

Nature in the poetry of Sarojini Naidu

DR. RAJESH KUMAR PANDIT

TEACHER,

ZILA SCHOOL DARBHANGA.

Introduction

Sarojini Naidu was one of the most outstanding figures in the pre-independence Indian English poetry. She was known as “The Nightingale of India”. Sarojini Naidu was born in Hyderabad on February 13, 1879 in a respected family of Brahmins, which had migrated, from Brahmanayan, a village in East Bengal. She was a poetess nationalist, fighter for women’s rights and nation-builder. Her ancestors in Bengal were the ‘lovers of the forest and mountain caves, and great dreamers, great scholars, great ascetics’. Her poetry seems to sing itself as if her swift thoughts and strong emotions spring into lyrics of themselves. Her mother Barada Sundari Devi had literary learning and several lyrics in Bengal to her credit. Her father Dr. Aghorenath Chattopadhyay as she has recorded was a mystic and a dreamer of exquisite dreams, a man of cast in a legendary mould, and an accentric. Her poetry is undoubtedly poetry of nature. Her love of nature is reflected even in poems which are not about nature but have a different theme. Nature is the eternal environment of man, and Sarojini looks at it with a child like, open eyed wonder. Her response to nature is the response of man in his infancy, who looked at nature, was fascinated with her sights and sounds , with her colors and odors, and is also struck with awe by her grandeur and her mystery .When Sarojini was only eleven years , she wrote her first poem ‘One Day’. From that day began her poetic art and she continued writing imitative verses. In her creative work, she revealed herself as an Indian poetess, often soaked in herself, ancient culture of her country, its tradition and originality. Sarojini’s response to nature, like that of John Keats, is

universal .She enjoys her beautiful scenes and sights, her colours, her sweet melody and fragrance. And striking pen-pictures of nature in all her pristine glory and majesty abound in her lyrics .Nature for her is a “sanctuary of peace”, a refuge from the fever and fret of the world and is often coloured by human moods and emotions. ‘The Village Song’ is a folk-lyric in the form of a dialogue between a mother and her daughter where we see that the daughter is a romantic who wants to escape from the sorrow and suffering of the real, the actual and the present into the romantic world of nature and the super-nature

“Mother mine, to wind forest i am going’
Where upon the champa boughs the champa buds are
blowing;

To the koil-haunted river-isles where lotus lilies glisten,

The voice of the fairy folk are calling me: O listen”

Besides , Sarojini was a great lover of birds. We come across common Indian birds in her poetry. In ‘The Bird Sanctuary’ we come across a long list of Indian birds that sing in the garden. Here Sanctuary of these birds, and ways and habits of each of the birds are described by Naidu. Her love for flowers can be seen everywhere in her poetry. She was deeply fascinated by the associations of the lotus in Indian mythology and arts.

As a poetess, Naidu’s thoughts and imagery are fully reflected by true Indians. She gives us Indian pitchers in English verse which have the ring of originality. The Indian of Sarojini is not the India of the god-like sahibs and object-natives, but the India, in which she lived and died. She looks at things straight with her eyes and sets down faithfully what she has seen, with perfect fidelity details. She is quick in appraising the value of local colour. She had wide knowledge of Indian birds and animals, flowers and fruits, articles of dress and decoration, kings and queens, precious stones and musical instruments.

The legend of the post provided Sarojini Naidu with themes for poems. Her poetical works include poems on Indian festivals – Vasant Panchami, Nag Panchami and Moharram and poems on Indian flowers – the red gulmohur, the fragrant Nasturtium, the golden Cassia, the rich Champak, the lovely Ashoka. She sings of the seasons of her land autumn and its sadness, spring and its joy. She recaptures the scenery around her dawn over fields full of harvest, blossoming woods in Summer sunset, in the twilight over hills, and nightfall in the city of Hyderabad.

As a lover of Indian natural scenes and spring seasons, Naidu has written two kinds of nature poems. Poems depicting seasons and poems depicting other individual manifestations of natural beauty. As she enjoys the scenes and shades of the coconut glades, the scent of the mango grove, the sands at the full of the moon, the sound of the voices she loves, the kiss of the spray, the dance of the wild foam, the flue of the Verge, where the sky mates with the sea – all these are sweet to her. She loves to go ‘where upon the champan boughs the champa buds are blowing, to the koil-haunted river isles where lotus glisten. The bulbul, the dove, the maina welcome the spring in their song.

All pain is compassed by your frown,

All joy is centered in your kiss,

You are the substance of my breath,

And you are mystic gong of death.

These poems are remarkable for emotional intensity and vitality of her poetic energy. We also find autobiographical elements in her love characters because it echoes her deep intense love for Dr. Govinda rajulu Naidu, whom she married despite parental and caste opposition. These lines of “An Indian Love Song” are filled with personal emotions:

For love shall cancel the ancient wrong and
 Conquer the ancient rage
 Redeem with his fears the memorized sorrow
 That sylled by gone age;

She also depicts the harshness and cruelty that she saw around her. She does not want that the widow should at all times be made to feel her of fin clothes and jewellery. She raises her hand to stop this harshness and cruelty. "Vasant Panchami" treats of a sorrow that is the lot of Indian widows. Death has parted a lovely bride from her lord and she I being divested of the glimmering dress and shining jewellery of her bridal days. The young widow sighs and her eyes weep as order is given to:

Shatter her shining bracelets, break and string
 Threading the mystic marriage beads that cling
 Loathe to descent a sobbing throat so sweet
 Divest her of her azure veils, and cloud
 Her living beauty in a living shroud.

Sarojini Naidu loves Indian traditions and customs. We wander with her into pomegranate gardens to watch a June sunset. Falcons feed on scented grass and the bees on Cactus gold. The koels invite us to the summer woods.

The Hindu deities were favourite subjects of her poems. She showed intimacy not only with her own great religion but also Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism. Her song of 'Radha, the Milkmaid deals with Radha's love for Krishna, interpreted according to Vaishanava philosophy. It stands for the love of human soul for God. As Mulk Raj Anand remarks about this poem, "Sarojini has transferred

love as personal desire into divine love, and given it a sense of eternity; of the Universal.”

Again it is easy to say that Sarojini is the Indian Elizabeth Browning or Keats, because one third of the total output of her poetry is about love. We do not find here the modernist naked sex, and the Freudian subtle anatomization in Naidu’s loves poetry. Her vision of love is coloured by the high Indian traditions of self-sacrifice. The poems such as ‘The Desire of Love’, ‘The Sorrow of Love’, ‘The Silence of Love’, ‘The Worship of Love’, as their titles reveal deal with the various. As she remarked about herself, “I have come so near life that its fire have burnt me.”

The colours that occur frequently are blue, green, purple, red and saffron. Her weavers are real personal, they earn their honest bread by queen, the funeral shroud of a dead man:

The maidens in her poems send their pitchers afloat on the tide and hasten away to gather the leaves of the henna tree. The red of the tilak looks beautiful on the brow of a bride, the red of the betel-nut lovely on lips that one sweet, but for lilly like the red of the henna tree. There is realism in the attitude of an Indian who sees the moon.

‘The Golden Threshold’ and ‘The Bird of Time’ are included as Folk songs and Indian Folk songs. All the pieces grouped here are not all songs sung or supposed to be sung by the folk. Both these kinds of songs are what make the folk themes. In some of them we feel the loneliness of a village girl; in others spaciousness of open places; in still others joy and sadness; wild vitality and emotions, love and veneration or the longing and despair of the Indian rural people.

Indian is the main theme in Naidu’s poetry, which is full of patriotic and nationalistic feelings. The gift of India is a poem that depicts the Indian Chivalry in the World War I, who fought and fell for the cause of the

allies. Love of motherland is a passion with her. 'Anthem of love' is deeply patriotic poem:

Two hands are we to serve thee, our mother,
To strive and succor, cherish and unite.
Two feet are we to clear the warring darkness
And again the pathways of the dawning light.

These strains occur again and again in poems dealing with pageant of Indian life or adoration of Indian heroes ancient or contemporary. In A Nutshell, her poems in actually deal with the vast panorama of India. No significant aspects of Indian life are untouched by her. In her poems we come across a cross-section of Indian society of her day from gypsies to the princess. Her depiction of India is comprehensive and realistic. She depicts with beauty, grace, love, sympathy and penetration the changing seasons, the rivers and lakes, beaches and forests, flowers and birds, men and women of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, engaged in diverse vocations and exhibiting various skills. Since she ignores the harsh and the ugly aspects of life and does not touch upon the modern industrialized life, her view of India is somewhat romantic and sentimental, though treatment is realistic. At the same time she has added "something Keats-likes in its front but perfectly pure sensuousness" Her significance and greatness as a poet of India has been acknowledged by all her biographers and critics. Notable amongst those are Padmini Sen Gupta, Tara Ali, Subrahmanyam Ayyar, P.G. dustoor, P.C. Kotoky and Mulk Raj Anand. According to Jawahar Lal Nehru, "Mrs. Naidu was a great nationalist and mighty internationalist." In fact no other Indo-English poet has sung of India with such glamour and grace, such passion and fluency, such vigour and vitality as she has done.

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