

PALANQUIN BEARERS

Sarojini Naidu

About the Author

Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949) was born in Hyderabad, India, in a highly educated Bengali family. She was sent to England for university education. There she met Edmund Gosse, and showed him some of her poems. He encouraged her to write on Indian themes. Henceforth, she anchored her poetry in the culture of India. Sarojini Naidu was an active participant in India's freedom movement. She was an outstanding public speaker, and was elected President of the Indian National Congress in 1925. She worked for women's education and franchise, and campaigned against purdah. She became the Governor of Uttar Pradesh in independent India. Naidu was recognised as a major poet with the publication of her first book of poetry *The Golden Threshold* (1905).

About the Poem

This is a lyrical poem that can be read as describing a palanquin or a bride's journey in a palanquin to her husband's home. This is a lyrical poem written in the tradition of a folk song. Palanquin bearers were once familiar figures at weddings held in India. The bearers turn the dreary task of carrying the bride into a joyful experience by singing songs in harmony with their movements. The poet gives voice to what goes on in the hearts and minds of the palanquin bearers as they carry the bride to her husband's home.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN . . .

Women leaders and activists played an important role in India's national movement. They were instrumental in bringing women's issues such as widow remarriage, women's education, dowry and the need for gender equality to the forefront of India's freedom movement. Look up the following personalities and their contribution to the national movement.

1. Kasturba Gandhi
2. Kamala Nehru
3. Aruna Asaf Ali
4. Sucheta Kriplani
5. Lakshmi Sahgal



Lightly, O lightly we bear her along,
 She sways¹ like a flower in the wind of our song;
 She skims² like a bird on the foam of a stream,
 She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream.
 Gaily³, O gaily we glide⁴ and we sing,
 We bear her along like a pearl on a string.

Softly, O softly we bear her along,
 She hangs like a star in the dew of our song;
 She springs like a **beam on the brow of the tide**⁵,
 She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride.
 Lightly, O lightly we glide and we sing,
 We bear her along like a pearl on a string.

Points to Ponder

The poem brings to life a characteristically Indian theme. Naidu was adept at recreating the magic of Indian life and scenes from everyday life. She brought a distinctly Indian flavour to English poetry. Note how the poet has used quintessentially Indian images and metaphors in this poem to give it a sense of rootedness. She also uses poetic techniques that serve to highlight such themes. The metre and rhyme of this poem, for example, make you feel as if you are actually swaying with the palanquin, mimicking the rhythm of palanquin bearers.

- ¹ *sway*: to move rhythmically from side to side or backwards and forwards
- ² *skim*: to move quickly and lightly over a surface
- ³ *gaily*: happily
- ⁴ *glide*: to move smoothly
- ⁵ *beam . . . tide*: compares the movement of the palanquin to the movement of a ship on the ocean

COMPREHENSION**A. Answer the following questions in one sentence each.**

1. Who are the speakers in the poem?
2. Who is being carried?
3. What are the similes used to describe the bride in the poem?
4. Who is described as being carried 'along like a pearl on a string'?

B. Answer the following questions in about 30-40 words.

1. What do you think the tone of the poem is?
2. Comment on the title of the poem.
3. How would you describe the mood of the palanquin bearers?
4. What does the line 'She hangs like a star in the dew of our song' mean?
5. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem?

C. Answer the following questions in about 150 words.

1. Paraphrase the poem in your own words. What kind of story do you think the poem is telling you?
2. Elaborate on the theme and style of the poem.

ON THE GRASSHOPPER AND CRICKET

John Keats

About the Author

One of England's greatest poets, Keats was a key element of the second generation of the English Romantic Movement. He devoted his short life to the perfection of a poetry marked by vivid imagery, great sensuous appeal, descriptions of the beauty of nature, and an attempt to express deep philosophic questions using Greek classical legends. He published his first volume of verse in 1817, his second in the following year, the third in 1820. His third book raised him at once to the foremost rank in the highest class of English poets assuring him a place beside Shakespeare. He died of consumption in Rome in 1821 when he was only twenty-five. The faultless force and the profound subtlety of his instinct for the absolute expression of natural beauty can hardly be questioned or overlooked. This is doubtless his main distinctive poetic quality. He developed a style, which was heavily loaded with the sensuous, gorgeous in its effects, and animate. Although he did not receive favourable reviews during his short span of life, his reputation grew steadily and remarkably marking his work as the accepted standard of sensory writing.

About the Poem

'On the Grasshopper and Cricket' was published in Keats's book *Poems*. The poem is a meditation on the beauty of nature by focusing on the songs of two of its common beings – the grasshopper and the cricket.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN . . .

1. What could be the theme of this poem in view of what you have read about Keats?
2. What is a sonnet? Have you read any other sonnets in previous semesters?
3. What do you understand from the term 'lyrical'?



The poetry of earth is never dead:

When all the birds are **faint**¹ with the hot sun,

And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run

From **hedge**² to hedge about the new-mown **mead**³;

That is the Grasshopper's—he takes the lead

In summer luxury,—he has never done

With his delights; for when tired out with fun

He rests at ease beneath some pleasant **weed**⁴.

The poetry of earth is **ceasing**⁵ never:

On a lone winter evening, when the frost

Has **wrought**⁶ a silence, from the stove there **shrills**⁷

The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,

And seems to one in **drowsiness**⁸ half lost,

The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.

Points to Ponder

'The poetry of earth is ceasing never'. In the searing heat of the summer, when even birds are silent and tired of the heat, one can hear the grasshopper's song. In the dead of winter, when nights are silent and hard, there emerges the shrill song of the crickets, reminding one of the grasshoppers of the summer past. Nature never ceases to delight. Even in the harshest of conditions, nature finds a way to express its persistent beauty. This also has a metaphorical meaning. One can always find ways of retaining positivity and delight in life, even in moments of deep sorrow or personal crisis. One should never give up hope or stop enjoying the gifts of life.

¹ *faint*: lacking strength or vigour

² *hedge*: a fence formed by a row of closely planted shrubs or bushes

³ *mead*: meadow; a piece of grassland

⁴ *weed*: a wild plant

⁵ *cease*: stop

⁶ *wrought*: made or formed in a particular way

⁷ *shrill*: to utter a shrill cry

⁸ *drowsiness*: very sleepy state

COMPREHENSION

A. Answer the following questions in one sentence each.

1. Who 'takes the lead / In summer luxury'?
2. Who is described as 'never done with his delights'?
3. What is described as 'in warmth increasing'?

B. Answer the following questions in about 30-40 words.

1. Comment on the descriptions used by the poet to portray the summer scene.
2. How does the grasshopper break the reverie of the summer?
3. What effect does the cricket's song have on the listeners?

C. Answer the following questions in about 150 words.

1. 'The poetry of earth is never dead'. Comment on this line in the light of the poem's message.
2. Comment on the use of contrasts in the poem.

PIED BEAUTY

Gerard Manley Hopkins

About the Author

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889) was a leading English Victorian poet, and is widely regarded as the greatest Victorian poet of religion and nature. He studied Classics at Oxford and it was during his time here that he became a prolific poet. It was also here that he decided to become a Roman Catholic. Hopkins is best known for the use of simple yet intricate imagery in his poetry, and his experiments with poetic form and rhythm which led him to discover the 'sprung rhythm', a poetic rhythm designed to imitate the patterns of natural speech. Hopkins's style was so radically different from other poets of the time that his poetic genius was only recognised long after his death. Some of his most famous poems include 'The Windhover', 'Pied Beauty' and 'As Kingfishers Catch Fire'.

About the Poem

Through this poem, Hopkins strives to reverse traditional notions of beauty. The poem reads as a joyous celebration of the beauty of 'pied' things, or things which are not uniform but made of two colours. The poem is a 'curtal sonnet', a form invented by Hopkins himself, which curtails the poem to ten and a half lines instead of the usual fourteen lines (exactly three-fourths of the Petrarchan sonnet).

BEFORE YOU BEGIN . . .

In 'A Simple Philosophy' you read about how human greed to conquer nature ultimately leads to devastation and human tragedy. Have you come across any recent news articles or videos that reported environmental degradation or disasters that had resulted from uncontrolled human intervention in nature? Think about the news item and outline how

the tragedy could have been prevented while ensuring sustainable use of the environment.



Glory be to God for **dappled**¹ things –
 For skies of **couple-colour**² as a **brinded**³ cow;
 For **rose-moles**⁴ all in **stipple**⁵ upon trout that swim;
 Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; **finches' wings**⁶;
 Landscape **plotted and pieced**⁷ – **fold**⁸, **fallow**⁹, and plough;
 And áll trádes, their gear and **tackle**¹⁰ and trim.

All things **counter**¹¹, original, spare, strange;
 Whatever is **fickle**¹², **freckled**¹³ (who knows how?)
 With swift, slow; sweet, sour; **adazzle**¹⁴, dim;
 He **fathers-forth**¹⁵ whose beauty is **past change**¹⁶:
 Praise him.

¹ *dappled*: marked with spots or rounded patches

² *couple-colour*: two-coloured

³ *brinded*: striped or dual coloured

⁴ *rose-moles*: the poet is referring to a reddish spot found on the side of a trout (a kind of fish)

⁵ *stipple*: in painting, to mark a surface with numerous small dots or specks

⁶ *finches' wings*: multi-coloured wings of the finch, a kind of bird

⁷ *plotted and pieced*: divided into separate patches of land

⁸ *fold*: enclosure for sheep

⁹ *fallow*: land that is left uncultivated

¹⁰ *tackle*: the equipment required for a sport, or a mechanism consisting of ropes, pulley blocks and hooks, used for lifting heavy objects

¹¹ *counter*: fake or imitation

¹² *fickle*: changing frequently

¹³ *freckled*: covered with freckles, that is, small light brown patches on the skin

¹⁴ *adazzle*: glittering or shining brightly

¹⁵ *fathers-forth*: father to, or the creator of

¹⁶ *past change*: not subject to change

Points to Ponder

Hopkins lists the various 'dappled' creations of God, such as the sky, or spotted cows, which appear imperfect to the human eye. However, he subverts this idea of perfection and lays stress on the beauty in all of God's imperfectly perfect creations, while asserting the superiority of the Creator Himself. The central idea is that every being in nature has its value and its place. We may develop this idea further to a vision that acknowledges the intrinsic equality in nature and ecology.

COMPREHENSION

A. Answer the following questions in one sentence each.

1. What examples of 'pied beauty' has the poet provided in the poem?
2. What attitude does the poet adopt towards the imperfect creations he observes in nature?
3. What does this poem reveal about the poet's views on 'God'?

B. Answer the following questions in about 30-40 words.

1. Briefly comment on the series of opposites in the poem.
2. What do you think the poet wishes to convey through the use of the opposites?
3. Has the poet blended the themes of religion and nature in the poem or has he differentiated between the two?

C. Answer the following questions in about 150 words.

1. Think about some conventional notions of 'beauty'. Have they been upheld in the poem? Discuss the title of the poem in this light.
2. Comment on the first and last lines of the poem. What light do they throw on the poet's relationship with his creator?