

Research Article

The portraits of pre-independent india in sarojini naidu's poems

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Abstract

Sarojini Naidu wrote poetry based on the beauty of simple joys and sorrows of life. One of the major themes of Sarojini Naidu's poetry is the theme of people because she has succeeded in offering diverse images of the lives of Indian people and their various life backgrounds. Poet, feminist, nationalist and a powerful Orator, Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) was born in in Hyderabad during the critical time of India's Independence. She was called affectionately by the people with multiple titles like "The Nightingale of India", "The wandering Singer", "The Indian Joan of Arc", "The Indian Judith", and "The Peace-Maker." This paper analyses the ways in which how she exhibits the Indianness throughout her poems. Lyricism, symbolism, imagery, mysticism and native fervour are the remarkable assets of her poetry. The present paper focuses on the poems written by Sarojini Naidu which depict the lives of common men and women of India and their traditions. Naidu's poetry is written in English and usually took the form of lyric poetry in the tradition of British Romanticism, which she was sometimes challenged to reconcile with her Indian nationalist politics. Finally, this paper further analyses her variety of poetic expressions such as Indian ethos, pathos, naturalness, gentleness and hunger.

Keywords: poet, feminist, nationalist, orator, ethos, pathos, gusto.

Introduction

*"Lightly, O lightly, we bear her along,
She sways like a flower in the wind of our song..."*

In the above lines, one can feel and see the poet, Sarojini Naidu herself in the place of the bride in the Palanquin. Yes, undoubtedly it is none other than Sarojini Naidu herself. Poet, feminist, nationalist and a powerful Orator, Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) was born in in Hyderabad during the critical time of India's Independence. She was called affectionately by the people with multiple titles like "The Nightingale of India", "The wandering Singer", "The Indian Joan of Arc", "The Indian Judith", and "The Peace-Maker". Her lyrical poems express personal ethos and pathos in vivid and colorful sketches. Her spontaneous overflow of Indian ethos and pathos are poured out in a lyrical style. Her fusion of feelings, musical notes and imageries in expressing common Indian way of life have made her worthy to be called as "The Nightingale of India". With her enormous poetic wealth, she has brilliantly illustrated the flesh and blood of the native elements in her poems. Scribbling poetry at a young age, Sarojini Naidu had hardly hoped to become a poet and be called "Bulbul-i-Hind" by then President Rajendra Prasad. Her poetry found way in her patriotic speeches and debates in the Constituent Assembly. An active participant of the India's freedom movement, Sarojini delivered fiery speeches across India. She spoke in support of women's rights, labor rights and urged all to join the freedom struggle. She was the second woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress after Annie Besant in 1925. Once Sarojini spoke about her...

"One day...I was sighing over a sum in Algebra; it wouldn't come right; but instead a whole poem came to me

suddenly...From that day, my 'poetic career' began. At thirteen, I wrote a long poem 'The lady of the Lake'—1300 lines in six days. At thirteen, I wrote a drama of 2000 lines, a full-fledged passionate thing that I began on the spur of the moment, without forethought, just to spite my doctor, who said I was very ill and must not touch a book. (qtd. in Dustoor 2).

Objectives

To study and explore her major contributions in the field of poetry.

To study and explore her selective poems in terms of a thematic analysis.

To study and explore the pre-Independent India through her poems and find rooms for further research.

Research methodology

This paper is completely based on the secondary data. A systematic review was done in detail for the collected literatures. Secondary sources of data used are journals, reports, search engines, company websites and scholarly articles, research papers, and other academic publications. The research tool used for analyzing the data which amassed from different sources for this paper is a content analysis and the research method is descriptive research. We have taken into consideration the qualitative aspects of the research.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

"As long as I have life, as long as blood flows through this arm of mine, I shall not leave the cause of freedom...I am only a woman, only a poet. But as a woman, I give to you the weapons of faith and courage and the shield of fortitude. And as a poet, I fling out the banner of song and sound, the bugle call to battle. How shall I kindle the flame which shall waken you men from slavery."

“Sarojini Naidu springs herself from the very soil of India, her spirit very Indian, manipulates the English language, a foreign language effectively as a vehicle to convey very Indian thought and themes” (P. Sreenivasalu Reddy & Sandhya). Poetry came naturally to Sarojini. It is said that Edmund Gosse, an English poet guided Naidu into “a genuine Indian poet of Deccan, not a clever ...imitator of English classics,” writes Vishwanath S. Naravane in his book “Sarojini Naidu: An Introduction to Her Life, Work and Poetry.” Aldous Huxley, the famous English writer once remarked on Sarojini Naidu, “A woman who combines in the most remarkable way great intellectual power with charm, sweetness with courageous energy, a wide culture with originality and earnestness with humor. If all Indian politicians are like Mrs. Naidu, then the country is fortunate indeed.”

Results and discussions

“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...”

Folk theme is one of the dominant themes in Sarojini Naidu’s poetry. The poem, “the bazaars of Hyderabad”, deals with one such theme, of a traditional Indian bazaar in the city of Hyderabad. The poet has vividly described the bazaars with vendors selling different kinds of wares. Sarojini Naidu goes one after the other stalls given by merchants, maidens, pedlars, goldsmiths, fruit sellers, musicians and flower girls. She asks all of them about what they are selling and who in turn politely reply. Another theme in the poem is the freedom movement, which can be deduced from her time period.

“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.”

“Indian Weavers,” is a very good example of her incredible poetic ability. In this poem, she describes the weavers who begin work at the day break, weaving garments for significant event like birth, marriage and death. In describing this, Naidu expresses the integral, cultural significance of weavers. The central theme of this poem is the parallelism that the poet brilliantly draws between the three parts of the weavers’ workday and the three stages of human life.

“Bangle sellers are we who bear our shining loads to the temple fair...”

Another main theme of her poems is feminism. In, “The Bangle Sellers” She describes the traditional Indian bangles, which are all of different colors. The colors represent a different stage in a woman’s life, from youth and fertility to old age. This lyrical poem touches upon the theme of Indian culture and people. Like her other poems, it is also set on Indian settings and describes a temple fair where the bangle sellers sell their bangles. The theme of the poem revolves around the “bangles” and the role of bangles in each stage of a woman’s life.

“Lightly, O lightly, we bear her along, She sways like a flower in the wind of our song...”

In, “Palanquin Bearers,” Naidu describes the scene of the Pre-Independent India, when the cars were not in fashion for carrying the brides to their in-laws’ house. In those days, the brides were carried in the palki. The palkis were carried

on shoulders of two or four men using bamboo- sticks for support. In order to avoid the physical tiredness, the palanquin bearers used to sing. The palanquin bearers sing songs in rhythmic harmony with their footsteps.

“O little mouse, why dost thou cry while merry stars laugh in the sky?”

In, “Corn-Grinders,” Naidu suggests that life cannot be divided into categories. All lives are one and the same. Life in the mouse is the same as life in the deer. Pathos is the main feature of this poem. The poem begins with the pathetic tale of she-mouse when it tells the con-grinders how its mate was killed and how it is all alone now. Next, she-deer tells its heart-breaking story of the death of its mate. In the last stanza of this poem, the very height of pathos is revealed by a young widow. After her husband’s death she has to lead a mountain like life. She will remain hungry for love which she can never get in this Indian society.

“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.”

“Coromandel Fishers,” is about the fishing folk, yet it symbolically reflects the poet’s desire for free India and thus she encourages the people of India to speed up their freedom movement. The sea is considered the mother because it feeds them and helps them to sustain their life. Similarly, clouds are their brothers and waves are their companions. Naidu calls the freedom fighters (the fishermen) to wake up as the success of India’s independence is very near. The poem is an indirect call for freedom fighters.

Findings and suggestions

Her lyrical poems described Indian flora, fauna, customs, traditions, festivals, places, men, women, kings and queens and so on. Sarojini Naidu wrote poetry based on the beauty of simple joys and sorrows of life. In the Bazaars of Hyderabad is a vibrant, colorful poem. The poem was written during the British period when Indians were asked to boycott foreign goods and buy goods from traditional bazaars. During this time, public media were banned. Therefore, she might have thought the best way to spread the message to people was her poems. Though the theme of India’s Independence is not explicitly mentioned in the poem but it can be deduced from the time period when the poem was written. In this poem, we see the bazaars witnesses both sorrows and joys of life. The bazaars witness happy moments such as weddings, birth days, ceremonies and festivals. The bazaars also witness sad occasions like death. Naidu calls the freedom fighters (the fishermen) to wake up as the success of India’s independence is very near.

Conclusions

Throughout Naidu’s poems, we can witness the Indianans, as a pre-dominant part of her poems. Any literary work by an Indian in English is known as Indian English Literature. However, merely being a work by an Indian does not add the elements that might be classified as Indianans. The elements that highlighted Indian values, ways of life, religious colors, history and some local issues should ideally be called as Indianans. While enumerating the number of themes in her poems, Naidu mentions Death also as one of themes. Even in her early poems Naidu reveals us anguished awareness of the ravages of Time and Death. Indian

Weavers suggests the three stages in the life of men..."Birth, Youth and Death." In "Palanquin bearers," the poet has deliberately mixing the contradictory feelings of happiness and sadness. The bride is sad and is crying as she is separated from her family. In the poem, "Corn-Grinders," Naidu expresses the feelings of a young widow through the words of she-mouse and she-deer who have lost their mates. In "Coromandel Fishers," Naidu portraits the hard life style of the fishermen and their little earnings along with the socio-political status of the India's freedom movement.

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