

Sarojini Naidu: A Poetic Voice of Patriotism

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Abstract – Sarojini Naidu was a freedom fighter, political activist, reformer and a poet. She was the first female president of Indian National Congress. She was appointed as the governor of the United Province. Mahatma Gandhi called her as the ‘Nightingale of India’ Sarojini Naidu’s first anthology ‘The Golden Threshold’ is a collection of poems deeply stemmed in patriotism, romanticism, mysticism, love for beauty and love for nature. Her lyrical, sonorous poetry is ornamented with kinaesthetic imagery and orientalism. Her romantic poetry is a blend of Keat’s love foe beauty, kinaesthetic imagery and Kalidas’s ornamentalism and eroticism.

Keywords – Patriotic, romantic, oriental, oppose to colonialism, lyrical, love for beauty, love for nature, kinaesthetic, educational value

Sarojini Naidu fondly known as the Nightingale of India was a gifted poet and a fervent patriot. She helped in shaping the Indian writing in English at its early phase. Her contribution in the Indian independence movement is well known and she also played a crucial role in shaping the cultural and political identity, the proud heritage Indians seemed to forget about. The flavour of patriotism makes her poetry shine in the realm of Indian writing in English.

Naidu's poetry resonated with a deep sense of patriotism, reflecting her unwavering commitment to the cause of Indian independence. Her sonorous verses were powerful artistic

expression that ignited the flame of nationalism among compatriots. The first anthology of her poems 'The Golden Threshold', published in 1905 reflected the zeal of a patriot combined with love for nature and artistic expression. A collection of poems by Naidu, this 100 paged classic book consists of poems that talk about the Indian countryside and common people like dancers, weavers etc. Very simple yet complex in their structure and meaning, these poems are soul-stirring and rustic in a unique way.¹ In the anthology the poet explored Indian poetic types like folk songs along with the European poetic genre like ode. The themes of her poems in 'The Golden Threshold' were very much Indian. Her love for her country is quite obvious in the poems like To India, The Royal Tombs of Golconda, To a Buddha seated on a Lotus. The subjects of her poems were very much Indian which is quite obvious from the title of the poems, to mention a few - Palanquin-Bearers, Wandering Singers, Indian Weavers, Coromandel Fishers, The Snake-Charmer, Corn-Grinders, Village-Song, In Praise of Henna, Harvest Hymn, Indian Love-Song, Cradle-Song, Suttee.

Her poems celebrated the Indian spirit and shaped the national identity when the country was under colonial rule. Her poetry, like her active political life in India against the British colonial rule, served the country in the darkest and most turbulent times in the history of Indian subcontinent. Her verses fostered a sense of unity and pride among Indians and became a source of inspiration for many freedom fighters. In the poem 'Indian Dancers' she celebrates the Indian spirit, Indian aesthetics and womanhood. As Dr. Narawane rightly puts that for Sarojini Naidu – "Being a feminist – that is fighting for women's freedom and self respect – is fully consistent with being feminine, that is accepting the fundamental distinction between the roles of man and woman in human life."²

In the poem 'In the Bazaars of Hyderabad' poet Sarojini Naidu asks a series of questions about their goods to the merchants, vendors, pedlars, goldsmiths, fruit sellers and flower girls in a traditional Hydrabadi market. The conversation form of the poem makes the readers feel that they are present in the bazaar. –

What do you sell, O ye merchants?

Richly your wares are displayed.

Turbans of crimson and silver,

Tunics of purple brocade,

Mirrors with panels of amber,

Daggers with handles of jade.

As the title of the poem suggests, the poem is set in a market in the then princely state of Hyderabad in India. The whole purpose of the poem is a s if to show the real wealth of India for which the Europeans plundered the country. A country bestowed upon with natural beauty of various flora, precious wealth like gold, silver, ivory sold by pedlars to common people communicates in few words how India was a wealthy country, and above all, rich heritage of Indian art and culture showing the rich aesthetic taste in draping, jewellery, games and art –

What do you make, O ye goldsmiths?

Wristlet and anklet and ring,

Bells for the feet of blue pigeons,

Frail as a dragon - fly's wing,

Girdles of gold for the dancers,

Scabbards of gold for the kings.

Visual, aural and olfactory imagery are all used here to enhance the reading experience –

What do you cry, O ye Fruit merchants?

Citron, pomegranate and plum.

What do you play, O ye musicians?

Sitar, Sarangi and drum.

.....

What do you weave, O ye flower-girls?

With tassels of azure and red?

Crowns for the brow of a bridegroom,

Chaplets to garland his bed

Naidu didn't present a rhetoric of national pride in this poem, neither criticised the Britishers for plundering her country. But the poem served as a catalyst for building a national identity and mobilizing public opinion against colonial rule.

Sarojini Naidu's success lies in her ability to powerfully express the collective consciousness of a nation yearning for freedom. Her poetry, infused with passion and conviction, is timeless because it continues to resonate with generations, encapsulating the spirit of patriotism and fuels the reader with pride in Indian culture.

Sarojini Naidu's poetry is characterized by its romantic undertones, filled with love for nature, adventurous spirit, lyrical quality and mysticism. Her lyrics are sonorous with the lavish use of alliteration and onomatopoeia –

Once in the dream of a night I stood
Lone in the light of a magical wood,
Soul-deep in visions that poppy-like sprang;
And spirits of Truth were the birds that sang

The above lines from 'Song of a Dream' are lyrical, enchanting, lending the poem a flavour of mysticism. Indeed, Sarojini Naidu is the pioneer of romanticism in the Indian writing in English. Lyricism is one of the marked features of poetry of Sarojini Naidu. Her lyrics are full of music, charm and fascination. The real beauty of her poems lies in the quality of lyricism which she is always capable of creating. Sarojini Naidu has also used symbolic and allegorical techniques in order to present her thoughts and feelings.³

Sarojini Naidu's romanticism is in accordance with Indian aesthetics. Though an admiration for and influence of romantic fervour in European literature is quite discernible in her work, but her aesthetic lineage is certainly oriental. Her romanticism is a blend of Keat's love for beauty, kinaesthetic imagery and Kalidas's ornamentalism and eroticism. Her themes are quite often oriental and titles are suggestive of her interest in the oriental life and village life in particular - - Palanquin-Bearers, Wandering Singers, Indian Weavers, Coromandel Fishers, The Snake-Charmer, Corn-Grinders, Village-Song, In Praise of Henna, Harvest Hymn, Indian Love-Song, Cradle-Song.

In addition to her romantic poetry, Sarojini Naidu was also a fierce advocate for Indian culture and patriotism. Her poems often celebrate the rich heritage of India, paying homage to its traditions, customs, and history. Naidu's patriotic verses are imbued with a sense of national pride, highlighting the beauty and resilience of the Indian people.

One of Naidu's most well-known patriotic poems is "The Golden Threshold," a collection of verses that pay tribute to the spirit of India and its people. The poem reflects Naidu's deep love for her country, as she extols the virtues of Indian culture and pays homage to its ancient traditions. Through her patriotic poetry, Naidu sought to instil a sense of pride and unity among her fellow countrymen, inspiring them to embrace their heritage and work towards a brighter future. Naidu's poem 'The Gift of India' the Mother India screams at the highest pitch in pain over the loss of her sons in the war field during the World War I -

Is there aught you need that my hands withhold,
 Rich gifts of raiment or grain or gold?
 Lo! I have flung to the East and West
 Priceless treasures torn from my breast,
 And yielded the sons of my stricken womb
 To the drum-beats of duty, the sabres of doom.

. The agony of mother whose sons are martyred is conveyed powerfully and poignantly. A mother's helpless, giving, plundered and rendered heart vents out the frustration and anger over the futility of war, the horrendous destruction it unleashed and lack of sympathy on the part of the rulers –

Can ye measure the grief of the tears I weep
 Or compass the woe of the watch I keep?
 Or the pride that thrills thro' my heart's despair
 And the hope that comforts the anguish of prayer?
 And the far sad glorious vision I see
 Of the torn red banners of Victory?

As a fierce advocate for Indian nationalism and patriotism, the poetry of Sarojini Naidu is of immense value and should be studied by Indian youth. It is imbued with immense moral values and spirit of freedom and celebrates the rich heritage of India, never fails in paying homage to Indian traditions, customs and glorious past.

References

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