Chapter-II
Sarojini Naidu And Her Works: A Context To Her Feminine Sensibility
Sarojini Naidu, the eldest daughter of Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya and Varada Sundari, was born in Hyderabad Deccan, on 13th Feb, 1879. Her father was “a scientist dreamer and a mystic-jester,”¹ and her mother was “half-angel and half-bird”,² and in the atmosphere of most colourful Hyderabad, Sarojini Chattopadhyaya started her childhood slowly ripening into girlhood of immeasurable poetic promise. Her stormy rise of greatness started when she passed the Madras matriculation at twelve, composed 1000-line poem at thirteen, she was fallen in love at fourteen and married to Govindrajulu Naidu at nineteen and had four children while she was twenty-five. Her parents were great and wonderful. She had six sisters and brothers. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, the youngest of them who became a renowned Indo-Anglian poet and playwright, writes about his parents in his autobiography-Life and myself. Her first major collection of poems-“The Golden Threshold” 1905 was

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1. K.R.S. Iyengar- ‘Indian Writing In English’ (New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1984) P. 208
2. Ibid
published when she was twenty-six. She dedicated the book to "Edmund Goose who first showed me the way to the Golden Threshold". And Arthur Symons was responsible for the publication of this book. "The Bird of Time" (1912) was published with introduction of Edmund Goose. The Broken Wing (1917) her third publication, was included under The Sceptred Flute published by Dodd, Mead and Co., New York in 1937 and its Indian edition was issued by Kitabistan Allahabad in 1943. The Feather of Dawn, a book of the poems edited by her daughter Padmaja Naidu was published in 1961, twelve years after the poet's death. Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu are the fullest collection, published by G.A. Natesan. Madras in its third edition which came out in 1925. She was the first Indian woman to become the president of the Indian National Congress, the first woman governor of a state in independent India, the principal follower of Mahatma Gandhi and the best-known Indian woman of her time.

and an international figure of India’s cultural ambassador and spokesman of the freedom-movement. She was a figure of liberal woman of India who talked about women’s education and the unity of India in U.S.A. and England as “a cultural ambassador of east”.

She was truly “Bharat Kokila” or “the Nightingale of India” that Gandhiji used to address her and she breathed her last on 2\textsuperscript{nd} march 1949.

Sarojini Naidu’s feminine sensibility started since her childhood and Arthur Symons felt that “this child had already lived through all a woman’s life”.

The Vision of Love had blossomed into other visions like The Vision of Faith, The Vision of Mother, The Vision of Patriotism, The Vision of India and the mother and love filled the horizon of her consciousness.

She turned to reveal the heart of India and “stirred the soul of the East long before the West had begun to dream that it had a soul”.

5. Ibid
6. Ibid
She considered herself as a “wildfree thing of the air like birds with a song in her heart”.\textsuperscript{7} and as the governor of U.P., she expressed her feelings”, “Look I am like a bird and they are trying to put me in a cage”.\textsuperscript{8}

There is always a quest for freedom in her poetic feelings and she feels a sense of loss for swiftly fleeing away of childhood days with a flame of aspiration and finally--- “…The lyric child had grown into the lyric woman. All the instincts of her awakening womanhood for the intoxication of love and the joy of life were deeply interfused with the more urgent and intimate need of poet-soul for a perfect sympathy with its incommunicable vision, its subtle and inexpressible thought”.\textsuperscript{9}

She reflects her poetic sensibility while painting the ethos of woman as a bride, as a girl and as a queen of palace in Hyderabad. She is a singer of woman’s pains. Her different poems display the different moods

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{7} K.K. Mehrotra,”The Poetry of Sarojini Naidu”, Essays and Studies, Allahabad, second ed. 1970, P.1
\item \textsuperscript{8} Ibid, P.17
\item \textsuperscript{9} Iyengar, Op.cit., PP.210-211
\end{itemize}
and notes of her sensibility as a woman.

Her poetry may be classified thematically into three main groups: poems of personal experience, poems of Indian life and nature poems. Love is the major area with which the poet is concerned with a majority of the poems based on personal experience. “The Temple” (The Sceptred Flute, PP.211-231), in the form of the twenty-four lyric sequence, is the most comprehensive attempt to define the nature of love amidst its tensions. It outlines three stages of the poet’s spiritual journey on the way of love. The first section of eight lyrics communicates a sense of fulfilment of a long cherished dream of love which speaks the language of ecstatic passion. The second section analyses the painful experience of worldly pains. Words are laden with feelings of exploring honesty and directness,

Why did you turn your face away?

Was it for grief or fear

Your strength would fail or your pride grow weak

If you touched my hand: if you heard me speak,
After a life-long year?10

In the third section, the poet represents her belief in the power of love which approves its thematic as well as structural significance.

Love is the essential quality of feminine sensibility. Here lover is like a worshipper to God which reminds us of Bhakti cult of Hindu religion as expressed through the love of Mirabai to Lard Krishna. But the poetess has emphasized on the spirit of love, which is not Hindu, Christian but love is beyond the boundaries of religion, sect and caste. In her poem, the offering, she has tried to associate the image of God in Hindu temple with the Christian way of praying to God.

Were beauty mine, beloved, I would bring it
Like a rare blossom to Love's glowing shrine,
Were dear youth mine, beloved, I would fling it
Like a rich pearl into Love's lustrous wine.11

The second group of poems includes Sarojini Naidu's folk-songs about India's traditional professions

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10. The Sorrow of Love, P.218
11. The offering, P.227.
and festivals. The folk songs evoke a characteristically passionate response from the lyrical sensibility of the poet. We can witness the elaborate recurrent rhythmic patterns with repetitive images and musical sounds. The comparison between Sarojini Naidu’s “Palanquin Bearers” with Abindranath Tagore’s “Song of Palanquin” explains the quality of her sensuous imagination and metrical skill. Abindranath Tagore, for instance, describes the movement of the palanquin along uneven paths thus:

The Palanquin rocks
Staggering up an embarkment
The Palanquin swings like a nose ring
Climbing down a ditch.  

But Sarojini Naidu, on the other hand, exploits the imaginistic potentiality of the situation more meaningfully in:

She springs like a beam on the brow of the tide
She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride.
(Palanquin Bearers)

12. Abindranath Tagore, “Song of Palanquin” (Translated by Prithvindra Chakravarti And Ulibeir, Indian Literature, Sept.1971), P.43
In spite of their rhythmic charm, her folk-songs suffer a death of thematic content although some of the critics seem to be seriously involved with their thematic aspect. C.D. Narasimhaiah refers to the "symbolic presentation of life's journey from birth to death"\textsuperscript{13} in "Indian weavers". P.V. Rajyalakshmi has perceived "Yeast's gyre" in the Indian weaver's loom, which is but the "artifice of eternity".\textsuperscript{14} Sarojini Naidu's folk-songs represent "life's journey from birth to death". It is a poetic cry or genuine thematic exploration which enriches her poetry.

Sarojini Naidu was an active participant in the struggle for India's freedom and as one of the leaders of women's emancipation. She has depicted her feminine sensibility in her occasional pieces like "Suttee" (P.18) or "The Purdah Nashin" (P.53). She has attached the unjust social customs with romantic notes that idealize her real self as a woman. As a romantic lover of nature,

\textsuperscript{13} C.D. Narasimhaiah, "The Swan and The Eagle". (Shimla-Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1969), P.22
\textsuperscript{14} P.V. Rajyalakshmi, "The Lyric Spring", Abhinav Publications, 1977, P.142
her nature- poems reflect an aesthetic quest for passion for beauty. She loves spring as the basic faith in the joy of life. It is spring which "hastens the seeds of all beauty to birth", that blossoms in "the roots of delight in the heart of the earth" (The Joy of The Spring Time, P.89). Notably enough, spring is carrier of joy and loneliness, but realizes the sense of loss to a widow in "Vasant Panchami",

   Go, dragon-fly, fold up your purple wing,
   Why will you bring me the tidings of the spring? (P.90)
   Hide 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
   Crown me with the rose of Love.15

   In "Palanquin-Bearers", she has presented a fine fabric of feelings of woman into Palanquin-Bearers which reflects her sensibility and originality of genius.

   The poet has vividly described how the Palanquin-Bearers are carrying the palanquin from one place to

the other. The Palanquin has been drawn to sway like a flower, skim like a bird; float like a laugh and to look like a pearl on a string. She hangs like a star in the dew of the bearers’ song. It is a fine example of her feminine sensibility of a newly-married bride going to her romantic land lost in imagination of happy home.

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.

She is a master of romantic aspirations that we can find in sorrows of Savitri, Sita’s desire, Draupadi’s longings, Damayanti’s fears and Sakuntla’s magical tears.

Interwoven of fragrance and fire

Are Savitri’s sorrow and Sita’s desire
Draupadi’s longing, Damayanti’s fears
And sweetest Sakuntla’s magical tears

(P.95)
those of dream, song, silence and purity. But her passion for sensuous imagery explores experience of a variety of metrical patterns within the framework of traditional English stanza forms. The music of her alliterative verse often creates a lyrical pattern.

Her outstanding poems like the Palanquin Bearers, Corn Grinders, Village song, Song of Radha, the Milkmaid, Indian Weavers, Bangle-sellers, Suttee, Ecstasy, Vasant Panchami, A Persian Love Song, A Love Song from North, Wandering Beggars and others highlight her feminine sensibility with a touch of newness in form and content. We can trace her heart loving in "The Time of Roses", galvanized with poetic craziness of love-loyalty and that of spring festivity.

Softly, O softly, we bear her along,

She hangs like a star in the dew of our song

She springs like a beam on the brow of the tide

She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride.\textsuperscript{16}

Corn-Grinders gives another shade of her feminine heart. She has drawn a living picture of the

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. P.58
wretched Indian women who have to take up the rigorous work of corn-grinding old women in early morning hours, are at their grinding wheels, singing a pathetic song, which eternizes their life experience. The old women- the corn-grinders question and answer as a she-mouse, a she-deer and presents the pain and misery of a suffering woman.

O little bride, why dost thou weep
With all the happy world asleep.

And the bride replies-

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

We can trace the human feelings in the story of she-deer and she-mouse who have lost their partners like the Hindu widow. The story leads to path of pathos as her bridegroom is no more and now there is none to console her love-stricken soul. It happened to be in a

17. Sarojini Naidu- “Selected Poems” edited by R.L. Varshney, Published by Lakshmi Narain Agrawal, Hospital Road, Agra-3, 1997, P.227
rich farmer's granary where it was trapped and killed. It is a story of separation and loss of happiness. The question goes on to a she-deer the cause of its sorrow. It replies that its lord went to "drink beside the river head" where it was shot dead by a hunter and now she is helpless and lonely. Lastly, they ask a bride why she weeps "with all the happy world asleep". She responds that her husband is departed and now "who will stay these hungry tears". We can study the story of misery which runs from animal world to human world.

Thus the song devotes poet's unbounded poetic sensibility of feminine sensibility which encompasses her heart filled with the milk of human kindness.

Naidu establishes a bond of human love between the world of animals and birds and that of human world. Her feminine sensibility becomes the key-note of pathos that we can find in the last stanza of the poem which is to the climax of her heart-felt emotions of pathos and sympathy:

My soul burns with the quenchless fire
That lit my lover's funeral pyre
Alas! Alas! My lord is dead. 18

Now she switches over to human world where the Hindu widow is beautifully portrayed in “Suttee” who has lost her life-partner and left her in a gloomy world full of pains and misery. She is a living image of austerity and loneliness but none reads chapters of hungry heart of love for her husband. She is dead like a stone and is deprived of all pleasure and enjoyment. She is even helpless to reveal her feelings of love. Naidu has beautifully presented the Indian widows who are like a body without soul:

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\text{Life of my life, Death’s bitter sword}
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\[
\text{Hath severed us like a broken word}
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\[
\text{Rent us in twain who are but one…}
\]
\[
\text{Shall the flesh survive when the soul is gone?} 19
\]
\[
\text{Again the poetess delineates the image of suffering where widow is like a tree without blossoms:}
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\[
\text{Tree of my life}
\]
\[
\text{Death’s cruel foot}
\]

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Hath crushed thee down to thy hidden root
Nought shall restore thy glory fled,
Shall blossom live when the tree is dead. ²⁰

Metaphors are very beautifully laden with strong emotions where the dead husband stands for “Lamp of My Life” and “Tree of My Life”. In India, a widow without her husband is like a river without water and a flower without fragrance.

Hide me in a shrine of roses
Drown me in a wine of roses
Drawn from every fragrant grove!
Bind me on a pyre of roses
Burn me in a fire of roses
Crown me with the rose of Love! ²¹

We can see another face of feminine sensibility in “The time of Roses” which denotes heart as a festival of spring and loyalty of love. In brief, it highlights notes of romantic madness which is heart-touching and

²⁰. Sarojini Naidu- Selected Poems, by A.N. Gupta and Satish Gupta, Revised by S.N. Arora, Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly, P.188
²¹. Sarojini Naidu and Her Poetry, A. N. Dwivedi, Dept. of English, University of Allahabad, Allahabad, Kitab Mahal Agencies, P.100
appealing.

Her feminine heart has gripped our heart and we stand face to face in the visible form to her world of feminine sensibility with poetic allusions.

We can witness her feminine sensibility in her poem Village Song-I. Her love of nature and pastoral life gets significance in the poem. The mother, addressing her sweet daughter, asks her where she is going to. Would she throw away all her jewellery into the wind that is blowing, and would she leave her mother has fed her on “golden grain” i.e. brought her up with such affectionate care? Would she also break the heart of the lover who is coming on horse-back to marry her, and thus cause him intense grief? The intensity of heart-felt emotions from the poet’s feminine heart arises out in full swing when we go through the opening lines of the very poem-

Honey, child, honey child, whither are you going?
Would you cast your jewels all to the breezes blowing?
Would you leave the mother who on golden grain has fed you?
Would you grieve the lover who is riding forth to wed you. 22

The sweet daughter responding very well to her mother's questions tells that she would go away to the beautiful forests where the sweet-scented champa flowers are blossoming and shining in all their beauty, and the koels are singing. She is being called to the beautiful forest by the fairies and she must go. She listens to their call and she does invite her mother also to listen them as indicated below---

Mother mine, to the wild forest, I am going,

Where upon the Champa boughs, the champa buds are blowing?

To the koil-haunted river-isles where lotus lilies, glisten the voices of the fairy-folk are calling me,

O listen ! 23

The voice of her feminine heart is quite audible if we have sensitive ear to listen and feel it.

The Village-Song II also expresses a maiden's

23. Thirl
fear in a long and lonely way. She is fascinated by the song of the boatsman and caring not at all even for the long and lonely way she has to cover. Her pitchers are full and she has to take them far. The shadow of the Night has begun to fall and moving owls have also started to hoot. In such a desolate and dark atmosphere, the maiden trembles with fear and imagines that her death either by shake-bite or by the charm of some evil spirit would definitely occur. She happens to think of her brother fretting over her delay and her mother weeping and saying...

O! Safe the great gods bring her,

The Jamuna waters are deep. 24

In the meanwhile, she does observe dark clouds looming large in the sky and her fear on such an occasion knows no bounds. She prays to God ...

O! if the storm breaks, what

Safe from the lightning where shall I hide me?.

Unless thou succour my footsteps and guide me

Ram re Ram, I shall die. 25

‘Ram re Ram is’ is a typical exclamation used by Indian women folks in moments of excitement and fear. The reference of the song to the boatsman puts us in the mind of Krishna, the eternal flute-player and girl then would be Radha out to meet Krishna and delayed by him. The background to the exquisite lyric is provided by the Radha-Krishna myth which is known to all even the remotest villages. Jamuna forms the background of the story of Radha and Krishna and in the present song, it is to this river that the maiden goes to fill her pitchers. It is pertinent to quote P.V. Rajyalakshmi regarding her heart-touching presentation made by the feminine heart infused with the fine art of her poetic sensibility mentioned below...

“The shadows rise like black-birds in the sky. The serpent represents the phallic fears of an innocent maiden. Jamuna’s waters rush by, a storm and lightning produces a chiascuro effect. The dark river projects the mystic canvas on which Radha’s quest for recognition

25. Ibid
of the cosmic being is unfolded.” 26

The beautiful portrayal of the Indian women’s plight and their sufferings has been the main source of the poet’s feminine sensibility which strikes our heart and dominates our mind.

“Ecstasy” strikes another face of her feminine sensibility. Sarojini Naidu wrote three poems under the title “Ecstasy” one each in her three volumes of her poems...The Golden Threshold, The Bird of Time and The Broken Wing. Lost in the raptures of pleasure of a higher order she forgets the miseries and sufferings of the world around her. The echo of her feminine sensibility strikes our mind and heart when we look into the ideas of her poems:

Cover mine eyes, O my Love!

Mine eyes that are weary of bliss

As of light that is poignant and strong

O Silence my lips with a kiss

My lips that are weary of song!

Shelter my soul, O my Love!
My soul is bent low with the pain
And the burden of love like the grace
Of a flower that is smitten with rain!
O shelter my soul from thy face. ²⁷

The beloved’s kiss throws the maiden into ecstasy. Once having seen the beloved’s face, felt his touch, known his love, she does not care at all for Kamadev’s invasions. He might shoot a thousand arrows and usher in the most bewitching and exciting of spring, nothing would now tease or trouble her. She has had life’s deepest satisfaction. Spring may flaunt its flowers, but Radha (Radha... the symbolic name for all maidens, the manifestation of the beauty aspect of the Divine in the Universe) has her own miraculous flower—her beloved. Spring may madden bees with her perfumes, but Radha has a sweeter nectar to madden her—the nectar of her beloved’s breaths and Spring may thrill the world with its melodies, but Radha has a wilder music to thrill her—her beloved’s touch.

“Ecstasy” in The Bird of Time presents maiden’s heart in the state of rapture in the spring-time which she greets or welcomes with joy. It is at this time that the koel sings dulcet songs of love and the bright rivers flow with sweet murmurous sounds. Lovely peacocks dance in “rhythmic delight”. She asks men not to recall their grief at this time.

Their joy from the birds and the streams let us borrow

O heart! let us sing,

The years are before us for weeping and sorrow…

Tomorrow --- it is spring.²⁸

What a fine piece of her feminine sensibility has been shown by the poet! while referring all the maidens to Radha--- the symbol of love and beauty.

Her feminine sensibility responded very well to make a living picture of ‘Radha’ in the poem Song of Radha, The Milkmaidu. It is Radha, the eternal feminine crys for absorption of Love. It is “Prakriti”

aspiring to merge with the *Purusha-Kanhaiya, or Krishna or Govinda*.

Radha goes from the countryside to Mathura, the town, where Krishna lives, to sell curds, and instead of the cry---

"Who will buy these curds that are white as the clouds in the sky". 29 What comes out is *Govinda! Govinda!* and when at the banks of the Jamuna, her mates invite her to join their song, what she utters, again without her knowing is *Govinda! Govinda!* and again when she goes to the *Mathura Temple* and folds her hands to the "*Devta*", what she could utter was none other than the "*Mantra*", *Govinda! Govinda!*.

The absorption of the lover in the beloved, could go no further.

The river flows brightly and through Nature sings the echo 'Govinda! Govinda!'. She waits eternally, and He "comes, comes, ever comes, every moment and every age, every day and every night, he comes, comes,

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ever comes". 30 That is Love’s play.

The poet has done her best to arrange a fine meeting of Radha and Krishna to deliver the message of divinity. Mulkraj Anand rightly points out—

"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." 31

Dr. James H. Cousins rightly remarks...

"My first contact with Mrs. Sarojini Naidu’s poetry was through hearing the “Song of Radha, The Milkmaid”, recited by an Oxford man in India. I shall never forget the mantric effect of the devotee’s repetition of “Govinda, Govinda, Govinda”, as she carried her curds, her pots, and her gifts to the shrine of Mathura". 32

We can find that her feminine heart strikes very

30. Echo of A Tagore poem From ‘Gitanjali’.
31. Mulkraj Anand: The Golden Breadth (1933), P.102, Quoted here from Kotoky, P.51
32. James H. Cousins: The Renaissance in India (Madras, Ganesh & Co.1918) PP, 268-69
acutely to the Indian Philosophy, Culture, Civilization and Hindu religion. When we go through the poems of Sarojini Naidu, we can come across glimpses of Lord Krishna and Radha--- the meeting of soul with divinity. Meaning here by, when the soul is separated from God, the process of life begins and when the soul meets God, the process of life ends. This is divine order of Nature.

A Rajpute Love Song, a magnificent ballad, which evokes for us the Medieval Rajpute world of chivalry and romance. Through the eyes of her feminine sensibility, we may observe the beautiful portrayal of the Romantic love between Parvati, the Rajput princess and the lover- Amer Singh, a Rajput warrior and prince. They have passed the night together, but he must go to look to his duties as prince and warrior. Parvati stands at the latticed window of her bed-room to bid farewell, to her lover, while he is there below on his horse, ready to ride out, perhaps to the battlefield. It is a moment of parting and the songs both of Parvati and Amer Singh are expressive of their grief and their keen desire for
reunion at night. The heart-felt and heart-touching appeal from the side of the lover follows—

_Haste, O wild-deer hours, to the meadows of the sunset!_

_Fly, wild stallion day, to the postures of the west!_

_Com, O tranquil night, with your soft, consenting darkness,

And bear me to the fragrance of my Beloved's breast._

In brief, we can find the different shades of feminine sensibility in her poems. Woman, as a bride in Palanquin Bearers, Indian Weaver, as a romantic lover and beloved as Radha-Krishna, a typical love of Ecstasy and Rajput's lover who is going to battlefield, expresses different voices of feminine heart as presented by Sarojini Naidu in her poems. The journey of poetic heart of Naidu reveals, decidedly, her feminine sensibility.

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33. Sarojini Naidu- Select Poems, by Raghukul Tilak, Dept of English, Meerut College, published by Rama Brothers, Bank Street, Karol Bagh, New Delhi, ed. 1997, P.30