Chapter-IV
The Bird Of Time
Apart from being a poet, she was an enchanting orator. Before the publication of her second book, she was in great demand as an orator on the public platform. Her poetic springs were essentially fresh and vivacious which got expression in a book of her poems titled The Bird of Time: Song of Life, Death and the Spring. It was dedicated to her loving father, Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya and her affectionate mother Varda Sundari Devi. Sir Edmund Gosse, in his Introduction, called the poet as “a dear and valued friend”.¹ and felt that Sarojini was “in all things and to the fullest extent autochthonous. She springs from the very soil of India, her spirit, although it employs the English language as its vehicle, has no other tie with the West”.²

In one of her letters, Sarojini wrote to Sir Edmund Gosse: “While I live, it will always be the supreme desire of my soul to write poetry-one poem, one line of enduring verse even. Perhaps I shall die

². Ibid, P.6
without realizing that longing which is at once an exquisite joy and an unspeakable anguish to me.\textsuperscript{3}

\textbf{The Bird of Time} is quite interesting and meaningful. Sir C.P. Ramaswami Iyer thinks that it is associated with Sarojini's developing phase when the great noble ideals of humanity began to move her directly and she started her work for the emancipation of womankind. The title is derived from Omar Khayyam's immortal lines:

\begin{quote}
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly---and Lo! The Bird is on the Wing.\textsuperscript{4}
\end{quote}

These lines are full of suggestive overtones for the sensible readers.\textit{The London Times} observed it, "Fine expression of a nature rich in emotions. To find an Indian atmosphere making fragrant English poems is a rare pleasure.\textsuperscript{5}

Mr. Edward Thomas reviewed it in the \textit{Daily Chronicle}, and said---"She has more than a profusion of

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beautiful things...her poems achieve an uncommon outward gorgeousness and inward glory".6 The Pall-Mall Gazette wrote: “She has at her command a wealth of delicate imagery entirely and truly Indian...its merit is incontestable and its charm all its own”.7

The Bookman came out with this remark:-

“She possesses her qualities in heaped measure. Her boldness of feelings, imagery and expression is exuberant, superb and abounding in spacious gestures. Mrs. Naidu enriches contemporary verse by her mastery and her brilliant temperament”.8

The Yorkshire Post expressed that the poetess had not only “enriched our language but has enabled us to grow into intimate relation with the spirit, the emotions, the mysticism and the glamour of the East”.9

The first section begins with the title poem “The Bird of Time”. It is based on a dialogue form between the poetess and the bird and the poetess is curious to

8. Ibid, P.81
know about the source of inspiration of bird’s songs and reply comes forth:

Songs of 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.¹⁰

In the second stanza, she has been asked to disclose the location where she learned the “changing measures of her song”

In blowing forests and breaking tides

In the happy laughter of new-made brides,

And the nests of the new-born spring.¹¹

Thus we are struck by her feminine sensibility as she has portrayed a very fine presentation of herself in the form of “The Bird of Time”.

We can find the music of melody throughout the

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¹¹. Ibid
poem and the bird of time sings the songs of sorrows and joys of men and women on the earth. The theme is universal as sorrows and joys, pleasures and pains are earth bound and none is exception to these feelings.

"Dirge", the next poem is based on the sorrow of a woman's bereavement and its tone suggests great loss of her miseries of widowhood. The widow has to suffer the "yearning pain of unfulfilled delight", the moonless vigils of her lonely night", "the abysmal anguish of her tears", and "flowering springs that mock her empty years". The poem evokes the pains of the widow as her beauty is also her sorrow and the poetess calls her "living beauty in a living shroud".

Her feminine sensibility strikes a heart-touching portrayal of widowhood and her miseries reveal loss of her lord.

"An Indian Love Song" is a unique and comic dialogue between "He" and "She" which reflects the feminine sensibility. It is purely a love poem where the

13. Ibid
lover urges the woman to lift up the veil covering her gracious face, but she denies on the basis of the old feud existing between his people and hers. The lover, however, suggests to cancel "the ancient wrong" and "the ancient rage". This song incorporates purely an Indian tune and temper where the poetess highlights the true love above all family feuds and social customs. Apart from it, the lover is highly charmed by beloved’s beauty and he requests her to remove the veil which has concealed her beautiful face. He craves to feel the smell of the "Keora" scent in her pinioned curls and loves to drink and enjoy the magical nectar that "dwell in the flower of thy kiss".14

The beloved admires her lover’s sincerity and earnestness which is questionable as an enemy of her father. But the lover insists on the nature of true love. This one stands similar to the Shakespearean sonnet which defines true love as an ever-fixed mark that looks an tempests and is never-shaken. Her feminine sensibility strikes here the sensuous appeal and we can

trace the senses of smell, touch, sight and taste which respond well in context of true love.

The poem, “In Remembrance”, immortalizes the memory of Violet Clarke who died on March 21, 1909. Clarke had “the bright gifts of genius, youth and subtle grace”, and wrote “Leaves”, which was posthumously published. Her feminine sensibility is instrumental to pay a glowing tribute to Clarke. Love and Death is a love sonnet, which ends in death. The burden of human miseries and pains about all-consuming death concludes the notes of love which strikes in her feminine heart well. It also speaks of ecstasy and pain in the hearts of lovers and adopts a simple diction to convey the feelings of love.

In “A Love Song from the North”, the lover is forsaken and dejected. He cannot bear the Papeeha’s calls of love or similar joyous sounds, for they raise the dreams of delight that are gone. The editorial footnote suggests such: the Papeeha is a bird that comes in Northern India when the mangoes are ripe and calls ‘Pi-Kahan, Pi-Kahan’? Where is my love?¹⁵
Her feminine sensibility points out the beauty and charm portraying the living picture of 'Papeeha', that remains thirsty round the year in absence of 'Swati Nakshatra'. It is a sign of bond of love and determination and suggests and approves the dedicated love for living human-beings on the earth.

The poem, titled At Twilight, composed on the way to Golconda, describes the sad mood of the poetess, who has now no high dreams and hope and love “to cherish, and whose spirit is now besieged by poignant ills, clamorous hate, and reverberant strife”. This poem reflects the poetess’s disappointed and dejected feminine heart.

Alone highlights Sarojini’s loneliness in search of Love. When bruised by the pangs of Love, she found no solace in the wind and no comfort in the star but only the sequestered bower or glade relieved the burden of her heart. The tunes of her poetic sensibility echo in our

minds when we stand in the shelter of Nature as it provides the soothing effect to our painful hearts.

The longing of lovers has got expression with true oriental splendour in "A Rajput Love Song". Parvati, the beloved, and Amar Singh, the lover, have shared togetherness during the night, but with the sun-light, they have to depart till night falls. Between day and night, they are separated which even becomes unbearable to lovers. The refrain of Parvati's song denotes the pangs of separation in love:

_Haste, O wild-bee hours, to the gardens of the sunset!_

_Fly, wild-parrot day, to the orchards of the West!_

_Come, O tender night, with your sweet, consoling darkness,_

_And bring me my Beloved to the shelter of my breast!_16

Similar in tone and style, the refrain of Amar Singh’s song, has successfully captured the spirit and atmosphere of the Indian Medieval love song. It projects us in a world of chivalry and romance. There are jades and golden bracelets, scents, sandal lutes and silver lamps, and the gleaming tinkling bells. The

poetess has beautifully built her world of romance full with feminine aspirations.

A Persian Love Song exhibits another feature of the serener mood of lovers, who are aware of their togetherness or oneness through love. The lover does not know the reasons of gladness, sadness, restlessness, pains and joys of his beloved and searches the possible explanations as suggested---

Hourly this subtle mystery flowers anew

O Love, I know not why...

Unless it be, perchance, that I am you

Dear love, that you are I!\(^{17}\)

The last poem of this section is To Love, where we can witness the complete dedication of the lover to the beloved.

O Love! of all the riches that are mine,

What gift have I withheld before thy shrine?

What tender ecstasy of prayer and praise

Or lyric flower of my impassioned days?\(^{18}\)

\(^{17}\) A. N. Dwivedi, Op. cit., P. 83

\(^{18}\) Ibid
The above-quoted lines reveal her fine poetic feminine sensibility and versatility which appeal to the hearts of the readers. The second section reveals poet’s love of nature especially during spring season. Spring is a symbol of youth and beauty. Her poems are sensuous and they express her genuine reactions and responses of sights, sounds and smells of flowers and trees on the earth during the ‘Spring Season’, the youth season of Nature. Spring, the first poem, begins with glory of Nature and beauty of season that we can see on the fresh and young leaves of banyan twigs, red ones on Peepal tree, honey birds humming on the budding figs, the musical sounds of bee on the blooming flowers, and that poppies, lilies and kingfishers. These are charming sights and sounds of nature which got expression into poem with feminine insights.

Spring is a revival of new life and freshness in nature. Green leaves grow on the banyan twigs and red on the Peepal tree. Poppies shine with delicate golden colour. Multi-coloured lilies bloom. Spring brings joy and novelty. Butterflies move here and there fluttering
their wings in the wild rose hedge. Kamala slowly lingers in the grove where temple-bells ring and *Krishna* plays on his bamboo flute the notes of love and spring. Spring is also the symbol of hope and love in life. Unlike Shelley and Keats, Naidu has depicted in her poems the magnificent aspects of Nature's beauty. Her descriptions are marked by romantic charm and grace. Her poem contains sensuous and rich effects of colours and sounds which add to the beauty and grace to her poetic sensibility.

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Poppies squander their fragile gold

In the silvery aloe brake

Coral and ivory lilies unfold

Their delicate lives on the lake.19

The next poem, “A Song in Spring”, mirrors her another face of poetic sensibility with a melancholy note where she turns from the wild-bees, birds and glimmering fireflies of Spring to the dreams of “a heart-grown old”.

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? 20

The Joy of The Spring Time describes the "essence" of the happiest mood during the Spring-time. Spring brings happiness to everyone living on the earth when the bulbul sings melodiously, the rose spreads fragrance and scatters its beauty, dew-drops shine luminously on the blades of the grass and the petals of flowers and the Zephyr (West wind) glides producing musical sounds. All these are the expressions of joy during spring time. The poetess finds it difficult to comprehend the mysterious secret of the magical mirth of spring that fills the morning with wonderous beauty in all objects and enables all seeds to grow beautifully. The poetess seeks the sensuous beauty during the spring which is remarkable feature of her poetic as well as feminine sensibility.—

Spring time, O Spring Time, what is your essence,

The lilt of a bulbul, the laugh of a rose,

The hope of a bride or the dream of a maiden

Watching the petals of gladness unclose?

_Vasant Panchami_ is one of the popular Hindu festivals which bring the auspicious occasion to everyone in India and the Hindu girls and women with gifts of lighted lamps and new-grown corn offerings worship goddess Spring and set them ceremoniously afloat on the surface of the waters. But the Hindu widows are deprived of such ceremonies. It touches the heart of the poetess and _Lilavati_ is the representative of such widows who lament on the occasion of the Feast of Spring. The poetess expresses her feelings laced with feminine obsessions:

O joyous girls who rise at break of morn

With sandal-soil your threshold to adorn,
Ye brides who streamward bear on jewelled feet,
Your gifts of silver lamps and new-blown wheat,
I pray you dim your voices when you sing
Your radiant salutations to the Spring.\(^{22}\)

A mild note of melancholy well-equipped with her poetic feelings is expressed in *In A Time of Flowers* but it is soon dispelled by the scent and song and tremendous mirth that Spring brings in its wake. It has been characterized to be “one of her best Spring Poems”.\(^{23}\)

His bunch of four poems titled “In Praise of Gulmohur Blossoms”, “Nasturtiumus”, “Golden Cassia”, and “Champak Blossoms” are dedicated to manifestations of Nature’s beauty with its striking images. The following lines of “Champak Blossom” are notable that echo her feminine sensibility with marvellous Cadence---

*Only to girdle a girl’s dark tresses*

*Your fragrant hearts are uncurled*

\(^{22}\) Paranjape, Op.cit., P.80  
\(^{23}\) Dustoor, Op.cit., P.28
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 24

If *Gulmohur* is a flower of lovely colour, *Champak* is certainly of great perfume. Naidu has delineated the wonderful combination of colour and perfume in the poem.

"Ecstasy", the last poem of this section which expresses great joy at the arrival of Spring. If "Ecstasy" in The Golden Threshold is a pure love which sends the maiden athrill, it is pure and spring which inspires love. In this charming lyric, the maiden's heart is swelled in the state of rapture during the spring time which she enjoys with joy. On this occasion the *Koel* sings the dulcet of love and the bright rivers ripple with the sweat murmurous sounds. Lovely peacocks dance in "rhythmic delight". She appeals men not to forget their grief in order to welcome the

moments of joy.

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.

Today...it is spring.

The above analysis brings the treasures of Sarojini’s love of nature with different shades where there is a romantic land of meadow and grove, mellifluous Koels, paeans of love, bright rivers, melodious birds and peacocks with sumptuous rhythmic delights. We can easily trace tenets of Keats’s sensuousness, Shelley’s airiness, Rossetti’s colours, and Swinburne’s sounds in such poems.

Tagore, the great mystic Indian poet, was also in Naidu’s mind when she wrote in her ‘Cycle of Spring’. The poems already discussed in the chapter denote the feminine insights of poetess when she played on strings of love-lorn beloved when the occasion of happiness knocked at the door of young widow. She is also a poet of romantic melancholy like Keats and Shelley.

The first and second sections have twelve and ten poems respectively, the third section has only eight poems. It begins with *Village Song* which is sung by a maiden, whose house is in a village, probably in *Uttar Pradesh*, at a distance from the river *Yamuna*. In the evening, she goes to the river with her pitchers in order to fetch water which is certainly a common countryside scene. After filling up her pitchers, she is in hurry to go home before nightfall, but she is detained by the boatsman’s song.

It is a beautiful scene drawn by the poetess as the village-maiden is innocent, fearful and natural in her appeal. The lover is waiting for her, *Yamuna* is quick and overflowing, night is approaching quickly, the moon is not up in the sky and she fears the snake-bite in darkness. The stormy night full of lightning may strike her. On the other hand, her mother and brother are waiting for her. The song is quite heart-touching and full of Indian ethos. Professor Rameshwar Gupta considers it as a valuable contribution to
English poetry and opines, "Nothing like this had ever been heard in the English language before. Here is India's contribution to English poetry"26

The poetess has captured lovely sight of contemporary Indian society. Commenting on this lyric, P.V. Rajyalakshmi has marvellously remarked—"The shadows rise like black birds in the sky. The serpent represents the phallic fears of an innocent maiden. Jamuna's waters rush by, as storm and lightning produce a chiaroscuro effect. The dark river projects the mystic canvas on which Radha's quest for the recognition of cosmic being is unfolded. The poem is so elemental in its power of evocation that its visual impression recalls the medieval paintings of the Kangra school on Raga-Malhar. These depict Radha, in the role of Abhisarika, tremulously awaiting Krishna against a stormy background".27

Slumber Song for Sunalini is a lull written in a Bengali metre. It is remarkable for its alliterative

rhythm and powerful imagery.

Where the golden, glowing
Champak-buds are blowing,
By the swiftly-blowing streams,
Now, when day is dying,
There are fairies flying
Scattering a cloud of dreams.\textsuperscript{28}

Her poetry produces here a magical charm of words with rhythmical effect. "Song of My City" is divided into two parts: In a Latticed Balcony, and In the Bazaars of Hyderabad. The first part expresses Sarojini's deep love of Hyderabad that she paints as a latticed balcony, while the second one shows the face of its crowded markets. The lines quoted from the first part: In A Latticed Balcony' mirror strong sense of her feminine sensibility.

How shall I garland thy tresses?
With pearls from the jessamine close.
How shall I perfume thy fingers?

\textsuperscript{28} A. N. Dwivedi, Op. cit., P. 86
With the soul of the *Keora* and rose

In the second part—"In the Bazaars of Hyderabad"—she reflects the beautiful vision of her feminine sensibility through the living portrayal of the *Hyderabadies* as lines----

What do you sell, O ye merchants?

Richly your waters are displayed.

Turbans of crimson and silver,

Tunics of purple brocade,

Mirrors with panels of amber,

Daggers with handles of jade

The general view is presented in the question and answer form which reflects the spirit of multi-coloured shades of *Hyderabad*. While portraying the well-reflected and well-mirrored shades of men and women as the typical *Hyderabadies*, her feminine vision is well-maintained. The importance of bangles in Bangle-Sellers denotes the different stages of a woman's life, which typifies the Indian scenario. We can see the

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30. Ibid, P.85
captivating picture of "Bangle-Sellers, who go on wandering from one place to the other, from one home to the other in order to sell bangles to the Indian women.

Indian bangle-sellers sing this beautiful song while selling their multi-coloured bangles to the temple fair :-

Who will buy these delicate, bright
Rainbow flinted circles of light
Lustrous tokens of radiant lives,
For happy daughters and happy wives.  

The Festival of Serpents is based on the serpent-worship of common folk of India where people offer milk and maize, wild figs and golden honey and pray to the serpent-God to protect them from miseries. They have been variously described in the poem:

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

Her power of poetic sensibility is expressed in full swing in order to highlight the picture of serpent-worship prevailing in the Indian society.

The next poem in this section is “Song of Radha, the Milkmaid”. It has already been discussed in the second chapter of this book. Radha is a mythical character and she is a typical figure of love and fascination to Indian psyche.

Spring Song comprises characters like Padmini, Mayura and Saraswati chant their songs and create a rhythmical effect. The Festivals of Spring, Snakes and Light, the Vasant Panchami, Nagpanchami, and Diwali highlight the Indian ethos with feminine touch.

“Hymn to Indra”, Lord of Rain “which reflects the Indian society where men and women pray to God for sufficient rainfall. Rain is a symbol of creativity, happiness and prosperity on the earth. Indra, therefore, is “Omnipotent Giver”, who is portrayed as ‘Lord Indra-a divine-being’.

The last section of the book begins with ‘Death and Life’ that presents a philosophical vision of poetess
where she discusses about life and death. Death is a harbinger of pains and suffering but her strong will-power to live provides us an optimistic insight of life which reminds us of Browning's optimism in Indian English poetry. The poem is written in a conversational style with a patriotic tone.

'The Hussain Saagar' is her tribute to lake situated in the heart of city that she calls with excitement 'O living image of my soul'.

Her graphic word-pictures of lake create the charming effect upon readers. The Faery Isle of Janjira is dedicated to Her Highness Nazli Raffia, Begum of Janjira, and she craves to live in the blissful island forever:

Fair would I dwell in your faery kingdom,

O faery queen of flowering clime,

Where life glides by to a delicate measure

With the glamour and grace of a far-off time

'The Soul's Prayer' is remarkable for its depth and

34. Ibid
sincerity of feeling. One may mark the clear *Shelleyan* tone in the concluding lines of the poem---

I bending from my sevenfold height

Will teach thee of My quickening grace,

*Life is a prism of my light,*

*And Death the shadow of My face*  

We can trace the shade of spiritualism enriched with her deep insight of philosophical freedom and sadness.

‘*Transience*’ highlights the transitoriness of sorrow and lamentation, and is full of hope for the dawn of new dreams, new joys and new faces. The reference to “lotus blossom” and “Ashoka Leaf” in the midst of sorrow and tears indicates the poetess’s attitude that man can derive solace and satisfaction from Nature even in adverse circumstances. Her feminine way of toning up sacrifice and suffering gets deeply expressed in the poem.

‘The Old Woman’ depicts an image of misery,

poverty, and hunger of an old woman, a Muslim medicant, who is the living figure of patience and courage, even after that she has none to support her in her weary old days. Her picture essentially expresses the feminine sensibility of the poetess.

‘In the Night’ represents the cry of mother for hungry little ones who is unfortunate, yet she craves for better tomorrow. Her poetic feelings mirror here the heart-touching effects.

“At Dawn” and “An Anthem of Love”---are expressive of the poetess’s the patriotic tones which begin from the care of feminine sensibility.

In “Solitude”, the poetess wants to retire from the hustle and bustle of human life and go to the glens or glades for the peace of her heart and mind. The poem vividly reminds us of Yeats’s “The Lake Isle of Innisfree, which reflects the same temper.

“A Challenge to Fate, is heroic in spirit, and tells us of the indomitable hearty appeal of the poetess, who has a strong feeling against the cruel Fate, though she is hard-pressed by sorrow and helplessness:
Tho’ you deny the hope of all my being,
Betray my love, my sweetest dream destroy
Yet will I slake my individual sorrow
At the deep source of universal joy…
O Fate, in vain, you hanker to control
My frail, serene, indomitable soul 36

‘The Call To Evening Prayer’ is a poem of universal appeal of love and understanding where followers of all the great religions of the world---Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Hinduism are summoned to pray to God for welcome of humans. Sarojini was secular and liberal in religious matters and promoted the principle of world-brotherhood-----“All the world is but a family”. She presents as a mother of all humanity who love is the ruler of world.

The Bird of Time ends with “Guerdon”, a well-known poem, which is characterized by “directness and economy of words”. 37 In this simple but effective piece, Sarojini craves for the various ways and ends of

37. H. C. Dalway Turnbull, Sarojini Naidu: Selected Poems (Bombay, 1930) P.216
"guerdon", (reward) She prays to God to grant her the raptures of Love, Truth and Song. It completes her the poetic appeal for the welfare of humanity:

    To field and forest
    The gifts of the spring,
    To hawk and to heron
    The Pride of their wing,
    Her grace to the Panther
    Her tints to the dove ... 
    For me, O my Master
    The rapture of Love! 38

In brief, The Bird of Time comprises the several moods, insights and shades of her feminine sensibility which is essentially poetic and artistic in appeal and which distinguishes her from other poets of Indian English poetry.