

Poetic Voice of Sarojini Naidu: A Study

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Abstract: Sarojini Naidu is a prominent figure in pre-independence Indian English poetry. She is considered to be a dreamer, born in a dreamless age and an ardent, versatile and dynamic genius and unsurpassable for her sweet and melodious songs which are unsurpassed in the entire range of Indian English poetry as a magnificent and colorful album of Indian life. This thesis makes an attempt to discuss in detail Sarojini Naidu's portrayal. In this process, I probe the poet's autobiography, which bears upon her poetry on the folk themes, the irresistible fascination of Nature and Spring, Love, Life and Death.

Keywords: *Poetic voices, Sarojini Naidu, Nature poems, the snake and humayun to zobeida and the time of roses.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Like Tagore and Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu too was more than a poet, she was one of Mother India's most gifted children, readily shared her burden of pain, fiercely articulating her agonies and hopes, and gallantly striving to redeem the Mother and redeem the time. As an English poet she first caught the attention of the public, but that was only the beginning. In course of time the patriot exceeded the poet, and Sarojini Naidu came to occupy some of the highest unofficial and official positions in the public of India.

Fifty-five years ago, when Sarojini Naidu made a trip to England in search of health there took place between her and the great nationalist leader, Gopal Krishna Gokhale. She had to fight without remission the battle of her health losing and winning and losing again and she had to struggle long against the bludgeoning of circumstance, neither wincing nor crying aloud. Sunniness and sadness, life and death, victory and defeat early they set up their joint sceptre in her life, in her soul.

Sarojini Naidu was a distinguished poet, renowned freedom fighter and one of the great orators of her time. She was famously known as Bharatiya Kokila (The Nightingale of India). Sarojini Naidu was the first Indian woman to become the president of the Indian National Congress and the first woman to become the governor of a state in India.

Sarojini Naidu was born on February 13, 1879. Her father Aghoranath Chattopadhyaya was a scientist and philosopher. He was the founder of the Nizam College, Hyderabad, Sarojini Naidu's mother Barada Sundari Devi was a poetess and used to write poetry in Bengali. Sarojini

Naidu was the eldest among the eight siblings. One of her brothers Birendranath was a revolutionary and her other brother Harindranath was a poet, dramatist, and actor.

Sarojini Naidu was a brilliant student. She was proficient in Urdu, Telugu, English, Bengali, and Persian. At the age of twelve, she attained national fame when she topped the matriculation examination at Madras University. Her father wanted her to become a mathematician or scientist but she was interested in poetry. She started writing poems in English. Impressed by her poetry, Nizam of Hyderabad, gave her scholarship to study abroad. At the age of 16, she traveled to England to study first at King's College, London and later at Girton College, Cambridge. There she met famous laureates of her time such as Arthur Simon and Edmond Gosse. It was Gosse who convinced her to stick to Indian themes—India's great mountains, rivers, temples, social milieu, to express her poetry. She depicted contemporary Indian life and events. Her collections The Golden Threshold (1905), The Bird of Time (1912), and The Broken Wing (1912) attracted huge Indian and English readers.

II. POETIC VOICES

Sarojini Naidu is popularly known as the Bharat Kokila or The Nightingale of India, is the most lyrical woman poet. In her perfect lyricism and mellifluous melody she is indeed the nightingale of India. She is a singer of India's glory, India's present, India's fauna and flora. She pictures in melodious strains the landscape of the Deccan. Whereas the western critics would categorize her with Shelley and Keats. She once described herself as a wild free thing of the air like the birds with a song in her heart. This self portrait reveals her essential poetic temperament and lyrical gifts. Spontaneity and naturalness of manner give her poetry a distinct bird like quality and melodic beauty. Besides a melodist and a singer, she is a lover of beauty. She is a romanticist too. She deals with love as a major theme in her poetry. Her poems reveal the authentic heart of India. Under advice from Edmund Gosse she undertook to write on Indian themes and subjects. As the nightingale of India, Sarojini Naidu is also sensitive to beauty, the beauty of living things, the beauty of holiness, the beauty of Buddha's compassion, the beauty of Brindavan's land. She did not specially seek the bizarre, the exotic, the exceptional, but her poems lack neither the variety nor the flavour of actuality.

Her poetry is frankly the poetry of nature. Her love of nature is reflected even in poems which are not about nature, but have a different theme. Nature in the external environment of man, and Sarojini looks at it with a child-like, open-eyed wonder. Her response to nature is simple and innocent like that of a child who looks at nature with fascination and is struck with awe by her grandeur and her mystery. It is the homely and the familiar that fascinates Sarojini; she shuts her eyes to the ugly and the terrible in nature. Similarly, she does not philosophise nature. We do not get in her poetry any consistent world view which defines the relationship of God, Man and Nature. She is neither pantheistic like Wordsworth nor cosmic like Tagore.

She has a woman's or poet's partiality for spring. Many of her poems are full of spring imagery. She draws loving picture of gulmohurs, golden cassias, nasturtiums, champak blossoms, wild lilies, and the bright pomegranate buds. She offers the odours of henna, sarisha and neem. She gives us a chance to hear the melodious songs of various birds and the buzzing of bees. It is altogether a picture of lost innocence, to us in modern India, caught up as we are in fever and fret of materialism.

III. THE ART OF SAROJINI NAIDU

Sarojini Naidu was a conscientious artist who believed that a poet should have the gift of communication before he publishes his poems. In other words, his compositions should have clarity before it is fit for publication. He should revise and polish what he writes, till this perfection is achieved. When Arthur Symons advised her to publish her poems, she was hesitant because she felt that she still lacked this gift communication, and she set out painstakingly to cultivate it. The result is a distinctive style which, is her own, and which, when at her best, acquires an almost classical felicity of expression. It should also be remembered that she was much influenced by the English romantics and, pre-Raphaelites, and as such her diction has a sensuous warmth and opulence characteristic of the romantic poets. Her diction was certainly influenced by Keats, Shelley, Tennyson and others, and it is certainly over — hung with pre-Raphaelite tapestry and decor, but it is not imitative. It has an, Individual beauty of its own and carries with its own peculiar aura and charm.

This distinctive and original flavour of her diction is accounted for in a number of ways. She was a woman and had a woman's partiality for words. She has a woman's love of words. They are not, to her, just convenient instruments of expression, they were things, precious, lovely things, like jewels. She rejoices in poly — syllables that roll and rumble, or rattle like long burnished swords in phrases like 'lovely stalactite of dreams', or, 'in the long dread, incalculable hour'.

Besides having a woman's love of words, she also had a woman's love of flowers and precious stones. The result is an opulent, colourful diction which is entirely her own but which has also exposed her to some criticisms. For example, only Sarojini Naidu could speak of the burning and speckled evening sky, jewelled with embers of opal and peridot. Such colourful word pictures are frequent in her poetry. It is her feminine love of words which leads her into many an adjectival excess which are said to blur the vision and dilute the emotion but which have a charm and fascination of their own. It is her love of words which gives to her, her phrase - making power, phrases which are aglow with imagination, with exuberance and which consequently strike deep, bite in, so to say, and are easily remembered. Here are a few examples of such trenchant, sensuous and passionate phrases selected at random. 'Silver tears of sorrow' (Silver Tears), 'lyric bloom', 'melodious leaves' (Ashoka Bloom), 'a carnival of lights', 'Sanctuary of sorrow', 'a spectre in the rose-encircled shroud', 'echoing bough', 'blossoming hopes unharvested' (The poet to Death), 'the wakening skies', 'the leaping wealth of tide', 'the kiss of the spray', 'the dance of the wild foam's glee' (Coromandel Fishers).

IV. POEMS ON COMMON INDIAN LIFE

Sarojini Naidu exploited to the full the resources of the English language, and when it suited her purpose she did not hesitate to introduce into her lyrics words from the native languages. "Govinda, Govinda", "Ram re Ram", "Ya Allah", "Allah ho Akbar", and many more such examples readily come to mind. Such use of Indian words, exclamations and cries is quite appropriate in poems dealing with the life of the Indian folk. They impart an Indian colour to her songs and lyrics which also acquire in this way an incantatory, or mantric quality. They enable her to convey shades of meaning, which could not have been conveyed by the use of their Indian flavour and finesse of meaning, and will appear grotesque if translated into English. An idea of this fault can be formed from such translations in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand. However, she has been criticised for such use of Indian words and phrases. For example Lotika Basu is severely critical of what she calls Sarojini's Pseudo Indianism in the use of vernacular words which have no evocative associations for the English reader. The result is a thin veneer of Indianism which diminishes and strains the verbal flow of poetic feeling. Sarojini's diction is a synthesis of various cultures and modes of expression. It is never Western romantic feeling working in isolation that we have in her poetry.

Romantic assertion is Sanskritized, even as Vaishnavite affirmation is Persianized, and Sufi mystic intuition is Westernized. Her poetic diction depends more on the melodic phrase than on verbal adhesion, and in this she clearly follows the Sanskrit example of "Samasa" (what Empson calls "complex structures"). Although, from

the purely “English” point of view, this strains her linguistic resources, it enlivens the feeling the imagery and the perception, “Pomegranate gardens of the mellowing dawn”, “Night’s hyacinthine gloom”, “the wise compassionate glory of your face”, are Romantic, or Pre-Raphaelite, only on the surface. In reality they are related to the massive compositional technique in Indian vernacular poetry. If we ignore the native idiom, they give the impression of swinburnian effusion, or needless stylization. But placed in context, they recall the amplitude, spaciousness and improvisational freedom and adjustability of Sanskrit poetry. Thus her diction is seen to be an expression of her Indianness and of her artistic sincerity, and many of the so-called faults of hers are positive virtues. They place her firmly in the Indian tradition stretching from Kali Das to Tagore.

CONCLUSION

Sarojini Naidu is a conscientious artist. She believes in the Poet’s having a gift of Communication. She has the classicist’s perfection and refinement and the sensuousness of the romanticists. Her diction is influenced by Keats, Shelley, Tennyson and the pre-Raphaelites.

Her poetry is remarkable for its ease and spontaneity. Words flow from her pen as honey from a bee-hive. Brevity, melody, subjectivity, intensity of emotion, condensed thought - these features of lyric poetry are found in her poetry, who works on an inch of ivory very perfectly. Violent, passions, industrial problems, Freudian libido, deep mystic experiences unnatural themes, and supernatural haunts are unknown to her.

Sarojini is the poetess of life and love; equally she is the poetess of the challenge of suffering and pain and death to life, which enables her to look straight into the eyes of death and face it boldly too. Life and death both, according to her, constitute the mingled web existence, life remains incomplete without a combination of both. She is really ashamed to encounter death scheme facedly.

Sarojini’s Poems breathe an Indian air in all its fresheners, glory and romanticism. They are mellifluous and catching and disclose a depth of feeling that is rare in the works of most of her contemporary writers of English verse. From her collection Sarojini Naidu emerges as a distinguished poets. Her poetry is marked by her delicate imagination and melodious language and is remarkable for its command of English. Her poetry reveals to us the various phase of Indian life. The genius of Mrs. Naidu is essentially lyrical. Most of her poems are crises of the heart of joy, sorrow, fervour and exultation. There is an intensity of feeling in many of her best pieces; coupled with this there is a magical cadence in verses which are astonishing.

Mostly Sarojini’s Poems are lyrical. The fact that she did not write any dramatic, epic or narrative poetry nor any blank verse shows that she is only a lyricist and a singer and nothing more, and since she sings of India realistically and truly and sincerely, she is our authentic singer. Her technical skill, her ability to choose right words, her rich diction and love for phrases, her mastery of melody, her emotional intensity and warmth of passion, her commend of language and above all her rich imagination obviously make us conclude that she had genuine poetic talent. The oppositeness of sentiments and imagery and the perfect management of the rhymes have made her songs lovely and memorable.

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