Chapter - V

Sarojini Naidu’s Twilight View Of Life and Death

ABSTRACT

Here in this chapter, the researcher has covered the eternal truths about life and death through Sarojini Naidu’s poems on life and death. In doing so, the researcher has portrayed Sarojini Naidu’s poems which brings out a clear theme that life is not a bed of roses. It brings in its wake joy as well as pain, comfort as well as misery, kindness as well as cruelty.
Chapter – V

Sarojini Naidu’s Twilight View Of

Life and Death

“The old order changeth, yielding place to new, and God fulfills himself in many ways, lest one good custom should corrupt the world.”

- Alfred Lord Tennyson

Poetry is not an escape from life but an escape into it and the greater a poet, the greater is his involvement in life. A poet can never be indifferent to life. He is endowed with keen poetic sensibility and sensitiveness and his involvement in life is greater than an ordinary person. The greatness of a poet, according to Mathew Arnold, lies in his powerful application of idea to life, immutably fixed under the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty.

Sarojini Naidu too had a great intimacy and involvement in life. She encouraged many happy and sad experiences in her life and longed to know the secret of life, death and love.

On one occasion Gopal Krishna Gokhale told Sarojini Naidu, “Do you know, I feel that an abiding sadness underlies all that unfailing brightness of
yours, Is it because you have come so near Death that its shadows still cling to you?” Sarojini Naidu answered: No, I have come so near life that its fires have burned me.”

There is in fact; an unmistakable sense of life in all her poems, whatever is the topic- Nature, Love, Death or Faith, Sarojini is irresistibly drawn to the central fires of life, reflecting their patterns or casting their shadows on her poetic experience.

As a poet, she uses her power of vision and faculty of song, to retrieve and the gift of life from every experience and circumstances. The inner world of painful sensitivity and the outer world of stress and strife are both drawn together into a creative alignment, by the violation. She attributes to the fact and process of life.

In the poem ‘Dirge’ Sarojini gives a moving account of an Indian widow’s tryst with her lonely destiny. The widow is divested of all her shining jewels, and is left without a second chance in life, to wear them, terrified and tantalized by her status as a passionate fragmented person. Time has left her superfluous, and without the resources of self-redemption.

“What longer need hath she of loveliness

Whom death has parted from her lord’s caress"
The poet enters into the young widow’s feelings and condemns the unjust and inhuman treatment met with widows in India by divesting them of all articles of embellishment and making it compulsory for them to cover themselves with the customary dress of widows. In this poem, a cardinal evil of Indian society is exposed in a characteristically liberal, sympathetic and persuasive manner. It is to be especially noted that the author herself was a woman and therefore her analysis of the sentiment of widowhood cannot be passed over lightly.

In Sarojini Naidu’s poem death has parted the lovely maiden from her lord’s caress. Therefore, according to the age-long custom, she has no need now of glimmering robes of bright bangles or jewelry on her wrist, of flowers or pearls to deck her hair, of jasmine garlands to adorn her bed. The mirror should also be taken away from her. The henna on the hands is a happy symbol of new wedlock; now there should be no more henna for her hands. Her lips breathe sighs; so no more red spices now; and for her weeping eye no more black collyrium.

Society cannot forget that, inspite of her youth and beauty; she is above all, a widow. But is it her fault that she is a widow? Society does not care to give an answer. A Custom-bound and tradition-ridden society wants that her shining bracelet should be shattered; this is the first and foremost
The necklace that clings to her sobbing throat should be broken. She must be given a plain dress to cover herself.

Sarojini Naidu’s portrays with unerring instinct, the meaning of a typical Indian Hindu widow’s life which is virtual exile and banishment from the community sans festitivity. She recaptures with dire naturalism, the crude and painful ritual of divestiture and denitiation accompanied by the blotting out of the vermillion mark on the face, the snapping of the ‘mangala-sūtra’, the breaking of the bangles and the tearing down of the auspicious veil, tonsuring the head as well by a barber.

“Divert her of her azure veils and cloud
Her living beauty in a living shroud”

The undoing of the marriage bond is a reversal of the social bond as well as the personal status. The unbearable life after death of husband marks a dead-end in the Hindu widow’s life, and she must ever remain a victim of time amidst the wreckage of her dreams and hopes. Time has lost its power of flow and continuity. She lives in a frozen state and is arrested in a lifeless void. ‘Nay let her be!’- is all that even a poet can say in the face of such a remorseless finality with which the life of the individual is closed and shut.
In the poem ‘Past and Future’ Sarojini Naidu contemplates the relation between the old and the new, between memory and aspiration. The past appears like a hermit, retiring into a mountain cell to do penance. The future appears like a bride at the threshold of new life, coyly entering the bridal chamber. It is only the passage of time which would reveal their organic connection. Although in individual life the past is closer to youth and the future proximate with old age whereas in an evolutionary life the past is antiquity and the future, a potentiality. The soul discards the old self as a worn-out cliche, and invites the new self as an exciting mystery. The keen heart hastens to forget old longings in fulfilling new desires. This can be clearly viewed in the poem ‘In a Time of Flowers’ spring is viewed here as a revival of the old into the new. The old earth breaks into passionate bloom to welcome the new-born year. Sarojini Naidu is poignantly aware of mutability and transience, but she is equally conscious of the counterveiling power of Time bringing experience and maturity to the individual. Time, which is the unexempting law of nature and life, does not flatter by false chivalry. Time fleets and is unremitting, a Rank is no protection: nor beauty an armour against it. In a woman’s life, time’s passage leaves a trail of physical and psychological loss and disenchantment, for, her beauty fades away and her pride is exhausted. The various roles she plays in the life of
others as lover, mother and comrade pass into poignant nostalgia, or oppressive familiarity, and constant anxiety. As time passes, she is left on the eroded embankments of her own lonely life.

In the titular poem ‘The Bird of Time’ she discusses two different aspects of life.

1. She traces the two patterns of time – Time Manifest and Time Implicit. She is aware of the creative aspects of Time

2. The time-bird is a Symbol of both flight and transcendence. It encompasses the whole of life, and yet manages to be free of its gravity and compulsion.

In the same way birth and death, joy and sorrow are created by Time, but time itself is not conditioned by them. The poet seems to feel, that in a total view, time does not annihilate life but rather promotes, purifies and renews life

“O Bird of Time, say where did you learn
The changing measures you sing?”

A quite different outlook can be seen in ‘The Indian Gypsy’- which offers a kind of counter point to the ‘Dirge’. The Gipsy girl, unlike the
widow, is untrammeled by social convention. Her individuality is unruffled by mechanical time. She is close to the roots of racial consciousness and has the knowledge and the means of survival and triumph. Her personality merges with the landscape, and responds with supple ease to the shifts in time. The universe inhabited by her is spatial, untouched by clock and calendar. Temporal change is cushioned by evolutionary space in her primitive, old-fashioned ways of life. Sarojini Naidu’s close involvement with life gave her an occasion to experience its happiness and buoyancy, its colour and variety, its pain and separation. She knew what sorrow was. Her brother’s death was followed by many tragic experiences of life and death of many of her close associates.

‘Alone’ is another lyric in which the poet employs the meditative and visionary process as an illuminated return. Love, which is the voice that is great within us, brings the self back to the world of things.

“Alone, O Love, I seek the blossoming glades,

The bright, accustomed alleys of delight”,

The self, in contemplation, offers the world as meditation and also as an object of adoration.
Here, Sarojini Naidu emphasizes her awareness of the life that stands revealed by circumstance. She is equally aware of the potential and inclusive life nurtured by love. From the solidity of the vegetable world, the imagery shifts to the liquidity of flowing streams, and finally to the ethereal, but illuminating mystery of cosmic principles. The individual images are united to the symbol of the sanctuary, again personalized as the familiar face of love. Sarojini Naidu views the human self as a unique and distinctive possession.

In the poem, ‘Invincible’, she expresses her conviction that life shall prevail. For, pain has no terrors for the soul which cannot be overcome by the creative force of Love. Pain is the augury and awakens humanity. The individual reaches out every other point in creation through charity.

“O Fate, betwixt the grinding-stones of Pain,

Tho’ you have crushed my life like broken grain”;

The feeling of reciprocity, which connects the various spheres of existence, rests on the creative plentitude and the transforming power of the universe. Pain engenders pity, sympathy and charity; and through one’s individual suffering, one learns about others and discovers the world at
large. Pain is a way of knowing, while love is a way of being. And Life connects them and endows them with meaning and purpose.  

Sarojini Naidu recognizes life’s urgent and inviolable claim to bind and consecrate the Self with the Cosmic Order. Without indulging in high metaphysical distinctions, she expresses her solidarity with life, profound sense of richness, variety and beauty. All seasons of life evoke in her, a perennial sense of reverence. Her poetry has an archetypal and visionary quality, reflecting her concerns for the timeless themes of human experience happy and simple and sorrowful things.

Sarojini Naidu is a poet of the subjective, rather than of the objective correlative. Her axis of entry into the world of experience, or vision, is her Self. The lyrical impulse, coming naturally to her, arranges the world for her, both as scene and plot, to be explored and dramatized by her own mood and feeling. Her poetic inspiration designs are diverse and shifting roles for the self. The poet surveys life, absorbing its joy and sorrow, anguish and ecstasy. She reaches the terminal points, of loneliness, of waste, of suffering and of death, without losing nerve or faith. Time, Nature and Cosmos; personality, experience and consciousness: Love, death and devotion; the language, the people and their activities- through all these, there plays a
vibrant rhythm of life. The will to live and live on forms the golden thread of unity and continuity in Sarojini Naidu’s poetry.

In ‘Three Sorrows’ the poet expresses her transcendental faith in life and song.⁸

The poet analyses pain and grief, for she views them not partially, but as governed by a totality of the world-force.

“How shall I honour thee, O sacred grief?
Fain would my love transmute?
My suffering into music and my hear
Into a deathless lute

According to P.E. Dustoor sorrow is a fact, but not the truth. It is not a punishment, but a gift of life.⁹

In ‘The Old Woman’ Sarojini presents a heroic figure struggling with life ‘In the face of the Sun and the Wind and the Rain holding converse with poverty, hunger and pain and the ultimate sleep that awaits.’ There are poems that reveal a spirit crushed and awed by fate.’ They also reveal the poetess’s indirect involvement in life. The old woman counting her days becomes a symbol of abiding faith in God who is fountain head of all life. It is one of Sarojini Naidu’s finest poems. It evokes ‘karuna’ or compassion.
The refrain, which is the first article of faith for a Muslim works very effectively, underscoring the woman’s stoicism and fortitude born of her devotion. She gives us a possible history of the old woman, how she once was a wife and mother, who are now reduced to begging in the streets.

“The pageant of life going blithely and fleet

To the feast of eternity”

A Deccani character ‘The Old Woman’, for instance evokes sympathy and admiration of the poet for her incredible fortitude of spirit. In the Poem, ‘The Old Woman’ emerges as Mother, courage in the Indian setting. She has tasted the bitter fruit of life. Experience has dug deep trenches of tragic memory on her forehead. Yet she is invincible in her faith. Time may ravage her flesh, but has no power over her indomitable spirit. Her faith counterminds the dictates of time. The stern and austere portrait of the old lady is a mirror held up to Time, Time stands caricatured in its own burning glass.

“Is the faith that doth solace her breast:

La ilaha illa-I-Allah

La ilaha illa-I-Allah,

Muhammad-ar-Rasul-Allah”
‘The Old Woman’ with her refrain of ‘La ilaha illa-I-Allaha, La ilaha illa, I-Allaha Muhammad-ar-Rasul-Allah’ is a familiar sight in Muslim localities. Sarojini Naidu must have encountered such Muzzeins, Fakirs and old women in Hyderabad.

The poem presents the pathetic condition of the woman who tasted and swallowed lots of bitterness of life yet remains invincible in faith. She sits patiently in the sun and the wind and the rain with hope that some passerby, moved by her pathetic lot, may offer something, but often her expectation has been in vain. The poem depicts a moving account of the misery, poverty and hunger of a beggar in the guise of the woman. The woman, who is an embodiment of patience and courage, and who has none in the world to fall back upon in her poems ‘Glaring Old Age’. Faith in God is the sole consolation and stay of life. The old woman evokes sympathy and admiration of the poet for her incredible courage and mortal fortitude. Though poverty, hunger and pain are her sole companions, she lifts a brave heart to the jest of the days. When the poet compares her happy past with her unhappy present, the tone gets all the more pathetic. Time may ravage her flesh, but has no power over her indomitable spirit. She is bold enough to face the vicissitudes of life. The poem is based directly on experience and observation, and has a native tune of pleasant nature.
The Poem is an embodiment of courage and forbearance. She is sublime in her tragic intensity. There is in fact, an unmistakable sense of life in all the poems of Sarojini Naidu. Whatever is her immediate topic- Nature, Love, Death or Faith- Sarojini Naidu is irresistibly drawn to the central fire of life, reflecting their patterns, or casting their shadows, in her poetic experience.

Sarojini’s Naidu’ poems on life and death are marked by optimism and heroic spirit though it is missing in all her poems on these themes as a poet cannot be as consistent as a philosopher. She is fully aware of the challenge of suffering and pain and death to life but she is not afraid of them. Sarojini Naidu is not an escapist as revealed in ‘The Faery Isle of Janjira’ where she expresses her desire to taste the hustle bustle of life and problems:

“Into the Strife of the throng and the tumult,
Tis mine to carry the banner of song” 12

The optimistic note is struck in the last stanza of the poem:

“The solace of faith to the lips that falter,
The succour of hope to the hands that fall,
The tidings of joy when peace shall triumph,
When Truth shall conquer and Love prevail.”13
For Sarojini Naidu Life was not a bed of roses.

In the poem ‘In Life’, a poem for her children, she tells them that life is not a lovely dream, or carnival of careless joy’ but the mingled yarn of passionate longings and sufferings of fear and strife of joys and successes, The fulfillment of life lies in passing through the ordeals of love, pain and suffering and also in enjoying all ‘passionate rapture’.

“Children, ye have not lived, to you it seems
Life is a lovely stalactite of dreams”  

She reminds her children of the holiness and the tragic wholeness of life. Life is more real than dream, larger than existence and greater than personal experience. It is all these, and yet more. It encompasses and transcends the partial and final, the individual and the immediate, and the actual and the imaginary. Sarojini Naidu’s view of life is essentially heroic. It is festive panorama of beautiful objects and scenes played upon by a primal sense of being.

“Wounded with fierce desire and worn with strife,
Children, ye have not lived, for this is life.”
But this is mere existence, as yet unshaped by an awareness of structure, design or direction. As time passes, the self is formed and the personality gets a definition.

For Sarojini Naidu ‘Life’ is not, as it is to children ‘a lovely dream or carnival of careless joys but a bundle of hardships too is involved. She gives the message of hope and courage in the face of sorrow and pain.

Sarojini Naidu views life as a comrade, not adversary. Life brings in its wake joy as well as pain, comfort as well as misery, kindness as well as cruelty. But these are elements of a single reality, not opposites. They are the contingent powers of a single force and essence.

In ‘The Soul’s Prayer,’ the poet expresses her desire to be spared no bliss, or pang of strife but to drain ‘Earth’s utmost bitter, utmost sweet.’ Her chastened spirit shall sue to learn the simple secret of peace from God, who declares from his sevenfold height

“Life is a prism of my light,

And Death the shadow of my face”.$^{16}$

There is pain and suffering, liability and deprivation, in Sarojini Naidu’s world, but no moral or metaphysical evil. The conversation with God reveals to her some very deep and eternal truths about life and death.
Though it is the experience of her childhood, she does not talk like a child but an enlightened soul seeking purgation through pain and suffering.

Her experience is similar to that of Wordsworth, the mystic worshipper of Nature, who was transported to ecstatic raptures by communion with Nature and found himself in a highly elevated and exalted mood. The poetess makes a prayer to God to give her a full experience of life, including all its joys and sorrows, pleasures, and pains. She knows that an experience of both is necessary to make life full;

Robert Browning, the immortal poet, of the Victorian age, also says that man should not try to evade sorrows and have only the joys of life. The poetess emphasizes thine divinity in man, and says that God is the creator of everything in the world, including man. In a highly philosophic and enlightened mood she further entreats God to grant her love and knowledge which she reflects in the following lines in ‘The Soul’s Prayer’-

“The intricate lore of love and life
And mystic knowledge of the grave”

According to most religious theories death is not the negation of life; it is only the beginning of a new and immortal life of happiness and tranquility in some celestial sphere. Browning, the philosophical poet of the
Victorian age, has also a vision of life after death which is highly optimistic and inspiring.

The ideas expressed in the poem are deep and philosophical, the sentiments intense and passionate, and the expression simple, clear, poetic and appealing. The poem shows great artistic maturity, and the verse moves fluent and musical by conveying a message that spiritual fulfilment is possible only by God’s mercy.

Sympathy and empathy form a generous part of Sarojini’s poetic gift. They permeate her vision of all things, from the simple to the sublime and this can be clearly noticed in ‘To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus’ which is a criticism of life and contains a pen picture of life’s sorrows and sufferings, blighted hopes and unfulfilled longings. All attempts of poor mortals to attain divine summits ‘with faith that sinks and feet that tire’ will end in smoke:

“How shall we reach the great, unknown
Nirvāna of thy Lotus-throne?”

Here, Sarojini Naidu presents Buddha as one who has attained the Nirvāna (bliss) through the illuminated self, which takes its stand on the high grounds of Dharma and Nirvana. Although we can understand and analyze
the nature of his illumination, the way of the Buddha is not accessible to all. But the spiritual frontier opened up by Buddha is a perpetual reminder of our spiritual hunger for identity and unity with the cosmic Soul.

Sarojini Naidu accepts the reality of death but to her life’s joys and loveliness is of greater importance. The fragrant flowers, the lyric dawns, the melodious notes of singing birds and dancing sea waves enthralled her but in spite of their fascination they could not divert her attention from the sordid realities of life.

“Dream yields to dream, strife follows strife
And Death unweaves the webs of Life”

The poet makes a moving and poignant contrast between our limited world of nescience, Desire, pain and sorrow and Buddha’s emancipated world of illumination, detachment, peace and bliss. Man has in his lot toil, struggle, pains and sufferings, insults and defeats with no object achieved, no wish fulfilled and no desire attained, yet the longing for the divine spirit persists and remains uncrushed. The soul of man is ever lured by a feeling of mystery, and the more it tries to attain, the more it remains unsatisfied, it pursues a vision, a distant vision which goes on receding, still farther off, as it comes near it. It goes on bemoaning it even as it recedes and this game of
hide and seeks between the mystery of life and the soul of man continues forever. With time-ridden faces we live through the terror of life and the horror of death. We are the victims of subjectivity and finitude, casualty and mortality. But the Buddha seated on the Lotus above the turbulent streams of passion and strife, reminds us of soul’s hunger for freedom and transcendence. The secret is elusive, but the goal beckons. Buddha’ peace can be won only in the supreme way of sacrifice and compassion.

Sarojini Naidu’s comprehension of life is elementary and natural, unburdened with metaphysical density or intellectual obliquity. Her passion for life is direct and optimistic. In the language of enchantment and incarnation she speaks of the familiar, accustomed alleys of sensation and emotion. Her poetry of life rests on passion and correspondence, not on paradox and irony. Her perception, despite its dated idiom and the ornate and overwrought imagery, is precise and intense, because it organizes itself around the primal varieties of life-time, love, death and devotion.

As P.E Dustoor sums it up:

Sarojini Naidu’s strength does not lie in reflective power or intellectual path. She does not seek to grapple with life’s problems as a philosopher or an abstract thinker. In fact, for her, there are no problems to
be pondered; there are only situations that make her nerves tingle and stir her into quivering song.

Life, for her, is not a riddle to be solved; it is a miracle to be achieved celebrated and sung like a song. Its endless variety excites her, colours dazzle her and beauty intoxicates her. Her response to it is immediate; it is not sicklied over with the pale cast of thought. In this, no doubt, is her weakness, but is also her strength. In this is the secret of her perennial youthfulness. Because of this she casts a spell over young and impressionable hearts, and, while perhaps not quite satisfying the spiritual hunger of those who have suffered disillusionment or defeat, revitalizes them by leading them out of the murky atmosphere of a complex existence into the clear fresh air of life’s elemental experiences; its recurrent joys and woes, its lavish gifts and mysterious denials.²⁰

Life, taken all in all, if Sarojini Naidu like her poetry. It is not an obsession, but a possession, ²¹ not an experiment but an adventure, a graceful movement into things, by means of which we recognize the wonder, magnificence and splendour of the world. Sarojini Naidu is a minstrel of life, not its prophet raising a finger of admonition at right and wrong, but praising, and thrilling to its beauty and purpose. Life for her ever remains a
little lovely dream which makes all kindred, and all the world our home, as her ‘wandering singers’, sing

“Where the wind calls our wandering footsteps we go”  22

The threnody of loss and pain is continually transformed into a hymn of love and worship in her poetry. One touch of life, and all is a consecration of joy. 23 Life for her, then, is both a burning veil and a luminous web, a mystery to be adored and a glory to be celebrated.

The spontaneous and cyclic renewal of vegetal life to Sarojini Naidu seemed to contain the answer to the riddle of life. Actually transience was not the problem, but solution for Sarojini Naidu. Once accepted, it makes us free. Transcience, paradoxically, is the proof of immortality, because even death is transcendent. As she says in “The poet to Death” 24

“Tarry a while, O Death, I cannot die,  
With all my blossoming hopes unharvested, 
My joys ungarnered, all my songs unsung, 
And all my fears unshed”.

Sarojini Naidu in explaining the concept of death has very beautifully compared Death to the season of spring. Spring thus, is not just renewal and regeneration, but the proof of the continuity and persistence of life. Sarojini
Naidu would have us believe that even if we grow old and die, as long as single flower blossoms, life endures and, through it, so do we. That is because though apparently atomized and individualized, all life is actually one, a sort of force that transforms and animates all living organisms. According to Sarojini Naidu, life is a tension or balance of opposites and diversities, there can be no laughter without sorrow, no love without death.

In ‘The Garden Vigil’, the poetess expresses the poignant agony in her heart, which cannot be assuaged even by the balmy breath of fragrant wind. Zephyr stealthily rifles the honeyed scent of Sirisha flowers and the rose. The poetess knows neither peace nor rest:

“Pain weary and dream worn I lie awake,
Counting like beads the blazing shows o’erhead”.25

The nocturnal beauty of nature cannot alloy her deep sorrow. The radiant sunrise cannot infuse hope in her sorrowful heart; it, on the other hand, reminds her of her beloved who was the glorious light of hope in her life. She yearns to hear his tender voice to comfort me or teach Sun-up and Sun-down and all radiant beauties of nature do not thrill her heart with pleasure:

“I care not what brave splendours bloom or die
So thou dost burn in thine appointed place”.26
The poem gives us a vivid description about the pathetic condition of zephyrs, who is dejected, exhausted by pain and haunted by dreams. She restlessly keeps awake counting the twinkling stars, as a worshipper counts beads in a rosary.

In Sarojini Naidu’s view life is a tension or balance of opposites and diversities. There can be no laughter without sorrow, no love without death. But she would revel in the entire process, not just embrace the pleasure and eschew the pain. Unlike many of the male poets, Sarojini Naidu believed in salvation and not in renunciation or denial of this world or senses. The dissolution of the centre or detached ego through a keen sensual experience is her idea of emancipation. In this she is not just romantic, but sensualist. Sense to her is, ultimately, sensibility. The capacity to feel, to experience, to be one with life is crucial to her. And she seeks a heightening of this capacity repeatedly, feverishly, and compulsively—almost like an addict. Hence we find an element of exaggeration and excess in her poetry. Her senses are her source of ecstasy and life is the stimulant; often, she forces the stimulants and the senses beyond their capacities in her attempt to reach her “high”.

Overall, Sarojini Naidu, like the aesthetes and symbolists, was an idealist; she believed in the soul, but a soul which worked through the
senses, not one which was transcendental and which could be reached only through repression or denial of what we experience through our senses. Thus, while her poetry downplays the intellectual aspects of the human personality and celebrates the life of emotion and sensuality, it is not totally devoid of a philosophical content and foundation. Perhaps, no poem of Sarojini Naidu puts up her idealist-aesthetic manifesto as much as “Guerdon”, in which she declares that her chosen gifts from life, which expresses her true calling, is ‘The Rapture of Love, ‘The Rapture of Truth’, and ‘The Rapture of Song’.

Essentially feminine as her world is, Sarojini Naidu’s poetic self goes through the entire gamut of emotional experiences akin to her sex. It is a world of pain inextricably linked with the elemental facts of birth, bereavement and death. It is a world of dreams, hopes and desires. It is a world of unions and partings, of mysterious encounters and poignant outcomes. Sarojini Naidu presses close to the facts of life lying in the twilight regions between experience and vision. Her feelings go straight to the paradigmatic situations in a woman’s life, ranging from the beautiful to the sublime, from the ecstatic to the transcendental.
Life, for Sarojini Naidu, has indeed the texture and quality of a woman’s love, whether it is the bride’s bashful tear of joy, or the pilgrim’s votive lamp that stands as her symbol.

Sarojini Naidu views the self’s sacrificial strength as the source from which all glorious deeds in life flow. Selflessness is vast love compassion, and a ripe human concern for all. In the poem ‘Renunciation’ she asks her lover-comrade to give nought to her, but everything to the world. Through this gesture of voluntary self-denial she rises above the world of private memory and desire, and realizes her higher self in public good.27

The self inhabits both the worlds at the same time; its own inner space, teemingly with memories, desires and visions; and the outer space filled with others, their deeds, ideals and aspirations, which weave a luminous web of life. In her poems on love and in her meditative pieces, Sarojini Naidu plunges into deep introspection of her own personality weaving a shining hood to veil its private identity and personal meaning. In her poems on folk-life, places, events and persons, on the other hand, she projects her sense of life into the world of values and relationships, and offers a sensitive estimation of human action and human purpose. The self takes its stand where these two worlds meet in her poetic sensibility.

Love, protecting, protects itself, like law, like life. Life is immutable, because love is its very breath and being. In the poem ‘Immutable’ Sarojini
Naidu expresses her creed in the language of the Hindu mystic poets. Indeed, life for Sarojini Naidu, as for Mirabai, is a carpet of ageless beauty outspread for love to walk upon. The beauty of dreams, the grace of passion, the meaning of sorrow, the illumination of light and the mystery of darkness are all part of the same life-force. The greatest tribute that a lover or poet may pay to life is to render it back to its source in eternity.

While Sarojini Naidu finds the supreme goal of life in the attainment of union with the Divine, she cannot ignore the perennial pressure and challenge of the tragic element in life. Time and fear of death cause life-weariness, and tear as under the fabric of personality. In a woman’s life, especially, they assume a peculiar poignancy, for they strike at the very foundations of her self. Outliving the pain of love and the pain of parting demands she displays exceptional courage and fortitude and faith and devotion.

Life is a constant crisis for a woman, who must always encounter death in order to bear the intolerable chalice of new life. Since she is so close to life and death, she naturally has an instinctive sense of renewal and resurrection. The sacrificial nature of reality and resurrection.

The sacrificial nature of reality thus deepens the sacramental quality of life.
In the poem ‘Festival of Memory’ for instance, Sarojini Naidu expresses this sentiment:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{No worship dost thou need,} \\
\text{O miracle divine!} \\
\text{Silence and song and tears} \\
\text{Delight and dreams are thine,} \\
\text{Who mak’st my burning soul} \\
\text{Thy sacrament and shrine.}^{28}
\end{align*}
\]

The poet’s miraculous view of life is at once a recognition of the self’s liability as well as its capacity to transcend the condition. Like Lord Krishna’s call to the Gopikas, life calls forth to man of his lair of selfhood. Once the awful risk of total surrender is taken, life becomes an adventure of the spirit. As Radha tells Krishna, in, the poem ‘The Flute-Player of Brindaban’:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{No peril of the deep or height} \\
\text{Shall daunt my winged foot;} \\
\text{No fear of time-unconquered space,} \\
\text{Or light untravelled route} \\
\text{Impede my heart that pants to drain} \\
\text{The nectar of thy flute!}^{29}
\end{align*}
\]
Not chaos, but cosmic purpose, is the order of life. Sarojini Naidu’s comprehension of life is elemental and unsophisticated, unburdened with metaphysical density or intellectual obliquity. Her passion for life is direct, and uncomprisingly forward-looking. In the language of enchantment and incantation she speaks of the familiar, accustomed alleys of sensation and emotion. On one occasion she reveals the obscure and remote depths of the primitive, chaotic springs of human fear and hate and sorrow. But she never strays far from the threshold and foothold of man in life. She lets her vision work by discovery and recognition, not by surprise and invention. Her poetry of life rests on passion and correspondence, not on paradox and irony. Her perception, despite its dated idiom and the ornate and overwrought imagery, is precise and intense, because it organizes itself around the primal varieties of life - time, love, death and devotion.

Sarojini Naidu has a few and limited number of themes which recur in her poems. They are mainly lyric and timeless ones. Patriotism is not a theme in her poetry but there is no doubt in saying that it is mainly because of Sarojini Naidu’s dedication and patriotism which has made her one with it. This aspect is discussed with great loyalty in the next chapter.

“For men may come and men may go, but I go on forever.”

….Alfred Lord Tennyson
REFERENCES:

1. Padmini Sengupta, Sarojini Naidu, op.cit. p.109
2. Sarojini Naidu, “Dirge”, from the Sceptred Flute, p.66
   Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948.
   Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948.
   Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948.
5. Ibid., “Alone” P.79
7. Ibid., p.175
   Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948.
9. P.E Dustoor, Sarojini Naidu, p.47
    Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948.
12. Sarojini Naidu, “The Faery Isle of Janjira”, from the Sceptred Flute,

   Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948.

   Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948.

   Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948.

17. Sarojini Naidu, “In Soul’s Prayer”, from the Sceptred Flute, p.123
   Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948.


20. P.E. Dustoor, Sarojini Naidu, p.47


22. Sarojini Naidu, “Wandering Singers”, from the Sceptred Flute, p.4
   Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948


27. Ibid., “Renunciation”, p. 31
