

PALANQUIN BEARERS

Sarojini Naidu



Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), Indian poet was born into a Bengali Brahmin family in Hyderabad. With her father a scientist and her mother a poet, she grew up surrounded by artists, intellectuals, and revolutionaries. A brilliant student, she entered Madras University at the age of 12, about the time she began also to write poetry. In 1895 she was sent to England to study at King's College, London, and Girton College, Cambridge, before poor health forced her to abandon her studies and return home. In 1925 Sarojini Naidu became the first Indian woman to be elected as the President of the Indian National Congress and, continuing her active participation in Gandhi's program of *Satyagraha*, a non-violent form of protest, was jailed on several occasions by the British. Her published poetic works include *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time* (1912), *The Broken Wing* (1917), *Selected Poems* (1930), *The Sceptred Flute* (1937, with introduction by Joseph Auslander), and *The Feather of the Dawn* (1961). Many of her speeches have also been published.



The poem beautifully compares the bride to numerous images. The bride is carried in a palanquin which was until recently a part of Indian culture.

Lightly, O lightly we bear her along,
 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 from the lips of a dream.
 Gaily, O gaily we glide and we sing,
 We bear her along like a pearl on a string.



Softly, O softly we bear her along,
 She hangs like a star in the dew of our song;
 She springs like a beam on the brow of the tide,
 She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride.
 Lightly, O lightly we glide and we sing,
 We bear her along like a pearl on a string.

Glossary

skim	skim	glide smoothly over something.
sway	swai	move from side to side.
foam	fəum	a mass of very small bubbles formed on the surface of a liquid.
gaily	'gei.li	merrily; happily.
glide	glaid	to move easily without stopping and without effort or noise.
dew	dju:	drops of water that form on the ground and other surfaces outside during the night.
beam	bi:m	a line of light that shines from a bright object.
brow	brau	the top part of a hill or the edge of something high such as a cliff or rock.

Understanding the Poem

1. What are the feelings of the palanquin bearers as they carry the princess inside the palanquin?
2. 'Lightly, O lightly we bear her along; she sways like a flower in the wind of our song'. What are these opening lines of the poem suggestive of? Do you think that the palanquin bearers are sensitive to the presence of the bride?
3. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem? Pick out the pairs of rhyming words in the poem.

Learning about literary devices

1. In line 4 the poet says, 'She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream' and in line 10 she writes, 'She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride.' Do you think that the poet has deliberately used the device of contrast? Why has she done so?
2. Simile: It is a figure of speech used to compare the qualities of two objects or things using

words such as ‘like’ or ‘as’. For example;

- a. The poet compares the bride to a flower.
- b. She hangs like a star in the dew of a song.

The poem is full of similes. (Pick out all the similes used by the poet in the poem).

3. Refrain: poets often use the device of refrain (‘refrain’ is a line or a part of line or a group of lines repeated in the course of a poem). Did you notice that some words, lines/parts of lines are repeated in the poem?

Pick out these words or lines that are repeated. What effect does such repetition create in the poem?

4. You have studied in the last poem about images. Read the poem and complete the following table by matching lines from the poem with the related images conveyed by them:

Line from the poem	Image conveyed
Skims like a bird	gliding movement of a bird flying over a stream
Sways like a flower	_____
Floats like a laugh	_____
Hangs like a star	_____
Springs like a beam	_____
Falls like a tear	_____

Discussion

Palanquin was the part of our culture recently. It still finds its way in folk songs and film songs. Do you think that such parts of culture should be preserved. Give reasons in support of your answer.

Suggested Reading

Coromondal Fishers by Sarojini Naidu.

The Queen’s Rival by Sarojini Naidu.

Quote to remember

*Beauties in vain their pretty eyes may roll;
Charms strike the sight, but merit wins the soul.*

Alexander Pope