

RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Theme of Resistance and Nationalism in Sarojini Naidu's Poems

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### ABSTRACT

The literature is an interpretation of the socio-political and economic events of its time. Indian poetry in English follows the same tradition. Poetry, under British rule, worked as a form of resistance, an anticolonial movement, and a song of bravery. Sarojini Naidu addresses the issues of her time through the use of imagery and symbolism in her poetry. As a poet and activist, she raises her voice against oppressive British rule in India and advocates for its independence from them. She portrays India's cultural heritage and awakens the people to unite and preserve their identity against imperialistic policies. This research paper aims to analyze Sarojini Naidu's poems in the context of themes such as resistance and Nationalism. The present study employs an analytical methodology to explore the aforementioned themes. The present study focuses on Naidu's roles as poet, activist, and nationalist, as well as her proficiency in using literature as an instrument of resistance.

Keywords: Resistance; Nationalism; Colonialism; Cultural heritage; Identity; Independence

## FULL PAPER

### Introduction

The history of Indian poetry in English begins with the introduction of the English language to Indians by the British in the Eighteenth century. The pioneers of Indian poetry in English are Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sarojini Naidu. The oppressive policies of British rule gave rise to resistance and the spirit of nationalism, which ultimately led to the national movement for India's independence. The British literature gave birth to Indian writers, who wrote in English. In pre-independence India, the first phase of writers wrote in British forms, with subject matter related to British culture and traditions. However, in the second phase, Indians were drawn to the indigenous subject matter in British forms. The second phase is remarkable for the contributions of Indian English writers in awakening Indians to resist colonial rule, to raise their voice for their identity, to fight for India's independence, and to awaken them towards the spirit of nationalism. In Indian poetry in English, notable early contributors include Henry Derozio, Toru Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sarojini Naidu, among others. Indian poets in English often explore themes such as raising the voice for indigenous cultural heritage, Indian identity, Indian independence, nationalism, colonialism, imperialism, and oppression.

Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) was a poet, feminist, and nationalist. She collaborated with Annie Besant and Hirabai Patel in the fight for women's emancipation, advocating for their rights. As a member of the Congress party, she worked closely with Mahatma Gandhi and holds the distinction of being the first Indian woman in the Indian Congress party. Additionally, she was the first Indian woman appointed as the Governor of India. As a literary writer, she mainly contributed to Indian Poetry in English. In 1905, she published her first collection of lyrical poetry titled *The Golden Threshold*. Moreover, followed by the collections of *The Bird of Time* (1912) and *The Broken Wing* (1917). Also, *The Sceptred Flute* and *The Feather of the Dawn* (1961) were published posthumously by her daughter, Padmaja Naidu. In 1918, a collection of speeches by Naidu was published under the title *The Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu*. In her poetry, she explored themes such as resistance, nationalism, identity, cultural heritage, colonialism, imperialism, independence, oppression, etc. Mahatma Gandhi esteems her with the words of “The Nightingale of India” (1). Moreover, Edmund Gosse called her “the most accomplished living poet in India” in 1919 (2). Addressing her nationalistic works at the moment of homage, Nehru said (as cited in Praveen Dawar, Feb, 2025), “here was a person of great brilliance – vital and vivid. Here was a person with so many

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gifts, but above all, some gifts that made her unique. She infused artistry and poetry into our national struggle ... she represented herself as a rich culture into which flowed various currents which have made Indian culture as great as it is." (3)

#### Research Methodology:

The present study aims to explore the themes of Resistance and nationalism in the poems of Naidu, including "The Indian Waivers," "In the Bazaars of Hyderabad," and "To India."

#### Discussion:

As colonized, Indians survived under the oppressive policies of the British, the colonizers. During the rule, though the British thought that civilizing Indians would provide them with civilized workers, the introduction of English to Indians was something else. The Education of English to Indians opened the doors of World knowledge, and with the various revolutions brought against the colonizers by the colonized throughout the world. Following this, socio-political and economic anti-colonial movements emerged in India against colonization. Moreover, as an anticolonial literary movement, it contributed to a range of genres. The Indian Poets raised their voice through their Poetry by manifesting the spirit of Indianness as a threat to colonial ideology. The pioneers of them were Henry Derozio, Toru Datt, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sarojini Naidu. The Yorkshire Post commented (as cited in Priyanka Datt, 2013) on the publication of her *Bird of Time* (1912), thus: "Mrs. Naidu has not only enriched our language, but has enabled us to grow into intimate relation with the spirit, the emotions, mysticism, and the glamour of the East" (4). The spirit of Indianness was inculcated in her by Edmund Gosse, who advised her to write on themes from your native place, the Deccan, rejecting the slavish imitation of English classics. He comments (as cited in Aruna Arputhamalar, 2018) that: "She springs from the very soil of India, her spirit very Indian, manipulates the English Language, a foreign language, effectively as a vehicle, to convey very Indian thought and themes" (5).

Under colonization, Indian poetry in English raised its voice against the British with the expression of its strong desire for India's independence. The colonial power recurrently tried to undermine the indigenous cultural heritage and its national identity by imposing various rules and regulations, and often tortured the Indians with the hope of looting. To resist the violence, oppression, and the suppression of colonizers, the Indian poetry raises its voice in the sake of its diversity, culture, traditions, rituals, and the slavery of its people. It appeals to the natives to stand against slavery and the Oppression of colonial rule. Moreover, incite them for the

eventual freedom of India. The purpose of poetry was to manifest love towards the nation, to advocate for freedom, and to praise the cultural prosperity of the nation. Poetry intended to motivate and congregate the natives and inculcate the spirit of nationalism by hoping to awaken them to their eventual freedom. The poet followed the theme of the native's eternal love for the homeland and the hope for a better future.

Regarding the poetries of Naidu, M. K. Naik says that "her best poetry is not just a faded echo of the feeble voice of decadent romanticism, but an authentic Indian English lyric utterance exquisitely tuned to the composite Indian ethos, bringing home to the unbiased reader all the Opulence, pageantry, and charm of traditional Indian life, and the splendor of the Indian scene" (6). As Naik says, Sarojini Naidu, through her poetry, demonstrates themes such as her love and patriotism towards India. She explores India's cultural heritage and its people. Additionally, her poetry is written in honor of India's traditions, rituals, and languages, which is a unique aspect of the country. Naidu's verses include imagery, romanticism, and love for the nation, as well as the strong theme of patriotism and the desire for India's freedom. Naidu's poem awakens the sense of national pride and unity. M.K. Naik mentions that Naidu's "some songs celebrate the traditional Indian mythology, legends, and history which reveal the poet's catholicity of sympathy and secular outlook" (7). Even looking at Naidu's poetic form and influence, her poetry is written in the form of a lyric under the influence of romanticism, with the best use of imagery and symbolism. As M. K. Naik explains, Naidu's "The folk-songs mostly take the form of dramatic lyrics in which the speakers represent groups of Indian folk plying their traditional occupations- e.g., palanquin Bearers, Wandering Singers, Indian Weavers, etc."(8).

Colonialism brought about drastic changes through its oppressive policies in India. The colonial policies had brutal effects on indigenous culture, traditions, language, and the traditions of the native Indians. The Indians were tortured and oppressed by implementing such economic looting. As Dadabhai Nauroji, in his theory of 'Economic Drain' (Arth Nissaranacha Siddhant), explores the loot of the Indian Economy by the British. The colonizers brought the raw material at the lowest rate from the colonies to their own nation, and the processed material was brought to the markets of the colonies. The aftermath of this was detrimental to the indigenous small industrialists, as the natives were drawn to the attractive goods of the colonizers and sometimes were forced to purchase them. Like this, the colonizers forcefully imposed the policies in the socio-politico-economic domain of India. The Indian cultural heritage, traditions, rituals, and craftsmanship were

jeopardized. Moreover, the natives were suppressed and beaten to death. This resulted in unrest among the natives or colonized Indians. Moreover, the Indians were urged to raise their voice against the British by their leaders. They advocated against colonizing policies and rejected colonial goods, instead preferring indigenous ones. Like this, the spirit of resistance was inculcated among the Indians by the freedom fighters and the writers of the nation. Sarojini Naidu demonstrates the theme of celebrating indigenous things and resisting colonial policies in her poem, "The Indian Waivers." The lines are;

WEAVERS, weaving at break of day,  
Why do you weave a garment so gay? . . .  
Blue as the wing of a halcyon wild,  
We weave the robes of a newborn child. (<https://allpoetry.com>)

In the first stanza of the poem, the poet uses the image of Indian warriors to express both themes of resistance and nationalism. To portray the life of native people and their craftsmanship means that giving preference and praising the indigenous goods or craftsmanship, as well as attracting the minds of natives towards them, is a challenge to the colonial policies and their goods. As a resistance to colonization, she appeals to the natives to prefer indigenous things and promote Indian craftsmanship. Moreover, the nationalistic perspective is that Naidu advocates the indigenous heritage and portrays the beauty of India's traditions and crafts.

Naidu's poem 'In the Bazaars of Hyderabad' is divided into five stanzas. The poem is composed in the form of a question and answer with the formal conversation between the vendor and the buyer. In each stanza, there is an introduction of a new merchant with his own goods, like merchants, vendors, peddlers, maidens, goldsmiths, fruit vendors, musicians, magicians, and the flower girls. When the buyer visits the stalls in the market, she asks the vendor a question about the goods, and she gets an honorable reply from the seller, telling her the names of the goods. As in the first stanza of the poem, the poet asks the merchant what you are selling, and the merchant replies that he is selling turbans, mirrors, and daggers. The lines are as follows;

What do you sell, O ye merchants?  
Richly, your wares are displayed.  
Turbans of crimson and silver,  
Tunics of purple brocade,

Mirrors with panels of amber,  
Daggers with handles of jade. (<https://allpoetry.com>)

As a freedom fighter, Naidu worked alongside Mahatma Gandhi and other leaders, participating in various movements, including the Salt Satyagraha, Quit India Movement, and Swadeshi Movement. Naidu explores Gandhi's ideology by advocating the Swadeshi Movement through her poem, "In the Bazaars of Hyderabad." The Swadeshi Movement was a resistance to British goods and a challenge to the monopoly of colonizers in the markets of the colony. Moreover, appeals are made to the natives to prefer indigenous crafts. The poem also follows the theme of nationalism as the poet introduces the diversity of Indian cities with the imagery of Hyderabad. The market of Hyderabad implies that India has a rich heritage, culture, and tradition in every domain. As in the poem, the poet attracts the native mind towards their traditional products in the market and appeals to resist the colonizer's monopoly over the markets of the colony.

The poet appeals to the motherland by stating that she has to rise and raise her voice against colonialism because of the irresponsibility of her children. They are still the slaves to the colonisers. Henceforth, the poet pleads to the motherland by resisting the colonizers, to be an inspiration to her children and to those countries that are living in the darkness of colonialism. Moreover, show them the desire for freedom by coming out of the gloom.

In the first Stanza of the poem, the poet expresses the anxiety that the colonizers have ruined and destroyed the nation's cultural heritage. Moreover, says, yet the motherland is bearing the agonies without revolting against the alien rule. That is why the poet pleads with the mother to arise from the gloom and recreate the prestige of the nation from her eternal womb. The lines are as follows;

O YOUNG through all thy immemorial years!  
Rise, Mother, rise, regenerate from thy gloom,  
And, like a bride high-mated with the spheres,  
Beget new glories from thine ageless womb! (<https://allpoetry.com>)

In the second stanza of the poem, the poet pleads with the motherland to awake and resist the colonial ideology and the oppression to save her children from slavery. As well as being the idol of third-world countries, which are yet to be independent. As in the lines of the second stanza;

The nations that in fettered darkness weep  
Crave thee to lead them where great mornings break ...

Mother, O Mother, wherefore dost thou sleep?  
Arise and answer for thy children's sake! (<https://allpoetry.com>)

In the last stanza of the poem, the poet manifests her desire before her mother to reclaim her past with honour, splendour, and victories, in which she was the “empress of the sovereign”. To arouse the nation to revolt against the brutality of the colonizers and gain independence from British rule, the poem manifests both themes of resistance and nationalism. Henceforth, Sarojini Naidu expresses her view that resistance against injustice and the pursuit of independence from alien rulers is a form of nationalism.

#### Conclusion:

The present study explored the spirit of Indianness of Sarojini Naidu. Naidu worked with Gandhi and other freedom fighters for the independence of India. The colonial experiences compelled her to participate in the Indian freedom movement. She experienced the colonial ideology that harshly affected the socio-political, economic, and cultural aspects of India. The sense of loss of identity, heritage, culture, traditions, and the slavery thrust upon the natives resulted in Nationalism. Moreover, the feelings of nationalism raised a voice against the oppressive ideology of the colonizers, which is known as resistance. Therefore, the poems of Naidu are an exhibition of the themes of resistance and nationalism.

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