

OUR PUBLICATIONS

Art and Culture

	Rs. a.
A. FLORES : Literature and Marxism	2 0
GORKEY : Culture and the People	3 8
CHAUBEY : Indian Music Today	4 12

Gandhian Literature

MURIEL LESTER : Gandhi, World Citizen	5 8
DOROTHY HOGG : The Moral Challenge of Gandhi	0 8
" " : India, A Plea for Under- standing	3 0
A. N. AGARWALA : Gandhism, A Socialistic Approach	0 12

In the Press

NICHOLAS ROERICH : Heroica (Illustrated)	8 12
A SYMPOSIUM : India Looks Ahead	7 8

Con
ni
of
vi
bu



Library

IAS, Shimla

821.5 N 43 B



00012781

KITAB MAHAL ♦ Publishers ♦ ALLAHABAD

Branches

BOMBAY : Sohrab House, Hornby Road, Bombay.
CALCUTTA : 23, Upper Chitpure Road, Calcutta.

Sarojini Naidu

*The Poet of a
Nation*

154
R. BHATNAGAR

With Introduction by
KAMLA DEVI CHATTOPADHYAYA

821.5
N 43 B

KITAB MAHAL

No Indian woman has captured the imagination of the world to such an extent as Sarojini Naidu, our poet-politician. Twice she has visited the West as the ambassador of Indian Nationalism, and people of many countries and many nationalities have felt her great personal magnetism. Quick, witty, mercurial, practical, honey-tongued, full of the milk of humane kindness, she symbolises the traditional leadership of Indian Womanhood. There is no mood and no occasion which does not find her betwitching.

13

And we of this generation who have seen her moving amidst us as a champion of a thousand causes, forget that she has left for us a legacy of sweet songs that will out-live the present strife.

Let us turn to here small collection of poems '*The Sceptred Flute*'. A nation dreamt in her before she changed her dreams to kettle-drums.

Price Rs. 1-8

Abdul Majed Khan

7.1.47.

Sarojini Naidu

The Poet of a Nation

by

RAM RATAN BHATNAGAR, M.A.

DATA ENTERED



CATALOGUED

KITAB MAHAL

ALLAHABAD



821.5
N43B

PRINTED BY M. K. DIKSHIT AT THE DIKSHIT
PRESS, ALLAHABAD & PUBLISHED BY KITAB
MAHAL, 56-A, ZERO ROAD, ALLAHABAD

TO

DR. AMARANATHA JHA

Vice-Chancellor, Allahabad University

*whose expositions of the first principles of Art and
Literature have been a source of inspiration
to the author*

CONTENTS

Introduction by Kamla Devi Ohattopadhyaya

- I. Sarojini : The Song-Bird
- II. The Song-Bird Learns to Fly
- III. From Ivory-Tower to Battle-field
- IV. Nature
- V. Love
- VI. The Pageant of Life
- VII. Life and Death
- VIII. The Motherland
- IX. Dramatic Poems
- X. The Child
- XI. Art and Diction
- XII. Conclusion

Post-Script



Library

IAS, Shimla

821.5 N 43 B



00012781



INTRODUCTION

by Kamla Devi Chattopadhyaya

"There is something of oriental magic about Sarojini Naidu. Born at another period in Indian History, she would have been more concerned with her exquisite and delicately perfumed verses than with the rough and tumble of politics. In the India of today, so gifted and sensitive a personality, feeling acutely her country's humiliation under foreign rule, could not possibly take to the ivory tower." In these words Yusuf Meherally defines Sarojini's personality in his sketch of her.

In a way she eludes definition—she is so many things and in so many ways. She is all things to all people. That is her uniqueness, given indeed to few. So it would be not only foolhardy but stupid to label her. For labelling a person is shifting the emphasis from the human personality to a human attribute. With Sarojini, her humanness towers over everything else. It is not unusual to find the creation of a person more impressive than the person that created. At times it is even disillusioning. With Sarojini her personality reflects the whole of her and impresses one more than any single one of her attributes. Lovely as her lyrics may be, she is herself even richer and many more sided than her poems. Equally commanding as her oratory may be, her personality is more compelling than her speech. Therefore to estimate her, it is most inadequate to read her poems or hear her speeches.

What is true of Sarojini is true of everyone like her who is many-sided. She is indeed an amazing versatile person. With her it is not so much acquiring of knowledge, so much as a quick knack for grasping the core of a subject which is not concerned with details, the facts and figures, but makes a straight bee-line for the kernel and gets the teeth right into it, and having once got at the core, she weaves the subs-

tance round it. Her sensitive nature makes her early responsive to a myriad moods and things, wide apart and diverse in character. That is what makes her so tolerant and never a stickler for any one particular factor, unless it happens to violate any principle.

This is one of the qualities which makes her so universal, so cosmopolitan, so many different things to so many different people. That is why she can be at home almost anywhere, with any one, in any surroundings, in any company and she is really and truly at home. So completely free from self-consciousness, or pre-occupation with herself—she is one of the very few who is never defeated or frustrated in the most trying of circumstances or damping of atmospheres. She has an eternal spring of buoyancy within her, that never seems to contract, but ever keeps flowing. She can always draw upon herself where her surroundings fail her, be they human or inanimate objects. Nay, so infectious are her spirits that they would almost draw a ripple from a dumb stone. She has also the rare gift of being able to indulge with equal ease in small talk as in high-brow conversation. She will listen with equal relish to a string of sentences woven round the weather, the season's parties, the latest local brides' trousseau, the fortunes of the race-course and the like as the latest book of poems or plays. That is the real secret of her social popularity and success. There are many with gift of tongue and quickness of brain, but they can shine in only one sphere—either in this one or that, never both.

Sarojini is therefore the universal Akka, whom all proudly and affectionately claim as the elder sister, one to whom they can go with their family problems, hunt for jobs, communal tangles and the kind. She is always there—that too is a rare gift. So many may be physically there, but not mentally there—that is, she is ready to listen, to give her time, her attention, in short make the matter her own, thus creating a link between herself and the problems placed before her. It needs a lot to be able not merely to rouse, for that is not enough, but what is far more important, sustain that interest. That is typical of Sarojini.

One is never sure whether it is this passionate interest of her in human beings and affairs that has cultivated such a prodigious memory in her. One can't define it in any other way. Some remember faces, other names, while the rest have only a lingering sense of associations. Not so with Sarojini. She remembers faces, names (not merely of an individual but the whole bunch of the individual's family members), all the associations formed around this individual. This again most necessarily add to her popularity and likability. For nothing flatters people so much as celebrities recognising them and even remembering their names. But they are completely overwhelmed when they find that their whole family and all the personal associations formed around them are so freshly green in the big leader's mind. It lends them a sense of added interest in their own eyes, which is but human. Thus Sarojini being very human herself is able to draw out the human in everyone she comes into contact with.

Sarojini is a big person, not merely generous. Although she has been used to a lot of physical comfort and needs it partly because of her poor health, she is not petty enough to be a slave to it. Sarojini loves the good things of life, but without making a fetish of them. When she was incarcerated and deprived of many of these comforts she was used to, she was never known to have demanded them or sulked for not being able to have them. To her they were some of the many details that were genuinely too insignificant as to subject her to them. They were on the contrary subject to her command. Thus while others who could have surmounted these hardships with greater ease, sulked or stormed, she barely shrugged her shoulders ever.

We may thus assume that those who choose to rise above the physical details of their surroundings in a way rise above their environment or rather dominate it. To one like Sarojini who has such a zest for the good things of life, incarceration should be a genuine hardship. But those who have shared it with her, have never once found her in low spirits, never once at a loss how to kill time, never once sighing for what could be. Such uniform cheerfulness is indeed almost astounding.

Yet Sarojini is extremely responsive to environment and the more human it is the quicker and the livelier the response from her. In fact it would be no exaggeration to say that the whole of her functions only when the human factors in her surroundings are stimulated. That neither this stimulation nor her own responses are as superficial as in others, is easily proved by the fact of this strong retention by her memory, a peculiar trait which has already been pointed out. In fact this is further followed up by her keep-up and retaining those links, for instance by the care with which she remembers to send birthday wishes to hosts of people in the country, greetings on all special festive occasions and the like, which is rather a staggering job, to say the least. It is also one of the qualities that make her so big and so lovable.

It is said that accident made her alive to her own gifts of poetry, that while she was trying to solve a rather obtuse algebra problem, she scribbled a few lines of verse instead and lo! there was born the poetess Sarojini. At least so some of her biographers describe it. It is rather naive and a little too simple. If it was an accident, it was no doubt a very happy one, for the lyrics that resulted from it are some of the loveliest. One may indeed speculate endlessly on what might have been, in so far as Sarojini and her poetry go, had she been born in a free country and the call of politics had not claimed her. To me the two have no connection. Those who are poets first and last, continue to be poets, whether they be lying in the trenches or in the enemy's dungeons. Poets soaring high in their monstrous bombers composed soft lifting verses. Resistance movements underground or over-ground, throw up masses of poetry. If Sarojini has stopped composing verses, she has certainly not ceased being a poetess. That same spirit comes out in all her movements and forms of expression. Lord Selborne, chairman of the Joint Parliamentary Committee in 1918-19, is said to have remarked after her evidence before the Committee Members: "Madame, we are grateful for the poetic touch you have brought to our prosaic proceedings." Well may one echo that and realise how that element in her is neither deflected or suppressed, but

finds its flow, in all her moods and passions, her faithful championing of the noble cause of freedom, her ungrudging sacrifices and voluntary sacrifices for that cause. Her almost scintillating vivacity, her now proverbial sense of humour, her easy sportsmanship, are indeed eloquent tributes to the soul of the poet in her. When man transcends himself, those brief moments are his poetry ; "Moments of the soul", they may be called. When Sarojini sat on the scorching pathway to the salt-pans of Dharasana leading with a grave determination a band of fighters, she was making poetry, for those were her moments of the soul.*



I

SAROJINI : THE SONG-BIRD

Sarojini Naidu has held two generations of English-knowing Indians by her magic spell. And two generations have hailed her with pride.

The poetical works of Sarojini Naidu are now available to the Indian public in a small volume,—The Sceptred Flute—published by Kitabistan. The contents were first published in England under the titles of '*The Golden Threshold*' (1905), '*The Bird of Time*' (1912), and '*The Broken Wing*' (1924). Even then they were regarded as crystal gems of poetry full of grace and beauty, reflecting in full splendour the youthful soul of India on the threshold of a new awakening. Much water has flowed down the Ganges since then, but their brilliance stands undimmed. A generation has slept over them to find them still charming, still alluring and still inspiring. They are perennial fountains of light and joy, love and beauty.

Sarojini Naidu is no escapist. Her poems are her life and blood; every line has the warmth of real emotional intensity and the words pulsate with fire of life. To study such an author is a joyous experience of the highest sort. The earlier poems have a strong note of Romanticism and at places one gets the ethereal, myth making touch of Shelley, or the passionate animosity of Keats, or the æsthetic qualities of the Pre-Paphaelites. She has learnt much from the songs of the English Muse, but she has enriched amply what she has got from her. The lyrical genius that has flowed in these songs is unsurpassable even on English soil. It is the Platonic love of Shelley that speaks out in her :—

Cover mine eyes, O my Love !
Mine eyes that are weary of bliss
As of light that is poignant and strong,
O silence my lips with a kiss,
My lips that are weary of song !

Shelter my soul, O my love !
 My soul is bent low with the pain,
 And the burden of love like the grace
 Of a flower that is smitten with rain :
 O shelter my soul from thy face !

And it is Keats writing when she paints Night
 in a colour of lights and shades.—

The serpents are asleep among the poppies,
 The fireflies light the soundless panthers' way
 To tangled paths where shy gazelles are straying,
 And parrot-plumes outshine the dying day.
 O Soft ! the lotus buds upon the stream
 Are stirring like sweet maidens when they dream.
 (*Leili*).

There may be a romantic strain in all these earlier poems, but they have more innovation than tradition, and bear the stamp of a real genius. The peculiarities which mark Sarojini's poetry are many—the flute is hers and her breath knows to bring forth varied melodies. With the passing of time and the development of her art, she becomes an adept singer with complete control on her instrument. The broken wing is a culmination of her poetic flights. It is not the wings that are broken really ; rather they soar with measured movements. The poetic prodigy that gave such promise in so short a period is silenced after its weird feat. The flute has turned into a Sceptre. Sarojini, the singer, the poet, gives place to Sarojini, the symbol of Indian Womanhood, the leader of India's political struggle for freedom. 'The Broken Wings' begins with a quotation, probably from a letter of Gokhale, which asks,—“Why should a song-bird like you have a Broken Wing ?” and clear comes the answer—

Shall spring that wakes mine ancient land again
 Call to my mind and suffering heart in vain ?
 Or Fate's blind arrows still the pulsing note
 Or my far reaching fail unconquered throat ?
 Or a weak blending pinion daunt or tire
 My flight to the high realms of my Desire ?
 Behold ! I arise to meet the destined spring
 And scale the stars upon my broken wing !

A poet lost is a leader gained. But such are the vicissitudes of our country, such our trials, and the rose-bower of poetry hums with silence till the free song-bird changes its Sceptre-clang to the flute-tune. Till then these songs of love and beauty, of India's panoramic life shall move before us like a sword of fire, and lead us to the temple of Freedom, Yes, till then the Sceptred Flute.

II

THE SONG-BIRD LEARNS TO FLY

Sarojini Naidu was born on February 13, 1879, in Hyderabad (Deccan) in a respected family of Brahmins which had migrated from Brahmanagar (Bengal). Her father Dr. Aghore Nath Chattopadhyaya was given a D. Sc., in 1877 by the Edinburgh University. Of him, Sarojini ever remembers with all abounding love and devotion :

"I suppose, in the whole of India there are few men, whose learning is greater than his and I don't think many men more beloved." The scientific spirit of research into the unknown has given birth to Romantic and æsthetic quest of rhythm and beauty. On his return from Europe, Aghore Nath established the Nizam College at Hyderabad and throughout his life, he worked indefatigably for it. Sarojini was the eldest of his children, and he wanted to make her a votary of the temple of science. Aghore Nath was a devoted scholar of English literature and he spared no pains to give his daughter the soundest education in that language. The result was an uncommon mastery of English language in all its shades and forms which went to make her a poet, a charming conversationalist and an orator of high order. She passed her Matric from the University of Madras at the age of twelve. She had begun to write poems a year earlier and two years later, while thirteen, she wrote a long narrative poem "Lady of the Lake" in 1300 stanzas, and a small play.

In 1805 (age 16) her father sent her to England for higher education and for three years she studied at King's College and Girtan (Cambridge). Later her health broke down and she had to take a pleasure trip to Italy, the land of mirth and beauty, of Dante, of Virgil, of Michael Angelo, and inspired by the warmth and profusion of nature and artistic traditions, she sang her sweet songs.

In September 1893, Sarojini returned to India, and married Dr. Major M. D. Naidu. This was a bold act for those days—this inter-caste, inter-provincial marriage. By this act of courage, she laid the foundation of the awakening of Indian Womanhood. In 1919, she went to England on a propaganda crusade as a member of the Home Rule League Deputation. Her first public appearance was, however, during the Lucknow session of the Moslem League (1913), when she spoke on Hindu-Muslim unity. From 1915 onward she was a regular participant in Congress sessions and her mental vision as well as her reputation widened year by year. Her speeches at this time were a feast of wonder and joy.

It was, however, in 1921 that a change came over her life. Till then she looked more to West in her dress and ideals. She was one of the most fashionable ladies of the land. In 1921, when she returned from a propaganda tour in England, the saintly Star of India (Gandhi) had illuminated the political horizon of the country. Till then she was one of the liberals. Gandhi's approach to Indian masses and his spirit of self-sacrifice touched her poetic heart, and the Jallianwallah tragedy gave her a spur to drop the cloak of liberalism and put on a mantle of fire. She added her poetic fervour to the crystal clear voice of the saint. In 1922, she was the bitterest in her condemnation of the Governments' policy towards the Moplahs. On March 11, 1922, Gandhiji was arrested and sentenced to six years imprisonment. He left a message to Sarojini in these words—"I entrust the Unity of India into your hands." It was for this unity that she risked her life in the Bombay Riots (1921) and now she went on a lecture tour throughout the length and breadth of the country. Her devotion to Gandhi was immense. On 18th March, 1922, she spoke of him :

"They might take him to the utmost end of the earth but his destination remains unchanged in the hearts of his people who are both the heirs and the stewards of his matchless dreams and matchless deeds."

It was with poet's conviction of India's destiny that she opposed the Council entry resolutions of

Deshbandhu C. R. Das and Moti Lal (1922). She has never believed in India's 'Fight from within the constitutional framework', but she did never impose on others, and never crossed swords with her trusted colleagues on the question of Council entry.

In 1917, she took to her heart the service of the Indians abroad and raised a momentous movement on the "coolie"-ism in white colonies. She spoke :

"Let the blood of your hearts blot out the shame that your women have suffered abroad. The words that you have heard tonight must have kindled in you a raging fire. Men of India, let that be the funeral pyre of the indenture system. Words from me tonight ! No, tears from me tonight, because I am a woman and thought you may feel the dishonour that is offered to your mothers and sisters ; I feel the dishonour offered to me in the dishonour to my sex."

She went to South Africa to work to that end and presided over the Mombasa session of the South African Indian National Congress. In 1929, she went to Rhodesia and Kenya for a similar session.

In 1925, Sarojini Naidu presided over the Cawnpore session of the Indian National Congress and her Presidential address will ever be remembered as a national manifesto. She said :

"In the battle of liberty, fear is the one unforgivable treachery, and despair the one unforgivable sin."

In 1929, she visited America, and the American people were greatly influenced by her great speeches. One of the speeches—"The Message of India"—is a historical achievement which posterity will never forget.

From 1930 onwards the story of Sarojini's life is intimately woven with the history of Indian nation's struggle for freedom. Hers has been the poet's anguish and the 'Sceptred flute.' She has been our chosen priestess in the temple of Indian nationhood.

III

FROM IVORY TOWER TO BATTLE-FIELD

Of the Indian women who have offered their song flowers to the English Muse, the most welcome are Taru Dott, Sarojini, Nilima and Begum Shah Nawaz—"X X X and one may safely say, without much fear of challenge that she is perhaps the greatest living poetess today ("Alfred E. Pheres in the "Japan Primes"). In her "Select poems by Indian Women" Mrs. Margaret Menicoll extolls Sarojini in the same vein. Her poems come to the poetess with as much ease as leaves to the trees in the spring. They are a rhythmic outburst of a refined sensibility. They were not primarily meant for circulation. Some friends came to know of them and they asked that they should be published for private circulation. However, they achieved the admiration of a former Viceroy and were published for the general public.

1890-1920 (A period of thirty years)—This covers the whole span of Sarojini's poetry. The period of full bloom comes only after 1898. "The Broken Wing" introduces a new vision of life in her. She accepts the call of Gokhale which is the call of the nation. She leaves the rose-bower of poetry, and toils with the nation under the glare of the mid-day sun. A poet's flute is changed to a patriot's Sceptre. She replies to her critics who accuse her of leaving the Muses for Mars—

"Often and often have they said to me—"Why have you come out of ivory tower of dreams to the market place? Why have you deserted the pipes and flutes of the poet to be the most strident trumpet of those who stand and call the nation to battle? Because the function of a poet is not merely to be isolated in ivory towers of dreams set in a garden of roses, but his place is with the people, in the dust of the high ways; in the difficulties of the battle is the

poet's destiny. The one reason why he is a poet is that in the hour of danger, in the hour of defeat and despair, the poet should say to the dreamer if you dream true, all difficulties, all illusions, all despair are but "Maya"; the one thing that matters is hope. Here I stand before you with your high dreams, your invincible courage, your indomitable victories. Therefore today in the hours of struggle when in your hands it lies to win victory for India, I, a weak woman, have come out of my home, I, a dreamer of dreams, have come into the market place, and I say—"Go forth, comrades, to victory!" But does this mean the victory of Politics over poetry? Does this mean the market place has triumphed over the ivory tower? Not so. Sarojini has brought the message of the ivory tower, its beauty and its dreams, into the crowded heart of the market place. She has permeated nationalism with a rich heritage of poetic liberalism and internationalism. The spiritual heritage of India which has asserted itself once more in the Gandhian leadership, has found in her a flute to pipe to a weary world its joys and sorrows, its rich idealism, and its saintly flights. In her the noble womanhood of India is pouring out its strivings, its hopes and visions of a free India, its birth-pangs of a new era of love and fellowship. She is still young of heart, though old in years—for a vision is ever young and the Muses know no ageing. Hers is a bride's dream and a mother's sympathy with which she lulls to sleep the dissonant notes of our own national life and unlocks the heart of a nation. She says:—"I am of a tribe of beauty" coming from an aristocratic family and blessed with golden dreams, she searched for beautiful images of Indian life, of love, of spring, of soul's gracious way. And her quest for ideal beauty has led her to the sufferings and tribulations of the nation. What could be more beautiful than the strivings of a nation for its liberty? What could be more poetic than the dream of India "that is to be." The last dreamer of this land of dreams, she chooses to sell dreams to drums calling a nation to suffer and succeed, to do or die. Her whole life is the sweet blossoming of a lotus bud to a thousand-petalled flower of radiant beauty. Years ago, she wrote of herself;

Into the strife of the throng and tumult
The war of sweet love against folly and wrong
Where brave hearts carry the sword of battle
'tis mine to carry the banner of song,
The solace of faith to the lips that falter,
The succour of hope to the hands that fail
The tidings of joy when peace shall triumph
When truth shall conquer and love prevail.

She has lived up to this ideal. She has carried the banner of songs into the battle for freedom. She has given the solace of faith, the succour of hope and the tidings of joy. But she has also sounded the trumpet call for the women of India to rally and fight for the woman's cause.

IV

NATURE

Sarojini has something of the spark of divine youth in her and the two seasons that draw out the response of her poetic soul are summer and spring. Spring is the very symbol of youth, with its roses and Gulmohurs, with its songs of Koels and Dadhikuls. It is the bright profusion of nature that invites the poet to youthful sallies and 'idyls of love and spring.' The spring poems of Sarojini are not only metrical triumphs, but have also variegated forms and colours of the season. The spring of Sarojini has a peculiar oriental warmth and breathes of all the charms of Indian spring poems. There is a sweet mingling of English and Indian flowers, and the effect is supreme ; for example—

Kingfishers ruffle the feathery sedge,
And all the vivid air thrills
With butterfly-wings in the wild-rose hedge,
And the luminous blue of the hills.
Kamala tinkles a lingering foot
In the grove where temple-bells ring,
And Krishna plays on his bamboo flute
And idyl of love and Spring.

(Spring)

'Gulmohur', 'Nasturtiums' and 'Champak flowers' and golden are the very soul of the spring. Sarojini has not turned her hands upon them as a descriptive or a moralising poet. She approaches them with her spirit of beauty and ancient love of mythology. Thus she strikes a new note in the poetry of Nature. Note her poem on 'Nasturtium'—

Poignant and subtle and bitter perfumes
Exquisite, luminous, passionate bloom,
Your leaves interwoven of fragrance and fire
Are Savitri's sorrows and Sita's desire,
Draupadi's longing, Damayanti's fears
And sweetish Sakuntala's magical tears.

There is a romantic vein in this sort of poetical approach, but it all caters for effect. 'Champak Blossoms' call forth the great message that beauty is its own reward. Other blossoms

Live anew the luscious harvests
Of ripening yellow and red

but the Champak

You make no boast in your purposeless beauty
To serve or profit the world.

'In praise of Gulmohur Blossoms and Golden Cassia' are poems of fancy. The poetess piles images over images to bring out the unearthly beauty of the flowers. 'Gulmohurs' are the glimmering red of a bridal robe, rich-red of a wild bird's wing or the mystic blaze of the gem that burns on the brow of a serpent-king, or the limpid clouds of the lustrous dawn, or the blood that poured from the thousand breasts to succour a Rajput queen, or the flame of hope or hate or heart's desire or

"The rapturous light leaps to heaven
from a true wife's funeral pyre?"

The Golden Cassia are the fragments of some new fallen star or golden lamps for a fairy shrine or golden pitchers for fairy wine or bright anklet bells from the wild spring's feet or the gleaming tears that some fair bride shed remembering her lost maidenhood. The above clearly shows the profusion of images such as is the characteristic of Romantic poetry. What marks them is the freshness and newness of a number of them which are drawn from legends and history or Indian social life. It is this fact that gives them the power to touch the Indian heart and open new vistas to an Indian votary of the English Muse.

But the flight of fancy and profusion of imagination is found mostly in earlier poems. The later poems abound with depth of emotion, and the poetess sees the spring through ecstasy or love or a radiant philosophy of life which shuns Death and vies with

immortality. 'A Song in Spring' is a beautiful poem in the last strain. Wild bees, wild birds and fire-flies do not know 'of dreams deferred and a heart grown old.' They know only their blithe, brief season. But the wise winds know of the changing sorrows of the human soul through love's changeless ways. They know the transience of life, but they also know of the charm of unknown ages that will dawn on humanity. So they praise

Divining the magic of unblown lilies
Foretelling the stars of the unborn night.

But this mood of philosophising is shortlived in a poet of joy and mirth. Most of her Spring-poems are either associated with a sentiment of love or have an ecstasy of their own. In the 'Joy of the Springtime' the poet explores the essence of the Spring, but does not answer. The essence of spring is beauty and joy which unfold themselves in the tilt of a bulbul, the laugh of a rose or the dawn of the dew. 'In a time of Flower' the poetess gives expression to the magic effect of the Spring and asks Love that has grown cold with years and bereavement.

The winds are drunk with the odorous breath
Of Henna, Sarisha, and Neem.....
Do they ruffle your cold, strange, tranquil sleep,
Or trouble your changeless dream
With poignant thoughts of the world you loved,
And the beauty you held so dear ?

'The Magic of Spring,' 'The Coming of the Spring' and the time of Roses harp on the same string of despondency. They are later poems from the 'Broken Wing' when the poetess has tasted more of life, and knows more of the shades of sorrows :

O Spring ! I cannot run to greet
Your coming as I did of old.

Or

Love, it is the time of Roses

give vent to a heart-burning anguish. Still the call of the Spring is a call that cannot be denied, and the magic of the Spring knows how to open the old lock of Spring festivity.—

I buried my heart so deep, so deep
 Under a secret hill of pain,
 And said : "O broken pitiful thing
 Even the magic spring
 Shall ne'er wake them to life again,
 The March Woods glimmer with opal rain
 And passionate Koels sing."
 The Kimshuks burst into dazzling flower,
 The Seemuls burgeoned in crimson pride
 The pangroves shone with Oriale's wing
 The Koels began to sing
 The soft clouds broke in a twinkling tide.....
 My heart leapt up in its grave and cried,
 "Is it the Spring, the Spring ?"

'The Call of Spring' is a call of her children to bring back to her the golden days of dream when

The earth is ashine like a humming Bird's wing,
 And the sky like a kingfisher's feather
 O come, let us go and play with the Spring
 Like glad-hearted children together.

But the best Spring-poem of Sarojini is still one of her earlier poems—The Ecstasy :

Heart, O my heart ! lo, the Spring time is waking
 In meadow and grove.
 Lo, the mellifluous Koels are waking
 Their pæns of love.
 Behold the light rivers and rills in that glancing
 Melodious flight,
 Behold how the sumptuous peacocks are dancing
 In rhythmic delight.

The summer has not touched the strings of the poetess' heart so often as the spring, and it claims only two fine poems, "Summer Woods' and 'June Sunset'. Both are later poems and like all other later poems are devoid of mere fancy. The 'Summer Woods' depict the wearisomeness of her heart as

V

LOVE

Love has the most cherished bower in the grove of poetry. Like all young poets, Sarojini has much to say on the joys and sorrows of love. Every love-poem has a new world and experiments in new forms and diction. Some of the poems are poignant with utter simplicity, for example—

O Love! I know not why, when you are glad,
Gaily my glad heart leaps.
O Love! I know not why, when you are sad,
Widely my sad heart weeps.

I know not why, if sweet be your repose,
My waking heart finds rest
Or if your eyes be dim with pain, sharp throes
Of anguish rend my breast.

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!

It is the heart of an Indian girl learned in all the ancient lores of immortal women of the land that bursts forth in songs of self-surrender to love. Love strikes at the root of diversity. When hearts unite in a sweet symphony of oneness, the experience partakes the nature of Divine. It is this oneness with the beloved that Eastern poets have extolled. Nowhere in Sarojini's poems this spirit of self-surrender is more manifest, than in her ode 'To Love' wherein she enumerates the various gifts that she had brought to the shrine of love and devotedly ends—

O Love! of all the treasures that I open,
What gift have I withheld before thy throne.

'Atone' is a poem of despair at the lonesomeness of the lover who pines after the abiding place of the

beloved. This note of sorrow and remorse of the one forsaken of love, is struck with greater force amidst oriental colours and imagery in 'A Love-song From the North'. For simplicity of diction and sincerity of sentiment, there are few love-poems that can match this :

Tell me no more of thy love, papeeha,
 Wouldst thou recall to my heart, papeeha,
 Dreams of delight that are gone,
 When swift to my side came the feet of my lover
 With stars of the dusk and the dawn?
 I see the soft wings of the clouds on the river,
 And jewelled with raindrops the mango-leaves
 quiver
 And tender boughs flower on the plain . . .
 But what is that beauty to me, papeeha,
 Beauty of Blossom and Shower, papeeha,
 That brings not my lover again.

Such lines are great because of their art of artlessness.

Love and Death are the twin mysteries of life.
 Love has

beckoning joys that wait,
 Laughter of children and the lyric dawn,
 And Love's delight, profound and passionate,
 Winged dreams that blow their golden clarion,
 And hope that conquers immortal hate.

Death has her 'silence of the dead'. In an anguish of spirit the poetess cries—

High dreams and hope and love are in vain,
 Absolve my spirit of its poignant ills,
 And cleanse me for the bondage of pain.

But the cold touch of oblivion is not meant for the poet. She must still dream of life, of a bright future, of the opening of a new relation between man and man, race and race. Death can only quicken the pulse of life in her. 'At Twilight' has this inspiring message. But the sorrow is that even all the love of a lover cannot save the beloved from the throes of death. Love must give way to Death.

(*vide*, 'Love and Death'), with all its rich and joyous experience.

India is famous for its love-lore and Sarojini has done a service to the nation to weave them in English patterns for the world outside. Parvati and Amar Singh ('A Rajput Love-song'); Gulnaar and Feroz (The Queen's Rival), 'Damayanti to Nala', 'Humayun to Zobeida' are some of her best song fragments. Sarojini has again and again chanted on the quality of love between man and woman. She has repeated the same favourite theme in 'A Rajput Love-song'. Parvati adores love in all fineness. She imagines of love as a sandal lute or silver lamp or Keora's soul.

Amarsingh has a stronger view of love. It is a hawk upon his hand, an unconquered sword, a shield or a drum-beat. Thus she puts in contrast the love of man and woman and the tragedy of life that is the common lot of womanhood. When manhood marches to the drum-beat of a nation and dies with the hilt in his hand. The poem is neither a ballad, nor a lyric. It is a study in contrasting emotions with a suggestion of infinite action. 'The Queen's Rival' is not love-poem. Queen Gulnaar pines for rival, and all the seven queens of elfen grace could not satisfy her yearning heart. Her young daughter, at last, came to see her rival. The poem runs on a psychological thread that mother's heart finds the graceful pains and pleasure of a rival in the reflection of her own beauty in her child. 'Damayanti to Nala' is a lyric eulogising love's strength and protection, love's sacrifices and tears. 'Humayun to Zobeida' harps upon the one-ness of the lover and the beloved through lover's adoration. Humayun wails to Zobeida of her coolness...

What is this of Thee and Me ? Give o'er the
wanton strife,
You are the heart within my heart, the life
within my life

It is this oneness-thirst that sends forth a cry of anguish soul in 'Ecstasy':

'O, silence my lips with a kiss.'

What is this 'oneness thirst' for ? It is for strength of love :

In noon-tide hours, O Love, serene and strong,
 I need thee not x x x x
 But in the desolate hour of midnight, when
 An ecstasy of starry silence sleeps
 On the still mountains and the soundless deeps,
 And my soul hungers for thy voice, O then,
 Love, like the magic of wild melodies,
 Let thy soul answer mine across the seas.

It is this strong man's love for a faery-hearted maid that finds expression through Sarojini's verse. The woman's part of our love is matchless devotion and self-sacrifice. The man's part is a memory of sweet 'perfume in the petals of a rose.' (*Vide*, Indian Love-song) which is hidden in his heart heavy with life's weariness. Sarojini has passed over all the gamut of love-idyls and her poems would enrich the best selection from immortal poets.

But we have still to fathom new depths. Under the title 'The Temple', A pilgrimage love, Sarojini has woven a small garland of love-poems under three big heads :

- I. The Gate of Delight
- II. The Path of Tears
- and III. The Sanctuary.

She expresses a number of moods and modes of love, a whole life of pleasure and pain. There is no attempt at story, or even a moral, yet the sequence of thought is clear. Love delights in offering all that is most precious to it, but it is

Content to wait in proud and lowly fashion,
 And kiss the shadow of love's passing feet.
 (*The Offering*)

Such is the humbleness of love, that it asks of the beloved—

Bring no fragrant sandal paste,
 Let me gather, love, instead
 The entranced and flowering dust

lover will even like to save the beloved from the fire of his heart's desire—

What sanctuary can I pledge
Whose very love of you is sacrilege ?
O I would save you from the ravening fire
Of my own heart's desire !

Love is not a transient spark—the light that it brings is that of eternal flame. The greatness of love is this illusion that it offers. It gives the lover the vision of God's dwelling place. Sarojini is eloquent in unfolding this glory of love—

And as all men deem, dearest, you may be
Only a common shell
Chance-winnowed by the seawinds from the sea
I care not . . . Since you make most audible
The subtle murmurs of eternity.

True love is triumphant in death. Love is omnipotent as it is the miraculous strength of the lover. At love's call, the lover tightens his girt and flings himself in hell-fire. It is the soul-effacing devotion of love that sustains the lover in his gloomiest days. The lover would never for a moment think that the object of his adoration should stoop down—

Stoop not from thy proud, lonely sphere,
Star of my Trust !
But stare implacable and purer,
Serene and just ;
And bid thy struggling spirit rise
Clean from the dust !

As we have already seen these love-poems smack of foreignness, though the intensity of emotion and the quality of imagination that they unfold are peculiarly their own. 'Love Transcendent' is based on the semitic conception of the day of Judgment—

When Time shall cease and the world be ended
And Fate unravel the judgment scroll,
And God shall hear—by His Host attended
The secret legend of every soul,

INSPECTION OF AD

And each shall pass to its place appointed
And yours to His inmost paradise,
To sit encrowned 'midst the pearl-mounted,
O my saint with the sinless eyes !

It is clear that a poet with the cosmopolitan outlook of Sarojini Naidu must be free to glean her sheaves from distant lands, and thus add a new colour to the already rich harvest of lovelore in India. In many of her love-poems she has set the jewels of Indian love-ideals. Foreign influence in others is limited to the poems of 'The Temple' and even here we feel that the utterance is matchless.

THE PAGEANT OF LIFE

The best of Sarojini's poems are those which give us a panorama of Indian life in all its colours and moods. This is quite a new contribution and the best that the poet's ingenuity can offer. No event of importance in Indian life, no social festivity, no cross-section of the society has remained untouched. In one swift *Lasso* of imagination, a whole type or class is caught in a moment of grace and beauty and immortalised in rhythmic life. Neither Tagore, nor Harindranath has ever attempted to catch thus the fleeting moments of Indian festivity and sorrow. From cradle to grave, from gypsies to princes and princesses—all the spheres of Indian life have been explored. And the wonder is that Sarojini never repeats herself. Her cosmopolitan view gives us the insight to enter into the spirit of all sections of Indian life and caste-barriers are broken as claywalls. Sarojini has founded a new type of poetry which can be rightly called the poetry of nationhood or poetry of National life. The metres, the rhythms and the devices in style and diction are many and they had to be resorted to as of necessity. It is these devices that allure us. Words and phrases from vernaculars have been interwoven between lines or form the burden of songs. No colonial poetry can give us a single instance of this kind of poetry and flowering of a native genius in its own atmosphere. The poets of Celtic Revival in Ireland laboured long to give celtic colour to the English Muse, but they ended only in mystical chants and faery legends of a dim, romantic age. Sarojini, rightly, did not attempt to pour Indian philosophy and mysticism, rich as they are, in English verse. Tagore, Arbindo and Vivekanand have done it with grace. Hers has been a flute that has sung of a nation in its various forms and moods. No side of Indian life is left untouched. Palanquin-bearers,

Wandering Singers, The Snake Charmer, Corn-grinder, Sutee, Indian Dancers, The Indian Gipsy, The Pardah Nashin, Vasant Panchami, Songs of My City, Spring Song, Bangle Sellers, The Festival of Serpents, The Husain Sagar, The Faery Island of Janjira, The Old Woman, The Call to Evening Prayer, The Temple, The Beggars, Kali—the Mother, make a comprehensive album of Indian life—the Panoramic India. These two dozen poems are worth a volume. The genius that they show is unrevealed by other poems. Sarojini has touched both the usual and the unusual, and her romantic spirit has given her the most exquisite sense and sensibility that pierce deep into wandering tribe and gipsy girls.

There are a number of Islamic pictures. 'Wandering Beggars' portrays Musalman beggars with bowls so frequently seen at the step of Muslim monasteries, singing songs with the burden 'Y' Allah ! Y' Allah !' Sarojini has woven this refrain very ingeniously :

From the threshold of the dawn
On we wander, always on
Till the friendly light be gone
Y'Allah ! Y'Allah !

'The Prayer of Islam' ends with another burden, this time changing from stanza to stanza, in the same style :

We praise Thee, O Compassionate !
Master of life and Time and Fate,
Lord of the labouring winds and seas,
You Hameed ! You Hafeez !

'The Old Woman' is one of the most touching of those pictures—

A lonely woman sits out in the street
'Neath the boughs of a banyan tree
And hears the bright echo of hurrying feet,
The pageant of life going blithely and fleet
To the feast of eternity.

Her tremendous hands hold a battered white bowl,
 If perchance in your pity you fling her a dole,
 She is bent, She is bent, she is blind,
 But she lifts a brave heart to the jest of the days
 And her withered, brave voice crowns to pæan of
 Praise,

Be the gay world kind or unkind :
 "La ilaha illa-l-Allah,
 La illaha illa-l-Allah,
 Mohammad-ar-rasul Allah."

'The Imam Bara' and 'A Song from Shiraz' are superb poems in the same vein. The metrical ingenuity is supreme as elsewhere. One cannot but quote some lines from 'The Imam Bara' :

Out of the sombre shadows,
 Over the sunlit grass,
 Low in a sad procession
 The shadowy pageants pass
 Mournful, Majestic, and solemn,
 Stricken and pale and dumb,
 Crowned in their peerless anguish
 The sacred Martyrs come.
 Hark, from the brooding silence
 Breaks the wild cry of pain
 Wrung from the heart of ages
 Ali ! Hassan ! Hussain !

'A Song from Shiraz' captures the oriental spirit of Shiraz and brings forth in immemorial lines the loving soul of Islam.

The typical Hindu scenes are not so numerous, but where they are, they penetrate deeper into the spirit of the religion and drink deep at the fountain of the ancient lores. 'Sutee' is a fine appreciation of the spirit of ancient Hindu womanhood :

Life of my life, Death's bitter sword
 Hath severed us like a broken word
 Rent us in twain who are but one.....
 Shall the flesh survive when the Soul is gone ?

'Vasant Panchami' is really a study in contrast. It is aptly sub-headed as Lilavati's lament at the Feast of Spring. It is a widow's lament and rebukes the Spring in the traditional vein of Hindi poetry :

O quench your flame, ye crimson gulmohura,
 That flaunt your dazzling bloom across my doors
 Fast you white bells, sweet champa buds that call
 Wild bees to your ambrosial festival
 And hold your breath, O dear Shirisha trees.....
 You slay my heart with bitter memories.

'Song of Radha, the milk-maid' is the familiar Radha Krishna legend. It is more a dramatic piece than a lyric. The sentiment is borrowed from native sources but it is amplified in stanzas. This is one of her most famous poems. The rhyme scheme is very fascinating and wholly original. 'Hymn to Indra, Lord of Rain,' has a vedic echo about it. 'Spring Song' is a glorification of India's festivals. 'Vasant Panchami, 'Nagpanchami' and Deepavali—we have dealt with elsewhere. 'The Temple' is a dialogue between the priest and the pilgrims and it has memories of Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali. The pilgrim's last words are a culmination of religious ardour :

O Priest ! Only my stricken soul I bring
 For love's burnt offering.

'Lakshmi, the Lotus Born' is a prayer which like other prayers by her is sweet strung. 'The Flute-player of Brindaban' is the expression of the helplessness of the beloved on hearing the call of the flute. 'Kali, the Mother' is a great chorus of the adoration of the Mother.

But more poignant are the stray songs from unimagined quarters. 'Songs of My City' is a study in the city-cries. 'The Indian Weavers' is a sweet lyric showing three contrasting moods of Indian weavers. It has its universal appeal:

Weavers, Weaving at break of day,
 Why do you weave, a garment so gay ?
 Blue as the wing of halcyon wild,
 We weave the robes of a new-born child.

Weavers, weaving at fall of 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.

Weavers, weaving so, solemn and still
Why do you weave in the moonlight chill ?
White as a feather and white as cloud,
We weave a dead man's funeral shroud.

She is specially skilful in catching the spirit of the wandering tribe and a number of such poems show her in those primitive people which remind us of romantic ages. In 'Wandering Singers':

What hopes shall we gather, what dream shall we sow !
Where the wind calls our wandering footsteps we go,
No love bids us tarry, no joy bids us wait :
The voice of the wind is the voice of our fate.

The last stanza gives us characteristic note of the gypsy tribes all over the world. Another poem 'The Indian Gypsy' is more highly strung, and one is tempted to quote it whole because here one finds the typical Sarojini-touch in diction and style :

In tattered robes that board a glittering tree,
Of bygone colours, broidered to the knee,
Behold her, daughter of a wandering race,
Tameless, with the bold falcon's agile grace,
And the lithe tiger's sinuous majesty.

With frugal skill her simple wants she tends,
She folds her tawny heifers and her sheep
On lonely meadows when the daylight ends,
Ere the quick night upon her flock descends
Like a black panther from caves of sleep.

Time's river winds in foaming centuries
Its changing, swift, irrevocable course
To far off and incalculable seas ;
She is twin-born with primal mysteries,
And drinks of life at Time's forgotten source.

The above few lines boldly give us contours and colours of gypsy life and its pre-historic continuity of primitive modes. In our modern world the gypsies strike a totally discordant note, but they interest us immensely because the past has its own captivating

But sweeter, O brother, the kiss of the spray
and the dance of the wild foam's glee :

and Palanquin-Bearers which bear their precious
weight so lightly :

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.

These are only a few of the many views of the panoramic India which the genius of the poetess gives us. All the colours and shades of Indian life are represented in her poetry, and they get new warmth and mystery from her rich imagination aglow with the fires of youth. The choice of subject is not deliberate ; it is because Sarojini has a peculiar romantic outlook on life. Every aspect of Indian life seems to interest her, and this interest is crystallised in a class of poetry unique in its form, technique and imagery and full of thousands of possibilities.

There is another class of poems which mirror the religion of India. Vasant Pachami, The Festival of Serpents, Song of Radha the Milk-maid, Hymn to India, Lord of Rain, The Call to Evening Prayer, The Temple, Lakshmi the Lotus Born, The Imam Bara, The Flute-player of Brindaban and Kali the Mother are these poems. They touch upon ancient times as well as modern, and all sects of the present India. 'Song of Radha, the Milk-maid' shows the self-abandonment of the Gopi who sells her curds in Mathura Fair, crying, 'Govinda, Govinda !' 'The Flute-player of Brindaban' plays the tunes of the Infinite :

Why, didst thou play thy matchless flute
'Neath the Kadamba tree,
And wound my idly dreaming heart
With poignant melody,
So where thou goest I must go,
My Flute-player, with thee !

Still must I like a homeless bird
 Wander, forsaking all ;
 The earthly loves and worldly lures
 That held my life in thrall,
 And follow, follow, answering
 Thy majestic flute-call.

'The Call to the Evening Prayer' is a study of the reverential atmosphere of the evening when men of all sects and creeds assemble in their respective places of worship to offer their thanksgiving to their deity. This is one of the most successful poems of Sarojini ; each stanza is devoted to one particular sect and the major religions : Hindu, Moslem, Parsi and Christian—are represented in the poem. 'Kali the Mother' wholly differs in technique. The poem begins and ends with a charm. Its artistic structure is supreme.

All voices : O Terrible and tender and divine !
 O Majestic Mother of all sacrifice,
 We deck the sombre altars of thy shrine
 With sacred basil leaves and saffron rice,
 All gifts of life and death we bring to thee,
 Uma Haimavati !

Maidens : We bring thee buds and berries from the
 wood !
 Brides : We bring the rapture of our bridal prayer !
 Mothers : And we the sweet travails of motherhood !
 Widows : And we the bitter vigils of despair !
 All voices : All gladness and all grief we bring to
 Ambika ! Parvati !

Artisans, peasants, victors, vanquished, scholars, priests, poets and patriots, all continue in this way and the poem reveals a strange yet native grandeur.

But Sarojini's genius does not end here. She gives us excellent pen pictures of some Indian cities (and of some greatmen who made Indian History. Nightfall in the city of Hyderabad) is a matchless feat of its sort :

See how the speckled sky burns like a pigeon's
 throat,
 Jewelled with embers of opal and peridote.

See the white river that flashes and scintillates,
Curved like a tusk from the mouth of the city
gates.

Hark, from the minaret, how the Muezzins' call
floats like a battle-flag over the city wall.

From trellised balconies, languid and luminous
Faces gleam veiled in a splendour voluminous.

Leisurely elephants wind through the winding
lanes,
Swinging their silver bells hung from the silver
chains.

Round the Char Minar sounds of gay cavalcades,
Blend with the music of cymbals and serenades.
Over the city bridge night comes majestic.
Borne like a queen to a sumptuous festival.

'Imperial Delhi' is lower-pitched :

But thou dost still immutably remain
Unbroken symbol of proud histories,
Unaging priestess of old mysteries
Before whose shrine the spells of Death are vain.

And the great men to whom she offers homage
are Buddha, Gandhi and Jinnah (one time an apostle
of Hindu-Moslem Unity). 'To a Buddha seated on
a Lotus' gives us her high idealism in face of change,
grief, sorrow, strife and defeat :

With futile hands we seek to gain
Our inaccessible desire,
Diviner summits to attain,
With faith that sinks and feet that tire ;
But nought shall conquer or control
The heavenward hunger of our soul.

The end, elusive and afar,
Still lures us with its beckoning flight,
And all our mortal moments are
A session of the Infinite.
How shall we reach the great, unknown,
Nirvana of thy Lotus throne ?

A brief, sustained verse on Mahatma Gandhi
(The Lotus) is perhaps the best written on him, and
it tells us of the high imaginative reaches of the
poetess. Gandhi is metaphorically spoken as 'The
Lotus' ;

Will prove your heart a traitor to its sorrow,
And make your eyes unfaithful to their tears.

Even Death, eliminator of human suffering, is
blessed :

Sweetness dwells in the bee-hive,
And lives in a maiden's breadth,
Joy in the eyes of children
And peace in the hands of Death.

(Medley : a Kashmiri song)

It cannot be otherwise. We have frail, serene,
indomitable soul ('A challenge to youth') Sarojini
believes in spiritual values. In her poem, 'Solitude'
she asks her heart to rise and go forward :

"Or Perchance, we may gleem a far glimpse of the
Infinite Bosom.
In whose glorious shadow all life is un-folded or
furled,
Thro' the luminous hours ere the lotus of dawn
shall reblossom,
In petals of splendour to worship the Lord of the
World.

It is this philosopher's touchstone of the oneness of
man's soul and universal soul that makes of her
a fountain of pure, ethereal joy. She challenges
Fate :

Yet will I stake my individual sorrow
At the deep source of universal joy.

Hope for ever wells up in the deep caves of the
human heart, and it is this perennial fountain of
strength to which she turns :

O Fate, betwixt the grinding stones of Pain
Tho' you have crushed my life like broken grain,
Lo, I will leaven it with my tears and knead
The bread of Hope to comfort and to feed
The myriad hearts for whom no harvest blow
Save bitter herbs of woe

(Invincible)

One of her noblest poems of defiance is 'The Challenge' :

Thou who dost quell in thy victorious tide
 Death's savaged secret and life's ruined pride,
 Shall thy great deeps prevail, O conquering sea,
 O'er Love's relentless tides of memory ?
 Sweet Earth, though in thy lustrous bowl doth
 shine

The limpid flame of hope's perennial wine,
 Thou art too narrow and too frail to bear
 The harsh, wild vintage of my heart's despair.
 O valiant skies, so eager to uphold
 High laughing burdens of sidereal gold,
 Swift would your brave brows perish to sustain
 The radiant silence of my sleepless pain.

It is this view of life which prompts the poetess to accept life as a challenge and a reality: Under 'Life' she says :

Children, ye have not lived, to you it seems
 Life is a lovely stalactite of dreams,
 Or carnival of careless joys that leap
 About your hearts like billows on the deep
 In flames of amber and of amethyst.

Children, ye have not lived, ye but exist
 Till some resistless hour shall rise and move
 Your hearts to wake and hunger after love
 And thirst with passionate longing for the things
 That burn your brows with blood-red sufferings.
 Till ye have battled with great grief and fears,
 And borne the conflict of dream-shattering
 years,
 Wounded with fierce desire and worn with strife,
 Children, ye have not lived : for this is life.

Yet the soul of man weeps under pain and there are moments of gloom and tears. 'To the God of Pain' catches one such moment :

I have no more to give, all that was mine,
 Is laid, a wrested tribute, at thy shrine.
 Let me depart, for my whole soul is wrung,
 And all my cheerless omissions are sung ;
 Let me depart, with faint limbs let me creep
 To some dim shade and sink me down to sleep.

In another such weak moment, the poetess implores
Death :

Tarry a while, till I am satisfied
Of love and grief, of earth and altering sky,
Till all my human hungers are fulfilled,
O Death, I cannot die !

(The Poet to Death)

What we have given above gives us a chain
of thoughts on life and death. Life and Death are
two sides of a shield. Death is associated with pain,
and that pain might cow us down, but Hope sings
her sweet note in every human breast, and we rise
and girt ourselves for a new journey. Life is a struggle
sweet and simple and brave men do not falter. 'To a
Buddha Seated on a Lotus' gives us her sustained
views on this theme—

The wind of change for ever blows
Across the tumult of our way,
Tomorrow's unborn griefs depose
The sorrows of our yesterday.
Dreams yield to dream, strife follows strife
And Death unweaves the webs of life.

* * *

With futile hands we seek to gain
Our inaccessible desire,
Divinier summit to attain
With faith that sinks and feet that tires,
But nought shall conquer or control
The heavenward hunger of our soul.
The end, elusive and afar,
Still lures us with its beckoning flight,
And all our mortal moments are
A session of the Infinite.

For one who has known deeper roots of joy and
sorrow, Death and the vast unknown beyond have
no fear. Sarojini welcomes pain, death and the
mysterious unknown :

Welcome O fiery pain !
My heart unscared, unstricken
Drinks deep thy fervid rain,
My spirit-seeds to quicken.

Welcome, O tranquil Death !
Thou hast no ills to grieve me,
Who com'st with Freedom's breath
From sorrow to retrieve me.
Open, O vast unknown,
Thy sealed mysterious portal !
I go to seek my own,
Vision of love immortal

(Welcome)

It should be clearly understood that Sarojini's jubilation for Death and suffering is not the same as Tagore's and Shelley's Romantic approach to Death. She does not extoll death as Tagore does in "Death O ! Death" (*Gitanjali*). Her approach has the strength of a philosopher's vision who sees through the webs of life and death to Eternity. It is not a Romantic Phantasy with her.

VIII

THE MOTHERLAND

The most inspiring of Sarojini's poems are those which subscribe to the love of Mother India. Love of Motherland is a passion with her, and throughout his poems, we see her struggling between two allegiances—to song, to the service of the country. From the earliest time, she has known this inner struggle. In one of her earlier poems, she exhorts the mother to wake and rise:

O! young through all the immemorial years !
Rise, Mother, rise, regenerate from thy gloom,
And like a bride highmated with the spheres,
Beget new glories from thine ageless womb !

The Indian chivalry in World War I (1914-18) must have sent a thrill in the heart of Sarojini. 'The Gift of India' brings forth her best sentiments. She reminds the world of the brave who fought and fell for the allied cause :

Gathered like pearls in their alien graves
Silent they sleep by the Persian waves ;
Scattered like shells on Egyptian Sands
They lie with pale brows and brave, broken
hands ;
They are strewn like blossoms mown down by
chance.
On the blood-brown meadows of Flanders and
France.

She Implores :

When the terror and tumult of hate shall cease
And life be refashioned on anvils of peace,
And your sons shall offer memorial thanks,
To the Comrades who fought in your dauntless
ranks,
And you honour the deeds of the deathless ones,
Remember the blood of thy martyred sons.

Another poem recited at the Indian National Congress (1915), written at the same period, proudly asserts the manifold blessings India has showered upon sons and daughters of her soil—

Are we not thine O Belov'd, to inherit
The manifold pride and power of thy spirit ?
Ne'er shall we fail thee, forsake thee or falter,
Whose hearts are thy home and thy shield and
 thyne altar,
Lo! We would thrill the high stars with thy
 story
And set thee again in the forefront of glory.
(Awake)

'Anthem of Love' is the jewel of Sarojini's love-offering to the Mother :

Two hands are we to serve thee, O our Mother,
To strive and succour, cherish and unite ;
Two feet are we to clear the waning darkness,
And gain the pathways of the dawning light.

Two ears are we to catch nearing echo,
The sounding cheer of Time's prophetic horn ;
Two eyes are we to reap the cresent glory,
The radiant promise of renascent morn.

One heart are we to love thee, O our Mother,
One undivided, indivisible soul,
Bound by one hope, one purpose, one devotion
Towards a great, divinely-destined goal.

Pure poems adoring Patriotism and nationhood are not many, but the strain continues in a large number of other poems that deal with the pageant of Indian life or exalt Indian heroes, ancient or contemporary, as Lord Buddha, Gokhale, Gandhi and Jinnah. Her poems of nature with their native background of Indian flowers, Indian birds and dawns and sunsets, and her frequent allusions to mythological India are a continuation of the same strain. It is this Indian atmosphere that most of her poems breathe which makes her poems, whether on Nature, love, or life, or death, 'Songs of India'. No other Indian poet, barring Tagore, has so successfully inter-

preted this country to the Western readers through the English Muse. The whole complicated texture of Indian life and thought, of Indian flora and fauna, finds a sublime expression in her verses. She represents India's past and present and reveals the glory of her destiny in words and phrases which glow with warmth of emotion.

There is a story behind this. Sarojini, as we know, had gone to England as a mere girl. One day Sir Edmund Gosse persuaded her to show him her poems. Bashfully and reluctantly she did so. He advised her to give up writing as an Englishwoman about nightingales and skylarks and to write on Indian subjects and interpret the soul of India to the West through her English poems. She burnt her whole manuscript and started afresh. Her determination and Sir Edmund Gosse's advice resulted in the poems we have been studying.

IX

DRAMATIC POEMS

No one who has been with Sarojini for a day and seen her in a mood of exultation would be surprised with the great ingenuity and energy she releases in her dramatic poems. There is much of the dramatic in her being, and sometimes it might be taken for mere theatrical. But a deeper study would show that the fountains of her energy are deep and sweet.

These dramatic poems are innovations of style and art. They range from single monologues to complicated verse-forms. There are a number of monologue-poems like 'Palanquin Bearers' and 'Wandering Singers.' Some come to the simplicity and strength of folksongs which take the shape of imaginary dialogue like 'Corn-grinder :'

O! little mouse, why dost thou cry
While merry stars laugh in the sky ?

And the mouse answers :

Alas ! Alas ! my lord is dead ;
Ah ; who will ease my bitter pain ?
He went to seek a millet grain
In the rich farmer's granary shed
They caught him in a baited snare,
And slew my lover unaware.....
Alas ! alas ! my lord is dead.

Then the Corn-grinder asks the deer :

O! little deer, why dost thou moan,
Hid in thy forest-bower alone ?

And the deer answers. This dialogue-method is sometimes very expressive. Two of her love-poems are mere dialogues of men and women : 'Indian Love-Song' and 'An Indian Love-Song.'

SHE

Like a serpent to the calling voice of flutes,
 Glides my heart into thy fingers, O ! my love ;
 Where the night-wind, like a lover, leans above
 His Jasmine-gardens and sirisha-bowers ;
 And on ripe boughs of many coloured fruits
 Bright parrots cluster like vermilion flowers.

HE

Like the perfume in the petals of a rose,
 Hides thy heart within my bosom, O my love !
 Like a garland, like a jewel, like a dove
 That hangs its nest in the asoka-tree.
 Lie still, O Love, until the morning shows
 Her tents of gold on field of ivory.

(Indian Love Song)

In some of her poems, she gives the effect of an invocation at a temple at the time of Prayer. Such poems are 'Harvest Hymn', 'Kali the Mother,' 'The Temples,' 'The Call to Evening Prayer' and 'Hymn to Indra.' The drama of life is so sublimely expressed in her poems which picture street-cries.

How shall I feed thee, Beloved ?
On golden-red honey and fruit.
 How shall I please thee, Beloved ?
With the voice of the Cymbal and lute.
 How shall I garland thy tresses ?
With pearls from the jessamine close.
 How shall I perfume thy fingers ?
With the soul of the Keora and rose.
 How shall I deck thee, O Dearest ?
In hives of the peacock and dove.
 How shall I woo thee, O Dearest ?
With the delicate silence of love.

In some of her poems she has caught the most critical moment and depicted the intense soul-moving tragedy or comedy of life. One or two bracketted words suffice to unfold the whole drama. In 'A Rajput Love-Song' Parvati stands at her lattice waiting for Amarsingh while Amarsingh in his saddle flies from a battle-field back to see her. The eager longing of the beloved and swift desire of man's heart are beautifully immortalised by a few chosen strokes,

X

THE CHILD

Saroji ni has the heart of a mother, and we come across a number of her poems on the child and its innocence. Such poems have the innocence and simplicity of the child about them. 'Cradle song' is the song of sleep to the child :

From groves of spice
O'er field of rice,
Athwart the lotus stream,
I bring to you
Aglint with dew
A little lovely dream.

Sweet, shut your eyes,
The wild fire-flies
Dance through the fairy neem ;
From the poppy bole
For you I stole
A little lovely dream.

Dear eyes, good night,
In golden light
The stars around you gleam ;
On you I press
With soft caress
A little lovely dream.

Another cradle song is the 'Slumber Song For Sunalani' :

Slumber, spirits winging,
Thro' the forest singing,
Flutter hither bringing soon
Baby visions sheeny
For my Sunalani
Hush thee, O my pretty moon !

Some other child-poems are addressed to her children or invoke their innocence. Jay Surya, Padmaja, Randheer, Lilamani, Sunalini—what sweet names to inspire the poetess-mother !

XI

ART AND DICTION

All the poems of Sarojini were written between the period of her youth of twenty and her womanhood of forty. They have, thus, the youthfulness of imagination, the frolics of fancy and the strength of prime. Each verse is a chiselled piece of art.

The earlier poems are full of brilliant fancies. In one of her later poems, she bids adieu to her fancies :

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.

Nay, no longer ye may linger
With your laughter-lighted faces,
Now I am a thought-worn singer
In life's high and lovely places,
 Fairy fancies, fly away
To bright wind-inwoven spheres,
 Fly away.

(To My Fairy Fancies)

But in spite of this farewell poem, sweet fancies form a big part of her Muse. She is essentially a poet of fancy and imagination. It is for this that similies and metaphors are the ornaments dearest to her heart. Some of her poems are simply pure and pretty similies netted together. The bride borne to the house of the husband is 'like a flower in the wind of song', 'like a bird on the foam of a stream', 'like a laugh from the lips of a dream', 'like a pearl on a string', 'like a star in the dew', and 'like a

sweet tear'. These similies are children of fancy and they catch our imagination as no other device could. The beauty, the purity, the innocence of a maiden bride are a fine vision. In her poem 'Coromandal Fishers' she uses a very apt similie :

"The wind lies asleep in the arms of the dawn
like a child that has cried all night."

Some of the earlier poems are full of sweet images, for example, 'Indian love song' where the night-wind is like a lover. Some similies are very complex and honeycombed :

Like a serpent to the calling voice of flute,
Glides my heart into thy fingers, O my love ;

Or

Like the perfume in the petals of a rose,
Hides my heart within my bosom, O my love ;
Like a garland, like a jewel, like a dove
That hangs its nest in the Asoka-tree.

Some are purely Shelleyan :

Like a joy on the heart of a sorrow
The sunset hangs on a cloud.

(Autumn Song)

Some of the similies are the unstrung pearl of grace and imagination :

Round the sadness of my days
Breaks a melody of Praise ;
Like a shining storm of petals,
Like a lustrous rain of pearls,
From the lutes of eager minstrels,
From the lips of glowing girls.

The later poems abound in such rich imagination. At places, Sarojini rises to such mysterious height of imagination that it becomes hard to comprehend her :

Deep in a lovely garden on the hill
 Lulled by the low sea-tides,
 A shadow set in shadows, soft and still,
 A wandering spirit glides,
 Smiting its pallid palms and making moan.
 O let my love atone !

Deep in a lovely garden on the hill
 Among the fallen leaves
 A shadow lost in shadows, vague and chill,
 A wandering spirit grieves,
 Beating its pallid breast and making moan.
 O let my Death atone !

(Atonement)

Such ethereal imagination is beyond the reach of an ordinary poet.

Another great quality of Sarojini's vision is her phrasemaking genius. She is an artist in the use of words and phrases aglow with fire and meaning. Some are—'Silver Tears of Sorrow' (*Silver Tears*), lyric bloom, melodious leaves (*Ashoka Bloom*), a carnival of lights, sanctuary of sorrow, a spectre in the rose-encircled shroud, echoing bough, blossoming hopes unharvested (*The Poet to Death*), the wakening skies, the leaping wealth of the tide, the kiss of the spray, the dance of the wild foam's glee (*Coromandal Fishers*), Moon-light tangled meshes of perfume, where golden-vested maidens tread with mellow laughter, the petals of delight, silver breasted moonbeam of desire (*The Snake Charmer*), the Koil—haunted river isles, sandal-scented leisure (*Village Song*), Centuried sleep, birds of sleep white-pinioned (*Ode to H. H. the Nizam*), the conflict of dream-shattering years (*life*), An ecstasy of starry silence (*The Poet's Love Song*), hopes upleaving like the light of dawn (*To the God of Pain*), a wail of desire, gemtangled hair (*Indian Dancers*), Wild pigeons of joy. There are hundreds of more condensed similies and metaphors which give an individual touch to Sarojini's Muse and breathe a complete mastery of style and imagination unknown to lesser poets.

Another speciality is her myth-making genius. In '*The Dance of Love*' music itself is personified—

In another poem 'Death and Life' a single stroke enlivens Death:

'Death stroked my hair and whispered tenderly'
She is deeply rooted in Indian mythology which
has given her a number of subjects like Nala and
Damyanti. Often she uses ancient myths to bring
out newer emphasis :

(Summer Woods)

Thine ageless beauty born of Brahma's breath.

(The Lotus : To M. K. Gandhi)

Sometimes the effect is enormous :

To Indra's golden-flowering groves
Where streams immortal flow
Or to sad Yama's silent courts
Engulfed in lamplight woe,
Where'er thy subtle flute I hear
Beloved, I must go !

(The Flute player of Brindaban)

Not only Hindu myths, but Muslim myths and lores too are skilfully woven in the texture of the poems. These ingenuities make Sarojini's poems a class by themselves.

The Descriptive powers of the poetess are evident from a number of nature-poems :

A brown quail cries from ten tamarisk bushes,
A bulbul calls from the cassia—plume,
And thro' the wet earth the gentian pushes

Her spikes of silvery bloom.
 Where 'er the foot of the bright shower passes
 Fragrant and fresh delights unfold ;
 The wild fawns feed on the scented grasses,
 Wild bees on the cactus—gold

(June Sunset)

The culmination of her powers of description is seen in such poems as call forth the best of the vocabulary of the poet, for example :

Out of the sombre shadows,
 Over the sunlit grass,
 Slow in a sad procession
 The shadowy pageants pass.
 Mournful, majestic and solemn,
 Stricken and pale and dumb.
 Crowned in their peerless anguish,
 The sacred Martyrs come.
 Hark, from the brooding silence
 Breaks the wild cry of pain
 Wrung from the heart of ages
 Ali ! Hassan ! Hussain !

(The Imam Bara)

Or

Now silent, now singing and swaying and swinging,
 like blossoms that bend to the breezes or showers,
 Now wantonly winding, they flash, now they falter,
 and lingering, languish in radiant choir,
 Their jewel girt arms and warm, wavering, lily-long
 fingers enchant through melodious hours,
 Eyes ravished with rapture, celestially painting, what
 passionate bosoms aflaming with fire !

(Indian Dancers)

Sarojini has used a number of poetic styles and she is a master of more than one sort of diction. Most of her poems are lyrics which invariably have a very attractive refrain. This refrain is the soul of the poem. In most of her lyrics, the same or similar refrain passes from one stanza to another and adds to the charm of the poem. In a number of poems, the idea is expressed in a number of stanzas and is either contrasted in each one of them, or the effects accumulated. The patterns of contrast or comparison give variety and strength to her art :

Weavers, weaving at break of day,
 Why do you weave a garment so gay ? ...
 Blue as the wing of a halcyon wild,
 We weave the robes of a new-born child.
 Weavers, weaving at fall of 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.
 Weavers, weaving solemn and still,
 What do you weave in the moonlight chill ?...
 White as a feather, and white as a cloud,
 We weave a dead man's funeral shroud.

—(*Indian Weavers*)

Three definite strokes bring out the whole comedy and tragedy of life. In another poem 'Sutee' she piles effect on effect variegating the theme. The language and diction clearly show Tagore's influence. This device is a favourite with her. Every next stroke is a development on the first :

Cover my eyes, O my Love !
 Mine eyes that are weary of bliss
 As of light that is poignant and strong.
 O ! Silence my life with a kiss,
 My lips that are weary of song!
 Shelter my soul, O my Love !
 My soul is bent low with the pain
 And the burden of love like the grace
 Of a flower that is smitten with rain !
 O shelter my soul from thy face !

—(*Ecstasy*)

This contrast or comparison or repetition of ideas makes some of Sarojini's poem's irresistible :

Tarry a while, O Death I cannot die
 While yet my sweet life burgeons with its spring ;
 Fair is my youth, and rich the echoing boughs
 Where *dhadikulas* sing.

Tarry a while, O Death, I cannot die
 With all my blossoming hopes unharvested,
 My joys ungarnered, all my songs unsung,
 And all my tears unshed.

Tarry a while, till I am satisfied,
 Of love and grief, of earth and altering sky ;
 Till all my human hungers are fulfilled,
 O ! Death, I cannot die !

—(*The Poet to Death*)

Most of her poems have a highly strung diction which sometimes smacks of artificiality. The vocabulary used in most cases is uncommon and is greatly influenced by the Romantic Vocabulary of the early 19th century poets of England. In fact she is influenced by Shelley, Keats, Masfield, Yeats and Tagore. All of these have a lot of romanticism in them both in the world of Imagery, and in the use of language. Sarojini seems to have deeply imbibed the works and spirit of these poets. It is not incorrect if we say that Sarojini's Diction is high-browed, though it does not lack in passion. Any kind of diction is alright so long as it does not have the effect of insincerity and it is not a 'handling of emotions rather than the compelling utterance of them.' In his Essay 'Poetic Diction in English' (collected Essays, 11, 111, 1930), Robert Bridges says that the quality of diction is closely associated with two other matters, namely, Properties and keeping. In Aesthetics no Property is absurd if it is in keeping. The use of mythology, or special types, or high-tuned imagery is known as Property and keeping is the harmonizing of the artistic medium. Different Properties are indispensable for different imaginative effects; the only essential in all good writing is Good Keeping. It is too much to demand of a poet to confine Properties to actualities or ask him to drop downright archaic and literary forms of speech. Poetic language being essentially a rarity of expression, apt and desirable, though obsolete, grammatical forms may appear, and they will certainly colour the diction and invite a kindred vocabulary. Sarojini is more often unusual, but her sonorous unusual words add to the subtlety in the expression of ideas. We might not go so far as Bridges, but we cannot be too hard to the poetess for choosing uncommon words and phrases because they have a keener perception of beauty. She does not subscribe to Wordsworth's view which defines poetry as 'fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation' (Lyrical Ballads, 1800). There are still not a few who believe with Coleridge that there is "an essential differences between the language of prose and of metrical composition" (Biographia

Literaria, chapter XVIII, 1817). We meet some rhetorical caprices in the works of Sarojini, but they do not spoil our enjoyment of her poetry.

But it is untrue that Sarojini is always sophisticated. Lines of extreme simplicity are dovetailed with rich, luxuriant images which call forth bold strokes of uncommon, big words. We can, as an instance, take 'The Time of Roses :'

Love, it is the time of roses !
In bright fields and garden closes
How they burgeon and unfold !
How they swamp O'er tombs and towers,
In voluptuous crimson showers
And untrammelled tides of gold !

How they lure wild bees to capture
All the rich mellifluous rapture
Of their magical perfume,
And to passing winds surrender
All their frail and dazzling splendour
Rivalling your turban-plume.

How they cleave the air adorning
The high rivers of the morning
In a blithe, bejewelled fleet !
How they deck the moonlit grasses
In thick rainbow tinted masses
Like a fair queen's bridal sheet !

Hide me in a shrine of roses,
Drown me in a wine of roses,
Drawn from every fragrant grove !
Bind me on a pyre of roses,
Burn me in a fire of roses,
Crown me with the roses of love.

This is typically Omarkhayyam. The last stanza is simplicity itself full of the madness of spring-festivity and love-loyalty. The second and the third stanzas are high-strung and the contrast of the last stanza comes with the suddenness of a revelation. This light and shade, this high browedness and light-heartedness, their queer mixture of imagination and emotion is the key to Sarojini's workmanship. As we have seen these poems included under the head 'The Temple' are one end of the line

with exquisite workmanship and total restraint of emotion. At the other end of the line we have a number of poems which are classics of sincerest emotional utterance in the simplest poetic language. For example, 'The Magic of Spring' :

I buried my heart, so deep, so deep,
Under a secret hill of pain,
And said "O I broken pitiful thing,
Even the magic spring
Shall ne'er wake thee to life again
Tho' March woods glimmer with opal rain
And passionate Koels sing."

The kimshuks burst into dazzling flower,
The seemals burgeoned in crimson pride,
The palm-groves shone with the oriole's wing,
The Koels began to sing,
The soft cloud broke in a twinkling tide.....
My heart leapt up in its grave and cried,
"Is it the spring, the spring?"

And what can be simpler in art and diction, yet more superb, than the song of the Palanquin-Bearers :

Lightly, O lightly, we bear her along,
She sways like a flower in the wind of our song;
She skims like a bird on the foam of a stream,
She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream
Gaily, O gaily, we glide and we sing,
We hear her along like a pearl on a string.

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.

It is clear from the above that Sarojini has no mental reservations. All styles suit her, though she has a weakness for the ornate style decked with the choicest jewels of language. Though there has developed a halo round her of a finished orator—and the best orator in a foreign medium—she is essentially a poet, and her greatest speeches have a strong under-current of fleeting images and sweeping

emotions. An artist she certainly is, for she never abandons herself in her dreams and visions. She makes of them a sceptre and a sword. This, however, does not mean that her poems smell of labour ; far from that, they flare in freshness. She had a fine needle, and a big pattern of a nation's life. Her poems are like an

“.....albaster box whose art
Is frail as a cassia flower × × ×
Carven with delicate dreams and wrought
With many a subtle and exquisite thought.

Therein I treasure the spice and scent
Of rich and passionate memories blunt
Like odours of cinnamon, sandal and clove,
Of song and sorrow and life and love.

Yet this albaster box has a strong art that will survive decades. Its Indian colours and contours are so vivid as to make a reader distasteful of English ones. Tagore has not attempted in English metres. ‘Gitanjali’, ‘Gardener’, ‘Fire-flies’, ‘Fruit-gathering’ ‘Lover’s Gift and Crossing’—all invariably contain free translations of Tagore’s Bengali poems. They required no pains to give them an Indian setting. Sarojini was using English metres which must call forth typical English imagery and foreign myths. She has the credit of introducing life and wealth in Indo-Anglian poetry, which for the most part has set masters and set task.

Much can be said about Sarojini’s use of metre and rhythm, and such a study must repay us with a large harvest. Nevertheless, it is a painstaking work and we shall here deal with only same broader aspect of her metrical genius.

Sarojini uses a number of metres and she uses all of them with equal success. There is the short stanza :

Welcome, O ! fiery pain !
My heart unseared, unstricken,
Drinks deep thy fervid rain,
My spirit seed to quicken.

and there are the sweeping lines set to the time of a dance :

Now silent, now singing and swaying and swing-
 ing like blossoms that bend to the breezes
 or showers,
 Now wantonly winding, they flash, now they
 falter, and lingering, languish the radiant
 choir,
 Their jewel-girt arms and warm, wavering, lily-
 long fingers enchant through melodious hours
 Eyes ravished with rapture, celestially panting,
 what passionate bosoms aflaming with fire !

or the deliberately laboured lines of 'the Pearl':

Shall not some ultimate
 And unknown hour deliver thee an attest
 Life's urgent and unvoilable claim
 To bind and consecrate
 The glory on some pure and bridal breast
 Or set thee to enhance with flawless flame
 A new-born nation's coronal of flame ?

There are poems set to Indian tunes :

Where the golden, glowing
 Champak buds are blowing,
 By the swiftly-flowing streams,
 Now, when day is dying
 There are fairies flying
 Scattering a cloud of dream

—(*Slumber Song for Sunalani*)

and there are poems put to the tune of Bazaars and
 folksongs :

What do you weigh, O Ye Vendors ?
Saffron and lentil and rice.
 What do you grind, O Ye maidens ?
Sandal wood, henna and spice.
 What do you call, O Ye Pedlars ?
Chessman and ivory and dice.

Or

Tell me no more of thy love, *papeeha*,
 Wouldst thou recall to my heart, *papeeha*
 Dreams of delight that are gone.....

But the metrical inventiveness of the poetess is best

seen in those poems where she weaves vernacular cries and phrases for Indian Colour :

Allah ho Akbar ! Allah ho kbar !
 From Mosque and minar the muezzins are
 calling,
 Pour forth your praises, O chosen of Islam ;
 Swiftly the shadows of sunset are falling :
Allah ho Akbar ! Allah ho Akbar !

Or

Till we meet the Night that brings
 Both to beggars and to kings
 The end of all their journeyings
Y'Allah ! Y'Allah !

Sometimes a number of elements combine to forge a new rhythm which trembles at each step like a nervous girl going for a tryst :

I carried my curds to the Mathura fair.....
 How softly the heifers were lowing.....
 I wanted to cry, "Who will buy
 These curds that are white as the clouds in
 the sky
 When the breezes of *Shrawan* are blowing ?
 But my heart was so full of your beauty,
 beloved,
 They laughed as I cried without knowing :
 Govinda, Govinda !
 Govinda, Govinda !
 How softly the river was flowing.

Such richness of metrical varieties and uncommon rhythms is not to be found elsewhere and the beauty is that metres and rhythms which she delights in handling are living, pulsating and reacting. Such happy rhythms fill the reader with a sweet surprise. Even many modern English poets cannot claim such ingenuity. Her poems have rhythms of life, as they come out direct from a vital personality. Actualities, imagination, feeling and music are sweetly blended into an artistic form aglow with life and fire of real passion. She is a supreme artist in words, imagery and patterns, and her canvas is

a whole nation. What is more, she knows the art of being artless. It is a pity that she did not give us many more of those fine-cut jewels of beauty. The call of a nation in her bondage brought her out of her rose-bower amidst a veritable sea of storms seething with humane puns and passions. She became the high-priestess in the steel-temple of the Mother.

XII

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing pages we have tried to arrive at a correct estimate of Sarojini Naidu's poetry. The influences, we have seen, are mainly Romantic and, but for some abiding ones on language and coinages of words and phrases, almost negligible. She copies no one and represents no school or movement.

Like all our modern poets who began their work in the last decades of the 19th century, she has learnt much from the English Romanticists of the early 19th Century. She is a bit verbose too. Uncommon words commonly occur. But she has an eye for melody and colour and in these fields none can beat her. With melodious and colourful words aptly chosen from a rich vocabulary she can gracefully raise an image of exquisite beauty or strike a new emotion.

Her choice of Indian background, of Indian subjects and the native treatment of her subject is quite original. Nowhere does she borrow a foreign allusion or myth. She drinks from the perennial nectar-fountain of Hind. It is this that makes her appeal so irresistible. Her poems are truly songs of India.

Some might feel too much art (artifice) in Sarojini's poems. There seems to be much chiselling and polish in her poems, but they do not lose in effect. Her expressions have all the culture and sophistry of a lady brought up in a highly cultured Bengali home with a father overzealous over the beauty of English language and literature. Both Sarojini and her brother Harindranath Chattopadhyaya seem to drink English with their mother's milk. But while Sarojini has moulded English to the genius of her land, Harindranath has more foreign element in his thought and expressions. Among the Indian exponents of English Muse she remains

at the top, second only to Tagore in the use of language and opening new possibilities in diction and style. Let us quote one more poem to illustrate the uniqueness of Sarojini's Muse. Take "Leili". "Leili" is a Persian word for 'Night'. The poem is a description of Night :

The serpents are asleep among the poppies,
The fireflies light the soundless panther's way
To tangled paths where shy gazelles are straying,
And parrot-plumes outshine the dying day.
O soft, the lotus buds upon the stream
Are stirring like sweet maidens when they dream.

A caste-mark on the azure brows of Heaven,
The golden moon burns sacred, solemn, bright.
The winds are dancing in the forest-temple,
And swooning at the holy feet of Night.
Hush ! in the silence mystic voices sing
And make the gods their incense-offering.

This is an imaginative picture of Night. The canvas used is the widest imaginable. The first stanza pictures the approach of Night. Poppies are associated with sleep. The poetess imagines that the serpents have gone to sleep. The second image is that of a panther stealing through dense forest lit by the fireflies to the streams to prey upon gazelles. How nicely she locks the several images :

The fireflies light the *soundless panther's way*
To *tangled path* where *shy* gazelles are straying.

The use of adjectives 'Soundless', 'Tangled' and 'Shy' is well thought out. These give the sense of the panther's silent steps in dense forest-path. The lotus bud evokes a dream-like imagery. They are stirring like sweet maidens when they dream. 'O Soft' gives a stir of emotion to this rather static picture. The second stanza raises the picture to the highest pitch. The golden moon is 'a caste on the azure brows of Heavens.' It burns sacred, solemn, bright. The

play of wind is expressively caught in the following words—

The winds are dancing in the forest-temple,
And swooning at the holy feet of Night.

Here Night is personified, and the image of a temple gives it a mythological touch. The mystic silence of night finds its expression in the last lines. This analysis brings out the characteristic trends in Sarojini's poetry employing (1) individual and artistic use of the language, (2) imagery, (3) oriental similes and metaphors, (4) myth-makinggenius. All these are intricately woven to result in the highest kind of poetry. Elsewhere we have examined other brilliant qualities of Sarojini's verse, but these mentioned above predominate in all her writings and go to contribute a large bit to her success.

It is a sorrowful fact that Sarojini's career as a poet was cut short, and her output was confined to only three thin volumes. 'The Golden Threshold' promised to be the beginning of a new era in her poetry. The more pity for it, for it was not given to her to carry on her experiments in the newer fields of art and emotion ! She passed to the disputed field of Politics, and her sincere devotion to Gandhiji and her eloquence, her broad sympathies soon raised her to the highest eminence. She presided at the Indian National Congress and for a decade and more has been a member of the Congress Working Committee. Her speeches have been collected and published by Natesan and they show her a first rate speaker, a debator, a stylist in Prose and a thinker of no less brilliance. Poetry is her very soul, and her prose is illuminated with bright jewels of poetry. It is emotional, elaborate and poetical. Her prose might rank with those of her illustrious contemporaries : Tagore, Gandhi and Nehru.

Yet it is as a poet that we have approached her. As a national leader, as a pioneer of Hindu-Muslim Unity, as a brilliant specimen of Indian womanhood, as a prose-stylist, Sarojini has shown a rich personality which it is not easy to grasp. Poetry is one prominent side of her personality—

and it is the poetry of life, of rhythm, of colour, of a people, that she has given us. But for her, English would have been much poorer. With Tagore, she stands as the rich heritage of India adding colours and contours to English sounds and rhythms. Of course, Tagore is a class by himself. He has greater depths of vision and higher flights of imagination. W. B. Yeats wrote about Gitanjali :

"These lyrics.....which are in the original, my Indians tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention—display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes. A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble.....

"Rabindranath Tagore like, Chaucer's forerunners, writes music for his words, and one understands at every moment that he is so abundant, so spontaneous, so daring in his passion, full of surprise, because he is doing something which has never seemed strange, unnatural, or in need of defence.....

"At every moment the heart of this poet flows outward to these without derogation or condescension, for it has known that they will understand ; and it has filled itself with the circumstance of their lives. The traveller in the red-brown clothes that he wears that the dust may not show upon him, the girl searching in her bed for the petal fallen from the wreath of her royal lover, the servant or the bride awaiting the master's home-coming in the empty houses, are images of the heart turning to God. Flowers and rivers, the blowing of couch shells, the heavy rain of the Indian July, or the parching heat, are images of the moods of that heart in union or in separation ; and a man sitting in a boat upon a river playing upon a lute, like one of those figures full of mysterious meaning in a Chinese picture, is God Himself. A whole people, a whole civilisation, unmeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into

this imagination." (*Gitanjali Introduction XIII-XVII.*)

Sarojini does not attempt such ethereal height. Her ambitions are humbler. She sings to us 'Songs of India.' Indian springs and summers, Indian love-lore, the pledges of the sons and daughters of the Mother to her, Indian streets and bazaars, Indian scenes and sights—these she attempts to put into words aglow with the fires of real passion and with a genius quick at metrical inventions. Indo-Anglian poetry is mostly an echo of the English Muse. It has very little that is indigenous. Even Greek Myths and continental absurdities are not forgotten. For these Indo-Anglian poets, there are no Indian birds and flowers, no typical Indian scenes and sights, nothing essentially Indian. Even Ar-vindo whose talks of Myrtle and Myrrha. A new light dawned on Indo-Anglian poetry when Tagore gave it Indian background and Sarojini wove Indian birds and flowers in the texture of her poems, and broke the rigidity of English metres by setting them to the tune of Indian folksongs and Bengali metre. Take the little poem 'In the Evening' by Harindra-nath Chattopadhyaya :

1

Dim Evening shades descend,
The Crowds disperse, the colours pale,
The wayside fair doth end.

2

You lost the day in running after
Fruitless love and fleeting laughter,
You played a hundred games and missed
The real game, my friend !

3

And all the while the daylight burned,
Great fame and wealth you sought and earned,
Now at its close you find you have
Not even a pie to spend.

Dim evening dies and night comes on,
Where has your last companion gone !
You are alone and you have now
A lonely way to wend.

This is typically English, in language, metre and spirit. Take one from Tagore :

"The day is no more, the shadow is upon the earth.
It is time that I go to the stream to fill my
pitcher.

"The evening air is eager with the sad music of the
water. Ah, it calls me out into the dusk. In the
lonely lane there is no passer-by, the wind is
up, the ripples are rampant in the river.

"I know not if I shall come back home. I know
not whom I shall chance to meet. There at
the fording in the little boat the unknown man
plays upon his lute."

—(*Gitanjali* 74)

This is essentially Indian in spirit and background.
The image pulsates with life, and sorrow becomes
a reflection of joy : we are reminded that

'Our sweetest songs are those
That tell of saddest thought.'

—(*Shelley*)

The mystery darkens when we know that the
shadows of the evening symbolise the soul's parting
turmoils and struggles. All this is typically oriental.
And now we turn to Sarojini :

Here shall my heart find its haven of calm,
By rush-fringed rivers and rain-fed streams
That glimmer thro' meadow of lily and palm.
Here shall my soul find its true repose
Under a sunset sky of dreams
Diaphanous, amber and rose.
The air is aglow with the glint and whirl
Of swift wild wings in their homeward flight,
Sapphily emerald, topaz, and pearl,
Afloat in the evening light.

A brown quail cries from the tamarisk bushes,
 A bulbul calls from the cassia-plumes,
 And thro' the wet earth the gentian pushes
 Her spikes of silvery bloom.
 Where'er the food of the bright shower passes
 Fragrant and fresh delights unfold ;
 The wild fawns feed on the scented grasses,
 Wild bees on the cactus-gold.

—(*June Sunset*)

This is a very faithful pen-picture of a summer sunset in our land. All the glow and warmth of the sky is clearly caught in a few chosen words and symbols. The picture burns with vivid colours, Diaphanous, amber, rose, sapphire, emerald, topaz, pearl and cactus-gold. Such wealth is not revealed by an English, and so we have a delightful home-scene in foreign tongue. Here you find real Indian stuff. Tagore gives us the spirit of India. He is a superb dreamer of dreams. He says :

“My song has put off her adornments. She has no pride of dress and decoration.”

—(*Gitanjali*)

And he is true. In sheer simplicity and grandeur of diction, he is unsurpassed :

“I have got my leave. Bid me farewell, my brothers !
 I bow to you all and take my departure. Here
 I give back the keys of my door—and I give up
 all claims to my house. I only ask for last kind
 words from you. We were neighbours for long,
 but I received more than I could give. Now the
 day has dawned and the lamp that lit my dark
 corner is out. A summons has come and I am
 ready for my journey.”

—(*Gitanjali* 93)

Sarojini is different. She does not represent the mystic soul of India. She is a trumpet-call. Words come to her as leaves to the spring. She loves them for the sake of their music, their colour, their strength. To a mere versifier, they might be like a clichés. She makes of them a sceptre and a flute,

In Sarojini's poems we find the flowering of an essentially Indian genius in a foreign medium. She has triumphed while lesser lights have failed. Indo-Anglian poetry is the richer for her and Indian poetry, the poorer. How great would have been her contribution to Bengali poetry if she gave her wealth of imagination and her ingenuity—we can only imagine. Yet she has shown to the world that a great poet can plough across lingual barriers. India will not only express in English: she will create things of beauty in that medium. In the higher pursuits of religion, philosophy and poetry, India can afford to enrich the world from her ancient treasures and her sons and daughters today can add their own jewels to them. A free India will not trade in a foreign tongue as an inter-provincial language. A national language shall replace English. There shall be no impetus to Indo-Anglian poetry, and Tagore and Sarojini shall become a dream phenomena associated with a foreign domination. These are sad things to think. The Persian literature—of the Moghul times lives to our day through Urdu which was forged on the anvils of Time to mark a cultural unity of the peoples of Hindustan and the invading races. English has no cultural ties in India, and she would inevitably suffer when we break from England. Most of the Indo-Anglian literature shall then pass to remote history as a specimen of colonial literature born out of the need of the times. But some of this shall be saved from historical archives because of its innate freshness and capacity to give Joy. Tagore will live. Sarojini will live. *Mirabile Visu ! Mirabile dictu !!*

POST-SCRIPT

The Indo-Anglian poetry became a possibility when on March 7, 1835, Lord William Bentinck agreed with Macaulay and the famous 'Minute' ushered a new era in Indian education. Soon there was born a generation of educated Indian who prided in imitating his English master to ridiculous extreme. His voice became "an echo, his life a quotation, his soul a brain and his free spirit a slave to thing." (*S. Radhakrishnan*). In 1816, Gangadhar Bhattacharya started '*Bengal Gazette*' and thus began a bold adventure in the field of Indo-English Journalism. Letters, memoranda, monographs, translations, articles, portraits, political and economical pamphlets, skits and short stories came luxuriantly. Cartloads of such material was justly needed for a period of apprenticeship, and we do not regret if much of it is lost today.

The first literary awakening dawned in Bengal and it was here that Indo-Anglian poetry felt the birth-pangs in the period following Mutiny. In 1876 was published Toru Dutt's first work—*A Sheaf Gleaned in French Fields*, which had such chaste lines as this—

Still barred thy door ! the far east glows,
The morning wind blows fresh and free,
Should not the hour that wakes the rose
Awaken also thee ?

—(*Morning Serenade*)

This was a close and accredited imitation of the English Muses. But her other book posthumously published in 1882, *Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindusthan*, was a landmark in Indo-Anglian poetry as the subjects chosen were essentially Indian, although the imagery was exclusively derived from Western sources. After Toru Dutt came other members of the Dutt family, Shashi Chander Dutt, who wrote some verses, and his brother Ramesh Chandra Dutt who wrote copiously. His *Lays of Ancient India*, *Ramayan* and *Mahabharat* are still impressive. Madhusudan Dutt wrote '*The Captive Lady*' and '*The Visions of the Past*'. Another great adventurers in the field were Ghose brothers—Manmohan and Arvindo. '*Love Song and Elegies*' and '*Songs of Love and Death*' contain such excellent pieces as would adorn any literature. Sri Arvindo's work has been more prolific, and among Indo-Anglian poets he is a class by himself with his '*Ahava and other Poems*', '*The Herd and the Nymph*', '*Perseus the Deliverer*,' '*Urvasi*', '*Baji Prabhu*', '*Love and Death*,' '*Songs to Myrtilla*' and '*Six Poems*'. His is an extremely intellectual and sensitive soul adventuring into the mystic realms of the spirit, and he wields a highly facile pen.

The best known of Indo-Anglians are, however, Rabindranath Tagore and Sarojini. Rabindranath's claim rests on his prose translations of his Bengali poems—*Gitanjali*, *Gardener*, *Crescent Moon*, *Fruit gathering*—almost half a dozen precious gems. It is unfortunate that his long poems are still untranslated except a few like *Urvasi* and some others published in the pages of *Vishwabharti*. They are not available to the public in handy volumes. Nevertheless, the poems of Tagore have the loftiest grandeur, and even in translation they have enriched a literature of great richness. Today Tagore ranks in world-poets. Sarojini we have elaborately discussed in the pages of this small volume.

Arvindo, Tagore and Sarojini Naidu are the best that Indo-English poetry can offer. And they have host of imitators in their own land. Prose-poems became much favourite after Tagore; of these the best collections are '*On the Sand-Dunes*' (K. S.

Venkatramani) and *Songs of a Wanderer* (R. R. Kaikani). Harindranath Chattopadhyaya in his '*The Feast of Youth*,' '*The Perfume of Earth*,' '*Grey Clouds and White Showers*,' '*Ancient Wings*' has given us beautiful, though sometimes unequal, pieces of poetry. Then there are host of other writers : K. S. Ramaswami, Sadhu T. L. Vaswani, J. Krishnamurti, Nagesh Vishwanath Rai, M. Krishnamurti, Manjeri S. Isvaran, Bharti Sarabhai, A. K. Khabardar, Jehangir Modi, and Dilip Kumar Roy. The Professors and scholars of English have contributed their bit, and of these the best are Principal G. K. Chettur (*Triumph of Love, The Temple Tank, The Shadow of God*), Principal P. Sheshadri (*Bilhan, Champak Leaves, Vanishing Hours*), Humayun Kabir (*poems, Gandhi and other Poems*), and Principal V. Thadani (*Krishna's Flute and Triumph of Delhi*). There are still others full of love of life and beauty. True, there is much rubbish that goes under the name of Indo-English poetry, but that does not take away the merit of the pioneers who would grace any selection of modern English Poetry. There have been imitators and imitators, but credit must go to those who like Toru Dutt and Sarojini, Tagore and Arvind have achieved complete mastery over a foreign flute, and piped many an immortal songs. There have been influences. In the 19th century, the influences were classical poets, but with the new century Indo-English poet turned to the Romantics, Victorians and Pre-raphaelites. Eliot and Ezra Pound find little echoes, for they are too experimental and alien to Indian spirit of poetry. Anyway, Indo-English poetry has justified itself as it has contributed Indian colours and fragrance to English poetry.

FINIS

By the Same Author

TAGORE : THE POET

PREM CHAND



