

“ REVOLUTIONARY IMPULSE IN TORU DUTT’S *A SHEAF GLEANED IN FRENCH FIELDS*”

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ABSTRACT:

Toru Dutt spent some time in France, read French poets and translated some poems into English with her sister Aru Dutt. This collection of translated poems was published as *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* in 1876. The study of French poets made her an ardent lover of freedom, which is evident in *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*. The poems express love and pain for nation and generate revolutionary impulse. It also revives collective consciousness by narrating events from historical battles.

Key words:

Nation, National Consciousness, Patriotism, Impulse, Sacrifice.

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INTRODUCTION

Toru Dutt and her sister, Aru Dutt, translated the poems of French poets. This collection of translated poems, *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Field*, was published in 1876 without preface or introduction. These include poems with patriotic feelings and national consciousness filled with revolutionary impulse.

Toru Dutt was an ardent lover of freedom. Her love for freedom of nation and national consciousness is evident in her letters written on 29 and 30 January 1871, in the unpublished diary of her voyage (Bader, 2005, p. 11). She had a deep love for France and expressed her feelings in these letters, which were written during the war between France and Germany. This conflict was between the Second French Empire of Napoleon II and the German states led by the Kingdom of Prussia (19 July 1870 – 10 May 1871). Her love for France and emotional reaction to the destruction of Paris was expressed in the letter as follows:

Alas! What changes have taken place in France! When we were in Paris a few days, how beautiful

it was! What houses! What roads! What a magnificent army! But now! Ah! How it has fallen! It was the first of the cities, but now what misery it houses! As soon as the war began, my whole heart was with the French (Bader, 2005, p. 11).

She expressed her feelings and the agony of the French vividly:

Capitulated! That is a word the French use with difficulty! Poor, poor people, they must have been hard pressed to have surrendered! Then came other thunderbolts- a revolution in Paris, the Empress flying away to England, the imperial prince sent to Wilhelmshohe as prisoner of war, the Germans marching into Paris, Strasbourg bombarded and capitulating. What misery in this town during the bombarding! All the houses devastated! Bombs flying about everywhere! (Bader, 2005, p. 11).

Her noble feelings of sacrifice for nation are obvious in the line, “Alas! Thousands and thousands of men have shed blood from their heart for their country, but however the country fell into the hands of their enemies” (Bader, 2005,

p. 12). Pain at the defeat of France and hope for peace is evident in the lines:

Oh France, France, how you have fallen! May it happen that after this humiliation, you serve and adore God better than what you did these days! I hope that there will soon be peace and no more blood will be shed (Bader, 2005, p. 12).

She expressed patriotic feelings and zeal for nation in the lines:

To die for the country,

Is the most beautiful destiny,

The most worthy of envy (Bader, 2005, p. 12).

On 30 January 1871, she wrote that an Italian domestic servant stated, "Paris [has] capitulated", and she read the same in *The Times* "The Germans will enter the forts tomorrow" (Bader, 2005, p. 12). Toru Dutt imagined the conquest, and envisioned "They will disarm all the regiments except for the sedentary national guards and one division that will take it upon themselves to quell all tumult or all battle in the streets while the Germans enter Paris". She expressed her sympathy for France, "Poor, poor France, how my heart bleeds for you!" (Bader, 2005, p. 12). A reading of the letters of Toru Dutt raises patriotic thoughts of national consciousness in the mind of the reader. The generation of strong emotions of love and sacrifice for nation is able to bring an effect of catharsis.

2. Revolutionary Impulse in *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*

Victor Hugo was Toru Dutt's favourite among the poets she translated and she included thirty of his poems in her translations. In the poem *Après le Coup D'état*, Toru Dutt mentioned the patriotic feelings of Victor Hugo. Love and pain for nation is expressed in the lines "O France, dear France, for whom I weep in vain" (Dutt, 1876, p. 6). National consciousness is expressed by remembering the legends as "Tomb of my sires" and attachment to nation in "nest of my loves, - my all/ I ne'er shall see thee, with these eyes again" (Dutt, 1876, p. 6). The feelings of pain on being exiled from the motherland due to the coup are expressed as "I shall not see thy sad, sad

sounding shore,/ France, save my duty, I shall all forget" and "O bitter exile, hard, without a term" expressing latent feeling to return to motherland (Dutt, 1876, p. 6). Patriotic feelings to fight for the nation are expressed in the last stanza of the poem and instil the reader with patriotism.

If true a thousand stand, with them I stand,

A hundred? 'Tis enough: we'll Sylla brave,

Ten ? Put my name down foremost in the band,

One ? Well, alone, - untill I find my grave (Dutt, 1876, p. 6).

The poem, *Lines*, is also filled with patriotic feelings. The poem was written by Victor Hugo while in exile on the "little island of Jersey" (Dutt, 1876, p. 191). The opening stanza expresses pain for the country and for the condition of France under Louis Napoleon Bonaparte. Louis Napoleon Bonaparte was president of France from 1848 to 1852 and the Emperor of France as Napoleon III from 1852 to 1870. Hugo describes the condition of the nation during this period, and he states that people have forgotten the truth, and their souls have become weak to achieve selfish aims. People have chosen selfish aims over the values of "Honour and glory, law and right" (Dutt, 1876, p. 7). People can no longer resist doing wrong. The exile is painful but it has protected his "Faith, Virtue, Dignity" and freedom but it is at the cost of the stern demand of loyalty and his identity as a refugee (Dutt, 1876, p. 7). Hugo regards the island of rocks and caves as his Patmos. It gives him the vision to write most of his poems in the same way that the small Greek island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea gave the vision that inspired the Christian Bible's *Book of Revelation*. The poet likes the island as it protects his freedom under the grand and old banner of England. Hugo has a favorite rock from where he can hear the thunder-shock of waves, which make him sorrowful. The sound of waves is like the cries of a mother who wails at the departure of her children. Here, the nation is referred to as a

mother and the exile as children. The waves remind him of his duty to his motherland and make him to feel as though his nation is calling him in the time of distress.

“The Awakening” is taken by Toru Dutt from Victor Hugo’s poetry collection, *Les Châtiments*. *Le Châtiments* was banned in France. The language was purposefully “savage” and “violent” to rouse the passions of the French people and to demonstrate that Napoleon III’s fall was inevitable and justice would be done (Robb, 1999, p. 325). The publisher of this work, Hetzel, found the work too violent but agreed to publish the work in 1853 at Hugo’s urging (Maurois, 1956, p. 314). Victor Hugo’s works such as “*Les Châtiments* and *Les Misérables* remain cherished texts and over time have helped from the French collective memory of the era” and his “words were woven into individual citizen’s memories of the times and as such became part of France’s collective memory” (VanderWolk, 2006, p. 9).

In the poem, French people are addressed and a call is given to awaken their soul from its sleeping and unconscious state. The poem is set in France after the overthrow of the Second Republic in 1851 by Louis Louis-Napoleon. There are two opposing ideas. One is about the Monarchy, which Hugo is opposed to. He refers to the days in France under Louis-Napoleon after the overthrow of republican government as terrible and without hope. The self-respect and honor of the people have been seduced by the joys of life. The indication is towards the supporters of the monarch against the republican values of the revolution. These supporters are compared to an unconscious person dreaming in sleep. The degradation of values is shown in the following: “Virtue flows out, as blood from sword-wounds streams,/ And angels weep” (Dutt, 1876, p. 86). Under such circumstances, people have no option but to bend down like hollow grass vile reeds. The atrocities of monarchy are described as “all evil, folly, crime” (Dutt, 1876, p. 86). The monarchy is reveling and there is no one to listen to the cry of the soul. The evils of monarchy are expressed as

“They eat, drink, sing, nor care they, if they roll/
In mire and gore” (Dutt, 1876, p. 86). The monarch has been described as “half a god” and the shameless followers of the monarchy (Dutt, 1876, p. 86) unleash crime on innocent people. The situation is so grim that the heroes of the revolution are stirring in their graves. The people do not see the situation though their eyes are open. The poet has sought a response from the people to awaken and give a clear message to stand up for liberty and raise arms against the tyranny of the monarchy. The last lines of the poem express a strong desire to champion the right cause with guns against atrocities. The people are encouraged to wake up from the state of unconsciousness against the wrong deeds of monarchy and for the cause of republican government.

“To Those Who Sleep” is also taken from Victor Hugo’s *Les Châtiments*. This poem is also based on the political ideas of Victor Hugo against the monarchy and he appeals to the French people to overthrow it and replace it with a republican government. The republican government in France resulted from the French Revolution from 1789 to 1799. It was a symbol of the freedom and rights of the people. Napoleon III overthrew the republican government in 1851 and Victor Hugo went into exile, during which time he wrote the poem. Through this poem, Hugo asks the French people to unite against the atrocities. Acceptance of the atrocities of the monarch is regarded as shameful. The people have been exhorted to awaken and unite like a tide, as the time has come and the future of their nation depends upon them. The memories of the French Revolution are revived to motivate people. The people are incited in the lines “Sweep away the tyrant, and his bandits accurst!” Religious sanction is given to this appeal by saying “God, God is with you” and “God is king over all” (Dutt, 1876, p. 87). Despite a lack of resources, the people are motivated in the lines:

You are not armed? It matters not,
Tear out the hinges of the door!
A hammer has deliverance wrought;

David had pebbles from the shore!
 Shout for the cause, - the flag advances!
 Became once more the mighty France!

(Dutt, 1876, p. 87)

People have been motivated to fight despite the odds, and examples are given, such as “To conquer a bastion, or to break through a wall/ Or spike a whole battery 'mid rain-showers of ball/ Often one man has gone!” (Dutt, 1876, p. 88). They are reminded of their race and their great ancestors. If someone is still not ready to fight, violent and derogatory language is against those who are unwilling to join the revolution. While their ancestors were identified with lions, such people are compared with the off-spring of dogs as mentioned below:

The old race, stir no more, but keep
 Their shades in closet prison bound,-
 For never could they- would they own
 Such dastared sons, - nor hare nor hound
 The lion breeds, but whelps alone. (Dutt,

1876, p. 88)

Various techniques are used to revive the national consciousness of the people, to unite them against the tyrant and to liberate the nation from the monarchy and its atrocities. Racial conscious is used by reminding them of their ancestors. Religious consciousness motivates for unity against the tyrant. National consciousness has also been used in the lines “Shout for the cause- the flag advance!/ Become once more the mighty France!” (Dutt, 1876, p. 87). Moreover, historical consciousness is used by mentioning the French Revolution and other historical events in the lines “Remember the men of Ninety-two/ dred twenty kings on battle plains” and “Bastilles again and vilest chains!/ What when the sires could Titans brave,/ Shall dwarfs like these the sons of enslave!” (Dutt, 1876, p. 87).

“The Universal Republic” is another poem with patriotic fervor taken from Victor Hugo’s *Les Châtiments*. Hugo was “the champion of the republican cause in France” and he “expressed his vision of the seminal idea of the United States of Europe before an international audience” on 21

August 1849 as chair of the Paris Peace Conference (Metzidakis, 1994, p. 72). Large segments of Hugo’s writings indicate that he “came to identify historical progress and accomplishment with the utopian goal of a peaceful, united Europe” (Ousselin, 2005, p. 32). According to Ousselin,

Throughout most of his work, Hugo identified himself with his century, and with the progressive, indeed historically providential mission he saw being accomplished by the people of France- or, more specifically, of Paris- through the continuation, in its various forms, of the 1879 Revolution (Ousselin, 2005, p. 32).

A vision of a free and prosperous nation is seen in the opening lines, “O vision of a future time!/ O prospect glorious and sublime” (Dutt, 1876, p. 95). It is hoped that the coming days will be full of love, as “The Past was Hate, - is over his reign,/ Thy name is love, thou coming day” (Dutt, 1876, p. 96). It also reflects Hugo’s vision of a European Utopia with France as the torch-bearer of this revolution. This idea of peace and progress is evident in the lines, “The germ of Union lights its spark,/ Men shall be brothers,- Thus God wills” (Dutt, 1876, p. 96). Such a step will change the dynamics and open a new way for progress, as “At dawn the humble be awakes,/ From poison flowers its honey makes,/ And so works Progress with our ills” and “The wings of Peace that all” (Dutt, 1876, p. 96). The position of France as torch bearer is described in “Surge up, free France- white robbed and pure!/ Thy place is first, thy place is sure!” (Dutt, 1876, p. 96). The vision of a republic with equal rights is expressed as “One picture in all hearts is traced,/ One purpose animates all minds;/ Equality,- no king,- no chief” (Dutt, 1876, p. 96). The poem closes with the hope of a republic of all nations with France leading from the front.

The title of the poem “*France, Á L’heure Oú Tú Te Prosternes*” is written in French and it means “France! In the hour when you bow down”. This is also part of *Les Châtiments*. In this poem “Hugo sees himself as a, or perhaps the, savior of

the French people” (VanderWolk, 2006, p. 132). “Collective memory can be easily manipulated” by use of right words (VanderWolk, 2006, p. 126). Hugo’s words became “an instrument of salvation and even military power” (VanderWolk, 2006, p. 132). The poem describes the condition of France after the coup by Napoleon III. Napoleon III overthrew the republican government in 1851 and he established a monarchy, which was also known as second empire. The coup changed the national life as though joy was caged in a cave and shedding tears. The patriotic feelings are expressed in the following:

The exile standing on the shore,
And looking at the star and wave,
Shall speak as prophets speak of yore,
Whom God a fearless puissance gave.

(Dutt, 1876, p. 125)

Napoleon III is criticized in “‘Shame to the Tyrant!’ – They shall shout, / ‘Shame to the vile, vile homicide!’” (Dutt, 1876, p. 125). People are encouraged to unite like brave warriors against the monarchy to overthrow it. The dead have also been summoned to wake up and take up arms if the living ones will not come forward: “And if the living hide their brow/ The dead shall wake up with fire and steel” (Dutt, 1876, p. 126).

“The Clarions of Thought” is about a biblical myth, which is used to motivate them to overthrow the monarchy and to establish a republican government based on the values of the French revolution. The poem tells the story of Joshua, a Hebrew. He fought against the Jews and brings about the fall of the city of Jericho. The biblical story is described by Zivotofsky:

The Jewish history of Jericho begins with the famous biblical story of its capture by Joshua. As the book of Joshua relates, Jericho was the first city captured by the Israelites upon their entry into the Land of Israel, and the conquest was accomplished through miraculous means. In response to a Divine command (Joshua 6:1- 21), the Israelites encircled the city once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day in a

procession that was led by seven priests with seven rams’ horns and the Holy Ark. After the final encirclement on the seventh day, they blew trumpets and the people issued a grand shout; the city’s wall collapsed and the Israelites entered the city. (1995, p. 21).

In the poem, the original text was reduced and only tells about the seventh day of the story of Joshua. The poet identifies himself with Joshua. Napoleon III thought that Hugo was ill-advised and his writings would not change the thinking of the people. The writings of Hugo symbolize the miraculous means of Joshua to overthrow the empire and for the establishment of a republic. The people and the king in the biblical myth mocked and did not think that Joshua could bring down the city with his bugle. They found it ridiculous and insignificant. Through this poem, Hugo seeks to bring down the monarchy for establishing the republic government through his writings in the same way that Joshua brought down the city of Jericho with the sound of trumpets. Joshua is a symbol of the revolt of the people against the powerful monarch. Joshua also symbolizes Hugo. Indeed, Joshua fought with a weapon that appeared harmless, the bugle; Hugo fights with his pen through his writings. In turn, Hugo becomes an epic hero. The poem ends with the fall of Jericho city, symbolizing the fall of the monarchy. The poem is political in character. The biblical king of Jericho is replaced with Napoleon III and the city of Jericho becomes France.

Napoléon Le Petit is also taken from *Les Châtiments*. The poem is a contrast between Louis Napoleon and his uncle Napoleon I. The poems of Toru Dutt in *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* are not only expressive but are also a historical commentary that presents social and political events. Another work also bears the same name, *Napoléon Le Petit*, which was Hugo’s political pamphlet written and published while in exile in 1853. He coined the title during a parliamentary speech before the fall of the Republic to refer derogatorily to Louis-Napoleon

in comparison to his uncle Napoleon Bonaparte (Robb, 1999, p. 290).

In the poem, *Napoléon Le Petit*, Napoleon I is glorified as the one whose “grandeur dazzled history” and as “The God of War” (Dutt, 1876, p. 102). His nephew, Louis-Napoleon, is compared to an ape imitating his uncle and is addressed as “Tom Thumb”, which means a pigmy. Napoleon was a legend to the French and his bravery and war skills raised the head of nation with pride. However, the deeds of his nephew, Louis-Napoleon, are described as comic and make people laugh. Napoleon I conquered Berlin, Vienna and Moscow, and all other opponents bowed to him. He took vengeance on the enemies of nations but Louis-Napoleon is shown as having promiscuous lifestyle, as “But thou,- for thee, lo, here are girls,/ Tom Thumb, Tom Thumb” (Dutt, 1876, p. 103). Napoleon I established a vast empire and administered it effectively. His glory is described through hyperbole: “His glories would the navies sink/So vast their sum!” (Dutt, 1876, p. 103). Napoleon I is hailed as a legend of pride and as the honour of the nation. However, his nephew is described as a tyrant who shed the blood of innocent people, as suggested in the lines “For thee- see blood, come run and drink,/ Tom Thumb, Tom Thumb” (Dutt, 1876, p. 103). Napoleon I is described as the highest angel of war and his fall saddened the nation and shook the earth. In the last lines, the fall of Louis-Napoleon is also desired but with an insulting tone as “Thou too shalt drown, but drown in slime/Tom Thumb, Tom Thumb” (Dutt, 1876, p. 103).

CONCLUSION

The poems in *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* are filled with patriotic feelings and a sense of national consciousness generating revolutionary impulse in the mind of the readers. The French poets expressed their love and patriotic feeling through their poems to motivate people to do good deeds for nation. The brave deeds of legends were used as theme of the poems to cultivate noble qualities of love and sacrifice for the nation. The

same feelings impressed and influenced Toru Dutt during her stay in France. Toru Dutt’s translation of these poems into English imported the feelings of national consciousness and revolutionary impulse from France to English educated strata of Indian society. It was an import of the thoughts of French Revolution to India through *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*.

National consciousness and patriotic feelings are not natural qualities; they need to be cultivated. Patriotic poems transfer these emotions of love and sacrifice from the text to the reader. “*Apré le Coup D’état*” expresses patriotic feelings to fight for one’s nation. The poem “Lines” is a call to reform society by renouncing selfish aims. It also expresses the pain of a patriot while in exile. A reading of the poems creates strong emotions that call for protecting the freedom of a nation, even at the cost of everything. On reading such poems, the memories of the historical events, legends and sacrifices of national heroes of own country are naturally revived. Flashes of historical events and legends emerge from the collective memory, which results in generation of patriotic feelings and revolutionary impulse.

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