Chapter-III
The Golden Threshold
The Golden Threshold:

It is a collection of 40 short poems and borrows its title from the house which Sarojini had build for herself at Hyderabad after marriage and christened it "The Golden Threshold". It was published in England in 1905 by William Heinemann, London. In one of her letters to Arthur Symons, she wrote:

"I am not a poet really, I have the vision and the desire but not the voice. If I could write just one poem full of beauty and the spirit of greatness, I should be exultantly silent for ever, but I sing just as birds do, and my songs are as ephemeral." ¹

In the another letter, she revealed the source of inspiration of her poems:

"It is possible that I have written verses that are filled with beauty and it is possible that you really put them worthy of being given to the world ? You know how high my ideal of Art is, and to me my poor casual little poems seem to be less than beautiful --- I mean

than final enduring beauty that I desire” 2

It carried an introduction by Arthur Symons, and
was dedicated to Edmund Goose “who first showed me
the way to the Golden Threshold.” 3

After its publication, author’s fame suddenly shot
up that we can record on the basis of some of the
comments which appeared in the British Press:

“This title volume should silence for ever the
scoffer who declares that women cannot write poetry” 4
(Review of Reviews)

“Her poetry seems to sing itself as her swift
thoughts and strong emotions sprang into lyrics of
themselves.” 5 (The London Times)

Such remarks provide the more challenging task to
feminist critics than merely an identification of the
image of women in her poems. Her “construction of
femininity and masculinity is amazingly essentialist.” 6

2. Ibid, P.15
Review, Madras, March, 1949, P.208
5. A.N.Gupta, Op.cit; P.10
Women that Naidu portrays are often not conventional and subordinate but they appear to endorse the patriarchy themselves in words, images, and attitudes.

The Golden Threshold reflected:

“individual beauty of their own.” As England was still coloured with Victorian sentimentality, the volume was enthusiastically received.” 7

Besides, it stands on its own intrinsic values. One might as well ask whether Shelley or Keats or Tennyson would have been acclaimed vociferously today, but they are now comfortably established as the representative poets of their times. In a limited sense, Sarojini, too, made her mark in the literary world with her mellifluous lyrics, which are read today with a sense of pride and pleasure. In Sarojini’s poetry, one comes across “the wisdom of the ancient race”, too, and, according to her biographer, “her intensity of feeling and quicksilver attitude towards life mingled

7. A. N. Dwivedi, Op.cit ; P.64
harmoniously with the calm of her ancient tradition.” 8

The Golden Threshold turned a best-seller. She always gave attractive titles to her volumes of poetry. Her titles were usually colourful, picturesque and symbolic.

According to Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer, who had been in close contact with Sarojini since her schooldays in Madras, it is related to her happy domestic life. It also indicates her indebtedness to Sir Edmund Goose, who first showed her “the way to the Golden Threshold.” 9

While reviewing it The Manchester Guardian appreciated and remarked:

“It is a considerable delight to come across such genuine poetry as is contained in The Golden Threshold-by Sarojini Naidu. Its simplicity suggests Blake, it is always musical, its Eastern colour is fresh, and its firm touch is quick and delicate.” 10

Another Weekly pronounced:

“A book of verse undeniable beauty and

distinction. Her (Sarojini’s) work is remarkable opening a window through which the West may see the East if it will.” 11

It is also relevant to quote. The Morning Post also wrote:

“There are some small poems describing the daily life of the East which have an astonishing vividness. It is a rare art which gives the true effect of the poetry in what is, after all, only the accurate statement of what the eye has seen..... The book is not merely of accomplished but beautiful verse, it is the expression of a temperament.” 12

We can trace the similar appreciation in Saturday Review, Spectator, but it is remarkable to add The Indian Ladies Magazine’s remarks which follows:

“The voice of Toru Dutt is husband. Sarojini is charming us by her sweet lyrics” 13

It further adds,

“Sarojini has a great horror of false sentiment and

11. Ibid
12. Ibid
13. The Indian Ladies Magazine, Madras, Sept, 1905
cant, she tries to keep away from all tinsel and glitter. Real inspiration is in mud of her poetry, and there is scarcely one of her poems of which the technique and rhythm and rhyme is not perfect. The thoughts are beautiful, the language is charming.”  

It is also relevant to quote the statement of K.K.Sharma.

“The very title of the book suggests the presence of undistinguished emotion conveyed in colourful and gorgeous imagery.”  

The Golden Threshold is divided into three sections: (i) Folk-songs, (ii) Songs for Music and (iii) Poems. Folk-songs include Palanquin Bearers, Wandering Singers, Indian Weavers, Corn Grinders, Village Song, Indian Love Song, Suttee, Coromandel Fishers, The Snake Charmer etc. which are poetically powerful. Another section which highlights songs for music comprise his poems like Ode to H.H. The Nizam of Hyderabad, Indian Dancers, To The God of Pain,

Damayanti to Nala in the Hour of Exile, The Poet To Death, Nightfall In The City of Hyderabad. Street cries, To India, The Royal Tombs of Golconda, To A Buddha Seated On A Lotus, To Youth, To My Children etc.

Her Folk-Songs begins with ‘Wandering Singers’ which is next to Palanquin Bearers which has already been discussed in the second chapter. Her feminine sensibility strikes when she happens to portray a very fascinating picture of wandering singers who wander from village to village, entertaining people specially of Indian society with their sweet and melodious songs. They are men of fixed destination. They wander freely like the wind and hear the music of the wind which urges them to keep on wandering. A critic has beautifully compared it:

“We are reminded of the English poet John Masefield’s poem--- “Sea-Fever”, in which the poet hears the call of the sea, and is unable to resist it.” 16

Though the wandering singers are gay, but they

sing pensive song. They sing of uprooted cities, women, the kings and the battles of the old, and above all of “happy and simple and sorrowful things.” These are the timeless themes which maintain memories full of life. Man treasures in his heart the ‘scent of rich and passionate memories’ which carry out the ingredients of sorrow, life and love.

The poem breathes the leisurely life of past. It may have no place in a neo-modernistic poetry, but it will always rule in the heart of man.

Her feminine heart does respond well and highlights the painful portray in the following lines—

Our lays are of cities whose lusture is shed

The laughter and the beauty of women long dead

The sword of old battles, the crown of old king

A happy and simple and sorrowful things

Some critics compare this poem with Solitary Reaper of Wordsworth.

The Lines are highly suggestive which may stand in

17. Raghukul Tilak, Op.cit; P.83
the comparison of 'Solitary Reaper':

Will no one tell me what she sings?

Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow

Of old, unhappy and far-off things

And battles long ago,

Or is it some more humble lay

Familiar matter of today?

Some natural sorrow, loss or pain

That has been or may be again 18

There can be no comparison between both poems on the basis of sources of their inspiration and rhythms but they sing on the common theme of battles fought in the past. But they share the sorrows of the people which is simple but painful. But her feminine heart dominates the emotional scenario of people's feelings through the wandering singers.

Her feminine heart knits a fine picture of Indian weavers in "Indian Weavers", who are weaving on their handlooms in different colours and designs. A questioner approaches the weavers and puts questions

that they respond. It is in the question-answer pattern. They are knitting day and night, morning and evening, for ‘a new-born child’, and for ‘a bride’ and also ‘a shroud’ for dead people. The concept of time and people is beautifully displayed and adjusted in the poem: The poem opens with ---

Weavers, Weaving at break of day

Why do you weave a garment so gay?

Blue as the wings of a halcyon wild,

We weave the robes of a new-born child

Weavers weaving at the fall of the night

Why do you weave a garment so bright?

Like the plumes of a peacock, purple and green

We weave the marriage-veils of a queen. 19

We can trace her feminine sensibility in symbols and imagery of the poem. Fate is the great architect of human life which governs the universal belief of man in the super power of God. Fate governs the cycle of birth, life and death. Selection of colours in the poem is also

symbolic according to the Hindu mythology. *The Lord Brahma* is a designer of Fate according to Hindu mythology. 'The blue of halcyon wings' in the first stanza suggests about *Vishnu*—Her God of prosperity—marriage, wealth and splendour—who is sitting in the blue sea on a lotus. It corresponds to the peacock plumes in the second stanza, a symbol of prosperity and happiness. The white feather is symbolic of death which suggests the power of destruction in the hands of *Rudra*. The different robes for a child, a bride and a dead man suggest the tragedy and comedy of human life that poetess has brought to people for poetic realizations.

P. E. Dustoor has rightly pointed out---

"We are made to symbolize that the web of our life is of a mingled yarn ---grave and gay together."

The poem stands highly symbolic, as Prof. Narasimhaiah has rightly pointed out ---

"Here, in twelve lines, is an elliptical, allusive, and symbolic presentation of life’s journey from birth

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to death.... It is not merely a complete poem, but a very distinguished one, for the poet, here is in full possession of rare gifts—a profound awareness of her our tradition, admirable poise, economy and an ear and eye for striking rhythm, image and symbol, all used to fine advantage to make the poem most evocative.”

Padmini Sengupta concludes the poem with this remark:

The poem brings out “the whole comedy and tragedy of human life.”

Being fascinated by the beauty of Nature in the form of Coromandel Coast, the east coast of India from Copecamorin to Nellore, her feminine heart highlights and respects to following poem of this section—"Coromandel Fishers". The word "Coromandel" is a correction from Choramandela or the Realm of Chora, which is the Tamil word for the title of Chola dynasty.

Her feminine eyes dazzle at the dawn when “the wind lies asleep in the arms of the dawn like a child

that has cried all night", the fishermen gather their nets from the shore to collect the leaping riches brought by the tide. They have developed close affinity with nature that we can see in the songs of the sea:

The sea is our mother, the cloud is our brother
The waves are our comrades all.  

Dauntlessly they wrestle with the swelling waves. The kiss of the spray is sweet to them and the dance of the wild foam pleases their eyes. "They hold the storm by the hair and wrestle with the waves and tide. They row their boats almost to the blue of the horizon, where the low sky seeks to mate with the sun."  

Naidu, like Wordsworth, has reflected the everlasting relationship between Nature and Man with a special touch of her feminine sensibility.

She has beautifully delineated the calm, fragrant and natural surroundings where the fishermen live---

Sweet is the shade of the coconut glade, and the scent of the Mango grove
And sweet are the sands at the full of the moon with tho,

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, Brothers, row to the blue of the verge, where the low
Sky mates with sea. 25

According to a critic, the poem reminds us of John Masefield's "Sea-fever" particularly in the use of phrases like the "leaping wealth", "sea-gull's call", "the kiss of the spray", and "the wild foam's glee".

Her poetic sensibility emerges when she happens to come across a snake-charmer as presented in a beautiful atmosphere of the English-Knowing world, a common sight in India, in the poem "the Snake Charmer". In the poem, snake-charmer sings to charm the snake in the basket. The flowers are the special features with special fragrance like scented *Keora and Jasmine*, the bower where the snake hides and other bower to which the charmer would carry the snake ---

To a palace-bower where golden vested maidens

Thread with mellow laughter the petals of delights.\textsuperscript{26}

Responding quickly to the external manifestations of Indian society, her feminine sensibility represents on embodiment of sensuousness, the pictorial art of John Keats that we can find in the following---

Whither dost thou hide from the magic of my flute call?

In what moon-light tangled meshes of perfume
Where the clustering Keoras guard the squirrel's slumber
Where the deep woods glimmer with the Jasmine's bloom? \textsuperscript{27}

The power of music of snake-charmer also creates the power of magic upon the snake as well as upon the readers:

Come, thou subtle bride of my mellifluous wooing,

Come, thou silver-breathed moonbeam of desire. \textsuperscript{28}

Her feminine heart sings well like a singer in drawing such powerful images. She draws a vision of fairy world full of perfume, colour and romance. The images in "thread with mellow laughter the petals of delight, "golden vested maidens", subtle bride of my

\textsuperscript{26} A. N. Gupta, Op.cit.; P.170
\textsuperscript{27} Varshney, Op.cit.; P.223
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid
mellifluous wooing “and the silver-breasted moon-beam of desire” are romantic and picturesque. We are fascinated and deeply touched by the melody of the song.

The second section opens with “Song of a Dream”. Her feminine spirit captures the portrayal of beauty and love in her next poem Humayun to Zobeida, a rendering from the Urdu, highlights the intense love of *Humayun* to *Zobeida*. Her romantic spirit gets merged with her feminine heart when she succeeds to pulsate the poem with beauty and love. *Humayun* gets deeply fascinated by the beauty of *Zobeida*, while wandering in the garden blossomed with roses and well-equipped with other beautiful objects. She has been represented as glorious as the dawn, as white as the swan and having as sweet voice as the nightingale. Her feminine sensibility strikes here in the following lines when we are enchanted by the spell of her charming beauty:

You haunt my waking like a dream, my slumber like a moon
Pervade me like a musky scent, possess me like a tune.²⁹

He is dying to have a momentary glimpse of her beauty, but she happens to cry:

I sit behind the veil, I cannot show my face.³⁰

He asks her to give up the wanton strife because

What war is this of thee and me? Give over the wanton strife

You are the heart within my heart, the life within my life.³¹

Her feminine sensibility leads the poem to high sense of spontaneity and musicality.

To My Fairy Fancies stands next in this section. Her (poet's) feminine heart offers a farewell to a thought—worn singer. It is a light, little lyric, flitting like fairy's soft feet, with its alliterations like fairy fancies and "laughter lighted".

Her feminine sensibility puts her forward to give up her lighter more fanciful mood and to take up more, serious thoughts. She addressed her 'fairy fancies' to fly away 'to the whitle-cloud-wilderness' as she is not in position to hold her 'spirit's soft caresses' like 'lotus-

³⁰ Ibid, P.229
leaves’ that enfold one in ‘the tangles of her tresses’. It is a beautiful example of her feminine notes:

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
Fairy fancies, fly away
To the white cloud-wilderness
Fly away!³²

“Alabaster” depicts her another face of feminine sensibility. When her feminine heart appears like the alabaster-box in which rich and passionate memories are treasured:

Carven with delicate dreams and wrought
With many a subtle and exquisite thought ³³

The alabaster-box of heart is a rich reservoir of her passionate memories.

There I treasure the spice and scent
Of rich and passionate memories blent ³⁴

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³⁴. Ibid
The last section begins with "Ode to H.H. The Nizam of Hyderabad", a glowing tribute to the prince on the eve of the Ramzan. It is addressed to the late Nizam of Hyderabad who was both a renowned king and poet. Her feminine sensibility is reflected in paying homage to the king:

Deign, Prince, my tribute to receive
This lyric offering to your name,
Who round your jewelled sceptre bind
The lilies of a poet's fame

She portrays the living picture of the prince, the symbol of harmony and unity. She has admired his law-abiding subjects who belong to different races and creeds, but they are interlinked with a fine sense of fraternity. He is shown as an ardent supporter of secularism as under his stewardship different religions have blossomed. His court recalls the "sweet, sumptuous fables of Baghdad. His Ghazals represent the spirit of sufism. In his glorious kingdom, cities

turned prosperous and hills and ancient forests added to its glory and splendour. He loved to honour virtue and value. The glory of his kingdom would outshine the deeds. As a women poet, she responds to this glory with poetic touch and used many similies and metaphors in order to evoke her thought:

And Saki-singers down die streets
Pour for us in a steam divine
From goblets of your love-ghazals
The rapture of your Sufi wine.\(^{36}\)

Her feminine sensibility dreams of night in a personified form in the poem “Leili”. It is a Persian word and the first stanza presents the arrival of the night through concrete events and images, and the second on makes us feel her mighty presence. Her feminine heart is enlightened by beautifully personified night which is enshrined in the forest temple. The winds are envisioned and dancing in the forest temple. But the figure of the moon as a caste-mark (\textit{Kumkum} would have been better) on the forehead of heaven is a

\(^{36}\) Paranjape, Op.cit., P.63
unique feminine imagery of a woman poet in the English Literature.

James H. Cousins considers:

"The image of the moon as a caste-mark "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 remembrance to Earth that the Divine is imprinted on the open face of Nature." 37

The serpents are asleep among the poppies
The fireless light the soundless panther's way
To tangled paths where shy gazells are straying
And parrot-plumes outshine the dying day 38

Mr. Cousins observations about the 'dancing winds' mirror her unique sense of feminine sensibility and he further added:

"The symbolism in Mrs. Naidu's poem of the 'dancing winds' as the devotees in the temple of Nature must surely stand among the fine things of literature" 39

“In the Forest”, she also highlights another face of feminine sensibility. The first two stanza reveal the mood of dejection and weariness, while the last one points out a definite charge for the betterment of the speaker, who is now prepared to face desires “the war of the world and the strife of the throng” and to conquer “the sorrow of life with the sorrow of song”.

Her poetic spirit mirrors and represents the keynote of the *Gita*—“change is the law of the nature”, in the poem entitled “Past and Present”. The famous line of the poem---“The new hath come and now the old retires” reminds us of Tennyson’s lines---

The old order changeth yielding place to new

And God fulfils Himself in many ways,

Lest one good custom should corrupt the world ⁴⁰

(*Morte-D. Arthur*)

Her feminine sensibility scatters its fragrance while portraying the picture of *Damayanti’s* unbounded

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and passionate love for *Nala* in the famous poem, “Damayanti to Nala in the Hour of Exile”. Her heart responds positively while striking a strong note of optimism and triumph. *Nala* stands as the figure of perfect lover. The poem is enriched with poetic words and phrases and ends with---

O god-born lover, whom my love doth gird
And armour with impregnable delight
Of Hope’s triumphant keen flame-carven sword $^{41}$

“The Queen’s Rival” is a fine poem revealing Sarojini’s insights of feminine psychology. In tradition of Freud, she tells us that women are jealous of their daughters-in-law because they consider them as their potential rivals.

They remind them of their own faded beauty, their daughters are what they once were themselves. It is based on her personal experience of her own daughters and the poem in an outcome of her own psychological compulsions.

Her feminine sensibility responds beautifully to the romantic portrayal of the *Iranian king Feroj* and his queen *Gulnaar*, peerless in beauty, having all the comforts and all the beauty. She gazes in her mirror and sighs—

> O king, my heart is unsatisfied \(^{42}\)

The king is surprised and asking queen what else of more she could desire, when she had everything. She thus responds:

> Queen Gulnaar sighed like a murmuring rose,
> Give me a rival, O king Feroj \(^{43}\)

Messengers are sent and made to run all over the seas and round the earth. They return with seven beautiful damsels, who are all brought before her. None of them could become worthy of being the queen’s rival in beauty. But she has been blessed with a daughter in the spring. At the time when she happens to feel in need of a rival, she (daughter) has become two spring times old. She sets on her curls and looks into the mirror and

\(^{43}\) Ibid
kisses swiftly and gladly. On seeing her such actions, the queen bursts out with pleasure that she has got her rival.

Naidu has beautifully evoked "Jealousy spirit among women" which depicts her feminine sensibility.

Madam P.V. Rajyalakshmi has rightly pointed out its merits and demerits in the following lines:

"The folk-conclusion of the poem presents a typical resolution of adult conflict. It offers the play-instinct as a palliative to individual aggression and the consequent feeding of isolation and anxiety. The individual, who, by chance or choice loses his sense of connection with life, is restored to reality. The ballad-structure with the iterative situations, repeated words, images and symbols, the incremental refrains, the free flow of the verse and, above all, the unsophisticated narrative and the folk-flavour of the story-line, lends a natural grace to the lyric vision of adolescent experience and childhood innocence. The mother's agreeable shock of recognition of her own daughter's budding individuality has the quality of folk-drama,
usually associated with the puberty—rites observed in the Indian villages. These rites celebrate growth and change. Shock and crises are overcome by nurturing a sense of social connection and continuity in the emerging personality of the individual. Along with her daughter her mother too grows up, stepping gracefully out of the cocoon of her our self-centred world into the flux and process of life”.

*The Purdah Nashin* unveils another face of her feminine sensibility when she highlights the prevailing customs of the Muslim culture. ‘Purdah’ covers the sorrowful face of a woman and nobody knows the mystery of her fears for suitable years behind such covering. There is a mask behind her such crying and weeping face of a woman that Naidu has presented in an exquisite piece of her fanciful poem:

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

"The first two stanzas of the poem show the poet's fascination for the life of "harem" which she had observed in the palaces and mansions of Hyderabad. Secure in all their luxury, surrounded by beautiful and precious things, dressed in colourful, raiment, soft like the morning mist, the lovely ladies are immersed in perpetual relaxation. They are sheltered from all obtrusive and unwanted attentions. Sarojini saw in their life the poetry of perfect repose"

The last poem of this section comprises "To A Buddha Seated On A Lotus". She focuses on the divine vision of Lord Buddha, lost in meditation and sitting on the lotus throne, in Padmasan—a specific, cross-legged, lotus-like sitting posture, recommended for Yogis, with praying (help-open) eyes, elated hands. His face wears mystic rapture and peace, which is a kind of supreme, changeless and eternal happiness.

The Buddha's face with mystic rapture and peace

could be compared with lines of the "Rose of God" by the poet-seer, Sri Aurobindo:

"Rose of God like a blush of rapture on Eternity’s face." She has drawn a contrasting viewpoints about the peace and serenity of Buddha. She highlights the picture of the world where there is hustle and bustle all around, where there is no fulfilment. Sorrow pursues sorrow and dreams remain unrealized: a life which is constantly checked by Death.

As a woman poet she has mirrored man’s fate sorrowfully in the third stanza, where Lord Buddha is shown to enjoy peace but man is a victim of suffering and faces pains of struggle and toil, insults and defeats and where hopes remain unrealized, wishes unfulfilled and objects unachieved.

As a mother, her feminine sensibility feels the transmigration of the divine soul in the concluding stanza. The divine seat of Moksha is an unattainable dream for a man. Although people aspire too much, yet they lack a strong faith in life and therefore meet the results of failure. Indeed human life on this earth is
nothing but a short period of separation from infinite.

We are reminded of Shelley’s lines:

The one remains, many change and pass

*Heaven’s* light forever shines, *Earth’s* shadows fly.\(^47\)

The remarks of P.E. Dustoor is also significant and quotable regarding the spiritualistic and metaphysical journey of the poem:

“...A realization of the helplessness of herself and her kind before the wind of change, which blows across the ways of men and blows away one sorrow only to bring another, enters also into the profundity...What mystic rapture, what peace, unknown to the world of men, she asks the secret of *Lord Buddha*, seated on his lotus-throne? She recalls by way of contrast the sufferings and strife, the strenuous lessons of defeat, the hope deferred, the futile strivings of the spirit, the unsatisfied hunger of the soul, which are our common human destiny.”\(^48\)

Life is a game of life and death and as a woman


poet she feels the pangs of death and suffering. Between dreams of light and darkness, she has achieved the message of Lord Buddha to the humanity on the earth:

*Life is a prism of my light*

*Death is the shadow of my face*

To sum up, we draw that the poet’s feminine sensibility glitters brightly as a curious investigator who portrays wandering singers singing hither and thither fascinating the villagers by their melodious songs, as a keen observer of unique mysticism lying in the highly symbolic form of trinity—*Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh* who happen to weave the men’s destiny through birth, marriage and death as suggested by Indian weavers, as a great lover of Nature like Wordsworth and as a sensuous poet like Keats responding beautifully to a fairy world *coromandel* enriched with colour and romance, as a nightingale to India and as a passionate singer of love and youth striking the intense and unbounded love of *Humayum* to *Zobeida*, standing peerless in beauty and the love-affair of *Nala* and
Damayanti, as a peerless queen Gulnaar as stung by her jealousy spirit with her daughter considering her as a potential rival, as a social reformer pointing out the ineffectiveness of Purdah-System prevailing in Muslim society, as a prophet of peace and as a divine messenger of Lord Buddha seated on a lotus-throne.

In brief, she is a potential architect of human emotions as a woman poet. Her feminine sensibility is a rich treasure-house of her feelings with several colours and designs that she has artistically depicted in her poems.