

'Lotus' by Toru Dutt

'Lotus' is a Petrarchan sonnet written by Toru Dutt. A Petrarchan or Italian sonnet is a fourteen line poem divided into two parts, the first part is called an octave which consists of eight lines and the second part consisting of six lines is called a sestet. The rhyme scheme of the sonnet is ABBA ABBA for octave and CDC DDC for the sestet.

The first quatrain of the sonnet introduces a problem where Love who is generally represented in literature as Aphrodite in line with classical mythology approaches Flora, the goddess of spring and flowers to ask for a flower that could undisputedly be called the queen of flowers. Mentioning "undisputed" indicates the scope of disputes and conflicts. Also, giving precedence to one flower among others suggests the human temperament of finding elements of discord even in perfect peace and harmony. Employing mythical goddesses to put forth a human folly connects the theme with religion.

The second quatrain develops on the problem posed by the first and the narrator informs the reader that Lily and Rose have long been in conflict to achieve the coveted position of the queen. Repetition of the word 'Long' is used to create an ancient atmosphere and therefore to provide cosmic importance to an otherwise mundane issue involving clash of egos. The second quatrain is loaded with paradoxes. "Bards of power" impresses the corrupting influence of power on the minds of the readers. The quest for power can ruin the most harmonized of the natural elements. Similarly putting "pale" Lily against Juno's mien suggests that hunger for power can bereave a person of his natural goodness.

Lily has been traditionally associated with purity and bliss and is characterised by a white hue. Mythologically it was believed to be created by Hera's breast milk. And therefore a "pale" colour suggests Lily's weakness as a result ^{of} for the quest for power. Juno was the queen of goddesses in Roman mythology and hence a symbol of State and power. "Juno-mien" suggests an emptiness that Lily has been rendered as a natural outcome of her desire for power.

Similarly rose which ^{has} traditionally ^{been} considered a symbol of self-effacing love is used in the poem with "tower" which translates into the rose's failed attempt at grandstanding against the Lily.

"Flower-factions" robs all the traditional adjectives of innocence, love, tenderness and grace associated with flowers and leaves them with mindless savagery of wars. Psyche, the Greek goddess of Soul is helpless in containing the strife and maintaining harmony. The reference to the goddess of soul is another indication at the undercurrent of religion.

In accordance with the convention of the Petrarchan sonnet, the resolution of the conflict begins with the sestet. Love or Aphrodite opts for the middle path and asks for a flower as delicious as the rose and as stately as the Lily. Aphrodite's demand hints at the possibility of opening new vistas for resolution of age-long conflicts by changing set perspectives.

Flora then gives a "rose-red" and "lily-white" Lotus to Aphrodite as "the queenliest flower" to meet her demand. It brings the reader to a conclusion that amicable resolution of long-standing conflicts is possible if the parties agree to show the grace of a rose and the will of a lily.

The choice of Lotus - the national flower of India and the symbol of Hindu faith, to many critics, is the assertion of the supremacy of Hinduism by Toru Dutt. The lily representing the white race of rational West when combines with the rose representing the spiritual East gives Lotus which contains the goodness of both the cultures. The fact that the Lotus is an aquatic plant suggests the fluidity, flexibility and the scope of a diverse co-existence in a polytheistic Hindu faith.

The use of a Greek goddess in Aphrodite/Love and a Roman goddess in Flora hint at a series of wars fought between the two civilizations during the late Hellenistic period. The historians broadly believe that religion was used as a spur to ensure mass support to fight these wars. These were the wars between the pagan tribes of Greece and the institutionalized States of Rome. Toru Dutt is possibly suggesting through the poem that both paganism and codified, institutionalized religions can peacefully co-exist in the all-encompassing embrace of Hinduism.

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