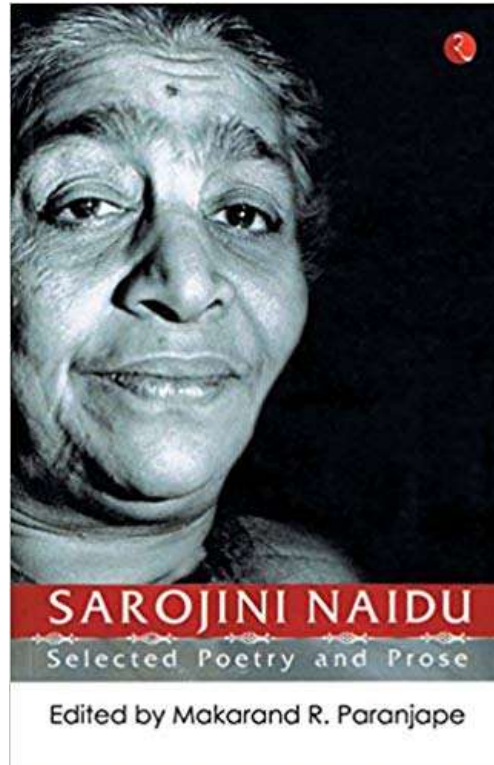


Sarojini Naidu as a Poet of Nature

S. Nagendra and Dr. P. Sreenivasulu Reddy



Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.com/Sarojini-Naidu-Selected-Poetry-Prose/dp/8129115808>

Poetry of Nature

Sarojini Naidu's poetry is undoubtedly poetry of nature. Her love of nature is reflected even in poems which are not about nature but have a different theme. Nature is the eternal environment of man, and Sarojini looks at it with a child-like, open-eyed wonder. Her response to Nature is the response of man in his infancy, who looked at nature, was fascinated with her sights and sounds, with her colors and odors, and is also struck with awe by her grandeur and her mystery. It is homely and familiar that fascinates Sarojini. and Nature. She is neither pantheistic like Wordsworth nor cosmic like Tagore.

Not Simply Related to Visual Sensation

Sarojini Naidu feels a heavenly delight in nature and succeeds in communicating her own delight to her readers. It is said that her response is not limited to the visual sensation. It is auditory and tactual. The vocabulary of her nature poetry is such in words denoting colors, sounds, fragrances and skin feelings such as glassiness, softness, pliability and suppleness. Sarojini feels the spring season meant passion, excitement and the breath of life itself. Most of the poems reveal her sensuous enjoyment of the colors, sounds, fragrance and sights of nature.

Spring

Her poem 'Spring' depicts beautiful pictures of the season. Young leaves grow on the banyan stems. The leaves on the *peepal* tree are red. The honey birds pipe to the budding figs, and honey blooms call the bee. The poppies squander their fragile gold in the silvery aloe-fern, coral and ivory lilies unfold their delicate leaves on the lake. The kingfishers ruffle the feathery sedge. The air is thrilled with butterfly wings in the wild rose hedge. The earth is filled with the luminous blue of the hills. Spring kindles life in the trees, flowers and birds and butterflies. It draws human beings into the eddies of its vital flood. spring is the moment, the season, and the cycle of Love'

*Kamala tinkles a lingering foot
And Krishna plays on his bamboo flute*

Spring Colours and the Myth of Radha and Krishna

In this lyric the colors of spring are stressed, and the season is related to the myth of Radha and Krishna. In 'A Song of Spring' it is the life and movement with which spring endows all nature that are stressed.

*Wild bees that rifle the mango blossom
Set free awhile from the love god's string.....
... Fireflies weaving aerial dances
In fragile rhythms of flickering gold.*

Nightingale of India and Bharata Kokila – Sensuous Experience of Nature

Because of this lyrical quality of her poetry, she might have earned the titles of the 'Nightingale of India' and 'Bharata Kokila'. In certain lyrics the mood is one of sensuous enjoyment of the manifold beauties of nature.

Social Consciousness and Yearning for Reformation

But the mood changes in *Vasant Panchami* (Festival of Spring) and the lyric records the grief of a widow at the return of spring. It is a day when young girls and married women celebrate the coming of spring. They welcome spring with new-grown corn and lighted lamps, with music and folk-dance. But Lilavati is sad at the very feast of spring. She implores the dragonfly to fold up its wings and not to bring the tidings of spring. She asks the lilting *koels* to hush their voices and the *dadhikulas* to still their throats, because their songs pierce her heart with poisoned arrows. They bring back memories and sweet reminiscences of happy days during her spring time. She asks the flowers to quench their color and hold their fragrance because they slay her heart with bitter memories. She persuades the joyous girls, who go to sing carols to the spring to dim their radiant voices.

Adoration for Flowers – Lotus Born Saraswati and Buddhist Lotus

Sarojini has a great adoration for flowers. Flowers are everywhere in Sarojini's poetry. There is a hierarchy of flowers, the 'lotus' being the first and foremost. This unique flower has been celebrated in Indian poetry, myth and legend since times immemorial, and has acquired far reaching symbolic significance. It is a symbolic representation of purity and sanctity. It is associated with 'Lakshmi', the Lotus-born and 'Saraswathi', who is seated on a lotus. The lotus is equally important in the Buddhist tradition. The Buddha is shown meditating upon a lotus-throne. Lotuses are painted or carved on his palms and toes in Buddhist painting and sculpture. Sarojini is deeply fascinated by these associations

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 18:7 July 2018

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of the lotus in Indian mythology and art. This fascination is reflected in many of her poems. Her own name denotes 'lotus plant' or 'a lake abounding in lotuses'. Her eldest daughter was named 'Padmaja' (Lotus-born), which is also one of the names of 'Lakshmi, the Goddess of Fortune'.

Poetry Abounds in Animals – Focus on Serpents

Indian animals like stallions, golden panthers, cows, monkeys, dears and 'leisurely' elephants enter into her poetry, but it is the serpent intimately connected with innumerable Indian myths and legends which inspires two of her best poems. To Sarojini, snakes are not objects of horror, but of love and adoration, as they are in so many Indian myths and legends. The concluding lines of 'The Snake-Charmer' expresses the Indian snake charmer's deep love for his pet:

*Come, thou subtle bride of my mellifluous wooing
Come, thou silver-breasted moonbeam of desire.*

Sun and Sunshine

Sarojini's response to nature is one of adorations like that of our ancestors. A number of hymns to the objects and forces of nature are scattered all up and down her poetry. She has particular affection for the sun and sunshine, and in the 'Harvest Hymn', the farmers express her own love and gratitude for this 'lord of the morn' and 'lord of the harvest'.

*O giver of mellowing radiance, we hail thee,
We praise thee, O Surya, with cymbal and flute.*

There is, indeed, something characteristically tropical about her love for the sun. But, though she was particularly fond of the bright, clear sunshine which illumines the landscape of India, she also had a deep feeling for the subdued light of the setting sun, as is expressed in 'June Sunset'. In the 'Harvest Hymn', the farmers express the poet's own adoration and gratitude for the beautiful earth, 'the Queen of the gourd flower, queen of the harvest'.

Rainy Season Is Not Forgotten!

Though rainy season does not figure much in her poetry, we get the 'Hymn to Indra', in which the people pray to the Lord of Rain:

*Thou, who with bountiful torrent and river
Dost nourish the heart of the forest and plain,
Withhold not Thy gifts, O Omnipotent Giver,
Hearken, O Lord of Rain.*

In 'Nightfall in the City of Hyderabad', 'the speckled sky' burns like 'a pigeon's throat', 'Jeweled with embers of opal and peridot.' The river flows out, 'Curved like a tusk from the mouth of the City gates', the call of the muezzin's, 'Floats like a battle flag over the city wall', and

*Over the city bridge Night comes majestically
Borne like a queen to a sumptuous festival.*

Remarkably Refreshing

Originality, freshness, and imaginative justness of these images are remarkable. They startle, surprise, and immediately capture the attention of the readers, and bear witness to the minuteness of observation of the poetess. P.V. Rajyalakshmi says, "The City of Hyderabad is dominated by the Musi

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river, exactly curved like a tusk from the mouth of the city-gates. The image is at once precise and evocative. Besides, it connects the city to nature-landscape suggesting how the wild river has been tamed into the city's culture, while giving life to it. The sky, at nightfall in the city, looks like a pigeon flown from one of the towers on the river-side, burning like a pigeon's throat; perhaps like the thought of a city bride whose throat quivers and burns with ornaments of opal and peridote.'

To Conclude

Thus, Sarojini's nature-poems are remarkable not only for the loveliness of the Indian nature but also for the beauty of imagery and descriptive details. It is true that they are not poems of fiery lyricism, but imagination, sensuousness and romanticism are all evident. Of all our early Indian poets of twentieth century, Sarojini has outstandingly recaptured the early Indian responses to our natural environments.

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S. Nagendra
Lecturer in English
SKSC Degree College
Proddatur, Kadapa Dt.
Andhra Pradesh
India
sunkunagendra71@gmail.com

Dr. P. Sreenivasulu Reddy
Assistant Professor of English
GITAM University
Visakhapatnam
Andhra Pradesh
India
sreenupydala@gmail.com