

# International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

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## THE KOEL AND THE NIGHTINGALE

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the Koel which is the Indian equivalent of the English Nightingale.

It becomes clearly evident, when their poetic technique is compared, that both the poets express general ideas through concrete images. They are poets of lyric emotion. They concentrate always on a particular thing or emotion but their sensory system is a comprehensive one which is evenly developed. Hence their poetry is not only rich in line, color, light, shade, sound, touch and taste but also rich in organic and kinesthetic images – the powerful sensations inviting an empathic response.

Both the poets draw inspiration from the visible world. They describe what they see but through that they convey some vast mystery with the help of symbols. And it is achieved through the technique of imagery well organized with symbols.

An effort is made to analyse some effective sense images of both the poets. All the images are characterized by a

### ABSTRACT

**T**his paper is an effort to make a comparative analysis of the techniques of poetry of Sarojini Naidu, the Koel, and John Keats, the Nightingale, the best of the Romantic Poets, so far as their use of imagery is concerned. I refer to Sarojini Naidu as the Koel which is the Indian equivalent to the English Nightingale. Both the poets are strong in sensational perceptions. Both are lovers of nature and beauty and both are poets of love. They differ in the use of certain images at times.

**KEYWORDS:** techniques of poetry of Sarojini Naidu, Indian equivalent.

### INTRODUCTION

Sarojini Naidu and John Keats stand unique in their depth of feelings as the best of the Romantic poets of the world. There is a close resemblance in their vision of life and love of nature which is reflected in their poetic craft, use of imagery and symbolism. Both are primarily sensuous poets. But there is a basic difference in their attitudes. It is observed that both Keats and Sarojini Naidu worked in the visual world and their poetry is characterized by concreteness and sensuous intensity.

Sarojini Naidu is popularly referred to as the Nightingale of India. I thought it more appropriate to refer to her as

high degree of concreteness and imaginal abundance.

Keats is strong in organic, tactual, kinesthetic and visual imagery. But auditory and olfactory images are also present in his poems. In some poems they work out the whole poem, as for instance, in *Ode to a Nightingale*. The whole poem is the reaction on the action of the bird's sweet song. Motor image is used in less proportion in Keats.

Sarojini Naidu, like Keats, is a lover of all beautiful objects, especially beautiful colors, ornaments and flowers. She has also a special liking for sounds and is temperamentally an expert in the use of auditory, gustatory and visual images. It is observed that she has used all types of images in her poetry which enriched her poetic craft.

Keats is an adorer of beauty. Beauty is his religion. Sarojini Naidu is also an admirer and a lover of beauty but there is a distinctive Oriental mood and touch in her attitude. The panorama of India's Kaleidoscopic beauty in colour, odour, song and movement in her ancient and traditional past fascinated her and kept her enthralled throughout her poetic compositions.

Keats appears to be highly successful so far as the use of visual imagery is concerned. There is no notion of space or distance, which may stand on the way of his successful visual imagery. He always concentrates on the particular and gives his attention to the principal figure. If ever any bird is visualized, it is within the reach of human eye, may be hidden by thick foliage.

In *Ode to Autumn* Keats deals with change and decay which is inherent in nature. But the poem has no pining for the spring, and no foreboding of the winter. It describes a happy autumn having its own identity:

"Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,....."

The observer observes the autumn, for the sake of deriving utmost delight out of its pleasant scenes and sights without brooding over the past and the present.

Sarojini Naidu, like Keats, has the same attitude towards life. It is reflected in her exquisite depiction of spring:

"What, O my heart, though tomorrow be tragic,  
Today is inwoven of rapture and magic."  
(*Spring in Kashmir*)

Like Keats, the visual images of Sarojini Naidu are synaesthetic as she views the objects and the human figures portrayed from the organic point of view. She is one with Keats in her use of concentration while using visual imagery. But unlike Keats she does not remain within a set and predetermined boundary and feels delighted to keep her scope unlimited, often pointing towards the vast sky:

"She hangs like a star in the dew of our song."  
(*Palanquin Bearers*)

In Keats, tactual image serves to enhance other types of imagery, especially the visual image as in *The Eve of St. Agnes*:

"The carved angels.....  
With hair blown back, and wings put cross-wise on their beasts."

Here indirect suggestion of touch makes the image very sensitive.

In *Ode to a Nightingale* the olfactory image is qualified by the tactual one in the lines:

"I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,

Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs.....”

A striking and romantic image of touch adorns the first two lines of the second stanza of Sarojini Naidu’s ‘Ashoka Blossom’ in the section The Peacock Lute:

“If your glowing foot be prest  
O’er the secrets of my breast.”

Keats used to express rich and luxuriant tactual feeling by rich consonantal sounds, for example “kiss”, “breast” etc. The sensation of cold is sweet to Keats.

Keats has negative capability. So both cold and heat are agreeable to him. It is exemplified by the pervasive warmth of To Autumn and in the sunny warmth implied in the cold body of wine in *Ode to a Nightingale*.

But ‘cold’ as a sensation of touch is somewhat lifeless to the poet Sarojini Naidu. It is associated with “white color”, “dull”, “pale” and “death”. It is evident in the last stanza of her *Indian Weavers*:

“White as a feather and white as a cloud,  
We weave a dead man’s funeral shroud.”

Both the poets are lovers of the material world. Keats’ overpowering sensuousness gets expressed through his frequent references to “arms”, “lips”, “breasts”, “soft hand”, “delicious face” etc. Similarly, in the charming lyrics of Sarojini Naidu there are fascinating romantic words like “love”, “lover”, “beloved”, “sweetheart”, “kiss”, “lips”, “eyes”, “hands” etc. The poet is fond of the image of “warm” as a tactual sensation which gets concretised in her poem:

“Fill thou our heaving net  
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Warm from the green floating groves of thy tides.”

(*The Festival of the Sea*)

Keats is fond of using auditory images. His letter to Fanny of 1st May 1819 confirms the fact that Keats felt a continual and tranquil joy after listening to the bird Nightingale’s song. “Silent”, “calm”, “quiet” and “gentle” are the favorite auditory images of Keats. His love of silent noise finds a flawless expression in his poems:

“What is more gentle than a wind in summer?”  
(Sleep and Poetry)

Sarojini Naidu is very fond of creating musical poetry. She creates tremendous auditory images in her poetry. Song and service are one to her:

“We will conquer the sorrow of life with the sorrow of song.”

(*In the Forest*)

“Tis mine to carry the banner of song.”

(*The Faery Isle of Janjira*)

Like Keats, she is also fond of ‘silent’ images as portrayed in her poem *Solitude* and *Coromandel Fishers*.

Both the poets have few storms, few troubled seas and their winds are gentle and tranquil. Their whole gamut of experience with nature is soothing, calm and sweet.

In both the poets, the olfactory images are strongly sensuous and pervasive in nature. The “embalmed

darkness" and "soft incense" in Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale*, "clustering keoras" in *The Snake Charmer* and "perfume in the petals of a rose" in Sarojini Naidu's *Village Song* are beautiful examples.

Images of taste comes to both the poets as both of them were connoisseurs of good food. Keats' use of "a draught of vintage" (*Ode to a Nightingale*), "honey-feel", "honeyed wings" (*Endymion*) appeal to the sense of taste.

Sarojini Naidu uses the adjective "sweet" very frequently. The rich images like "sweet are the sands", (*The Coromandel Fishers*), "Honey, child, honey child" (*Village Song*), "sweet maidens" in *Leili*, "In your sweet garden where I walked with you" in *Gokhale's Garden* testify to her good taste.

Keats is massive and smooth in his organic imagery. It has a hypnotic effect on the readers. The opening of the *Ode to a Nightingale* creates it:

"My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk."

The words "aches", "numbness", "pains", "drunk" etc are suggestive of drowsiness. In *Ode on Indolence* it is notably present.

Keats is a master of the organic images having both the hypnotic spell and the powerful throbbing and beating sensations.

Sarojini Naidu's organic imagery does not create a hypnotic effect like that of Keats. Yet it is at times effectively used as in *The old woman* through the words "poverty", "hunger and pain", and "tired eyelids".

Keats' kinesthetic imagery works out slowly. He follows the technique of concentration to make the image effective as in *Hyperion I*:

"While Fate seem'd strangled in my nervous grasp."

Sarojini Naidu has used kinesthetic sensation as a favorite medium of expression. Not only her vibrant speeches and letters but also many lines of her poems are rich in energetic kinesthetic imagery:

"Rise brothers, rise, the wakening skies pray to the morning light."

(*The Coromandel Fishers*)

Keats has used very little motor imagery. It is always with slow movement and motion. Though his motor images are mixed with kinesthetic, it appears to be static. Sarojini Naidu is somewhat different, though like Keats it is used less in proportion in her poetry. But when it is used it becomes unique as it becomes slow and speedy in action and movement. The following lines exemplify her vision of this sensation:

"Swift are ye as streams and soundless as the dewfall,  
Subtle as the lightning and splendid as the sun,"

(*The Festival of Serpents*)

The pattern of empathic imagery in both the poets are the result of a unique combination or fusion, of compression which is symbolic of physical suggestion, without which creation of empathy is impossible.

Keats experiences empathy in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn* which arises out of prolonged and passionate contemplation of a beautiful object:

"Thou still unravish'd bride of quiet-ness,  
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,"

Empathy works with the perception of physical shape of the vase by the artist.

Just like Keats Sarojini Naidu too deals with both the animate and inanimate objects of nature. She gives form to the formless, life to the lifeless and motion to the static ones through the technique of empathic imagery.



So it is primarily a technique of synaesthetic compression and concentration. The empathic image of a tiger in her *The Indian Gipsy*:

“Behold her, daughter of a wandering race,  
Tameless, with the bold, falcon’s agile grace,  
And the lithe tiger’s sinuous majesty.”

In her two symbolic poems *The Bird of Time*, and *The Broken Wing*, empathic imagery of the bird is not the real bird. It is imbued with the human spirit, and so it is none other than the poet herself. In the first poem it is well revealed:

“O Bird of Time,.....  
What are the songs you sing?.....”

*In the Broken Wing* she makes an effort to –  
“..... rise to meet the destined spring  
And scale the stars.”

Keats’ process of empathy worked in a line of *Hyperion* through personification:  
“Tall oaks branch- charmed by the earnest stars.”

There is a remarkable difference between the two poets in their use of visual imagery. There is some limitations for Keats, and for Sarojini Naidu there is no limit. Her bird with the broken wing is more powerful than Keats’ *Nightingale* or Shelly’s *Skylark*.

The synaesthetic imagery of both the poets has a common touch. Firstly, it is comprehensive. Secondly, it is sensuous. This type of imagery is characterized by intellect, sense and emotion, revealing their intuitive sense of the ‘Oneness’ of things and their faith in the relationship between dissimilar phenomena. Ultimately, their perception of cosmic harmony is achieved. The important effect achieved by the reader is the realization of the macrocosm within the microcosmic world of the image, which points out a close kinship between man and nature. It is evident in their emotional verse and exquisite prose as well.

A close resemblance is there in their attitude towards life. In *Ode to a Nightingale* being fed up with this world of harsh reality, Keats desires to fly away to the land of the bird, unseen and unknown. The same such desire is expressed by Sarojini Naidu in *To the God of Pain*.

Both the poets are realists, not escapists. Being natives of this world of reality, they cannot belong to the land of dream and imagination permanently, and hence they return home, to the real world. It is poetized by Keats in his *Ode to a Nightingale*:

“Adieu! The fancy cannot cheat so well  
As she is fam’d to do, deceiving elf.”

In *To My Fairy Fancies* Sarojini Naidu sings:

“Fairy Fancies, fly away  
To the white cloud- wildernesses,  
fly away.”

Both the poets appear to be similar in their death wishes – in their romantic desire to pass away from this mundane world in order to immortalize the best moments of their life.

Keats’ *Bright Star* and Sarojini Naidu’s *At Twilight* reveal it.

To both the poets beauty is truth and beauty is perceived when one loves an object. Beauty is Keats' religion – central to his theory of art.

According to him poetry has to reveal beauty which is an abiding reality. In his letter to John Taylor on Friday, 27 February 1818 Keats writes:

Poetry should "Come as naturally as leaves to a tree."

The following lines written by Sarojini Naidu about her father brings out exquisitely her love for 'Beauty':

" ..... what in my father is the genius of curiosity, the very essence of all scientific genius - in me is the desire for beauty."

Mr. Arthur Symons remarks on her love of beauty in his *Introduction to the Golden Threshold*:

"It was the desire of beauty that made her a poet; her 'nerves of delight' were always quivering at the contact of beauty."

Sarojini Naidu and Keats revel in light and shade, pain and joy. This sensuous ecstasy enables them to cherish a cosmic vision – a comprehensive and intimate kinship between nature and humanity.

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