**UNIT II**

**‘Our Casuarina Tree’**

**About Toru Dutt**

Toru Dutt, despite having a short life, made her poetry to live long as a testimony of her literary credentials. Toru Dutt, born on March 4, 1856, was a poet, novelist, essayist, translator, and the first Indian poetess to write in French and English. She contributed regularly to the ‘Poet’s Corner’ of *The Bengal Magazine* and *The Calcutta Review*, publishing a series of English translations of French poetry between March 1874 and March 1877. Although she died at the tender age of 21, in 1876, she has produced an impressive collection of poetry and [prose](https://poemanalysis.com/genre/prose/) within the short period of life.

## Form and Structure

‘Our Casuarina Tree’ by Toru Dutt is a poem of fifty-five lines, divided into five [stanzas](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/stanza/).  Eleven lines of each stanza consist of an [octave](https://poemanalysis.com/poetic-form/octave/) (8 lines), following the [style](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/style/) of a [sonnet](https://poemanalysis.com/poetic-form/sonnet/) has two [quatrains](https://poemanalysis.com/poetic-form/quatrain/) (4 lines) with closed [rhymes](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/rhyme/) and a [rhyming](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/rhyme/) [tercet](https://poemanalysis.com/poetic-form/tercet/). Thus, making the overall [rhyme scheme](https://poemanalysis.com/definition/rhyme-scheme/) of the poem ‘ABBACDDCEEE FGGFHIIHJJJ KLLKMNNMOOO PQQPRSSRTTT UVVUWXXWYYY’. Further, using a rhyming tercet (3 lines) rather than the regular [rhyming couplet](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/couplet/) (two lines) gives the impression of overflowing which mirrors the speakers overflowing emotions towards her childhood memories and the Casuarina tree, the center of the poem

## Poetic Devices

The poem ‘Our Casuarina Tree’ in itself is a symbolic representation of the poet’s memory associated with the Casuarina tree. Using the [subjective](https://poemanalysis.com/definition/subjective/) pronoun in the title suggests the ‘subjective’ [tone of the poem](https://poemanalysis.com/definition/tone/). In the first stanza, the poet’s description of the creeper’s stronghold on the tree, and the scare symbolically represent the impact of colonialism on Indian Culture and Philosophy. The poem uses rich [imagery](https://poemanalysis.com/figurative-language/imagery/) which presents in the description of the tree’s appearance, description of dawn, and the memory of her loved ones connected with it. The [metaphor](https://poemanalysis.com/figurative-language/metaphor/) used in the lines “The giant wears the scarf,” “trembling Hope,” and “Time the shadow” and the [similes](https://poemanalysis.com/figurative-language/simile/)’  “”LIKE a huge Python,” “baboon sits statue-like alone,” and “The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed,” that add beauty to the poem and instates the poet’s feelings.

### Stanza One

LIKE a huge Python, winding round and round

 The rugged trunk, indented deep with scars,

 Up to its very summit near the stars,

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,

 Whereon all day are gathered bird and bee;

And oft at nights the garden overflows

With one sweet song that seems to have no close,

Sung darkling from our tree, while men repose.

The first stanza of ‘Our Casuarina Tree’ begins with the image of the tree. The poet remembers the tree being wound by a creeper like a python. Its hold was too tight for it had left the scar on the trunk. The poet further states that no other tree would have sustained this hold, for it is too strong, but her tree did. Also, the ‘giant,’ the tree has proudly worn those ‘scars’ like a ‘scarf’, representing its strength. To further describe its strength, the poet says it is filled with crimson flowers in every bough like a crown that invited birds and bees. Often at night when the poet could not sleep she used to listen to the music that filled her garden as if it has no end.

### Stanza Two

When first my casement is wide open thrown

 At dawn, my eyes delighted on it rest;

 Sometimes, and most in winter,—on its crest

A gray baboon sits statue-like alone

 Watching the sunrise; while on lower boughs

His puny offspring leap about and play;

And far and near kokilas hail the day;

 And to their pastures wend our sleepy cows;

And in the shadow, on the broad tank cast

By that hoar tree, so beautiful and vast,

The water-lilies spring, like snow enmassed.

The second stanza of ‘Our Casuarina Tree’ details the experiences of dawn which delighted the poet. Every morning, as she opens her window, her eyes rest on the tree and ‘delighted.’ She presents the picture of the changing scene with seasons. Sometimes during other seasons, and mostly during winter, she has seen a baboon sitting on the top branch like a statue waiting to receive the first array of sunlight. Whereas, his ‘puny offspring’ plays around in the lower branch of the tree. Along with this scenic beauty, the poet also experienced the ‘kokilas’ welcoming note. She has also observed the cows guided towards the pastures and the water-lilies spring under the shadow of the hoar tree, like gathered snow.

### Stanza Three

But not because of its magnificence

 Dear is the Casuarina to my soul:

 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.

Blent with your images, it shall arise

In memory, till the hot tears blind mine eyes!

 What is that [*dirge*](https://poemanalysis.com/poetic-form/dirge/)-like murmur that I hear

Like the sea breaking on a shingle-beach?

It is the tree’s [*lament*](https://poemanalysis.com/poetic-form/lament/), an eerie [*speech*](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/dialogue/),

That haply to the unknown land may reach.

In the third stanza, the [speaker](https://poemanalysis.com/diction/speaker-in-poetry/) turns more subjective in the memory associated with the tree. She comments on why the tree will remain dear to her always. Besides the morning bliss, the tree reminds her of the time she played with her siblings. The tree, blended with the memory of them, gives her the images of the intense love they shared, leaving the poet in tears.   The poet mourns for those departed souls as she thinks down the memory lane. And, she imagines that the tree shares her lose which she hears as “dirge-like murmur” resembling the waves breaking on a pebble beach.

### Stanza Four

 Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!

 Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away

 In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,

When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith

 And the waves gently kissed the classic shore

Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,

When earth lay trancèd in a dreamless swoon:

 And every time the music rose,—before

Mine inner vision rose a form [*sublime*](https://poemanalysis.com/definition/sublime/),

Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime

I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

In the fourth stanza, the poet presents an in-depth connection with the tree. Through the image of waves, she takes us to the foreign land which is “Unknown, yet well-known” where the “waves gently kissed the classic shore”. Whenever this music of the waves touching the waves rises, it arouses the memory of the tree in front of the poet’s eyes as she has seen in her youth.

### Stanza Five

 Therefore I fain would consecrate a lay

 Unto thy honor, Tree, beloved of those

 Who now in blessed sleep for aye repose,—

Dearer than life to me, alas, were they!

 Mayst thou be numbered when my days are done

With deathless trees—like those in Borrowdale,

Under whose awful branches lingered pale

 “Fear, trembling Hope, and Death, the skeleton,

And Time the shadow;” and though weak the [*verse*](https://poemanalysis.com/definition/verse/)

That would thy beauty fain, oh, fain rehearse,

May Love defend thee from Oblivion’s curse.

Unknown, yet well-known to the eye of faith!

 Ah, I have heard that wail far, far away

 In distant lands, by many a sheltered bay,

When slumbered in his cave the water-wraith

 And the waves gently kissed the classic shore

Of France or Italy, beneath the moon,

When earth lay trancèd in a dreamless swoon:

 And every time the music rose,—before

Mine inner vision rose a form [*sublime*](https://poemanalysis.com/definition/sublime/),

Thy form, O Tree, as in my happy prime

I saw thee, in my own loved native clime.

In the final stanza, the speaker wants to erect something in the honor of the casuarina tree. For those who were beloved, who are resting in peace, loved it. She wants the tree to live long like those trees of “Borrowdale” making a reference to Wordsworth’s “Yew-trees.”  Also, she makes an attempt to distinguish the trees of England from the Casuarina tree, connecting to her varying emotions. The Casuarina tree stands for [nostalgia](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/nostalgia/), longing, and memory, whereas the trees of England reflect her isolation. The final lines of the poem underscore the idea of a poem as a written memory. The poet seeks “Love” to protect the tree and her poem from time’s ravage.