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Madisyn Staggs
Morehead State University

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From Poet to Activist:

Sarojini Naidu and Her Battles against Colonial Oppression and Misogyny in 20th-Century India

Madisyn Staggs

Morehead State University

(Morehead, KY)

Growing up as a Brahmin before marrying into a lower caste, Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949) was defying India's sociopolitical norms long before she was well known.¹ During her early days of marriage, she turned her lifelong passion for poetry into a career, rising as a world-renowned poet by the early 1900s. After a few years of writing peaceful lyrics, Naidu could no longer ignore the chaos of the British empire's oppression occurring right outside her home, so she suspended her poetry career and dove into political activism. Her reputable status as a published poet drove diverse crowds to listen to her speeches and watch in wonder as she, defying the period's gender roles, stood by Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) through his nonviolent protests and began taking prominent leadership positions in political bodies. Despite her early fame and numerous accomplishments throughout the twentieth century, however, Naidu's name remains unknown to most of the modern world. This needs to change, as Sarojini Naidu deserves to be recognized, appreciated, and remembered for her poetic journey, her social and oratory skills, and her political involvement.

1. Ranjana Sidhanta Ash, "Two Early-Twentieth-Century Women Writers: Cornelia Sorabji and Sarojini Naidu," in *A History of Indian Literature in English*, ed. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 130-131.

Born to a Bengali poet mother and a polymath father with connections to the Nizam of Hyderabad, young Sarojini Chattopadhyay grew up in an intellectually affluent environment.² Her family gave up the restrictive nature of the caste system, opting instead for more inclusive, unconventional choices like allowing Naidu and her sisters free thought, action, and a comprehensive European-style education.³ Despite her initial reluctance to make English her new language, Naidu quickly became a fluent child prodigy, so she was sent to England to study.⁴ She attended multiple colleges, but finding no interest in them, she returned to Hyderabad without a degree, where she instead focused on improving her poetry after encountering esteemed mentors and later married Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu even though their different social statuses brought disapproval from her family.⁵ After having four children, Naidu's poetic career officially began when she published her first book, *The Golden Threshold*, in 1905; and while she dabbled in politics as well, it was not until her meeting with Gandhi in 1914 that she established herself as a true activist for both India as a whole under the nationalist movement and Indian women, who were being pushed aside to appease the patriarchal nation.⁶ Neglecting her poetry for activism, she stood by Gandhi's side, fought for her beliefs, secured leadership roles, and withstood oppression until her last breath.

Although frequently neglected in scholarship, most scholars agree that Naidu was deeply influential, but they disagree on the nature of her influence. Scholars with concentrations in women's studies, like Anupama Arora, tend to focus on her women's rights efforts, recognizing her strategic connections between American women, modern Indian women, and colonialism's

2. Ash, 130; Basanta Koomar Roy, "India's Great Woman Poet Now Gandhi's Chief Adviser," *The Washington Times*, March 23, 1922.

3. Sarojini Chattopadhyay, "Sunalini: A Passage from Her Life," transcribed by Dr. Edward Marx, 1898, British Library, London.

4. Frances Kirkland and Winifred Kirkland, *Girls Who Made Good* (1930; repr., Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 26.

5. Ash, 131.

6. Ash, 131; Edward Marx, *The Idea of a Colony: Cross-Culturalism in Modern Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 58.

effect on matriarchal expectations, but failing to recognize her poetic impact. Meanwhile, historians like Edward Marx examine the constraints placed upon Naidu as an Indian woman trying to survive in a patriarchal colonial world and evaluate her literature in relation to her mandated adaptations. Even though historians are inclined to more comprehensive perspectives on Naidu, they frequently fail to see the depth of her impression on Indian history and culture today. English scholars like Javed Majeed and Ranjana Sidhanta Ash discuss her poetic career and its relation to her public life – also overlooking her broader significance – and there are more divided views on Naidu among these academics, especially regarding her stability in her opposing commitments. Intellectuals siding with Majeed believe Naidu, while venerable, struggled to manage her multiple identities and intentions, which they see clearly in her writings. On the other hand, those with Ash’s view commend her strong sense of balance, pointing to the maintenance of her romanticized private life during her rise as a skilled orator as evidence. Even though everyone agrees Naidu was an accomplished, successful woman, they all fail to see the greater connections between her poetry, oration, feminism, and nationalism. Therefore, this paper will examine all aspects of her public and private life in order to prove her balance and skill as a multifaceted revolutionary of her time.

The first part of Naidu’s life demanding respect is her poetry, most notable for her willing acceptance of feedback that allowed her to adapt her style and led to her growth as a unique and distinguished writer. Naidu began writing at a young age and quickly attracted the attention of British poets Edmund Gosse (1849-1928) and Arthur Symons (1865-1945). When she was sixteen, Gosse mentored her, providing constructive criticism for her work.⁷ While she stayed in his home, he said her work did not reflect her Indian heritage and only imitated the

7. Kirkland and Kirkland, 25.

work of English poets, so she needed to write of her own country instead.⁸ This recommendation for such a stark change in her entire poetic content took more than one isolated comment to be fully received, but once Gosse wrote Naidu demanding she toss her regurgitated English poems in the trash, she rapidly accepted this criticism and followed his cumulative advice with little delay, turning away from the influences of Alfred Tennyson and Percy Bysshe Shelley and finding a sense of individuality.⁹ As a rising poet who, despite her Indian heritage, used English as her outlet, Naidu sought validation of Englishmen like Gosse early on in her career and lacked the confidence necessary to be herself, but his harsh words led to the realization that her voice was equally valid to those of her contemporaries.¹⁰ Pushing Naidu to abandon English themes led her to develop her own unique style, with her content beginning to reflect a romantic version of India's myths, fables, and legends.¹¹ Her newfound voice and freshness as a poet prompted thoughts of publishing, which opened her up to new critical audiences, triggering an introspective view into her work.

While Gosse was a more critical mentor – which was what the young poet needed in her earliest days – Arthur Symons, with whom Naidu began correspondence as a teenager and continued to exchange letters with well into her twenties, functioned as a more emotionally supportive influence, helping Naidu as she fell into a rut of self-doubt. Often referring to her writing with self-deprecating terms like “little,” Naidu expressed her concerns to Symons in one letter, saying she did not believe she was a true poet because, while she had a vision and a desire

8. Kirkland and Kirkland, 25.

9. Marx, 53-54.

10. Javed Majeed, “Political Autobiography and Life-Writing: Gandhi, Nehru, Kenyatta, and Naidu,” in *The Cambridge History of Black and Asian British Writing*, ed. Sushila Nasta and Mark U. Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 165.

11. Ash, 131.

to write, her voice was too weak and fleeting.¹² Rather than arguing with her and refuting her reflective analysis, Symons instead expressed how he believed her ephemeral lyrics hinted at her uniquely eastern temperament and western influences in a way that left the reader wanting more and feeling the Indian magic.¹³ For example, in her poem “Street Cries,” Naidu would likely see her lengthened descriptions of the setting as lacking in strength and impact. On the other hand, Symons would see her use of English vocabulary, grammar, and style to describe Indian street markets as a beautiful conjunction between Western language and her Eastern background. Feedback like this fueled Naidu’s confidence, so she began sharing her poems with the world and was eventually recognized for her majesty in both the Eastern and Western worlds. While many writers fear negative criticism or doubt positive feedback, Naidu accepted the commentary of her mentors and evolved into a more distinct and confident poet.

In addition to her criticism-driven adaptations, Naidu’s unique content, structure, and composition are worthy of acknowledgement. First of all, in her writings, she merged her Indian background with her English style to form connections across both audiences. For example, in the poem “Love and Death,” Naidu references Savitri’s conquest of death through devotion in the Indian story of Savitri and Satyavan, where she used the one request Yama, the god of death, offered her to bring her love back from the dead.¹⁴ While many Western readers were likely unaware of this brief reference’s meaning, brushing past it and simply appreciating the poem for its melodic structure instead, Naidu’s family, friends, and country would see this reference and feel a deeper connection to the poem. Her early days were marked with worry that

12. Majeed, 173; Sarojini Naidu, quoted in Arthur Symons, *Figures of Several Centuries* (1916; repr., Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 376-377.

13. Arthur Symons, *Figures of Several Centuries* (1916; repr., Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 376-377.

14. Sarojini Naidu, “Love and Death,” in *The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death and the Spring*, ed. Edmund Gosse and Sarojini Naidu (London: William Heinemann, 1912), 20.

her dedication to English as opposed to Hindi meant she had abandoned her Indian heritage and was no longer worthy of its wonders and history. As she progressed, however, she accepted her complex identity, finding a steady balance between integrating English cliches and true Indian culture throughout her writings.¹⁵

While she was taking Gosse's advice and incorporating the heart of India into her work, Naidu's style also included writing poems in various rhyme schemes, most commonly ABAB or AABB, and the frequent using of anapests, which are patterns of two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed one to create a unique rhythm.¹⁶ An example of this structure appears in line eight of "June Sunset," where words like "swift" and "wings" are stressed, but words like "of," "their," and both syllables in "wild" remain unstressed.¹⁷ While she viewed impulsive spontaneity as an essential poetic feature, it did not stop her from incorporating such advanced techniques into her work.¹⁸ Her passion for spontaneity allowed her to thrive in the present, where she kept her poems brief and condensed, but still fueled them with a subjective intensity that separated her from most of her poetic peers.¹⁹ Even though the content in all of her published collections varied, the works often shared this deep subjectivity in the form of love poems which, whether peaceful or tumultuous, were present in every collection.²⁰ All in all, Naidu's passion for Indian stories, modern love, complex techniques, and spontaneity, while seemingly unrelated, coalesced into a unique style unmatched by any of her contemporaries.

15. Majeed, 165-67.

16. Ash, 132; Ash, 133.

17. Sarojini Naidu, "June Sunset," in *The Broken Wing: Songs of Love, Death and Destiny*, ed. Sarojini Naidu (London: William Heinemann, 1917), 54.

18. Ash, 134.

19. Sangeeta Chaudhari, "Humanistic Concern in the Poetry of Sarojini Naidu" (PhD thesis, Durgadutta Chunnilal Sagar Mal Post Graduate College, 2011), ii, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

20. Ash, 133.

Lastly, Naidu's large collection of published works during a time of turmoil for her country and lack of respect for women throughout the world demands recognition and appreciation. Due to colonial racism and India's intensely patriarchal culture, it was difficult for Naidu to follow the advice of her mentors and be her true self.²¹ Supporters of Great Britain's colonization were angered by Naidu's use of poetry to convey her desire for a free India. Similarly, Indian men urged her to keep quiet on women's rights issues to maintain low internal conflicts while they fought for nationalism, so she faced social restrictions to her publications. In order to navigate the pressures to stay silent while still producing poetry, she had to compromise by not fully freeing herself, instead altering her work to please those who never wanted her to succeed in the first place while keeping her regular audience satiated.²² Her knowledge of her audience and deeper understanding of the circumstances permitted Naidu to produce successful lyrics and begin her publishing journey. While her father published her childhood poems in 1896 under her maiden name, Naidu published all of her professional works in the twentieth century, with *The Golden Threshold* being the first in 1905 and *The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death and the Spring* and *The Broken Wing: Songs of Love, Death and Destiny* following in 1912 and 1917, respectively.²³ Before she officially immersed herself into political activism, Naidu was already sharing the horrors of her time in *The Golden Threshold* with works like "To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus," in which she describes the lasting negative impact death and change were having on her people and asks the Buddha how, or if, they would ever feel peace again.²⁴ Poems like these spurred her rise to fame to the point where, when

21. Marx, 51.

22. Marx, 51.

23. Ash, 131.

24. Sarojini Naidu, "To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus," in *The Golden Threshold*, ed. Sarojini Naidu and Arthur Symons (1905; repr., London: William Heinemann, 1916), 97-98.

she later gave political speeches, poets and other artists were always the first to praise her with standing ovations.²⁵ Her legacy persisted long after her passing, as a collection of her 1920s poems was posthumously published in 1961 under the title *The Feather of the Dawn*.²⁶ In the end, Naidu's ability to accept criticism, develop a unique style, and navigate societal constraints allowed her to publish numerous works and become a world-renowned, esteemed poet. T his status is in need of restoration.

In addition to Naidu's poetic journey, her social and oratory skills hold merit, most notably her ability to connect with crowds and motivate people to action. Being a poet first, her arguments were not always spoken with pure clarity and freed from excess flowery details, but they always flowed with eloquence and her humor and resourceful nature kept the audience attentive despite the occasional obscurity of her speeches.²⁷ Naidu's rhythmic voice, paired with her charisma, captivated her audience and drew them in masses from all over the globe to hear her truth.²⁸ One instance of this poetic charisma shines through in her speech "The Hope of To-morrow," which drew a crowd of six to seven thousand people.²⁹ Repeatedly reiterating the significance of her "monotonous" striking of the note that India should be free to govern itself, she spends much of her speech coming back to the same points and questions in different words.³⁰ Her references to a historical past and her own personal anecdotes hypnotized her audience, compelling their retention of her message.

Despite her newer connections with the Western world, Naidu also used her Indian heritage to remain connected with her people, appealing to them through religious references and

25. Basanta Koomar Roy, "What Hindu Women Sacrifice for Gandhi's Cause," *The New York Herald*, January 8, 1922.

26. Ash, 131.

27. Ash, 134.

28. Roy, "India's Great Woman Poet Now Gandhi's Chief Adviser."

29. Sarojini Naidu, "The Hope of To-morrow," in *Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu*, 2nd ed. (Madras: G.A. Natesan & Co., May 1919), 150.

30. Naidu, "The Hope of To-morrow," 150.

cultural analogies, ultimately allowing her to unleash a feeling of frenzied patriotic passion among her audiences.³¹ For example, in her speech “Indian Women’s Renaissance,” delivered in Pittapuram in 1915, Naidu used the Hindu goddesses to make the idea of nationalism more sacred, thus moving her female audience to develop a more active role in revolutionary Indian politics.³² In another speech in Punjab a few years later, Naidu referred to the educated female audience members as her friends and humbled herself to avoid appearing condescending.³³ This different, more laid-back approach shows her adaptability, as the first audience would need more convincing to become politically active and this audience simply demanded a push in the right direction from a fellow contemporary to ignite their thoughts of revolution. Naidu varied her connective approaches depending on the audience with whom she interacted, and this ultimately allowed her to call a variety of groups to action with her voice alone.

Like her adaptable connections and motivation skills, Naidu was also incredibly skilled in her ability to merge her beliefs and convey to audiences the symbiotic connections between them. While a nationalist, Naidu was also a proud feminist, and she believed these concepts to be interconnected. After Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India* spurred a public relations disaster for both movements, she was sent to the United States to be India’s voice, to validate their right to and readiness for freedom, and to prove Indian women were not trapped in the primitive stages of equality.³⁴ She argued that women were the force keeping India alive and fighting, indicating that the nation would never be restored to glory without their public participation, and she

31. Ummekulsoom Shekhani, “Sarojini Naidu: The Forgotten Orator of India,” *Rhetoric Review* 36, no. 2 (April-June 2017): 149; Roy, “What Hindu Women Sacrifice for Gandhi’s Cause.”

32. Shekhani, 144-145.

33. Shekhani, 146.

34. Anupama Arora, “The Nightingale’s Wanderings: Sarojini Naidu in North America,” *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 44, no. 3 (September 1, 2009): 88-90, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0021989409342157>.

worked tirelessly to draw support for this radical idea.³⁵ Women were slightly easier to convince than men, so in her speech “Unit Lamps of India” to young men at a college in Gunter, Naidu used her reputable status and stories of Hindu goddesses and characters to elevate her fellow women and motivate the men to listen.³⁶ She then demanded equality for women, explaining to the crowd that the reason India was in darkness and lacked independence was because women were locked away and kept from social and political participation.³⁷ Seeing as men experienced the damage of British occupation firsthand, since they were the ones out working and obtaining education, they wished to be freed from the oppression as soon as possible, so Naidu gave them an ultimatum by showing how close freedom was and let them know that emancipating women was the only way to secure it. More subtly, Naidu used a similar strategy in her speech “The Arms Act.” Here, the explicit message of her speech was that Indian men should never have had the right to freely bear arms stolen from them. However, her reference to Indian men as sons and brothers of women like her, and her remark that it was a woman who was fighting for these men’s rights when they were too scared to speak, demonstrates the power she believed Indian women had.³⁸ By being an outspoken advocate for rights that would not affect her , Naidu strengthened her feminist argument that women were the powerhouses of the nationalist movement. Throughout her speeches, she always managed to connect the idea of India becoming a self-governing body with unity, whether it be between men and women, higher or lower castes, or Islam and Hinduism, and her assignment of responsibility to every individual regardless of status made everyone feel united and worthy of engaging in patriotic nationalism.³⁹ Connecting

35. Kirkland and Kirkland, 30.

36. Shekhani, 141-142.

37. Shekhani, 142-143.

38. Sarojini Naidu, “The Arms Act,” in *Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu*, 2nd ed. (Madras: G.A. Natesan & Co., May 1919), 78-9.

39. Marx, 59.

herself to her audience was one thing, but merging these numerous diverse groups through words alone shows Naidu's impressive skills in the art of oration.

While Naidu's relationship with her audience and associations between her beliefs set the foundation for her influence, it was the impact her words had among famous leaders and world powers that experiences the most underappreciation. As previously discussed, Naidu fought tirelessly for women's rights because women were expected to stay out of the public eye and suffer in silence during her time. For her speeches to be so powerful that, in spite of these limitations, her cries for full Indian independence led the British government to deny her entry into the country out of fear her words would wage war is unimaginably impressive.⁴⁰ They underestimated her before, seeing her as a mere poet, but after her passionate speeches brought thousands to the cause and brought Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the nonviolent resistance movement against British colonists in India, to her doorstep, they realized she was a force to be reckoned with. Her speeches captivated the resistance leader's attention so much that, when Naidu marched alongside Gandhi, he put her in charge upon his arrest. She accepted this responsibility, verbally motivating his followers to stand strong as his soul remained with them and there was still a war to win, even if they were not to partake in the physical fight.⁴¹ Wild, frantic cheers often followed speeches like this one, but they also accompanied her simplest words, like her quote upon her arrest: "I'll come, but don't touch me."⁴² Despite the British government's rejection of her, the Indian nationalist movement adored Naidu to the point where on one occasion, a group of Muslims, who frequently fought with Hindus, persuaded her to

40. Roy, "India's Great Woman Poet Now Gandhi's Chief Adviser."

41. Webb Miller, "Dharasana Salt Raid," in *The Gandhi Reader: A Source Book of His Life and Writings*, ed. Homer A. Jack (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1956), 249.

42. Sarojini Naidu in Webb Miller, "Dharasana Salt Raid," in *The Gandhi Reader: A Source Book of His Life and Writings*, ed. Homer A. Jack (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1956), 252.

speaking at their mosque in Thukarvar because they were so touched by her words.⁴³ Her sociability and confidence as the self-prescribed voice of her nation created a platform that stood up for the speechless and brought hope to the hopeless.⁴⁴ Overall, Naidu's social skills allowed her to build connections among people and her oratory skills warned foreign governments while being praised and desired by local movements of all shapes and sizes, and this talent warrants admiration and remembrance.

Lastly, Naidu's political involvement, in particular her connection with Gandhi, was so profound that it merits true wonder and recognition. In his autobiography, Gandhi recalls his first impressions of Naidu as she was sewing clothes for soldiers and he was volunteering in first aid and ambulance work during the First World War.⁴⁵ Impressed by her work ethic and ability to take charge, and since she was already following his nationalist movement prior to the start of the war, a camaraderie between the pair soon blossomed.⁴⁶ Her tour in America was at Gandhi's request, as India needed an ambassador and he thought she was the best equipped for such a daunting task.⁴⁷ While he originally tried preventing women from partaking in his famous Salt March protests, Naidu found a loophole, met him and his followers there, was the first to be arrested, and later criticized this matriarchal exclusion before Gandhi called for female participation in the movement a few days later.⁴⁸ In reports of the Salt March and accompanying protests, Naidu was always recalled as standing by Gandhi's side, and despite his initial reluctance to include women in his movement, he named her as his primary choice to lead the

43. Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, trans. Mahadev Desai (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1957), 461.

44. Arora, 103.

45. Gandhi, 348.

46. "Mrs. Naidu Given Nine Months for Salt Insurrection," *New Britain Herald*, March 23, 1930.

47. Arora, 89.

48. Manini Chatterjee, "1930: Turning Point in the Participation of Women in the Freedom Struggle," *Social Scientist* 29, no. 7/8 (July-August 2001): 42-43.

resistors should both he and Abbas Tyabji (1854-1936), another prominent resistor, be arrested.⁴⁹ Upon their arrests, she took the leadership role and raided the salt pans along with 2500 volunteers, where hundreds were injured by brutal policemen who bludgeoned the protestors as they held strong to their nonviolent roots.⁵⁰ Gandhi's misogyny may have prevented her prevalence in his writings, but Naidu's determination to immerse women in the nationalist movement motivated her to pursue a close relationship with him, leading to her status as one of his closest comrades. Her commitment to the cause and her persistence in educating Gandhi on gender equality allowed Naidu to make a name for herself; and although Gandhi is the one everyone recognizes for introducing the nonviolent resistance movement for Indian independence, Naidu's strength and influence during this time deserve just as much praise.

Whereas her connections with Gandhi receive the most credit, Naidu's commitment to and level of knowledge about politics despite her initial choice to stay out of them are worthy of acknowledgement themselves. Both Naidu's father and husband had professional affiliations with the Indian government, so for a while, she was unable to participate in political debates, conferences, and discussions without negatively impacting her loved ones' careers.⁵¹ Even though she continued to comment on the situation in some of her more serious poems, the political climate became too loud for her to hide from, so she risked public backlash and began learning. For example, when the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which said war would no longer be used to solve conflict, was signed in 1928, Naidu, like most, believed this was a step in the right direction, but she saw beyond the surface and warned people of economic implications hidden by

49. Louis Fischer, ed., *The Essential Gandhi: An Anthology of His Writings on His Life, Work, and Ideas* (1962; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 227; H.S.L. Polak, "Toward Dandi," in *The Gandhi Reader: A Source Book of His Life and Writings*, ed. Homer A. Jack (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1956), 239.

50. Webb Miller in Louis Fischer, ed., *The Essential Gandhi: An Anthology of His Writings on His Life, Work, and Ideas* (1962; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 228.

51. Roy, "India's Great Woman Poet Now Gandhi's Chief Adviser."

the loopholes in the agreement.⁵² In addition to her growing knowledge of policy, she also learned about political leaders, both foreign and domestic. In 1917, Naidu led a group of women to meet with the Indian Secretary of State and a British lord sent to be the Governor General in order to demand a reformation regarding the discriminatory conditions against women.⁵³ Making the knowledgeable, informed decision of going straight to the most powerful leaders, she maximized her resources in her calls for social change. Her commitment to the cause of women's emancipation and education coupled with her awareness of political hierarchies allowed Naidu to make significant progress for her fellow women.⁵⁴ Additionally, she familiarized herself with Indian history to make the point that respect and rights for Indian women was not a radical idea, as it had thrived during the ancient times, but it was a movement to restore the sanctity of the past and pave a way for a brighter future of a strong nation.⁵⁵ Historic appeals like this one enticed not only the educated political icons, but also her people as a whole, who then understood the cultural significance women's rights had with respect to India's restorable legacy. Within a few short years, Naidu went from a housewife committed to poetry to a feminist and nationalist committed to a better India .

While many of her accomplishments are talked about with respect to her mentors and partners, Naidu's achievements in the world of social change and politics merit respect in their own right and should be remembered as her own. Even while she was fighting alongside Gandhi for Indian independence, she maintained her original commitments to women's rights, eventually co-founding the Rashtriya Shree Sabha, a women's rights movement based on the ideals of

52. "American 'Myths' of India Exploded," *Evening Star* (Washington D.C.), January 6, 1929.

53. Chatterjee, 40.

54. "Mrs. Naidu Given Nine Months for Salt Insurrection."

55. Asha Nadkarni, "Eugenic Feminism: Asian Reproduction in the U.S. National Imaginary," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 39, no. 2 (March 1, 2006): 236, <https://read.dukeupress.edu/novel/article-abstract/39/2/221/2144/Eugenic-Feminism-Asian-Reproduction-in-the-U-S?redirectedFrom=fulltext>.

Gandhi.⁵⁶ She then went on to help establish the Women's India Association and the All-India Women's Conference, continuing in her journey to bring social changes for Indian women.⁵⁷ Her relentless dedication to women's rights allowed some progress to be made, but she demanded more than just societal change. Because of this and her other nationalist motivations, in addition to her accomplishments in the world of social justice changes, Naidu also took many political offices. She was the President of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee in the early 1920s, and after being initiated into the Indian National Congress, within a few years she became its first female president in 1925.⁵⁸ Making traction in the world of politics, Naidu was presidentially appointed as the first governor of the freed United Provinces of Independent India in 1947, where she served diligently until her death in 1949.⁵⁹ Because of the advances she made possible for women in India today, National Women's Day is celebrated every year on Naidu's birthday, February 13th.⁶⁰ These achievements and her posthumous commemoration reveal the impact she had on Indian politics and society as a whole. Her passion for her ideals motivated her to guide India's transformation and reformation, and, although she had friends, partners, and mentors along the way to help her achieve her goals, her ability to make these connections, her persistence, and her strength remain unparalleled and deserve the recognition and glory they have been denied for decades.

In conclusion, Naidu's poetic, oratory, and sociopolitical contributions are historical wonders deserving of studying and remembrance. Though few today would recognize her name,

56. Chatterjee, 40.

57. Ash, 133.

58. Roy, "India's Great Woman Poet Now Gandhi's Chief Adviser"; Ash, 131.

59. "Smt. Sarojini Naidu," Former Governors, Raj Bhavan, Uttar Pradesh, accessed September 21, 2020, <http://upgovernor.gov.in/cn/post/smt-sarojini-naidu>.

60. Kahekashan, "National Women's Day: Remembering the Nightingale of India on 141st Birth Anniversary," *The Hans India*, February 13, 2020, <https://www.thehansindia.com/life-style/national-womens-day-remembering-the-nightingale-of-india-on-141st-birth-anniversary-604737>.

her unique stylization of English poetry as an Indian woman was incomparable, her ability to motivate a crowd to action given her humble beginnings was remarkable, and the advancements she made for women as a whole and for herself in politics are imperative to the understanding of the nationalist movement in India and should be treated as such. Transitioning from a life with her family and poetry to one where she traveled the world pleading for justice and got arrested for her resistance was surely a struggle, but after having to conform her poetry to the standards society had for her as a woman and a victim of colonialism, she had struggled enough and was determined to make India a nation she would be proud to call home. She saw a free India and the evolution of women's rights before her death, and therefore deserves posthumous recognition for her influence on these things, not just for her poetic status, although this also fails to be honored in modern education circles. Naidu was a significant historical actor and has earned better treatment than what she has received.

About the Author

Madisyn Staggs is an undergraduate student at Morehead State University. She is majoring in History, minoring in Creative Writing, and is set to graduate in the spring of 2022 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. After she graduates, Madisyn would like to work at a museum until she becomes a full-time author.

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