

The Theme of Life and Death in Sarojini Naidu's Poetry

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Abstract: - Life and Death is one of the major themes of Sarojini Naidu's poetry. Her [Naidu's] poems on life and death are marked by optimism and heroic spirit though it is missing in all her poems on these themes as a poet cannot be as consistent as a philosopher. She is fully aware of the challenge of suffering and pain and death to life but she is not afraid of them. Sarojini Naidu is not an escapist as revealed in 'The Faery Isle of Janjira' where she expresses her desire to taste the hustle bustle of life and problems

**"Into the Strife of the throng and the tumult,
Tis mine to carry the banner of song"**¹

In the poem 'In Life', a poem for her children, she tells them that life is not a 'lovely dream', or 'carnival of careless joy' but the mingled yarn of passionate longings and sufferings of fear and strife of joys and successes. The fulfillment of life lies in passing through the ordeals of love, pain and suffering and also in enjoying all 'passionate rapture'. To quote—

**"Children, ye have not lived, to you it seems
Life is a lovely stalactite of dreams."**²

She reminds her children of the holiness and the tragic wholeness of life. Life is more real than dream, larger than existence and greater than personal experience. It is all these, and yet more. It encompasses and transcends the partial and final, the individual and the immediate, and the actual and the imaginary. Sarojini Naidu's view of life is essentially heroic. It is festive panorama of beautiful objects and scenes played upon by a primal sense of being. To quote—

**"Wounded with fierce desire and worn with strife,
Children, ye have not lived, for this is life."**³

In 'The Soul's Prayer', the poet expresses her desire to be spared no bliss, or pang of strife but to drain 'Earth's utmost bitter, utmost sweet.' Her chastened spirit shall sue to learn the simple secret of peace from God, who declares from his sevenfold height. To quote—

**"Life is a prism of my light,
And Death the shadow of my face."**⁴

Robert Browning, the immortal poet, of the Victorian age, also says that man should not try to evade sorrows and have only the joys of life. The poetess emphasizes thine divinity in man, and says that God is the creator of everything in the world, including man. In a highly philosophic and enlightened mood, she further entreats God to grant her love and knowledge, which she reflects in the following lines in 'The Soul's Prayer'—

**"The intricate lore of love and life
And mystic knowledge of the grave."**⁵

Sympathy and empathy form a generous part of Sarojini's poetic gift. They permeate her vision of all things, from the simple to the sublime and this can be clearly noticed in 'To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus', which is a criticism of life and contains a pen pictures of life's sorrows and sufferings, blighted hopes and unfulfilled longings. All attempts of poor mortals to attain divine summits 'with faith that sinks and feet that tire' will end in smoke—

**"How shall we reach the great, unknown
Nirvana of thy Lotus-throne?"**⁶

Here, Sarojini Naidu presents Buddha as one, who has attained the Nirvana (bliss) through the illuminated self, which takes its stand on the high grounds of 'Dharma' and 'Nirvana'. Although we can understand and analyze the nature of his illumination, the way of the Buddha is not accessible to all. But the spiritual frontier opened up by Buddha is a perpetual reminder of our spiritual hunger for identity and unity with the cosmic Soul.

Sarojini Naidu accepts the reality of death but to her life's joys and loveliness is of greater importance. The fragrant flowers, the lyric dawns, the melodious notes of singing birds and dancing sea-waves enthralled her but in spite of their fascination they could not divert her attention from the sordid realities of life. To quote—

**"Dream yields to dream, strife follows strife
And Death unweaves the webs of Life."**⁷

Sarojini Naidu is a minstrel of life, not its prophet raising a finger of admonition at right and wrong, but praising, and thrilling to its beauty and purpose. Life for her ever remains a little lovely dream, which makes all kindred, and all the world our home, as her 'wandering singers', sing. To quote—

"Where the wind calls our wandering footsteps we go."⁸

The spontaneous and cyclic renewal of vegetal life of Sarojini Naidu seemed to contain the answer to the riddle

of life. Actually transcendence was not the problem, but solution for Sarojini Naidu. Once accepted, it makes us free. Transcendence, paradoxically, is the proof of immortality, because even death is transcendent. As she says in 'The Poet to Death'. To quote—

**“Tarry a while, O Death, I cannot die,
With all my blossoming hopes unharvested,
My joys ungarnered, all my songs unsung,
And all my fears unshed.”⁹**

In 'The Garden Vigil', the poetess expresses the poignant agony in her heart, which cannot be assuaged even by the balmy breath of fragrant wind. Zephyr stealthily rifles the honeyed scent of Sirisha flowers and the rose. The poetess knows neither peace nor rests—

**“Pain weary and dream worn I lie awake,
Counting like beads the blazing shows o'er head.”¹⁰**

Finally, 'In Salutation To The Eternal Peace' is a clear and courageous assertion of faith in life. Like W.B. Yeats, despite all its sorrow and sufferings, she accepts life and is determined to live it out.

Thus, despite an undercurrent of melancholy and pessimism, Sarojini Naidu's poetry is optimistic and forward-looking forward to the soul's union with the eternal, the infinite and Life and Death are the means to this union.

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