



“Nature As Mirror Of The Soul: Romanticism In Sarojini Naidu's Poetry”

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Sarojini Naidu was an Indian poet also known as the "The Nightingale of India". She was a political activist, social reformer and feminist leader also who played a pivotal role in India's Independence movement. She was one of the most influential poets with fervent nationalism. Her poetry is frankly and unabashedly, the romantic poetry. Nature is the external environment of man, and Sarojini looks at it with a child-like open eyed wonder. She has a great reverence for spring and other seasons. Sarojini's imagination was mythopoeic and many are nature-myths that she has created and woven into the fabric of her nature-poetry. Her poetry doesn't portray only beautiful colours and forms of nature, but it is also filled with melodies of Nature.

Sarojini belongs to the English romantic school of poetry. Just like other romantic poets her poetry was also characterised by sensuousness, by opulence in words, phrasing and imagery and was frankly escapist. Her picture of India has been called romantic, sentimental in short, "Kipling's India". Her eyes turned towards beauty as the sunflowers turn towards the sun, and it is this beauty of nature which she celebrates in one lyric after another just like a true romantic poet.

Keywords- romanticism, Nature, spring, love, birds.

Introduction

Romanticism was a European cultural movement that focuses on exploring one's self and its relationship to nature and others with the help of a symbolic and internalized romantic plot. This movement was started in mid 18th century and ruled literary arena for a century. The proponents of this movement emphasized that imagination is a faculty higher and more inclusive than reason. Human soul always looks for solace in a natural world. It evokes the belief that the divine is immanent in nature. This movement was in great favour of free expression without any rational thinking. They rejected the established canons of neoclassical aesthetics and against both aristocratic and bourgeois social and political norms. There were some main characteristics of that period - Individualism, Love for nature, Personification, Melancholy, Visual arts, Gothic, and Aesthetic love. Though seeds of Romanticism were sown in mid 18th century but it came in its full power as a tree in 1798, with publication of Lyrical Ballads by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. But before it were William Blake and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who challenged conventions and stress upon the natural goodness of children to stay away from corrupting influence of society to go near nature and spontaneity. Any restriction on

imagination is hindrance in creation. Beginning of 19th Century saw the outburst of some great romantic writer like John Keats, P.B. Shelley, Lord Byron, whose works immediately made this period immortal and that still lives in young hearts across the world. Romantics had a great reverence for nature. They never saw it just as a backdrop but as a living, divine force. It was seen as a teacher and as a manifestation of God that gives humans a path to spiritual revelation and ultimate truth. It works as a mirror of the soul that reflects poet's inner feeling.

Sarojini Naidu is considered as one of the most prominent Romantic writers of Anglo-Indian Literature. Her poems were filled with all the major characteristics of romantic literature. i.e. Individualism, love for nature, melancholy, visual imagery, personification of nature. Her poetry is frankly and unabashedly the poetry of nature. Her love for nature is reflected even in poems which are not about nature; Nature is an external environment of man and Sarojini took it with a childlike curiosity who always wonders about natural phenomenon like- sights and sounds, colours and odours, its grandeur and mystery. She adores all the seasons and changes in nature but has a special love for spring season. Her poetry is redolent with the images of **Vasant** (spring). She turned occasionally to summer and autumn too but hardly ever to rainy or winter season. Sarojini portrays pictures of gulmohars, golden cassias, nasturtiums, champak, blossoms, wild lilies and bright pomegranate buds. She reminds us pleasant voices of various birds and humming bees. It all reminds us about the lost innocence of human soul in materialistic world that proclaims itself as modern.

Sarojini's love for nature is frankly sensuous. She feels genuine delights in nature and is able to pass it to readers successfully. To her Nature meant passion, excitement and the breath of life. Her poems reveal her sensuous enjoyment of the colours, sounds, fragrance, scenes and sights of nature-

**“ Wild bees that rifle the mango blossom,
Set free a while from the love-God's string
Wild birds that sway in the citron branches
Drunk with the rich, red honey of spring
Fireflies weaving aerial dances
In fragile rhythms of flickering gold.”**

-A song of Spring

Sarojini's poetry exposes readers to different kind of moods. Mood of happiness, joy and hope is mostly found in her poetry. Spring season is used fervently to convey this mood that is also called Rituraj (The King of Seasons). Young leaves grow on the banyan stems. There are red leaves on the peepal tree. The honey birds pipe to the budding figs and honey-blooms call the bee. The King-fishers ruffle the feathery sedge. The earth is filled with the luminous blue of the hills. Spring is the moment, the season and the cycle of love -

“Kamala tinkles a lingering foot

And Krishna plays on his bamboo flute.”

In this lyric the colours of spring have been stressed, and the season has been related to the myth of Radha and Krishna. Nature for her is not a riddle to be solved instead it is a miracle to be celebrated and sung. Its endless variety excites her, its colours dazzles her, its beauty intoxicates her. Her response to it is immediate. In this is the secret of her perennial youthfulness.

Nature for Sarojini is not only a source of joy and optimism only but at the same time it is able to dig deep in her soul to arouse pain also. At the time of **Vasant Panchami** nature penetrates into her soul and her lyric records the grief of a widow. When young girls and married women are celebrating the coming of spring, they welcome spring with new grown corns and lighted lamps, with music and folk

dance, but **Lilavati**, the widow is said at the very feast of spring and implores the dragon fly to fold up its wings and not to bring the tidings of spring. She asks the lilting koels to hush their voices and dadhikulas to still their throat, because their songs pierce her heart with poisoned arrows.

“ For my sad life is doomed to be alas

Ruined and sere like sorrow-trodden grass,

My heart hath grown, plucked by the wind of grief.

Akin to fallen flower and faded leaf.

Akin to every lone and withered thing

That hath foregone the kisses of the spring”

-Vasant Panchami: Lilavati

Lament at the feast of spring, "The Bard of Time"

According to Sarojini nature is able to fill the human heart with melancholy also where it can feel oblivion type situation and is unconcerned to the festivities of the world.

Sarojini's imagination was mythopoeic and among them many are nature-myths that she has created and woven into the fabric of her nature poetry. For example in **"In a Time of Flowers"**, a girl reminds her lover that spring has arrived.

“O Love: do you know the spring is here

With the lure of her magic flute?

The old earth breaks into passionate bloom

At the kiss of her fleet, gay foot.”

The spring is here visualised as a young girl and the earth as a tree which burst into blossom at the touch of the girl's foot. Sarojini is alluding to an ancient legend which has figured prominently in Indian sculpture as well as poetry. According to the legend, if a tree-divinity or forest-divinity leans against a tree and touches the stem with her foot, the tree will put forth fresh flowers, thus the lyric is the myth of spring as a young goddess, making all nature bloom with her magic touch. Her poetry is filled with such nature myths where nature seems as a manifestation of God.

Sarojini's response to nature is one of reverence like that of our Vedic ancestors. A number of hymns to the object of nature are scattered up and down in her poetry. She has particular affection for the sun and sunshine, and in the **"Harvest Hymn"** the farmers express their own love and gratitude for this "Lord of the morn" and "Lord of the harvest".

“O giver of mellowing radiance, we hail thee,

We praise thee, O Surya, with symbol and flute.”

Though she was particularly fond of bright, clear sunshine which illuminates the landscapes of India, She also had a deep feeling for the subdued light of the setting sun, as is expressed in "June Sunset". She had a great reverence for Earth also and in her poetry addressed it as – "the queen of the gourd flower queen of the harvest. Though rainy season does not figure much in her poetry, we get the **"Hymn to India"** in which the people pray to the lord of Rain.

“Thou, who with beautiful torrent and river.

Does nourish the heart of the forest and plain.

Withhold not Thy gifts, O Omnipotent Giver

Hearken, O Lord of Rain.”

For Sarojini nature is a "Sanctuary of peace" a retreat from the tumult of the crowd and freedom from its strife just like other romantic poets. All the romantic poets had validated nature as a perennial source of Joy, comfort and rest for the spirit tired of cares and worries of life. Her poetry seems like a call for – a transition from man to nature. It is not the final destination but a resting place to the infinite. She asserts that – We may glean for a glimpse of the Infinite Bosom in whose glorious shadow all life is unfolded or unfurled.

Nature for Sarojini is like a store house of images, similes and metaphors. Sarojini's imagery is vivid, graphic, picturesque and sensuous. Sarojini had conveyed the ideas of holiness, luminosity and solemnity. She uses a string of images, one image following the other in quick succession, very much in the manner of Shelley. **Palanquin Bearers** is a fine illustration of the point in question-

“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 gaily and we sing.

We bear her along like a pearl on a string”.

Conclusion

Nature in its human context and man in his natural context, these two themes are integrated into a simple unity in Sarojini's poetry, that's the main reason Sarojini is considered as the prominent romantic poet of Anglo – Indian Literature. She had presented nature as soothing, sympathetic and benevolent that truly caters Indian readers. She didn't present nature's ugly & destructive form "red in tooth and claw" instead life-given and life protecting aspects of the world. She has outstandingly recaptured the early Indian responses to our natural environment, as Wordsworth and Keats did to England's natural beauty. She comes endearingly close to the kind of lyric enchantment that one finds nature exercising over man, bird and flora in Shelley's poetry. Nature for her was like a mirror that showcases all the hidden truths of the soul of a human.

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