

THE POETRY OF SAROJINI NAIDU

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ABSTRACT

Sarojini Naidu was a poet par excellence. Her poems were imbued in her spirit. She made the themes, which she worked on, her own. Her major themes were folk life, nature etc. Her poetry was soaked in ethnic culture. It is said about Shakespeare if one does not know history of England, one can come to know about the same through his works. Same is true about Sarojini Naidu. If anybody is not aware of the culture of India, the same, one can come across in her poems. Her themes involved daily chores. She celebrated simple things like dawn or morning, the trials and tribulations of the common people. The objective of this paper is to depict the life and society and the culture prevalent at that time. Earlier the flora and fauna in her poetry was Anglican. Edmond Gosse, her mentor thought her poems lacked originality as they were modelled on the Western flora and fauna. She was every inch an alien poet. Gosse told her to Indianise her poetry. Sarojini Naidu took his advice seriously. Now there was a change in her themes. Her work celebrated festivals, occupations and folk life. Her poems were an amalgamation of imagery and theology.

Keywords: *Imagery, mysticism, folklore, verse, theology, fervour*

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to find out what kind of poetry, the historic figure like Sarojini Naidu, an exceptional artist dealt with. Her poetry is appreciated, for its traditional tinge. Sarojini Naidu was a renowned Indian poetess. At first let us find out which ambience this gifted poet was born in. There was cosmopolitan atmosphere at her home as her father Aghore Nath Chattopadhyaya used to relish the rich and humble with aplomb in his house. The Nizam of Hyderabad and the humble, talented people from different walks of life used to flock in his house. She inherited some rare qualities from her father. The Nizam of Hyderabad was her patron. When she was small, she was locked by her father in her room for not showing interest in learning the language English. But when her father opened the door, she had mugged up the whole of English. At the age of 13, she struggled with the sum of Maths, instead she could render poem of 13 lines in English. English Language was her forte. She wrote on variety of topics. She wove her poems with Traditional flavour. Actually it was on the lilting quality of her poems that her glory rests. Shakespeare in one of his dramas has stated if music be the food of love then play on. And for Sarojini Naidu it can be said that she played with the words. Her vocabulary was musical in nature. She employed apt vocabulary in her poems. The Golden Threshold, The Bird of Time and The Broken Wing have contributed a great deal in the history of Indo-Anglican poetry.

The paper focuses on diverse themes which Sarojini presented in her poems. Henna, Coromandel Fishers, Indian Weavers, Leili, Village Song, Past And Future Cradle Song, The Royal Tombs Of Golconda, Song of Radha, The Milkmaid The Snake Charmer, The palanquin-bearers, The Bangle-Sellers, Wandering Singers and Street Cries.

Sarojini portrayed the common folk so well that one can never tell that she was not one of them. Any true Indian would quickly develop a liking for her poems as they are Indian to the core. Life is a mixed bag and she through her poems brought a contrast between the joys and sorrows of people. The happiness and good times, the vocations of the common folk are highlighted in her poems. She has depicted the culture of India by mentioning different colours like colour of Henna for the woman.

A KOKILA called from a henna-spray:

Lira! liree! Lira! liree!

Hasten, maidens, hasten away

To gather the leaves of the henna-tree.

Send your pitchers afloat on the tide,

Gather the leaves ere the dawn be old,

Grind them in mortars of amber and gold,

The fresh green leaves of the henna-tree.

A kokila called from a henna-spray:

Lira! liree! Lira! liree!

Hasten maidens, hasten away

To gather the leaves of the henna-tree.

The tilka's red for the brow of a bride,

And betel-nut's red for lips that are sweet;

But, for lily-like fingers and feet,

The red, the red of the henna-tree.

She wrote about fishermen as if she had an inkling about the fishermen. How beautifully she has depicted Coromandel Fishers in the poem by the same name!

Rise, brothers, rise;

the wakening skies pray to the morning light,

The wind lies asleep in the arms of the dawn like a child that has cried all night.

Come, let us gather our nets from the shore and set our catamarans free,

To capture the leaping wealth of the tide, for we are the kings of the sea!

She has also touched aspect like Transience in the poem by the same title.

Nay, do not grieve tho' life be full of sadness,

Dawn will not veil her splendor for your grief,

Nor spring deny their bright, appointed beauty

To lotus blossom and ashoka leaf.

Nay, do not pine, tho' life be dark with trouble,

Time will not pause or tarry on his way;

To-day that seems so long, so strange, so bitter,
Will soon be some forgotten yesterday.

Nay, do not weep; new hopes, new dreams, new faces,
The unspent joy of all the unborn years,
Will prove your heart a traitor to its sorrow,
And make your eyes unfaithful to their tears.

She has penned down lines on Indian Weavers:

Go WEAVERS, weaving at break of day,
Why do you weave a garment so gay? . . .

Blue as the wing of a halcyon wild,
We weave the robes of a new-born child.

Weavers, weaving at fall of night,
Why do you weave a garment so bright? . . .

Like the plumes of a peacock, purple and green,
We weave the marriage-veils of a queen.

Weavers, weaving solemn and still,
What do you weave in the moonlight chill?

White as a feather and white as a cloud,
We weave a dead man's funeral shroud.

She has written a poem on the Queen Gulnaar who told her husband King Feroz that she is very much unsatisfied as she had not found her rival. She thought nobody could match her beauty. Next she watches her daughter admiring herself in the mirror. Then she is able to make out that it is her daughter who is her real rival.

King Feroz bent from his ebony seat:

"Is thy least desire unfulfilled, O Sweet?

"Let thy mouth speak and my life be spent
To clear the sky of thy discontent."

"I tire of my beauty, I tire of this
Empty splendour and shadowless bliss;

"With none to envy and none gainsay,
No savour or salt hath my dream or day."

Queen Gulnaar sighed like a murmuring rose:

"Give me a rival, O King Feroz." the simple feelings of a woman.

II. PAST AND FUTURE

he new hath come and now the old retires:
And so the past becomes a mountain-cell,

Where lone, apart, old hermit-memories dwell
In consecrated calm, forgotten yet
Of the keen heart that hastens to forget
Old longings in fulfilling new desires.

III. CRADLE SONG

FROM groves of spice,
O'er fields of rice,
Athwart the lotus-stream,
I bring for you,
Aglint with dew
A little lovely dream.

Sweet, shut your eyes,
The wild fire-fiies
Dance through the fairy neem;
From the poppy-bole
For you I stole
A little lovely dream.

Dear eyes, good-night,
In golden light
The stars around you gleam;
On you I press
With soft caress
A little lovely dream.

IV. THE ROYAL TOMBS OF GOLCONDA

I MUSE among these silent fanes
Whose spacious darkness guards your dust;
Around me sleep the hoary plains
That hold your ancient wars in trust.

I pause, my dreaming spirit hears,
Across the wind's unquiet tides,
The glimmering music of your spears,
The laughter of your royal brides.

In vain, O Kings, doth time aspire
To make your names oblivion's sport,

While yonder hill wears like a tier
The ruined grandeur of your fort.

Though centuries falter and decline,
Your proven strongholds shall remain
Embodied memories of your line,
Incarnate legends of your reign.

O Queens, in vain old Fate decreed
Your flower-like bodies to the tomb;
Death is in truth the vital seed
Of your imperishable bloom

Each new-born year the bulbuls sing
Their songs of your renascent loves;
Your beauty wakens with the spring
To kindle these pomegranate groves.

V. LEILI

The serpents are asleep among the poppies,
The fireflies light the soundless panther's way
To tangled paths where shy gazelles are straying,
And parrot-plumes outshine the dying day.
O soft! the lotus-buds upon the stream
Are stirring like sweet maidens when they dream.

A caste-mark on the azure brows of Heaven,
The golden moon burns sacred, solemn, bright
The winds are dancing in the forest-temple,
And swooning at the holy feet of Night.
Hush! in the silence mystic voices sing
And make the gods their incense-offering.⁸

VI. VILLAGE SONG

HONEY, child, honey, child, whither are you going?
Would you cast your jewels all to the breezes blowing?
Would you leave the mother who on golden grain has fed you?
Would you grieve the lover who is riding forth to wed you?
Mother mine, to the wild forest I am going,
Where upon the champa boughs the champa buds are blowing;

To the köil-haunted river-isles where lotus lilies glisten,
The voices of the fairy folk are calling me: O listen!

Honey, child, honey, child, the world is full of pleasure,
Of bridal-songs and cradle-songs and sandal-scented leisure.
Your bridal robes are in the loom, silver and saffron glowing,
Your bridal cakes are on the hearth: O whither are you going?

The bridal-songs and cradle-songs have cadences of sorrow,
The laughter of the sun to-day, the wind of death to-morrow.
Far sweeter sound the forest-notes where forest-streams are falling;
O mother mine, I cannot stay, the fairy-folk are calling.

The palanquin-bearers sing of the beauty of the bride and carry the palanquin with delight.

The poem “Bangle-Sellers” is also a charming lyric depicting the vocation of bangle sellers.

Wandering Singers is the poem written by Sarojini Naidu that portrays the carefree life of the wandering singers, who do not have homes to live but they sing.

Street Cries by Sarojini Naidu is written on the vendors who sell their goods in the streets of India.

She dealt with mythological characters. She rendered a poem on Radha also.

Song of Radha, The Milkmaid, by Sarojini Naidu.

carried my curds to the Mathura fair...

How softly the heifers were lowing...

I wanted to cry, “Who will buy

The curds that is white as the clouds in the sky

When the breezes of Shravan are blowing?”

But my heart was so full of your beauty,

Beloved, They laughed as I cried without knowing:

Govinda!Govinda!

Further her poem The Snake Charmer is another feather in the cap when it comes to folk culture.

WHITHER dost thou hide from the magic of my flute-call?

In what moonlight-tangled meshes of perfume,

Where the clustering keovas guard the squirrel's slumber,

Where the deep woods glimmer with the jasmine's bloom?

I'll feed thee, O beloved, on milk and wild red honey,

I'll bear thee in a basket of rushes, green and white,

To a palace-bower where golden-vested maidens

Thread with mellow laughter the petals of delight.

Whither dost thou loiter, by what murmuring hollows,

Where oleanders scatter their ambrosial fire?

Come, thou subtle bride of my mellifluous wooing,

Come, thou silver-breasted moonbeam

She once went to meet Gopal Krishna Ghokhale who was very ill. There he asked her why a song bird had a broken wing? She had a great regard for this National leader. She replied:

Behold I rise to meet the destined spring

and scale the stars on my broken wing.

VII. CONCLUSION

The first collection of her poems was *The Golden Threshold*. *The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India* is a collection of the previous three volumes of Naidu. *The Feather of the Dawn* was published by her daughter Padmaja Naidu after her death. *The Bird of Time* was published in 1912. The third collection of Sarojini Naidu's poems, *The Broken Wing* was published in 1917. Sarojini Naidu's lyrics are rich and traditional in nature. In this way Sarojini Naidu has woven a rich tapestry of folklore, culture and tradition through her poems. Sarojini Naidu was not hailed the Nightingale of India just like that. She showed great craftsmanship when it came to weaving imagery in her words. She had a bird like quality. She wrote on diverse themes be it nature, God, daily chores, trials and tribulations, loss of a person, happiness of a young bride. Her poetry is very much approachable indeed. In this way the paper highlights diverse themes which Sarojini presented in her poems.

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