

# Rabindra Nath Tagore and Sarojini Naidu: A Comparative Study

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**ABSTRACT--** *Both Tagore and Naidu are illustrious luminaries in the firmament of Indo – English poetry. They made a binding contribution to it and gave it a permanent place in the poetical map of the world. Both Tagore and Naidu rendered incalculable service to Indian literature by interpreting the quintessence of Indian culture to the western world. They evoke in images and rhythms the spectacles of Indian life and artically moulded English language for poetically communicating the typical Indian atmosphere and feelings. Tagore’s lyrics, says W.B.Yeats, are “The work of supreme culture ,they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes.....A whole people ,a whole civilization immeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination; and yet we are not moved because of its strangeness, but because we have met our own image, as though we had walked in Rossetti’s willow wood, or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature our voice as in a dream. “ In Sarojini’s poems we find India poetically and picturesquely revealed. She writes about India’s festivals and faiths, the customs and traditions, the flowers and bazaars, the aspects and events of life, the bangle sellers and palanquin bearers, the dancers and fishers.*

**Keywords--** *Tagore, Naidu, English, whole, India*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Tagore and Sarojini Naidu are poets of nature. Tagore’s conception of nature is more comprehensive and vaster than that of Sarojini Naidu. Whereas she merely describes the sensuous manifestation of nature in colourful and picturesque imagery, Tagore pries deeper and deeper into the mystery underlying the sensuous manifestation of nature and finds an abiding unity and oneness in nature and human life. He has a mystical affinity with nature which is entirely absent in Sarojini ,s poetry. The following lines from *Gitanjali* illustrates his mystical conception of nature:

“ The sun rose to the mid sky and doves copes in the shade. Withers leaves danced and whirled in the hot air of noon. The shepherd boy drowsed and dreamed in the banyan tree, and I laid myself down by the water and stretched my tried limbs on the grass.

... ..

The repose of the sun- embroidered green gloom slowly spread ever my heart. I forgot for what I had travelled, and I surrendered my mind without struggle to the maze of shadows and songs.

... .. “ (Song No. SO VIII)

There is communion between nature and human life in Tagore’s nature poetry:

“ How often great Earth, have I felt my being yearn to flow over you, sharing in the happiness of each blade that raises its signal banner in answer to the beckoning blue of the sky “.

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(The Fugitive, III-7)

Sarojini's nature poetry does not contain any deep thought. She picturesquely describes the nature of "eye and ear" in her nature poems- Vasant Panchmi, In Praise of Gulmohur Blossoms, A Song In Spring, Summer, Woods, June Sunset etc. The following lines from A Song In Spring reveal her fascination for the sensuous appeal of nature and her glaring contrast with Tagore:

"Wild bees that rifle the mango blossom, Set free awhile 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,  
What do you know in your blithe, brief season Of dreams deferred and a heart grown old? "

To Tagore spring is the harbinger of new hopes and freedom and not a medley of colours and perfumes as it is to Sarojini. Tagore welcomes the advent of spring:

"Come, spring reckless lover of the earth, make the forest's heart pant for attendance!

Burst, like a rebellion of light, through the night's vigil, through the lake's dark dumbness, through the dungeon under the dust, proclaiming freedom to the shackled seeds!

Like the laughter of lightning, like the short of storm, break into the midst of the noisy town; free stifled word and unconscious effort, reinforce our flagging fight and conquer death!"

According to Tagore nature moulds human thoughts and character and has the power to elevate human beings from the mundane and sordid realities of life. In his poetry we find complete identification of man with nature. In his beautiful lyric The End the child tells his mother that death will only transform him into various aspects of nature:

"I shall become a delicate draught of air and caress you, and I shall be ripples in the water when you bathe, and kiss you and kiss you again.

In the gutsy night when the rain patters on the leaves you will hear my whisper in your bed, and my laughter will flash with the lightning through the open window in the room. "

(The Crescent Moon)

## II. DISCUSSION

Sarojini Naidu does not make nature divine. She seeks to know Nature perfectly and to enjoy her fully. With her no consideration of theology, humanity or metaphysics mingle with nature. In the joy spread in the realm of nature:

Spring time, O spring time, What is your essence, The Lilt of a bulbul, the laugh of a rose

The dance of the dew on the wings of a moonbeam, The voice of the Zephyr that sings as he goes, The hope of a bride or the dream of a maiden  
Watching the petals Of gladness unclose. "

Like Tagore she depicts the calm and peaceful moods of nature and not nature in tumult. To her nature is a sanctuary of peace. In her two poems Summer Woods and June Sunset she expresses her disgust for the glittering externals of life and yearns for repose in the sanctuary of nature:

"Here shall my heart find its heaven of calm  
By rush-fringed rivers and rain-fed streams

That glimmer through meadows of lily and Palm  
Here shall my soul find its true repose  
Under a sunset sky of dream

Diaphanous, amber and rose. "(June sunset)

Tagore has not altogether ignored the terrible aspects of nature. *The Sea Waves* and *Barsha Shesh* are Tagore's two outstanding poems which depict nature in her terrible moods. The opening lines of the former present a graphic description of storm tossed sea:

“On the breast of the shirtless sea

Destruction swings and sweeps, in dreadful festival  
The indomitable wind is roaming, ungovernable in strength,  
Beating its thousand wings,  
Sky and sea in one are reeling together in vast confusion,  
Darkness veils the eyes of the universe,  
The lightning flashes and threatens, the foam fields hiss,  
The sharp white terrible mirth of brute Nature”.

Edward Thompson highly admires this poem in the following words: “This is the grandest sea-storm he ever did.....The poem is magnificent both in imaginative presentation and in pity, and no stanza is without unforgettable touches...”.

Unlike Sarojini Naidu, Tagore had the unique faculty of endowing nature with human qualities. His famous lyric *Krishnakali* presents Krishnakali as a maiden:

“I call her my Krishna flower  
Let other say what they like.  
In the rice field of Maina village  
I felt the first glance of her eyes.  
She had not a veil On her face,  
Not a moment of leisure for shyness.  
Ah, you call her dark! Let that be  
Her back gazelle eyes I have seen”.

Love occupies a cardinal place in the poetry both of Sarojini Naidu and Tagore. She is the singer of human love par excellence but there is a want of divine love in her poetry. A great and gifted artist, Sarojini Naidu expresses the joys and sorrows of love, the rapture of fulfilment and the poignant pangs of frustration and separation. True love is self- surrender, an offering both of body and soul at the altar of love:

“Were beauty mine, beloved, I would bring it  
Like a rare blossom to Love's glowing shrine;  
Were dear youth mine, beloved, I would fling it  
Like a rich pearl in Love 's lustrous wine “.  
(The Offering)

The same feeling is expressed in To Love:

“ O Love! Of all the riches that are mine,  
What gift have I withheld before thy shrine? “  
Love is the complete identification of two loving souls:  
“ Hourly this subtle mystery flowers anew ,  
I Love, I know not why...  
Unless It be, perchance. That I am you,

Dear love, that you are I ?” ( A Persian Love Song)

The aim of both Tagore and Sarojini Naidu has been to depict Indian life before Europe and in this respect, too, Tagore excels Sarojini. The latter has merely painted in rich colors various facets of Indian life whereas the former has interpreted the spirit of Indian thought and culture. Sarojini’s poems- *Indian Weavers, Bangle sellers, The Snake Charmer, The Indian Gipsy, Coromondel Fishers* etc.- express various sections of Indian life. *The prayer of Islam, The Imam Bara, The Flute Player of Brindaban, To a Budha seated on a Lotus, The call to Evening prayer* etc. Express various facets of Indian religious life. Indian spring and flowers, customs and traditions are vividly expressed in radiant diction in her poetry. Tagore gave Indo- English poetry Indian background as W.B.Yeats writes in his *Introduction to Gitanjali*, “The traveller in the red-brown clothes that he wears that dust may not show upon him, the girl searching in her bed for the petals fallen from the wreath of her royal lover, the servant or the bride awaiting the master’s home- coming in the empty houses are images of the heart turning to God. Flowers and rivers, the blowing of conch shells, the heavy rain of the Indian July, or the parching heat, are images of the moods of that heart in union or in separation; and a man sitting in a boat upon a river playing upon a lute, like one of those figures full of mysterious meaning in a Chinese picture, is God Himself.”

Frustration, defeat and hope run simultaneously in Sarojini Naidu’s poetry. Her poems reveal helplessness and limitations of a spirit crushed and awed by fate. In her poem *To the God of Pain* she seems to be an unwilling priestess in the temple of the *God Of Pain*, earnestly yearning for a release from his service:

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.”

In spite of the predominance of melancholy in her poetry. She is not pessimistic. The Challenge and Death and Life Strike a defiant and courageous note. She is deeply in love with life and unmindful of worldly gloom fever and fret, she rejoices in the fact that she was born:

Men say the world is full of fera 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 terrace of corn  
I watch the golden Orioles of Thy morn.”

There is a note of sheer optimism which arises from the feeling of fulfilment and the realization of the divine spirit in Tagore’s poetry. The poet welcomes death:

“ Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one solution to thee. “

Both Tagore and Sarojini Naidu occupy a prominent place in Indo- English lyrical poetry. There is simplicity, lucidity and gracefulness combines with profundity of emotions in Tagore’s lyrics. Sarojini’s lyrics have a

distinctive place in respect of lilting music, spontaneity, radiant and colourful diction but they are not brimming with deep feelings as Tagore's lyrics are. The following extracts from their respective lyrical poetry will make this point amply clear:

“ Clouds heap upon clouds and it darkens. Ah, love, why dost thou let me wait outside at the door alone?  
I'm the busy moments of the noontide work I am with the crowd, but on this dark lonely day it is only  
for thee that I hope.

If thou showest me not thy face, if thou leaves me wholly aside, I know not how I am to pass these long,  
rainy hours.

I keep gazing on the far- away gloom of the sky and my heart wanders wailing with the restless wind.”

( Lyric No. XVII in Gitanjali)

Here we find that sweetness and lucidity of expression are wedded with the wait of substance that distinguishes poetry of the highest order. These lines are marked with two poetic excellence. The following lines from Sarojini's palanquin Bearers” are noticeable for dulcet music and aerial similes and like Tagore's poetry do

Lighting, O lighting, we bear her long,  
She sways like a flower in the wind of our song,  
She skims like a bird on the foam of stream  
She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream,

Both Tagore and Sarojini Naidu are indubitably great in their respective spheres, but Tagore is, certainly, a greater poet who exercised powerful influence both on Indian and foreign poets. Ezra Pound came under the influence of Tagore's poetry. In a note to Chak written in 1949.” Sarojini was never an influence. Her shadowy images, her sensitive perception and the mellifluous music of her verse are too subtle to be imitable.

Tagore's range was much wider than that of Sarojini. He composed about 1400 songs and 2000 poems, whereas her poetic output is very slender. Both as poet of love, nature and human life, he is superior to Sarojini. Tagore's *The Gardener* is a monumental contribution to Love poetry. Dr. Iyengar writes: “ All the make- believe and love- play that lovers feed on, all the agony and hopelessness, all the ecstasy and fulfilment of lover's lives, all is woven here into a garland of memorable song”.<sup>2</sup> Tagore, he adds, “ Was the one writer who first gained for modern India a place on world literary scene. He is without question the greatest song writer and lyrical genius of modern times”.<sup>3</sup> Late Dr. Radhakrishnan once remarked that Tagore's writings are a commentary on Upanishads. Sarojini's poems, in the other hand, are made of “ adolescent stuff” and lack in measure and deep thoughts. Sarojini Naidu deserves a place in Indo- English poetry not as high as that of Tagore or Aurobindo but only next to them by virtue of her lyrical quality and the presentation of Indian scenes and life. Her *The Golden Threshoof*, *The Bird Of Time* and *The Broken Wing* have a commendable place in Indo- English poetry.

### III. CONCLUSION

Both Sarojini Naidu and Tagore are romantic but there is a basic difference between them. Sarojini's romanticism evinces the influence of English romantic poet and Urdu lyrical poetry and is mainly confined to the presentation of sensuous manifestation of the Indian scene. Tagore's romanticism strikes a deeper note and is suffused with mysticism and spirituality which are the perennial characteristics of Indian thought. Hirnamony Banerjee says that Tagore's romanticism is based on “ the discovery in main of the manifestation of divinity or, if

we want to express it the other way, of God “.1 He adds that Tagore “ Sings of the beauty of nature, it sings of the union with God and it sings of the divinity of the universal man”.2

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