**Palanquin Bearers by Sarojini Naidu(Nightingale of India)**

(When people can’t express through tongue they choose to bleed through their pen, becoming a writer isn’t easy though. Single emotion but innumerable styles, abundant ideas and infinite techniques of communicating; only a writer can do this and so was Sarojini Naidu, who was given the title of ‘Nightingale of India’ because of her major contribution in the field of poetry, which contained English words but an Indian soul.

She was born on February 13, 1879, in Hyderabad. Her father Dr Aghornath Chattopadyaya, was the founder of Nizam College of Hyderabad and a scientist. Her mother, Mrs Varasundari, was a Bengali poetess and Sarojini Devi inherited qualities from both her father and mother.

She was a great patriot, politician, orator, and administrator. Her interest in the field of poetry was an outcome of the disinterest in algebra. She wrote her first inspired poetry in the algebra book and then enthused by this ***“The Lady of the Lake”***, a poem of 1300 lines long was written by her.)

**Palanquin Bearers**

The theme of the poem "palanquin bearers" by "sarojini naidu" is to reflect about the Indian marriages and their cultures. The poet has deliberatory used the contradictory feeling of laughing and weeping. The bride is sad and is crying as she is separated from her family

“Palanquin Bearers” appears in Sarojini Naidu’s well-known poetry collection *The Golden Threshold*. It is the first poem of the volume, appearing in the Folk Songs section. It is a song of the bearers of a palanquin. The term “Palanquin” is associated solely with India. It is a covered couch for a passenger, especially a bride or married woman, consisting of a large box carried on two horizontal piles. Usually, it is carried by four or six sturdy bearers. While carrying the palanquin, they sing in chorus in order to lighten their burden, mentally. This poem features one such song voiced by the Indian “Nightingale” Sarojini Naidu.

Read the full text of “Palanquin Bearers” below:

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.

**Summary**

“Palanquin Bearers” has two verses. The first verse features how the bearers handle the box with caution and sing along the way. They glorify the passenger by using several metaphors. For example, they compare the lady to a flower dancing in their beautiful song. She skims like a bird on the foam and floats like a laugh from the lips of dreamers. The bearers are happy to do their job and they bear her as if she is a precious pearl hung on strings of a pole.

In the next stanza, Naidu uses a similar pattern in order to describe the lady. The bearers sing about how the lady hangs on the palanquin. They describe the lady as a beam as well as a tear. The last two lines are repeated as a refrain.

**Meaning**

The title of the poem “Palanquin Bearers” associates an Indian essence. This piece is about the song of palanquin bearers which they sing while carrying a lady passenger. In this poem, Naidu explores how they glorify the lady as if she is a precious thing. Besides, it also depicts the respect they have for the lady. For them, she is as soft as a flower. Hence, they have to bear her lightly. It is not that they are unhappy with their work. So they reiterate the fact they are more than happy to be the co-passengers of the bride. This sweet, little song vividly depicts the beauty of the lady and the gliding movement of the palanquin.

**Form, Rhyme Scheme, & Meter , Structure & Form**

“Palanquin Bearers” consists of two stanzas. Each stanza has six lines. The number of lines somehow hints at the number of men bearing the lady to her destination. This poem has a song-like structure. It contains a refrain at the end of each verse. Naidu uses a similar sentence structure in both verses. Besides, this piece is written from the bearers’ point of view. The musicality alongside the presence of first-person speakers brings out a lyrical quality in this piece.

**Rhyme Scheme**

This piece contains a set rhyme scheme. It is AABBCCDD, meaning each verse consists of three rhyming couplets. For example, the first two lines form a couplet that contains the following rhyming pair of words: “along” and “song”.

The same scheme is followed in the second verse. There is only one exception. It occurs in the last two lines. In these lines, “sing” and “string” rhyme imperfectly. However, these terms end with a similar consonant sound.

**Meter**

Most of the lines of this poem contain eleven syllables. While a few contain ten syllables. After grouping the syllables into units of two/three syllables, there will be a total of four feet in front of readers. They need to stress the second/third syllable of each foot. Hence, the overall poem is composed in anapestic tetrameter with a few iambic and trochaic variations. Let’s see how the metrical scheme works in the text.

**Poetic Devices & Figures of Speech**

Naidu uses the following poetic devices in “Palanquin Bearers”.

* **Repetition:** It occurs throughout the poem. For instance, the beginning of the first line is repeated in the fifth line. Besides, line 2-4 follows a similar beginning.
* **Anaphora:** It occurs in the second, third, and fourth lines of each verse. These lines begin with the pronoun “She”.
* **Simile:** It occurs in lines 2-4 of both the stanzas. For example, Naidu compares the lady to a flower, bird, and laugh in these lines.
* **Metaphor:** This device is used in the lines where simile occurs. For instance, the phrase “the wind of our song” contains a metaphor. Here, the flow of the song is compared to the wind. Another important metaphor of this piece is “a pearl on a string”. Naidu compares the woman to a pearl and the poles of the palanquin to a string.
* **Refrain:** The last two lines of each stanza act as a refrain.
* **Alliteration:** It occurs in “**S**he **s**ways”, “**S**he **s**kims”, “**G**aily, O **g**aily we **g**lide”, “**S**he **s**prings”, etc.
* **Imagery:** Naidu makes use of visual imagery to compare the lady to a number of things. She also uses kinesthetic imagery in order to depict the movement of the palanquin

**Themes**

The main themes of “Palanquin Bearers” concern the act of palanquin bearing and feminine beauty. Naidu also explores the theme of nature, music, and Indianness or orientalism. This poem presents an oriental rural scene. It has now become rare. However, Naidu takes readers to a time when Indian women traveled by palanquins. In this poem, she visually depicts how the palanquin moves. It seems as if she is describing a shop floating on the sea or a bird flying with the wind.

Besides, she associates the essence of music with this physical activity to fuse beauty with activity and toil with enjoyment. From the tone of the bearers, it doesn’t even seem that the act has made them tiresome. Rather they enjoy the process as they were not bearing a lady, but taking a precious pearl safely to its destination.

**Line-by-Line Critical Analysis & Explanation**

**Line 1**

Lightly, O lightly we bear her along,

The pellucid style and the cadence of a collective song fill the ambiance of “Palanquin Bearers”. Naidu speaks in this poem from the perspective of the bearers carrying a lady to a place. She does not delve into any personal details. Rather her focus solely lies on the agility of their movement and the way they appreciate the passenger.

The repetition of the term “Lightly” in the very first line describes how softly they bear the palanquin. For the passenger sitting inside, the journey does not seem tiring at any point. The bearers are so swift and light in their movement that it seems they are floating, not treading on the ground.

**Lines 2-4**

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.

In the following lines, Naidu uses a number of metaphors, presented with similes. Firstly, the lady is compared to a flower. By using this comparison, the poet describes how soft the lady is. For the poet, it seems as if the lady is nodding her head as a flower does in the mild air current. Furthermore, the flow of the bearers’ song is compared to the wind. So, the lady is swaying with the rhythm of their song.

In the next line, the lady is compared to a bird. The movement of the palanquin seems like the waves and the lady, like a bird, touches the foam while gliding over them. The beautiful metaphor of a stream not only describes the wave-like movement of the palanquin but also depicts how swiftly the bearers carry it.

The third line contains another thought-provoking comparison between the lady and a laugh. According to the speaker, she floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream. In “lips of a dream”, the poet uses synecdoche to invest an abstract with a concrete attribute. Here, “dream” represents a dreamer. The lady is like a happy dream of a person. Her transience is compared to the temporary happiness of a dreamer while having a vision of the lady.

**Lines 5-6**

Gaily, O gaily we glide and we sing,

We bear her along like a pearl on a string.

The fifth line begins with a repetition of the term “gaily”. It refers to the cheerful mood of the bearers. They are more than happy to carry the lady to her destination. Naidu describes their movement as if they are gliding with the wind. So, here the poet metaphorically compares the bearers to birds or a ship.

While carrying the passenger, they sing to unburden them from weariness. Besides, they bear her like a “pearl on a string”. This phrase has two metaphors. First of all, the lady is so precious to the speakers that they think it is like a pearl. This pearl hangs on a string, a metaphorical reference to the poles of the palanquin or the bearers. Imaginatively, the bearers are like a string and the lady, the central attraction, is the pearl hanging on it. So, the bearers along with the passengers depict an image of a pendant

**Lines 7-12**

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.

The second stanza of “Palanquin Bearers” begins with a refrain. In the beginning, Naidu uses the phrase “Softly, O softly”. This line describes how soft the bearers’ movement is.

In the following lines, the poet presents a series of comparisons as present in the first stanza. Firstly, the speakers compare the lady to a star. Their song is described as a “dew”. Here, the reflection of a star in dew is portrayed. As the dew trembles, it makes the reflection tremble. While the palanquin moves, the passenger’s body also shakes in this manner.

Then she is compared to a “beam”, meaning a ship or a ray of light. Like a ship sails on the tide, the palanquin is carried. The lady is portrayed as a ship or a light beam that springs on the “brow of the tide”. Here, Naidu uses a personal metaphor in the quoted phrase.

In the next line, Naidu hints at the lady’s mental state. She is newly married and leaving her home. That’s why the poet uses an image of a bride in tears. Apart from that, the last two lines are repeated for the sake of emphasis. **Historical Context**

The poem “Palanquin Bearers” was first published in Sarojini Naidu’s first poetry collection *The Golden Threshold*. It appears as the first poem of the Folk Songs section. The book was first published in 1896 in the United Kingdom and later in Hyderabad in 1905. Her poems published in this volume were admired in India and abroad. Politicians like Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Mahatma Gandhi appreciated her works. In this song, Naidu depicts a rural Indian scene. It centers on an image of a newly married woman carried by a palanquin. The poet vividly depicts how the bearers adorn her and carry her swiftly and softly to her destination.

**Questions & Answers**

**What is the poem “Palanquin Bearers” about?**

It is a folk song of the palanquin bearers, typically sung while carrying a newlywed bride. While carrying her to her father’s home to the groom’s home, bearers often sang such songs in order to cheer the bride up. This song features a variety of epithets used to adorn the delicate beauty of the lady.

**Why is the bride referred to as “a pearl on a string”?**

By using this phrase, Naidu describes how precious the bride is for the bearers. She is like a pearl, hanging delicately from a string. Here, the string is metaphorically compared to either the palanquin or the bearers. Collectively, they form a pendant and the pearl enhances the value of the chain.

**What is the meaning of “Palanquin Bearers”?**

The term “Palanquin” originated primarily from East India. It means a covered box, often used for a single passenger. The large box is carried on two horizontal poles by four or six bearers. In this poem, Naidu features the song of such bearers while carrying a lady in the palanquin.

**In which year the “Palanquin Bearers” was published?**

The poem was first published in London, the United Kingdom in 1896 and later it was published in 1905 in Hyderabad. It appears in Sarojini Naidu’s first poetry collection *The Golden Threshold*.

**Who sang the poem the “Palanquin Bearers”?**

In this poem, the palanquin bearers sang the song while carrying the bride.

**What is the tone of the poem “Palanquin Bearers”?**

The tone of this piece remains cheerful, cajoling, and heartwarming throughout. It changes slightly to a sad one in the fourth line of the second verse. However, the poet stylistically maintains the overall tone.

**What is the mood of “Palanquin Bearers”?**

The mood of this poem is high-spirited, light, and celebratory. This song is sung to cheer the lady up while traveling to her destination.

**Why do the palanquin bearers carry the bride lightly?**

The bearers, by no means, want to make the bride feel tiresome throughout the journey. Hence, they sing a song while carrying the palanquin as lightly as they can.

**Why do the palanquin bearers sing?**

The bearers, by no means, want to make the bride feel tiresome throughout the journey. Hence, they sing a song while carrying the palanquin as lightly as they can.

**How do palanquin bearers carry the bride?**

They carry the bride lightly and softly. Besides, they sing a beautiful song that adorns her features.

**Who is being carried in the palanquin?**

A newly married lady is carried in the palanquin.

**How do the palanquin bearers feel while carrying the bride?**

The bearers feel happy in the whole process. They gaily carry the bride as she is a precious gift given to those humble men to take care of.

**Why is the bride compared to a “flower” and a “bird”?**

The bride’s calm and soft features are compared to that of a flower. Besides, the way the palanquin is carried makes it feel that the lady is gliding in the air like a bird.

**What are the two adverbs used to describe the way the palanquin bearers were carrying their passenger?**

The two adverbs that are used to describe the movement of the bearers are “Lightly” and “Softly”.

**How do we know that the palanquin bearers think that the bride is delicate and must be treasured?**

From the last line of each verse “We bear her along like a pearl on a string”, it becomes clear that the bride is delicate and must be treasured.

**What is the meaning of the expression “a tear from the eyes of a bride”?**

This expression hints at the mental state of the bride. She sheds tears as she is leaving her father’s home.

**What is the message in “Palanquin Bearers” by Sarojini Naidu?**

Through this poem, Naidu conveys an interesting message to readers. It concerns how precious a bride is for the palanquin bearers. They feel blessed to bear her.

**What does the phrase “brow of the tide” mean?**

This phrase refers to the upper portion of a tide. “Brow” means the summit or peak. It is also a reference to an eyebrow. Hence, this phrase can be interpreted in two ways.

**What do the palanquin bearers want to mitigate?**

They want to mitigate the bride’s sadness as well as her weariness by singing the song.

**Do you think the palanquin bearers are sensitive to the presence of the bride?**

They are indeed sensitive to the presence of the bride. She is a pearl for them that they are given to take care of.

**Where are they carrying the palanquin?**

They are carrying the palanquin to the home of the bride’s husband.

**How does the poet describe the movement of the palanquin?**

The poet describes the movement of the palanquin by comparing it to a beam gliding over a stream.

**What purpose do similes serve in the poem “Palanquin Bearers”?**

In this poem, similes are used to describe the delicacy, softness, and embalming beauty of the lady.

**Why does the poet refer to bridal laughter and bridal tears?**

The poet refers to the bridal laughter as well as her tears in order to depict the state of a bride’s mind. She is happy to begin a new journey. Besides, she feels sad to leave her home for the first time.

**Why do the palanquin bearers say they carry the palanquin lightly?**

They carry the palanquin lightly as the passenger sitting inside is like an invaluable pearl for them.

**Why do the palanquin bearers feel privileged?**

They feel privileged to carry the bride. Along the journey, there is none from her family to take care of. Only the bearers are there to protect, cheer and take care of her.

**What does the poet mean by “lips of a dream”?**

The lady is as transient as a dreamer’s laughter. Before marriage, she brought a smile to her parent’s faces. After marriage, her presence will bring a smile to her husband’s face. In this way, she floats like a peal of laughter from one’s face to another’s.

**For what purpose were palanquins used in the past?**

Palanquins were used for transportation in the past. Newly married brides, kings, and queens travelled to faraway places by palanquins.