

# GOLDEN RESEARCH THOUGHTS

## PORTRYAL OF WOMEN IN THE POETRY OF SAROJINI NAIDU: A STUDY



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### Abstract :

Sarojini Naidu is remembered as a virtuoso of English metrical forms and romantic imagery in her poetry, which she wrote in English. Her mastery of such difficult poetic construction as the dactylic prompted the English writers Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symons to praise her work widely and develop friendship with her. Sarojini Naidu's early poetry evidences the strong influence of her Brahmin upbringing. Crafting poems in traditional English metrical forms, she concentrated primarily on Western themes. Her first volume, *The Golden Threshold*, combines traditional poetic forms with lush and serene images of India. Naidu's second collection of poems, *The Bird of Time*, confronted more serious themes such as death and grief as well as containing poems expressing Naidu's patriotism and religious convictions. In her third volume, *The Broken Wing*, Naidu included more poems of patriotism and description of Indian culture, by the very name she depicted craving for freedom and independence. *The Temple and A Pilgrimage of Love* where she speculated her popularity which is dwindled, particularly in England, when she moved away from the flowery, romantic style of her early poetry to a comparatively morbid and contemplative tone in her later work. It provides an impetus and kindles positive thinking. In 1961 Naidu's daughter published a collection of her previously unpublished poems, *The Feather of the Dawn*, but it met with a little critical interest. Her poetry has since undergone revolution by Indian critics, many of whom regarded her as one of India's greatest twentieth century poets. Naidu is a plain and simple woman with an attractive temperament who wanted to get maximum out of life for service to the community. Her contributions to the women's movement were commendable. The whole credit of India's greatness goes to the ideals of Indian womanhood. Indian woman is always stands an example for her devotion, sacrifice and service towards her family. Naidu seriously criticizes the stupidity of pardah system and attacked the practice of child marriage and has touched all the ideals and aspects of Indian women in her poetry.

**Keywords:** Portryal Of Women , Poetry Of Sarojini Naidu , English metrical forms .

## Portrayal Of Women In The Poetry Of Sarojini Naidu: A Study

### INTRODUCTION:

The devotion, sincerity and sacrifice are the main characteristics which make Indian woman dignified and honorable. It is her service, purity, chastity, sacrifice and surrender on which the dharma and the honor of her family rest. In 'Nasturtiums' for instance, the speaker evokes both the bitter fragrance of the bloom and the sensations elicited by sight of the petals moving swiftly on a recitation of the names of women from Hindu mythology:

...Savitri's sorrow and Sita's desire  
Draupadi's longing, Damayanti's fears  
And sweetest Shakuntala's magical tears.<sup>1</sup>

(Nasturtiums)

Each of the women Savitri or Sita, Draupadi, Damayanti or Shakuntala has suffered a pain or betrayal at the hands of a man. The poet points them out as immortal women of Sanskrit legends and song. Their grief and virtue still 'inspire' the lives of Indian women she adds. The tale of Sita in particular haunted Naidu, especially the portion of her life set forth in the disputed Uttar Rama Kanda of '*The Ramayana*'. There King Rama still dubious about her virtue after the years of exile he's forced upon her, requires Sita to undergo a test by fire, Sita, white-haired now and the mother of grown twins, their faces the sitting image of Rama's own, utterly blameless still is humiliated. She cries out to the mother earth, and earth quiet literally her mother splits open to save her. Sita is served, swallowed back into the earth from which, at birth she had emerged. The myth with its ontological base in the maternity of the earth is put to. Sarojini's poetic words stress on their sufferings in her poem '*Nasturtiums*' but through these sufferings their radiant virtues and ideals glow.

Naidu's early poetry establishes a theme never to overcome in her career as a writer. The work is haunted by a voice telling of the other female slaves, resonance of subjectivity that we both imprisoned and endure mutilations. The search for 'the blind ultimate silence of the dead' that overtakes the speaker on the way of Golconda, finds its emotive counter part in the lives of the women in a poem like '*Pardah Nashin*': their days behind the veil are described as 'a revolving dream or of languid and sequestered ease.' Their clothing idealized, and unreal, caught within the walls of a segregated dwelling becomes 'morning mist/ shot opal, gold and amethyst'.

In the poem '*Suttee*', the voice is that of a woman mourning the death of her beloved husband. He was the 'lamp of my life' without him she's condemned to live in the dark. He was the 'tree of my life' now crushed by death's cruel foot. The mellifluous language highlighting the terrible self destruction the women is ready to embrace, the voice asks:

Lamp of my life, the lips of death  
Hath blown thee out with their sudden breath:  
Naught shall revive thy vanished spark...  
Love, must I dwell in the living dark?  
Tree of my life, Death's cruel foot  
Hath crushed thee down to thy hidden:  
Naught shall restore the glory field...  
Shall the blossom live when the tree is dead?  
Life of my life, Death's better sword  
Hath served us like a broken word,  
Rent us in twins who are but ne...  
Shall the flush survive when the soul is gone?<sup>2</sup>

(Suttee)

Self and other were untied as substance and sense in a word that's now 'broken'. The language of dualism rises up to buttress the division of gender, the woman likened in this trope not unfamiliar to reader of romantic poetry to the flesh in all weakness, and the man linked to the powerful soul, the immortal spirit. The question asked in the female voice is merely rhetorical. There is no question of survival without the beloved husband. Lacking the soul, the flesh in dross, fit merely to be consigned to the fire. From static and the enclosure of a woman's life we move to the immolation of the female body once it's been left from its male counterpart.

In the poem '*The Feast*':

Being no scented lotus-wreath,  
Moon-awakened, dew-caressed;  
Love, thro memory's age-long dream  
Sweeter shall my wild heart rest  
With your footprints on my breast.<sup>3</sup>

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(The Feast)

In the case of Mrs. Naidu's poem just quote, this is not so: it is a reflection of the whole attitude and custom of Hindu society in relation to its womanhood; despite poem's delicate beauty or, rather perhaps the more insidiously because of its beauty- is a menace to the future of India, because of its perpetuation of the 'door-mat' attitude of womanhood, which is at the root of India's present state of degeneracy through not only its direct enslavement of womanhood, but through its indirect emasculation of manhood, and the stultification of action for national freedom through the possession of a bad conscience as regards their own womankind.

It is curious to observe that while, in both her private and public life, Mrs. Naidu has broken away from the bonds of customs, by marrying outside her caste, and by appearing on public platform, she reflects in her poetry the derivative and dependent habit of womanhood that masculine domination which is a real impediment that has sentimentalized into a virtue: in her life, she is a plain feminist, but in her poetry she remains incorrigibly feminine where she sings and brings out the sinister design to malign the culture in the guise of offering a spirited defense of hapless women. As far as womanhood is concerned in India, she herself has passed on stuck of rut. It is not often in literature that an artist is in front of his or her vision, but it is safest to leave the artistic implications of the circumstances for the fuller, illumination of future volumes.

Sarojini Naidu was a profound poet, a thinker and a philosopher, mysticism also revealed in her lyrics. But she is ephemeral, and her lyrics are as light as the burden which the 'palanquin bearers' in her poem bear like a beautiful flower, a bird, a laugh, a star, a beam on the brow of a tide, a tear.

She sways like a flower in the wind our song,  
She wings like a bird on the foam of a stream,  
She floats like a laugh from the tips of a stream  
She hangs like a star in the dew of our song  
She springs like beam on the brow of the tide.<sup>4</sup>

(Palanquin Bearers)

The princess and queens in India those days used to be carried in palanquin bearers. The bearers used to sing nice song to forget their burden. Song gives delight to the soul. In this poem Sarojini Naidu uses the words like flower, bird, laugh, a star, a beam on the tide and a tear. These words indicate the transitory life of a person who enjoys herself or himself in this world. At the same time she reveals the eternal life of a person who has to know its progress spiritually. The word 'tide' indicates physical obstacle with which we have to confront. In a poem '*Advice to Fellow Swimmers*', Kamala Das says that physical obstacle is the desire that we have to cross it to reach the balanced stage. In this poem, '*Palanquin Bearers*', the word 'she' is referred to the palanquin. She is compared to a flower swinging in the wind, a bird skimming on the foam of a stream, to a laugh from the lips of dreaming youth, to a pearl on the string, to a star in the dew, to a tear from the eye of a bride and to a beam on the brow of a tide.

The songs of love and death were received with approval in Europe and with acclamation in India. The Daily Chronicle commented that she had more than a profusion of beautiful songs. The Yorkshire Post tells us Mrs. Naidu has not only enriched our language that has enabled us to grow into intimate relation with the spirit, the emotions, the mysticism and the glamour and the East. The Boot Man wrote that she possesses her qualities in heaped measure. Another observation by Edmond Gosse in his introduction is significant,

The sight of much suffering, it may be stated as thinned her jasmine garlands and darkened the azure of her sky. It is known to the world that her labors for the public weal not been carried out without deep injuries to her private health. But these things have not slackened the lyric energy of Sarojini, they have rather given it intensity. She is supported, as the true poet must be, by a noble ambition.<sup>5</sup>

In the poem *An Indian Love Song*, Mrs. Naidu writes about the feelings of Indian maiden for her father.

How shall I yield to the voice of thy pleading, how  
Shall I grant thy prayer,  
Or give thee a rose red silken tassel, a scented leaf  
from my hair?  
Or fling in the flame of thy heart's desire the veils  
that cover my face  
Profane the laws of my father's creed for a foe of  
my father's race?  
The kinsmen have broken our sacred altars and  
Slaughtered our sacred kine,  
The feud of old faiths and the blood of old battles  
Sever thy people and mine?<sup>6</sup>

(An Indian Love Song)

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The pages of Indian history are full of brave deeds of Rajput women. Mrs. Naidu refers queen Padmini of Chittor with other Rajput women had sacrificed their lives by performing 'Jouhar' as they had lost hope of victory of Rajputs in their battle with Ala-ud-Din-Khilji and died by jumping into fire to save their purity.

Or the blood that pured from a thousand breasts  
To succor a Rajput queen?<sup>7</sup>

( In Paise of Gulmohar Blossom)

Sarojini Naidu depicts the picture of a devotional Indian wife through the example of Savitri, with her unflinching devotion and power had overcome the greatest evils of death, where her husband, Satyavan, a true symbol of truth. Though Indian wife knows the truth that death is inevitable to her husband, who is sinking in death, drama in her subconscious mind that her husband would recover. As the thoughts could not be fulfilled in reality, she had its fulfillment in dreams.

O Love, I dreamed my soul had ransomed thee,  
In thy love, dread incalculable hour  
From those pale hands at which we mortal cower,  
And conquered Death by Love, like Savitri.<sup>8</sup>

(Love and Death)

Though Mrs. Naidu wants to stress that Indian daughters are always take care for their parent's feelings. In Western countries, the girls never about their families where as in India the girls are always think of their family's reputation. As a daughter, Indian woman is more devoted towards her parents. Indian house wife implants the luster of love, service and wisdom to her husband and children as sun imparts his rays on earth which removes the darkness and fills life by giving elixir to it. Sarojini writes:

Who serves her household in fruitful pride,  
And worships the gods at her husband's side.<sup>9</sup>

(Bangle sellers)

Sarojini Naidu was a woman ahead of her time. She was a woman with multiple talents. A great poet, writer, an orator, leader, fighter, activist, liberator, administrator, mother, daughter, friend, but most importantly a true Indian, she was born in a time when India was going through the toughest phase in her history. During that time women were considered secondary to men. It takes a lot of grit or perhaps even a touch of defiance for a woman writer, albeit an Indian writer to express it in writing and place it on exhibition to the entire world. Inter caste marriages were not allowed. Girls didn't use to study beyond school level. But Sarojini broke all these bonds. She led as an example and kept on providing herself right, at every given opportunity. In spite of having a happy settled life with her family, Sarojini did not forget her duties towards her motherland. She worked for years, continuously striving for India's Liberalization from the Colonial Rule. She was responsible for awakening the women of India. She brought them out of the kitchen. She traveled from state to state, city after city and asked for the rights of the women.

But in the modern changed ambience, their position is still debatable on the threshold of social change. She re-established self-esteem within the women of India. Sarojini Naidu addresses in one of her speeches about Indian women:

You, who within the shelter of our homes are goddesses, high priestesses, the inspirer of our faith, sustainer of our hopes, the flowers of joy upon our breasts.

(Equality of Sex)

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