



## SAROJINI NAIDU AS A FOLKLORIST

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Indian Poetry of English swells with pride of the three women poets –Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu and Kamala Das .Each one has observed women of India and treated them in their own way. Of the three, Sarojini Naidu started to write poems imitating the Romantic poets like Keats but changed the whole tone as per the guidelines given by her mentor Edmund Gosse. He was quite unhappy about her writing Robins and skylarks but told her

“to describe the flowers , the fruits, the trees, to set her poems firmly among the mountains, the gardens, the temples, to introduce to us the vivid populations of her own voluptuous and unfamiliar province; in other words to be a genuine Indian poet of the Deccan-----“(introduction to *The Bird of Time*)

Sarojini Naidu immediately accepted his advise and made a prominent mark in the arena using her sharp” aesthetic sensibility”(Khanna) She began to write on the themes of India. Her poems were so original that she touched upon nature, love, life, death, patriotism and Indianans through folklore, picturing the life of simple folks and describing the joy and the sadness of the people in and around her. As a true Indian she has transferred the folklore of India in her songs. She has talked about Nala and Damyanthi, Sita and Draupadhi, but equally, she has concentrated on the bangle seller, palanquin bearer, the wailing of Muslim old lady, the beauty of Hyderabad bazaar. Thus she has managed to weave her own folktales

### Folklore

Folklore is a study of culture of a group of people living together .It encompasses the tradition of sub-cultures also. Mostly they are followed and adapted on oral tradition. It includes “customary lore”, rituals and beliefs of a group of people. It ranges from “natural’ to ‘native’, traditional to ‘rural. They are passed on from generation to generation through songs, stories, dance and drama. However these folklores are the central pivot in which local people are tied through ethnicity. They are the pride of any nation which is popular in India though varied. This includes oral tradition, material tradition and customs. The oral tradition includes stories and tales while material tradition talks about various handmade professions while the customs and rituals are carried through stories

The folklore is not individualistic. It is a community process and found in many forms such as:

- Folk song
- Folk tales
- Fairy tales
- Tall tales
- Ballads
- Folk dramas
- Proverbs, charms and riddles
- Use of Folklore by Children

India has a large treasure house of ballad, songs and epics in oral tradition. In rural background we have many ballads through lullaby and also through dirge and each one will have a story associated with epic

stories. The Panchathantra stories and animal fables, composed in 9th century may vary according to the varied culture of India but the underlying thread is the same

These folklorists lost importance during the foreign invasion but some of them came up during the fight for independence. Poets like Tagore, Mahadevi Varma, Bharathar, V.O Chidembererm wrote emotional poetry and made the common folk sing whenever they assembled. These patriotic songs with Indian flavor with beating drums became the common sayings among the citizens. However not a deep study of them was done except in the last thirty years. Indian folklorists during the last thirty years have substantially contributed to the study of folklore. Devendra Satyarthi, Krishna Dev Upadyhayaya, Prafulla Dutta Goswami, Kunja Bihari Dash, Ashutosh Bhattacharya and many more senior folklorists have contributed for the study of folklore. But it is during the 1970s that some folklorists studied in US universities and trained up themselves with the modern theories and methods of folklore research and set a new trend of folklore study in India. Especially, South Indian universities advocated for folklore as a discipline in the universities. A.K Ramanujam contributed a lot towards this. Recently scholars such as Chitrasen Pasayat, M. D. Muthukumaraswamy, Vivek Rai, Jawaharlal Handoo, Birendranath Dutta, P. C. Pattanaik, B. Reddy, Sadhana Naithani, P. Subachary, Molly Kaushal, Nandini Sahu Shyam Sundar Mahapatra, Bhabagrahi Mishra and many new folklorists have contributed in their respective field for development in folklore studies of the current period. The cultural milieu of the country has been recognized by other equally important disciplines. This has underlined the importance of interdisciplinary research in folkloristic and related areas with the shaping of folklore study as a strong discipline in representing the people's memory and people's culture

#### **Sarojini Naidu as a Folklorist**

Sarojini Naidu has tried varied types of poems but one of her popular themes is folk life of India. "Her poetry gained vitality and spontaneity through the folk inspiration. Her folk poetry reflected simplicity and contained vocabulary and imagery from everyday scenes and sights which showed her sense of solidarity with folk life:", says Meeta Ajay Khanna .She wrote about everyday life of her country representing simple people like palanquin bearers, bangle sellers, Song of Radha, milk maid, the old woman's wail, the lullaby to the child, the united prayer of different religions, weaver men and fisher folk. A. N. Dwivedi points out aptly:

"A poet is a person of sharp sensibility and deep insight and is primarily guided and controlled by his inner urges. But he is also a social being, even if for a moment or two. As a social being, he comes into contact with other persons, places and things and thus gains in experience. These other experiences supply food to his inner experiences. (The myriad picture of folklore has many facets. This paper analyses the emotions of common folk, the customs followed by the common man of the society, the beautiful picture of the city or village.

The Bangle- Sellers describes how it was a common habit of women of all ages decorating themselves at the time of festivity. The bangle sellers added colour to them by displaying the "rainbow-tinted circles of light".(BS) He used to have bangles which attracted the maiden. Some bangles were glowing with "limpid colour for newborn leaves"(BS). A few were made for the brides and they were as rich as their desire. The bangle seller had bangles even for the ladies who have lived through life. She points that the women in village spent their time in bringing up their children, looking after the household duties being with their husbands all the time, take time to enjoy during these festivities.

In *The Bazaars of Hyderabad*, she takes the pain of describing the merchants of "Turbans of Crimson and Silver"(BH). While describing the vendors, she gives importance to " saffron and lentil and rice"(BH). She points out how the maidens grind sandalwood, henna and spice to make themselves attractive .We see the goldsmiths who make native jewels while fruit men sell citron, pomegranate. On another side in the bazaar, the musicians play Sitar, sarong and drum. Thus she points out that this habit of singing on the commonplace has been prevalent in India.

Both the cities and villages are filled with *Wander Singers* to earn their livelihood. They are not bothered about their materialistic life but carry on their life carrying the lute in their hands. They roam around and enjoy by entertaining the others. They are not bothered about the battles but they consider all men as their kindred as for them the world is their home. They are highly philosophic by wandering as they like. Nothing binds them

She employs the device of triplicity in vivid imagery and describes the dignity of labour in Street Cries. These street vendors rouse different types of people by calling everybody to buy bread in the early morning. The villagers do not wake up to do the routine by alarm but hearing the sound of birds or the vendors. They see even fruit men selling their fruits during noon while in the evening they sell flowers. She takes the pain of describing the three hours of the day. She brings out the difference by vivid imagery such as "dawn's first cymbals", "implacable radiance of noon", "unfurls a sudden canopy of stars"(SC)

Service to men is service to God is the dictum of common man. their work. *The Palanquin* Bearers enjoy the work that they do Here the poet personifies *The Palanquin* to a delicate woman who is taken care of. They treat her like a flower tossing her head, a bird that skims through the air and so gently as a "Laugh from the lips of a dream". It is a common belief that any work becomes lighter when you sing and do. Here these palanquin bearers can be compared to the Solitary Reaper of Wordsworth. How lightly they carry her.

Lightly, lightly we glide and we sing

We bear her along like a pearl on a string

The richness of the imagination of the bearers make the work enjoyable.

The customs of the society have been forwarded to the generation only orally. In a country like India, each festival is celebrated according to the customs of the state.

Snake worship is one of the chief customs of the country. Through this, Sarojini Naidu evokes the folk spirit of uniting the nature and the spirituality. The ethos is mentioned in their faith and spirit. According to the folks, the serpent is worshipped as Adi-Sesha and naga around the neck of Shiva. On Nagapanchami, the ladies worship in sand hills and in the sacred banyan roots pouring milk and playing the flute and dancing according to that. Through this, they evoke the mercy of Nagas to protect them and to soothe their troubled hearts. They are splendid and they make you understand "where life and death and sorrow and ecstasy are one"(FS)

Being a romantic poet she takes the past and weaves into a melodious lyric in *The Hymn to Indra, Lord of Rain*. Varuna, Indra, Agni are all symbolic of Air, Rain and Fire. The belief that worshipping these gods and having a celebration, they will be blessed with bountifulness of nature. Here also the outlook of men and women change. While men evoke him to give bountiful water, women expect a change in the season and they expect the koel to sing and fly. Here the poet brings out the fact that in India also the seasonal birds are popular and bring joy and happiness

The womenfolk of India used to spin songs according to the occasion. The protagonists of the poem *Spinning Song*, describe how her sisters were engrossed in plucking levees and flowers with a slight hum for the festival of spring while Mayura notices how her sisters enjoyed in "kneading saffron cakes" gathering various offers to be given to the Nagas. A few girls were busy in composing songs for the festival of lights. Through these lines she recalls how young girls enjoy every festival and how colourful they were.

The womenfolk of India linger to the tradition and it is passed on to the young girls. The story of Radha and Krishna is popular in transcendental love mingled with mysticism. The song of Radha vividly portrays how the devotion to the Lord Krishna makes her forget her duty. Commenting on this poem, Mulk Raj Anand remarks:

"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!"

It was this poem that had introduced Dr. James H. Cousins to Sarojini's poetry and he observes:

My first contact with Mrs. Sarojini Naidu's Poetry was through hearing the "Song of Radha, the Milkmaid" recited by an Oxfordman in India. I shall never forget the mantric effect of the devotee's repetition of "Govinda, Govinda, Govinda, Govinda," as she carried her curds, her pots,

Sarojini Naidu is aware that India is a country of religious diversity but with unity. In *The Call to Evening Prayer* she is proud of the fact how the evening air is filled with the evocative calls to Allah ho Akbar! Allah ho Akbar!, the priests' call to Ave Maria! Ave Maria! And the invocation to Narayana! Narayana! In rapt admiration

The poet is conscious of the plight of certain helpless women. The old woman under the banyan tree waits for the visit of a few persons who would dole her need by offering money, but yet she evokes the mercy of Allah through her La Ilaha illa-I-Allah. She cries often in the hope calling the attention of the passer-by to

alleviate her poverty .The poet knows that she might have comforted her lover and son in her youth but now is helpless .Still she seeks the solace of God revealing the infinite faith of being one with God, inspite of her poverty.

The poet is aware that the young girls are not allowed to wander and sing listlessly. She has to listen to her father and also the brother who will murmur "Why doth she linger "The mother, being over protective would start weeping if she is late. She is also afraid of darkness and the snake bite but yet she couldn't resist her being attracted by the melody of a boatman. The poem is written in natural flow of thought .She questions herself over her love for wandering while she is anguish if the Jamuna river overflows and she dies Here the poet portrays the desire of the young girl and also the societal fear

Very few Indian English poets have reflected the colourful pageant of Indian life in all its picturesque variety so vividly and successfully as Sarojini has done. To conclude let us take the few quotes of the stalwarts who have praised her,

"The panorama of India's ageless life," writes K. R. Srivastava Iyengar, "fascinates her without end." It is not surprising that she won her early renown in the West because of her representation of the soul of the East and the ethos of India." Edmund Gosse wrote admiringly:

"It has been ...the characteristic of Mrs. Naidu's writing that she is 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. It addresses itself to the exposition of emotions which are tropical and primitive, and in this respect, as I believe, if the poems of Sarojini Naidu be carefully and delicately studied they will be found as luminous in lighting up the dark places of the East as any contribution of savant or historian. They have the astonishing advantage of approaching the task of interpretation from inside the magic circle, although armed with a technical skill that has been cultivated with devotion outside"

Amarnath Jha in his tribute to Sarojini rightly remarks: "She is of India, the spirit of India is in her, and although men of all nationalities will find their questions echoed and answered yet it is the Indian that will feel his own feelings reciprocated in every line."

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5. Village Song
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7. The Festival of Serpents
8. Song of Radha, the Milk maid
9. Spinning a Song
10. Hymn to Indra, Lord of Rain
11. The Old Woman
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