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## **Sarojini Naidu as a poetess**

Sarojini Naidu, a poet of South, the Nightingale of India and the Peacock of Bengal, is one of the foremost Indian poetesses in English who placed India on the international map of letters. Even in her own days, she was acknowledged as “the most brilliant, the most original, as well as the most correct of all the natives of Hindustan who have written in English.” She is sui generis as a poet. She is fresh, original and appealing. Like Jane Austen, her range is limited. But whatever work she has given us as a poetess is the work of filigree, finished and polished like a work on an ivory piece. She is an immaculate artist and a perfect craftsman of high quality. Her poems have an enduring quality and will continue to bring delight to the future generations of English-educated-Indians. Gokhale said of her poetry- “you begin with a ripple and end in eternity.” She will be remembered for her vivid and original images, few moving tributes to great men and some enchanting glimpses of the Indian landscape and life.

Sarojini Naidu was a great romantic poet. There is little in her poetic outlook or execution that is not in the direct line of descent from the romantic poets of yesterday of both Eastern and Western literary history. There are echoes in her works of Shelley, Swinburne and Tennyson. Her love lyrics may well pass for the outpourings of a more passionate Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a more self-effacing Sappho, or a more sensuous and earthly Mirabai. Her love of nature, folk-lore, youth, beauty, glory, delight and tears, her emotional intensity, her melancholy, her love for beauty and above all her subjectivity make her a truly romantic poet. In fact, her poetry is a tapestry of romantic colouring with the quivering threads of gold.

Sarojini Naidu is the supreme poet of beauty. Her imagination is pure and undefiled by worldly desires. Though death, misery and sorrow figure in her poems, yet her poems are free from the dirt and squalor of the world. Her political and social work made her aware of the darker aspects of Indian life and the sufferings of the Indian people. But she saw and felt behind this the calmness and simple beauty of Indian life, its spiritual richness, its amazing continuity and assimilative power. As she loved beauty, she reflects in her poems, the gentle and enchanting sides of Indian's life and landscape. To quote Dr. Iyengar: “She was, above all, sensitive to beauty, the beauty of living things, the beauty of holiness, the beauty of the Buddha's compassion, the beauty of Bundavan's Lord. She didn't specially seek out the bizarre, the exotic, the exceptional...”

For the vast majority of men and women in the East, life is still the ancient mystery of birth and love and death encircled with the supreme mystery of the great Beyond. Sarojini Naidu, like Tagore and Iqbal, has given expression to her awareness of these mysteries in imagery conjuring up the visions of birds and flowers and trees, sun, moon, slais, cloud, wind, rain, hill, valley, sea, lamp, lute, the cradle, the bridal-bed, and the grave etc.

The themes of Sarojini Naidu's poems were timeless ones, Love and Life and Death. Her Wandering Singers declare:

“Our lays are of cities whose lustre is fled, The laughter and beauty of women long dead; The sword of old battles, the crown of old kings, And happy and simple and sorrowful things.”

Love is her main theme-worldly and spiritual both. Union, separation, illusion, ecstasy, fear, anxiety, entreaty, devotion- all moods of love are portrayed by her. Dr. Dastoor opines that “life's colours dazzle her; its beauty intoxicates her and its endless variety excites her.” 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 unfailing verbal felicity and rhythmical dexterity she succeeded as well. She had genuine poetic talent, and she was a wholesome and authentic singer.” (K P Srinivasa)

Sarojini Naidu was a cherry stone artist. She was a lyric poet and writer of songs. When we think of her as a poet, we think of her lyrics, short, simple and musical. She sings like a bird. Her poetry is remarkable for its ease and spontaneity. It has a distinctly musical quality, the rhythms that have the lilt and liquidity of song, that are most characteristic of her and are most readers' favourites. Brevity, melody, subjectivity, intensity of emotion, condensed thought- these features of lyric poetry are found in her poetry. ‘Palanquin Beavers’ is in this sense a representative utterance of the poet's: -

“Highly, O lightly, we bear her along, She sways like a flower in the wind of our song; She skims like a bird on the foam of a stream, She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream, Gaily, O gaily we glide and we sing, We bear her along like a pearl on a string.”

Sarojini Naidu is a poet of joy and optimism not of sorrow and pessimism. The will to live and live on, despite the challenges of pain and death is strong in her, and this will to live forms the golden thread of unity in her poetry. Life for her is not a riddle to be solved but a miracle to be celebrated and sung. Her poetry leads the readers out of the murky atmosphere of doubt and gloom into the clear fresh air of life's elemental experience, and herein lies her perennial youthfulness. Life for her is not an obsession but a possession. It is a movement through which we recognise the wonder, magnificence and splendour of the world. Death is not an extinction of life, but a gateway to new life. It makes union with the infinite possible, and so is to be

welcomed. She is aware that time is destructive but it is as well the agent of experience, growth and maturity, it is the only way to rejuvenation and new life.

In Sarojini Naidu's poem, there is a reflection of Hindu myth and legend, Hindu beliefs and customs. Poem after poem reveals, whether in its basic inspiration and theme or in its incidental imagery and illusions, the native Hindu mind and outlook of the poet. The very titles of some of the poems are tell-tale in this respect: *Suttee*; *To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus*; *Vasant Panchami*; *Song of Radha*, *The Milkmaid*; *Lakshmi, the Lotus-born*; *The Flute Player of Brindavan*; *Kali the Mother* etc. She gives delightful glimpse and descriptions of Indian festivals and the daily chores performed by men and women in our villages or cities. She writes about snake- charmers, tree-worshippers wandering singers, hermits; weavers singing at the loom; fisherman bursting into song when the catch is in; hawkers boasting about the excellence of their wares; village girls with the pitchers on their way to the well or the river, gypsies, bangle sellers etc. In this way her description of India is comprehensive and all- inclusive and her vision of India is joyous and fascinating.

Sarojini Naidu shows in her poems technical skill of a high order. She has been praised for her mastery of English. She was also a master of rhyme, possessing a sensitive ear for every delicate sound. Her poems have 'a prosodical correctness and regularity which seldom become mechanical.' Her metrical felicity charms us, her rhythmic sweep takes the reader off his feet. Sensuousness and love of beauty are two cardinal characteristics of her poetry. E.E. Speight says- "Her songs must be listened to with their gesture and accompaniment of musical voice. For Mrs. Naidu is above all a singer." Her strongest features are her vivid imagery. Her most memorable lines are those in which she has presented beautiful and graphic pictures by fusing together several visual impressions. Her images are natural and functional, there is no deliberate artistry.