

## **Fusion of Hindu - Sufi Culture in the Love Poems of Sarojini Naidu**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Sarojini Naidu was a gifted artist whose poetry is appreciated for its bird-like quality. The themes and background of her poetry were purely Indian and she sang in full-throated ease of the festivals, occupations, and life of her people as a true daughter of her motherland. Lyricism, symbolism, imagery, mysticism, and native fervour, were the remarkable qualities of her poetry. Naidu's themes were indigenous as advised by Edmund Gosse and capture the spirit of India. There are greater poets than Sarojini Naidu but none are more original because she saw things with a fresh approach. Naidu wrote poetry on a variety of themes. Divine Love was one of the prominent themes in Naidu's poetry. Naidu wrote beautiful Love poems depicting an urge to unite with the Divine. Her poems are written on Hindu Mythology as well as Sufism. This paper reflects the influence of Hindu and Persian cultures on the poetic sensibility of Sarojini Naidu as portrayed in her Love poems.

### **KEYWORDS**

Sarojini Naidu; Poetry; Divine love; Hindu Mythology; Sufism.

The theme of Love is prominent in Sarojini Naidu's poetry. Apart from poems dealing with human love, Naidu has depicted divine love in some of her love lyrics. In her poems dealing with divine love, one comes across a variety of love experiences that reflect both the Hindu tradition of love poetry and the Sufi-Muslim tradition. Sarojini Naidu's lyrics "The Flute Player of Brindaban" and "Songs of Radha, the Milkmaid" depict the Hindu tradition of love poetry where the individual soul

yearns to unite with the infinite. Here the human love transcends into the divine love where the persona is in search of the Infinite. The beloved may be the Divine, the Supreme, or Krishna, the eternal lover and such lyrics derive their poignancy and appeal from the soul's hunger for union with the object of love. "The Flute Player of Brindaban" in *The Broken Wing* is a beautiful lyric that depicts Naidu's Hindu sensibility. In a note along with this poem, Naidu described Krishna as, "the Divine

Flute-player of Brindaban, who plays the tune of the infinite that lures every Hindu heart away from mortal cares and attachments” (Naidu, TSF 161). The poetess described herself as a devotee in search of the Infinite leaving all the worldly pleasures with an apt simile of “a homeless bird” (TSF 7) and wrote:

Still must I like a homeless bird  
Wander, forsaking all;  
The earthly loves and worldly lures  
That held my life in thrall,  
And follow, follow, answering  
Thy magical flute-call. (TSF 7-12)

“Songs of Radha, the Milkmaid” is a poem written in the tradition of the Bhakti cult. The spiritual tradition of Hinduism has produced a rich legacy of poets. These Hindu poets sought to express the sentiments and experiences of their spirituality through poetry. In “Songs of Radha, the Milkmaid” Sarojini Naidu resembles Mirabai, the devotee of the highest order who had written many prayerful songs (bhajans) in her devotion to Krishna, the divine lover. The poem in the last stanza describes Radha, the devotee, standing in the sanctum with folded hands, seeking shelter and surrendering her soul with a contrite heart: “I carried my gifts to the Mathura shrine.../ How brightly the torches were glowing.../ I folded my hands at the altars to pray” (TSF 21-23).

Radha is offering the gift of her soul to her divine lover. The devotee is completely lost in devotion and is not concerned about the world around. The devotee gains spiritual awareness of the highest order where love as personal desire is transformed into divine love. Radha attains a transcendental experience by identifying herself completely with her divine love. She says:

But my heart was so lost in your  
worship, Beloved,  
They were wroth when I cried  
without knowing:

Govinda! Govinda!  
Govinda! Govinda!... (TSF 26-28)

Mulk Raj Anand, highly impressed by the poem, observed,  
Here the poetry of romanticism, of ornate epithets and delicate similes, has become infused with transcendental experience. Sarojini has transferred love as personal desire into divine love, and given it a sense of eternity, of the Universal (119).

It was this poem that introduced Naidu to the famous English critic James. H. Cousins who was highly impressed by the chanting effect of ‘Govinda! Govinda!’.

“The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love” reflects love based on Sufism, where the devotee wants to cross all the hurdles in the path of divine love and waits for the union with the Infinite. The Epigraph taken from Rabindranath Tagore, “My passion all burnt as the flame of Salvation, / The flower of my love shall become the ripe fruit of Devotion.” (TSF 210), captures the central theme of the poem. These poems on divine love show that Naidu was greatly influenced by the medieval devotional love poets. In her poems, love began as a passionate urge which led to a mystic union, after experiencing a series of trials.

“The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love” is a well-structured long poem on love in three sections, each consisting of eight poems. The central symbol is the temple which is connected in various ways with the idea of pilgrimage. It suggests the journey of a pilgrim reach the shrine crossing all hurdles. There is no mention of any idol of worship in the temple which suggests the influence of Sufi poets on Sarojini Naidu’s sensibility.

“The Gate of Delight” which is the first section, suggests the poet’s desire to surrender to the Infinite:  
Bring no pearls from ravished seas,  
Gems from rifled hemispheres;  
Grant me, love, in priceless boon

All the sorrow of your years,  
All the secret of your tears. (TSF,  
"The Feast" 11-15)

Love's pilgrimage starts from passion, from a physical state, and moves towards the psychic state. The devotee expresses that she longs to unite with her beloved. She expresses the physical aspect of love where her hands want to touch her beloved and she asks for forgiveness for the sins of her hands: In their tremulous longing to touch

Your beautiful flesh, to caress,  
To clasp you, O Love, and to bless  
With gifts as uncounted as sand.  
(TSF, "The Sin of Love" 10-14)

The devotee has experienced the deep passion and confesses boldly in "The Sin of Love", "Forgive me the sin of my heart, / If it trespassed against you and strove/ To lure or to conquer your love." (TSF 22-24). The devotee is expressing her intense emotion of love towards her divine lover. Her heart is filled with passionate love to conciliate with her being and asks for forgiveness: "To solace its hunger and ease / The wound of its sorrow or smart- / O pardon the sin of my heart." (TSF 26-28). In "The Vision of Love", love rises from the physical level and becomes a psychological experience. The persona sees the glimpse of her divine lover everywhere: "And flowering earth-I find anew / The changing glory of your face / The myrial symbols of your grace." (TSF 4-6). The devotee says: "To my enraptured sight you are/ Sovereign and sweet reality," (TSF 7-8). The devotee asserts that all the joys and pain are gifts of love: "All joy is centred in your kiss. / You are the substance of my breath / And you the mystic pang of Death" (TSF 22-24). There is ideal and mystic love in "The Vision of Love". Naidu resembled the famous Persian poet Rumi. "The Agony and Ecstasy of Divine Discontent: The Moods of Rumi" is an English translation of Rumi's love poem by a Farsi scholar

Fereydoun Kia. It reflects the deepest mystic longings of the human heart:  
In the orchard and rose garden  
I long to see your face.  
In the taste of Sweetness  
I long to kiss your lips.  
In the shadows of passion  
I long for your love. (1-6)

In section two, "The Path of Tears" the devotee is urging her divine love to be hers always. Whether she faces sorrow in life or encounters death, she desires the constant presence of her beloved. In "The Sorrow of Love" she says:

Turn not your face from me, O Love!  
Shall Sorrow or Death conspire  
To set our suffering spirits free  
From the passionate bondage of memory  
Or the thrall of the old desire? (TSF,  
11- 15)

In "The Silence of Love" the silence of the beloved is well accepted by the devotee. She regards silence as a precious gift of love as it is given by the divine lover: "Give what you will... if ought be yours to give!" (TSF 7). The devotee waits patiently and bears the anguish in the path of devotion, "Still for Love's sake I am foredoomed to bear / A load of passionate silence and despair" (TSF 17-18).

In the third section "The Sanctuary", the persona experiences joy after a long period of suffering, sacrifice, and atonement. She is emotionally mature to understand that love can transcend the present woe and suffering hence the resentment is meaningless. The devotee has surrendered herself fully to the divine lover. She has faith that she will, "Thro' sorrow find deliverance / From mortal pride," (TSF, "Invocation" 21-22). The devotee further asserts: "So shall my soul, redeemed, re-born / Attain thy side." (TSF "Invocation" 23-24). In the last poem "Devotion" she affirms her faith in the supremacy of love and says, "Why should

my true love falter or fear or rebel? / Love, I am yours to lie in your breast like a flower, / Or burn like a weed for your sake in the flame of hell" (TSF 6-8). Analysing "The Temple" Armando Menezes compares Naidu with the great women poets of the past and remarks:

Here is a love passionate and uninhibited, love which gives itself without stint or measure, love which dares pain and contempt and humiliation; love prostrate before a shrine, hoping but to attain the sanctuary of a face; love that has no greater rapture than being trodden under-foot, than being crushed like a lemon leaf or basil bloom, than being cast to the dogs or burning like a weed in the flames of hell. It is the love of many great women of history who have also been poets; Sappho, Mariana Alcoforado, Elizabeth Barrett, and Alice Meynell. (46)

It is fitting to compare divine love in the poetry of Sarojini Naidu and Tagore. There is a difference between Naidu's

divine love and the depiction of divine love in Tagore's poetry. In Naidu's poetry, the persona is in search of the Infinite whereas in Tagore's we find that the Infinite is the innermost being in the poet. He was not in search of the Infinite rather he asserted that his life was governed by the presence of the Infinite in him. In song 72 of *Gitanjali*, he wrote:

He it is, the innermost one, who awakens my being with his deep hidden touches. He it is who puts his enchantment upon these eyes and joyfully plays on the chords of my heart in varied cadence of pleasure and pain. (1-5)

Sarojini Naidu's poems on divine love are rich in transcendental experiences. The persona in these poems has an intense urge to unite with the divine lover. Naidu resembles Persian poets as well as the renowned Indian poets who have written poems rich in Hindu sensibility.

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