

ASSIGNMENT SHEET
ENGLISH COMMUNICATION
(A Compulsory Course under AECC)
Shastri B.A. Honours VI Semester (All Subjects)

SAROJINI NAIDU

Poem: Autumn Song

Like a joy on the heart of a sorrow,

The sunset hangs on a cloud;

A golden storm of glittering sheaves,

Of fair and frail and fluttering leaves,

The wild wind blows in a cloud.

Hark to a voice that is calling

To my heart in the voice of the wind;

My heart is weary and sad and alone,

For its dream like fluttering leaves are gone,

And why should I stay behind.

About the Poem: Sarojini Naidu has a special liking for nature. She has given vivid descriptions of orchards, groves, forests and farms. She also admires the regenerative and restorative powers of nature. Every season has its own beauty and charm. But all her passion is reserved for the spring season about which she has written immensely. An entire section of *The Bird of Time* is entitled “Songs of the Springtime.” For her spring symbolizes mirth, joy, excitement and life. Autumn Song is perhaps the single instance where she has written something about autumn. This is a time of colour and transformation. It has its own beauty despite of its melancholic suggestions. John Keats had also celebrated the autumn season in his “Ode to Autumn” where he glorifies autumn season: “thou has thy sweetness too.”

In this song Sarojininaidu uses lyrical language with simple end rhymes in order to parallel personal loss and loneliness with the beautiful frailty of autumn. She capitalizes on wind as a metaphor for change and loss of “joy” in the fair frailty of autumn. The change from invocation of the nature to the personal address in the concluding lines gives the speaker the urgency to move on from the loss and not linger in sorrow that she hears in the wind.

About the Poet: Sarojini Naidu was born on the thirteenth of February, 1879 to Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya and Varadasundari. As a child, she was blessed with an atmosphere of culture and refinement. The parents as well as her siblings were multilingual. Sarojini herself spoke Urdu, Telegu and English. It is quite incredible fact about her that a poet who won recognition in England even before Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore resisted English for a long time during her childhood. She was punished by her father for this behavior. He locked her up in a room did not let her out until she composed a stanza in English. Both her parents were quite hospitable and this ensured the presence of several guests at her home. She inherited the talent for poetry from both her parents. Her mother composed lyrics in Bengali but was satisfied managing her household.

She was educated at Hyderabad and Madras. She was an excellent student in spite of her illness. At the age of twelve she passed her matriculation examination from Madras in 1891. She secured first position in the entire presidency. Her ill health precluded her academic life as she had to take several breaks due to ill health. But she did not give up reading. She read extensively on various subjects. She was quite mature about the aspects of life. The lyrics composed when she was barely fourteen express the maturity of thought. She was deeply hurt by the untimely death of her brother but this melancholy was broken by the arrival of Govindarajulu Naidu, a student of Medical Science. She got drawn towards him and her feelings were reciprocated by the young doctor. Sarojini’s parents were troubled a bit by this turn of events, she was barely fifteen with poor health and the poet inside her had just started to reveal itself. They decided to send her to Madras in order to concentrate on her interests in seclusion and further she was sent to England thereby increasing the distance between the young people. Sailing to England when she was just sixteen she studied at London and Cambridge for three years. Although she was not an admirer of classroom studies, a romantic at heart, she always craved for natural surroundings. That is why, rural England impressed her a great deal and her earliest nature poems were composed during her visits to English countryside. Her stay in England served to refine her poetic

Dr. Shweta Awasthi

Assistant Professor (English), Uttarakhand Sanskrit University, Haridwar

E-mail: dr.shweta@usvv.ac.in

sensibilities under the influence of Rhymers' Club. She presented some of her poems to Edmund Gosse who advised her not to Anglicize her feelings and forget about the robins and skylarks of the English countryside. He told her to 'set her poems firmly among the mountains, the gardens, the temples, to introduce to us the vivid population of her own voluptuous and unfamiliar province; in other words, to be a genuine Indian poet of the Deccan, not a clever, machinemade imitator of English classics.' Whether it was the advice or her own natural evolution, her poetic craft became better after 1895. Her poems written during this period impressed both Gosse and Arthur Symons, to whom she was introduced later. Symons left an interesting description of Sarojini's personal appearance: 'She was dressed always in clinging dresses of Eastern silk, and as she was so small, and her long black hair hung straight down her back, you might have taken her for a child. She spoke little, and in a low voice, like gentle music; and she seemed, wherever she was, to be alone.' But this loneliness was not for long as she got married to Dr. Naidu three months after returning from England. Her domestic life did not curtail her dreams and passions. She became even more active being satisfied with her life. She began to feel and respond to the call of her motherland. The meeting with Romesh Chandra Dutt further hastened the process. She was invited for delivering lectures at various institutions and this paved the way for her to become a public speaker. She motivated the students to get away from caste and religious prejudices and serve to develop India thereby connecting it to the other parts of the world. She got associated with several public figures of the time whose advices she accepted with great humility. Gopal Krishna Gokhale influenced her a lot. She had witnessed her father Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya performing several tasks for the Congress Party and thus was well informed about the nationalist movement. This was the time when she met Ramabai Ranade, one of the pioneers of the Women's liberation movement in India. This meeting had a great impact over Sarojini's mind and she became more and more instrumental in India's freedom struggle as well as the amelioration of the Indian women. Wherever she went, she carried the stamp of Indianness with her. Her lectures were filled with the love and passion for India. During her visits to America and Canada she endeavoured to present the real picture of India in front of the foreign audience and rectify the prejudiced image of India set by foreign authors and media. Her intimate friendship with Gokhale further fired her nationalistic zeal. Gokhale once exhorted her quite strongly to devote her life for the cause of the country: 'Stand here with me' he said, with the star and hills as 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 poet, see visions from

Dr. Shweta Awasthi

Assistant Professor (English), Uttarakhand Sanskrit University, Haridwar

E-mail: dr.shweta@usvv.ac.in

the hill tops and spread abroad the message of hope to the toilers of the valleys.’Sarojini promised him that she would perform the way he wishes. Her relationship with Mahatma Gandhi was both amusing and serious. She often addressed him as ‘the little brown man’, ‘our mickey mouse’etc in a jocular mood. Although she never adopted his life style but was influenced by his philosophy ‘I am the one of the millions upon whom the little man has cast his spell’.Sarojini’s will to serve her cause in public as well as personal life is reflected in these lines where she refuses to die: “Tarry awhile, O Death, I cannot die/ till all my hungers are fulfilled.”

Sarojini Naidu’s juvenilia had been published privately by her father in 1896- poems by Miss Chattopadhyay. Her reputation mainly rests on three volumes published subsequently: The Golden Threshold(1905), the Bird of Time: songs of Life, Death and the Spring(1912) and the Broken Wing: Songs of Love, death and Destiny 1915-16(1917) The Feather of the Dawn consisting of poems written in the late 1920’s was published posthumously in 1961. The growth of the poet within her was probably abated by the demands of the public life. As a poet she could be called a romantic at heart. All the four collections present a continuity of imagination. She was completely unaffected by the modernist movement in the English poetry initiated by Ezra Pound and T.S.Eliot. In one of her unpublished autobiographical fragment she wrote about her realization that she was a poet with ‘new, irresistible, unutterable longings and sensations’. The tone reminds us of Wordsworth famous definition of poem as: ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquility.’

The defining feature of Sarojini Naidu is her passion for nature. She did revel in the presence of nature and responded to its every call. Her intimacy with nature was not confined to mere physical sensations; rather it had deeper connotations. It was a medium to express, her aches and joys. She enthusiastically responded to the gulmohars, the sirisas, the champak, the lotus buds and the koels and the dhadikulas, all that was offered by the natural surroundings of India. She felt an uninhibited joy in beauty especially in the spring season which she endeared the most: “O let us fling all care away and lie alone and dream/ neathtangaed boughs of tamarind and molsari and neem” She lies somewhere between the mysticism of Wordsworth and the sensuousness of Keats. Her poems display a comprehension as well as acceptance of the Indian outlook as far as the question of man’s relationship with the nature is concerned. Indian mythologies establish the interdependence of man and nature. Man has worshipped nature from prehistoric times. This was also done to secure the boons of nature. Sarojini Naidu has expressed the continuity between the

Dr. Shweta Awasthi

Assistant Professor (English), Uttarakhand Sanskrit University, Haridwar

E-mail: dr.shweta@usvv.ac.in

natural and the human in many ways. Sometimes she also expresses the desire to transcend to the bliss of nature, a characteristic feature of a true romantic. For her nature continues to be a welcoming abode, a resting place where she can get rid of her worries and strains. She has never portrayed the destructive aspects of nature. She is in deep love with Indian countryside as well and has captured several scenes. For example in one of her poems, “June Sunset” she describes a typical Indian pastoral scene:

“An oxcart stumbles upon the rocks,
And a wistful music pursues the breeze’
From a Shepherd’s pipe as he gathers his flocks
Under the peepal trees.”

Similarly, she personifies wind to express her diverse moods; sometimes the winds are ‘wise’ while during the dawn it becomes a quiet child: ‘The wind lies asleep in the arms of the dawn/ like a child that has cried all night’.

She had travelled extensively and had experienced almost every type of landscape. She was acquainted with the variegated climatic conditions. She celebrates the abundance and variety displayed by the earth: “Queen of gourd flower, queen of the harvest/Sweet and omnipotent mother, O Earth.”

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RABINDRA NATH TAGORE

POEM : WHERE THE MIND IS WITHOUT FEAR AND THE HEAD IS HELD HIGH

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high

Where knowledge is free

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments

By narrow domestic walls

Where words come out from the depth of truth

Where tireless striving stretches its arm towards perfection

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way

Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit

Where the mind is led forward by thee

Into ever-widening thought and action

Into that heaven of freedom, my father let my country awake

About the poem: The poem expresses the poet's desire to free his country not only from the physical control of the British Raj but also from the mental oppression. The poem, written during the time of freedom struggle contains patriotic undertones. It expresses poet's heartfelt grief at the oppressed condition of his people who suffer under the British government. The poet wishes, his fellow citizens to stand by themselves and should maintain their respect and dignity. He wants them to spend their time in gaining knowledge. The British Government created several differences and rift among the Indian citizen under their policy of divide and rule. The poet seeks

to destroy “narrow domestic walls” of language, religion, race, region etc. He also wants his citizens to get rid of the superstitions, which existed in the society. The poet asks his fellow citizens to follow the path of truth and righteousness. In Tagore’s opinion, the efforts and struggle for freedom would only be fruitful if the countrymen try to attain perfection and make their country an ideal place to live in. He prays to lord to grant reason to his fellow citizens and asks them not to follow the dead habits instead he wishes them to apply reason before accepting any custom. Lastly, he urges God, the almighty to provide guidance to his fellow citizens and to lead them to freedom, the heavenly abode they have been striving for so long.

About the Poet: Rabindranath Tagore was the fourteenth son of Maharshi Debendranath, one of the founders of the BrahmoSamaj and the grandson of ‘Prince’ Dwarkanath Tagore, one of the most successful entrepreneurs of his time. So he was blessed with intellectual as well as culturally refined environment. His family was probably the most creative and intellectually active family of the day. He had enough solitary space in his huge house that was always brimming with activity. He had little formal schooling but that did not hinder the free flow of his poetic utterances. As a boy, he loved day dreaming, staring out of the windows, constructing fantasies about them and hated private tutorial and rote learning. He adored holidays when he could indulge in his creative recreation. As a poet Tagore reached those heights that are still unattainable for Indian poets; he won the esteemed Nobel Prize in Literature in his very first effort. He started an unparalleled tradition of literary bilingual tradition in literature. But as a child, he hated English lessons. (about his personal life to be added) Tagore hailed as the ‘Great Sentinel’ by Mahatma Gandhi, had contradiction in his relation to English language. In his autobiography, ‘JibanSmriti’(1991; translated into English as My Reminiscences,1917) he has described at length, his dislike for English language. He and other children were terrified of the English teacher Aghorebabu as it was common with the pupils of the day: “How well do I remember the day our tutor tried to impress on us the attractiveness of the English language. With this object he recited to us with great unction some lines- prose or poetry could not tell- out of an English book. It had a most unlooked for effect on us. We laughed so immoderately that he dismissed us for the evening.”

In 1912, when he was about to leave for England for his medical treatment, he decided to translate some of his Bengali poems into English. This started Tagore’s career as an Indian

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Assistant Professor (English), Uttarakhand Sanskrit University, Haridwar

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English poet. His translated version of Geetanjali took the literary world by storm. Geetanjali was followed by *The Gardener*(1913) and *The Crescent Moon* (1913). Tagore's reception in the literary world of London was characterized by opposite extremes; W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound who were ardent admirers of Tagore earlier became his critics later. Tagore's own attitude towards English language was quite ambiguous. In one of the letters written to his niece Indira Devi, Tagore writes about his relation with English language: "I did not undertake this task in a spirit of reckless bravado; I simply felt an urge to recapture, through the medium of another language, the feeling and sentiments which had created such a feast of joy within me in past days." Further he adds, "I was possessed by the pleasure of receiving anew my feelings as expressed in a foreign tongue. I was making fresh acquaintance with my own heart by dressing it in other clothes." Whereas, at the same time he informs his niece about the difficulty he feels in writing in English: "You have alluded to the English translation of the Gitanjali. I cannot imagine to this day how people came to like it so much. That I cannot write in English is such a patent fact that I never had even the vanity to feel ashamed of it. If anybody wrote an English note asking me for tea, I did not feel equal to answering it...."

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