poetical works. The poems are about the imagination and their memory about their beloved persons. Toru Dutt mourns over the death of her companions through this poem. Keats wants to die to escape from the fever and fret of the real world. John Keats, the sensuous poet paints nature through words. He imagines the new world, as the world of Nightingale. Toru Dutt becomes sensuous poet, when she describes the Casuarina tree. They are similar in the theme, description and the images.

**Key Words** : Comparison, Imagination, Sensuousness, Nature, death, Romantic

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### **Introduction**

The primary aim of Literature is to deal with the impact of experience on subjective awareness. Every national Literature feels at times the need to cross national boundaries. Chingi Aitmatov says, "Today's world is swiftly heading towards an age of uniformity". Comparative Literature is one such, which makes the analogy between two different Literatures. It is the comparison of one Literature with another in the spheres of human expressions. It is an interdisciplinary field, which studies the Literature across the national borders, across time periods, across languages, across genres and across boundaries between Literatures. This paper compares the poems of Toru Dutt, the Indian poet and John Keats, the great romantic poet.

## Comparative Literature

Etymologically, the term comparative literature denotes any literary work or works when compared with any other literary work or works. Hence, comparative literature is the study of inter-relationship between any two or more than two significant literary works or literatures. It is essential that while making comparative study the researcher must take the sources, themes, myths, forms, artistic strategies, social and religious movements and trends into consideration. The comparatist with her critical approach and investigations will find out, the similarities and dissimilarities among various works that she has undertaken for the purpose of comparison and justification lies in the fact that her approach must be unbiased and unprejudiced to reach the ultimate truth.

The definition of comparative literature given by Bijay Kumar Dass is, “The simple way to define comparative literature is to say that it is a comparison between the two literatures. Comparative literature analyses the similarities and dissimilarities and parallels between two literatures. It further studies themes, modes, conventions and use of folk tales, myths in two different literatures or even more.” Comparative Literature as a branch of literary criticism can be applied in analyzing Romantic poems. Welleck says, the terms Romantic and Romanticism everywhere understood as the kind of Literature produced after Neo-Classicism. In the Neo-Classical age, writers wrote objective Literature and followed classical rules who wrote for the aristocrats. The Romantic Poets wrote about nature for common people in simple language. In his preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth describes the poetry as “Spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and emotions recollected in tranquility”. The poem is to be genuine, it must be spontaneous or unforced and the free from artificial rules.

### John Keats and Toru Dutt

John Keats and Toru Dutt lived in different generations, belonged to different cultural backgrounds and grew from different social, political and spiritual climates. Toru Dutt was born thirty five years after the death of John Keats. The younger poet had no chance of having any personal contact with elder poet. But she had the unique opportunity of having an access to the poems of John Keats. The two poets are lovers of nature and they received inspiration, themes and images from nature.

### Spontaneous Overflow of Powerful Feelings

John Keats ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. In the spring of 1819 Keats was living in a house in Hampstead, near London with his friend Charles Brown noticed that when he came back into the house he had some scraps of paper. That is the poem ‘Ode to a Nightingale’. In composing poems, John Keats and Toru Dutt seem to believe in the Wordsworth’s theory of poetry. Toru Dutt’s ‘Our Casuarina Tree’ is the emotions recollected in Tranquility. After the death of her brother and sister, she stayed near Borrowdale. By seeing the Casuarinas’ tree in that place. She recollected the memories of the past through

this poem, she immortalize the tree as well as her emotional attachments to their sweet companions.

May'st thou be numbered when my days are done

With deathless tree like those in Borrowdale(49-50)

They are Romantic poets and they immortalize the Casurania tree and song of the nightingale in a similar manner with slight differences. Toru Dutt portrays her past memories through imagination. But Keats portrays the unknown world of Nightingale through imagination. Both poets are the lovers of nature and they paint nature through words. The theme of death is mentioned in their poems. Toru Dutt mourns over the death of her companions through this poem. Keats wants to die to escape from the fever and fret of the real world.

Toru Dutt is called the Keats of the Indo-English Literature. Some of her poems show the influence of Keats. They led a short span of life and produced remarkable works. Their lives were full of melancholy. They lost their dear brothers and sisters. They are the lover of classics. Toru Dutt uses Sanskrit myths in her works. Keats uses Greek myths in his works.

## Art and Nature

‘Art imitates nature’ says Aristotle, the poets have understood the relationship between arts and nature. In each period, the poets differed in their attitude to nature. The imitative theory enabled the poets to give a mechanical reflection of the world. In the Romantic period, the poets brought their imagination to be upon external reality using their imagination as an instrument of knowledge of the real. The Romantic poets identified their poetic self with the object of nature and turned it to be symbol of his emotional and psychological situation. Wordsworth in his preface says, “Man and the objects that surround him as acting and reacting upon each other. So as to produce infinite qualities of nature”. The poet is a man speaking to men but equipped with a greater organic sensibility.

John Keats is one of Romantic poets. Though he was a student of medicine, he was not absorbed nature in scientific way. The visible world for Keats was chiefly the world of nature without the moral and mystical over tones. “With the senses he discovers nature and with his thoughts he discovers nature of poetry”. In his poems, he chose an intense and passionate enjoyment derived from the objects of nature. The song of Nightingale makes him painful pleasure. John Keats seems to have inspired Toru Dutt, Indian poetess as in glorifying nature. She finds painful pleasure in Casuarina tree. She considers the tree as her companion. To think about the tree is the only enjoyment for her. She lived a life in harmony with nature.

## Sensuous Poets

John Keats, the sensuous poet paints nature through words. He imagines the new world, as the world of Nightingale. In its main aspects, the world of imagination is similar to the world

of nature. When the poet flies on the 'Viewless wings of poesy' and reaches the world of imagination, he finds the Queen moon on her throne clustered around by the stars. In its darkness, the poet guesses each flower by its smell. He identifies that the flower blossomed are the Hawthorne, Eglantine and musk rose just smelling them. He hears the murmuring sound of the flies and concludes that the flowers are filled with honey.

Toru Dutt resembles Keats in describing the Casuarina Tree.

Like huge python, winding round and round  
The rugged trunk, indented, with scars  
Upon its very summit near stars,  
A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound  
No other tree could live(1-5)

The Casuarina tree is very tall and its summit is near the stars. The creeper plants have grown in the tree and it is like python with rugged trunk indented with scars. A grey colored parent monkey sits at the top of the tree like a statue, watching the sunrise. The little monkey is leaping and playing under the tree. The Kokilas are hailing day. The sleepy cows are moving towards the pastures. The trees shadow falls on the water tank. The water lilies have spring like snow enmassed. The birds and bees are haunting.

## Imagination

Imagination is the mantra for the poets. It can give the poet a Godly vision and it raises him to the status of the God. The poets are the creator. They are creating a new world through imagination. The world of imagination is boundless, spacious and immortal. "When the imagination sleeps, words are emptied of their meaning". Keats hears the song of Nightingale. It kindles the imagination of the poet. He escapes from the world of suffering to the world of joy.

" Away! Away! For I will fly to thee,  
Not charioted by Bacchus and his Pards,  
But on the viewless wings of poesy."(31-33)

He imagined the whole world of Nightingale and painted it in this poem. The pouring of the bird's soul in full throated ease changed it as a melodious world. Toru Dutt resembles Keats in her capacity of imagination. When the poet sees the Casuarina tree in Borrowdale, she recollects her sweet companions and the tree in her sweet native place. She brings up the real world through the imagination. As she is a lover of nature, she describes the tree beautifully.

## Idea of Death

Death is one of the important themes of poems. Emily Dickenson personifies Death as a impartial gentleman and she obeys his words and gone with him with immortality and eternity. John Keats suffers during his life. He lost his parents and brother at the young age. His Lady love didn't accept his love. He is in melancholy. He finds solaces in nature. He wants to live in the world of joy. By hearing the song of Nightingale, he got the real joy. There can be no better time for him to die than this. When he is experiencing the highest mood of imaginative rapture. He wishes that he may die at midnight a painless death with the sweet songs of the Nightingale pouring into his ears. Toru Dutt rouses for the death of Abju and Aru Dutt. Toru Dutt wrote to her Cambridge friend Mary, "The Lord has taken Aru from us. It is a sore trail for us, His will done, We know He doeth all things for our goods." The tree is dear to her for the sake of her sweet companions. It picturizes the image of her companions. Now, they are in blessed sleep. Dutt's sunniness however remained although darkened now and then by the memory of the lost brother and the lost sister.

Toru Dutt imagines the mourning song of the tree. It mourns for the death of Tour Dutt's companions. Imagination makes her long for the memories of her dead sisters and brothers. She lives with them in the world of imagination.

It is the tree's lament, an erie speech,

That haply to the unknown land may reach (32-33)

Toru Dutt hears the songs of the tree. This Casuarina Tree is not like that sea in the Alfred Lord Tennyson's 'Break Break Break' but it sings mourning songs for the death of the sweet companions of Toru Dutt, she hears the song form far away place. The Songs of the tree makes her cry.

The song of the Nightingale is the image used by Keats. The poet is kindled to have an ecstasy by hearing the song of Nightingale. He loves to hear the melodious song. He likes to die in ecstasy by hearing the songs. The poet has a doubt whether it is a vision or dream.

Thus, Toru Dutt, Indian Poetess and John Keats British Poet are found to be similar in the treatment of subject matter and in sensuous description of nature.

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