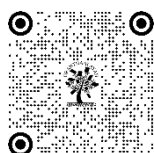


DISCONNECTIONS AND DEPTHS: ALIENATION AND THE UNCONSCIOUS IN TORU DUTT'S POETRY, A FREUDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Rahul Bhardwaj ¹, Dr. Javid Ahmed Reshi ²

¹ Research Scholar, University Institute of Humanities, Sant Baba Bhag Singh University, Punjab

² Assistant Professor, University Institute of Humanities, Sant Baba Bhag Singh University, Punjab



DOI

10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.4586

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2024 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.

ABSTRACT

This research paper employs Sigmund Freud's Iceberg principle and theory of Alienation to investigate the unconscious meanings and symbolism in Torulata Dutt's poems, "The Lotus," "The Ballad of Savitri," and "Our Casuarina Tree". The poems are treated as the bottom of an iceberg, containing repressed thoughts, reminiscences and desires, demonstrating a flux between conscious and unconscious thoughts. The paper also explores the themes of alienation, revealing how the poet portrays the consequences of alienation on the human experience, including the disengagement from oneself, others, and the physical world. It aims at providing a deeper understanding of the poems by delving deep under the surface layers to enable readers to cherish the richness and complexity of Toru's poetry. Dutt's poetry represents her struggles with identity, culture, and loneliness, offering a refined exploration of alienation in its various forms. Her works explore the complexities of cultural uprootedness, spiritual starvation, and isolation, crafting a unique poetic voice that resonates with readers across cultures. The selected poems, taken from her collections *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1877) and *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876), showcase Dutt's ability to convert personal experiences of isolation into universal explorations of the human psyche. This intervention seeks to provide a deeper understanding and nuanced appreciation of her literary oeuvre.

Keywords: Alienation, Unconscious, Identity, Toru Dutt, Freud, Hemingway, Iceberg



1. INTRODUCTION

Toru Dutt (1856-1877) was an Indian poet, translator, and essayist who experienced cultural displacement, personal loss, and existential isolation. She was born in Calcutta, India, to a Bengali Christian family, and spent her adolescent years in France and England, where she submerged herself into Western literature and culture. This cultural threshold, caught between Indian and European identities, later became the central thought of her poetry, reflecting themes of alienation, disconnection, and longing. Dutt's life was also tainted by personal loss, which included the loss of her mother and sister to tuberculosis, a disease that would eventually consume her own life at the age of 21. These experiences of cultural displacement and sense of loneliness deeply marked her poetic craft, enriching it with a profound sense of alienation. Her works explore the complexities of cultural uprootedness, spiritual starvation, and isolation, crafting a unique poetic voice that resonates with readers across cultures. This paper examines her three poems—"The Lotus," "The Ballad of Savitri," and "Our Casuarina Tree"—which exemplify Dutt's proficient portrayal of alienation. These poems, taken from her collections *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1877) and *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* (1876), showcase Dutt's ability to convert personal experiences of isolation into universal explorations of the human psyche.

The theory of alienation was outlined and developed by Karl Marx in the context of capitalism in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. The theory suggests that individuals become disassociated from their original human potential as a result of societal and economic forces. According to Marx, alienation occurs when people are seen as mere commodities rather than humans, leading to a sense of disconnection and powerlessness. This theory postulates that capitalism, in particular, perpetuates alienation by creating a system in which individuals are reduced to mere wage labourers, stripped of their autonomy and creativity. Marx argued that alienation has four main aspects: alienation from the product of one's labor, alienation from the process of production, alienation from others, and alienation from one's own humanity. As a result, individuals become fragmented and disconnected from their own desires, needs, and aspirations. The alienation theory has had a significant impact on various fields and continues to be relevant in understanding the effects of modern capitalism on human relationships and well-being (69-70).

The Iceberg theory, also known as the "Iceberg Principle", has been commonly attributed to the writings of Freud. However, according to Christopher D. Green, the metaphor "Iceberg" was never used by Freud himself, rather it was first used by Granville Stanley Hall, one of the founders of American psychology, as early as 1898 in his article "Some Aspects of the Early Sense of Self" to refer to the deeper recesses of human mind which are invisible and have great role to play (Green, 370-371). The metaphor of iceberg was later used by another great writer, Ernest Hemingway, in his "theory of omission" that he developed in his later years. In his non-fiction book on Spanish bullfighting *Death in the Afternoon*, he wrote,

If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about, he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. (Hemingway, 192)

So, Hemingway believed the key to writing good prose is to knowingly omit the references to the deeper meanings hidden from the surface, however, perceived by the "true reader". In other words, Hemingway puts forward the idea that much of the meaning and significance of a story lies underneath the surface, much like an iceberg, where only a small portion is visible above the waterline. Hemingway was of the opinion that a good writer should convey complex emotions, themes, and ideas through suggestions and implications, rather than explicit statements. The Iceberg theory stressed the importance of subtlety and restraint in writing, allowing readers to find and interpret the deeper meanings and symbolism in a story. By leaving much of the narrative unspoken, writers can create a more rich and engaging reading experience. The Iceberg theory has been influential in modernist literature and continues to be studied and applied in creative writing and literary analysis. It highlights the power of suggestion and encourages writers to trust their readers' intelligence and imagination.

Along the similar lines, the present study will use a qualitative analysis to examine and uncover the themes of alienation and implicit meanings underlying beneath the surface of Dutt's poetry. The selected poems exemplify the principles of Alienation and Iceberg theory. The poems will be analysed using a thematic analysis approach, where themes related to alienation, disconnection, and implicit meaning will be identified and categorized, thereby offering readers a novel perspective through which to cherish poems, gaining a deeper understanding and nuanced appreciation of the literary works.

The sonnet, "The Lotus," provides a glance into the poet's inner tussle and desire for equanimity. Love's request for an elite flower represents the quest for ideal perfection, while the rivalry between the rose and lily depicts the speaker's internal struggle between passion and purity. The opening line of the poem, "Love came to Flora asking for a flower" (1) represents the idea of Id, or the instinctual part of the complex working of the human mind, which is driven by desires and impulses. This inner conflict showcases Toru Dutt's personal struggles with cultural identity and her desire to reconcile the opposing influences.

"Give me a flower delicious as the rose

And stately as the lily in her pride" (Dutt, 9-10).

This line represents the idea of the fragmented self, where the person is lurching between conflicting desires and impulses. Love is searching for a flower that possesses the qualities of both the rose and the lily, which can be interpreted as a symbol of the search for a unified and complete self. At first Love is indecisive and initially chooses "rose-red" then "lily-white," suggests a longing for yearning between these opposing forces. The lotus gift from Flora which combines both colours, resolves the problem that had been troubling the speaker. With the help of the gift, the poet is able to merge their contradictory desires, attaining a state of emotional balance and harmony.

"And Flora gave the lotus, "rose-red" dyed

And "lily-white," --the queenliest flower that blows" (Dutt, 13-14).

The line throws light upon the idea of the artificial build-up of the self, where the person is contrived to conform to societal expectations. The lotus flower can be seen as an ideogram of the unnatural construction of the self, which is "rose-red" and "lily-white, where the individual is forced to embody conflicting qualities and characteristics. Shashi Kant Uppal contemplates, "Beauty of the poem lies in its child-like simplicity which subtly camouflages the fusion of passion and ascetic withdrawal as symbolised by rose-red and lilywhite" (122). Further, Kalidasa and numerous Indian classical poets have often written several verses praising lotus for being the best flower known.

Beneath the surface of the poem, resides a complex network of unconscious thoughts and emotions. The surface or conscious level presents a simple survey of beauty and symbolism. On the other hand, at the preconscious level, the poet's personal sentiments and incidents influence the poem. Unconsciously, the rose and lily act as opposing forces (passion vs. purity), while the lotus settles this conflict, representing Toru's idealized life. This also indicates an Oedipal Complex, where Love's appeal and Flora's reply represent Toru's desire for maternal guidance and consent. The poem's intent symbolizes Toru's escape mechanisms for controlling inner turmoil.

Toru's "The Lotus", based on the Western themes, R. L. Tiwari argues that this poem aptly demonstrates Toru's technical, philosophical, and emotional excellence as a poet. "The Lotus" clings to conventional formal structures which include a fourteen-line sonnet with a traditional ABBA CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme and iambic pentameter. Classical references of Juno and Flora establish a timeless mythological context. Literary devices such as imagery, symbolism, and irony enrich the poem. This formal structure reinforces the poem's themes of balance and unity. The feminist viewpoint reveals Flora, the female figure, to resolve the conflict, highlighting feminine supremacy. Toru Dutt's Indian heritage and European influences blend in the poem's classical references and symbolism. Overall "The Lotus" is a sonnet that knits together psychological elements and cultural symbolism.

The anatomical analysis of "The Ballad of Savitri" reveals fascinating insights into the human spirit. Savitri's personality personifies the idealized feminine archetype, exhibiting purity and selflessness, while also protruding the tussle between individual passion and societal expectations. Satyavan, appears as the perfect partner, showcasing bravery, kindness, and nobility, and their love has the vote for the union of complementary opposites. Savitri's apprehension about Satyavan's approaching death reflects humanity's universal fear of loss and mortality. Her determination to follow Satyavan into the forest demonstrates her assertion of agency and autonomy in a patriarchal society. This showcases the tension between societal expectations and individual desire. On the surface, Savitri seems to be a devoted wife, but underneath she is in deep trouble with the imminent loss of her husband. Her feelings and sentiments are complex, and her efforts are driven by a profound sense of affection and duty. In the ballad, death is not just a physical entity but also a symbol of conversion, change, and the unknown. Beneath the surface, death represents the inevitability of fate and the human fear of the unknown.

"Death in his palace holds his court,

His messengers move to and fro" (Dutt, Part III, 1-2).

Freudian Iceberg analogy distinguishes between the visible, the surface, the conscious part of the human mind, which is very little compared to the invisible and the hidden depths that constitute and govern the human mind and identity. At the surface, the story revolves around Savitri's love story and her endeavour to save Satyavan. However, underneath, like the depths of an iceberg, there are a multitude of themes submerged and lurking in the mysterious and dark recesses demanding an effort like Hemingway's "true reader" to perceive the meaning. The Oedipal complex is evident in Savitri's relationship with her father and Satyavan, sailing between paternal and romantic love. Satyavan is experiencing disconnection from his own soul and encountering a sense of alienation from his own life. The image of the asp gnawing in his brain implies a sense of internal conflict and disconnection.

"I had a pain, as if an asp

Gnawed in my brain, and there I lay

Silent, for oh! I could but gasp" (Dutt, Part V, 25-27).

Satyavan's imminent death manifests the unconscious death wish, while Savitri's attempt to save him represents the struggle against emasculated anxiety. Their unification represents the universal desire for love and completeness. Additionally, Savitri's tussle represents the struggle between the Id (desire), Ego (reason), and Superego (moral

principles). Symbolism plays a vital part in the narrative. The forest depicts the unknown, symbolizing the unconscious mind and the empire of doom. Satyavan's departure to heavenly abode signifies the inevitability of death and the destruction of idealized love. Savitri's fidelity embodies the selfless, nurturing aspects of femininity. Her dilemma towards autonomy and yielding to higher standards of societal expectations is apparent. The unconscious realization of death and loss underlying their love is another prominent theme. The ballad hints at Savitri's boyish freedom which is directly in contrast with Toru's personal life since she often wrote in her letters that she is trapped in her house. Toru Dutt was against social alienation of women and desired for freedom of women, like Savitri enjoyed before her marriage. Meanwhile, Jagannathan observes, Dutt could have seen hope in the reform activities of many brave Indian women who openly resist custom and patriarchy to raise their voice against their double oppression, but she chose instead to consider only the pessimistic aspects of Indian culture, which she called degenerate (23). The ballad provides a convincing exploration of the human psyche and condition, throwing light on the complex workings of the human psyche. Another poem by Toru Dutt "Our Casuarina Tree" is a sincere tribute to the poet's early years' memories and familial ties. The speaker's deep spiritual bond to the tree reflects stability, security, and continuity (lines 1-4). These childhood memories stem from the poet's connection of the tree with their nostalgic reminiscences, showcasing the magnitude of early encounters in shaping one's identity. In this ever-changing world, the casuarina tree represents a sense of permanence, awakening feelings of solace and belonging (lines 5-6). The poet's psychological attachment to the tree refers to an unconscious desire for stability and security. She found such comfort in England as well, as she further calls her desire to go back to a world of innocent and plentiful life of England as "Rousseauian" sensibility. Meera Jagannathan notes,

In its Freudian connotation, this sensibility is a refusal to accept maturing sexuality, but in Dutt's case, it was more a turning away from the suffocating life in Calcutta. Additionally, the severe limitations that were placed on her imagination and growth as a writer by her family's return to Calcutta— "such a horrid place"—contributed to this backward movement to a mythic past, which was therapeutic (183-184).

The imagery of the creeper caressing the casuarina tree "in whose embraces bound / No other tree could live" (lines 4-5), suggest a dire need for protection and nourishment. The poem also traverses the poet's encounters with loss and alienation. The lines "But not because of its magnificence / Dear is the Casuarina to my soul" (lines 23-24) suggest that the poet's undying bond for the tree. Her recollection of the thoughts of playing underneath the tree with siblings (Dutt, lines 35-40) evokes a sense of loss and desolation.

"Beneath it we have played; though years may roll
O sweet companions, loved with love intense,
For your sakes, shall the tree be ever dear" (Dutt, 25-27).

The poem is replete with surface and hidden meanings. On the surface level, the poem narrates the casuarina tree and its association with the speaker. But under the surface, the poem hides unconscious memories for childhood innocence. The tree allegorically portrays the poet's psyche, with its core signalling the unconscious mind (Id), branches signifying conscious thoughts (Ego), and trunk personifying the moral ethics (Superego). The creeper embracing the tree (lines 9-10) symbolizes the Id's desire for shelter and nourishment. The speaker's innate attachment to the tree shows the Ego's tussle to cope up with the conscious and unconscious feelings and thoughts. The Superego is apparent in the speaker's moral courtesy for the tree, illustrated in the lines:

"Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay
Unto thy honor, Tree, beloved of those
Who now in blessed sleep," (Dutt, 45-47).

The poem also reveals some Oedipal footprints as the tree is portrayed as a paternal figure providing comfort and shelter. The poet's subdued feelings, including yearning for a long lost past and fear of alienation and mortality, are evident in the lines:

"What is that dirge-like murmur that I hear /
Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?" (lines 29-30).

About the structure of this poem, Dr. Iyengar says:

The eleven-line stanza form with the rhyme scheme abba, cddc, eee is worthy of Keats himself. In the organization of the poem as a whole and in a finish of the individual stanzas, in its mastery of phrase and rhythm, in its music of sound

and ideas Our Casuarina Tree is a superb piece of writing and gives us a taste of what Toru might have done had not the race of her life so quickly run (Tiwari, 187).

The poem illustrates the speaker's alienation from nature, self, others, and society. The poet's longing for childhood memories and their connection with the tree symbolises alienation from their current self (lines 33-40). The tree's presence serves as a reminder of the passage of time, rousing feelings of detachment and self-analysis. The lines "And oft at nights the garden overflows / With one sweet song that seems to have no close" (lines 9-10) portrays the poet's detachment from the materialistic world. The speaker's personal attachment to the tree represents a longing for unity and entirety. The poem also hints at Toru's alienation from others. The lines "O sweet companions, loved with love intense" (line 26) suggest a steadfast longing for human connection. However, the speaker's concentration on the tree and their individual emotions reinforce their isolation. The colonial Indian mindset adds another surface of alienation. The speaker's cultural values and encounters are presented as the amalgamation of Indian and European influences. The casuarina tree, indigenous to Australia and Asia, appears as a symbol of cross culturalism and hybridity. In conclusion, "Our Casuarina Tree" offers a heartfelt observation of human emotions, recollections, and the passage of time.

Through the Freudian lens, Toru Dutt's poems, "The Lotus", "Savitri", and "Our Casuarina Tree", reveal an intricate reciprocity between the conscious and unconscious mind. The iceberg analysis showcases a structure for comprehending the poet's navigation of the strains between societal expectations and personal aspirations. As we dive deep into the inner layers of these poems, we find a refined research of the human psyche, marked by the struggle for self-efficacy and the impact of nostalgia. Readers also witness an intense experience of alienation, where the dividing lines between person and world, past and present, are persistently blurred. Through Savitri's self-surrender of her own desires, the lotus's detached beauty and the casuarina tree nostalgic entice, Dutt remarkably transports the pain of separation and the yearning for entirety. Ultimately, her poems deliver an influential testament to human encounters, one marked by the brittle tensions between belonging and alienation, singularity and dislocation. In a nutshell, Toru Dutt's poems reveal a heartfelt contemplation on the human experience, one that persistently echoes with readers today.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Dutt Toru. *A Sheaf: Gleaned in French Fields*. Kessinger Publishing, 2008.
- Dutt Toru, and Jha, Amarnath. *Ancient Ballads And Legends Of Hindustan: With An Introductory Memoir By Edmund Gosse*. Lector House, 2020.
- Jagannathan, Meera. *Poetics of Dislocation: Comparative Cosmopolitanism in Charlotte Bronte, Flora Tristan, and Toru Dutt*. May 2018, University of Houston.
- <https://uh-ir.tdl.org/bitstream/handle/10657/3130/JAGANNATHAN- DISSERTATION-2018.pdf>.
- Freud, Sigmund. *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. Hogarth Press. 1933.
- Green, Robert D. "Where Did Freud's Icerberg Metaphor of Mind Come From?" *History of Psychology*. American Psychological Association. 2019, vol 22, no. 4, Pp. 369-379.
- <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/hop0000135>
- Hemingway, Ernest. *Death in the Afternoon*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955.
- Jagannathan, Meera. "The Enigma of Toru Dutt." *Dalhousie French Studies*, vol. 94, Spring 2011, pp. 13-25.
- JSTOR. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41705580>.
- Johnston, Kenneth G. "Hemingway and Freud: The Tip of the Iceberg." *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1984, pp. 68-73.
- JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30225083>. Accessed 23 Sep. 2023.
- Marx, Karl. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Translated by Martin Milligan, Progress Publishers, 1959.
- Tiwari, R. L. *Toru Dutt Selected Poems*. Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, 2020.
- Uppal, Shashi Kant. *Shades of Alienation in Post Independence Indian English Poetry*. Panjab University, 31 Dec. 1993.
- <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/84358>.
- Tiwari, Sharad. *Henry Derozio and Toru Dutt as Apostle of the Renaissance in Indo Anglian Poetry*. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University Agra, 1998.
- <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/393427>.
- Wang, Ban. "Human Rights, Alienation, and Aesthetics." *Arcade: The Humanities in the World*, 1 Dec. 2009.
- <https://shc.stanford.edu/arcade/interventions/human-rights-alienation-and-aesthetics>.