

Chapter II

SAROJINI MAIDU -- THE LAST ROMANTIC

Sarojini Maidu holds a unique position not only in the history of Indo-Anglian literature, but also in the history of modern India. Her two-fold personality is not, however, the expression of any confused duality amounting to contradiction; rather, it is a varied manifestations of the same poetic self that she dearly possessed. Verily, she was a 'Nightingale of India', as Gandhiji affectionately called her, who sang of India in her poetry and politics alike. The 'bird-like quality' in her was the driving force behind her beautiful lyrics as well as her selfless and passionate patriotism.

One of the greatest women of her time in India and one of the greatest in the world, Sarojini was born on February 13, 1879 at Hyderabad in an illustrious Bengali Brahmin family that migrated from East Bengal [now, Bangla Desh]. The Chattopadhyaya family had a long tradition of rich cultural heritage. In the words of Sarojini herself :

"My ancestors for thousands of years have been lovers of the forests and mountain caves, great dreamers, great scholars, great ascetics; my father is a great dreamer himself, a great dreamer, a great man whose life has been a magnificent failure. I suppose, in the whole of India there are few men whose learning is greater than his,

and I don't think there are many men more beloved. He has a great white beard and the profile of Homer and a laugh that brings the roof down. He has wasted all his money on two great objects : to help others and alchemy. He holds huge courts everyday in his garden of all the learned men in all religions-- rajahs and beggars and saints and downright villains, all delightfully mixed up, and all treated as one. And then alchemy ! Oh, dear, night and day the experiments are going on and everyman who brings a new prescription is welcome as a brother. But this alchemy is, you know, only the material counterpart of a poet's craving for Beauty, the Eternal Beauty. The makers of gold and the makers of verse -- are twin creators that sway the world's secret desire for mystery."¹

A great linguist -- a master of Hebrew, French, German, Greek, Sanskrit, Bengali, Urdu and English, Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya, her father, was virtually "a walking encyclopaedia. There was nothing he didn't know literally."² A great scientific genius, Aghorenath was the first D.Sc. of India from a foreign University, namely, Edinburgh University in 1877. On his return from England he went to Hyderabad and settled there. He founded the Nizam College and remained its Principal and Chief Patron. Rabindranath is believed to have confessed before Harindranath, Sarojini's younger brother, that the strange character in his Hungry Stones was "one but

1. The Golden Threshold, pp. 14-15.

2. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, Life and Myself (Bombay : Nalanda Publications, 1948), p. 23.

Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya. Once Sir P.C.Roy, the eminent scientist of Bengal, while travelling from Calcutta to Hyderabad in a railway compartment remarked to Harindranath, without knowing that he was talking to Aghorenath's youngest son :

"Aghorenath is one of our greatest geniuses, one of the very greatest Bengal has given to the world he is a great scientist, one of our very greatest."³

He was also a mystic of the highest order, who saw and realised the Universe as part of his own being. Harindranath says :

"... father constantly talked to us of the macrocosm and microcosm, words which well-nigh sent my brain whirling into flights of imagination. Wonderful words I have always thought them to be."⁴

He would often say to his young children : "Baby, I am God.... you are God."⁵ In a way he was an eccentric, too, and yet his eccentricities did not prevent him from realising that the learning of English language in the new age that was dawning in India was highly essential for the new generation and this conviction prompted him to encourage his children

3. *Ibid.*, pp.26-27.

4. *Ibid.*, pp.211-212.

5. *Ibid.*, p.25.

in learning the language. Their upbringing and education were, therefore, done in an atmosphere that was more English than Indian. Yet, he cherished in his heart the spirit of Indian nationalism. He "took an active part in the Indian National Congress from its very inception".⁶ In collaboration with Abdul Gayum, he established a branch of the Congress at Hyderabad. He took initiative in getting the writings of Lokmanya Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal printed and distributed at Hyderabad. Sarojini had the proud privilege of being the daughter of such a great man like Aghorenath. Certainly, Aghorenath was one of the most vital of the formative influences on Sarojini.

No less strong was the influence of Varada Sundari Devi on her daughter, Sarojini. In keeping with the family tradition, she was well-versed in a number of languages. She used to speak to her husband in Bengali, their mother tongue, to her children in Hindustani and to the servants in Telugu. She knew enough English to be able to write in and converse with her European friends. Her youngest son, Harindranath in his Life and Myself remembers her sweet voice which won her the Viceroy's gold medal for singing during her student

6. Padmini Sengupta, Sarojini Maids (New Delhi : Sahitya Academy, 1976), p.7.

days in East Bengal. She wrote a few lyrics in Bengali in her youth. A full-fledged mistress of the house, where guests and visitors of all ranks poured in day in and day out, she was loving, religious and hospitable. She was one of the first inmates of the 'Bharat Ashram' founded by Keshab Chandra Sen. She was extremely happy with her husband and her children. Harindranath, also an eminent poet and playwright of Indo-English literature, says, : "They were not merely human parents, but rare spiritual beings".⁷ He further says : "Father and mother were one, absolutely one, sharing striking qualities of generosity and wisdom of an unfaltering love of humanity".⁸

Such were the parents whose influence moulded the taste, temperament and personality of the children. Sarojini imbibed her father's spirit of craving for Beauty, his liberal attitude to religion, his simplicity, his lofty ideals and, above all, his visionary zeal. Harindranath is one of the most renowned poets of Indo-English literature of the modern age. He is also a composer, an actor and a playwright. Virendranath, another brother of Sarojini, was a linguist like his father. He knew sixteen languages and had complete mastery of the English language. A great man, though unhonoured by history,

7. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, *SB&Sik.*, p.2.

8. *Ibid.*, p.5.

Virendranath was a star among the revolutionaries. His name was a pass-word in the 1914-1918 war in the camps of German soldiers. He spent most of his life as a patriot-exile in Germany.

The Chattopadhyaya family at Hyderabad was unique in many respects. It had the singular distinction of cultivating wisdom and culture. The home environment was just suited to the rich cultural tradition of the family. The house the Chattopadhyayas lived in had an aristocratic and dignified look. It had to be so, as Aghorenath was a V.I.P. in the Nizam's estate. There was a beautiful garden in the front and at the back there was a kind of 'wood' vibrating with the music of birds. The veranda walls were crowded with large botanical plates framed like pictures. Harindranath fondly calls it "a museum of wisdom and culture, a Zoo crowded with a medley of strange types -- some even verging on the mystic, for our home was open to all alike."⁹ People of all ranks and professions and of all colours, creeds and religions were equally welcome to this liberal home of Dr. Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya. Aghorenath was also liberal to his children. They were allowed to imbibe freely the varied influences to which they might be exposed. They were not unduly cloistered or restricted in their relationship with the outside world.

9. *Ibid.*, p.15.

Rather, they were made to feel that life was a continuous process of 'rainbows and fancy happenings'. All these factors -- the liberal home environment, the cultured and understanding parents, the traditionally sensitive Bengali temperament and the city of Hyderabad itself, which was the seat of a sophisticated medieval Muslim Culture-- combined together to mould and stimulate the young mind of Sarojini Chattopadhyaya.

Like all other children, Sarojini had her early education from her parents, particularly from her father who was a 'living Encyclopaedia'. Dr. Achorenath, a tireless teacher-scientist, would fill their minds with all sorts of knowledge and his subjects would range from English language and literature to astronomy and religion. Along with such an inspiring non-formal education at home, Sarojini received formal school education at Hyderabad and Madras. She passed the Matriculation Examination from Madras in 1891 at an early age of twelve and was placed in the First Class. Besides, she stood first in the said examination in the entire Presidency of Madras and was the first girl to do so. Unfortunately, she suffered from ill-health and it stood in her way of continuing formal studies; but it could not prevent her from extensive reading on various subjects at home.

Although Sarojini's father wanted her to be the first lady scientist of India, destiny willed otherwise and she began to show her poetic leanings from her very early age. She wrote :

"One day, when I was eleven, I was sighing over a sum in Algebra; it wouldn't come right : but instead a whole poem came to me suddenly; I wrote it down. From that day my 'Poetic Career' began. At thirteen I wrote a long poem A la lady of the lake - 1,300 lines in six days. At thirteen I wrote a drama of 2,000 thousand lines, a full-fledged passionate thing that I began on the spur of the moment without forethought, just to spite my doctor who said I was very ill and must not touch a book. My health broke down permanently about this time, and my regular studies being stopped I read voraciously. I suppose the greater part of my reading was done between fourteen and sixteen. I wrote a novel, I wrote volumes of journals : I took myself very seriously in these days."¹⁰

These early works, including the play Nina in blank verse, remained unpublished and is now preserved in the Archives of National Library, Calcutta. Her extensive reading of the Romantic and Victorian Poets like Shelley, Keats, Tennyson and Browning and also the Pre-Raphaelites like Rossetti and Swinburne shaped and coloured her early imitative verses. It was at this time that a bitter experience shook up her romantic-idealist attitude to life.

10. The Golden Threshold, pp.11-12.

The death of her little brother was a great shock to her and she took life seriously. However, very shortly, this gloomy and depressing experience was counter-balanced by another experience that was pleasing as well as exciting. On her visit to Sholapur at the age of fifteen, she chanced to meet a young handsome doctor named Govindarajulu Naidu from Andhra. She fell passionately in love with him. Her parents were very much disturbed at this unexpected turn of events and disapproved of their marriage on the ground that Sarojini was too young and of ill-health and Dr. Naidu was a non-brahmin. So, in 1895 they sent her to England with a scholarship from the Nizam with the hope that, being out of sight, Dr. Naidu would be out of Sarojini's mind and there would be an end to the problem; but in vain.

In England, she stayed only for three years. She was first admitted to King's College, London, but, being too young, she could not be admitted to Girton College, Cambridge. After two years she was moved to Girton College. However, she was not happy in her class-room which seemed to stifle her free romantic spirit. Bored with the disciplined courses of study, she often would play truant and wander about in the English countryside to satiate her romantic thirst on the one hand and, on the other, to choose birds and flowers as subjects for her poetry. In England she was fortunate

enough to be the ward of Miss Manning who had done much for Indian students in England. It was in Miss Manning's modest and hospitable rooms that she met some of the great literary figures of the day including Edmund Gosse, the man who put her firmly on the path of becoming a poet. Soon after her arrival in England, Sarojini was introduced by a fellow-student to Edmund Gosse, a poet and a critic and the Clark Lecturer at Cambridge. She was also introduced to Arthur Symonds, another English poet and critic of the day; and through them she made her way to the Rhymers' Club. At Miss Manning's she also met William Archer and Heinemann, her future publisher. The small Indian girl with her talent, beauty and personality very soon earned the friendship of these great literary figures. Edmund Gosse and Arthur Symonds, in particular, came very close to her and were pleased to be her poetic mentors. Under their care and guidance she successfully launched out to be a poet. After her fateful introduction to Edmund Gosse she showed some of her verses to him and, on going through them, he at once recognized her poetic potentiality, her technical skill and her mastery of the English language. But, at the same time he was disappointed to note that her verses were imitative and insipid, and did not breathe an air of her native country. He felt that she had been Anglicizing her feelings and dealt with English themes with which she was not

expected to have intimate touch. He, therefore, advised her to forget the robins and skylarks of the English countryside and like a true Indian poet of the Deccan give some

"revelation of the heart of India, some sincere penetrating analysis of native passion, of the principle of antique religion and of such mysterious intimations as stirred the soul of the East long before the West had begun to dream that it had soul".¹¹

Sarojini at once took the advice to heart, for she realised that it came from no mean a person like Gosse and that it was well-meant and technically sound. She lost no time to give up her English vein and looked to India for inspiration. As a result, the poems written after 1895 are different from and make better impressions than the earlier ones. No wonder, therefore, that she dedicated her first volume of poems, The Golden Threshold, to Edmund Gosse, her mentor, who showed her 'the way to the golden threshold' of genuine poetry.

Another Englishman of letters who patronized and stimulated her poetic genius was Arthur Symonds, a Foot-member of the Rhymers' Club. He was favourably impressed by her poems and wrote an 'introduction' to The Golden Threshold in which he has left a detailed description of her appearance and personality. She earned his friendship and patronage

11. The Bird of Time, p.4.

after some of her poems were read to him in 1896 on the advice of Edmund Gosse. A few of her letters, till now unpublished but the contents of which are referred to in Appendix III of Izzet yar Khan's Sarojini Naidu : The Poet (New Delhi : S.Chand & Co.) reflect that her relation with Symonds was very intimate and personal. Like Gosse, he recognized the poetic genius in her and, even on her return from England, he continued to play a decisive role in her poetic career. He noted in her poetry an individual beauty and charm, for she had something fresh to say, something at any rate was comparatively fresh to English poetry; moreover, she had command of a technique of selection and arrangement of language and meter which expressed something fresh in poetically effective form. He traced in her poems "a rare temperament, the

"a rare temperament, the temperament of a woman of the East, finding expression through a Western language and under partly western influences... and there is an Eastern magic in them."¹²

Among all other distinguished members of the Rhymers' Club, Symonds came closer to her possibly because he himself had a kind of hyper-sensibility, perhaps due to his Welsh and Cornish ancestry, that enabled him to understand and appreciate a dreamer like Sarojini. It was he who understood her as a

person most and introduced her to the West by gently persuading her to publish her poems. But, it was in their company that she

"improved the verbal and technical accomplishment, the mastery of phrase and rhythm, without which she could not have translated her visions and experiences into melodious poetry."¹³

From England Sarojini returned home in 1898 without a formal degree, but with a kind of maturity that was undoubtedly useful to her poetic career. On her way home she broke her journey for sometime in Italy to gain health. Immediately after her return to India, she married Dr. Govindarajulu Naidu, M.B., C.M.(Edin), Medical Officer to His Highness the Nizam's Imperial Service Troops at Madras on December 2 of the same year under the Indian Special Marriage Act in spite of strong opposition from both sides on the ground of caste. The newly weds were extremely happy in their home, 'The Golden Threshold' built on Nizam Shahi Road in Hyderabad. The house was well-named, for it was the threshold of golden hospitality offered to men of learning and culture, including great Arabic and Persian scholars. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu took charge of her new home and performed happily all the chores of a housewife. In quick

13. R.R. Bhatnagar, Sarojini Naidu (Allahabad : Katab Mahal, 1967), p.61.

succession she bore four children--two sons and two daughters. Jayasurya, the eldest son, became a member of the Parliament later on. He was followed by Padmaja, who resembled her mother in face and voice, ^{and} became the Governor of West Bengal. Anadhira died prematurely, but Lilamoni, the youngest daughter, became well-known in cultural circles. Sarojini loved her children deeply and in her poem In My Children she seeks life's sweetness and love, its victories and fortunes for her children.

Sarojini lived the most happy and contented life for the first few years of her marriage; her passionate love was readily reciprocated by Dr. Naidu. Her face glowed with the joy of motherhood and love of her husband. As a charming graceful and hospitable hostess in her own home, she was highly popular among her valued guests. She was free from the cares and anxieties of her family as well as of her parents. Such a happy-going domestic life might have thwarted any other woman's pursuits in creative writings. But it could not cripple Sarojini's Muse and her energy reigned supreme. She showed that a woman could be a good housewife as well as a poet at the same time; rather, it may be said that her poetic urge grew stronger with the awakening of motherhood in her. Some of her poems of this period appeared in The India Ladies' Magazine in 1901, when her first child was born. In 1905

the first volume of her poems, christened as The Golden Threshold after the name of her house, was published by William Heinemann, London. The volume, dedicated to Edmund Gosse, contained a valuable 'Introduction' by Arthur Symonds who took the initiative to publish her poems. The publication of this volume, which contained forty short poems, brought her to the notice of poets and critics in England and she instantly rose to fame. On this volume some of the comments appearing in the British Press in 1905 are mention-worthy : The London Times remarked :

"...but chiefly remarkable, considering her nationality, is her passionate delight in the beauty of the sounds and the words of our tongue and the lilt of our measures. She revels in the swing of her verse. Her poetry seems to sing itself, as if her swift thoughts and strong emotions sprang into lyrics of themselves."¹⁴

The Manchester Guardian observed :

"It is a considerable delight to come across such genuine poetry as is contained in The Golden Threshold by Sarojini Naidu. Its simplicity suggests Blake, it is always musical, its Eastern Colour is fresh and its firm touch is quick and delicate."¹⁵

The Review of Reviews for October, the same year wrote :

"Not for many months has there been so rich a harvest of poetry as that garnered during the last month. In the forefront I must

14. Padmini Sengupta, Sarojini Naidu (Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 1976), p.27.

15. Ibid., p.27.

place Sarojini Naidu's exquisitely musical collections of Oriental lyrics and Poems. This little volume should silence forever the scuffer who declares that women cannot write poetry."¹⁶

The Morning Post declared :

"The book is one not merely of accomplishment, but beautiful verse, it is the expression of a temperament."¹⁷

The Glasgow Herald commented :

"The pictures are of the East it is true ; but there is something fundamentally human in them that seems to prove that the best song knows nothing of East or West."¹⁸

There are many more such appraisals from both the British and Indian Press, which conclusively show that Sarojini has by now become a promising lyric poet of India. Although the contents of the volume are varied in theme, the poems may broadly be divided into three categories, namely, 'folk-songs', 'songs for music' and 'poems'. Some of the poems like Ode to H.H. the Nizam of Hyderabad, The Royal Tombs of Golconda and To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus strike a deeper and more reflective note than the folk-songs and songs for music.

16. Ibid., p.27.

17. Ibid., p.28.

18. K.R.S. Iyenger, Indian Writing in English (New Delhi : Sterling Publishers, 1967), p.215.

The second volume of her poems, called The Bird of Time containing fortysix short poems and an 'Introduction' by Edmond Gosse, was published by William Heinemann, London in 1912. It was dedicated to the memory of her parents. The title of the book is borrowed from Edward Fitzgerald's translation of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam :

"The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly - and lo ! the Bird is on the wing."¹⁹

This volume, too, was lauded equally by the press and the critics. The poems dealing with love, sorrow, life, death and nature reflect that the girlish ecstasy of the poet noticed in The Golden Threshold is over and she appears quite mature in her selection of themes and her tone is much graver. In his 'Introduction' Gosse observed that there had dawned

"another facet of her eminent career - in close companionship with sorrow; she had known the joy and also the despair of consolation. The sight of much suffering, perhaps, has thinned her jasmine-garlands and darkened the azure of her sky... But these things have not slackened the lyric energy of Sarojini; they have rather given it intensity... the desire for beauty and fame, the magnificent impulse, are still energetic within this burning soul."²⁰

That the reception of the book was spontaneous can be traced

in

19. Padmini Sengupta, SBGII, P.34.

20. Ibid., P.33.

in the observation of the Yorkshire Poet :

"Mrs. Naidu has not only enriched our language but has enabled us to grow into intimate relation with the spirit, the emotions, the mysticism and the glamour of the East."²¹

In the Daily Chronicle Edward Thomas, an English Poet and critic, wrote : "She has more than a profusion of beautiful things";²² while The Bookman declared : "She possesses her qualities in heaped measure."²³

The third and the last volume of Sarojini's poems published during her life time is The Broken Wing, published in 1917 by the same publisher, William Heinemann, London. The title, of the volume is symbolic and a casual question from Gopal Krishna Gokhale had decided it. The question was : "Why should a song-bird like you have a broken wing?"²⁴ and her answer was in the opening poem itself :

"Behold ! I rise to meet the destined spring
And scale the stars upon my broken wing."²⁵

In this volume of poems the easy flow of lyricism is waning.

21. Ibid., p. 34.

22. K.R.S. Iyengar, op.cit., p. 217.

23. Ibid., p. 217.

24. Padmini Sengupta, op.cit., p. 43.

25. Ibid., p. 43.

but the poetry is gaining in life's poignancy and seriousness. The poet arrives at a greater maturity, warmth of feeling and depth of soul than in the previous two volumes.

"She now abandons every romantic sensual longing and starts a new life so to speak. This passion for the human lover is symbolic of the Divine and Sarojini strives to reach metaphysical heights, but fails rather sadly, because her poems here are not like the spontaneous outpourings of the few mystical verses she previously wrote, three of which were good enough to be included in The Oxford Book of English Mystic Verse in 1917."²⁶

Again, Padmini Sengupta observes :

"....it is not wonder that not only the pathos but the frustrations of those years are reflected in her book The Broken Ring. In this book she also loses herself in Cosmic mysticism."²⁷

The Sceptered Flute is a collection of all the poems contained in the three volumes, viz. The Golden Threshold, The Bird of Time and The Broken Ring. The poems were rearranged, though not chronologically, and published by Dodd, Mead & Co. in U.S.A. and later in India by Kitabistan, Allahabad in 1943. The Feather of the Dawn is a collection of Sarojini's poems, not published during her lifetime, were collected in a volume and edited by her daughter, Padmaja Maibou. These poems, thirtyseven in number, written

26. Ibid., p.45.

27. Ibid., p.47.

written during a period of great poetical activity, are of various types. The volume was first published in 1961 by Asia Publishing House, Bombay. Besides, a few poems written in her childhood belonged to the period 1892-'96 and were collected together and published under the title Pages by Miss S. Chatterjee. This volume is not available now. There are a few copies, printed on rough paper, in the Archives of the National Library at Calcutta. In 1902 Sarojini wrote a fantasy called Nilambini (The Blue Lotus) which remained unpublished for many years. It was later included in The Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu published by G.A.Natesan & Co. of Madras in 1919. This prose-poem is directly autobiographical presenting the beautiful dream-pictures that Sarojini drew when she was first stepping out into the world -- "a bud blossoming into flower, its petals opening their delicate beauty to the warm glow of the golden sun."²⁸

Sarojini's poetical career was cut short by her participation in the political movements of the day. Her association with the nationalist movement began as early as 1904 when the eighteenth session of the Indian National Congress was held at Bombay. She was already acquainted with the activities of the Congress through her father who, in collaboration with Abdul Qayum, established a branch of

28. Ibid., p.3.

Congress at Hyderabad. She had the chance of meeting some great nationalist leaders like Feroz Shah Mehta, C.Y. Chintamani and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. She also had the opportunity of being acquainted with the writings of Lokamanya Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal, which were printed and distributed by Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya at Hyderabad. Her visit to the Bombay session of the Indian National Congress in 1904 began to play a vital role in determining her future career. Her political life came to a sudden halt in 1915 and all these years she had been struggling between two ideals, namely, her allegiance to the Muse and her love for Mother India. The overpowering passion of love for motherland finally possessed her. She turned to be a patriot in the true sense of the term. But Sarojini the patriot could not be fundamentally different from Sarojini the Poet. "She talks politics but in the words of a poet",²⁹ says D.B.Dhanapala while recollecting her political speeches. Professor Amalendu Bose recollects one of her speeches and describes :

"The speaker no longer seemed to be a mortal woman; she became transfigured into a resplendent personage of a magic world from where the astonishing words flowed."³⁰

It is not true that she lost her poetic fervour and stopped composing poems. Some of her poems included in

29. D.B.Dhanapala, Eminent Indians (London : David Marlowe Ltd., 1947), p. 57.

30. Iyengar, OR&S, p. 216.

The Feather of the Dove were written in the last decade of her life. It will, therefore, be truer to say that her poetic heart fervently desired better expression in the service to the nation. Her sister-in-law Mrs. Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya remarked,

"If Sarojini has stopped composing verses, she has certainly not ceased being a poetess. That same spirit comes out in all her movements and forms of expression.... when Sarojini set on the searching pathway to the salt-pans of Dhasana leading with grave determination a band of fighters, she was making poetry." 31

However, she entered the political movements of the day not as a politician but as a patriot and she carried on her poetic fervour into patriotism.

During the formative years of her public life Sarojini received inspiration and guidance from Gopal Krishna Gokhale. His influence on her life was deep and lasting. Sarojini regarded him not only as a preceptor but as a close and intimate friend. She dedicated a poem in the 'Memorial Verses' included in The Feather of the Dove to acknowledge her debt to this great nationalist leader. In another poem, In Gokhale's Garden included in The Feather of the Dove she indicates how fondly she treasured her associations and friendship with the great leader. Gokhale was struck by Sarojini's talent and

sincerity as early as 1902. Very often he would affectionately address her as 'child' and would advise her to dedicate herself to the service of the motherland. Once on a terrace together, Gokhale said to Sarojini :

"Stand here with me with the stars and the hills for witness and in their presence consecrate your life and your talent, your song and your speech, your thought and your dream to the motherland. O Feet, see visions from the hill tops and spread the message of hope to the toilers in the valleys."³²

To this call of the great man Sarojini readily responded with her consent. In 1906, on hearing her address on 'Women's Education', Gokhale complimented her so warmly that she felt inspired to carry on her patriotic ideals with renewed vigour and energy. Sarojini regarded her relationship with Gokhale as one of the crowning honours of her life. She met him last on October 8, 1914 when she left England for home. He had to stay there for his prolonged illness and at the time of Sarojini's departure he once again reminded her that her life belonged India and she was to remember that, for he might not have the chance to meet her again. Sarojini fondly remembers all this in "Lovely Comrade" published in the Bombay Chronicle soon after he died on February 19, 1915. To her Gokhale was 'a saint and a soldier of national righteousness'. She

32. Padmini Sengupta, op.cit., p.37.

proposed that the best homage of the mournful millions who gathered round Gokhale's funeral pyre would be to

"Kindle their souls with consecrated fire
Caught from the brave torch fallen from thy hand,
To illumine and to serve our suffering land
And in a daily worship taught by thee
Uphold the temple of her unity."³³

She herself made sincere efforts to 'upbuild' the temple of India's unity through her writings and speeches, and in this respect it is worthwhile to remember that the influence of her father was no less strong; because Achorenath's home was an ideal place of pilgrimage for men of diverse culture and religion.

When the First World War broke out in 1914, Sarojini was in England. On his way to India Gokhale also reached England from France; but his health broke down and had to remain there longer than scheduled for medical treatment. Sarojini spent much of her time in looking after her friend and philosopher-guide who in the meantime briefed about the activities of Gandhiji in South Africa. In July, 1914 Gandhiji, along with Kasturba and his friend Kallenbach left South Africa for England after his success in the epoch-making struggle against racial discrimination there. A large number of people proposed to accord him a hero's welcome when he was

33. The S. S. L., p.159.

to reach London. Sarojini failed to attend the ceremony and decided to meet him on the next day. With much difficulty she searched out the old house in Kensington where Gandhiji was staying. Sarojini describes her first meeting with Gandhiji in the following words :

"I had not been able to meet his ship on arrival, but the next afternoon I went wandering around in search of his lodging in an obscure part of Kensington and climbed the steep stairs of an old, unfashionable house, to find an open door framing a living picture of a little man with a shaven head, seated on the floor on a black prison blanket and eating a messy meal of squashed tomatoes and olive oil out of a wooden prison bowl. Around this were ranged some bettered tins of parched groundnuts and tasteless biscuits of dried plaintain flour. I burst instinctively into laughter at the amusing and unexpected vision of a famous leader, whose name had already become a household word in our country. He lifted his eyes and laughed back at me, saying : 'Ah, you must be Madam Naidu ! who else dare to be so irreverent? Come in and share my meal'. 'No thanks', I replied sniffing, 'What an abominable mess it is'. In this way, and at that instant commenced our friendship, which flowered into real Comradeship, and bore fruit in a long, long loyal discipleship, which never wavered for a single hour through more than thirty years of common service in the cause of India's freedom."³⁴

This fateful meeting was a turning point in her life which was since then dedicated fully to the cause of India's freedom movement. The two diametrically opposite personalities were drawn close together by a common bond of patriotism.

34. Padmini Sengupta, *RRG&C*, P-40.

On her return to India she devoted herself entirely to the cause of national movement. The patriot-poet also composed a few poems of patriotism and at the Indian National Congress Session of 1915 she cited her poem, ~~which~~ conveying the idea of awakening of Mother India from her slumber by the united effort of her children who are Hindus, Parsees, Mussalmans and Christians. The children want to awaken their mother from the sleep of bondage to the foreign rulers. Sarojini dedicated the poem to Mohammed Ali Jinnah, 'The Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity', who was a staunch supporter of Congress at that time. Her gesture in dedicating the poem to honour his leadership bore fruit; the next year both the Congress and the Muslim League held their session at Lucknow. She addressed both the sessions. The two organisations agreed to frame jointly a constitutional programme on the basis of 'Dominion' Status. She not only brought the Hindus and Muslims closer together but drew the confidence of the moderate wings of the Congress. The Lucknow Session was also remarkable for her first meeting with Jawaharlal Nehru who turned to be one of her intimate and trusted friends. As a follow-up measure of the Session, in April 1916 Lokamanya Tilak inaugurated 'The Home Rule League' which carried on intensive propaganda for the scheme of political reforms suggested by the Congress and the League.

Sarojini took part in the 'Champaran Satyagraha', the first of its kind led by Gandhiji against the exploitation of the workers of indigo plantation in the district of Champaran in Bihar. That was the beginning of the long march undertaken by her towards steering the nationalist movement under the leadership of Gandhiji. She became actively engaged in mobilising public support and for that purpose she toured various parts of the country to hold meetings and deliver lectures. In January, 1917, she delivered her lecture on 'The Vision of Patriotism' in a meeting held at the 'Leader Building' at Allahabad. The same year she addressed Madras Students' Convention presided over by Annie Besant in the Gokhale Hall, Young Men's Muslim Association of Madras. In December, she joined a deputation which waited on the Secretary of State, Edwin Montague to demand equal rights for women. In March, 1918 she delivered lecture on the emancipation of women at Jullunder. In April, she was at Lahore and in May at Madras to open the National School for Girls. In September, she moved a resolution in the Congress Session at Bombay, demanding equal rights for men and women. In December, again, she reiterated her demand of women's franchise at a Conference at Bijapur.

The passing of the Rowlett Acts, also known as 'Black Bills', by the British Government in March, 1919 brought deep discontent to the Country and great efforts were made to

prevent the Bills enacted. Gandhiji called a Conference at Sabarnati Ashram and only a dozen people were invited. Sarojini was one of them to sign the satyagraha pledge adopted in the Conference. Before the 'Hartal' in April, Sarojini delivered speeches at various parts of the country, including Madras and Ahmedabad, to gain support from the masses. The Government, on the other hand, was firm to suppress the movement by repressive measures, and the worst of such acts was the brutal killing of about four hundred unarmed people at Jalianwalla Bagh on April 13, 1919. The barbarous act of the British Government not only shocked the country but drew much indignation and protest. Like Rabindranath Tagore refusing 'Knighthood' as a mark of protest, Sarojini returned the 'Kaiser-e-Hind' medal which the British Government awarded to her in recognition of her valuable services in the Ambulance Corps during the First World War. In July, 1919 she went to England, as a member of the delegation sent by Home Rule League to submit a memorandum to the British Government. During her stay at London she delivered lecture at Kingsway Hall on April 22, 1920 on the 'Khilafat Movement' that had been started by Muslims in India against the British Government for hurting their religious sentiments; for Britain had taken a vital role in the dismemberment of the Turkish empire and the abolition of the Caliphate. On

June 3, 1920 in another lecture she narrated the Punjab atrocity committed by General Dyer who ordered the firing on the unarmed crowd.

Sarojini returned to India in July, 1920 and joined Gandhiji in his non-cooperation movement that started on the first of August. The movement drew overwhelming response from all quarters and by September, 1921 nearly thirty thousand people were in jails. On the 17th November came the Prince of Wales, but there was complete 'Hartal' on that day all over India. At some places there were clashes between the police and the people and many were injured. Sarojini helped the injured being removed to hospitals. Seeing that the non-violent Non-Cooperation Movement was becoming violent now and then, Gandhiji decided to suspend the movement for the time being. Sarojini supported his stand, while many other leaders were disappointed, she went to Ceylon and delivered a number of lectures at different places on the nationalist movement in India. On her return to India, she went to Gaya where an important session of the Congress was being held. It was important in the sense that some leaders like C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru felt that 'Council election' should be fought, while Gandhiji thought that the Congress should have nothing to do with the Councils. Sarojini supported the view of Gandhiji in this case also. However, a compromise was reached

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at in the All India Congress Committee meeting held at Delhi a few months later.

In January, 1924 Sarojini sailed for Africa, as a delegate of the Indian National Congress to attend the Kenya Indian Congress. On January 19, 1924 she presided over the East African Indian Congress at Mombasa. She conveyed to the Indians in East Africa and South Africa the message of solidarity from the Indian National Congress, on her return to India she attended the Belgaum Session of the Congress. Gandhiji proposed the name of Sarojini Naidu for the Presidentship of the next session of the Congress. Nearly fifteen thousand delegates of the Belgaum Congress welcomed the proposal with cheers. In the meantime, on the instance of Gandhiji, the Congress suspended all programmes of 'Satyagrahs' and devoted to constructive works as a preparation for the next phase of its movement. In the Kanpur Session, 1925, Sarojini's address as President of the Congress was "shortest and sweetest" :³⁵ "In the battle of liberty fear is the one unforgivable treachery and despair the unforgivable sin."³⁶ Her elevation to this high office was welcomed as an honour of Indian womanhood. As Congress President Sarojini became very much concerned with Hindu-Muslim unity when the

35. Pattavi Sitaramayya, The History of Indian National Congress (Bombay : Padma Publications, 1946-47), p.294.

36. LOC.SIT.

Muslims were making separatist demands. She travelled extensively, especially in the northern part of the country for this purpose. It was felt by her that the cause of the freedom movement should get publicity outside India and therefore she proceeded to U.S.A. via England to enlighten the Americans about the real state of things happening in India, particularly because Miss Katherine Mayo's book, Mother India contained anti-India propoganda in it. When American reporters asked her : What do you think of Katherine Mayo? She calmly replied, "Katherine Mayo? who is she?"³⁷ She later described Mayo as an inspector of drains in India. In fact, her tour through U.S.A. and Canada was a tremendous success. Her lectures consisted of interpretations on India's spiritual ideals, ideals of Indian womanhood and the renaissance in modern India. During her stay in U.S.A. she met poets, artists, social workers and statesmen and explained to them the cause of Indian freedom movement. Mr. C.F.Andrews, a close friend of Gandhiji, happened to be in U.S.A. during her visit and he wrote to Gandhiji about her 'amazing popularity' in America. A rousing reception was given to her on the 10th November, 1928 in International House, New York where many distinguished persons were present. She was presented with a welcome address printed on yellow silk.

The next session of the Congress was held at Lahore in

December, 1929 and Jawaharlal Nehru became the President. After her return from U.S.A. she left for Kenya to preside over East African Congress, but she promised to Mr. Nehru that she would come to see him hoist tri-colour national flag on December 31, 1929, and she kept her promise. On January 26, 1930 Independence Day was celebrated all over India. Sarojini met Gandhiji frequently at Sabarmati Ashram when he was preparing for the famous 'Salt Satyagraha'. She joined him in his 'Dandi March' which began on the 12th March, 1930, demanding abolition of Salt Tax. Nearly seventyfive thousand people joined the march. Arrests were made indiscriminately. Gandhiji was arrested and Tayabji was succeeded by Sarojini who led twenty thousand volunteers to the salt depot. Blows were rained with steel-shed lathis on unprotected skulls, the ground was littered with bodies with great patches of blood on their white khaddar clothes, but she continued to utter to exhort them :

"Gandhiji's body is in jail but his soul is with you. India's prestige is in your hands. You must not use any violence under any circumstances. You will be beaten but you must not resist; you must not raise a hand to ward off blows."³⁸

Mr. Webb Miller in his book I Found No Peace describes vividly the brutality perpetrated by the British Police on the helpless and unarmed men in this momentous struggle and the leadership, courage and determination of Sarojini Naidu.

Sarojini emerged as an undisputed leader of the nation-- whether in peace-talks or in the battle-field. In 1931 she accompanied Gandhiji to attend the Round Table Conference at London to explore the possibility of, if any, settlement with the British Government. After the Conference Gandhiji returned to India, while Sarojini remained there and spent sometime in travelling some parts of Europe and South Africa. On her return she found that Gandhiji had been arrested as the Congress was declared as an illegal body. Shortly after this, she herself was arrested, although her term lasted only for a few months because of her ill-health. In September, 1932 when Gandhiji undertook a fast in jail against attempts of the Government to divide the so-called 'untouchables' from the caste Hindus. Sarojini came out of the women's jail-yard to give him company and care. In 1940 the Congress Working Committee passed a resolution reiterating India's demand for immediate transfer of power, and on August 8, 1942 the famous 'Quit India' resolution was adopted by the Congress. The resolution also authorised Gandhiji to lead a mass movement, but before the movement could be launched, thousands of Congress leaders, including Gandhiji and Sarojini, were arrested and put in jail. Sarojini's presence in the jail had a soothing and cheering effect on the jail-mates.

The British Government ultimately decided to transfer power to a new Constituent Assembly for which elections were announced and held. The Congress captured most of the general

seats, while the Muslim League captured those reserved for the Muslims. When efforts towards an agreement failed, on August 15, 1947 the British transferred power to two independent states, India and Pakistan. Jawaharlal Nehru requested Sarojini to accept the Governorship of U.P. in free India, because in his estimation she was the most ideally qualified person to be the head of a state where Hindu and Islamic traditions co-exist for centuries together. Sarojini reluctantly accepted the offer and held her office till March 2, 1949 when her eventful life came to an end. In her death the nation lost an ardent patriot who played an important part in India's struggle for freedom and stood for Hindu-Muslim unity before and after independence. On March 3, 1949 Jawaharlal Nehru as Prime Minister paid a fitting tribute to her in the Constituent Assembly :

"She began life as a poetess. In later years, when the compulsion of events drew her into the national struggle and she threw herself into it with all the zest and fire she possessed, she did not write much poetry with pen and paper but her whole life became a poem and a song.... Just as the father of the Nation had infused moral grandeur and greatness into the struggle, Mrs. Sarojini Naidu gave it artistry and poetry and that zest for life and indomitable spirit which, not only faced disaster and catastrophe, but faced them with a light heart and with a song on the lips and a smile on the face."³⁹

39. K.R.S. Iyengar, RR, Cit., P-222.