

LOVE, LIFE AND DEATH IN THE POETRY OF SAROJINI NAIDU

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Abstract

Sarojini Naidu is best known and most widely read poets while reputation extends outside her native countries. When we think of the theme of poetry in general, we tend to think of traditional subjects like love, life, death, nature, religion etc. Love and death are common faits in every human beings' life. So there two themes could not escape the attention of most of the creative winters. Love life and death, the essential factors in every person's life, are the focal points of this research paper. The aim of the present study is to discuss the poetry of Sarojini Naidu on these specific aspects. Love and death, though very much attempted themes, every writer deals independently and with originality.

Keywords: Spontaneity, Interprovincial, Utilitarianism, Archetypal, British Romanticism

Sarojini Naidu is popularly known as "The Nightingale of India" because she writes a highly musical and Vibrant like of poetry. Her poetry is noted for its soft and subtle music. The place of Sarojini Naidu is like the shining sun in the world of Indian English poetry. She brings life and various types of manner in true colours. "She has written spontaneous poetry in which images and metaphor's image rolling ready on the hotplates of imagination. Her poetry is intensely emotional at times passional to the point of being erotic and is always musical in tone." (1)

Like Sri Aurobindo and Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, strongly influenced by British romanticism, is a great poet of the 19th country. She sings of both Krishna and Radha. Naturally love is one of her favourite subjects and her handling of this age-old thane is marked by a variety of approach, mood and technique. He whole life had been a battle and a struggle as she had to fight the battle of her health and she had to struggle against the inter caste and interprovincial marriage. "Naidu was one of mother India's most gifted children, readily shaving her burden of pain, fiercely her agonies and hops, and gallantly striving to redeem the mother and redeem the time. Indeed, her whole life had been as battle and a struggle: she had to struggle long against the bludgeoning of circumstances. Sunniness and

sadness life and death, victory and defeat- early they set up their joint scepter in her life, in her soul. (2)

Indeed, Sarojini Naidu is the best known and most widely read poet, whose reputation extends outside her native counties. Of all the great poets of India Naidu is the most subjective and the chief characteristic for her poetry lies in the beauty of long, life and the descriptions of death. She declares to the world of her misery and despair. Naidu found real life among the common folk. The narrative and descriptive power of her poetry is significant. When we think of her theme of poetry in general, we tend to think of traditional subjects like love, life and death. Actually, love and death are common facts in every human being's life. So, these two themes couldn't escape the attention of most of the creative writers. Love, life and death are the essential factors in every person's life and every writer deals independently and with originality.

Frankly speaking, her poetry is the poetry of nature. Her love for nature is reflected even in poems which are not about nature, but have different themes. Nature in the external environment of man, and Sarojini looks at it with a childlike, open-eyed wonder. Her care for nature is humble and innocent like that of a child who looks at nature with charm 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. Likewise, she does not judge nature. We do not get in her poetry any constant world view which defines the relationship of God, Man and Nature. She is neither pantheist like Wordsworth nor cosmic like Tagore. She has a woman's or poet's favoritism for spring. Almost all her poems are full of spring imagery. She sketches loving pictures of gulmohurs, golden cassias, nasturtiums, champak blossoms, wild lilies, and the bright pomegranate buds. She offers the fragrance of henna, sarisha and neem. She provides 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 of utilitarianism.

Sarojini Naidu is a careful artist. She believes that a Poet must have a gift of Communication. She holds the classicist's perfection and the sensuousness of the romanticists. Her language is influenced by Keats, Shelley, Tennyson and the pre-Raphaelites. Her poetry is remarkable for its effortless and spontaneity. There is no exaggeration in saying that in her poetry, words flow from her pen as honey from a bee-hive. Conciseness, melody, subjectivity, passion of emotion, condensed thought - these specialities 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.

Sarojini Naidu's early poetry shows Anglo-Saxon sentiments and setting, the later poems replace the Anglo-Saxon sentiments and setting with the Indian. Naidu's "The Snake Charmless", "The Bangle Sellers", "The Weaver", "Song of Radha" and "Souls' Prayer" are a few examples of love as a divine feeling rather than more passion. Iyengar says:

In any case, resentment is pointless, and acceptance is the only same answer to the situation. She will not complain any longer, she will neither cherish hope nor quite give way to despair. She will return to her old adoration, asking nothing and expecting nothing; she is his to do what he likes. "Strangle my soul and fling it into the fire! Why should my true love falter or fear or rebel? Love, I am yours to lie in your breast like a flower, or burn like a weed for your sake in the flame of hell." (3)

Sarojini Naidu believes that love should completely surrender to the loved. In love there are only humility, loneliness and selfless service. It is a passion which is always ready to give for nothing in return. In her love poems we see and feel the traditional and age-long customs and adventure. She also emphasizes that no lover feels tired even if he was thousands of miles away; when his beloved calls him the lover finds it irresistible:

If you call me

If you call me I will come
 Swifter, O my Love,
 Than a trembling forest deer
 Or a panting dove,
 Swifter than a snake that flies
 To the charmer's thrall ...
 If you call me I will come
 Fearless what befall.
 If you call me, I will come
 Swifter than desire,
 Swifter than the lightning's feet
 Shod with plumes of fire.
 Life's dark tides may roll between,
 Or Death's deep chasms divide —
 If you call me I will come
 Fearless what betide.(4)

"The Sins of love" narrates love with concrete and sensible beauty. Sarojini's love of physical sensations is unequivocally expressed in this poem":

Sins of love

Forgive me the sin of mine eyes,
O Love, if they dared for a space
Invade the dear shrine of your face
With eager, insistent delight,
Like wild birds intrepid of flight
That raid the high sanctuaries skies —
O pardon the sin of mine eyes!

Forgive me the sin of my hands
Perchance they were bold overmuch
In their tremulous longing to touch
Your beautiful flesh, to caress,
To clasp you, O Love, and to bless
With gifts as uncounted as sands —
O pardon the sin of my hands!

Forgive me the sin of my mouth,
O Love, if it wrought you a wrong,
With importunate silence or song
Assailed you, encircled, oppress'd,
And ravished your lips and your breast
To comfort its anguish of drouth —
O pardon the sin of my mouth!

Forgive me the sin of my heart,
If it trespassed against you and strove
To lure or to conquer your love
Its passionate love to appease,
To solace its hunger and ease
The wound of its sorrow or smart —
O pardon the sin of my heart! (5)

The best example for the poetry of self-surrender is:

Love's Guerdon

To field and forest
The gifts of the spring,

To hawk and to heron
The pride of their wing;
Her grace to the panther,
Her tints to the dove
For me, O my Master,
The rapture of Love!

To the hand of the diver
The gems of the tide,
To the eyes of the bridegroom
The face of his bride;
To the heart of a dreamer
The dreams of his youth ...
For me, O my Master,
The rapture of Truth!

To priests and to prophets
The joy of their creeds
To kings and their cohorts
The glory of deeds;
And peace to the vanquished
And hope to the strong ...
For me, O my Master,
The rapture of Song! (6)

Sarojini Naidu's love poetry covers almost all aspects of love. In "Village -Song," the girl's feelings when coming back from the river Yamuna after meeting her lover are described. It becomes dark and she repents for the delay and prays Rama to guide her in the dark evening.:

The Village Song

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 boatmen's song?
Swiftly the shadows of night are falling,
Hear, O hear, is the white crane calling,
Is it the wild owl's cry?
There are no tender moonbeams to light me,
If in the darkness a serpent should bite me,
Or if an evil spirit should smite me,

Ram Re Ram! I shall die.

My brother will murmur, 'Why doth she linger?'
My mother will wait and weep,
Saying, 'O safe may the great gods bring her,
The Jamuna's waters are deep...'
The Jamuna's waters rush by so quickly,
The shadows of evening gather so thickly,
Like black birds in the sky...
O! if the storm breaks, what will betide me?
Safe from the lightning where shall I hide me?
Unless Thou succor my footsteps and guide me,
Ram Re Ram! I shall die. (7)

Without a mention of Radha's love, Sarojini Naidu's love poetry is incomplete. In the poem "Songs of Radha, the Quest" Radha searches for Krishna and asks wind, water and wood for him. This quest for the hiding lover is a redoing of the proto-quest that is mentioned in Bhagavatam, when on finding the Gopies bloated with ego Krishna performs a vanishing trick. Then each of the Gopies searches for Krishna and in the process questions every element of nature whether it has seen the divine lover. This quest has become archetypal search in all devotional poetry, whether the individual soul yearns for union with the Absolute:

Songs of Radha, the Quest.

My foolish love went seeking thee at dawn,
Crying — O wind where is Kanhaya gone?

I questioned at noon rise the forest glade,
Rests my sweet lover in thy friendly shade?

At dusk I pleaded with the dovegray tides,
O tell me where my Flute-player abides?

Dumb were the waters, dumb the woods, the wind,
They knew not where my playfellow to find.

I bowed my weeping face upon my palm,
Moaning — O where art thou, my Ghanashyam?

Then, like a boat that rocks from keel to rafter,
My heart was shaken by thy hidden laughter.

Then didst thou mock me with thy tender malice,
Like nectar bubbling from my own heart's chalice.

Thou saidst, — O faithless one, self-slain with doubt,
Why seekest thou my loveliness without,

And askest wind or wave or flowering dell
The secret that within thyself doth dwell?

I am of thee, as thou of me, a part.
Look for me in the mirror of thy heart. (8)

Another important poem of Love is “Pilgrimage of Love” which is divided into three parts and shows the pilgrimage of love towards the temple of sanctity. As Indu Goel explains, “The Temple” enshrines love, and the pilgrim has first to pass through “The Gate of Delight,” and then has to proceed on “The Path of Tears” in order to attain “The Sanctuary.” (9)

Death is also one of the fundamental themes. Though many poets have written in death Emily Dickinson is identified with the theme. For her, death leads to immortality: “The general symbol of Nature, for her, is Death and her weapon against Death is the entire powerful dumbshow of the puritan theology led by Redemption and Immortality.” (10)

Before exploring the theme and treatment of death in the poetry of Sarojini Naidu, one may ask whether she had any practical experience like Tory Dutt, who lost her brother and sister. She reveals her innocence on death in the poem “The Bird of Time.” She invokes time to reveal to her,

The fragrant peace of the twilight's breath
And The mystic silence that men call death.
In “The Soul’s Prayer,” she exhorts:
Speak, Master, and reveal to me
Thine in most laws of life and death. (11)

Sarojini Naidu does not merely live as a poet in the Cloud Cuckoo land of romanticism but shows a keen social awareness in the poem “The Old Woman.” In this poem she portrays death as a form of sleep:

In hope of your succour, how often in vain,
So patient she sits at my gate,
In the face of the sun and the wind and the rain,

Holding converse with poverty, hunger and pain,
And The ultimate sleep that awaits. (12)

“In Remembrance” is a poem written on the death of Violet Clarke, her friend. She looks at death as usurper:

Till Death usurped your vivid loneliness
In wanton envy of its radiant bloom?

Like Keats Sarojini Naidu laments over the loss of beauty when death comes. Death is a cruel villain that snatches away the lovely bride from her husband's caress. On the death of a young bride the poet's feelings are:

What longer need hath she of loveliness
Whom Death has parted from her Lord's caress? (13)

Though she is sensuous in her love poetry and though she seems to be singing of love on the physical plane there is something more to it than mere physical. Sarojini Naidu's love poetry sings of total devotion and surrender to the beloved. Love is no love when there is no sacrifice. Love is a quality that grows out to embrace the other. It is an eraser of the ego:

Love, I am yours Tom lie in your heart like a flower,
Or burn like a weed for your stake in the flame of hell. (14) (“Devotion”)

In Sarojini Naidu's love poems the typical Indian ideal of self-sacrifice and complete surrender of body, heart and soul dominate. No personal feel of death is visible in her poetry.

Sarojini Naidu always views love from the woman's point of view and therefore there is rare sensitivity and charm in her poems on love. Her vision of love is more comprehensive and wider than that of Toru Dutt. Her expression of love is powerful love in various moods - irony, hope, despair, expectation, challenge and ecstasy; in its various states - depressed, ecstatic, romantic, spiritual, and a mixture of pain and joy, and in various situations - separation, temporary or by death, suspicion or jealousy. Love is seen both in its aggressive and sensuous forms. Her poetry on love thus covers a wide range of subjects and themes and addresses all kinds of readers by its truth of observation, variety of experiences, depth of feeling and sympathetic presentation of human nature.

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