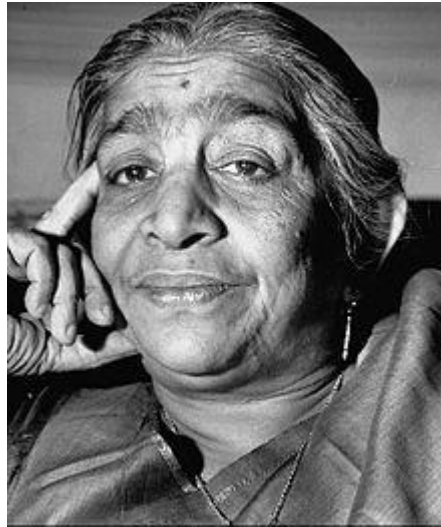

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Rythm and Liveliness in the Poems of Sarojini Naidu Mrs. S. Lalitha



Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949)

Courtesy: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarojini_Naidu

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Mrs. S. Lalitha

Rhythm and Liveliness in the Poems of Sarojini Naidu

Abstract

Sarojini Naidu, a child prodigy, Indian independence activist and a poet, is also known by the sobriquet, “The Nightingale of India”. Born in an intellectual family, the charm of writing poetry was in her blood for her mother was also a poet of Bengali language. A woman, proficient in many languages, she started to write poetry at a young age.

Motivated by famous poet laureates during her college education abroad, Sarojini Naidu convinced herself to stick to Indian themes while expressing her views through poetry. Her collections were related to life, nature, national independence, women’s empowerment and so on. She was active both as a poet and a politician, and had tremendous success in her family life also. Her poems speak volumes about the emotions of an Indian soul, with English words. She roamed around the country like an army general, to sow her enthusiasm within the hearts of Indians through politics and poetry. She was the first woman governor of independent India.

Sarojini Naidu was one of the greatest women poets who were responsible for the awakening of the spirit of the women of India. She brought them out of the kitchen to the limelight, intellectually, emotionally and culturally. Her poems based on various themes highlighted her vast knowledge and thirst for enlightenment, which has brought many of her readers from darkness to light. The present paper highlights how Sarojini Naidu has penned her poems with great zeal to connect literature and life through her pen-portrayals.

Nightingale of India

Sarojini Naidu, popularly known as the “Nightingale of India”, is one of the most eminent women poets. Her poems are noted for the quality, theme and rhythm in her writings. Born in an intellectual family, Sarojini Naidu has penned many poems on various themes, which melt the hearts of the readers (Naravane 1996).

Lyrical Wealth

What makes Sarojini Naidu's poetry so lively and charming, is the lyrical wealth which happens to be the pre-dominant aspect of her poetic techniques. Her poems express the personal emotions and quality of life through rhyme. Her spontaneous overflow of emotions and Indian ethos is poured out in a lyrical style. This fusion of feelings, music and imagery in expressing Indian life has made her worthy to be called, "The Nightingale of India".

With this lyrical wealth, she has beautifully expressed the hearts and emotions of Indians. She attempted to write mostly short poems, each dealing with a single concept and emotion. She has dealt with various concepts like the life of Indian people, beauty of nature, philosophy of life, Indian women, and patriotism and so on.

Characteristics of Sarojini's Poetry

Simplicity, brevity, spontaneity, emotional intensity, compactness and vision, music and melody are the wonderful characteristics of her poetry. Expression extraordinary is a remarkable feature of Sarojini Naidu's lyrics. She is never obscure; her language is as clear as crystal. The rhyme scheme with a flawless rhythm in all her poems is simply superb.

Radha, the Milkmaid

Sarojini's poem, "Song of Radha, the milk-maid" (*The Golden Threshold*, Sarojini Naidu, 1905, www.manybooks.net) is a true and sincere piece of poetry to express one of India's deepest spiritual experiences, so simply and directly as:

"I carried my curds to the Mathura fair.....

How softly the heifers were lowing.....

I wanted to cry, "who will buy

These curds that are white as the clouds in the sky

When the breezes of Shrawan are blowing?

But my heart was so full of your beauty, Beloved,
They laughed as I cried without knowing
Govinda! Govinda!!
Govinda! Govinda!!
How softly the river was flowing! “

Rhythmic Flow of River Yamuna

The rhythm in these lines captures the rhythmic flow of river Yamuna. The calling of Govinda produces as well as conveys a mystic vision and a deep spiritual experience. With simple musical words, Sarojini Naidu has been able to present a message of the soul's high yearnings.

Village Song – Pain and Emotions

Sarojini Naidu's lyrics are an entity of powerful feelings and emotions. These spontaneous lines seem to come to her naturally with an effortless ease. The lines from “Village Song” (*The Golden Threshold*, Sarojini Naidu, 1905, www.manybooks.net) are ones which need no explanation, but just be read and enjoyed. The intensity of emotion, spontaneity, and naturalness create a powerful feeling in the verses of Sarojini Naidu.

“Full are my pitchers and far to carry,

Lone is the way and long,

Why, O why was I tempted to tarry?

Lured by the boatman's song?”

The poem brings about the pain and emotions of the lady carrying the pitchers. She is bound between her duty and the music of the boatman. Such references intensify her Indian flavour. If we carefully read between the lines we can see the symbolic meaning of the poem; it is a song about the burden of duties in one's life, which if one delays due to pleasures that distract one, burden can become heavier and more painful with the passage of time.

Religious Experience as well as Patriotic Flavor

Sarojini's poems like , "The flute player of Brindhavan" , "Ecstasy"," The Quest", (*The Golden Threshold*, Sarojini Naidu,1905, www.manybooks.net) are all beautifully marked by spontaneity, emotional intensity, and in many cases by symbolic meaning. Her lyric "Awake" (*The Golden Threshold*, Sarojini Naidu,1905, www.manybooks.net) is really a soul stirring call for unity and action, in the form of a patriotic prayer to spread the message of universal brotherhood, patriotism, and hope for a bright future for all Indians:

"Wake, O mother! Thy children implore thee,

Who kneel in thy presence to serve and adore thee!

The night is aflush with a dream of the morrow,

Why still dost thou sleep in thy bondage of sorrow? "

Compact Thought and Vision

Sarojini's lyrics are marked with a compactness of thought and vision, especially remarkable for their musical effect. Her poems are written in the manner of Indian folk songs, such as Palanquin Bearers, Indian Weavers, Indian Dancers, Wandering Singers, and so on. She turned herself totally mystic and thoughtful in the lyrics which deal with the true philosophy of human life.

The rhyme scheme set in the poem "Palanquin Bearers" (*The Golden Threshold*, Sarojini Naidu, 1905, www.manybooks.net) reveals the movement of the palanquin with a beautiful bride inside. The lines are beautifully set in such a way that her expressions relate both to the palanquin and the bride inside:

"Lightly, O Lightly, we bear her along,

She sways like a flower in the wind of our song,

She skims like a bird on the foam of a stream,

She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream.

Gaily O' Gaily we glide and we sing,

We bear her along like a pearl on the string"

It is the rhythm of comfortable swift swaying movement of the palanquin, with the bride inside. The rhythm here creates the proper atmosphere of the movement of the palanquin.

Optimism

The poems "Life", "To the God of Pain", "Love and Death", and "A Souls Prayer" (*The Golden Threshold*, Sarojini Naidu, 1905, www.manybooks.net) are some of the poems where she has spread the optimistic message of life, to enjoy life despite all sorrows and sufferings.

Her poem, "Indian Weavers" (*The Golden Threshold*, Sarojini Naidu, 1905, www.manybooks.net) is unquestionably reflective in nature and thoughtful in content, throwing light on man's total life on earth.

The use of rhyming and appropriate words in each line has brought a wonderful richness and melody to her verses.

Indian Dance and Indian Dancers

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Another important poem is the “Indian Dancers” (*The Golden Threshold*, Sarojini Naidu, 1905, www.manybooks.net). She uses the onomatopoeic words, rich alliteration and vivid rhythm to portray the flexibility of the Kathak dancers.

“Now silent, now singing and swaying and singing,

Like blossoms that bend to the breezes or showers,

Now want only winding, they flash, now they faster,

And lingering, languish in radiant choir”.

The alliteration used in this poem abundantly expresses the beat of the dancing feet.

Bangle Sellers - Different Stages of an Indian Woman’s Life

When we think of Sarojini Naidu as a poet, we think of her lyrics, short, simple and musical. We find the same rhyme in the poem, “Bangle Sellers”. She has added realism with a melodious touch:

“Some are meant for maiden’s wrist,

Silver and blue as a mountain’s mist:

Some are like fields of sun-lit corn,

Meet for a bride on her bridal morn.

Some are purple and gold flecked grey,

For her who has journeyed through life half way”.

These rhyming lines express the different stages of an Indian woman's life through the radiant colors of the bangles. The simplicity, melody and the rhythmic flow suggest the lively musical flow in Sarojini's poems.

Coramandal Fishers- Row to the Blue of the Verge!

The music and melody in Sarojini's poem, "Coramandal Fishers" is the very echo of her mood, to awaken the young Indian minds to reach their target at an early stage:

"But sweeter, O brothers, the kiss of the spray and

The dance of the wild foam's glee:

Row, brother, row to the blue of the verge,

Where the low sky mates with the sea".

By introducing the musical words, row, dance, low kiss, etc., Sarojini Naidu has presented a melodious lyric in which, the intense love for the sea of the fisher-folk finds full expression. The poem goes beyond the fisher-folk and calls upon all of us to seek goals that look almost impossible to achieve! For a nation that was under an alien rule for centuries and for a nation that got freedom only recently, unceasing constructive endeavor is encouraged. Both individual and nation becomes the target of this poem.

To Conclude

Besides the lyrical wealth, Sarojini Naidu demonstrates her mastery in the handling diction and versification of poetry. There is perfect harmony in the poetic thought and expression of the meaning. She has combined an eloquent sense of expression with Indian thought. Sarojini Naidu has used a number of stylistic devices to convey her meaning with much lyrical wealth in her poetry. Comparison and contrast are used frequently. This lends a variety and vitality to her poetic art. Her writings are a unique expression of her Indianness and her artistic sincerity. She

combines the graphic and visionary modes of observing nature and relating them to her inner experience. She finds meaning and fulfillment only in the context of human aspiration, but she has proved through her lyrics that nature too needs man as its instrument of self-expression.

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