Classic Poetry Series

Sarojini Naidu

- poems -

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Sarojini Naidu (13 February 1879 - 2 March 1949)

Saroji Naidu also known by the sobriquet The Nightingale of India, was a child prodigy, Indian independence activist and poet. Naidu was the first Indian woman to become the President of the Indian National Congress and the first woman to become the Governor of Uttar Pradesh state. was a great patriot, politician, orator and administrator. of all the famous women of India, Mrs. Sarojinidevi Naidu's name is at the top. Not only that, but she was truly one of the jewels of the world. Being one of the most famous heroines of the 20th century, her birthday is celebrated as "Women's Day"

Early Life

She was born in Hyderabad. Sarojini Chattopadhyay, later Naidu belonged to a Bengali family of Kulin Brahmins. But her father, Agorenath Chattopadhyay, after receiving a doctor of science degree from Edinburgh University, settled in Hyderabad State, where he founded and administered the Hyderabad College, which later became the Nizam's College in Hyderabad. Sarojini Naidu's mother Barada Sundari Devi was a poetess baji and used to write poetry in Bengali. Sarojini Naidu was the eldest among the eight siblings. One of her brothers Birendranath was a revolutionary and her other brother Harindranath was a poet, dramatist, and actor.

Sarojini Naidu was a brilliant student. She was proficient in Urdu, Telugu, English, Bengali, and Persian. At the age of twelve, Sarojini Naidu attained national fame when she topped the matriculation examination at Madras University. Her father wanted her to become a mathematician or scientist but Sarojini Naidu was interested in poetry. Once she was working on an algebra problem, and when she couldn't find the solution she decided to take a break, and in the same book she wrote her first inspired poetry. She got so enthused by this that she wrote "The Lady of the Lake", a poem 1300 lines long. When her father saw that she was more interested in poetry than mathematics or science, he decided to encourage her. With her father's support, she wrote the play "Maher Muneer" in the Persian language. Dr. Chattopadhyaya distributed some copies among his friends and sent one copy to the Nawab of Hyderabad. Reading a beautiful play written by a young girl, the Nizam was very impressed. The college gave her a scholarship to study abroad. At the age of 16 she got admitted to King's College of England.

England

At the age of 16, she traveled to England to study first at King's College London and later at Girton College, Cambridge. There she met famous laureates of her time such as Arthur Symons and Edmond Gosse. It was

Gosse who convinced Sarojini to stick to Indian themes-India's great mountains, rivers, temples, social milieu, to express her poetry. She depicted contemporary Indian life and events. Her collections "The golden threshold (1905)", "The bird of time (1912)", and "The broken wing (1912)" attracted huge Indian and English readership.

Love and Marry

During her stay in England, Sarojini met Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu, a non-Brahmin and a doctor by profession, and fell in love with him. After finishing her studies at the age of 19, she got married to him during the time when inter-caste marriages were not allowed. Her father was a progressive thinking person, and he did not care what others said. Her marriage was a very happy one.

Works

Her major contribution was also in the field of poetry. Her poetry had beautiful words that could also be sung. Soon she got recognition as the "Bul Bule Hind" when her collection of poems was published in 1905 under the title Golden Threshold. After that, she published two other collections of poems--The Bird of Time and The Broken Wings. In 1918, Feast of Youth was published. Later, The Magic Tree, The Wizard Mask and A Treasury of Poems were published. Mahashree Arvind, Rabindranath Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru were among the thousands of admirers of her work. Her poems had English words, but an Indian soul.

Politics

One day she met Shree Gopal Krishna Gokhale. He said to her to use her poetry and her beautiful words to rejuvenate the spirit of Independence in the hearts of villagers. He asked her to use her talent to free Mother India.

Then in 1916, she met Mahatma Gandhi, and she totally directed her energy to the fight for freedom. She would roam around the country like a general of the army and pour enthusiasm among the hearts of Indians. The independence of India became the heart and soul of her work.

She was responsible for awakening the women of India. She brought them out of the kitchen. She traveled from state to state, city after city and asked for the rights of the women. She re-established self-esteem within the women of India.

In 1925, she chaired the summit of Congress in Kanpur. In 1928, she came to the USA with the message of the non-violence movement from Gandhiji. When in 1930, Gandhiji was arrested for a protest, she took the helms of his movement. In 1931, she participated in the Round Table Summit, along with Gandhiji and Pundit Malaviyaji. In 1942, she was arrested during the "Quit India" protest and stayed in jail for 21 months with Gandhiji.

After independence she became the Governor of Uttar Pradesh. She was the first woman governor in India.

Works:

The Golden Threshold, published in the United Kingdom,1905
The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death & the Spring, published in London, 1912
The Broken Wing: Songs of Love, Death and the Spring, including "The Gift of India" (first read in public in 1915), 1917
Muhammad Jinnah: An Ambassador of Unity, 1916
The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India, Allahabad: Kitabistan, posthumously published, 1943
The Feather of the Dawn, posthumously published, edited by her daughter, Padmaja Naidu, 1961

A Love Song from the North

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 their beauty to me, papeeha,
Beauty of blossom and shower, papeeha,
That brings not my lover again?
Tell me no more of thy love, papeeha,
Wouldst thou revive in my heart, papeeha
Grief for the joy that is gone?
I hear the bright peacock in glimmering woodlands
Cry to its mate in the dawn;
I hear the black koel's slow, tremulous wooing,
And sweet in the gardens the calling and cooing
Of passionate bulbul and dove....
But what is their music to me, papeeha
Songs of their laughter and love, papeeha,
To me, forsaken of love?

Sarojini Naidu

A Rajput Love Song

(Parvati at her lattice)
O Love! were you a basil-wreath to twine
among my tresses,
A jewelled clasp of shining gold to bind around my sleeve,
O Love! were you the keora's soul that haunts
my silken raiment,
A bright, vermilion tassel in the girdles that I weave;

O Love! were you the scented fan
that lies upon my pillow,
A sandal lute, or silver lamp that burns before my shrine,
Why should I fear the jealous dawn
that spreads with cruel laughter,
Sad veils of separation between your face and mine?

Haste, O wild-bee hours, to the gardens of the sun set!
Fly, wild-parrot day, to the orchards of the west!
Come, O tender night, with your sweet,
consoling darkness,
And bring me my Beloved to the shelter of my breast!

(Amar Singh in the saddle)
O Love! were you the hooded hawk upon my hand
that flutters,
Its collar-band of gleaming bells atinkle as I ride,
O Love! were you a turban-spray or
floating heron-feather,
The radiant, swift, unconquered sword
that swingeth at my side;

O Love! were you a shield against the
arrows of my foemen,
An amulet of jade against the perils of the way,
How should the drum-beats of the dawn
divide me from your bosom,
Or the union of the midnight be ended with the day?

Haste, O wild-deer hours, to the meadows of the sunset!
Fly, wild stallion day, to the pastures of the west!
Come, O tranquil night, with your soft,
consenting darkness,
And bear me to the fragrance of my Beloved's breast!

Sarojini Naidu

Alabaster

LIKE this alabaster box whose art
Is frail as a cassia-flower, is my heart,
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 blent
Like odours of cinnamon, sandal and clove,
Of song and sorrow and life and love.

Sarojini Naidu

An Indian Love Song

He

Lift up the veils that darken the delicate moon
of thy glory and grace,
Withhold not, O love, from the night
of my longing the joy of thy luminous face,
Give me a spear of the scented keora
guarding thy pinioned curls,
Or a silken thread from the fringes
that trouble the dream of thy glimmering pearls;
Faint grows my soul with thy tresses' perfume
and the song of thy anklets' caprice,
Revive me, I pray, with the magical nectar
that dwells in the flower of thy kiss.

She

How shall I yield to the voice of thy pleading,
how shall I grant thy prayer,
Or give thee a rose-red silken tassel,
a scented leaf from my hair?
Or fling in the flame of thy heart's desire the veils that cover my face,
Profane the law of my father's creed for a foe
of my father's race?
Thy kinsmen have broken our sacred altars and slaughtered our sacred kine,
The feud of old faiths and the blood of old battles sever thy people and mine.

He

What are the sins of my race, Beloved,
what are my people to thee?
And what are thy shrines, and kine and kindred,
what are thy gods to me?
Love recks not of feuds and bitter follies,
of stranger, comrade or kin,
Alike in his ear sound the temple bells
and the cry of the muezzin.
For Love shall cancel the ancient wrong
and conquer the ancient rage,
Redeem with his tears the memoried sorrow
that sullied a bygone age.

Sarojini Naidu

Autumn Song

Like a joy on the heart of a sorrow,
   The sunset hangs on a cloud;
A golden storm of glittering sheaves,
Of fair and frail and fluttering leaves,
   The wild wind blows in a cloud.

Hark to a voice that is calling
   To my heart in the voice of the wind:
My heart is weary and sad and alone,
For its dreams like the fluttering leaves have gone,
   And why should I stay behind?

Sarojini Naidu

Corn Grinders

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

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.

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

Alas! alas! my lord is dead!
Ah! who will quiet my lament?

At fall of eventide he went
To drink beside the river-head;
A waiting hunter threw his dart,
And struck my lover through the heart.
Alas! alas! my lord is dead.

O little bride, why dost thou weep
With all the happy world asleep?

Alas! alas! my lord is dead!
Ah, who will stay these hungry tears,
Or still the want of famished years,
And crown with love my marriage-bed?
My soul burns with the quenchless fire
That lit my lover's funeral pyre:
Alas! alas! my lord is dead.

Sarojini Naidu

Coromandel Fishers

Rise, brothers, rise; the wakening skies pray to the morning light,
The wind lies asleep in the arms of the dawn like a child that has cried all night.
Come, let us gather our nets from the shore and set our catamarans free,
To capture the leaping wealth of the tide, for we are the kings of the sea!

No longer delay, let us hasten away in the track of the sea gull's call,
The sea is our mother, the cloud is our brother, the waves are our comrades all.
What though we toss at the fall of the sun where the hand of the sea-god drives?
He who holds the storm by the hair, will hide in his breast our lives.

Sweet is the shade of the cocoanut glade, and the scent of the mango grove,
And sweet are the sands at the full o' the moon with the sound of the voices we love;
But sweeter, O brothers, the kiss of the spray and the dance of the wild foam's glee;
Row, brothers, row to the edge of the verge, where the low sky mates with the sea.

Sarojini Naidu

Cradle Song

FROM groves of spice,
O'er fields of rice,
Athwart the lotus-stream,
I bring for you,
Aglint with dew
A little lovely dream.

Sweet, shut your eyes,
The wild fire-fiies
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.

Sarojini Naidu

Damayante To Nala In The Hour Of Exile

SHALT thou be conquered of a human fate
My liege, my lover, whose imperial head
Hath never bent in sorrow of defeat?
Shalt thou be vanquished, whose imperial feet
Have shattered armies and stamped empires dead?
Who shall unking thee, husband of a queen?
Wear thou thy majesty inviolate.
Earth's glories flee of human eyes unseen,
Earth's kingdoms fade to a remembered dream,
But thine henceforth shall be a power supreme,

Dazzling command and rich dominion,
The winds thy heralds and thy vassals all
The silver-belted planets and the sun.
Where'er the radiance of thy coming fall,
Shall dawn for thee her saffron footcloths spread,
Sunset her purple canopies and red,
In serried splendour, and the night unfold
Her velvet darkness wrought with starry gold
For kingly raiment, soft as cygnet-down.
My hair shall braid thy temples like a crown
Of sapphires, and my kiss upon thy brows
Like çithar-music lull thee to repose,
Till the sun yield thee homage of his light.

O king, thy kingdom who from thee can wrest?
What fate shall dare uncrown thee from this breast,
O god-born lover, whom my love doth gird
And armour with impregnable delight
Of Hope's triumphant keen flame-carven sword?

Sarojini Naidu

Ecstasy

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!

Sarojini Naidu

Harvest Hymn

Mens Voices:

LORD of the lotus, lord of the harvest,
Bright and munificent lord of the morn!
Thine is the bounty that prospered our sowing,
Thine is the bounty that nurtured our corn.
We bring thee our songs and our garlands for tribute,
The gold of our fields and the gold of our fruit;
O giver of mellowing radiance, we hail thee,
We praise thee, O Surya, with cymbal and flute.

Lord of the rainbow, lord of the harvest,
Great and beneficent lord of the main!
Thine is the mercy that cherished our furrows,

Thine is the mercy that fostered our grain.
We bring thee our thanks and our garlands for tribute,
The wealth of our valleys, new-garnered and ripe;
O sender of rain and the dewfall, we hail thee,
We praise thee, Varuna, with cymbal and pipe.

Womens Voices:

Queen of the gourd-flower, queen of the har- vest,
Sweet and omnipotent mother, O Earth!
Thine is the plentiful bosom that feeds us,
Thine is the womb where our riches have birth.
We bring thee our love and our garlands for tribute,
With gifts of thy opulent giving we come;
O source of our manifold gladness, we hail thee,
We praise thee, O Prithvi, with cymbal and drum.

All Voices:

Lord of the Universe, Lord of our being,
Father eternal, ineffable Om!
Thou art the Seed and the Scythe of our harvests,
Thou art our Hands and our Heart and our Home.
We bring thee our lives and our labours for tribute,
Grant us thy succour, thy counsel, thy care.
O Life of all life and all blessing, we hail thee,
We praise thee, O Bramha, with cymbal and prayer

Sarojini Naidu

Humayun To Zobeida (From the Urdu)

You flaunt your beauty in the rose, your glory in the dawn,
Your sweetness in the nightingale, your white- ness in the swan.

You haunt my waking like a dream, my slumber like a moon,
Pervade me like a musky scent, possess me like a tune.

Yet, when I crave of you, my sweet, one tender moment's grace,
You cry, "I sit behind the veil, I cannot show my face."

Shall any foolish veil divide my longing from my bliss?
Shall any fragile curtain hide your beauty from my kiss?

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

Sarojini Naidu

In Praise Of Henna

A KOKILA called from a henna-spray:
Lira! liree! Lira! liree!
Hasten, maidens, hasten away
To gather the leaves of the henna-tree.
Send your pitchers afloat on the tide,
Gather the leaves ere the dawn be old,
Grind them in mortars of amber and gold,
The fresh green leaves of the henna-tree.

A kokila called from a henna-spray:
Lira! liree! Lira! liree!
Hasten maidens, hasten away
To gather the leaves of the henna-tree.
The tilka's red for the brow of a bride,
And betel-nut's red for lips that are sweet;
But, for lily-like fingers and feet,
The red, the red of the henna-tree.

Sarojini Naidu

In Salutation to the Eternal Peace

Men say the world is full of fear and hate,
And all life's ripening harvest-fields await
The restless sickle of relentless fate.

But I, sweet Soul, rejoice that I was born,
When from the climbing terraces of corn
I watch the golden orioles of Thy morn.

What care I for the world's desire and pride,
Who know the silver wings that gleam and glide,
The homing pigeons of Thine eventide?

What care I for the world's loud weariness,
Who dream in twilight granaries Thou dost bless
With delicate sheaves of mellow silences?

Say, shall I heed dull presages of doom,
Or dread the rumoured loneliness and gloom,
The mute and mythic terror of the tomb?

For my glad heart is drunk and drenched with Thee,
O inmost wind of living ecstasy!
O intimate essence of eternity!

Sarojini Naidu

In The Bazaars of Hyderabad

What do you sell O ye merchants ?
Richly your wares are displayed.
Turbans of crimson and silver,
Tunics of purple brocade,
Mirrors with panels of amber,
Daggers with handles of jade.

What do you weigh, O ye vendors?
Saffron and lentil and rice.
What do you grind, O ye maidens?
Sandalwood, henna, and spice.
What do you call , O ye pedlars?
Chessmen and ivory dice.

What do you make,O ye goldsmiths?
Wristlet and anklet and ring,
Bells for the feet of blue pigeons
Frail as a dragon-fly's wing,
Girdles of gold for dancers,
Scabbards of gold for the king.

What do you cry,O ye fruitmen?
Citron, pomegranate, and plum.
What do you play ,O musicians?
Cithar, sarangi and drum.
what do you chant, O magicians?
Spells for aeons to come.

What do you weave, O ye flower-girls
With tassels of azure and red?
Crowns for the brow of a bridegroom,
Chaplets to garland his bed.
Sheets of white blossoms new-garnered
To perfume the sleep of the dead.

Sarojini Naidu

In The Forest

HERE, O my heart, let us burn the dear dreams that are dead,
Here in this wood let us fashion a funeral pyre
Of fallen white petals and leaves that are mellow and red,
Here let us burn them in noon's flaming torches of fire.

We are weary, my heart, we are weary, so long we have borne
The heavy loved burden of dreams that are dead, let us rest,
Let us scatter their ashes away, for a while let us mourn;
We will rest, O my heart, till the shadows are gray in the west.

But soon we must rise, O my heart, we must wander again
Into the war of the world and the strife of the throng;
Let us rise, O my heart, let us gather the dreams that remain,
We will conquer the sorrow of life with the sorrow of song.

Sarojini Naidu

Indian Dancer

EYES ravished with rapture, celestially panting, what passionate bosoms aflaming with fire
Drink deep of the hush of the hyacinth heavens that glimmer around them in fountains of light;
O wild and entrancing the strain of keen music that cleaveth the stars like a wail of desire,
And beautiful dancers with houri-like faces bewitch the voluptuous watches of night.

The scents of red roses and sandalwood flutter and die in the maze of their gem-tangled hair,
And smiles are entwining like magical serpents the poppies of lips that are opiate-sweet;
Their glittering garments of purple are burning like tremulous dawns in the quivering air,
And exquisite, subtle and slow are the tinkle and tread of their rhythmical, slumber-soft feet.

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 panting, what passionate bosoms aflaming with fire!

Sarojini Naidu

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 sows
Her tents of gold on fields of ivory.

Sarojini Naidu

Indian Weavers

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.

Sarojini Naidu

Leili

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.

Sarojini Naidu

Life

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.

Sarojini Naidu

My Dead Dream

HAVE YOU found me, at last, O my Dream? Seven eons ago
You died and I buried you deep under forests of snow.
Why have you come hither? Who bade you awake from your sleep
And track me beyond the cerulean foam of the deep?

Would you tear from my lintels these sacred green garlands of leaves?
Would you scare the white, nested, wild pigeons of joy from my eaves?
Would you touch and defile with dead fingers the robes of my priest?
Would you weave your dim moan with the chantings of love at my feast?

Go back to your grave, O my Dream, under forests of snow,
Where a heart-riven child hid you once, seven eons ago.
Who bade you arise from your darkness? I bid you depart!
Profane not the shrines I have raised in the clefts of my heart.

Sarojini Naidu

Nightfall In The City Of Hyderabad

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 muezzin's 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 their silver chains.

Round the high Char Minar sounds of gay cavalcades
Blend with the music of cymbals and serenades.

Over the city bridge Night comes majestical,
Borne like a queen to a sumptuous festival.

Sarojini Naidu

Ode to H.H. The Nizam Of Hyderabad

DEIGN, Prince, my tribute to receive,
This lyric offering to your name,
Who round your jewelled scepter bind
The lilies of a poet's fame;
Beneath whose sway concordant dwell
The peoples whom your laws embrace,
In brotherhood of diverse creeds,
And harmony of diverse race:

The votaries of the Prophet's faith,
Of whom you are the crown and chief
And they, who bear on Vedic brows
Their mystic symbols of belief;
And they, who worshipping the sun,
Fled o'er the old Iranian sea;
And they, who bow to Him who trod
The midnight waves of Galilee.

Sweet, sumptuous fables of Baghdad
The splendours of your court recall,
The torches of a Thousand Nights
Blaze through a single festival;
And Saki-singers down the streets,
Pour for us, in a stream divine,
From goblets of your love-ghazals
The rapture of your Sufi wine.

Prince, where your radiant cities smile,
Grim hills their sombre vigils keep,
Your ancient forests hoard and hold
The legends of their centuried sleep;
Your birds of peace white-pinioned float
O'er ruined fort and storied plain,
Your faithful stewards sleepless guard
The harvests of your gold and grain.

God give you joy, God give you grace
To shield the truth and smite the wrong,
To honour Virtue, Valour, Worth.
To cherish faith and foster song.
So may the lustre of your days
Outshine the deeds Firdusi sung,
Your name within a nation's prayer,
Your music on a nation's tongue.

Sarojini Naidu

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 bear 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.

Sarojini Naidu

Past and Future

The new hath come and now the old retires:
And so the past becomes a mountain-cell,
Where lone, apart, old hermit-memories dwell
In consecrated calm, forgotten yet
Of the keen heart that hastens to forget
Old longings in fulfilling new desires.

And now the Soul stands in a vague, intense
Expectancy and anguish of suspense,
On the dim chamber-threshold . . . lo! he sees
Like a strange, fated bride as yet unknown,
His timid future shrinking there alone,
Beneath her marriage-veil of mysteries.

Sarojini Naidu

Song Of A Dream

ONCE in the dream of a night I stood
Lone in the light of a magical wood,
Soul-deep in visions that poppy-like sprang;
And spirits of Truth were the birds that sang,
And spirits of Love were the stars that glowed,
And spirits of Peace were the streams that flowed
In that magical wood in the land of sleep.

Lone in the light of that magical grove,
I felt the stars of the spirits of Love
Gather and gleam round my delicate youth,
And I heard the song of the spirits of Truth;
To quench my longing I bent me low
By the streams of the spirits of Peace that flow
In that magical wood in the land of sleep.

Sarojini Naidu

Street Cries

WHEN dawn's first cymbals beat upon the sky,
Rousing the world to labour's various cry,
To tend the flock, to bind the mellowing grain,
From ardent toil to forge a little gain,
And fasting men go forth on hurrying feet,
Buy bread, buy bread, rings down the eager street.

When the earth falters and the waters swoon
With the implacable radiance of noon,
And in dim shelters koïls hush their notes,
And the faint, thirsting blood in languid throats
Craves liquid succour from the cruel heat,
Buy fruit, buy fruit, steals down the panting street.

When twilight twinkling o'er the gay bazaars,
Unfurls a sudden canopy of stars,
When lutes are strung and fragrant torches lit
On white roof-terraces where lovers sit
Drinking together of life's poignant sweet,
Buy flowers, buy flowers, floats down the singing street.

Sarojini Naidu

Suttee

LAMP of my life, the lips of Death
Hath blown thee out with their sudden breath;
Naught shall revive thy vanished spark . . .
Love, must I dwell in the living dark?

Tree of my life, Death's cruel foot
Hath crushed thee down to thy hidden root;
Nought shall restore thy glory fled . . .
Shall the blossom live when the tree is dead?

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?

Sarojini Naidu

The Bangle Sellers

Bangle sellers are we who bear
Our shining loads to the temple fair...
Who will buy these delicate, bright
Rainbow-tinted circles of light?
Lustrous tokens of radiant lives,
For happy daughters and happy wives.

Some are meet for a maiden's wrist,
Silver and blue as the mountain mist,
Some are flushed like the buds that dream
On the tranquil brow of a woodland stream,
Some are aglow wth the bloom that cleaves
To the limpid glory of new born leaves

Some are like fields of sunlit corn,
Meet for a bride on her bridal morn,
Some, like the flame of her marriage fire,
Or, rich with the hue of her heart's desire,
Tinkling, luminous, tender, and clear,
Like her bridal laughter and bridal tear.

Some are purple and gold flecked grey
For she who has journeyed through life midway,
Whose hands have cherished, whose love has blest,
And cradled fair sons on her faithful breast,
And serves her household in fruitful pride,
And worships the gods at her husband's side.

Sarojini Naidu

The Coromandel Fishers

Rise, brothers, rise; the wakening skies pray to the morning light,
The wind lies asleep in the arms of the dawn like a child that has cried all night.
Come, let us gather our nets from the shore and set our catamarans free,
To capture the leaping wealth of the tide, for we are the kings of the sea!

No longer delay, let us hasten away in the track of the sea gull's call,
The sea is our mother, the cloud is our brother, the waves are our comrades all.
What though we toss at the fall of the sun where the hand of the sea-god drives?
He who holds the storm by the hair, will hide in his breast our lives.

Sweet is the shade of the cocoanut glade, and the scent of the mango grove,
And sweet are the sands at the full o' the moon with the sound of the voices we love;
But sweeter, O brothers, the kiss of the spray and the dance of the wild foam's glee;
Row, brothers, row to the edge of the verge, where the low sky mates with the sea.

Sarojini Naidu

The Illusion of Love

Beloved, you may be as all men say
Only a transient spark
Of flickering flame set in loam of clay –
I care not …since you kindle all my dark
With the immortal lustres of the day.

And as all men deem, dearest, you may be
Only a common shell
Chance-winnowed by the sea-winds from the sea –
The subtle murmurs of eternity.

And tho' you are, like men or mortal race,
Only a hapless thing
That Death may mar and destiny efface –
I care not … since unto my heart you bring
The very vision of God's dwelling-place.

Sarojini Naidu

The Indian Gipsy

In tattered robes that hoard a glittering trace
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 the 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

Sarojini Naidu

The Pardah Nashin

HER 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.

From thieving light of eyes impure,
From coveting sun or wind's caress,
Her days are guarded and secure
Behind her carven lattices,
Like jewels in a turbaned crest,
Like secrets in a lover's breast.

But though no hand unsanctioned dares
Unveil the mysteries of her grace,
Time lifts the curtain unawares,
And Sorrow looks into her face . . .
Who shall prevent the subtle years,
Or shield a woman's eyes from tears?

Sarojini Naidu

The Poet To Death

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!

Sarojini Naidu

The Poet's Love-Song

In noon-tide hours, O Love, secure and strong,
I need thee not; mad dreams are mine to bind
The world to my desire, and hold the wind
A voiceless captive to my conquering song.
I need thee not, I am content with these:
Keep silence in thy soul, beyond the seas!

But in the desolate hour of midnight, when
An ectasy of starry silence sleeps
And my soul hungers for thy voice, O then,
Love, like the magic of wild melodies,
Let thy soul answer mine across the seas.

Sarojini Naidu

The Queen's Rival

QUEEN GULNAAR sat on her ivory bed,
Around her countless treasures were spread;

Her chamber walls were richly inlaid
With agate, porphory, onyx and jade;

The tissues that veiled her delicate breast,
Glowed with the hues of a lapwing's crest;

But still she gazed in her mirror and sighed
"O King, my heart is unsatisfied."

King Feroz bent from his ebony seat:
"Is thy least desire unfulfilled, O Sweet?

"Let thy mouth speak and my life be spent
To clear the sky of thy discontent."

"I tire of my beauty, I tire of this
Empty splendour and shadowless bliss;

"With none to envy and none gainsay,
No savour or salt hath my dream or day."

Queen Gulnaar sighed like a murmuring rose:
"Give me a rival, O King Feroz."

II

King Feroz spoke to his Chief Vizier:
"Lo! ere to-morrow's dawn be here,

"Send forth my messengers over the sea,
To seek seven beautiful brides for me;

"Radiant of feature and regal of mien,
Seven handmaids meet for the Persian Queen."
. . . . .

Seven new moon tides at the Vesper call,
King Feroz led to Queen Gulnaar's hall

A young queen eyed like the morning star:
"I bring thee a rival, O Queen Gulnaar."

But still she gazed in her mirror and sighed:
"O King, my heart is unsatisfied."

Seven queens shone round her ivory bed,
Like seven soft gems on a silken thread,

Like seven fair lamps in a royal tower,

Like seven bright petals of Beauty's flower

Queen Gulnaar sighed like a murmuring rose
"Where is my rival, O King Feroz?"

III

When spring winds wakened the mountain floods,
And kindled the flame of the tulip buds,

When bees grew loud and the days grew long,
And the peach groves thrilled to the oriole's song,

Queen Gulnaar sat on her ivory bed,
Decking with jewels her exquisite head;

And still she gazed in her mirror and sighed:
"O King, my heart is unsatisfied."

Queen Gulnsar's daughter two spring times old,
In blue robes bordered with tassels of gold,

Ran to her knee like a wildwood fay,
And plucked from her hand the mirror away.

Quickly she set on her own light curls
Her mother's fillet with fringes of pearls;

Quickly she turned with a child's caprice
And pressed on the mirror a swift, glad kiss.

Queen Gulnaar laughed like a tremulous rose:
"Here is my rival, O King Feroz."

Sarojini Naidu

The Royal Tombs Of Golconda

I MUSE among these silent fanes
Whose spacious darkness guards your dust;
Around me sleep the hoary plains
That hold your ancient wars in trust.

I pause, my dreaming spirit hears,
Across the wind's unquiet tides,
The glimmering music of your spears,
The laughter of your royal brides.

In vain, O Kings, doth time aspire
To make your names oblivion's sport,
While yonder hill wears like a tier
The ruined grandeur of your fort.

Though centuries falter and decline,
Your proven strongholds shall remain
Embodied memories of your line,
Incarnate legends of your reign.

O Queens, in vain old Fate decreed
Your flower-like bodies to the tomb;
Death is in truth the vital seed
Of your imperishable bloom

Each new-born year the bulbuls sing
Their songs of your renascent loves;
Your beauty wakens with the spring
To kindle these pomegranate groves.

Sarojini Naidu

The Snake Charmer

WHITHER dost thou hide from the magic of my flute-call?
In what moonlight-tangled meshes of perfume,
Where the clustering keovas guard the squirrel's slumber,
Where the deep woods glimmer with the jasmine's bloom?

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.

Whither dost thou loiter, by what murmuring hollows,
Where oleanders scatter their ambrosial fire?
Come, thou subtle bride of my mellifluous wooing,
Come, thou silver-breasted moonbeam of de- sire!

Sarojini Naidu

The Song Of Princess Zeb-Un-Nissa In Praise Of Her Own Beauty

WHEN from my cheek I lift my veil,
The roses turn with envy pale,
And from their pierced hearts, rich with pain,
Send forth their fragrance like a wail.

Or if perchance one perfumed tress
Be lowered to the wind's caress,
The honeyed hyacinths complain,
And languish in a sweet distress.

And, when I pause, still groves among,
(Such loveliness is mine) a throng
Of nightingales awake and strain
Their souls into a quivering song.

Sarojini Naidu

The Soul's Prayer

In childhood's pride I said to Thee:
'O Thou, who mad'st me of Thy breath,
Speak, Master, and reveal to me
Thine inmost laws of life and death.

'Give me to drink each joy and pain
Which Thine eternal hand can mete,
For my insatiate soul can drain
Earth's utmost bitter, utmost sweet.

'Spare me no bliss, no pang of strife,
Withhold no gift or grief I crave,
The intricate lore of love and life
And mystic knowledge of the grave.'

Lord, Thou didst answer stern and low:
'Child, I will hearken to thy prayer,
And thy unconquered soul shall know
All passionate rapture and despair.

'Thou shalt drink deep of joy and fame,
And love shall burn thee like a fire,
And pain shall cleanse thee like a flame,
To purge the dross from thy desire.

'So shall thy chastened spirit yearn
To seek from its blind prayer release,
And spent and pardoned, sue to learn
The simple secret of My peace.

I, bending from my sevenfold height,
Will teach thee of My quickening grace,
Life is a prism of My light,
And Death the shadow of My face.'

Sarojini Naidu

To A Buddha Seated On A Lotus

LORD BUDDHA, on thy Lotus-throne,
With praying eyes and hands elate,
What mystic rapture dost thou own,
Immutable and ultimate?
What peace, unravished of our ken,
Annihilate from the world of men?

The wind of change for ever blows
Across the tumult of our way,
To-morrow's unborn griefs depose
The sorrows of our yesterday.
Dream yields to dream, strife follows strife,
And Death unweaves the webs of Life.

For us the travail and the heat,
The broken secrets of our pride,
The strenuous lessons of defeat,
The flower deferred, the fruit denied;
But not the peace, supremely won,
Lord Buddha, of thy Lotus-throne.

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?

Sarojini Naidu

To India

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

The nations that in fettered darkness weep
Crave thee to lead them where great mornings break . . . .
Mother, O Mother, wherefore dost thou sleep?
Arise and answer for thy children's sake!

Thy Future calls thee with a manifold sound
To crescent honours, splendours, victories vast;
Waken, O slumbering Mother and be crowned,
Who once wert empress of the sovereign Past.

Sarojini Naidu

To My Children

Jaya Surya

GOLDEN sun of victory, born
In my life's unclouded morn,
In my lambent sky of love,
May your growing glory prove
Sacred to your consecration,
To my heart and to my nation.
Sun of victory, may you be
Sun of song and liberty.

Padmaja

Lotus-maiden, you who claim
All the sweetness of your name,
Lakshmi, fortune's queen, defend you,
Lotus-born like you, and send you
Balmy moons of love to bless you,
Gentle joy-winds to caress you.
Lotus-maiden, may you be
Fragrant of all ecstasy.

Ranadheera

Little lord of battle, hail
In your newly-tempered mail!
Learn to conquer, learn to fight
In the foremost flanks of right,
Like Valmiki's heroes bold,
Rubies girt in epic gold.
Lord of battle, may you be,
Lord of love and chivalry.

Lilamani

Limpid jewel of delight
Severed from the tender night
Of your sheltering mother-mine,
Leap and sparkle, dance and shine,
Blithely and securely set
In love's magic coronet.
Living jewel, may you be
Laughter-bound and sorrow-free.

Sarojini Naidu

To My Fairy 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-wildernesses,
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 lonely places.
Fairy fancies, fly away,
To bright wind-inwoven spaces,
Fly away!

Sarojini Naidu

To The God of Pain

UNWILLING priestess in thy cruel fane,
Long hast thou held me, pitiless god of Pain,
Bound to thy worship by reluctant vows,
My tired breast girt with suffering, and my brows
Anointed with perpetual weariness.
Long have I borne thy service, through the stress
Of rigorous years, sad days and slumberless nights,
Performing thine inexorable rites.

For thy dark altars, balm nor milk nor rice,
But mine own soul thou'st ta'en for sacrifice:

All the rich honey of my youth's desire,
And all the sweet oils from my crushed life drawn,
And all my flower-like dreams and gem-like fire
Of hopes up-leaping like the light of dawn.

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 orisons are sung;
Let me depart, with faint limbs let me creep
To some dim shade and sink me down to sleep.

Sarojini Naidu

To Youth

O YOUTH, sweet comrade Youth, wouldst thou be gone?
Long have we dwelt together, thou and I;
Together drunk of many an alien dawn,
And plucked the fruit of many an alien sky.

Ah, fickle friend, must I, who yesterday
Dreamed forwards to long, undimmed ecstasy,
Henceforward dream, because thou wilt not stay,
Backward to transient pleasure and to thee?

I give thee back thy false, ephemeral vow;
But, O beloved comrade, ere we part,
Upon my mournful eyelids and my brow
Kiss me who hold thine image in my heart.

Sarojini Naidu

Transcience

Nay, do not grieve tho' life be full of sadness,
Dawn will not veil her spleandor for your grief,
Nor spring deny their bright, appointed beauty
To lotus blossom and ashoka leaf.

Nay, do not pine, tho' life be dark with trouble,
Time will not pause or tarry on his way;
To-day that seems so long, so strange, so bitter,
Will soon be some forgotten yesterday.

Nay, do not weep; new hopes, new dreams, new faces,
The unspent joy of all the unborn years,
Will prove your heart a traitor to its sorrow,
And make your eyes unfaithful to their tears.

Sarojini Naidu

Village Song

HONEY, child, honey, child, whither are you going?
Would you cast your jewels all to the breezes blowing?
Would you leave the mother who on golden grain has fed you?
Would you grieve the lover who is riding forth to wed you?

Mother mine, to the wild forest I am going,
Where upon the champa boughs the champa buds are blowing;
To the köil-haunted river-isles where lotus lilies glisten,
The voices of the fairy folk are calling me: O listen!

Honey, child, honey, child, the world is full of pleasure,
Of bridal-songs and cradle-songs and sandal-scented leisure.
Your bridal robes are in the loom, silver and saffron glowing,
Your bridal cakes are on the hearth: O whither are you going?

The bridal-songs and cradle-songs have cadences of sorrow,
The laughter of the sun to-day, the wind of death to-morrow.
Far sweeter sound the forest-notes where forest-streams are falling;
O mother mine, I cannot stay, the fairy-folk are calling.

Sarojini Naidu

Wandering Singers

WHERE the voice of the wind calls our wandering feet,
Through echoing forest and echoing street,
With lutes in our hands ever-singing we roam,
All men are our kindred, the world is our home.
Our lays are of cities whose lustre is shed,
The laughter and beauty of women long dead;
The sword of old battles, the crown of old kings,
And happy and simple and sorrowful things.
What hope shall we gather, what dreams 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.

Sarojini Naidu