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NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE

Indian Poetry in English

Lecture 07: Sarojini Naidu

BINOD MISHRA

DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES



Socio-Political Conditions

- Women were excluded from metropolitan, political culture.
- Nationalism was on the rise.
- World Wars were being waged.
- Terrible condition of Indian widows and wives.
- Debates on voting rights for women

Condition of Women Poets

- Women wrote about domestic and personal affairs.
- However, there was a growing poetic tradition.
- Tour Dutt, Cornelia Sorabji, and Sarojini Naidu were some important poets.
- Naidu was a ‘representative of the Orient’ and for the Women.
- **Hyderabad’s Ladies War Relief** in **1915** addressing ‘the sacrifice of Indian mothers on behalf of an ungrateful empire’ recited her poem ‘The Gift of India’.



Introduction to the Poet

- Born in 1879 in Bengali Brahmin family of Hyderabad.
- She visited England at the age of 16.
- Scholarship at King's College London and Griton College, Cambridge
- Returned to India in 1893, married Dr. Govindraju Naidu
- First Female Indian President in 1925 of Indian National Congress,
- Governor of Uttar Pradesh from 1947-49
- Believed in cosmopolitan Nationalism- 'Home and the World'
- Gandhi called her '*Bharat Kokila*'-'The Nightingale of India'
- Died on 2nd March, 1949

Contd…..

- **Influences**
  - Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, Browning, Rossetti and Swinburne
  - Gandhi, Tilak and Gokhale
- **Achievements**
  - Ambiguous position of the accomplished poetess.
  - ‘Private singer of Indian poetry and public face of nationalism.’
  - In Europe, it was the era of the Decadents and Aesthetics, which influenced her.
  - The Rhymer’s Club, **Edmund Gosse**, Arthur Symons.



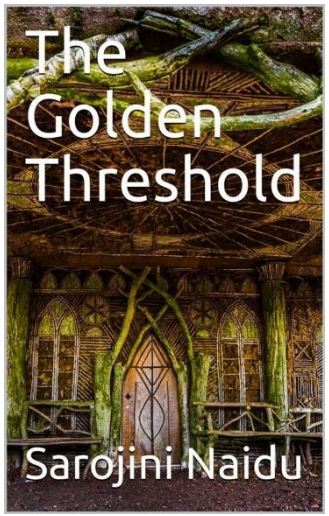
Depiction of Ordinary Life

" If the poems of Sarojini Naidu can be carefully and delicately studied they will be found as luminous in lighting up the dark places of East as any contribution of a savant or historian."

- Edmund Gosse

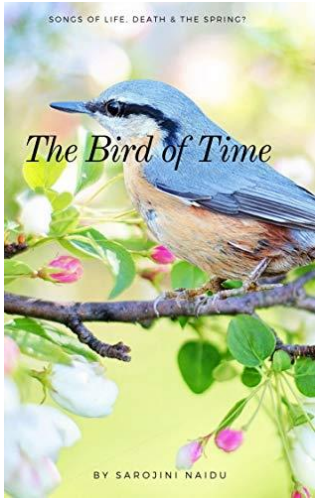
"The Bangle Sellers,"
"Street Cries,"
"Indian weavers,"
"Champak Blooms,"
"Song of Radha,"
"Vasant Panchmi,"
"Kali," "The Mother,"
"Lakshmi," "The Lotus Born"
"To A Buddha Seated on A lotus"

Poems



- ✓ Collection of Poems-
  - ❑ *The Golden Threshold(1905)*
  - ❑ *The Bird of Time (1912)*
  - ❑ *The Broken Wing(1917)*
  - ❑ *The Feather of the Dawn(1961)*

(Revolutionary, Paean to womanhood, Indian in tenor and tone.)

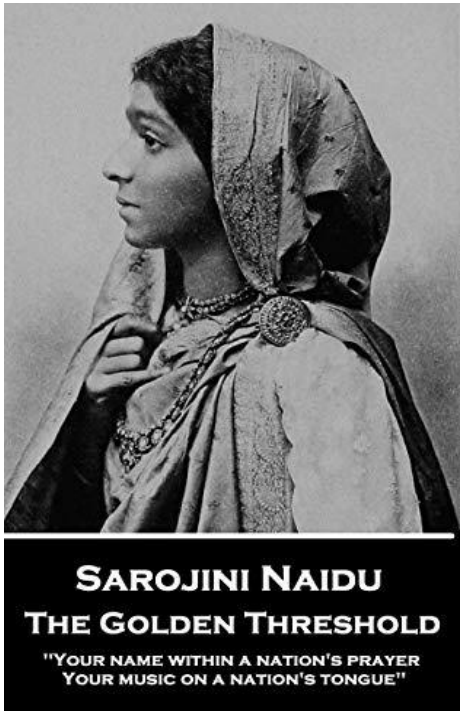


"Be masters of whatever language you like, so long as it is the language of the human heart and spirit. Literature is the only way truth can be kept alive."

- Naidu

Characteristics of Naidu's Poems

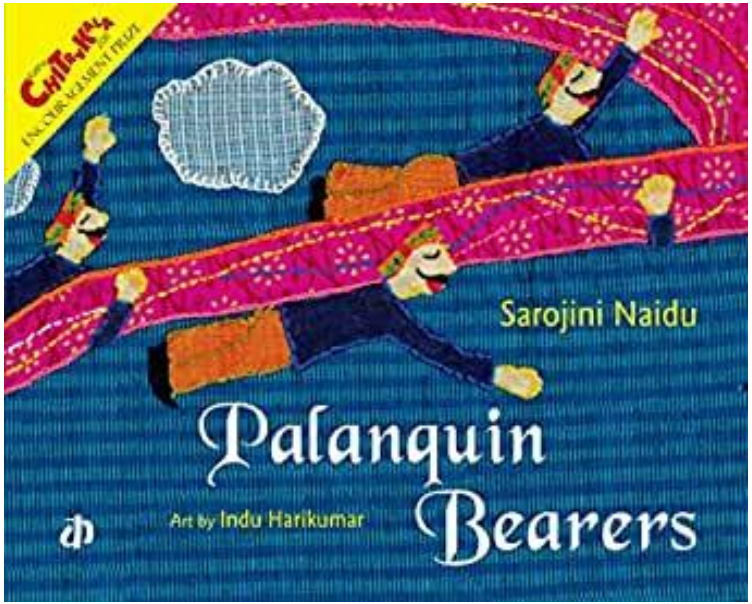
- British romanticism, Persian, Urdu poetic mode.
- Nationalistic and secular lyric
- Folk-songs, love-lyric, etc.
- Revolutionary but lyrical.
- Themes: Love, Nature, Life and Death.
- Romantically evoking imagery from Indian scene.
- Symbolic, Sentimental yet vague at time.



Indian mythology, legends and history

“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.



Contd…

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.



Characteristic of the Poem, “Palanquin Bearers”

- Exoticization of India
- Reflects on Indian culture, women, the bearers.

- **Did the ‘palanquin bearers’ feel privileged?**

- Dactyl and Anapaestic meter
- Melodious due to use of assonances and rhymes
- Lilting cadence, evoking beautiful embellished imageries



“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;

Contd…

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?

Characteristic of the Poem, “Pardah Nashin”

- Veiled Muslim beauty
- Reflects on beauty and time.
- Raises questions about the condition of women and traditional institutions.
- Women as prisoners of time, house, and body.
- What is the woman’s identity?
- Rhetorical ending

- Rhyme scheme: ababcc

“The Lotus”

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,
What legions loosed from many a far-off clime
Of wild-bee hordes with lips insatiate,
And hungry winds with wings of hope or hate,
Have thronged and pressed round thy miraculous prime
To devastate thy loveliness, to drain
The midmost rapture of thy glorious heart
But who could win thy secret, who attain
Thine ageless beauty born of Brahma’s breath,
Or pluck thine immortality, who art
Coeval with the Lords of Life and Death?



“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?

Contd…

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 as an Indian English poet

- Abundance of Indian scene, theme, symbols and landscape
- Songs of Krishna and Allah, Radha and Gulnar
- Evocative and original use of imagery
- Sharp with and comic sense

"She brought prestige to Indian English writing long before Tagore received the Nobel Prize; an d her best poetry is not just a faded echo of the feeble voice of decadent romanticism, but an authentic Indian English lyric utterance exquisitely tuned to the composite Indian ethos, bringing home to the unbiased reader all opulence, pageantry and charm of traditional Indian life and the splendours of Indian scene."

(Naik, *A History of Indian English Literature*)

Summing up

- Naidu presents varied and vivid pictures of Indian life
- She is full of youthful imagination and possesses ornate style.
- She makes abundant use of ancient Indian myths and literary devices.
- The picturesque, repetitive and metrical quality of her verses makes her an all time favourite poet.

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.

(“To the God of Pain”)

Thank You

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