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SAROJINI NAIDU AS A POET OF NATURE

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ABSTRACT

Sarojini Naidu was one of the most outstanding figures in the pre-independence Indian English poetry. She was known by the sobriquet 'The Nightingale of India'. Her first major collection of poems entitled 'The Golden Threshold' was published in 1905. Her second collection of poems 'The Bird of Time' was published in 1912. Her last collection of poems 'The Broken Wing' was published in 1917. All the above collections of lyrics were published in 1943 in one volume 'The Sceptred Flute'. Besides, some of her poems were written in the last decade of her life and were published posthumously under the title, 'Feathers of the Dawn'(1961). Sarojini has a number of beautiful nature-lyrics to her credit. Her poetry is the poetry of nature. Her love of nature can be seen even in poems which are not about



nature. The present paper highlights Sarojini Naidu's treatment of nature as reflected in her poems.

KEYWORDS: Sarojini Naidu , Indian English poetry , Indian personality.

INTRODUCTION:

Sarojini was a born poet. Like Tagore and Aurobindo, she was more than a poet. She was one of Mother India's most gifted children. She interpreted the soul of India to the West and created an authentic Indian atmosphere through her poems. Her poetry is pictorial and it has the romantic colouring and smooth

rhythms. She achieved success in the handling of Indian imagery and the expression of Indian personality. While Toru Dutt described the puranic legends of ancient India, Sarojini has immortalized the familiar scenes of everyday life in modern India. In the words of KR Srinivasa Iyengar, "Children's poems, nature poems, patriotic poems, poems of love and death, even poems of mystical transcendence, Sarojini Naidu essayed them all; and with her unflinching verbal felicity and rhythmical dexterity, she generally succeeded as well. Seldom did she venture out of her depth; she wasn't interested in wild

experimentation; she didn't cudgel herself towards explosive modernity. But she had genuine poetic talent, and she was a wholesome and authentic singer." Her poetry unfolds the beauties, the transformations and the significances of our natural world. In the words of P V Rajyalakshmi, "Nature, in its human context, and man in his natural context, the two themes are integrated into a simple unity in Sarojini's poetry." In some of her poems of 'The Golden Threshold' Sarojini has shown relationship between human life and the moods of nature. She took child-like interest in nature. She was fascinated with her sights and sounds, with her colours and odours and by her grandour and mystery. But it is to be noted that she shut her eyes to the ugly and destructive in nature.

Major Themes in Sarojini's Poetry

In Sarojini's poetry we come across the four recurrent themes – life and death theme, the theme of love, the folk theme and the appeal of nature. A large number of Sarojini's poems deal with the problems of life and death. She is conscious of the pain of life and the inevitability of death, and hence a note of melancholy runs through many of her lyrics. But she bravely accepts the challenge of death and is determined to enjoy her life, despite all sorrow and suffering. She is a poet of joy and optimism, not of sorrow and pessimism. Despite an undercurrent of melancholy and pessimism, her poetry is optimistic.

The theme of love can also be seen in Sarojini's poetry. We come across the theme of love even in the poems which are primarily in praise of nature or spring. Her contribution as a love-poet is not that she has exhausted the Hindu-tradition of love, but that she has enriched it by a mixture of other tradition- Hindu Sufi-Muslim, Buddhist, etc. Her attitude towards love is essentially feminine and is marked by a spirit of total self-surrender, humility and self-sacrifice.

In her folk-poetry, Sarojini has successfully represented all the qualities of traditional folk-poetry. In her folk-poetry, she portrays the common life which she saw around her, which she witnessed at first hand, with its setting, events, peoples and their occupations. In her folk-poetry, she presents a colourful pageant of the life of the Indian masses and of their diverse occupations, customs, traditions, and beliefs.

Her nature-poems deal with the seasons of India, Indian flowers, birds, animals, rivers, etc. Sarojini's response to nature is frankly sensuous. She feels a genuine delight in nature, and she is able to communicate her own delight to the readers. In her nature-poems we see that her imagery is vivid, graphic, sensuous and picturesque. As K R Srinivasa Iyengar has aptly remarked, "Nature too attracted Sarojini Naidu, and she sang in praise of Henna –

*But, for lily-like fingers and feet,
The red, the red of the henna-tree-*

and of harvest-sights and warbling birds and nightfall in her city, of nasturtiums and lotus lilies and champak blossoms." Indeed, Sarojini enjoys the beautiful colours and forms of nature. For her nature is a relief from the conflicts and worries of worldly life as she says in 'Summer Woods' -

*"O I am tired of painted roofs and soft and silken floors,
And long for wind-blown canopies of crimson gulmohurs!"*

SAROJINI NAIDU AS A POET OF NATURE

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 the wild 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 voices 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 Sarojini. The seasons of India, particularly, the spring,

fascinate Sarojini. She sings of the joys of spring in a number of her lyrics. Her well-known nature lyrics are 'Leili', 'Songs of the Springtime', 'The Flowering Year', 'Spring in Kashmir', 'The Gloriosa Lily' etc. There are ten poems in 'Songs of the Springtime' which describe spring in all its splendor. Her lyric 'June Sunset' brings out the fact that nature for Sarojini is a sanctuary of peace, a retreat from the noise and strife, care and worries of the world –

*"Here shall my heart find its haven of calm,
By rush-fringed rivers and rain-fed streams
That glimmer thro' meadows of lily and palm.
Here shall my soul find its true repose
Under a sunset sky of dreams
Diaphanous, amber and rose".*

In the words of K R Srinivasa Iyengar, "Spring inspires her to song, but even as she thrills at the thought of the Festival of Spring, Vasant Panchami, her compassionate heart rues the plight of the Hindu widow who has no part in the festive ceremonials". The plight of the widow can be seen in the following lines –

*"For my sad life is doomed to be, alas,
Ruined and sere like sorrow-trodden grass....
Akin to every lone and withered thing
That hath foregone the kisses of the spring."*

We come across Indian birds like stallions, golden panthers, cows, dears, monkeys, elephants and particularly serpent which inspires her to compose two of her best poems namely 'The Festival of Serpents' and 'The Snake-charmer'. Moreover, she composes hymns to the objects and forces of nature. Her affection for the sun and sunshine can be seen in her lyrics. Indeed, she was particularly fond of the bright sunshine which illumines the landscape of India.

Her love for flowers can be seen everywhere in her poetry. Sarojini was deeply fascinated by the associations of the lotus in Indian mythology and art. Sarojini praises the inherent beauty and elegance of the lotus plant, its leaves, buds and blossoms. A vivid description of various flowers can be seen in her poetry. In 'Golden Cassia' she has described the splendor and glory of the flowers –

*"O Brilliant blossoms that strew my way
You are only woodland flowers they say
But, I sometimes think that perchance you are
Fragments of some new-fallen star
Or golden lamps for a fairy shrine
Or golden pitchers for fairy wine."*

The music of nature can also be seen in her poetry. The music of nature can easily be seen in her lyrics in the form of murmuring of rivers and the warbling of birds. Her poems are filled with the calls of koels and bulbuls, buzzing of bees and dragon-flies. Sarojini has used a number of images, similes and metaphors from nature. Her imagery is vivid, sensuous and graphic. She has presented beautiful, colourful and graphic pictures of nature in her lyrics. In 'June Sunset' we come across the description of the birds in the following lines –

*"The air is aglow with the glint and whirl
Of swift wild wings in their homeward flight
Sapphire, emerald, topaz, and pearl.
Afloat in the evening light"*

Here the birds fly swiftly as they are returning to their homes. As they fly through the light of the setting sun, they shine brightly and the sky becomes variegated as if by the variegated diamonds, as sapphire, topaz, emerald and pearls. Her similes and metaphors are often drawn from the common scenes and sights of nature. Images like that of the moon being a 'caste-mark' on the azure brows of heaven is remarkable. K R Srinivasa Iyengar remarked, "Her description of a tropical night in "Leili" is one of her most satisfying Nature poems". Images like that of the moon in "Leili" in the following lines is highly original -

*"A caste-mark on the azure brows of Heaven,
The golden moon burns sacred, solemn, bright."*

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Sarojini does not put forward any philosophy in her nature-lyrics. Her attitude to nature is not pantheistic like Wordsworth. She is content to enjoy sensuous beauty of nature and her success as a poet of nature lies in the fact that she is able to communicate her delight to the readers through her poetry. Sarojini's portrayal of nature is pictorial and is a source of perennial joy for the readers.

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