

Brotherhood of Diverse Creeds : Sarojini Naidu's view of Religion

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Religion, according to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, is "recognition on the part of man of some higher unseen power as having control of his destiny, and as being entitled to obedience, reverence and worship."¹ True, religion is one's faith in one of the prevalent systems of worship; it is the unfailing union of soul and spirit, it is the bond that unites humanity with eternity. Sarojini Naidu was a Hindu, but she respected all the systems of worship. Her ambition was to create a feeling of unity between the Hindus and the Muslims. Naturally, she believes

*In brotherhood of diverse creeds,
And harmony of diverse race.*²

It was faith in the Almighty that stirred her soul to sing to the rhythm of the infinite time:

*For my glad heart is drunk and drenched
with Thee
O inmost wine of living ecstasy!
O intimate essence of eternity!*³

Sarojini's religion embedded in invincible faith in goodness, truthfulness and love. She believes that ecstasy is born of deep faith in the Eternal. To her, each human soul prays:

*Give me to drink joy and pain
Which thine eternal hand can mete,
For my insatiate soul would drain
Earth's utmost bitter, utmost sweet!*⁴

Sarojini's notion of religion runs intermittently from one religion to another. She

feels devotional and emotional uplifting of spirit when she addresses God with various names as in the poem, "The Call of Evening Prayer". She advocates emotional oneness of all religions. For her, human growth depends on religious faith. Without religion human life is like rudderless ship, tossing on the waves of endless ocean. She believes that the world's weariness sinks into the "essence of eternity."⁵

The tune of the Infinite irresistible lures every heart. It releases human soul from the bondage of mortal cares and attachments as shown in the poem, "The Flute-Player of Brindaban". Human soul wanders like "a homeless bird" and seeks resort in faith. The cadences of the tune of the divine flute fall on dew-drenched golden fields and ever-flowing streams. The infinite rhythm in silence engulfs the "lampless woe".⁶ "The attitude of Vaishnava philosophy with its mystic, rapturous devotion"⁷ is revealed here. The divinely inspired being moves in whatever direction the Flute-Player calls.⁸

In the poem, "Song of Radha, the Milkmaid". Sarojini Naidu shows how the new buds of the spring season, symbolizing budding dreams and desires, are carried by human beings to the Divine Beloved. The materialistic world mocks⁹ at the offerings. The devotee loses her heart and is disentangled of human distress before the brightness of a thousand torches. Charmed by the

shrine, she cries the divine name “Govinda” and gets lost in the eternal glory, while the river ceaselessly flows with added brightness.¹⁰

In the poem, “Kali the Mother”, all gifts of life and death are offered to the Eternal Mother, Kali, Ambika or Parvati. She is addressed in devotional prayer by many names, and women offer her buds and berries, bridal prayer, “sweet travail of motherhood as also “the bitter vigils of despair” and all “gladness and all grief”.¹¹ Artisans, peasants, victors and vanquished alike offer Her tributes to their toil. The men of wisdom, priests, poets and patriots strive to join in one voice to the eternal tune of the subtle music of our hearts and offer their sleepless worship to Her.

Sarojini Naidu, in her poem entitled “The Festival of Memory”, points to a divine miracle which casts spell on human memory. Deep agony and bliss are shrouded in mystery. The heart of the poetess is deeply steeped in the fathomless eternal bliss.

Sarojini’s religious deal with the devotional ecstasy and eternal longing of the human soul to comprehend the mystery of life and death. Each animate and inanimate object is magnetized with the omnipresence of God. In this context the poem, “Bells”, is worth referring to. In it the call of temple-bells wrecks the sky and resounds with the incessant cry of man’s sad lot; it ushers in the dawn and dispels the dark gloom by the brightening “wings of prayer”. Prayer after prayer is offered in eternal silence for life’s despair and solace by the agonized hearts.

The golden dawn, the bejeweled stars, the beauty and the bewitchment of music touch the heart of the poetess as with a magic band. She sees divinity scattered in insignificant objects of

Nature like Wordsworth in “Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.”

Arthur Symons admires and wonders at her “consciousness older than the Christian.”¹² This ancient consciousness and tranquility of mind adds to her vision a divine faculty. Indeed, she sings of divine splendor and eternal peace in a world torn of strife. Her vivid images soar into a world of “intimate essence of eternity.”¹³

The satiable thirst and hunger of the soul continue for divine summits to attain. The last stanza of the poem speaks of the destined hour – the elusive end – which lures and tempts human soul to a destination where each moment having passed through the journey of life becomes

*A session of the Infinite.*¹⁴

The tempestuous ocean beckons to fight the waves as the religious instinct crosses the indefinable line. Then it strives to unweave “the webs of life” to attain

*Nirvana of thy Lotus-throne?*¹⁵

In her religious poems, there is profound understanding of diverse cultures and cults. She speaks of the divinity in man, and points out that the Eternal may be presented in multiple religious cults, but He is one and His image remains unchanged. The truth is that the religious instinct appears in diverse forms of human worship and invariably retains the image of the Supreme.

Sarojini’s poetry demonstrates that God is all compassionate. His radiance is the shine of the stars. He is the destination of the pilgrim of life. He is the life of the sunbeam and the seed. He transmits power to the weak and liberty to the people in bondage. He is the true reality, and that is why Sarojini states:

*We are the shadows of Thy light,
We are the secrets of Thy might,
The vision of Thy primal dream.....¹⁶*

In the poems of Sarojini Naidu, human soul is in quest of self-revelation to the tune of the eternal music, which fills the vacant hours. The love poetry of her early life soon merges with deeper emotions and becomes religious. Her heart wanders wailing with the restless wind to catch the music of the stars, seek the truth and foster faith in Him.

In his book, *The World as I See It*, Albert Einstein affirms that the religious feelings of a scientist are of amazement at the harmony of natural law and that science encourages us to adopt an empirical attitude. Scientific research includes para-normal phenomena and spiritual states. Religious experience is not mere magic or witchcraft, and its roots are not in rituals and superstitions alone. Likewise, for Sarojini Naidu religion explores the inward nature of man and leads him to the ideal:

*And Truth thy pure imperishable goat....
All hail to thee in thy transcendent flight
From hope to hope, from height to
heavenlier height,
Lost in the rapture of the cosmic soul.¹⁷*

When man concentrates on the outward world by his senses, he loses contact with his inner self and forgets his goal. Not only the Indian thinkers, but the Greeks also lay emphasis on self-knowledge. Hiraclitus says: "I sought myself", and Socrates begins his quest of the self with the awareness that he does not know himself and does not know anything. The awareness of ignorance is the beginning of the quest of knowledge. Sarojini Naidu endorses this concept of human nature in the poem "To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus", and wishes to seek the knowledge of the "Mystic Rapture". She wants to know the great Infinite and

the path which may lead her to *Nirvana*. She believes that the supreme bliss of *Nirvana* can be attained with the discovery of the self. She feels in her a "sleepless pain"¹⁸ in quest of the Truth. In the poem, "Guerdon", she speaks of the earthly gains of gems from the tides and of the youngman's joyous dreams of the bride; but

*For me, O my Master
The rapture of Truth!¹⁹*

In fact, Sarojini Naidu is full of the dreams of divinity, and has no erroneous notions about religion. She strives for an elevated state of mind; she longs to break through the outer darkness to entire into the world of light and spirit. Her religious thoughts are deeper than her perceptions, feelings and passions. She realizes the presence of the ultimate reality in each individual. Human life has the primacy of spiritual experience. The doctrine of Indian culture and religion; "*tat tvam asi*" – the eternal is in one's self – finds expression in her poetry.

In the end, we refer to Sarojini Naidu's exquisite poems, "The Call to Evening Prayer", which dramatically portrays the presence of One Father under whom the devotees of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Zoroastrianism are united in the bond of divine worship. The most noble message of Sarojini in her poems is that of the oneness and greatness of all religions, and the futility of mutual strife and hatreds. She expresses man's lyrical feelings for creation and the creator.

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