The predominance of Love in the poems of Sarojini Naidu

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ABSTRACT
The present paper is an attempt at highlighting the different shades of love reflected in her love-lyrics. Her love lyrics deal with a variety of love experiences and her attitude to love has the feminine tenderness and is marked by a total self-surrender of the beloved to her object of love. The influence of the English romantic poets like Shelley and Keats is easily perceptible through the entire fabric of her love poetry which combines freshness and exuberance of spirit suffused with exquisite melody and sensitivity of emotion and expression. At times one gets the impression that she transfers love as personal desire into divine love and gives it a sense of the eternity of the Universal and hence reminiscent of the qualities of amorous tradition of Keats and Pre-Raphaelites.

Introduction

Born on 13 February 1879 Sarojini Naidu enjoyed the titles such as The Nightingale of India a child prodigy, Indian independence activist, a poet, the first Indian woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress, the first woman to become the Governor of Uttar Pradesh state, one of the formers of the Indian Constitution and what not. Her full name was Sarojini Chattopadhyaya. She was married to Govindarajulu Naidu, a general physician and had five children with him. She died of a cardiac arrest on 2 March 1949.

Naidu's poetry includes both children's poems and others written on more serious themes including patriotism, romance, and tragedy. Published in 1912, "In the Bazaars of Hyderabad" remains one of her most popular poems.

It seems that writing came natural to her as only at the age of twelve. Sarojini Naidu took to pen and began writing. Her very first collection of poems, entitled "The Golden Threshold" saw the light of the day in 1905[1]. The volume presents an introduction by Arthur Symons. Admiration for her poetry came to her from no less distinguished Indian politicians than the likes of Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Her poem "In the Bazaars of Hyderabad" was published as a part of The Bird of Time with her other poems in 1912. "In the Bazaars of Hyderabad" was well received by critics, who variously noted Naidu's visceral use of rich sensory images in her writing.[2][3] The Feather of The Dawn which contained poems written in 1927 by Naidu was edited and published posthumously in 1961 by her daughter Padmaja Naidu.[4]

Although a number of themes such as of nature, death, folk life, romance, patriotism etc find detailed handling in her poetry yet the present paper is chiefly focused on her theme of love in her poetry. The theme of love predominates in Sarojini Naidu's poetry. She penned plenty of lyrics on the theme of love. Her love lyrics describe the various moods and emotions that Love evokes in the human heart ranging from passionate desire to mystic communion. Love is a gift of Nature and an expression of the beautiful. It is the agent of spiritual ecstasy. It is a rite of adoration, a bridal initiation into life, and nuptial consummation of Nature. It is an annunciation of the divine mystery. Love is also an encounter with one's own destiny, opening an exquisite door to painful transcendence of desire. It is epiphany, revealing the real beyond the ephemeral and affirming the unity of life and death and eternal return. Sarojini Naidu's poetry unfolds the drama of love, with all its shifting identities, its shuffling masks and its ever fluent roles. The main emphasis, however, is on communicating a deeply felt experience. Her lyrics set up a mood rather than enact an attitude. They merely project emotive images, not linking them up with an associative chain of ideas. The poetic impulse is not directed to any ostensible intellectual process. No strikingly original interpretive capacities are involved in the description of the feelings roused by love. Sarojini Naidu deals with both the aspects of love - union and separation - in its Garious moods of despair, challenge, frustration, sorrow, hope, expectation, ecstasy, challenge. She not only powerfully depicts various moods and states of love but also embodies various love situations - separation, jealousy and suspicion. Love is seen in both violent and delicate aspects. Sarojini Naidu's own love affair with Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu gave her adequate material to write about the feelings and emotions of women in love. Mixing poetry with person experience, Sarojini Naidu vividly describes the various stages in the journey of a woman's love relationship with a man: the outpourings of a girl's heart who has fallen in love for the first time ("Song of a Dream"); the ravishing beauty of a woman revealed gradually to her lover ("The Song of Priness Zeb-un-Nissa in Praise of her Own Beauty");

the woman shedding her coyness and entering into a firm love-relationship ("Ecstnsy"); and woman's passion which makes the bond stronger.

Love is the primary theme of her poems. Her love poems are passionate to the point of eroticism. The poetess is very deep in love with her mate. In the poem 'If You Call Me' she says that she is willing to have a call from her mate. She is very eager to meet and join her mate defying all the obstacles. She writes:

"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."

Her love poems remind us of Robert Burns’ “My Love Is Like a Red, Red Rose” in which the poet expresses his eager love to his beloved and determines to meet her anyway.

The bulk of her poems deal with the theme of Nature. Her Nature is full of trees, woods, birds, peace, freedom and beauty. She desires to take shelter in Nature being tired and weary of man-made society and its artificiality. ‘Summer Woods’ is a Nature poem dealing with such a tenet. In this poem he says:

“O I am tired of painted roofs and soft and silken floors,
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I am tired of strife and song and festivals and fame
And long to fly where cassia woods are breaking into flame.”

The Bird Sanctuary’ is another poem dealing with the theme of love to Nature. In the poem, she says that Nature is a sacred place full of Joy, beauty and freedom. In the poetess’ language:

“In your gracious garden, there is joy and fostering freedom
Nestling place and singing space for every feathered thing,
O Master of the Birds, grants sanctuary and shelter
Also to a homing bird that bears a broken wing.”

The third theme of her poetry is her love to the motherland. The poetess is very aware of India’s slavery under the British and she is very passionate and emotional to free India from the yoke of the English. Sarojini Naidu believes that to get freedom, the people irrespective of caste and creed must come out. In the poem entitled ‘Awake’ she says:

“Waken, 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?”

Besides those above analyzed themes, some of her poems are bent to mysticism though not apparently. Her heart and soul are so much sensitive that she feels the human soul be akin to the soul of Nature. Nature is the expression of the human soul as well as of Divine Soul. In the poem Caprice she says:

“You held a wildflower in your finger tips,
Idly you pressed it to indifferent lips,
Idly you tore its crimson leaves apart…
Alas! It was my heart.”

The poetess also talks of the winds of separation which often draw lovers apart, leading to a life of solitude for the woman, devoid of physical intimacy and emotional support. But despite the poignancy, there is also the firm belief that true love shall win in the end and unite the woman one day with her lover. And when this actually happens, what option remains before the happy couple except marriage? Sarojini Naidu’s poem “In Praise of Henna” captures the excitement of the event of marriage in a woman’s life, while “A Persian Lute Song” captures the bride waiting nervously for the arrival of the bridegroom. “An Indian LOW Song” discusses the plight of a Hindu woman in love with a Muslim, a theme that maybe of autobiographical significance because of Sarojini Naidu’s purported infatuation for Mohammad Ali Jinnah. The subject matter of her poems is unique. Addition to it the style is simpler and direct which makes her readers read it interestingly. Her use of English is a flawless one. There is no unevenness, no falling of inspiration; evidently, only her best has been published. She is the poet of perfection, perfection of phrase, of line, of verse, and of the whole poem. She is thus eminently quotable. One of her devices is the use of a series of antitheses, which gives balance and precision to her poems. All these virtues are collected in her later verses; but here she is absolutely mistress of them all.

Conclusion

It is obvious enough that love in Sarojinis poetry is physical, emotional and mystical. Her concept of love seems to be romantic, and her treatment of it is basically traditional. Her heroine has many characteristics in common with the lovelorn woman of Sanskrit poetry. Sarojini has only a heroine, her hero (man-lover) is only a shadow, a psychic projection of the heroine. Sarojini seldom portrays her heroine against the background of a family or society. The setting of Sarojini’s poems seems to be idyllic woods or gardens that stimulate the passion-ridden heart of the heroine to long for love. Different traditions from both East and West are blended with artistic success in the love lyrics of Sarojini.

References