

Chapter III

CATEGORIZATION OF HER POETRY

Sarojini Naidu does not surely belong to the mainstream of English literature, but it cannot be denied that she carved out a niche in the annals of English Poetry. As a Poetess she lives for ever in the pages of The Oxford Book of English Mystic Verse (Oxford, 1917) for a few of her symbolic and mystic poems like To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus and The Soul's Prayer. George Sampson wrote about her in The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature :

"Sarojini Naidu (1879) made a more definite contribution to English Poetry. She came to England in 1895 and went to Girton. Her ardent literary temperament was fired by the poetic spirit of the Nineties and she began writing verses that are entirely English in matter and form, but was advised to turn to her native land for themes. Her chief work is contained in the volumes called The Golden Threshold (1905), The Bird of Time (1912), and The Broken Wing (1917). Some of her songs are little more than ecologically sentimental utterances that might have come from an English writer who knew the East by hearsay; but others give vivid vignettes of native life and some embody the spirit of Oriental devotion. In general her work is more remarkable for its command of English than for any revelation of India."¹

The Golden Threshold was printed first in 1905 and was reprinted in quick succession in 1906, 1909, 1914 and 1916 by

1. George Sampson, The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature (Cambridge : The University Press, 1945), p.914.

William Heinemann, London. It was a remarkable achievement for any Indian poet to earn so much popularity among the English readers. The other two volumes, namely, The Bird of Time and The Broken Wing drew similar response when they were published. The encouraging comments from the British Press and from the eminent poets and critics, which have been already referred to in the previous chapter, also point to her acceptance by the West as a poet of considerable merit. As a poet she also figured in the critical observations of O. Molloy in Modern India and the West (1941), Mary, C. Sturgeon in Studies of Contemporary Poets (1920), and ^{G.} H. Dalway Turnbull in his "Introduction" to Sargini Mehta : Select Poems (1930). In her achievement as an Indian poet writing in English, she is, therefore, singularly individual.

Yet, her poetry, though English in form, is Indian in spirit and it breathes Indian air with all its freshness and vitality. Except those few poems written before The Golden Threshold and published under the title, Poems by S. Chattopadhyaya which speak of her imitative and derivative character and which prompted Edmund Gosse to advise her to turn to India, her native country, for themes of her poetry, the poems in general reveal 'Eastern magic' in them. About the themes of her poetry Dr. P. E. Dustoor says :

"The simple joys and hopes and fears and lives of the common folk in town and country; the irresistible fascination which Nature, especially at Spring time, exercises over her, the ecstasies and ecstasies of love, the ever-present challenge of suffering and loss to human spirit, of Death to Life;-- these are her recurrent themes."²

In fact, themes of her poetry vary, within limited range, from a humble bangle-seller to the religious-philosophical concept of Radha and Lord Krishna. Contemporary themes like patriotism and communal harmony have also been dealt with with no less seriousness. Considering the colour and range of themes of her poetry, absolute categorization of her poems is not possible; rather, such categorization is likely to be partial and defective. Yet, for the convenience of readers all her poems may be broadly classified as Nature-Poems, Love-Poems, Poems dealing with Indian scene and Poems on Life and Death. In addition, substantial references to some other themes like folk-songs, Indian womanhood, patriotism, etc. are to be made while discussing the broad divisions, and the following four Chapters will be devoted to the thematic study of her poems on the basis of the above classification.

2. Dr. N.E. Dustoon, Sargini Naida, (Mysore : Rao & Raghavan, 1961), p. 22.