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**A Comparative study of Charlotte Bronte's "Life" and Sarojini Naidu's  
"Life"**

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**Abstract:**

The essence of Life is in the persistence and determination of an individual; it is all about one's perception and imagination. Many poets in English have expressed the quintessence of Life in their poetry. For example, *Life* represents a juvenile and optimistic way of feeling Life. It can be seen as a rather childish and naive view of Life, far from the depth of other views, but it can also be seen as an unpretentious way of sensing the world, with all the intense and positive feelings and meaning that only the young can attribute to Life... In this paper, we are focusing on two poems entitled "Life" by Charlotte Bronte and The Nightingale Sarojini Naidu and making a comparison between these two poems. Both the poets have explicit perceptions regarding what Life is and how it is to be lived.

**Keywords:** study, Life, poetry, poems, perceptions.

**Introduction:**

I slept and dreamt that Life was a joy. I awoke and saw that Life was service. I acted and behold, and service was joy. *Rabindranath Tagore*

Since the dawn of civilization, artists of all forms have sought to express the essence of the human condition and the full range of human experience. Poetry has been one of the most common forms of expression from ancient times until now. These words have the ability to capture the abstract emotions and concrete experiences that have been part of our humanity throughout the ages. For instance, Shakespeare, in one of his famous poems called 'All the World's a Stage' an excerpt from his play "As You Like It," compares the world to a stage and Life to a play and catalogs seven stages in a man's Life: infant, schoolboy, lover, soldier, justice, pantaloon, and old age, facing imminent death. The poem suggests that each stage in man's Life calls upon him to play another role. Poetry – either in its most common form or in prose – often comprises an existentialist or philosophical content or trace.

Much poetry glosses over Life and its joys, fate, destiny, our place in the

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Universe, illusion, pain without reason, and the cruel element of Life. The specific themes vary, but to sing, to cry, or to speculate - in a philosophical form - about Life and its meaning is part of the repertoire of dozens of great writers. Many poets in English, for instance, George Herbert, Charlotte Bronte, Sarojini Naidu, Sylvia Plath, etc., have written the poem entitled 'Life.' The present paper compares Charlotte Bronte's 'Life' and Sarojini Naidu's 'Life.' Charlotte Bronte is one of the most famous Victorian woman writers. Her novels have become the classics of English literature. Bronte poured everything into her books but lived it first. That's what makes her three novels *Jane Eyre* (published in 1847), *Shirley* (published in 1849) and *Villette* (published in 1853) so electrifying. Sarojini Naidu was a poet and politician. The themes and background of her poetry were purely Indian, and she portrayed the festivals, occupations, and Lives of the Indians. Lyricism, symbolism, imagery, and mysticism are the remarkable qualities of her poetry.

In the poem *LIFE*, Charlotte Bronte encourages the reader to look beyond the immediate disappointments and appreciate the pleasures Life has to offer. The poem begins with the following lines:

*Life, I believe, is not a dream  
So dark as sages say;  
(Life, Charlotte Bronte)*

Charlotte Bronte, relating to the image of a dream, denies that Life is a dark dream, as the sages say, but she doesn't deny that Life is a dream. Life can be an illusion, a mirage of sorts- continuously running towards an inexistent pleasure/relief. On the contrary, Sarojini Naidu also mentions dreams in her poem. It seems that Life is a lovely illusion of dreams or a festival in which careless joys keep popping up. She uses it in negation.

*CHILDREN, ye have not lived; to you, it seems  
Life is a lovely stalactite of dreams,  
Or a carnival of careless joys that leap  
(Life, Sarojini Naidu)*

She says that to the people who have not lived, Life seems to be a dream. Most of us pass through Life without giving it any thought. One doesn't take time to consider whether his/her Life is going in the right direction. Another poet, Henry Wordsworth Longfellow, in his poem 'A Psalm of Life', addresses a psalmist who claims that Life is an empty dream. At the end of the poem, the speaker hopes that the reader will take heart in his assertions that Life isn't just an empty dream. He calls upon the reader to strive and achieve in spite of the promise of death.

Bronte again moves towards the ephemeral nature of Life, using the metaphor 'cloud.' She compares sorrow or gloom to clouds.

*Sometimes, there are clouds of gloom,  
But these are transient all;*

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*(Life, Charlotte Bronte)*

Bronte also uses rain to serve as a metaphor for gloom, despair, and even death. Early in the poem, she remarks that "morning rain" can lead to a "pleasant day." She adds that since rain makes the flowers bloom, we should not be gloomy or sad when the rain does fall.

*If the shower will make the roses bloom,  
O, why lament its fall?  
(Life, Charlotte Bronte)*

As the poem continues, Bronte uses the metaphor to address human concerns. At times, the rain will fall. Likewise, there will be times when humans must deal with Death. There will be times when "sorrow seems to win over hope." However, just as sunny days and blooming flowers follow the rain, hope and happiness will follow such sorrowful times. Here, I would like to quote some lines from George Herbert's 'Life,' which is based on the same theme of transience, using nature imagery 'posy.' Its attitude toward dying could also be compared to his Death. Herbert makes the title immediately obvious:

*Farewell, dear flowers, sweetly your time ye spent,  
Fit while ye lived, for smell or ornaments,  
And after death for cures.  
I follow straight without complaints or grief  
Since "if my scent be good, I care not if  
It is as short as yours."  
(Life, George Herbert)*

The posy is an emblem of his Life. Both the flowers and the day ('the day ran by') are images of transience, of the shortness of Life. This is a conventional image, going back at least to Old Testament times. The prophet Isaiah talks of 'The grass withers and the flower falls' (Isaiah 40:8), a verse quoted extensively in the rest of the Bible (for example, 1 Peter 1:24). Herbert here compares a posy's Life in time and space, and substance to his own Life as well as to Life in general.

On the contrary, Naidu thinks that gloom and sorrow are essential for growth. She considers them an important push for growth:

*Children you have not lived, ye but exist  
Till some resistless hour shall rise and move  
Your hearts to wake and hunger after love  
And thirst with passionate longing for the things  
That burns your brows with blood-red sufferings  
(Life, Sarojini Naidu)*

Naidu addresses the reader by saying that they haven't lived but merely exist. The true nature or value of Life is only discovered when one encounters and overcomes adversities. She further emphasizes having a passionate yearning, which

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leaves us restless until we triumph.

Further, Bronte incorporates 'Hope' as a vehicle that encourages one to conquer despair or sorrow. Note that spring is the season of rebirth. Bronte adds that "Hope elastic springs again." This means that hope is elastic; it can bend but will not break. Hope will spring back into action, just as the spring season will always return after a cold winter. Thus, the battle between hope and despair is explicit in the following lines:

*What though sorrow seems to win,  
O'er hope, a heavy sway?  
Yet Hope elastic springs again,  
Unconquered, though, she fell;  
Still buoyant are her golden wings,  
Still strong to bear us well.  
(Life, Charlotte Bronte)*

The idea of rain sets up the metaphor. The rain becomes a vehicle for describing gloomy weather. Bronte uses this vehicle to refer to human sorrow. The upside is that just as sun and Life follow the rainfall, hope may also "spring" back after human sorrow. In this way, the rain (or its referent sorrow) is not something to dread. It is simply part of the ebb and flow of Life and emotion: rain/sun, sorrow/hope.

The concluding lines of Naidu's 'Life' talks about a realistic view of Life, which explores its true essence through hardships. A juvenile has a naïve view of Life. Far from the depth of other views and speculates Life with optimism. But it can also be seen as an unpretentious way of sensing the world, with all the intense and positive feelings and meaning that only the young can attribute to Life.

*Till ye have battled with great grief and fears,  
And bear the conflict of dream-shattering years,  
Wounded with fierce desire and worn with strife,  
Children, ye have not lived: for this is Life.*

*(Life, Sarojini Naidu)*

She wants us to snap back from the clutches of our illusions. She says a great deal about the harsh reality of the world and how Life is to be lived through faced by numerous obstacles.

**Conclusion:**

Both the poets talk about grief and sorrows. While Charlotte Bronte gives assurance that they are momentary and short-lived and that we must fill ourselves with hope so that we can move forward, Sarojini Naidu gives us a reality check by telling that Life is full of challenges and unless we have undergone great grief and conflicts we have not lived fully.

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The poets give us an apt and clear idea about Life though they have different opinions but it is mostly because of the challenges they have faced. One had to face the death of her three sisters at an early age and the other had worked for the independence of our country; hence these differences in the way they view Life. Both of them give us an insight of Life and push us to dwell deeper.

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