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## CONTENTS

Name of the Author	Title of the Paper	Download
Dr. Archana & Dr. Pooja Singh	Feminine Sensibility Vs. Sexuality: A New Dimension	1201PDF
Dr. Akhilesh Kumar Dwivedi	Interrogating Representations of History: A Study of Mukul Kesavan's <i>Looking Through Glass</i>	1202 PDF
Dr. A.P. Pandey	Problems and Promises in Translating Poetry	1203 PDF
Dr. Ketan K. Gediya	Generation Divide among Diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's <i>Unaccustomed Earth</i>	1204 PDF
Dr. Nisha Dahiya	Patriotic Urge in Sarojini Naidu's Poetry	1205 PDF
Md. Irshad	Shashi Deshpande's <i>That Long Silence</i> : A Study of Assertion and Emotional Explosion	1206 PDF
Dr. Shanti Tejawani ICT	: As an Effective Tool for Teacher Trainees	1207 PDF
Dr. Manoj Kumar Jain	Differences in Stock Price Reaction to Bond Rating Changes: With Special Ref from India	1208 PDF
Maushmi Thombare	Bahinabai Chaudhari – A Multidimensional Poet	1209 PDF
Prof. Deepak K. Nagarkar	Death as Redemption in Arthur Miller's <i>Death of a Salesman</i>	1210 PDF
Dr. Vijaykumar A. Patil	Zora Neale Hurston's Theory of Folklore	1211 PDF
Dr. Jaiprakash N. Singh	Dalitonki Vyatha-Katha: Dalitkatha	1212 PDF
Raj Kumar Mishra	Traces of Hindu Eco-Ethics in the Poetry of A.K. Ramanujan	1213 PDF
Dr. Nidhi Srivastava	A Comparative Study of Values and Adjustment of Secondary School Students With and Without Working Mothers	1214 PDF
Sanjeev Kumar Vishwakarma	<i>Pinjar</i> : From Verbal to Audio-visual Transmutation	1215 PDF
Swati Rani Debnath	W.B. Yeats: Transition from Romanticism to	1216 PDF

	Modernism	
Sushil Sarkar	Environment and Woman: Reflections on Exploitation through Eco-Feminism in Mahasweta Devi's <i>Imaginary Maps</i>	1217 PDF
<b>Book Review</b>		
Sangeeta Singh	Goddess in Exile: A Sad Tale of Female Existentialism	1218 PDF
<b>Poetry</b>		
Bhaskar Roy Barman	On The Marge	1219 PDF
Dr Seema P. Salgaonkar	Entrapped	1220 PDF
Jaydeep Sarangi	I Live for My Daughter / Writing Back	1221 PDF
<b>Interview</b>		
Prof. Masood Ahmed	Interview with Poet Arbind Kumar Choudhary	1222 PDF

## Patriotic Urge in Sarojini Naidu's Poetry

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### ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt towards analyzing Sarojini Naidu not only a poet and politician but also a true patriot. She has a visionary grasp of the primal forces at work in the Indian experience. She tries to resolve the complex realities of life into the simple truths of imagination. Pandit Nehru rightly remarks: "Mrs. Naidu was a great nationalist and a mighty internationalist, while Gandhiji lifted politics to moral sphere; Sarojini lifted it to artistic sphere. She started her life as a poet, but when she was drawn into politics her whole life became a poem and a song." He further says that Sarojini "infused artistry and poetry into our freedom struggle just as the Father of the Nation had infused moral grandeur and greatness into the struggle". She consecrates her life with a storm singleness of purpose to the service of her motherland.

**Key Words:** patriotic urge, infused artistry, politician, lyric poet

Sarojini is one of the most illustrious daughters of India who combines in her an intense poetic temperament and a strong patriotic urge. Though she is an ardent worshipper of beauty, and pursues this ideal all through her life, she is never an idle singer of empty verse. True, she longs to remain in her ivory tower of beauty and romance but she is never indifferent to the social, moral or political issues facing her country and countrymen. She does not believe in the creed of art for art's sake if it is taken to mean that art is more important than life. She, on the other hand, holds the view that a true poet cannot sit content with the attempt to create pure poetry untouched by the interests of the life of the people, Shelley possesses a supreme gift for natural

song yet he feels an undying urge to reform the world.

Sarojini is fully aware of her poetic gifts and wants to use it in a spirit of dedication for her motherland. She announces, again and again in her poetry, that she wishes to serve her country and countrymen with her song. That is the real mission of her life. She loves her country and is passionately interested in the sufferings and afflictions of her people. Prof. Iyengar rightly observes: "Like Tagore and Aurobindo, Sarojini too was more than a poet; she was one of Mother India's most gifted children, readily sharing her burden of pain, fiercely articulating her agonies and hopes, and gallantly striving to redeem the Mother and redeem the time".

To Sarojini, as to Nehru India is a not a mere geographical entity, a portion of earth and a population but something “felt in the blood and experiences by the senses”. But while Nehru shows a historian’s urge in the discovery and assessment of his country’s unfathomable cultural treasure, Sarojini, possessed with a sensitive heart of a woman and a genuine urge of a poet, loves to “experience, enjoy, celebrate and worship” her motherland. India is, to her, an ever present, ever felt reality. It is everywhere – in the fields, gardens and see – beaches; it is in the thoughts, feelings, crafts and pursuits of her people. Sarojini has thrown all the energy of her passionate soul into the service of her motherland. Poets have been inspired to work for great causes and it is to the cause of liberty that Sarojini has dedicated herself. In one of her fiery speeches she says:

As long as I have life, as long as blood flows through this arm of mine, I shall not leave the cause of freedom. Come my general: come: my soldiers: I am only a woman, only a poet. But as a woman I give to you the weapons of faith and courage and the shield of fortitude. And as a poet, I fling out the banner of song, and sound the bugle – call to battle. How shall I kindle the flame which shall waken you men from slavery.”<sup>5</sup>

Love of motherland is a passion with Sarojini, and throughout her life she is seen struggling with the two equally powerful forces in her – her craving to sing songs of beauty, love and life, and her urge to serve her country. The desire for personal

fulfillment, for rewarding individual life is ever in conflict with the impersonal desire to devote and dedicate herself to her country and her people. Her passion for “the rapture of song” (p.141) is disturbed again and again till she finally decides to ignore the urges of her poetic self for the call of her nation. Her “love-affair with India”, as she once called it, begins in her early childhood. The “Traveler’s Song” which she wrote at the age of twelve shows clearly her deep affection for her motherland. Even when she was in Europe, she carried her country with her:

O’er Italia’s sunny plains  
All aglow with rosy flowers  
I wander ‘mid fallen fence  
And now amid the myrtle bowers  
But whosoever I may roam  
I long for thee, my dear dear home <sup>6</sup>

The sentiment of love and reverence for motherland is always surging in Sarojini’s heart. She always stands firm and inflexible in defense of her country’s honour. The prayer of Goddess Lakshmi, in behalf of motherland, shows her intense love and sincere attachment with her land:

For our dear Land do we offer oblation,  
O keep thou her glory unsullied, unshorn,  
And guard the invincible hope of our nation  
Hearken, O Lotus-born (p/150).

Sarojini is a poet of national awakening. The yearning for freedom is always strong in her. “To India” is a hymn to Mother India. It is addressed to Mother India to rise from her slumber and open up the prospectus for her children. The poet projects a vision of her country realizing her full stature and glory. Looking at her through prophetic eyes she portrays the ageless India. She exhorts Mother India to

rise and regenerates from her present gloom and despondency:

Rise, Mother, rise, regenerate from thy gloom,  
And, like a bride high-mated with the spheres,  
Beget new glories from Thine ageless womb

The shadow of despair which pervades the first stanza is now dispelled. The poet is now fully confident of the bright future of her country. She interprets the period of slavery through which her country is passing as a period of Mother's long slumber. The poet is quite hopeful that soon the Mother, who was once a great power, will regain her lost glory and be "crowned" with "crescent honors, splendors and victories". The concluding stanza has strong optimistic notes:

Thy Future calls thee with a manifold sound  
To crescent honours, splendours, victories vast;  
Waken, O slumbering Mother, and be crowned,  
Who once wert impress of the sovereign past  
(p.58).

Sarojini has an unflinching faith in the indomitable soul of India, endowed with "a perennial vitality and an unmeasured power of ultimate self renewal, able and ready after each dark epoch of political tribulation to fulfill the prophecy of her won Sri Krishna and 'be born again and again for the establishing of national righteousness'." Occasionally she gets prophetic in her pronouncement: "The Dawn of her (India's) deliverance is at hand. For imperishable are the prophecies of Time and eternal the pledges of the Soul".<sup>7</sup>

"The Gifts of India" is a noble tribute to the brave sons of India, who attained martyrdom fighting from the side of the Allies in the First World War. The poem

was raging World War in its background. It is in a form of address by the Mother India to the World. The country is personified and identified with the poet. Her tender and sensitive soul leaps forward to sympathies with the heroes who displayed their valour on different battle fronts fighting in favor of Allies. The boundless grief of Mother India for her heroic sons, who were killed in alien lands, is poignantly expressed:

Is there aught you need that my hands withhold,  
Rich gifts of raiment or grain or gold?  
Lo: I have flung to the East and West  
Priceless treasures torn from my breast,  
And yielded the sons of my stricken womb.

To the drum-beats of duty, the sabers of doom.

The brave sons of India were killed in strange climates and in strange lands. Their bodies were buried to "alien graves" without any concern or love or a drop of tear. They were

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 (p.144)

It is hard to assume and "measure" the grief of the Mother who is compelled to offer her beloved sons in the name of duty to be killed in war. Her tone gets very pathetic:

Can ye measure the grief of the tears I weep  
Or compass the woe of the watch I keep?  
Or the pride that thrills thro' my heart's  
despair and the hope that comforts the  
anguish of prayer. (p.146)

The poet is ever haunted by the great sacrifice India did in the First World War, and wants to remind the world of the blood of the "martyred sons" of India. A strong

note of protest, against the Imperialists, is implicit in the following lines:

When the terror and tumult of hate shall cease  
And life be refashioned on anvils of peace,  
And your love shall offer in your dauntless  
ranks,  
And you honour the deeds of the deathless ones,  
Remember the blood of my martyred sons.

It has been called a “War” poem but critics are divided in their opinion on this point. In fact, it is a patriotic poem which is soaked with deep love for motherland. It is written with a motive to attract the attention of the world to the brave soldiers of India who served the little in the First World War. The poem, on the whole, is characteristically colorful and romantic.

Sarojini’s most absorbing pursuit in her advances age has been the service of her country. Even the charms of spring cannot divert her from the call of the “loud World”. She readily responds to the clarion call of her nation, and resolves, for all times, to serve the dreamless suffering people with her dreams of love and faith. It is this urge for action that makes her bid farewell to the fairy world of mystery and romance. “The Fiery Island of Janjira” addressed to Her Highness, Begum of Janjira” shows Sarojini’s intense desire to come out of the blissful island of beauty and joy to serve her country. The craving for beauty is irresistible but the urge for action is not less powerful. She cannot ignore her country and her people for her personal joy. She says:

Fain would I dwell in your faery kingdom,  
O faery queen of a flowering clime,  
Where life glides by to a delicate measure,  
With the glamour and grace of a far-off time  
(p.121)

She can no longer afford to remain in ease and ecstasy in her ivory tower of beauty and joy, for her country call her to dedicate her songs and life to patriotic services. It is a great pleasure to respond to the drumbeats of duty. She announces in emphatic tone that she will

go where the loud world beckons,  
And the urgent drum-beat of destiny calls,  
For from your white dome’s luminous slumber,  
Far from the dream of your fortress walls  
(p.121).

She determines to plunge into the vortex of politics, into the “strife of the throng and the tumult” by raging a crusade against “folly and wrong”. She knows that in the “Island of Bliss it is always spring” but it is high time to plunge

Into the strife of the throng and the 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 (p.121)

“The Broken Wing” is marked by patriotic fervour. A mild note of pathos colours the poem because it has in its background the personal grief of the poet due to the death of her beloved father and her close friend Gokhale. The poem is cast in question-answer form and expresses the poet’s deep patriotic passions. The “mournful night is past” and a new dawn breaks with new hopes and promises. Everything in nature returns to the “winds of hope”, gains new vigour and life. This fills the poet’s sad, melancholy heart with new hopes and dreams. She builds up her courage and stamina to wake her motherland to new heights of glory:

The great dawn breaks, the mournful night is past,  
From her deep age-long sleep she wakes at last;

Sweet and long- slumbering buds of gladness ope  
 Fresh lips to the returning winds of hope,  
 Our eager hearts renew their radiant flight  
 Towards the glory of renascent light,  
 Life and our land await their destined spring

“An anthem of Love” is a sincere expression of the poet’s deep love and divine duty towards her land. She experiences an intense patriotic urge and surrenders whole- heartedly to the cause of freedom. She is willing to undertake any amount of strain or do any degree of sacrifice:

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

Her deep love for her motherland attains the intensity of a devotees’ love. Here is an “undivided, individual soul” bound by “one hope, one purpose, one devotion”. The last stanza shows the poet’s unflinching faith, unwavering devotion towards the great goal of freedom:

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

The poem is appealing with its depth of passion and sincerity of tone.

The same theme of mother India waking up from the gloom of sorrow recurs in the poem “At Dawn”. It is a poem of national awakening. The painful “long night” is over and the country is fast moving ahead towards a new dawn of splendour and glory. As the daylight of new hope and promise is breaking, the poet wishes to wake the sleeping people to a national consciousness.

The poem opens with a strong note of optimism:

Children, my children, the daylight is breaking,  
 The cymbals of morn sound the hour of your waking,  
 The long night is o’er and our labour is ended.

Sarojini’s response to the call of Indian nationalism is deeply rooted in her profound sense of identity with the land, the people and the culture. As a poet, she sets her to discover India, though customs, traditions and values of the people. Here is a poet’s and, a poetic discover of India. She visualizes India as a nation rising towards a future as glorious as the past. She sees India exactly in the same way as Langland saw his England, as a field full of folk, and folk clad in glory.

“Lotus” is a sonnet dedicated to Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation. If Gokhale initiated Sarojini to the path of politics, it was Mahatma Gandhi who gave her the direction. The poem highlights Mahatma’s virtues and the spiritual height he attained during his lifetime serving his country. Sarojini expresses her deep admiration and high regards for him:

O Mystic Lotus, sacred and sublime,  
 In myriad – petalled grace inviolate,  
 Supreme o’er transient storms of tragic Fate,  
 Deep-rooted in the waters of all Time  
 (p.167)

Many poems have been written in indifferent languages to eulogize Mahatma but this poem stands as a unique poetic piece, for it reveals beautifully the spiritual aspect of his personality.

“Lokmanya Tilak” is commemorative as the previous one. Tilak, unlike moderate

Gokhale, was a political extremist. He was conscious of Maratha inheritance, and a great upholder of Hindu culture and tradition. He was a man of great integration. Who never believed in compromises? The poet is reminded of the “sovereign grandeur of this great hero of nation”:

Changeless, austere, your fame is counterpart  
Of your own stories hills inviolate.  
Your proud immortal deeds irradiate  
The darkness of our land, and star-like dart  
The lustre of your wisdom, valour, art,  
Transfiguring sorrow and transcending Fate<sup>9</sup>

Tilak was a great freedom fighter, and his immortal deeds, his “wisdom, valour and art” went a long way in dispelling “the darkness of our land”. The poet goes directly to the inner core of his personality, by referring to his ability, as a hero of Indian culture, to evoke the racial consciousness. His “sovereign grandeur” is connected beautifully with the “storied hills” of Maharashtra. At a time when it was a crime to utter the word “freedom”, Tilak inspired the whole nation by his clarion call “Freedom is my birthright and I will attain it”.<sup>10</sup> The poet pays a fitting tribute to the “virtuous heart”;

Hail dauntless soldier, hail intrepid sage  
Who taught our nation Freedom’s Gayatri :  
Immutable from the redeeming flame  
Your ashes are our children’s heritage,  
And all the epic rhythms of the sea  
Chant your triumphant and undying name

Tilak did a great job by integrating the whole nation in a cultural bond. His great gift to nation has been beautifully described as “Freedom’s Gayatri”. The poem shows Sarojini’s profound love and deep admiration for the great national hero. The

last line “and all the epic rhythms of the sea/chant your triumphant and undying name” change this sonnet to Mantra or sacred chant.

Sarojini grows up in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Chattopadhyay home and in the loving care of her father who was an embodiment of truth, love, justice and patriotism. She recalls her beloved father who taught her “Be not limited even to the Indians, but let it be your pride that you are a citizen of the world”<sup>11</sup>.

Sarojini shows a rare confluence of diverse currents of culture and tradition, a conjunction of many roads of influence. She is Hindu, very much at home in her Muslim environment and a Brahmin bound by ties of marriage to a non-Brahmin. Dastoor gives a good estimate of the poet:

In her outlook and temper, the old and the new,  
Hindu and Muslim, East and West, met and mingled  
Without clash or incongruity. She was, too, a  
Patriot whose sympathies did not exclude people  
And culture other than her own. She was a citizen  
Of the world who yielded to none in her  
attachment to Motherland.

Sarojini has been fascinated by the diversity of India’s religions and has tried to understand each of them with sympathy and love. However, it is Islam, more than any other non-Hindu religion which has exerted a special influence on her.

Her contribution to Hindu-Muslim unity is very valuable. The circumstances of her life have made the hard task of unifying the two communities in the mutual bonds of love and tolerance easy for her. Born as a Hindu, brought up in the constant association of the

Mohammedans in a Muslim city, Sarojini can grasp the thought and understand the sentiment of each religion, especially Islam. Her patriotic urge is best revealed in her intense desire to see India over united. This passion for Hindu-Muslim unity she shares with Gandhi and Gokhale. In most of her patriotic songs which are in the form of prayers to Mother India, she expresses her belief in all faiths living together, and though their acts of love and sacrifice, building up a new image of united India. She is committed to the Gandhian ideal of freedom, unity and progress of all without any greed or violence. Rajyalakshmi observes: “Her nationalism is not a confined, restrictive fervour of provincial feeling, but an open, creative and dynamic humanian born of universal feeling”.<sup>13</sup>

She finds emotional oneness behind all religion in theory as well as in practice. With her characteristic skill in giving dramatic vividness to any theme, she sings a poem “The call of Evening Prayer” in which devotees of different religions are brought in the bond of love and worship. The poem is in a form of prayer and studies the reverential atmosphere of the evening when people of all sects and creeds assemble in their respective places of worship to pray to their deities. It is one of the most powerful poems of Sarojini on the theme of unity and brotherhood. The poem consists of four stanzas, each devoted to a particular creed. All the four major religions of India – Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Hinduism – have been beautifully represented. The first stanza captures the Muslim spirit at the time of evening prayer. It opens with the

resounding calls of “Allah ho Akbar: Allah ho Akbar: “, attracting the Muslim to the mosque:

Allah ho Akbar: Allah ho Akbar:  
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: (p.136)

In the second stanza, the Christians offer their prayers to the Blessed Mother: “Ava Maria: Ava Maria:/Devoutly the priests at the altars are singing”. In the third stanza, we are among the Parsis singing praises of Ahura Mazda:

Ahura Mazda: Ahura Mazda:  
How the sonorous Avests is flowing:  
Ye, who to Flame and the Light make obeisance,  
Bend low where the quenchless blue torches are glowing  
Ahura Mazda: Ahura Mazda: (p.136)

And, finally, we get the privilege of hearing the familiar Mantric chants of Hindu devotees. The lines resound with the Vaishnava chant of Narayana: Narayana:

Naray ' yana : Naray'yana:  
Hark to the ageless, divine invocation:  
Lift up your hands, o ye children of Brahma,  
Lift up your voices in rapt adoration:  
Naray ' yana : Naray'yana: (p.136)

Sarojini believes like Mahatma Gandhi that the fundamental messages of all religions are the same. They all award the highest value to love. They differ only in their external expressions of customs, festivals and modes of worship. The broad and fervid appreciation of the greatness of all religions is one of the most precious messages of Sarojini's poetry as well as her life.

“Awake” is dedicated to Mohammad Ali Jinnah whom Sarojini hails as the ambassador of Hindu – Muslim unity. It was recited at the meeting of the Indian National Congress, Bombay, 1915. She believes that the united efforts of all communities are needed to break the chains of India’s slavery. She describes, in the poem, India as the Divine Mother who loves and bestows her blessings on all her children irrespective of caste and creed. All her sons whether they are Hindus or Muslims, Parsis or Christians are equally beloved to the Mother. In the opening stanza, the people invoke the Mother, to wake up from her long slumber: “why still dost thou sleep in thy bondage of sorrow?” Her sons are impatient to set her “again in the forefront of glory”:

Waken, o mother: they children implore thee,  
Who kneel in thy presence to serve and adore thee:  
The night is aflush with a dream of the morrow,  
Why still dost thou sleep in thy bondage of sorrow?  
Awaken and sever the woes that enthrall us,  
And hallow our hands for the triumphs that call us:  
Are we not thine, o Belov’d, to inherit  
The manifold pride and power of thy spirit?  
Ne’er shall we fall thee, forsake thee or falter,  
Whose hearts are thy home and thy shelter and  
thine Altar (p.180)

The concluding stanza is in a form of chorus in which Hindus, Parsis, Muslims and Christians offer their prayer separately, and finally the people of all creeds and faiths pray collectively: “Shall not our dauntless devotion avail thee/ Harken : O queen and o goddess, we hail thee”. The poem may not have the artistic appeal but it surely has deep patriotic notes.

Sarojini has brought to the Indian nationalism a point of view which is not only poetic but feminine. She has

approached the social and political situations with the aesthetic sensitiveness of a poet, and imparted a kind grace to the freedom struggle which only a poet can give.

Sarojini is very much shocked by the plight of the women in the society and fights all her life for the recognition and restoration of their rights. In one of her speeches, she remarks: “Does one man dare to deprive another of his birth right to God’s pure air which nourishes his body? How, then, shall a man dare to deprive a human soul of its immemorial inheritance? Therefore, I charge you; restore to your women their ancient rights... “. The duty and privilege of women, according to her, is to keep by the side of the men in all their battles of public good. The women must be always with them to heal their wounds and comfort them in their hour of weariness. She is fully aware of the duty of women in the present state of political upheaval. She speaks of the awakening of Indian womanhood to the need of time, and claims:” The Indian woman of today is once more awake and profoundly alive to her splendid destiny as the guardian and interpreter of the Triune Vision of national life – the Vision of Love, the Vision of faith, the Vision of Patriotism.”.

Sarojini accepts the traditional view of women’s place in society and, particularly, in the family. In her poems, she shows admiration and sympathy for the virtuous women of Indian mythology, legend and history. Sita, Savitri, Padmini, Damyanti and others are her ideal. This has led some of her critics to condemn her as a perpetuator of an outmoded view of Indian womanhood.

Cousins believe that her poems perpetuate “the door-mat attitude of Indian Womanhood”. He is shocked to find that she “reflects in her poetry the derivative and dependent habit of Indian womanhood, the masculine domination has been sentimentalized into a virtue”. True, Sarojini sings in praise of the virtuous women of the past and writes about the Pardahnashin and the suttee but she does not approve of these prevalent ills of society. The poem “The Pardah Nashin” expresses her sense of enchantment for the lavish mode of living of the aristocratic pardahnashin Muslim women with whom she has been familiar and friendly. In fact, she does not praise the custom of pardah she simply depicts the ease and splendour that surrounds the pardah world. In order to understand this attitude of the poet one must remember that she has lived in the midst of the pardah world which has its own fascination and enchantment.

“The Pardah Nashin” is a beautiful poem which reflects the luxurious life of pardahnashin women of high and sophisticated Muslim houses. The poet enters the realm of beauty and splendour and gets lost in their glamorous mode of life. The poem breathes the romantic atmosphere of colour and perfume. The pardahnashin woman’s

Life is a revolving dream  
Of languid and sequestered ease;  
Her girdles and her fillets gleam;  
Like changing fires on sunset seas;  
Her raiment is like morning mist  
Shot opal, gold and amethyst.

The world of pardahnashin delicate beauties is a world of courtesy and charm in which they, with gem-studded ornaments,

remain in a state of perpetual relaxation. But the poet’s fascination for the pardah world cannot be taken to imply that she approves of this kind of life for Indian women. She is intensely aware of the fact that the world of beauty and splendour is also a world of inner frustration and pain. Her heart is filled with sympathy for such women who are compelled to lead an artificial life of isolation and loneliness. The poet quietly pouts off the veil of the pardah woman and acquaints us with her “pathetic lot”:

But though no hand unsanctioned dare  
Unveil the mysteries of her grace,  
Time lifts the curtain unawares,  
And Sorrow Looks into her face (p.53)

The poet, who is so deeply moved by the sad plights of pardah women, can never justify their mode of living. The poem shows just her fascination for the mysterious pardah world, and to be fascinated is not necessarily to approve of it. Sarojini, though actively engaged in the campaign of women’s emancipation does not conceal her nostalgia for the pardah world.

As a poet of national consciousness, Sarojini takes her stand as a visionary. She confesses in her speech at Allahabad that she cannot grapple with the transcendent of details of politics. She takes Independence as a “Yogana, a sacred baptism”. In which the active participation of people of all communities, faiths and creeds is essential. All must be united to “pour the divine essence of love for India”. Eclipse of Sarojini’s Poetic power. Prof. A. Bose maintains that by the time she joins politics, she has exhausted the limited range of her poetic experience and realize that any further attempt will be mere dull repetition.

But such awareness, if it is a fact, would have come to her earlier, and not so late in the day and that too after her great success. In fact, the most convincing reason lies somewhere in her patriotic urges. She willingly abandons her “singing robes” for the uniform of the soldier in “the war of Independence”.

<sup>32</sup> The reason why she fails to sustain both the roles lies in the fact that it is hard to change the spirit of her airy romantic songs

to fiery revolutionary themes. Here is, however, not a solitary instance. Arnold’s poetic powers stopped short simultaneously with the devotion to literary criticism. In Sarojini, the creative impulse only changed its sphere from poetry to politics. As Cousins says: “She maintained no distinction between her song and service”. The field of prose oratory is still hers and she enriches it with her poet’s imagination.

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