

3 THE LOTUS



Love came to Flora asking for a flower
That would of flowers be undisputed queen,
The lily and the rose, long, long had been
Rivals for that high honor. Bards of power
Had sung their claims. 'The rose can never tower
Like the pale lily with her Juno mien' -
'But is the lily lovelier?' Thus between
Flower-factions rang the strife in Psyche's bower.
'Give me a flower delicious as the rose
And stately as the lily in her pride' -
But of what color?' - 'Rose-red,' Love first chose,
Then prayed - 'No, lily-white - or, both provide;'
And Flora gave the lotus, 'rose-red' dyed,
And 'lily-white' - the queenliest flower that blows.

- Toru Dutt

About the Poet (March 4, 1856 - Aug. 30, 1877)

Toru Dutt is a well known poet of India whose contribution in Indian writing in English is memorable. Her father was a rich man of Calcutta. Her mother had a deep knowledge of the Hindu myths. This family was impressed by the glitter of the West and had embraced Christianity. But Toru Dutt had a deep attraction for the Indian epics and mythology. She read the **Ramayana**, the **Mahabharata**, the **Vishnu Purana** and the **Bhagavata**. Her imagination was shaped by these indian classics. Her literature abounds in the cultural heritage of India.

About the Poem:

'The Lotus' is a small poem called **sonnet**. It is a Petrarchan sonnet. The lotus has been a favourite flower with Indian gods and goddesses. Both Lord Vishnu and

Goddess Laxmi love this flower. In present times many prizes have been named after the lotus - the Padamshri, the Padam Bhushan, the Padam Vibhushan etc.

For Toru Dutt the lotus is the most perfect flower regarding the combination of colours and appearance. The poet describes a dispute among flowers in the manner of a beauty contest. The rose and the lily are rivals to get the status of the best flower. But Flora, the goddess of flowers chooses the lotus as a flower of supreme beauty because this flower retains in it the whiteness of the lily and the redness of the rose. So neither the lily nor the rose can equal the beauty of the lotus.

Symbolically, the victory of the lotus is the victory of Indian culture over the western world, since the lily and the rose are the western flowers.

GLOSSARY

Love (n)	:	used for Cupid, the god of love in Roman mythology
Flora (n)	:	goddess of vegetation and flowers
undisputed (adj.)	:	without any dispute or doubt
lily (n)	:	a flower of white colour
rose (n)	:	a flower of red colour
rivals (n)	:	contestants, opponents
Bards (n)	:	poets
tower (v)	:	stand straight
pale (adj)	:	dim
Juno (n)	:	a goddess known for stately beauty
mien (n)	:	a person's appearance, look (Juno mien: standing straight with confidence like the goddess Juno)
flower-factions (n)	:	groups of flowers (one group in the leadership of the rose and another in the leadership of the lily)
rang (v)	:	clashed
strife (n)	:	quarrel
bower (n)	:	residence
delicious (adj)	:	sweet

stately (adj)	:	appearing noble, great
pride (n)	:	confidence
rose-red (adj)	:	red as rose
lily-white (adj)	:	white as lily
blows (v)	:	blooms

ACTIVITY 1 : COMPREHENSION

A. Tick the correct alternatives:

- Who wrote 'The Lotus'?

(a) Sarojani Naidu	(b) Toru Dutt
(c) R.K. Narayn	(d) Khuswant Singh
- 'Rivals' in the poem are:

(a) the lotus and the rose	(b) the lily and the lotus
(c) the lily and the rose	(d) the lotus and love
- Flora is the goddess of:

(a) fruits	(b) vegetables
(c) flowers	(d) milk

B. Say whether the following statements are True or False. Write T for true and F for false in brackets:

- Cupid came to Psyche to obtain a flower. []
- The lily and the rose quarrelled for the title of superior reputation. []
- The lily stands straight in pride like Juno. []
- Cupid first selected the colour of the lily. []
- Flora gave the lotus to Psyche. []

C. Answer the following questions in about 30-40 words each:

- Why did Cupid come to Flora?
- What was the cause of quarrel between the lily and the rose?
- Describe the appearance of the lily.
- Describe the appearance of the rose.
- How did Cupid hesitate in choosing the colour of the desired flower?

D. Answer the following questions in about 60 words each:

1. How had the poets sung about the lily and the rose?
2. How is the lotus considered as a cultural symbol in the Indian society?
3. What do you know about Cupid and Flora?
4. How did Flora solve the problem of Cupid?
5. Do you agree with Flora's decision about the quarrel between the rose and the lily? Explain.

ACTIVITY 2 : REFERENCE TO CONTEXT

Explain the following lines with reference to context:

1. Love came to Flora high honour.
2. Thus between flower factions Psyche's bower.
3. And Flora gave the lotus that blows.