CHAPTER -II

Oriental and Indian Ethos in Sarojini's Poetry

Sarojini's poetry is essentially native in spirit, tone and temperament. Despite her literary affiliation with the English poets and adoption of English as the medium of poetic expression, she remains rooted firmly to her soil. Her themes, thoughts and the imagery she employs in her poems are typically native in spirit and character. Very few Indian English poets have reflected the colourful pageant of Indian life in all its picturesque variety so vividly and successfully as Sarojini has done. "The panorama of India's ageless life," writes K. R. Srivastava Iyengar, "fascinates her without end."¹ It is not surprising that she won her early renown in the West because of her representation of the soul of the East and the ethos of India. Edmund Gosse wrote admiringly:

It has been ...the characteristic of Mrs. Naidu's writing that she is in all things and to the fullest extent autochthonous. She springs from the very soil of India; her spirit, although it employs the English language as its vehicle, has no other tie with the West. It addresses itself to the exposition of

emotions which are tropical and primitive, and in this respect, as I believe, if the poems of Sarojini Naidu be carefully and delicately studied they will be found as luminous in lighting up the dark places of the East as any contribution of savant or historian. They have the astonishing advantage of approaching the task of interpretation from inside the magic circle, although armed with a technical skill that has been cultivated with devotion outside of it.¹

As has been pointed out, the credit for discouraging Sarojini from providing in her verses echoes of Anglo-Saxon setting and advising her to the need of revelation of the heart of spiritual India and reflection of native passion and life, goes to Edmund Gosse. But even if such an advice had not come, she would have, in due course, turned to the Indian scene. After all, it was in India that she was born and brought up and had lived most of her impressionable years, and most of her later life, her senses catching the Indian colour and air, and her heart and mind filled with the love for her motherland. It is therefore not a coincidence that her extraordinary creative imagination has tried to capture the visions of Indian ethos in all its entirety. She was born and bred up for this mission in her career as a poet.

¹ Edmund Gosse, p. 6.
Oriental Splendour:

Being a poet in romantic tradition, Sarojini turned to the remote in place as well as in time and drew inspiration from the gorgeous East. Several of her poems reveal a spirit intoxicated with the romance of the past and striving after a perfect transmission of beauty. She loves the past for its romance and chivalry, its fabulous glamour and spectacle. Persia and its royalty, famous in history for riches, splendour and luxury, held a special fascination for Sarojini. She was familiar with Persian poetry and knew about its rich medieval heritage. Her poems, "The Queen's Rival" in The Golden Threshold, "A Persian Love Song" in The Bird of Time, "A Song from Shiraz" in The Broken Wing, and "A Persian Lute Song" in The Feather of the Dawan, give us glimpses of rich romance, beauty, music and grandeur of Persia.

"The Queen's Rival" is the fascinating tale of king Feroz of Persia and Gulnaar, his queen, unrivalled in beauty. The queen though living in fabulous luxury, suffers from ennui and desires of her husband to give her a rival in loveliness. Seven charming damsels are brought in the harem, but the queen gazes in her mirror and sighs, for none of them could be a rival to her in beauty. Spring comes and a daughter is born to the queen. The daughter grows two years old. She sets on her curls her mother's fillet with fringes.
of pearls, looks into the mirror and prints on it a swift, glad kiss. The queen sees and cries out of joy: "Here is my rival, 0 King Feroz". The setting of the poem is romantic and it moves in the world of love, luxury, beauty and innocence. Describing the beauty and splendour of the queen and her chamber, the poet writes:

Queen Gulnaar sat on her ivory bed,  
Around her countless treasures were spread;

Her chamber walls were richly inlaid  
With agate, porphory, onyx and jade;

The issues that veiled her delicate breast  
Glowed with the hues of a lapwing's crest;¹

The images and metaphors drawn from colour, light, flowers, stars, moon tides and mountain floods further add to the grandeur of this enticing world of fancy. The seven queens round queen Gulnaar's bed shine like seven soft gems on a silken thread; like seven fair lamps in a royal tower; like seven bright petals of Beauty's flower. They are the seven new moon tides and they rise round the Vesper, the sole evening star, the queen. The queen's young daughter in blue robes bordered with tassels of gold, runs to her mother's knee like a wildwood fay and sets on her light curls her mother's fillet with fringes of pearls. The queen sighs like a murmuring rose and laughs like a tremulous rose. Her uneasy heart is 'the sky of discontent' and to be

The queen is, however, unable to feel happy even when spring comes and nature wakens to colourful flowers and melodious music.

When spring winds wakened the mountain floods,
And kindled the flame of the tulip buds,

When bees grew loud and the days grew long,
And the peach groves thilled to the oriole's song,

Queen Gulnaar sat on her ivory bed,
Decking with jewels her exquisite head;

And still she gazed in her mirror and sighed;
"O King, my heart is unsatisfied."

The queen feels satisfied only when she sees her two year old daughter looking into the mirror. She gets a glimpse of her own beauty reflected in that of her daughter.

The central idea of "A Persian Song" is derived from Persian mysticism. It elaborates the sufi strain emphasizing the identity of the individual and God, of the lover and the beloved, and the world being seen as the manifestation of God. According to the Persian mystics, the most intimate relationship possible between two beings is through love. The sentiment of love implies an emotional progress to higher and higher levels till the lover and the loved experience identical feelings. This emotional telepathy is the emergence of the state of feeling wherein there are two bodies but one soul. This merger of "thee" and "me" is regarded by sufis as the culmination of love-life.
O Love! I know not why, when you are glad,  
Gaily my glad heart leaps.  
O Love! I know not why, when you are sad,  
Wildly my sad heart weeps.

Hourly this subtle mystery flowers anew,  
O Love, I know not why ...  
Unless it be, perchance, that I am you,  
Dear love, that you are I!

(p. 82)

The poem has simple diction and uses mostly monosyllabed words. Even the metaphors used - "rendering the breast" (a stock Persian figure), "the heart leaping", "the mystery flowering" - are plain and simple and parts of the common speech.

"A Persian Lute Song" is rich in romantic sentiments and imagery. It shows the singer, a princess, waiting for the arrival of her warrior lover. She wants everything around her to maintain its beauty and freshness to welcome her lover:

Sweet stars in drift on shining drift,  
Weave not your dance too soon,  
Be not too sudden or too swift,  
To rise, O glimmering moon.

She wishes the singing girls and flute players to restrain the rapture of their music and watch with her for the golden hour when her lover comes:
Comes he for whom the lutes are strung.
For whom the feast is set.

Who holds my trembling heart in thrall,
Whose name I may not name,
His voice is like a battle call,
His eyes a beacon flame.

(The Feather of the Dawan, p. 11)

"A Song from Shiraz" describes the devotees of Islam calling from the mosque-towers of the Persian town, Shiraz, to waken people to the teachings of the prophet Mohamed for the atonement of their sins:

From the Mosque-towers of Shiraz ere daylight begin
My heart is disturbed by the loud muezzin,
But what is the voice of his warning to me,
That waketh the world to atonement of sin?
The stars shall be broken like mirrors of brass,
And Rapture be sunk like a stone in the sea,
Ere the carpet of prayer or of penance surpass
The carpet of dreams, O Mohamed Ali!

(p. 154)

Like Persia Sarojini also loves the Baghdad of fables for its Oriental splendours, its Saki-singers, its love-ghazals and its Sufi wine. In "Ode to H.H. The Nizam of Hyderabad", she recreates the old world romance of the Middle East as an objective correlative to vivify the spectacular durbar of one of the wealthiest Indian princes:
Sweet, sumptuous fables of Baghdad
The splendours of your court recall,
The torches of a Thousand Nights
Blaze through a single festival;
And Saki- singers down the streets,
Pour for us, in a stream divine,
From goblets of your love-ghazals
The rapture of your sufi wine.

In the elegy, "Ya Mahbub", written on the death of the Nizam of Hyderabad, Mr. Mahbub Ali Khan, the well-beloved of his people, she again recalls the fabulous glamour of old Baghdad to describe the grandeur of the Nizam's Hyderabad:

O hands that succoured a people's need
With the splendour of Haroun-al-Rasheed!
O heart that solaced a sad world's cry,
With the sumptuous bounty of Hatim tai!
Where are the days that were winged and glad
In the fabulous glamour of old Baghdad.
And the bird of glory used to sing
In your magic kingdom... when you were king?

The bazars of Hyderabad, abounding in wealth and luxury, as depicted in "Songs of My City", remind us of the glory of the ancient Oriental cities with the colourful variety of splendid articles. The rich wares displayed by merchants consist of turbans of crimson and silver, tunics of purple brocade, mirrors with panels of amber. The vendors weigh saffron and lentil. The maidens grind sandalwood and henna. The pedlars sell chess-men and dice. The goldsmiths make
bells for the feet of the blue pigeons, girdles of gold for the dancers, and scabbards of gold for the king. The fruitmen sell citron, pomegranate, and plum. The musicians play sitar and sarangi. The flower-girls make crowns for the brow of a bridgegroom and chaplets to garland his bed (pp. 106-107).

Sarojini's passion for mediaevalism reveals itself in her treatment of the beauty, glamour and romance in the royal palaces of Mughal India. In the poem, "Humayun to Zobeida", she describes how Humayun sees the beauty of Zobeida in the rose, her glory in the dawn, her sweetness in the nightingale, her whiteness in the swan. When he is awake, he thinks of Zobeida; when he is asleep he dreams of her.

You flaunt your beauty in the rose, your glory in the dawn,
Your sweetness in the nightingale, your whiteness in the swan.
You haunt my waking like a dream, my slumber like a moon,
Pervade me like a musky scent, possess me like a tune.
Yet, when I crave of you, my sweet, one tender moment's grace,

You cry, "I sit behind the veil, I cannot show my face". The lover is unable to understand the excuse of the beloved unwilling to show her face when she and he are one in heart and life:
What war is this of Thee and Me? Give O'er the wanton strife,
You are the heart within my heart, the life within my life.

"The Song of Princes Zeb-un-Nissa in Praise of Her Own Beauty" is rich in sensuous imagery, ornateness and melody. The poem is remarkable for the exquisite picture of beauty it draws with the help of images drawn from nature. When Princes Zeb-un-Nissa (the eldest daughter of Aurangzeb, who was a gifted Persian poet) lifts the veil from her cheek, the roses turn pale with envy. The beauty of the princes so pierces their hearts that they "send forth their fragrance like a wail". If the caress of the wind perchance loosens even her single perfumed trees, the hyacinths languish in "a sweet distress". The Mughal Princess is so lovely that when she pauses among the groves, the nightingales awake and "strain their souls into a quivering song."

And, when I pause, still groves among,
(Such loveliness is mine) a throng
  Of nightingales awake and strain
Their souls into a quivering song.

"The Royal Tombs of Golconda" expresses Sarojini's nostalgia for the departed greatness and glory of kings and queens lying buried in the royal tombs of Golconda. Though kings are dead "Yonder hill wears like a tiar/ the ruined grandeur" of their fort:
Though centuries falter and decline,
Your proven strong holds shall remain,
Embodied memories of your line,
Incarnate legends of your reign.

"Old Fate" has decreased "flower-like bodies" of queens to
the tomb, but:

Death is in truth the vital seed
Of your imperishable bloom.
Each new-born year the bulbuls sing
Their songs of your renascent loves;
Your beauty wakens with the spring
To kindle these pomegranate groves.

(pp. 59-600)

In medieval Rajasthan Sarojini finds romance and
chivalry. Through musings of Parvati at her lattice and Amar
Singh in the saddle in the poem "A Rajput Love Song," the
poet produces a whole culture of a vanished age. The ladies
of noble rank twined a basil-wreath among their tresses.
They fastened a jewelled clasp of shining gold around their
sleeves. They wore silken raiment perfumed with the scent of
the keora. Their girdles had a bright vermilion tassel.
Scented fans lay upon their pillow. Silver lamps burned
before their shrine. Warriors of noble rank rode with a
hooded hawk upon their hand. The collar band of their hawk
had gleaming bells. A radiant sword swung at their side and
they wore an amulet of jade against the perils of the way
(pp.80-81).
HINDU ETHOS

Mystic Thought:

Though not a mystic poet like Aurobindo Ghose and Rabindranath Tagore, Sarojini being deeply steeped in ancient Hindu spiritual thought, realizes the significance of the yearning of the human soul for the divine. She believes in the mystic philosophy of "the one in two and the two in one" and considers the mundane and the mortal to be the reflection of the Absolute in some supersensible world. She, however, feels that direct and immediate communion with God cannot be attained by ordinary people. In her poem, "To A Buddha Seated On A Lotus" she highlights man's persistent yearning and striving for the divine state and his inability to attain it because of his constant involvement in mundane affairs. Seeing Buddha seated on a lotus in meditation with mystic rapture and peace on his face, she addresses him:

Lord Buddha, on thy Lotus- throne,
With praying eyes and hand elate,
What mystic rapture dost thou own,
Immutable and ultimate?
What peace, unravished of our ken,
Annihilate from the world of men?

This mystic rapture is however, not possible in the human world:
The wind of change for ever blows
Across the tumult of our way,
Tomorrow's unborn griefs depose
The sorrows of our yesterday.
Dream yields, to dream, strife follows strife,
And Death unweaves the webs of Life.

All efforts of man to seek communion with God end in Failure:

With futile hands we seek to gain
Our inaccessible desire,
Diviner summits to attain
With faith that sinks and feet that tire;
But nought shall canquer or control
The heavenward hunger of our soul.

The end, elusive and afar,
still lures us with its beaconing flight,
And all our mortal moments are
A session of the Infinite.
How shall we reach the great unknown
Nirvana of thy Lotus- throne?

(pp. 61-62)

The two lines: "And all our mortal moments are A session of the Infinite", are a direct imaginative realization of the Vedantic philosophy.

The awareness of human experiences of joy and fame, love and pain, checks Sarojini from having sustained transcendental visions. Padmini Sen Gupta is right when she remarks: "This duality of spirit always pulls back Sarojini
from being a true mystic- she soars into the realms of
dreams be they divine or not, and is back again in life
tasting its mortal pains and raptures."¹ Sarojini is,
however, a poet whom Nature has endowed with the imaginative
vision and the faculty divine. This is why there is a
peculiar trance-like quality in her poems, a mystic other-
worldliness and transcendental quality - though not a
sustained one. It is to be glimpsed in lines here and there.
Rajyalakshmi rightly observes: "She is goaded by a hunger
for the eternal, the unknown and the infinite, and seeks,
poetically rather than metaphysically, to relate herself to
the universe."² D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu corroborates this
view when he remarks: "However, there are many elements in
Sarojini's poetry which either derive from a mystic attitude
to life, or employ the imagery and symbolism and the
characteristic rhetoric of the mystic's experience of the
transcendental reality."³ It is in recognition of the mystic
urge in Sarojini's poetry that three of her poems, "The
Soul's Prayer", "In Salutation To The Eternal Peace" and "To
A Buddha Seated On A Lotus", are included in the Oxford Book
of English Mystic Verse.

¹ Padmani Sen Gupta, p. 93.
² P.V. Rajyalakshmi, The Lyric Spring (New Delhi: Abhinay
³ D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu, ed. The Two-Fold Voice: Essays On
Indian Writing in English (Vijaywada, Guntur, Navodaya
"The Soul's Prayer" reveals Sarojini's deep mystic awareness. The poem begins with the poet's prayer to God, the Master, "who mad'st me of Thy breath", to reveal to her His "immost laws of life and death":

"Spare me no bliss, no pang of strife,
Withhold no gift or grief I crave,
The intricate love of love and life
And mystic knowledge of the grave."

The Master grants her prayer and says in his stern and low voice:

"I, bending from my sevenfold height
Will teach thee of My quickening grace,
Life is a prism of My Light,
And Death the shadow of My Face."

(p. 124)

A strong mystic note is also evident in the poem, "In Salutation to the Eternal Peace". As the poet has drunk deep the divine ecstasy and tasted the peace of eternity, she is not afraid of the sordid realities of life. Though life is full of pain and suffering she rejoices being born. She has conquered the mythic terror of life and death and finds joy in the divine manifestations being witnessed in the images of life and renewal of nature.

Say, shall I heed dull presages of doom,
Or dread the rumoured loneliness and gloom,
The mute and mythic terror of the tomb?
For my glad heart is drunk and drenched with Thee,  
O inmost wine of living ecstasy!  
O intimate essence of eternity!

(p. 137)

In the poem, "Solitude", Sarojini desires to escape "from the sound of this lonely and menacing crowd" to the lap of nature to listen to the mystic speech of the objects of nature in solitude:

Let us climb where the eagles keep guard on the rocky grey ledges  
Let us lie neath the palms where perchance we may listen, and reach  
A delicate dream from the lips of the slumbering sedges,  
That catch from the stars some high tone of their mystical speech

(pp. 132-133)

Like Wordsworth she wishes to get glimpses of the Infinite through nature or catch the intimations of immortality from an ecstatic contemplation of the evening scene:

Or perehance, we may glean a far glimpse of the Infinite Bosom,  
In whose glorious shadow all life is unfolded or furled,  
Thro' the luminous hours ere the lotus of dawn shall reblossom  
In petals of splendour to worship the Lord of the World.

(p. 133)

In "The Garden Vigil" also the poet tries to establish communion with the Supreme Self through the perception of nature's beauty:
Long ere the sun's first far-off becomes shine,  
Or her prophetic clarions call afar,  
The gorgeous planets wither and decline,  
Save in its eastern shrine,  
Unquenched, unchallenged, the proud morning star,

O glorious light of hope beyond all reach!  
O lovely symbol and sweet sign of him  
Whose voice I yearn to hear in tender speech  
To comfort me or teach,  
Before whose gaze thy golden fires grow him!

I care not what brave splendours bloom or die  
So thou dost burn in thine appointed place,  
Supreme in the still dawn- uncoloured sky,  
And daily grant that I  
May in thy flame adone his hidden face.

(pp. 172-173)

In "The Festival of Serpents" the serpents acquire a mystic significance:

O lift your dreaming heads from their trance of ageless wisdom,  
And weave your measures to the melody of flutes.

(p. 110)

They are the "symbols of the ancient silence". The mystic note is distinctly audible:

Swift are ye as streams and soundless as the dewfall,  
Subtle as the lightning and splendid as the sun;  
Seers are ye and symbols of the ancient silence,  
Where life and death and sorrow and ecstasy are one.  

(p. 111)
In the poem, "Welcoine”, the poet welcomes pain as a positive force and death as a great release and relief from worldly bondages. In the last stanza, she tries to explore the mystery of the "vast Unknown" and seeks her own vision of Love immortal:

Open, 0 vast Unknown,
Thy sealed mysterious portal!
I go to seek mine own,
Vision of Love immortal.

(p. 205)

In "Alone", the poet-beloved ('human self') yearns for the vision of her lover's (Supreme Self) face. Nothing comforts the restless soul progressing towards illumination, neither the "accustomed alleys of delight "nor the" moon- enchanted estuary of dreams". It craves for peace and joy in "the sanctuary" of her lover's face:

But no compassionate wind or comforting star
Brings me sweet word of thine abiding place...
In what predestined hour of joy or tears
Shall I attain the sanctuary of thy face?

(p. 79)

The Hindu myth of the temporal love of Radha, the milkmaid and Krishna, the cowherd, symbolizes the yearning of human soul for the Ultimate Reality. Here Radha, the eternal feminine or Prakriti aspires to merge in the Purusha-Kanhaiya, or Krishna or Govinda. The myth is very popular among Indians and many renowned poets like Jayadeva,
Vidyapati and Surdas have woven their memorable verses round it. Krishna, the Divine flute player of Brindaban, plays the tune of the Infinite that lures every human heart away from mortal griefs and attachments. The sweet music enchants Radha, the beautiful village belle, and spell bound by it she is drawn towards Krishna irresistibly. Krishna responds to her love but the consummation eludes her. She is unable to get the fulfilment of her soul's yearning. Sarojini has enshrined this eternal love in her poems, "Song of Radha, the Milkmaid", in The Bird of Time, "The Flute-player of Brindaban" in The Broken Wing and "Poems of Krishna" in The Feather of the Dawan.

Song of Radha, the Milkmaid" reveals how Radha is so much lost in the thought of her lover that she is unable to utter anything except his name:

I carried my curds to the Mathura fair ...  
How softly the heifers were lowing...  
I wanted to cry, "Who will buy  
These curds that are white as the clouds in the sky  
When the breezes of Shrawan are blowing?"  
But my heart was so full of your beauty, Beloved,  
They laughed as I cried without knowing:

Govinda!Govinda!  
Govinda!Govinda!  
How softly the river was flowing!

(p. 112)
This absorption of the lover in the beloved is a state of the highest intensity of awareness. It is in such absolute absorption alone that life's highest realization consists. Commenting on this poem, Mulk Raj Anand remarks: "Here the poetry of romanticism, of ornate epithets and delicate similes, has become infused with transcendental experience. Sarojini has transferred love as personal desire into divine love, and given it a sense of eternity, of the Universal!"\(^1\)

It was this poem that had introduced Dr. James H. Cousins to Sarojini's poetry and he observes:

> My first contact with Mrs. Sarojini Naidu's Poetry was through hearing the "Song of Radha, the Milkmaid" recited by an Oxfordman in India. I shall never forget the mantric effect of the devotee's repetition of "Govinda, Govinda, Govinda, Govinda, "as she carried her curds, her pots, and her gifts to the shrine of Mathura.\(^2\)

"The Flute Player of Brindaban" describes the poet's soul as "a homeless bird" struggling hard to reach its divine destination. Lord Krishna, the flute player of Brindaban, plays the tune of the Infinite to lure every human heart away from mortal's care and attachment. The soul experiences a mystic longing to merge completely in the flame of the Divine:


Still must I like a homeless bird
Wander, forsaking all;
The earthly loves and worldly lures
That held my life in thrall,
And follow, follow, answering
Thy magical flute-call.

(P. 161)

Detached from worldly attractions, the soul yearns for the
eccstasy of the divine union. It progresses undaunted by the
impediments on its way to reach the Absolute:

No peril of the deep or height
    shall daunt my winged foot;
No fear of the time- unconquered space,
    Or light untravelled route,
Impede my heart that pants to drain
   The nectar of thy flute.

(p. 162)

One of the poems in the series of Poems of Krishna,
"Ghanashyam", in The Feather of the Dawan, describes how
Lord Krishna symbolizing Divinity on earth manifests Himself
in the objects of nature. He gives colours to mountains,
laughters to snow-fountains, healing breath of balm to
forest pines, beauty and blackness of his hair to the
storm's unbridled tresses, transcendent calm to seekers and
sages. The poet's soul seeks for the ecstasy of the union
with the Divine Soul:
O take my yearning soul for thine oblation,
Life of all myriad lives that dwell in thee,
Let me be lost, a lamp of adoration,
In thine unfathomed waves of ecstasy.

(p. 39, The Feather of the Dawn)

Another poem of the series, "The Quest", depicts the mystic yearning of the human self for the Ultimate Reality through the hectic quest of Radha for Kanhaiya right from dawn to dusk. When no information is received, she starts weeping. The soul separated from its source, experiences utter grief and pain. Suddenly Radha hears Kanhaiya's hidden laughter mocking her. He tells her that she, fraught with doubt and distrust, is uselessly seeking for him outside whereas he is always within her:

Thou saidst, - O faithless one, self-slain with doubt,
why seekest thou my loveliness without,

And askest wind or wave or flowering dell
The secret that within thyself doth dwell?

I am of thee, as thou of me, a part,
Look for me in the mirror of thy heart.

(pp. 42-43, The Feather of the Dawn)

The poem is richly interlaced with mystic thought.

The group of twenty four love lyrics, entitled "The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love", which forms the concluding part of The Broken Wing, has aroused conflicting critical
opinions. While some consider them to be "the lacerating recordation of a personal experience,"¹ a passionnote expression of some hidden love, others find them imbued with deep mystic fervour. Padmini Sen Gupta remarks: "The love which reigned in her (Sarojini's) heart was more for a mystic lover than a human being, until God and the Eternal Spirit won a supreme victory - and in His love she found the real love she sought all her life."² In fact the emotions of the poet's complete surrender before the lover are similar to those of the medieval Bhakti poets before God. A deep mystic fervour thus seems to inspire these love poems.

The poems in "The Temple" are in three parts: "The Gate of Delight", "The Path of Tears", and "The Sanctuary". These sub-titles allude to the three parts of the temple according to classical Hindu architecture: The torana (entrance way), the prakdakshina-patha (circumambulatory passage-way) and the garbha-girha (inner sanctuary). The first part shows the devotee's nervous hesitancy and hushed anguish to see God directly. She offers her heart's deathless passion and craves for no divine recompense. She does not trespass the holy premises when she finds the divine door closed. She waits till God shows his face. The devotee is:

1. Iyenger, p. 184.
Content to wait in proud and lowly fashion,
And kiss the shadow of Love's passing feet.

(p. 211)

The devotee employs the mystic universals of all faiths to define her own intimations of love. To her lost in the love of the Master (God), the world is just a manifestation of the divine lover. The world tries to lure the soul, but it derives sweeter joy in the contemplation of its lover:

But sweeter madness derives my soul to swift and sweeter doom
For I have drunk the deep, delicious nectar of your breath!

(p. 213)

The path of realization is essentially the path of tears:

All the sealed anguish of my blood shall taunt you
In the rich menace of red-flowering trees;
The yearning sorrow of my voice shall haunt you
In the low wailing of the midnight seas.

(pp. 219-20)

At last the beloved reaches the "Sanctuary" where her lover is dwelling. When she is face to face with him, she forgets all her pain and woes, and surrenders to him totally. The struggling spirit rises clean of the mortal's bondage and dust after being chastened by grief and suffering:

So shall my yearning love at last
Grew sanctified,
Thro’ sorrow find deliverance
From mortal pride,
So shall my soul, redeemed, reborn,
Attain thy side.

(p. 231)

The soul undergoes the long process of purgation before it merges into the divine flame.

As has been pointed earlier, Sarojini is not a mystic poet like Tagore, Aurobindo Ghosh and Iqbal, yet she is possessed with a mystic urge, and, in her inspired moments, tries to venture the region of the unknown and unfamiliar.

**Hindu Myths and Festivals:**

Sarojini has depicted in several of her poems the Hindu religious ethos in all its variety by the treatment of Hindu gods and goddesses, myths and festivals. "Harvest Hymn" which is a choric song, describes a group of men and women singing a hymn of adoration and thanks-giving to the four great deities of Hindu pantheon, responsible for their rich harvest - Surya, the Sun god; Varuna, the god of the waters (rivers and seas); Prithvi, the goddess of earth; and Brahma, the god of creation of all life in the universe. Men sing to the gods Surya and Varuna, the women to the goddess Prithvi and then all join together to sing in devotion of the life - giver Brahma, to the accomplishment of cymbal, flute, pipe and drum.
Surya is worshipped because he is the giver of light and warmth:

O giver of mellowing radiance, we hail thee,
We praise thee O Surya, with cymbal and flute.

Varuna is praised as the giver of rains and water for the growth of their crops:

O sender of rain and the dewfall, we hail thee,
We praise thee, Varuna, with cymbal and pipe.

(p. 14)

Women feel affinity with mother earth whose womb holds and whose bosom feeds rich gifts of nature:

O source of our manifold gladness, we hail thee,
We praise thee, O Prithvi, with cymbal and drum.

(p. 15)

Devotees are beholden to Brahma, 'Lord of the Universe', "Father eternal, ineffable Om" because he is the creator of life:

O Life of all life and all blessing, we hail thee,
We praise thee, O Brahma, with cymbal and prayer.

(p. 15)

"Hymn to Indira, Lord of Rain" is the prayer of Indian peasants - men and women - to the god of Rain to favour them by his bounty for their very existence depends on his mercy:

O Thou, who rousest the voice of the thunder,
And biddest the storms to awake from their sleep,
Thou who art mighty to succour and cherish,
Who savest from sorrow and shieldest from pain,
Withhold not thy merciful love, or we perish,
Hearken, O Lord of Rain!

In "Lakshmi, the Lotus-Born", Sarojini recalls
Lakshmi Puja which is held during Diwali festival (the
festival of lights). She lifts her hands of prayer, not for
her own self alone, but her entire nation. She invokes the
goddess of fortune and wealth with eager devotion to adorn
the threshold of her countrymen with her sweet eyelids and
careressing fingers of auspicious footfalls and shower her
precious gifts on her motherland:

Prosper our candles and kindred and cattle,
And cherish our hearth-fires and coffers and corn,
0 watch O'er our seasons of peace and of battle,
Hearken, O Lotus-born!

For our dear land we offer oblation,
0 keep thou her glory unsullied, unshorn,
And guard the invincible hope of our nation
Hearken, O Lotus-born!

In "Kali the Mother", Kali, the eternal Mother of
Hindu worship, symbolic of the consciousness force hidden in
the womb of Nature, and active everywhere, is referred by
its various mythical names, 'Uma Himawati', 'Ambika',
'Parvati', 'Girija', 'Shambhavi', 'Kali' and 'Maheshwari'.

(p. 116)

(p. 150)
Her worshippers make their offerings to her and seek her blessings:

O Terrible and tender and divine!
O mystic mother of all sacrifice,
we deck the sombre altars of thy shrine
With sacred basil leaves and saffron rice;
All gifts of life and death we bring to thee,
Uma Himavati!

(p. 177)

The Radha-Krishna myth has been the source of inspiration to many Indian poets in regional languages because of its profound romantic and mystical overtones. As has been shown earlier, Sarojini has treated it in her poems, "Song of Radha the Milkmaid", "The Flute Player of Brindaban", and "Poems of Krishna". Some of the songs in the series "Poems of Krishna" have purely temporal significance. In "Kanhaya", Sarojini describes sportive antics of Krishna as a body and the great embarrassment they cause to his mother Yashoda. Villagers of Nandagaon - farmers, priests and milkmaids - bring complaints of Krishna's teasing them and tampering with their prized goods, to Yashoda, who unaware of her son being the divine incarnation, punishes him by tying his hands and feet with a rope and beating him with a rod to hush his peccant lips. The last stanza of the poem describes the complaint of village boys against Krishna:
Nanda's wife, Nanda's wife Kanhaya
Brawls and boasts
He is stronger than the fire and storm
and all the demon hosts
He says a mountain he can hold in one
hand and uproot
The forest trees of Mathura by playing
on his flute.
Boastful One! Boastful One! Yashoda
took a rod
And husband the peccant lips of him
who was a laughing god.
(p. 38, The Feather of the Dawn)

"Damayanti to Nala in the Hour of Exile" depicts Damayanti's devoted love to her royal husband Nala, who had lost his kingdom in the game of dice and was exiled. The myth is taken from the famous Sanskrit epic, the Mahabharata. Damayanti consoles her husband not to feel dejected in his hour of calamity because she is by his side and will fill his life with the bliss of her love:

My hair shall braid thy temples like a crown
Of sapphires, and my kiss upon thy brows
Like cithar-music lull thee to repose,
Till the sun yield thee homage of his light.
O King, thy kingdom who from thee can wrest?
What fate shall dare uncrown thee from this breast,
O god-born lover, whom my love doth gird
And armour with impregnable delight
Of Hope's triumphant keen flame-carven sword?.
(pp. 43-44)
Sarojini Naidu's songs of Hindu festivals not only project the spirit and occasion of these festivals, but also reveal the faith and enthusiasm of those who celebrate them. The Vasant Panchami is the spring festival when Hindu girls and married women carry gifts of lighted lamps and new grown corn as offerings to the goddess of the spring and set them afloat on the face of the waters. Hindu widows are denied the pleasure to take part in any festive ceremonials for they are treated as unfortunate ones and have to lead the life of sorrow and austerity. The poem, "Vasant Panchami", describes the lament of a Hindu widow at the festival of spring. The first two stanzas of the poem with rich auditory, visual and olfactory imagery, present a vivid description of the enchanting atmosphere at the time of the festival:

Go, dragn-fly fold up your purple wing,
Why will you bring me tidings of the spring?
O lilting koels, hush your rapturous notes,
O dhadikulas, still your passionate throats,
Or seek some further garden for your nest ....
Your songs are poisoned arrows in my breast.
O quench your flame, ye crimson gulmohors,
That flaunt your dazzling bloom across my doors
Furl your white bells, sweet champa buds that call
Wild bees to your ambrosial festival
And hold your breath, O dear sirisha trees...
You slay my heart with bitter memories.

(p. 90)
The poet then describes how the joyous girls and married women celebrate the festival:

0 joyous girls who rise at break of morn,
With sandal soil your thresholds to adorn,
Ye brides who streamward bear on jewelled feet,
Your gifts of silver lamps and new-blown wheat,
I pray you dim your voices when you sing
Your radiant salutations to the spring.

(pp. 90-91)

The widow wants the participants in the festival to restrain their enthusiasm for it reminds her of her own unfortunate lot:

For my sad life is doomed to be alas,
Ruined and sere like sorrow-trodden grass,
My heart hath grown, plucked by the wind of grief
Akin to fallen flower and faded leaf,
Akin to every lone and withered thing,
That hath foregone the kisses of the spring.

(p. 91)

On the festival of serpents, Nag Panchami, celebrated three days before the festival of the birth of Lord Krishna, Hindu women offer milk, maize, wild figs and golden honey to serpents and pray to them to protect their lives from dangers. The poem, "The Festival of Serpents", gives a vivid description of the festival:
We bring you kilk and maize, wild figs and golden honey,
And kindle fragrant incense to hallow all the air,
With fasting lips we pray, with fervent hearts we praise you,
O bless our lowly offering and hearken to our prayer.

Guard our helpless lives and guide our patient labours,
And cherish our dear vision like the jewels in your crests;
O spread your hooded watch for the safety of our slumbers,
And soothe the troubled longings that clamour in our breasts.

(p. 110)

The last stanza of the poem acquires a mystic significance.
The serpents become symbols of the ancient silence:

Swift are ye as streams and soundless as the dewfall,
Subtle as the lightning and splendid as the sun;
Seers are ye and symbols of the ancient silence,
Where life and death and sorrow and ecstasy are one.

(p. 111)

"The Festival of the Sea" gives a vivid account of "Narieli Purnima" or Coconut Day which is celebrated as the sea festival by the people of the Western India, who live by sea and prosper by it. On this day, which marks the end of the monsoon and beginning of the fishing season, fishermen, sailors, merchants and their women folk, all pay homage to
the sea -- the repository of treasure -- for their prosperity and safety by offering the auspicious coconuts to it. Women of seafaring folk pray to the ocean by chanting:

Our tribute and our tears to thee we render,  
Dread, sweet, compassionate  
Woman and Goddess unsurpassed in splendour  
Terror and love and hate.

We worship thee with chaplets of devotion,  
Cherish our dear desire,  
And guard the lives we yield thee, sacred Ocean,  
Lover and son and sire.

From folly and from fear our hearts deliver,  
Set from all sorrow free,  
Of joy and grief and hope, O triune giver,  
Lakshmi, Chundee, Sarasvati.

"Raksha Bandhan" is a poem about one of the most popular and colourful festivals of the Hindus in North India. On this day following an ancient Rajput custom, Hindu women tie bracelets of gold - turned silk on the wrists of their brothers. The silken thread is a symbol both of the deep love of sisters for their brothers and of the pledge of brothers to protect their sisters:
A garland how frail of design,
Our spirits to clasp and entwine
In devotion unstained and unbroken,
How slender a circle and sign
Of secret deep pledges unspoken.

(p. 10, The Feather of the Dawn)

"Spinning Song" describes the celebrations of three Hindu festivals - "Vasant Panchami", "Na£ Panchami" and "Deepavalti". Three spinner women, Padmini, Mayura, and Sarasvati, sing about these festivals to the rhythm of the Charakha to relieve the monotony of their work. Padmini remembers how her sisters celebrated the Festival of Spring:

   My sisters plucked green leaves at morn
   To deck the garden swing,
   And donned their shining golden veils
   For the Festival of Spring...

Mayura thinks of the Festival of Snakes when her sisters sat beside the hearth:

   Kneading the saffron cakes,
   They gathered honey from the hives
   For the Festival of Snakes ...

The third spinner Sarasvati muses over the colourful Festival of Lights:

   My sisters sang at evenfall
   A hymn of ancient rites,
   And kindled rows of silver lamps
   For the Festival of Lights....

(pp. 114-115)
Muslim Ethos:

Born in Hyderabad, Sarojini had inculcated from this Muslim princely state not only her love for Urdu and Persian but also a deep acquaintance with and regard for Muslim life and culture. Hyderabad which was the heart of the finest Islamic culture and had retained all the glamour and values of princely Persia, reminded Sarojini of the splendour of the stories of the Arabian Nights. Its ruling prince, the Nizam of Hyderabad, was a poet of great distinction. Praising the high quality of his songs Sarojini wrote to Edmund Gosse in December 1903; "His songs were exquisite and moving, combining all the fluid mysticism and poignant human simplicity of Burns and the delicate art and melody of Tennyson. They are sung in all his four capitals alike by courtier and peasant and they appeal equally to the poor."1 Owing to the influence and patronage of the Nizam, poetry and poets flourished in Hyderabad. Here, as in the past in Islamic societies, poets were the conscience and heart-strings of the people. Poetry to them was a vehicle of the exploration of the depths of the soul and emotions and played a great role in community life. People acclaimed the vision of poets and relied on their wisdom and insight. It was perhaps because of this poetic atmosphere of Hyderabad that poetry became the main focus of Sarojini Naidu's intellectual life, the centre of her inner being. Tara Ali Baig, is right when she remarks:

1. Quoted by Tara Ali Baig, p. 23.
It is not surprising that all this should subconsciously affect her choice of poetry as the vehicle for her deep and passionate emotions, and under the influence of the English language and poets of another land, she began to write her colourful, melodious, verse.¹

Sarojini Naidu had close associations with Muslims with whom she had lived and played as a child. Later she developed a great friendship with the Khilafat leader Muhammad Ali and a great regard for and life-long intimacy with M.A. Jinnah. She was also held in high esteem by Muslims and had the rare privilege of addressing the Conferences of the All India Moslem League in 1912 and 1916. Referring to her close relations with Muslims she remarked in her speech delivered on December 19. 1917 in Madras in a meeting held under the auspices of the Young Men's Muslim Association:

Whenever I go to a new city, I always look for my special welcome from the Mussulmans of the place. Never have I been disappointed or defrauded of my right. It is my right, because I come from the premier Mussalman city in India. The premier Mussalman city in India rules over the city from which I come, and there the tradition of Islam has

¹ Quoted by Tara Ali Baig, p. 25.
truly been carried out for two hundred years, that tradition of democracy that knows how out of its legislation to give equal rights and privileges to all the communities whose destinies it controls. The first accents I heard were in the tongue of Amir Khusru. All my early associations were formed with the Mussalman men and Mussalman women of my city. My first playmates were Mussalman children.¹

In the same speech she laid emphasis on the democratic ideals of brotherhood and sense of justice in Islam, which she wanted all the peoples of the world to emulate:

Brotherhood is the fundamental doctrine that Islam taught - Brotherhood of civil life, of intellectual life, of spiritual life in the sense of leaving other religions and creeds free to offer their worship. This is what we call modern toleration, the larger outlook, this is what we call civilisation; this is what we call the real understanding of human characteristics, the real understanding of those sources that bind human hearts to one another.²

She added further:

It was the first religion that preached and practised democracy, for, in the mosque when the minaret is sounded and the worshippers are gathered together, the democracy of Islam is embodied five times a day when the peasant and the king kneel side by side and

1. Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu, p. 124.
2. Ibid., p. 126.
proclaim, "God alone is great". I have been struck over and over again this indivisible unity of Islam that makes a man indistinctively a brother.  

Sarojini's fascination of Muslim life and culture is visible in her poems - "A Persian Love Song", "A Song from Shiraz", "A Persian Lute Song", "The Queen's Rival", "Humayun to Zubeida", and "The Song of Princes Zebunnisa" - picturing splendour, glory and romance of medieval Persia, Arabia and Mughal princes and princesses. Besides these poems, there are several others which give an insight into Muslim ethos in India. Some of these are related to her birth-town Hyderabad and the state's princely ruler, the Nizam of Hyderabad. Sarojini had unbounded love for her beautiful place of birth. In her poem, "Nightfall in the City of Hyderabad", she describes the stately magnificence of a flourishing Oriental metropolis. The starry sky of Hyderabad appears jewelled with embers of opal and peridot. The curve of the white river, the Musi, that flashes and scintillates, looks like a tusk from the mouth of the city gates:

See how the speckled sky burns like a pigeon's throat Jewelled with embers of opal and peridot.

1. Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu, p. 127.
See the white river that flashes and scintillates,
Curved like a tusk from the mouth of the city-gates.

One can listen to the call of the **muezzin** from the minaret
and get a glimpse of gleaming beauties behind the veil in balconies:

Hark from the minaret, how the **murzzin**'s call
Floats like a battle- flag over the city wall

From trellised balconies, languid and luminous
Faces gleam, veiled in a splendour voluminous.

Leisurely elephants wind through lanes swinging their silver bells
hung from their silver chains and round the famous high Char Minar
the sounds of gay cavalcades blend with the music of cymbals.
The city bridge is the first to feel the majestic approach of the night:

Over the city bridge Night comes majestical,
Borne like a queen to a sumptuous festival.

The two poems of "Songs of My City" - "In a Latticed Balcony" and "In the Bazars of Hyderabad" - are reminiscent of the romance and grandeur of Muslim life in the middle ages as witnessed in Hyderabad. "In a Latticed Balcony", the lady sitting in her balcony waits for her lover whom she wishes to feed "On golden - red honey and fruit" and entertain "With Th' voice of the cymbal and lute". She will
garland his hair "With pearls from the jessamine close" and perfume his fingers "With Th' soul of the keora and rose". She will decorate her dearest "In hues of the peacock and love" and woo him "With delicate silence of love" (p. 105).

"In the Bazars of Hyderabad", one witnesses rare, exotic articles sold in the Oriental markets. Most significant among these are:

- Turbans of crimson and silver,
- Tunics of purple brocade,
- Mirrors with panels of amber,
- Beggers with handles of jade.

Vendors sell "Saffron and lentil and rice", while maidens grind "Sandalwood, henna, and spice", and pedlars exhibit "Chessmen and ivory dice". Goldsmiths prepare precious ornaments:

- Wristlet and amulet and ring,
- Bells for the feet of blue pigeons,
- Frail as a dragon-fly's wing,
- Girdles of gold for the dancers,
- Scabbards of the gold for the king

(p. 106)

One can see fruitmen crying to sell "Citron, pomegranate, and plum" and musicians playing on "Sitar, sarangi, and drum"; or can listen to magicians chanting " Spells for the aeons to come". Flower-girls weave with tassels of azure and red:
Crows for the brow of a bridegroom,
Chaplets to garland his bed,
Sheets of white blossoms new-gathered
To perfume the sleep of the dead.

(p. 107)

Sarojini has eulogized the loving and gracious nature of the late Nizam of Hyderabad, Mir Mahbub Ali Khan, the well-beloved of people, and the glamour of his princely state in two of her poems. "Ode to H.H. the Nizam of Hyderabad" was presented to the Nizam at the Ramzan Darbar. In it she describes how the people of different religious faiths flourish in his cosmopolitan state and do obeisance to him:

The votaries of the Prophet's faith,
Of whom you are the crown and chief
And they, who bear on Vedic brows
Their mystic symbols of belief;
And they, who worshipping the sun,
Fled O'er the old Iranian sea;
And they, who bow to Him who trod
The midnight waves of Galilee.

(p. 29)

In the last stanza of the ode, the poet prays to God to give him strength and grace to stand for truth and virtue:

God give you joy, God give you grace
To shield the truth and smite the wrong
To honour Virtue, valour, Worth,
To cherish faith and foster song.
So may the lustre of your days
Outshine the deeds Firdusi sung,
Your name within a nation's prayer,
Your music on a nation's tongue.

(p. 30)

In one of "Memorial Verses", "Ya Mahbub!", she mourns the death of the Nizam and pays a glowing tribute to him. The title of the poem is derived from the device, 'Ya Mahbub' (Beloved) designed on the state banner of the Nizam. Hyderabad under the late Nizam gave the poet the impression of the splendour of Haroun-al Rasheed in the fabulous glamour of old Baghdad. His hands were always ready to help people and his heart always solaced a sad world with the bounty of Hatim Tail.

"The Prayer of Islam" was composed on Id-uz Zuha, 1915, and in it Sarojini makes use of ten of the ninety nine beautiful Arabic names of God (being the ninety nine attributes of God) as used by the followers of Islam. God is worshipped because he is Hameed, one to whom all praise is due. He is Hafeez, the Protector. He is the Master of Life and Time and Fate, The Lord of the labouring winds and seas. He is Ghani, the Bountiful, and Ghaffar, the Forgiver. He is the kindly Light, the radiance of our ways and the Pardoner of our errors. His name is known from star to star. God is Wahab, the bestower, and Weheed, the Unique. He is the goal
to which we aspire, the bestower of happiness and sorrow, the principle underlying all universe, the source from which all things emanate, the life found in the sunbeam and the seed. He is Qadeer, the Almighty, and Quavi, the Powerful. Nothing is beyond His power. He can transmute the weakness of human beings into their strength, their bondage into liberty. God, being the Merciful, the Compassionate, will surely respond to the cry of those who call him. The poem ends with the inspiring lines:

We are the shadows of Thy light,
We are the secrets of Thy might,

The visions of Thy primal dream,
Ya Rahman! Ya Raheem!

(p. 68-69)

In the poem, "Wandering Beggars", Sarojini with remarkable ingenuity weaves the refrain, "Y' Allah! Y'Allah! "used as the burden in the prayers chanted by wandering Muslim beggars:

Time is like a wind that blows,
The future is a folded rose,
Who shall pluck it no man knows.
Y' Allah! Y'Allah!

(p. 165)

These eternal itinerants care neither for wealth nor for the glory of the great. They are the God intoxicated mystics
like sufis and wherever they go they spread the message of God and wisdom of life.

"The Old Woman "describes an old Muslim beggar woman sitting in the street under a banyan tree begging in the name of the Almighty Allah:

Her tremulous hand holds a battered white bowl,  
If purchance in your pity you fling her a dole;  
She is poor, she is bent, she is blind,  
But she lifts a brave heart to the jest of the days,  
And her withered, brave voice croons its paen of praise  
Be the gay world kind or unkind:  
" La ilha illa-l-Allah,  
La ilha illa-l-Allah,  
Muhammad-ar-Rasul-Allah!"

(p. 126)

In the poem, "The Imam Bara", describing the famous monument, Imam Bara of Lucknow, which is a chapel of lamentation where Muslims of the Shia community celebrate the tragic martyrdom of Ali, Hassan and Hussain during the mourning month of Muharram, Sarojini gives a vivid account of the passion-play that takes place to the accompaniment of the refrain, "Ali! Hassan! Husain!"

Out of the sombre shadows,  
Over the sunlit grass  
Slow in a sad procession  
The shadowy pageants pass
Mournful, majestic, and solemn,
Stricken and pale and dumb,
Crowned in their peerless anguish
The sacred martyrs come.
Hark, from the brooding silence
Breaks the wild cry of pain
Wrung from the heart of the ages
Ali! Hassan! Husain!

The poet appreciates the mourners' underlying love for the martyrs; and on leaving the Imam Bara, she prays:

Love! let the living sunlight
Kindle your splendid eyes
Ablaze with the steadfast triumph
Of the spirit that never dies.
So may the hope of new ages
Comfort the mystic pain
That cries from the ancient silence
Ali! Hassan! Hussain!

Still more graphic is the description of the mourning procession depicted in the sonnet, "The Night of Martyrdom".

Blackrobed barefooted, with dim eyes that rain
Wild tears in memory of thy woeful plight,
And hands that in blind, rhythmic anguish smite
Their bloodstained bosoms to a sad refrain
From the old haunting legend of thy pain,
The votaries mourn thee through the tragic night,
With mystic dirge and melancholy rite,
Crying aloud on thee- Hussain! Hussain!
The poem ends with a subtle irony on the celebration:

Why do thy myriad lovers so lament?
Sweet saint, is not thy matchless martyrhood
The living banner and brave covenant
Of the high creed thy Prophet did proclaim,
Bequeathing for the world's beautitude
Th' enduring loveliness of Allah's name?

(The Feather of the Dawn, p. 6)

Regional Traits of Indian Men and Women:

Sarojini has revealed through her poems the emotional and mental make-up of Indian men and women, their particular traits, their fancies, and changing moods, their reactions to happiness and frustration in personal love and marital relations, their attitude to children and their age-long customs. Some of their instincts and qualities are of universal nature for being human beings they resemble men and women of all ages and countries. But in personal respects they are different from others owing to their peculiar habits and traditions.

In "A Song of the Khyber Pass", Sarojini shows how the Muslim tribes of North West Frontier prize nothing more than a maiden to love and a battle to fight:

Wolves of the mountains
Hawks of the hills,
We live or perish
As Allah wills.
Two gifts for our portion
We ask thee O Fate,
A maiden to cherish,
A kinsman to hate.

Children of danger,
Comrades of death
The wild scene of battle
Is breath of our breath.

(The Feather of the Dawn, p. 12)

"A Rajput Love Song" describes Rajput warrior's yearning for his beloved wife as he goes to battle-field riding on his stallion with his sword swinging at his side. His wife also suffers the pangs of separation from her husband and eagerly waits for his return:

Haste, O wild-bee hours, to the gardens of the sunset!
Fly, wild-parrot-day, to the orchards of the west!
Come, O tender night, with your sweet, consoling darkness
And bring me my Beloved to the shelter of my breast!

(pp. 80-81)

An Indian woman surrenders her all for the love of her husband:

O Love! of all the riches that are mine,
What gift have I withheld before thy shrine?

What tender ecstasy of prayer and praise
Or lyric flower of my impassioned days?

("To Love", p. 83)
"A Love Song from the North" describes the suffering of a woman whose lover has forsaken her:

Tell me no more of thy love, papeeha,
Wouldst than recall to my heart, papeeha,
Dreams of delight that are gone,
When swift to my side came the feet of my lover
With stars of the dusk and the dawn?
I see the soft wings of the clouds on the river,
And jewelled with raindrops the mango leaves quiver,
And tender boughs flower on the plain ....
But what is their beauty to me, papeeha,
Beauty of blossom and shower, papeeha,
That brings not my lover again.

(p. 75)

The greatest misery in the life of an Indian woman is the death of her husband. She is considered an unlucky woman and deprived of all her fine clothes and rich jewellery:

Shatter her shining bracelets, break the string
Threading the mystic marriage- beads that cling
Loth to desert a sobbing throat so sweet,
Unbind the golden anklets on her feet,
Divest her of her azure veils and cloud
Her living beauty in the living shroud.

("Dirge", p. 66)

Sometimes as shown in the poem "Suttee", she feels so miserable after her separation from her dead husband, that she dies along with him on his pyre:
Life of my life, Death's bitter sword
Hath severed us like a broken word,
Rent us in twain who are but one ....
Shall the flesh survive when the soul is gone?

As contrasted with the image of the suttee who delivers herself to the flames of fire on which lies her dead husband; is the picture of the tameless and free gipsy girl who wanders about in her wild majesty:

In tattered robes that hord a glittering trace
Of bygone colours, brodered to the knee,
Behold her, daughter of a wandering race,
Tameless, with the bold falcon's agile grace,
And the lithe tiger's sinuous majesty.

("The Indian Gipsy", p. 50)

"Village- Song" in The Golden Threshold, describes simple village girl's disgust for worldly pleasures and love for forest life in the company of flowers, birds and rivulets. She turns deaf ears to the entreaties of her mother, who lures her with the temptations of luxuries of life, and retires to the forest:

The bridal- songs and cradle - songs have cadences of sorrow,
The laughter of the sun to day, the wind of death tomorrow,
Far sweeter sound the forest- notes where forest- streams are falli
O mother mine, I cannot stay, the fairy folk are calling.

(p. 12)
The other poem of the same title in The Bird of Time depicts the fear and anxiety of a village belle who lured by the boat men's song, tarries on the banks of the river Jamuna and gets late for returning home:

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Full are my pitchers and far to carry,
Lone is the way and long,
Why, O why was I tempted to tarry
Lured by the boatmen's song?
Swiftly the shadows of night are falling,
Hear, O hear, is the white crane calling,
Is it the wild owl's cry?
There are no tender moon beams to light me,
If in the darkness a serpent should bite me,
Or if an evil spirit should smite me,
Ram re Ram! I shall die.
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(p. 103)

"In Praise of Henna" recalls a typical Indian scene. Henna is a plant the power of whose dried leaves made into a paste is applied by maidens and young women, particularly on auspicious occasions, to their palms and feet to colour them red. When the rains come, a call goes to the girls to come out and collect the leaves of henna, and sing song in its praise.

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The tilka's red for the brow of a bride,
And betel- nut's red for lips that are sweet,
But, for lily- like fingers and feet,
The red, the red of henna tree.
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(p. 13)
"The Parda Nashin" is the picture of a veiled Muslim beauty, evoking all the grace, colour and also the paths of her life.

From thieving light of eyes impure,
From coveting sun or wind's caress,
Her days are guarded and secure
Behind her carven lattices,
Like jewels in a turbaned crest,
Like secrets in a lover's breast.

But though no hand unsanctioned dares
Unveil the mysteries of her grace,
Time lifts the curtain unawares,
And sorrow looks into her face....
Who shall prevent the subtle years,
Or shield a woman's eyes from tears?

(p. 53)

The last stanza is ironical and shows that though by imposing purdah man may protect the woman from impure eyes, but he cannot prevent the destruction of her beauty by Time.

The poem "Indian Dancers" portrays the vivid and enchanting picture of beautiful Indian dancers with "houri-like faces", their "eyes ravished with rapture" and "passionate bosoms aflaming with fire". Dressed in "glittering garments of purple", they tread" their rhythmical, slumber-soft feet "while dancing in accompaniment with "endtrancing "strain of keen music".
With rare poetic felicity Sarojini creates in her verses the rhythmic movement of the dance itself.

Now silent, now singing and swaying and swinging, like plossoms that bend to the breezes or showers, Now wantonly winding, they flash, now they falter. and, lingering, languish in radiant choir;
Their jewel - girl arms and warm, wavering, lily - long fingers enchant through melodious hours Eyes ravished with rapture, celestially panting, what passionate bosoms aflaming with fire!

Indian Folk Ethos:
The folk songs of Sarojini Naidu - "Palanguin - Bearers", "Wandering Singers", "Indian Weavers", "Coromandel Fishers", "The Snake Charmer", "Corn Grinders", "Village Song", "Harvest Hymn", "Cradle Song", "Bangle- Sellers", "Spinning Song", "Hymn to Indira, Lord of Rain", "Wandering Beggars" - open before us the vistas of variegated and bizarre life in India and enchant us by their lilting rhythmic music. These songs project feelings, aspirations and desires of the wide range of Indian people belonging to the lower strata of life. Sarojini has cast them in different metres and verse forms which bring out their spirit most effectively. She has tried to galvanize into life with the use of apposite diction, power of words, and picturesque imagery the sentiments, rhythmic movements, and
the flush and the fire of these folk singers and dancers. These songs beautifully express the abandon and gaiety, buoyancy and carefreeness which characterize the folk life.

"The Palanquin Bearers" with its romantic setting and imagery, successfully recreates the scene of careful and tender swaying and heaving of palanquin bearers as they carry a beautiful maiden sitting in their palanquin. The palanquin is veiled and its bearers sing songs in rhythmic harmony with their foot steps to assuage the tiredness of their burden. The love-laden heart of the lady sitting behind the veil finds true expression of its beats in the song and springy movement of the palanquin bearers. The melody of their song pervades the atmosphere.

Lightly, O lightly, we bear her along,
She sways like a flower in the wind of our song;
She skims like a bird on the foam of a stream,
She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream,
Gaily, O gaily we glide and we sing,
We bear her along like a pearl on a string.

The poem is rich in kinesthetic images expressed through words conveying 'felt motion' - "sway", "skim", "float", "glide", "hang", "spring", and "fall". The poem has a rhythm of comparative swift movement corresponding with the swaying movement of the palanquin. The rise and fall of palanquin, expressed through the stressed and the unstressed sounds,
synchronizes with the rise and fall of the footsteps of the palki - bearers. There is a complete rapport between the tone of the palanquin bearer's song and the heart-beats of the lady inside.

The folk song, "Wandering Singers", breathes an air of buoyancy, carefreeness, abandon and freedom. The wandering singers are neither attached to time - present and future - and space nor bound by any worldly ties of home, family, love and comfort. They believe in universal brotherhood and consider all men to be their kinsmen. They cherish no hopes, no dreams, no ambitions that would curb their movements. They wander to the call of the wind and go wherever it blows:

Where the voice of the wind calls our wandering feet,
Through echoing forest and echoing street,
With lutes in our hands ever- singing we roam,
All men are our kindred, the world is our home.

(p. 4)

To make their songs sweetest they sing of saddest things, of the uprooted cities, of beautiful women gone and mighty kings dead, of the battles of the old and simple and sorrowful things of life:
Our lays are of cities whose lustre is shed,
The laughter and beauty of women long dead;
The sword of old battles, the crown of old kings,
And happy and simple and sorrowful things.

(p. 4)

While the wandering beggars in the poem "Wandering Beggars" spread the message of God, the wandering singers spread the message of brotherhood of men.

The tune of the song has been created by managing prosodic rising rhythm corresponding with the rising tone of song. The eleven syllables in each verse have an iambic foot and three anapests. The predominance of anapests makes for quickness and tallies with the quick movement of the wandering feet.

"Indian weavers" has a symbolic significance. The poem shows weavers in the rural areas weaving cloth on handlooms in different coloured patterns. These patterns are designed to suit three stages of man's life described in three different stanzas of the poem. At the day-break when the dawning sun holds new promise and new hopes, they weave gay and colourful garments for the birth of a child: "Blue as the wing of a halcyon wild we weave the robes of a new-born child". At nightful which the newly married couples eagerly await, they weave radiant cloth with peacock's purple and green plumes for the bright marriage-veil of the queen:
Like the plumes of a peacock, purple and green,
We weave the marriage - veils of a queen.

In the "moonlight chill" symbolizing the last stage of man's journey of life, the weavers weave "a dead man's funeral shroud". The epithet "chill" is associated with cold stillness of death:

White as the feather and white as the cloud,
We weave a dead man's funeral shroud.

(p. 5)

The images of different colours suggested by the blue wings of halcyon bird or purple plumes of peacock or whiteness of feather and cloud bring before us very vividly the different patterns of cloth woven by weavers. The poem has a symbolic significance for it is the fates which are shown weaving the web of human life. The weavers remind us of the three fates or three sisters of Greek mythology, Clotho, Lachesis, and atropos, who weave the threads of the birth, and life and death of man. The poem also conveys the conception of Hindu trinity - of Brahma, the god of Creation; Vishnu, the god of splendour of life; and Shiva, the god of destruction. Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah remarks significantly about the poem: "Here, in twelve lines, is an elliptical, allusive, and symbolic presentation of life's journey from birth to death."¹

"Coromandel Fishers" captures beautifully the Indian fishermen's sense of identity and belonging with the sea. The poem depicts the happy, carefree but busy life of the fishers who go out with their net to the sea early morning to catch fish. Man and nature work together for human sustenance. There exists a perfect harmony between fishers and their environment which ensures professional success, prosperity and joy. Man- nature relationship gets more intimate as the fishermen call sea their "mother", cloud their "brother" and waves their "comrades":

No longer delay, let us hasten away in the track of the sea- gull's call
The sea is our mother, the cloud is our brother, the waves are our comrades all.
What though we toss at the fall of the sun where the hand of the sea- god drives?
He who holds the storm by the hair, will hide in his breast our lives.

(p. 6)

The man-nature relationship is extended further to man-nature- God relationship. Sea God appears to bless the sons of the sea and grant them prosperity and joy.

The poem, "The Snake Charmer", presents an impressive description of the entreaties the snake charmer makes to his pet to unveil itself and come out in open. He treats his pet as his fiancee and bride to be wooed with love and concern. The poem opens with the romantic atmosphere of
sweet and delicate perfume of "Keora and Jasmine", which attracts a snake:

Whither dost thou hide from the magic of my flute-call?
In what moonlight -- tangled meshes of perfume,
Where the clustering keoras guard the squirrel's slumber,
Where the deep woods glimmer with the jasmine's bloom?

The snake charmer invites snake on milk and honey and tempts and flatters it in various ways. He calls it his bride and wooes it with love:

Whither dost thou loiter, by what murmuring hollows,
Where oleanders scatter their ambrosial fire a
Come, thou subtle bride of my mellifluous wooing,
Come, thou silver-breasted moonbeam of desire!

(p. 8)

The poem "Corn-Grinders" brings out the Hindu view of all life being one. The life in the mouse, the deer and the human being is the same. They suffer in the same manner and deserve equal pity. A little mouse cries because its life partner was caught in a baited snare and killed. A little deer laments for the death of its lord who fell a victim to the arrow of the hunter. A little bride suffers from the poignant sorrow because the cruel fate has snatched away her husband from her:

Alas! alas! my lord is dead!
Ah, who will stay these hungry tears,
Or still the want of famished years,
And crown with love my marriage - bed?

(p. 10)

In the poem "Harvest Hymn" (pp. 14-15) and "Hymn to Indira", Lord of Rain" (p. 1160) Indian peasants pray the gods, Surya, Varuna, the goddess Prithvi and the rain god Indira to shower their mercy on their fields and bless them with rich and plentiful harvest. 'cradle Song' is a lullaby sung by a fond mother to send her little child to bed:

Dear eyes, good- night,
In golden light
The stars around you gleam;
On you I press
With soft cares
A little lovely dream.

(p. 17)

The poem "Bells" portrays a typical village scene describing the love of a peasant boy for her village belle, of the shepherd for his cattle and villagers for the religious deity in the temple. The 'bells' symbolize anklet- bells (the token of human love), cattle- bells (the token of animal love), and temple bells (The token of divine love).

The poem, "Bangle- Sellers", presents a typical Indian scene of bangle- sellers selling bangles of variegated radiant colours in the village fair to meet the requirements of women in different stages of life. The "bright Rainbow- tinted circles of light" are meant for
"happy daughters and happy wives". The bangles for brides are of different colours to suit their changing moods:

Some are like fields of sunbit corn,
Meet for a bride on her bridal morn,
Some, like the flame of her marriage fire,
Or rich with the hue of her heart's desire,
Tinkling, luminous, tender and clear,
Like her bridal laughter and bridal tear.

(p. 108)

The poem is rich in visual images of colours taken from objects of nature.

Sarojini's folk songs are sincere and authentic representation of true folk spirit of India. They beautifully express the abandon and gaiety, verve and carefreeness which characterize the folk life.

**Indian Towns and Monuments:**

Sarojini has captured colourful life of towns in several of her poems. Besides the picturesque scenes of Hyderabad drawn by her in her poems like "Songs of My City" and "Night-fall in the city of Hyderabad", she has also written poems about historical city of Delhi and Bombay. The poem "Street Cries" depicts the typical scene of hawkers selling their articles in most of the Indian towns. The hawkers cry to sell their breads in the morning.
When dawn's first cymbals beat upon the sky.
Rousing the world to labour's various cry.

Their fruits in the noon:
When the earth falters and waters swoon
With the implacable radiance of noon.

and their flowers at the night-fall:
When twilight twinkling o'er the gay bazars,
Unfurls a sudden canopy of stars,
When lutes are strung and fragrant torches lit
On white roof-terraces where lovers sit
Drinking together of life's poignant sweet.

(p. 57)

The poem "Imperial Delhi" is a tribute to the "Imperial City" which has witnessed changes of many kings and kingdoms and yet remained unravished by the spoils of time:

Thy changing kings and kingdoms pass away
The gorgeous legends of a bygone day,
But thou dost still immutably remain
Unbroken symbol of proud histories,
Unageing priestess of old mysteries
Before whose shrine the spells of Death are vain.

(p. 156)

In the poem, "On Juhu Sands", Sarojini beautifully presents the objective picture of the Juhu Beach in Bombay and the subjective feelings of the poet remembering her pleasant trip to the mountains:
Under the palms on sea-wet sands
Half drowsy I recline,
How comes upon my foam-kissed hands
The scent of mountains pine?

Though the sea-waves pour their melodies in the poet's ears, she can, however, hear only "the murnuring mountain breeze". Even while gathering "gleaming shells" and drifting seaweed plumes" of the beach, she dreams of blooming "wild narcissus" in "hidden dells". Even the beautiful sight of the moon shining on the breast of the sea, is unable to divert the poet from the mountain snows:

On the sea's breast the young moonrise
Falls like a golden rose,
But my heart gazes with your eyes
On the far mountain snows.

(The Feather of the Dawn, p. 23)

Sarojini's poems thus reflect the colourful pageant of Indian life in all its picturesque variety. Amarnath Jha in his tribute to Sarojini rightly remarks: "She is of India, the spirit of India is in her, and although men of all nationalities will find their questions echoed and answered yet it is the Indian that will feel his own feelings reciprocated in every line."¹ Sarojini is often

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criticized for avoiding the treatment of harsh and sordid realities of Indian life in her poems. It is forgotten that her gay temperament and happy conditions of her life, have made her a lyricist of joy in life. Those who criticize her for drawing blank over sordid and coarse aspects of Indian life, demand from her what she being a genuine person and poet, could not have given them without sounding unnatural and unauthentic.