

A Comparative Study of the Imagery in select poems of Sarojini Naidu and T.V.Reddy.

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Abstract- Sarojini Naidu is a well-known Indian English poet of the early 20th century and T.V.Reddy is an eminent Indian-English poet of the later 20th century. Though from separate timeline both poets' works are connected in parallels. This research paper analyses the similarities in their poetry through a thematic analysis of select poems. This paper also aims to bring out the prominent images that seem to converge in their poetry and themes as well as the poetic features they use in order to substantiate their diverse impressions.

Keywords – Indian English Poetry, Sarojini Naidu, T V Reddy, Comparative study, 20th century Indian poems, Imagery.

I.INTRODUCTION

Poetry is a genre in every literature as a higher form of art. Indian poetic tradition dates back to ancient civilizations Poetry is considered the highest form of art. In the ancient tradition, 'Kavya' (poetry) is hailed as the fifth Veda. Poetry calls for much higher order of creative faculty to organize its thoughts and feelings into an organic whole. Poetry is the language of human feelings and emotions. Poetry will always be written as long as man remains 'human.' What Keats said to the Nightingale is true for poetry

“Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird;
No hungry generations tread thee down.” [1]

The advent of English language with the colonial rule centuries later gave birth to the Indian English poetry. Indian English poetry itself evolved through various stages to enable itself to detach from the heavy influence of English tradition while simultaneously embracing its native roots. When Indians began writing poetry in English, their works were only considered to be tributary to mainstream English literature. With Indian Independence from British and withdrawal of British from India, Anglo Indian literature (in the sense of literature written by British in India) came to an end. Yet Literature by Indians in English language increased with time evolving an indigenous tradition for itself. This was declaration of literary independence from colonial identity for Indian critics who were influenced by the freedom struggle in the 1930's and 1940's. Most Indian poets have been bilingual or have their works translate from Indian languages. Toru Dutt, Manmohan Ghose, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore, Puran Singh, Sri Ananda Acharya, Nissim Ezekiel, A.K.Ramanujan, R.Parthasarathy, Arun Kolatkar, Jayanta Mahapatra, Dilip Chitre etc. are famous poets in India. Indian English poetry embodies the legacy of colonialism and also our struggles against such oppression. It remains a site for Indo-western encounters even today and also the evolving Indo-western culture in post-colonial India. [2]

Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) was a well-known Indian poet, critic and political activist of Pre-Independence India. Her poetry collections and writings gained wide recognition in India and abroad and her studies in London and later inter caste-marriage and active political involvement in Indian Freedom Struggle broke gender, broke caste and barriers of inequality that subjugated women of her times. Referred to as “The Nightingale of India” Sarojini Naidu published her first collection of poetry in 1905 “The Golden Threshold” at the age of 12. Her following works “The Bird of Time”, “The Feather of Dawn” gained her admirers in the literary circles of both India and abroad. Dr. T. Vasudeva Reddy (1943-2020) is a contemporary Indian English poet, novelist and critic from Andhra Pradesh,

India. He authored 12 poetry collections, novels and critical works of which his collections 'The Broken Rhythms' (1987) and 'Melting Melodies' (1994) are noted. His collection 'Fleeting Bubbles' have earned him the Best Poetry Award from Michael Madhusudan Award (Academy) in 1994 and he has also received 'The International Eminent Poet' from International Poets Academy, USA. in 1987. Popularly known as T.V.Reddy, he became a leading voice in the post 1980 generation of Indian Poets writing in English. [3]

This research paper tries to compare common thematic aspects of select poetry of Sarojini Naidu and T.V.Reddy during the early and late 20th century. Though the works of these poets may seem to converge in themes, their works portray diverse perspectives of the changing Indian society and beliefs in the mindscape of the Indian reader. This research tries to abridge the gap between the works of both authors by establishing the similarities in their writing styles, imagery and themes. The paper closely analyses how both Sarojini Naidu and T.V.Reddy portrays Indian woman and working class in their poetry pertaining to its Indian aesthetics.

II. A COMPARATIVE READING

In her much celebrated poem 'Palanquin Bearers' published in her collection 'The Golden Threshold' in 1903 Sarojini pens a simple folk song, portraying the picture of a vanished aspect of rural life. She compares the bride carried in the palanquin to a number of objects in a Shellyan manner:

"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 on the lips of a dream
Gaily, O gaily we glide and we sing,
We beat her along like a pearl on a string." [4]

The poet purposefully employs two symbols to express the opposing emotions of joy and sorrow of the bride. He compares the bride to a delicate 'flower', 'a bird' flying along the stream, a cheerful 'laugh' in anticipation of her future dreams while the palanquin bearers carry her gently along, 'like a pearl on a string.' We should note that poet's use of similies and images are as natural and blending into the emotions of the bride being carried. 'Swinging' 'hanging' 'springing' 'falling' are all kinetic images in themselves. The impact of Wordsworth can be distinctly felt on her imagery. The image of "the dance of the wild foam's glee" is reminiscent of Wordsworth's golden daffodils 'The waves behind them danced but they/outdid the sparkling waves in glee...' [1]

Similar influence of Wordsworth can also be traced in the poems of T.V.Reddy decades later. In his poem 'The Corn Reaper' from his collection 'The Fleeting Bubbles' we see T.V.Reddy captures the beauty of a village girl reaping 'the fallen crop' from 'under the scorching sun' using a 'mutli-toothed sickle'. His imagery deliberately shifts from the familiar romantic styles to envision a more social and realistic portrayal of the rural character. The poet compares her to a 'flower under foot' of her drunken lord, thus indicating the existing system of feudalism and social oppression of women in such a society. The imagery of 'the scorching sun' also throws light on the rising climatic challenges of the later 20th century. The melancholy of the corn reaping girl in T.V.Reddy's poetry echoes Wordworth's famous poem 'The Solitary Reaper' were the poet reminisces the sight of girl from rural lands 'Reaping and singing by herself' and how her 'melancholy strain' and its musical ripples leaves the poet's heart to ponder the reasons for her misery. T.V.Reddy also celebrates the Indian marriage ceremonies and its ensuing cultural practices in his poems. In his poem "The Bridal Blossom" published in 'Pensive Memories' in 2005 similar emotions of the Indian bride are observed and reflected. His poem explores the psyche of the Indian bride.

"The far off clouds in the azure sky
Touch the tender strings of my heart
With the magic wand of amorous showers
Million fresh and fragrant flowers
With greeting petals bloom in my heart." [5]

Her varying emotions of joy, anxiety are portrayed through these lines "Incessant showers of tender thoughts/ Fill my bridal bosom with thrill" [5] and "Free from care I wish to leap and hop/And float on the flowing foamy crest, / And rise as a ray in the dawning east." [5]. Both concrete and abstract imagery interlaced with an internal rhyme. These are vivid and concrete images portrayed with gnostic terseness like those similar to Sarojini Naidu's 'skimming on the foam of a stream', 'tears falling from the eyes of a bride'. As we closely read we also notice that both these poems are even written in a rhythm similar to the wave like emotions of the anxious bride. T.V.Reddy's 'Indian Bride' succeeds and reflects the same emotions of the shy bride in the palanquin in Sarojini Naidu's 'Palanquin Bearers'. The imagery such as 'delicate flowers', 'the wind and skies', 'the ebb of tides in the oceans and streams', 'the swift glide of birds in sky', emotions such as joy, laughter and sorrow used by both the poets are same

irrespective of the time they were written. The universality of the emotions portrayed is evident throughout these poem excerpts.

In T.V.Reddy's another similar poem "The Indian Bride" in a later collection *The Fleeting Bubbles* (1989) we see how the poet uses the same bridal emotions of anxiety to compare the change in the Indian society and its questionable practices. The poet echoes the ideals of feminism of the later 20th century when he questions the system of dowry that exists in spite of legal prohibition and its cultural repercussions that reduce woman to the level of mere commodities to be sold with a price. The bride's is dolled up and almost sold by her parents to the groom, the lines

"Having brought the groom in auction
As cattle dealers buy their lusty bulls,
She is content to be his slave
Ready to play to his whimsical tunes
And pay heavily for the dear prize." [6]

T.V.Reddy while depicting such imagery also rhythmically syncs to the anxiety of the bride. The poets thought reflects the idea of Bruno Latour 'we have never been human, if human means something that transcends gender, race or class.' [7] He shows explicit concern about the dire changes in the Indian society's approach to gender, race and caste systems while Sarojini Naidu's poetry simply portrays emotions and experiences in an almost romantic perspective.

In her poem 'The Indian Gipsy' Sarojini Naidu draws the portrait of an Indian gipsy woman who wanders around from town to town. Her romantic influences portray this woman character as majestic as the tiger and as mysterious as Time itself. Sarojini admires the skills gipsy woman used to tend to their daily needs amidst all the poverty.

"In tattered robes that hoard a glittering trace
Of bygone colors, brodered to the knee,
Behold her, daughter of a wandering race,
Tameless, with the bold falcon's agile grace,
And the lithe tiger's sinuous majesty.
With frugal skill her simple wants she tends,
She folds her tawny heifers and her sheep" [4]

Sarojini Naidu portrays women as Marakand Paranjape in his book "Sarojini Naidu-Selected Poetry and Prose" rightly points out

"Sarojini's poetry mediates between the usually opposing but sometimes complementary forces of the English poetic tradition and her Indian sensibility, between the politics of nationalism and the aesthetics of feudalism, between the overwhelming power of modernity and the nostalgia for a threatened tradition, between in security of a comfortable patriarchy and the liberating power of the women's movement." [8]

Whereas T.V.Reddy's poem 'The Gipsy Woman' also portrays the character of a gipsy woman in his lines "With a basket/Woven of palm leaves/Balanced meticulously/On the disheveled head/She walks along the street/Treading the scorching ground/With her bare tripping feet; /Her silver anklets and bracelets/Vie in the arresting heaviness." [9] We notice the poet addresses the 'scorching heat' again as an indication of the changing climatic conditions and environmental changes of the later 20th century India that add to ordinary people's misery. The scorching heat of the sun may also depict the intensity of the poverty the gipsy woman and plebeian class has to go through. "With her wondrous wand/And discloses pages of fate/In words of musical cadence/And earns her palmfuls of rice;" [9] the poet is in awe as she wagers her life on her skills to swindle the fantasies of rustic maidens. The portrayal of gipsy women by both Sarojini Naidu and T.V.Reddy helps the reader understand the rustic villages and its individual characters that are exclusively seen in such places of India and imbibe that overlooked essence of common man's life.

In another famous poem "Harvest Hymn" we can see the appreciation Naidu has for the working class and farmers of India. She acknowledges how Indian farmers highly regarded their relationship with Mother Earth as sacred and their occupations as an act of devotion to the goddess earth who provides them with their daily needs. We see how her poem echoes early ecofeminist ideals when her women characters sing to their mother and praise her for the riches of her womb through the lines

"Queen of the gourd-flower, queen of the harvest,
Sweet and omnipotent mother, O Earth!
Thine is the plentiful bosom that feeds us,
Thine is the womb where our riches have birth.

We bring thee our love and our garlands for tribute,
With gifts of thy opulent giving we come;" [10]

Whereas in the poem of T.V.Reddy "The Tiller" the farmer is seen braving the 'scorching sun'. T.V.Reddy voices his ecocritical viewpoint of the changing climatic conditions. In the lines "Although defying the scorching sun/ You tame the rocky land/with a yoked wooden plough/and make it pregnant/with golden grain". [11] The poet depicts the struggle of the farmer in late 20th century India to carry forward his ancestral duty amidst the chaos of climate change, globalization and poverty. The lines: "Braving the meridian heat/of the midsummer/ you reap crop/heap the harvest/and feed millions in cities/in A.C rooms in skyscrapers; /Your roots are firm in an uprooted land" [11]. The poet hints how the changing society with its increasing urban population and resulting consumerism impose a toll on the farmers who are left with burden of feeding the urban population amidst the staggering poverty that grips them tighter each day.

In a critical appraisal on Sarojini Naidu, V.S.Narvane comments on the Indian character of Sarojini Naidu's imagery as follows:

"However the strongest feature of Sarojini's poetry is her vivid imagery, her most memorable lines are those in which she has presented beautiful and graphic pictures by fusing together several visual impressions. It should be stressed once again, that these images can be appreciated only by those who have retained their sensitivity to the subtle stimuli which come from the Indian environment, and who still have a feeling for aspects of Indian life now rarely experienced in our modern cities." [12]

While in his critical opinion S.A.Sahim says T.V.Reddy takes a more realistic approach to the same subject

"Thus the poems of T.V.Reddy are a living testimony to the richness of rural sensibility evoked in them, and as a matter-of-fact Indian sensibility has become an undividable part of the texture of his poetry. As a true son of the soil, he shows his utmost regard for Indian Culture and its rich heritage; and it is this awareness of India's culture which makes his poetry vibrant with Indian sensibility." [13]

CONCLUSION

Both Sarojini Naidu and T.V.Reddy have vocalised the daily life of Indian middle class and their lives. Their works are rich in Indian sensibility and unique imagery. Sarojini Naidu's poetry explores the Here and Now of her several experiences and celebrates momentariness of uncertainty of life we see T.V.Reddy observes and reflects his critical opinions of the modern Indian society through his realistic poetry. As a poet of keen sensibility and rich imagination Sarojini Naidu offer a delightful assemblage of similies and metaphors. Her images are delicate, sensuous and uniquely romantic in portraying early 20th century India. [14] T.V.Reddy has vividly depicted the rural scenes and elements alongside the contemporary social issues of present day India in his own characteristic style. By employing striking imagery, biting satire and diligent poetic tools his poetry collections reflect intense individual emotions as well as social criticism of the Indian society of later 20th century. An exploration of the works produced during the timeline of Indian English poetry Sarojini Naidu's poems serve as a base in exploring the charm and picturesque world of the early 20th century Indian society and as the reader progresses to grasp the various changing phases of both the poetic works and evolving themes of Indian English poetry through the decades, T.V.Reddy's works assist in correlating the past with the present. Both poets use highly imaginative imagery and sensuous appeal as seen in Sarojini Naidu's works while T.V.Reddy uses poetry to also highlight his social apprehensions of the ever changing Indian Society. [1]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Both authors Raimy George, Dr.V.Sunitha * have no conflict of interest in the content of this paper and also testify it is original work.

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