Chapter - VII

Summary and Conclusions

ABSTRACT

Here in the last chapter, the researcher has tried to sum up the chapter and has concluded by critically evaluating all thoughts, ideas, and values discussed in the previous chapters and has made an attempt to analyse it as a whole.
Chapter – VII

Summary and Conclusions

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty’-

That is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.”

John Keats

Sarojini Naidu enjoys immense popularity in two fields-viz; Indo-Anglian Poetry and the history of the Indian struggle for Independence. Her writings offer us a vivid portrait of her multi-dimensional personality. They reveal a woman with a fragile physique but an indomitable spirit, who could withstand great pain and suffering but yet emerge from it unscarred. She was a woman who could laugh at herself and at others and had immense panache and presence of mind.

The main positive attitude of Sarojini Naidu was she loved the society and got along with a wide variety of people. She was quite broadminded and open to new ideas. She had the capacity to enjoy herself even under demanding circumstances. She had patience and fortitude, and often offered solace and comfort to others around her.
Sarojini Naidu was aware of the important role she was playing in India’s national life, and was confident and self-assured. She was both a great wag and a wit. She had the discipline to make her personal life subservient to her public obligations and was essentially optimistic and forward looking. She had an inner faith which gave her the strength. She was utterly free from prejudice of caste, race, gender, nation or religion.

Sarojini Naidu was not a feminist but fought for the cause of Indian women, who though bourgeois in sensibility, values, beliefs, was yet an anti-imperialist. She loved spring and the bounties of nature. She proved to be a loyal wife and conscientious mother. She worked tirelessly for Hindu-Muslim unity. She got identity as a poet not because of her political influence as some critics have opined. Her poetic fame has nothing to do with her role in politics. One may feel that her poetic stature is at the honours and critical praise she received during and after her lifetime both at home and abroad. A recipient of the title ‘Kaisar-i-Hind’ gold medal for poetry, she was made a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. An honorary Doctorate Degree was conferred on her by Allahabad University.

Dr. Kotoky rightly says that “She has remained for decades the most well-known Indo-English poet, even to the extent of popular identification of Indo-English poetry with her poetic output alone.” Her lyrical genius was
recognized when she was given the titles of ‘the Nightingale of India’ and ‘Bharat Kokila’. Her poetry readings at Lahore and Allahabad impressed the people and gave them an idea of her poetic powers. She was the first President of the Indian P.E.N. and presided over the All India Writers’ Conference held at Jaipur, October 1945, which was attended, among others, by E.M.Forster

Sarojini Naidu was widely acclaimed as a poet only after the publication of “The Golden Threshold”. Her poems received excellent reviews and were given a wide coverage in the British Press. Her name entered the literary history of England and she was counted one among the greatest of the English poets when her three poems i.e. ‘The Soul’s Prayer’, ‘In Salutation to the Eternal Peace’ and ‘To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus’ were given an honoured place in the Oxford Cambridge History of English Literature.

A study of Sarojini Naidu’s poetry is a delightful affair. She is a poet of colour and melody and beauty, while her poems, one is bound to be deeply involved in her aesthetic response to things. A poem like the following can send one into raptures over the poet’s lyrical feel of the bliss and ecstasy of love.
“Cover mine eyes, O my love!

Mine eyes that are weary of bliss

As of light that is poignant and strong,

O silence my lips with a kiss,

My lips that is weary of song!²

It is impossible to miss the romantic fervour, the felicity of expression and the intensity of feeling conveyed in an extremely sensuous manner in the above stanza of her representative love-lyric. The poem is charged with the drive of feeling as much as with sensuousness.

The poetic beauty of Sarojini Naidu’s work and her consequent widespread reputation as a poet will convince one of her intrinsic poetic talent and literary grace. She wielded the English language with the felicity of a native Englishman. In many of her poems she does not display her poetic insight but its absence is more than compensated for by her powerful lyricism, imaginative appeal and richness of imagery. That is the reason why she became famous after the publication of ‘The Golden Threshold’ in the year 1905 in England by William Heinemann. She was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in the year 1914. Her poetical renown became established. The people to whom the language which Sarojini Naidu used and who were supposed to be the best judges of the poetry in the same
were not courteous to her poetical ambition when they hailed her as an English poet of undeniable grace and distinction.

Referring to Arthur Symons’s introductory passages on Sarojini Naidu, the London Times remarked “We find them all in her poems but chiefly remarkable. Considering her nationality, is her passionate delight in the beauty of the sounds and the words of our tongue and the lift of our measures. She reveals in the swing of her verse … Her poetry seems to sing itself, as if her swift thoughts and strong emotions sprang into lyrics of themselves. There is the same unity and spontaneity about such poems, as that ‘To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus’, in which her wisdom has play… It is a far cry from that to her descriptive poems- motion and sight turned to music- or to the quaint and charming little songs to her four children. In this case the marriage of Western culture with the Eastern has not proved barren. It has given the poet new eyes with which to see old things. The result is something unique which we need not hesitate to call Poetry.”

Sarojini Naidu’s strength is her mastery of the medium and of epithets which she coins skillfully and of a jewelled beauty of phrase, and her subtle magic of imaginative temperament.
Sarojini Naidu suffers from a low-down of the poetic stature only when something is demanded of her, for which she had no flair. In respect of poetic craftsmanship and melody of the language she is superior to Toru Dutt and Harin. She comes close to Manmohan Ghose in sensing the verbal music underlying a word. But when it comes to an employment of the various genres of poetry or thematic originality and innovation, she stands next to Harin, Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore. Her themes are not varied. There are only four major themes in her poetry. In this respect she is comparable to Manmohan Ghose who also wrote poems mainly on love, nature, death and pain. Both of them belong to the Elizabethan school of lyrics.

And what Manmohan Ghose says is equally true of her poetry: “How we have sacrificed form and expression in our devotion for modern thought and for contemporary subject-matter, and the idea that a Poet should have something new to say! The Elizabethans don’t seem to trouble themselves much about having a new political mission. What old and time-worn subjects they chose, seeming evidently to to care for nothing except for rhythm and expression, on which they spend the whole power of their art”.4

Sarojini Naidu’s major themes - nature, love, life and death - are quite old and time-worn but her art is superb, because the technical skill of her
poetry is high. Moreover, what gives them freshness and beauty is the richness of poetic details, romantic imagery and lyrical quality.

The first chapter gives us a brief introduction about English education and its impact on the Indians, how it exercised potent and ineffaceable influence on Indians who were lost in cultural and literary decadence.

It also deals with the comparative study of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu. The poetic achievement of Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu is limited. Toru Dutt is mainly a translator. Her few, original pieces are simple, flawless expressions which cannot claim to be of great poetic value, the only possible exception being of her translations from Sanskrit is based on that of William Wordsworth, St.Coleridge and John Keats. Sarojini Naidu’s pre-occupation with love suggests her relationship with the romantics. Her romanticism tends to be decadent because of her infatuation for the music of words and her exclusive aesthetic concern with the beautiful aspects of Indian life and nature. Both the romantics bypass the tensions of their personal lives and social milieu in their poetic works. But their achievement becomes vital in view of the fact that they were the first authentic Indian poets in English.
Dr. P.E.Dustoor nicely puts it, “For the vast majority of the men and women in the East life is still the ancient mystery of sun and shower and season, and encircled with the supreme mystery of the Great Beyond. It is quite surprising that even in the twentieth century Sarojini Naidu, still like Rabindranath Tagore and Iqbal, has given expression to her awareness of these mysteries in imagery that is as fresh as the world’s first dawn and yet as old as history, conjuring up, as it does, visions of birds and flowers and trees, sun and stream, cattle and the plough, hearth-fire and altar-fire, the lamp and the lute, the wine cup and the sword, the cradle, the bridal-bed and the and the grace?”

In Support of the above observation, in the Second chapter, it may be quoted that Sarojini Naidu’s nature-poem “Leili” which is a rare image, an image which James H.Cousins felt as “a unique achievement of the imagination of poetry in the English language”

“A caste-mark on the azure brows of heaven

The golden moon burns, sacred, solemn, and bright”.

In the Second chapter, the poet responds to the exclusively pleasant aspects of nature in her nature-poems with an aesthete’s passion for beauty. She loves ‘Spring’ as the symbol of her basic faith in the joy of life. It is
spring which hastens the seeds of all beauty to birth, and blossoms the roots of delight in the heart of the earth. Notably enough, spring is the only vocabulary through which the poet prefers to externalize the sense of loneliness and loss. A widow from ‘Vasant Panchami’, for instance pleads, which is clearly depicted in the lines below:

“Go, dragon-fly, fold up your purple wing
Why will you bring me the tidings of the spring?”

But on the whole ‘The Call of Spring’ is quite irresistible because it has ‘magic’

“The earth is ashine like a humming-bird’s
And the sky like a kingfisher’s feather,
O come, let us go and play with the spring,
Like glad-hearted children together.”

The poems on spring are the zones where Sarojini Naidu could find the answer to the riddle of life. Transience was not the problem, but the solution was the problem for Sarojini Naidu. Spring, thus is the renewal and regeneration, but the proof of the continuity and persistence of life. Sarojini Naidu would have us believed that even if we become old and die, as long as
a single flower blooms, life endures and, through it, so do we. That is because though apparently atomic and individual, all life is actually one.

It must be admitted that Sarojini Naidu’s range and themes are slender and limited, that her genius was confined to lyrics. But she is a true poet in her imagination and handling of the language. She would be remembered long for her image-making capacity and her name would go down in the annals of Indian history as the Nightingale of India.

Prof. K.K.Mehrotra rightly says, “The range of Mrs. Naidu’s poetry is limited, she covers a restricted field, but within that field, she is flawless. Her heart is touched by the sights around her and her imagination links the experience with ‘before’ and the ‘after’ and ‘the result is perfect lyricism.’

The poetic world of Sarojini Naidu, as explained in the previous chapters, is the familiar, ordinary world of Man and Nature, made vivid and meaningful through imagination. The contours of this world are drawn from the simple joys and sorrows of which human experience is made. As a poet of truth and beauty, Sarojini Naidu responds to the primal lore of life, with direction and simplicity of lyrical emotion, and reveals the structure and rhythm underlying all existence. She wrote no epic, dramatic or narrative poetry, nor any blank verse, flair or talent for them. She is a lyricist.
In the year 1914 she was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, her poetical renown became established. The people to whom the language which Sarojini Naidu used and who were supposed to be the best judges of the poetry in the same period were not courteous to her poetical ambition when they hailed her as an English poet of undeniable beauty and distinction.

In tracing the connections between man’s physical environment and his passional being, she shows a rare grasp of the reality of human emotions and of the shifts in individual consciousness as it strives for identity and meaning. She employs rapture and ecstasy as instruments of a modal analysis adapted to the exploration of man’s inner life.

There is a wealth of inner reference in Sarojini’s poetry, which tends to be obscured by excessive rhetoric and ornamentation. Once the themes are singled out and examined in context, a fairly coherent picture of her poetic universe emerges into focus. Although a writer’s poetry is not a mere sum of his themes, the thematic patterns do hold the key to the meaning, as well as the manner of the poetic utterance. Keeping this in view, Sarojini Naidu’s poetry reflects a veiled world, arranged as an unending succession of scenes and interiors, and mirrored spaces, much in the manner described in her poetic fantasy.
In their totality, her poems enact the process of self-formation, the experience of the questing self as it comes under the governance of feelings and moods opening out into the realm of eternal verities. Whether she deals with nature, love, Life or Man, Sarojini Naidu describes the immense tour of the self through the realities of human existence, until, ultimately, it returns to its origins and achieves union and merges with the source of all Being. The beauty of the “renascent morn” of the human soul is a truth affirmed by imagination and acknowledged by the senses in joy.  

The poetic world of Sarojini Naidu built around the themes of nature, love, life and the folk, Patriotism thus projects a consistently joyous universe, reconstructed out of her own emotional life, and tenanted by images and symbols of human aspiration and hope. Her poems project a sensitive awareness of the promotion and progression of life towards the immutable co-ordinates of truth, beauty and joy, captured in rhapsodic utterance. Although her themes are ordinary and common it lends her poems a visionary elevation and a sense of personal immediacy. The poet rediscovers the inner and outer world and their golden links in the human consciousness.

Sarojini Naidu displays high workmanship and dexterity in the composition of her poems, which are remarkable for their cadences that are
mellifluous. Influence of John Keats, P.B. Shelley, Alfred Lord Tennyson, the Pre-Raphaelites and Swinburne are reflected in her works; but her own art is not derivative. It is the outcome of complete absorption with what she has studied with interest and their echoes in her poetry are indirect and subtle.

It is said that, she once in her dreams saw that she would be the John Keats of India but unfortunately her dream remained unfulfilled; notwithstanding, certain images, left behind by her sensuous, mythical and colourful, like that of John Keats. She is described as a romanticist and her poetry is mostly ornate and her poetic style is jewelled and exuberant. Her poems are highly ornamental and figurative, which comprises plenty of similes, metaphors, symbols, images etc., which at times blurs her thought of feeling, which she tries to express in her poems.

Sarojini Naidu’s poetry is not marked by intellectual vigour, her strength does not lie in reflective power or intellectual pith but on the other hand she is at times sentimental. It is not her aim to grapple with life’s problems as does the philosopher or the abstract thinker. In fact, there are, no problems for her to be pondered over, she only introduces situations that make her nerves tingle and stir her into quivering song.
For her life is not a riddle to be solved; it is a miracle to be celebrated and sung about. Its endless variety excites her, colour dazzles her and beauty intoxicates her. Her response to it is quick and it is not sickled with the pale cast of thought. This lends the gift of perennial youthfulness to her poetry, with the aid of which she exercises a spell over young and impressionable hearts and revitalizes those who have suffered defeat and disillusionment. Her poetry serves as a tonic which takes her readers out to breathe in the clear fresh air of life’s elemental experiences, its recurrent joys and woes, its lavish gifts and its mysterious denials.

K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar wrote a brochure *Indo-Anglian Literature* for the P.E.N. Books, published in 1943, which deals partly with Sarojini Naidu. He acknowledges Sarojini Naidu’s mastery over English verse forms

a) He regards both Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu as children of renascent India- idealists and poets and patriots.

b) The brochure may be regarded as a short introduction to the bigger book *The Indian Contribution to English Literature*, published in 1945.

c) It devotes six pages to Sarojini Naidu whom the author regards, in general, as simple, sensuous and impassioned.
Sarojini Naidu displays a wide range of feeling towards the natural world. In the second chapter many comments are made on Sarojini Naidu’s poems on Nature. Her account of Nature is not mere mechanical description, but oneric, meditative and symbolic. The poems on the seasons do not have any outstanding quality in them. All her poetry is pretty as well as sincere expression of her genius excitement over the sights and sounds and scents of the earth, especially in spring. They are at times coloured with a gentle melancholy caused on account of the absence of the loved one from the scenes of such delights Her poems reveal her general buoyancy, her sensitiveness to all forms of beauty and her great zest for life. Notwithstanding, they do not show her to be a Nature-poet of any special quality.

Love is the major area with which the poet is concerned in a majority of the poems of personal experience. And it was very beautifully discussed in the third chapter. In the poem ‘The Temple” in the form of the twenty-four lyric, which is the most comprehensive attempt of them all to define the nature of love and the tensions generated by it. It outlines three stages of the poet’s spiritual journey on the path of love. The first session of eight lyrics communicates a sense of fulfillment of a long-cherished dream of love in the language of ecstatic passion. The second section analyses the painful
experience of mental and physical derangement because of the sense of estrangement between the two. The words gain explorative value when the poet is able, at rare moments, to confront the experience with honesty and directness, as in ‘The Temple’:

“Why did you turn your face away?
Was is for grief or fear,
Your strength would fail or your pride grow weak,
If you touched my hand, if you heard me speak,
After a life-long year?”

In the third section, the poet reasserts her belief in the power of love. The sequence has received warm approval from critics like K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar, P.E. Dustoor, P.C. Kotoky, R. Sundararamaiah and P.V. Rajyalaxmi for its thematic and structural significance.

The poem, however, seems to be ambiguous in defining the exact nature of the love-relationship. The poet seeks to co-relate her idea of love with the worshipper’s relationship with the idol in the temple as implied in the Bhakti cult of Hindu religion and as externalized in Mirabai’s worship of Lord Krishna. The ambiguity arises from the fact that she tries to amalgamate the particular Hindu concept of devotion to God in the temple
with the Christian and Persian concepts of worship. For instance, her image of the Hindu method of offering God in the temple is associated with the Christian image of sacrifice in the beginning of the sequence thus depicting in the following lines:

“Were beauty mine, beloved, I would bring it
Like a rare blossom to Love’s glowing shrine;
Were dear youth mine, beloved, I would fling it
Like a rich pearl into Love’s lustrous wine” 12

The sense of ambiguity deepens in the last lyric of the sequence where the Persian exuberance of passion, as expressed in the beloved’s plea to the lover to “Take my flesh to feed your dogs, if you choose” 13 seems incongruent in the context of the typically Hindu idea of devotion elaborated in the poem.

The basic ambiguity of the concept of love thus prevents the whole effort from being a sustained expression of the poet’s passion of love even if the poet succeeds in some of the lyric in conveying her love-experience authentically. Sarojini Naidu is a true Romantic, her art is romantic and her sensibility is romantic. English Romantic poets who shaped Indo-Anglian
romanticism were a product of Romantic Revival, a return to Milton and Elizabethans.

The Elizabethan age was a nest of singing birds and abounded in poetry of romanticism, lyricism and glow of imagination. Keeping this background in mind, one may conclude that Sarojini Naidu is a singing bird belonging to the flock of Elizabethan poets. As Rameshwar Gupta has pointed out “If Sarojini Naidu is to be described as belonging to any class or school of poetry, it would be Romantic, and I would confine her to Elizabethan Romanticism, the elemental and simpler kind. That is the impression her poetry as a whole gives. Sarojini is essentially Elizabethan, whatever the influences on her.”

Neo-modernist poets and their champions have criticized her poetry for the prominence of Romantic fireflies in it. Some have also called her imitative. S.C.Saha, a workshop poet and champion of new poetry, observes, “Sarojini Naidu is a notable example of the ordinariness and absence of originality. She writes a love-poem “If You Call Me”, a few lines of which will show her command over the flow of the English language but also the deplorable lack of ingenuity and originality(which is betrayed by her imitative fluid style and repetition of words and images in the manner of P.B. Shelley and Alfred Lord Tennyson). But we may rebutt it in the words
of Rameshwar Gupta, “Some of her poems can be compared with the best of the poems written in England during the period of her creative activity (1898-1914). And as far as the skill of composing lyrics in varied cadences, in melody of diction, in luxuriance of imagery and in bringing to life the bygone Indian scene with its undertone of simple joys and sorrows, Sarojini Naidu is yet to be equalled by any ‘modern’ Indo-English poet’ 16

Another poem “An Indian Love Song” presents a heavily mannered and conventionalized love poem with the images tailored for the contrasting masculine and feminine voices. The poem is a part of a cycle of love poems which include “An Indian Love Song” and “A Rajput Love Song” from the Bird of Time. All these poems show that Sarojini Naidu deliberately created masculine and feminine types, complete with appropriate gestures, clothes, accessories, and speech patterns. The masculine and feminine to her are, thus, abstract categories, opposite yet balanced, somewhat like Purusha and Prakriti; she was, like many of her generation, an essentialist in many matters relating to gender.

Overall, we can see that there was decline in the poetic inspiration and quality when her volume “The Feather of the Dawn” was published in 1961, by Asia Publishing House. The enthusiasm of the earlier verses had flagged and the themes seemed more tired. “Songs of Radha” 17 the most interesting
poems in the collection, attempt to bring the rich tradition of Lord Krishna’s poetry into Indian English, but fail to do so.

Here, we see Sarojini Naidu turning from human to divine love in a fashion that is not unusual in Indian poetry. Yet, she does not quite succeed in pulling it off. Writing poems on Radha in English, it would seem to consider. It becomes all the more clear that a simple appropriation of such native poetic traditions and practices into English will not succeed without remaking a re-experiencing the spirit of the originals.

This Sarojini Naidu had been unable to do. Instead, the poems seem to be weighed down by much more mundane lover’s complaints, embellished with the stage dressings of pining lover’s paraphernalia.

In this connection, there is an argument that, the most effective way of reviving an interest in Sarojini’s Naidu’s poetry is by shifting the critical focus from an evaluation of individual poems to an engagement with the underlying material and cultural conditions in which her poetry was produced and interpreted.

The question here is not to judge how good or effective a poet she was or even what the major themes and techniques of her poetry were, but what the nature of her poetic project was and how it was shaped by the dominant
ideological structures of her time. Then we can begin to appreciate the inner
tensions and conflicts of her poetry. Thus situated, Sarojini Naidu’s poetry
becomes a rich and complex text which reproduces the contradictions and
debates of her age.

The fourth chapter depicts Sarojini Naidu’s folk-songs about India’s
traditional professions and festivals. The folk-songs evoke a
characteristically passionate response from the lyrical sensibility of the poet.
In them, the poet tends to elaborate recurrent rhythmic patterns with the help
of repetitive images and musical sounds. The comparison between Sarojini
Naidu’s ‘Palanquin Bearers’ with Abanindranath Tagore’s ‘Song of
Palanquin’ explains the quality of her sensuous imagination and metrical
skill. Abanindranath Tagore, for instance, describes the movement of the
palanquin along uneven paths thus:

“The Palanquin rocks

Staggering up an embankment

The Palanquin swings like a nose ring

Climbing down a ditch”\textsuperscript{18}

Sarojini Naidu, on the other hand, exploits the imagistic potentiality of
the situation more meaningfully. In spite of their rhythmic charm, her folk-
songs are devoid of thematic content although some of the critics seem to be seriously involved with their thematic aspect.

C.D. Narsimhaiah refers to the “symbolic presentation of life’s journey from birth to death” 19

In ‘Indian Weavers’ P.V. Rajyalakshmi believes “Like Yeat’s ‘Gyre’, the Indian weaver’s loom is but the artifice of eternity.”20 It is, however, essential to note that Sarojini Naidu makes use of the concept of life’s journey from birth to death in a number of folk-songs. It is a poetic strategy rather than a means of genuine thematic exploration for the poet

In view of Sarojini Naidu’s career as an active participant in the struggle for India’s freedom and as one of the leaders of Women’s Emancipation Movement, it is surprising to find that her poetic sensibility rarely communicates her social consciousness.

In her occasional pieces like ‘Suttee’ or ‘The Purdah Nashin’, the poet tends to turn the unjust social customs into romantic symbols that idealize the feminine destiny. Her presentation of the folk-theme reflects a genuine understanding and appreciation of the spirit of India’s folk-culture. She projects the totality of the vernacular ethos in the customs, beliefs, legends, songs, mimicry, games, festivals, rituals, vocations, and professions that
constitute the social calendar of rural India. The picture that emerges is something more than the image of Rudyard Kipling’s India, of a land filled with strange people inhabiting a romantic, exotic background of pagan superstitions and archaic observances. There is, in her folk-poems, a social pantheism at work, which revalorizes the folk lores and values with insights into the authentic past collective behaviour and corporate ecstasy.

The festivals stand for a cyclical renewal and reaffirmation of the bond between Man and Nature, and of the filiations between the visible and the invisible universes. The rituals observed by the folk mark the rites of passage on the part of individuals as well as communities, emphasizing the principles of human solidarity, reciprocity and common purpose. The myths and legends constitute a frame of reality in which the structures of society and personality are comprehended and ascertained. The vernacular aesthetic media, besides their purely ceremonial and celebrative functions, enact the rhythm of life encompassing the totality of human activities, from birth to death. They ritualize the transition of the human consciousness from innocence to experience, from adolescence to maturity, from known to the unknown world. Sarojini Naidu’s poems on occupations and professions are synoptic plots of life, revealing a sensitive geometry of form as well as wealth of iconic symbolism.
Sarojini Naidu, like other Indian artists and intellectuals, had to deal with the question of cultural preservation and identity. In this connection, she exploited many of the domains in effort to create an authentic world of difference from colonial modernity. She tried to offer an entry into the unspoiled India. But of course, it would have been too painful to portray it with all the horrors of its poverty, inequality, disease, squalor, and suffering; if only these were glossed over, then a very attractive image of India would emerge, pre-modern, vivid, vibrant, colourful and joyous.

Moreover, in a period of almost exponential, social and technological change she could see vanishing before her eyes, a way of life which the West had already lost and now pined for. She felt quite compelled to capture it in poetry and song because she probably longed for it herself. It was a poetic ethnography, a way of preserving through writing what was passing away before her eyes. All these facts contributed to her an attempt of offering not just to Westerners, but also to Indians, a picture of themselves which they might be proud of, something that might salvage some of their crippled self-respect as a colonized and humiliated people.

The problem of representation in Sarojini Naidu’s poetry assumes the dimensions of a crisis. All her labouring folk like the palanquin bearers, the wandering singers, the weavers of India, the fisher folk, the snake charmers
and the aged beggars and so on, the happy or stoical toilers and heavers become suspect. They are all made to deny the hardship and sweat of their occupations, hide their own dispossession and marginalization, and celebrate their lowly and oppressed state. They become picturesque, exotic figures in tableaux, frozen in various attitudes of quaintness. These folk are pretty; they are simple, they are guileness; and are sincere. They are, moreover, in harmony with nature; the social order in which they live is seen as an extension of the natural order. Whether this order is just or unjust, whether they can rebel against it or not—such questions never occur to them. It would almost seem that, they are exactly as their masters, whether colonial or native, would want them: obedient, docile, and yet fascinating, interesting, and quaint.

A symptomatic reading thus hints at the rich context and subtext of these poems. Such a historicist-materialistic approach would explain the absences in Sarojini Naidu’s text as examples of the overwhelmingly harsh reality of colonialism which the poems seek to repress and banish.

C.D. Narsimhaiah, while praising Sarojini Naidu’s services, through song and speech, in bringing India to self-reference culturally and historically, concludes that “She is all the same not a major factor in English Verse written by Indians.” 21
There is no remarkable presence in her poetry as in the case of Toru Dutt. C.D.Narsimhaiah traces the historical and temperamental reasons why Sarojini Naidu, inspite of possessing in full the rare gifts of a profound awareness of her own tradition, admirable poise, economy, and a melodic and pictorial competence, could not rise above mere rhetoric, sentimentally, vagueness and diffusiveness. A wise, old woman at seventeen, she gave no evidence in her poems of ‘large draughts of intellectual day’.

Nevertheless, C.D.Narsimhaiah sees in poems such as “Indian Weavers” and “The Song of Radha, the Milk-Maid” marks of a highly distinguished achievement in elliptical symbolism and musical phrase. But Sarojini Naidu, despite her clear aspiration fails in sensibility, because she cannot discover and probe the identities of self and tradition in such a way as to constitute a definite contribution of genius to inheritance.

The individual artist has to ‘discover’ as well as ‘create’ his own identity; he does not find it ready-made. Of course, in the process he discovers and creates his national identity too.

Sarojini Naidu inherited a poetic world so ready-made that she was content to imitate and echo it, rather than probe and reconstitute the inspiration provided by it.
M.K. Naik, in his “Echo and Voice in Indian Poetry in English,” taking a historical standpoint, traces the dichotomy in Indo-Anglian poetry between two voices. One is the voice of the true poet, a man speaking to men; the other is an echo, “a trick of ventriloquism, which makes puppets masquerade as men.”

M.K. Naik finds the persistent strain of imitation in Sarojini Naidu’s poetry, an easy adaptation of the Romantic gold standard, an aping of subject and attitude and technique. But then, the derivative element is not a monopoly of the earlier poets alone. It continues overtly, or covertly, in the so-called modern poets too.

M.K. Naik, concedes, however, that Sarojini Naidu represents a kind of synthesis of the age-old ethos of India with the living, complex reality of modern India. This synthesis is illustrated in the thought of Vivekananda, Gandhi and Nehru; in the fiction of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan; in the best poetry of Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, Harindranath Chatopadhyaya and Bharati Sarabhai and Nissim Ezekiel.
M.K. Naik illustrates how Sarojini Naidu while capable on occasion of an authentic Indian tone of voice, was not always consistent in silencing the echo and cultivating the voice.

..........When the fishermen in Sarojini’s Naidu’s ‘The Coromandel Fishers’ say that it does not matter where the temptuous sea drives them, for ‘He who holds the storm by the hair, will hide in his breast our lives.’ they express a sentiment which is typical of the Indian mind, and which presents a significant contrast to the resolve of Tennyson’s Ulysses; ‘My purpose holds/To sail beyond sunset, and the baths/Of all the western stars, until I die.’ For Ulysses death is final and irrevocable; for Coromandel Fishers it is only a return to the breast of the Almighty. On the other hand, in a poem like Palanquin Bearers, Sarojini Naidu is lost in a welter of vague romantic sentimentality, as in ‘She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride’- a line which once so horrified an intelligent student in the postgraduate class the he asked agitatedly: ‘Does it mean that the palanquin bearers dropped the palanquins to the ground?’

C.D.Narasimhaiah and M.K.Naik avoid hagiography and saint-baiting, and offer us an academic-historical perspective, in which Sarojini Naidu’s poetry is to be properly viewed and judged. They reflect critical urbanity at its best, viewing with dispassion and disinterestedness, the merits
and drawbacks of Sarojini Naidu. They do not deny her the courtesy of a close reading of the individual poems. Yet courtesy does not mean courtship. Their criticism rests on standards, which imply both objectivity and commitment to values, which they are prepared to apply to the old and the new poets alike. They thus register an advance on the purely humanistic and historical evaluation of Sarojini Naidu, provided, for example, by Mulk Raj Anand in his ‘The Golden Breath’ (1933), an early work devoted to the poetic renaissance in India as represented by Rabindranath Tagore, Iqbal, and Puran Singh. Sarojini Naidu and Harindranath Chattopadhyaya.  

The fifth chapter deals with the element of mysticism of the poet. Mysticism is the doctrine held by man which means that he gets in touch with the divine reality through self-surrender. The doctrine centres round insight, unity, unreality of time and space and evil as mere appearance. Mysticism is an attitude held in Literature also. Sarojini Naidu is not a mystic poet nor is mysticism a dominant trait of her poetry. She is primarily a lyricist and her poems are “short swallow-flights of song”. She is not a true mystic but mystic fervour or mystical approach is not altogether rare in her poetry. There are some poems in which mysticism is more than evident.

Sarojini Naidu also got influenced by Sufi Mystic poets who adopted mystical approach in love. Rumi was her favourite and she read Persian
poetry. According to Dr. Rameshwar Gupta, “Persian love-poetry is rich and one of the chief strains among its many is the Sufi strain (the identity of the individual and God, of the lover and the beloved; and the world is seen as the manifestation of God”.

In view of the above influences it is not surprising to know that three of her poems were included in the Oxford Book of English Mystic Verse (1917). These poems are “The Soul’s Prayer,” “In Salutation to the Eternal Peace” and ‘To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus.” The first poem is a prayer to God for giving her ‘all passionate rapture and despair’ and God replies to the soul:

“I, bending from my sevenfold height
Will teach thee of my questioning grace
Life is a prism of my light,
And death the shadow of my face.”

Commenting on the poem, Padmini Sengupta says, “The mysticism in The Soul’s Prayer is evident. She has actually heard the voice of God. He promises her the secret of His peace. The Vision is clear, but it always harps around life and death.”

Her second poem “In Salutation to the Eternal Peace” reveals her awareness of the eternal peace which mystics seek in solitude. She does not
care for the strife and turmoil of the world because she has a sensuous apprehension of the eternal peace. Verses like “I watch the golden orioles of thy morn” suggest that she is here a sensuous mystic like Tagore. The mysticism is revealed in the last stanza in most obvious imagery:

“For my glad heart is drunk and drenched with Thee,

O inmost Wine of living ecstasy!

O intimate essence of eternity!” 32

The second stanza expresses Sarojini Naidu’s ecstatic sudden apprehension of the divine and here she comes closest to William Blake who saw eternity in an hour and Rabindranath Tagore who saw eternity revealed in the flash of a moment. The vivid and evocative images of “the golden orioles of the morn”, “the gleaming and gliding silver wings”, “the homing pigeons of even tide” etc. convey the mystic moment. Commenting on the mysticism Padmini Sengupta says,” Here is a deep and sincere poem which carries Sarojini into the very heart of the great English mystic poets.” 33

The third poem included in the Oxford Book of English Mystic Verse is “To A Buddha Seated on a Lotus”. It is not a poem embodying as direct mysticism as we notice in the two previous poems. It refers to Buddha’s experience of the mystic rapture and contrasts the turmoil of life with the peace that surrounds him on his lotus. Whatever mysticism the poem has surfaces itself in the concluding stanza:
"The end, elusive and afar,
Still lures us with its beckoning flight,
And all our mortal moments are
A session of the Infinite" 34

‘The Temple, A Pilgrimage’ seems to have been inspired by a deep mystic fervour. Her longing in these poems is more for some mystic lover than for a human being. Even if it were otherwise, the passion for the human lover would have been symbolic of the divine. This is suggested by the devotional tone of some of the poems:

“I care not since you make most audible
The subtle murmurs of eternity
And tho’ you are, like men of mortal race,
That Death may mar and destiny efface..
I care not … since unto my heart you bring
The very vision of God’s dwelling place” 35

Despite all the above references to her mystical tone and touch, Sarojini Naidu is not a mystic poet. She is deeply attached to life and its pageantry. She is not a true mystic because “She would have become a mystic poet of high stature if she had given us poems like: “The Soul’s Prayer”, and “In Salutation to Eternal peace”, in great bulk, for example, she
could have touched mystical heights in her dialogue with death as Rabindranath Tagore does. As it is, a few mystical poems and verses show her capacity to reach depths but it is a minor key of her poetry.

The Sixth chapter deals with the Indian patriot whose poetry is a mirroring of her outer life of patriotism, gaiety, loveliness and vivacity, of her wit and wisdom. The scaldingly tumultuous inner life, which is projecting in many of her poems on love, leaves them baffled, if not embarrassed. Their criticism is an act of patriotism and personal chivalry.

Dr. Amarnath Jha, in his “A Personal Homage”, appreciates the passion, imagery and the golden cadence in her poetry. He notes the voice of sadness and melancholy in her poems, which he avers, is not at all morbidity. He refers to St. Coleridge, P.B. Shelley, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and Swinburne as her major British influences. Dr. Jha, however makes no attempt to provide a critical appraisal of the essential qualities of Sarojini Naidu’s poetry, and is content to offer his personal tribute to one who was for him “half-mother, half-sister”. R.R.Bhatnagar considers Sarojini Naidu as the pioneer of the poetry of nationalism, interpreting India to Western readers through the English Muse.
He also attempts to show Sarojini Naidu as a poet of national integration, in that she made a fruitful synthesis between the old and new, as well as the Hindu and the Islamic cultural and poetic traditions. The impact of the Persian and Urdu literary conventions and of Sufi and Deccani influences on Sarojini Naidu’s poetry is taken notice of by Bhatnagar, which is a useful discrimination, throwing light on some of the obscurities in the poet’s erotic and devotional poetry.

Armando Menezes, in his brief portrait of Sarojini Naidu, in ‘Lighter than Air’, is full of humanistic warmth. He praises her as a poet of freedom, beauty, love, and life. He emphasizes the feminine sensibility in her poetry as it is reflected in her choice of passions, imagery and words.

And she had a woman’s love of words. They were not, to her, just convenient instruments of expression, they were things; precious, lovely things, like jewels. She rejoices in polysyllables that roll and rumble, or rattle like long burnished swords in phrases like “lovely stalachite of dreams; or, ‘in the long dread, incalculable hour.’

Armando Menezes notes too, that her poetry and patriotism were of one piece, and that her poetry was essentially a search for freedom, unity and self-realization.
The Indian patriot who wrote English poetry which is Indian to its fingertips; this soul which faced and shook crowds and yearned secretly for solitude; this heart that could as well as sing, was above all a woman and could press all humanity, with its dreams and its pains, to her large maternal breast. At the fall of the day, when the mystic hour calls for prayer, she hears in the same wind the voice of many creeds- of Hindu and Muslim, of Parsee and Christian.  

K.R. Srinivas Iyengar devotes a whole chapter to Sarojini Naidu in his Indian Writing in English, offering an appreciative sketch of her emergence and development as a poet. He also addresses himself to the question of Sarojini Naidu’s retirement from the poetic vocation, and concludes that it was brought about by a loss of the vital fire of inspiration and the will to poetize. “The woman, the mother, the patriot remained; but the poet was not no more than memory.” However, he sees a resurrection of the poet on the political scene,” in an age of heroic striving, an age of imperatives and absolutes. Politics was for her but a form of love and sedition but a form of poetry. Srinivas Iyengar’s appraisal is an admixture of sensitive critical responses and biographical generosities, both of which are placed in the wider context of historical judgement. In his article, “How Major is Indian Poetry in English,” he compares Tagore and Sarojini Naidu, and concludes
that: In Sarojini Naidu, and to an even more pronounced extent in Tagore’s Gitanjali and The Gardener, human love, Nature, love and divine love meet and merge and grow wings of revelation.\(^{42}\)

Lotika Basu, in her Indian Writers of English Verse, records the first reaction of the modern temper to the nineteenth century spirit of romanticism in Indo-Anglian poetry. In her chapter on Sarojini Naidu, she draws attention to two major deficiencies in her poetic work. Lokita Basu question the validity of the poet’s image of India as a land of bazaars, full of bright colours and perfumes, and peopled with picturesque beggars, wandering minstrels and snake-charmers. This is Rudyard Kipling’s and Mark Twain’s India-interesting but not representative.

In Sarojini Naidu’s treatment of Indian subjects she does not give a realistic picture of India; she merely continues the picture of India painted by Anglo-Indian and English writers.\(^{43}\)

Sarojini Naidu’s nationalism is reflected in poems such as ‘To India’, the poem, not particularly effective or memorable, is a typical of the prevailing discourse. India is personified as the Mother who is both ancient and young. The burden of the poem is to awaken the slumbering nation to freedom and to a sense of her special mission as the inheritor of a great past.
and progenitor of a promising future, after having traversed the ‘fettered darkness of the colonial interregnum.

‘An Anthem of Love’ and ‘The call to Evening Prayer’ are both nationalistic poems like ‘To India’. Again, we see a clear apotheosis of the nation and a sense of divine destiny in the freedom movement. Sarojini Naidu worked for communal harmony for the better part of her life as did Mahatma Gandhi, her mentor. The poem, though not effective as such, shows her attempt at making religion unite rather than divide people. The main reason of decline in her poetic output was that she was devoted more to the national cause.

In another memorable encounter, this time on the terrace of the Servants of India Society in Pune, Gopal Krishna Gokhale exacted a promise from her ‘Stand here with me with the stars and hills for witness and their presence consecrate your life and your talent, your song and your speech, your thought and your dream to the Motherland, O, Poet, see visions from the hilltops and spread abroad the message of hope to the toilers in the valleys’.

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.

Though Sarojini Naidu ceased to be a poet after she turned to politics, she may be supposed to have reached maturity as a poet in her speeches which can be also regarded as prose-poems. The exuberance of style in the speeches is strictly subordinated to the thematic concern. Her speech after the death of Mahatma Gandhi, “My Father Do Not Rest”, can even be accepted as the climax of her poetic career it is an impassioned elegiac communication of the sense of loss and the psyche’s struggle to overcome it. The faith in the ideals of the Mahatma Gandhi transcends the uncontrollable sense of grief in the rhythmic chant, “We are his living symbols. We are the soldiers. We are the carriers of his banner before an embattled world. Our sword is a sword of the spirit that conquers without blood”. It is notable that her earlier lyric, “The Faery Isle of Janjira” expresses almost similar ideas. But the piece fails to achieve meaning due to its romantic exuberance. The speech, on the other hand, emerges as a meaningful work of poetic art because the authentic experience validates those ideas.
The poetry of Sarojini Naidu has some obvious shortcomings. Her vision of life as realized in her poems is rather limited. Her poems suffer from a want of depth and intellectual vigour. No intellectual problems are sorted by her; she dabbles and delights in mere romantic feelings, relating mostly to love and vasant (spring). There is a want of profundity even in her poems of love and nature. Her love poems depict the various aspects and moods of love, but they are quite unconcerned with the modernist’s realistic vision of love and its problems like sex, divorce, intellectual companionship etc. Her poems on nature likewise, have a limited canvas, and do not go beyond the beauties of spring; its flowers, sweet-smells, birds, songs and colours. The other aspects of nature—nature in her terrific and mystic moods—do not find a place in her poetry. Her realm of romance is also limited; it is not as vast and all-covering as that of St. Coleridge. No supernatural beings inhabit it; fairies appear only once in a while, and do not form an integral part of it. In Sarojini Naidu’s treatment of the theme of love, as in her treatment of nature, one can find nothing but superficialities. The cluster of love poems entitled ‘The Temple’ is perhaps more ambitious, here again it is vain to look for any depth or penetration. The poems in this sequence are no doubt an expression of passionate feeling but the idealization of love which she attempts does not come out successfully beside the sentimentalization of
masculine domination and the abject surrender of womanhood which she seems to advocate in them. Even humiliation at the hands of the lover is described as a sweet experience. Sarojini Naidu’s poems of life and death too lack the ‘fresh inward eye’. There is of course in these poems an affirmation of faiths in life or an expression of a mood of despair or exhaustion, but they cannot however, be said to reveal any high reflective power or deep intellectual quality. In her poetry there is nothing like the magic and mystery of the past, nor any aspiration for an idealistic future. When the poetic mood overtakes her, she sings of such adolescent stuff as snake-charmers, koels and champak, blossoms and touches the mystic depths of life only rarely.

In conclusion, the Indian complexion of Sarojini Naidu’s poetry is, however, not an obstacle in the way of her permanent poetic fame. Her poems are full of poetic beauty and timeless human appeal. There is something which delights her readers. Like Toru Dutt, She is still read and admired.

As a critic said, “The pictures are of the East, it is true; but there is something fundamentally human in them that seem to prove that the best song knows nothing of East or West”. In many of her poems, as we have seen, she presents Islamic pictures of life, on the other hand there is her
devotional poetry on Hindu gods and goddesses but everywhere her themes are timeless – love, death, nature, optimism, challenge to fate and haunting pathos. The desire for beauty made her a poet and there is beauty in her verses. Mary C. Sturgeon rightly says, “Sarojini’s poetry … though truly native to her motherland, is more sensuous than mystical, human and passionate rather than spiritual and reveals a mentality more active than contemplative.”  

Commenting on her achievement, Prof. A.A. Ansari states that, “….the most characteristic quality of Sarojini Naidu’s poetry, besides its lyrical wealth, is its purely Indian in character. For one thing, her poems are drenched in Indian myths and legends. Their atmosphere, too, is always Indian. Her splendid phraseology sometimes betrays the mixture of an exotic element, but it is more in conformity to the practice of Persian poets rather than to that of English or French. Owing to the Western influences in her early equipment she developed the art of expressing herself in a foreign linguistic medium, but the spirit of her poetry is always indigenous. Mrs. Naidu is the first poetess who has been able to synthesize these to desperate elements in the form of an art so complex and subtle, and with such superb success.”
This most outstanding feature of Sarojini Naidu’s poetry is its passionate lyricism. She was a born poet and singer. Hence her talent was essentially lyrical. The lyric is her favourite form and mode, she is a lyric poet first and last, and remains a lyricist from the beginning to the end. That is why her collections of poems have a unity born of her supreme lyrical talent. Her lyrics are simple, direct, and sensuous. They make a direct emotional appeal to our heart. This is major factor for the immense reputation she enjoyed during her life-time. The lyrical quality of her poetry is what earned her the titles of the “Nightingale of India” and “Bharata Kokila”. V.N. Bhushan says, “Mrs. Naidu is almost the first Indo-English singer to have wide reputation both here and abroad. And that is because of two prominent characteristics of her poetry. She is first and foremost a melodist of high order-using nothing but winged words and making even ordinary words sound musical by placing them in a peculiar context. Combined with this is the pure Indian complexion of her poetry.”

Her poems have a bird-like quality. They are brief, spontaneous, musical and delicate. Her lyrical genius deserts her if she goes beyond the lyric range to dabble in philosophy and mysticism. She is most successful in short poems, which she once described as “short swallow-flights of song”.

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As Rameshwar Gupta says, “As a lyricist what most characterizes her work is delicate fancy and haunting melody.”

Sarojini Naidu’s Muse is lyrical. Love, nature, death and fleeting scenes of life are her subjects. She did not run after deep meaning of life. Beauty in all forms of life awakens her lyrical energy. Therefore, she does not attempt long poems on these themes. She cannot bear the burden of philosophy and intellectual questions of life and death. Though limited, her range is intensely lyrical. As K.K.Mehrotra says’ “Her work consists of short poems, the rendering of single waves of emotion in forms attractive and abiding. The momentary thrills of the soul, the tingling of the nerves, the rapturous glow of feeling are the very substance out of which lyrics are created and no Indian woman has written so many and such perfect songs of India as Mrs. Naidu.”

Sarojini Naidu’s poetry is characterized by melody, sonority, and delicacy. Her diction is sweet and musical. She sustains the melodic beauty of her lyrics with the devices of assonance and alliteration. They are melodious because of the verbal music and rhymic beauty. The use of rhyme and internal rhyme makes her poetry sing-song.
It has been said time and again that her poetry is sentimental, her
diction too sweet and her imagery fanciful. Her themes are delicate, her
inspiration is genuine and her poetry on the whole is melodious and
appealing. As P.E. Dustoor says she is “a lyricist of delicate fancy and
haunting melody”\footnote{51}

“In three words I can sum up everything I’ve learned about life:

it goes on”

Robert Frost