

Exploration of Spirituality and Mysticism in the Select Poems of Sarojini Naidu

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Abstract

This paper explores the profound themes of spirituality and mysticism in selected poems of Sarojini Naidu, one of India's most celebrated poetesses. Known as the Nightingale of India, Naidu's poetry is often praised for its lyrical beauty, but beneath its aesthetic surface lies a deep engagement with spiritual philosophy, devotional longing, and mystic symbolism. Through a close reading of poems such as "To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus", "In the Forest", "The Temple", and "Songs of Radha", this paper examines how Naidu draws upon Bhakti traditions, Indian religious imagery, and nature mysticism to express the soul's inner journey towards peace, divine union, and transcendence. This study highlights how her poetic voice merges personal emotions with universal spiritual themes, making her work both intimate and timeless. By analyzing her use of metaphor, tone, and symbols, this paper aims to shed light on how Naidu transforms poetry into a vehicle for spiritual expression and mystical insight.

Keywords: spirituality, mysticism Indian religious imagery, divine union, and transcendence

Introduction

Sarojini Naidu's poems reflect the rich tapestry of spirituality and mysticism. It blends Indian tradition, imagery, and emotional depth. Many of her poems suggest universal spirituality, transcending religion and embracing a sense of unity with nature, love, and the cosmos. Sarojini Naidu's poetry has gained her identity as the Nightingale of India. She is widely recognized for her lyrical poetry, which combines the themes of Indian culture, patriotism, and romanticism. While much of her poetry is celebrated for its musicality and nationalist fervor, there is also a profound undercurrent of spirituality and mysticism that reflects her deep connection to Indian tradition, philosophy, and metaphysics. Her work often reveals the soul of India, where spirituality and mysticism are intertwined in day-to-day life. Her poetic volumes have become treasures of spirituality and mysticism. The deep connection between Indian Culture and Religion is reflected in her poems through the portrayal of Indian mythology, gods, and rituals. Poems like "The Temple," "To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus," and "Coromandel Fishers" "Songs of Radha" (from *The Broken Wing*) reflect a reverence for the divine in both personal and communal life.

"The Temple: A Pilgrimage of Love" is a spiritual journey in the form of devotional love. The "temple" becomes a metaphor for the human soul seeking union with the Divine. The imagery of incense, flowers, and prayer expresses sacred longing that is both emotional and transcendental. This echoes the Bhakti tradition, in which love is worship. This offers insights into Indian Spirituality and the cultural significance of temples. The temple serves as a symbol of spiritual aspirations and a quest for transcendence. The following lines reveal that the speaker's devotion to the divine is evident during their journey to the temple. The speaker attempts to connect with the divine.

"O Master of the Dreams, behold!
We bring Thee frankincense and gold,
And vow the rapture of our days
To Thine ineffable praise."
(From "The Temple")

captures the essence of Indian spiritual philosophy: stillness, detachment, and the pursuit of enlightenment. Naidu portrays Buddha as a symbol of the divine calm and

eternal truth, who sits unmoved amidst the chaos of the world. The speaker addresses the Buddha in a tone of awe and admiration, expressing a desire to emulate his detachment and find peace within the soul.

"O mystic Lotus, sacred and sublime,
In myriad hearts thou dost enshrine thy throne..."

The lotus is a powerful symbol of spiritual purity and transcendence. It represents Buddha's ability to remain untouched by the "mud" of worldly desires—an image deeply rooted in Eastern philosophy. Naidu uses symbolic imagery to evoke the mystical aura surrounding Buddha. The lotus signifies purity, spiritual awakening, and detachment. Buddha's stillness amidst life's turbulence symbolizes perfect inner harmony. Phrases like "mystic silence" and "soul's repose" reinforce the theme of meditative transcendence. This imagery invites readers to look inward and reflect on their own emotional restlessness in contrast to Buddha's divine stillness. The tone is devotional, reverent, and introspective. The speaker is not just praising Buddha; she is yearning for the peace and detachment that he embodies. There's an undercurrent of spiritual humility, as though the poet sees herself as a seeker before an enlightened master. The use of second person ("thou") gives the poem a personal, prayer-like quality, reminiscent of Bhakti poetry, where the soul speaks directly to the Divine. Naidu's language in this poem is elevated yet accessible. She uses rich musical diction with a soft, lyrical rhythm. The alliteration and assonance contribute to the calm, meditative mood of the poem. The poem is not just about Buddha as a historical figure—it's about the ideal of spiritual stillness. Naidu contrasts the transience of worldly life with the timeless repose of enlightenment: This duality highlights the central philosophical idea that true peace lies in renunciation and inner realization. A Buddha Seated on a Lotus is an example of Sarojini Naidu's ability to blend spiritual depth with lyrical beauty. It is more than a poem—it is meditation. In revering Buddha, Naidu reveals her own spiritual quest, offering readers a window into the soul's yearning for peace in a restless world. Through this poem, Naidu not only honors Indian spiritual heritage but also universalizes its message, making it resonate with readers across cultures and beliefs.

Sarojini Naidu's *Songs of Radha* is a lyrical sequence that beautifully merges divine mysticism with human emotion, reimagining the age-old love between Radha and Krishna not just as romantic but deeply spiritual and symbolic. Rooted in the Bhakti tradition, these poems reflect Naidu's ability to blend classical Indian themes with a modern poetic voice. At its heart, *Songs of Radha* explores divine love—a union of the soul with the Eternal. Radha is not merely a lover of Krishna in the earthly sense; she becomes a symbol of the soul in longing and devotion to the Supreme Being. This theme resonates with the teachings of Bhakti saints like Mirabai, where personal love for God transcends rituals and becomes a path of salvation.

"I seek thee not in mortal guise,
I search for thee with yearning eyes..."

The lines highlight the soul's quest for the infinite, expressing a spiritual hunger that surpasses physical desire.

These poems are rich in mystical imagery and symbols drawn from nature and mythology. The flute of Krishna, the lotus, the moonlit Yamuna, and Radha's longing all serve as metaphors for the divine union, detachment from the world, and the ecstasy of surrender. Radha's emotions evolve through the poems—from longing and pain to rapturous fulfillment—mirroring the soul's journey through separation (viraha) to oneness with the divine (samadhi). Naidu's Radha is not a passive devotee but a woman of strength and passion. Her voice was intimate, emotional, and deeply introspective. She articulates her love with clarity and strength, reflecting Naidu's own feminist sensibilities. Through Radha, Naidu gives voice to the spiritual power of feminine love, portraying it not as weakness but as a creative, divine force that can overcome ego and achieve liberation. Naidu's use of simple, lyrical English conveys the rhythm and feelings of traditional Indian devotional songs. The musicality of her lines and the fluidity of her verses enhance the emotional and spiritual tone of the poems. She employs soft consonants, musical rhymes, and a flowing cadence that echo the mystical traditions of Indian poetry. Her diction is refined yet accessible, bridging the gap between classical and modern content. The songs of Radha are not merely a poetic celebration of love, but a profound exploration of the soul's eternal relationship with the Divine. Sarojini Naidu masterfully blends Indian spiritual traditions with modern lyricism, making this work a treasure of mystical devotion, emotional intensity, and a poetic grace.

Sarojini Naidu's *In the Forest* is a gentle yet deeply reflective poem that explores the themes of solitude, nature, mysticism, and the inner spiritual journey. In this poem, the forest is not just a natural setting; it is a symbolic space for introspection, self-discovery, and communion with the divine. Through evocative imagery and lyrical language, Naidu offers a meditative experience rooted in both nature and spirituality. At its core, *In the Forest* explores the human soul's desire to retreat from the material world into a place of peace, simplicity, and higher awareness. The forest symbolizes spiritual isolation—a retreat from worldly distractions and mystical connection—a place where the divine can be felt in nature and freedom—from social roles, emotional entanglements, and material desire.

"I wandered alone where the myrtle grows,
And the honeysuckle blows..."

This line reflects not only physical solitude but also inner withdrawal, a key element in mystic traditions across cultures, including Indian spiritual thought. Nature in this poem is not passive: it is alive, sacred, and deeply interconnected with the speaker's soul. The forest has become a sanctuary, where "Fragrance, color, and sound evoke spiritual emotions
The silence and rhythm of nature mirror inner calm"

The speaker hears the "voice of the forest," suggesting a mystical presence. Naidu uses sensory imagery (myrtle, honeysuckle, leaves, and light) to bring the forest to life, but also to express intangible feelings, such as peace, longing, and spiritual clarity. The tone is contemplative, serene, and melancholic. There is a sense of withdrawal, not sadness, but yearning for something deeper and purer. The poet's quiet reverence for nature hints at a spiritual surrender, a mood often found in Eastern mysticism. In this poem, the forest becomes a metaphor for the inner world where the soul seeks refuge and truth. The poem echoes Indian mystic poetry, particularly the idea that silence and solitude are paths to divine realization. By turning away from the noise of the world and entering the stillness of the forest, the speaker symbolically moves closer to the truth of self.

The Forest is a masterful blend of romantic nature poetry and mystical philosophy. Sarojini Naidu used the forest as both a literal and symbolic setting to express the soul's quiet search for peace and truth. The poem exemplifies her gift—delicate language, lyrical beauty, and profound spiritual insight. In a modern world full of noise and speed, the forest still speaks powerfully of the need to pause, retreat, and reconnect with the eternal. Sarojini Naidu's poetry is the saga of spirituality and religion, the quest for love, and pure and intense aspiration. Sarojini Naidu portrays a colorful and bright Indian spirit. She uses beliefs, customs, and traditions, reflecting the resilience, beauty, and colorful diversity of Indian culture. Sarojini's work of poetry is the Songs of Life, Death, and Destiny; although the topics are versatile, their essence is essentially spiritual. Sarojini Naidu's poems showcase her exploration of mysticism, spirituality, and human experiences. Her use of natural imagery, symbolism, and lyrical language creates a unique and captivating poetic style. Naidu's spiritual poems often echo the tone of Bhakti poetry, which is full of love, surrender, and longing for the Divine. She adopts the tone of a devotee and a seeker, not a detached philosopher. Even her most sensuous imagery — colors, fragrances, and music — serves to elevate the spirit, not just please the senses. Beauty has become a pathway for the divine. Sarojini Naidu's poems offer a glimpse into her mystical worldview, exploring the themes of spirituality, devotion, and human experience. Sarojini Naidu captures this longing with intense lyrical beauty, echoing the timeless tradition of mystical poetry.

Conclusion

Sarojini Naidu's poetry is a rich tapestry of spirituality and mysticism, blending Indian traditions, imagery, and emotional depth. Her work, which earned her the title "Nightingale of India", explores universal spiritual themes beyond specific religions, embracing unity with nature, love, and the cosmos. Through poems like "To a Buddha Seated on a Lotus," "In the Forest," "The Temple," and "Songs of Radha," Naidu utilizes Bhakti traditions, Indian religious imagery, and nature mysticism to depict the soul's journey towards peace, divine union, and transcendence. She transforms poetry into a vehicle for spiritual expression and mystical insight through her use of metaphor, tone, and symbols. Her poetic voice merges personal emotions with universal spiritual themes, making her work both intimate and timeless.

Naidu's poems reflect the profound connection between Indian culture and religion through their portrayal of Indian mythology, gods, and rituals. Her spiritual poems often echo the tone of Bhakti poetry, characterized by love, surrender, and longing for the Divine. She adopts the tone of a devotee and seeker, using even sensuous imagery to elevate the spirit, not just to please the senses, ultimately making beauty a pathway for the divine.

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Conflicts of interest

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