

The Folk and Landscape in Sarojini Naidu's poetry

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Abstract

Sarojini Naidu is one of the main characters in pre-independence English Indian poetry. She is known by the sobriquet 'The Nightingale of India'. Her first collection of poems entitled 'The Golden Threshold' appeared in 1905. Her second poetry collection 'The Bird of Time' was published in 1912 and his latest poetry collection 'The Broken Wing' was published in 1917. All collections of the above lyrics were published in 1943 in one volume titled 'The Sceptred Flute'. Besides, several of her poems were written in the last decade of her life and published posthumously under the title, 'Feathers of the Dawn' (1961). One of the main themes of Sarojini Naidu's poetry is the theme of the people because she has succeeded in offering diverse images of the lives of Indian people and their various life backgrounds and people's verdicts, traditions, and life habits. This paper intends to highlight the theme of the people as reflected in Sarojini Naidu's poetry.

Keywords: background, diverse, Indian, image, life, people, poetry, theme Sarojini Naidu

Introduction

In Sarojini Naidu's poem we find love for Nature as in her poetry, she managed to uncover the beauty of Nature, the transformation and significance of our natural world. Another major theme of his poetry is the challenge of suffering and pain and death to life. In some of her lyrics, Sarojini Naidu accepts life and is determined to live it out of all sadness and suffering, pain, and death. Besides, the theme of love also dominates in Sarojini Naidu's poetry. Every kind of love experience and every possible atmosphere of love finds its place in Sarojini Naidu's poetry. While expressing his views on Nature, death, and love, Sarojini Naidu was able to describe the joys and simple hopes, fears, and lives of ordinary people in cities and villages. The lyrics of the people are characterized by simplicity and directness. She has described the common life around him and his presentation of shared life is comprehensive because he has described almost every aspect of the public of India.

I don't want to live in a culture of despair.

I'd like to live in a culture of hope." ...

Natalie Merchant

Sarojini Naidu belongs to a heroic age of modern India, which witnessed the struggle and achievement of great Indian men and women in bringing about a renaissance of the human heart in many ways. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, GopalaKrishna Gokhale, Mahatma Gandhi and Jinnah on one hand, and Rabindranath Tagore, Iqbal, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu on the other, represent the historical transformation of India into an energetic modern culture deriving inspiration from the past and imparting a new dynamism and vision to the present as they shape the contexts of a creative future. Of all these heroic individuals, Sarojini Naidu embodied in herself in the largest measure the integral culture of modern India, for, she was indeed, a genuine confluence of diverse traditions, cultures and values.

Like her brilliant predecessor Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu also springs from the very soul of India and is rooted firmly to her soil. Despite her literary affiliation with the English poets, her sensibility is purely Indian. For all her western garb, for all her adoption of English as her medium of poetic expression, she remains essentially the daughter of her race and land. Her themes, thoughts and even the imagery she employs in her poems are typically native in spirit and character.

Both Sarojini Naidu and Toru Dutt turn to their native land for inspiration and thought. But while Toru Dutt is fascinated more by the rich cultural heritage of her country, its legendary past, Sarojini Naidu is enchanted more by the colourful Indian life throbbing around her, While Toru Dutt tries to explore the philosophical aspect of Indian life, Sarojini Naidu makes a sincere effort to discover a strange meaning, a peculiar significance in the life of her humble fellow-men. Every aspect of Indian life seems to interest her. There is hardly anything in her poetry which does not owe its origin to Indian or oriental inspiration.

The most striking feature of Sarojini Naidu's poetry is its native flavour. Her poetry takes us to the voluptuous richness of an Indian landscape with its pomegranate buds and Sirisha and Neem, the lilting melody of bulbuls and koels and the colourful noisy Indian bazaars, especially Hyderabad. It introduces and acquaints us with the familiar characters of Indian folk-life, with the Palanquin Bearers, the Weavers, the Corn-grinders, the Snake Charmers, the Bangle sellers and the Wandering Singers.

Folklore is a study of culture of a group of people living together. It encompasses the tradition of subcultures also. Mostly they are followed and adapted on oral tradition. It includes "customary lore", rituals and beliefs of a group of people. It ranges from "natural" to 'native', traditional to 'rural. They are passed on from generation to generation through songs, stories, dance and drama. However these folklores are the central pivot in which local people are tied through ethnicity. They are the pride of any nation which is popular in India though varied. This includes oral tradition, material tradition and customs. The oral tradition includes stories and tales while material tradition talks about various handmade professions while the customs and rituals are carried through stories.

The folklore is not individualistic. It is a community process and found in many forms • Folk song • Folk tales • Fairy tales • Tall tales • Ballads • Folk dramas • Proverbs, charms and riddles • Use of Folklore by Children.

India has a large treasure house of ballad, songs and epics in oral tradition. In rural background we have many ballads through lullaby and also through dirge and each one will have a story associated with epic stories. The Panchathantra stories and animal fables, composed in 9th century may vary according to the varied culture of India but the underlying thread is the same. Sarojini Naidu has tried varied types of poems but one of her popular themes is folk life of India. "Her poetry gained vitality and spontaneity through the folk inspiration. Her folk poetry reflected simplicity and contained vocabulary and imagery from everyday scenes and sights which showed her sense of solidarity with folk life:", says Meeta Ajay Khanna.

Sarojini Naidu's engrossing delight in nature and her romantic longing for a tranquil retreat, does not blind her to the active interests of human life and the delineation of human emotions. Her poetry paints the panorama of Indian life in all its colours and moods. The life of the Indian people fascinated and inspired Sarojini Naidu the most. She loves to be among them and share their hopes and despairs, joys and sorrows, ambitions and aspirations. Her poems on nature reflect their delicacy of emotion and luxuriance of imagination, her love poems, with their range and depth of passion, but her folk songs are miraculously powerful, for, to them, almost all the aspects of her genius contribute. She is admirably successful in setting a rural or pastoral scene. She presents in her poems "veritable portrait gallery of Indian folk characters. The picture of India these evoke is romantic, but not anachronistic." 1 These folk characters are still very much a part of the Indian reality. The institutionalization of the human personality is also shown in the Indian reality.

Sarojini Naidu was primarily a poet of the human heart, a 'wandering singer' as she described herself, and she bore both the agony and the ecstasy that life brought to her, with an equal and spacious eye. P.E. Dustoor has observed that the folk- theme is the one theme in which Sarojini Naidu was the least imitative. 2

The subject of her poetry is the simple, familiar and unpretentious world of nature feelings and emotions, simple joys and sorrows, vivid memories and reveries, poignant recognitions and epiphanies all characterized by the rich normality and poise of the Indian life and landscape. Sarojini Naidu was a poet of folk-consciousness.

Sarojini Naidu presents veritable portrait gallery of Indian folk characters in her poetry. 'The Palanquin bearers' and 'The Pardah-Nashin' may be a memory of Rudyard Kipling's India, but the weavers and the bangle- sellers and the fishermen and the beggars and even the snake charmers are still authentic presences of the Indian scene. When we talk about the poem 'Bangle-sellers' it takes an imaginative leap from a folk song to the level of a 'sukta' in which

the entire life- cycle of an Indian woman from childhood to widowhood is enabled. Similarly a short-poem like “The Indian weavers” establishes itself as a mystic threnody hymned to birth, life and death to ‘Sristi (creation)’, ‘Stiti (life)’ and ‘Laya (destruction)’.

The theme which Sarojini has made particularly her own, in which she is least imitative, is the folk- theme. The importance of the folk-theme in her poetry is seen in the fact that two sections of her collections of poems are entitled “Folksong” and Indian Folk Songs. Besides, folk-lyrics are there in the other sections also. However, there is nothing new or original about this theme, for in India there has been a long tradition of folk poetry. But it predominates in Sarojini poetry, and acquires a new significance and orientation. In her folk-poetry, Sarojini is able to capture all the qualities of traditional folk-poetry. The folk inspiration lends to her poetry vitality and spontaneity which we miss in her more formal poems. Her folk-lyrics do not make excessive demands upon the readers, and their simplicity, their vocabulary and their imagery drawn from the everyday scenes and sights, expresses her sense of solidarity with folk-life as it is lived from day to day. Through her folk-poetry, she portrays the common life which went around her, which she had experience at first hand, with its setting, events, peoples and their occupations. In this way, she achieves an artistic identity with the life of the community, with folk culture and wisdom, which is age-old as it has been transmitted from father to son over countless generations.

The people's theme dominates in Sarojini Naidu's poetry as seen in the fact that the two parts in his first two poetry collections, the Golden Threshold and Time Bird are titled 'Folk Songs' and 'Indian Folk Songs'. These titles are rather misleading; however, the songs from both sections are the people's themes in Sarojini Naidu's poetry.

The lyrics of hisfolk songs are characterized by their simplicity and their pictures are taken from everyday scenes and views of people's lives. Various aspects of the poetry of the people show their artistic identity with the lives of the people. For example, the lyrics of 'Wandering Singers' are set to the rhythms of songs sung by wandering singers or singers from India. The lyrics are marked by the simplicity and charm of the regional songs sung by the Bard. These bards roam from village to village, entertaining people with their sweet songs. They have no fixed purpose, they roam freely, just like the wind. They hear the call of the wind which urges them to keep moving and therefore continue to roam:

"What hope will we gather, what dreams will we sow?
Where the wind calls our steps to wander, we go.
There is no love bargaining for us to live, there is no joy in offering us to wait;
The sound of the wind is the voice of our destiny. "

In ‘Cradle Song’ Sarojini Naidu describes the sweet melody of Indian lullabies. Various aspects of the Indian folk tradition can be seen clearly in the lyrics. As P. V. Rajalakshmi

correctly observed, "The Cradle-Song evokes a fertile, humid landscape in Indian villages, with rice fields, neem trees, fireflies, and real sunsets that merge into the blazing steel starry blue sky. Mother's attention to childgrowth towards fullness and fulfilment is clearly stated in a gentle accent of people's sentiments ". In the lyrics, the mother tells the baby

"Sweet, close your eyes, Wild flies dancing through neem fairies; From poppy-bole I steal for you A beautiful little dream.

'The Village Song' is a good folklore lyric where Sarojini Naidu dramatizes the tension between the traditional view of mother about life and the romantic view of the princess about individuality.

The culture of the Indian people is dominated by various rituals and performances of diverse collective rites. In several folk poems Sarojini Naidu we found his presentation about various Indian public festivals such as Vasant Panchmi, Snake Festival, Light Festival, Sea Festival, Raksha Bandhan, etc. He has shown his deep and keen observation of various Indian rituals and festivals in his poetry. Besides, Sarojini Naidu has also highlighted the people's spiritual culture in a number of his poems. He called the same gods and goddesses of faith and represented people's religious beliefs and their fears and terror.

Kali is believed by the people as a goddess who is terrible, gentle, and divine. He is a mystical mother of all sacrifices to whom worshipers offer all the gifts of life and death. In the poem, Sarojini Naidu has succeeded in capturing the fusion of Hindu ideals through his observations of people's respect for mothers and sacramental ecstasy from group worship.

Folk themes can be seen in Sarojini Naidu's love poems when we find references to Indian folklore, myths, and legends. His poems about 'Kanhaya group' such as 'Radha Songs - The Quest' and 'Radha-Kanhaya Songs' reflect Sarojini's appeal to the legends who surrounded Radha and his efforts to find Kanhaiya or Krishna - mystical musicians and gardeners Brindavan. Krishna is considered Mahapurusha from the Hindu heroic tradition, teases Gopi, fights the devil, and shows the way to salvation. Through such poems, Sarojini has portrayed the incomparable love of Radha and Krishna. Radha continued her search for Krishna.

We also get loyal representations of Sarojini Naidu about the rural landscape of India and the character of Indian people with their vocation in his poetry. For example, in 'Village Song' from 'The Bird of Time', Sarojini Naidu describes Panghat - a romantic place typical of Indian villages - where Indian village women go to fetch water, and for secret gossip and dating with them. lover. Here we find the hero of the song that has filled the pitcher in Panghat and now returns home. But then he was tempted by the boatman's sweet singing and stayed there to listen to the song. This makes it late. It was dark, so he was afraid. Because there is no shelter around him, he realizes that only God can help him and guide him safely to his house.

The words 'Ram re Ram' display the Indian taste of this folk song. Some of Sarojini Naidu's poems such as 'Indian Weavers', 'The Bangle-seller', 'Bear the Corn-grinders', 'The Palanquin-Bearers' showcase the character of the people and their work. As K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar points out, "The panorama of the eternal life of India captivates it endlessly. The hard work of many people in India, but what makes life bearable - and sometimes even fun - is the stimulation provided by songs and jokes and rhythmic movements. In some of his early poems, Sarojini Naidu has tried to capture and reproduce in English lilt and the atmosphere of some of these folk songs. 'Fish Coromandel Fishermen' express the identity of fishers with the sea and the community as well as a sense of order and people's discipline.

Conclusion

All aspects mentioned above show that almost every aspect of people's lives has been represented by Sarojini Naidu in his poetry. The theme of the people seeps into his poetry and he has succeeded in describing the beliefs, customs, traditions, superstitions, vocation, joys, and sorrows of people's lives.

Very few Indian English poets have reflected the colourful pageant of Indian life in all its picturesque variety so vividly and successfully as Sarojini has done. To conclude let us take the few quotes of the stalwarts who have praised her.

The panorama of India ageless life, writes K. R. Srivastava Iyengar, "fascinates her without end. It is not surprising that she won her early renown in the West because of her representation of the soul of the East and the ethos of India." Edmund Gosse wrote admiringly: "It has been ...the characteristic of Mrs. Naidu writing that she is in all things and to the fullest extent autochthonous. She springs from the very soil of India; her spirit, although it employs the English language as its vehicle, has no other tie with the West. It addresses itself to the exposition of emotions which are tropical and primitive, and in this respect, as I believe, if the poems of Sarojini Naidu be carefully and delicately studied they will be found as luminous in lighting up the dark places of the East as any contribution of savant or historian. They have the astonishing advantage of approaching the task of interpretation from inside the magic circle, although armed with a technical skill that has been cultivated with devotion outside".

Amarnath Jha in his tribute to Sarojini rightly remarks: "She is of India, the spirit of India is in her, and although men of all nationalities will find their questions echoed and answered yet it is the Indian that will feel his own feelings reciprocated in every line."

Sarojini Naidu accepts the reality of death, but to her life's joys and loveliness is of greater importance. The sweet scented flowers, the lyric downs, the melodious notes of singing birds and dancing sea waves enthralled her but in spite of their fascination they do not divert her attention from the grave realities of life. Sarojini Naidu is usually believed to be the singer of sweet and fanciful aspects of life but she very well knew that griefs and fears, the strenuous lessons of defeat and the broken secrets of pride, joy deferred and fruits denied are inevitable realities of life and they are necessary to make life complete.

“Everything that has ever been called folk art has
always reflected domination.”

...Theodor Adorno

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