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**NATIVE THEMES IN POETRY OF SAROJINI NAIDU**

**KEY WORDS:** Flora and fauna, temperament, imagery, Id-uz-Zoha

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**ABSTRACT**

Sarojini Naidu is a poetess of Indian thought and culture. She makes lyrics on Indian flora and fauna, customs and traditions, festivals, men and women. She writes children poems, nature poems and poems on love and death. "Bazaars of Hyderabad" describes a typical Indian markets during British Rule witnessing both sorrows and joys of life. Arthur Symons described her that she has a rare temperament of women of the east. She describes folk culture of the Coromandel Coast of India in lyrical form rich with vivid imagery in Coromandel Fishers. **Her The Prayer of Islam** portrays Id-uz-Zoha in which she describes the Islamic mode of worship and 99 beautiful Arabic names of Allah or God.

**Introduction of the Poetess:**

Sarojini Naidu is known a distinguished poet, renowned freedom fighter, the great orators and the gem of the 20th century India. At an early age, she wrote a "thirteen-hundred-lines" long poem **The Lady of the Lake**. She has great intellectual power with charm, sweetness with courageous energy, a wide culture with originality, and earnestness with humour. Her works are to be noted as " **The Golden Threshold**, published in the United Kingdom, 1912: **The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death & the Spring**, published in London, 1917: **The Broken Wing: Songs of Love, Death and the Spring**, including **The Gift of India**, first read in public in 1915), 1916: Muhammad Jinnah: An Ambassador of Unity, 1943: **The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India**, Allahabad: Kitabistan, posthumously published, 1961: **The Feather of the Dawn**, posthumously published, edited by her daughter, Padmaja Naidu, 1971: **The Indian Weaver**. The poems of her are to be included as " **Damayante to Nala in the Hour of Exile, Ecstasy, Indian Dancers, The Indian Gypsy, Indian Love-Song, Indian Weavers, In Salutation to the Eternal Peace, In the Forest, Ramamuratham, Nightfall in the City of Hyderabad, Palanquin Bearers, The PardahNashin, Past and Future, The Queen's Rival, The Royal Tombs of Golconda, The Snake-Charmer, Song of a Dream, Song of Radha, the milkmaid, The Soul's Prayer, Sutte, To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus, To the God of Pain, Wandering Singers, Street Cries, Alabaster, Autumn Song, Bangle Sellers, The Coromandal Fishers, To youth, By the ruler**"

**Her Uniqueness;**

Sarojini Naidu is a poet of Indian thought and culture, and her poems describe Indian flora and fauna, Indian customs and traditions, festivals, men and women, places legends of kings and queens etc. Her works were so beautiful that many of them were transformed into songs She was a sensitive poet and wrote poetry based on the beauty of simple joys and sorrows of life. Her poetry included children's poems, nature poems, poems on love and death etc. In the Bazaars of Hyderabad is a vibrant, colorful poem describing the bazaars of Hyderabad. This poem was written during the British Rule when Indians were asked to boycott foreign products and buy goods from traditional Indian bazaars. Folk theme is one of the dominant themes in Sarojini Naidu's poetry. **In the Bazaars of Hyderabad** deals with one such theme, the loveliness and vibrancy of a traditional Indian bazaar in the city of Hyderabad. The poet has vividly described the bazaar with vendors selling different kinds of wares. Sarojini Naidu visits the stalls given by merchants, maidens, peddlers, goldsmiths, fruit sellers, musicians and flower girls. She questions them what they are selling and who in turn politely answer. Through the poem, we see the bazaars witness both sorrows and joys of life. They witness happy moments such as wedding when the bazaar is crowded with people buying garlands, jewelry etc and also during the festive occasions like Holi, Diwali, Eid etc.

The bazaars also witness occasions of sadness like death when kings and soldiers die and the flower girls are seen weaving wreaths and sheets of white flowers to be used for the dead people's homage and grave. Another theme in the poem is the Swadeshi Movement. Though this theme is not explicitly mentioned in the poem but it can be deduced from the time period when the poem was composed.

**The Golden Threshold:**

**The Golden Threshold** gave her recognition as a metrical poet both in the East and the West. Arthur Symons has written an introduction to **The Golden Threshold** in which he referred to a letter written to him by Sarojini Naidu. She writes in the letter "I sing just as the birds do, and my songs are as ephemeral" (1905, 10). This was a fair confession by Naidu about which Symons remarked: "It is for this birdlike quality of songs, it seems to me that they are to be valued. They hint in a sort of delicately evasive way at rare temperament, the temperament of a woman of the east, finding expression through a western language" (1905, 10). He further wrote, "the poems have eastern magic in them" (1905, 10).

**The Bird of Time:**

Sarojini Naidu gained fame as a poetess. Her poems are full of soaring rhetoric and sentiment found numerous admirers. Her second collection is known as "The Bird of Time" being published in 1912 in London by William Heinemann. Its introduction has been written by Edmond Gosse. It comprises forty-six lyrics. Gosse praised it highly. He found the poems much more mature than those which Sarojini Naidu had done several years earlier. The collection received great reviews. Meeta Ajay Khanna – **The Poetry of Sarojini Naidu: A Canvas of Vibrant Pageantry of Folk Traditions** London Times said: "Fine expression of her nature rich in emotion, to find an Indian atmosphere making fragrant English poems is a rare pleasure". The Yorkshire Observer remarked: "Her songs are children of surprise. They break forth fresh and fragrant... each is a finished thing and a perfect delight".

**The Broken Wing:**

The third collection of Sarojini Naidu's poems is entitled "The Broken Wing" being published in 1917. It has sixty-one lyrics. Tagore praised the poems saying, "Your poems in 'The Broken Wing' seem to be made of tears and fire like the clouds of a July evening glowing with the muffled passion of sunset".

**Coromandel Fishers** is a lyric enriched with vivid imagery and folk culture of the Coromandel Coast of India. It illustrates the relationship of fishermen with the world of nature. In the poem human emotions are set against the world of Nature. The first stanza of the poem deals with the solidarity between the fishermen that is an important aspect of folk life in India. There is a deep relationship between man and Nature. Nature stands for a symbol of beauty. It brings optimistic view of life being important for consoling and bringing forth a special meaning

and message in man's life:

Naidu's poem "**Palanquin Bearers**" in **The Golden Threshold** has a unique title. It lights on the tradition of carrying a bride in a palanquin or sedan. Dwivedi remarked: "It is a poem of great artistic beauty and has a rhythmic swing in it which is well in accord with the soft onward movement of the palanquin-bearers".<sup>1</sup>

The palanquin bearers sing of the beauty of the bride and carry the palanquin with delight and with poise:

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. Lightly, O lightly we glide and we sing, We bear her along like a pearl on a string. (1958, 7-12)

**Street Cries** by Sarojini Naidu is written on the vendors who sell their goods in the streets of India. The same is to be observed in Indian society even today. Still India consists of a hike in its economy. We have large scale business flourishing all around but street hawkers are seen delivering their products door to door this time as well. They have limited resources and so they labor a lot to earn their living. Sarojini Naidu portrayed the life of street vendors beautifully and charmingly. In stanza one the street hawkers are depicted roaming in the streets at the dawn:

WHEN dawn's first cymbals beat upon the sky, Rousing the world to labour's various cry, To tend the flock, to bind the mellowing grain, From ardent toil to forge a little gain, And fasting men go forth on hurrying feet, Buy bread, buy bread rings down the eager streets. (1958, 1-6)

In the bright noon, when the sun shines bright and emits 'the cruel heat' the street vendors come out to sell their fruits and shout in a loud voice: "Buy fruits, buy fruits, rings down the eager street" (1958, 12). At night, "When twilight twinkling o'er the gay bazaars / Unfurls a sudden canopy of stars, / When lutes are strung and fragrant torches lit" (1958, 13-15), the cries are heard aloud:

"Buy flowers, buy flowers, floats down the singing street" (1958, 18). Naidu painted a vivid picture of three different hours of the day. She employed the device of triplicity once again in this poem and conveyed the importance of the service rendered by the street hawkers according to human needs and moods. Naidu painted well humble folks engaged in their daily task. The poetess portrays the dignity of labor associated with the people of India through which they earn their livelihood.

**The Prayer of Islam** composed on Id-uz-Zoha in the year 1915 shows the acquaintance of poetess with the Islamic mode of worship. God is omniscient, omnipresent. This poem mentions some of the 99 beautiful Arabic names of Allah or God as used by the followers of Islam such as Hameed, Hafeez, Ghani, Ghaffar, Wahab, Waheed, Quadeer, Rahman and Raheem. This poem expresses the Islamic faith. It is, therefore, significantly entitled "The Prayer of Islam. 'Wandering Beggars' presents Muslim Fakirs who roam here and there uttering the name of Allah:

"From the threshold of Dawn On we wander, always on Till the friendly light be gone Ya' Allah! Ya' Allah!"<sup>2</sup>

The poem "**Lokmanya Tilak**" is an apt and beautiful tribute to the great son of India, who was the beacon of hope and heroic courage to the teaming millions of India and pillar of national unity. The poetess welcomes him as a fearless soldier and wise sage who taught India the real meaning of freedom in his famous slogan 'Freedom is our birthright'. This poem makes him immortal.

"Lo! Let the mournful millions round thy pyre Kindle their souls with consurated fire Caught from the brave torch fallen from thy hand, To succour and to serve our suffering land, And in a daily worship taught by thee Upbuild the temple of her unity"<sup>3</sup>

**The Lotus** (To Mahatma Gandhi) is a sonnet dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi lovingly known as father of the nation. Gokhale initiated Sarojini to the path of politics and Mahatma Gandhi gave her the direction. Sarojini Naidu made the title "The Lotus" as the lotus is a sacred flower and it is associated with Hindu gods and goddesses – Vishnu, Brahma and Lakshmi. Mahatma Gandhi is addressed as the flower lotus because he has sacred and sublime character. The name of Gandhiji does not occur anywhere in the poem; however the mystic lotus symbolizes Gandhiji. The mystic lotus symbol stands for Gandhiji despite the fact his name does not occur in the body of the poem.

The lotus symbol is used to elevate the character and personality of Gandhiji. It is to give him sublime heights. The versatile genius of Mahatma Gandhi was not shaken by the temporary storms of misfortune and difficulties. Mahatma Gandhi was the pillar of strength for India and its people. Mahatma Gandhi is physically dead, however he has become immortal. He is an incarnation of Brahma for his noble thoughts and sacred deeds:

"But who could win thy secret, who attain Thine ageless beauty born of Brahma's breath, Or pluck thine immortality, who art Co-eval with the Lords of Life and Death?"<sup>4</sup>

Sarojini Naidu had a woman's and a poet's weakness for spring. Many of her poems are not actually on that season, however are redolent with the imagery of 'Vasanta' (spring). She draws a loving picture of all the natural objects. She makes the world a wonderful place to live in. She provides us a chance to listen to the melodious songs of various birds and the buzzing of bees. It is altogether a picture of lost innocence to us in modern India. We are caught up in the fever and fret of a culture increasingly entrapped in materialism and modernity. Her song is ablaze with Gulmohar and Cassia, with the Champak and Jasmine. We wander with her into Pomegranate gardens of mellowing to watch a June Sunset, Fawn feeding on Scented grass and the bees on Cactus Gold. The Koels invite us to the summer woods.

There are no ideas or sentiments or feelings that wake up from the poems that imply the plain, palpable, concrete objects on the land and in the air, which have been objectively depicted and made lively in the poem 'June Sunset' to constitute a genuine, poetic picture.

"An Ox-cart stumbles upon the rocks, And a wistful musk pursues the breeze From a Shepherd's pipe as he gathers his flocks Under the pipal-trees"<sup>5</sup>

In the poem, **A song in spring**, Sarojini Naidu introduces her personal element. Her dreams are deferred and her heart has grown old. Naturally, she feels depressed. But depression is incompatible with the mood of nature during the spring. So, the poetess cheers herself up. The bees and birds and fireflies cannot answer her questions, for she thinks that they are but brief visitors, they come with the spring and go with the spring. These temporary visitors can have no wisdom because wisdom comes with the experience of age. But the winds are wiser and omniscient, since they blow all over the universe. They are a symbol of wisdom. They have followed the hurrying feet of the pilgrims. They have observed the churning sorrow of the human souls.

"Their wings have winnowed sorrow of the garnered sunlight, Their lips have tasted the purple sea."<sup>6</sup>

The Rainy season has been a perennial source of inspiration to Rabindranath Tagore, but seldom attracts Sarojini Naidu. In **Hymn to Indra**, Lord of Rain, (Varun) she invokes Lord Indra for blending the Vedic myth and folk lore. Apart from these hymns, there is hardly any poem worth mentioning which reflects Sarojini Naidu's love and enthusiasm for the rainy season. It appears rather surprising when we consider the importance of rain in the Indian folk poetry and in the legend

of Radha and Krishna with which she has been so thoroughly familiar. The predominant quality of Sarojini Naidu is the habit of viewing the natural world and its manifestations as events of personal emotion and individual awareness.

Sarojini Naidu visualizes the winds as experienced travelers who have accumulated a lot of knowledge during their journeys over Earth and Sea.

This can be clearly seen in the following lines:

“The wise winds, as they pause to slacken The speed of their subtle, omniscient flight Divining the stars of the unborn night.”

Nature is a relief from the conflicts of the worldly life. In **Summer Woods**, the poet says:

“O, I am tired of painted roofs and soft and silken floors And long for wind-blown canopies of crimson Gulmohar” She expresses her longing to fly where cassia-woods are breaking into flame, and koels call from flowery glade and glen. She wishes to lie beneath the boughs of Tamarind, and Molasri and Neem. She wants to bind their brows with jasmine sprays and play on carven flute; to roam along the river's bank and bathe in the water-lily pools.<sup>30</sup> For Sarojini Naidu, Nature is a 'Sanctuary of Peace.'

Sarojini Naidu shows feminine fascination for flowers. Her Path to Nature is strewn with flowers of rich hue and intense smell. No matter, whatever be the theme, flowers must appear in abundance. There are many poems which are dedicated to individual manifestations of Nature's beauty.

In **In Praise of Gulmohar Blossoms**, the poet discovers Gulmohar blossoms as 'Gorgeous boon of the spring'. They are so lovely that nothing can rival them in their rich hue neither 'The glimmering red of a bridal of a bridal robe' nor 'the rich red of wild bird's wings'. Perhaps 'the mystic blaze of the gem that burns on the brow of a serpent king' can measure up her beauty.

“The limpid clouds of the lustrous dawn That colour the ocean's mien? Or the blood that poured from a thousand breasts To succour a Rajput Queen?”<sup>7</sup>

The time-bird's song in **The Bird of Time** represents the song of nature as well as of human life. Time fleets and never fluctuates. Change and fluctuation is the theme of the time-bird, as also of human life. Birds acquire a special significance in Sarojini's love world. An entire poem '**A Love Song from the North**' is addressed to the 'Papeeha', in the manner of Indian love poetry. Papeeha's handling calls are at once sweet and painful to the lovers separated, for they arouse in them strange feelings of longing which is depicted in the following lines:

“Tell me no more thy love, Papeeha, Wouldst thou recall to my heart, Papeeha”<sup>8</sup>

#### CONCLUSION:

The poetry of Sarojini Naidu made a mark of prominence in the arena of Indian poetry in English and is an important part of women's writing. She possessed sharp aesthetic sensibility and was an admirer of the varied colours of Indian traditions and folk life. Naidu's themes are indigenous as advised by Edmund Gosse and capture the spirit of India. Meeta Ajay Khanna – The Poetry of Sarojini Naidu: A Canvas of Vibrant Pageantry of Folk Traditions was Edmond Gosse who inspired Sarojini Naidu to infuse in her poems, the feature of Indianness. He was disappointed to see her early poetry, as they were imitations of English poets and on British objects. He felt that she had been 'Anglicizing' her feelings. Gosse advised her to infuse in her poetry, the hues of the Indian culture and traditions. Sarojini Naidu accepted his advice and the real poet in her came out in a glorious manner and her poetry thereafter, breathed an Indian air in all its freshness,

glory and romanticism, with her themes exclusively Indian.

#### WORKS AND REFERENCES

- (1) "Sarojini Naidu and Her Poetry" of Dwivedi, 1981, Pg.. 122
- (2) "The Prayer of Islam" of Sarojini Naidu from the Sceptred Flute, Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948, Pg.. 169
- (3) "Memorial Verses" of Sarojini Naidu from the Sceptred Flute, Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948, Pg.. 169
- (4) "The Lotus" of Sarojini Naidu from the Sceptred Flute, Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948, Pg.. 167
- (5) "The June Sunset" of Sarojini Naidu from the Sceptred Flute, Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948, Pg.. 193
- (6) Sarojini Naidu, "A Song in Spring", from the Bird of Time p.25
- (7) "In Praise of Gulmohar Blossoms" of Sarojini Naidu from the Sceptred Flute, Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948, Pg.. 94
- (8) "A Song from the North" of Sarojini Naidu from the Sceptred Flute, Kitabistan, Allahabad, 1948, Pg.. 75