

Contemporary Scenes and The Emergence of Sarojini Naidu

Shatakshi Misra
Assistant Professor
Department of English
RBSETC, Bichpuri, Agra
shatakshi78@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Like Rabindra Nath Tagore and Shri Aurobindo Sarojini Naidu too was more than a poet. She was one of mother India's most gifted children, readily sharing her burden of pain, fiercely articulating her agonies and hopes. The present paper "The Contemporary Scene and The Emergence of Sarojini Naidu", provides an account of Sarojini's social, political, and literary background, here love for India evident from her passionate involvement with the freedom struggle did, in no way, withhold her for being so enamored by the poetic muse. It is rather unfortunate that Sarojini Naidu has been criticized for writing about the colorful land of romance and mystery, the India of the common western imagination, with the essential reality-a of real experience, a real landscape, and the real people blurred into a mystified sentimentality.

Keywords: *Indian history, Hinduism, Contemporary Scenes, sati, Sarojini Naidu.*

Sarojini Naidu lived in one of the most tumultuous periods of Indian history, a period in which a passion for radical change in every walk of life reigned supreme. People had begun to look at everything from a national and revolutionary point of view. In the words of Humayun Kabir:

“Old political ideas have crumbled; old social standards
have lost their compelling force. The old economic system has
been shattered beyond repair. Even religion can no longer
console people as in the past. In every sphere of thought and
action there is uncertainty, doubt and hesitation with old
land marks swept away, it is not surprising that Indian youth is
restless and turbulent”.

In the 19th century Indian society and religion had become the victims of several evils. Parda pratha, sati pratha, dowry system, child marriage, untouchability, etc. are some of the social evils which had become luminant in society. During the last quarter of 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, India was not only politically slave to the foreign yoke, but socially also it was chained in the shackles of outworn traditions and superstitions. Due to the impact of western culture there grew up a new intelligentsia that displayed a new scientific outlook with rapid and challenged absoluteness of the old social institutions, religious outlooks, and

ethical conceptions. The first and foremost problem of those days was the problem of the caste system – the steel frame of Hinduism – which divided the Hindu community into a multitude of almost hermetically sealed groups, hierarchically graded and based on birth. The association with the British brought forth new social reforms which in turn, brought about a new grouping of the population. The Indian people became differentiated into such categories as capitalists, workers, merchants, tenants, land labors, doctors, lawyers, and technicians, with each category being composed of individuals belonging to various castes and communities but having identical material and political interests. Ancient beliefs, superstitions, and traditions were replaced by intellect, logic, and a rational outlook.

Another very significant problem was that of marriage. It is needless to say that the institution of marriage had reached a deteriorating condition by the beginning of the twentieth century. unequal marriage, child marriage, widowhood, and the system of sati were the results of the defective system of marriage. Inspired by the British influence the young men of those times had changed their outlook in this regard. When They tried to materialize his dreams of love and marriage in actual life, they found that the barriers of caste, creeds, and customs were too strong for them.

Hollowed with tradition and sanctified by religion, the age-long institution of untouchability continued to exist in all its barbarous vigor during this period. There prevailed the segregation of a section of the Hindus as untouchables who were precluded from the such elementary right as the right of entry to public temples. Social reformers and political leaders such as Gandhi crusaded against untouchability and strove for the spread of education. The condition of women in Indian society was also very miserable. They suffered from medieval forms of social subordination and suppression for centuries. In brief, during this period, the Indians were trying hard to be purified of social evils. In society, a struggle was going on to introduce such measures of social amelioration as the abolition of caste and untouchability.

Efforts were being made for the emancipation of women. All these measures brought awareness among the people and roused them to a new consciousness. Towards the beginning of the 20th century, British imperialism opened an all-around offensive against the Indian national economy. Under British rule India's economic condition had become very weak, Indian trade, Industry, and agriculture had been destroyed by the English so that the Indians could not stand against the Britishers in business competition- "One of the most important facts in the history of India during the first century of British rule is the decay of her flourishing

trade and Industry". The history of Indian agriculture under British rule was the history of the progressive impoverishment of the agricultural population of the steady growth of their indebtedness of the increasing expropriation of the peasants of their land and their transformation into paupers as the agricultural proletariat. The foremost manifestation of their exploitation was the use of India as the hinterland for the role of British manufacturers and the source of raw material for the metropolitan economy. Those were the times when the inflow of private British capital increased. The direct consequence of the new capitalist economic structure established by the British was the emergence of a new middle class. Due to the mechanization of the industries, the population problem of India also began to assume dangerous proportions. The living conditions of the laborers were poor and most of them lived a life of perpetual want and misery. The selfish industrial policy of the British, the unemployment problem, the increasing poverty of the rural communities, the miserable conditions of the laborers, and the exploitation of the capitalists were the factors that made the economic life of India quite pitiable. Consequently, a feeling of disappointment and degradation set in the minds of the people which found a clear expression in the poetry of Sarojini Naidu.

From the very beginning of the 20th century, India had begun to come under the influence of modern means of science. It was under British rule that modern means of transport and communication appeared in our country. It was the pressure of British industrialists who wanted to import cheap raw materials that led to the development of modern means of transport and communication, especially railways. The phenomenal progress in the field of science also led to the emergence of the press in India. Some popular magazines pertaining to Hindi literature such as Indu (1909), Madhuri (1923) and Vishal Bharat (1928) also appeared during the period.

Before the First World War, the people of the western countries were eagerly waiting for a millennium that the multifarious discoveries and inventions of science were likely to bring. Though it was an age of scientific progress and prosperity, as far as international conditions were concerned, science transcended the limits of time and space by providing the boons of electricity, airplane, telephone, and railways. Despite all this, the scientists invented many infernal weapons and thus sought to wield scientific power for the annihilation of humanity. During the end of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century, Indian society was bound in the shackles of age-old customs and outdated traditions. A few stalwarts of Indian

thought and culture undertook the task of a socio-cultural renaissance. They were Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the founder of 'Brahma Samaj' who was associated with the abolition of 'Suttee', Swami Shraddhananda, Lala Lajpat Rai, Swami Dayanand, the leader of the Theosophical Society, Mrs. Annie Besant, Ram Krishna Paramhansa and his famous disciple Swami Vivekananda, Bal Ganga Dhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, and Rabindra Nath Tagore. All these thinkers and sociocultural reformers influenced the age and its trend of thinking through their high ideals and aspirations and cultural insight. In -fact, the sociocultural renaissance proved a blessing in disguise for Indian literature. Sarojini Naidu's life extends over a period of seventy years. At her birth, Queen Victoria, as empress of India ruled this vast subcontinent through her Governor-General stationed at Calcutta (now Kolkata).

When Sarojini died India was an independent country with a free voice in the comity of nations. The period between her birth and her death witnessed important events in Indian history. There was a marked, though not permanent, change in thought, in social manners, in politicoeconomic principles, and Sarojini contributed her mite towards the emergence of this change in the socio-political field.

Sarojini Naidu has been acclaimed as one of India's distinguished authors who have written in English and attained international status. Unlike most of her sex who take to the ivory tower in moments of isolation and depression, she led, through the vicissitudes of fortune, a very active life of public engagements both as a poet and as a politician. If Mahatma Gandhi lifted politics to the moral sphere, Sarojini Naidu lifted it to the artistic sphere. She started her life as a poetess, but when she was drawn in to the rough and tumble of politics, her whole life became a poem and a song. A fragrant flower of the strange sapling of poetry and politics, Sarojini scattered the scent around her wherever she happened to be. That she filled in many a dignified post during her lifetime, speaks of the beauty of her personality and the versatility of her genius. In her lifetime Sarojini was quite popular among the Indo-Anglian poets and was also the least criticized. The Indian public accepted its image of Sarojini rather than the image projected by her verse. Some of her poems still appear in school anthologies.

Sarojini had never been in and out of fashion; She was always respected and occasionally taken too much for granted. As pointed out by Mokashi-Punekar:

“Sarojini was the Nightingale of India- read or- unread- the symbol of an achievement at a time when such achievements were badges needed for the Indian mind to establish its pride and identity. Sarojini did not receive any academic honours. Although she frequently visited the Allahabad University,

addressed the convocations of several seats of higher learning- Banaras, Agra and Dacca, for example- and was Chancellor of several universities in her capacity as Governor of U.P., no university came forward to confer any degree honoris causa in recognition of her poetical works. This shows that the academic world of her time was reluctant to accept her as a poet worthy of recognition. She was a poet, pure and simple and she paid dearly for it- “the price of not being taken seriously in the hey- day of fame or in the period of comparative neglect”.

Sarojini was born in Hyderabad on February 13, 1879, in a respected family of Brahmins which had migrated from Brahmanagar, a village in East Bengal. Harindra her brother, wrote: “Our parents had done everything to make us feel that life was one fluent process of rain bows and fancy happenings”

Sarojini was the eldest daughter of Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya and Varadasundari. The Chattopadhyaya’s belonged to an ancient line of great Sanskrit scholars who were highly respected in Bengal. Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya was a unique combination of science and literature. His favorite subject was chemistry. Aghorenath had a good command of Sanskrit and was widely read in the literature of the east and the west. He was also a good scholar of English, Hebrew, French, German and Russian. His idea was to learn something new every day. His literary taste has been praised by his contemporaries. He had resolved that his daughter should be given a purely scientific education so that she might flower in as a mathematician or a scientist. Sarojini’s mother, Varada Sundari, was an East Bengali girl.

Sarojini’s married home was also full of song, dance, and color. A generous welcome awaited one and all here, and a glimpse of It can be had in Sarojini’s letter to Arthur Symons, in which she invites her sponsor to come to her lovely home:

“Come and share my exquisite March morning with me: this sumptuous blaze of gold and sapphire sky; these scarlet lilies that adore the sunshine; the voluptuous scents of neem and champak and serisha that beat upon the languid air wit their implacable sweetness; the thousand little gold and blue and silver breasted birds bursting with the shrill ecstasy of life in nesting time. All is hot and fierce and passionate, ardent and unashamed in its exulting and importunate desire for life and love. And, do you know that the scarlet lilies are woven petal by petal from my heart’s blood, these little quivering birds are my soul made incarnate music, these heavy perfumes are my

emotions dissolved in to aerial essence, this flaming blue and gold sky is the ‘very me’, that part of me that incessantly, and insolently yes, and a little deliberately, triumphs over that other part a thing of nerves and tissues that suffers and cries out, and that must die tomorrow perhaps or twenty years hence”.

Sarojini began writing English poetry at the age of eleven. She composed a long poem when she was thirteen, from the age of thirteen to fifteen she wrote a number of verses, published privately by her father under the title Songs (1895). In the Archives of the National Library, Kolkata preserved Sarojini’s earliest poems printed on rough paper and with the inscription on the cover,

“Poems by S. Chattopadhyaya, dated 3rd October 1896”. Songs is a collection of Sarojini’s earliest poems and reveal her precocious mind. Even as a child, Sarojini was a lover of travels and wrote “Traveller’s Song” in May 1892 at the age of twelve:

O’er Italia’s Sunny plains
All aglow with rosy flowers,
I wander now mid fallen fanes,
And now amid of the myrtle bowers”.

Another poem, “On my Birthday,” was written on Sarojini’s fourteenth birthday (February 13, 1893). It brings out the happiness of a girl in an immature but spontaneous verse:

My birthday! O this day I am fourteen!
And childhood’s years on golden wings have fled,
Right many a grateful blessing have I seen,
And purest joys on me their lustre shed,
As flew these years over my happy head
My joys were not what joys to childhood seem;
Not on unthinking sports my soul was fed,
But nursed it was on many a brighter theme,
And lofty high ideas formed my radiant dreams.

In March 1893, Sarojini’s poems contained in songs were written at her parental home and at the summer holiday resort of Shorapur. It seems that Sarojini was sent to Shorapur because of her budding love for a young doctor, her future husband. Her love for the doctor began after

her matriculation. At first, this love affair was not approved by her parents and it was decided to send Sarojini away from Hyderabad. The Nizam gave her a special scholarship and she was sent to England in 1895, accompanied by Annie Besant to study first at Kings College, London and then at Girton College, Cambridge. She stayed in England for three years. The classroom seemed to stifle her romantic spirit, which responded to the countryside, and she did not attend lectures often. This association with the English countryside, made her choose the flowers and birds and rural life of England as subjects for her poetry. When Sarojini returned to India in 1898. She married Dr. Naidu, M.B., C.M. (Edin), Medical Officer to his highness, the Nizam's imperial service troops, at Madras in December of the same year under the Indian special marriage act, in the teeth of heavy opposition from both sides and to the scandal had to deny at the time of marriage that they were Hindu, Muslims, Christians, Persian, Buddhist, Sikh or Jain.

After her marriage, Sarojini built her home "The Golden Threshold". It was a quiet bungalow set in the midst of a walled-in compound and nestling in the shade of trees. A marble plate with the legend "The Golden Threshold" greeted one at the entrance of the house and a huge swing, so common in the south Indian homes, hung in the verandah. It was an easy shelter to which she often returned to seek relief from her travels. Today it is a hotel. Sarojini's travel abroad constituted in itself a liberal education. She came to know, more or less intimately, all the rising literary men of the day. Sarojini's youth passed during a time of great literary ferment when Victorian traditions, unable to stand the force of the new thought, were crumbling. The poetry of the nineties marked a severance from Victorian poetry. The day of Tennyson – the last of the great Victorians – was over resulting in the setting up of a poetic convention of smooth-flowing verse, pretty epithets, and onomatopoeic ornamentation: much that was produced had therefore a great deal of watery sentimentality.

A reaction against Tennysonian convention and sentimentality is visible, even while Tennyson was alive, in the rugged simplicity of Browning, the vehement passion of the preraphaelites, and the purely classical thought and form of Arnold. The revolt had already come, and the young enthusiasts of the nineties put the last nail in to coffin of this tradition. The life and movement of cities came to inspire the voice of the new singer. As a product of the Age she lived in, Sarojini had inherited some of its characteristics. She sang of:

The solace of faith to the lips that falter,
The succor of hope to the hands that fail,

The tidings of joy when Peace shall triumph,
When Truth shall conquer and Love prevail.

Sarojini's literary career came to a premature end as an act of voluntary surrender at the altar of the motherland. Even in her early years, she was both socially and politically a rebel. Whenever she appeared on the platform, it was in the dual but complementary role as the spokesperson of Indian womanhood and as the soldier of Indian freedom. She fearlessly condemned evil customs such as infant marriage, nautches, extravagant expenditure on social and religious occasions, and the glaring disparity of age between girls and men when their marriages were arranged. She waged many a battle on the political front in the cause of women's franchise. She pleaded before montage, the Southborough committee, and the joint parliamentary committee, and by her eloquence and fervor advanced the cause of Indian women. She toured every part of India and addressed woman's meetings and presided over woman's conferences, and made the biggest single contribution to the awakening of Indian womanhood. In one of her speeches, she thundered from the platform: "You talk of Indian womanhood, you talk of the courage and devotion that took Savitri to the very realms or death to win back her husband's soul. Yet to the Savitri of today you deny that power to win back the national life from the depths of death". In 1917, when Mrs. Annie Besant was elected the first woman President of the Indian National congress on Mrs. Besant's right and left sat Sarojini Naidu and Bi Amma, the mother of the Ali Brothers (Mohammad Ali and Shaukat Ali). The presence of this triumvirate was a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity as well as the dawn of the era of women in Indian politics.

Even early as 1906 Sarojini cast a spell on men of the eminence of Gokhale. Her personal association with Gopal Krishna Gokhale commenced, as it ended, with a written message. It had fallen to Sarojini to propose the resolution on the education of women at the Calcutta session of the All-India Conference, 1906. Something in her speech moved Gokhale sufficiently to pass her some hurried and cordial sentences which, according to Sarojini's own statement, struck the keynote of all their future intercourse:

May I take the Liberty, he wrote to offer you my most respectful and enthusiastic congratulations? Your speech was more than an intellectual treat of the highest order. It was a perfect piece of art. We all felt for the moment to be lifted to a higher plane.

One evening in Poona, stirred by some deep emotions, Gokhale told Sarojini words of counsel and warning; He spoke of the unequalled happiness and privilege of service for India... He said:

Stand here with me with the stars and the hills for witness,
and in their presence consecrate your life and your talent, your
song and your speech, your thought and your dream to the
motherland. O poet, see visions from the hill tops and spread
abroad the message of hope to the toilers in the valleys.

Sarojini was in England when the First world war broke out. For the first time in her life, she met Mahatma Gandhi and it was in London. The Mahatma described how it happened. He was organizing an ambulance unit to help the British war effort. The Byceum, a ladies' club, undertook to make as many clothes for the soldiers as they could. He writes:

Shrimati Sarojini Naidu was a member of this club and threw herself whole heartedly in to the work. This was my first acquaintance with her. She placed before me a heap of clothes which had been cut to pattern, and asked me to get them all sewn up and return them to her. I welcomed her demand and with the assistance of friends got as many clothes made as I could manage during my training for first aid.

When she died on March 2, 1949, the work of one generation was over, it was passed on to the succeeding generation. Now the new entrants would carry it on. What would be the attitude of the new generation towards the old? Would it be one of gratitude, or criticism, or pardon for mistake?

Children, my children, who wake to inherit
The ultimate hope of our travailing spirit,
Say, when your young hearts shall take to their keeping,
The manifold dreams have sown for your reaping,
Is it praise, is it pain you will grant us for guerdon?
Anoint with your love or arraign with your pardon?

Another great influence on Sarojini was that of Sir Edmund Gosse. Sarojini was sent, to England for further studies. She was fortunate to have formed a few literary friendships there. One such friendship was with Edmund Gosse, the well-known English critic. Sarojini was

introduced to him in January 1896. To Miss Manning's modest rooms used to come some of the great literary figures of the day, and it was here that Sarojini saw Edmund Gosse for the first time. It was at Miss Manning's that she saw also William Archer, who did so much to popularize Ibsen in England, and William Heinemann, her future publisher. She wrote to Gosse in 1896:

"I do not dare to trust myself to thank you for what you said on Sunday. You cannot know what these words meant to me, no people always colour my life, how when I am in the very depth of self-disgust and despair as I often am- they will give me new hope and new courage- no, you cannot know! Poetry is the one thing I love so passionately, so intensely, so absolutely that it is my very life of life and now you have told me that I am a poet- I am a poet! I keep repeating it to myself to try to realise it. Will you let me tell you a little about myself because I want you to know you have been an influence on my life ever since I was eleven years old and As you [Edmund] have been for so long so good an influence in my life I wanted you to go on forever; I will send you everything I write and you must tell me what you think. I want you to be more severe and exacting than ever, the better I do, because I do not want to outlast the years but the centuries."

Her early work which was never published was imitative of her readings in English verse—in Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, Swinburne, and the pre-Raphaelites, they were merely full of English colors, flowers, odors, skylarks, and nightingales. The celebrated English critic advised her to consign all that she had written in a falsely English vein to the waste-paper basket and start afresh with some sincere, penetrating analysis of native passion of the principles of antique religion, and of the soul-stirring mysterious intimations of the East. He also advised her not to write about "robins and skylarks" of midland countries, but about fruits, flowers, and trees of India, especially of the Deccan. With docility and the rapid appreciation of genius, Sarojini instantly accepted and acted upon the suggestion. And thereafter, her writings tended to be typically Indian in the choice of subjects and sentiments. She showed Gosse some of her poems. He was disappointed. He felt that she had been "anglicising her feelings".

Gosse advised her to leave English vein and to seek inspiration from India and not from England:

"I Implored her to consider that from an Indian of extreme sensibility, who has mastered not merely the language, but the prosody of her west that we wished to receive was, not a reshuffle of Anglo-Saxon sentiment in an Anglo-Saxon setting, but some revelation of her heart of India, some sincere penetrating analysis of native passion".

Without such sincere advice, she might have continued to write in a false vein. The sunlight and snow-capped Himalayas might have remained lost in the fog and mist of England. The champak flowers, the jasmine garlands, and the intoxicating Indian scenes might not have found a place in her poetry and she might have continued to sing of tulips and golden daffodils. The Bul-Bul and Koel might have remained in oblivion under the western spell of nightingales, skylarks and robins. The flowing rivers of India might have remained silent as the silent ocean of Coleridge's "Kubla Khan". Sarojini became one of the most welcome and intimate of his guests. When he came to learn of her poetic aptitude, he entreated her to show her poems to him. They were given to him with reluctance. He hastily examined them as soon as he was alone but was disappointed. In the opinion of Gosse, the poems were:

Skill full in form, correct in grammar, and blameless in sentiment, but they had the disadvantage of being totally without individuality. They were western in feeling and in imagery; they were founded on reminiscences of Tennyson and Shelley; I am not sure that they did not even breathe on the atmosphere of Christian resignations. On the advice of Edmund Gosse, Sarojini gave up writing on Western themes. Thereafter with vibrant optimism she wrote:

rise let us, O my heart

let us gather the dreams that remain...!

Meanwhile, she was also introduced to Arthur Symons, who was the first English poet and critic to suggest her to publish her poems that had individual beauty of their own. He appreciated her poetry for the expression of "a rare temperament, the temperament of women of the East". If Edmund Gosse gave a pragmatic direction to Sarojini as a poetess, it was Arthur Symons who fully understood her as a person. Sarojini first met Symons in London in 1896. She read the earliest of her verses to him; the later ones were sent to him from India in 1904, when she was twenty-five. This distinguished man of English letters suggested her to publish her poems which, he thought, had an individual beauty of their own. But she hesitated, and wrote to him that his letter made her very proud and very sad: Proud because it came from a big gun in the field, and "Sad" because she thought that her poems were not beautiful to be published. But Symons valued Sarojini's poems for their flamboyancy and ephemeral note. Symons conceded that they did not express the whole of that temperament, but they did express its essence: there was "an Eastern Magic" in them. Symons ultimately succeeded in this persuasion that Sarojini's poems be published. Symons prefaced an excellent essay to The

Golden Threshold, recalling how Sarojini's poetic career had begun and what had been her physical appearance then. In his introduction to *The Golden Threshold*, Symons wrote:

“To those who knew her in England, all the life of the tiny figure seemed to concentrate itself in the eyes...”

Symons spoke of her “low voice” and love of aloofness, and, like Gosse, was impressed by her Eastern maturity; and first there was the wisdom of the East.” He noticed in her a passionate tranquillity of mind, before which everything means and trivial and temporary caught fire and burnt away in smoke. According to him, her body was never without suffering, or her heart without conflict but neither the body's weakness nor the heart's violence could disturb that fixed contemplation, as of the Buddha on his lotus throne. His introduction to *The Golden Threshold* is extremely sensitive and presents us a living picture, of Sarojini as she was in those days. In some place Symons says of her:

There was something else, something hardly personal, something which belonged to a consciousness older than the Christian which I realized, wondered at, and admired, is her passionate tranquillity of mind, before which everything means and trivial and temporary caught fire and burnt away in smoke.

How well he summed up the very role she was to play in her country's affairs where, in the face of meanness triviality and controversies, her wit and wisdom saw to it that differences were “burnt away in smoke” Symons was in constant correspondence with her, and she laid bare her very heart to him. Their friendship proved extremely fruitful for the young poetess. Sarojini's trip to Italy was also a revelation. The Italian scene, with its warm and sensuous luminosities, exercised a therapeutic influence not only in a physical but also in a spiritual sense. It restored her to zest for life, the enjoyment of this world of sense, This Italy is made of the gold of dawn and daylight, The gold of the stars and dancing in weird, enchanting rhythms through this magic month. Sarojini also met the members of the Rhymers Club who made her understand the verbal and technical accomplishment, the mastery of phrase-owned rhythm. Sarojini, like the Rhymers, stuck to the verbal felicity, metrical discipline, and musical texture. Sarojini, in her frequent visits to Bengal, soon got to know Tagore and became an intimate visitor to Jorasanko, Tagore's ancestral home. On March 15, 1919, Sarojini was asked to speak at the unveiling of Rabindranath Tagore's portrait by the editor of the *Hindu*, Kasturiranga Iyengar at the hall of the student's Home in Madras. She praised the poet and remarked that she was in England when his *Gitanjali* won worldwide fame. She truly understood the genius of Tagore when she exclaimed:

“For one, to adequately understand the real meaning of his mystic genius, one must take into account the traditional mysticism and the traditional spirituality of Bengal. Every race has its own traditional genius that transmitted itself from age to age. Genius, like Character, beauty and many other things in life, was due largely to environment. The beauty born of the murmuring of Bengal forests, of those green fields and wide rivers and the dark July clouds of Bengal, had been transmitted into the glory and scenery of Rabindranath’s poetry.”

Sarojini had profound respect for Tagore and his wise utterances, although she could never read Bengali, and hence Tagore’s poems, in the original. Her favourite occupation was to make someone read out to her in Bengali the poems of Tagore for her understanding. Tagore’s songs and Rabindra Sangeet endlessly delighted her. Her biographer Padmini Sengupta, records that she heard Sarojini at parties to into ecstasies over Tagore’s songs. Sarojini’s friendship with Tagore lasted throughout her life. She not only admired his poetry and songs, but greatly appreciated his paintings. In December 1933, Sarojini arranged a Tagore week in Bombay and organized exhibition of his paintings, dramatizations of his plays, and lectures on his genius. Tagore himself arrived with fifty members from Shantiniketan on December 23, and an exhibition was opened in the Town hall. Sarojini soon became a familiar and respected figure in Shantiniketan and a Governor of Visva Bharti. On December, 22, 1948, Sarojini paid her last visit to Shantiniketan and launched with Rabinidranath’s son Ratindranath at Uttarayan. Thus Sarojini had a great impact on Tagore in her life and career. She continued her friendship with the Tagore family and connection with Shantiniketan till the very last. Sarojini always held Tagore in high esteem, and his influence on her was immense. Her poetic career spans from 1898 to 1927 but she composed her best poetry up to 1914, the year she came in contact with Mahatma Gandhi. During this brief period, she composed a corpus of poetry which time will not willingly let die. Her entire poetical work is contained in four volumes:

(i) *The Golden Threshold*

(ii) *The Bird of Time*

(iii) *The Broken Wing*

(iv) *The Feather of Dawn*

Sarojini's first major collection of poems is *The Golden Threshold*. It was first published in 1905 in England with an introduction by Arthur Symons, and was dedicated to Edmund Gosse "The very title of the book" in the opinion of Ansari, "Suggests the presence of undistinguished emotion conveyed in colourful and gorgeous imagery" 27 Due to the sudden fame for the book in India and abroad, some of the comments that appeared in the press were noteworthy. The lyrics in this collection reveal that in composing them the poetess was moved by human emotions of joy and grief, love, sorrow, success and failure. "Suttee", "Coromandel Fishers" etc. reveal various phases of emotional life. "To A Buddha Seated on a Lotus" sums up Indian Philosophy of contentment and self-realization. The Times of London wrote on its publication:

Her poetry seems to sing itself as if her swift thought and strong emotion sprang into lyrics themselves..., in this case the marriage of the western culture with eastern has not proved barren. It has given the poet new eyes with which to see old things. The result is something unique which we need not hesitate to call poetry.

Various newspapers and critics welcomed the emergence of a new poet and showered praises on Sarojini Naidu's poetic art. Sarojini Naidu's second poetical publication. *The Bird of Time* appeared in 1912 with an introduction by Edmund Gosse. The book was dedicated to her father Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya and to her mother Smt. Varada Sundari. Its title was borrowed from Edward Fitzgerald's translation of the Rubaiyats of Omar Khayyam:

The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly- and Lo! The Bird is on the Wing.

It has one hundred and seven pages containing forty- six poems which are divided into four sections entitled "Songs of Love and Death", "Songs of the Spring Time", "Indian Folk Songs" and "Songs of Life". *The Broken Wing* came out in 1917. It was the last of Sarojini's books published in her lifetime. The foreword of *The Broken Wing* was written by Sarojini Naidu herself. The dedication, written at Hyderabad, Deccan on August 10, 1916, is in the rhetorical vein:

To the dream of Today
and
The hope of Tomorrow

It contains 61 short poems. G.K. Gokhale asked her “Why should a song- bird like you have a broken wing?” and her answer in the opening poem itself was

“Behold! I scale the stars upon my broken wing!

The Broken Wing shows a marked decline in her lyrical faculty, and it shows “The woman, the mother, the patriot remained, but the poet was now no more than a memory”. Though Sarojini Naidu scarcely wrote any poetry after 1917, yet she always called herself a “Wandering Singer”. Her three books of poems were heartily welcomed by all her readers. One volume of Sarojini’s collected poems The Sceptered Flute was produced in America by Dodd, Mead and Co., in 1937 with an introduction by Joseph Auslander. This volume was rapidly sold out and therefore another publication appeared under the same title, The Sceptered Flute Songs of India by Kitabistan in 1943. The publishers said that they had great pleasure in presenting for the first time in India the collected works of ‘our greatest living poet’. Though Sarojini was deeply involved in the political movement of the country, she kept the lamp of her poetry lighted, at least to a limited degree. In the year 1928, Sarojini told her friend, Dr. Amar Nath Jha that she would write a book called The Feather of the Dawn but “We heard no more of this collection and it is to be feared that the poems are lost,” says Jha. But the collection was not lost and after the death of Sarojini Naidu, her daughter Padmaja Naidu, collected and edited her mother’s unpublished poems in a slim volume of 30 poems entitled The Feather of Dawn which was brought out by Asia Publishing House, Bombay in 1961. The Collection shows that Sarojini did not abandon poetry as has been supposed by some. Her poetic vein did not dry up and the lilting tunes of a number of lyrics in her last collection, bring out that she continued to sing like a songbird up to the very end. Sarojini’s era was that of the sonnet with its disciplines of form, the ode with its call to higher thought, and the lyric with its emphasis upon imagery and colour. She was a genuine child of the age she lived in, and followed its norms and practices. Further, it is very likely that the reason for her distaste of modern forms in art and literature was something much closer to her intrinsic nature. In modern poetry, there is perhaps truth, but no exaltation of spirit. What rings through many of her poems is this heroic transformation of the mere mortal into a divinely possessed person lifted to higher realms, such as in her ode “To India”.

O young through all thy immemorial years!
Rise, Mother, rise regenerate from thy gloom,
And, like a bride high-mated with the spheres,

Beget new glories from thine ageless womb!

it is certainly this aspect of her nature that took her into the service of her country. She was not in favour of verse libre, and worked under the influence of the Rhymers. Her world is a mingled fare of rainbow and romance, of sunlight and starlight, and at the same time of death and deprivation. Wonderful lights exist side by side with shadows in her world. Sarojini's romantic yearnings are to be clearly seen in her poetry throughout. The great gifted and glorious daughter of India worked hard and kept her promise till the last. The Bharat Kokila, one of the greatest India's daughters passed away on March 2, 1949. A black-bordered gazette of India, extraordinary was issued on March 3, 1949 announcing Sarojini Naidu's death. The Government paid its tribute by calling her "a brilliant orator", a great poet, person endowed with unusual charm and a sense of humour as well as a genius in oratory, administrative skills, and popular leadership. A memorial stand today on the banks of the Gomati river. Tributes poured in from all parts of India. It is true that a poet is a person of sharp sensibility and deep insight, and is primarily guided and controlled by his inner urges. But he is also a social being, he comes into contact with other persons, places and things, and thus gains in experiences. These outer experiences supply food to his inner experiences. A poet who has seen life in its entirety will, as a matter of fact, be able to point a rich and variegated picture of the world for the benefit of readers. As for Sarojini Naidu, she had seen life full and whole and acquired a wide range of experiences. She was in touch with so many celebrities of the day and learnt much from the during the impressionable years of her career.

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