

TO STUDY THE HUMANISTIC CONCERN IN THE POETRY OF SAROJINI NAIDU

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ABSTRACT

The English-language Indian poet and politician Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949) appears before the spectator in the frontispieces of her first two poetry collections, *The Golden Threshold* (1905) and *The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death and the Spring* (1912). As in her oratory, she portrays herself in print as both a figure of the history of verses of the nineteenth century and a cosmopolitan nationalist. *The Golden Threshold* includes Arthur Symonds' now well-known introduction and a sketch of a young Naidu by J. Hey, B. Yeats (father of W. B. Yeats). Arrayed in a voluminous and ruffled white dress, distinctly "Western" in design, Naidu's youthful yet grave face looks squarely at the viewer with hands clasped together. As a precocious, prepubescent Victorian poetess caught in a private setting, she appears here. Yet the image, drawn during Naidu's sojourn in England in the mid-1890s when much of the poetry included in the collection was written, must have been almost a decade old when this volume was published in 1905. Her subtly shaded skin and dark hair is the only sign of an ethnic disparity in the sketch. Naidu's own ambiguous status at this time is mirrored by the blurred sketch: she is neither entirely Indian nor entirely English, and she navigates uncomfortably between the positions of a naïve student of poetry and an experienced poet.

The platform rhetoric of Sarojini Naidu indicates that, due to her involvement in the public domain as first a poet, and then a nationalist leader, she functioned as the representative for Indian women. In order to convince her audience to believe that gender equality was a necessary precursor to India's independence, Naidu used her position as a jingoistic orator. She pleaded with her audience in her speeches, using the ancient Indian form of Nyaya and other different rhetorical methods to support her points.

KEYWORDS: Rhetoric, Threshold, spectator, Arrayed

INTRODUCTION

One of the celebrated poets of modern India, Sarojini Naidu, was born in Hyderabad on February 13, 1879 (Deccan). Her parents were Varada Sundari and Dr. Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya. Her dad wanted her to be a mathematician, but instead, she became a poet. In 1890, she had her first poetic experience. When she fell in love with Govindarajulu Naidu in 1894, in September 1895, with a special scholarship from the Nizam of Hyderabad, her parents arranged to ship her to England. She saw the private release of *The Songs* the same year. She studied at King's College, London, and at Girton College, Cambridge, "between" 1895-1898, and met and also visited Italy with Edmund Gosse, Arthur Symonds, and other members of the Rhymers' Society.

Sarojini returned from England in September to India in 1898 without obtaining any degree, and in December was married to Dr. Naidu. In 1902, her first meeting with Gopal Krishna Gokhale was held. Her first poetical book, *The Golden Threshold*, came out in 1907. She addressed the Indian Social Conference in Calcutta on the issue of the education of Indian women" the following year. In 1908, in appreciation of her social work, she was awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind gold medal and attended the session of the Indian National Social Conference at Madras in the Congress pavilion.

In 1912, under the title *The Bird of Time* the second collection of Sarojini's verses appeared. In 1914, with the death of her father and Gopal Krishna Gokhale in 1915, her first encounter with Mahatma Gandhi took place. She was plunged into sorrow and mourning. She saw Pt. in 1916. At the Lucknow Congress conference, Jawaharlal Nehru, and this proved to be a turning-point in her career. Her poetical book, *The Broken Wing*, was published the following year. Thereafter, she started taking active interest in politics. As a member of the Deputation of the All-India Home Rule, Sarojini visited England in 1919.

Lokmanya Tilak created the league. Returning to India in 1920, she and some other national leaders escalated the struggle for liberty in the region. She attended court hearings for the prosecution of Gandhiji in 1922. As a delegate to the Kenya Indian Congress, she went to Africa in 1924. The following year at a Kanpur session held in December, she was elected President of the National Congress.

In 1928-1929, she was sent to the United States of America and Canada as Mahatma Gandhi's emissary. Also in November, 1929, she visited East Africa a second time. She was arrested the next year for engaging in the Gandhiji-launched Salt Satyagraha. In 1931, in order to attend the second Round Table Meeting, she accompanied the Mahatma to

London and visited South Africa as a representative of the Indian Government to study the workings of the 1927 Cape Town Agreement, in particular the mechanism of assisted repatriation of Indian emigrants to India. She was imprisoned and sent to the Arthur Roud Jail in 1932, and afterwards to the Yaravada Women's Jail, for actively engaging in the Civil Disobedience Movement. She was released along with the Mahatma on May 8, 1933. She then played a major role in the opening of Delhi's Lady Irwin College for Women. She toured the nation extensively during 1934-1937. In 1935, at the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Indian National Congress in Bombay, she served as the President of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee. She opened Champdani's Hooghly Jute Mills Workers' Conference in 1938.

In 1939, when Subhas Chandra Bose refused to serve as President on principles, Sarojini played a very important role in solving the issue of the presidency of Congress. In 1940, along with Bhula Bhai Desai and other Congress employees, she offered individual Satyagraha and court detention, following the 'Quit India' Campaign; she was imprisoned on August 9, 1942, for a third time. But she was unconditionally released in 1943. In 1944-1947, her health was stable. And she was appointed Governor of Uttar Pradesh when the country was liberated, in which capacity she continued for two years. She chaired the Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi in 1947. She endured with the country the shock of the assassination of Gandhi in 1948. She died in Lucknow on March 2, 1949, and was cremated on the bank of the Gomati River with full state honours. Her daughter, Padmaja Naidu, collected her unpublished poems after her death and published them under the title *The Dawn Feather*.

IN THE TRADITION OF INDIAN WOMEN WRITERS

While Indian English poetry written by women marked its presence with the arrival of Toru Dutt in the nineteenth century, further reinforced by Sarojini Naidu in the next century, this poetry lacked a sense of immediacy and intimacy of personal experience, despite its intensity and significance. These poets were more concerned with developing their credentials as an English-language Indian poet than with expressing their inner desire. So, they wrote mainly of Indian myth, mythology, and landscape; they relegated their personal selves and misery to the background. But with the advent of 'I,' an assertive self, in the poetry of Kamala Das, a perceptive shift was observed after the mid-sixties of the twentieth century, and this movement continued to gather strength with Mamta Kalia, Eunice de Souza, Sunita Jain, Lalitha Venkateswaran and Shree Devi. Apart from the lilting romanticism of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu, this new race of female poets are

poles-the new generation's literary world is more true and vivid, even if it is ugly on the face of it. These contemporary poets are not those who are exposed to the barest bones to cover their guilt and pain behind some mask or personal feeling. It is through this constant revelation that these poets find their own! " -Their innate force. "This 'I' is no longer a male prerogative alone these female poets can also claim it as her "Introduction" concludes with Kamala Das: "I too call myself I. The early phase, Toru Dutt's time and then Sarojini Naidu's, was one of imitation; the Western poets were a storehouse of models and motifs"1 to be followed by Indian poets, both male and female, religiously. As the true voice of feeling can not be brought out by imitation, so the poems of that time were hardly anything more than complex philosophical exercises, largely deprived of the originality stamp The result was as unusual as seeing "Arnold in a saree" or "Shakuntala in skirts".

But then in the initial stage, none can expect excellence and authenticity. The translation of French poetry into English began with Toru Dutt, so her *A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields* is an apprentice work. Before plunging headlong on the stage itself, it was intended to sense the delicate pulse of poetry through first experience. Even when she left the French masters and returned to India via England, as found in her *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindustan*, her India was from the mythological past. So she writes of Sita, of Savitri, of Uma, of Casuarina's tree in her backyard, but not of her personal tragedy and agony, of the family's death and illness that soon claimed her own life. She's got the Keatsian, the tragic brevity, but not the great poet's vibrant self-expression. She uses the typical Indian philosophical way of all ordained by nature in place of the clear expression of her traumatic personal life: "We are the playthings; with her breath/She blows us where she lists in space" There is a vibrant legend and scenery, but there is no internal drama that points to "her inability to modulate her inner life's strings in relation to outer experience."

"Sarojini Naidu, yet Sarojini Naidu, too, avoids her genuine, intimate experience and writes of "Savitri's sorrow and the desire of Sita, the longing of Draupadi, the fears of Damayanti, and the mystical tears of the sweetest Shakuntala. She comes to the milk women of Brindavan or to the veiled Muslim lady of Hyderabad when she leaves out these mythological heroines-representing their predicament in pulsating romanticism. On her side, there is hardly any attempt at correlating their condition with her own. Her poems on love are less true and more sentimental as well, reminiscent of one of the golden past: "Were my dear youth, beloved, I would fling it into the lustrous wine of love/like a rich pearl." Sarojini Naidu found her subject, but she forgot her own while dealing with the

native passion. She remained, therefore, mainly' a poet of yesterday and tomorrow, rather than of today.'

The other noticeable poets, after Sarojini Naidu plunged herself into politics and left poetry, are Monika Varma, Mary Erulkar and Indira Devi Dhanrajgir. For the sake of nature, Monika Varma negates her private self. "And what a pale shadow she is of Wordsworth and Keats: "Laughter is in a silver breeze thread" and the gold of sunshine is the gold of pollen-drenched flowers. Although both Wordsworth and Keats could, in their own distinct ways, equate nature with man, Monika Varma suffers from a peculiar separation. Even Mary Erulkar, a poor copy of Dylan Thomas, is no better. She comes to modern science from nature, but she never comes to her own self. There is no personal pain for Indira Devi Dhanrajgir of royal blood to write about so she gets poetry out of the philosophical idea of passion, time and eternity. While these three have written some satisfactory poems, they fall short of the desire of modern readers demanding deeper exploration, and thus lament "their inability to come to grips with bare reality", including the individual self's searching reality.

"Women's poetry takes a sudden, brave turn with the advent of Kamala Das, recognising that the raw material of a poet is not stone or clay; it is her personality. She is the first Indian woman poet who with the greatest meaning, used the smallest pronoun 'I.' The spontaneity in which the poet documents her most personal reactions is her key contribution to Indian English poetry, an uninhibitedness that is even now more or less rare in the Indian sense." there may be many pitfalls in her poetic expression, but she is the most remarkable female poet to explore the different experiences of "I" with confessional candour." Long fed on Eliotic impersonal theory, during the mid-sixties, her open disclosure of the suffering self could have been very surprising to Indian scholars and in their excitement, they could have called her a-shameless show piece, a festering sore on the conservative Nair face. Nevertheless, it is beyond doubt that Kamala Das is the most important stage in the growth of Indian feminine poetic sensitivity." Her poetry is intended solely for her self-expression; "I" therefore appears so often in her lines:

*It is I who laugh, it I who make love
And then feel shame, it is I who lie dying
with a rattle in my throat. I am sinner I am
saint. I am beloved and the Betrayed.*

There are her other poems that do not fall under the above four categories, either having two or three of the above themes in them or arc on themes that are different from these.

Such is her poem, named Bells, which is beyond her four key classes, and yet almost all of them are mirrored. Some of her other poems on varied subjects are Indian Musicians, The Indian Gipsy, The Queen's Competitor, Nightfall in the City of Hyderabad, To India and Guerdon. The Gift of India and The Lotus express a tribute to the motherland, the dedication of the poet, "O her country or her hopes, the glorious renaissance of India." She remembers the Vedic heritage of India in the Harvest Hymn and the Hymn to Indra. Puranic and modern practises are represented in Lakshmi, the Lotus-Bom, Kali, the Mother, and The Flute Player of Brindaban. She tells us how much the great storeys have meant to her in Nasturtiums ami Damayanti to Nala, and poems such as the Royal Tombs of Golconda and Imperial Delhi bring us the tragic pageant of Indian history. In short, the main themes of Sarojini Naidu's poetry include nature, love, death, human misery and popular Indian life and traditions.

INDIANNES IN HER POETRY

In the sense of history, during which English education was introduced in India, the beginning of Indo-English literature must be studied. There was a disagreement about the introduction of English in India and about its intent as well. There were Orientalists who felt that it was important to promote native languages and literature. There were Anglicists, on the other hand, who were begging for Western education in India. It should not be forgotten that there were ardent supporters of the implementation of English education among the Indians who firmly held that western education in India would bring a kind of reawakening. Raja Ram Mohan Rai, for instance, held that conventional schooling was useless because stagnation stinks.

The Minute on Education by Macaulay was an important event in India's history. He spoke strongly about the need for English education and emphasised that it is likely to become the language of trade in the eastern seas'. He also repeated that the 'Indians themselves requested the introduction of English and there was a higher demand for English books than Sanskrit and Arabic. Macaulay did not favour proselytising, which the missionaries frequently indulged in. He wanted to anglicise Indians, of course, and he had a firm belief that the anglicization of India was nothing but the civilising phase of India. William Bentinck accepted the minute for Macaulay, and on 7 March. It was agreed in 1835 that the British Government had decided to encourage the iteration and science of Europe among Indian natives. We must always note that English was not forced on Indian people, but it was actually accepted whole-heartedly by educated Indians.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first Indian to underline the need for English to be relevant. In addition to Sanskrit, Persian, Bengali and English, he was well versed in many languages. He wrote quite efficiently in English. He was a great social reformer who suffered like 'Sati' against the evils of Indian customs. He was a master of English literature, and he vehemently opposed India's evil customs in English. He's polemical in his essays. He defended the theological theories of Jesus' Vedas and precepts. He took a rather liberal outlook on religion. In this sense, Sarojini Naidu stands as one of the most remarkable poets after Tagore, as Raja Ram Mohan Roy stands as a great personality who heralded the Indian Renaissance in Indo-English literature. She belongs to the era of the Gandhiji-led freedom movement she adored. She stood on the threshold of a new age in which India's voice appeared loud and clear. Sarojini was an influential participant in India's fight for freedom. She was a nationalist and was a member of the Party of Congress. Her political views were more about Congress than about her own. She was of course, vehement in her approach to women's educational problems. She believed in all human beings' dignity and dreamed of the glorious future of an independent India. She was a staunch liberalist and worked for peace between Hindus and Muslims.

The poetry of Sarojini Naidu is commonly alleged to be imitative and she imitated romantic poets such as Shelley, Byron, Keats and Wordsworth. It is true that her poetry is lyrical, but to say that she imitated the aforementioned Romantic poets is not right. Poets are often inspired by other poets, and literary influences have been responsible for a vast amount of literature worldwide. Currently, in the poetry of Sarojini, we find two opposing the influence of the Romantic tradition and its keen Indian sensibility are trends. In his book on 'Sarojini Naidu- Selected Poetry and Prose, Markand Paranjpe rightly points out that

“Sarojini’s poetry mediates between the usually opposing but sometimes complementary forces of the English poetic tradition and her Indian sensibility, between the politics of nationalism and the aesthetics of feudalism, between the overwhelming power of modernity and the nostalgia for a threatened tradition, between in security of a comfortable patriarchy and the liberating power of the women’s movement. Thus Sarojini’s text displays both resistance and the co- operation with dominant ideology of

her time which was Colonialism There is in it both a compromise and a collusion with Prevailing power structures, whether literary or political. Unlike Tagore, Sarojini was unable to liberate her from these contradictions”

THE POETESS

With four volumes of poetry to her name, Sarojini Naidu carved a permanent niche in the annals of English poetry for herself. In matter and type, she wrote verses that are entirely English, but was urged to turn to her native land for themes. Did she sing exquisitely about the beauty of the Indian landscape, the common man and woman, Hindu-Muslim unity, and India's subjugation? "When he says: "Some of her songs are nothing more than exotically romantic utterances that may have come from an English writer who knew the East by hearsay; but others offer vivid vignettes of native life and some embody the spirit of Oriental devotion. Mr. Sampson does not give her justice. In general, her work is more noteworthy for her English command than for any Indian revelation. But from the beginning of her poetic career, critical opinions were usually in Sarojini's favour. She was shown the direction by Arthur Symons and Edmund Gosse and the members of the Rhymers' Club, and never swerved from it. The bright consequence was that she found a place in so many verse anthologies and collections. Even by including three of her poems, namely The Soul's Prayer," "In Salutation to Eternal Peace," and To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus," the Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse (Oxford, 1916) honoured her.

As we know, poetry came to Sarojini as a natural gift" and when the mood overwhelmed her, she could not help writing it. She inherited it largely from her parents who loved poetry and wrote poems too much. What she got by birth was undoubtedly nurtured during the formative years of her life by her home environment and by her stay in England. She was also influenced by Romantic poets such as Keats and Shelley, in addition to Symons and Gosse and the Rhymers' Club.

In reading Sarojini's poetry, the first thing that strikes us is her exquisite melody and fine delicacy of feeling and language combined with spiritual freshness and exuberance. She is mostly a singer of songs" and a bird of songs," "Indian Nightingale" and "Bharat Kokila." When he points out that it is a closed mind that assumes that she is not a song, Prof. Vishwanathan is right. Uh, bird. Like the philosopher, she does not attempt to grapple with life's problems. There are only circumstances for her that make her nerves tingle and stir her into a trembling song. Life is not a riddle to be solved for her; it is a miracle to rejoice

and sing for her. Her infinite variety excites her, her colours dazzle her, and her attractiveness intoxicates her. ³ Her reaction to it is instant. It can be viewed by some people as her vulnerability, but her strength lies in this too. The secret of her perennial youthfulness resides in this. Sarojini is in Mr. Mathur's view, "a supreme singer of beautiful songs, songs bathed in melody and thought."⁴ In her Indian folk songs, we find a moving melody.

In Sarojini's poetry, there can be no two views on the predominance of lyrical impulses. Her poems are "short swallow-flights of fancy" mostly. Some are full of spring's rapture; some lead us into a realm of inner bliss and spiritual exhilaration; even others with the passion of love, quiver. There are some poems that take us into the luminous history of India's sky. "The lyrical appeal is different in her poetry-and beautiful and full of the beauty of melody." Some of the notable lyrics are "The Memory Festival," "Palanquin-Bearers," "To a Buddha Sitting on a Lotus," "Wandering Singers," "Guerdon ", " etc. It has also been suggested that the metrical achievement is part of the lyricism of Sarojini.

It is difficult to conceive of a real lyric poet with narrow sympathies. Mrs. Naidu has kept her antipathies, if any, out of her poetry, very wisely. A broad variety of themes have been explored by her compassionate interpretation. Poems such as "Corn-Grinders" and "The Pardah Nashin" are clearly influenced by the modest and the sufferer's sympathies. The third and fourth stanzas of "At Twilight" are influenced by the same spirit. On the other hand, she feels herself one with the essential rhythm of the world with all kinds of normal and innocent joy and becomes almost part of the expanding life of birds and flowers. In "The Call to Evening Prayer," her sympathetic attitude towards the world's various religions is expressed. She has written many poems about the society of Muslims. In her poetry, she often portrays the Hindu way of life. She seems to be at home everywhere and at all kinds of meetings," in truth. This speaks to "her personality's greatness and richness."

The poetry of Sarojini undeniably belongs to the Romantic school, but it's the romance that leaves no ashes in the mouth in its most passionate mood. While she did not become a Keats for India, as Edmund Gosse hoped, she succeeded in becoming a much more vital and persuasive entity than a representation of Goethe or Keats; with her own very individual freedom, she became herself. She added "something Keats-like in its frank but perfectly pure sensuousness" to literature. But in her work, except for the use of a few traditional terms, there is hardly any sign of the derivative impulse.

CONCLUSION

On February 13, 1879, Sarojini Naidu was born in Hyderabad into a respected Brahmin family that had migrated from Brahmanayan, a village in East Bengal. The 'lovers of the forest and mountain caves, great dreamers, great philosophers, great ascetics' were her Bengal ancestors. Her aunt, Smt. To her credit, Vareada Sunadri Devi had literary training and many lyrics in Bengali. As she has recorded, her father, Dr. Aghore Nath Chattopadhyay, was a mystic and a dreamer of exquisite dreams, a man cast in a legendary mould and an eccentric.

Sarojini wrote her first poem, 'One Day,' when she was just eleven. Her poetic art started that day and she proceeded to compose imitative verses. She showed herself in her artistic work as an Indian poetess, always imbued with herself, her country's ancient history, her tradition and her originality.

As a poet, the thoughts and photographs of Naidu are completely expressed in true Indianness. In English verse, she offers us Indian pitchers that have the ring of originality. Sarojini's India is not that of god-like sahibs and object-natives, but that of India, where she lived and died. In her eyes, she looks directly at things and diligently sets down what she has seen with absolute fidelity to the facts. She is quick to determine the importance of local colours. She had detailed knowledge of Indian birds and animals, flowers and fruits, dress and decorative articles, kings and queens, precious stones and musical instruments.

Her poetic works include poems on Indian festivals—the red gulmohur, the fragrant Nasturtium, the golden Cassia, the rich champak, the lovely Ashoka, and poems on Indian flowers—Vasant Panchami, Nag panchami and Moharram. She sings of the seasons of her land—her autumn, her sorrow, her spring, her joy. In the summer sunset, in the dusk over hills, and at nightfall in the city of Hyderabad, she recovers the scenery around her—dawn over fields full of harvest, blossoming woods.

Naidu has written two kinds of nature poems, as a lover of Indian natural scenes and spring seasons, depicting seasons and poems depicting other individual manifestations of natural beauty. As she enjoys the scenes and colours of the coconut glades, the fragrance of the mango grove, the sand of the full 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 They're all good to her. She likes to go where the Champak buds blow on the champagne boughs, to the koil-haunted islands of the river where lotus shines. In their songs, the bulbul, the dove, the maina, welcomes spring.

*“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”.*

At least some of her folksongs, Palanquin-bearers, The Snake-Charmer, Cradle Tale, Bangle Sellers, Song of Radha the Milkmaid and Village Songs (from *The Bird of Time*"), her musical songs such as *Alabaster*, if not all her poems. *To My Fairy Fancies*, and her songs, such as *Leili*, *The Queen's Rival*, *Indian Dancers Raksha Bandhan*, *A Song of the Khyber Pass* and her songs of life and death, like *the Lotus*, *To a Buddha Sitting on a Lotus Bells*, *The Pearl*, *Brindaban's Flute Player* and her springtime songs, such as *Spring*, *Champak Blossoms*, *June Sunset* and a few of her love-lyrics in *The Temple*, will always be her good poetry and continue to haunt readers forever. Her contribution to English poetry in general and Indo-Anglian poetry in particular are two (1) her development of new metrical rhythms and setting to them some Indian folk-song tunes, (2) recreation of Indian life's colour, elegance, romance and pageantry—the soul of the country-in English verse. It is not the magical or mystical aura that is needed, it is just the lyrical feeling that is felt and understood.

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