Sarojini Naidu’s Poetry full of Love.

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ABSTRACT

Love is the dominant theme of Sarojini Naidu’s poetry. There are a large number of love-lyrics in the store of her poetry. As a love-lyricist, Sarojini Naidu is superb. Her lyrics deal with human love to metaphysical love. Thus, her love-lyrics have an aesthetic approbation of contemplation and sensation.

Keywords: Dominant, Human Love, Metaphysical Love, Aesthetic Approbation, Contemplation, Sensation etc.

Love is the essence of a woman’s existence. It knows no barriers. A girl of sweet and romantic temperament, Sarojinitasted its nectar at the age of only sixteen when she fell in love with a man who was senior to her by ten years and was of non-Brahmin caste. A short-lived separation could not fridgethe spring of love in her and she was ultimately united with the man of her heart’s desire in the permanent bound of marriage. Moreover, she was a woman of essentially lyrical talent and love is the perennial theme of lyric poetry. Further, she was exposed to Persian poetry which has love as the most inspiring theme. Sanskrit love poetry also influenced her. As a result, she became the greatest love-lyricist of India whose heart had nothing but love. In the following lines of ‘Alabaster’, she gives us a clear description of her heart:

“Like this alabaster box whose art
Is frail as a cassia-flower, is my heart, Carven with delicate dreams and wrought
With many a subtle and exquitive thought
Therein I treasure the spice and scent
Of rich and passionate memories blent
Like odours of cinnamon, sandal and clove,
Of song and sorrow and life and love.”

The theme of love predominates in Sarojini’s poetry. It breaks even into poems that are primarily in praise of Nature or Spring. It is, indeed, ever present in her work, and almost every one poem out of three among her poems is a love poem of one kind or another. Every kind of love-experience and every possible mood of love find its place in her poetry. Her love lyrics show that “Prayer, not praise” is the proper tribute to love that love in the partial in search of the complete. In her love poetry, there is a constant progression from devotion to the exacty of fulfillment of the object of love.

Sarojini Naodu’s earlier love-poetry is romantic though it takes on a devotional and mystical colour especially in herlyrics on Radha-Krishna theme and in ‘The Temple’ which has love-lyrics, following “the concept of Vaishnavism andthe Radha-Krishna cult”. The love-lyrics on Sri Krishna and Radha and ‘Songs of Radha’, ‘The Milkmaid’, ‘The Flute Player of Brindaban’ and the songs of Radha—‘At Dawn’, ‘At Dusk’ and ‘The Quest’. These poems are an example of Sarojini’s devotional love-poetry. She must have drawnher sustenance from Indian devotional love poets who also influenced Tagore and Tagore in turn influenced her. This is suggested by this category of love-poems. Radha is eternal divine beloved of Lord Krishna. Her longing for absorption in her love is so acute that it reaches the state of self-effacement in love. Radha carried her curds to the Mathura fair saying:

“........... “who will buy, who will buy
These curds that are white as the clouds in the sky
When the breezes of Shrawan are blowing? but my heart was so full of your beauty, Beloved, They laughed as I cried without knowing. Govinda! Govinda! Govinda! Govinda! Govinda! Govinda!

Further, the poem ‘The Flute Player of Brindaban’ is not without mystic element and strikes a similar note of self-identification of the poetess with Radha. The poem reveals the mood of total surrender which is specially clear in the poem. ‘The Quest’ also presents the ardent longing of Radha for Krishna. Moreover, ‘If You Call Me’ also express the force of love. Besides these, ‘Eastasy’ is also a poem of ecstasy and supreme bliss in love. Thus these lyrics reveal not only Sarojini’s devotional bent of mind but also her treatment of devotional love in lyrical pieces of moving poetry. Traces of love as depicted by Indian devotional love-poets are found in Sarojini’s trilogy of love-lyrics. Poems like ‘The Offering’, ‘The Lute Song’, ‘The Vision of Love’ are marked by a devotional feelings of mystical kind. To quote Ram Ratan Bhatnagar in this regard:

“The imagery in most of these poems is foreign to both English and Indian spirit of love. It is borrowed from Persian and Urdu poetry of which Sarojini knows a lot. .......... Sarojini puts the same thing in another image to give it a Hindu atmosphere but she is led away from the spirit of Hindu poetry where blood-thirst is not a characteristic of the beloved. ”

Love is a powerful force in Sarojini’s eyes. According to her, dull would be the soul who cannot respond to its irresistible call. That is why Sarojini responded to it even at the age of sixteen by passing all the barriers of caste and creed. To quote from ‘An Indian Love Song’ to prove it:

“Love reck not of feuds and bitter follies of stranger, comrade or kin, Alike in his ear sound the temple bells and the cry of the muezzin.

For Love shall cancel the ancient wrong and conquer the ancient rage. Redeem with his tears the memoried sorrow that sufficed a bygone age.”

Sarojini Naidu plays all possible notes on the orchestra of love. The longing of lovers from each other is expressed with truly oriental splendour in ‘A Rajput Love Song.’ To quote:

“Haste, O wild-bees hours, to the gardens of the sunset! Fly, wild-parrot day, to the orchards of the west!

Come, O tender night, with your sweet, consoling darkness,
And bring me my Beloved to the shelter of my breast!”

‘A Persian Love Song’ which comes immediately after, exhibits the serene mood of lovers who are conscious of their oneness through love. The lover does not know why, when his beloved is glad, or sad, or at rest, or in pain and he feels exactly what she feels. He has an inkling of the possible explanation the ecstasy of loving and being loved can be so overpowering as to be almost unbearable. Witness below the early poem called ‘Eastasy’:

“Cover mine eyes, O my Love!

Mite eyes that are weary of bliss

As of light that is poignant and strong

O silence my lips with a kiss, My lips that are weary of song! Shelter my soul, O my love!

My soul is bent low with pain

And the burden of love, like the grace Of a flower that is smitten with rain:

O shelter my soul from thy face!”

Another aspect of love is revealed in ‘The Poet’s Love Song.’ The poet, far away from her lover, is rapt in dream all day; but not so at night. But in ‘Alone’ the sense of loneliness is constant; neither the “accustomed alleys of delight” nor the “orchards of the night” bring any relief; nor the maiden breasts of the “tides of life’s familiar streams.” To quote:

“But no compassionate wind or comforting star

Brings me sweet word of thine abiding place.................

In what predestined hour of joy or tears Shall I attain the sanctity of thy face.”

In “The Garden Vigil”, the woman separated from her lover, finds comfort in apostrophizing the morning star. In a ‘Love Song From North’, the forsaken one cannot bear to hear the papeeha’s call or similar joyous sights and sounds, for they only recall dreams of delights that are gone. In “Caprice” and in “Destiny”, we are shown how maidens’ breasts are broken by those unworthy of their love. But in “Longing”, the heart, though broken, still hopes for the return of the wayward lover. In Sarojini’s view, it is better to loved and lost than never to have loved at all; for the memory of a lover, however transient, is a dear memory. This is beautifully expressed in ‘The Festival of Memory’.

But all these are scattared poems. There is a group of love poems at the end of her last volume, and the twenty-four poems that form the group are significantly given the collective title, ‘The Temple’. The deep mystic fervour that inspires them is stressed with the subtitle ‘A Pilgrimage of Love.’ And the pilgrimage towards the temple is carefully worked out in three stages of eight poems each. The pilgrimage begins with ‘The Gate of Delight’ and the poems of this stage are calculated to demonstrate that in Love’s bondage is true freedom, and true bliss in the sacrifices it demands. In the opening poem, ‘The Offering’, the woman unable to bring
beauty or greatness to Love’s shrine, can yet bring a devotion that asks for no recompense. Similarly, the devotee of ‘The Feast’ is content to smear her head and eyelids with the “entranced and flowering dust” that Love has honoured with his tread, happy to bear

In ‘The Lute Song’, the beloved tells her lover that he needs no mirror, no lute, no silks. Her eyes, her voice, another heart will serve instead. Further, for the sin of looking at the face of her lover, touching his flesh, assailing him with her silence or her song, the poetess-beloved asks forgiveness in ‘The Sins of Love’. To quote:

“Forgive me the sin of my heart, If trespassed against you
and strive To lure or to conquer your love.”

‘The Desire of Love’ is a short, simple song but intense and packed with passion. The last of the eight poems in this section is ‘The Vision of Love.’ The woman has lost all knowledge except that of her beloved. But issuing through ‘The Gate of Delight’, the Pilgrim of Love must tread ‘The Path of Tears’ tears of humiliation. True love, long suffering and self-denying must overcome pride whether in the lovedone’s spirit or in the lover’s own. Accordingly, eight poems that make up ‘The Path of Tears’, the faithful lover bewails the other’s pride and disdain and cruelty. In the opening poem, ‘The Sorrow of Love’, the woman complains that her beloved has turned his face away, if he continues to give himself to her. And yet how long he keep away? In the ‘Silence of Love’, she is determined that, though she has given her love, the whole joy of her flesh and the treasure of her soul, she will demand no answering gift from him. ‘The Menace of Love’, opens:

“How long, O Love, shall ruthless pride avail you Or wisdom shield you with her gracious wing When the sharp winds of memory shall assail you In all poignant malice of the spring?”

and ends:

“When youth and spring and passion shall betray you And mock your proud rebellion with defeat, God knows, O Love, if I shall save or slay you As you lie spent and broken at my foot.”

But even humiliation at the loved one’s hands is sweet and is hugged as a rich reward, as in ‘Love’s Guerdon’.

Thus, we can say that Sarojini’s attitude to love is not merely an expression of Hindu philosophy, but a rare synthesis of a number of philosophies Hindu, Sufi-Muslim, Buddhist, etc. Indeed, Sarojini’s contribution as a love poet is not that she has exhausted the Hindu-tradition of love, but that she has enriched it by a mixture of other traditions. The secular relation between two earthly lovers is raised to the level of the relation of God and Man, to that of the Quest of the finite for the infinite, and thus comes within the province of mystic contemplation.

References

2. Ibid: 112.
4. Ibid of (1) P. 69.
5. Ibid of (1) P. 80.
6. Ibid of (1) P. 25.
7. Ibid of (1) P. 79.
9. Ibid., P. 100.
10. Ibid., P. 101.