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A POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF SAROJINI NAIDU'S POLITICAL
RHETORIC (1915–1918)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the platform oratory of Sarojini Naidu, an eminent Indian politician and poet from the early to mid-twentieth century. What follows is a brief inquiry into the complex feministic nature of a woman who functioned as the representative for all Indian women due to her presence in the public sphere as, first, a poet and, then, a nationalist leader. Yet there are questions to be asked about her life and prose writing. In her platform oratory, what types of arguments did Sarojini Naidu employ to campaign for gender equality? I analyze the ways Sarojini Naidu transitioned from her status as a poet to that of a politician, a nationalist, and a platform orator by studying records of her speeches her from a postcolonial feminist perspective. I begin with a symptomatic account of Naidu's poetry and her transference into the independence movement. Then, I discuss Naidu's role as a jingoistic feminist by engaging with representations of feminist platform rhetoric to probe how she persuaded her audiences to believe that female equality was a necessary precursor to the independence of India. In the final section of this essay, I consider the conclusions and inferences that can be drawn from this thesis, as well as pedagogical implications in terms of future research.

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Introduction

Sarojini Naidu: An Indo-Anglian Poet and Rhetor

As long as I have life, as long as blood flows through this arm of mine, I shall not leave the cause of freedom. Come, my general! Come, my soldiers! I am only a woman, only a poet. But as a woman I give to you the weapons of faith and courage and the shield of fortitude. And as a poet, I fling out the banner of song, and sound the bugle-call to battle. How shall I kindle the flame which shall awaken you men from slavery!

—Sarojini Naidu¹



Figure 1 "At Dandi, April 5, 1930" (from *Sarojini Naidu: The Traditional Feminist* 1998)

1. Quoted in P.E. Dustoor, *Sarojini Naidu*, p.4.

Orator, poet, feminist, and nationalist, Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) was an Indo-Anglian born in Hyderabad during a critical time of India's history. Going against cultural norms from a young age, Naidu—a Brahmin by birth—had an inter-caste marriage in her late teenage years to a man of lower social status and a medical doctor, Muthyala Govindarajulu Naidu. She played a key part in securing India's independence from Britain, was one of the chief formers of the Indian Constitution in 1947, and was also known as the "Nightingale of India" because of her frail figure and poetic verse. She was given multiple epithets of which "The Nightingale of India" was merely one: others still were "The Wandering Singer," the Indian "Joan of Arc," "The Indian Judith," and the "peace-maker." Using English as her primary medium through which to communicate, Naidu stirred the hearts of her country-fellows and those abroad through her prose and poetry.

In this honors thesis, I will analyze the ways Sarojini Naidu transitioned from her status as a poet to that of a politician, a nationalist, and a platform orator by studying several specimens of Sarojini Naidu's platform oratory to ascertain what can be gleaned about her from a postcolonial feminist perspective. I will begin, in chapter 1, with a symptomatic account of Naidu's poetry and her transference into the independence movement. Then, in chapter 2, titled "Critical Question—Naidu's Rhetorical Stratagems in Public Oratory," I will present the query that propelled this research in its entirety and dissect the following question: In her platform oratory, what types of arguments did Sarojini Naidu employ to campaign for gender equality? In chapter 3—"Sarojini Naidu's Platform Oratory and Feminist Approach"—I will first examine Naidu's role as a jingoistic feminist; then, I will engage with specific illustrations of her feminist platform oratory in order to disinter the rhetorical strategies she employed when presenting a cultural paradigm shift in an attempt to persuade the masses that female equality was a necessary precursor to the independence of India. In the final chapter of this essay, I will discuss the conclusions and inferences that can be drawn from this research, as well as theoretical and pedagogical implications for future study.

Born in February of 1879, Sarojini Naidu had a privileged, if wholly different, upbringing from other Indian girls of her time. Her younger brother, Harin Chattopadhyaya relates in his autobiography, *Life and Myself*, “Our parents had done everything to make us feel that life was one fluent process of rainbows and fancy happenings” (qtd. in Sengupta 11). Whereas other girls did not have the opportunity of having a structured educational curriculum, Naidu’s parents ardently encouraged their children’s literary and linguistic achievements. Regarding her own mastery of English, Naidu relates, “I was stubborn...and refused to speak it. So one day when I was nine years old my father punished me—the only time I was ever punished—by shutting me in my room for a whole day” (22). After this episode, she would later claim that she surfaced from the chastisement “a full blown linguist” (qtd. in Lokuge 116.) Much of what she learned early on about feminism was through her parents, specifically her father, the founder of the eminent male-only Nizam’s College in Hyderabad. Later, he helped found Osmania College, the all female counterpart to Nizam’s College. Dr. Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya, Naidu’s father, was a staunch advocate for women’s education and economic freedom (Sengupta 15). He would hold “huge courts every day in his garden of all the learned men of all religions—Rajahs and beggars and saints and downright villains all delightfully mixed up, and all treated as one” (Naidu, *The Golden* 14-15). Thus, Naidu’s childhood home undoubtedly had an effect on her own convictions and sentiments about tolerance and equality. In her own words, her family’s residence was “a home of Indians and not of Hindus or Brahmins” (qtd. in Sengupta 22). Everyone was welcome, regardless of religion or caste, with her father sitting “in an easy chair with a host of friends surrounding him” (19). Seeing her parents employ existing cultural conceptions as a way of ushering in novel ideas and practices instead of allowing their culture be a means of constraint, this could indeed be why Naidu chose to have an inter-caste marriage and supported Hindu-Muslim unity later during her political activism.

Naidu’s love for public speaking and oratory was initiated during her childhood. The oldest of seven children, she would regularly stand in front of her siblings and hold their captivated attention while

telling stories: “They would sit around her, gaping and wonder-eyed at her beautiful flow of words and magic manner of rendering a story” (61). Although she had gotten some practice as a child, when giving one of her first public speeches, someone remarked, “She kept looking at her notes...and she told me that she felt nervous. When she got up to speak all nervousness vanished; she spoke without consulting a paper for an hour, and took the house by storm—there was thunderous applause” (47). Naidu’s immense passion for the causes she advocated for throughout her political career—emancipation of women’s education and equal rights, brotherhood between Muslims and Hindus, and Indian independence—always shone through whenever she stood in front of an audience. This passion, paired with her poetic ability and sensitivity to her listeners, enraptured her audience every time.

Sarojini Naidu began her literary career at the age of eleven, which began as a sort of haven from the trouble she was then experiencing. She once recounted the humorous advent of her poetic faculties and exclaimed:

One day...I was sighing over a sum in Algebra; it wouldn’t come right; but instead a whole poem came to me suddenly...From that day, my ‘poetic career’ began. At thirteen, I wrote a long poem *a la* ‘The lady of the Lake’—1300 lines in six days. At thirteen, I wrote a drama of 2000 lines, a full-fledged passionate thing that I began on the spur of the moment, without forethought, just to spite my doctor, who said I was very ill and must not touch a book. (qtd. in Dustoor 2)

This passage aptly exemplifies Naidu’s character—passionate, fervent, frolicsome. Although her disposition to illness kept her bedridden for days on end throughout her lifetime, she persevered and continued to write poetry and later, persistently worked towards what she felt were her national responsibilities as a female citizen of India. Considered a legend even during her own lifetime due to her poetic prowess, Naidu received public acclaim long before she joined the political arena.

As is evidenced by the epigraph that opens this chapter, Naidu considered herself foremost a poet, and secondarily a politician. For the first half of her life, poetry was her central focus, and she experimented with rhythms of Indian folk songs in order to create a harmonious effect in English; she learned how to interpolate rhyme into the text of her verse—not merely as an embellishment for the words, but as a necessary feature to advance the flow of her lines. Naidu’s mastery over internal alliteration is also shown in her poem titled “Coromandel Fishers” found in *The Sceptered Flute*: “No longer delay, let us hasten away in the track of / the sea-gull’s call. / Sweet is the shade of the coconut glade, and the / scent of the mango grove” (6). Her poetic acumen paved the path for Naidu becoming one of the most celebrated English language poets among her contemporaries.

An accomplished poet, Naidu oversaw the publications of her three volumes of poetry, all of which were published in England: *The Golden Threshold* (1905), *The Bird of Time* (1912), and *The Broken Wing* (1917). Her last book of poetry, *The Sceptered Flute: Songs of India*, which she had composed before immersing herself in political life, was published posthumously in 1958. Since the modernist movement was being ushered in when Naidu was at the peak of her poetic career, her poetry did indeed belong to a preceding time; some critics even dismissed her, claiming that she was simply imitating Victorian styles and was a sentimentalist, both ideals that many considered dated at the time. Nissim Ezekiel, however, a critic of Naidu’s poetry, was quick to assert that it was through no fault of her poems that they lost favor by some, but that “it was Sarojini’s ill-luck that she wrote at a time when English poetry had touched rock-bottom of sentimentality and technical poverty” (qtd. in Ghose 28). Others still, praised her poetry: in a 1905 issue of the *Indian Ladies Magazine*, it was written that her “poetic thoughts are beautiful, the language is charming. We welcome this new volume with great interest” (qtd. in Sengupta 59).

Primarily, she wrote her poetry during the late 1800s and early 1900s, after which she turned her attention to the political cause for independence of India, although she still sparingly wrote poems at

times. Thus, she did not fully divorce herself from her poetry. She perhaps used her political influence to promote her poetry; notes taken by an individual hired by the British government to track Naidu's activities during her 1929 trip to the United States reveal that during the lecture given by Sarojini Naidu at Scottish Rite Hall in San Francisco, she made it clear that "she has two obsessions, her poetry and the glories of the house of Chatterji (that being her family name). Little by little we heard more of her poems, at first these tiny brain-children peeped timidly from behind her skirts, but becoming bolder, soon occupied the center of the stage" (qtd. Archival Research British Library). Her love and desire for her poetry to be widely read never truly left her. She did not want her mark to be erased from the poetical arena just yet. Scholars, Meena Alexander for instance, propose that Naidu simply abandoned writing poems due to the caustic nature of her last poem, "The Temple," which was published in the volume titled *The Broken Wing*. Alexander claims that in this poem

the poetic self is in the grip of a sexuality so atavistic that desire equals destruction. Effectively, there were no more poems...The confrontation with the sometimes tragic bonds of her own culture empowered her psyche, permitting it to attack the public bonds laid down by the colonizing power. (60)

Others scholars still claim that there was inauthenticity to her poetry due to her poems imitating a Western style, which she counteracted by the candor and genuineness exuded in her political oratory (Brinks 173). According to Chandani Lokuge, Naidu valued three major tenets that guided her life—"Romanticism, internationalism and overriding both, the deepest patriotism" (Lokuge 117). Thus, Naidu turned her attention to the political sphere and devoted herself fully to her country, where she could have her "living voice" heard all over India.

In 1895, at sixteen years of age, Naidu left India for the first time when she was sent to England on a scholarship where she first studied at King's College in London and then later at Girton College, Cambridge University until 1898. It was in London that she became acquainted with Arthur Symons, the

Decadent fin de siècle poet and a member of the London-based Rhymer's Club who wrote the introduction to her second book, *The Golden Threshold*. He said of her in the prelude:

They hint, in a sort of delicately evasive way, at a rare temperament, the temperament of a woman of the East, finding expression through and under partly Western influences.

They do not express the whole of that temperament; but they express, I think, its essence; and there is an Eastern magic in them. (10)

With her poetry, and then later her prose, she functioned as the link between Indian and English—Western—cultural, social, and literary elements. Usually garbed in her flowing, brightly colored saris, she was neither a product of the East or the West, but of both combined.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Naidu began to feel a pull in the direction of political activism. At this time period in India, civil unrest increased at an unprecedented rate. Since she had been exposed to a large network of people through her poetry, she had met with many of the future leaders of India and had been asked to speak at public gatherings even before she officially joined the independence movement. The emphatic response she had received in England due to her poetic competency caught the attention of nationalist leaders such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale, an eminent founding member of the Indian independence movement (Arora 98). She started her public oratory while she was in the throes of childrearing and writing poetry. Acutely cognizant of the injustice and inequality against women and the need for unity in order to achieve an integrated India, Naidu began to travel throughout the country. Already well known for her poetic ability, she was asked to recite a nationalistic poem entitled, "Ode to India," at the Indian National Conference in 1904. She exclaimed in anguish, "Mother, O Mother wherefore dost thou sleep?/. . .Waken, O slumbering Mother, and be crowned" (qtd. in Sengupta 48-49). This address marked the start of Naidu's inauguration into the political sphere.

Chapter 1

Critical Question—Naidu's Rhetorical Stratagems in Public Oratory

Two hands are we to serve thee, O our mother, / To strive and succor,
cherish and unite; / Two feet are we to cleave the waning darkness, / And
gain the pathways of the dawning light / ...One heart are we love thee, O
our Mother, / One undivided, indivisible soul, / Bound by one hope, one
purpose, one devotion, / Towards a great, divinely-destined goal.

—Sarojini Naidu²



Figure 1 "Sarojini Naidu" (from *The Bird of Time* May 1919)

2. Quoted in Sarojini Naidu, *The Bird of Time*, p. 89.

The advent of Naidu's political career signaled the commencement of the plethora of speeches she would make throughout her lifespan. Yet there are questions to be asked of her life and rhetoric. For Naidu, women's participation in national politics was imbricated with female equality and freedom for their nation against the British Raj. This thesis will attempt to study the declamatory strategies and rhetorical tactics she employed in order to achieve this end: in her platform oratory, which she was greatly dependent on to voice her causes, what types of arguments did Sarojini Naidu employ to champion women's rights?

Background of the Critical Question

When studying Sarojini Naidu, scholars such as Elleke Boehmer, Melissa Purdue, K. Venkatachari, and B.S. Mathur have tended to gravitate towards examining her poetic ability, and, as a result, her poetry has been the main scholarly focal point in the past. Scholars, from recent decades, however, such as Chandani Lokuge and R. Das Gupta, have written about Naidu's role in the Indian independence in relation to her poetry. Still very few scholars have studied Naidu's skills as an orator. In almost any academic article or book written about Naidu, the scholars mention her ability as an orator without fail: they speak about her "wittiness," or about how her mere presence would encapsulate her audience, but seldom do they delve deeper into the rhetorical gradations.

A excess of questions unfold as one begins to explore her speeches: How was Sarojini Naidu able to overcome the many challenges presented to her as a political orator? Being female, as well as Indian, presented its own set of hurdles as Sarojini Naidu began her career as a public speaker. Did she establish to her audience credibility before she began speaking through virtue of her poetry? Did the support she have from well-known British writers of her time (such as Edmund Gosse, A. Rogers, Arthur Symons) help her in securing the respect and support of the general Indian public, or did it create a barrier between her and other Indians? She was a Brahmin Hindu who worked for the abolishment of the caste system, so she did not have to face any opposition from Hindus based on religion, but how was she able to garner the

support of Muslim leaders and scholars of the time? How did she maneuver her words and ideas so that she was able to encourage the Muslims— young students and community leaders—to put their religious differences and decades of rivalry with the Hindus aside? While Sarojini Naidu is better known for her poetry in the literary and academic frameworks, her political rhetoric also warrants close analysis.

Although she roused both the men and women of India and effectively served as Mahatma Gandhi’s mouthpiece on certain occasions, her role in the independence movement is nearly ignored. She was close to Gandhi in proximity as well as in friendship. V.V. John discusses in his essay, titled “Sarojini Naidu: Her Way with Words,” about her memorable relationship with Gandhi:

The one person who was really able to help Gandhiji to relax and enjoy a joke was Sarojini Naidu. She was herself a unique human being with a fund of amusing stories and could say the most outrageous things without giving offence. It was she who nicknamed Gandhiji “Mickey Mouse” when he was at the height of his fame...Sarojini was the only one who, so far as I remember, could joke with him on his views of *brahmacharya*, chastity...Behind all this apparent irreverence was her abiding faith in the quality of grace that Gandhiji brought into the life of this nation. (9)

This excerpt highlights not only Naidu’s good-humored camaraderie with Mohandas Gandhi, but also her involvement in the independence movement. She was one of the central figures who helped India achieve its independence, but her role as such has nearly been forgotten. In literary studies also, she was studied for only a few decades after her death, but that interest, too, soon waned. As Neela Saxena, literary scholar, tells us, “Recently, while I was in Hyderabad, the city where Sarojini was born and lived most of her life, I went around the bookstores quite sure of easily locating her works, but I was astonished to find not a single work in any of the college bookstores” (76). Saxena further continues to say that the storeowners were quick in trying to sell her European poetry books instead.

Could it be that Naidu's prominence in the Indian nation is not remembered anymore, or is it perhaps that her work for the nation is not deemed to be so important? Even in the West, when one thinks of the Indian independence movement, the central figure that immediately comes to mind is Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nonviolent crusade. Sarojini Naidu's contributions are scarcely acknowledged although it was she who brought thousands of women to Gandhi's (salt) "March to the Sea," to make salt from seawater and defy British rule, who encouraged them to take part in the national cause. When Gandhi was taken to prison on April 6, 1930, he gave Sarojini Naidu full leadership over the campaign. He further stated, "She is capable of being Viceroy" (qtd. in Morton 157). Indeed, he would have utter and complete confidence in her faculties as she had previously proven herself to be an adept leader as the President of the Indian National Congress in 1925 (and later the governor of the state of Uttar Pradesh in 1947). Not only was her resilient governance known nationally, but she was also lauded for her duties internationally. In an American newspaper article in 1926, "the ten leading women of the world" were listed, and "among the first...was Sarojini Naidu" (147).

Having been one of the most celebrated women of her time, it is somewhat surprising and curious, however, that feminist and rhetorical scholars have not extensively studied Sarojini Naidu, especially when she has so much to offer to those respective fields. Even postcolonial feminist scholars, such as Meena Alexander and Melissa Purdue, have not ventured into exploring Sarojini Naidu as a rhetor, but have only focused on Naidu as a nationalist, or feminist poet. Simply judging by our contemporary political surroundings in the twenty-first-century United States, we have not yet had our first female president, but India, a third world country, a nation that was unfairly deemed to be "exotic" and "backwards" in previous centuries by Westerners, managed to produce an exemplary, educated, cultured woman president—Naidu—who helped India out of the throes of colonialism in the early twentieth century. It was principally through Sarojini Naidu's oratory finesse that she was able to change the hearts and minds of many during her tours throughout India and convince thousands to join the

political cause for independence. So why is it that her political rhetoric has not been the cause for analysis in the West as of yet? She was a woman who fought for women's equality in her home country, who fought for their education, voting rights, and presence in the political arena, who irrevocably altered the framework of Indian politics so that a female could make executive decisions, but still she has not been recognized as being one of the chief torch holders for feminist thought and action. Even in the United States and the Western countries, her platform rhetoric and significance as an orator have been disremembered although she caused quite a sensation on her 1928 trip to America. Anupama Arora argues in her article, "The Nightingale's Wanderings: Sarojini Naidu in North America," that Naidu "was a savvy, accomplished, and cosmopolitan woman who was bound to attract attention on her North American tour" (91). And engender attraction she indubitably did: "Americans looked wondrously upon the fifty-year-old woman in a sari, waxing eloquent about America, reading evocative poetry in English and denouncing British colonialism all with the same energy" (100).

As mentioned earlier, her poetry, as opposed to her political rhetoric, has nonetheless been the subject of academic and literary discourse in the West as well as in India. Although a select few literary critics considered some of her poems to be passé, her poetry was largely well received due to their merit and her writing in an English medium instead of her native languages of Bengali or Urdu. Since Naidu quickly rose to prominence because of her poetry and then her political activism, Indian publishing houses began recording transcripts of her speeches during the 1910s, but her lesser collection of prose still remains very difficult to obtain. Several years after her death in 1949, Naidu's official biography, written by Padmini Sengupta, was released in 1966. Since this was the most conclusive account of Naidu's life, after this book was published, many Indian and Western scholars began studying Naidu's poetry and writing about it critically. This interest in Naidu's life continued approximately until the 1980s, after which articles written specifically about Naidu in relation to literature began to diminish. Now, remarkably enough, just within the past couple of years, there has been a resurgent interest concerning

Naidu's place in literature. However, the angle through which scholars are approaching her writing has changed. No longer are they interested in her poetry (as it has already been analyzed exhaustively): the focus has currently changed to address Naidu in relation to politics. Still, although scholars have started studying the effects of her poetry on her political agendas, no one has yet begun to study her exemplary skills as a platform rhetorician.

This lack of scholarly discourse concerning Naidu's political oratory comes as unexpected and wholly surprising, however, judging by the positive critical acclaim her speeches received during her lifetime. Not only was Naidu a well-recognized speaker, she was esteemed because of her ability to inject pathos into her speeches and move her audience emotionally by educing an affective response. V.V. John recounts several reactions to her speeches as president of the Indian National Congress:

On the public platform, she was the most enchanting spellbinder in an era of veritable spellbinders. It was the heyday of Indian political oratory...hearing Sarojini's poetic and impromptu presidential address...moved the audience to tears...As was her usual practice, she spoke without notes...Those who have heard Sarojini Naidu testify that there was nothing contrived in her speeches, for enticing the audience. Her spontaneity was a marvel. A friend of mine told me once of his attending a convocation...where Sarojini Naidu was to give the formal address. Talking to the senate members just before the convocation procession formed, Sarojini dismayed everyone by casually exclaiming, "Lord, what am I going to say to these young people!" My friend told me that, despite all the repute of the distinguished guest speaker, his heart sank within him at the prospect of threatened improvisation. But his dismay was shortlived. Once the speaker started, he was enthralled. He said to me that he had never been thrilled and amused, by turn, as he was that day. (qtd. in *Sarojini Naidu—Some Facets* 10-11)

Acknowledged as a fine orator, Naidu sought to gain legitimacy within the assumptions created of her by others. She ensured that she continually gave her “best to India” even if her audience could not always “understand, appreciate, respond to one’s best and finest giving” (qtd. in Paranjape 99).

Response to the Critical Question

Through this essay, I will extend the current model of study and focus on the challenges Naidu had to face as a political rhetor at such a vital time in India’s history in order to answer the central analytical question this thesis poses—What kinds of methods did Sarojini Naidu employ to advocate for women’s rights in her oratorical discourse? Although Sarojini Naidu delivered an unrecorded amount of public, political speeches on a wide array of topics, ranging from Hindu-Muslim unity and student involvement in the national cause to eulogies for passing colleagues and inspirational addresses about the purpose of life, I have chosen to analyze just three speeches that focus exclusively on women’s rights and equality.

In the chapter that follows, I will discuss the ways Naidu could, if indeed she was, be considered a feminist and how her perspective on female equality shaped and instigated her platform rhetoric and dialogue with her audience. Then, I will examine specific examples of her addresses in order to illustrate the distinct strategies Naidu employed when persuading her diverse spectators that female equality was an essential feat Indians had to undertake.

Much of the research for this paper was done through library research and archival research from The British Library in London. My methodology or approach for analyzing Naidu’s platform oratory will be through the perspective of postcolonial feminist theory. Since collections of her prose are not readily available, I have found only two books have reprinted collections of her speeches: *Sarojini Naidu: Great Woman of Modern India*, the first half of which is a record of some of her addresses, and *Speeches and Writings*, which documented her speeches from the years of 1903 to 1920. The speeches that I use to analyze her political rhetoric in this essay come from this compilation. For the purposes of this thesis,

then, I will conduct an analysis of Sarojini Naidu's rhetoric through a postcolonial feminist reading by specifically concentrating on her speeches about women and their rights.

Chapter 2

The Nightingale's Platform Oratory and Feminist Approach

They expected me to fit their notion of what an Indian woman should be, a timid woman, a modest woman, a jump-on-to-a-chair-at-a-mouse woman who had come to learn from them. But Sarojini had come to them as a free woman.

—Sarojini Naidu³

Sarojini Naidu—An Indian Feminist?

Before beginning to understand Naidu's speeches about women's equality, it is vital to first recognize her position on feminism and women's liberation. Although she was a staunch advocate for women's rights and equality, she did not consider herself to be a traditional feminist as defined by Western standards. At the time when the suffrage movement was reaching its apex in the West—specifically in the United States and Great Britain— during the early 1900s, Naidu went to great lengths to dissociate herself from the principles of feminism. She would insistently declare, "I am not a feminist" (qtd. in Banerjee 49).

Hailing from a nation that was still under colonial rule, Naidu's position on the right to vote was different than the feminist contemporaries of her time because she stressed that Indian ideals were paradoxical to the Western concept of feminism. Naidu once asserted during her 1928 trip to the United States that, "Our customs and culture and religion differ from yours" (50). Banerjee further elaborates Naidu did not think it was necessary to have "a separate woman's movement nor did she believe in arbitrary division of work between man and woman but 'each should do the special work for which he or she is fitted'" (49). While in England the right to vote would signify equality for women, in India, it

3. Hasi Banerjee, *Sarojini Naidu; The Traditional Feminist*, p. 54.

would not alter the unjust circumstances surrounding women because, there, the majority of women were not even interested in political advancement, let alone progressing to the struggle for voting rights. In the United States, The suffrage movement as done in the West did not apply to Indian women; their struggle was different than that of women in the West: their fight was for equality, for men to acknowledge and value the roles that women play in their everyday lives, and to give them complete social and political rights. In response to a news correspondent, she once said, “There it is a empty word suggesting a foreign ideal...What we are fighting for is not vote but a social and intellectual existence equal to, while different from man” (58-59). She was vying for equality, in every social sphere that Indian women took part in. She also considered the political struggle for freedom synonymous to the women’s cause. She felt that neither could exist without the other. She claimed that without the women, the men could not achieve independence for India alone:

When you are ready to have the citizen army...when you are ready to send our sons for the defense of the Empire, when you are ready to stake your life and your wealth and all that you hold dear for the freedom of India, you should remember that you are accepting half the responsibilities for India’s future in trust...Remember that in all national crises, it is the man who goes out, but it is the woman’s hope and woman’s prayer that nerves him—nerves his arm to become a successful soldier. (qtd. in Sengupta 153)

She desired women to be seen as fairly matched to men in terms of intellect and societal aptitude, but also that females should not be stripped of their womanhood, was the crux of her feminist paradigm for Indian women.

Constantly alluding to the traditional, mythical female figures of Sita, Savitri, Gargi, and Damayanti in ancient Hinduism, she tried to appeal to the male leaders’ sense of justice when demanding from them to return to the Indian women their rightful status as “part possessors and co-trustees of the life-blood” (qtd. in Banerjee 64). She expressly mentioned these goddesses because they were celebrated

in Hindu tradition as being dignified, loyal, devoted wives and women who prevailed and showed honorable courage and wisdom in times of adversity and suffering. Naidu called for the women of India to emulate their exemplary standards, to be leaders and gain back their birthright, to emulate “their devotion and patience—Savitri’s courage to follow her husband to the gates of death or Sita’s sacrifice in the wilderness of the forest” (85). Naidu strove to make the ancient archetypes a reality once more:

In days of yore, Indian men possessed real men who honoured women and spared no pains to raise them to their level and make them helpmates...What sort of men do we have now? They are not men at all. They can be called the degenerated descendants of ancient heroes. (qtd. in Banerjee 21)

Naidu felt that India could never truly be free until men and women worked together without depriving the other of their rights. A proponent of the conventional family structure, she repeatedly emphasized that women were hearth makers and that the home “is women’s natural sphere” (50). Banerjee explains that Naidu was opposed to all ideas that led to division or unnecessary conflict between women and men. She further continues, “She was all in favour of stability in married life. Sarojini believed that in Indian tradition a woman’s sense of self is identified with the family. And a stable family always attracted her” (105). As a mother of four children herself, although Naidu was greatly involved in the independence movement, she prioritized her responsibility as a mother and wife. Writing to Gandhi from Genova in 1928, she entreated him to counsel her daughter, Padmaja, in her absence:

You have given me a task to do in far off lands, and the whole nation has endorsed your mandate, I am giving you a duty to fulfil at home in which I cannot ask the entire nation’s assistance, though I can certainly count upon its sympathy! I am not so anxious about Padmaja’s physical health, but I am desperately anxious about her. She has come to a very difficult corner of her spiritual pilgrimage in which no one can help her, except you or I. (qtd. in Paranjape 206)

While traveling across the nation and internationally giving speeches, she took her role as a homemaker seriously and made time to entertain friends regularly. Her biographer, Sengupta, notes, “Indeed, Sarojini’s soirees, which she held throughout her life, did remind one of French *salons*...All were welcome and all her friends dropped in. Delicate eats—samosas, singaras, sweets and cakes were for ever circulated, and cups of tea passed around; and there in the midst of the audience, Sarojini would reign supreme—laughing, extending her cheek to be kissed...retorting either with asperity or laughter—a figure forever to be remembered!” (121).

Although Naidu was a promoter of the idea that women should tend to the domestic sphere, she considered this only one of their many responsibilities. (She herself shouldered the duties of being a mother, housewife, poet, orator, social reformer, and politician.) Naidu concomitantly realized that if men were infringing upon women’s rights for education and equality, then women should protest to regain what was rightfully theirs: She was vehemently opposed to the purdah (outer covering of the Muslim women) being used as a form of an internal covering on women’s thoughts and voices. About this practice, she once stated, “The purdah system did not mean that there should be a purdah on the soul also” (qtd. in *Speeches* 204). She repeatedly emphasized that for the “amelioration of a country the co-operation of both sexes is necessary” (qtd. in Banerjee 36). According to Naidu, the women were to be the ones who would lead India forward in its quest for independence.

A Representation of Naidu’s Feminist Public Oratory

In this section, I will provide an analysis of three different speeches that Sarojini Naidu delivered to Indian audiences over the course of her political career. These addresses have been taken from the only known collection of Naidu’s oratory from the years of 1903 to 1919, titled *Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu*. The discourses that I have chosen to examine are focused around the theme of women’s

rights and equality. The section that follows shows a representation of Naidu's platform rhetoric and how it relates to the quest for women's emancipation.

“Unlit Lamps of India” 1915, Gunter, India⁴

This speech was given in July of the year 1915 during the time that Sarojini Naidu was travelling throughout India encouraging its citizens to join in the struggle for independence. Although we cannot know for sure, since this talk was given in a college hall, we can speculate based on the information given that this speech was given to a relatively large audience. Naidu begins the speech by thanking her audience for the “truly fraternal welcome” (48) and saying that she was honoured by the initial reception given to her. Through her opening statement, it is shown that not only did she immediately engage with her audience, but that she also leveled herself with the spectators.

Following this brief introduction, she directly transitions into the crux of her argument—the reality of womanhood. She says, “I have learnt to feel that this generous and spontaneous welcome that awaits me wherever I go is not at all a personal tribute but stands as a symbol of what the womanhood of India represents” (48). She aligns herself with all the women of India and then uses her already established ethos as a reputable speaker, leader, and educated woman to assert that she was just one representation of Indian womanhood. She then continues to make the first point of her speech and provides her audience with examples of women in different places in India who embody the epitome of what it means to be a woman:

Go to Bengal and there you see women with great spiritual ideals...Go to Bombay...do you think there is a single house where it does not survive in the richest vitality, all those living ideals that make the names of the women in our country and literature so immortal.
(48)

4. All direct quotations in the following analysis have been taken from *Speeches and Writings*.

By citing the names of certain cities, Naidu unifies Indian women as one entity and further references to the past days of glory, when Indian civilization was at its pinnacle.

Following a sequence of logical progression, after emphasizing that the women of her time were on par with the ideal of womanhood as exhibited by mythological Hindu figures, she continues to her next assertion, in which she claims that men have become obstacles in the way of women being similar to the likes of Sita or Savitri and that there was “not a single home in the length and breadth of India, no matter rich or poor, where womanhood is not as great to-day as” (48) it was in preceding times. She first establishes common ground with her audience on a concept or idea that they already agree with, thus she uses her resource of previous knowledge about Hindu religion. This way, she caters to her audience, knowing that the spectators (especially male audience members) will be able to resonate with examples that are found in their religion and that they revere themselves. By aligning women with the religious figures of female epitome, Naidu positions her next argument in a way that would make her audience question their previously held convictions about the status or responsibilities of women.

Although scholars have not identified the intended audience for this speech in terms of sex, much of the time, Naidu directly addresses men by imploring them to fulfill their responsibility towards women: “It is your duty which you have not recognised to fulfill the task of giving the women those very opportunities which you yourselves had, which are necessary for their equipment, to fully realise all these hidden virtues that lie within their souls.” Again, Naidu once more tries to draw a comparison between female mythological figures and the women of that time. Here, it is also important to note that not only does Naidu ask for equal rights, but she frames the opportunities in terms of them being an imperative. She asserts her recognized authority as the representative for the women of India.

She then continues and merges spirituality with womanhood. First, she euphemizes the “glory of Greece” and the “grandeur of Rome” and implicitly states that they withered because of a lack of spirituality. Thus, by having previously associated womanhood with spirituality, she implies that both of

the empires fell because women were not able to fulfill their responsibility. Whether or not she believed this, we cannot know for sure, but for the purpose of her speech, it functioned as an effective rhetorical strategy. By linking her messages to underlying moral principles, the allusion to other once great empires may have elicited some sort of affective response—hesitance, anxiety, or fear—from the audience, as she placed the burden of responsibility on men. Naidu likely manipulated her knowledge and the lack of the audience knowing the nuances of the demise of these ancient countries. She knew that although her audience had likely heard of Greece and Rome, they did not have an in-depth understanding of the subject; therefore, she is able to successfully persuade her audience.

Once she implied that women are linked with spirituality, she explicitly declared that it is women, and not the men, who keep a country functioning productively. She asserted to her audience that it was because of the women's "spiritual comradeship" and her tending to "the family fire" that any country is able to reach great heights. After emphasizing why women need to be educated and given the same rights as men with different examples, Naidu then transitioned into another mode of reasoning:

Make themselves capable of realising their higher ideals and then it will certainly be never said that our women are backward. They are backward because they have not the lamps to light, not a flame to kindle because you will not give them what is called the daily oil—the opportunity that that brings that flame to the lamp. (49)

Here, if there was any question of it before, it is shown that Naidu's primary audience is men, and she makes it clear that since it was men who took away their right, it is their responsibility to give it back to women.

By metaphorically binding women with light as she does in the passage quoted above, Naidu further implied that India was currently in darkness. The darkness alluded to might have also referred to India being under the shadow of British colonialism. By using this metaphor, Naidu highlights that the effect of men's constraints on the women was not just local, but global: in actuality, it could have been

the reason why India was under colonial rule in the first place. Such a poignant *implicit* accusation could have been the way in which Naidu employed pathos in her speech—by engendering fear and challenging preconceived notions that her male listeners may have had.

With all of these examples (Greece, Rome, Sita, etc.) Naidu manages to make them conducive to her general argument of trying to persuade the audience to give women similar opportunities as men. She ends her address by referencing to John Ruskin's 1849 essay, "The Seven Lamps of Architecture," in which the author wrote about the requirements that good, aesthetically pleasing architectural designs must be conducive to. Just as she had done previously with her allusion to ancient empires, she weaves this metaphor seamlessly into her speech as well: "But I do not know of any that is more symbolic than the "Seven Lamps of Architecture" (49).

Initially, when she introduces Ruskin's writing, she does not elaborate or explain to her audience what the seven lamps originally represented. Perhaps this is because she expected her audience to have previous knowledge of the subject, or that she did not deem it to be relevant to the context of her speech, because she then continues to highlight to her listeners that in their country, there were "seven hundred thousands of lamps in the architecture unlighted" that *they*—the menfolk— had refused to light. By extending Ruskin's symbol of lamps and light to all Indian women in general, she again appropriates the blame for the present condition of India on the men. Just as the "Seven Lamps of Architecture" illumine the whole civilization of the," she argues, "think of the dazzling illumination that shall light the whole world with a conflagration and radiance that cannot be quenched when the 700,000 lamps in our national structure are lit for the glory of humanity" (50).

Perhaps knowing that she might encounter resistance from her audience, in order to make sure her comparison was a concrete one, Naidu counted herself among the seven hundred thousand women. She says, "I am only one lamp of clay. But there are thousands of lamps of gold hidden away for want of opportunity." Trying to convince her audience of the worth of her fellow women, she attempted to

minimize her feats and accomplishments by crying, “Let me beseech you not to be content with such small ideals as are represented by any successes that I may have achieved”(50). In an effort to articulate to her listeners the magnitude and significance of her request, as she concludes her speech, she joins the cause for female equality with nation building. She reflects the sentiments of women and their shared struggles and desires. Through her words, she unites the independence of India with the emancipation of women and frames both in such a way that concludes that neither can be achieved without the other’s success. She says, “It is only in your hands to give the illumination and it is only by that illumination that we can wake up our sleeping Mother” (50). With her concluding statement, Naidu employs pathos and directly addresses her audience.

As shown previously, her assertive address seems to be focused towards the men in her audience, and more generally, all the men of India. Here, if there was any doubt of it before, Naidu goes beyond her light chastisement that she employed throughout her address, and now pointedly addresses the men, thus adopting a fearsome, intimidating stance that is conveyed to her audience. Through this speech, it is shown that Naidu is holding the men responsible for the plight of India and of women, and further, holds high expectations by giving them a chance to rectify their past mistake before it is too late.

“Indian Women’s Renaissance” 1915, Pittapuram, India⁵

Sarojini Naidu delivered this speech to a primarily female audience at an Indian Ladies’ Club in 1915. The Indian Ladies’ Club—the venue for this speech—was created as a joint effort between European and Indian women and did not discriminate women based on caste or age. Since the full text of the speech is not recorded or available, the following constitutes an analysis of the extracts that were documented in *Speeches and Writings*.

5. All direct quotations in the following analysis have been taken from *Speeches and Writings*.

In contrast to the first speech that I examined, this address is a direct discourse towards women. Naidu begins this talk by immediately thrusting responsibility onto Indian women. She asserts, “The time is ripe when not men but women themselves should learn to recognize the sacred and inalienable trust and responsibility of their womanhood, in shaping the destinies of the country” (51). The word *sacred*, as she uses it in this context, refers to the female mythological figures discussed previously. She begins by stressing that it is the women’s job to take charge of their own lives, to take back what is rightfully theirs, their inheritance that was given to them by the Hindu goddesses. Women themselves, she implies, have squandered this trust, and thus she begins this speech with a somber note.

But that she immediately begins with an urgent request to her audience illustrates her hope for reformation. She conveys to her audience that although they have not formerly taken part in the national cause, they still have another opportunity. Then, she transitions into uttering the most forceful and arresting words of her address: “I say that it is time for us all, women of India, to awake, whatever our race, or caste, or creed, or rank in life, to awake and grasp the urgency of the situation...” Since she had already been involved in the independence movement for several years by the time this speech was made, Naidu’s audience clearly knew that she was one of the principal leaders of their nation, and thus respected her authority and credibility on matters concerning nation building. Whatever she claimed, they would believe. Only because of her established standing, was Naidu able to proclaim, “I say” without needing any external support from another revolutionary individual. By likening females’ want of understanding to not being awake, Naidu portrayed an image of slumber or blindness that seemingly could only be reversed if women realized the importance of fulfilling their obligations to the nation. Although her proximate audience was contained to those who were in the vicinity of hearing her speech, she was addressing a more general audience as she calls to all the “women of India.”

Naidu, likely having predicted the diversity of the types of women who frequented the establishment before delivering her lecture, made a fitting remark when she, in an effort to find common

ground with the women's club, appealed to women regardless of any differences. She conveyed her message in terms of an experience that the women were already familiar with. In doing so, she united all Indian women in one "sacred" cause. Since Sarojini Naidu had already proven her ethos, she used this resource to her advantage and further declared that it was time for the women of India to "awake and grasp the urgency of the situation, the immediate need for of adequate and equal co-operation, and the comradeship in guiding, moulding, sustaining and achieving those lofty and patriotic ideals that thrill the heart of every generation, and in whose fulfillment lies the noblest destiny of man" (51). Although previously it might have seemed that she asked women to accept complete responsibility for the national cause, in this instance, she expounded on that thought, saying that women and men should cooperate and be comrades in assuming this obligation together. She also referenced to a greater cause, to the "noblest destiny of man," to exalt or attach greater significance to her entreaty. By continuously implying religious or spiritual insinuations throughout her speech, perhaps Naidu was attempting to align the cause for independence and women's equality to divine injunctions.

After establishing her goals for the women of India, Naidu cogently moved into her next course of action—showing that it was indeed possible for women to start shouldering some responsibility on behalf of their country. Since the prospect of asking women to alter the framework of Indian culture may have seemed a daunting or even impossible feat to some women, Naidu counteracted that in the succeeding portion of her address by reminding her listeners that what she has enjoined upon them was a communal effort:

I...do bring you a message of awakening from the women in other parts of the country, north and south, east and west, from the women who may, indeed, be separated from you by difference of language and creed and custom and even race, but who are essentially one with you in all those imperishable realities of life that make them co-inheritors with you of common duty and common devotion in the service of the citizens. (51)

By mentioning that women in different parts of the country were also involved in the awakening of India, Naidu makes the task seem more manageable and feasible. Again, just as she had previously done, she emphasized that the differences in caste, creed, or race were not relevant to the independence movement. Naidu made a radical contention staying true to her progressive nature, one that was not readily accepted at the time due to the strict adherence of most Hindus to the caste system. By highlighting this point, it is shown that she was making an attempt to usher in novel ideas and thought processes for the betterment of the country.

In this speech, Naidu did not precisely refer to a specific course of action that she asked her audience members to engage in. Instead, Naidu skillfully highlighted the necessity of women dynamically participating in the changes that were happening in their country so that they could, in turn, be active agents, instead of merely passive receivers: “The time is ripe when not men but women should learn...” (51). She called for a mental, cognitive shift in the thought processes of women so that they would realize that each of them was part of the larger framework of society, no matter their differences. The exigency of the deficient response or action from the female sex likely prompted Naidu to deliver a speech of this kind in order to convince women that it was indeed incumbent on them, as citizens of their nation, to contribute to public service so that they could free themselves of the shackles of society.

“A Vision of India’s Future Women” 1918, Punjab, India⁶

Sarojini Naidu delivered this lecture at the Kanya Maha Vidyalaya College in Punjab, India, during the year of 1918. With this speech, Naidu begins with a direct address to the spectators by declaring that they were her “Punjabee friends” (206), and, as a result, creates a sense of familiarity and intimacy with her audience by referring to them as her companions. Through doing this, she manages to

6. All direct quotations in the following analysis have been taken from *Speeches and Writings*.

set the tone for her lecture and puts the audience at ease. Instead of adopting the conventional top-down hierarchical model for this speech, Naidu chose to align herself with the audience and formed an affable bond with them from the outset. Then, to support her claim of being closely linked with the people of Punjab, she refers to a certain sight and custom that her audience is familiar with and that is particular to their province when she says, “You have all seen in your cities...the wandering singer with a stick on his shoulder with two bundles tied on its each end going from city to city singing his songs” (206). Ensuing from this image, she interjects herself into the example in an attempt to show the audience that she, too, is no different than the wandering singer they are accustomed to seeing: “I stand before you to-day as a wandering singer like that with all my possessions carried in my two bundles—one with a little bundle of dreams and another a growing bundle of hopes” (206). Sarojini Naidu effectively humbles herself to her audience, ultimately removing any form of imposition from her persona and assuming a seemingly relatable approach by likening herself, a reputable political figure, to the meagerly position of a wandering singer.

She continues to expound on her comparison and states that she goes from city to city with a different dream for each town to achieve: “I, too, am going from city to city and like him too I have always something to dream about every new city that I visit” (206). Naidu generates anticipation and excitement in her audience as they can deduce that she has come to the Punjab with a dream for them, too. She assures them that her dreams and hopes have not been for naught and that they “have not always proved shattered illusions but they have come some time as realised hopes too” (206). Although she has not yet revealed her hopes for her audience, she emphasizes that no matter what it is, it will be achievable, no matter how arduous the task may seem to be.

Advancing from the local context, Naidu then takes a more global approach and unites Punjab’s shared goal with the national cause:

To-day we in India stand upon the verge of destiny, a glorious destiny. (*Cheers*)... This is no mere nightmare, no mere poet's dream, but the dawn is already in sight, the glorious dawn that would lit up the eastern sky and fill it with light. (*Loud Cheers*). (206)

As opposed to the other two speeches studied in this essay, this address is the only one that gives any description of audience reactions and response. Again, as shown in the analyses of her other two speeches, Naidu employs a rhetorical strategy in which she aligns the ambitions that she highlights in her speeches to notions that hold more cultural or social weight or significance to her audience such as coupling women's emancipation with Indian independence. In this instance, she links the individual objectives of each city to the greater framework of the national cause, and the audience favorably responded to her suggestion as they cheered with ardor at the prospect of Indian independence.

Naidu continues with her address and provides her audience with further illustrations of the ways in which her dreams for other cities have been fulfilled: "When I think of the great Maharashtra I dream not of the glory of the Peshwas, not of the clashing swords...but I see and think of Fergusson College of Poona with its noble band of professors working" (207). Instead of attaching value to historical occurrences, Naidu places contemporary educationalists in high regard and adulates them by allegorically considering them to be modern day warriors. She then briefly transitions into a discussion of the ancient ideals, but only to provide a point for comparison and to highlight that the true success of the cities is due to the colleges and learning institutions that they have founded. She says that the higher education facilities are the ones that "hold up all that is noblest and purest in our national life" (207). By elevating education and colleges in her speech, this must have undoubtedly resonated with her audience as she was delivering this address at an all-women's college campus. By giving the college due regard and commending what they were associated with, she continued to gain their support. In terms of logical progression, within the context of her speech, Naidu still has not told her audience what her dream for

their city is; she has hinted at it, but by first recognizing the work they have already done for progressing India, her audience becomes more receptive to her words, as is evidenced by their applause and cheers.

Once she garnered her listeners' attention, she transitioned into her aspirations for Punjab, which she phrased in the form of a question: "But what is the dream that I dream here in the Punjab?" (207). Judging from the collection of speeches in *Speeches and Writings*, Naidu did not habitually ask rhetorical questions as a means to engage with her audience. In this instance, she seems to use this question to distend the suspense created from her earlier words. And then, as her audience waits to hear what her vision is for their city, she says, "My first vision of the Punjab has been this cloister, this sanctuary, this stronghold of the women...and I would never forget their kindness and their welcome" (207-08). Naidu had earlier in her address extolled women for all that they had done in terms of developing education in India, but now, her speech takes a personal note. She says that she would never forget their courtesy and goodwill towards her, repeating her earlier sentiment of considering these women as being her "Punjabee friends" (205). Being careful not to give unnecessary praise, however, Naidu balances her approval by aptly confronting the reality of the situation: "Had I said that the school was an ideal one in every respect, I would be paying not a tribute but sound its death-knell. Imperfections it has, but it...is true to the past and yet alive to the modern conditions of life" (208). Through this statement, she introduces the idea that there is further work needed to be done for women's education.

In this speech, Naidu employs the rhetorical tactic of first articulating an argument and then countering it so that her position is well supported with evidence. To illustrate, she says, "We often hear, not without a taunt, that the education of girls has been...a failure. It could not but be so...We have produced exceptional women and brilliant women too, not because of the present system of education but in spite of it" (209). Likely aware that she might have faced resistance to the current method of education for females, she responds to that opposition by claiming that even with limited resources, dedicated educators were able to produce intelligent thinkers. Still, she realizes that a reform of some sort was

essential to the progression of national education due to the changing times and the rise of the independence movement. She proposes, “If we want to reconstruct our educational system it must be along the course which would continue to preserve the best traditions of the East and West” (209). By incorporating both India and the West into her speech within the same sentence, Naidu emphasizes to her audience that both methods had an equivalent amount of weight. She then elaborates on her vision for the projected schooling system for Indian women: “Our standard of education should be a normal average. Not that one of our women should be pointed out with admiration as a wonderful and a brilliant woman for her culture and attainments, but rather people should point out with horror at an illiterate woman in India” (209). Finally, Naidu clearly states what her vision or hopes are for the state of Punjab. Although she previously did hint at it, she culminates her discussion of her dreams in this section.

As she concludes her speech, Naidu begins to talk more generally about women in India and their role in the cause for nation building. She asserts, “Remember that woman does not merely keep the hearth fire of your homes burning but she keeps also the beaconfire of national life aflame” (210). Although Naidu frames this declaration as a reminder, as something her audience was already conscious of, it could well be the case that this was the first time they were presented the idea of women serving as torchbearers for the national cause. By citing it as a reminder and not a novel thought, Naidu emphasizes it indirectly and poses it to her audience as something that had been previously accepted to counter any form of resistance that could have possibly arose. Another rhetorical strategy that Naidu employs at the end of this speech is repetition of preceding imagery in order to link her different points together coherently: “To-day, we who dream dreams of the coming women of India have our hopes centered around institutions like this, (*cheers*)...Friends to morrow again I shall face forth as a singing wanderer with my two bundles of hopes and dreams” (201-11). Ending her speech with what she originally began with engenders a sense of predictability that her listeners had come to expect and helps them understand the logical progression of the argument. Since they had heard these phrases before, they had their

response at the ready, which is made evident by the passionate cheers that are recorded. To effectively end her address, Naidu makes use of contrasting statements in order to overtly accentuate the ideals that she supported.

She staunchly declared that her hopes, and hopes of all Indian women, center around “not the institutions that only slavishly imitate men’s college but the institutions that would send forth to the world women not merely brought up and fed in the dry pages of lifeless works but rather women trained in the beauties and necessities of life” (210). She further proclaims, “These women would go forth not bearing the burden of dead knowledge but culture transmuted in the service of humanity” (210). By juxtaposing these dissenting positions with each other, Naidu attempts to gain her audience’s approval by listing three unfavorable references to the traditional androcentric method of schooling and offsetting it with constructive references to the work that the women’s college was engaged in. Through this strategy, Naidu manages to add strength to certainties she would have otherwise stated. With these lines, Naidu also establishes herself as one with her audience with using the words “our hopes,” and further connects with her listeners by emphasizing their shared struggles and desires. For her closing statement, Naidu strives to ensure that the desires she had voiced in her address would not be forgotten: “But never, never shall I forget this institution of yours which is destined to take its legitimate place in the history of the regeneration of India with the promise...of the high ideal that it stands for. (*Loud and prolonged cheers*)” (211). By staging an agreement of sorts and immortalizing the institution at which she was relating her speech, Naidu extends to her audience the same opportunity: they, too, should be careful not to forget their shared hopes and dreams and lead India towards “a glorious destiny” (206).

Conclusion

Always a Poet: Sarojini Naidu as The Wandering Singer

You will say...that after all I am a poet, rhapsodizing in my usual way...but I have never rejoiced so greatly before that I am a poet and that the lily wand I carry in my hand opens all doors to my knocking... “gates of brass shall not withstand one touch of that magic wand”...I am so particularly grateful that all the groups of men and women I specially wish to reach, in a more personal association than is possible in public meetings, so not wait for me to approach them, but do me the delightful honour of seeking me out themselves.

—Sarojini Naidu⁷

As is evidenced from the epigraph that opens this chapter, Sarojini Naidu considered herself primarily a poet, even long after she was immersed in the Indian independence movement, and it was through her poetic “magic wand” that she was able to rhetorically persuade her audiences throughout India and abroad to support the national cause. She could adeptly weave lyrical metaphors and expressive allusions that would resonate with her audience and that they could unreservedly relate with. Her own practice after hearing a political speech was to “always carry away the memory of some fervent and stirring words of exhortation to dedicate my life to the service of India” (qtd. in Banerjee 31). Through the addresses analyzed in this thesis, it is shown that she attempted to do the same for her audience when promoting ideas about women’s emancipation.

It is shown from the three representations of her speeches that Naidu molded her addresses to her audiences’ knowledge base and expectations. In order to ground her authority, she would recurrently recall her journeys to other cities in India to exemplify to her audience that she did indeed have the ethos to propose novel dogmas and thoughts to better the Indian nation.

One may ask the question of what family life was like for a woman who was so immersed in the Indian independence movement. It can be inferred that because of her constant traveling and unfaltering

7. Quoted in Makarand Paranjape, *Sarojini Naidu—Selected Letters, 1890s to 1940s*, p. 213.

dedication to the political arena, her marriage may have suffered as a consequence. Did she truly have a loving and supportive domestic life? Her husband, M. Govindarajulu Naidu was a medical doctor by profession and Sarojini Naidu a political activist for most of her life. Was the spousal relationship full of marital bliss or inner turmoil? Current research rarely alludes to her family life except when speaking of her breaking caste sanctions at the time of her marriage. Some scholars do hint at the inevitable collapse of her marriage due to the radically differing interests between husband and wife; others still suggest that Naidu might have had an emotional affair with a younger Indian man who was zealous about politics. Whatever the truth may be, although she appeared poised in the public sphere and impeccably executed her responsibility as the sole representative for millions of women, her immersion in the national cause must have indeed taken its toll on her in another aspect of her life.

The implications of this research include curricular and theoretical applications in women's studies, rhetorical studies, and politics, as well as prospective discussion of her achievements as an international woman who revolutionized platform oratory in India. Here, we have a contemporary female who originated from a third-world country and was a spokesperson for feminist concerns despite the fact that she resolutely sought to dissociate herself from the prevailing feminist ideology. By creating a separate feminist platform through her public oratory, Naidu established to the West that the Indian women's struggle was different than theirs so that the plight of the East would not be minimized and overshadowed by preponderant Western thought.

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ACADEMIC VITA

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Education

B.A., English. Psychology Minor, Expected Graduation December 2014, The Pennsylvania State University, Schreyer Honors College, University Park, PA

Honors and Awards

- High school valedictorian
- Dean's List: all semesters
- Mitchell Kunkle Honors Scholarship—Fall 2014
- L. Slepetz Frank Trustee Scholarship in Liberal Arts—Fall 2014
- Penn State Discovery Grant for Undergraduate Research—Summer 2014
- Lighthouse Trustee Scholarship in Liberal Arts—Fall 2013 and Spring 2014

Professional Experience

Leadership Experience

Vice President and Secretary, Muslim Students' Association, 2012—2014

Penn State University, University Park, Pennsylvania

- Revived an organization that had relatively no presence on the Penn State campus
- Planned and executed events with over three hundred people in attendance
- Organized weekly meeting and agendas

Teaching Experience

Peer Tutor in Writing, 2013—Present

Penn State Learning, University Park, Pennsylvania

- Assess the skill of writers from a range of different academic and ethnic backgrounds
- Guide students through various steps of the writing process: brainstorming, drafting, editing, revising
- Assisted students with resume building and personal statements
- Helped students develop and hone their writing skills
- Sent faculty feedback and information regarding students' tutorials

Teacher's Helper, Gudith Elementary School, 2012

Woodhaven-Brownstown School District, Brownstown, Michigan

- Helped struggling third grade students with math and language arts studies
- Spent one-on-one time with students helping them understand material

Learning Coach/Homeschool Tutor at Michigan Virtual Charter Academy, 2011—2012

Brownstown, Michigan

- Provided instruction to a fifth grade and eighth grade student
- Organized weekly and daily lessons
- Monitored students' progress and learning
- Communicated with supervisors from the school
- Guided students through the various processes of learning

Editing Experience

Student, ENGL 417: The Editorial Process, 2014

Penn State University, University Park, Pennsylvania

- Created a comprehensive style sheet for an article from *The New Yorker* with rules for capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and house style
- Learned the skills needed for copyediting, manuscript editing, and proofing
- Gained a strong understanding of surface errors, grammar, and style

Managing Editor and Editing Intern, The Dangling Modifier, 2013—2014

Penn State Learning, University Park, Pennsylvania

- Edited, updated, and restructured archived and current articles on the web journal publication
- Supervised new interns
- Reviewed articles for publication
- Managed email and effectively communicated with writers
- Organized group meetings to help the group accomplish set goals

Staff Editor, Lyceum: A Fine Arts Journal, 2012

University of Michigan—Dearborn, Dearborn, Michigan

- Edited writing and art submissions from students
- Learned the computer-based editing system