CHAPTER -FOUR

POETRY OF NATURE

Sarojini's Vision of Nature:

Sarojini Naidu is the foremost Indian English poet of Nature. She shares this love for nature with her ancient Vedic sages, poet Kalidas, Rabindranath Tagore and Allana Iqbal and sings of her intense delight in Nature in their unique tradition. She is primitively involved in Nature; its freshness and loveliness infatuate her. Even as a young girl she was deeply impressed by the beautiful scenes of Nature in Italy and wrote to Arthur Symons from Florence:

This Italy is made of gold, the gold of dawn and daylight, the gold of the stars, and now dancing in weird enchanting rhythms through the magic month of May, the gold of fireflies in the perfumed darkness - 'aerial gold'. I long to catch the subtle music of their fairy dances and make a poem with a rhythm like the quick irregular wild flash of their sudden movements. Would it can not be wonderful? One black night I stood in a garden with fireflies in my hair like darting restless stars caught in a mess of darkness. It gave me a strange sensation, as if I were not human at all but an elfin spirit.¹

In another letter to Arthur Symons from Hyderabad she again expressed her ecstasy of delight at the beautiful scenes of Nature:

Come and share my exquisite March morning with: this sumptuous blaze of gold and sapphire sky; these scarlet lilies that adorn the sunshine, the voluptuous scents of neem and champak and sirisha that beat upon the languid air with their implacable sweetness; the thousand little gold and blue and silver breasted birds bursting with the shrill ecstasy of life in nesting time. All is hot and fierce and passionate, ardent and unashamed in its exulting and importunate desire for life and love. And, do you know that the scarlet lilies are woven petal by petal from my heart's blood, these little quivering birds are my soul made incarnate music, these heavy perfumes are my emotions dissolved into aerial essence, this flaming blue and gold sky is the 'very me', that part of me that incessantly and insolently, yes, and a little deliberately, triumphs over that other part- a thing of nerves and tissues that suffers and cries out, and that must die to-morrow perhaps, or twenty years hence.¹

Sarojini loves Nature for its own sake, for its beautiful and charming aspects- changing moods of day and

season; the sun, the moon, stars, clouds, winds, birds, flowers, rivers, lakes and seas. Hers is an aesthetic kind of response to Nature, characterized by Keatsian ecstasy and sensuousness and expressed in Shelleyian lyrical effusions. Nature's variegated colours - opal, gold, yellow, purple, green and scarlet; perfumes of champa, champak, heena, keora, rose, saffron, cinamon, sandal and clove; its melodies released by the bulbul, koel, oriole, and the papeeha; and the soft touch of its breeze enchant and possess her and make her nerves tingle. Though influenced by the English Romantic poets in her love and treatment of nature, she does not see it as moral teacher like Wordsworth. She only derives delight from its sensuous and aesthetic aspects as Keats does. Describing Sarojini's love for nature Armando Menezes remarks: "Her song is ablaze with gulmohur and cassia, with the champak and jasmine. We wander with her into pomegranate gardens of mellowing dawn or watch a June sunset. Fawns feed on scented grass and the bees on cactus gold. The koels invite us to the summer woods."¹

Sarojini does not, like Rabindranath Tagore, reveal a philosophical approach to Nature. In her cosmic world-view God (Supreme Self), Man (Self) and Nature (Other Self) - the

¹ Armando Menezes, Light Than Air (Dharwar, Samyukta Karnataka Press, 1959), p. 45.
three points of the "metaphysical triangle" - are not interpreted in their integral relationship. She, however, believes in Indian point of view as found in Vedic hymns and Hindu mythology, according to which Man and Nature are conceived as essential parts of the Universe having harmonious existence with each other. There is a common stream of life or Life Force animating both Man and Nature. Both enrich and complete each other. Their dependence is mutual.

The inter-communion between nature and man is conveyed by linking nature images with the feelings of human heart in the poem, "Medley", a Kashmiri Song:

The poppy grows on the roof-top,
The iris flowers on the grave;
Hope in the heart of a lover,
And fear in the heart of a slave.

The opal lies in the river,
The pearl in the ocean's breast;
Doubt in a grieving bosom,
And faith in a heart at rest

(p. 138)

'Dancing fireflies' and shaking peach-leaves are similar to dreams and fancies dancing in the mind of a poet. Sweetness in the beehive reminds the poet of sweetness in a maiden's breath and joys in the eyes of children:
Fireflies dance in the moon-light,
Peach-leaves dance in the wind;  
Dreams and delicate fancies
Dance thro' a poet's mind.

Sweetness dwells in the beehive,
And lives in a maiden's breath;
Joy in the eyes of children
And peace in the hands of Death.  

The variety of emotions that goad the bird in "The Bird of Time" to burst in spontaneous music are similar to human emotions in different moods:

O Bird of Time on your fruitful bough
What are the songs you sing?...
Songs of the glory and gladness of life,
Of poignant sorrow and passionate strife,
And the lilting joy of the spring;
Of hope that sows for the years unborn,
And faith that dreams of a tarrying morn,
The fragrant peace of the twilight's breath,
And the mystic silence that men call death.  

There is a perfect correspondence between men and Nature in their joys and despair:

O Bird of Time, say where did you learn
The changing measures you sing?...
In blowing forests and breaking tides,
In the happy laughter of new-made brides,
And the nests of the new-born spring;
In the dawn that thrills to a mother's prayer,
And the night that shelters a heart's despair,
In the sigh of pity, the sob of hate,
And the pride of a soul that has conquered fate.

(p. 65)

The poem "Corn Grinders" shows that the affliction suffered by woman who loses her life companion is similar to that of a mouse or a doe in the same circumstances. A little mouse cries because her lord is dead:

Alas! Alas! my lord is dead!
Ah, who will ease my bitter pain?
He went to seek a millet-grain
In the rich farmer's granary shed;
They caught him in a baited snare,
And slew my lover unaware...
Alas! Alas! my lord is dead.

(p. 9)

A doe moans alone for her mate who fell victim to a cruel hunter's arrow:

Alas! alas! my lord is dead!
Ah, who will quiet my lament?
At fall of eventide he went
To drink beside the river-head;
A waiting hunter threw his dart
And struck my lover through the heart.
Alas! alas! my lord is dead...

(p. 9)
The woman suffers the deep pangs of sorrow because her husband is dead:

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?
That lit my lover's funeral pyre...
Alas! alas! my lord is dead.

(p. 10)

The three separate pictures of death are fused together by the sorrow of three survivors. The profound agony of the three beings is similar to the wail of the female Kraunch birds on the death of her mate, which aroused the poetic effusions in the heart of the sage Valmiki who wrote the Ramayana thereafter.

The poem, "Song of a Dream", describes a strange dream the poet once had. In it she finds herself standing alone in a forest while visions spring around her like poppies. In this poem human ideals are projected upon natural phenomena. The poet participates in the life of these natural objects.

Once in the dream of a night I stood
Lone in the light of a magical wood,
Soul-deep in visions that poppy-like sprang;
And spirits of Truth were the birds that sang,
And spirits of Love were the stars that glowed,
And spirits of Peace were the streams that flowed
In that magical wood in the land of sleep.
She finds a close correspondence between her life and the human ideals projected upon natural phenomena:

Lone in the light of that magical grove,
I felt the stars of the spirits of Love.
Gather and gleam round my delicate youth,
And I heard the song of the spirits of Truth;
To quench my longing I bent me low
By the streams of the spirits of Peace that flow
In that magical wood in the land of sleep.

The poem, "Mimicry", shows that there is a close correspondence between Spring and the poet. The poet considers Spring to be a mimic who has cleverly copied its glory and colours from the heart of the poet. For 'tulip' and 'poppy', it draws the red colour from the wounds of the poet's heart:

O Spring how you grieve me!
Would you deceive me with praise of your fragile
Miraculous art?
Where did you copy
Your tulip and poppy if not from the red-flowering
Wounds in my heart.

The whole natural phenomena gets transformed under the influence of Spring because the latter decorates it by copying the colours from the dreams of the poet's soul:
Who lent the bright cluster
Of Pleiades their lustre, the hills their soft hue
Like wild lilac in bloom?
Are you beholden
To none for the golden, rich pattern that jewels
The wood pheasant's plume?
O Spring I have caught you!
Who would have thought you a traitor denying
My script and my scroll,
Whereby you moulded
And subtly nfolded your world in the dyes
And the dreams of my soul?
(The Feather of the Dawn, p. 22)

Sometimes this correspondence between man and nature
is disturbed because while the nature's marvellous rhythm
flows on uninterrupted, the man's life is interrupted by his
own artificial creation. In the poem, "Transcience", the
poet remarks:

Nay, do not grieve tho' life be full of sadness,
Dawn will not veil her splendour for your grief,
Nor spring deny their bright, appointed beauty
To lotus blossom and ashoka leaf.
(p. 125)

Like Wordsworth Sarojini also believes in the healing
power of nature. She believes that one who suffers from the
conflicts and tensions of life should go to the warm lap of
nature for relief and solace of one's grief-stricken soul.
0 I am tired of painted roofs and soft and silken floors,
And long for wind-blown canopies of crimson gulmohors!
0 I am tired of strife and song and festival and fame,
And long to fly where cassia-woods are breaking into flame.

(p. 190)

She invites her lover to join her in the blessed atmosphere of nature:

Love, come with me where koels call from flowering glade and glen,
Far from the toil and weariness, the praise and prayers of men.

0 let us fling all care away, and lie alone and dream
'Neath tangled boughs of tamarind and molsari and neem!

And bind our brows with jasmine sprays and play on carven flutes,
To wake the slumbering serpent-kings among the banyon roots,

And roam at fall of eventide along the river's brink,
And bathe in water-lily pools where golden panthers drink!

(PP. 190-191)
The poet wants that she and her lover like Radhika and Krishna, should enjoy the happiness pervading in nature:

You and I together, love, in the deep blossoming woods,
Engirt with low-voiced silences and gleaming solitudes,
Companions of the lustrous dawn, gay comrades of the night,
Like Krishna and like Radhika, encompassed with delight.

(p. 191)

In the poem, "Solitude" the poet addresses her own heart and suggests a sojourn into the land of twilight, to the glens and glades where rivers of gold are falling 'from the breast of a radiant cloud' - far away from the crowd, from the throng with its tumult. In the land of twilight there is rest, there is escape from strife. There is halcyon night holds in trust the songs of to-morrow and 'the silence is but a rich pause in the music of life'.

Let us rise, O my heart, let us go where the twilight is calling.
Far away from the sound of this lovely and menacing crowd,
To the glens, to the glades, where the magical darkness is falling
In rivers of gold from the breast of a radiant cloud.
Come away, come away from this throng and its tumult of sorrow,
There is rest, there is peace from the pang of its manifold strife.
Where the halcyon night holds in trust the dear songs of the morrow,
And the silence is but a rich pause in the music of life.

(p. 132)

The last two stanzas of the poem have mystical overtones. Like Wordsworth, Sarojini finds nature as a medium for catching the glimpse of the "Lord of the World":

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,
The delicate dream from the lips of the slumbering sedges,
That catch from the stars some high tone of their mystical speech.

Or perchance, 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.

(pp. 132-133)
In "The Garden Vigil" also nature does not remain merely a place of consolation from the strife and tensions of life but turns a source of the poet's communion with the Supreme Self:

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 dim!

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 adore his hidden face.

(pp. 172-173)

An important aspect of Sarojini's nature poetry is that she describes the bright aspects of nature. She presents nature in its benign, soothing and life supporting forms. She does not emphasize the dark side of nature and rarely shows it "red in tooth and claw". The poem, "Gujarat", composed on the disastrous flood of Gujarat in 1927, is the only poem which deals with devastating fury of nature. However, in it also the poet blames God and not nature for letting loose its relentless anger on mankind. In her general poems on nature Sarojini always sees in nature accord rather than discord, beauty and love rather than violence or strife.
Sarojini has dealt almost all aspects of natural phenomena in comprehensive manner. She discerns minutely the changing moods of day, night, seasons, stars, the sun, the moon, winds, rivers, seas and lakes; the colourful beauty of flowers, their sweet fragrance and the melodious chirping of birds, and describes them artistically and delightfully.

**Treatment of the Sun, The Moon, Stars, Winds and Clouds:**

The changing moods of the day with the sun shining or setting in the sky and the moon sparkling and the stars shimmering in the night are a source of great fascination for Sarojini. She does not only use these heavenly bodies—the sun, the moon and stars as objects of her rich imagery, but also loves them for their own sake. In the poem, "Harvest Hymn", farmers are shown expressing their gratitude to the sun for scattering its shining warmth in their fields and ripening their corn:

Lord of the lotus, lord of the harvest,  
Bright and magnificent lord of the morn!  
Thine is the bounty that prospered our sowing,  
Thine is the bounty that nurtured our corn,  
We bring thee our songs and our garlands for tribute,  
The gold of our fields and the gold of our fruit;  
O giver of mellowing radiance, we hail thee,  
We praise thee, O Surya, with cymbal and flute.  

(p. 14)
In the poem, "The Garden Vigil", she describes how with the rising of the sun, other planets "wither and decline":

Long ere the sun's first far-off beacons shine
Or her prophetic clarions call afar,
The gorgeous planets wither and decline,
Save in its eastern shrine,
Unquenched, unchallenged, the proud morning star.

To the poet the sun appears like "glorious light of hope" or "lovely symbol and sweet sign of him" whose voice she yearns to hear. In its bright flame she gets a glimpse of the Infinite mystery:

And daily grant that I
May in thy flame adore his hidden face.

"At Dawn" describes the breaking of the daylight when children wake up to attend to their work:

Children, my children, the daylight is breaking,
The cymbals of morn sound the hour of your waking,
The long night is o'er, and our labour is ended,
Fair blow the fields that we tilled and we tended,
Swiftly the harvest grows mellow for reaping,
The harvest we sowed in the time of your sleeping.

In this poem, "dawn" assumes the symbolic significance of the dawn of the future career of children to complete the work begun by their elders:
We toiled to enrich the glad hour of your waking,
Our vigil is done, lo! the daylight is breaking.

(p. 129)

In the "Autumn Song", Sarojini gives a pictorial
description of the sunset in the autumn season, with clouds
hanging, fallen leaves fluttering and wild wind blowing:

Like a joy on the heart of a sorrow,
The sunset hangs on a cloud;
A golden storm of glittering sheaves,
Of fair and frail and fluttering leaves,
The wild wind blows in a cloud.

(p. 23)

In the poem, "June Sunset", the poet presents a typical
picture of rural life at the time of the sunset:

An ox-cart stumbles upon the rocks,
And a wistful music pursues the breeze
From a shepherd's pipe as the gathers his flocks
Under the pipal-trees.
And a young Banjara driving her cattle
Lifts up her voice as she glitters by
In an ancient ballad of love and battle
Set to the beat of a mystic tune,
And the faint stars gleam in the eastern sky
To herald a rising moon

(pp. 192-193)

The poem, "Leili", which describes a tropical night
presents a beautiful image of the moon:
A caste-mark on the azure brow of Heaven
The golden moon burns sacred, solemn, bright,

James Cousins was so much thrilled by this image of the moon that he described it as a "unique achievement of the imagination in English poetry". He further added: "It lifts India to the literary heavens; it threatens the throne of Diana of the classics; it releases Luna from the work of asylum-keeper, and gives her instead the office of remembrancer to Earth that the Divine is imprinted on the open face of nature. How miraculously the artist makes articulate the seer, and reinforces vision by utterance." Stars figure as interesting and beautiful similes in Sarojini's poems as seen in the famous line, "she hangs like a star in the dew of our song."

Sarojini has written some fine poems about the night. Highly artistic and apposite visual images makes the description of a night in the poem "Leili" very appealing:

The serpents are asleep among the poppies,
The fireflies light the soundless panter's way
To tangled paths where shy gazelles are straying,
And parrot plumes outshine the dying day.
O soft! the lotus buds the stream
Are stirring like sweet maidens when they dream.

(p. 31)

The silent solemnness of night is conveyed impressively by religious imagery used in the second stanza of the poem:

A cast-mark on the azure brows of Heaven  
The golden moon burns sacred, solemn, bright,  
The winds are dancing in the forest temple,  
And swooning at the holy feet of Night.  
Hush! in the silence mystic voices sing  
And make the gods their incense offering.  

(p. 31)

Sarojini pictures in this stanza winds as "dancing" in the temple and "swooning" at the "holy feet of the Night". The poem "Autumn Song" shows the wild wind blowing" in a cloud" with fallen leaves fluttering in it. Sarojini often describes the wind in its close association with clouds. In the "Song of Radha", she writes:

I wanted to cry, "Who will buy, who will buy,  
These curds that are white as the clouds in the sky  
When the breezes of shrawan are blowing?"  

(p. 112)

In "A Song in Spring", the poet visualizes the winds as habitual travellers who, during their journeys over earth and sea, accumulate a lot of knowledge:

But the wise winds know, as they pause to slacken  
The speed of their subtle, omniscient flight,  
Divining the magic of unblown lilies,  
Foretelling the stars of the unborn night.  

(p. 88)
These soothsayers have "followed the hurrying feet of pilgrims", they have spied on love's secrets, they are familiar with the sorrows of human hearts; and they have spent some time in the awesome company of death herself:

They have followed the hurrying feet of pilgrims
Tracking swift prayers to their utmost goals,
They have spied on Love's old and changeless secret,
And the changing sorrow of human souls.

They have tarried with Death in her parleying places,
And issued the word of her high decree,
Their wings have winnowed the garnered sunlight,
Their lips have tasted the purple sea.

Unseen and unheard, the wind penetrates all the mysteries of nature's variegated life. This idea is expressed in the opening stanza of "The Garden Vigil":

In the deep silence of the garden-bowers
Only the stealthy zephyr glides and goes,
Refling the secret of sirisha flowers,
And to the new-born hours
Bequeaths the subtle anguish of the rose.

But even the wind, the busybody who chooses the clouds and pries into otherpeople's affairs, must have the time for rest. In a beautiful line in the first stanza of the poem, "Cromandel Fishers", the poet describes the wind relaxing itself:
The wind lies asleep in the arms of the dawn
Like a child that has cried all night.
(p. 6)

In the poem, "Damayante to Nala In The Hour of Exile", Sarojini makes impressive references to winds, planets, the sun, sunset and night:

The winds thy heralds and thy vassals all
The silver-belted planets and the sun.
Where'er the radiance of thy coming fall,
Shall dawn for thee her saffron foot-cloths spread,
Sunlet her purple canopies and red,
In serried splendour, and the night unfold.
Her velvet darkness wrought with starry gold
For kingly raiment, soft as cygnet-down.
(p. 43)

The poem, "In A Time of Flowers", shows dawn and dusk as full of scent and song and winds drunk with fragrance of flowers and trees:

The dawn and the dusk grow rife
With scent and song and tremulous mirth,
The blind, rich travail of life.
The winds are drunk with the odorous breath
Of henna, sarisha, and neem ...
(p. 92)

"In Praise of Gulmohur Blossoms", clouds are shown lending their colour to the ocean's face:

The limpid clouds of the lustrons dawn
That colour the ocean's mien.
(p. 94)
These sea and mountain figure rarely in Sarojini's poems. "On Juhu Sands", however, presents the picture of both the sea and mountain. Though the poet relaxes in the fascinating atmosphere of the sea beach, she pines for the beautiful scenes of mountains - "the scent of mountain pine", "the murmuring mountain breeze", "wild narcissus" blooming in the hidden mountain dells" - she has earlier experienced during her sojourn to the mountains. Even the beautiful sight of the moon shining on the breast of the sea, is unable to make her forget the beautiful sight of snows covering far mountains:

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

(The Feather of the Dawn, p.23)

The poem, "Coromandel Fishers", tries to capture the atmosphere of the sea and describes the intense feeling which fisherfolk have for the sea. In this song, the fishermen call themselves to be the sons of the sea and enthuse each other to "hasten away in the track of the seagull's call" in order to capture the "leaping wealth of the tide." They address the sea as their mother, the cloud as a brother, and the waves as their comrades:
Sweet is the shade of the coconut glade, and the scent of the mango grove,
And sweet are the sands at the full o'the moon with the sound of the voices we love.
But sweeter, O brothers, the kiss of the spray and the dance of the wild foam's glee:
Row, brother, row to the blue of the verge, where the low sky mates with the sea.
(pp. 6-7)

In "Bangle-Sellers", Sarojini describes mountain mist as silver and blue. The bangles meant for maiden's wrist are "Silver and blue as the mountain-mist" (p. 108). In "The Faery Isle of Janjira", sea winds are shown as singing to the rhythm of the sea waves:

Fain would I dwell where your wild doves wander,
Your palm-woods burgeon and sea-winds sing...
Lulled by the tune of the rhythmic waters.
(p. 121)

Sarojini describes the earth as the mother, who yields rich harvest to her toiling sons. In "Harvest Hymn", village women offer prayer to the earth for her blessings:

Queen of the gourd flower, queen of the harvest,
Sweet and omnipotent mother, O Earth!
Thine is the plentiful bosom that feeds us,
Thine is the womb where our riches have birth.
We bring thee our love and our garlands for tribute,
With gifts of thy opulent giving we come;
O source of our manifold gladness, we hail thee,
We praise thee, O Prithvi, with cymbal and drum.
(p. 15)
Among the rivers, the Jamuna figures prominently in Sarojini's poems as the background for the love of Radha and Krishna. In "The Song of Radha, the Milkmaid", the concluding line of each stanza is about the flow of the river Jamuna:

How softly the river was flowing!

Or,

How gaily the river was flowing!

(p. 112)

Or,

How brightly the river was flowing!

(p. 113)

In the poem "Village Song", of The Bird of Time, also the poet describes the river Jamuna. The village girl who goes to the river Jamuna to fill her pitcher, lingers on its bank lured by the boatmen's songs:

My brother will murmur, "Why doth she linger?"
My mother will wait and weep,
Saying, "O safe may the great gods bring her,
The Jamuna's water are deep"...
The Jamuna's waters rush by so quickly,
The shadows of evening gather so thickly,
Like black birds in the sky...

(p. 103)
In the poem of the same title "Village Song" of the anthology, *The Golden Threshold*, Sarojini describes the music of forest streams being sweeter than that of the bridal songs and cradle songs:

Far sweeter sound the forest notes where forest-streams are falling.

(p. 12)

The poem "Ecstasy" depicts the flowing movement of the rivers and rills:

Behold the bright rivers and rills in their glancing, Melodious flight.

(p. 99)

In "Slumber Song for Sunalini", Sarojini refers to "swiftly-flowing streams" (p. 104) and in "Bangle-Sellers" to the "tranquil brow of a woodland stream" (p. 108).

Sarojini has drawn a beautiful picture of the Hussain Sagar lake near Hyderabad in her poem, "The Hussain Sagar".

The young dawn woos thee with his amorous grace, The journeying clouds of sunset pause and hover, Drinking the beauty of thy luminous face, But none thine inmost glory may discover, For thine evasive silver doth enclose What secret purple and what subtle rose responsive only to the wind, thy lover. Only for him thy shining waves unfold Translucent music answering his control; Thou dost like me, to one allegiance hold, O lake, O living image of my soul.
The poem shows that the lake is so completely devoted to her lover, the wind, that she pays no heed to the advances of other lovers.

**Flowers, Trees, Birds and Animals:**

Sarojini's poems are very rich in the treatment of Indian flowers of variegated colours and sweet fragrance. Lotus, the national flower of India, has a special fascination for Sarojini because it suggests purity and sanctity in the Hindu mythology. Though born in a muddy pool, it remains clean and unsoiled. It is associated with Lakshmi, the lotus-born and Sarasvati, who is seated on a lotus. Sarojini named her eldest daughter as "Padmaja" i.e. Lotus-born, which is also one of the names of Lakshmi, the goddess of Fortune. In her poem, "To My children," she describes Padmaja as a "Lotus-maiden":

Lotus-maiden, you who claim  
All the sweetness of your name,  
Lakshmi, fortune's queen, defend you,  
Lotus-born like you, and send you,  
Balmy moons of love to bless you,  
Gentle joy-winds to caress you ...  
Lotus-maiden, you may be  
Fragrant of all ecstasy.  

(p. 51)
In the poem "Lakshmi, The Lotus-Born", written on the day of the worship of Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity is addressed as Lotus-born:

Thou who didst rise like a pearl from the ocean,
Whose beauty surpasseth the splendour of morn!
Lo! we invoke thee with eager devotion,
Harken, O Lotus-born!

(p. 150)

Each of the four stanzas of the song ends with the refrain: "Hearken, O Lotus-born!"

In the poem "To My Fairy Fancies", the poet regrets that she cannot hold her fairy fancies "in the tangle" of her "tresses like lotus-leaves".

Nay, no longer I may hold you,
In my spirit's soft caresses,
Nor like lotus-leaves enfold you
In the tangles of my tresses.

(p. 26)

The gentle swaying of lotus buds is beautifully drawn in the poem "Leili".

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

(p. 31)

The lotus figures prominently in the Buddhiot tradition. Lotuses are painted or carved on the palms and toes of the Buddha as he is shown meditating upon a lotus-throne in
Buddhist painting and sculpture. Sarojini also shows Lord Buddha in meditation seated on his "Lotus-throne" in the poem "To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus Throne" (pp. 61-62). In the poem "The Lotus", Mahatma Gandhi is symbolized as "Mystic Lotus":

O mystic Lotus, sacred and sublime,
In myriad-petalled grace inviolate,
Supreme o'er transient storms of tragic fate,
Deep-rooted in the waters of all time.

(p. 167)

Among other flowers treated by Sarojini in her poems, prominent ones are "gulmohur", "cassia", "naustriems", "champak", "champa", "rose", "sirisha", "jasmine", "keora", "lily", "poppy", "hyacinth", and "tulip". In the poem, "In praise of Gulmohur Blossoms", the poet finds gulmohur blossoms as "gorgeous born of the spring". They are so lovely that nothing can rival them in their rich colour - neither "the glimmering red of a bridal robe", nor "the rich red of a wild bird's wing":

What can rival your lovely hue
0 gorgeous boon of the spring?
The glimmering red of a bridal robe,
Rich red of a wild bird's robe,
Rich red of a wild bird's wing?
Or the mystic blaze of the gem that burns
On the brow of a serpent-king?

(p. 94)
In the poem "Vasant Panchmi", The Hindu widow prays to *gulmohurs* not to flaunt their shining colour for she cannot take part in the festivities of the spring:

O quench your flame, ye crimson *gulmohurs*,
That falunt your dazzling bloom across my doors.

(p. 90)

In "Golden Cassia", the poet finds that the frail *cassia* blossoms are much more than mere "woodland flowers", that are strewn on the way. They appear to her as "some new-fallen star" or "golden lamps for a fairy shrine" or as "golden pitchers for fairy wine". She also finds them as "bright anklet bells from the wild spring's feet" or as "gleaming tears that some fair bride" shed:

O brilliant blossoms that strew my way,
You are only woodland flowers they say.

But, I sometimes think that perchance you are
Fragment of some new-fallen star;

Or golden lamps for a fairy shrine,
Or golden pitchers for fairy wine.

(p. 96)

In the poem, "Alabaster", cassia flower is described "as frail" as the poet's heart (p. 24).

Writing about nasturtiums, in the poem of the same title, Sarojini remarks:
Poignant and subtle and bitter perfume
Exquisite, luminous, passionate bloom,
Your leaves interwoven of fragrance and fire.
Are Savitri's sorrow and Sita's desire,
Draupadi's longing, Damayanti's fears,
And sweetest Sakuntala's magical tears.

(p. 95)

The reference to the immortal women of the Puranic Age and their intense sorrow endured for their great virtues shows the poet's profound love for her country's glorious past.

In the poem "Champak Blossoms", Sarojini describes the "voluptuous" perfume of champak blossoms:

Amber petals, ivory petals,
Petals of carven jade,
Charming with your ambrosial sweetness
Forest and field and glade,
Foredoomed in your hour of transient glory
To shrivel and shrink and fade!

(p. 97)

The maidens adorn their tresses with sweet-smelling blossoms and minstrels sing songs in their priase:

Only to girdle a girl's dark tresses
Your fragrant hearts are uncurled:
Only to garland the vernal breezes
Your fragile stars are unfurled.
You make no boast in your purposeless beauty
To serve or profit the world.
Yet, 'tis of you thro' the moonlit ages
The maidens and minstrels sing,
And lay your buds on the great god's altar,
O radiant blossoms that fling
Your rich, voluptuous, magical perfume
To ravish the winds of spring.

(p. 98)

The poem "The Dance of Love" describes how the sweet fragrance of champak trees affects the midnight's soul with weariness:

And the midnight's soul grows weary
With the scent of the champak trees.

(p. 73)

The poem, "The Time of Roses", describes the enchanting beauty and intense perfume of lovely roses which can be seen anywhere in abundance:

Love, it is the time of roses!
In bright fields and garden closes
How they burgeon and unfold!
How they sweep o'er tombs and towers
In voluptuous crimson showers,
And untrammelled tides of gold!

How they lure wild bees to capture
All the rich mellifluous rapture
Of their magical perfume,
And to passing winds surrender
All their frail and dazzling splendour
Rivalling your turban-plume!
How they cleave the air adorning
The high rivers of the morning
In a blithe, bejewelled fleet!
How they deck the moonlit masses
Like a fair queen's bridal sheet!

The crimson roses with their "magical perfume" captivate the poet so intensely that she measures woman's entire life with the season of flowers:

Hid me in a shrine of roses,
Drown me in a wine of roses
Drawn from every fragrant grave!
Bind me on a pyre of roses,
Burn me in a fire of roses,
Crown me with the rose of Love!

"The Glorissa Lily" is rich in romantic images, and beautiful similes and metaphors. It captures the magic and colour of lily flower impressively:

Even the dawn's arrested gaze
Grows envious to behold
Hid in sequestered, shadowy ways
His crimson and his gold
In such fantastic rays illume
The dim, enchanted forest gloom

Who lit your clustering lanterns, all
In fringed fire to make
Rosered and amber carnival
In woodland bower and brake,
And lure the purple moth to search
Her rich wings at your blossoming torch?

(The Feather of the Dawn, p. 16)

The poem, "The Water Hyacinth", reveals both their magical charm and destructive power:

Magical, mistpurple, pale,
In alluring splendour spread,
Snaring pool and riverhead
In your perilons and frail
Farflung, subtly painted veil.

How you revel in your trade
Wanton water hyacinth!
Like a fatal labyrinth
Is your loveliness displayed,
Death in Beauty's masquerade.

(The Feature of the Dawn, p. 17)

The water hyacinth is presented here as a dangerous creep or which drains and sucks the vitality of water:

Soft, relentless, delicate
Vampire legion ravaging
Wave and every wave-born thing
Like a winged, insidious fate
Exquisite, insatiate.

(The Feather of the Dawn, p. 17)
Among other flowers Sarojini described "sirisha" with its "alluring scent" (p. 119); 'jasmine' with whose bloom "the deep woods glimmer" (p. 8); clustering 'keoras' guarding "the squirrel's slumber" (p. 8), or the "pinioned curls" of a beloved (p. 68), sweet Champa buds with their whitebells, that call "wild bees" to their "ambrosial festival" (p. 90), 'tulip buds' kindled by the spring winds (p. 47), and 'poppy-boles' among which serpents lie asleep (p. 31). She also refers in her poems to famous Indian trees, 'Ashoka' in which a dove hangs its nest (p. 16), 'Kadamba' beneath which Krishna plays his "matchless flute" (p. 161), 'henna' whose leaves are gathered by maidens (p.13), 'fairy neem' through which the wild fire-flies dance (p. 17) or whose adorous breath is drunk by winds (p. 92), 'mango' whose blossoms are rifled by wild bees (p. 88) or whose leaves "jewelled with rein-drops" quiver, (p. 76), 'banyan twigs', whose leaves grow green and 'peepal tree' which glitters with red leaves during the spring (p. 87), "tangled boughs" of 'tamarind' and 'molsari', 'palm woods' burgeoning in the islands (p. 121) and fragrant 'sandalwood' spreading its sweet odour (p. 106). In the time of flowers, we catch glimpses of "the burgeoning leaves on the almond boughs" (p. 92), "the bright pomegranate buds" unfolding themselves (p. 92) and 'the citron branches' being swayed by
wild birds (p. 88), In the streets fruitmen sell 'plum', 'fig' and 'citron' and in the bazars one comes across 'honey' and variety of spices, 'clove' and 'cinnaman'.

Sarojini Naidu's fondness for birds can be judged from the fact that the titles of three out of her four collections of poems have some reference to birds. The Bird of Time, The Broken Wing, and The Feather of the Dawn. Almost all the birds that have attracted the attention of Indian poets, singers, mythmakers and story-tellers figure in Sarojini's poems - koel or kokila, papeeha parrot, maina, eagle, halcyon, crane, swan, dove, peacock, bulbul, kingfisher, fire-flies, nightingale, pigeon, bees, oriole, dhadikula, falcon, hawk, butterflies and dragon flies. Sarojini derives some striking images from peacock plumes, the dove's speckled throat, the halcyon's blue wings, the bright parrots which 'cluster like vermillion flowers', and the blackbirds gathering like evening shadows.

"The Bird Sanctuary" is a beautiful poem which describes many kinds of birds dwelling in the gracious garden of God:

In your quiet garden wakes a magic tumult Of winged choristers that keep the Festival of dawn, Blithley rise the carol in richly cadenced rapture, From lyric throats of amber, of ebony and fawn.
The bulbul and the oriole, the honey-bird and shama
Flit among high boughs that drip with nectar and with dew,
Upon the grass the wondering gull parades its sea-washed silver,
The hoopoe and the kingfisher their branze and sapphire blue.

Besides these there are pigeons and parrots and other birds flying among the three-tops.

Wild gray pigeons dreaming of a home amid the tree-tops,
Fill their beaks with silken down and slender banyan twigs,
But the jade-green gipsy parrots are only way mauroauders,
And pause upon their sum-ward flight to plunder ripe figs.

In your gracious garden there is joy and fostering freedom,
Nesting place and singing space for every feathered thing.
O Master of the Birds, grant sanctuary and shelter
Also to a homing bird that bears a broken wing.

(The Feather of the Dawn, p.19)

In the poem "Farewell", Sarojini describes 'butterflies', 'bees' and 'wild birds' as "sweet comrades" of her lyric spring:
Bright shower of lambent butterflies,
Soft cloud of murmuring bees,
O fragile storm of sighing leaves
Adrift upon the breeze!

Wild birds with eager wings outspread
To seek an alien sky,
Sweet comrades of a lyric spring,
My little songs, good-bye.

Sarojini has a special fascination for the spring bird koel. "In Praise of Henna", she describes the koel or kokila pouring forth its rapturous melody from "a henna spray" to call maidens to gather henna leaves:

A kokila called from a henna-spray:
Lira! Liree! Lira! Liree!
Hasten, maidens, hasten away
To gather the leaves of the henna-tree.

The spring season wakes the whole natural phenomena to ecstasy. The koels burst out in melodious songs and peacocks dance with intense delight:

Heart, O my heart! lo, the springtime is waking
In meadow and grave.
Lo, the mellifluous koels are making
Their psalms of love.
Behold the bright rivers and rills in their glancing Melodious flight,
Behold how the sumptuous peacock are dancing
In rhythmic delight.

("Ecstasy", p. 99)

In the spring, hills, valleys, gardens and groves echo with the melodious music of bulbul, maina and dove:

O'er hill-side and valley, through garden and grove, Such exquisite anthems are ringing Where rapturous bulbul and maina and dove Their carols of welcome are singing.

("The Call of Spring", p. 185)

In this season "the dragon-flies glimmer and glide", and "the plumes of wild peacocks" gleam (p. 185).

The melodious songs of birds, however, arouse grief rather than joy in the heart of a woman forsaken by her lover:

Tell me no more of thy love, papeeha, Wouldst thou revive in my heart, papeeha, Grief for the joy that is gone? I hear the bright peacock in glimmering woodlands Cry to its mate in the dawn; I hear the black koel's slow, tremulous wooing, And sweet in the gardens the calling and cooing Of passionate bulbul and dove.... But what is their music to me, papeeha Songs of their laughter and love, papeeha, To me forsaken of love?

("A Love Song From the North", pp. 75-76)
In the poem, "Indian Weavers", Sarojini describes blue wings of a halcyon bird and purple and green plumes of a peacock (p. 5), in "Leili", the parrot-plumes" outshining the dying day" (p. 31), and in "Indian Love Song" bright parrots clustering "like vermillion flowers" round boughs of fruits (p. 16). In "My Dead Dream "Sarojini refers to "the white, mented, wild pigeons of joy" (p. 41), in "Nightfall In The City of Hyderabad", to "the speckled sky" burning "like a pigeon's throat" (p. 55), in "The Poet of Death" to "rich echoing boughs where dhadikulas sing" (p. 49), in "The Indian Gipsy", to 'the bold falcon's agile grace" (p. 50); in "A Rajput Love Song" to "the hooded hawk "fluttering on the hand of the Rajput warrior (p. 81), and in "Solitude" to the eagles keeping "guard on the rocky grey ledges" (p. 132). In the poem "Cradle-Song, "Sarojini shows "the wild fire-flies" dancing "through The fairy neem" (p. 17), or in "A Song in Spring" "weaving aerial dances In fragile rhythms of flickering gold" (p. 88).

Like birds, animals of different types also figure prominently in Sarojini Naidu's poems. She describes a magnificent 'stallion' spurred on by a valiant Rajput knight (p. 81); golden 'panthers' drinking at water-lily pools (p. 191), or a black 'panther' emerging from the caves of sleep (p. 50), or the fireflies lighting "the soundless panther's
way" to "tangled paths where shy gazelles are straying" (p.31), "leisurly elephants" moving "through the winding lanes/Swinging their silver bells hung from their silver chains" (p. 55); cows returning to the village at dusk; and the wild fawns feeding on he scented grasses (p. 192). In the poem "The Bells", she refers to "White heifers gathered in for sleep' (p. 170), in "The Indian Gipsy" to "the lithe tiger's sinuous majesty" (p. 50); and in "The Call of Spring" to the hiding of 'fox', 'squirrel' and "timid fawn' (p. 185).

Two of the best animal poems are about serpents - "The Snake-Chamber" and "The Festival of Serpents". In the former Sarojini describes the snake-charmer offering temptations to the cobra to come out and not hide itself:

I'll feed thee, O beloved, on milk and wild red honey,
I'll bear thee in a basket of rushes, green and white,
To a palace-bower where golden-vested maidens
Thread with mellow laughter the petals of delight.

(p. 8)

In the latter, the worshippers pray to serpents to awake and accept their offerings:

Shining ones awake, we seek your chosen temples
In caves and sheltering sandhills and sacred banyan roots;
O lift your dreaming heads from their trace of ageless wisdom,
And weave your mystic measures to the melody of flute.
(p. 110)

The Seasons:
Sarojini Naidu took great delight in the renewal and change that the earth and nature around it undergo from season to season. According to her Indian summer is the season of "low-voiced silences and gleaming solitudes". In this season one likes to rest under the shade of trees or walk in the evening along the river bank or cool oneself by bathing in pools. In the poem, "Summer Woods", the poet asks her companion to come to soothing lap of nature and rest:

O let us fling all care away, and lie alone and dream
'Neath tangled boughs of tamarind and molsari and neem!

And bind our brows with jasmine sprays and play on carven flutes,
To wake the slumbering serpent-kings among the banyan roots,

And roam at fall of eventide along the river's brink,
And bathe in water-lily pools where golden panthers drink!

(pp. 190-91)
In rainy season, the "necromantic rain", the poet writes:

Touches dead loveliness to life again,
Revives onwithered meads and barren rocks
Postures and gleaming pools for wandering flocks,
And sows wet fields with red and ivory grain.

(The Feather of the Dawn, p. 1)

During this season the love-lorn maiden pines for her lover as she listens to the cry of papeeha:

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 no my lover again?

("A Love Song for the North", p. 75)

Very impressive is Sarojini's pictorial description of the sunset in the autumn season, with clouds hanging, fallen leaves fluttering and wild wind blowing:

Like a joy on the heart of a sorrow;

The sunset hangs on a cloud;

A golden storn of glittering sheaves,
Of fair and frail and fluttering leaves,
The wild wind blows in a cloud.

("Autumn Song", p. 23)
Of all the seasons Sarojini was fascinated most by the spring which with its lovely colours, sounds and perfumes cast a magic spell on her sensitive heart. Dalway Turnbull highlights Sarojini's special love for this of youth, freshness, joy and profusion of colour and beauty, when he remarks: "In her songs of springtime and the flowering year she feels herself one with the vital rhythm of the world, and becomes almost a part of the expanding life of bird and flower." 1 Sarojini has written larger number of poems on spring than on any other season. An entire section of The Bird of Time is entitled "Songs of the Springtime". In The Broken Wing, the section entitled "The Flowering Year" contains six poems about spring and summer. Many of her poems, even when they are not actually on the season, are redolent of the imagery of spring.

The poem, "Spring", presents a lovely picture of the season. The blooming nature all around fascinates the poet a great deal and she, struck with its unlimited treasure of beauty, transports us to the land of colour, beauty and fragrance where:

Young leaves grow green on the banyan twigs,
And red on the peepal tree,
The honey-birds pipe to the budding figs,
And honey blooms call the bee.

Poppies squander their fragile gold
In the silvery aloe-brake,
Coral and ivory lilies unfold
Their delicate lives on the lake.

(p. 87)

The poem emphasizes the colours of spring: green leaves of the banyan tree, red leaves of the peepal, the golden poppies, the silvery aloe-brake, coral and ivory-white lilies, and the luminous blue of the hills. Spring generates new life and vigour into the trees, flowers, birds, and butterflies. It excites and draws human beings also into its vital flood of joy:

Kamala tinkles a lingering foot
In the grove where temple bells ring,
And Krishna plays on his bamboo flute
An idyll of love and spring.

(p. 87)

"A Song in Spring", shows the season in a different aspect, an aspect of movement. It begins with the note of thrill and excitement at the lovely music and sound scattered by the spring:

Wild bees that rifle the mango blossom,
Set free a while from the love-god's string,
Wild birds that sway in the citron branches,
Drunk with the rich, red honey of spring.

(p. 88)

There is a note of melancholy about the poem as it shows that a human soul with dreams shattered and heart broken finds it difficult to respond to the calls of spring enthusiastically:

Fireflies weaving aerial dances
In fragile rhythms of flickering gold,
What do you know in your blithe, brief season
Of dreams deferred and a heart grown old?

(p. 88)

"The Joy of the Spring Time" presents the picture of the earth renewing its beauty in the springtime:

Springtime, 0 Springtime, what is your secret,
The bliss at the core of your magical mirth,
That quickens the pulse of the morning to wonder
And hastens the seeds of all beauty to birth,
That captures the heavens and conquers to blossom
The roots of delight in the heart of the earth?

(p. 89)

The poem "Vasant Panchami", describing the festival of spring, unfolds the sorrow of the Hindu widow who can neither enjoy the beauty of spring nor participate in the delights of the festival. The colourful sights and sweet fragrance of spring wound the widow's heart with "bitter memories". They revive in her the memories of happy days when her husband was alive:
Go, dragon-fly, fold up your purple wing,  
Why will you bring me tidings of the spring?  
0 lilting koels, hush your rapturous notes,  
0 dhadikulas, still your passionate throats,  
Or seek some further garden for your nest ...  
Your songs are poisoned arrows in my breast.  
(p. 90)

"In a Time of Flower", a girl reminds her lover that spring has arrived:

O Love! do you know the spring is here  
With the lure of her magic flute?...
The old earth breaks into passionate bloom  
At the kiss of her fleet, gay foot.

The spring is visualized here as a young girl and the earth as a tree which bursts into blossom at the touch of girl's foot. V.S. Naravane refers to an ancient legend associated with this belief: "Sarojini is alluding to an ancient legend which has figured prominently in sculptures as well as poetry. According to the legend, if a tree-divinity or forest-divinity leans against a tree, and touches the stem with her foot, the tree will put forth fresh flowers."

The poem expresses the joy and vitality of spring:

O Love! do you know the spring is here?...
The dawn and the dusk grow rife

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1. Naravane, p. 120. In "Ashoka Blossoms" also Sarojini refers to the tree divinity (p. 202).
With scent and song and tremulous mirth,
The blind, rich travail of life.
(p. 92)

In the poem, "Ecstasy", the poet asks her heart to forget its grief and partake in the delights of spring:
Heart, O my heart! lo, the spring time is waking In meadow and grave.
Lo, the mellifluous koels are making their poems of love.
Behold the bright rivers and rills in their glancing, Melodious flight,
Behold how the sumptuous peacocks are dancing, In rhythmic delight.
(p. 99)

In the poem, "The Call of Spring", Sarojini asks her daughters, Padmaja and Lilamani, to come out and share in the joys of spring:
Children, my children, the spring wakes anew,
And calls through the dawn and the daytime
For flower-like and fleet-footed maidens like you,
To share in the joy of its playtime.
(p. 185)

The poet herself is unable to resist the temptation of playing with her children in the open fields adorned by the spring:
The earth is ashine like a humming-bird's wing,
And the sky like a kingfisher's feather,
O come, let us go and play with the spring
Like glad-hearted children together,
(p. 186)
The poems, "The Coming of Spring" and "The Magic of Spring", have a deep melancholy note about them. Like Wordsworth in the "Ode to Immortality", Sarojini describes in these poems her helplessness in the old age to enjoy the beauty and delights of spring as she did in her young age.

In "The Coming of Spring" the poet laments:

O Spring! I cannot run to greet
Your coming as I did of old,
Clad in a shining veil of gold,
With champa-buds and blowing wheat
And silver anklets on my feet.

(p. 187)

It is not that she is false and a traitor in her love for spring, the trouble is that her heart is so weary now that it has forgotten its old mirth and joy:

O Sweet! I am not false to you -
Only my weary heart of late
Has fallen from its high estate
Of laughter and has lost the clue
To all the vernal joy it knew.

There was a song I used to sing -
But now I seek in vain
For the old lilting glad refrain -
I have forgotten everything-
Forgive me, O my comrade Spring!

(pp. 187-188)
The note of melancholy grows deeper in "The Magic of Spring". Buried under a "secret hill of pain" the heart cannot be cheered even by the coming of spring which has wrought a magical transformation in nature:

The kimshuks burst into dazzling flower,
The seemuls burgeoned in crimson pride,
The palm-groves shone with the oriole's wing,
The koels began to sing,
The soft clouds broke in a twinkling tide...
My heart leapt up in its grave and cried,
"Is it the spring, the spring?"

(p. 189)

Of all the Indian English poets, Sarojini has alone beautifully recaptured the autochthonous response to natural environment. Her treatment of nature is very comprehensive and covers every aspect of its phenomena. She has equally wide range of feelings towards the natural world - the sense of wonder of a child, ecstasy of youth and pensive feelings of old age. Sarojini's response to nature is, however, purely aesthetic. She loves it for its own sake, its fascinating colours, sweet fragrance and enchanting melodies.