

## Study Material for Degree III (Hons.), English, Paper-VII

Dr. Suman Sinha

Department of English

R. N. College, Hajipur

POEM: OUR CASUARINA TREE

POET: TORU DUTT

**Our Casuarina Tree** is a superb creation of Toru Dutt. The poem consists of five stanzas. Each stanza has eleven lines with a rhyme scheme of abba, cddc, eee. In this poem Toru Dutt expresses her emotional association with the tree. The tree reminds her of memorable moments spent in her childhood days. The poem is about timelessness and eternity. Toru Dutt gives a beautiful romantic description of the tree in the poem, **Our Casuarina Tree**. In the description of the tree Toru Dutt exhibits a unique poetic talent she possesses. The poem is full with the description of nature.

Toru Dutt is one of the outstanding poets of Indian English Literature. She was born on 4 March 1856 in Calcutta. Unfortunately, she died at a very young age of 21 years in 1877. In a short span of life she has produced unparalleled work in literature. The two collections of poems included-*A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* and *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*. She also wrote few short poems, essays and two novels. She had written a French novel entitled *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d' Arvers*(1879) and an unfinished novel in English, *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden*.

In the first stanza of the poem the poet describes the majestic beauty of the tree that stood in her garden. The tree is huge and strong. The tree looks grand and beautiful in the tight grip of a python like creeper with crimson flowers that has wound the tree all around. The tree appears like a giant wearing a scarf. The survival of the tree in the tight embrace depicts the strength of the tree because no other tree would have survived. The grip is tight but blossomy. The tree has a rugged trunk with scars all over. The ruggedness with deep marks symbolise the long existence of the tree. These lines describe the beauty as well as the strength of the tree:

*A creeper climbs, in whose embraces bound  
No other tree could live. But gallantly  
The giant wears the scarf, and flowers are hung  
In crimson clusters all the boughs among,*

This huge Casuarina Tree is a centre of life as it serves as a home for birds and bees. The birds and the bees hum and buzz and make the whole environment vibrant. In the night the sweet song of the bird coming from the dark corner of the tree makes the surroundings

musical. The line, '*Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose*' carries a romantic flavour. It reminds us of the famous poem, 'Ode to a Nightingale' written by John Keats.

In the second stanza, the poet gives a very lively and rapturous description of the tree. She describes the pleasure of enjoying the delightful sight of the tree in the early morning. As she opens the window she finds a grey baboon sitting on the branch of the tree like a statue and enjoying the sun rise. The young ones of the monkey are seen enjoying on the lower branches of the tree. The music of the kokila during day time is extremely refreshing. The cows move towards the pastures. The water lilies give the sight of snow enmassed when the shadow of the huge tree cast upon the water tank. Through these descriptions the poet makes the tree appear huge and grand. The sight of the baboon, the hailing kokilas and the sleepy cows portrays the typical Indian scene.

The first and the second stanza of the poem exhibit the tree's physical charm. In the third stanza there is a change of mood. She experiences a moment of nostalgia and becomes sensitive and emotional. The tone becomes melancholic.

In the third stanza of the poem, Toru Dutt affirms that it is not the magnificence of the tree that fascinated her; in fact, the tree is dear to her because of the memories of past that is linked with it. The memories cannot be separated as it has merged with the image of the tree. She is reminded of the wonderful moments of childhood days which she spent with her brother and sister under the shade of this huge tree. Toru Dutt remembers her sister Aru and her brother Abju who are dead. She expresses her feelings as follows:

*O sweet companions, loved with loved intense,  
For your sakes shall the tree be ever dear!*

The poet has so effectively blended the aspect of nature with her memories of the past that it draws tears from her eyes. The image of the tree as the poet expresses '*shall arise in memory..;*'. The tree becomes a symbol of memory. Her sense of loss and her longing for those moments makes her sad. It seems to the poet that the tree is sympathising and lamenting on the loss of her brother and sister. And as it sympathises it produces a dirge like murmur which is like the sea waves breaking against the shore filled with pebbles. In other words, it seems that the tree is mourning the loss of those pleasant moments of childhood very strangely. The lines below are reminiscent of the thoughts of Matthew Arnold and John Keats:

*What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear  
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?  
It is the tree's lament, an eerie speech,  
That haply to the unknown land may reach.*

In these lines the poet writes that the tree laments making strange sounds that perhaps reaches some unknown land.

In the fourth stanza of the poem Toru Dutt humanises the tree as its lament was a universal record of human pain and regret. It also reaches to the distant lands of France and Italy. The image of the tree emerges as a sublime form in the mind of the poet. The image of the tree reminds her of her dead brother and sister. This form correlates to her childhood

memories that she spent in her motherland. Thus, Casuarina tree of her garden has now become a symbol of time and eternity as the poet recollects the moment of past and immortalises it forever.

The last stanza is an expression of poet's desires to make the tree immortal. She desires to dedicate a lyric in honour of the huge tree because it is associated with the memories of those who were precious to the poet more than her life. She desires the Casuarina tree to stand with deathless trees of Borrowdale. In other words, Toru Dutt wanted the Casuarina tree to become immortal like the yew trees of Borrowdale that were made immortal by William Wordsworth, a great romantic poet. The death of Abju and Aru haunts the poet. The tree was the memory of love and companionship for Toru Dutt. She desired to protect the tree from Oblivion's curse. In other words, she willed that the tree must not be forgotten. Hence, this poem was written to immortalise the tree that forever remained an image of her loved ones.

The images and symbols used in the poem enhance its beauty as well as successfully bring out the intense emotion that the poet had in her mind. The love for the brother and sister, the loss and the longings are all presented through various similes and images.

### **POINTS TO REMEMBER**

Poem: Our Casuarina Tree

Poet: Toru Dutt

Born: 04.03.1856

Died: 30.08.1877

Notable Works:

- a) *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields.*
  - b) *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*
  - c) *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d' Arvers*(1879) (French Novel)
  - d) *Bianca or The Young Spanish Maiden* (an unfinished novel in English)
-