

# Glorification of Indian Folk Life in Sarojini Naidu's Poetry



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## Abstract

India is known for her 'Unity in Diversity'. Sarojini Naidu has glorified this unity underlying the diversity of Indian life through her poems. Her poems on Indian folk life have a variety of aspects. Every aspect of Indian life seems to interest her. There is hardly anything which does not owe its origin to Indians.

Most of her poems are about the common people of India engaged in their day to day activity. The folk characters like snake charmers, weavers, farmers, fisherman, corn grinders etc are still very much a part of India reality.

She has beautifully presented Indian culture and tradition in her poems. Her poem 'Palanquin-Bearers' takes us back to that Indian when palanquins were a common sight in the streets. She has depicted the tradition of carrying a bride in palanquins.

Sarojini Naidu has also depicted the occasional celebration of humble folks in many of her poems in which village folks are rejoicing the fruits of harvest and giving thanks to God for the blessings bestowed upon her.

Her poetry presents a veritable portrait gallery of Indian folk. They are not merely picturesque or decorative characters. They are suitable symbols of Indian folk culture and tradition. They seem to emerge from a folk life to find a place in the world of literature. No aspect of folk life is untouched in her poetry.

**Keywords:** Glorification, Indian Folk life, Sarojini Naidu's Poetry, Palanquin Bearers, folk character snake charmers, Indian Philosophy.

## Introduction

Sarojini Naidu, known as the 'Nightingale of India', is considered one of the distinguished poet who attained great height in the domain of English literature and won worldwide acclaim. Her poems deal almost entirely with Indian themes. She was the great admirer of Indian tradition and culture. She was gifted with deep insight and sensibility which made her able to observe minutely the life of humble folk people of India. She herself was very simple and humble. Though she belonged to the aristocratic society, yet she was sympathetic and had affinity for humble and simple people. She inherited these qualities from her parents, especially from her father. As A.N Dwivedi points out-

'The true greatness of father and daughter lay in the fact that they were "dreamers of dreams" and also simple and humble, giving little attention to the endless tributes paid to them from everywhere.'<sup>1</sup>

Through her folk songs she presents the panorama of Indian folk life in all its colours and moods. Her poetry presents a veritable portrait gallery of Indian folk. They are not merely pictures or decorative character. They are suitable symbols of Indian folk culture and tradition. They seem to emerge from a folk life to find a place in the world of literature. No aspect of folk life is untouched in her poetry.

Most of her poems are about the common people of India engaged in their day to day activity. The folk characters like snake charmers, wearers, farmers, fisherman, corn grinder etc. are still very much a part of Indian reality. She has depicted these people in a very glorifying manner by presenting their positive attitude towards life. Though these people belong to lower strata of Indian society and they live a very hard life, they are happy and content. We find them enjoying their occupation without any complain. They themselves live a very hard life with very few resources of living, yet they love life and nature and are happy in other's happiness. They are thankful to God for whatever they have. They have affection for

all the creatures of this universe. They are the true icon of Indian philosophy of universal love.

Her poem 'Palanquin Bearer' takes us back to the age when palanquins were a common sight on the street. In this poem, Sarojini Naidu has beautifully depicted the tradition of carrying a bride in palanquin. In olden days, it was a custom of carrying a bride in a Palanquin. Though the palanquin with its bearers are almost extinct now, palanquins still have its symbolical existence and significance in Indian weddings and a bride's farewell. In this poem, Sarojini Naidu has shown the positive attitude of bearers. Though carrying a person in the palanquin is a dreary task yet the bearers turn this dreary task in to the joyful experience as they sing song in rhythmic harmony with their movement:

'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.'<sup>2</sup>

The beauty of this poem lies in its wealth of emotions. Sarojini Naidu has beautifully presented the emotions, beauty and delicacy of a bride at the time of her farewell. A mixed feeling of sorrow of leaving the parental home and joy mixed with anticipation about future home can be seen in a single line:

'She falls like a tear from the eyes of a  
bride'.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, through the poem 'Indian Weavers' Sarojini Naidu presents a typical Indian folk scene. During her period, weaving was very important folk vocation of India. Even today we can see weavers weaving cloth on handloom in different coloured patterns in the remote villages of India. In the life of a weaver, she captured skilfully the philosophy of life and death and depicted it in her poem. Sarojini Naidu has made the life of weavers significant by making it symbolical. In this poem, she watches the weavers weaving the yarn and asks the question:

Weavers, weaving at the break of the day  
Why do you weave a garment so gay?<sup>4</sup>

Weavers answer that they are made to be-

Blue as the wing of halcyon wild,  
We weave the robes of a new-born child.<sup>5</sup>

In the above line, three things (colour of the garment, time when the weavers are weaving and mood of the weavers) are significant. Here the blue colour is the symbol of birth and 'the break of the day' is the symbol of beginning of a new life. Here we can see that weavers are in a happy mood. They are happy in making a cloth for a new born child. They are weaving with full emotion of happiness.

She asks the same question repeatedly at three different hours of a day which symbolises the three different stages of man's life:

Weavers, weaving at the full of night,  
Why do you weave a garment so bright?  
Like the plumes of a peacock, purple and  
green,  
We weave the marriage-veil of a queen.<sup>6</sup>

In the above line, the poet shows the second stage of life in which a man craves for identity. He wants to realise his dreams of life. Here the bright colours are the symbol of a colourful and hopeful life. Here we can see that the weavers are weaving a cloth for a queen to make her marriage veil which symbolises the hopefulness and excitement for coming life.

Weavers, weaving solemn and still,  
What do you weave in the moonlight chill?  
White as a feather and white as cloud,  
We weave a dead man's funeral shroud.<sup>7</sup>

In the above lines, 'moonlight chill' symbolises the third stage of man's journey of life and the words 'white feather' and 'white cloud' suggest death. We see that how skilfully Sarojini Naidu has glorified the life of weavers by making their occupation symbolical. Indian weavers are the common people of India, but cloths made by them are unique. Here we can see that weavers are not weaving just technically they are also infusing their emotions in it and their emotions are also changing with different types of cloths. These cloths are instilled with emotions, hard work and dedication which give it an aesthetic value.

India is the only country where snakes are considered holy and related to God and are worshipped. A festival (Nag Panchami) is held every year to pay respect to these snakes. In olden days, snake charmers were called to fascinate the snake with the magic of his flute. Even today these snake charmers are the inseparable part of Indian culture and tradition. Another folk song of Sarojini Naidu is 'Snake Charmer'. In this poem, poet depicts a snake charmer who allures the snake by his affectionate offers as the snake has not appeared before his eyes:

I'll feed thee, O beloved, on milk and wild red  
honey,  
I'll bear thee in a basket of rushes, green and  
white,  
To a palace-bower where golden-vested  
maidens,  
Thread with mellow laughter the petals of  
delight.<sup>8</sup>

Here we can see a beautiful relationship between an animal and a human being. The snake charmer is calling the snake affectionately and offering it milk and other things as if the snake is understanding his language. It shows a deep bonding between them. Through this poem, Sarojini Naidu has skilfully presented the Indian Philosophy of universal love which teaches us to love each and every creature of God. Here the snake charmer is addressing to the snake as his beloved which shows his deep love for the snake. In the concluding lines of the poem the snake is depicted as soft and delicate bride and the snake charmer is trying to woo the snake by the sweet tunes of his flute-

"Come, thou subtle bride of my mellifluous  
wooing,  
Come, thou silver breasted moon beam of  
my desire."<sup>9</sup>

Here we can see how successfully Sarojini Naidu has presented Indian philosophy by treating with the simple subject of folk vocation.

In many of her poems, Sarojini Naidu has depicted the occasional celebration of humble folks. 'Harvest Hymn' is such poem in which village folks are rejoicing the fruits of harvest and giving thanks to God for the blessings bestowed upon them. A group of men and women shows their grace by singing a hymn to the different deities like Varun, Prithvi and Brahma. This song is sung first in men's voice then in the women's voice and finally in both voices with accompaniment of cymbals and flute. Men's voices praise Surya with golden things as He gives his generous golden sunrays for the crops to prosper. They offer Him garlands as a tribute.

'The gold of our fields, and gold of our fruits,  
O giver of mellowing radiance, we hail thee,  
We praise thee, O Surya with cymbal and  
flute'.<sup>10</sup>

Then they praise Varun who is the lord of the rainbow and the sender of rain and dewfall. Out of kindness He gives his water to prosper the crops. They offer him garlands as a tribute and propitiate him with a song along with the musical notes of cymbal and pipe:

O sender of rain and dewfall, we hail thee,  
We praise thee, Varun, with cymbal and  
pipe.<sup>11</sup>

Motherhood has always been glorified in Indian culture. It is not only about a woman's relation with her child but it is characterised by a sense of giving. Here, Sarojini Naidu has glorified this motherhood through folk women. After the thanks giving prayer to Varun, Women's voice praise Prithvi as she is the supreme mother who gives us land for the crops to grow. They offer her garland as a tribute and praise her with cymbal and drum:

Queen of the gourd-flower, queen of the  
harvest,  
Sweet and omnipotent mother, O Earth!  
Thine is the plentiful bosom that feed us,  
Thine is the womb where our riches have  
birth.<sup>12</sup>

Then all voices of men and women hail and  
praise Brahma, who is the Lord of the universe.

"Lord of universe, Lord of our being,  
Father Eternal ineffable OM,  
Thou art the seed and scythe of our harvest,  
Thou art our Hands and our heart and our  
Home,  
We bring thee our lives and our labour for  
tribute,  
Grant us thy succour, they counsel, they  
case."<sup>13</sup>

Thus, through this poem Sarojini Naidu vividly creates the joyous atmosphere of Indian

countryside at the harvest time and beautifully presents the simplicity and faith of India folk people.

#### **Aim of the Study**

Aim of this paper is to highlight Sarojini Naidu as a poet of Indian soil. She has beautifully presented unique colour palette of Indian society-its infinite shades, mysterious fascinations and emotions of Indian peasants and made it acquainted to the world. The present paper brings forth Naidu's deep insight into the life of very common people for whom the hardships of day-to-day life get turned into the melodies and ecstasy of innocence.

#### **Conclusion**

Folk people are the integral part of the culture and tradition of India. Sarojini Naidu has minutely observed each and every aspect of their life and presented it through her poetry. Treating the simple subject of folk vocations, she has glorified their life by making them symbolical. Sarojini Naidu has presented the simplicity and faith of Indian folk people through her folk songs. She has depicted the folk people in a very glorifying manner by presenting their positive attitude towards life. We find them enjoying their life without any complain. Their love for life, affection for all the creature of the world, sense of making others happy have made them the true icon of Indian philosophy.

#### **Endnotes**

1. A.N. Dwivedi. *Sarojini Naidu and Her Poetry*. Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1981, p. 20.
2. *Sarojini Naidu. The Golden Threshold*. London: William Heinemann, 1905, p. 27.
3. *Sarojini Naidu. The Golden Threshold*. London: William Heinemann, 1905, p. 27.
4. *Sarojini Naidu. The Golden Threshold*. London: William Heinemann, 1905, p. 27.
5. *Sarojini Naidu. The Golden Threshold*. London: William Heinemann, 1905, p. 30.
6. *Sarojini Naidu. The Golden Threshold*. London: William Heinemann, 1905, p. 30.
7. *Sarojini Naidu. The Golden Threshold*. London: William Heinemann, 1905, p. 30.
8. *Sarojini Naidu. The Golden Threshold*. London: William Heinemann, 1905, p. 33.
9. *Sarojini Naidu. The Golden Threshold*. London: William Heinemann, 1905, p. 34.
10. *Sarojini Naidu. The Golden Threshold*. London: William Heinemann, 1905, p. 40.
11. *Sarojini Naidu. The Golden Threshold*. London: William Heinemann, 1905, p. 40.
12. *Sarojini Naidu. The Golden Threshold*. London: William Heinemann, 1905, p. 41.
13. *Sarojini Naidu. The Golden Threshold*. London: William Heinemann, 1905, p. 42.