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## Claiming Her Own Context(s): Strategic Singularity in the Poetry of Toru Dutt

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This daughter of Bengal... Hindu by race and tradition, an English woman by education, a French woman at heart, poet in English, prose writer in French; who at the age of eighteen made India familiar with the poets of France in the rhyme of England, who blended in herself three souls and three traditions . . . presents in the history of literature a phenomenon without parallel. – French critic James Darmesteter (qtd. Gupta 11)

<1> One hundred and thirty years after Toru Dutt's death, James Darmesteter's eulogistic description remains riveting: Dutt was truly at the nexus of the many determining ideologies—nationalism, imperialism, gender binarism, and racism—that shaped the lives and literary work of indigenous female intellectuals in nineteenth-century British India.<sup>(1)</sup> In addition to capturing the difficulty of placing Dutt, who had no single nationality, in an appropriate literary school or context, Darmesteter describes in highly illustrative fashion Dutt's "blend[ing] in herself" of these variegated identities. His rightful insistence on his conceptualization of Dutt as blending, rather than erasing or hierarchically positioning, different identities and on Dutt's agency in acquiring and retaining her hybrid subjectivity separates his assessment from that of many nineteenth-century, and even some more recent, Dutt scholars. Building upon Darmesteter's foundational notions of Dutt's hybridity and authorial agency, this article aims to both continue the process of Dutt's reclamation and contribute to ongoing efforts to create an appropriate critical context for her poetry.

<2> After over a century of neglect, critics began seriously revisiting Dutt's work in the late 1990s. In recent years, scholars have proposed several important potential contexts for her work: those of Dutt as colonial conspirator, as Indian nationalist, and as occupant of free-floating "in-between" space. My methodological approach here will be to examine each potential context using close readings of selected poems from Dutt's *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882), while focusing primarily on complicating the more recent critical positioning of Dutt in a "risk-ridden, in-between" space. Rather than conceding that Dutt's context is necessarily ambiguous, I examine the ways in which Dutt positions herself within the binary system—using what I call her "strategic singularity" or her ability to exclusively privilege certain aspects of her complex subjectivity—in order to achieve her particular (and sometimes contradictory) political purposes. Ultimately, I contend that we must respond to Dutt's work (and potentially that of other transnational women writers), not by forcing her into pre-existing and stable critical contexts, but rather, by proliferating these once seemingly unified constructs—into nationalisms, feminisms, etc.—in order to account for the rich complexity of the interactions between and among nationality, gender, race, and religion.

<3> The most traditional readings of Dutt's work seek to align her solely with one of the two movements—British colonialism or Indian nationalism—that dominate our scholarly engagement with questions of nationality in British India. Often reacting to specific, isolated articulations rather than a comprehensive analysis of her poetry, critics who characterize Dutt as an imperial sympathizer mistake her receptivity to Western influences for a willingness to absorb and espouse whole doctrines uncritically.<sup>(2)</sup> Though Dutt's poems often incorporate Eastern as well as Western allusions, forms, and themes, she consistently and harshly critiques certain aspects of British ideology—most notably, imperialism. For example, in one of her most obviously nationalistic works, "Sonnet—Baugmaree," Dutt integrates East and West by using a stalwartly Western form to liken her family's Calcutta garden to the biblical Garden of Eden. Dutt's sonnet is a formal hybrid that begins with a Petrarchan octave (rhymed ABBAABBA) and ends with a final quatrain and closing couplet that are variations upon either a Shakespearean or Spenserian

pattern (rhymed CDCDEE).<sup>(3)</sup> Yet, despite her choice of these Western forms, “Sonnet—Baugmaree” is populated with distinctively Eastern images and objects. Dutt’s garden is filled with “light-green graceful tamarinds” (4), “mangoe clumps of green profound” (5), “palms” (6), “seemuls” (7), “bamboos” (10), and “white lotus” (11). British hedges of “dull unvaried green” (2) and garden canopies of “pillars gray” (6) appear in the shadows of the poem’s early lines—always dreary in comparison to the “palms” (6) and the “Sharp contrast of all colours” (3) in the “sea of foliage” that “girds our garden round” (1). Though Dutt gestures to the British garden, the Indian garden’s vibrancy marks its separateness—the rightful boundary for Dutt’s garden is the homegrown “sea of foliage” (1) rather than the incongruous, “dull” (2), and foreign hedge. Yet, despite Dutt’s depiction of the Indian garden as an exclusively Eastern space, the British martial presence in India intrudes through the variegated boundary and explodes into the poem. In the final lines of the Petrarchan octave, Dutt writes: “And o’er the quiet pools the seemuls lean/Red, —red, and startling like the trumpet’s sound” (7-8).<sup>(4)</sup> Dutt’s invocation of the shrill trumpet, strongly associated with British military exercises, in the midst of her description of her Indian Eden, brings the otherwise fluid poem to an abrupt halt. The imposition, however, is surprisingly transient and Dutt moves with lightning speed to subordinate the trumpet’s interruption—looking “eastward” (10) she concludes:

One might swoon  
 Drunken with beauty then, or gaze and gaze  
 On a primeval Eden, in amaze. (12-14)

In these closing lines, Dutt re-interrupts the “startling...trumpet” (8) and re-imposes her initial mood of dreamy reimagining. She continues to assert, despite the colonial disruption, her authorial right to transform Baugmaree into “a primeval Eden” (14). For Dutt, Christianity is certainly not the exclusive domain of the Western colonizers. “Sonnet—Baugmaree” demonstrates that Dutt is aware of India’s colonial status, her own subjected position, and Britain’s imperial domination: the trumpet’s sound can reach anywhere, even inside the private recesses of an Indian’s garden. Yet, the poem also exemplifies Dutt’s determination aesthetically to destabilize the West’s attempts to unilaterally figure Eden and Britain’s claims of legitimate colonial occupation. In “Sonnet—Baugmaree,” Dutt describes India (her memories, its landscapes, animals, etc.) using English words and forms in order to present English-speakers with a different imagining of India and England’s rightful relationship—one in which there is no place for the “startling...trumpet’s sound” (8) in the Indian garden and in which the East/Easterner successfully resists Western attempts at domination.

<4> Dutt’s poetic refiguring of India’s position vis-à-vis England in “Sonnet—Baugmaree” seems organically to suggest her contextualization as an Indian nationalist poet. However, Dutt’s poetry is also characterized by an indigenous proto-feminism—one simultaneously engaged with and necessarily estranged from British feminism—that marks her brand of patriotism as distinctive from that of mainstream Indian nationalism.<sup>(5)</sup> Undoubtedly, the Indian nationalist movement brought about real improvements in the lives of middle-class women, granting them access to unprecedented educational and economic opportunities as well as improving their social status. Yet, these gains did not dissolve, but rather evolved, gender binaries in Indian society. As Partha Chatterjee persuasively argues, the nationalist “project of emancipation and self-emancipation of women” ultimately created both the “new woman” and a “new patriarchy” (Chatterjee 246). According to Chatterjee, nationalist ideology predicated the improved status and increased opportunities available to “new women” upon their ability to embody, protect, and preserve traditional Hindu spiritual practices (the “essence” of India) by rejecting the westernizing influences that were reshaping Indian culture. This gendered division of patriotic responsibilities bound women, in Chatterjee’s words, to a “new, but entirely legitimate [in the framework of nationalist ideology] subordination” (Chatterjee 248).<sup>(6)</sup> Thus, while Dutt’s poetry reflects her cautious support for Indian nationalism’s primary goal, her work bears few of the other hallmarks of nationalist ideology. Far from reflecting the nationalists’ commitment to separate gender roles and their calls for women to resist westernization, Dutt’s nationalism is informed by the more egalitarian (in terms of gender only) ideas of British feminists and, perhaps most telling of its distinctiveness, expressed in English-language poetry that evidences deep engagement with western poetic traditions and forms.

<5> Dutt’s clearest articulation of her nationalism, “Sonnet—The Lotus,” subverts many of the binaries (male/female, public/private, West/East) that nationalist ideology left fundamentally intact. Though the sonnet is steeped in almost exclusively feminine imagery and set in a flower-filled bower, Dutt emphasizes the centrality of her political purpose by permeating the lines with

explicitly political language. The title in question is “undisputed queen” (2) of all flowers and the debate is characterized by “strife” (8) and a history, on both sides, of political posturing. The rose and lily are “rivals” (4) for the crown with organized “factions” (8) to support them and “Bards of power” (4) to reinforce “their claims” (5). Yet, despite the highly public and politicized nature of the task, Dutt assigns the responsibility of crowning “the queenliest flower that blows” (14) to Flora. In Dutt’s poetic imagining of political discourse, Cupid and Flora engage in a deliberative process—carefully weighing the merits and claims of each flower—but, ultimately, it is Flora, not Cupid, who decides the question. Dutt’s critique of the gender binaries inherent in “new patriarchy” is perhaps the most obvious; however, she also resists notions that women’s practice of nationalism necessarily involves hostility to Western influences. In fact, Dutt speaks her own nationalism, not only in English-language poetry, but also through the quintessentially English code of floriography. (7) In the Victorian language of flowers, the two primary rivals for the crown in Dutt’s poem had very stable meanings: the red rose symbolized romantic love, beauty, and respect, while the white lily represented purity and majesty. Furthermore, as Chandani Lokuge notes, Dutt’s recasting of the contest between the rose and the lily invokes a long tradition in English poetry of comparing the virtues of the two flowers (371). The blending of the colors red and white, intended to settle the long rivalry, in the sonnet’s conclusion (“or, both provide” [12]) even seems to recall the post-War of the Roses (1455-1485) combination of the white and red rose into a symbol of British unity and an official emblem of England. Yet, despite Dutt’s engagement with these western literary codes and traditions, it is not a British national symbol but instead the Indian lotus, later selected as India’s national flower, which forms as the features of the red rose and white lily meld. In addition to depicting a decidedly Indian flower emerging from the political infighting as sovereign, Dutt also contests the floriographic tradition that associates the lotus with “estranged love and forgetfulness of the past” (“Language of Flowers” 1). Leaving the traditional English symbolism of the rose and the lily untouched, Dutt subverts British figurings of the lotus by showing that while the flower might be Other and strange, it is not “estranged” or separate from the lily and the rose—instead, it is an amalgamation of their colors. By emphasizing Flora’s political power and stressing the hybrid nature of the lotus, Dutt articulates a nationalism that envisions gender equality (of a degree much more in keeping with British feminist thought than with Indian nationalist ideology) and autonomy for the East without separateness from the West.

<6>The inability to reconcile Dutt with either of the contexts readily available—British conspirator or Indian nationalist—suggests an interesting and seductive critical position. Perhaps, as Alpana Sharma Knippling claims, Dutt does not need a fixed context; perhaps she and other third world feminists occupy a “risk-ridden, in-between space” (Knippling 213). (8) Recognizing as problematic the relationship between British feminists and Third World women writers, Knippling argues that Dutt’s feminism “finds its articulation . . . in another place where textual play and improvisation replace cultural pieties and fixed literary standards” (Knippling 218). Knippling posits that by “refus[ing] to settle neatly into only one side of any number of binary relationships: female/male, colonized/colonizer, Indian/Western, original/imitative, young/old, sheltered/free,” Dutt was able to “seriously play . . . with the patriarchal norms of her time” and to establish a precedent (for subsequent Third World feminists) of unwillingness to consolidate . . . politics in binary terms” (Knippling 225). While Dutt is certainly subversive of binarism (and perhaps even linguistically playful), I argue that the richness of her political project is diluted or erased if we contextualize her poetry, as Knippling suggests, in this “risk-ridden, in-between . . . space in the international area of textual production and reception” (Knippling 213). Rather than locating Dutt “in-between,” I claim that she was able—self-consciously and strategically—to place herself in either the marginalized or dominant position within the binary system. My terminology “strategic singularity” is an attempt to articulate the process by which Dutt chooses, from a multiplicity of available identifications, a particular position (or positions) from which to constitute her authorial subjectivity for a particular piece. I will analyze two examples of Dutt’s strategic singularity: first, “Savitri,” in which Dutt accentuates her marginalized status as an Indian woman in order to reappropriate her representation in patriarchal Indian and British societies, and second, “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind,” in which Dutt rejects Hindu pundits’ interpretation of an ancient myth in favor of recasting it as a Christian fable.

<7> Dutt initially constitutes Savitri as the archetype of patriarchally prescribed Indian womanhood; however, she ultimately uses her retelling of the legend to redefine traditional Indian notions of ideal wifeliness. In the opening stanzas, Dutt emphasizes Savitri’s dark features—her “soft black eyes” (14) and “raven hair” (14)—and employs the fanciful rhetoric of overly-feminized womanhood, likening Savitri to a blooming “lotus” (6) and blessed “vision” (12). She also embellishes patriarchal notions of womanly purity, relating that Savitri’s “own peculiar

also emphasizes patriarchal notions of womanly purity, relating that Savitri's "own peculiar charm" (13) was her "Childlike and innocent and fair" (18) face upon which "no man with thought impure or base/ Could ever look" (19-20). Presenting Savitri as an Indian beauty so pure that, despite her literally budding sexuality, men could not even look upon her with desire, Dutt indicates her awareness of patriarchal constructions of Indian womanhood and emphasizes their unrealizable nature. Yet, Dutt's highly traditional depiction of Indian womanhood becomes more progressive as she reveals Savitri's girlhood freedom. In the sixth stanza, Savitri's sexual purity is replaced by Dutt's surprisingly vivid depiction of her physical response to Satyavan, upon whose "tall and lithe" (66) body she "looked and looked" (71) before "she went away/ Leaving her virgin heart behind" (102-103). Though Dutt implies no sexual impropriety, Savitri's "look[ing]" and her consequent sexual desire for Satyavan occasion the forfeiture of her "virgin heart." Throughout the poem, Dutt describes this encounter as Savitri's loss of sexual innocence. In stanza fourteen, Savitri tells her father:

When I have given  
My heart away, though but in thought,  
Can I take back? Forbid it, Heaven!  
It were a deadly sin, I wot. (157-160)

Savitri has not even bestowed a word upon Satyavan; however, she has "thought," imagined, and desired to give him both her "heart" and body. Significantly, Savitri seems to redefine her own virginity: she treats her desirous thoughts as a kind of sexual experience and, within the confines of her definition, failing to marry Satyavan would be tantamount to "deadly sin." In addition to articulating her own standards of sexual purity, Dutt's Savitri also subverts patriarchal expectations by exhibiting the independence and agency to defy and/or overturn the decisions of three male figures of the highest social and even divine authority—her father, father-in-law, and Yama, God of Death.<sup>(9)</sup> Dutt's retelling casts Savitri as a dutiful daughter and wife, but also as a woman capable of reappropriating the right to define her own sexual standards and of independently making and executing valid decisions about her own welfare and that of her family.

<8> While Dutt's challenge to patriarchal constructions is the most obvious and successful, Savitri's final instance of defiance—her refusal to abandon Satyavan's soul to Yama—also offers a more subtle critique of British feminists' tendency to depict (usually via references to *sati*) Indian women as victims. Rather than rushing to reunite with her husband through self-immolation, Dutt depicts a reversal of *sati* in which Savitri, through a bold display of agency, rejoins Satyavan in life rather than in death.<sup>(10)</sup> Through successive rounds of pleading, flattery, and displays of familial loyalty and selflessness, Savitri persuades Yama to relinquish Satyavan's soul. By allowing Savitri to accomplish, through her exhibition of physical strength, intellect, and freedom, the resurrection of her husband—a feat impossible to achieve through the self-sacrifice of *sati*—Dutt redefines the ideal qualities of a devoted, Hindu wife. Despite her reconfiguration of the traditional act of supreme wifely commitment, her premarital experience of sexual desire, her reimagining of virginity, her refusal to remain confined within the home, and her willingness to defy male authority figures, Dutt assures us that

As for Savitri, to this day  
Her name is named, when couples wed,  
And to the bride the parents say,  
Be thou like her, in heart and head. (993-996)

Just as Dutt juxtaposed "heart" (158) and "thought" (158) in Savitri's description of her sexual attraction for Satyavan and her determination to marry him, Dutt reiterates the necessity of allowing brides to follow Savitri in fully expressing the emotions of their "heart[s]" (996) and to freely act upon the decisions of their "head[s]" (996). By perpetuating the legend of Savitri's unchecked freedom and unwavering devotion through the advice of "parents," Dutt lends her reimagining of the ideal Hindu wife both legitimacy and, at least in the context of the poem, generational staying power.

<9> Dutt self-consciously creates a heroine who is decidedly Indian and Hindu: she chooses Savitri, the most venerated figure of Indian womanhood, dwells upon the darkness of her features, and repeatedly describes her fierce Hindu piety. Most remarkably, Dutt omits all references to Western influences (i.e. British feminism and Christianity) and strategically emphasizes only ("singularly") Eastern aspects of her own identity. Dutt vigorously constitutes for herself a textual space that is—far from being "risk-ridden" and "in-between" in a global context—emphatically

Indian (even more Indian than her “real” life). By first reproducing the patriarchal imagining of the Indian wife/woman and, then, reappropriating it, Dutt asserts her power to redefine Indian wifehood and womanhood and exposes as an appropriative process the traditional (and, to a lesser extent, the nationalist) depiction of Indian women as secluded and subservient (and, later, merely as subordinate) wives.

<10> Dutt privileges Eastern or Indian aspects of her identity in “Savitri” for specific proto-feminist purposes; however, the identities Dutt creates using strategic singularity do not always emphasize her marginalization. In “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind,” Dutt foregrounds her Christian identity in order to revisit traditional interpretations of the legend of Bharat. Cast as a dialogue between Parasara and Maitreya, the poem depicts the life of “Bharat, that great hermit-king” (2) who abandoned his kingdom and family in order to “attain/Perfect dominion on his soul” (15-16) through asceticism. However, the king’s solitary and somber existence is disrupted by his rescue of a young orphaned deer, which he subsequently comes to love. Dutt’s account of the legend, told by Parasara to Maitreya, is faithful to the original and, for both speaker and listener, Bharat’s preoccupation with his love for the deer is an unfortunate demonstration of his failure to renounce earthly pleasures for divine considerations. After many years with his beloved deer, Bharat falls fatally ill and, in his final moments, the king

could not think of the Beyond at hand,  
So keen he felt the parting, such deep grief  
O’erwhelmed him for the creature he had reared. (96-100)

According to traditional Hindu readings of the legend, Bharat’s love of the deer and his subsequent inability to adhere to his self-imposed asceticism warn Hindus against becoming too preoccupied with earthly attachments.

<11> Dutt, however, contests their interpretation and, in the final three stanzas, recasts Bharat’s love for the hind, not as a spiritual misstep, but as a sign from the Christian God that he was wrong to have adopted the ascetic life. Curiously, Dutt does not explicitly demarcate a change of narrator; however, her reference to Parasara in the third person—“Brahman sage”(102)—sharply indicates that a new voice has taken control of the narrative. Additionally, Dutt immediately challenges Parasara’s reading of the legend by aligning herself, through the repeated use of “we,” with her fellow Christians and their doctrine. Dutt writes:

Thus far the pious chronicle, writ of old  
By Brahman sage; but we, who happier, live  
Under the holiest dispensation, know  
That God is Love, and not to be adored  
By a devotion born of stoic pride,  
Or with ascetic rites, or penance hard,  
But with a love, in character akin  
To His unselfish, all-including love. (101-108)

Quoting John 4: 16 (Lokuge 366), referring to a single God, and positioning Christianity as “the holiest” religion (103), Dutt challenges the validity of Bharat, Parasara, and Maitreya’s belief that “ascetic rites” (106) and “penance hard” (106) are acceptable means of praising God. Significantly, it is not the legend itself that Dutt depicts as carrying the wrong message. Instead, it is an error by the Hindu interpreter—by the “Brahman sage” (110) who “would fain imply” (110) that for Bharat “it was a sin/To love his nursling” (113)—that results in centuries of widespread misunderstanding. The hind, Dutt suggests, is an intervention by the Christian God to save the hermit-king from living a life without love—a life that would be unholy:

This love engendered in his withered heart,  
  
This hindrance to his rituals,—might these not  
Have been ordained to teach him? Call him back  
To ways marked out for him by Love divine? (121-124)

Having reinterpreted the legend to yield a Christian rather than a Hindu moral, Dutt’s retelling ends with words of Christian advisement:

Not in a place elected for its peace,

But in the heat and bustle of the world,  
'Mid sorrow, sickness, suffering, and sin,  
Must he still labour with a loving soul  
Who strives to enter through the narrow gate. (127-132)

For Dutt, “God is Love” (104), and Christians are bound to spread his love by engaging with the world and required to imitate Christ’s love and sacrifice for sinners by ministering to other human beings afflicted with “sorrow, sickness, suffering, and sin” (130). Whereas Dutt chose to omit all references to her Christianity in “Savitri,” she constitutes her subjectivity in “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind” as ardently Christian and makes no acknowledgment of the racial or cultural heritage that she shares with Parasara. From this position, Dutt reinterprets the Hindu legend, yielding a new reading that is consistent with the Christian ideology she has strategically privileged in the poem.

<12> Whether in an act of reappropriation (as in “Savitri”) or reinterpretation through the lens of a dominant ideology (as in “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind”), Dutt uses strategic singularity to shape her authorial personas. The suggestion that Dutt and her poetry exist in a “risk-ridden, in-between” space fails to consider her impressive agency as a writer—an agency that enables her to strategically emphasize and minimize certain aspects of her subjectivity for specific political, religious, or social purposes. Consequently, if recent reclamation efforts are to be productive, the task of analyzing Dutt’s poetry must be approached as an aesthetic, but also a deeply political, one. It must be acknowledged that regardless of Dutt’s self-positioning, she is inevitably an outsider—in both Indian and British society by her gender, in British culture by her race and colonial status, and in Indian culture by her Christianity and English education. On one hand, Dutt’s subjectivity is largely an amalgamation of marginalized identities—Indian, female, colonized—and by imagining her in an “in-between” space, we risk endorsing the oppressive notion that, in order for a marginalized speaker or writer to achieve agency, these identities must be hybridized, circumvented, or transcended. On the other, the slipperiness of the “in-between” space enables us to avoid acknowledging that Dutt’s identification with some Western institutions, such as the Christian Church or British educational system, caused her to impose her own interpretation upon that of the Hindu pundit in “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind.” Dutt occupies, at will, different sides of the binaries that Knipling lists; however, her adoption or rejection of these identities is often strategically totalizing: Dutt writes either from a highly marginalized position or with the authority of the dominant ideology, but rarely, if ever, from the interstitial space in the middle. Dutt’s extreme privileging of individual aspects of her subjectivity—her presentation through strategic singularity of herself as essentially Indian and female or, alternatively, as essentially Christian in her poems—forces upon her readers an awareness of competing and sometimes contradictory subjectivities.

<13> Until recently, Toru Dutt was relegated to the critical outskirts because scholars were unsure how to engage productively with her work. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century pioneers, such as Edmund Gosse, James Darmesteter, and Harihar Das, were drawn to the dramatic story of her death-stunted genius, her multicultural identity, the richness of her imagery, and the smoothness of her meter. However, their critical tools—national constructs (such as “English,” “Indian,” and “French”), a binary understanding of gender, conceptualizations of fully separate Eastern and Western cultures, and notions of unified movements (such as British colonialism, Indian Nationalism, and feminism)—could not enable the kind of readings that Dutt’s poetry requires. These scholars seemed certain that she must be categorized, but unsure whether she should be read alongside Wordsworth and Keats, Barrett Browning and Rossetti, or Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Sarojini Naidu. A new generation of postcolonial, feminist, and transnational scholars has brought about her critical rediscovery, and, though still in the formative stages, our critical understanding of Dutt’s work is growing exponentially.

<14> Yet, Dutt is often still forced into stable, pre-existing, but ultimately ill-fitting contextualizations. My primary goal in the preceding pages has been to offer a critique of that restrictive type of engagement with Dutt’s work by using close readings of her poetry to demonstrate her resistance to such neat categorization. Dutt’s poetry reveals her subjectivity to be *both* Indian and English. “Sonnet—Baugmaree” exposes her nationalist sentiments, while “Sonnet—The Lotus” indicates that her nationalism is of a different, more proto-feminist variety than that advanced by Indian nationalist ideology. She *both* endorses and resists Indian nationalism. Dutt’s “Savitri” and “The Royal Ascetic and the Hind” exemplify her commitment to preserving and retelling Hindu mythology—though the poems represent, respectively, acts of reappropriation and reinterpretation. She *both* respects and rewrites Hindu practitioners and

pundits. She is *both* a progressive indigenous proto-feminist and a Christian proselytizer. As evidenced by her critical reception in India and Britain, Dutt is *both* familiar and Other in each culture.

<15> Any critical constructs that will prove useful in examining Dutt's work must be flexible enough to absorb the shock of a substantial list of deep-seated contradictions. Dutt's hybridity (and that of other transnational women writers) demands that we be prepared to address the complication or shattering of stable critical understandings of the interactions among nationality, gender, race, class, and religious affiliation in the formation of individual subjectivities. Dutt's demonstration of her own agency as a writer also cautions us to be wary of critical readings that fix her in a particular place within the binary system, even if that position is "in-between," rather than examine her strategic self-location within or subversion of those systems. Toru Dutt's world was one of pluralized "isms" and she invites us to (in fact, demands that we) think in terms of Indian nationalisms, Indian and British feminisms, racisms, and classisms. There is certainly much more work to be done.

#### Endnotes

(1) Toru Dutt was born the youngest child of Govin Chunder and Kshetramoni Dutt on March 4, 1856, just one year before the outbreak of the Sepoy Mutiny. The Dutt family was exceedingly wealthy and already well known for their literary accomplishments. In 1865, they traveled to France, where Dutt learned the language, and then to England, where both daughters attended the Cambridge Higher Lectures for Women. In 1873, the family returned to Calcutta and Dutt's first essays, devoted to Henry Derozio and Leconte de Lisle, appeared in *Bengal Magazine*. She also began regularly contributing translations of French poetry. These poems, combined with previously unpublished translations, were published in 1876 as *A Sheaf Gleaned from French Fields*. In 1877, after a prolonged and painful battle with tuberculosis, Toru Dutt died at the age of only 21. She was widely eulogized in India, France, and England even though most of her work had yet to appear. Her masterpiece, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan* (1882), as well as two novels, *Bianca, Or the Young Spanish Maiden* (1878) and *Le Journal de Mademoiselle d'Arvers* (1879), were published posthumously. (△)

(2) Historically, many wealthy, English speaking Indians supported the British administration. Dutt's family closely fits Meredith Borthwick's description of the sub-group *abhijat bhadralok* or Indians who permanently resided in Calcutta and, owing to their cooperation with the British, amassed large fortunes and social prestige. Chandani Lokuge, author of the first book length project devoted to Dutt, depicts the Dutt's in a similar way. However, she cites only a few exceptional incidents—for example, Dutt's short-lived desire to relocate to England after the family's return to Calcutta, her complaints about the heat of Calcutta's summers, or her infrequent (and ultimately retracted) use of the derogatory term "native"—as evidence that Dutt "thinks and feels like an imperialist" (Lokuge xx) or understood herself as "an exile in her own land" (Lokuge xxxi). In contrast, my readings of Dutt's letters and poetry suggest that she positioned India and England as counterparts and that her feelings for both countries easily coexisted. Dutt consistently depicts the Eastern cultural tradition as sufficient and her extensive reading in the European classics seems to enrich, rather than dominate, her intellectual development. For examples, see Das 56, 144, 168. (△)

(3) Dutt's use of these forms aligns her with the sonnet tradition, dating back to Petrarch in the fourteenth-century; with British Romantics, such as Wordsworth and Keats (to whom she is often likened stylistically and biographically); and with her Western contemporaries, such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti. (△)

(4) Though Dutt could not possibly have been aware of the symbolism, even as late as 1877, her poem's primary colors—green ("tamarinds" and "mangoe clumps"), red ("seemuls"), and white ("lotus")—ultimately became the colors of the Indian National Flag. Historical accounts place the inception of the Indian National Flag in 1921. (△)

(5) While Dutt was outspoken in her admiration of British feminist poets (particularly Elizabeth Barrett Browning), she necessarily practiced a distinct kind of feminism. As Antoinette Burton's *Burdens of History* skillfully demonstrates, Dutt's relationship with British feminism, as with Indian nationalism, was vexed: British feminism was not available to Dutt for direct

appropriation as a consequence of her status as a racialized colonial subject. Burton argues that British feminist ideology was tinged with endorsements of racism, nationalism, and, relatedly, imperialism. She claims that a central demand made by British feminists was acknowledgment, by means of equal domestic recognition, of the special contribution that women could make in prolonging and improving the British Empire. Modifying Rudyard Kipling's phrase, Burton claims that British feminists imagined themselves as laden with "the white feminist burden" (Burton 10). Furthermore, the rhetoric of British feminist demands was often "predicated on the imagery of Indian women, whom [they] depicted as helpless victims awaiting . . . the redress of their condition at the hands of their sisters in the metropole" (Burton 10). Burton's work focuses on suffragist crusaders, such as Millicent Garrett Fawcett and Arabella Shore (with whom Dutt corresponded), but the rhetoric Burton describes is similarly apparent in women's poetry—across the political spectrum. In other as yet unpublished essays, I analyze poems by Francis Ridley Havergal, Ann and Jane Taylor, Maria Jane Jewsbury, Emma Roberts, Barrett Browning, and Letitia Elizabeth Landon to show that British women writers consistently endorsed imperialist imaginings of Indian culture and, in particular, Indian women. British feminists frequently used poetic depictions of *sati* or the Hindu rite of widow immolation to justify their "civilizing" aims. (△)

(6)Importantly, "new women" were allocated a new social status—superior to that of lower-class Indian women, who were uneducated and consistently depicted as lacking both social and moral virtues, and also to that of "westernized" Indian women, who had purportedly forfeited their spiritual purity (and, thus, their femininity) by abandoning traditional Indian values (Chatterjee 245). It is the last distinction—between "new women" and "westernized" women—that most powerfully reveals the double standard at the foundation of the nationalist movement's "new patriarchy": while Indian nationalism permitted men to publicly adopt Western habits, Indian women's value in nationalist ideology lie in their rejection of corrupting, westernizing influences and their ability to enshrine in their mannerisms and bodies as well as in the privacy of Indian homes the values and beliefs that made up the immutable, spiritual "essence" of India.(△)

(7)According to the Victorian Bazaar, the language of flowers or "floriography" was so important during the Victorian period that dictionaries of the symbolic meanings of particular flowers were published in order to ensure smooth communication between people via flower-gifts. For a complete listing of symbolic meanings, see Beverly Seaton, *The Language of Flowers: A History* (Charlottesville: UP Virginia, 1995).(△)

(8)Citing Homi Bhabha's *Locations of Culture*, Lokuge states a similar position: "Toru Dutt claims an ambiguous physical presence, in an 'interstitial passage between two fixed identifications'" (Lokuge xiii). However, Lokuge seemingly contradicts this position when she depicts Dutt as having a "home" in India that she is, at particular points in her life, either reconciled with or exiled from. Knippling consistently locates Dutt in a "risk-ridden" space and, for that reason, I have relied more heavily on her argument.(△)

(9)When Savitri's father learns that Satyavan is cursed to die within the first year of his marriage, the king states his opposition to the marriage: "thou must make a different choice" (216). However, Savitri's entreaties alter his opinion and the king concedes, "My child shall wed the youth she loves" (264). In the second instance, both Satyavan's mother and his royal father "begged Savitri hard, to rest" (448) rather than journey into the forest on the fated day of their son's death. However, her stubbornness—"nothing could her purpose shake" (452)—again allows Savitri to have her own way. Finally, in the stanzas after Satyavan's collapse, the initial emissaries of death cannot wrest his soul from Savitri. Thus Yama is forced to confront her: "And I am come myself to take/Thy husband from this earth away" (601-602). For seventeen stanzas, Savitri defies Yama's orders to return home. Through her persistence and clever exploitation of his offers of "boons" (769) in compensation for her devotion, she ultimately wins Satyavan's soul from Death.(△)

(10)Importantly, *sati* is neither proper nor even permissible in Dutt's poem. When, at first, Savitri "meekly followed" Yama (616), the god "looked surprised" (618) and advised Savitri to follow the prescriptions of earth-bound widowhood rather than to perform the *sati* tradition. On one occasion, Yama tells Savitri that she may not follow her husband into the realm of the dead: "Satyavan's life I may not grant,/ Nor take before its turn thy life" (701-702). Dutt's Savitri cannot follow Satyavan and, instead, must rely on her argumentative prowess to regain his life.(△)

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