Chapter – II

Nature and Sarojini Naidu

ABSTRACT

In this chapter the researcher has tried to depict the theme of nature through Sarojini’s poems and endeavoured to reflect as to how nature in its human context, and man in his natural context are integrated into a simple unity in Sarojini Naidu’s poems. The researcher has made a sincere effort to show that man may need nature for his sustenance but nature also needs man as its instrument of self-expression.
Chapter – II

Nature and Sarojini Naidu

“And Hark! How blithe the throstle sings! He, two, is no mean preacher: Come forth into the light of things, Let Nature be your teacher.”

..William Wordsworth

The relationship between man and nature has been an intimate one ever since the beginning of life. In the primitive age, his aesthetic pleasures and physical needs were gratified by nature. He must have appreciated the snow-clad mountains and sweet carols of various birds and must have dipped into sparkling streams and basked under the Sun.

In the Vedic age, nature was raised to the status of a deity. All elements of nature like Sky, Fire, Air, Water and Earth were worshipped as the divine powers. The Sun was prayed for repelling all evil forces and for absolving one’s sins.
It was in the nineteenth century, where it was English poetry, which influenced Indian English nature poetry, the most. William Wordsworth’s Pantheism, P.B.Shelley’s Mythopoetic Imagination, John Keat’s Sensuousness and St.Coleridge’s heuristic vision influenced the Indian poet to a great extent. They began to interpret nature in terms of mankind. The Victorians and the Pre-Raphaelites augmented the process of re-orientation. English romanticism paved a new creative ground for Indian poets. They found their critical inspiration in nature. The rich Indian landscape, radiant flowers and their colours, the murmuring rivers, the snowy mountains and the melodious songs of birds caught the imagination of Indian English poets who looked at nature with a new vision.

In the classical Indian poetry nature was treated as a background, and never an automatic force by itself. Poets like Henry Derozio, Kashi Prasad Ghosh and others could just become derivative romantics. It was for the first time, in the poetry of Toru Dutt and Manmohan Ghosh that the genuine native tone could be heard. Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo appeared to be influenced by the Western Romanticism, but the stress in their poetry was always on the resonance of their souls.

The scenery of nature is used only to illumine their inner world, and they seem to be emanating out of their own native tradition. Sarojini Naidu
unlike Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo show any constituent view of the world in which the role of man and nature in the cosmic scheme may be defined. Their poetry is based on a philosophy, which presents God, Man and Nature in their integral relationships. Sarojini Naidu’s conception of nature lacks philosophical foundation but her poems reveal a spontaneous understanding of the Indian point of view.

Sarojini Naidu’s conception of nature is longed with her innate best for romanticism. The colours, the sounds and lights, the scents and the touch of natural objects fascinated and thrilled her. Her poems reveal a spontaneous understanding and acceptance of the Indian point of view on the question of man’s relationship with nature. This point of view is seen throughout the Indian literature and mythology from the Vedic hymns right up to the poetry of the modern age. In the Indian tradition man’s superiority is not explained in terms of his unique ability to express creatively the harmony between his own life and the life of nature. Man and Nature enrich and complement each other. Their dependence is mutual. There is a common stream of life, a rhythmic power, which animates both nature and man. Her early English poetry is mostly imitative of English colours and odours of skylarks and nightingales and is reminiscent of the English poetry of John Keats, P.B. Shelley and Alfred Lord Tennyson, the poet Laureate of England. But to
the great surprise of Sarojini Naidu it was Edmund Gosse who advised her to write about things, Indian. She immediately acted on his advice and began to write about Indian flowers and Indian seasons. Her poems on nature are rich in oriental colours and magnificence.

Sensuousness is the predominant quality in her nature poetry. Her poetic world is the ordinary world clarified and enriched by the sensitivity and delicacy of her imagination. The subject of her poetry is the simple, familiar and unpretentious world of natural feelings and emotions, simple joys and sorrows, vivid memories and reveries, poignant recognitions all characterized by the rich naturality and poise of the Indian life and landscape.

Her nature poems employ rapture and ecstasy to bring a wealth of internal reference to the outer world. The landscape of things is modified by the inscape of the perceiving mind. In the midst of her small world of flowers, birds and the gems, she weaves the glitter and glow of bangles, brocades, bells and murmurs the shadows of windows, balconies, groves and shrines, thereby humanizing the child-like pictures of actual perceived naturality. She views it as a manifestation of the Cosmic Being, as a creative dance in which man and nature unite amidst the medley and interplay of natural forces. From childhood innocence to erotic ecstasy of youth, Sarojini
exemplifies the inclusion of the natural world of change and growth into the human awareness of being. Thus nature and everything in it emerges as a symbolic manifestation in Sarojini’s Naidu’s poetry reflecting the exquisite flow of contrasts and possibilities in human life towards an archetypal union. We may get an idea of her passionate and sensitive response to the beauty of nature from what she wrote to Edmund Gosse. “Come and share my exquisite March morning with me; this sumptuous blaze of gold and sapphire sky; the voluptuous fragrances of neem and champak and Sirisha that beat upon the languid air with their implacable sweetness, the thousand little gold and blue and silver-breasted birds bursting with the shrill of life in resting 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 any heart’s blood, these little quivering birds are my soul made incarnate music; these perfumes are my emotions dissolved into aerial essence, this flaming gold and blue sky is the every me’ that part of me which incessantly, yes, and a little deliberately, triumphs over that other part … a thing of nerves and tissues that suffers and cries out and must die tomorrow perhaps or twenty years hence,” 1

Sarojini Naidu’s sympathy for nature is expressed more directly in her description of farms, orchards, groves and forests than in her poems about
rivers or lakes. She took great delight in the renewal and change that earth undergoes from season to season. All her affection was concentrated on spring (Rituraj), the Monarch of the seasons – spring rather than the other seasons.

Sarojini Naidu’s love for self, love for the concrete as manifested in its various flowers, birds, seasons and fragrances inspired the two series of nature poems:

(a) *Songs of The Spring Time contains*

- Spring,
- A Song in spring,
- The joy of the spring time,
- Vasant Panchami,
- In a time of flowers.
- In praise of Gulmohar blossoms,
- Nasturtiums,
- Golden Cassia,
- Champak blossoms and
- Ecstasy.
(b) *The Flowering Year contains*

- The Call of Spring
- The Coming of Spring
- The Magic of Spring
- Summer Woods
- The June Sunset and
- The Time of Roses etc.

‘The Magic of Spring’ sends Sarojini Naidu into raptures and the individual manifestation of nature’s beauty attracts her imagination. ‘The June Sunset’ makes the reader soar and deeply immersed in the world of nature.

> “Here shall my soul find its true repose

*under a sunset sky of dreams*²

The poet here seeks repose in a peaceful country-scene under the colours of a June sunset. The sight and sounds of the country side, both those of wild nature and of human life are described, till the stars begin to gleam. The poetess does not keep in mind the negative aspect of the scorching heat in the early June but tries to depict the positive later part of
June, when there have been a few monsoon showers, the clouds saunter about and the sky is aglow at the hour of sunset.

Normally a poet writes a poem which truly is the reflection of a particular sight seen on a particular day by the poet as in the case of John Keats in ‘To Autumn’ when the scene struck him on a Sunday’s walk, but this is conspicuous by its absence in June sunset. The poet writes what she sees at the particular moment.

The poem reminds us of John Keats ‘odes’ where every rift is loaded with lore. In the second line the ‘rush-fringed rivers’ and ‘rain-fed streams’, the consonance of the ‘r’ and the ‘S’ and the ‘sh’ sounds, ‘double alliteration in ‘fringed’ and ‘feel’ and the word ‘glimmer’ in the palm, turning the rivers and streams running through the meadows into an impressionistic picture revealing an artistic or rare workmanship unmatched anywhere except in John Keats.

“Of swift wild wings in their home ward flight,
Sapphire, emerald, topaz and pearl,
A float in the evening light”

A veritable feast of rich colours, diaphanous, amber and rose which richly coincide with the sky of dreams and Sapphire, emerald, topaz, and
pearl of the birds flying in the air and reflecting the colourful splendour of
the scene. The faint stars gleaming in the sky, the objects, particularly the
quail, the bullock-cart, the pipal (tree), the Banjarin (gypsy) and the way,
have been grouped together, to portray sunset.

Sarojini Naidu always had an abundant capacity to ally herself with
the very spirit of her surroundings. By blending ‘memory and desire’ the
music of the earth and the magic of the heaven. She could project every
natural thing as an image of pure delight and profound beauty. The laws of
nature are manifest in the transparent forms of sensuous actuality. The
sunset is brought in a cup of flowers. The rays of moon light are caught by
the gossamer threads of fancy.

Sarojini Naidu had a woman’s and a poet’s weakness for spring. Many of her poems even when they are not actually on that season are
redolent with the imagery of ‘Vasanta’ (spring). She draws a loving picture
of all the natural objects and makes the world a wonderful place to live in.
She provides us a chance to listen to the melodious songs of various birds
and the buzzing of bees. It is altogether a picture of lost innocence to us in
modern India, caught up as we are in the fever and fret of a culture
increasingly entrapped in materialism and modernity. Her song is ablaze
with Gulmohar and Cassia, with the Champak and Jasmine. We wander with
her into Pomegranate gardens of mellowing to watch a June Sunset, Fawn feed on Scented grass and the bees on Cactus Gold. The Koels invite us to the summer woods.  

There are no ideas or sentiments or feelings that wake up from the poems that imply the plain, palpable, concrete objects on the land and in the air, which have been objectively depicted and made lively in the poem ‘June Sunset’ to constitute a genuine, poetic picture.

“An Ox-cart stumbles upon the rocks,
And a wistful musk pursues the breeze
From a Shepherd’s pipe as he gathers his flocks
Under the pipal-trees”  

Apparently superficial as simply enumerating some sights or sounds. A scene compelling silence is suggested by the wistful music from the shepherd’s pipe, the singing of the banjarin against a background of faint stars gleaming in the sky.

The above poem is clearly a reminiscent of the poem of William Wordsworth’s. ‘The Solitary Reaper’, the gentian pushing through the wet earth conjures up in the second stanza, as image which is kinetic. It is followed by a metaphor—the foot of the shower passing through the fields.
The third and the last stanza contain references to Banjarin’s ballad of love and battle, set to delicate, mystic tune. The poem presents a glimmer everywhere. With the sunset gleam there is repose and peace in the sky and everywhere.

According to Westermark, among the Aryans who inhabited the plains of the North, the spring or Vasantha celebrated in a song by the poets, and the time for marriages and feasts.

Sarojini Naidu’s nature-poems are mostly in praise of spring but at times her approach to it is conventional, as for example in ‘Vasant Panchami’ which is the festival of spring. Here, Lilavati, a widow is sad and the spring season has no charm for her.

‘Vasant Panchami’ - It is the festival of spring whenever Hindu girls and married women carry gifts of lighted lamps and new grown corn as offerings to the goddess of the spring and set them afloat on the face of the waters, but unfortunately her Hindu tradition has come into action as widows cannot take part in any ceremonies or festivals. For them it is sorrow and austerity. Here the voice of a widow literally makes a person imagine the agony she undergoes or experiences.

Sarojini Naidu handles the natural scene with a loving delicacy, producing a variety of effects-pictorial, elegiac, meditative and symbolic.
Although much of her poetry today appears to be worn-out, and full of romantic stock-in-trade, and without any authentic individuality but it did compel attention and admiration in the ‘Twenties’.

“O quench your flame, ye crimson gulmohurs,

That flaunts your dazzling bloom across my doors”

Here Lilavati, a widow laments at ‘feast of the spring’. Being a widow she cannot partake in the celebrations of spring and there is poignant sorrow in her heart for the days that are no more. The melodious songs of Koels, Dadikulas and other birds absolutely bring no joy into her life. On the other hand their dull notes are like poisoned arrows in her heart.

Crimson Gulmohar, sweet Champa buds and Sirisha trees embitter her heart with bitter memories. They cast a sorrowful impact on her mind constantly reminding her that she is a widow.

“I pray you dim your voices when you sing

Your radiant salutation to the spring”

She requests the joyous girls and young brides who carry the gifts of lighted lamps and new-blown wheat to worship spring, to subdue their voices when they sing their radiant salutations to the spring. The joys of spring is meant only for the happy women. Her heart is like a sere leaf and
all the joys and beauties of nature are strange to her. She is not jealous but there is a deep sense of pathos reflected in this poem:

Lilavathi’s life is doomed to be sad and ruined like withered blades of grass. She is past all joys and passionate feelings that pulsate in other blessed women’s heart. Her grief stricken heart is compared with a faded flower or a sere life just as a faded flower or a sere leaf is plucked by merciless wind and flutters hither and thither.

Similarly her heart has been broken by grief and all its feelings flutter in vain. Out of her days and nights a joy has taken flight. Like every lone and wither thing she can no more enjoy the splendid beauties of spring. Here simile and metaphor has been very beautifully mused for sorrow-trodden. For e.g. poisoned arrows ‘Plucked by the wind of grief’. Here Sarojini Naidu has expressed the feelings of a widow who is quite helpless very beautifully. She has no right over nature. The plight of a widow was portrayed very pathetically in this poem.

Nature to Sarojini Naidu is a charming objective reality, a vast limitless storehouse of beauty, colour and splendour and is to be enjoyed as it is for its glory and pageantry. She is enamoured by the beauty of spring which is the season of flowering and a reformation of life in nature on the arrival of spring. The poem has a very simple arrangement in description of
the nature and scenery of our countryside during spring. The subject was dealt with, by almost all poets of the world who have endeavoured to recreate in their poetry the spirit and splendour of spring. The poetess objectively describes the magnificent beauty of nature, as John Keats did in his famous poem ‘Ode to autumn’.

The poem ‘spring’ is the season of revival of a new life in nature. The honey birds’ pipe to the budding figs and honey-blooms call the bee. Green leaves grow on the banyan twigs and red on the peepal tree. Poppies glow with delicate golden colour, multi-coloured lilies bloom. The kingfishers ruffle the feathery sedge. The air is filled with butterfly wings in the wild-rose hedge. The earth is filled with the luminous green of the hills. Spring is the harbinger of joy and novelty. It kindles the life-fuse in the trees, flowers and birds and butterflies. It draws the human beings into the eddies of the vital flood. Spring is the moment, the season, and the cycle of Love, while Kamala slowly lingers in the grove where temple bells ring and “Krishna plays on his bamboo flute an idol of love and spring.”

“Kamala tinkles a lingering

In the grove where temple-bells ring,

And Krishna plays on his bamboo flute

An idyl of love and spring”

57
Her description is marked by romantic charm and grace. The poem contains sensuous and rich colour affects which add to the beauty of the poem and which illustrates her poetic craftsmanship. It arouses the emotion of love in the heart and invites us to sing in ecstasy the ‘idyls of love’. She loved the beauty of nature as selflessly, passionately and sensitively as John Keats did. There is nothing abstract, philosophical or intellectual in her poetry, but has only tender feelings and sensitive emotions. The setting of the last stanza is pastoral. Kamala and Krishna seem to be the characters of Indian pastoral beauty. Two notes of joy and melancholy run in her poems of spring-time. The transience of beauty and the profound anguish caused by the absence of the beloved annihilate the deep joy of spring. This streak melancholy is conspicuous in her later nature poems like June Sunset and Summer Woods, whereas the early nature poems are characterized by a cheerful mood.

In the Poem ‘A song in spring’, Sarojini Naidu introduces a personal element. Her dreams are deferred and her heart has grown old. Naturally she feels depressed. But depression is incompatible with the mood of nature during the spring. So, the poet cheers herself up. The bees and birds and fireflies cannot answer her questions, for they are but brief visitors, they come with the spring and go with the spring. These temporary visitors
can have no wisdom because wisdom comes with the experience of age. But the winds are wiser and omniscient, since they blow all over the universe. They are a symbol of wisdom. They have followed the hurrying feet of the pilgrims. They have observed the changing sorrow of the human souls.

“*Their wings have winnowed sorrow of the garnered sunlight,*

*Their lips have tasted the purple sea.*” 11

The winds know of dreams deferred and a heart grown old they know the causes of past frustration. But they also know the future and the fulfillment of desires that is to be. They divine the magic unblown lilies. They foretell the stars of unborn night. The wise winds have permanence. They have witnessed the ageless drama of human existence on the earth. So, their unimaginable knowledge and experience give them wisdom. And the wise winds seem to tell to the poet that there is no reason to be depressed, for the desires that are hither to be fulfilled shall be fulfilled one day. Countless lilies have unblown. Countless starry nights have come and gone, but still there are starry nights that are yet to be reborn. Birds, animals, flowers enjoy themselves in spring, they are free from worry, but it is different with men and women whose joy is marred by some fear, doubt or unfulfilled dreams. Such a mood is depicted in ‘A Song in spring’
Nature’s loveliness in spring which is reflected in the hope of a bride or in the dream of a maiden is revealed in the poem ‘The Joy of Spring Time’. The poet fails to understand the mysterious secret of spring’s magical mirth that fills the morning with splenderous beauty and sprouts all seeds to grow into beauty and abundance. Spring is here addressed directly and asked to reveal the “essence” of its mysterious power. The poet herself tries to explore the mystery behind the beauty that spring sprinkles all around it. It is beauty and joy which unfolds them in the life of a Bulbul, the laugh of a rose and the dance of dew on the wings of a moon beam. Indian traditional life also stresses the importance to seasons especially spring which comes in the months of March and April.

Sarojini Naidu loves nature in all its manifestations - the beautiful and the ugly, the kind and the cruel aspects of nature make their impact on her and find a place in her poetry. She is not a poet of strong and violent emotions, but a tender poet of mystery and dreams, love and joy, sorrow and strife. Her nature poems reveal her general buoyancy, her sensitiveness to all forms of beauty, and her great zeal for life.

‘Leili’ is one of the best nature poems of Sarojini Naidu where ‘Night’ is personified. ‘Leili’ is a Persian word for night. Here the aim of the poet is the creation of the impression of silence of muteless night by a wonderful
and unique combination of images, metaphors and symbols, and of consonant and vowel sound.

“The serpents are asleep among the poppies,
The fireflies light the soundless panther’s way
To tangled paths where shy gazelles are straying
And parrot-plumes outshine the dying day” 12

The approach of the night is mentioned by concrete events and images viz, the Serpants fallen asleep among the poppies, here poppies having association with sleep and dreams. The fire flies, which are visible only during the night light the path of the Panther. The night’s quietude is further accentuated in by the lotus bird, stirring upon the streams like dreaming maidens, subdued and soft sounds and the device of contrast used for the same suggestion in the parrot, plumes outshining the dying day (the dying day is grey).

“O soft! The lotus-buds upon the stream
Are stirring like sweet maidens when they dream”. 13

Here, it makes one feel the nightly presence of mighty pervading everywhere. Here, the atmosphere imparts her sublime holiness. The forest is the temple, where she is avidly enshrined and the moon shining like a cast
mark on the brows of heaven, actually having like a luminous mark on the brows of night herself. The winds like maidens in temple swoon at her holy feet, and mystic voices sing in its silence and offer incense to the gods. Here one is simply left wondering at the cast-mark, the winds dancing and swooning, the mystic voices, the incense being offered to gods, without mentioning their names. All is vague and romantic and aims to produce surrealistic effects. The myth, metaphor, symbolism, subdued sound and wonder are used in just measure to create an impression of some kind of ‘mysterious’ and ‘wondrous’ suggestion.

The nature poetry of Sarojini Naidu reflects two different moods. One is of the joys and delight, and the other of sorrow and melancholy. The former which can be noticed in ‘The Call of Spring’ which is addressed to her daughters Padmaja and Leelamani who are flower like and fleet-footed maidens. Addressing her daughters she says that spring calls through the dawn and the day time “for flower-like and fleet-footed Maidens like you”.

Over hillside and valley through gardens and groves, Bulbuls, Mainas and Doves are singing carols to welcome the spring. Sweet-fragrance and lovely flowers are blooming everywhere. Joy is reigning supreme in the realm of nature in the spring time.
O, come let us go and play with the spring

Like glad-hearted children together.”^15

‘Autumn’ to Sarojini Naidu, is not a season of joy or fulfilment, as it is to John Keats. Autumn, though a time, a colour and transformation, is full of melancholy suggestions for the poet. It is like a joy on the heart of a sorrow. Autumn with its paltriness revives in the poet the memories of broken dreams. Like pale, fluttering leaves her dreams also seem to have been swept away, leaving behind a strange sense of sadness.

The poet utters in a mood of dejection

“My heart is weary and sad and alone,
For its dreams like the fluttering leaves have gone”^16

The Rainy season, which has been a perennial source of inspiration to Rabindranath Tagore, seldom attracts Sarojini Naidu. In ‘Hymn to Indra’, Lord of Rain,’(Varun) she invokes Lord Indra for blending the vedic myth and folk lore.

Apart from these hymns, there is hardly any poem worth mentioning which reflects Sarojini Naidu’s love and enthusiasm for the rainy season. It appears rather surprising considering the importance of rain in the Indian folk poetry and in the legend of Radha and Krishna with which she has been
so thoroughly familiar. The predominant quality of Sarojini Naidu is the habit of viewing the natural world and its manifestations as events of personal emotion and individual awareness.

The importance of Wind, Cloud and Sea in Sarojini Naidu’s poetry: Sarojini Naidu visualizes the winds as an experienced traveler who, during their journeys over Earth and Sea, has accumulated a lot of knowledge.

This can be clearly seen in the following lines:

“The wise winds, as they pause to slacken
The speed of their subtle, omniscient flight
Divining the stars of the unborn night” 17

Unseen and unheard, the wind penetrates all the mysteries of variegated life. This idea is expressed in the opening stanza of ‘The Garden Vigil.’ Sarojini Naidu describes the wind in close association with clouds, as in the lines from ‘Song of Radha’

I wanted to cry, who will buy, who will buy,
These curds that is white as the clouds in the sky,
When the breezes of shravan are blowing” 18
But even the wind, the busy body which chases the clouds and pries into other people’s affairs, must have its hours of relaxation. Here is a beautiful stanza from Coramandel Fishers in which Sarojini Naidu describes the wind at rest.

“The Wind lies asleep in the across
The wind lies asleep in the arms of the dawn,
Like a child that has cried all night” 19

Sarojini Naidu has written very little about the sea. Some of her earlier poems and letters, written during her travel in southern Europe contain vivid descriptions of the Mediterranean. In her nature poetry, then, sea does not occupy any place of importance.

Sarojini Naidu enjoys nature and feels it, and she has an aesthetic kind of reaction. She is very easily responsive to ‘loveliness’ soft colour, melody of things and wherever nature shows these virtues, the poet tries to recapture them in her poetry. Her poetry on nature is full of vivid and concrete imagery. The images used by her in her treatments of nature are sensuous, impassioned, rich and romantic. They are derived mostly from the Indian legend, history, mythology and life as a whole. She is an Indian John
Keats and has strong affinities with the English romantics in her love for nature.

Sarojini Naidu’s lyric sentiment for Nature is not, of course limited to the rural or pastoral scene; it is extended to the city also. In fact there are in fact very few poets in India who can view the city scene as fondling and with understanding as Sarojini Naidu does. The Romantic tradition set up the city as a soul-destructive antithesis to the countryside, which is identified with the harmonious and creative aspects of Nature. With the exception of Charles Lamb and Whitman, it is the underside of the city that is played up.

T.S. Eliot seems to have perpetuated the city as a symbol of man’s magnificent irrelevance and futility. On the contrary, Sarojini Naidu has a strong feeling of love, admiration and identity for the city. Her own City of Hyderabad is the Queen of the Deccan, a confluence of cultures, historical memories and folk-customs. The city is an extension and fulfillment of Nature and vital urges of beauty, purpose and continuity. Sarojini Naidu’s poems ‘Songs of My City’, ‘Street Cries’ and ‘Nightfall in the City of Hyderabad’ are poems of endearment, gratitude and pride. Particularly in ‘Nightfall’, she projects an Arabian-Nights picture of the city, endowing it with an active, vibrant personality of its own, employing scintillating images to emphasize its continuity in, and its contiguity with, Nature. The City is
both in nature and nurtured by Art, and Art fostered by nature. Its towers and minarets, its gates and balconies, its roads and bridges rise out of the landscape like bird and tree and star. The sky, the land and the river so engirt the city as though it were a lover’s embrace.

The city is a bridge with a fondness for ornament, coquettishness and coy forgetfulness, all veiled in bashful mystery. The city of Hyderabad is dominated by the Musi River, exactly curved like a tusk from the mouth of the city-gates. The image is at once precise and evocative. Besides, it connects the city to the riparian landscape, suggesting how the wild river has been tamed into the city’s culture, while giving life to it.

*See the white river that flashes and scintillates,*

*Curved like a tusk from the mouth of the city gates.*

The sky at nightfall in the city, looks like a pigeon flown from one of the towers on the river-side, burning like a pigeon’s throat; perhaps like the thought of a city-bride whose throat quivers and burns with ornaments of opal and peridot. The city is a frame of beauty and reverence, power and glory, history and destiny. The city is solid, active, curious, unhurried and even self-indulgent, reflecting the spacious and anachronism in the survival of this feudal city even in modern times. But there is no scene of abruptness.
in the steady flow of its life. The Presiding Deity of the city is the Goddess of Love, and living, there, is in itself an act of love.

The night sky is the latest votary, a nature summoned to celebrate the royalty of the sky and the sovereignty of man.

“Over the city bridge Night comes majestical

Borne like a queen to a sumptuous festival”

In the poem, Sarojini Naidu captures fully the flavour of the City of Hyderabad in all its dreamy opulence, wistful splendour and humanizing eccentricity. The portrait is refreshingly free from the oppressive modern sense of citified separation from Nature. Sarojini’s Naidu’s city includes, and is included in nature, both by its personality and its history. Sarojini Naidu’s nature poetry has none of the mystical leanings that distinguish Rabindranath Tagore’s nature poetry. Devoid of deep thoughts and the mystical interpretation, her nature poetry is superb in the sphere of sensuous depiction of various natural objects and seasons. With her no considerations of theology, humanity or metaphysics mingle with nature. She viewed with child-like delight at the objects of nature, and her whole being was thrilled by what she saw and heard. She loved nature for her own sake, and not for the sake of any idea that the human mind can read into her with its own
working and aspirations. She was stirred to depths by the colour and fragrance and music in nature.

Sarojini’s Naidu’s limited awareness of nature makes it difficult to accept Ms. P.V.Rajyalakshmi’s conclusion that her ‘response to nature is radical, elemental and total.’

Sarojini Naidu’s poetic sensibility is essentially lyrical. The typically recurrent images in her poems are those of dream, song, silence and shrine. But her passion for sensuous imagery weakens her ability to explore experience. She offers a surprising variety of metrical patterns within the framework of traditional English stanza forms. The cloying music of her alliterative verse often results in stifling the sense.

There is a note of change in the poem, ‘The Coming of Spring’, written on Vasanta Panchami day. The poet speaks of herself as a middle aged woman no longer able to participate in the festival as enthusiastically as she did as a girl. The passage of time has created the necessity of decorous distinctions, vicarious thrills of experience, and surrogate emotional outlets. Age, having lost the reckless splendour of juvescence, resorts to the artifices of structured response and controlled emotions. It is
through empathy that the mind guides the heart to assert its feelings, and not by the instant upsurge of sympathy as in youthful times.\textsuperscript{24}

‘In Magic of Spring’, the poet is in despondence mood. Spring brings about a magical transformation in nature but, at times, it fails miserably in cheering a human heart buried under ‘a secret hill of pain’

\begin{quote}
\textit{“I buried my heart so deep}
\textit{Under a secret of hill of pain”}\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}

But soon the shadow of melancholy is dispelled. Her depression vanishes when the ‘March woods glimmer with opal rain and passionate Koels sing. She returns to her usual mood of joy and Ecstasy and cries “my heart leapt up in its grave and cried. ./is it spring, the spring? Here Sarojini Naidu comes very close to P.B. Shelley and John Keats whom she admired much. Melancholy is an inherent temperament of P.B. Shelley. He says in ‘Ode to the West Wind’

\begin{quote}
\textit{‘Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud,}
\textit{I fall upon the thorns of life: I bleed}^{26}
\end{quote}

John Keats feels pain because of excess joy. Joy, by its intensity, turns into pain. He says in ‘Ode to a Nightingale’
‘My heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains/my sense’ 27

The veil becomes a mask, as reality in one’s life usurps romance. But she allows now a chance to the younger girls to participate in the same manner as she did as a young maiden. She asks spring not to think her untrue and unkind, in case she lags behind, leaning to rest against a sheltering wall. There was a song she used to sing, but now she has forgotten it. There is only the desire, but not the power, to sing. She is only a coeval, not a colleague, of her comrade spring, of whom she begs forgiveness. 28

But soon after comes the joy, after the pain; the return, after the withdrawal; the letting-go of feeling, after the hushed anguish; the strains of thawed music, after the toneless pause of tautened nerves. Sarojini’s depression vanishes when the March woods glimmer with opal rain, and the passionate Koels sing, the Kimshuks burst into dazzling flower, and the soft clouds break in a twinkling tide.

Nature is a relief from the conflicts of the worldly life. In “Summer Woods”, the poet says:

“O, I am tired of painted roofs and soft and silken floors
And long for wind-blown canopies of crimson Gulmohar” 29
She expresses her longing to fly where cassia-woods are breaking into flame, and koels call from flowery glade and glen. She wishes to lie beneath the boughs of Tamarind, and Molsari and Neem. She wants to bind their brows with jasmine sprays and play on carven flute; to roam along the river’s bank and bathe in the water-lily pools. For Sarojini Naidu, Nature is a ‘Sanctuary of Peace.’

In another poem, written on the day of Lakshmi Puja (a worship of Goddess Lakshmi). The goddess of prosperity is addressed as Lotus-born. There are four stanzas in this poem, and each of these concludes with the line: ‘Hearken, O, Lotus born!’ Apart from the mythical association of the lotus Sarojini Naidu praises the inherent beauty and elegance of the lotus flowers, its leaves, buds and blossoms. Addressing her ‘Fairy fancies’, she regrets that she can no longer like lotus leaves enfold you in the tangles of my tresses. In another poem she refers to lotus honey in yet another, the gentle swaying of lotus buds in the wind is described in these lines:

“O soft! The lotus buds upon the stream
Are stirring like maidens when the dream”

A clear picture of the flower lotus can be seen in Sarojini Naidu’s poem addressed to the Buddha, seated upon his Lotus. But nowhere has
Sarojini Naidu expressed symbolism of lotus, more effectively than in her poem addressed to Mahatma Gandhi. The Mahatma is here compared to the mystic lotus, sacred and sublime, in myriad petalled grace inviolate. Rooted in the waters of eternity, unaffected by transient storms of tragic fate, the lotus withstands the attacks of wild bee hordes and hungry winds many have tried:

“To devastate thy loveliness, to drain
The midmost rapture of thy glorious heart,
But who could win thy secret, who attain
Thine ageless beauty born of Brahma’s breath,
Or pluck thine immortality” 34

Mahatma Gandhi has been eulogized by Indian poets in a dozen languages. But rarely has his purity and spiritual beauty been conveyed so gracefully as in this poem by Sarojini Naidu, in which the ancient symbol of the myriad-petalled lotus has been so imaginately employed.

Besides the lotus other Indian flowers that have been fascinated poets since ancient times are the Sirisha, Kadamba, Champak, Kimshuka and Ashoka. Sarojini Naidu has introduced all the themes in her poems. The Sirisha is mentioned by Kalidasa as one of the flowers with which the
maidens of Alakapuri loved to deck their ears. Even in Sarojini Naidu’s poem ‘Vasanta Panchami’ the beauty of the Sirisha is painful to the widow who exclaims:

“Hold your breath, O dear Sirisha trees,
You slay with my heart bitter memories”

Sarojini Naidu draws inspiration from the world of animals and birds and insects. Her poems are full of references to gazelles, deers, elephants, serpents, fire-flies, glow worms, dragon-flies, bulbul, koels, papihas, peacocks, pigeons, doves and vultures. But she is somewhat partial to the birds like the eagle maybe for its force and energy or to the bulbul for its grace and delicacy. Birds are the messengers and envoys of love, pain and joy. The bird is also a code for the poet, signifying flight or ascent, escape or transcendence, aspiration or memory. In fact three of her poetical collections have their titles drawn from the bird imagery: ‘The Bird of Time,’ ‘The Broken Wing,’ and ‘The Feather of Dawn.’

Sarojini Naidu shows feminine fascination for flowers. Her path to Nature is strewn with flowers of rich hue and intense smell. No matter, whatever be the theme, flowers must appear in abundance. There are many poems which are dedicated to individual manifestations of nature’s beauty.
‘In Praise of Gulmohar Blossoms’ the poet discovers Gulmohar blossoms as ‘Gorgeous boon of the spring’. They are so lovely that nothing can rival them in their rich hue neither ‘The glimmering red of a bridal of a bridal robe’ nor ‘the rich red of wild bird’s wings’. Perhaps ‘the mystic blaze of the gem that burns on the brow of a serpent king” can measure up her beauty or perhaps only

“The limpid clouds of the lustrous dawn
That colour the ocean’s mien?
Or the blood that poured from a thousand
breasts
To succour a Rajput Queen?” 37

Nasturtiums are exquisite, luminous and passionate blooms. Their leaves are interwoven of fragrance and fire and recall the immortal women which are depicted in the lines:

“…Savitri’s sorrow and Sita’s desire,
Draupadi’s longing, Damayanti’s fears,
And Sweetest Sakuntala’s magical tears.”38

There is a quick transition from the natural to mythic imagery which intensifies the poignancy of the scene. The reference to the immortal women
of old legends and songs recall the sorrows and virtues which still inspire the loves of Indian Women. The floral setting is extended into a symbolic landscape which has modified and tamed the topography in the ‘Golden Cassia’. We have a flood of metaphors. They are more than mere wood-land flowers strewn on the way. They may be compared to fragments of some new- fallen star on account of their resplendence as they are portrayed here:

“Golden lamps for a fairy shrine
Or Golden pitchers for fairy wire” 39

They have been aptly likened to ‘bright anklet sells from the wild spring’s feet’ or to ‘the gleaming tears that some fair bride shed’. Here metaphors are not quaint but quite natural in the background of Indian scene. They convey the poetic sensibility and romantic imagination of the poetess.

Sarojini Naidu, in her use of simile and metaphor, may often appear to be natural from the point of view of English rhetoric. But she is altogether natural in terms of the traditional Indian sensibility. Intelligence, perception, feeling and imagination are blended, not so much into a line as into a unit of consciousness crystallizing itself around the evocative image of the world as a garden of flowers. Mediating between experience and vision, the image is
further sharpened into a symbol. The ‘Champak Blossoms’ are a joy forever, P.B. Shelley, too, appreciated their fragrance:

“The champak odours fail
Like sweet thoughts in a dream” 40

Along with their fragrance, Sarojini Naidu also appreciates their petals. They are like amber petals, ivory petals, petals of jade. Their sweetness charms forest and field and valley. But their beauty is evanescent. Their glory is but for an hour. They are foredoomed to shrivel and shrink and fade. Experiences like this made Walter de la nare generalize that:

“But beauty vanishes; beauty passes;
However reare; rare it be” 41

The poem brings out the idea that beauty, inspite of the fact that objects of beauty are perishable, exists for its own sake. The mango blossom and orange blossoms have vanished since long, but the champak blossoms have come and, when their delicate bloom is over, they will also be reckoned among the dead. They adorn the dark tresses of a gird. They make no boast of serving or profiling the world. Though their glory is temporary, these flowers are praised much by maidens and minstrels. They have a sacerdotal
They are offered at God’s altar as tokens of devotion, faith and adoration. Their beauty is purposeless.

“Your rich, voluptuous, magical perfume

To ravish the winds of spring” 42

‘The Glorissa Lily’ beautifully captures the magic and colour of the flower. It brings out in the profusion of rich similes and metaphors and its unique charm. The description as usual is romantic.

The poem ‘The Time of Roses’ reflects intense perfume of lovely roses which can be seen anywhere in abundance. The crimson roses with their magical perfume captivate the poet so intensely that she measures woman’s entire life with the season of flowers:

“Bind me on the pyre of roses,

Burn me in a fire of roses,

Crown me with the rose of love!” 43

Though the poem lacks the logical sequence, as there cannot be any crowning for a person after being burnt and reduced to ashes, it enchants us with the floral setting.

J.H. Cousins, disgusted with the poem, comments:
“It may be too much to expect sequence in so abandoned a mood, but the mend sees something unworthy of good art or even of common surface of the pool, though ‘alluring’ in splendour destroys everything else. The poem beautifully reveals the destructive aspect of nature by describing Hyacinth’s strange trade of death and destruction.

“Is your loveliness displayed
Death in Beauty masquerade”

‘The Water hyacinth’ appears here as a dangerous weeds which drains and sucks the vitality of water. It portrays in the lines:

“Like a winged, insidious fate
Exquisite, insatiate”

Unlike John Keat’s ‘Nightingale’ and P.B. Shelley’s ‘Skylark’ Sarojini Naidu’s ‘bird world has a sensuous and geometrical solidity’. Sarojini Naidu’s birds, though take dizzy flights, return again and again in the familiar world of gardens, Minarets and Courtyards.

Birds are the great messengers or envoys in classical Indian poetry. Sarojini Naidu’s birds become reliable messenger of human joy and pain. They are friends of the lyric spring, bringing bridal joy or mystic communion. They are so civilized that they appear to be man’s partners.
rather than rivals. They stand as appropriate symbol of all the contradictory pulls of pleasure and pain that effect human destiny.

The time bird’s song in ‘The Bird of Time’ represents the song of nature as well as of human life. Time flees and never fluctuates. Change and fluctuation is the theme of the time-bird, as also of human life.

Birds acquire a special significance in Sarojini’s love world. An entire poem ‘A Love Song from the North’ is addressed to the ‘Papeeha’, in the manner of Indian love poetry. Papeeha’s handling calls are at once sweet and painful to the lovers separated, for they arouse in them strange feelings of longing which is depicted in the following lines:

“Tell me no more thy love, Papeeha,
Wouldst thou recall to my heart, Papeeha” 47

According to Thomas H. Johnson, “Almost all the birds that have drawn the attention of Indian poets, singers, myth-makers and story tellers have a unique status in Sarojini’s poems: the Koel or the Kokila, the Parrot, the Maina, the Papeeha, the Eagle, the Halycon, the Crane, the Swan, the Dove and the Peacock. Sarojini Naidu derives some striking images from peacock plumes, the dove’s speckled throat, the Halycon’s blue wings, the bright parrots which cluster like vermillion flowers, the black birds gathering
like evening shadows.” But she has special affection for the Koel. When the mango trees put forth springs first blossoms, Koels begin their raptures melody. Sometimes Koel calls from a henna spray: “Lira! Lira! Lira! Liree!” her song is now a ‘slow, tremulous wooing’ now a full throated paean of love. And what a beautiful sight it is when a baby Koel, a mere fledgling, makes her first attempt to fly.

There are some fine descriptions of animals in Sarojini’s Naidu’s poems: a magnificent stallion spurred on by a valiant Rajput Knight; godless panthers drinking at water lily pools; cows returning to the village at dusk, serene and contented; shy gazelles disappearing into the jungle when they hear the chatter of monkeys; The following lines portray these feelings:

“But her best poems on animals are the two poems on serpents. They reflect the typical Indian attitude to these unique specimens of our jungle life. In the west, the serpent is looked upon with horror, as a vicious and deadly creature. The serpent is the tempter, the embodiment of evil and cruelty. In Indian myths, on the contrary, the serpents are guardians of their life. They implore them to guard their helpless lives and guide their
patient labours. Like other creatures, they are willing to lend their services for a good cause.

Literature in Indian languages is rich with serpent lore, and in many parts of India the snake charmers are very much in demand. In Sarojini Naidu’s poems, serpents are given positive attitude and treated as deities.

Sarojini Naidu’s nature poetry rests on a less ambitious plane. The impression of novelty and freshness her poems created on their appearance was pronouncedly due to the new romantic sensibility. In fact, in her treatment of nature, she stands in a closer and more direct relationship than others to both the English Romantics and the Hindu-Sufi Mystics. Her attitude towards Nature is not muscular but meditative. She describes the scenery and spectacles of the natural world with a sense of primal wonder and joy, combined with pensive reverie and melancholy. Even her adjectival excess and hyperbolic orateness catch the essence of the magical spell cast by nature. The individual consciousness responds to the enriching experience of beauty, harmony and meaning which permeate man’s inaugural world. In describing a scene or mood of Nature, the poet imagines a situation in which the scene or mood is absent. She contrasts the presence and the absence, as though the substance and the shadow together constitute a single reality. Her lyrics thus assume a meditative sensitivity, and a strange
brooding quality which draws the variant emotions of the lover into the patterns of Nature. The separation of the beloved from the joys and delights of Nature humanizes her own loneliness. The arrivals and departures of revenants, arising from the crosslights of memory and fancy, trace a pattern of the inner life. Nature is bountiful which, for the poet, finds meaning and fulfillment only in the context of the human aspiration. Man may need Nature for his sustenance, but Nature too needs man as its instrument of self-expression. The pearl is nature self distilled and self-revealed.

Man, in Sarojini Naidu’s Poetry, is constantly under the impact of nature in its varying and variegated moods, responding to its flux. Nature, in its human context and men in his natural context- These are the two themes integrated into a single unity in her poetry of all our early Indian poets of this century. Sarojini Naidu has beautifully recaptured the autochthonous response to natural environment.

In conclusion, Sarojini Naidu’s conception of nature is neither completely Wordsworthian nor exclusively classical Indian. For her, nature is a sacred, solitary retreat from the struggle and strife and conflicts of human life, a sinless Eden. It is a Mystic Brindaban as she describes in ‘Summer Woods’ where innocent lovers like ‘Krishna and Radha’ appear engrit with low voiced silences and gleaning solitudes and are ever
encompassed with delight. It is a world of garden away from menacing human crowds, a place very safe for love. Nature is the external environment of Man, and the manifestation of beauty, harmony and continuity. It is a symbol of mysterious forces breaking into the emotional life of the individual as well as the race. It is a retreat from strife and conflict, encouraging solitary contemplation, and renewing man’s connection with the world.

Love is the main theme of Sarojini Naidu’s poetry. Her poetry on love does not enunciate any philosophy of love. It is simple and straightforward expression of the vision of love of the poetess, who had her own intense experience of the rapture and sadness of love. According to the poetess true love is immortal. In the brief span of life true lovers may be parted by hard necessities, worldly obstacles, pride etc., but they realize the fulfillment after death. Death is accepted as an inevitable fact which unites two loving souls, which is portrayed in the next chapter.

“Read nature; nature is a friend to truth.”

… Edward Young
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