

## **Nature in the Poetry of Sarojini Naidu**

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### **Abstract**

Sarojini Naidu, a poetess with perfect knowledge of English language gained the spectacular success as the nightingale of India. She was a successful poet of early twentieth century along with being a true patriot. Sarojini Naidu looked into the locations, sounds, colours, quality and moods of nature remarkably and incredibly. She was a versatile poet and had written her poetry on different themes. Her poems project different themes like love, folk life, challenges of life and death, nature, Indian customs and traditions, but she was always inclined towards nature, specially towards spring season. The poet was particularly enticed and mesmerized by the bliss and astonishing gifts of springs. In spite of the short tenure of her artistry she had lyrical elegance, exquisite passion and enchanting melody in her poetry. Her major works *The Golden Threshold*, *The Bird of Time* and *The Broken Wing* overflow with many wonderful and picturesque beauty of Indian natural landscape.

**Keywords:** Nature, Spring Season, Indian Birds, Flowers, Romanticism

### **Introduction**

**“And Hark! How blithe the throstle sings! He, two, is no mean preacher: Comeforth into the light of things, Let Nature be your teacher.”** ...William Wordsworth

The relationship between man and nature has been an intimate one ever since the beginning of life. In the primitive age, his aesthetic pleasures and physical needs were gratified by nature. He must have appreciated the snow-clad mountains and sweet carols of various birds and must have dipped into sparkling streams and basked under the Sun.

In the Vedic age, nature was raised to the status of a deity. All elements of nature like Sky, Fire, Air, Water and Earth were worshipped as the divine powers. The Sun was prayed for repelling all evil forces and for absolving one's sins.

It was in the nineteenth century, where it was English poetry, which influenced Indian English nature poetry, the most. William Wordsworth's Pantheism, P.B.Shelley's Mythopoetic Imagination, John Keat's Sensuousness and St.Coleridge's heuristic vision influenced the Indian poet to a great extent. They began to interpret nature in terms of mankind. The Victorians and the Pre-Raphaelites augmented the process of re-orientation. English

romanticism paved a new creative ground for Indian poets. They found their critical inspiration in nature. The rich Indian landscape, radiant flowers and their colours, the murmuring rivers, the snowy mountains and the melodious songs of birds caught the imagination of Indian English poets who looked at nature with a new vision.

The scenery of nature is used only to illumine their inner world, and they seem to be emanating out of their own native tradition. Sarojini Naidu unlike Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo show any constituent view of the world in which the role of man and nature in the cosmic scheme may be defined. Their poetry is based on a philosophy, which presents God, Man and Nature in their integral relationships. Sarojini Naidu's conception of nature lacks philosophical foundation but her poems reveal a spontaneous understanding of the Indian point of view.

Though she has written poems on religion, country, women's freedom, etc. her poems on nature occupy the first place in her poetry. Even in sorrow, her nature poems glow with a touch of her suffering.

Sarojini Naidu(1879-1949) was one of Mother India's most gifted children readily sharing her burden of pain, fiercely articulating her agonies and hopes and gallantly striving to redeem the Mother and redeem the time. Her poetry is pictorial and melodious. She is rightly called 'The Nightingale of India.' She describes typical Indian scenes in her poetry. Her lyrics are full of magic and melody. Thoughts of love, nature and death form the themes of her many poems. The three volumes of her poems 'The Golden Threshold,' 'The Bird of Time', and 'The Broken Wing' published between 1905 and 1920 testify her splendid poetic achievement. The felicity and charm of Sarojini Naidu's lyrics make her the rightful heir to Toru Dutt, whom she has recalled as a lyrical poet. Dr.Naik observes: In spite of the strong romantic Century poetic diction, Sarojini Naidu speaks of bangles as 'rainbow-tinted circles.' Kashi Prasad Ghose describes the Moon as 'irradiated gem of night' in the last volume published in 1917. Till the end, she continued to sing like the song-bird, the Nightingale.

Sarojini Naidu is one of the illustrious poetesses of Indo-Anglian poetry. Her songs are in great tradition of Indian devotional literature, the literature which successfully and beautifully illustrates and explores the vedantic and Upanishadic philosophy of love, truth, peace, God, immortality of the Supreme soul, religious faith, self-realization soul, etc. But what makes her poetry charming and lively is her lyrical wealth, her spontaneous overflow of her emotions steeped in Indian, ethos and culture, the vividness of imagery, her simplicity of expression, her passionate desire for beauty, music and melody, and above all, the thrilling, imagistic-and rhythmic language. H.M.Prasad rightly holds the view:

"Sarojini Naidu writes instant poetry where images and metaphors come rolling ready on the hotplates of imagination: Her poetry is intensely emotional, at times passionate to the point of eroticism and always has a spring-like lyricism."<sup>1</sup>

Sarojini Naidu was a great poetess of Indian writing in English. She started her poetic career at a very tender age. Her poetry is not of a particular theme but of multiple themes. One of the major themes of her poetry is the Indianness or portrayal of Indian life in her poetry. While in England it was Edmund Gosse who had advised her to cultivate Indianness.

Sarojini Naidu throws light on the development of her poetic career and patriotism. Like Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, too, was more than a poet. It was as an English poet that Sarojini Naidu first caught the attention of the public, but that was only the beginning. In course of time the patriot exceeded the poet and Sarojini Naidu came to occupy some of the highest unofficial and official positions in the public life of India.

She was called as Bharat Kokila(the Nightingale of India) on account of her beautiful poems and songs. Sarojini Naidu's poems are deliberately meant to be heard rather than to read or to study. She is primarily considered as a lyric poet with the distinct feature of melody. In her poems sound and sense combine to produce an emotion like in music. She is a versatile poet, drawing the rich traditions of several Indian languages, religions, regions in her works. Her major themes are love, common life of Indian people, beauty of Indian scenes and sights, Indian traditions, philosophy of life and patriotic sentiments of Indians. She is primarily considered to be a love poet, and her love poetry explores the various aspects of love, such as love in union, love in separation, the pains of love, earthly love, sins of love, divine love, etc. Sarojini Naidu's images are stylized sophisticated. The fusion of personal emotions through Indian ethos, in a lyrical manner with vividness of imagery is major feature of her poetry.

'The Nightingale of India' has achieved spectacular success as a poetess and as a patriot. As a luminous star in the sky of Indo-Anglian literature, she scattered the light of her poetic achievement in the international sphere. She enjoyed the privilege of having a good number of wise friends and celebrated acquaintances, who quickly recognized her poetic talent and introduced her to literary circles of the west.

Her very first poem is the product of her potentiality ability of a poet that is already in her. She started her early writing when she was in England. There she was in love with the young Dr.Govinda Naidu and the poems she wrote till her marriage. With him in 1898.The poems she wrote were all love-poems, in different moods and tones. The scenery and sights of England countryside, of flowers the birds in particular. This was the sign of the romantic nature of England Literature poets like John Keats, P.B.Shelley , William Wordsworth.

Sarojini wrote her first published poem. The Song of a Dream as a college girl at Cambridge. Subsequently, she published a series of poems exhibiting a mixture of romanticism and idealism in the manner of Keats and Tennyson. The early poems show a strain of melancholy born out of loneliness, a combination of fantasy and delight and an unbelievable command over words, phrases, rhythm and rhyme- traits which would be developed to perfection in her later poems.

The English critics, Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symons, were struck by the charm of Sarojini's poems. They noted her passionate delight in the beauty of the sounds and words. However, they advised her not to be skylarks and nightingales. She was told to stir the soul of the East to reveal the heart of India to the westerners. Edmund Gosse asked her to set her poems firmly among the mountains, the gardens, the temples, to introduce to us the vivid population of her own and unfamiliar province, in other words, to be a genuine Indian poet of the Deccan, not a clever machine-made imitator of English classics.

After her return to India, Sarojini decided to confine herself to Indian themes. The next twenty years of her life was dedicated to writing poetry, fulfilling an ardent mission of introducing the exotic oriental world of beauty and mystery to the English speaking world.

Though several of her themes are light and ephemeral, Sarojini's poetry is intensely Indian. She has poetized the sights and sounds, situations and experiences familiar to us. Though she reached the peaks of excellence only rarely, for sheer variety of themes, range of even today feelings, colour, rhythm, fancy and conceit, metaphor and similies Sarojini remains unsurpassed even today.

In 1905, her first collection of poems, *The Golden Threshold* was published. Subsequently, she published *The Bird of Time*, *The Broken Wings*, *The Magic Trees*, *The Wizard Mask* and *A Treasury of Poems*.

Gandhi whom she addresses as a 'Mystic Loyus' in her famous sonnet, was to transform her from a romantic singer of life's beautiful ephemeral ties to a determined and impassioned fighter for her country's liberation. Ten years younger to the Mahatma and ten years elder to Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini entered the vortex of the freedom struggle immediately after the publication of her last collection of poems *The Broken Wing* in 1917.

Sarojini has written a variety of poems. Her poems are available in four volumes-*The Golden Threshold*(1950),*The Bird of Time*(1912),*The Broken Wing*(1917) and *The Feather of Dawn*(1961).The name of Sarojini' bungalow in the city of Hyderabad is "The Golden Threshold."

Sarojini Naidu's nature poetry rests on a less ambitious plane. The impression of novelty and freshness her poems created on their appearance was pronouncedly due to the new romantic sensibility. In fact, in her treatment of nature, she stands in a closer and more direct relationship than others to both the English Romantics and the Hindu-Sufi Mystics. Her attitude towards Nature is not muscular but meditative. She describes the scenery and spectacles of the natural world with a sense of primal wonder and joy, combined with pensive reverie and melancholy. Even her adjectival excess and hyperbolic ornateness catch the essence of the magical spell cast by nature. The individual consciousness responds to the enriching experience of beauty, harmony and meaning which permeate man's inaugural world. In describing a scene or mood of Nature, the poet imagines a situation in which the scene or mood is absent. She contrasts the presence and the absence, as though the substance and the shadow together constitute a single reality. Her lyrics thus assume a meditative sensitivity, and a strange brooding quality which draws the variant emotions of the lover into the patterns of Nature. The separation of the beloved from the joys and delights of Nature humanizes her own loneliness. The arrivals and departures of revenants, arising from the cross lights of memory and fancy, trace a pattern of the inner life. Nature is bountiful which, for the poet, finds meaning and fulfilment only in the context of the human aspiration. Man may need Nature for his sustenance, but Nature too needs man as its instrument of self-expression. The pearl is nature self distilled and self-revealed.

Man, in Sarojini Naidu's Poetry, is constantly under the impact of nature in its varying and variegated moods, responding to its flux. Nature, in its human context and men in his

natural context- These are the two themes integrated into a single unity in her poetry of all our early Indian poets of this century. Sarojini Naidu has beautifully recaptured the autochthonous response to natural environment.

**Discussions/Conclusion:**

In the end, we may say that she was a poetess not of today but of yesterday and tomorrow. Her poetic themes were not congenial poem they were elemental and eternal. She wrote little poetry but she remained a poetess. She was precluded by her preoccupation with the national struggle from pouring out her delicate songs about love and life and death. To the English reader, she is interesting, no doubt, as an interpreter of the East to the West.

Her genius was not as a roaring flame, it was a brilliant incandescence that dispelled the darkness with a warm and cherry luminosity. She once said “I sing just as the birds do, and my songs are equally ephemeral.”

In conclusion, Sarojini Naidu’s conception of nature is neither completely Wordsworthian nor exclusively classical Indian. For her, nature is a sacred, solitary retreat from the struggle and strife and conflicts of human life, a sinless Eden. It is a Mystic Brindaban as she describes in ‘Summer Woods’ where innocent lovers like ‘Krishna and Radha’ appear engrit with low voiced silences and gleaning solitudes and are ever encompassed with delight. It is a world of garden away from menacing human crowds, a place very safe for love. Nature is the external environment of Man, and the manifestation of beauty, harmony and continuity. It is a symbol of mysterious forces breaking into the emotional life of the individual as well as the race. It is a retreat from strife and conflict, encouraging solitary contemplation, and renewing man’s connection with the world.

**“Read nature; nature is a friend to truth.” ... Edward Young**

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