

**Nationalism and Indianness in Sarojini Naidu's poems  
'In The Bazaars of Hyderabad' and 'Palanquin Bearers'**

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**Abstract:** The notable artist, the political figure, and “the Nightingale of India” Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) was one of the outstanding poetesses in Indian English literature especially in the pre independence period. In addition to the artistic part of her life, she also was a social activist, a freedom fighter, and a politician; she was the first women governor of an Indian state after independence. Her poetry has gained her an elevated literary position in the Indian English poetry as well as a political attribution to the independence demand. Sarojini's first collection of poems was “the Golden Threshold” (1905). Thereafter, she published two collections called the “Bird of Time” (1912) and the “Broken Wings” (1917). This wide spread fame of Sarojini in the world and in India in particular comes from the highly touching and elevated themes she was addressing in her writings. She celebrated themes that motivate and touch people's hearts such as nationalism and Indianness. These themes echo in most of her poems, but the objective of this paper is to highlight these themes as they are reflected in her two famous poems; “In The Bazaars of Hyderabad “and “Palanquin Bearers”.

**Key words:** Nationalism, Identity, Indianness,

**Introduction:** Sarojini Naidu was born on February 13, 1879 in the city of Hyderabad. As a child she was very talented, intelligent and fluent in many languages such as English, Bengali, Urdu, Telugu and Persian. This cosmopolitan educational interest comes from her educated family. Her father, Aghore Nath Chattopadhyay, was a scientist and a philosopher. He was the one who founded the Nizam college of Hyderabad. Politically speaking, he was a prominent member in the Indian national congress of Hyderabad. Her mother, Varada Sundari, was also a poetess in Bengali language, thus she was as source of inspiration that encouraged Sarojini later

in her career of poetry. Sarojini was the eldest daughter of eight children. one of her brothers was a poet and a dramatist. She also had a sister who was an actress and a dancer. This diversity of the family member interest has led the emergence of the most famous Indian poetess.

At the age of twelve, Sarojini Naidu topped the matriculation examination at Madras University. Encouraged by her father she began to write her first poem of 1300 lines "The Lady of the Lake" and her impressive play "Maher Muneer" written in Persian language. The Nizam college was very impressed and gave her a scholarship to study abroad at King's college of England.

Just like Tagore and Toru, Sarojini Naidu was one of the Indian poetess who share her pain, grief, agony and hope with Indian peoples in her poetry. She used English language only as medium to deliver her Indian themes, subjects, landscape and identity to the whole world. Her nationalism is also expressed in her celebration of India's fauna and flora, past glory, present anxieties and future dreams. Her poetry reflects her nationalistic and patriotic stand with her mother land, India; drawing a panoramic picture of Indian life, culture, mood, and tradition.

At an early stage of her career, Sarojini was imitating the English writings on their subjects. She was highly influenced by English romantic poets such as Shelly and Keats. As a lover of beauty and nature in the romantic sense; she appeals to the world of imagination and mysticism. but later on she started addressing purely unique Indian themes and subjects in her writings. Indianness and Nationalism in Sarojini's poetry is revealed to the whole world through the use of the English language as a medium of her writings. These two themes, nationalism and Indianess, are frequently and simultaneously used in almost all her poems. In her poetry, Sarojini Naidu was very close to the Indian society with all its casts and classes. She depicts pictures of middle class men and women as we see in her famous poem "Palanquin Bearers". On the other hand, the theme of nationalism is, just like all other Indian poets, is the prevailing theme in all her works. Her patriotic and nationalistic stands as well as her fight for her country freedom is obvious in all her writings as she states:

*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. 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...*

This expressive and influential statement paves the way to our main discussion of nationalism and Indianness in two of Sarojini's famous poems: "In the Bazaars of Hyderabad" and "Palanquin Bearers".

**The Concepts of Nationalism and Indianness in "In The Bazaars of Hyderabad"-The concept "Nationalism" is fundamentally a European concept that was prevailing in their writings.** Although many specialist critics agree that this concept is a modern concept, yet we find that it is as old as history and especially in India. Besides being a poetess, Sarojini Naidu was considered as the flag bearer of the Indian Nationalist struggle. She was struggling and fighting for her country's freedom from the British occupation; she was invoking and encouraging her people as well as her "Mother India" and imploring them to get back the glorious past of their country and ancestors. Sarojini is singing India in all its aspects and situations of happiness, sadness and the golden days of the past. She carried the burden of spreading these aspects to the whole world as the wandering minstrel of India singing the joys and sorrows of her motherland from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin. She is the messenger of her master, whose supreme word she carried from town to village, from peasant to prince." She was concerned about people as well as humanity at a larger scale.

Sarojini's nationalism and Indianness is a motif and a frequent theme in almost all her poems. In her poem "In The Bazaar of Hyderabad", which was a part of the Swadeshi Movement, Sarojini was celebrating the Indian goods and products which was highly appreciated by the Swadeshi Movement. This movement was both a nationalistic and economic attempt to replace both the political and the economic dominance of the British power and products in India at that time. In this poem, Sarojini helps in spreading the Indian nationalism through the promotion of the Indian goods, and compelling people to cut off with the foreign products. In this poem, Sarojini is portraying a panoramic picture of a typical Indian market in the city of Hyderabad in which she celebrates all the native products which are particularly made of an

Indian natural sources. This shows India as a rich country that does not need to use the foreign products. Sarojini is numerating some of the Indian products to show the self-sufficiency of the Indian markets:

*What do you sell O ye merchants?  
Richly your wares are displayed.  
Turbans of crimson and silver,  
Tunics of Purple brocade,  
Mirrors of panels of Amber,  
Daggers with handles of jade.*

By these descriptions, Sarojini Naidu is trying to convey the message that India is a self-sufficient country and have all the major sources to make good products. And this is how Sarojini's national contribution is presented in this poem; she supports and promotes the notions and ideas of the Swadeshi National movement at her time.

Moving to the second frequent theme in Sarojini's poetry which is Indianness, one can clearly examine the features of Indianness in this poem. Sarojini Naidu was one of the outstanding poetess who carries the responsibilities of conveying the flavor of Indianness to the whole world in general and the western society in particular. At an early stage of her career, Sarojini's poetry was a mere imitation of the English poets and themes. But it was the advice of her English friend Edmond Gosse that makes her deviates from the British themes and writings to gain her own Indian unique themes. She states that she has been "Anglicizing" her emotions, thoughts, ideas and writings. Edmond Gosse advices Sarojini Naidu that from:

*... an Indian of extreme sensibility, who has mastered not merely the language but the prosody of the west, what we wished to receive was ... some revelation of the heart of India. Some sincere penetrating analysis of nature, passions of the principles of antique religion and such mysterious intimations as stirred the sole of the East long before the West had begun to dream that it had a sole. (TBT 5)*

This advice has led Sarojini to use English only as a medium to represent the Indian culture, tradition, and sensibility. The theme of Indianness now became Sarojini's hunting thought that she started reflecting in her poems. For instance, in her poem "In the bazaar of Hyderabad", she mentions very unique and Indian products that we can only find in India. She talks about the "sandalwood", "henna", "spice", and "ivory" which are very Indian products that have culture-specific flavor. The mere description of the city of Hyderabad and how people are going to the market and enjoy their lives is also a reflection of Sarojini's theme of Indianness. She is trying to say that this is the Indian tradition and culture and how people of different casts and religious background are coexisting with each other in the city. The uniqueness of Indian products and native goods are reflected in:

*What do you weigh, O ye vendor?*

*Saffron and lentil and rice.*

*What do you grind, O ye maidens?*

*Sandalwood, henna, and spice.*

*What do you call, O ye pedlars?*

*Chessmen and ivory dice.*

Through this poem, Sarojini Naidu reflected the two important themes of nationalism and Indianness in a very expressive manner that shows India as a rich country, both culturally and economically.

**Nationalism and Indianness in "Palanquin Bearers"**- As a nationalist poet, Sarojini Naidu was carrying the burden of defending her mother Indian both locally and internationally. She looks at her role and mission as a poet, from the higher perspective of universal emotions and responsibilities. As a woman, Sarojini was aware of her poetic gift, and she wishes to serve her mother land India through her writings and singings about the glorious days of her country. In her poetry, nationalism was expressed both explicitly and implicitly in the lines. For instance, in her poem "Palanquin Bearers" nationalism is not clearly expressed directly as in the previous poem 'In The Bazaars of Hyderabad'. In "Palanquin Bearers", and from a nationalistic point of view, the bride carried in the palanquin represents mother India that are carried by the palanquin bearers who represent the Indian people with all its casts. Sarojini indirectly asks people to

kindly take care of their “Mother” India and defend her against all the external threats. Those bearers celebrate their country and “sing” the glorious past of India which is portrayed as a “star” that shines in the sky of the world:

*Lightly, O lightly we bear her along,*

*She sways like a flower in the mind of our song; [...]*

*Softly, O softly we bear her along,*

*She hangs like a star in the dew of our song;*

Looking at the theme of Indianness, we can notice that this poem is considered a good example by Sarojini Naidu in which Indianness is clearly expressed in these lines. Indianess in this poem is not only in the choice of the subjects and sentiments, rather it includes all the setting imagery, norms and traditions of India. Thus Sarojini’s poem “Palanquin Bearers” in the collection *The Golden Threshold* is one of the poems that expresses the unique theme of Indianness and reflects the tradition of carrying a bride in a palanquin. A.N. Dwivedi states that “*It is a poem of great artistic beauty and has a rhythmic swing in it which is well in accord with the soft onward movement of the palanquin bearers*” (Sarojini Naidu and Her Poetry 1981, 122). Those bearers celebrate the beauty of the bride as they carry the palanquin with joy and tranquility. These visual and auditory imageries reflect Indianness:

*Softly, O softly we bear her along,*

*She hangs like a star in the dew of our song;*

*She springs like a beam on the brow of the tide,*

*She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride.*

*Lightly, O lightly we glide and we sing,*

*We bear her along like a pearl on a string.*

This poem is considered one of the expressively composed lyrics depicting Indian culture and traditions and portraying the beauty of the bride and the musical rhythmic movement of the palanquin on the shoulders of the bearers who are carrying the bride to her husband’s house. All these imageries help in making this poem a perfect reflection on Sarojini’s Indianness.

**Conclusion** -Sarojini Naidu's poetry is unique and expressive. The dominant features and themes in her poems are nationalism and Indianness. Sarojini Naidu was a poet with an aesthetic perspective who admired both nature and the Indian cultural legacy at the same time. She has given a panoramic picture of the Indian society with all its aspects, and she has taken the responsibilities of conveying her nationalistic voice to the western reader. She also celebrated the cosmopolitan and cultural aspects that Indian people bear in their hearts and minds to express their Indianness. Finally, A.N. Dwivedi remarks "One of India's illustrious daughters, Sarojini ably served the cause of Indo-Anglian poetry, at the dawn of the twentieth century" (14).

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