Chapter - IV

The Folk and Landscape in Sarojini Naidu’s poetry

ABSTRACT

Here in this chapter the researcher has taken utmost care to depict the Indian folk, culture, values, landscape, People and also some of Sarojini Naidu’s great contemporaries through her poems. Her poems on festivals, temples, folk culture, people, landscape gives the picture of a romantic India and not of an anachronistic one.
Chapter - IV

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“I don’t want to live in a culture of despair.

I’d like to live in a culture of hope.”

…Natalie Merchant

Sarojini Naidu belongs to a heroic age of modern India, which witnessed the struggle and achievement of great Indian men and women in bringing about a renaissance of the human heart in many ways. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gopala Krishna Gokhale, Mahatma Gandhi and Jinnah on one hand, and Rabindranath Tagore, Iqbal, Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu on the other, represent the historical transformation of India into an energetic modern culture deriving inspiration from the past and imparting a new dynamism and vision to the present as they shape the contexts of a creative future. Of all these heroic individuals, Sarojini Naidu embodied in herself in the largest measure the integral culture of modern India, for, she was indeed, a genuine confluence of diverse traditions, cultures and values.
Like her brilliant predecessor Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu also springs from the very soul of India and is rooted firmly to her soil. Despite her literary affiliation with the English poets, her sensibility is purely Indian. For all her western garb, for all her adoption of English as her medium of poetic expression, she remains essentially the daughter of her race and land. Her themes, thoughts and even the imagery she employs in her poems are typically native in spirit and character.

Both Sarojini Naidu and Toru Dutt turn to their native land for inspiration and thought. But while Toru Dutt is fascinated more by the rich cultural heritage of her country, its legendary past, Sarojini Naidu is enchanted more by the colourful Indian life throbbing around her, While Toru Dutt tries to explore the philosophical aspect of Indian life, Sarojini Naidu makes a sincere effort to discover a strange meaning, a peculiar significance in the life of her humble fellow-men. Every aspect of Indian life seems to interest her. There is hardly anything in her poetry which does not owe its origin to Indian or oriental inspiration.

The most striking feature of Sarojini Naidu’s poetry is its native flavour. Her poetry takes us to the voluptuous richness of an Indian landscape with its pomegranate buds and Sirisha and Neem, the lilting melody of bulbuls and koels and the colourful noisy Indian bazaars,
especially Hyderabad. It introduces and acquaints us with the familiar characters of Indian folk-life, with the Palanquin Bearers, the Weavers, the Corn-grinders, the Snake Charmers, the Bangle sellers and the Wandering Singers.

Sarojini Naidu’s engrossing delight in nature and her romantic longing for a tranquil retreat, does not blind her to the active interests of human life and the delineation of human emotions. Her poetry paints the panorama of Indian life in all its colours and moods. The life of the Indian people fascinated and inspired Sarojini Naidu the most. She loves to be among them and share their hopes and despairs, joys and sorrows, ambitions and aspirations. Her poems on nature reflect their delicacy of emotion and luxuriance of imagination, her love poems, with their range and depth of passion, but her folk songs are miraculously powerful, for, to them, almost all the aspects of her genius contribute. She is admirably successful in setting a rural or pastoral scene. She presents in her poems “veritable portrait gallery of Indian folk characters. The picture of India these evoke is romantic, but not anachronistic.”1 These folk characters are still very much a part of the Indian reality. The institutionalization of the human personality is also shown in the Indian reality.
Sarojini Naidu was primarily a poet of the human heart, a ‘wandering singer’ as she described herself, and she bore both the agony and the ecstasy that life brought to her, with an equal and spacious eye.

P.E. Dustoor has observed that the folk-theme is the one theme in which Sarojini Naidu was the least imitative.²

The subject of her poetry is the simple, familiar and unpretentious world of nature feelings and emotions, simple joys and sorrows, vivid memories and reveries, poignant recognitions and epiphanies all characterized by the rich normality and poise of the Indian life and landscape. Sarojini Naidu was a poet of folk-consciousness.

Sarojini Naidu presents veritable portrait gallery of Indian folk characters in her poetry. ‘The Palanquin bearers’ and ‘The Pardah-Nashin’ may be a memory of Rudyard Kipling’s India, but the weavers and the bangle-sellers and the fishermen and the beggars and even the snake-charmers are still authentic presences of the Indian scene. When we talk about the poem ‘Bangle-sellers’ it takes an imaginative leap from a folk-song to the level of a ‘sukta’ in which the entire life-cycle of an Indian woman from childhood to widowhood is enabled. Similarly a short-poem like “The Indian weavers” establishes itself as a mystic threnody hymned to
birth, life and death to ‘Sristi (creation)’, ‘Stiti (life)’ and ‘Laya (destruction)’. Though these poems seem to be simply picturesque, decorative and ornamental, Sarojini Naidu invests them with a sense of Personality.

‘The Indian Weavers’ a powerful poem based on a common Indian scene, is symbolic in significance. Weavers can be seen anywhere is India weaving cloth on handlooms in different coloured patterns. Sarojini Naidu watches the weavers weaving their yarns, and is led into the mystery of life, love and death. It is included in ‘The Golden Threshold’ and introduces an Indian scene that of weavers weaving particularly in the country-side in different coloured patterns. The poem is in question–answer form and achieves a similar allegorical dimension without the aid of metaphysical gravity or technical sophistication.

As P.E. Dustoor observes “We are made to realize in the poem that the web of our life is of a mingled yarn, grave and gay together”.

Even C .D. Narasimhaiah, though not a great admirer of the poet acknowledges her in twelve lines, “is an elliptical, allusive and symbolic representation of life’s journey from birth to death....” It is not merely a competent poem, but a very distinguished one for Sarojini Naidu, because
the poet here is in full possession of rare gifts- a profound awareness of her own tradition, admirable poise, economy, and an ear and eye for striking rhythm, image, and symbol, all used to fine advantage to make the poem most evocative”

Folk character is close to the pulse of intuitions of life and death. It is undeterred by life and undaunted by death. Life and death are but the phases of a single being, connected by the silken thread of Karma and Rita (Casuality and Evolution). They are like day and night weaving a Single time-universe. They are like pauses and interludes in the music of an eternal order. The weavers are the fates. They are the Indian trinity. Brahma, Vishnu, Maheswara among whom the creative potencies of regeneration through birth, life and death are distributed in cosmic nature.

The three stanzas describe a day in the life of an Indian weaver. The weavers enumerate the colour and texture and function of the garment woven by them. The weavers, at day break, weave a gay garment, blue as the wing of a halycon wild. They weave the robes of a new born

“Blue as the wing of a halcyon wild,

We weave the robes of a new-born child”
The creative mood of Brahma is Peace, Poise and freshness of vision. ‘Blue’ represents the depth of ‘Manasa – Sarovara’, out of which the Hamsa, the white Swan and the white lotus emerge in the creation myths of India. The new-born child symbolizes the Brahma-Muhurta, sacred to Brahma, and the apex of his creative powers.

At fall of night, the weavers weave a bright garment, like the plumes of a peacock purple and green, the colours of blood and sap, vitality, and growth power and sustenance.

“Like the plumes of a peacock, purple and green,

We weave the marriage-veils of a queen” 6

The plumes of a peacock (a Symbol of the Dionysian God, Krishna, an avatar of Vishnu) represent the many-coloured splendour of life and its perennial rhythm, the dance of being. The coloured garments designed to be the marriage-veils of a queen, are for Radha, the eternal bride. They symbolize the marriage of heaven and earth, the sacred union of Being and Becoming.

The glory, the mystery and the joy of life are all stressed as the magisterial impulsion of Vishnu in his creative mood.

The third stanza suggests destruction and death.
“White as a feather and white as a cloud,
We weave a dead man’s funeral shroud.”

The white feather (a feather torn off a dead bird) and the chill moonlight and the weavers weaving in solemnity the funeral shroud, suggest death. The Poem is symbolic, rather allegorical, since it is only a thought rather than an experience, which the poet is working out here. The whole comedy and tragedy of human life is brought out here. Belief in fate is almost a universal mythological phenomenon.

In Greek mythology, fate appears in the form of the three sisters Cloatho, Lachesis and Atropos weaving the threads of birth, life & death of man. Sarojini Naidu reveals a capacity to invest the folk-theme with the richness of allegory and symbolism besides an adjustment of Sensibility towards tradition.

‘The Palanquin-Bearers’ with its superb mastery of the metrical form, has the quality of a Rajput miniature painting.

In P.E. Dustoor’s words it is: “a fair specimen of the true folk-song”

It recalls a common experience in India a century ago and the Song of the Palanquin-Bearers expresses in its movement the muffled mumblings which dictated the rhythm of their march through the streets.
Even today, in most Indian marriages we find the ceremony of the palanquin marks the initiation of the bride into married life. The palanquin bearers are gentle, chivalrous in their deference and courteous in their attention to the feelings of the bride, who leaves the familiar parental home to join her new home. Nostalgia, expectancy, joy and excitement are blended with melancholy, wistfulness, anxiety and sadness in the bride’s feelings. She passes from one freedom to another, from that of innocence to experience, identity to personality, spatial unity to temporal differentiation. This is a transition-point in her life at which her future is to be determined. The Palanquin-Bearers acting as surrogate parents usher her into adult life. They are conscious of their role in her psychic voyage. They must therefore bear her lightly, softly along. The poetess has deftly caught the swift movement of the palanquin bearers and she has artificially harmonized the rhythm of this poem with their movements. Music, therefore is the cardinal quality of this poem.

“Lightly, O lightly, we bear her along,

She sways like a flower in the wind of our song;”

The poem which is divided into two parts puts out the lacing of the two movements which define the total rhythm of human growth in the ebb and tide of life.
The palanquin bearers, gorgeously attired, the veiled palanquin and young bride in the full bloom of her beauty. The bride sways like a flower in the wind of their song. She swims like a bird on the foam of a stream. She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream. The images and the verbs of action indicate a lightness of touch and a buoyancy and dream-like lambency. They suggest a quality, not of definition, or measurement or calculation, but of invitation, curiosity and expectation. The bride’s initiation is neither an encounter nor a confrontation; it is rather a passage, a ritual tour of possibilities. Hence, the palanquin-bearers carry her along like a pearl on a string. There is a sense of connection of continuity and solidarity, in their action.

“Lightly, O, lightly we glide and we sing,

We hear her along like a pearl on a string” 10

The above stanza takes us from the fluid surfaces of life to its crystallized depths and complex intensities. The palanquin-bearers have to bear her along softly. They are now covering a rougher terrain, as they approach another place, which is to invite the unknown and the unfamiliar into the bride’s life.
The bride hangs like a star in the dew of their song. She springs like a beam on the brow of the tide. She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride. The images and the action verbs indicate the burden, the tension and the solidity of the actual world, its capacity and reflection, its agitation and wayward movement, its complexity and ambivalence. The bride’s personality has passed a state and acquired a status from a passive role as a daughter, she has moved unto the active role as a wife. The image ‘falling like a tear from the eyes of a bride’ is beautiful and appealing and in the words of Rameshwar Gupta “an achievement” unto itself. The delicate theme is skillfully woven into the texture. She has entered ‘Samsara’ with its obligations and realities. She is now a committed and confirmed individual. ‘The Palanquin-Bearers,’ a simple folk-song directly reflecting the depths of lyric a vanished aspect of rural life, thus gains a richness of associative symbols and images which lie embedded in the native consciousness. The poet directs her poetic sensibility softly and lightly towards an unmediated vision of experience.

Beggars are a common sight in India. One can find them anywhere in any part of the country. The poet might have seen, in her childhood, a large number of Muslim beggars with their begging bowls and tattered clothes in the Charminar area of Hyderabad. The ‘Wandering Beggars’ recalls a very
common sight of India - that of Fakirs, moving from door to door singing psalms in a loud voice. Though they are deprived of all worldly comforts and joys, they wander with gay heart and divine courage, from morning to night. Since they are “free born sons of fate” they are not envious of the wealth and glory of the great. Their sad plight evokes the poet’s sympathy and their lively portrait moves the same in the reader:

“We are free-born sons of fate,

What care we for wealth or state”\textsuperscript{12}

The beggars have neither shelter nor cloth, neither breed nor money, yet they always look ‘gay and bold’ unmindful of the present or the future, they fearlessly go with the ‘staff of freedom’ in their hand, from place to place. They go on wandering until they meet the night which is the same to the beggars and the kings.

“Meet the Night that brings

Both to beggars and to kings”\textsuperscript{13}

It is their deep faith that makes their life easy and carefree.

‘The Snake Charmer’ is a loving portrait of a familiar folk personality on the Indian scene. The charmer takes something more than a professional pride in his dangerous cargo. He treats his pet as his protegee, fiancee and
bride, to be wooed with love, courtesy and concern. His attitude reflects the folk artisan’s reverential approach to his tools, and his sense of identity and partnership with his craft. By careful nurture, he persuades nature to confer her blessings on him. He personalizes the snake’s natural habitat and domesticates it, in terms of his own romantic temperament. His personal magic makes his dream-world work and assumes meaning in reality.

The poet vividly recreates the romantic atmosphere of sweet and delicate perfume, which attracts a snake. The imagery of the poem has an orphic power, blending the natural, human and the personal worlds, without any sense of intrusion or interference. The law of music enables the self to dance to the rhythm of life, in much the same way as his flute-call makes the snake sway to his will. There is no sense of horror here. The snake emerges from its sheltered hide-out in Nature like a glittering bride, a silver breasted moonbeam of desire. The reptile is seen here not as a dangerous reptile but as a moonbeam. Sarojini Naidu offers a faithful vignette into the rural landscape with its clustering Keoras guarding the squirrel’s slumber, the wood glimmering with jasmine bloom, the murmuring hollows where oleanders scatter their ambrosial fire. The landscape is not a static canvas, but one that comes to life from repose to enchantment, from merged individuality to emergent identity. It is interspersed with the Krishna motif.
Krishna, the flute player, performing the acts of melodious enchantment in legend and tale, dominates the scene. The folk-spirit imparts to the stock character of the snake-charmer the flavour of mystical surprise.

Sarojini Naidu shrouds everything that she writes with a halo of mystery and romance. The poem recalls a common native experience of the charmer inviting the snake on milk and honey. He tempts and flatters his pet in various ways which is portrayed in the lines given:

“I’ll feed thee, O beloved, on milk and wild red honey
I’ll bear thee in a basket of rushes, green and white”

The concluding stanza finds the snake charmer in deep love and professional attachment with his pet. The charmer identifies himself with his pet. The snake becomes a bride of his ‘Mellifluous Wooing’. He woos his bride with love which is reflected in the poem ‘The Snake charmer’ in the given lines:

“Come, thou subtle bride of my mellifluous wooing,
Come, thou silver breasted moonbeam of desire.”

Sarojini Naidu’s folk songs are set to Indian tunes, and are meant for singing. They are remarkable in their oriental glamour, thought and eastern imagery.
Amarnath Jha, in his tribute to Sarojini Naidu, says: “She is of India, the spirit of India is in her, and although Men of all nalimalities will find their questions echo and Answered, yet it is the Indian that will feel his own feelings reciprocated in every line”.  

The poem ‘Village song’ is set in the pastoral atmosphere of Indian countryside. It is a song sung by a village maiden that goes a long way to the outskirts of the village, or the river bank, to fetch her daily pitcher of water. The poem captures a very familiar rural sight: a lovely woman goes out with her pitcher to the river to fetch water, and perhaps, may be to meet her lover. The panghat is one of the familiar haunts of Indian village women. It is a concourse of rural belles where gossip, rumour, scandal and judgement are exchanged. The poem presents the maiden as a beloved craving for a glimpse of her lover. She delays in the way for her love but her heart is seized with a strange fear as the night is approaching fast and she is alone. Suggestion after suggestion is forwarded till the scene is completely set with phase: ‘Ram re Ram’. The poet catches the folk spirit with admirable sincerity and portrays it in the following way:

“There are no tender moonbeams to light me
If in the dark ness a serpent should bite me,
Or if an evil spirit should smite me,
Ram re Ram: I shall die.”
The maiden is so lost in her love that she mistakes the Crane for the owl, and gets nervous for, the owl is a bad-omen foreboding danger. The maiden is in a strange emotional state. She is between the driving force of her individual passion and her fear concerning her social status. In a touching tone, the poem bears the lyric feel of Indian life. There is everything here: The love as well as fear, the maiden’s passionate attachment with her love and her apprehension of unseen dangers. The poem ‘Village-Song’ is built on the theme of Radha and Lord Krishna, and it sincerely remains faithful to the form and spirit of Indian folk-song.

‘Wandering Singers’ is a beautiful lyric written to one of the tunes of those nature minstrels who wander free and wide, singing the songs of life, love and joy. Behind the music of the lines it is always possible to find great ideas, the ideas that may compel us to think. The songs of the wandering singers have a timeless theme- the theme of fundamental unity of men throughout the world. Their songs and mode of life present a great thought that there is no race all over the world except the human race. The wandering singers, wandering through the forests and streets, and singing endlessly, give us a great message of universal brotherhood: ‘All men are our kindred, the world is our home’:
“With lutes in our hands ever-singing we roam,
All men are our kindred, the world is our home”. 18

The wandering singers have no home, no direction, no destination, they move where the wind of time takes them to. They sing about the glories of day’s bygone, about happy and simple though the singers are in gay and buoyant spirit, the song is pensive. The lines remind us of the following lines of William Wordsworth,’s ‘The Solitary Reaper’19

“Will no one tell me what she sings?
That has been, and may be again.”

The wandering singers are neither attached to the present nor looked into the future with hope and aspiration. There is nothing in the world that can bind them, neither the comfort nor stability of a home nor the excitement and ecstasy of love. The concluding stanza presents the philosophy of the ‘Gypsy’ tribe all over the world:

“No love bids us tarry, no joy bids us wait.
The voice of the wind is the voice of our fate” 20

The singers hear a call from the distant and eternal and move with the voice of the wind. The voice of the wind is in fact, the voice of the fate.
Sarojini Naidu is miraculously successful in catching the spirit of the wandering tribe in her poem ‘The Indian Gypsy’

‘The Indian Gypsy’ is a ‘daughter of a wandering race’, and represents a class which has been roaming upon the earth since the times immemorial in the colourful pageant of diverse people which India proudly presents. The figure of the Gypsy girl has unique attraction in tattered robes that yet hoard a glittering trace of bygone colours. Sarojini Naidu beholds the daughter of the wandering people, tameless and unabashed, she is healthier in body and spirit than her sisters of a sophisticated society. She is the proud possessor of the agile grace of the bold falcon and the sinuous majesty of the little tiger.

Simplification of wants being the secret of happiness, she tends her simple wants with frugal skill, when avarice, jealously and mutual bickerings are the rule rather than the exception among the dwellers of the most modern of towns. The Indian gipsy girl leads a pastoral life, a life idealized by a number of former Greek, Roman and English poets. She and her sleep must go home.

“Ere the quick night upon her flock descends
Like a black panther from the caves of sleep.” 21
Days, weeks, months, years, centuries come and go, but the life of the gypsies is immutable and eternal. The character of the gypsies is moulded by the particular place, they live in. They are born and bred in the purity of nature, far away from the contamination of sophisticated society. Being unartificial, they conform to non cut-and-dried codes and conversions, to no rubber-stamp judgements. They have plain emotions, eternal and universal passions, rather than the outcome of a highly developed logic. This elemental nature of their emotions harmonises with the elemental nature of their environment. Their constitution is never complex; they never have those feelings that are born only with advanced civilization; they know perfectly well that they are demanding and doing and they feel that they are right.

The poet shows the gypsy to be thoroughly at ease in her world leading an unspeculating life, and never rebelling as we do against circumstances. Sarojini Naidu wishes to suggest that the gypsies may be humble and modest, but they move through nature, and their life is regulated by nature. There is hardly any difference between Sarojini Naidu’s ‘Gypsy Girl’ and all the gypsies scattered all over the globe, between the present day gypsy and the gypsy of centuries ago. We, therefore observe the very roots of humanity-primary emotions in a pristine state. Their emotions of love and
hatred are, consequently fiercer and deeper in contrast with the superficial products of modern materialism.

The gypsy girl appeals to the poet because:

“She is twin born with primal mysteries,

And drinks of life at Time’s forgotten source” 22

‘Corn-Grinders’ is another genuine folk-song in which the villagers try to relieve the monotony and drudgery of their daily chores by songs and chants. Their subjective passion breaks in expressing itself in moods of melancholy, reminiscence nostalgia and sheer whimsy. The ‘Corn-Grinders’ as is usual in many folk-songs, uses the animal motif, transferring human roles to animals and birds and vice-versa. The little mouse is crying, while merry stars laugh in the sky, because her Lord is dead, caught in a baited Snare

“O, little mouse, why dost thou cry

While merry stars laugh in the sky”23

The implied social criticism is an element of folk-literature, speaking for itself, without the editorial voice on surface stressing the socialist doctrine.
“Alas! Alas! My lord is dead!
Ah! Who will quiet my lament?” 24

Similarly the little deer laments the death of her lover, who has met his end with the hunter’s arrow, when at fall of even tide he went to drink beside the river-bed. The precarious and dangerous encounters which the simple needs of survival prompt living creatures into are described with the directness of the folk-idiom

“Or still the want of famished years,
And crown with love my marriage-bed?” 25

The little bride is unhappy, while the whole world is happy, waiting through the want of famished years, for her ultimate union in death with her lover. The Sadness and Sorrow that life brings and the ache of parting and the burden of loneliness are revealed with transparent compassion and spontaneous feeling which characterizes folk-song. Sarojini’s Naidu’s presentation of the folk-theme reflects a genuine understanding and appreciation of the spirit of India’s folk-culture’

In ‘Bangle -Sellers’ Sarojini Naidu discovers or presents the folk-custom of the ‘Bangle wearing’ ceremony, a poetic equivalent of a woman’s growth from the status of a daughter to that of a wife and mother. The
ceremonies have the markings of an auspicious initiation into adult life, auguring fulfilment, fertility and succession. When a woman becomes a widow, the bangles are broken symbolizing the tragedy of abruption and the experience that traumatically separates her from an active sense of role and status in family and society. The ceremony on that occasion assumes the form of a ritual withdrawal, denitiation and renunciation. The bangle is therefore a ‘symbol of the Indian’ woman’s connection with life and reality. ‘Nay let her be!’ the poet cries watching a young widow, being stripped of her ornaments, including her dear bangles.26

The bangle sellers are aware of their role as the holy custodians of feminine status and dignity in Indian folk-life. They are the priestly functionaries associated with the inaugural and valedictory phases of an Indian woman’s social and psychic growth. The four stanzas of the poem are attuned to this pattern of fusion and growth in the feminine personality. They set up a symbolic correspondence between the rhythms of nature and society. The bangle-sellers carry shining loads to the temple-fair, the point of convergence where the social activity of the folk reflects an ethos of natural joy and festive freedom. The bangles around the wrists of happy daughters and happy wives are the tokens of radiant lives. They exude a delicate, bright radiance, which is an extension of the weaver’s
unselﬁc conscious, quiet happiness. They waver like rainbows auguring fertility in nature, they scintillate like circles of light, like the halos around the Gods and Goddesses in the temple shrine. The human, natural and the divine planes are thus corrected in their effulgent splendours.

“Some are ﬂushed like the buds that dream

On the tranquil brow of a woodland stream;”

The undeﬁned radiances of the bangles is gradually deﬁned and identiﬁed. Some are meant for a maiden’s wrist. Their dependence on reﬂected splendour is in character with the maiden’s role in the family. One is of sheltered incumbent individuality drawing strength from the accepted props of the parental tie. A maiden’s virginity clings to the pinnacle of the familiar organization, and is like the mountain mist silver and blue are colours of Virginity, Purity and Promise. Some bangles are ﬂushed like the buds that dream on the tranquil brow of a woodland stream. They evoke the elegant ﬂow of rural life, in which the peasant maiden enters the threshold of adolescence tenderly and with a soft gait. Some bangles are aglow with the bloom that cleaves to the limpid glory of newborn leaves. They symbolize the blend of beauty with function. They represent the connection between emerging personality and its creative source in the life-force.
“Some are like fields of sunlit corn,

Meet for a bride on her bridal morn”\(^{28}\)

The third stanza draws upon the bridal experience, central to which is the element of fire in which a new consciousness is forged and tempered. The bridal morn is full of vague longing and sweet anguish, and a suppressed mellowness like the fields of sunlit corn. The flame of marriage is the holy fire around which the bride performs the rite of circumambulation along with her groom. The bangles have the colour of nature’s fertility, as well as the rich hue of the heart’s desire. The columns are not specified, only associated with the bride’s moods and gestures and her mixed feelings of coyness and daring on the occasion.

She is expansive, resonant and vigorously healthy, like laughter. She is deep, intimate and intensely pure, like tears.

“Some are purple and gold-flecked grey,

For her who has journeyed through life midway,” \(^{29}\)

The fourth and final stanza displays the experience of maturity of Sarojini Naidu. The maiden-turned bride has at last achieved the fullness and purpose of her role as wife and mother. She is a partner in the perception and maintenance of the family and social order. The bangles are purple, a colour
which indicates power, authority and dignity and gold-flecked grey, a sober
colour which indicates a colour of experience, wisdom and self-assurance.

New criticism is acute over what danger a poem, a superfluous word,
an archaism, an aversion. The opening lines of the poem are vulnerable to
close criticism:

“Bangle sellers are we who bear

Our shining loads to the temple fair”.

Mokashi – Punekar asks: Do we rejoice in ‘Shining Loads’ or
annoyed over the inversion ‘are we’? He answers, “On whether you are a
simple reader or belong to a bandwagon. Metrically accomplished poems go
by a law of their own, and the critical theories of rigorous textual scrutiny
should normally pause safer laying hands on these flower like presence
whose composition itself in their best apology’.

There is a strong impact of Islam and Persian poetry on Sarojini
Naidu’s poetry. The richness of her poetry is romantic and Persian and
Islamic culture appealed to her.

‘The Queen’s Rival’ has a wispy plot drawn from Persian legend,
told in the narrative vein of the folk-ballad. It deals with a single situation,
revealed dramatically, with the utmost simplicity and economy of
expression. Yet, in its wistful sense of aspiration, melancholy and pathos, in the midst of super abundant opulence, splendour and glory, the poem is a lyric with ballad-like overtones. Readers are plunged into the action. The conclusion avoids a supernatural intervention, but propels the natural towards a magical return to origins, which outclasses life from the ordinary with joy and fulfilment. 31 Queen Gulnaar is tired of her beauty, the empty splendour and shadowless bliss of her sheltered royalty. Her peerless beauty has made her a lonely, tantalized figure. She must have a rival, discover an objective correlative in experience other than her own body, measuring against which she can achieve self-definition and estimate her own real worth. She is like Nilambuja of the poet’s prose fantasy, standing in the desert of her own lonely temperament, seeking a foothold in the eternal beauty of the universe, but unable to overcome the pattern of interrupted acts her life had assumed.

“But still she gazed in her mirror and sighed

“O king, my heart is unsatisfied”.

The Queen is tired of her beauty, tired of the empty splendour around her, tired of the shadow less bliss. There is nobody to envy her, to contradict her, to press her own claims against her. She wants someone to feel jealous of her charms, of her magnificence, of the unbounded love, which King
Feroz bestows upon her. What she wants is a rival to compete with her, clash with her, because competition and complicit add to the zest and saves the life. Therefore, the queen, Gulnaar sighs like a murmuring rose, and asks the King to give her a rival.

But King Feroz, in his passionate infatuation for his Queen, does not understand what the Queen, out of her oriental modesty, is hinting at. He sends for his chief advisor and orders him to search for seven beautiful brides for him. King Feroz acquires seven handmaids for his Queen. Gazing in the aphrodisiac mirror, she still finds in it only her narcissistic image, evanescent, partial and incomplete and aliened. The Queen is sternly unsatisfied. The real cannot match the ideal. It has no continuity. It stands on its own pedestal of accumulations and lacks succession, relation and meaning.32

“I tire of my beauty, I tire of this
Empty splendour and shadowless bliss”

‘The Queen’s Rival’, as Sarojini Naidu confessed to Amarnath Jha, was the only poem which did not ‘come’ to her33. The conclusion was added as a delayed response to a friend’s narration of the Persian poetry. It is a tender composition, full of insight into the feminine psychology of growth
and differentiation. The folk-conclusion of the poem presents a typical resolution of adult conflict. It offers the play-instinct as a palliative to individual aggression and the consequent feeling of isolation and anxiety. The individual, who, by chance or choice, loses his sense of connection with life, is restored to reality.

The ballad structure, with the iterative situations, repeated words, images and symbols, the incremental refrains, the free flow of the verse and above all, the unsophisticated narrative and the folk-flavour of the story-line, lends a natural grace to the lyrical vision of adolescent experience and childhood innocence. The mother’s understandable shock of recognition of her own daughter’s budding individuality has the quality of folk-drama, usually associated with the puberty-rites observed in the Indian villages. These rites celebrate growth and change.

Shock and crisis are overcome by nurturing a sense of social connection and continuity in the emerging personality of the individual. Along with her daughter, the mother too grows up, stepping gracefully out of the cocoon of her own self-created world into the flux and process of life.

The roles assigned to the woman in folk-culture are strategic compensations. Through these she fulfils her ego-ideal and her symbolic
status, as the embodiment of disinterested love. In the poem, the action moves progressively from narcissistic desire towards hieratic power, from self to breed.

In Indian culture, woman-as-mother is identified with the divine Genetrix (Adi Mata or Shakti.).

The Bangle-Seller is not so much a vocational song, as a kind of creation myth dramatizing the fusion of the roles of Lakshmi, Uma and Shakti all Indian deities into the cultural identity of the Indian woman.

The poem uses the folk-theme to map the growth of the feminine psych, and rediscover the truth of such an experience through a direct observation and rendering of folk custom and belief. The poem is rich in ‘felt-life’, relating the difficulties in human experience directly to the archtypal aspects of a culture which has retained its identity with resisting the changes in time.

The controlling principle in the poem is the pattern of a life-time during which the Indian woman assumes the full control of the family structure and gains both self-assurance and dynastic centrality. By corollary, the bangle-sellers are the divine ordinators of human destiny, the sacred trinity of the Hindu mythology who, according to mythology were unified
into a Single Deity, Dattatreya, by Anasya, the Mother of the Equal Eye, through her chastity. Coromandel Fishers is a perfectly realised lyric with no superfluous adornment, or gratuitous metaphysical bonus. But it reveals and reflects a legacy and tradition of the human world. It is a vocational song, expressing the fishermen’s sense of belonging and identity with the sea. It reveals their professional pride in fusing their tools and their own purposes into effective action. It projects the tribal awareness of a sense of structure in things, which is organically linked with their fluctuating fortunes.

Fishing is a pattern of regulated life as well as a prolonged play-activity. It catches the essences of life, in a net of implied and extended relationship, all striving towards a creative equilibrium in the group personality of the people. The Coromandel fishers recognize the truth and value of communal solidarity. They find it confirmed not only in their individual lives, but also in their environment. Man and Nature work together, to produce Sustenance. Men must work together, too for survival in the face of a common foe, chance. However there is perfect harmony between them and their environment, which ensures their prosperity and well-being. There is no dissonant feeling whether in surcease or defeat.
Greed, vanity and extravagant individuality do not mar their group chaos. All are bound together by the feeling of brotherhood and comraderu. The folk-character of the song underscores a non-competitive view of life. For the fishermen, life is not so much a struggle as a sport. There may be an exertion and exercise of the human spirit, but not exhaustion and expense. The poem is composed of three vivid scenes from the professional day of the fishermen, measured by Sunrise, Sunset and the Full moon.

“Rise, brothers, rise, the wakening skies pray to the Morning light,
The wind lies asleep in the arms of the dawn like a Child that has cried all night”

The above stanza describes the stir of activity before their dipping into the sea. The auroral mood of Nature is blended with the devotional and reverential attitude of the folk towards their craft and their tools’ Their filial feeling of love, their attachment and faith towards the sea is supported and reinforced by the imagery of protected childhood and the uterine symbolism of the morning light.

‘The wind lies asleep in the arms of the dawn like a child that- has cried all night’ denotes a cosmic benevolence at the sources of our origins.
The catamarans are set free to the capture of wealth that is inexhaustible. The fisherman’s vocational freedom is employed, not exploitatively but creatively, to foster life and ensure well-being.

“No longer delay, let us hasten away in the track
Of the sea-gull’s call,
The sea is our mother, the cloud is our brother, the Waves are our comrades all” \(^35\).

Here the action, effort, courage and movement of the fisherman is portrayed. The contours of Nature are faithfully followed. There is objectivity on the part of the fishermen. Reason and the senses have built up the landscape for them and linked up with their family and community feeling’. ‘The track of the Sea-gull’s call binds and connects the fisherman’s line with the law of Nature. The faith that the sea is our mother, the cloud is our brother, the waves are our comrades all’ shifts the specialized function of the fisherman into the perspective of human relationships. The natural law enters into free partnership with man, at the levels of the family and the tribe.

The pattern of action is aligned with a wider circle of relationship. This extends, beyond the Man-Nature connection, to the Man-Nature-God
relationship. The sea God, who holds the storm by the hair, hides the fishermen’s lives in his breast. Reiterated again is the idea of our ultimate return to our origins. All action is a movement back to the beginnings. Far out on the sea, we are in touch with the sky, our horizons are but tours of the infinite.

“And sweet are the sands at the full o’ the moon

With the sound of the voices we love.”^ 36

This stanza brings the fishermen back to shore-life; to the stability, the amenity and the continuity of the terrestrial identity, from which their vocational specialization has temporarily separated them back on land. The fishermen enjoy the granaried fulness of life. The shade of the coconut glade offers shelter. The scent of the mango grove offers experience. The moon-lit sands and the loving voices offer beauty and joy.

But life on earth is a dream, while on sea it was reality. On land, the sea becomes a dream, a dream that must be pursued the next day. The ‘blue of the verge’ is the matrix of all dreams. The earth fulfils itself where the low sky arrests the sea. Coromandel Fishers is a perfectly realized lyric with no superfluous adornment, or gratuitous metaphysical bonus. But it reveals, and reflects a legacy and tradition of the human spirit which is
characteristically Indian and arises unabashedly out of our significant soil. Underlying its theme and form is a texture of folk-experience, from which modern technological change and cultural sophistication have not yet isolated the vernacular personality.

The poem affirms Carl Sandburg’s description of poetic inspiration.

“Poetry is the journal of a sea animal being on land, wants to fly in the air. Poetry is a search for syllables to shoot at the barriers of the unknown and unknowable. Poetry is a phantom script telling how rainbows are made and why they go away”.

Indian folk-culture is dominated by ritual, as evolved in temples and shrines, is domestic and collective rites and in festivals and pageants, which mark the passage of both the individual personality and the institutional structure in time and space. The social calendar of Indian festivals links the renewal of nature with the rejuvenation of social life. The rituals observed on these occasions draw on the participants’ sense of their own common helplessness, in the face of dangers and mysteries which confront one, both in one’s nature and one’s world. They transmute the rhythmical polarities, of order and chaos, law and impulse, union and conflict, into sentiments of
mutual dependence, and love, and joy. On these festive occasions, the reality principle is exceeded and consolidated by the pleasure principle.

Thrift and extravagance are restored to the regular order and pattern of daily life to regenerative flux through the sacred continuum. The seasonal festivals of Vasant Panchami, the Festival of Serpents, Nariyal Paurnami, the Festival of Lights, etc., figure frequently in Sarojini Naidu’s poetry, both as themes and as symbolical plots of human experience. They link the renewal of Nature, to the awakening consciousness of the individual and to the revitalization of social life. In the calendar round of corporate ecstasy, induced during the festive rites, people pay homage to the Guardian Spirits. Working through Nature and racial memory, these control and regulate the whole chain of being. Ordinary life is elevated towards the sublime, and the bond between the actual and the ideal is reaffirmed.

In the collective rapture of trance, people realize the mystical benefit of unity in multiplicity, without any metaphysical exertion on their part. Their feelings dramatize themselves, spontaneously, around the objects and artifacts of their quotidian world. They have a direct access to the primal essences of being and experience, gaining a kind of emotional feedback through natural symbols.
Sarojini Naidu accepts the reality of death, but to her life’s joys and loveliness is of greater importance. The sweet scented flowers, the lyric downs, the melodious notes of singing birds and dancing sea waves enthralled her but inspite of their fascination they do not divert her attention from the grave realities of life. Sarojini Naidu is usually believed to be the singer of sweet and fanciful aspects of life but she very well knew that griefs and fears, the strenuous lessons of defeat and the broken secrets of pride, joy deferred and fruits denied are inevitable realities of life and they are necessary to make life complete which is depicted in the next chapter very beautifully.

“Everything that has ever been called folk art has always reflected domination.”

...Theodor Adorno
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