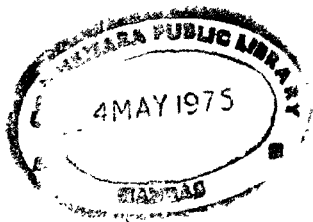


SAROJINI NAIDU





BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA



SAROJINI NAIDU

TARA ALI BAIG

PUBLICATIONS DIVISION
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

January 1974 (*Pausa 1895*)

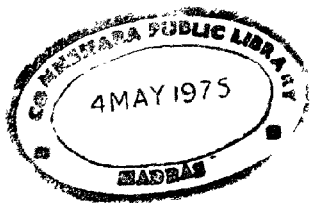
Price: Rs. 7.00

PUBLISHED BY THE DIRECTOR, PUBLICATIONS DIVISION, MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, PATIALA HOUSE, NEW DELHI-16

Regional Offices:

BOTAWALA CHAMBERS, SIR PHEROZESHAH MEHTA ROAD, BOMBAY-1
8, ESPLANADE EAST, CALCUTTA-1
SHASTRI BHAVAN, 35, HADDOWS ROAD, MADRAS-6

PRINTED AT HOOGHLY PRINTING CO., LTD., 41, CHOWRINGHEE ROAD, CALCUTTA-16



ABOUT THE SERIES

The object of this series is to record, for the present and future generations, the story of the struggles and achievements of the eminent sons and daughters of India who have been mainly instrumental in our national renaissance and the attainment of independence. Except in a few cases, such authoritative biographies have not been available.

The biographies are planned as handy volumes written by knowledgeable people and giving a brief account, in simple words, of the life and activities of the eminent leaders and of their times. They are not intended either to be comprehensive studies or to replace the more elaborate biographies.

The work of writing these lives has to be entrusted to different people. It has, therefore, not been possible to publish the biographies in a chronological order. It is hoped, however, that within a short period all eminent national personalities will figure in this series. 31/5/75

Shri R. R. Diwakar is the General Editor of the series.

PREFACE

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, when he was President of India, and Kumari Padmaja Naidu asked me to write this biography. Only on their urging and encouragement did I venture to accept, for to capture the spirit of this remarkable woman, and to put it down in words, is as impossible as describing the rising and setting sun. With this initial handicap, a biographer can at best recount episodes in a very unusual life; concentrating, for the sake of this series, upon the contribution she made to India as a leader during the Revolutionary Period, when with her high ideals, sacrifices, and splendid oratory, she galvanized the country.

Even to do this, however, was not simple. Many people do not keep letters or written notes, and historical records, papers, photographs, newspaper files and personal recollections failed for the most part to supply material on that period of her life from 1919 to 1936 when she was most active in politics in Bombay. All the AICC records had been destroyed, and had it not been for the assistance of the Maharashtra Government and Shri H. K. Pathak, the scholarly Editor of those invaluable source books, *The History of the Freedom Movement*, this chapter of her life would have been sketchy indeed.

Sarojini Naidu had a host of friends and associates, many of whom were still alive when I was collecting their personal *reminiscences*. Among those who gave me both time and many insights were Lady Thackersey, Shantiben Morarji, Jamnadas Dwarkadas, Kanji Dwarkadas, Navin Khandwala, K. M. Munshi and Lilavati Munshi, Vithalbhai Jhaveri, Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya, Sunalini Devi, "Gunoo" Chattopadhyaya, Goshiben Captain, Zarina and Ebrahim Currimbhoy, Kulsum Sayani, Col. Bhandari (Sarojini's one-time jailor), Dr. Satish Sen, Sophia Wadia (who put at my disposal all the records of P.E.N.), Acharya J. B. Kripalani, Aruna Asaf Ali, Renuka Ray, "Minnie" Mookherjee, Mrs. C. R. Das, Mrs. N. C. Sen, Miss Marion Barwell, The Maharani of Cooch Behar, Lady Protima Mitter, Mrs. Shushama Ray and Ganapathi Shanker Desai. Among those who sent me written information or notes were Dr. Radhakrishnan (though the letters he promised to send me never came), C. Rajagopalachari, Devika Roerich, Dr. Manmohan Kaur,

Kodanda Rao, B. Shiva Rao, S. K. Patil, M. R. Masani, Abid Ali, Rameshwari Nehru, Maniben Patel, Hansa Mehta, M. C. Chagla, Shankerlal Banker, Sadik Ali, Adam Adil and Saraladevi Sarabhai.

“Gunoo”, Sarojini’s sister, who gave me several rewarding interviews shortly before her death in Hyderabad, was a mine of colourful information about her family, and Padmini Sen Gupta’s excellent biography not only gave a great deal of material on her early life but provided a wonderful framework of complementary research.

I am most grateful, however, to Padmaja Naidu who, when she was Governor of Bengal and greatly over-burdened, not only gave hours of her time for personal reminiscences, but also prepared copies of her mother’s letters, lists of her old friends all over India for me to interview, and press cuttings of speeches which enabled me to write this book to a great extent in her mother’s own words. She also studied the final manuscript to eliminate any small factual errors, especially relating to their family.

One interview was outstanding. Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyer, then aged ninety, and one month before he died, was courtly and wonderfully lucid. He not only gave precise chronological information about his friend and colleague of many stirring years, but was the only one who, seeing her life as a whole, supplied an interpretation of her personality with both depth and compassion.

I am also indebted to Shri B. R. Nanda, Director of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, for his assistance in supplementing documentation not available in the National Archives, and making available back issues of the *Bombay Chronicle* from 1912. He was also kind enough to study the final manuscript for any possible historical errors.

I am grateful to many people named and unnamed, but most of all to my husband. Without his help, he who knew and loved Sarojini Naidu from his boyhood days, this book might not have been written. It is, thus, his book as much as mine. And for both of us a labour of love in memory of someone the like of whom may never be known again.

CONTENTS

I	FORMATIVE YEARS	...	...	...	...	1
II	NEW HORIZONS	...	...	...	...	25
III	IN POLITICS	...	...	...	...	46
IV	CONGRESS PRESIDENT	...	...	...	...	83
V	LULL BEFORE THE STORM	...	...	...	...	117
VI	INDEPENDENCE AND AFTER	...	...	...	...	130
	SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	...	...	...	...	167
	INDEX	...	...	...	...	169



I

Formative Years

WHEN MAHATMA GANDHI was assassinated in 1948, no tribute paid to him by his grief-stricken countrymen was more moving than that of Sarojini Naidu, devoted disciple that she had been for twenty-seven years. She exclaimed:

“He who was the apostle of peace has been taken to the cremation ground with all the honours of a great warrior. Far greater than all warriors who led armies to battle was this little man, the bravest and most triumphant of all.”

And she significantly recalled her father's words just before his own death: “There is no birth, there is no death. There is only the soul seeking higher and higher stages of the Truth.” During the Asian Relations Conference in 1947 she was to say the same thing, and many times in her life she quoted her father. For among the great men who shaped her life, Agorenath Chattopadhyaya was the first.

Born on February 13, 1879, Sarojini, the eldest daughter of this scientist and pioneer educationist, had an extraordinary family life. Describing her father to the English critic and writer, Arthur Symons, she wrote:

“My ancestors have been great dreamers, great scholars, great ascetics. My father is a 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 down the roof. He has wasted all his money on two great objects: to help others and on alchemy. But this alchemy, as you know, was only the material counterpart of a poet's craving for beauty, the eternal beauty.

The makers of gold are the makers of verse, they are the twin creators that sway the world's secret desire for mystery; and what in my father is the genius of curiosity—the very essence of all scientific genius..... in me is the desire for beauty.”

Nothing could have summed up her drive in life more than these words to this man who trimmed and shaped her later poetic gift. But what is significant was her recognition, as a young woman of twenty-five, that her father's alchemy and her poetry sprung from the same roots. What he did with chemicals, making him exclaim to his children one day, as recalled by his youngest daughter, Suhashini, “Eureka, Eureka! I've found it!”, (what he had found was gold from base metal), Sarojini did the same thing with words. Jawaharlal Nehru spoke no more than the truth when he said, “She lifted our struggle into higher planes.”¹ How she did this was a mystery, for words are words, and oratory is one thing and mastery over the language another. Poets can weave in imagery and thinkers can infuse deeper thought; but it requires an alchemist to transform.

All through her life, from her first-known speeches in 1902, she was to transport audiences with her fiery words, her glowing dedication of spirit, and each time people would come away uplifted, even bemused, unable to say what she had actually said, only aware that for a moment they were ennobled. Gokhale, writing to her after her speech proposing the resolution on the education of women at the All-India Social Conference of 1906, said, “May I take the liberty to offer you my most respectful and enthusiastic congratulations? Your speech was more than an intellectual treat of the highest order. It was a perfect piece of art. We all felt for a moment to be lifted to a higher plane.”² Rameshwari Nehru, when a girl, wrote of Sarojini: “It was not possible to give an import of what she said. What she meant was not clear. But the intoxicating effect of what she said was such that one forgot one's existence and got lost in the fragrant beauty of her utterance. The hour was over; she finished her oration. Young and impressionable as I was, I lost consciousness of myself. I got absolutely intoxicated with her words which rang in my ears for hours to come. Motilal Nehru

1. Speech of Jawaharlal Nehru in Constituent Assembly

2. “Gokhale the Man” by Sarojini Naidu, *Bombay Chronicle*, 1915

and Sarojini Naidu both observed how deeply I was affected. They laughed and teased me."

In later years, Laxmi Menon who became a leader of the women's movement, started in great part by Sarojini's call to women to become partners in the nation's struggle for life, was to say, "She has the unique power to transform. Whoever listened to one of her speeches was suddenly uplifted, translated to another realm." Father and daughter, therefore, were fed with the same fires, but if the father had been a "magnificent failure", the daughter was one of the most triumphant personalities of India's revolutionary period. The alchemy of the one was the secret life-spring of the other. And even if Agorenath Chattopadhyaya did not in fact succeed in turning base metals into gold, his influence upon her early life was to bring the touch of gold that transformed her and, in turn, through her vibrant humanism transformed hundreds of her countrymen who came under her special spell of wit, love and universalism.

In her father's laugh "that brings down the roof" we see another profound influence upon this otherwise deeply serious child. In the court of her parent's home where thinkers, poets and revolutionaries, ordinary mortals, relatives and friends gathered in constant comings and goings and where her gentle mother presided over a tiny kitchen from which, with limited resources, she produced prodigious meals for the endless hospitality of this home, Sarojini was to see from an early age how potent a force is laughter. Writing to a friend she said, "It is scarcely two months since I came back from the grave; is it worthwhile to be anything but glad? Of all things that life or perhaps my temperament have given me, I prize the gift of laughter as beyond price."¹ All through her life this earthy wit was to make her presence everywhere a pure delight, but more than that was her gift of bridging emotional situations with a jest. When approached by a trembling admirer after her thundering oration at the Asian Relations Conference in Delhi in 1947 with the words, "Oh Mrs. Naidu, that was such a wonderful speech, I nearly wept," she turned to the girl and said, "Nearly wept? What do you mean? Everyone else was weeping!"

Rajagopalachari, India's first Governor-General after Independence, was to write of her: "Sarojini Devi was undoubtedly one of the few

1. Arthur Symons, from his introduction to Sarojini Naidu's poems, *The Golden Threshold*, 1905

personalities in whom were combined a sense of humour along with perception of realities in the struggle for freedom". Robert Bernays, in *The Naked Fakir*, called her the "Court jester of the Mahatma's little Court". But in all the tales of her humour, which seem to be more easily recalled than more momentous events by all her hosts of friends, and in all the stories of her scant respect for the great (her title of Micky Mouse for Mahatma Gandhi became a household word), is the deep undercurrent of her wisdom and humanity which provoked Arthur Symons to write: "I have never known anyone to exist on such large draughts of intellectual diet as this child of seventeen, to whom one could tell all one's personal troubles and agitations as to an old wise woman. In the East, maturity comes early and this child had already lived through all a woman's life. But there was something else, something hardly personal, something which belonged to a consciousness older than the Christian, which I realised, wondered at, and admired, in her passionate tranquility of mind, before which everything mean and trivial and temporary caught fire and burnt away in smoke. Her body was never without suffering, or heart without conflict."

In a letter to Symons, she wrote:

"Come, share my exquisite March morning, the thousand little gold, blue and silver breasted birds bursting with the shrill ecstasy of life...All is hot and fierce and passionate, ardent and unashamed in its exulting and importunate desire for life and love. These little quivering birds are my soul made incarnate music, these heavy perfumes (champak and serisha) are my emotions dissolved into aerial essence; this flaming blue and gold sky is the 'very me', that part of me that incessantly and insolently, yes, and a little deliberately, triumphs over that other part...a thing of nerves and tissues that suffers and cries out and that must die tomorrow perhaps or twenty years hence."

Symons goes on to say that her desire always was to be a wild free thing of the air, like the birds "with a song in my heart". A spirit of 'too much fire in too frail a body'. Once she wrote to him, "One black night I stood in the garden with fireflies in my hair. It gave me a strange sensation, as if I were not human at all but an elfin spirit." In Italy she watched the faces of the monks, and at one moment longed to attain their peace by renunciation, . . . then, to quote her letter to him, "When

one comes out again into the hot sunshine that warms the blood, and sees the eager hurrying faces of men and women in the street, dramatic faces over which the disturbing experiences of life have passed and left their symbols, one's heart thrills up into one's throat. How can one deliberately renounce this coloured, unquiet, fiery human life of the earth?"

More than anything else this letter, written when she was but a girl, reveals how, from a poet who wrote an unpublished volume dated October 3, 1896, signed Sarojini Chattopadhyaya, a prose poem called *Nilambuja*¹, and three volumes of verse, published in 1905, 1912 and 1917, she moved to the larger stage of national life and the struggle for freedom. Many learned reasons have been given for her "leaving the ivory tower" of her poetic life "for the market place". But this letter from Italy tells us exactly why. Sarojini Naidu's most enduring contributions to India were her involvement in the reality of human life rather than politics, in the fight for independence, and her deep insight into the people's need. It was the human being who came first with her always, not doctrines or creeds; the dictates of love, not the narrow dictates of mere principle. And because these qualities in her were highly developed, it was inevitable that her role in the political life of her country evolved around the basic theme of unity. It was here that she made her greatest contribution, and here that she was, like her father, a "magnificent failure".

Much has been written about the family of Agorenath Chattopadhyaya and his wife, Varada Sundari Devi, for when men or a woman like Sarojini achieve national fame, there is a sudden desire to study the soil in which such genius has been nurtured. If the father dominated the atmosphere of activity and creative thought in the house, it was the mother with her soft, Bengali ways who was its presiding deity. Her youngest son, Harindranath, considered by some critics a greater poet than his eldest sister, Sarojini, wrote of the "quality of his mother's eyes which were always brimful of mercy, kindness and contemplation". In fact, in all the descriptions of her one finds the "ideal" Hindu woman whose life from waking to sleeping was a saga of devotion—whether in the culinary gifts she lavished upon her husband's court of friends and admirers, which gave Sarojini her robust love of good food, or in the simplicity and total "giving" of herself to her family of eight abnormally vital children.

1. Archives, National Library, Calcutta

Her simplicity profoundly affected Sarojini who developed a rare capacity to treat people as equals no matter what their walk of life. This simplicity also gave her clear insight and a freedom from cant. For there could have been no false pretensions in a woman of the calibre of Varada Sundari Devi, nor did there seem to be any pull in her nature to life outside her home. This to a child could provide no greater security. If she had any inner drive unrelated to her family, it probably came out in her poetry and the songs she sang. As Harindranath remembers, she would sit singing on the window sill overlooking their gate, with tears brimming out of her eyes. Perhaps Sarojini's term for herself, often said with her half-laughing, half-serious voice, "I am just a poetess-singer", comes originally from the sentimental lyrics her mother used to sing in that rich deep voice unusual to Bengal. What reached the girl, perhaps unconsciously, was the woman's soul expressing itself in songs that made her weep.

But, apart from the deep inner things, this must have been a house of endless activity, a home in which the world moved through with its trials and triumphs and in which challenges had to be met and the lamp of freedom always burned high.

In his early years in his ancestral village of Brahmanagar in East Bengal, the future linguist and scholar of Hyderabad was to imbibe a great deal from the Sanskrit lore of his forebears.¹ East Bengal is a land of rivers and the great estuary of the Brahmaputra had a special fascination for its sons. It was here that the young Agorenath, aged fourteen, is said to have seen a little girl of nine in a boat. This "half angel, half bird" as her lyrical youngest son was to describe her later in Browning's words, became in time the wife of this unusual young man. Many romantic stories of his youth are current, of how as a poor young student in Calcutta University he had to borrow books to study under street-lamps. Perhaps because the learning was paid for by his own efforts, he was not only a brilliant scholar but a great linguist who mastered Greek, Hebrew, French, German and Russian.

When Agorenath went abroad for studies, his young wife, as generally happened in those days, was left behind.² She lived

1. Agorenath Chattopadhyaya, by P. C. Roy Chowdhury, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, November 25, 1946

2. *Sarojini Naidu* by Padmini Sen Gupta, Asia Publishing House, 1966

in the Brahmo Samaj Ashram of Keshab Chandra Sen, learning to become a good house-wife. Her husband, however, having earned the Gilchrist scholarship sailed for England, and in 1877¹ took his degree in Physics at Edinburgh, winning in the process the Baxter Prize and the Hope Prize in Chemistry. It is said that he was the first Indian to win his doctorate in science. From England he went to Bonn in Germany, where he impressed scientists with the breadth of his mind and accuracy and insight in research. His career in pure science was not fulfilled on his return to India, any more than Sarojini's gift as a poet could be sustained when her country called her to service. In the case of both father and daughter, the needs of the country were too vast and imperative for the luxury of science or poetry.

Both Agorenath and the devoted Varada Sundari Devi had the cause of women's education, a rather rare phenomenon in that period, very much at heart. It is not surprising, therefore, that in 1878, when he became a teacher in a Hyderabad school with English as the medium of instruction, he should in time become Founder and Principal of the New Hyderabad College, the famous Nizam's College of later years. Subsequently, with his wife and some friends, he created the Girls College affiliated to Osmania University.

One of the reasons why Agorenath was a remarkable educationist was the fact that he could not resist teaching. His grand-daughter, Padmaja, said of him: "One of my earliest recollections was grandfather showing me the flowers in the garden and reeling off Latin names he expected me to remember." Agorenath's influence on his children was indeed profound. He would say, "If my children cannot live by their wits, let them die"² for. And once, when Suhashini came home shouting that she had come first in her class, he said gravely, "Is that so baby? What is the nature of the sun, do you know?" She answered "No". "What makes the rain?" "What is air?" On her saying again that she did not know, he said, "Broaden your knowledge. When you know many things, it is more important than being first." What different kind of youth we would have in India today if teachers were like Agorenath, and their homes an open house in which discussion and debate took knowledge and learning into the realm

1. R. M. Jambhekar, *Sarojini Naidu Memorial Volume*, 1968

2. Suhashini Jambhekar, interview at Khar, 1969

of the student's everyday thinking.

It was inevitable that the New Hyderabad College rapidly became the cultural centre of Hyderabad, and when classes were over students would flock to Dr. Chattopadhyaya's residence to sit at his feet and listen intently to his discourses. In fact the atmosphere of learning in this "modern" setting where the emancipation of women, especially their economic independence, distaste for child marriage and encouragement of widow remarriage, among other social reforms, were the constant topics of discussion, must have, in essence, resembled the old forest universities of ancient India where the relations between pupil and teacher were based upon many disciplines and constant contact with the teacher who was virtually a *guru*. As time went on, the stimulus of this gathering in the Chattopadhyaya home drew to it all the cultured, active minds of Hyderabad and became known as the "darbar of Dr. Agorenath".

Inevitably these informal gatherings began to crystallize into action groups based upon like-thinking. Soon the *Anjuman-e-Akhwan-us-Safa* (the Brotherhood Society) was born whose organisers' main concern was how to tackle the social and political problems of the country. At that time British rule in India was probably at its *apogee*. The English, by various means, had established law and order, local administration, revenue collection, communications through an extensive railway system, and through English as the medium of instruction assured themselves of a well trained Indian cadre of humble and subservient lower officials to carry out their rule. Every British official lived in comfort with a large household staff; their wives ruled these little kingdoms and the exclusively English Clubs and all migrated in summer to the joys of the hill stations in the Nilgiris and the Himalayas. If among the civilians and educators of those days before the turn of the century were Englishmen of learning and humanism who contributed richly to the development of this country, the bulk were men and women of much lesser calibre who enjoyed quite egotistically their status, comfort and power.

When Salar Jung, the Diwan of Hyderabad, died in 1883, the administration was entrusted to a Council consisting of some prominent noblemen with the Nizam as President. Hyderabad was then part of Britain's treaty of paramountcy with the old princely states where the ruler governed under the watchful eye of a British resident.

In the perspective of time, the "Chanda Railway Scheme" which led to the deportation of Dr. Agorenath Chattopadhyaya from Hyderabad seems an unlikely issue to be considered revolutionary. According to the scheme, the existing State Railway from Hyderabad to Wadi was to be taken over by a British company which planned to extend the service to Warangal, with side-lines to Bhadrachallam or Bezwada and another to Chanda. This was done in a rather high-handed manner and the public was agitated over the secrecy of the administration on a public issue they considered uneconomic. Dr. Agorenath and Mulla Abdul Qayyum, Principal of the Hyderabad College, formed a committee to consider the Chanda scheme and to demand that full facts be placed before the public. This was too much for the Council and Dr. Agorenath was suspended from service. This was headline news in *The Times of India* and *Bombay Gazette* of May 19 and 21, 1883, and *The Times* reported that the learned scholar was not even allowed to purchase a first class railway ticket, but was forcibly taken to the train by eleven military men where he made a speech saying, "Gentlemen, you will please bear witness that I do not enter this carriage willingly but that I am compelled to do so." Such a statement might be considered mild in the light of today, or even in the light of the utterances of Sarojini against the British Government later, but at that time this was the first voice raised against the actions of a State Government and against feudalism. The impact upon Agorenath's children must have been great.

Some years later, Dr. Agorenath was reinstated. His great friend and loyal supporter, Mulla Abdul Qayyum, who had left for Madras also returned to Hyderabad. Sarojini wrote of him:

"How happy I am to add a flower of affection to the memorial garland woven by many hands in honour of my father's beloved friend, Mulla Abdul Qayyum Sahib, whose picturesque figure and fascinating personality are integral parts of my earliest recollections. Seldom have two persons divided by such divergent circumstances of birth, education, racial heritage and religious tradition achieved such perfect friendship as these two gifted and distinguished people.

"Both were men of vigorous intellect and versatile knowledge, nobility of character and righteousness of conduct. Both were kindled by the fire of deep moral indignation against every force of falsehood, injustice and tyranny. Both were sustained and inspired by the radiant

and invincible faith in the redemption of humanity from the tragic evils of ignorance, poverty, exploitation and oppression. Above all both were patriots loving India with passionate and prescient devotion and a prophetic vision of her freedom from bondage.

"I was too young in those far off years to understand clearly or appreciate correctly the significance of their passion and their faith; nor was I able to realise till long afterwards that men like these were the first though perhaps not among the most famous pioneers of the Indian renaissance."

Beyond his role as leader in the struggle for social reform and political consciousness among the intellectual elite of Hyderabad, Agorenath was also one of the earliest Indians to help establish what was later to become the Indian National Congress.¹ With Abdul Qayyum and Ramachandra Pillai, he helped the *Swadeshi* movement to gain ground in Hyderabad. Abdul Qayyum was an officer in the Survey and Settlement Department of Hyderabad State, and he risked his career, as did Agorenath, to bring the new movement from Bengal into a Princely State. In fact large numbers of young Bengalis, with no more than one set of clothes to change, began to move about the countryside with *dhotis*, matches, soaps, buttons and other India-made goods which they encouraged patriots to buy.² At that time the movement being so new, British India had imposed no restrictions on their manufacture. Among the workers was Damodar Satvalekar whose reminiscences mention the young Bengalis and their secret political activities. He also mentions that Agorenath presided over many small private meetings, and one can assume that many of these were in his own house where his lively children began to catch the fervour and excitement of clandestine and important happenings. These would, in time, shape their lives.

The eight children of Agorenath Chattopadhyaya and Varada Sundari Devi were understandably unusual children and their collective vitality was of epic proportions. Gifted in different ways, each one of them was to make a distinctive contribution in the world. Sarojini, born on February 13, 1879, was the eldest and became the most famous. She was essentially a liberal, and in a less revolutionary period would probably have been a

1. Article by Dr. Syed Abdul Latif, *Sarojini Naidu Memorial Volume*, 1968

2. P. C. Roy Chowdhury, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, November 25, 1967

leader in literary salons in India and abroad. Virendranath, born in 1880, however, would have been a revolutionary anywhere. He was exiled from India for his activities and during the Stalin era died of a heart attack on December 2, 1942. The news of his death in Europe, however, did not reach his family till much later. Bhupendranath, the second brother, was born in 1882. He became the Assistant Accountant-General in Hyderabad and died in Bombay in 1933. Mrinalini, affectionately called "Gunny" by the family, was born in 1883. Taking her Modern Sciences tripos at Cambridge, she became an educationist and later as Principal of the Girls' College, Lahore, she was so greatly loved by her students that she dedicated her life to teaching and never married. Sunalini Devi was born in 1890 and became an artiste and dancer. She married Mr. Rajam, and their son, Prahlad C. Rajam, is now a well-known scientist in the U.S.A. in his own Foundation at Ann Arbor. Ranendranath was born in 1895 and died of cancer in 1959. His only daughter, Mrinalini, is the Secretary of the Andhra Pradesh Life Insurance Fund, Hyderabad.

The youngest brother and most flamboyant member of the family, Harindranath, was born in 1898. Poet, artist, dramatist, Harindranath was the classic picture of the bohemian poet. His only son, Rama, is a consulting engineer. Rama's mother is the former socialist leader, Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya, whose life-long work in reviving India's ancient traditions of handicrafts has not only earned her a place of distinction and honour, but earned for the country a vast export market. The youngest sister, Suhashini, was born in 1901, a year after Sarojini had borne her second child, Padmaja. Suhashini, like Viren, was an ardent communist, and she and her husband, R. M. Jambhekar, live and work in Khar, a suburb of Bombay. By 1969, Harin and Suhashini were the only surviving members among Sarojini's brothers and sisters.

Mrinalini, Suhashini, and Harin recall many scenes of their childhood, though Suhashini always complained she was much too small to remember many things about her eldest sister who was already married and had begun her public life by the time she was six. Harin was also very young but he tells intimate stories of the family in his book *Life and Myself* in the rich language of evocative imagery that Sarojini also loved.

"Gunny" recalled in later years that Sarojini was overbearing in their childhood, taking upon herself the right to rule the younger members of

the family and the responsibility for things that were, in her opinion, the function of her father and mother. In 1968, a year before her death, Gunnu spoke of an episode when Sir Akbar Hydari told her the family would be in great trouble because of their brother, Viren, whose revolutionary activities were beginning to alarm the authorities. Sir Akbar told Sarojini, "Do something. Disown your brother." In an agony of zeal to save her parents, she impulsively wrote a letter to Hydari dissociating herself from her father and brother. The letter was published, and outraged by her act her father refused to let her come to his home, for though he did not share the political views of Viren, he always stood by him loyally. Viren, whose portrait adorns the Martyrs' Hall in Calcutta, was an exile all his adult life for he worked with fanatic zeal against imperialism.

His youngest sister, Suhashini, recalls an episode during her childhood when a letter from Viren to Mrinalini was secretly received from Germany. The C.I.D. learned of the letter and surrounded the house with forty policemen. Suhashini was playing with her dolls when Sir Charles Teggart, Head of the Police, demanded entry and told Agorenath that Mrinalini must surrender the letter. Their father asked them to sit down with an old-world courtesy. "Pray, gentlemen, be seated." Placidly watched by the children, the police searched the house. Ranen was chewing steadily as he played unconcerned in the garden while the men proceeded to ransack the place and even to tear up the doll's house in their effort to find the letter. When they were unsuccessful, Agorenath showed Sir Charles a photograph of Viren and said in parting, "Tell them, gentlemen, that my son Viren will bring them independence!" When they had left, the eight-year old Ranen solemnly spat out the remnants of his distinguished elder brother's letter.

Viren's life-long companion, the Communist leader Agnes Smedley, is now buried in China with the epitaph on her grave, "Daughter of the Earth". Viren's major work was in Germany with the League Against Imperialism, and there are interesting references to him in Lenin's notes in the *Collected Works of Lenin* stating that in the Third Congress of the Communist International, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, G. A. Lugani and P. Khankhoje sent Lenin their "theses on India and the World Revolution" which were presented to the Executive Committee of the Communist International and the Commission of the Congress on the Eastern Ques-

tion. With the note they requested Lenin for a meeting saying, "We hope that when you have time, we shall have an opportunity to talk with you personally about the Indian question."

Viren was to admit later that the theses "were politically wrong in most of their clauses", but there was a reply from Lenin dated July 8, 1921, in the Central Party Archives of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism (item No. 501). Viren was then senior scientific worker in the Indian Department of Ethnography of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, and at a general meeting of the Academy mentioned in his report that Lenin had written to them, "I read your theses with great interest. But why new theses? I shall speak to you about this soon."

Viren represented the violent aspect of revolution and never returned to India. His life and work, particularly in Germany, was collected in a biography by Dr. Herst Kruger of the Academy of Sciences, Berlin, and Ilya Irinberg, the Swedish writer, spoke of him as a "Great Indian". While the brother gained renown abroad in the extreme of revolutionary political life, his sister gained renown in India by a totally different path. Unity and constructiveness were fundamental to her being. Here was a nature that demanded harmony and brotherhood, peace and love, and her voice was raised in anger during her life only against injustice or injury to her Motherland.

Nothing could have been a greater contrast to Viren's life and actions than the fact that Sarojini in 1908 earned the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal. In those days she was a social figure in the lavish parties at the Residency, and when the great floods disrupted life in Hyderabad and the river Musa brought untold misery to the people, she organised volunteers in flood relief work—her first great work of organisation. Sarojini's wonderful gift of being one with people of all kinds proved her capacity to work with the masses.

In 1891, women's education in India was a far cry from what it is today, and a girl in school was something of a rarity. Agorenath Chattopadhyaya, however, was a man born before his time and it seemed perfectly normal to him that his twelve-year old daughter should become a scientist or mathematician. There had been governesses in the Chattopadhyaya household to teach the children in English and French, as was customary in many homes in England, and later Persian studies were added, but no high school existed in Hyderabad where Sarojini could take

her matriculation examination. She was consequently sent to Madras where her English teacher was to say later that she was so brilliant that she mastered three years' work in one year.

While it was a tremendous achievement for a girl to have passed her matriculation with a First Class at the age of twelve, her mental age must have been much greater than that of her contemporaries, not only because of her natural intelligence but because an atmosphere of learning had been part of her babyhood and upbringing. By the age of fourteen she had read all the English poets, and loved Browning, Shelley and Tennyson in particular. What is more, there could have been no element of excluding children from adult life in their family. In fact, children probably wove in and out of the discussions and disputations that were a normal feature of this household. Philosophy, science, botany, alchemy, mathematics and politics would have been such concrete elements of daily life that learning was almost by osmosis and a process infinitely more fascinating and stimulating than routine studies in school.

It was probably in the gatherings in her father's house that Sarojini met Dr. Govindarajalu Naidu. That she fell in love with this young man who had just returned from Edinburgh after his medical studies, is brought out in her earliest poems, and the precocious love affair must have been of some concern to her parents. It was not because he was a non-Brahmin, as some have said, but because she was very young and so sensitive that her health was easily and constantly upset. This dogged her all her life leading to a complete break-down when she was in England in 1896.

It was the three years after her matriculation in Madras that she claims were among her happiest years. During this period she was to write of herself:¹

"I don't think I had any special hankering to write poetry as a little child, though I was of a very fanciful and dreamy nature. My training under my father's eye was of a sternly scientific character. He was determined that I should be a great mathematician or a scientist, but the poetic instinct that I have inherited from him and also from my mother (who wrote some lovely Bengali lyrics) proved stronger. One day when I was eleven I was sighing over a sum in Algebra: it

1. Introduction to *The Golden Threshold*, poems by Sarojini Naidu, 1905

wouldn't come right; but instead a poem came to me suddenly. I wrote it down. From that day my 'poetic career' began. At thirteen I wrote a long poem *la Lady of the Lake*—1,300 lines in six days. At thirteen I wrote a drama of 2,000 lines, a full-fledged passionate thing that had begun at the spur of the moment without forethought, just to spite my doctor who said that 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 that the greater part of my reading was done between fourteen and sixteen. I wrote a novel, I wrote fat volumes of journals; I took myself very seriously in those days."

Her eldest daughter, Padmaja, says her mother spoke of herself at that age as "having been a great prig", quoting her girlhood statement uttered with great solemnity, "One more year has passed. What have I done to change the world?" In families this would have been a subject of mirth, for Sarojini discovered, with her usual precocity, that the most serious things must be hidden and that they are most effectively hidden under laughter. She wrote to Arthur Symons: "I have taught myself to be common-place and like everybody else superficial. Everyone thinks I am so nice and cheerful, so 'brave', all the banal things that are so comfortable to be. My mother knows me only as such a tranquil child, but so strongly-willed. A tranquil child!" That she was serious under all the wit she was to develop in later years which earned her the title of "Court Jester to the Mahatma's Little Court", is amply borne out not only in her speech and actions but the deep inner content of her later speeches. Her younger sister, Mrinalini, recalls how, as a girl of barely thirteen, Sarojini would every Sunday go to the house next door and lead the prayers and songs, and once when there was some quarrel in the courtyard she mounted a carriage standing in the driveway and declaimed, "they are fools who dare to be in the right with two or three!" A poetic rendering of the democracy she was to champion in later years. It must have been the effect of such episodes that gave her the realisation that her words could move people whom she could command and lead.

But in those early years what seemed predominant was an ardour for life which expressed itself most aptly in poetry. She wrote the tender lyric *Love* in November 1894.

"I love thee with a love whose face
 Is changeless as the stars of night.
 My love is stronger far than death,
 My love is pure as morning light.
 I ask not if thou lovest me,
 It is enough to me thou art.
 The noblest, dearest, best—to thee
 I yield the treasures of my heart."

This was indicative of her strong but hidden feelings for the man she was to marry three years later. She also wrote a little Persian play called "Meher Muneer" which her father got printed in a local journal. A few copies of this play written in English were sent to friends. Among them was the Nizam of Hyderabad who was so charmed that he made a typically princely gesture. Aware of Sarojini's brilliance and her love of poetry, and perhaps to encourage a young genius, he said to her father that the young lady should tell him what she would like as a royal gift. History does not relate whether the choice was actually hers or not. Arthur Symons in fact states in his preface to her poems that she went to England against her will. All we know is that in 1895 His Exalted Highness endowed her with a scholarship granting her passage to England and £ 300 a year. At the turn of the century, this voyage of a sixteen-year old girl, accompanied by Annie Besant, was only the beginning of the many unusual things Sarojini was to do in her lifetime. In England she was more than fortunate in being the ward of Miss Manning who had done so much for Indian students in London. To Miss Manning's modest rooms¹ came some of the great literary figures of the day, and it was here that Sarojini was to meet Edmund Gosse, the man who put her firmly on the path of becoming a poet. In these cultured circles the small Indian girl in her rich silks, with great eyes that struck everyone with their darkness, depth and intensity, was to blossom and grow. Her nature was used to the atmosphere of cultured talk in salons of great intellects, and here, for the first time, it was she and not her father who was perhaps the centre of attention.

For the moment, however, she was attending lectures at King's College, London, being too young to get admission in Cambridge. But

1. P. C. Roy Chowdhury, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*

she studied for her "Little Go" at Cambridge and was admitted two years later to Girton College. By that time she was a personality in her own right, a friend of Gosse, the literary critic, and a frequent visitor to his home. At Miss Manning's, she had met not only leading literary figures such as William Archer, who did so much to popularise Ibsen in England, but also Heinemann, her future publisher. Those two years before she went to Girton were formative in the extreme. They also explain why she soon got tired of university life and what to her must have seemed a great deal of meaningless discipline both in the way of life and the form of study. Her colleagues were very likely patronising too, and Sarojini could have tolerated such attitudes with ill grace. They wrote of her, "You have a little Indian girl here who does nothing but write poetry." All the diminutives which even Gosse and Arthur Symons tended to use to describe her were unconsciously in these terms. The latter, in his introduction to her first book of poems in 1904, stated: "To those who knew her in England, all the life of the *tiny figure* seemed to concentrate itself in the eyes: they turned towards beauty as the sun-flower turns towards the sun, opening wider and wider until one saw nothing but the eyes. She was dressed always in clinging dresses of Eastern silk, and 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."

Symons was perceptive, uncommonly so, perhaps due to his Welsh and Cornish ancestry, and had his own kind of hyper-sensitivity that was a tingling awareness of life around him. Such people are poets, dreamers, and often ill. Symons who reached great stature as a poet and critic suffered from recurrent attacks of amnesia and was himself a man of great loneliness of spirit. His introduction to Sarojini's Golden Threshold was unusually sensitive and gives us perhaps the only word picture of her as she was in those days. In another passage he says of her: "There was something else hardly personal, something which belonged to a consciousness older than the Christian, which I realised, wondered at and admired, in her passionate tranquility of mind, before which everything mean, trivial and temporary caught fire and burnt away in smoke." How well he summed up the very role she was to play in his country's affairs where, in the face of meanness, triviality and controversies, her wit and wisdom saw to it that differences were "burnt away in smoke". And

he added: "Her body was never without suffering, or her heart without conflict; but neither the body's weakness nor the heart's violence could disturb that fixed contemplation as of a Buddha on his lotus throne."

But if Symons understood her as a person, it was Edmund Gosse who brought pragmatic direction into her life. Their friendship had been fostered by a fellow student who entreated her to show her poems to the celebrated critic. They were given to Gosse with shy reluctance and he wrote bluntly of them: "...they were skilful in form, correct in grammar and blameless in sentiment, but they had the disadvantage of being totally without individuality. They were Western in feeling and imagery, they were founded on reminiscences of Tennyson and Shelley and I am not sure they did not even breathe an atmosphere of Christian resignation!" Gosse's honesty with an ardent young poet was to be decisive. He advised her to consign all she had written in a falsely English vein to the waste paper basket and to start again with the genuine vision of her own land. She did this with immediate and wise docility and promptly found herself. In 1896 she was to write to him:

"I do not dare to trust myself to thank you for what you said on Sunday. You cannot know what these words meant to me, how people always colour my life, how when I am in the very depth of self-disgust and despair—as I often am—they will give me new hope and new courage—no, you cannot know! Poetry is the one thing I love so passionately, so intensely, so absolutely that it is my very life of life—and now you have told me *that I am a poet*—I am a poet! I keep repeating it to myself to try to realise it. Will you let me tell you a little about myself because I want you to know how you have been an influence on my life ever since I was eleven years old.

"Beautiful and romantic and remarkable circumstances in the midst of which I was brought up, there was nothing to directly encourage poetry. Indeed, the strongest influences that were brought to bear upon us were scientific and mathematical. I always loved poetry, but nothing could be further from my mind than trying to write verses myself. I did not tell any one 'about my new adventures' but went on writing. Things began to come with great ease and rapidity, weak and childish no doubt. I have no records left to tell tales! Somehow my father got hold of them and soon everybody got to know and I was of course the most marvellous thing in creation and every-

thing I did henceforth was wonderful, divine, etc. I was really on the way to have my head turned with all that flood of sincere but remarkably blind and injudicious praise and flattery. About this time, I don't know how or why, the name of Edmund Gosse began to be a sort of magical legend to me. Legends were more real than realities then, and in a dim, vague kind of way I began to feel somehow the magical name was to be one of the strongest and most inevitable influences on my life. I went on writing and Hyderabad began to be more and more mad about what I did. Indeed I think nearly all over India I began to be looked upon as a phenomenon. But the more they praised the more disgusted I got with myself and longed, and how passionately, for somebody who could really criticise. I knew my verses were very poor—but I wanted to know whether they had even a germ of promise for better things to come. At last in despair I wrote you a letter (it must have been very childish I suppose). This was when I was about 14 or 15 but I burned it the next day.

“Then I had a long and terrible illness which nearly killed me and I believe for a time half paralysed my faculties. Everything seemed gone except the love of poetry and the longing to do better. Then I came to England. I was about 16 then. I must have been singularly ignorant for sixteen because I know that England to me meant Shelley and Keats who were dead and Edmund Gosse who is alive and certainly made up by far the greater part of England! I think Westminster Abbey and the Thames made up the rest! Well I made up my mind that I must know Edmund Gosse. For the first six months I could not write a single line nor indeed do anything and then suddenly the fountains were unsealed and I began to write, write, write! In three months I wrote, I think, nearly 45 pieces, horrible! But the verses had, I thought, less strength than some of my earlier ones—the first batch I sent you was selections from this extraordinary outburst of bad verse.

“Well, in January I first saw you—the magical legend had become a reality. I was not disappointed. Indeed I shall never forget that day because with one great bound I seemed to wake into a new large life, the life I had always longed for and so long in vain. From that day I seemed to be an altered being. I seemed to have put off childish things and put on garments of new and beautiful hope and ambition,

and I have gone on growing and growing—I feel it—seeing more clearly, feeling more intensely, thinking more deeply, and loving more passionately, more unselfishly, that beautiful spirit of art that has now become dearer than my life's blood to me—and all this I owe to you. I know I have not expressed myself at all well but you will understand me I think and you will not mind my telling you all this.

“As you have been for so long so good an influence in my life I wanted you to go on for ever! I will send you everything I write and you must tell me what you think. I want you to be more severe and exacting than ever, the better I do, because I do not want to outlast the years but the centuries. That is very conceited of me, but is it not worthwhile to aim at the stars though one never gets beyond the mountain top? I don't think I am going to ask you to excuse me for taking up so much of your time, because I cannot go on being grateful to you in silence without your knowing how much cause I have to be grateful to you for. Ever believe me.”.

Academic life in England may have been a failure but Sarojini, returning to India without degrees or diplomas, matured so greatly that the three years away from home had turned her into a poet of genuine stature. This phase was to last until 1917 after which she wrote but rarely. It would seem that poetry nurtured, as it was in the romantic setting of a princely State, where picturesque people from philosophers to beggars came and went through her father's house, fulfilled a strongly romantic element in her spirit which was later absorbed in the stirring mission of fighting for India's freedom.

As P. E. Dastoor was to write of her, she was “every inch a woman and played a role in the nation's affairs few men can play, and as a weaver of exquisite garlands of songs was drawn into the vortex of tremendous national struggle.”

This romanticism was never more evident than in those early poems written at Girton. Through them move all the images of love, peace and truth and the yearning for love. For Sarojini missed her home, the fragrance and vivid colours of her homeland and perhaps, most of all, the man to whom she had given her heart. At the end of three years she became seriously ill and went to Switzerland and Italy to recover. From there her letters were full of ecstatic references to Italy's historic grandeurs;

"Is this a country of men or of gods? Is this earth or heaven?" While reality was less exalted, the impact of this visit came out many years later in her speeches quoting the high deeds of Garibaldi which had deeply stirred her patriotic nature.

In September 1898, Sarojini returned to her homeland and in December of the same year married Dr. Naidu, then a Major in charge of the Medical Services of His Highness the Nizam's Imperial Service Troops. Curiously enough, it was Sarojini's father whose reformist zeal had introduced Keshab Chandra Sen's Brahma Marriages Bill, which became an Act in 1822, into Hyderabad. This Bill, designed to overcome caste barriers, permitted a civil marriage between Indians, and Sarojini's marriage was one of the first of such marriages. She was to write to Edmund Gosse, "...when my mother held a great reception for Mohammedan ladies, the singing women sang a beautiful selection of His Highness's ghazals." Since she was married in Madras, with Pandit Veerasalingam Pantulu Guru¹ officiating as Minister in the Brahma ceremony, her mother, to celebrate her wedding, arranged a function in Hyderabad which was strictly for women friends in *purdah*. All of this aptly brought out the mingling of old and new which is so much a part of Indian life.

Living in a rented house, Sarojini, for all her frail health, had four children by 1903. No mother could have written a more charming poem about her children than the one she dedicated to Jayasurya, aged four, Padmaja, aged three, Ranadheera, aged two, and Lilamani, aged one. They contain the exuberance of a mother's love that wishes for her children all the joys and triumphs that life can offer. Significantly enough, each of the eight-line verses brings out qualities in the children that she might have sensed in their baby natures. Of Jayasurya she wrote: "Golden sun of victory born, in my life's unclouded morn", and wishes that he will be "sun of song and liberty". For Padmaja she wrote: "Lotus-maiden may you be, fragrant of all ecstasy." Of Ranadheera: "Lord of Battle, may you be, Lord of Love and Chivalry." And of Lilamani: "Living jewel may you be, laughter-bound and sorrow-free."

From all accounts the Naidu household was very much "laughter-bound and sorrow-free". Not only were there children but animals too,

1. *Sarojini Naidu* by Padmini Sen Gupta. Asia Publishing House, 1966

horses and a little trap, cats and birds which over the years were given names as whimsical as Nicholas Nicobar, Dik Dik Mah Jong and Lady Linka Lupin, and at one time a tiger and a lion cub. Jokes were constant, wit and repartee and tales galore, with every episode spiced and made infinitely amusing. Talking of her Brahma Samaj marriage ceremony in Madras which used Christian marriage vows, Sarojini has related how when asked "Wilt thou take this man for your lawful wedded husband?" she replied, "I wilt".

There are few descriptions of her life at that time except a long letter to Edmund Gosse in December 1903 from Hyderabad. He had continued to be her mentor and she turned to him for judgement on her poetry. This was a period of fulfilment of her romantic nature, when the joys of young wifehood and motherhood joined with seeing India with fresh eyes. She wrote:

"I am sending for your severest criticism five little poems I wrote last week—the only poems of the year. The first two verses of *Honey Child* were written as you know seven years ago. The little *Henna Song* pleases me very much—*Henna* is an immemorial and national institution and it is customary for all girls and married women to stain their palm and finger nails and feet with bright red juice of henna leaves. It symbolises gladness and festivity.

"The Ode to Nizam was presented to him two days ago at the great *darbar* held in honour of the *Ramzan* feast, with a superb translation in Urdu verse by a well-known Mohammedan poet. He took the plain robe of my English verse as it were, and embroidered it with all the golden jewels of eastern eloquence and imagery. I should never dream, of course, of going in the midst of five hundred belted courtiers to the Nizam's Court. It would be the scandal of India. As it is I suppose it is something quite novel in the annals of Indian tradition for a woman to present a poem to a sovereign in full *darbar*. It savours almost of the forbidden. The Court of the Nizam is the only true eastern Court left in India; it still retains all the barbaric splendour that recalls the stories of the *Arabian Nights* and I think among all the princes of India you cannot find a figure more picturesque, more brilliant and, alas, more pathetic than the Nizam of Hyderabad. He affects all the dazzling caprices and follies of a potentate to hide the real loneliness of a poet. Under happier circumstances of race

and opportunity he would have been a leader among men. But now he is merely the eastern Hamlet. His songs were exquisite and moving, combining all the fluid mysticism and poignant human simplicity of Burns and the delicate art and melody of Tennyson. They are sung in all his four capitals alike by courtier and peasant and they appeal equally to the poor. I am sorry I have nothing better to send you than these little poems but I have been very ill throughout the year, hardly leaving my bed for more than a week or two at a time. Next year if the Gods will but permit me a few holidays now and then from 'my piece-meal illnesses' I mean to recreate with all the golden bricks and mortar of verse the dead dramas and legends and passionate beauties of the Nizam's dominions."

The Hyderabad she had taken for granted as a child had now become, through her poet's eyes, splendid and filled with the colour of history and the magic of discovery.

To Arthur Symons she wrote: "Do you know I have some very beautiful poems floating in the air and if the Gods are kind I shall cast my soul like a net and capture them this year. If the Gods are kind and grant me a little measure of health. It is all I need to make my life perfect, for the 'spirit of Delight' that Shelley wrote, dwells in my little home; it is full of the music of birds in the garden and children in the long arched verandah." But for all the joy, beneath it lay this constant reminder of the fragility of life. Her sister said of her that illness made her think a great deal about death and she often spoke as though she had been on the brink of it. It is possible, as M.P. Sarangapani wrote in the *Modern Review* in 1926, that she wondered perhaps if she was to be cut off in the prime of life. That was the doubt that lingered in her mind; that was the cause of her despondency and deep-rooted pessimism. Years before, she had written to Arthur Symons: "I too have learned the subtle philosophy of living from moment to moment. Yes, it is a subtle philosophy, though it appears to be merely an epicurean doctrine 'eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die'. I have gone through so many yesterdays when I strove with death that I have realised to its full the wisdom of that sentence; and it is to me not a figure of speech but a literal fact. Any tomorrow I might die."

Symons had also sensed that she was always "alone". It was true. By herself the wells of gladness seemed to run dry, leaving her sad and thoughtful. Her philosophy was indeed liberal and so she became a fount of energy and joy for others, pouring her soul into a sick child, a person in need or trouble and becoming later the source of strength and inspiration in jail when Kasturba died and Gandhiji was afflicted.

Song of the balangwan-beans

I

Lightly, O lightly we hear her along,
She sways like a flower in the mid of our Song,
She skims like a bird on the foam of a stream,
She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream.
Gaily, O gaily we glide and we sing,
We hear her along like a pearl on a string.

II

Softly, O softly we hear her along,
She hangs like a star in the dew of our Song,
She springs like a beam on the bow of the tide,
She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride.
Lightly, O lightly we glide and we sing,
We hear her along like a pearl on a string.

Sarofine Nacido

7th August 1903.

New Horizons

IN THE EARLY years poetry was the main focus of Sarojini Naidu's intellectual life; the centre of her inner being. This was understandable, living as she did in the heart of the finest Islamic culture; for Hyderabad had retained all the glamour and values of princely Persia and its ruling Prince was a poet of great distinction. Here, as in the past in Islamic societies, poets were the conscience and sensitive heart-strings of the people. They used the technique of versifying to explore the depths of the soul and emotions, all of which was closely akin to the Bhakti element of the Hindu search for higher consciousness. Poetry to them was linked also with song and played a great role in community life as the *mushaira* of today continues to do in a rather limited way. Poets could do no wrong; their vision was acclaimed; their wisdom and insight became the catchwords of the people. It is not surprising that all this should sub-consciously affect her choice of poetry as the vehicle for her deep and passionate emotions, and under the influence of the English language and the poets of another land, she began to write her colourful, melodious verse.

Edmund Gosse put his finger exactly on the reason why her early work was stilted, derivative and without life when he told her to write of what she knew. Her return from England to everything—love, happiness, family, homeland—was also a key that unlocked the door to her inner self. It was then that her rich treasure-house of words—for she revelled in the richness of words for their own sake and their own music—led her to write some of the loveliest lyrics in the language. At times she could be so carried away by words, however, that meaning itself was lost, such as in her celebrated poem on Indian dancers:

Song of the balangwan. beams

I

Lightly. O lightly we hear her along.
She sways like a flower in the mud of our Song.
She skims like a bud on the foam of a stream.
She floats like a laugh from the lips of a dream.
Gaily. O gaily we glide and we sing.
We hear her along like a pearl on a string.

II

Softly. O softly we hear her along.
She hangs like a star in the dew of our Song.
She springs like a beam on the bow of the tide.
She falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride.
Lightly. O lightly we glide and we sing.
We hear her along like a pearl on a string.

Sarome Naeue

7th August 1903.

New Horizons

IN THE EARLY years poetry was the main focus of Sarojini Naidu's intellectual life; the centre of her inner being. This was understandable, living as she did in the heart of the finest Islamic culture; for Hyderabad had retained all the glamour and values of princely Persia and its ruling Prince was a poet of great distinction. Here, as in the past in Islamic societies, poets were the conscience and sensitive heart-strings of the people. They used the technique of versifying to explore the depths of the soul and emotions, all of which was closely akin to the Bhakti element of the Hindu search for higher consciousness. Poetry to them was linked also with song and played a great role in community life as the *mushaira* of today continues to do in a rather limited way. Poets could do no wrong; their vision was acclaimed; their wisdom and insight became the catchwords of the people. It is not surprising that all this should sub-consciously affect her choice of poetry as the vehicle for her deep and passionate emotions, and under the influence of the English language and the poets of another land, she began to write her colourful, melodious verse.

Edmund Gosse put his finger exactly on the reason why her early work was stilted, derivative and without life when he told her to write of what she knew. Her return from England to everything—love, happiness, family, homeland—was also a key that unlocked the door to her inner self. It was then that her rich treasure-house of words—for she revelled in the richness of words for their own sake and their own music—led her to write some of the loveliest lyrics in the language. At times she could be so carried away by words, however, that meaning itself was lost, such as in her celebrated poem on Indian dancers:

Eyes ravished with rapture, celestially panting,
 What passionate bosoms aflaming with fire
 Drink deep of the hush of the hyacinth heavens
 that glimmer around them in fountains of light,
 O wild and entrancing the strain of keen music
 that cleaveth the stars like a wail of desire,
 And beautiful dancers with houri-like faces bewitch
 the voluptuous watches of night.

This extraordinary dimension which she was able to give to words leapt, in later years, from poetry to such oratory that audiences were caught, swept away, bewitched and so bemused that they often ended up without knowing what it was that she had actually said.

But if the fountain of dazzling words continued to her last days, her published writings were actually slender. *The Golden Threshold* was published in 1905 and became a best-seller in England, earning reviews of great acclaim from all the leading journals and literary critics. In 1912, William Heineman published *The Bird of Time* and in 1917 *The Broken Wing*. There had been, of course, early writings when she was a girl, some of which were published in local papers. In the archives of the National Library, Calcutta, are some of her earliest poems dated October 3, 1896, and include "Traveller's Song" written when she was thirteen, a verse on her own birthday when she was fourteen, and poems written in Hyderabad and at the summer holiday resort of Shorapur, near Hyderabad, which reveal her budding love for her future husband. In a prose poem "Nilambuja" she wove a fantasy of lush, eloquent, bejewelled prose which described her own dream world set in princely romance and splendour. But the dreamer is alone and apart. Here was the lyric child who saw the world with clarity and fore told in poetic language her own future.

Yet must I go where the loud world beckons,
 And the urgent drum beat of destiny calls,
 Far from your white domes luminous slumber,
 Far from the dream of your forest walls,
 Into the strife of the throng and the tumult
 The war of sweet love against folly and wrong.....

"Nilambuja" was indeed a vision of girlhood with all the awareness

that delight, comfort and beauty were life; but it was not enough. In the introduction of her collected poems published many years later under the title *The Sceptred Flute*, Joseph Auslander wrote: "for this lady, who is conceded to be the greatest living poet of India, is, in spite of the apparent contradiction, a passionate philosopher. From first to last, she is the lyric poet, the singer of songs. Like Keats, she has suffered ill health almost all of her life. We detect this in a certain strange feverishness of texture. Her poems flush. We touch heat...If she sings as the birds do, she sings out of a darker passion. Her song is not ephemeral. For that matter neither is the bird's song. It is no more transitory than truth and her bird music was always true. She never writes for the mere sake of writing. There is no artifice in her poetry. She sings from the heart."

The titles of her three volumes of verse were regarded by Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer who had known her since her school days in Madras to be of significance. According to him, the first volume, *The Golden Threshold*, was linked to her happy domestic phase, the second *Bird of Time* to her developing phase when the great noble ideals of humanity began to move her directly and she started work for the emancipation of women. The last, *The Broken Wing*, was the saga of her emotions. It was during this phase that her passionate devotion to the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity centered itself first on Gokhale and later on Mohammad Ali Jinnah whom she was to acclaim in writing as the "ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity."

Her poem in response to Gokhale's question, "why should a song-bird like you have a broken wing?", significantly underlines the triumph of her spirit, for the poems that follow are with few exceptions songs of life, death and love.

Question: The great dawn breaks, the mournful night is past,
 From her deep age-long sleep she wakes at last !
 Sweet and long-slumbering buds of gladness ope
 Fresh lips to the returning winds of hope
 Our eager hearts renew their radiant flight
 Towards the glory of renascent light
 Life and our land await their destined Spring
 Song-bird, why does *thou* bear a broken wing?

Answer: Shall Spring that wakes mine ancient land again
 Call to my wild and suffering heart in vain?
 Or Fate's blind arrows still the pulsing note
 Of my far-reaching, frail, unconquered throat?
 Or a weak bleeding pinion daunt or tire
 My flight to the high realms of my desire?
 Behold I rise to meet the destined spring
 And scale the stars upon my broken wing!

In some ways it is fortunate that her poetry was published before the birth of modern poetry, with its harsh emphasis on truth without philosophy and meaning without lyricism. Her era was that of the sonnet with its disciplines of form, the ode with its call to higher thought and the small gem of verse with its emphasis upon imagery and colour. It has been said she wrote at a time when English poetry had touched¹ the rock-bottom of sentimentality and technical poverty and it is certain that her gem-like use of words would at a time like that have touched many chords, particularly in England, not only because they had intrinsic merit but because they came from a very young woman from a very old country. She was convinced, and told the author so herself in 1946, that modern poetry had no future and the trend would inevitably return to the disciplines and beauty of the metrical form of lyrics. Such a statement did not imply that she had greater prescience about the future of poetry than others, but that she sincerely believed modern permissiveness and lack of form to be a passing fad. What is more, like many people of her generation who find modern art hideous simply because it is not visually beautiful, so too did she feel that modern poetry honestly lacked her concepts of beauty.

If this were studied more deeply it is very likely that the real reason for her distaste of modern forms was something much closer to her intrinsic nature. In this type of poetry there is truth perhaps, but no exaltation of spirit. What rings through many of her poems is this heroic transformation of the mere mortal into a divinely possessed person translated into higher realms such as in her "Ode to India".

Rise Mother, rise, regenerate from thy gloom,
 And like a bride high-mated from the spheres,
 Beget new glories from thine ageless womb.

1. Nissim Ezekial, P. E. Dastoor, *Sarojini Naidu*, Rao and Raghavan, Mysore

Thy future calls thee with a manifold sound
To crescent honours, splendours, victories vast;
Waken, O slumbering Mother, and be crowned,
Who once wert Empress of the sovereign past.

It is certainly this aspect of her nature that took her into the service of her country, first through the redress of ancient wrongs which inevitably concentrated upon the lot of Indian women, and later to active political and revolutionary life.

It was only in the lyric period, however, from the time of her marriage in 1898 till her emergence into full-fledged national life in 1915 that Sarojini Naidu was whole-heartedly wife, mother and poet.

At the turn of the century, life in high-born families in Hyderabad was placid and revolved around cultured exchanges between people in their own homes, with women leading a separate life. Weddings and other ceremonies might bring them together, or the occasional tea party, but care of home, household, children and the clan was their major preoccupation. For festive days very elaborate saris and jewellery were mandatory, and Sarojini adored beautiful jewels and clothes as much as any other woman. In fact, colour permeates all she wrote, but she was herself an equal devotee of colour, loving rich silks and the golden chains, shoulder brooch and bangles—so favoured in Bengal. Later, twin tiger claws mounted on a gold pendant and chain were a permanent feature of her jewellery, and in a photograph taken of her in her sick bed in 1918 she is decked with ear-rings, necklace and bangles. There is also a picture of her as a girl in a bustled dress with long frilly sleeves, her brothers in velvet suits and long white stockings and boots, and her mother in a dainty sari with Chinese embroidered border and ivory bangles. Her father always wore the Hyderabad dress, and with his beard and Nizam turban—the *Dastar*—looked a perfect Muslim gentleman.

Others who have described the Chattopadhyaya household, and later that of the Naidus, always talk of luxury and opulence, though a friend who knew them very well more perceptively stated that they were “simple, generous and cultured”. If this had not been true, it is doubtful whether Sarojini could have endured what proved to be decades of camp life, moving from place to place, from hotels to huts, and even to jails with equal ease, bringing to each an aura of civilised, cultured sophistication.

But when she was in her own house, or that of a friend whose home she considered her own, no time was lost for marvellous dishes to be created for a well-laden table, and all round her were the tasteful appointments, from flowers to carved blackwood furniture, of a woman who loves a home filled with beautiful things.

Womanlike, there was a struggle too in her inner spirit between her attachment to these purely feminine aspects of life, the comfort, security and fun, but the drive of energy within her never left her wholly at peace. While she revelled in meeting people, gossiping and telling stories in great detail about this person or that, interlarding her tales with her boisterous chuckle and laugh (something she retained to the end of her life); another side of her was the reformer committed totally to work outside the home. And in the end this life claimed her. Sir C. P. Ramaswami Iyer believed that she was essentially a dreamer, but between 1910 and 1916 she reached the decisive point, whose dreams were translated into action and from that time till her full involvement in the political struggle she was to spend less and less time in her home in Hyderabad, and eventually barely twenty days in the year.

To begin with, the reformist aspect of her nature took the form of involvement in the lot of women. With her gift for trenchant language, she once, in an early speech, called the joint family system "a domestic rat".

But there is no record of all the speeches of Sarojini Naidu. Even if there were, her eldest daughter contends, almost none would really reflect the actuality of her words. The combination of rich language, fiery delivery, wit and pathos that, as a born orator, she could weave into structured form filled with imagery was always more than a mere reporter or listener could absorb. Yet in the few speeches that have been captured and imprisoned in print, the idealism and passion articulated in exquisite style pour out of her mouth as effortlessly and without notes as a waterfall on a high mountain. Of her contemporaries only Annie Besant had this same electrifying gift.

In a speech in Madras in 1903, she declaimed:

"Having travelled, having conceived, having hoped, having enlarged my love, having widened my sympathies, having come into contact with different races, different communities, different religions, different civilizations, friends, my vision is clear. I have no pre-

judice of race, creed, caste or colour. ...Until you students have acquired and mastered that spirit of brotherhood, do not believe it possible that you will ever cease to be sectarian...if I may use such a word... that you will ever be national!"

This early speech on unity was to be the grace note of her entire career.

In another speech to the Social Conference in Madras, where unity was again the main theme, she stated that she hoped that in ten years the resolutions they were passing on human brotherhood and integration in society would not be needed, and that the whole country would be one. With considerable insight she advised young people to travel, to come into contact with men and minds rather than depend upon books and the written word. She put her finger on the basic reason for disunity and discord, for in India tolerance may have been an accepted part of religious doctrine, but each community lived in isolation, and the nation was mentally separated from other nations. Decades later, this very isolationism of normal social life and attitudes was to be the root cause of separatism, civil strife and partition of the country. She said: "I say it is not your pride that you are a Madrasi, it is not your pride that you are a Brahmin, it is not your pride that you belong to South India, it is not your pride that you are a Hindu, but that it is your pride that you are an Indian. But this must transcend even national borders and extend to humanity, because if ideals be only for the prosperity of your country, it would end where it began, by being a profit to your own community and very probably to your own self." At the age of twenty-four, she thus described, with prophetic insight, the very plight her beloved country was to suffer in the narrow chauvinism and provincialism that was to grip the people after Independence in 1947.

During the year 1902, Sarojini travelled to Calcutta for meetings, and in Bombay addressed large crowds and ladies' meetings, dwelt on social disabilities of women, child marriage and widow remarriage, polygamy and women's education. She passionately exhorted women to come out of seclusion, to work and to take up careers. With the trammels of tradition to bind them, she took women to task for ignoring the poverty and misery around them, the sick in hospitals, the neglect of children, the misery of orphans and the handicapped. For she saw with complete clarity that the very isolationism of religious creeds which permitted the existence of other creeds did not foster any element of

ordinary human concern for the troubles and miseries of others. Herself "a Hindu very much at home in her Muslim environment, a Brahmin bound by ties of love and marriage to a non-Brahmin, she was a citizen of the world who yielded to none in her attachment to the motherland."¹ The bulk of her audiences, however, were locked in their limited worlds, and it was the dynamism of her personality, the shock of her words, combined with a pervading love and humanity making these words heeded and acceptable, that in great measure contributed to her success as a pioneer in creating the movement for women's emancipation in India.

It is not as though she were the first, for there were other great women reformers like Pandita Ramabai, Dr. Mrs. Muttalakshmi Reddy, Ramabai Ranade, but she had the rare gift of touching the heart of listeners in such measure that they gave themselves to her and were influenced. If one analyses the work she did in her lifetime, it is surprising to find that she did not perhaps have the organisational abilities of the women of the thirties and forties, but she had the unique gift to inspire others to action. Her contribution was almost entirely based upon speeches and the vision of an exalted and truly universal mind. Her frank and lucid analysis of social ills, especially in regard to women, generated a leadership with direction and purpose that was to start the emancipation of women, centered as it was later in the organisation of the All India Women's Conference.

The most significant event of these early years was her meeting with Gopal Krishna Gokhale. When he died in 1915, she wrote a touching tribute "Gokhale the Man" which was published in the *Bombay Chronicle*, in which she describes many significant episodes.

"One morning, a little despondent and sick at heart about national affairs in general, Gokhale suddenly asked me, 'What is your outlook for India?' 'One of hope', I replied. 'What is your vision of the immediate future?' 'Hindu-Muslim unity in less than five years,' I told him with joyous conviction. 'Child', he said, with a note of yearning sadness in his voice, 'You are a poet, but you hope too much. It will not come in your lifetime or in mine. But keep your faith and wish if you can.'

".....; it was my unique privilege to attend and address the now historic sessions of the Muslim League which met in Lucknow on

1. P. E. Dastoor—*Sarojini Naidu*, Rao and Raghavan, Mysore

the 22nd March (1913) to adopt a new constitution which sounded the keynote of loyal co-operation with the sister community in all matters of national welfare and progress.....I found the world famous leader of the Indian National Congress.....busy scanning the journals that were full of comments and criticisms of the Muslim League and its new ideals. 'Oh', he cried with outstretched hands when he saw me, 'have you come to tell me that your vision was true'!

"One day in London in 1913 I broached the subject of a delicate mission which I had undertaken on behalf of the London Indian Association, a new student organisation that had been only a few weeks previously founded by Mr. M. A. Jinnah with the active and eager support of Indian students in London. It was their earnest endeavour to provide a permanent centre to focus the scattered student life in London and to build up such staunch traditions of co-operation and fellowship that this young association might eventually grow into a perfect model of the federated India of the future, the India of their dreams; and it was their ardent desire to start on their new mission of service with a word of sympathy and blessing from their incomparable friend and servant of India.

"At first a firm refusal to my request backed by the strict prohibition of his doctors of all undue strain and fatigue somewhat daunted me. But I had a little rashly pledged my word that he would speak, and I redoubled my persuasion. 'You not only defy all laws of health yourself', he grumbled 'but incite me also to disobedience and revolt'. 'Besides', and his eyes flashed for a moment, 'what right had you to pledge your word for me?' 'The right', I told him, 'to demand from you at all costs a message of hope for the young generation'.

"A few days later, on the 2nd August, 1913, he delivered a magnificent inaugural address at Caxton Hall in the presence of a large and enthusiastic audience of students, and set before them the sublime lessons of patriotism and self-sacrifice which he alone so signally, among the men of his generation, was competent to teach with authority and grace."

She writes further on of another episode that left its mark on her life: ".....we sat quietly in the gathering twilight till his golden voice, stirred by some deep emotion broke the silence with golden words of

counsel and admonition, so grand and so solemn, and so inspiring, that they have never ceased to thrill me. He spoke of the unequalled happiness and privilege of service for India. 'Stand here with me', he said, 'with the stars and 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 Poet, see visions from the hill tops and spread abroad the message of hope to the toilers in the valleys'."

To the modern young mind such a scene might be considered melodramatic, yet at this clarion call to service her mind reacted with the full force of her idealistic ardour. Here was the altar at which she could worship, the noble cause to which she could give herself body and soul, and the majestic personality whose leadership she could accept. It is little wonder that her life of poetry and dreaming receded and, in its place, a new Sarojini began to emerge.

According to her, she was only twenty-two when she started making speeches and by 1905 had plunged into political life denouncing foreign rule and championing Hindu-Muslim unity. When Lord Curzon decided on partition of Bengal, a huge public meeting of Calcutta's citizens launched the first organised civil disobedience movement with boycott of foreign goods. Indian brotherhood was marked by the symbolic tying of *rakhis*, binding each other to loyal service to the motherland. Students left schools and universities with the cry that they were being trained as slaves for British overlordship. At the Indian National Congress in 1906, Sarojini's oratory coupled with her youthful looks staggered audiences. She seems to have had complete confidence even at that early age, jumping down from the platform after delivering an impassioned speech and joining the women in singing patriotic songs. Her presence at students' conferences which started at this time had a tremendous impact on youth, and she spoke at many such meetings in Benares, Calcutta and Bihar. From the beginning she addressed these public meetings along with the great leaders of the day such as Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Surendranath Banerjee, M. A. Jinnah, Dadabhai Naoroji, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bal Gangadhar Tilak.¹

1. Autobiography of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Asia Publishing House, 1957

One of the lesser known speeches she made was in 1906 at the Theistic Conference held in Calcutta in 1906. While she stressed the personal element in spiritual life, she pointed out that the spirit was India's salvation and because of it, India had survived, unlike Greece and Rome whose civilisations had perished. What was perhaps more significant was her emphasis upon unity as demonstrated in all of the great religious heritages of India, a theme which was to be the essence of her contribution as a national leader.

In 1906, at the Indian Social Conference on the Education of Women in Calcutta, her amendment substituting "Indian" for "Hindu" was prompted by the need to establish firmly the unity that did not require caste, creed or religion as definition. On the subject of "female education", she declaimed, "India, of all places, which at the beginning of the first century was already a great civilisation, had contributed to the world's progress radiant examples of women of the highest genius and widest culture. But by some irony of evolution the paradox stands to our shame. It is time for us to consider how best we can remove such a reproach, how we can achieve something more fruitful than the passing of empty resolutions in favour of female education from year to year?" She felt that the whole movement of striving for a common national ideal should be centred round the "woman question". She regretted the fact that there was not even "unanimous acceptance" of the fact that the education of women was essential.¹ With indignation, she said, "Does one man dare to deprive another of his birthright to God's pure air which nourishes his body? How then shall a man dare to deprive a human soul of its immemorial inheritance of liberty and life? And yet my friends, man has so argued in the case of Indian woman. That is why you men of India are what you are; because your fathers, in depriving your mothers of the immemorial birthright, have robbed you, their sons, of your just inheritance. Therefore I charge you to restore to your women their ancient rights, for I have said it is we and not you, who are the real nation builders, and without our active co-operation at all points of progress all your congresses and conferences are in vain."

Sarojini spent a good deal of time in Calcutta during those years when her father characteristically championed the reform movement of the

1. Padmini Sen Gupta, *Sarojini Naidu*

Brahmo Samaj with the intellectual giants of Bengal: Tagore, C. R. Das and Keshab Chandra Sen. Friends recall the happy family gatherings and Sarojini sitting in the garden surrounded by nieces and nephews and friends of these families, for here too she lived quite naturally in the atmosphere of the high purpose of these pioneers and reformers. In fact, the age could be called an age of reform in which the new generation educated in Western ways began to examine ancient Indian beliefs and practices objectively and, in so doing, introduced a new humanism and universalism into the lives of fellow citizens. It was a very different atmosphere to the national objectives of the forties and fifties when politicians, with their ruthless imperatives of satisfying and wooing the voter, introduced an absence of idealism painful in the extreme to the humanists of that era.

Sarojini was nurtured from her earliest years in this rarefied air and it is not surprising that in her declining years, in fact all through her political career, she was to be pained and disheartened by what could only be considered a terrible betrayal of decent human values. In her ebullience, she naturally rode each storm with zest and courage and the kind of soaring confidence that made her exclaim to Gokhale that they would see Hindu-Muslim unity in five years. But time and again there would be a return to despair and perhaps a repetition of her childhood cry "what have I done to change the world?"

With the stresses and strains of her emergence into active public life and the inevitable inner conflict that faces any woman who dearly loves her family, Sarojini's health broke down again in 1913 and she sailed for England. By that time her friendship with Gokhale had ripened into a relationship of great depth and meaning. His missionary zeal which had built up the selfless work of the Servants of India Society impressed upon this ardent young woman a sense of national service that made it possible to make the difficult decision to enter public life. Her talents of oratory were so effective in moving audiences that it is not surprising that Gokhale's instant recognition of her powers would affect her profoundly. He was essentially a spiritual teacher and the logical successor to her father in influencing her life. As her old friend, C. P. Ramaswami Iyer was to tell the author a month before he died at the age of ninety: "Sarojini's nature demanded a guru. The first influence of profound importace on her life was that of her father. The second

that of Gokhale, with his call to service. The third, Jinnah, whose nationalism inspired her to believe that Hindu-Muslim unity was a reality. It was only when she finally capitulated wholly to the call of Gandhiji that she gave herself up with total devotion to him and all he stood for. It went to such length that she even renounced her rich saris and jewels and started wearing khadi and this she maintained to the end of her days. Gandhiji's spiritual force was such that, after some struggle, she surrendered completely. She teased him as no one else did, but at the same time recognised his leadership as absolute."

Kamladevi, who married Sarojini's brother, Harin, described Gandhiji as someone "who was so sincere; this was the magnetic force which drew everyone to him. He believed implicitly in his intuition and he could not argue nor was he sharp enough to outwit people, but his faith was so great that it had an enormous impact on all who came near him. He not only inspired, but made you feel you could trust him completely." This impact was so great—Gandhiji's impact upon Sarojini—that she never gave him cause to doubt her devotion, and he was to entrust her later with some of the greatest national responsibilities during the height of the freedom struggle.

Curiously enough, Gandhiji was to say of both Gokhale and Sarojini that they were like the Ganges. Of Gokhale, after their first meeting, he remarked: "He gave me an affectionate welcome, and his manner immediately won my heart. Sir Pherozshah (Mehta) had seemed to me like the Himalaya, the Lokamanya (Tilak) like the ocean, but Gokhale was the Ganges. The Himalaya was unscaleable, and one could not easily launch forth on the sea, but the Ganges invited one to its bosom."

In a letter to Mr. Gokhale dated April 18, 1913 she wrote:

"This is just a line to bid you god-speed and wish you speedy recovery. I should like so much to see you before your departure but I trust we should soon meet in Europe as my doctors have ordered me off forthwith. They say I am ill and I suppose I must be. Mr. Jinnah is travelling with you, one of the reasons I believe for his doing so is to discuss freely and fully with you problems that are as dear to him as to you and, if I may add, to me. Please have confidence in my judgement and conviction—about him—and use your great influence to make him realise that he is the man for whom great work is waiting. I believe, if you confer together you will give him the

confidence he lacks and you will gain a new hope and a colleague uniformly worth having. *You are the only two men in whom I have faith* and you do me the honour to believe that my woman instinct and poet's vision help me to foresee—clearly almost to certainty.”

But it was Gopal Krishna Gokhale who was the guiding spirit of her life from 1902 to his death in 1915. “An acquaintance begun on such a happy note of sympathy grew and ripened at last into a close and lovely comradeship which I counted among the crowning honours of my life.” Sarojini wrote. “And though it was not without its poignant moments of brief and bitter estrangement, our friendship was always radiant both with the joy of spiritual refreshment and the quickening challenge of intellectual discussion and dissent.” Through these crowded years before she sailed for England in 1912, Sarojini maintained a tender friendship with Gokhale, based upon their common concern for Hindu-Muslim unity and national freedom but, added to this, was that rare friendship sometimes found in India where a man who is venerated for his high ideals and exemplary life attracts the close relationship of a young woman who fulfils his need for spiritual kinship as much as their common identity of high purpose. She wrote: “It was to me a valuable lesson in human psychology to study the secret of this rich and paradoxical nature with his unrivalled gifts of political analysis and synthesis, his flawless and relentless mastery and use of the consummate logic of co-ordinated facts and figures, his courteous-but inexorable candour in opposition, his patient dignity and courage in honourable compromise, the breadth and restraint, the vigour and veracity of his far-reaching statesmanship, the lofty simplicities and sacrifices of his daily life.” And of this friend whose friendship she held in such high esteem, a relationship accepted by his family as much as hers, she spoke of “his impassioned hunger for human kinship and affection in all the tumult and longing, the agony of doubt and ecstasy of faith of the born idealist, perpetually seeking some unchanging reality in a world full of shifting delusions and despair.”

Gopal Krishna Gokhale was born at Kutluk, a small village in Ratnagiri district, and came from the line of Chitpawan Brahmins. His early years were shadowed by tragedy and poverty, having lost his father when he was thirteen. But for the generosity of his elder brother, he would have had to give up his studies. As a student he led a frugal

existence, cooking his own meals and saving kerosene by reading under the street lamp. He was quiet and industrious and ambitious but his scholastic record was not particularly distinguished, though he gave early evidence of a prodigiously retentive memory. It was in his college days that his intellectual powers were to unfold. He thought of taking the ICS examination or joining the Engineering College in Bombay. For a year he attended the law classes in Bombay and might have ended up as a lawyer or a judge. But then, in 1885, he took a step which seemed almost insane to his family; he became a teacher on the paltry sum of Rs. 35 per month in Poona's New English School run by a band of young patriots who called themselves the Indian Jesuits. His work with Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Gopal Ganesh Agarkar in the New English School led, in due course, to the establishment of the Deccan Education Society of which Gokhale became a Life Member, and at twenty he began to teach at the Fergusson College, Poona. Shortly after, in 1890, he met the patriot Ranade and became the Secretary of the Sarvajanik Sabha, one of the foremost political associations of Western India, and the Editor of its quarterly journal. This groundwork of Gokhale's political career, in close association with Ranade, drew him into bitter controversy over issues of social reform which, in 1890, rent the public life of Poona. Early in 1897, Ranade sent Gokhale to London to appear before the Royal Commission where his written evidence with its solid statistical material was a masterly exposition of the Indian case. In 1899 he entered the Bombay Council and in 1901, the Imperial Council in Delhi. This was the forum where he showed his talent to the best advantage. His first speech, in 1902, on the Budget marked him out as the most outstanding member of the Imperial Council. Gokhale's emergence as a national leader in 1905 coincided with a crisis in the Indian National Congress. It also coincided with the return to power of the British Liberal Party and the appointment of Morley as Secretary of State for India. During the next three years, whenever proposals of constitutional reform were on the anvil, Gokhale visited England and explained the Indian point of view to the Secretary of State. But when the Morley-Minto Reforms finally took shape Gokhale's influence was less than what was assumed at the time though his advocacy outside the Council Chamber was noteworthy. From 1910 onwards Gokhale did his best to make the Morley-Minto Reforms a success and also supported Mahatma

Gandhi in the struggle on behalf of the Indian community in South Africa, the abolition of the indenture system, and the extension of elementary education.

In 1913-14, in the final phase of the Indian struggle in South Africa which culminated in the Gandhi-Smuts Pact, Gokhale played a crucial role behind the scenes as adviser to Mahatma Gandhi as well as to the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge. The strain of these anxious months, combined with his long work on the Royal Commission, helped finally to break a constitution already undermined by diabetes and long years of incessant toil. On February 19, 1915, at the age of 48, Gokhale died. Lord Curzon, whose policies Gokhale had strongly assailed, paid the highest tribute to him when he told the House of Lords that he had never met a man of any nationality more gifted with parliamentary capacity. Mr. Gokhale, he said, would have obtained a position of distinction in any Parliament in the world.

Gokhale's politics were those of Dadabhai Naoroji, W. C. Bonnerji, Hume, Wedderburn, Badduruddin Tyabji, Dinsha Wacha and Surendranath Banerjea. These Founding Fathers of the Indian National Congress had greater vision, courage, and political acumen than later generations have given them credit for. Certainly, Sarojini Naidu also belonged temperamentally to this band of idealists and not to the later politicians, for she like Gokhale was essentially a liberal and a humanist.

Over the years Gokhale had sent Sarojini constant notes of warm approval of her speeches or actions and often advice and admonition. He had been constantly concerned about her health and, like a typical Indian father, felt adulation might go to her head. As to few women in any age, adulation and praise was showered on her early in life and with the sensational impact of her poetry she received recognition all over India, England and Europe. Critics likened her verses to Blake and said that her rich imagery made English poetry look pale. When she began her career as an orator, her fame was instantaneous.

In March 1912, there was an event in which Sarojini played a significant role and one dear to her heart. The Muslim League convened a "historic session" to adopt a new Constitution embodying co-operation with Hindus in all matters of national welfare and progress. Sarojini addressed this gathering and gave an impassioned speech. But it was not so much the speech as the year that must be remembered when she,

a woman, addressed a meeting probably wholly male in which the new proposals were carried unanimously, not only by the young but by the more orthodox elements also. Though Sarojini's hopes for unity faded over the years, at that time it was said that this meeting of the Muslim League "marked a new era and inaugurated a new standard in the history of modern Indian affairs".

She has recorded Gokhale's reaction to this episode. "He seemed almost impatient of my words about the real underlying *spirit* of the Conference. His weary, pain-worn face lighted up with pleasure when I assured him that, so far at least as the younger men were concerned, it was not an instinct of mere political expediency but one of genuine conviction and a growing consciousness of wider and graver national responsibility that had prompted them to stretch out so frankly and generously, the hand of good fellowship to Hindus, and I hoped that the coming Congress would respond to it with equal, if not even greater cordiality." Gokhale told her: "So far as lies in my power, it shall be done." And he said later, "You have put new hope in me. I feel strong enough to face life and work again."

In 1915, just before Gokhale's death, Sarojini was also ill and in England for treatment. But characteristically she ignored this in the excitement of knowing that Jinnah, beginning to show signs of leadership, had just founded a student body, The London Indian Association. She could never resist the call of youth, and that Jinnah had created a centre for Indian students in London fired her imagination so greatly that on an impulse she promised the students who clamoured for Gokhale that "the incomparable friend and servant of India" would address them. All this Sarojini described in great detail in her "Tribute to Gokhale", published when he died and mentioned earlier in this chapter, but her constant concern and identity with the needs of youth come out vividly in this letter to Gokhale in London, dated July 29th.

She wrote: I see from Mr. Polack's letter that you are somewhat disturbed at the 'formality of the announcement for Saturday'. You need not be alarmed. We—my boys and I—shall be more than content with the few words of inspiration. We want you especially to give us a note of encouragement, to tell us how this Association can promote that unity of feeling, thought, action, ideal and endeavour that is the essential condition for national re-generation. We want

you to tell us how the young lives that are to receive that training in this Association can adequately and fruitfully serve their country later, each according to his own special circumstances and opportunities. Do not give us any rebuke, because we have all suffered enough. We want our self-respect restored and self-reverence revived for higher purposes. In ten minutes you can concentrate enough of such encouragement, advice and inspiration to last as an influence for the years. I say *we* because I feel one with my boys and have at the moment separate entity. With them I am beaten and outcaste, with them I shall be restored and strengthened. So dear Guru, give us your best, however little.

After his work in South Africa, Gokhale returned to India when, on November 28, 1913, Sarojini wrote to him from a private hospital in Park Lane.

"I am writing from my Nursing Home on the eve of my operation. They say I am very ill and I know I am very weary and broken in the flesh. My spirit is like a bird that cannot be caged. So I send you across the seas that divide my body from the land of my desire, a message of love and gratitude for the beautiful example of your noble life, the beautiful inspiration of your selfless ideals of service to the motherland. Sorrow and joy indeed teach a woman the meaning and mystery of life. But besides these lovely and fruitful influences I place another that has taught me the great lesson of patriotism, the great lesson of supreme impersonal all-sacrificing service for the country and both the woman and poet in me have mastered the lesson you have taught. You have been a beacon light of hope to my generation and I rejoiced to find in London, at Oxford, at Cambridge, at Edinburgh, wherever I have been in the midst of the young generation who are the makers of Tomorrow that you are still a beacon light; and a symbol of national service. I do not know of any higher happiness or greater privilege than this. But I am not speaking for my generation or for the generation of 'My Boys' who love me and have made me their comrade and friend, but I am in words most inadequate and humble in offering you the tribute of my own personal reverence and love. If I live—my life as you know is consecrated to the service of the country you have served so loyally and effectually; but if for me so sweet a destiny is not possible, I want you to remember

my words. Have faith in the younger generation. They are beginning to realise that unity, co-operation, loyalty to an impersonal cause and sincerity of ungrudging personal service are the necessary assets they must bring as their share to the national work and the essential problem lies with them to solve—nay, it is already being partially solved by the younger generation by the unity of aim and ideal—there is no ‘Hindu or Mussalman’ where common work and common ideals are concerned and that secret is the special gift of the younger generation to the great cause we love. Our children are outgrowing the creeds that divide, and learning the unifying, sweet immortal language called patriotism.

“You want work and not words, practical service, not rhetoric. Yes, the age of rhetoric is over—it belonged to an older generation of men, the younger being trained in sterner schools and they will graduate well-equipped for practical, concerted, wise and fruitful action.

“Good-bye—I am very tired, but I am also filled with hope and faith, it is not through violence and anger and division that we reach fulfilment, but through patience, wisdom and love.”

Writing to him from London, in January 1914, she mentioned that a friend had come to see her when she passed through London saying “Mr. Gandhi is the greatest man in Africa. By his magnificent speech, he is educating the whole of Africa to finer issues.” This was her first reference to the man who would ultimately influence her life most profoundly.

In the spring of 1914, Gokhale returned to England and visited Sarojini who was herself bed-ridden. He seemed to have some premonition of his end and told her that “with the utmost care, they think I might perhaps live for three years longer.”

During her convalescence the two friends would go for drives which she later described so vividly and how, once, he asked her, “Give me a corner of your brain that I can call my own.” But it was surely he who, in their long conversations and in his trust and confidence in her swift intelligence, shaped her mind and planted the seeds of political knowledge without which her political life may not have had the same content. But perhaps more than anyone else, it was he who led her to Mahatma Gandhi.

In 1914 Sarojini left for India and Gokhale's last words to her were: "I do not think we shall meet again. If you live, remember your life is dedicated to the service of the country. My work is done." There is something infinitely poignant in this parting between the elder statesman and the young patriot—both had felt the close breath of death upon them, Sarojini perhaps since her earliest years, and both knew what service to the country entailed. Here was no impulsive patriotism, but a steady, dedicated shining purpose whether there was strength or not. "If you live!" One day in England, when they were both convalescing, he had said "a little wistfully", "Do you know, I feel that an abiding sadness underlies all that unfailing brightness of yours. Is it because you have come so near death that its shadows still cling to you?" Sarojini promptly answered, "No, I have come so near life that its fires have burnt me!" On February 19, 1915, Gokhale died. The news reached Sarojini in Calcutta where the family was in mourning on the death of her father, Agorenath Chattopadhyaya. With no apparent premonition of his own end, he had written to her in grief, "I wish I had been anywhere near so that I could have gone to see you personally...I do hope your grief will break out into songs that will abide", and she answered on the 8th of February. "I am very grateful for your message of sympathy. I am writing to you in the little room where my father used always to sit and where on the morning of his death he sat talking to the end, with his usual vigour, brilliance and challenging charm on life and death and kindred subjects.....and I feel the little room has become a sanctuary filled with his living presence...I realise what he always taught that there is no birth and no death, only life progressing from stage to stage of evolution and growth; I believe with a triumphant faith that overcomes my human sorrow that he and I are more deeply united.

"The mourning in the Mohammadan city of Hyderabad could have been an object lesson to all Indian politicians as to the true meaning of Hindu-Muslim unity: and to that Mohammadan city we are taking back my widowed mother after the *Shradha* ceremony, to live among women who regard her as mother, and the men who loved my father as a father. This is the realisation of the great problem on which the future of India rests. My Brahmin Father and Mother solved it, by their love and sympathy. This is my supreme pride and solace. Thank God! And as far as it lies in me, I shall continue the work they began without even

knowing that they were achieving great work.”

While still at her father's house in Lovelock Street, Calcutta, and on the day of his *Shraddha* ceremony, Gokhale passed away in Poona. Within little more than a week she was deprived of her beloved father, the first dominant influence upon her life, and of her revered friend, the second dominant influence in her life. But now, by the age of 36, Sarojini Naidu was ready to begin her career as a builder of modern India. Her leadership at the historic meeting of the Muslim League in Lucknow on March 22, 1913 had established her firmly in her role of ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity, but it was at the Bombay Congress of 1916, under the Presidentship of Sir S. P. Sinha, when she moved a resolution on self-government, that her political career may be said to have begun. At the Calcutta Congress of 1917, presided over by Annie Besant, Sarojini made an impassioned speech: “I am only a woman”, she thundered, “I should like to say to you all, when your hour strikes, when you need torch bearers in the darkness to lead you, when you want standard bearers to uphold your banner and when you die for want of faith, the womanhood of India will be with you as the holder of your banner, and the sustainers of your strength. And if you die, remember, the spirit of Padmini of Chittor is enshrined in the womanhood of India.”

In Politics

CHILD OF HYDERABAD, a city in which Hindu and Muslim cultures fused and flowered, it is not strange that communal unity was, next to her desire of freedom, Sarojini's greatest motivating force. A true integrationist, unlike even her Master, Gandhiji, who believed in the closest and most fraternal co-existence, Sarojini was happiest, and perhaps at her greatest, as harmoniser and unifier.

In 1916, in the historic city of Lucknow which rivalled only Hyderabad in its harmony of Hindu and Muslim cultures, she addressed the Conference of the Muslim League in a manner both modest and frank. "I do not know, what claim I have to stand before you today except that I have been for many years a faithful comrade of the young generation of the Mussalmans and champion of the women of the Muslim community and fought with their men folk for the privilege that Islam gave a long ago but which you denied to your womenfolk."

It is doubtful if the Muslim political leaders would have accepted such a stricture from any other Hindu but one whom they regarded as a sister.

In 1918, in Jullunder, talking to the students of the *Kanya Maha Vidyalaya*, she stressed the need for women's education, saying, "Our *Guru*, Gandhi, has enjoined us to address meetings in Hindustani. I crave your indulgence for talking in imperfect Urdu. Your Vice-Principal has made an eloquent and stirring appeal in the cause of women's education and revealed that in Punjab even to this day, there is...prejudice and bigotry against female education. The narrow-minded people say that the education of women is to be condemned because it makes them bold. Brothers, have you forgotten the heroic stories and scriptures of your Motherland? It was the privilege of India to possess women who were bolder and braver than their brothers. For the amelioration of a

country the co-operation of both sexes is necessary...You demand political rights...Pray do not forget that a lame person can walk but slowly, a one-eyed man sees only on one side and that a carriage with one wheel cannot move properly." And turning to the problem of Muslim women, she said, "The purdah system did not mean...purdah on the mind and a purdah on the soul", and she ended, "Break open the cage of bigotry—the liberty of the soul will be India's share only when woman is free."

Again and again she reverted to the theme of unity. In Patna, on October 13, 1917, it was students she addressed: "President and Brother Hindus and Mussalmans, I feel today a peculiar sense of responsibility such as I have never felt before when dealing with a subject so intimately bound up with my life strings that I almost hesitate in trying to find words that might be wise enough to suit the occasion..." Romantically, she called upon the Ganges to give her inspiration, and, prophetically, she hoped that current political developments would not "cause a cleavage between the two communities."

So close was unity to her heart that little was needed for it to find expression. The episode with Gokhale will be re-called, when in reply to his question "what is your vision of the immediate future?", her answer was "Hindu-Muslim unity in less than five years", and he had answered, "You hope too much. It will not come in your life time or in mine."

Undiscouraged, she searched for a kindred spirit and crusader; and in 1913, found him in the young and dynamic M. A. Jinnah. Blessed by Gokhale, then the greatest living Indian, and united in the noblest of causes, a young man, a Muslim, and a young woman, a Brahmin, started on a journey which, though it was to diverge, led them to the highest, if separate, pinnacles.

If four men shaped her life, four influences shaped her complete secularism. Her father, the scholarly humanist; Hyderabad, the Hindu-Muslim city *par excellence*; Gokhale, the old liberal approaching his end; and Jinnah, the young liberal, facing his future. Meeting him as she did in her formative years, Gokhale perhaps influenced her the most. But some years were to pass before she came to regard him as her political *guru*.

When he died in 1915, she wrote the poem, *In Memoriam*, in which she poured her devotion:

"Heroic heart! last hope of all our days!
 Need'st thou the homage of our love and praise?
 Lo! let the mournful millions round thy pyre
 Kindle their souls with consecrated fire
 Caught from the brave torch fallen from thy hand,
 To succour and to save our stricken land;
 And in a daily worship taught by thee
 Uphold the Temple of her Unity."

Nothing brought out Sarojini's deep loyalty to friends than her life-long regard, if not always friendship, with Jinnah. He had appeared with her on public platforms many times, but no personal relationship seems to have developed till, as already recounted, she worked with him among the students in London. From then on, she encouraged his activities and even when the tragic failure of their joint dream of Hindu-Muslim unity separated their paths irrevocably, she defended him from criticism. Her biographer, Padmini Sen Gupta, relates a charming anecdote which bears out her deep loyalty to Jinnah. "Once, in 1946, I remember going to see Mrs. Naidu and telling her that I had written a book on 'Some Great Leaders'. She asked me if I had included Jinnah, and when I replied in the negative she was angry with me and immediately said: 'But Jinnah is a great man. You should have included him in your book.'"

Both by word and in verse she paid him tribute. At the 1915 session of the Congress, she recited in his honour her poem *Awake*.

Another great Muslim friend was Umar Sobhani. A prominent and rich businessman of Bombay, he was one of the first supporters of Gandhiji in whose cause he sacrificed his fortune and, later, his life. Mrs. Naidu's grief, when in 1926 he was found dead, inspired one of her most poignant poems:

"You were not of my kindred or my creed,
 O kingly heart, but closer still you stood
 In gracious bond of tender brotherhood
 Than they who blossomed from my father's seed.
 Alas! what bitter destiny decreed
 I, who stilled the fierce, blind fanged brood
 Of pain that mocked your proud, sad solitude,

Should be a far in your dire, ultimate need?
 I stand beside your narrow resting place,
 I call and call, you will not answer me,
 Does the earth lie too heavy on your face,
 Or is the silence of your year-long sleep
 Too dear, too incorruptible, too deep
 For friendship, pardon, grief of memory?"

A true Indian, Sarojini, unlike several of her colleagues, never consciously worked for Hindu-Muslim unity. Embodying in herself as she did the finest elements of both faiths, she only acted as her natural self.

When she succeeded Tagore as President of the P.E.N. in 1942, the Vice-Chancellor of Bombay University said of her, "Can you name anybody who has shed more lustre on India, as a gifted poet, as an eminent exponent of India's culture, as an ardent patriot, as an uncompromising reformer and finally as a cultured leader of thought in this country? Further, can we point to anybody who has done so much as she is striving to do to promote communal harmony in this country? Does she not stand before the youth of this country as the symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity?"

That Sarojini and Tagore should be intimate friends could not be otherwise. She had always made it a point to meet him whenever she was in Bengal, and she was in England when his poem which gained for him the Nobel Prize, *Gitanjali*, was published and, in her words, "spread his fame across the horizon of western life like a rainbow". She, of course, could not read Bengali but she loved to hear his songs and his poems read in that melodious language. As the years passed they came even closer. It was she who arranged a Tagore Week in Bombay in 1933, and it was only fitting that, later, she was appointed *Acharya* of Tagore's University, Visva Bharati, at Shantiniketan.

In a letter to her that year Tagore wrote: "You are great...You have helped me as none else could have done but what is more important to me is that I have come close to you and known you. You have amazing gifts that would have made me envious but I have loved you and that has saved me. I am afraid my language sounds absurdly sentimental but I do not care. I expose myself to your delightful laughter for I know it cannot be unkind to me."

In her answer, she addresses him as "Dear Master of many enchantments" and says, "One of the most enchanting things you have created is your gracious and tender letter to me, which moved me to both the 'delightful laughter' of which you speak and to tears of delight." Then in more serious mood she takes up his definition of 'great' and says, "But a seer like you must also realise that it is not an intrinsic or individual 'greatness'; rather it is the cumulative memory, experience, knowledge that I bring back as shining treasure from the long, frequent journeys into the ocean depths of human struggle."

But however great her love and loyalty for her friends, her devotion to Mahatma Gandhi, once she came under his sway, was complete and final. Gandhiji, little known and regarded as somewhat of a crank with some newfangled technique of passive resistance for gaining political ends, left South Africa and arrived in England on August 6, 1914. Accompanied by his wife, he had travelled third class and lived on nuts and fruits, dietary concepts Sarojini was to deplore on more than one occasion. But however strange were his ideas, the fact remained that his *satyagraha* struggle had proved largely successful, and Gokhale and others wished him to transfer his activities to India. He was, therefore, warmly welcomed by the Indian community in London, and two days after his arrival, at a reception in his honour, Sarojini, among others, paid tributes to his success in South Africa.

At another meeting Gandhiji expressed his opinion that Indians should help in the war effort. He invited volunteers and, though objections were raised, there was a good response. He had in mind an Indian Volunteer Corps, and Sarojini and about fifty other prominent Indians added their signature to a letter he sent to the then Under Secretary of State for India. "It was thought by many of us," they wrote, "that during the crisis that has overtaken the Empire and whilst many Englishmen, leaving their ordinary vocations of life, are responding to the Imperial call, those Indians who are residing in the U.K. and who can at all do so should place themselves unconditionally at the disposal of the authorities." "We would respectfully emphasize," the letter concluded, "the fact that the one dominant idea guiding us is that of rendering such humble assistance as we may be capable of performing as an earnest of our desire to share the responsibility of membership of the great Empire if we would share its privileges."

Sarojini must have been imbued with the spirit of this letter when she wrote her famous poem, "The Gift of India". "Is there aught you need that my hands withhold," the poem began, and after vividly recounting the part played and sacrifices made by Indian troops, ends:

"When the terror and tumult of hate shall cease
And life be refashioned on anvils of peace,
And your love shall offer memorial thanks
To the comrades who fought in your dauntless ranks,
And you honour the deeds of the deathless ones,
Remember the blood of my martyred sons!"

Alas! Sarojini would have to make many more appeals and undergo many sacrifices herself before life was refashioned, and even then only partly, as she wished.

Fortunately, both Gandhiji and Sarojini have recorded their first meeting. Following up her decision to help in the war effort, she threw her energies into making clothes, rolling bandages, and knitting socks, jerseys and other forms of woollens for the wounded. "This was my first acquaintance with her," Gandhiji has written. "She placed before me a heap of clothes which had been cut to pattern and asked me to get them all sewn up and return them to her. I welcomed her demand and with the assistance of friends got as many clothes made as I could manage during my training for first aid."¹

Sarojini's version, as might be expected, was more colourful, if somewhat different. "Curiously enough," she has written, "my first meeting with Mahatma Gandhi took place in London on the eve of the Great European War of 1914. . . . When he arrived fresh from his triumphs in South Africa where he had initiated his principles of passive resistance and won a victory for his countrymen who were at that time chiefly indentured labourers, over the redoubtable General Smuts, I had not been able to meet his ship on his 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. . . . I burst

1. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, p. 426

instinctively into happy laughter at this unexpected vision of a famous leader He lifted his eyes and laughed back at me saying: "Ah, You must be Mrs. Naidu! Who else dare 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 loyal discipleship which never wavered for a single hour through more than thirty years of common service in the cause of India's freedom."¹

Perhaps recognising his greatness before others did, Sarojini, till she left for India on October 10, 1914, kept as close to him as possible. "It thrilled me," she later wrote, "that men of all nations—Eastern and Western—gathered in his home, proof that true greatness speaks in a universal language and compels universal admiration." The woman in her was also attracted to the wifely devotion of Kasturba. "A kind gentle lady, with the indomitable spirit of the martyr...busy with a hundred small housewifely tasks, like any other woman, and not the heroine of martyrdom."²

Glad as she was to return to India, deep tragedy was soon to strike. First, in Calcutta, her beloved father died, and a few days afterwards, her political "father", Gokhale, passed away. Ignorant of her father's condition, Sarojini was in Hyderabad when her father died and suddenly an old beggar woman appeared at the gate and cried, "I shall not ask alms of you. Tell your mother. He who gave generously has gone, gone, gone. The giver has gone." Shortly afterwards, the fateful telegram was delivered. Rushing to Calcutta, she found her mother strangely calm. "Here is your father alive," she said, "your mother is dead."

But Gandhiji had returned to fill the double void. He soon established his Ashram near Ahmedabad and Mrs. Naidu quickly placed herself at his service. Soon she was lecturing in Andhra:

"For years now it has been my great privilege to be more closely identified with what is known as the younger generation. In almost every great city of India I have come into joyful and intimate comradeship with the young men who are going to make the history of tomorrow. In the different cities of India, I have come closely in

1. *Mahatma Gandhi* with a foreword and appreciation by Sarojini Naidu. Old-homes Press Ltd. London, 1942
 2. *Sarojini Naidu* by Padmini Sen Gupta, p. 90

touch with what is called the 'new spirit' in India—with what has mostly been called Indian *Renaissance*."¹

But to her the *renaissance* was not confined to the intellectual elite. Presenting medals on another occasion, she expressed her happiness in doing so "to those who are learning to work with their hands, to recognise the dignity of manual labour, as it should stand side by side with the dignity of scholarship. This, coming from me with traditions of scholarship behind me, should count for something, because it means that those who in the past considered that self-expression was merely a monopoly of intellectual authority have begun to realise that there are other and various forms of such self-expression . . . More and more young men are beginning to realise that the dignity of India does not consist merely in having degree of Oxford and Cambridge or in becoming lawyers, doctors or government servants, but depends also on having their expert knowledge of arts, science and industry which alone can give back to India her once central place in human civilization." She spoke such good sense that her ideas continued to be valid years later. Youth, she knew, must have right ideals and strong ideals and in speeches to young groups her feelings were summed up when she said: "If some Fairy Goddess of Destiny were to ask me what boon did I crave for in this world, I would say: 'Give me the power to mould the mind of the young generation'."²

Again and again she strove to rouse the people from their apathy and inertia. "All over India today," she said in Guntur, "there is a new spirit awakening that thrills the heart of the young generation from end to end, from North and South, East and West, the spirit that is called the *renaissance*, not a new spirit but a spirit reborn and revitalised in the past that holds exactly such ideas and dreams that taught by precept and example, such principles as you wish to fulfil in your life for the service of your country, whether you go to Bengal and speak with young men with the passionate spirit of 'ideals', whether you go to the Maharashtra country and see those intellectual youths with the spirit focussed and ready for any sacrifice, and if you go to South India . . . you realise the young spirit is the same, though it speaks in different vernaculars."³

-
1. *Sarojini Naidu* by Padmini Sen Gupta, p. 90
 2. Interview, Mrinalini Chattopadhyaya, Hyderabad 1968.
 3. Dr. Amir Ali's Diary. "*Vishwa Bharati News*", 1945

The years 1915 to 1917 seem to have been almost entirely devoted to touring and speaking with Annie Besant, an equally dynamic orator, and C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer. She had now fully realised her power of speech and lost no occasion to use it in the service of her country. Annie Besant, a British reformer and ardent Theosophist, was at this time at the height of her career. Founding the Home Rule League in 1916, she gave herself to the task of restoring India's freedom from British rule. She was among those rare humanists from England—Hume, who started the Indian National Congress, and C. F. Andrews—who gave themselves heart and soul for the freedom of this land ruled and exploited by their own people for nearly two centuries.

Better than any other national leader, she understood profoundly that there would be no nation, no freedom, until all citizens of India could work together and live together as *Indians*. Annie Besant had by now established herself as a crusader. An indefatigable worker, she inaugurated a daily called *New India* and a weekly called *Commonwealth*. Through this and the speeches of Sarojini and C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer, Annie Besant's clarion call to freedom came hard on the heels of Lokamanya Tilak's Home Rule League and his political struggles that earned him long jail sentences and the status of a national hero. For some reason Gandhiji who was not in India after his successful *satyagraha* work in South Africa had promised Gokhale not to enter politics on his return from England. Perhaps Gokhale sensed in him the uncompromising fanaticism that would lead India away from the more liberal values of those early, rather gentlemanly, confrontations with British power, to an outright bid for independence, something which did in fact come to pass.

But by 1916 Gokhale was no more. New winds were blowing in India. By now Sarojini was well launched on a nation-wide campaign of speeches, many of them to youth and women's groups, where she exhorted them to tackle social ills and join hands in the struggle for freedom.

It was, however, at the Lucknow Congress in 1916, that Sarojini gained wide recognition both as a speaker and national leader of first rank. Entrusted with supporting the resolution on self-government for India, she enthralled and electrified the audiences by declaring:

"I am merely a spectator from the watch-tower of dreams; and I watched the swift and troubled, sometimes chequered, but

nevertheless indomitable Time-spirit marching on in a pageant of triumph to the desired goal. We stand united but united with such strength that nothing from outside, not even the tyranny of colonial domination, shall withhold from us our rights and privileges, withhold from us the liberties that are due, which we claim by our united voice.....centuries have gone by, old divisions are healed, old wounds have got cured. To each of us has come that living consciousness, that is in united service for the motherland that constitutes the uppermost hope of tomorrow. There is no one so mean, so weak, so selfish as not to think that in the service of the Motherland lies the joy greater than all personal joys; in suffering for her comes the supermost consolation in our personal sorrow; and in her worship is the absolution of sin; to live for her is the most victorious triumph of life; to die for her is to achieve the priceless crown of immortality.”¹

The Resolution on Self-Government was moved by the great leader Surendra Nath Banerjea, and seconded by Annie Besant.

During the Lucknow Congress Session in 1916, Rajkumar Shukla, a peasant leader, persuaded Gandhiji to go to Champaran to help the tenants redress their grievances against the British indigo planters, a chance event that was to lead to great changes. It was at this meeting too that a young man called Jawaharlal Nehru first came in contact with Gandhiji. He later remarked, “All of us admired him for his heroic fight in South Africa, but he seemed very distant and different and unpolitical to many of us young men. He refused to take part in Congress or national politics then and confined himself to the South Africa Indian question. Soon afterwards, his adventures and victory in Champaran on behalf of the tenants of the planters, filled us with enthusiasm. We saw that he was prepared to apply his methods in India also and they promised success.”

Sarojini had often pleaded Gokhale’s cause on behalf of indentured labour in South Africa, Fiji and other places where Indian labour was treated little better than slaves. At the Lucknow Congress, on the subject of indentured labour she said:

“Let the blood of your heart blot out the shame that your women have suffered abroad. The words that you have heard tonight must

1. *Sarojini Naidu* by Padmini Sen Gupta, p. 94

have kindled within you a raging fire. Men of India, let that be the funeral pyre of the indenture system. No tears from me tonight because I am a woman, and though you may feel the dishonour that is offered to your mothers and sisters, I feel the dishonour that is offered to me is the dishonour of my sex."

Gandhiji's direct action in Champaran for better conditions for the indigo planting labour, by abolishing the old *tinkathia* system by which every planter was forced by law to plant 3 out of every 20 acres of his land with indigo, found a ready response in Sarojini. His *satyagraha* methods gripped her imagination not only because they were novel and based upon a lofty ethic which demanded unwavering moral courage but also, perhaps, because they succeeded. The Champaran Agrarian Act probably marks the first full-scale success of *satyagraha* principles against human exploitation, and Gandhiji's methods effectively introduced a new revolutionary technique into the fight for freedom.

At the 1916 Congress session in Lucknow, Jawaharlal Nehru was to meet Sarojini for the first time also. Himself an idealist and fighter, this bold young woman with her forthright oratory, warm humanism and fire captured his imagination and in his *Autobiography* he wrote: "I remember being moved also in those days by a number of eloquent speeches by Sarojini Naidu. It was all nationalism and patriotism and I was a pure nationalist, my vague socialist ideas of college days having sunk into the background."

Even though 1916 had seen the establishment of Tilak's and Mrs. Besant's respective, and almost rival, Home Rule Leagues, and both were competing for her support, the success of Champaran caused Sarojini decisively to dedicate her political self to Gandhiji. Though she was too individualistic to be a complete or blind disciple, she had found her Master.

She had returned from England more a politician than a poet. It was her prose now that captivated audiences and she was in constant demand as a speaker. Though she was later to espouse many causes, the Congress then, as always afterwards, provided her main platform. Her eloquence and personality enthralled Jawaharlal Nehru and from then on there developed a relationship that only death was to part. To her he was instantly "a brother" and she a "comrade" and his family became her family.

Among her speeches at this Congress Session, she declaimed on a subject strange for a woman. Asked by the President to move a resolution on the Arms Act, she addressed the audience which included the Lieut.-Governor, Sir James Meston and Lady Meston, as "unarmed citizens of India". "It might seem," she said, "a kind of paradox that I, a woman, should be asked to raise my voice on behalf of the disinherited manhood of the country but it is suitable that I who represent the other sex, that is, the mothers of the men whom we wish to make men and not emasculated machines, should raise my voice on behalf of the future mothers of India to demand that the birthright of their sons should be given back to them, so that tomorrow's India may be once more worthy of its yesterday..."¹ "Who but a woman shall raise a voice for you who have not been able all these years to speak for yourselves with any effect? The Mussalman, the Rajput, and the Sikh had their pride of inheritance to wield arms and it was an insult to them and their manhood to be denied this right." Ending her speech with a reference to her heroic poem on the Armistice in praise of Indian soldiers who had given their blood on the fields of Flanders, in Gallipoli and Mesopotamia, she thundered, "Remember your martyred sons, remember the armies of India and restore to India her lost manhood."²

Shortly after this session of the Indian National Congress, which was to be the watershed in India's political life, Sarojini attended an important session of the All India Muslim League which was also held in Lucknow. Once again she took a prominent role in a gathering wholly male and not of her own religion, but she reminded them of a previous Congress when the "young generation of Islam" passed an historic Resolution urging Hindus and Moslems to come together to achieve self-government. In supporting the resolution on this subject she said, "I miss today with an intense and passionate sense of loss the magnetic presence of my friend and your great leader, Mohamed Ali," and supporting Mohamed Ali Jinnah, she said, "In the Hon. Mr. Jinnah you have a President who stands as a focus between Hindus and Mussalmans, and it is so because Mohamed Ali persuaded him to become a member of the League."

1. *Sarojini Naidu*, by Padmini Sen Gupta p. 138

2. *Ibid*, p. 116-117

Significantly Jinnah had, uptill then, been a Congressman and ardent nationalist. That he had been persuaded to lead the Muslim League was one more decisive event in that curiously important year. The Indian National Congress could win independence for India but many sad omissions on the part of the great leaders, many errors of timing and judgement, eventually turned the nationalist Jinnah into the man who propounded the two-nation theory, who came to the bitter conclusion that Hindus and Muslims could never live together and who in the end created the separate State of Pakistan.

It was in 1917 that Mrs. Naidu's third book of poems, *The Broken Wing*, appeared. More mature than her other books, as could be expected of a more mature poet of thirty-eight who had met great men, seen great things and participated in great events, it had, as its title connotes, a ring of depression and pathos. It would seem that her ill health, over-work and some personal sorrows had dampened to some extent her ebullient spirit. There is more than a hint of emotional disappointment in the poems, *The Sorrow of Love* and *The Silence of Love*, and frustration was very evident in the *Menace of Love*.

“The tumult of your own wild heart shall smite you
With strong and sleepless pinions of desire
The subtle hunger in your veins shall bite you
With the swift and unrelenting fangs of fire.

When youth and spring and passion shall betray you
And mock your proud rebellion with defeat,
God knows, O Love, if I shall save or slay you
As you lie spent and broken at my feet.”

Whatever it was, or whoever it was, and there were not wanting many to suggest the name, this collection marked the end of her poetic phase. Though she continued to refer herself as a “singer of songs”, she was to be, henceforth, a weaver of words.

She wrote to the poet Rabindranath Tagore from Hyderabad on August 20, 1917:

“Beloved World Poet,

Since the whole world's tribute of love and reverence (is yours) it seems but a trivial gift to send you, as an individual offering, my little books of songs...songs of a bird with a broken wing.

"Into these poems I have poured perhaps less of my art and more of myself than hitherto, and if your taste, instinct and experience of life approve of these little songs, I shall feel I too have been crowned, not by the world, but by someone whom the world has crowned."

Tagore promptly replied:

"Dear Mrs. Naidu,

Shall I make a confession to you? Once again while reading your poems in your last book I became only too conscious of my own broken wing in my flight in the alien sky of English diction. You make me feel jealous of your lyric ease and grace in every movement of your thought among foreign words that are so friendly to you. However, it fills my heart with pride to know that you have gained by your own right your seat among the renowned of the West, thus mitigating the insult that broods over our Motherland.

Your poems in the *Broken Wing* seem to be made of tears and fire like the clouds of a July evening glowing with the muffled passion of the sunset."

The transition, in 1917, from her world of poetry to the hard realities of political life probably found her clinging to the romance and sentiment of earlier days. Inevitably her last book of poems marks the unhappiness such a sensitive individual has to bear. In a letter to a friend in Baroda she wrote:

"Life is full of sorrow for us all sometimes, touched with beauty and nobility sometimes, and sometimes with despair. But sorrow can be rendered divine and inspiring, whatever its source and circumstance. It is the supreme test of our nobility of spirit, how one accepts, uses, and sanctifies personal suffering to serve the world all the better and with sweeter devotion and sympathy."

Supremely human, this "sweet devotion and sympathy" was to be showered on all her friends, and if it gave her the strength to face life, it also gave her a depth of tenderness and compassion, and a thoughtfulness of those she loved, that sprang from a bottomless well.

About this period, Gandhiji and the Congress leaders were greatly agitated by the inhuman treatment of Indians in South Africa. Gandhiji, having first carried out his *satyagraha* experiment on their behalf, was well aware of their plight. Mrs. Naidu's interest and indignation were aroused when she read the following in an official despatch of the Govern-

ment of India: "It is believed in this country, and it would appear not without grave reason, that the women emigrants are too often living a life of immorality in which their persons are at the free disposal of their fellow-recruits and even of the subordinate managing staff."

An investigation followed, a deputation of Indian ladies waited on the Viceroy on April 12, 1917, and the cessation of all recruitment of Indian indentured labour was announced as a special War measure under the Defence of India Act. Mrs. Naidu gave many speeches on this issue. "I have travelled far, gentlemen," she said to a male audience, "to come to you tonight, only to raise my voice, not for the men, but for the women, for those women whose proudest memory is that Sita would not stand the challenge to her honour but called upon Mother Earth to avenge her."

At the height of her powers now, and in constant demand all over India, from 1917 onwards her life was one of continuous political activity. Her only periods of respite, in fact, were to be in gaol. For the next few years she was almost continuously on the move. Her eloquence seemed to cover all subjects easily. In October she was in Patna speaking on her favourite subject of unity and bringing to her audience the wide horizons of her knowledge and love of history. "Centuries ago," she said, "when the first Islamic army came to India, they pitched their caravans on the banks of the sacred Ganges and inspired and cooled their swords in the sacred waters. It was the baptism of the Ganges that gave the first welcome to the Islamic invaders that became the children of India as generations went by."¹ Here was her constant appeal to Hindus to recognise that all invaders in time become sons of the soil and that the early conquest and iconoclasm ended in human brotherhood and a common history.

Shortly after this she attended the Bombay Provincial Conference at Bijapur where she moved the resolution on women's franchise.

In December 1917, she was addressing the Madras Students' Convention, and a few days later the Young Men's Muslim Association. The next day she spoke at the Teachers' College, Saidapet and on the same day to students on "The Hope of Tomorrow". She finished the year by talking on "The Congress-League Scheme" at the Madras Special Provincial Conference, and on "Co-operation among Communities"

1. *Sarojini Naidu*, by Padmini Sen Gupta p. 136

at the Madras Presidency Association. She also spoke to the students at the Madras Law College.

March 1918 found her at Jullundur speaking on "Emancipation of Women" and next day on "A Vision of India's Future Women". In April she spoke in Lahore on "National Education of Women". "You talk of Indian womanhood," she cried to men vehemently, "you talk of the courage and devotion that took Savitri to the very realms of death to win back her husband's soul, yet to the Savitris of today you deny that power to win back the national life from the depths of death."

In May Mrs. Naidu was back in South India presiding over the Madras Provincial Conference in Kanjeevaram. In July she was speaking at the opening of the National School for Girls at Mylapore, Madras. In September she moved the resolution on "Equal Qualifications Between Men and Women" at a special Congress meeting in Bombay. The said resolution: "Women possessing the same qualifications as are laid down for men in any part of the scheme shall not be disqualified on account of sex;" and at the Provincial Conference at Bijapur she moved a resolution on "Women's Franchise". She then went North again and in December addressed the All India Social Conference.

Her presidentship of the Madras Provincial Conference at Kanjeevaram was later described by that great English friend of India, Mrs. Cousins, in these words: "She held the balance straightly and sweetly by the high level of idealism, rather than of detail, to which she lifted herself and her high office in that assembly." "I thought her," Mrs. Cousins continued, "like a highly-wrought, bejewelled clasp of finest gold which held together the divided edges of Mother India's cloak of patriotism."

She was indeed a bridge between many cultures and periods, and in another speech, "The Soul of India", she traced the thread of continuity that ran through its various historical periods. "India," she declared, "stands supreme amid the marvels of historical survival, and unique amid the miracles of historic paradise." Stressing the humanist rule of Akbar who created a "union between the children of such widely differing origins, faiths and associations", she passed on to the British who were a "bold and vigorous race with a glorious literature and a glorious heritage of freedom". "But they reaped in India a decadence of the national culture." But, she cried in her peroration, India would "arise again to

her birthright of individual and national liberty, the very breath of life." "The Soul of India, self-redeemed and victorious, shall become again the mystic example of humanity, when the pilgrim nations of the earth may sojourn as of yore to share the universal invocations for that ageless peace which is the divinest flower of Life's attainment."

In spite of the fiery patriotism which rang forth in her speeches, Sarojini was at heart a moderate, a true humanist, who cherished a deep love for England and all that English traditions and literature stood for. But unfortunately British political intransigence drove her inexorably to the parting of the ways. In 1917, the British Government declared their intention to enact a new scheme of political reforms by establishing "self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire". In pursuance of this, the Secretary of State for India, Mr. Edwin Montagu, brought a small delegation composed mostly of British parliamentarians to India to judge things for themselves. His path was not made easier by the internment of Mrs. Besant, founder of the Home Rule League, shortly before his arrival. She was, however, released and promptly elected the first woman President of the Indian National Congress. Her election may be said to have marked the acceptance of women as national leaders, and when Mrs. Besant took the Presidential chair, Sarojini was seated on her right. Perhaps it was an augury, for in 1925 she was to occupy that chair herself.

Women, in fact, were soon to make their voice heard. In Madras, on December 15, 1917, led by Sarojini, a delegation of fourteen leaders of women's organisations met Mr. Montagu and the Viceroy and, as was customary, presented an address. Demanding self-government, they stressed that women's status should be recognised and there should be no sex disqualifications. They were, of course, to be disappointed since the scheme of reforms that eventually emerged did not recommend any such enfranchisement stating: "until the custom of seclusion of women... is relaxed, female suffrage would hardly be a reality". In 1919, another women's deputation waited on the Southborough Commission for Franchise Reform, but fared no better. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms made no mention of women.

What women leaders may not have understood wholly was the British reaction to the suffragette movement, and that whatever may have been

ceded under pressure of events, the fact remains that the "fight for emancipation" of women in England and the Western world led to considerable male hostility. In India Sarojini's status as an equal in the world of men and in their highest councils, and the emergence of thousands of women in the freedom struggle played no small part in the easy transition of Indian women into full participation in public life. Male-female competition and hostility has been singularly absent in India, but the same was not the case in England or with Montagu. It is on such sub-conscious historical factors that many decisive events in human life take place. Montagu's reaction to the women's deputation bears this out. "We had an interesting deputation of women," Mr. Montagu recorded later in his diary, "asking for education for girls, medical colleges, the deputation being led by Mrs. Naidu, the poetess, a very attractive and clever woman, but I believe a revolutionary at heart." From his tone, it is clear he dismissed the women's deputation as of much lesser importance than the political issues of men he had been sent to investigate.

How revolutionary she was becoming, Mrs. Naidu lost no time in making clear. Very shortly afterwards, the annual Congress Session was held in Calcutta. It was natural that with the Parliamentary Delegation in the country, this session should assume more than normal importance. Since she had already spoken on self-government at the Lucknow Congress in 1916, Mrs. Naidu was again asked to be one of the main speakers on a resolution on the same subject in Calcutta. She rose to the occasion:

"Several years ago, in this historic city, the modern nation-builder, Dadabhai Naoroji, proclaimed that immortal message of *Swaraj* in your ears. I do not think that there was one single heart amongst you that did not respond to the call of your birthright that had so long been withheld from you. We are gathering here today to vindicate the message that he then gave, to confirm the truth that he proclaimed; and we demand the fulfilment of the dream that he dreamt for you on that memorable occasion. If I stand before you as a chosen representative of United India, it is only because the womanhood of the nation stands by you today and you require no proof more worthy, more convincing of your evidence for responsible and complete self-government than the sense of instinctive and fundamental justice you show in letting the voice of Indian womanhood

speak and confirm the vision, the demand, the endeavour, the ambition of Indian manhood.....Remember, whatever may be the details of the proposition, whatever may be the facts and factors of any practical politics that you contemplate, its permanent inspiration is the spirit in which these demands and these aspirations are conceived and fulfilled today. What is it that we demand? Nothing new, nothing startling, but a thing that is as old as life, as old as human consciousness, and that is the birthright of every soul in the world. Remember that within your province, within your own territories, you should have a living chance and not be disinherited as exiles in your own land, slaves in your own territories, dumb to all things, deaf to all things, that other nations are enjoying. That day is over when we were content to be slaves in bondage, intellectual and political, because the day of division is over. No race can be separated from another race in this great land. This is no longer an India of the Hindu or an India of the Mussalman, but it is an India which is united India."

It was characteristic of her to emphasize that political freedom was meaningless without communal unity. History would have been different indeed, had her words and exhortations been heeded.

In paying tribute to the fact that a woman had been elected as "a chosen representative of United India", Sarojini unconsciously emphasised that she was herself now at the height of her career. Between 1917 and 1919 she not only participated in every major political issue—the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, the Khilafat question, the public agitation against the Rowlatt Bills which really launched civil disobedience in the country, the Sabarmati Pact and the *satyagraha* pledge which brought the movement into its final form—but also toured with unexampled vigour and drive, using her dynamic oratory to stir up youth, women and workers of all kinds to join in the struggle for freedom.

To estimate the part she played in this field alone cannot be measured by any known yardstick. The impact of that small bold figure in her bright saris and jewels dominating huge concourses of people with words and emotions that came in some legendary manner from India's fabled past, must have seemed to many simple, cowed and irresolute people as though a goddess had suddenly appeared in their midst. How else can one explain the extraordinary effect she had upon audiences? Time

and again there were examples of her command over rowdy, boisterous, noisy and sometimes even threatening crowds: once in Calcutta she shouted at a youth audience "shut up, I will not speak unless there is silence" and continued her speech without another sound from the hall. In Bombay on several occasions she quelled unruly mobs during the first *satyagraha* movement, and in 1932 at a meeting in Jinnah Hall where many Muslims roused over communal issues came armed with knives, she, Jawaharlal Nehru and M. C. Chagla went to the meeting and their unconcern for physical danger resulted in not only calming the crowd but in avoiding bloodshed.

The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms were published and embodied in a Government of India Act in December 1919. The extension of the democratic principle, even if strictly limited, could not but create a ferment. Even if with all the constitutional safeguards there were now an Assembly and a Council of State in Delhi and Legislative Councils in each Province, the Congress and the Muslim League both objected to the blocks of nominated officials and the constitutional powers retained by the Viceroy and Provincial governors. Two factors brought the simmering unrest to boiling point: the Rowlatt Bills and the Khilafat movement. The Defence of India Act, having automatically expired at the end of the War, the Government felt that fresh powers were necessary to control any political activity which they considered seditious. A Committee, with Justice Rowlatt as Chairman, was therefore appointed to examine the matter, and in pursuance of its recommendations Rowlatt Bills were introduced in the Government-controlled Legislative Assembly. They provided that judges could try political cases without juries, and even the possession of "seditious" documents was made a criminal offence.

Calling them the "Black Bills", Gandhiji and a group of Congress leaders met at the Sabarmati Ashram and drafted the famous *Satyagraha Pledge*. It was signed by Mrs. Naidu and over six hundred other Congressmen. His appeal to the Viceroy to have the measures withdrawn being rejected, Gandhiji decided to launch a movement and directed his followers to disobey the Bills when passed and court imprisonment. Mrs. Naidu's powerful oratory was soon gaining volunteers to the movement. Declaring the Bills as "an accomplished piece of tyranny that in a day of doom might lay the whole of the Indian nation low", she, as was her practice, included Muslims in her exhortations. Citing the martyrdom of Imam

Husain and referring to the recent internment of Maulana Mohamed Ali, she cried:

“Each time a martyr of truth died for the sake of truth, his religion was born into immortality. With us also, friends, if we have the truth within us, we, children of the *Shastras*, we, children of the *Koran*, if we have the truth with us, if we are spiritually the descendants of Harishchandra and of Imam Husain, we shall also die so that truth may live.”

On March 17, 1919, the day before the Rowlatt Bills were enacted, Mrs. Naidu, on the beach in Madras, made an impressive speech to a vast audience and moved the following resolution:

“That this public meeting of citizens of Madras once again earnestly urges on H. E. the Viceroy and the Government of India that they should drop the Rowlatt Bills at least at this stage in as much as they are unjust, subversive of the principle of liberty and justice and destructive of the elementary rights of individuals on which the safety of the community as a whole and the State itself is based.

“That this public meeting gratefully welcomes the happy news of the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi tomorrow and once again expresses its unqualified adherence to Mahatma Gandhi’s *satyagraha* movement and calls on all the people to support it.”

She said in her speech:

“Citizens of Madras! You will wonder in what capacity and by what right I stand before you today to move the resolution that the President of this evening has read out to you and also to interpret to you the meaning, the purpose and the mission of what my honoured *guru*, Mahatma Gandhi, has said to you. Ever since in far off Ahmedabad, in that little thatched cottage where the selfless sage dwells, living the life of self-chosen poverty ever since the little *guru* of the men and women came to decide that the only possible weapon today in the armoury for tyrannised India was not the weapon of the machine gun and swords but the immortal, elementary and invincible weapon of all spiritual revolt and spiritual power which is against the material weapon and the material power of other nations, we decided to dedicate our lives, and all that our lives stand for, in the way of our personal liberty and, yes, according to the world’s standards of our personal happiness.”

As might be expected, there were many who strongly objected to Gandhiji's new methods which they considered more destructive than constructive. The Government of India, Home Department Resolution (Political), Simla, dated November 6, 1920, signed by M. Macpherson, Secretary to the Government, circulated at this time, is of some interest.

It says: "In view of the recent events, the Governor-General-in-Council considers that it is necessary to make a further declaration of the attitude and policy of the Government of India towards the non-co-operation movement not only for the guidance of the local Governments and administrations but also for the information of the people of India. In the first place they have been reluctant to interfere with the liberty of speech and freedom of Press at a time when India is on the threshold of great advance towards the realization of the principle of self-government within the Empire, when indeed the first elections are already in sight. In the second place Government were at all times reluctant to embark upon a campaign against individuals some of whom may be actuated by honest, if misguided, motives... The third and chief consideration, however, which has influenced the Government of India is the trust in the common sense of India, their belief in the sanity of the classes and the masses alike who would reject non-co-operation as a visionary, chimerical scheme, which, if successful, could only result in widespread disorder and political chaos and the ruin of all those who have any real stake in the country. The appeal of non-co-operation is to prejudice and ignorance and its creed is devoid of any constructive genius. India has had a bitter experience of its bitter forerunner, the *satyagraha* cult, and the Governor-General-in-Council still hopes that with the lamentable warning before her eyes, India will reject the much greater peril of non-co-operation. Its principal exponents have finally avowed that their object is to destroy the present Government—to dig up the foundations of the British Government—and they have promised their followers if only their gospel were generally accepted, India shall be self-governing and independent within one year. The confidence of the Government of India has already been in great measure justified by the unanimity of her best minds in the condemnation of the folly of non-co-operation. The most weighty body of educated opinion has rejected this new doctrine as one which is fraught with the most vicious potentialities for India. Having failed to secure a favourable verdict from educated India, the leaders of the movement have

now been driven to increase the violence of their appeal to the masses, to endeavour to enlist under the banner of non-co-operation the sympathy and assistance of immature school boys and college students. Herein lie the great dangers for India which have compelled Government to place the issues plainly before the country. Of the two latest developments, the most immoral is undoubtedly the mischievous attack which has been made on the youth of the country who are to be sacrificed to the exigencies of the political campaign. It matters not to the leaders of the movement, if the foundations of home life are sapped, the children set against their parents, and the appeal to the illiterate is also fraught with very grave danger. It has already resulted in at least one deplorable fact and it is certain that the restless activity of the leaders who wander from one city to another, stirring up the excitement among the masses by inflammatory speeches and by the reiteration of false statements, despite constant contradiction, may result in serious outbreaks and disorders. The Government realise that it is to enlightened public opinion they must chiefly trust for the dissipation of a danger that envelops India and it is on that same public opinion that India's political future must depend. It is in this trust that they refrained in the past so far as it was consistent with public safety from repressive action, for they consider such action must be employed in the last resort when indeed failure to adopt it would be criminal betrayal of the people. Ordered that the Resolution be published in the Gazette of India and be forwarded to all local Governments."

To a fundamentally law-abiding people, the raising of law-breaking to a virtue was a doctrine too novel for them to understand. To such doubters Sarojini explained: "...that logic, that law, is not the ultimate standard of a nation's spiritual advancement. There are times in the history of nations as of individuals, when the customary law of caution, of order, of reverence to constituted authority must fail before the inspiration and the impulse and the intuition of the moment's demands. Sirs, if logic, if mere reasoning, if mere academic following of things to their logical conclusions were always the highest mode of achievement, would the French nation have been led to victory?" "The Rowlatt Bills," she concluded, "were legislation which in its very nature is universally counted to be subversive against all laws of God and subversive of all human rights of man."

From Madras, Mrs. Naidu travelled to Ahmedabad where she commenced her speech by saying:

"I am ill, yet why am I standing before you? Why have our hearts been stirred, why do we get no sleep? It is because we are face to face with a hideous nightmare and unless it is laid to rest we are done for in perpetuity. What has become of the Congress-League Scheme? Where are the vaunted Montagu-Chelmsford proposals? They have receded to make way for the Rowlatt Bills."

And in a moving analogy of being given a cup of poison instead of bread, she said, "There is one remedy for poison or physical force and that is *satyagraha*." Again she exhorted her audience to support Gandhiji's lead. Five days afterwards, on March 30, 1919, Gandhiji launched his movement with an all-India hartal. For various reasons it was postponed to April 6, and was observed by all communities. An interesting reason for this postponement was given by Padmaja, Sarojini Naidu's eldest daughter. Gandhiji wanted to launch the Civil Disobedience Movement on March 30. Though he was ill, he travelled to Madras to address a mass meeting on *satyagraha* and Sarojini who was also ill, as was clear from her speech in Ahmedabad, was not with him. It seems Gandhiji refused to start the *satyagraha* movement unless Sarojini, Shankerlal Banker, Omer Sobhani and Jamnadas Dwarkadas agreed to take to *khadi* as a principle and launch the movement with him. When they got to Bombay, the movement had already been started in Delhi with a hartal on March 30. Swami Shradhdhananda addressed a vast gathering at the Jama Masjid, and the authorities decided to break it up by force. In the firing, some persons were killed and feelings ran very high. On April 6, in the morning, Gandhiji who always stayed in the home of Vithalbhai Javeri (the jeweller whose home in Bombay, Mani Bhavan, is now dedicated to the nation as a Gandhi Museum) took a cup of goat's milk, plied his charkha and said his prayers. With him were his trusted lieutenants who had pledged to use *khadi*, for the doctrine of *khadi* was not only a symbol of freedom from the oppression of industrialisation via British exploitation, but also, as Annie Besant said when Gandhiji had convinced her of its purpose, "a reminder, in every turn of the wheel, of India's poor, lonely and lost".

The small band, at the appointed hour, drove to the Chowpatty Seaface and addressed the huge crowds, and from there went to Pydhonie

where, from a mosque, Sarojini made a stirring speech. Coming in the wake of the police repression at the Delhi Jama Masjid, her call to unity through *satyagraha* found tremendous response, a procession of *satyagrahis* was described by her "as a symbol of national humiliation when the united prayers from far flung provinces would go forth to the Almighty to deliver them from the life-destroying Black Bills and from the danger to the liberty they threatened."

Sarojini stood up in the car again to address the crowd and it is significant that in this first wave of Gandhiji's new *satyagraha* movement, it was she who spoke by his side, it was she who was his most trusted partner in this experiment; a fact not without significance when he later called off the movement altogether and entrusted the technique of *satyagraha* only to individuals sufficiently evolved, sufficiently high-minded to use it and not to abuse it by faulty leadership which led to mob violence.

Unfortunately, the April 6th movement which started with such grandeur soon degenerated into terrible carnage that broke out first in Amritsar. Sarojini had meanwhile intensified the movement in Bombay in spite of police vigilance and reprisals by selling *Hind Swaraj* and *Sarvodaya* (the Gujerati version of Ruskin's "Unto This Last") which had been declared proscribed literature. Gandhiji had left for Amritsar and was detained on the way. This undoubtedly precipitated the wave of violence, riots and murder of Europeans that led to the tragedy of Jallianwala Bagh. On April 13, a huge concourse of 20,000 people gathered for a meeting in this ground surrounded on all sides by high walls and only one regular point of entry and exit. The holding of meetings had been forbidden but in the speed of events it seems many people were ignorant of this order. General Dyer, overcome in all probability by rage at the defiance of the prohibitory order, the attacks on English women and the murder of Europeans, ordered the crowd fired upon without being given any warning. At his own admission he stated later that 1605 rounds were fired by fifty soldiers until, in fact, "their ammunition was exhausted". Hundreds of people were killed on the spot and many more injured. A wave of shock travelled all over India as though the bullets had hit each citizen's heart. Up to now, the political game had been played by a set of almost gentlemanly rules. General Dyer's action was the first shock of brutal reality forcing upon

the country the recognition of the fact that no longer was liberty and freedom something to be bargained for, but something one had to die for.

The immediate impact upon Gandhiji was horror that his concept of peaceful hartals could have led to this. To restore peace, he called off the *satyagraha* movement, took upon himself the entire guilt of violence by his followers, called his actions "a Himalayan blunder" and imposed upon himself a penitential fast of three days. The soul-force of non-violence based upon its main objective of turning away violence because each satyagrahi was prepared to die rather than react with anger, appeared to have failed. Sarojini was a tower of strength during this bitter time, and on April 18, his faith somewhat restored, he called a meeting of volunteers in Bombay and appointed specially trusted workers with the task of individual *satyagraha* to carry on the work of non-violent non-co-operation.

As long ago as 1907, Annie Besant had prophetically insisted that Home Rule must be gained by constitutional means. It was not that she was opposed to *satyagraha* as a means of attaining Swaraj but she believed that incitement of ignorant crowds and mobs could only result in mob violence.

Perhaps no document summarises the impact of Gandhiji's doctrines on Sarojini's mind more effectively than his letter addressed to the Viceroy on May 4, 1918.

"The people are entitled to believe that the imminent reforms alluded to in your speech will embody the main general principles of the Congress-League Scheme. There is one thing I may not omit. You have appealed to us to sink domestic differences. If the appeal involves the toleration of tyranny and wrong-doing on the part of officials, I am powerless to respond. I shall resist organised tyranny to the uttermost. In Champaran by resisting an age-old tyranny, I have shown the ultimate sovereignty of British justice. In Katra a population that was cursing the Government now feels that it and not the Government is the power, when it is prepared to suffer for the truth it represents.

"If I could popularise the use of soul-force in the place of brute force, which is another name for love-force, I know that I could present you with an India that could defy the world to do its worst. In season and out of season, therefore, I shall discipline myself to express in my life

this eternal law of suffering, and present it for acceptance to those who care."

According to Jamnadas Dwarkadas who was always loyal to Mrs. Besant's Home Rule League and its declared objectives, in 1919, when Gandhiji's *satyagraha* began to take the country away from Home Rule's constitutional methods into the path of direct revolution, a significant incident took place in Bombay. Sarojini and C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer wanted Jamnadas to sign a statement that Mrs. Besant's approach to freedom was wrong. Gandhiji came to the Taj Mahal Hotel where Sarojini was staying and said that Jamnadas should cut off his right hand rather than sign. It is significant that loyalty to stated ideals should have been more important to Gandhiji than his own political objectives or the influence of his followers, and it indicates perhaps that his own "inner voice" was still not wholly sure of itself. Gandhiji's assessment of the first *satyagraha* movement as a "Himalayan blunder" could have been influenced by Annie Besant's certainty of the correctness of her methods. As far as history is concerned, 1919 marks the next watershed in the nation's destiny. Annie Besant receded into the background and Gandhiji emerged the full-fledged leader of the Indian revolution.

In July 1919, Sarojini sailed for England as a member of the All India Home Rule League. She felt that without effective propaganda, the Montagu-Chelmsford proposals which were then being considered might be marred by the total negligence to take into consideration the question of women's suffrage. Arriving in England, she mobilised all the different Indian political organisations and spear-headed an agitation demanding franchise for Indian women. Though perhaps she was not at heart a feminist (she constantly referred to herself as a "mere woman") her sense of justice had inevitably drawn her into the leadership of the women's movement. From the beginning, therefore, she had fully supported Mrs. Cousins in her great work in organising women's associations. Perhaps inspired by what she had seen in her youth of the British Suffragette Movement in England, she fully believed in women playing their full part in political affairs. Towards that end, in 1918, at the eighth session of the Bombay Provincial Council at Bijapur, she had moved a resolution to the effect that: "This Conference welcomes the requisition of the ladies of Bombay inviting the support of this Conference for the women's franchise in India, and places on record its opinion

that such a franchise should be given to women, but under suitable conditions." "Man", she asserted, should include "woman" in regard to the political and other rights of citizens. "Remember that in all great national crises it is the man who goes out, but it is woman's hope and woman's prayer that nerves him—nerves his arm to become a successful soldier."

Now in England she again took up that cause. On August 6, 1919, she appeared before the Joint Committee on Indian Reforms and presented a memorandum supporting franchise for women. Referring to her speech, the Chairman remarked: "If I may be allowed to say so, it illuminates our prosaic literature with a poetic touch." But her words went home nonetheless and, it has been recognised, largely influenced their decisions.

It was while she was in England that the Allies' peace terms for Turkey, which affected the spiritual and temporal position of the Sultan, who embodied in his person the office of Caliph of Islam, greatly agitated Muslim Indians. Even though the question had no relevance to India, and even though the Turkish colonial record was not such as to deserve the sympathy of a people themselves colonised, Gandhiji, to forge Hindu-Muslim solidarity, and Mrs. Naidu, through sentiment, since Islam in her heart was only second to her own beliefs, gave the movement their full support. A Khilafat delegation, led by Maulana Mohammed Ali, came to England, and Mrs. Naidu was one of the speakers at a meeting the delegation organised on April 22 at Kingsway Hall, London. "Mr. Mohammed Ali," she told the British audience, "has spoken to you of the invincible assent of the independent people, their determination to die in defence of their national sentiments. But I am not ready to die, because I think it requires an infinitely higher courage to live."

But though it raged intensely for a period, the Khilafat movement died down of its own accord due to the office of Caliph being abolished by Kemal Ataturk and the modernization and westernization of his country.

Side by side with the Khilafat movement, India was at that time greatly agitated by the happenings in Punjab and its aftermath, the publication of the reports of the official Hunter Committee and of the non-official Congress Committee, both of which had enquired into the occurrences. Still in England, Mrs. Naidu lost no occasion to acquaint British audience with the atrocities which had taken place, and on June

3, 1920, giving a lecture entitled "The Agony and Shame of the Punjab", she cried:

"My compatriots, I do not speak to you tonight, but for you English men and women, I speak to you today as standing arraigned at the bar because of the blood-guiltiness of those who have committed murder in my country. I need not go into details about those incredible atrocities that have been committed. My friends, Mr. Patel and Mr. Horniman have already given you in outline and in essence the nature of that horrible, most horrible, thrice horrible deed, done in the name of British Justice. But I am going to speak to you as a woman about the wrongs committed against my sisters. Englishmen, you who pride yourselves upon your chivalry, you who hold more precious than your imperial treasures the honour and chastity of your women, will you sit still and leave unavenged the dishonour and the insult and agony inflicted upon the veiled women of the Punjab?"

Such exposures were a great shock to liberal British opinion. They were widely reproduced in the press, discussions took place in the House of Commons, and even the Secretary of State, Mr. Montagu, challenged her accusations in writing. But none could contradict the facts she had made known.

In an article about his sister written many years later, Harin said:

"Sarojini came to be called 'Bulbul-i-Hind', the Nightingale of India—not, I am convinced, because of her verse, but because of her extraordinary oratory which poured through her like music, silver shot with gold, cataracting from summits of sheer inspiration. Sarojini's speeches wielded both charm and influence over the life of the nation—and although she was essentially a lyricist by nature and in her output of expression both in verse and speech, she did not always rest at the roseate point of lyricism. On occasion, her bird voice was transformed to a roaring fire and her colourful oratory to a sharp sword, sure laden with an impact-dealing blow. In the year 1920, after the shameful Amritsar massacre, I heard Sarojini speak at the Albert Hall crowded to more than capacity. She spoke with hate, she spoke with vengeance, she was in dead earnest: it was obvious to the entire audience that afternoon that she was in dead earnest—she was not going to mince matters, that she was not going to indulge in compromise. India flashed through and

out of her like lightning that was out to blind the people to whom those belonged who had massacred the people to whom she belonged! India spoke through her! India, torn, bled—humiliated! And when a group in the gallery, specially deputed to disturb the meeting, rose to mock at her, she shouted: ‘Shut up’—and the result was dead stillness—the brute mouths were sealed as though under the influence of the wand of an unchallengeable heroine!”

On July 15, 1920, she wrote to Gandhiji:

“I am in very bad health. But the twin question of the Punjab and the Khilafat absorb all my energies and emotions. But it is vain to expect justice from a race so blind and drunk with the arrogance of power, the bitter prejudice of race and creed and colour, and betraying such an abysmal ignorance of Indian conditions, opinions, sentiments and aspirations. The debate on the Punjab in the House of Commons last week shattered the last remnants of my hope and faith in British justice and goodwill towards the new vision of India. The discussion in the House was lamentable and indeed tragic. Our friends revealed their ignorance, our enemies their insolence and the combination is appalling and heart-breaking.”

Going on to more personal matters she wrote:

“The specialists think that my heart disease is in an advanced and dangerous state, but I cannot rest till I stir the heart of the world to repentance over the tragedy of martyred India.”

Gandhiji in his *Young India* wrote: “I do not think any praise of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu is overdone She has wonderful charm of manner and is tireless in her duties I have compared her to Mirabai she has such strength of mind and such love for her motherland that when occasion demands, she meets it. God alone knows from where she gets the strength.”

Sarojini returned from England in 1921, touring Sweden and Switzerland and receiving a tremendous ovation in France. But much had happened in India during her absence. The new political reforms had shown discord in the Congress ranks. Gandhiji, firm in his opinion that the reforms were too limited to be acceptable, proposed a non-cooperation movement based on the boycott of the legislatures, law courts, foreign cloth and government schools. This, however, was opposed by

a powerful group headed by the acknowledged leader of Bengal, C. R. Das. At a Congress session in Calcutta in September 1920, the confrontation took place and Gandhiji's policy was approved by a narrow majority. By the time Mrs. Naidu returned, the movement had become widespread and provided many opportunities for her exhortations. "Do not co-operate with the authorities," she told one group of young people, "remain indoors, do nothing beyond that." Then pointing to some proscribed literature, she added: "You are liable to arrest if you buy or sell them." The audience immediately accepted the challenge she gave and bought the books.

She had become so thoroughly disillusioned with the British that, at the same time that her revered friend Tagore returned his knighthood, she returned the Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal awarded to her by the Government in 1908 for humanitarian work when the great floods had disrupted Hyderabad city.

On October 4, 1921, Gandhiji, Sarojini and other leaders issued a manifesto to the nation indicating the purpose of non-co-operation and the programme that should be followed. This marked the real beginning of the Gandhian era in India. This manifesto was adopted with such enthusiasm that when the Prince of Wales arrived on November 17, disturbances took place. It was at this time that Lord Canning's perceptive remark was remembered by several observers: "Under the blue and serene Indian sky a cloud no bigger than a man's thumb may appear on the horizon, but it may at any time assume dimensions unexpected by anybody and no man can tell where it may burst." This time the violence and carnage was unprecedented. Sarojini was soon on the spot to pacify the crowds, and Gandhiji, shocked at the violence, said that "Swaraj stank in his nostrils" and undertook another five-day penitential fast. But the riots did not immediately cease. Sarojini's role during that period has been described by a fellow worker as follows:

"What shall I say of Shrimati Sarojini Naidu's daring? Time after time she would go out amongst the rioters in the different areas of disturbance; and coming back each time, she would relate to Mahatma with appropriate postures and gestures her personal exploits, not forgetting to give a dramatic picture of the acts of cowardice of which some others might have been guilty. Thus she, of them all, could occasionally bring a smile to the Mahatma's lips even in the midst of all this grief

and anxiety.”

Bombay, henceforth, became Sarojini's virtual home. She had been swept into Gandhiji's movement largely by his extraordinary personality and character, but absorbed his main ideas not without a struggle. She used to say to Gandhiji "I am a great fool for following a contrary old man like you", but follow him she did with whole-hearted devotion.

Gandhiji's call to students to leave government-sponsored schools had, not unnaturally, aroused much criticism. But Sarojini did not question the rightness of his policy. In words full of colour and imagery, she seconded his call. In December 1921, she presided over a students' conference in Ahmedabad. The 1914 war, she pointed out, saw thousands of British students leaving their universities to fight for their country. It was indeed a sacrifice "to deny themselves the knowledge they would need in later life. But freedom is worthy of even so valuable a sacrifice." "You are the new soldiers," she exhorted them, "..... march with me to the Temple of Liberty. I carry the Standard in my hands, comrades, march with me till we reach the goal."

Few could resist such emotional appeals which touched every fibre of their beings. Thousands were soon courting arrest and receiving imprisonment. During this time 39,000 people were arrested including the Nehrus. Gandhiji called for civil disobedience to cover all government laws and constitutions. Students were told to make the sacrifice of their education and careers, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel took up the challenge later when he started the "no tax campaign" in Bardoli. Sarojini and C. F. Andrews addressed a mass meeting convened by the Madras Presidency Khulafat Committee.

At the 37th meeting of the All India Congress Committee in Gaya in 1922, Sarojini moved the following resolution:

"The Congress congratulates Kemal Pasha and the Turkish nation on their recent successes and further records the determination of the people of India to carry on the struggle till the British Government has done all in its power and removed all its own obstacles to the restoration of the Turkish nation to free and independent status and the conditions necessary for unhampered national life and effective guardianship of Islam freed from all non-Muslim control." She then went on to say, "I want to say to you Hindus, my co-religionists, in this vast audience,

my Akali brothers, my brothers of the Arya Samaj and Sanatanis alike... we, the Hindus of India, are bound with a double bond to sustain the honour of Islam because our Islamic brothers are in a small minority in our land and alike by the call of chivalry and the call of love are pledged today, every single Hindu, man and woman, that till the sword of Mustapha Kemal Pasha stands aloft unchallenged by the Christian nations, so long shall every Hindu man and woman be dedicated to the cause of Islamic freedom...I assure the Islamic people in our midst, whether Shias or Sunnis, whether those to whom the Khalifa is the very soul of their souls...Islam will not die while there is a single Hindu alive to die for the freedom of Islam even if rivers of blood must flow before Islam can be free, it will be the confluent blood of the Hindus and Muslims alike."

Such were the circumstances in early 1922 but, in February, the movement again got out of control; a dreadful incident took place in Chauri Chaura and Gandhiji, dismayed, again suspended the movement. He called upon the people of India instead to spin, practice temperance, work for Hindu-Muslim unity and concentrate their energies on social reform and education. In February 1922, Gandhiji was severely criticised by his fellow Congressmen for calling off the movement and Government took this opportunity to arrest him. In his paper, *Young India*, just the day before his arrest in March, he had written: "If I am arrested...rivers of bloodshed by the Government cannot frighten me, but I should be deeply pained even if the people did so much as abuse the Government for my sake or in my name." Though he was arrested for seditious articles in *Young India*, the tone of what he wrote pervaded the Great Trial of the Mahatma that began in Ahmedabad on March 18, 1922. Mrs. Naidu was in court when the trial commenced before the Sessions Judge, Mr. Justice Broomfield. Seeing her there, Gandhiji said to her, ".....So you are seated near me to give me your support in case I break down...This is like a family gathering and not a law-court." Mrs. Naidu was greatly stirred by the drama that was being enacted, and, in *The Bombay Chronicle*, shared her impressions with the public:

"A convict and a criminal in the eyes of the Law; nevertheless the entire court rose in an act of spontaneous homage when Mahatma Gandhi entered—a frail, serene, indomitable figure in a coarse and scanty loin cloth, accompanied by his devoted disciples and fellow-prisoner, Shankerlal Banker.A thrill of fear, pride and hope

ran through the crowd when the judge took his seat.....An admirable judge, deserving of our praise alike for his brave and resolute sense of duty, his flawless courtesy, his just perception of a unique occasion and his fine tribute to a unique personality.The strange trial proceeded and as I listened to the immortal words that glowed with prophetic fervour from the lips of my beloved master, my thoughts sped across the centuries to a different land and a different age when a similar drama was enacted and another divine and gentle teacher was crucified for spreading a kindred gospel with a kindred courage. I realised now that the lowly Jesus of Nazareth, cradled in a manger, furnished the only parallel in history to this invincible apostle of Indian liberty, who loved humanity with unsurpassed compassion, and, to use his own beautiful phrase, 'approached the poor with the mind of the poor'."

Sarojini's praise of the British judge was no more than deserved. After a fair trial, Mr. Justice Broomfield, in a dignified judgement, sentenced Gandhiji to six years' imprisonment. Taking leave of Sarojini, Gandhiji said, "I entrust the destiny of India in your hands."

The imprisonment of Gandhiji round whom her thoughts and activities had come so much to centre brought about somewhat of an anticlimax in her life. But there was trouble in Malabar to claim her attention. A small Muslim community known as the Moplahs became excited for various reasons and committed many acts of violence on their Hindu neighbours. A serious situation arose, and the authorities suppressed what was literally a revolutionary uprising with extreme severity. Sarojini felt moved to speak against the actions taken by the military, and in a speech in Calicut denounced the authorities. She had seen the horror, the terror and misfortune that had befallen Malabar for herself, the madness and the reprisals and the "incalculable brutality of the minions of the martial law" who had thought neither for the sacredness of women nor the innocence of children. In Malabar she had seen with her own eyes one young woman with nine bayonet wounds, not healed, upon her body and she had seen a photograph of a little child brutally treated by a soldier, with its left arm hacked and bruises on the neck. And where the refugees from all this horror sheltered in the Moplah Centre, there were women unable to face the shame and consequences of what they had endured.

She roundly attacked the "paternal Government" that had visited this brutal fate on the Moplah people all in the name of law and order under martial law, and at the height of her anger against the Government did not forget to mention that law and order was not enforced with the moral force that Gandhiji preached but "by brute force unrelieved by a single pang of pity or a single throb of pain for the suffering it inflicted."

The Government of Madras, taking great umbrage at her disclosures, issued a communique demanding that she apologise on pain of prosecution. But with the help of the Kerala Congress Committee, she fully substantiated her accusations and in turn challenged the Government to withdraw their remarks or make good their threat. This brought forth a remarkable commentary from Gandhiji:

"It seems to me the special good fortune of Shrimati Sarojini Naidu to be threatened with prosecution or at least to have her statement contradicted. It will be remembered that the charges about the official misdeeds during the martial law period were repudiated by Mr. Montagu. She took up the challenge and quoted chapter and verse from the Congress Enquiry Report. If she was wrong it was the Congress Commissioners who misled her. She was able to prove that the India office did not even know the full content of the report. This time the Madras Government have actually threatened prosecution. I wish they would make good their efforts. India will then have the rare chance of listening to the statement of an undefended poetess of India—only there will be such a rush for hearing the non-co-operator in the courts, that the trial will have to be either in the open maidan (not a bad thing) or inside prison walls. There is no hall large enough in all India that will hold the eager crowd that would want to have a glimpse of the *Bulbul* in a British cage.

"Well, she has lost no time in repeating her charges. Chivalrous Kesava Menon and many others had come forward to support her speech. Mr. Prakasam has published the portrait of the boy whose arms were cruelly cut off. She has invited the Government to prosecute her or to tender an unqualified apology or before doing so to appoint an impartial commission of non-officials to investigate her charges. India awaits the reply of the gallant Madras Government. It surprises me that Lord Willingdon should have omitted the courtesy

of privately writing to Mrs. Naidu, asking her whether she had made the charges in an unguarded moment and, if not, whether she could assist the Government in proving them. Have English noblemen in their rage forgotten their tradition of chivalry? Must they insult one of the most distinguished daughters of India because she has the temerity to take up the popular cause? I do expect Lord Willingdon to make the *amende honourable* and that in a handsome manner. I assure him that he will regain for the Government a little of the lost prestige by such an honourable act. It cannot affect the struggle one way or the other. But that honourable act on the part of the Government will come like a drop of rain on a parched land."

Needing a rest, Sarojini took advantage of the political lull to visit Ceylon. But little rest was allowed to her and she found it impossible to resist the demands for speeches at Colombo, Galle, Jaffna and other centres.

But in India, with the restraining hand of Gandhiji no longer felt, differences of opinion in Congress on whether the new Reforms should or should not be worked polarised into two blocs. The followers of Gandhiji advocated total rejection of the Reforms and the launching of a non-co-operation movement. The other bloc favoured entry into the legislatures with the purpose of turning reforms to political advantage. Sarojini stood for unadulterated Gandhian non-co-operation and opposed Council entry. She believed any form of entry into the Councils would be a triumph for Government and a confession of failure on the part of Indians. At the November meeting of the A.I.C.C. at Calcutta, she opposed the resolution on Council entry and added that she preferred to be an invincible minority that made history than a disintegrated majority, not sure of its own intellectual or moral conviction. She said: "The object of the Indian National Congress is the attainment of *Swarajya* i.e. complete independence, by the people of India by legitimate and peaceful means." She continued:

"Friends, whenever I hear that pathetic and tragic cry of a slave for independence, I begin to realise the intensity of our slavery in the history of the world....What is *Swaraj*? *Swaraj* means that strength and that courage, born of a perfect national unity, that dares to share on equal terms with the rest of the world, the responsibility of freedom and comradeship of responsibility. But you and I day after day and

year after year quarrel among ourselves, full of mutual suspicion, full of mutual rancour and full of bitterness, dare to talk of that independence which is the outcome of only a disciplined national unity, that knows how to subordinate all merely individual, sectarian or communal interest and gain and greed for the common good...Let us realise that bigger ideal that...annihilates once for all the internal slavery of a disunited people and then, united, says to the rest of the world: 'here are we with you in that independent commonwealth of common human responsibilities, in which united India dares to be one with you... not isolated, not ringed round, not separated by that refuge of the weak called "independence"...but sharing the common dream realised by a common contribution by the progress of humanity'."

The Gandhian group became popularly known as "No-changers", and the other which favoured Council entry and was led by C. R. Das came to be called "Pro Changers". The difference came out into the open at the 1922 Congress Session at Gaya, when C. R. Das resigned the Presidentship of Congress and formed the Swarajya Party. Sarojini, as may have been expected, was an active member of the "No-Changer" group, but even her eloquence and personal influence with C. R. Das could not bridge the gulf.

After strenuous efforts, however, a compromise was reached and the two groups attended the 1923 Congress session at Cocanada.

Congress President

THE YEAR 1923 was to bring about a new turn in Sarojini's activities. The question of Indian settlers in Africa again attracted widespread attention and Mrs. Naidu was deputed to attend the Kenya Indian Congress as a delegate from India. She had been interested in the problems faced by Indians in South and East Africa since 1917 and greatly looked forward to being able to do something concrete on their behalf. Harsh laws had been passed segregating the Indians and denying them normal human rights, and this was just the cause likely to arouse her full fervour.

In January 1924, as Mahatma Gandhi's emissary to South Africa, Sarojini went to Mombassa to preside over the East African Indian Congress. Everywhere she went, she was received by huge crowds and with such enthusiasm that her tour of over three months to Mombassa, Johannesburg, Transvaal, Durban, Natal and Rhodesia turned into a Royal Progress.

At Mombassa, rising to a thundering ovation, she said :

"The stake of a person in a country could be measured neither by foot rule nor by staves. The real stake of an Indian was his honour... the self-respect of the Indian nation which was challenged today by the white settlers in Kenya. In the length and breadth of the inhabited globe there was no Indian of whom it could be said that he had no stake. Every man, rich or poor, literate or illiterate, goes out as an ambassador, as a custodian of his country's interests."¹

Received in Johannesburg, she was escorted in procession to the meeting of the Transvaal Indian Association and the road was crowded with people hanging out of balconies and windows to see this remarkable

1. Indian Review 1924, p. 196

envoy from India. Her references to the indomitable courage of Mahatma Gandhi evoked great applause, and in her speech to the Association she stood firm on the question of the Class Areas Bill and denounced Apartheid and the inhuman treatment of Indians and coloured peoples.¹

Speaking in meeting after crowded meeting, she hammered home the point that she had come to secure a better understanding of the Indian position, but, more than that, she appealed for humanity and justice.

In an interview she stated that she planned to leave in eighteen days to lead a deputation to visit Angola and Mesopotamia (visits that events prevented from taking place). She said :

“We cannot live as a branded people. I want to get the sympathy of South Africa for India and to put before you a different point of view.”

L. W. Ritch, a well-known champion of the Indian cause in South Africa, wrote in the *Star of Johannesburg* :

“Is your correspondent aware that since 1885, ‘Asiatics’ have been relegated by law to residence in locations or bazaars specially set apart for them, e.g. the Malay Location and private townships such as Jeppe and Fordsborg have imported into their leases covenants prohibiting occupation by Asiatics or coloured people?” Without decent streets or quarters to live in, deprived of status and authority of any kind, humiliated at every turn and treated as outcastes and undesirables, L. W. Ritch wrote bitterly, “It is a wonder they have a spark of self-respect left.” He went on to say, “Mrs. Naidu’s mission has been to try and broaden our vision, to raise this question of ourselves, India and the Empire to a plane above the wretchedly sordid evil on which it presently rests. She has tried to help us see what the world is slowly coming to realise...that humanity is a corporate whole, that its parts are independent and that no one part can injure any other without injury reaching every other part.”²

Speaking in Johannesburg, Sarojini said :

“I stand before you here and now with a message from the Indian nation, a nation that is no longer asleep, disunited or in doubt and perplexity as to its own destiny within its own borders and across the seas. On behalf of my nation I have brought you an assurance :

1. Bound Volume of Press Reports presented to Mrs. Naidu by the staff of the *Natal Witness*
 2. Press cuttings in possession of Miss Padmaja Naidu

not with impunity shall any nation or government, any authority no matter how strong, dare to trample on your inalienable birthright to equal status."

In Durban, addressing a Town Hall meeting of over four thousand people, she raised a storm of protest in the local press by saying Indians who had come to till the soil and make their home in Africa, generation after generation, were treated like helots and lived like pariahs and lepers—the first settlers being the poor indentured labour who had come to the country for plantation work in the cane fields and had put their thumb impressions on documents that virtually made them slaves of the white community.

Commenting on her speech in Alexander Hall in Natal on March 14, a Cape newspaper ran a leading article saying that instead of reasoning calmly, she rouses passions by the use of phrases like "helots, slaves, lepers and pariahs", and likened such speeches to that of labour leaders who wish to inflame their audiences. Another correspondent saw in her "strong passions coupled with a wonderful self-control and patience born of experience, though one does not imagine she would suffer fools gladly." But the outstanding impression she gave was of power, calm, confident power.

The Cape Town correspondent of the Times grudgingly reported: "There can be no pretence that Mrs. Naidu has made any lasting impression on South African opinion. But she has at least shown, despite her impulsive mistakes, that that opinion is less case-hardened, less impervious to friendly and human appeal than many people believed."

The *Rand Daily Mail* of March 18 said that Mrs. Naidu's appearance in the Gallery of the Parliament this afternoon synchronises with the Class Areas Bill being changed from seventh on the list to first position and they believed the Government were giving Mrs. Naidu an opportunity to lay her views before the Cabinet on the Asiatic question.

In May 1924 Mrs Naidu met General Smuts and discussed the moral and legal hardships under which Indians lived in South Africa. In a letter to Gandhiji published in *Young India*, Sarojini gave a detailed account of her tour.

"You have been kept in touch, I know, with the course of my mission here in laconic press cables. I have according to my capacity and opportunity done my best and in spite of a prejudiced press and

ignorant legislators, I have been able to win not hundreds, but thousands of friends for the Indian cause from all sectors and ranks of South African communities. How the white races have resented my expression 'University of Oppression' as applied to South Africa! Yet it is a 'University of Oppression' to discipline and perfect spirit of the non-European people. My interview with the strong man of the Empire (General Smuts) was very interesting. He was full of his famous charm and magnetism and withal apparently simple and sweet; but what depth of subtlety and diplomacy are hidden behind that suavity and simplicity! My impression of him is that he was designed by nature to be among the world's greatest, but he has dwarfed himself to be a small man in the role of authority in South Africa. It is the tragedy of a man who does not or cannot rise to the full height of his pre-destined spiritual stature."

In her talks with Smuts she told him that coercive legislation never solved any problems and appealed to him as a man of vision and understanding "to apply the principle of conference and consultation on the Indian question and for that purpose to convene a Round Table Conference with leaders of the Indian Parliament and local Indian leaders mainly for the exchange of views for some understanding acceptable to all."

In Durban, local enthusiasm in response to Sarojini's presence was unusual, to say the least. The excitement of the Indian community was described in a local paper as "The Naidu Joy Rides" where Indians in highly decorated motor buses careened around the city in reckless abandon, streaming cloth banners for all the world to join in their jubilation. Typically the editorial comment was that local fruit and vegetable sellers, abandoning their work, joined the joy rides, deplorably drunk to the annoyance of all "decent" citizens.

Her farewell from Cape Town was another triumph with huge crowds and the station festooned with decorations and flags, the engine of the train covered with coloured bunting, and citizens wearing rosettes. As the Special steamed out of the station, one could see her small, regal, garlanded figure waving to the cheering crowds.

On April 12, in London, she gave a lecture on South Africa to the British Indian Association of East London and mentioned that the real problem of South Africa was the six million coloured people, not so

much her compatriots who numbered only 160,000.

Sarojini was elected President of the 4th Session of the South African Indian Conference held in the Town Hall of Natal, with delegates from Natal, The Cape and Transvaal. In her Presidential address, she exhorted her countrymen to be the "golden link" between the white community and the coloured races. She wisely added:

"The Indian must look to Africa not for what Africa can do for *him*, but for what *he* could do for Africa."¹

Sarojini's welcome on return to Bombay on June 12, 1924 was a triumph also. Receiving a great ovation, she said:

"Prejudices against the Indians in South Africa, Kenya, Uganda and other British colonies in Africa are really not so deep-rooted that they cannot be removed by sympathetic people by a frank discussion. The chief work that Indians should do is to build up their lives as part and parcel of South Africa."²

She also felt that more educated Indians should be sent to South Africa to give support to the traders who, even if they had been pioneers, had shown typically Indian separatism in a foreign country. Indians kept to themselves and preserved their special ways of life, bringing girls out in marriage for their sons from their own castes and villages in India and generally playing no part in local life. She ended her speech by saying:

"The first thing is that emigration should be regulated and restricted on this side by the pressure of public opinion. I would call on India to realise that a large influx into South Africa of such traders as we have been sending will be absolutely fatal to our cause."

Many years later Government did indeed take up this policy in connection with Indian emigration.

During her absence in South Africa, a curious telegram was sent out from the Secretary of State, dated London, March 10, 1924, addressed to the Viceroy.³

"No 800 Sedition. Reference Paragraph 2 of D.I.E's weekly report dated January 30th. Mrs. Naidu's connection with body of volunteers not bound to non-violence. Information has been received here from two independent sources indicating possible grave develop-

1. Indian Review

2. Ibid

3. Home Department Files—Government of Maharashtra

ment in this connection. I.P.I. report on good authority that Chatto (Sarojini's revolutionary brother, Virendra) has received a letter from Mrs. Naidu asking him if he can arrange regular smuggling of arms into India. Her enquiry was made at the special request of some important revolutionary leaders who believed the time had come to start Irish tactics in India. Chatto is consulting his friends and says 15 lakhs will be needed."

Nothing seemed to have come of this enquiry nor do we hear any further references to Sarojini being connected with any "Irish type" revolution.

While Sarojini had been away doing great things for her country, Gandhiji, in prison, had been operated upon for appendicitis. In February 1924 he was released on grounds of health. But even before he had recovered, serious communal rioting broke out and Gandhiji, heart-broken, imposed upon himself his hitherto longest fast of 21 days. Sarojini was indeed back home.

In those days political activity took place in fits and starts. Apart from the periods of the civil disobedience movements when there was either intense activity or the enforced idleness of jail, politics mostly consisted of periodic conferences between which politicians more or less carried out their normal lives or professions, such as law. Even Mahatma Gandhi, between conferences, devoted himself to managing his ashram, editing his paper, and pursuing his social and economic objectives such as *Harijan* uplift, spinning and *khadi*. Whole-time politicians, as known today, were few and far between.

As may be expected, a vital personality, if not an elemental force, such as Sarojini's was soon and inevitably tired of the stultifying atmosphere of feudal Hyderabad and the confining role of house-wife. Bombay with its active social, cultural and political life provided for her a far more congenial setting, and in this cosmopolitan city she soon established herself. It was here that she was to spend perhaps the most active and fruitful period of her life. Here she became not a citizen but an institution, and her room at the Taj Mahal Hotel could only be compared with the *salons* of the France of the last century.

Her old co-worker from London, Mr. Jinnah, was also then establishing himself as a leader of the Bombay Bar and with no positive political ideology was tentatively searching for a political world to conquer. It

was then possible to be a member of the Congress and the Muslim League, or the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, simultaneously, and as the much hoped-for "Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity", he was beginning to interest himself in Muslim affairs. Time was, however, to prove that it was not he but she who was to be the Ambassador.

In this Jinnah had the full support of the acknowledged political leaders of that period, and one of the first reports of Sarojini's activities in Bombay is that on December 31, 1916, together with Tilak, Gandhiji and Mrs. Besant, she attended a Muslim League meeting presided over by Mr. Jinnah. It is recorded that they were "received with long cheers".

She seems to have been a constant companion of Gandhiji, and there is an account of an interesting incident at a Depressed Classes Mission Conference she attended in Bijapur on May 5, 1918. A resolution was to be moved by Gandhiji, but he first asked how many members of the depressed classes were in the *pandal*. On finding there were none, he, characteristically, refused to move the resolution.

Since Sarojini had soon come under police surveillance, much information of her activities can be gleaned from police reports reproduced in Vol. III of the *History of the Freedom Movement in India*. From this source we learn that in February 1919, together with a deputation, she visited Ahmedabad to draw Gandhiji's attention to some provisions of the Rowlatt Bills. There ensued a telegram to the Viceroy, informing that if Government proceeded with the Bills, passive resistance would be launched.

Gandhiji's confidence in Sarojini is unwittingly brought out on page 141 of Vol. III.

"Gandhi reiterated that he was determined at all costs to start *satyagraha* on the 1st July. Gandhi announced that he spent much of his time with Jinnah and Sarojini who were going to England and he gave them certain instructions. The police has informed that he had written four letters which Sarojini was to deliver for him in England."

As already stated, it was as a member of the deputation of the All-India Home Rule League that Sarojini had sailed for England. There she pleaded for the rights of women, and her evidence largely influenced the Joint Committee on Indian Reforms. After her return and after the *satyagraha* had been launched, there is mention of Gandhiji and Sarojini

addressing meetings in Surat and its neighbourhood.

The police reports paint a graphic picture of how the *satyagraha* movement rapidly gained force. From April 25, Gandhiji and Sarojini toured the Surat district. It is reported that large crowds met them wherever they went and many speeches were made by both, stressing Hindu-Muslim unity, the use of *Khadi* and the spinning wheel, and the disuse of liquor and foreign cloth. They then returned to Bombay to attend the Maharashtra Provincial Conference and immediately afterwards left for Allahabad.

On June 22, a crowded meeting took place at Ghatkopar on the outskirts of Bombay. The speakers were Gandhiji, Sarojini, the Ali Brothers and V. J. Patel. All called for support to the movement and appealed for donations for the Tilak Swaraj Fund. Later, they visited the Mangaldas Cloth Market where a purse of Rs. 25,000 was given for the Tilak Fund. It is mentioned that Maulana Shaukat Ali put up a one-rupee note for auction which fetched Rs. 1001 from a Mohammedan merchant.

The movement caught on and the crowds grew bigger. On August 8, before a crowd of lakhs, a huge bonfire of foreign cloth took place on the grounds of the Elphinstone Mills which belonged to Omar Sobhani. Gandhiji himself set ablaze the heap of silk sarees, brocade and other kinds of expensive cloth.

As may be expected, all this was too much for the Government, and Gandhiji was soon arrested. Sarojini visited him in jail and the police report faithfully records "that she had never been inside the jail before, but she thought she would not mind being sent to jail if she could be sure of getting a bath every day."

By 1924 her leadership was acknowledged sufficiently for her name to be put forward for the Presidentship of the Belgaum Congress. Though Gandhiji was eventually persuaded to preside, he made his own views known in the issue of *Young India* of July 17. Captioned *Sarojini the Singer*, he wrote: "Though I believe that I can contribute my humble share in the promotion of Hindu-Muslim unity, in many respects she can do better. She intimately knows more Mussalmans than I do. She has access to their houses which I cannot pretend to. Added to these qualifications is her sex which is the strongest qualification in which no man can approach her."

At the Belgaum Congress, however, her genius for conciliation might well have had full scope. As stated previously, differences had arisen between the senior members over the definition of *Swaraj*. Though the Cocanada Session had succeeded in papering them over, it had not succeeded in eliminating the schisms. It was, therefore, felt that this could be achieved only by Gandhiji himself assuming the presidency of the Congress. He was, therefore, elected, and presided over the 1924 Congress Session at Belgaum. Referring to the plight of Indians in East and South Africa, he drew pointed attention to the great work done in those countries by Sarojini. The Congress was, of course, already well aware of her achievements, and only the imperative need for Gandhiji's hand at the helm at this juncture prevented her being elected President.

In fact, while she was in South Africa, Gandhiji himself, having the same wish, had, on July 20, 1924, written to Mr. G. D. Birla to say that his three immediate objectives were: "First, my absolving the *Swarajya* Party from the charge of aspiring to office; second, my granting a testimonial to Suhrawardy, and third, my endeavouring to secure the Congress Presidentship for Sarojini... you are unnecessarily worried about Sarojini. She had served India well, and is still doing so while I have done nothing in particular for her Presidentship. I am convinced that if others who have so far accepted that position were fit for it, she too is fit. Everybody is enamoured of her enthusiasm. I myself bear witness to her courage. I have noticed nothing wrong about her. But from all this you need not infer that I approve of all that she or anybody else does."¹

Though this expression of Gandhiji's confidence was well deserved, the last line, and the fact that the letter had to be written indicates that her informality and cosmopolitan habits were not quite acceptable to the more sedate and conservative elements in the Congress, and that her bold, impulsive utterances troubled Gandhiji sometimes as, previously, they had troubled Gokhale.

But even if she had to wait another year for the supreme recognition of her leadership, she was considered indispensable in a Committee appointed by an All-Party Conference held in Bombay in November to reunite the two factions in the Congress in order to prepare a scheme for *Swaraj*

1. *In the Shadow of the Mahatma* by G. D. Birla, p. 7

including the solution of the Hindu-Muslim question. The Committee, apart from Sarojini, included Gandhiji, Jinnah, Sapru and Mohamed Ali.

In April 1925, she was entrusted with the organisation of the National Week. This was to be the first of an annual event she organised many times when, later, she became, and remained for many years, the President of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee. Since the programmes of National Weeks could not differ very much, the details of one such week organised later by her indicate the responsibility that fell on her shoulders.

Throughout Week

Boycott pledges collected from door to door. Flag Salutation ceremonies. Picketing.

April 6

Propaganda and demonstration against foreign cloth (especially spurious *khadi* from Japan).

Bonfire of foreign cloth.

Prabhat Pheries shouting boycott slogans.

April 7

Hawking of *Khadi*.

Spinning and *Takli* competitions.

April 8

Anti-Sugar Day.

Explanation : India consumes Rs. 11 crores worth of sugar annually and Government earns Rs. 10 crores in import duty. Citizens must deny Government this revenue. Concentrate on hotels, tea stalls, halwais, etc. Pledges to be obtained from wholesale dealers.

April 9

Anti-Petroleum and Kerosene day.

Explanation : Though complete boycott impossible, reduction of use would deny Government considerable revenue.

April 10

Anti-Foreign Drugs Day.

Explanation : Reduce volume of imports. Propaganda among, and pressure on, doctors, chemists, hospitals, etc.

April 11

Anti-Luxury Day.

Explanation : Reduce use of personal adornment, tea, coffee, cosmetics, etc. Encourage use of *Swadeshi* consumer goods.

April 12

Women and Children's Day.

Women, dressed in saffron saris, and children to collect pledges, picket shops, form processions.

April 13

Jallianwala Bagh Day.

General hartal. Processions, meetings, flag hoisting and two minutes' silence for martyrs.

As soon as the Belgaum Congress was over, it was unanimously felt that the honour of the presidentship of the next Congress should go to Sarojini. At Kanpur, therefore, Gandhiji himself proposed her name and in her *Women Behind Mahatma*, an observer, Eleanor Morton, describes her election. The whole audience rose as she entered the pandal at the side of Gandhiji. "Her once fragile figure had broadened, but she looked handsome, queenly, with her flashing eyes, her fine skin and beautiful dark hair. Accompanying her, was her eldest daughter who travelled with her on all tours made with Gandhi....Although her husband, Dr. Naidu, was concerned about her heart ailment, she showed no sign of illness."

After the nomination and the speech of the Chairman of the Reception Committee, the leader of the South African Indian Delegation begged permission to speak. Presenting her with her photograph, he said: "The South African Indians had given India the greatest living man. Mahatma-ji belongs to us. Mrs. Naidu also belongs to us. You will have to give us at least one or two to go to South Africa and fight our battle. If we take the great woman of India we are leaving behind her photograph so that you may look at it and be satisfied. We present this photograph to our mother and our aunt in token of love of South African Indians."

Sarojini then ascended the dais and, as usual, effortlessly and without a single note, her eloquence poured forth.

"Friends, were I to ransack all the treasure of human language I fear I should fail to discover words of adequate power or beauty to translate

my deep and complex emotion in acknowledging the signal honour you have done me, by entrusting to my unskilled hands the high burden and responsibility of so exalted an office....I am fully aware that you have bestowed upon me the richest gift in your possession, not merely as gracious recompense for such trivial service as I may have been privileged to render at home or abroad, but rather in generous tribute to Indian womanhood and as a token of your loyal recognition of its legitimate place in the secular and spiritual counsels of the nation. You have only reverted to an old tradition and restored to Indian woman the classic position she once held in a happier epoch of our country's story: symbol and guardian alike of the hearth-fires, the altar-fires and the beacon-fires of her land....I trust that to the fulfilment of the lofty task you have allotted me, even I might bring some glowing ember of the immortal faith that illumined the vigil of Sita in her forest exile, that bore the feet of Savitri undaunted to the very citadels of Death....I who have rocked the cradle—I who have sung soft lullabies—I the emblem of Mother of India, am now to kindle the flame of liberty....”

She then announced her policy:

“Mine, as becomes a woman, is a most modest, domestic programme, merely to restore India to her true position as the supreme mistress in her own home, the sole guardian of her own vast resources, and the sole dispenser of her own hospitality. As a loyal daughter of Bharat Mata, therefore, it will be my lowly though difficult task, through the coming year, to set my Mother's house in order, to reconcile the tragic quarrels that threaten the integrity of her old joint family life of diverse communities and creeds, and to find an adequate place and purpose and recognition alike for the lowest and the mightiest of her children and foster children, the guests and the strangers within her gates.”

Touching subjects such as non-violent non-co-operation, village reconstruction, education, national militia, South Africa, she reached the subject nearest to her heart—Hindu-Muslim unity.

“...and now I approach with the utmost hesitation and regret the most baffling and the most tragic of all the problems before us. I who have dedicated my life to the dream of Hindu-Muslim unity cannot contemplate without tears of blood the dissensions and divi-

sions between us that rend the very fabric of my hope....

"Though I am convinced that the principle of communal representation, whether through a joint or separate electorate, frustrates the conception of national solidarity, I am compelled to recognise that, situated as we are today in an atmosphere so tense and dark and bitter with increasing communal jealousy, suspicion, fear, distrust and hatred, it is not possible to reach any satisfactory or abiding readjustment without the most earnest and patient collaboration between Hindu and Muslim statesmen of undeniable patriotism to whom we should entrust the delicate and difficult task of seeing some sovereign remedy for so devastating a disease.

"I beseech my Hindu brothers to rise to the height of their traditional tolerance which is the basic glory of our Vedic faith and try to comprehend how intense and far-reaching a reality is the brotherhood of Islam which combines seventy million of Indian Mussalmans to share with breathless misery the misfortunes that are so swiftly overtaking the Islamic countries and crushing them under the heel of the military despotism of foreign power.

"In their turn I would implore my Muslim comrades not to permit their preoccupation with the sorrows of Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Arabia to obliterate their consciousness of their supreme duty to India, their Motherland, which must always have the first claim upon their devotion and allegiance.

"If the Hindus and Muslims would but learn to practise the divine qualities of mutual forbearance and accord to one another perfect liberty of living, without the tyranny of fanatical interruptions of one another's appointed rituals and sacrifice; if they would but learn to reverence the beauty of each other's creeds and the splendours of each other's civilizations; if the women of the two communities would but join together in the intimate friendship of their common sisterhood, and nurture their children in an atmosphere of mutual sweetness and harmony, how near we should come to the fulfilment of our heart's desire."

She ended her speech with an exhortation and invocation:

"In the battle of liberty, fear is the one unforgivable treachery and despair the one unforgivable sin. With palms uplifted in ardent supplication, I pray that to us in our coming hour of travail may be granted

in sufficient measure an invincible faith and an inflexible courage, and that He in whose name we begin our labours today will in the hour of our triumph keep us humble and in the beautiful words of our ancient invocation:

Lead us out of the unreal into the Real
 Out of darkness into the Light,
 Out of Death into Immortality."

The impression made by her eloquence has been recorded in *The History of the Indian National Congress* by Pattabhi Sitaramayya. "Sarojini Naidu took charge with a few choice words. Her Presidential address was perhaps the shortest delivered from the Congress rostrum while, of course, it was the sweetest ever delivered. She emphasized unity—unity between the parties and unity between India and the Indians abroad. She referred to the national demand as put forth from the Assembly, and pleaded for the obliteration of fear. 'In the battle for liberty fear is the one unforgivable treachery, and despair the one unforgivable sin.' Her address, therefore, was an expression of courage and hope. With the gentle hand to exercise discipline as well as forbearance, the Kanpur Congress had an easy time except for certain labour demonstrations and small troubles from certain delegates which were brought under control by sturdier men like Jawaharlal."

As may be expected, her eloquence gained world-wide attention. To the *New York Times* she was "a Joan of Arc who rose to inspire India". The English papers were equally eulogistic. But, in India, her words went unheeded; her efforts were in vain.

The effusive manner in which the thousands of delegates and visitors demonstrated their approval of Sarojini's presidentship was, however, lost on the Government. The relevant police report sourly records: "Very little interest was taken in Mrs. Naidu except by the communists on account of her imperialistic ideas and ill-treatment of Lala Lajpat Rai. In fact the movement was on foot to boycott her arrival but nothing came of it. Mrs. Naidu as President cannot be said to have been altogether a success. She commanded little attention or respect and was able to maintain her position only by Gandhi's tactful self-effacement."

Sarojini's presidential year being free of anti-government activity, she devoted her energy to organisational work¹. She had been in Calcutta

1. *Sarojini Naidu* by Padmini Sen Gupta, Asia, 1966, P. 9

in July 1925 when her friend and colleague, J. M. Sengupta, was elected Mayor of Calcutta. He was also President of the Bengal Provincial Congress, and, in early 1926, she accompanied him on a province-wide speaking tour. In May the Provincial Congress held its Annual Conference at Krishnagar. Here her presence and influence was felt when on one occasion the meeting grew unruly. Flattered by her presence, the Krishnagar Municipality presented an Address.

A serious situation which called for all her tact arose during her presidential year. In April 1926, an agreement had been reached at a conference at Sabarmati which laid down guide-lines for the policy to be adopted by Congressmen in the central and provincial legislatures. By May, however, serious differences in regard to the interpretation of the agreement arose between a section headed by Motilal Nehru and Sarojini on the one hand, and a group, which came to be known as the Responsivists,¹ led by M. R. Jayakar, N. C. Kelkar and Dr. Moonje on the other. So wide grew this rift that the Responsivists abstained from attending the A.I.C.C. meeting in Ahmedabad and, after a stormy session, the supporters of the Responsivists virtually broke away from the Congress.

Understandably enough, the personal intrigues and quarrels she had to settle exhausted her emotionally. Whenever upset, she drew strength from her beloved friends. Jawaharlal Nehru was then in Europe, and on him she released some of her pent-up feelings. "I am so glad," she wrote, "that you have had a prolonged vacation from the tropical horrors of Indian life....Alas, I wish I were away across the seas ! I have had a most strenuous time touring and settling quarrels....Good night, dear Jawahar. How I rejoice that you are out of India and that your soul has found its chance to renew its youth and glory and the vision of Eternal Beauty....."²

In her Presidential Address at the Kanpur Congress, Sarojini had called for a women's section of the Congress. Inspired by her exhortation to women to play their (due) role in national affairs, in October 1926 several women's organisations merged into the All-India Women's Conference. Though eschewing politics, the A.I.W.C. interested itself in the

1. Secret Files, Government of Maharashtra
2. *Indian Quarterly Review*, Maharashtra, Vol. III 1927

emancipation of women, the welfare of children, education, and all forms of activity that raised the status of women as an integral part of the nation. The contribution of Sarojini to this renaissance of Indian womanhood cannot be overestimated.

During 1927, discussions were constantly in progress on the Hindu-Muslim question. A thorny point was the separation of Sind from the Bombay Presidency which the Muslim leaders demanded and which most of the Hindu leaders, led by Arya Samajists such as Lala Lajpat Rai, opposed. How far Sarojini was above such communal wrangles is brought out vividly in the proceedings of the Punjab Provincial Muslim League which met at Lahore on the 1st of May. Sir Mohamed Shafi presided and according to a report "disclosed that there was not a single Hindu newspaper which had accepted the proposition adopted by the Muslim leaders in Delhi. He pointed out that in spite of Mrs. Naidu's efforts to draw him out, Mahatma Gandhi had refrained from expressing any opinion on this specific proposition adopted at Delhi and had indulged in merely vague statements not calculated to give any definite lead to Hindu public opinion."

But, undeterred, Sarojini continued to work for the cause dearest to her heart. On May 16, 1927, the Congress Working Committee met in her room in the Taj Mahal Hotel in Bombay. The discussion centered on the Hindu-Muslim question and the proposals of the Congress Working Committee were placed before the A.I.C.C. They were generally approved and the outcome was that Sarojini was entrusted with moving a resolution of Hindu-Muslim unity at the annual session of the Congress in Madras at the end of December.

"What does this resolution say?" she asked rhetorically.

"It only asks you, Hindus and Mussalmans, who have been engaged in shameful conflict, in tragic conflict, heaping bitterness upon bitterness, tumult, shame upon shame—it asks you to consider your position....I am one of those who have not the suspicion or shadow of any communal feeling, sectarian feeling, in my whole constitution. I am one of those, I am proud to say in this hour of my humiliation. I do not know if I am anything else but an Indian. My religion, my conviction stands above all creeds, castes and races, and my conviction is this, that the only religion for India is the religion of deliverance from bondage. Shall we be Hindus and Mussalmans in the magnifi-

cent sense in which our ancestral cultures were conceived and consummated? Till then we are no more than slaves leading ourselves into further slavery and tying ourselves with further ties of slavery in the consciousness that we are Hindus and Mussalmans, claiming our rights to the detriment and death of our sister communities."

Many anecdotes recalled by old friends bring out that very near the surface of the politician was a warm human being. At the All-Party Convention in Calcutta in 1928, a daring young man approached Motilal Nehru with an autograph book. On seeing him brushed aside summarily, Sarojini's heart was touched and she immediately intervened. "You cannot disappoint a young man," and Motilal Nehru meekly signed. Another time, years later, Mrs. Naidu was in the train with Gandhiji when a message reached them that Annie Besant had died. She knew the life-long devotion of Jamnadas Dwarakadas to Mrs. Besant, so she told Gandhiji that she would go personally to break the news to him. Climbing three flights of stairs, she found Jamnadas and said gently, "Jamni, you know the news."

Her love of the good things of life was well-known and wearing of coarse khadder was a sore trial for her. Avantibai Gokhale once said to Gandhiji, for jealousies and intrigues were as rife in his ashram as elsewhere, that Sarojini did not wear pure khadi. As Jamnadas recalls the episode, Gandhiji tartly replied, "Whatever Sarojini wears is purer than what you wear." It is true that despite her deep devotion to Gandhiji, she returned to wearing silks, handspun and hand-woven in the pure tradition of khadi, though at first she confessed "she felt indecently clad". Perhaps nothing proved her high status among her peers so much as in these small matters. Never slavish, she observed the principles, but satisfied her aesthetic needs and always remained supremely herself, somehow above all criticism.

Often it was her sharp repartee and humour that changed a difficult or sad situation into one that could be laughed away. Even motor car accidents could not suppress her extraordinary ebullience. She was quite badly hurt on one occasion, but she would often comment: "If there had been plastic surgery at the time I may not have been so ugly."

A new adventure came her way in 1928. Delegated by the A.I.W.C. to attend the Pan-Pacific Women's Conference in Honolulu, she sailed for America. Since, shortly before, Miss Mayo's notoriously anti-Indian

book, *Mother India*, had attracted wide notice, Gandhiji asked of her to visit America and Canada to rectify the wrong impressions that had been created. She started her visit in a characteristic manner. "What do you think of Katherine Mayo?" was the first question asked of her as she stepped ashore. "Who is she?" was her reply. From then on her visit was a triumphal procession. Her humour, eloquence and personality captured the journalists and her tour and speeches were widely reported. "Mrs. Naidu," commented the influential *New York Times*, "is a singular combination of personal qualities. As a politician she can be stern and strategically minded, issuing ultimatums to the British rulers demanding Swaraj for her followers, and leading women's deputations for equal franchise. On the other hand, her songs and poems reveal only love for the beautiful in nature and humanity." "The time has come," declares Mrs. Naidu, "when the ideas of Indian womanhood shall be set in letters of fire against a sky that will not blot out the flame."..... "Let us understand," says this oriental feminist, "that we must be ready to accept a lower standard of goods if the higher standard becomes incompatible with our true happiness. Neither man nor woman is to be judged by the amount of material goods each or both of them are able to produce, but by the understanding and sympathy they can command in converting these into human goods."

In her letters to her daughter during this hectic "Passage to America", she was wholly the mother giving warm and human accounts of the people she met; the annual Poetry Luncheon in New York where she was the Guest of Honour, and all the small, intimate reactions to events of which she was the centre. Ending one such letter, she writes, "I send you in a richer measure than you can ever realise, all my heart's love and tenderness and prayer, my beloved child."

Being so different from the popular image of an Indian woman, Sarojini's personality entranced and enthralled her audience. Working steadily from the east to the west coast, she spoke not only on Indian womanhood, modern Indian renaissance, and the spiritual ideals of India, but also gave, before select audiences, recitations of her poetry. She was feted wherever she went and many banquets were arranged in her honour. The famous New York International House was the venue of one of the many and her speech on this occasion was "Better Understanding between India of the Old World and America of the New."



She told the distinguished audience:

“Like the founders of your Republic, the Young India of today has proclaimed to the world a Declaration of Independence by which they mean not only political independence of the country from a foreign rule but also social, religious, cultural and moral freedom for the expression of man himself. To this end, the India of today is evoking its ancient *dharma* of renunciation and *ahimsa*, of which that little man, Mahatma Gandhi, who physically is so tiny, is yet spiritually the greatest living symbol of our age.”

In spite of all the diversions and new experiences, her mind remained rooted in India. On New Year's day of 1929, she wrote to her daughter: “All this week my thoughts have been in Calcutta...waiting from hour to hour with almost feverish suspense to know what will come forth from the churning of the oceans by so many hands...I wish I could have been there to help the warrior carved of ivory; but the little man was there and he is more than enough everywhere.”

The “Little Man” in fact was constantly in her mind. She wrote to him regularly, and he, as regularly, published her letters, with laudatory comments, in *Young India*. Even a Mahatma must have felt flattered when she described her mission as “the gospel of the ‘mystic spinner’ as interpreted by a wandering singer.” However much the intellectuals and the elite showered their attentions on her, she took care to meet the American people at all levels. She made a point to seek out all scholars, writers, politicians, preachers, and especially men and women who had served humanity. She was thrilled when she met descendants of contemporaries of Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and delighted to talk to Jane Addams. She stayed in the midst of the slums of Chicago, and wrote, “It breaks my heart to see the helpless, hopeless, silent and patient bitterness and the mental suffering of the educated Negroes... They are so cultured, so gifted, some of them so beautiful, all of them so infused with the earnest and sensitive appreciation of all that is authentic in modern ideas of life...and yet, there is a bar sinister upon their brow. They are the socially and spiritually outcast children of America.”

While much of what she saw during her triumphant progress across America impressed her, it was rare that her emotions were touched. In a letter dated January 1, 1929, from New York to her daughter, Padmaja, she describes one such occasion:

"I went the other night to see a wonderful play—Wings over Europe—which touched some deep chord in my heart. It is a story of young genius that has found a formula to save the world in conflict with the older generation of smug statesmen engaged in guiding the destinies of a powerful neighbour and preferring safety, power, prestige in relation to themselves and the country they represent as against the upliftment of the world...So they shoot him hoping that with his young body, his young idea and thought will also perish...but in vain! You cannot kill the vision and valour of youth that would save the world...The boy facing the Statesman of Downing Street says, 'I would raise up humanity if only on a cross. I would crown humanity if only with thorns.'

"The next day when I had to make a speech at the banquet of the Hindusthan Association of America...I took these words as my text."

Next to the down-trodden and the needy, her heart was with children. She lost no opportunity to visit schools and to talk to young groups. After one such visit, the headmistress of a school recorded: "Because she was real herself, because her hands were sensitive enough to feel the glowing coal under the ashes, she blew away from that which was useless and unworthy, and they responded universally to the majestic inspiration of her presence...Since Madame Naidu's talk I have heard girl after girl say, "Gandhi seems real to me now and I know what he is trying to do"..."It was not only in her actual address that Mrs. Naidu made India and Mahatma Gandhi 'live' to these young people. She was so gracious and so charming and so interested in all our school life that wherever she went she left behind her a trail of pleased and sparkling individuals."

But she did not only enthrall; she could also shock. One such occasion was a banquet given for seventy nations during a conference for the cause of Alliance for Peace. Called to deliver "a greeting from the East", she asked the startled and somewhat abashed audience where was the flag of India? What was the use of world peace, she added, when one-fifth of the human race was still in subjection. Enslaved India would be a danger to world peace and a mockery to disarmament talks. She ended with a peroration: "Unless they could hang India's banner dyed in the red of her hope, the green of her courage and the white of her faith among other

world symbols of liberty there could and would be no real peace in the world.”

The pace at which she had to live is brought out vividly in another letter from New York:

“Before I go off to the high diplomatic circles in Washington...I am to crowd in endless grave and gay things in 36 hours: one is a party given by Lydda Betti, one, a lecture by the famous Halide Edib, one, a dinner by the Rumanian Princess, Sava Goin, one, to hear Khalil Gibran read his new play, and after that the entire party to visit a night club by way of contrast, one is a poetry luncheon of 400 people with me as Chief Guest, and one is an at home at the house of a Federal Judge and so on and so forth. All in 36 hours.”

Halide Edib, a contemporary of Kemal Ataturk, was not an admirer of Sarojini—an opinion which was heartily reciprocated, according to Sir Shanker Lal and Dr. Ansari. In a book written in Egypt by Halide Edib some years later, she described Mrs. Naidu as ‘a cat-fish...of no political importance...the big fish left to themselves die, but if a cat-fish is there the stimulus keeps them alive!’

But Sarojini, never small-minded, went to Halide Edib’s lecture while in the United States.

After her return in 1929, physically and emotionally exhausted, we can presume, Gandhiji was to write: “The wandering singer has returned home after making many conquests in the west. Time alone will show how lasting is the impression created by her. If the reports received from private sources in America be any criterion, Sarojini Devi’s work has left a profound impression on the American mind. From the triumphal tour she has returned none too soon to take her share in solving the many and intricate problems facing us in the country. May she cast over us the spell she was always able to successfully cast on the Americans.”

But little rest was granted to her in India, and hardly had she unpacked when her travels began again. Having been invited to preside over the East African Indian Congress, Sarojini, accompanied this time by her daughter, Padmaja, sailed from India in November 1929. But it was not a long stay and they were back in time to attend the Annual Congress Session in December. She was immediately made a member of the Congress Working Committee, and was overjoyed when Jawaharlal was elected as president. He was forty at that time and the youngest president ever

elected. She wrote at once:

"My beloved Jawahar,

'I wonder if in the whole of India there was yesterday a prouder heart than your father's or a heavier heart than yours. Mine was in the peculiar position of showing in almost equal measure both his pride and your pain. I lay awake until late into night thinking of the significance of the words I had used so often in reference to you, that you were predestined to a splendid martyrdom. As I watched your face, I felt I was envisaging both the Coronation and the Crucifixion...In whatever fashion it is possible for me to help you or serve you in your tremendous and almost terrible task, you know you have but to ask... if I can give no more concrete help, I can at least give you full measure of understanding and affection...and though, as Khalil Gibran says, 'The vision of one man lends not its wings to another man', yet I believe that the invincible faith of one's spirit kindles the flame of another in radiance that illuminates the world.....

Your loving friend and sister."

At this period Sarojini had been elected President of the All India Women's Educational Conference, and on March 1, 1930, she addressed the women in India in a press statement:

"I hope women of India will realise the need for solidarity of their womanhood which is to be made a true foundation of national progress in the country. Time has come when irrespective of creed, community, rank and race, all women of India should dedicate their energies and talents to the service of India first and foremost in promoting unity among all the communities."

In accordance with a resolution of this Conference, a Women's Day was observed to focus attention and effort to diminish illiteracy among women.

It goes without saying that whenever the communal problem was discussed, Sarojini's advice was always sought. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, in its issue of March 21, 1930, records one such occasion:

"The Committee appointed by the Leaders' Conference on the communal question held its first meeting yesterday under the chairmanship of Sir A. P. Patro. Mrs. Sarojini Naidu attended by special

invitation. She spoke thus: 'In my opinion no matter what form the future of the Government of India might eventually take, whether Dominion Status or Federated States or a Republican Government, the first essential in the charter of India's freedom is unity of all component parts of the nation based on equitable and generous adjustment of all necessary claims and guarantees that go to make the minorities in the country feel secure. I am more deeply confirmed in this opinion by recent experience of such adjustments in Central European countries like Czechoslovakia...No matter to what political groups in the country credit for such a solution might go, I, as the ex-President of the Indian National Congress, make bold to say that no section of Indian people will be more glad or grateful for such noble service than the leaders and members of the Congress...My co-operation at all times and in all circumstances is available...because it is the fundamental belief of my political creed that Hindu-Muslim unity is the only sanction and guarantee of political freedom in India.'

It was a momentous session of the Congress in 1930 over which Jawaharlal Nehru presided, and, in fact, it may be considered as another milestone along India's march towards freedom. For the first time, complete independence was declared as the national goal, and, in pursuance of this, civil disobedience and non-payment of taxes were resolved upon. Gandhiji now returned to Sabarmati to plan the campaign. All the Congress leaders gathered round him, and Sarojini was present when he expressed his anxiety whether his doctrine of non-violence had been fully accepted and understood by those who were likely to take part in the movement.

Much heart-searching and deliberation took place, and Gandhiji eventually decided to break the law prohibiting the manufacture of salt except by Government agencies. But, characteristically, he first informed the Viceroy of his intentions. "Dear Friend," he wrote, ... "Whilst, therefore, I hold the British rule to be a curse, I do not intend harm to a single Englishman or to any legitimate interest he may have in India." Going on, he said that in an impoverished country, the salt tax amounts to three days' income a year. He made a last appeal to the Viceroy to rectify the wrongs of British rule, and announced that if his warning went unheeded, he would start his campaign in March 1930.

Though Sarojini was not among the devoted and hardy followers who

accompanied Gandhiji when, on March 12, he commenced his march to the sea, she was present when, on April 6, after a night spent in prayer, Gandhiji went down to the beach and broke the Salt Law by picking up some dried salt. So symbolic was this seemingly small act that Sarojini, overcome by emotion, cried "Hail Deliverer". Immediately, some thousands of men and women waded into the sea and followed Gandhiji's example. The Government which had been keeping a close watch now moved into action. On May 5, Gandhiji was arrested; his successor, Abbas Tyabji, suffered the same fate; and the leadership of the movement devolved upon Sarojini. "The time has come," she said in an interview given a few days afterwards, "when women can no longer seek immunity behind the shelter of their sex, but must share equally with their men comrades all the perils and sacrifices of the struggle for the liberation of the country."

It has been estimated that 25,000 volunteers had now gathered to break the salt law. Sarojini assumed the leadership in spite of her ill-health. Enjoining them to remain peaceful, whatever the provocation, she led them along the sea-shore. The police stopped them at the Dharasana Salt Works and her biographer¹ graphically describes the scene:

"Seeing that they could not proceed, they sat down on the sandy road. It was the middle of summer and a scorching hot day. They were cordoned off by the police and the salt field was fenced in by barbed wire. They were trapped there, without food or water. The young volunteers suffered from intense thirst, and in order to make them suffer more, the police, it was alleged, drove water carts through the rows of parched volunteers without allowing them a drop to quench their intolerable thirst. Sarojini Naidu sat in their midst in a deck chair. She never stopped smiling or encouraging her army and they were astounded to hear her cheerful remarks and her jokes."

Many foreign correspondents have also recorded their impressions. An American wrote: "A dusty road.....filled with nationalists..... about a woman who sat in an armchair writing letters or hand-spinning. Facing her and her followers was an equal number of police, armed with sticks and guns....."². Another³ wrote of "the famous Indian

1. *Sarojini Naidu*, by Padmini Sen Gupta, p. 232

2. *Women Behind Mahatma*, p. 158

3. *I Found No Peace* by Webb Miller, p. 7

poetess, stocky, swarthy, strong-featured, bare-legged, dressed in rough dark homespun robe and sandals."

But Sarojini did not sit in her deck-chair for long. Calling for a prayer, she exhorted her followers, "Gandhi'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 even raise a hand to ward off blows..."

The reporter went on, "*Inquilab Zindabad* greeted her words, and led by her the non-violent army advanced towards the salt pans. At times the spectacle of unresisting men being methodically bashed into a bloody pulp sickened me so much that I had to turn away. The western mind finds it difficult to grasp the idea of non-resistance. I felt an indefinite sense of helpless rage and loathing almost as much against the men who were submitting unresistingly to being beaten as against the police wielding the clubs, and this despite the fact that when I came to India I sympathised with the Gandhi cause."

The reporter continues, "While we were talking, one of the British officials approached her, touched her on the arm and said: 'Sarojini Naidu, you are under arrest'. She laughingly shook off his hand and said: 'I'll come but don't touch me.' She was taken away, and later sentenced to prison."

Accomplished story-teller that she was, her transference to jail lost nothing in its telling. "My darling children," she wrote from Yeravda, "you are all so accustomed to my travel stories from all parts of the world—San Francisco or Stockholm, Durban, Oxford, Venice or Budapest—but nothing exceeds in interest or novelty the most recent of my travels... as a prisoner of war, brought in great secrecy and with almost sumptuous care behind fast-shuttered windows in a special train from Dharasana to Yeravda...I slept serenely, well-guarded by high police authorities; I fed delicately and, praise the Lord, I was enabled after many days to perform prolonged and delightful ablutions in clean water."

She found, to her delight, "there is a wide yard for me to walk in with young sariska and mango trees, hasunakana bushes and a bed of cannas fed on my bath water." Characteristically, she promptly christened it "The Garden of Seclusion" and her next letter commences:

"Awake, O North Wind, and come thou South; blow upon my garden that the spices thereof may flow out...the flowers appear

on the earth, the tune of the singing of birds has come and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.

“Across the centuries come these lyric words of Solomon the Wise, and they might have been written but yesterday in the ‘Garden of Seclusion’. The voice of the turtle-dove is indeed heard in our land, building under the eaves...and lilies in magic profusion make a delight of loveliness. In the twilight they unfurl fresh unstained, fringed white banners but in the dawn they become crystal pools of rain-drops and amber honey for flame-breasted honey-birds, purple bees, green dragon-flies and tiny butterflies that look like cassia petals, lark-spur petals and the fragile petals of white poppies...”

Gandhiji, Sarojini and their army of followers were not alone in defying the Government. Electrified by Gandhiji's dramatic march, symbolic act, and subsequent arrest, a great national upsurge took place all over India. Thousands courted imprisonment and the jails were soon overflowing. Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru were imprisoned in their own province, and Gandhiji and Sarojini in Yeravda, near Poona.

But important discussions were taking place while they languished in gaol. The humane Viceroy, Lord Irwin, was constantly seeking a way out of the impasse, and responded readily to the offer of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Dr. M. R. Jayakar to see if some mutually acceptable compromise could be arrived at between the Congress and the Government.

After ascertaining how far the Government was prepared to go, the two mediators arranged a conference at Yeravda prison at which were Gandhiji, Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini and one or two other members of the Congress Working Committee. In a letter to Padmaja, dated August 16, 1930, Sarojini describes what occurred, in her inimitable fashion.

“And now, of course, you want to know something, everything of immediate issues and events...and personalities...The initial or it might even be, who knows, the penultimate phases and stages of the Peace Conference are over. The two Ambassadors excellently and correctly arrayed in grey suits have departed and the *khadi* clad gang of distinguished criminals and rebels have been conveyed back to their permanent or temporary habitation. The Little Man had an orgy of unwonted dissipation, pow-wow-ing with all his special old chums. He looks more than ever like a little widow all wrapped up in what

I call his opera cloak! He was full of his usual and rare combination of calm wisdom and child-like frivolity and so happy to get news of people (he has cut himself off from all interviews and the exclusion extends even to Ba). He sends tons of love to you both and with his unashamed partisanship of me which evokes so much envy he believes, foolish old darling, that my arrest has been the 'most perfect' event of the entire campaign and 'of the greatest world value'. (You never realised what a wonderful mother you own)..."

The discussions continued for three days, and, on August 16, the Nehrus were returned to Naini Jail. Soon after, Lord Irwin suggested a Round Table Conference, and Gandhiji accepted his invitation to come and discuss it at Delhi. But the first Round Table Conference was convened in London on November 12, 1930, with no Congress participation, and Gandhiji and Sarojini still in prison.

But the British intransigent policy was slightly modified with the change in Government in Britain when the Labour leader, Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, became Prime Minister. Motilal Nehru had come out of prison earlier due to ill-health, and, in January 1931, Gandhiji and Sarojini were also released.

The scene of activity now moved to Allahabad and Delhi. Motilal Nehru's death brought all the prominent Congress leaders to Anand Bhavan, his home, and it was here and in Delhi that some human glimpses of Sarojini were captured in *The Naked Fakir* by Robert Bernays. Her humour struck him in particular and he wrote: "Fortunately, many Indians, for all their solemnity, have a sense of humour...I came across one with the quality very highly developed. She was Sarojini Naidu, the Indian poetess...We met at a local flower show where Indians and Englishmen were self-consciously mingling together in brotherly love around the begonias. Mrs. Naidu had just come out of jail. I asked her about her experience. 'I had a splendid time,' she said, 'did not want to come out. I had planted some beautiful anthuriums, and just as they were coming into flower, we were all put out again. I begged the civil surgeon to allow me to stay just an extra day to see my flowers but he refused absolutely and I had to turn out.....What do you think of Gandhi—isn't he an ugly little man?' It was her devastatingly witty remarks about Gandhiji that amused friends most. Knowing of the Mahatma's habit of staying with the Birlas and of his extraordinary

economies, from making strings for ashramites, petticoats out of torn saris, to his items of simple diet that ranged from often unobtainable goat's milk to leafy vegetables that might not be in season, Sarojini once said that it takes a millionaire to keep Gandhiji in poverty.

In Delhi, the talks between Gandhiji and Lord Irwin slowly reached their climax. According to Robert Bernays, Sarojini had no optimism about their result. "She is not hopeful. She said, 'I have got my toothbrush already packed for my journey back to prison!'" He also quotes her remarks on the members of the first Round Table Conference. "They have just been passing the time in London; they represent no one out here. Their proposals are vague and nebulous...Not one of them has any following. They are just a handful of amiable educated gentlemen." "No doubt," Bernays comments, somewhat acidly, "there is a certain amount of engaging feminine pique in Mrs. Naidu's remarks for it must be a bit galling to come out of prison and find that the Round Tablers have, even temporarily, stolen the limelight."

It must have been about this time that Sarojini referred to the two protagonists, Irwin and Gandhi, as the toothless Mahatma and the armless Mahatma.

The full story of the long drawn-out talks, with their high and low points, need not be detailed here, but the upshot was the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Gandhiji and Sarojini, on August 29, 1931, sailed for London to attend the second Round Table Conference. On embarking, Gandhiji remarked, "I go to London with God, my only Guide." With him, however, was a more tangible partner—Sarojini Naidu.

As could be expected, the voyage provided much colourful material for her scintillating pen. Her correspondents were, as usual, her beloved family. "My darling Children", she wrote in a letter headed "Gulf of Suez, 6th September 1931."

".....The second class is full of young eager-eyed students..... But in the first class there are men of eminence and intellect like old Sir Prabhashankar Pattani hiding under his saintly white beard all the garnered statecraft of half a century of dictatorship in Kathiawar States....There is beautiful Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, the embodied symbol of Hindu culture, tradition and ideals; Pannikar, brilliant, versatile, of extraordinary charm; Neogi, adviser of the Orissa States, a man of deep knowledge and sound intellectual qualities;

K. T. Shah, cantankerous of manner but brilliant and of what incredible range of reading and infallible memory and mental resources; G. D. Birla, with his marigold coloured turban, his agile and incisive intelligence, his far-famed prescience in financial matters, the glamour of his youth, wealth and success. Then Shuaib, with sombre and semi-tragic, semi-romantic personality; Dr. Rahman, stern, elegant, efficient, courtier and physician in one....and so on....a goodly group,”

A little later, she writes:

“Which reminds me of my own *bon mot* which no one has enjoyed more than the Little Daridra Narayan himself. I said that while the beautiful Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya would represent the symbol of Hindu culture, the only culture the Mahatma would represent would be agriculture!”

Her letters, full of humour and yet deeply perceptive, continued from London.

“I am really bored to tears by the caprices and vagaries of the Little Man. He does not know his own mind for three minutes consecutively! With great difficulty I have found and officially established him in a beautiful house overlooking Hyde Park where he can see people, but some kink in the brain makes him cling to the East End to the utter weariness and rebellion of all his staff including the devoted Miraben! The Gandhi craze still persists and grows in the most unexpected quarters. But on the whole things have not been arranged to get the maximum amount of benefit out of the visit ...I am driven silly by ‘ranks and pseudo-saints and ineffectual angels all of whom try and fail to organise things well on his behalf...’¹

Though Mrs. Naidu was well-known in England, the impact of her personality was no less great. Margareta Barns, in her *India Today and Tomorrow*, has given her impressions. Discussing the members of the Round Table Conference, she says that they included “Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, poetess, politician, walking encyclopaedia on everyone’s affairs, combining the shrewdness of her years with the vivacity of a young girl. Almost more than any other Indian politician, Mrs. Naidu has the qualities

1. Letter to Padmaja Naidu, 23rd September, 1931

which appeal to English people. While she can laugh with others (not without a pinch of malice), she can also convulse an audience with jokes against herself. There is not the suspicion of any inferiority complex about Sarojini Naidu, and she is impatient and outspoken when she meets this trait in her countrymen. Who will forget her indiscretion at the end of one of the sessions of the conference when she turned to look for Mr. Gandhi and asked 'Where is our little Mickey Mouse?' Many will remember another occasion when a certain delegate had bored his colleagues almost beyond endurance by a repeat performance of his views in favour of second chambers. 'Why any second chamber?' asked Mrs. Naidu. She was, she said, 'in favour of third, or lethal chambers for certain politicians.'

Sarojini's own comments were not so good-humoured.

"I have *never* attended anything more disappointing and dull in every way. It is almost worse than the endless Unity and all Party Conference we have had *ad nauseum* in India! The only real work is effected in private talks but even these don't take one far. The Little Man makes his impression everywhere, but it is not of the magnitude one expected...if he had come to deliver his great spiritual message he would have commanded the world...but when he discusses the Second Chamber, finance and franchise he is less than convincing and below the standard of the more ordinary men who know law and constitution. I more than ever believe *a chacun son infini*."¹

But it was by no means all work and no play:

"But apart from all these I have endless personal engagements, public and private, in the shape of meals, speeches, and general 'whoopce'.....

"You have all, of course, seen the pictures of the stars, Charles Chaplin and Gandhiji.....I found Charlie Chaplain very simple, rather shy and quite charming. But of course the Little Man had never heard of him before."²

A memorable occasion was a function at the Friends Meeting House. Mrs. Naidu, according to a member of the audience, "was a magnificent specimen of womanhood, richly clad in native silk, erect in stature, com-

1. *Ibid*

2. *Ibid*

manding in mien, a potent and a beautiful presence....” As she entered the hall “and strode to her place, and received the rapturous acclaim of this crowded assemblage of Englishmen and women, one instinctively felt as though we were looking upon a queen.” “Any list,” the writer, Dr. Haynes Holmes, continues, “of Gandhi’s friends and colleagues would be incomplete without mention of Mme. Sarojini Naidu, greatest of Indian women. In her I find a perfect illustration of Gandhi’s power to capture the souls of men, and bind them to him with bonds not of steel but of the spirit...”

With her passion for Hindu-Muslim unity, the communalism that came to the surface during the proceedings almost broke her heart.

“I must be either inhuman or superhuman to have survived the past dreadful week of unceasing and anxious effort, hour in and hour out, to reach some agreement on the communal problem....to avoid exposing our shame to the world. But shame and sorrow, conflict and disunion continue to be our bitter portion. Tonight, there cannot be a sadder or heavier heart in the world than the broken heart of the Little Man of Sorrows who has once again faced defeat because his own countrymen are only fit to be slaves. Where is the use of apportioning blame when all are so blameworthy? But in the last hour those who failed were not the Mussalmans but the Hindus’ and Sikhs’ fear—mistrust—selfishness.”¹

It is not strange that in such an atmosphere Sarojini felt that her work lay more behind the scenes by arranging private talks between the protagonists than in making speeches at the Conference table. In this respect the role she played will never be fully known. It was known well enough and fully appreciated by those directly concerned, but all of these are now dead with little in writing left to tell this story.

A sad but silent spectator till the very end, Sarojini only rose to speak at practically the final session of the Second Round Table Conference. Her speech could not but have its customary effect, even though she herself was not fully satisfied.

“I don’t think it was one of my specially good ones. How could one speak in such an atmosphere, but old Colonel Trench came out and said, ‘Not a single eye remained dry...and we are supposed to be strong

¹ Letter to Padmaja Naidu, 8th October, 1931

men'. The Lord Chancellor and the Attorney General, Sir John Jowett, Lord Lothian and the others appeared deeply moved but Lord Reading, cunning old Jew that he is, said to me today, 'It was a fine speech; it interested me deeply but you cannot expect me to agree with all of it.' Of course, I don't since I asked for the *beau geste* of voluntary abdication."¹

Sarojini, of course, not only spoke for India, she spoke also for the women of India. The implications of the impending political reforms had not been lost on the leaders of the various women's organisations. Determined that their voice should not go unheard, the All-India Women's Conference, the Women's Indian Association, and the National Council of Women in India met in a joint conference and demanded immediate adult franchise without any sex distinction. The Resolution was circulated to all authorities considering this question. Interestingly enough, presiding over the All-India Women's Conference in Bombay in January of the previous year, Sarojini had said emphatically that she was not a feminist and would never be one as the demand for granting preferential treatment to women was an admission of their inferiority. There was no such thing in India, for the women had always stood by the side of men in political councils and the field of battle.

Having been appointed on a Delegation to South Africa, as soon as the Round Table Conference concluded, Sarojini sailed for that country.

It was the sorry plight of the Indian indentured labour in South Africa that had first stirred Gandhiji's heart sufficiently to cause him to leave the seclusion of a lawyer's office and to devote himself to the service of humanity. It was in South Africa also that he had first tentatively tried out the technique of passive resistance which he was to perfect during India's struggle for freedom.

This is perhaps not the place to recount the full story. Suffice it to say that from the very beginning, the South African Government violated both the spirit and the letter of the Agreement under which the unfortunate peasants from India were misled into migrating to work as labour in the newly discovered gold fields in Johannesburg.

Indian public opinion was well aware of, and deeply exercised over, the question, and responding to popular clamour, the Government of

1. Letter to Padmaja Naidu, 1st December, 1931

India had, in 1927, negotiated the Cape Town Agreement under which it was agreed that an Indian Agent should be appointed to guard the interests of the Indian emigrants. This Agreement also included a scheme for assisted repatriation to India, and provision for the social uplift of those who elected to remain behind. The agreement, however, could not alter certain prohibitions against Indians owning, occupying and trading in certain areas.

But certain Indians had succeeded in circumventing these prohibitions, and, in consequence, the South African Government, in 1930, passed the Transvaal Asiatic Tenure Bill which provided that all Indians who were in illegal occupation should vacate their premises in five years, and move to areas set apart for them. The Indians concerned were mostly shopkeepers, and it was obvious that the proposed Act would cause the ruination of their present business and preclude further profitable business since the segregated areas were distant from the centres of trade.

In order to review the workings of the Cape Town Agreement of 1927, with particular reference to the scheme of assisted repatriation, and secondly, to examine the situation created by the new Act, it was decided by the two Governments that a second conference be held in Cape Town, immediately after the Second Round Table Conference. The Indian Delegation was led by Sir Fazl-i-Hussain, member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, and consisted of eminent personalities such as Srinivasa Sastri and Sarojini, two prominent Europeans, and G. S. Bajpai as Secretary.

Even in such august and sombre company, Sarojini was as irrepressible as ever. At the very first meeting of the Delegation, Srinivasa Sastri, somewhat tactlessly remarked: "I wonder why Sarojini Naidu is in the Delegation," to which Sarojini retorted, "Mr. Sastri will be sorry that he demanded a public explanation. I only came here because my leader (Gandhiji) was not quite sure of the wisdom of the *men* of the East, and insisted on its being reinforced by the immemorial Wisdom of the *women* of the East."

Of her part played in this delegation little is known. The letters she must have written are unavailable, press reports mention only items such as the official welcome by General Hertzog, the South African Prime Minister, and the Report the Delegation must have submitted to the Government has not seen the light of day. Only a secret file exists in the

National Archives. This is probably due, as the present situation in South Africa manifests, to the Delegation not achieving very much. But as the result of its visit, the vicious Transvaal Asiatic Tenure Bill was modified to some extent. So the work of the delegation did bear some fruit.

Lull Before The Storm

IN SUCH circumstances, Sarojini returned from South Africa. As the only member of the Working Committee out of jail, she assumed the acting presidentship of the Congress and, in a statement dated March 3, 1932, issued a call to action.

After congratulating Congress workers on carrying on a good fight, she warned and informed them: "Ordinances more ruthless than Lord Irwin could devise in months were hurled at our head by Lord Willingdon right at the beginning of the movement, or rather even weeks before the movement began."

"What do we find," she asked, "after two and a half months of our non-violent war? Nearly 60,000 women and children have gone to jail—imports of foreign cloth were lower in 1932 than even before. We find demonstrations are being regularly held, *hartals* being regularly observed and the ordinances being regularly defied. Bombay is carrying on as one man the instructions of the War Council—in spite of threats and arrests not one market has ceased to observe hartal"

She then issued orders for a National Week of demonstrations, picketing and *hartals* from April 6 to 13, 1932, and a Postal Week to boycott post offices from April 21 to 27, 1932.

Sarojini, filled with important plans and duties, wrote to the Provincial Congress Committees that she intended to hold the next Congress Session in Delhi in the last week of April. Since most of the provincial presidents had been arrested, "dictators" for each province were being appointed to direct the movement. She, therefore, requested them to nominate their delegates. She also proposed to confine the proceedings to the presidential speech and the following three resolutions:

1. Complete independence as goal of Congress.
2. Endorsement of resolution of last meeting of the Working Committee reviving civil disobedience, under certain conditions.
3. Affirming Gandhiji as sole representative and spokesman of Congress.

In pursuance of her orders, a Reception Committee was formed in Delhi, and declared unlawful by the Government as soon as formed. Telegrams and letters also flew between the Governments of Delhi and Bombay. One dated New Delhi, April 4, 1932, read:

“In view of probability that Mrs. Naidu’s actions may render her liable to arrest anytime in the near future, may Government of Bombay assume concurrence of Government of India, whenever this course becomes unavoidable... .”

Letter from Commissioner of Police, Bombay, Secret D.O. No. SD2840, dated April 8, 1932.

“I am to say that the Home Member will wish to discuss at the Conference Sunday morning the question of arrest of Mrs. Naidu... proceedings in connection with the opening of the Swadesh Section of the Mulji Jetha Market will probably provide ample legal grounds. Mrs. Naidu may possibly be arrested either as a Member of the Working Committee or as responsible for National Week programme or for her speech on the opening of the Mulji Jetha Market... .”

Excerpts from the minutes of Conference dated April 10, 1932:

“It was decided it was doubtful whether sufficient evidence was as yet forthcoming for successful prosecution of Mrs. Naidu under the Criminal Law Amendment Act and it was therefore decided to issue an order under Section 4 ETO to leave Bombay within 24 hours.”

Excerpts from the minutes of Conference dated April 17, 1932:

“It was decided that this lady should not be proceeded against until she commits a substantial offence. She probably represents the more moderate party in the Congress and her influence, such as it is, is likely to be exercised on putting a brake on the more objectionable of the Congress activities... .”

Extract from letter from Commissioner of Police, Bombay, dated April 19, 1932:

“It is reported that Mrs. Sarojini Naidu will leave for Delhi by Frontier Mail on 22nd April.”

Extract from telegram to all Provincial Governments, dated April 19, 1932.

"Mrs. Naidu intends to leave Bombay for Delhi on the 22nd instant. Government of India consider that her activities as acting President of the Congress and member of the Working Committee in connection with National Week and the Congress Session fully justify her arrest and her prosecution on substantive charge under the Criminal Law Amendment Act. Pending this, they think that this action is desirable under Section 3 or 4 of the Emergency Powers Ordinance and will relieve the Delhi Administration, or Bombay Government can take necessary action before she leaves for Delhi and Government will be grateful if they will do this. The Government of India think it desirable that, subject to the views of the Governor-in-Council, if she is prosecuted on a substantial charge, the Counsel for the Crown will not ask for a sentence in excess of six months."

Note in Bombay Government file on telegram given above:

"H.E. is aware Mrs. Naidu's case has been discussed more than once with the Commissioner of Police and the Chief Presidency Magistrate and have come to the conclusion that there is no evidence at present on which court could convict Mrs. Naidu... Nothing that she has said or done openly in Bombay is an offence and we cannot prove intercepted letters which do not even bear her signature. Nor is there any advantage in arresting her under Section III for a few days since if she was subsequently released and served an order under Section IV leading to a second arrest for breaking it, they would merely make two newspaper sensations, where one would have done. H.E. therefore considers that the correct course would be for the Commissioner of Police to serve an order on Mrs. Naidu tomorrow forbidding her to leave Bombay. She will no doubt disobey the order having already announced her programme. In that case she will be arrested at the first station where the train stops. This course will fully meet the objects of the Government of India and the Delhi Administration who only want to ensure that she does not reach Delhi..."

The decision was duly carried out and Sarojini soon received the following communication:

"Whereas I am satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing that you have been acting or are about to act in a manner

prejudicial to the public safety or peace, I, Patrick Kelly, Commissioner of Police, Bombay, do hereby direct an order that you should abstain from any action in furtherance of the Civil Disobedience Movement, taking part in any public meeting and should not leave Bombay City limits without taking permission of the Commissioner of Police.”

As anticipated by the Government, Sarojini defied the Restraint Order, and a police report dated April 23, 1932, describes what happened next.

“In response to the appeal on the leaflets asking public to give a send-off to Mrs. Sarojini Naidu at the Bombay Central Station yesterday, people began to collect at the Station from 6 p.m. on the 22nd. About fifty persons were present on the platform and about fifty more on the outside of the platform. Mrs. Naidu... arrived at the Station about 7.00 p.m. On seeing her, the crowd in the hall shouted slogans such as *Inquilab Zindabad*.... They were soon silenced by Railway Police. Mrs. Naidu went straight to her first class coupé and was busy talking to her friends till the departure of the train at 7.30 p.m. A little before departure time, two Congress volunteers in red shirts went to the platform, posted themselves outside her compartment with Congress flags. When the train moved off, the crowd on the platform as well as in the hall shouted the usual Congress slogans. Two volunteers who tried to lead the procession from the platform were put under arrest by the Railway Police....”

As previously decided, Sarojini was arrested at the first stop, Bandra, and removed to the Arthur Road jail. But that even the Government considered her a prisoner very out of the ordinary, is related by Mira Behn. “I had not been aware,” she writes, “of the fact that as an A-class prisoner, I was entitled to all sorts of conveniences, but now an A-class outfit began to arrive in my barrack for Sarojini Devi.” These included: “a bed, dressing table with brush and comb, a wash stand, a bath tub etc. and even curtains. The matron was quite excited. Then the next day came Sarojini Devi, overflowing with vivacity and wit. She was of course exhausted with all the rush and excitement she had been going through outside, but neither her age nor her aches and pains ever daunted her.”¹

1. *The Spirit's Pilgrimage* by Mira Behn, p. 161

Her stay was, however, not for long and she was soon transferred to the women's prison in Yeravda, facing the men's prison in which was incarcerated Gandhiji.

While they were both in Yeravda, on August 8, 1932, the Communal Award was announced. Though he had accepted separate electorates for the Muslims as a painful necessity, Gandhiji was outraged when this principle was extended to the Untouchables, or Harijans as they were now being called. "I have to resist your decision with my life," he immediately wrote to the British Prime Minister, and commenced, in protest, a fast until death.

The epic fast commenced in jail on a white cot under a mango tree. Mahadev Desai and Vallabhbhai Patel were with him, and the fast started with morning prayers followed by Gandhiji's favourite hymn "Vaishnava Jana To" sung by the golden-voiced devotee of the Mahatma, Raihana Behn Tyabji. Streams of visitors poured into the jail compound to sit with Gandhiji and to comfort him in his self-imposed travail. Sarojini was immediately brought over from the women's section of the jail, and the role she played is related by Gandhiji's faithful secretary, Pyarelal:

"When the present writer visited Gandhiji on the afternoon of the 21st (21.8.32), she [Sarojini] had already constituted herself his bodyguard. She mothered him throughout the fast and stood sentry over him from morning till evening, exercising a mother's and a nurse's prescriptive right to tyrannise over her ward and the entire household..."¹

As is well-known, even though Dr. Ambedkar, the acknowledged leader of the Harijans, called the fast "a political stunt", the fear of Gandhiji's death forced him and some Hindu leaders to evolve a new scheme in regard to the political representation of the Harijans. Ambedkar capitulated when Gandhi whispered to him weakly "you hold my life in your pocket".² This scheme, subsequently known as the Poona Pact, being mutually satisfactory, was accepted by the British Prime Minister. His objective being achieved, Gandhiji, in the presence of Kasturba, Sarojini, Tagore and a few other inmates broke his fast by sipping a little orange juice.

But Sarojini's duties were not over. Gandhiji had been greatly enfeebled by his fast and had to be protected from the importunities of

1. *Gandhi Reader*, p. 283

2. Interview with Col. Bhandari, Superintendent of Yeravda Jail during the epic fast

innumerable visitors. Among them was a Christian missionary who later wrote:

"I was amazed to see Mrs. Sarojini Naidu, the great poetess and orator, looking out at us from inside, like some magnificent bird of prey protecting her young. The prison-guards appeared mild in comparison with her!"

The writer was momentarily taken aback and puzzled at Sarojini's presence in a men's prison:

"A few moments observation, however, indicated that she was helping the guard to decide which of the numerous visitors could be allowed to see their imprisoned leader."¹

In May 1933, Gandhiji again announced that he would commence a twenty-one-day fast in self-purification against the sin of untouchability. A secret letter from Col. Doyle, the Inspector General of Police, states the following:

"By the way, Mrs. Naidu whom I saw this morning is 'fed up' with the old man's monkey tricks and said she would like to give him a good dressing down if Government permitted her to see him. I told her to apply for an interview in writing...I think it will be all to the good if she does see him because she certainly has a steadying effect on him and a special interview may stop his sudden enthusiasm for fasts. (Signed) E. E. Doyle."

In spite of all this, Gandhiji commenced his fast at 12 noon on May 8, 1933. Since this fast was not for the purpose of putting any pressure on the Government, the latter saw no reason why they should risk the odium of his possible death. Together with Sarojini, therefore, he was released the same evening, and, leaning on her shoulder, left the prison and was taken to Lady Thackersay's house. There, nursed continuously by Kasturba and Sarojini, he completed his twenty-one days' fast. After some further weeks during which he regained his strength, Gandhiji moved to his Ashram in Wardha, and, before resuming her political work, Sarojini spent some time with her family in Hyderabad.

After her much-needed rest, Sarojini returned to the fray in Bombay. Concurrently with her activities as a member of the Working Committee, she had been for many years President of the Bombay Provincial Congress

1. *Bapu* by Mary Barr, Pp. 24, 25, 26

Committee. At one period her joint secretaries were S. K. Patil and Abid Ali. Some credit is surely due to their mentor if one recalls that S. K. Patil later became a member of the Cabinet of the Union Government of Independent India, and Abid Ali, apart from many years' distinguished service in the Indian Parliament, rose to top positions in the international labour movement.

Based on the deliberations of the Round Table Conference, the British Government framed and passed through the British Parliament the India Bill of 1935. The General Elections, which were scheduled for 1936 under the new reforms, had opened the field for women candidates, and Sarojini never failed to give the women of India the leadership they expected of her. Almost immediately after her release from jail and her rest in Hyderabad, she played an important part in the establishment of the Lady Irwin College for Women in New Delhi. In August 1934, she was in Madras to address the Women's Indian Association. Never one to make allowances for the slightest complacency, she brought them face to face with reality by asking them:

"Is there not work to be done around you? Are not the orphans crying for compassionate help?...Does not the wail of the widow reach down the corridors of time—not merely down the corridors of yesterday, but knocking upon the gates of today—saying through the ages, 'Injustice has been done to us, let your generation redeem us from the slavery of our position?' Are not the illiterate women of the country calling out to you mutely, but nonetheless urgently? Are there not villages that need your counsel, your succour, your care and your guidance for the amelioration of their conditions, of their merest elementary needs?"

She then exhorted her audience, mostly fashionable ladies, to pass from words to work by participating actively in the Swadeshi Movement by spinning a little every day and by weaving *khadi*.

"How many have considered the romance and adventure of swadeshi? Many people think that swadeshi means making yourself look perfectly ugly by wearing the most unpleasing texture and colour of cloth; the more unpleasant it is, the higher the swadeshi. But I have quite a different definition of swadeshi. For me swadeshi begins, may be with Gandhiji's *charkha*, but by no means ends there. For me it means the reviving of every art and craft of this land that is

dying today. It means the giving of livelihood again to every craftsman—the dyer, the embroiderer the goldsmith, the man who makes tassels for your weddings, the man who makes all the little things that you need for your home. All these dying industries... are awaiting the magic benediction of your hands to bring again livelihood and a living chance to thousands upon thousands of those who today, for lack of a little initiative or a little help, are among the unemployed and the desperate of your country. For me it is the renaissance of all our literature, the revival of our music, a new vision of architecture that is in keeping with our modern ideas of life. It means for me a kind of experiment that explores and exploits every resource within the country. It means to me the spirit of Indian nationhood—I do not use the word ‘nationalism’ because it is a word I dislike intensely as it has an unpleasant aroma of exclusion. Every woman is a creator in this ideal of nationhood. I want the women of India to have a consciousness of the great and dynamic nation whose energies have to be mobilised and harmonised for common purposes.”

A little later Sarojini was again addressing women. Speaking at a session of the All India Women’s Conference in Karachi, she again reverted to her theme of unity and harmony among all communities in India and all nations in the world:

“The ideal and genius of India had always been inclusion, not exclusion, of universal thought and culture. Once they understood the fundamental ideal preached by the world teachers of the indivisible oneness of man, they could give a mandate to the world to stop war. No matter whether it was temple or mosque, church or fire-shrine, let them transcend the barriers that divided man from man. They were, however, powerless to separate woman from woman, she being the element of Truth on which she founded the civilisation of humanity.”

So many were the demands, from totally different quarters, for her presence that it is difficult to prevent her biography from becoming a collection of speeches. A spirited defence of the English language as a medium of instruction was made by her at a students’ conference at Lahore. The subject of the debate was “Some Aspects of University Reform” during which Sarojini pointed out that the introduction of English had been a boon to the people of India, and Macaulay had done

a great service by introducing English. If it had done nothing else, it had brought within our vision true ideals of liberty. A common language was perhaps the greatest solvent of communal differences, and if today Indians were able to protest their grievances with a united voice from Peshawar to Cape Comorin, it was because of the common bond of English.

After students came musicians, and on March 4, 1935, Sarojini presided over the All India Musical Conference at Delhi. "I am not," she declared, "a musician or a dancer. I am only their poor cousin—a poet." In all her life things had come to her in tune or picture, in rhythm, colour or form. They did not come in words, she continued, perhaps stretching a point considerably in favour of her audience, words were the secondary medium of response. Music and dance made the ultimate expression of the undivided or collective life. Language has barriers and needs interpreters, but music none."

After the students and the musicians, the artists had their turn. Inaugurating the Universal Art Circle in Bombay, Sarojini deplored the production of a certain class of Indian films and castigated a particular school of Indian music and Indian architecture for being merely imitative of the West and lowering these artistic aspects of the country in the eyes of the world, and of Indians themselves. The climax of all forms of self-expression was beauty and, therefore, beauty was the highest measure of a nation's life and spirit. But, she emphasised, beauty must be original and not imitative. Conceding that the cinema occupied a place among the arts, she asked what could be more utterly ridiculous than an Indian film depicting Indian mythology with Lord Krishna in pink suspenders seated on a divan covered with cretonne, on which large flowers were embossed. The probable equal of this travesty, she concluded, were the large Gothic buildings in Bombay.

The year ended for Sarojini on a historical note. The Indian National Congress, founded in Bombay in 1885, celebrated in 1935 its Golden Jubilee. As President of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee, Sarojini unveiled a marble plaque outside a hall which housed the original meeting place. On the plaque was inscribed:

"In this historic hall on December 28, 1885, a band of gallant patriots laid the foundation of the Indian National Congress which during these 50 years has been built up, stone by stone, tier by tier, by the faith and devotion, courage and sacrifice of countless men and

women as the pledge and symbol of the invincible purpose to secure India, their motherland, her legitimate birthright of Swaraj.’’

Though 1935 had been a year of constant travel and speeches, and had greatly drained her physically, it had been, mentally and emotionally, peaceful compared to the years that immediately followed. As a member, in every way except actual blood-relationship, of the Nehru family, the last illness and death in early 1936 of Kamala Nehru distressed her deeply. The new Government of India Act which had emerged out of the deliberations of the Round Table Conference also necessitated political decisions of very difficult and fundamental nature. The new Act abolished the old system of dyarchy and envisaged ministries in each province, albeit with certain powers reserved to the provincial governors. History repeated itself and there was much debate over whether the Congress should form ministries in the provinces in which it had gained electoral majorities.

Jawaharlal Nehru was now again the President of the Congress and though he personally considered that the ministries under the Act would have “responsibility without power”, he was over-ruled by the majority and it was decided that the Congress would form the ministries. Fearing that the Congress ministers might get seduced by office, Jawaharlal Nehru resolved to have as radical a Working Committee as he could form to counter-balance any such trend. Well to the ‘left’ of the Congress leaders, he nominated to the Working Committee Jayaprakash Narain, Narendra Deo and Achyut Patwardhan who, as socialists, held views largely in consonance with his own. Since these nominations rendered inevitable the exclusion of some senior members who were hitherto members of the Working Committee, Sarojini was one of those whom Jawaharlal Nehru requested to make room for his candidates. As a good soldier, Sarojini readily agreed, but within a few months was brought back due to the resignation of Jayaprakash Narain.

Gandhiji would seem to have disapproved the decision to form ministries as much as the left-wing policies of Jawaharlal Nehru. Consequently, in as great a huff as a Mahatma can get into, he retired to his Ashram at Sevagram. There, in a letter dated April 30, 1936, to Agatha Harrison, he unburdened himself:

“I would love to kill the new Constitution today if I can. There is hardly anything in it I like, but Jawaharlal’s way is not my way.

I accept his ideal about land etc., but I do not accept practically any of his methods. I would strain every nerve to prevent class war... . He does not believe it is possible to avoid it. I believe it to be perfectly possible especially if my method is accepted..."

Even Sarojini, the "Court Jester", could not lift him out of his depression. She confessed her failure in a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, dated November 13, 1937.

"My very dear Jawahar,

I am writing from the modern version of the Tower of Babel. The Little Man is sitting unconcernedly, eating spinach and boiled marrow while the world ebbs and flows about him breaking into waves of Bengali, Gujarati, English and Hindi. Bidhan and his colleagues are in despair over his stubborn indocility as regards his health. He is really ill... not only in his brittle bones and thinning blood but in the core of his soul... the most lonely and tragic figure of his time ... India's man of destiny on the edge of his own doom... ,

To you the other man of destiny, I am sending a birthday greeting What shall I wish you for the coming year? Happiness? Peace? Triumph? All these things that men hold supremely dear are but secondary things to you... almost incidental... . I will wish you, my dear, unflinching faith and unfaltering courage in your *via crucis* that all must tread who seek freedom and hold it more precious than life... not personal freedom but the deliverance of a nation from bondage. Walk steadfastly along that steep and perilous path... . If sorrow and pain and loneliness be your portion, remember liberty is the ultimate crown of all your sacrifices... but you will not walk alone.

Your' loving
Sarojini"¹

Another development added greatly to Sarojini's general distress. Even if faint signs of the dawn of freedom appeared on the far horizon, she saw her dreams and hopes and all her life-long efforts for Hindu-Muslim unity beginning to move towards their final failure. The Muslim League had also contested the elections under the new constitutional

1. *A Bunch of Old Letters*, p. 255

scheme, and Jinnah, anticipating partition, demanded parity. His demand for Congress—Muslim League coalition governments in the provinces being rejected by an over-confident Jawaharlal Nehru, the existing rift between the two communities rapidly widened into a gulf, never to be bridged. That it was Jinnah, her old friend and co-worker in her efforts for communal unity, who should now be the most implacable opponent of all that she stood and worked for was for her the unkindest cut. But, till her death, neither did her hopes die nor her efforts cease.

A humanist to the core of her being, Sarojini sadly watched the war-clouds massing over Europe. Firm as the Congress leaders were against all that is implied in the term *fascism*, public opinion in India was firmly against the Munich Pact. But believing in the adage that "my enemy's enemy is my friend", Subhas Chandra Bose was heading an extreme faction opposed to the moderates grouped round Gandhiji, and even the socialists who considered Jawaharlal Nehru as their leader.

The conflict came to a head in March 1939 over the presidentship of the Congress Session at Tripuri. The full story of Gandhiji's fast on the eve of the session, Bose's illness, and the moves and counter-moves that resulted in Bose's election can be found in any history of the Congress and need not be related here. But the confused aftermath brought Sarojini into the centre of the storm. As soon as Bose's election had been announced, Gandhiji unexpectedly declared that "the defeat of Subas's rival was his own defeat". This, added to the fact that though Bose had won the votes of the majority of delegates at the open session his supporters were in a minority in the All India Congress Committee, threw everything back into the melting-pot. In such circumstances Govind Ballabh Pant and about 160 members of the A.I.C.C. moved a resolution declaring confidence in the leadership of Gandhiji and requesting Bose as President to nominate the new Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji. This resolution was generally considered as a vote of no-confidence in Bose. Pandemonium ensued and the new Working Committee could not be nominated. The next act took place when the A.I.C.C. met in Calcutta in April 1939. Bose, ill and realising that his position was untenable, expressed his wish to resign, but Jawaharlal Nehru framed a compromise resolution which requested Bose to remain President but to continue with the old Working Committee.

When the session was convened to consider this resolution, Bose, having submitted his resignation, declined to preside. Since in Calcutta, Bose's supporters were in force, no decision could be taken and the morning session ended in confusion. But in the afternoon Sarojini stepped into the breach and took the chair. Facing the unruly delegates with firmness and composure, she soon restored some semblance of order and called upon Bose to state his case. Bose, thereupon, explained that he "wanted unity of action and not unity of inaction". To achieve this, a homogenous Working Committee was essential. If he could not have the Working Committee of his choice, he was not prepared to take on the responsibility of presidentship.

Sarojini then made a direct appeal to him. "We are all anxious," she said, "that Mr. Bose should continue as President.....and lead the destinies of the Congress. We desire to co-operate with him. We desire his co-operation with us, we desire to express that the President of the Congress is not a non-entity. He is the true interpreter of the declared policy and progress of the Congress. We shall all give the necessary co-operation to Mr. Bose for the achievement of our goal." She then expressed the hope that Jawaharlal Nehru's compromise resolution would be accepted unanimously, and in order to give Bose time to think over the matter, adjourned the session till the next day.

But, next morning, Bose maintained his standpoint. There was, therefore, no alternative but to elect a new president. It was then pointed out that the A.I.C.C. was not empowered to elect one. But such legalism did not deter Sarojini. "I consider," she declared, "this House is competent to elect its President for the remaining period of the year." This arbitrary decision, even if not strictly constitutional, was generally accepted and Dr. Rajendra Prasad was elected President.

Independence and After

WITH THE confusion in Congress ranks and the pulls in different directions imposed by the new situation resulting from the war in Europe, Sarojini continued her efforts as peacemaker. To her the thought of war elsewhere and human suffering was not something apart from the travails of India. At such time neither she nor Gandhiji could think in merely self-interested terms. Politically there was no doubt at all that the freedom fighters could press home their advantage and bargain for terms from an England that in the next four years was almost brought to her knees. They both knew that cheap gains only made for cheap and temporary victories. In the long term, which is human life, principles alone were not enough. They had to be high principles—a basic decency.

Opening the North Arcot District Congress Conference, Vellore, Mrs. Naidu said:

“England is isolated today but we in India are connected with England and the English people who are fighting for the cause of freedom, and England’s danger today is doubly increased in India’s danger. If British statesmen had only realised this long ago, Britain would have had India’s full support in the prosecution of the War against Nazi aggression. The Congress did not want to do anything now which might embarrass the British Government, it only wanted the declaration that India would be conceded freedom after the war. If that declaration had been made, Britain’s difficulties would have been solved to a great extent, as she could today be getting the maximum support of India.”

In the meeting of the Congress Working Committee held in Poona in 1940, two resolutions were passed reiterating the belief in non-violence as the correct method of attaining freedom, and India’s whole-hearted

support of democracy in the war between Nazism and democracy that was presently raging in Europe. The resolution went on to say that though India could not participate in the war effort of the democracies until she was a partner on equal and free terms, she would not hinder the allied effort in any way. Abul Kalam Azad led the group who felt India should give total support to the war effort and join the Allies. But Gandhiji stood firm that India was allied to non-violence and, therefore, could not take part in war. In World War I he had worked in the Ambulance Corps and made bandages. World War II was not likely to alter his ideas.

The Congress thereupon launched a movement for individual *satyagraha* to keep aloft the flag of non-violent non-co-operation which would not compromise Gandhiji's basic principles for Independence, yet at the same time would not hamper the war effort and embarrass the British at a difficult period. Sarojini was consequently jailed along with Gandhiji, Jawaharlal and other leaders, but on December 12, 1940 she wrote to Padmaja from Lady Thackersey's house in Poona:

"Behold me ignominiously ejected from the Garden of Seclusion (Yeravda Central Jail) merely because two old Colonels got cold feet about my general condition...in case I died among the poinsettias of my own planting. Col. Adwani said 'please don't come again to Yeravda, we won't take the risk or responsibility.' I had settled down so comfortably with Hansa (Mehta) for a mouse-like companion. I have just made a list of 200 library books to be read. My housekeeping arrangement was all so complete and convenient...now I don't know what the Little Man wants me to do. I am leaving for Wardha tomorrow."

No prisoner in history can have shown great reluctance to be "at large", and as usual we find her making a home and a life in such unlikely circumstances; surrounding herself with flowers, greeting friends who would bring her *biriani* and other delicacies, listening to gossip of the world outside, in which she always revelled, and at the same time, as she said in this letter, "my health would have benefited by the enforced rest".

All this was not for her to choose; outside of jail and in poor health, she wrote two days later from Wardha:

"I have just returned from the Little Man (after having shared his meal of raw onion and spinach). Chuckling away he said: 'Of

course the Government could not keep you long in detention. You were not in a fit state to go at all, but how could I stop you?' Now of course he says no more *satyagraha*, it will be unfair on my part to any Government, but plenty of other work which I am sure will tire me out, while if I had been allowed to remain in Yeravda where I was thoroughly comfortable, I could have rested. I am going back to Bombay tomorrow on some work for the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee and on the 20th or 21st I shall be back home for a few weeks."

Her letter goes on to say that Papi (her younger daughter, Lilamani) would be going to Bangalore on the 24th for the All India Women's Conference for which Laxmi Menon, the President, had sent Sarojini an urgent S.O.S. to attend. Padmaja was then in Allahabad with Vijaya-laxmi Pandit's children, since the mother had been given a light jail sentence. Sarojini ends the letter: "Now that the months and months of suspense are over, I shall be able to rest. Take care of yourself and give an ocean of love to Jawahar."

But there was to be no rest for her that year. Home in Hyderabad, she had to witness the slow agony of her son Baba's wife, Eve, dying of cancer. Able to eat nothing, special golden coconuts were procured from Ceylon whose nourishing juice helped the dying woman. But all this was terrible to witness and Sarojini wrote to Jawaharlal:

"Your beautiful letter from prison and even more beautiful statement when you came out were inspiring and comforting to my troubled spirit. I have passed through the most tragic three months of my life, that has not been wanting in tragedy, but personal sorrow and suffering are after all personal and private."

But the work of the nation did not wait for personal suffering. Sarojini carried on. Presiding over a meeting in Hyderabad on April 6, 1940 in connection with the National Week celebrations, Mrs. Naidu said:

"Being Muslims and followers of Islam, you should not be afraid of majorities and think of revolting, but act according to the principles of Islam which gives us the message of peace. You came to India as merchants but unlike others you settled here on the soil of India and made it your home. Hospitality in India made you live here in prosperity and you are destined to die nowhere else but here. History is replete with facts that cannot be brushed aside to prove that Muslims

adopted many a Hindu custom and mingled themselves with Hindus. Even a new language common to both the major communities grew up in this great land. None could dare talk of separating them because they have been so brought together that they cannot under any circumstances be separated. Hindus, Muslims and other communities go to form the entire Indian nation and the talk of vivisectioning it into communal tracts is foolish."

Speaking in Bombay when Rajendra Prasad inaugurated the Scindia Shipping Company, reviving for the first time in centuries India's old maritime importance, she said:

"I look forward to the day when with our own laws, being responsible for our own disciplines, with not a single unlearned man in India, with all fear of exploitation annihilated and no longer disinherited in our own land, we will have free scope for every industry revived or newly created."

And she concluded:

"Let us hope the ship-building industry will be the precursor of other great industries. This then will be the most far-reaching industrial and political achievement...my blessings to the ships that will be built in these yards, to all the merchandise that will go, to all the passengers who will go in these vessels, and most of all to the Ambassadors who will take to the ends of the earth the message of the great Mahatma."

Meanwhile the War in Europe had set off another one in Asia. From 1941 onwards, there were a series of cataclysmic events: Japan overran South-East Asia, Burma fell and the 'enemy' was now on the borders of India. The British, in panic, ordered the scorched earth policy in Bengal and burnt all the boats which gave the bulk of people fish, their staple food. Migrating to Calcutta, the poor peasants died of hunger on the streets. Worse than the carnage of war, two million people died helplessly in the Bengal Famine.

In March 1942, the Cripps Mission had come to India to negotiate the formula for an Interim Government with the Indian leaders. Sarojini, as a member of the Working Committee, was present at all the Congress Working Committee meetings in March, April and May, and when the Congress party members met the Cripps Mission. The talks failed as no formula could be found acceptable to the Congress and Jinnah who was

now the nationally acclaimed leader of the Muslim League.

The last decisive phase of the struggle for Independence now moved to a climax. The Quit India Resolution was drafted by the Congress Working Committee in July 1942 and, on August 8, in the historic session in Bombay where girl volunteers maintained perfect order in the tented "city" that held 30,000 spectators, Mahatma Gandhi made his famous pronouncement of "*Karenge ya marenge*", and the British were told to "Quit India".

On August 7, Sarojini, who seems to have had much more prescience than her colleagues had said to the author that evening, "Goodbye, dear, because tomorrow we shall all be in jail." But Abul Kalam Azad had never seen Gandhi more dejected and in his *memoirs*, he writes: "I understand that he had not expected this sudden arrest." The blow fell in the early hours of August 9, and all the leaders without exception were arrested and the country left literally leaderless. Sarojini, Gandhiji, Kasturba, Pyarelal, Mira Behn and Mahadev Desai were jailed in the Aga Khan's Palace in Poona, and Jawaharlal, Maulana Azad and others in the Fort at Ahmednagar. Arrests were made all over the country and over 4,000 people went to prison. This time, jail regulations were rigid, and even if correspondence was not allowed to prisoners, Gandhiji maintained a unique correspondence with his jailors which reduced them nearly to tears. In the secret files of the Maharashtra Government is a remarkable record of the technique used by an unarmed Mahatma to reduce his captors. In one pained letter, the Superintendent of the Jail demands from a colleague why a letter of Mr. Gandhi had not been answered immediately, for if there was any delay the consequences were appalling!

The jail sentence, from August 8, 1942 to May 1944, showed unmistakably the grim British intention not to be bullied into submission. Only Sarojini had the unique ability to turn into a way of life the long jail term during which tragedies struck and both Mahadev Desai and Kasturba were to die. All this comes out into her warm loving letters to Padmaja. In one, dated September 16, 1942, she says:

"It is feeding time at the zoo...11 a.m. The Chief Animal has to be fed first and what to do about getting ready and serving the rabbit food! Anyhow I being Chef-in-charge am corrupting him into ways of civilised feeding...nasturtium salad, apple stewed in honey, buttered toast (both butter from his favourite animal and pan-

baked bread being produced in my back verandah!). To my duty then but before I fly to the room divided from mine by an anteroom, let me lodge a kiss on Numa's furry forehead and send you umpteen gallons of love."

In another dated October 14:

"...newspaper headlines and radio messages have a winged way of getting ahead of family news! I am sending one common letter this week. For one thing, my strong right arm is again in strong and open rebellion against me and I have to use it with discretion, if at all. O nothing more than the usual neuritis, I suppose. The latest letter I had from home was dated October 3rd. Since then not a word from any of you, though I dare say many words are waiting about for me, duly written and sent but not delivered to me."

How often during those long years must she have yearned for letters with the familiar handwriting, and how often had the feeling that letters sent by her and received from her family, which the censors would not let pass, lay somewhere unread. In the same letter, she writes of daily happenings:

"On Id Day (duly celebrated here with suitable and appropriate food, of course) my heart was heavy for those dear motherless children at Pissalbande (the home of Nawab Lutfuddowlah whose lovely Hindu wife had died. A pigeon fancier, it was found years later that the disease which finally carried off most of this family was traced to infection carried by the pigeons). I would have written to them but I thought H.E.H. had made other arrangements and that my letter might not reach easily. Some of you, and certainly Father, will be seeing them. Please give them my love and say that I am sure they will never hurt the spirit of their brave and beautiful mother by thought, word or deed unworthy of her teaching and counsel."

Going on to purely household affairs of her jail home, she asks:

"What about the books I wanted? If Papi (Lilamani) can possibly spare her Punjab *Khes* sent by Gunnu Auntie, I should be grateful. My bed is so large that it could easily house the whole family and I have no bedspread that more than half covers it. A couple of not too grand coloured small table cloths might be included."

Confirming a remark by Arthur Symons, made when she was a girl, that "she stood aside and judged us," her letter continues:

“My motley family is even more motley than any of you can realise. In this small circumscribed space with the very few people it contains, I can study humanity and make (perforce or voluntarily) deep research into the vanities and illogicalities of the human mind and temperament ...and the ways in which they express themselves in matters little and large!”

She writes in fact of all the little episodes of her daily life, and conjures in her own light-hearted manner a picture of jail that is full of the life of its inmates, her daily activities, and comments on the books she reads. And through all the letters are messages to friends in distant places and little greetings which confirm her immense capacity for interest and concern for people in all walks of life.

On October 28, she writes:

“There is an after-luncheon quiet in the house at the moment. They have all fed and fed well on their various diets. Little Old Tweedledum is trying out a squirrel diet of nuts and fruit in place of his *bakri* diet of green leaves. Tweedledee, however, has developed a great and fastidious desire for food after her recent brief and not very serious illness. It has to be in her quaint English ‘very nice, not *phika* not *masala*’ ...and I have to rack my brain every day to make very nice diets for her. It is so touching to see them both in their belated internment honeymoon. Tweedledum teaches her how to chant her lessons and Tweedledee bullies him like any old virago of a wife. She has never had such a chance for more than 60 years to be so continuously the centre of his life and thought! I wonder if you remember Patman’s poem “Toys”. Whenever I pass through the Little Man’s room and see his things set out (Urdu primer, Arabic Alphabet copy book, *Ramayana*, *Life of Mme. Curie*, *Oxford Dictionary*, spinning wheel, a vase of flowers, his bottle of honey and oil and little odd and wholly superfluous medicaments), I think of that moving poem...all these things are the “toys”...there are no tears on the lashes half dried...but tears of blood, invisible and very crimson with anguish inside. However everyone here is a sport and plays the great game as it should be played and who is a greater sport than the Little Tweedledum.”

Padmaja’s birthday on November 17 was greeted with a letter from her mother:

"My beloved Bebee,

Even if there should be what you so wittily called a 'traffic jam' in the Censor's Office, I hope and believe that a 'line clear' will be given for the free and immediate passage of the special letter that goes to you for such a special occasion, to carry to you more love than you can measure and more blessings than you can count. Did Papi (if she got my letter of instructions) manage to open my black box in which I had carefully left a little gift in case I could not be at home or rather, having an instinct that I should not be at home. If Papi did not get my letter, you must take out the sari from its hiding place yourself. There are two tiny flat keys tied together among my keys which at a pinch might do the trick if the proper key is not forthcoming. Wrap yourself for an hour or two in that sari, body and spirit (that fragile and suffering body, that shining and invincible spirit of fire and courage and pride) and realise the symbolic beauty and meaning of its warp and woof...it has the frail loveliness of flowers, it has the radiant magic of flame...it is symbolic of you, my beloved child."

As the year ended, her letters show her yearning for the animals that always surrounded her. She wishes the parcels sent from home could contain a "little dog" and says that "Saints on earth are too occupied in dealing with another kind of brute and have no room in their hearts or on their laps for a darling little pink-tongued, whining puppy." In her last letter of 1942 she sends "A very very happy year to all of you, Beloved Ones and may we meet again face to face in 1943."

Padmaja was again ill in the beginning of 1943, and her mother, in the advice she pours out in her letters to go slow, rest, and not go on tour has to admit ruefully "it is, I know, the pot calling the kettle black, but I have had sad experience!"

Sarojini was 63 years old at this time, and Gandhiji and Kasturba 73. The inaction of jail, lack of communication with the outside world, and the atmosphere of British intransigence made for great strain on all the inmates for it was difficult not to feel that this term in jail might last for years.

One day, when Sarojini was talking to Col. Bhandari, the Superintendent, in the interview room, Mahadev Desai complained of not feeling well. Going to his cell, he lay down and died of a heart attack. Gandhiji took command immediately. Laying out Mahadev Desai's body in the bathroom, he refused to allow anyone else to enter the room, and after

covering the body with sandal paste kept vigil until the cremation arrangements could be made by the jail authorities in the yard outside.¹

Understandably, the horror of all this in the closed confines of their limited existence made for depression and melancholy. Mira Behn wrote of that time: "Sarojini Devi was indomitable...Not even Bapu had realised up to this time of incarceration together in the Aga Khan's Palace, the full richness of Sarojini Devi's nature...it was only now, through direct experience that we came to know the bigness of her motherly heart, and the strength of her character in moments of suffering and sorrow."

The "home" Sarojini conjured out of her prison was made from her room and verandah which became the dining room and kitchen over which she presided, stirring her pots on small charcoal *sigris* and dressed in an old silk dressing gown. No outside help was permitted beyond a police jemadar and two sepoys who were on duty to look after the garden and Gandhiji's goats. One of the sepoys who, typically, was no more than an Indian youth dressed up, was very soon the "mataji's" willing slave, helping her with the cooking.

But in spite of caring for everyone and making special dishes for those who were sick, the little band began to lose heart. Kasturba stopped spinning and when Gandhiji in February decided to go on a fast of self-purification and in protest against the complete isolation from his people, Sarojini was convinced he would not survive and told him, "Bapu, your fasting will kill Ba."

The Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, had written to Gandhiji before the fast commenced, "You may rest assured that the charges against the Congress will have to be met sooner or later and it will then be for you and your colleagues to clear yourself before the world if you can. And if meanwhile, you yourself by any action such as you now appear to be contemplating attempt to find *an easy way out*, the judgement will go against you by default." The British always considered Gandhiji's fasts to be nothing but moral blackmail. This time they decided to be prepared for his death, no matter what the national consequences, and all preparations for cremation, including sandal wood for the pyre, were made ready.

But it was Kasturba for whom these preparations would eventually be used. During the fast she suffered a heart attack but recovered.

1. Interview with Col. Bhandari

On February 10, 1943 the fast commenced with the usual prayers and Kasturba offered her husband the last spoon of orange juice before his total abstention from all food, not even orange juice for twenty-one days. On the third day of the fast Gandhiji fainted. General Candy and Col. Bager Shah, the medical experts, were to say later that by all human calculations Gandhiji should have died. That he survived was nothing short of a miracle and beyond all their medical science. Sushila Nayar was with Gandhiji on February 21 when nausea and uraemia having already taken a heavy toll of his strength, he began to sink. In desperation Sushila started feeding lime juice to Gandhiji drop by drop, and he responded with a slow return to life.

There is a story told that General Candy was summoned at one stage, and leaving the room almost immediately raced out red-faced and anxious. Meeting Col. Bager Shah outside, they went back into the room to find Gandhiji with his eyes open, who said serenely, "Why have you come". It seems that when Candy examined him earlier, he thought Gandhiji was clinically dead!¹

Writing to Padmaja on February 19, Sarojini describes the ordeal.

"As you can imagine I am terribly rushed and pressed for time... My thoughts are almost exclusively in one place and one person... The official physicians and the non-official physicians are singularly unanimous in their attention and anxiety and service in his behalf. Of course he is very weak and suffering, but he still lets his elfin humour peep out and makes his usual jokes with me. I go in very little to see him, because I have to carry the entire burden of keeping the place and the people going smoothly. The former is easy to achieve but the latter most difficult in the present state of nervous tension!

"You will be very touched when I tell you that last evening, the ninth day, he was very very low, but at prayer time he remembered an old Marathi hymn that I like and instructed in a frail voice that it should be sung for that reason. His real greatness lies in his loving thought for everyone's need and the unfailing courtesy of his mind and heart towards the humblest."

And on March 3, she writes:

"Beebe darling, today your heart must be burgeoning into a litany of prayer and praise for the safe return of the little mystic traveller

1. Interview with Mataji Raihana Tyabji

from the dark valley of the Shadow of Death...how he made the return journey is beyond the solution of medical knowledge. It was a sheer act of faith! But what a dreadful period when we watched with hope and fear, more fear than hope! But the Little Old Man was actually reading the last chapter of Victor Hugo's '93' on the 20th day of his fast and on the last day, yesterday, he performed a wholly impromptu engagement ceremony of his great nephew Kánnu who is here as a temporary nurse and a Bengali girl from the *ashram*, with no more ceremony than a clasping of hands and a mouthful of gur! I hear he was discussing "The Hound of Heaven" with a distinguished ex-member of the Government of India who, being indifferent to English poetry, naturally thought it was a new kind of dog suitable as pets for members of the (ICS) Heaven-born-Service! Today's ceremony was very simple, very short, with no outsider except the doctors who happened to come for their visit at the time of breaking the fast. They had not realised there would be some preliminary 'doings' which were very well done...a prayer from the *Upanishad*, a hymn, a prayer from the *Koran*. But the first item was a surprise. Bidhan (Dr. B. C. Roy, who was with Gandhiji from February 15) sitting on the floor and opening the ceremony with Tagore's beautiful and very appropriate poem "Where the Mind is Free". Before taking the traditional orange juice, the Little Man with his exquisite courtesy began a little speech of thanks to the physicians but broke down before he could complete his sentence. He took some time to recover and end his gracious words of thanks. It was most moving to all. He is weaker than a new-born kitten and I fear he is *not* yet out of the woods. But the faith that sustained him in the valley of shadow will sustain him in the sunshine also.

So ends one phase which was on the very ultimate edge of being a tragedy...he said to the doctors, 'God has saved me for some purpose. I was ready for either death or life.....His will must guide me.'

The gates have closed upon us again. When they will open I don't know...meanwhile...we return to our routine but with a difference."

And she ends her letter characteristically:

"Now that all anxiety of an acute kind is allayed, I hope you will devote yourself to getting well, darling. Don't be anxious about me."

Sandalwood had been kept in readiness for any contingency by a "thoughtful" Government, and the inmates all knew it. To the small band of people locked in this decaying Palace in Poona, unsure of how long they would be there, with ill health and depression to dog their days, and the days dragging by with all sorts of efforts to keep themselves busy and knowing all the time that it was no more than a game to keep up their spirits, Sarojini's sudden attack of malaria must have been troubling indeed.

With the new Viceroy, Lord Wavell, a military man, at the helm of affairs, whom none of them knew, they were also alarmed by the rumours that plans were being made to divide India. In fairness to Wavell, for there was no means of verifying the rumours, he personally did everything in his power to prevent partition of India. Gandhiji was so depressed at this stage that he began to feel they might be in jail another seven years. Sarojini's temperature soared and the doctors started to panic about her condition. On March 21 she left the jail unceremoniously on a stretcher. In the records of Bombay Government are the usual entries listed thus:

"Prisoner, Naidu Sarojini, unconditionally released." For another whole year Gandhiji and Kasturba remained at the Aga Khan Palace. Kasturba was 74 years old when her stout spirit, having withstood a life of unexampled rigours and trials, came to an end. The heart that had beat in unison with this strange husband finally stopped beating altogether. For sixty years no sacrifice she could make satisfied his desire for her own perfection and the power for good that comes from total surrender of the self. Many times he tried her sorely, but her devotion knew no bounds. Now she was no more. For another three months Gandhiji was to be jailed. The loneliness of those months without his warm-hearted, devoted "Ba" can be imagined. This was his last imprisonment.

Sarojini may have left the Aga Khan's Palace on a stretcher, but, characteristically, and from her sick bed, being the only member of the Congress Working Committee out of jail, she took charge of the "Quit India" movement. To emphasise the significance of this movement launched a year earlier, she issued, on August 9, 1943, the following statement to the Press:

"Following the arrest of Mahatma Gandhi and of the Working Committee there seems to have arisen some confusion of ideas and

some conflict of opinion among the Congress workers who were suddenly left without a definite mandate or any recognised leadership. I wish to clear any lingering doubts by stating that no authority was delegated either by the Working Committee or by the All India Congress Committee to any individual or groups within the Congress nor, as has sometimes been alleged, but which I am loth to believe, to further secret activities directly opposed to the accepted creed and traditions of the Congress. Neither is it open to any member of the Congress to amend its constitution or alter its decisions at this juncture. Nevertheless, in the absence of the leaders, it is equally the responsibility of all of us to continue without interruption on our own part the authentic work of the Congress in the service of the country. Spectacular programmes, assuredly, have their special place and purpose in the scheme of national life, but today they can have but a limited and doubtful value, confronted as we are with the problems that demand a supreme and undivided dedication of all national thought for their solution. The heart-breaking and universal misery of the people cries out to us from myriad mouths of hunger, and not one of us dare be deaf to the poignant call for help. Though I am still too ill to take any active share in the beneficent work of relief.....I am for that reason increasingly conscious of the desperate agony of the poor and increasingly certain that the permanent, indeed at present, almost the sole task before us is to try to bring some measure of succour and solace to ameliorate their desperate plight.....An enduring national unity can only be built up on the foundation of sincere co-operation in the service of the people."

The Bijapur and Bengal famines of 1942 and 1943, to which she referred, were almost directly a product of the war, for the British had to keep the war machine rolling, move troops across India to Burma, and transport foodstuffs to feed the troops. With food shortages and no spare wagons to carry food for the people, they made the choice to keep Bombay's industries going at the expense of the people of Bijapur. Thanks to voluntary workers, no one died in the Bijapur famine, but Bengal's toll was appalling.

In January of 1944, Sarojini made a powerful speech repudiating allegations that the outbreak of violence in India was in accordance with Congress plans or that Mahatma Gandhi was pro-Japanese. With the

Indian National Army under the command of Subash Bose operating in Burma, rumours were naturally rife. Mrs. Naidu declared:

“If anybody has the audacity to continue saying it, it will be scurrilous, it will be a lie. I can tell you authoritatively, as the only member of the Working Committee outside jail, that far from being pro-Japanese, we have consistently been against any foreign aggression, no matter what label it may bear. We would be anti—anybody that tried to invade us. There are no two opinions among us on this.”¹

Shortly afterwards Sarojini travelled to Lahore² to see her sister Gunnu, but, on arrival in Punjab, was served with an order forbidding her to make speeches in public, to take part in processions or meetings or to communicate with newspapers. On being asked to sign the order, she wrote on the back of it that the order served on her was invalid since she was under doctor's orders not to undertake any public work of this nature. From Lahore she went to Calcutta, and then tragedy struck again in the family with the grave illness of Ranadheera, her beloved younger son “Mina”. In a letter to the author she wrote: “...when I returned from my long tour in the middle of February, I found my younger son alarmingly ill with a collapse following an operation,” and on May 16 to the author she wrote, “I have been hoping and waiting for your word of affection and consolation.....it has this very moment come. I know you give me the same love that I give you and that you share my loss and sorrow.....and that comforts me.”

“Mina was such a variously gifted being...he was not a limelight personality at all but a personality that brought light to those he knew. He had a brilliant and constructive mind, a wide culture that was not only gleaned from books but from life—a heart like a golden bowl that poured unlimited draughts of affection, compassion and consolation to all in need. He was subtle, generous, courageous...but it was destined that he should die young.”

On May 6 of that month of sorrow for Sarojini, Gandhiji was released from the Aga Khan's Palace and spent his time resting for some months

1. Indian Review. Vol. 45, 1944

2. *History of the Congress*. Vol. 11, p. 578

in our family house, *Dil Khusha*, in Panchgani. But on April 9, putting her grief behind her, Sarojini attended the A.I.C.C. meeting where an address by 100 women's groups was presented to her and she presided over the 'Save the Children Fund' meetings for the children saved from the Bengal Famine. This organisation in time became the Indian Council for Child Welfare. At the end of that year, addressing a meeting of the All India Student's Federation in Calcutta, she pertinently remarked:

"One of the minor tragedies of my life has been the consciousness that the younger generation was pulling itself even with the follies of the older generation. Youth with all its splendid dreams, all its unlimited powers and opportunities should be marching forward looking ahead towards the destined goal. They should not be wasting time by looking sideways at each other instead."

Continuing, she said:

"I feel my generation has set so bad an example, so suicidal an example to the younger generation that they are steeped in quarrels, in internecine warfare and communal quarrels, that they quarrel over mere words...why not take the reality of the situation of your own country and the world situation and so create conditions of freedom... so that your country will fulfil your dreams of taking its noble place in the International Federation of the world.....Those who believe that India is for Indians and nothing but Indians are betraying the genius of India which has always been universal."

Going on to a matter very close to her troubled heart, she went on:

"You shout Congress-League Unity. Do not use words cheaply. Unity.....how? You cannot bring unity from the top of the mountain. It is you and I in our daily knowledge of one another, in our appreciation of one another's culture, which express the soul of the community; only by building up that content can you expect any unity between Hindus and Muslims. Do not say 'Oh! well, look at the map of India, here is Hindu India and here is Muslim India'. It is not the leaders who can create unity. It is not the generals who win battles. Hundreds of Napoleons cannot achieve a victory unless the army is brave and loyal.....Unity cannot be one-sided. It must be all around and comprehensive and can only come, whether politically, socially or otherwise, by the most scrupulous standards of justice and equity to which you afterwards may add a large measure of generosity

that lies in your power. That is the fundamental meaning of political unity.”¹

Her last sentence bore greater philosophical and human implications than any of her audience may have guessed. It is generosity at the final point of negotiation in dispute which gives the healing power to change history from war to peace. As things stood, the most critical phase of India's modern history had now been reached and, in stressing unity, Mrs. Naidu spoke from the heart. Events now were moving towards a climax.

During this period the Allies had landed in North Africa and Europe and it became necessary to start considering post-war problems. It was obvious that a very weakened Britain could no longer hold India by force, and a political settlement, not only between India and Britain but between the Congress, the Muslim League and the Princely States had to be evolved. The point had now been reached when the differences between the two political parties were almost unreconcilable since the Muslim League had passed the Pakistan Resolution, but the British felt that at least till the end of the war a popular Interim Government could be formed and the final settlement between the parties kept in abeyance. During the earlier negotiations it was thought that Cripps with his well-known left-wing views would be the most acceptable negotiator to the largest party, the Congress, and not unacceptable to the Muslim League. But Cripps Mission having failed, Cripps went back to England along with the intransigent Lord Linlithgow, and the new Viceroy, Field Marshal Lord Wavell, came to India determined to make a fresh attempt.

In June 1945, all the leaders were released from jail and the first Simla Conference began at an altitude of 7,000 feet, which helped not a little to create a calm atmosphere for the talks, though they did not terminate with any success. By this time, Jinnah was quite convinced that the Congress, and specifically Hindu leadership, would never play fair and there was no hope for Muslims as a minority in this country. From his Two-Nation Theory—Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan—he would not budge, and Gandhiji could not accept anything but a united and secular India in which all minorities, not only Muslims, could play their part.

¹ Indian Annual Register, July-December 1944

On the last day of discussions with Jinnah, Jawaharlal Nehru was to dine with friends with whom Sarojini was staying. Arriving late, he walked down the hill and his hosts recall him entering the drive, head down and pensive, and when they greeted him, all he could say was "the man is a monomaniac, just a monomaniac. There's nothing we can do."

Meanwhile, political events moved inexorably towards the partition of India which took place on August 15, 1947. Shortly before the failure of the first Simla Conference in June 1945, the Labour Party won the British General Elections and Attlee, having become Prime Minister, sent Lord Pethick Lawrence with two Cabinet Ministers to work out a new scheme to be discussed at the second Simla Conference. The Cabinet Mission and Lord Wavell envisaged an undivided India, and when the first talks failed, proposed, to satisfy Mr. Jinnah, a Union in which Centre would deal only with Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications. The Provinces would then be responsible for all other subjects and would form groups with their own Executives and Legislatures. The central idea was to form a wholly Indian Interim Government to carry on the administration of the country. It was envisaged that if the new scheme was accepted by the principal parties, an Interim Government, representative of the principal parties, would be formed, while a Constituent Assembly worked out the details of the new scheme.

But when the Viceroy informed the Congress leaders that their representatives in the Interim Government should not include a Muslim, they rejected the proposal. The League, however, accepted the proposal. Recognising the futility of an Interim Government without the Congress, the Viceroy deferred its formation, but announced that elections to the Constituent Assembly would proceed. To this Jinnah took grave exception and immediately withdrew his first acceptance.

Though the Viceroy and the Labour Government strove to the last to preserve an undivided India, Jinnah now declared there was no alternative to partition of the country and called upon Muslims throughout India to observe August 16, 1946 as "Direct Action Day". Parts of India went up in flames. Hindu-Muslim relations descended to the lowest point in history and the holocaust known as the "Great Calcutta Killing" led to terrible reprisals from Hindus in Bihar. Bengal was particularly afflicted and Gandhiji decided to tour areas of East Bengal, especially

Noakhali, where terrible things had taken place. Writing to him from Shantiniketan, at the end of 1946, Sarojini said:

“This is not a letter, it is an affirmation of love and faith. Beloved pilgrim, setting on your pilgrimage of love and hope, ‘Go with God’ in the beautiful Spanish phrase. I have no fear for you...only faith in your mission.”¹

How well she knew the loneliness of spirit he would experience, for the India they had worked for and sacrificed their years to attain, had now eluded their grasp. Fearless as he was, Gandhiji knew, and she knew also, that it was not his life that was in danger so much as his ideals. He could only go to people, live among them and try to bring brotherhood back by his example. But it was already too late.

An Interim Government, in which the Muslim League participated, was eventually formed, but it was only to work out under the new Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, the procedure and details of the partition of India. On August 15, 1947, the two new countries were established and, in India, the Congress formed a government and also created a Constituent Assembly to prepare the Constitution of a free India.

An extract of the proceedings of this Assembly, on December 11, 1946, displays the remarkable role she played in public life:

The Chairman (Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha): I shall now request *Bulbul-i-Hind*, the Nightingale of India, to address the House (laughter and cheers) not in prose but in poetry.

(Mrs. Sarojini Naidu then went up to the rostrum amidst acclamation.)

Mrs. Sarojini Naidu (Bihar: General): Mr. Chairman, the manner of your calling me is not constitutional. (Laughter).

The Chairman (Dr. Sachchidananda Sinha): Order, order. No reflection on the Chair please! (Continued laughter).

Mrs. Sarojini Naidu: It reminds me of some lines of the Kashmiri poet who said:

“*Bulbul ko gul mubarak; gul ko chaman mubarak,
Rangeen tabiaton ko range sukhan mubarak.*”

and today we are steeped in the rainbow-coloured tints of speeches in praise of my great leader and comrade, Rajendra Prasad. (Cheers). I do not know how even poetic fancy can add yet another tint to the

¹ *My Days with Gandhi*—Nirmal K. Bose, Asia, 1953

rainbow. So I will be modest, emulating the example of Rajendra Babu himself and confine myself, as a woman should, to purely domestic issues. (Laughter). We have all been taken in the chariot of oratory by our great philosopher, Sir Radhakrishnan, who seems to have evaporated from the scene. (Laughter).

Sir S. Radhakrishnan: No, no. I am here! (Renewed laughter).

Mrs. Sarojini Naidu: He has poured very eloquent wisdom on us. And also all the other speakers representing different provinces, sects, religions, communities.

"I see gaps on this house and my heart is sore because of the absence of those brothers of mine...under the leadership of my old friend Mohamad Ali Jinnah...I am hoping...that my friend Dr. Ambedkar...will soon be among the most emphatic supporters of this Constituent Assembly...and his adherents of many millions will realise that their interests are as safe as the interest of more privileged people. I hope that those who call themselves the original masters of the land, the tribal people, will realise there is no distinction of caste, creed, ancient and modern status, in this Constituent Assembly. I hope the smallest minority in this country...will realise that they have a zealous, stern, loving guardian of their interests who will not permit the most powerful in the land to infringe his birthright of equality and equal opportunity in this country."

In the perspective of time, her next sentence is of certain significance:

"I hope also that the Princes of India among whom I count many my personal friends, who are so worried, so anxious, so uncertain, so afraid today, will realise that the Constitution of India is a Constitution for the freedom and emancipation of every human being in India, whether he be prince or peasant."

Concluding her speech, which was also the last speech, she said:

"I have the last word, no doubt, not because I am a woman, but because I am acting today as the hostess of the Indian National Congress who has gladly invited those not within her fold to come and participate with us in framing the Constitution, that shall be the immortal charter of India's freedom."

At the age of sixty-seven Sarojini was as vigorous as ever, capable of making bold and impressive speeches, but not capable any more to hope with the blithe confidence of her early years for unity. Life itself

had given her bitter insights, bitter truths had had to be faced and there had been bitter realisations which are now a part of history. In a farewell speech to Mme. Sophia Wadia, the President of P. E. N. who was leaving for a three-month trip to Buenos Aires to attend a P. E. N. Conference, she said:

“To such a Conference, India must send her very special message. She has always stood for the power of peace, not the peace of death as Gandhiji has said, nor the peace of a stone, but the peace that comes from a disciplined mind, the peace of a trained vision, the peace of noble hearts grown pure and high in communion with the beauty of all beauties. That is India’s message to the world...the unity of all beings. And we ask her to tell them that the whole meaning and purpose of all those literatures has been to uplift the spirit of the nation, and that the highest and loveliest phase of Indian literature that knows no ages, that is fresh as tomorrow’s dawn and old as the oldest morning of the world still remains one lovely word ‘Shanti, Shanti, Shanti.’”

Going on to her own disillusion with her world and the one to which she had given all her life, sacrificing home life and family life to do so, she said, “we have all noted the failure of politicians throughout the world; we have all noted the tragedy of the pledged word broken even as it was given; we have all seen the use of the mighty political authority of a nation, not to make reparations for injuries committed but to vindicate their action.” What was left to her was the high vision of the dreamer and the visionary, but she was pragmatic enough to know that while she could continue to place these ideals before those in power, she did not have the power herself to change politicians into saints.

On March 22, 1947, as President of the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi, Sarojini Naidu was to reach the crowning point of her life. Presiding with queenly dignity and grace, with a great map of Asia behind her head, and hundreds of dignitaries and representatives from all these countries (many of which were still under colonial rule) of Asia seated in front of her, she began her presidential speech:

“A friend reminded me that there was a saying in the Bible, a prophecy that there would be a great gathering of nations from the East, which should mark a new era in the history of humanity. It seems very arrogant on my part to assume that this gathering

of the nations of the East which I have called, is going to mark a new era. But still my hope is, that this friendly gesture, which I have made on the part of India, to the peoples of Asia, will bear great fruit.....What is our purpose? What is our ideal? Our ideal is to establish in Asia, as a preliminary step to a larger issue, Peace, Harmony, the co-operation in the great purposes of service to humanity. We do not take note of internal controversies or conflict, we are not concerned in this conference with internal politics or even controversial international politics, we are concerned only with the common ideal of progress of Asian countries, social and economic progress, on which alone can there be enduring political success..... We shall move together, the people of Asia, undefeated by disaster, not discouraged by anything...for I believe...that nothing can die that is good. When my father, who was one of the great men of the world, was about to die, his last words were "there is no birth and there is no death, there is only the spirit seeking evolution in higher and higher stages of life."

This the philosophy of her forbears, the Brahmins of India, was to be her solace in the three years of life that were left to her.

On August 3, 1947, the *Bombay Chronicle* published the official announcement of new Dominion and Provincial Heads:

"The Appointment of the Governor General of India and Pakistan as also of the Governors of five Provinces of India and three Provinces of Pakistan is announced tonight.

Rear Admiral Viscount Mountbatten of Burma (the present Viceroy) will be Governor General of the Dominion of India and Mr. M. A. Jinnah, Governor General of Pakistan Dominion."

The dispatch continues: "It is understood that Mrs. Sarojini Naidu has agreed to serve as Governor of United Provinces pending the arrival of Dr. B. C. Roy who is now in the United States."

Sarojini's beloved doctor, Bidhan Roy, with his towering figure and personality was suffering from eye trouble and was in America for treatment. It was here that he had received a phone call from Jawaharlal Nehru asking him to undertake a task the doctor-politician found quite unsuited to his temperament. He told Panditji he would undertake the work, if he considered it urgent, but only for a temporary period. Sarojini seems to have had the same reaction and the

Bombay Chronicle reports that in accepting the Acting Governorship, she remarked to the Press, "You are putting a wild bird in a cage."

In many ways it is strange that she accepted an Acting appointment of this nature; she who had played so vital a role in the revolutionary councils of the nation which now was about to be free. Her own reluctance to undertake such a role may have been part of it, for to all the leaders, Jawaharlal Nehru in particular, on whom the major responsibility had fallen, governing and administration were completely new.

Returning to India in November after Independence on August 15, Bidhan Roy found to his delight that "Mrs. Naidu was quite happy in her new position and performed her duties very well." From the West Bengal Congress Committee records it seems Dr. Roy had made up his mind to resign the Governorship of U.P. So, in an almost casual way, Sarojini Naidu became the Governor of the largest State in India and the first woman Governor of any State.

No State, moreover, could have had so lyrical an announcement of India's Freedom on August 15, 1947 nor so colourful a swearing-in-ceremony of their new Governor. To the latter, no European dress was permitted and the scene with its variegated Indian dress and head dress must have been reminiscent of the Nizam's old Durbar courts. Instead of court dancers, however, there were recitations of all the religions of this country and, as was befitting one to whom all religions were one, the new Governor was sworn in to the chanting of Sikh, Muslim, Jain, Buddhist, Hindu and Christian prayers.

In some ways it is strange that in the State which was to be the greatest protagonist of Hindi, the first Governor of Uttar Pradesh gave a stirring oration on August 15, 1947 in English. Addressing the people on that historic day her deep emotions can be appreciated:

"Oh world of free nations, on this day of our freedom we pray for your freedom in the future. Ours has been an epic struggle, covering many years, and costing many lives. It has been a struggle, a dramatic struggle. It has been a struggle of heroes chiefly anonymous in their millions. It has been a struggle of women transformed into strength they worship. It has been a struggle of youth suddenly transformed into power...it has been a struggle of young men and old men, of rich and poor, the literate and the illiterate, the stricken, the outcast, the leper and the saint.

“We are reborn today out of the crucible of our sufferings. Nations of the world, I greet you in the name of India, my mother, my mother whose home has a roof of snow, whose walls are of living seas, whose doors are always open to you.....I give for the whole world the freedom of this India, that has never died in the past, that shall be indestructible in the future, and shall lead the world to ultimate peace.”

The India of Sarojini's dreams, the strong, sheltering, comforting Mother had been reborn, but the children of this mother continued to be undisciplined, unfocussed upon a single concept of nationhood, and torn between each other. No one was more aware of this than the Governor of U.P. She often likened herself in that palatial establishment to a bird in a cage, a title, particularly apt in the light of the one given by Mahatma Gandhi, of *Bharat Kokila*. And if she was the superb hostess of this “gilded cage”, making an official establishment into a beautiful home, a warm and welcoming official residence into a centre of importance and dignity, at the same time, as many speeches and letters attest, her heart was heavy for her people.

None of this was evident to the guests who streamed through that well-ordered house. They would often find her on the wide verandah sitting in the sun reading detective stories or presiding over splendid teas and regaling friends and callers with stories and anecdotes filled with wit and humour. Countless friends recall those days and speak of her exquisite table and magnificent food, the Indian splendour of the furnishings, and the household who loved her so much, yet maintained the residence with the same order and dignity as for the former British masters. For it is well known that the staff who had served the British often became so servile that they had only contempt for an Indian master. But Sarojini could not only command, she also generated love. As Governor, this side of her nature which loved beauty, hospitality and entertaining, had ample scope. Some say that in her last years she reverted to her ivory tower, others that she recreated her father's court, and if she could not outdo the Nizam in wealth, she certainly succeeded in making the hospitality of her kingdom infinitely more warm and regal. What seems much more evident is that she continued to be herself. When in prison or hut she accommodated to those circumstances and made do with what there was, but when she was given a queen's role, she became a queen.

Her talents as a human being were varied and flexible but most important of all, as a person, she was never anything but herself.

During meetings of the Central Board of Education, Maulana Azad, Humayun Kabir and many other friends stayed at Raj Bhavan in Lucknow. Sarojini was greatly concerned over the language issue and well aware of how strong an advocate her own Minister of Education was of Hindi replacing both Urdu and English. U.P. was the home of Urdu and there was understandably great uncertainty regarding its future. Language is as personal as one's dress. What is more, it is the vital element in human life for culture and survival. Language issues, therefore, raise great storms of anxiety and protest. In an atmosphere where her own Ministers championed Hindi, it is typical of Sarojini that in her inaugural address to the Education Board she spoke for forty minutes and stated firmly: "I have heard people say that Urdu is the language of Pakistan. It was not born in Sind. It was born in India."

In the Board meeting afterwards, Shri Sampurnanand put his minute of dissent which was supported by the Chief Minister, Pandit Pant, against Urdu remaining a regional language. With two such powerful protagonists of Hindi, the *status quo* remained largely because of Mrs. Naidu's fair and firm support of Urdu and her understanding of the plight of Muslims if their language ceased to have official recognition.

In her Convocation Address to the Lucknow University on December 9, 1947, she explained her chronic inability to write speeches in advance:

"I only know after I have delivered the address what I have said.

It is a very uncertain procedure which I do not recommend to anyone." But she went on:

"I am going to speak to those whom I love most on earth, the young generation and they will forgive me my lack of degrees, diplomas, parchments and robes, because they know that I am their friend, their champion and their comrade."

And these were not empty words but part of her very real continuing youthfulness and the knowledge that all her nearly seventy years had done nothing to dim both ardour and idealism. What faced her was diminishing years and the realisation that there was no time ahead now for her. So it was youth and youth only who could carry this torch:

"We are still in the process of creating new India. We are still in the process of getting ourselves accustomed and disciplined to the

implications of the free flag of India. Who is to build this new India? Who are to be the legislators of this new India? Who is to create that magic world in which all problems are solved, where all injustice is annihilated, where all differences disappear, where young men and young women...in comradeship, march forward to join the free youths of the new world who have already got accustomed to the implications of their flag and their liberty."

It is unlikely that any of her audience understood the very clear things she said to them that day:

"Freedom is the heaviest burden that humanity can bear."

In the euphoria of that period when freedom intoxicated old and young, few, like her, recognised the bitter implications for the future of our freedom wedded, as it was, to a past rather than a future, and by a people used to being ruled and having merely the freedom to protest and rebel, but no knowledge of the justice, patience and wisdom needed to rule. She went on to say in that memorable convocation address,

"...the life of each generation is an empty shrine that awaits the gods to create His own image...you who have taken your degrees today...must realise that learning by itself is an arid thing...unless learning becomes part of your character and your daily conduct; unless the pledge you have made with acclamation today, that you will do all in your power to further human progress...till that becomes part of your daily prayer, daily speech, daily action, your learning is of no avail. It becomes indeed a treachery against that pledge to serve humanity, if for profit only you use those degrees and those diplomas.....I feel that a great part of that great duty of youth in India is to re-write the history of a proud India, a progressive India, an undivided India and a right-angled India."

and she ended:

"I who have loved you all my life...and the older I grow the more faith I have that the young people of the world will fulfil my dreams, my unfulfilled dreams...Let us speak of unity, not division; let us speak of love, and not of hatred, let us speak of fellowship and not of rights; let us speak of duty nobly and beautifully rendered. May we be the standard-bearers of the new world."

On January 30, 1948, only a month after that convocation address, Gandhi, the inspiration of Sarojini's life, comrade, beloved teacher and

guru, was shot and killed. The shock of his death went round the world, for his death had a meaning as much as his life. The drama played that day in Delhi was one of the epic dramas of human existence... life, death, good, evil and the triumph of virtue through the ultimate sacrifice. In her moving tribute to him, she wasted no time on grief. The tragedy was too great for grief. She spoke of his power, the power of the man so ascetic, he was almost without a body, so humble, he died without possessions, so weak, his strength was immeasurable and the power he exercised was unknown even to kings. All this she explained was "because he did not care for applause, he did not care for censure. He only cared for the ideals he preached and practised. And in the most terrible disasters caused by violence and greed of men, when the abuse of the world was heaped up like dead leaves, dead flowers on battlefields, his faith never swerved in his ideal of non-violence. He believed that though the whole world slaughters itself, and the whole world's blood be shed, still his non-violence would be the authentic foundation of the new civilisation of the world and he believed that he who seeks his life shall lose it and he who loses his life shall find it." Like Christ before him, there was no alternative to the doctrine of love, for man's life on this earth is finite, but in that time the lesson of love can be learned. And like Christ he suffered a death of violence that moved the heart of man.

Historically, Gandhiji's death came at a time of bitter hatreds. Partition had left its terrible scars. The two new states of India and Pakistan were confused and new to their tasks. In such uncertain circumstances, fears and hatred become exaggerated and unreasonable and those who have been brothers and are severed by hatred and distrust begin to hate with a hatred more terrible than that of mere enemies. The shock of Gandhi's assassination cut through that rising hatred on both sides and, in the deep searching of hearts that took place, militant Hinduism that had grown to alarming proportions was suddenly quelled.

In her broadcast to the nation on February 1, 1948, Sarojini said:

"His first fast in 1924 with which I was associated, was for the cause of Hindu-Muslim unity, but it had the sympathy of the entire nation. His last fast was also for Hindu-Muslim unity but the whole nation was not with him in that fast. It had grown so divided, it had grown so bitter, it had grown so full of hate and suspicion, it

had grown so untrue to the tenets of the various creeds in this country that it was only a section of those who understand the Mahatma, who realised the meaning of that fast. It was very evident that the nation was divided in its loyalty to him in that fast. It was very evident that it was not any community but *his* that disapproved so violently and showed its anger and resentment in such a dastardly fashion. Alas for the Hindu Community! That the greatest Hindu of them all, the only Hindu of our age who was so absolutely and unswervingly true to the doctrine, the ideals, the philosophy of Hinduism, should have been slain by the hand of a Hindu! That indeed,"

she said in a quivering voice,

"is almost the epitaph of the Hindu faith. That the hand of a Hindu, in the name of Hindu rights and a Hindu world should sacrifice the noblest of them all. But it does not matter. It is personal grief that is loss, day in and day out, year in and year out, for many of us who cannot forget, because for more than thirty years some of us have been so closely associated with him that our lives and his life were an integral part of one another...our muscles, veins, hearts and blood were all intertwined with his life.

"But it would be the act of faithless deserters if we were to yield to despair. If we were indeed to believe that he is dead, if we were to believe that all is lost. Because he is gone, of what avail would be our love and our faith.....Are we not there his heirs, his spiritual descendants, the legatees of his great ideals, successors of his great work? Are we not there to implement that work...make greater achievements by joint efforts than he could have made singly? Therefore I say the time is over for private sorrow."

Ending this powerful speech with words shaken from the depths of her being, she cried:

"My Father, do not rest. Keep us to our pledge, give us the strength to fulfil our promise, your heirs, your descendants, your stewards, the guardians of your dreams, the fulfillers of India's destiny. You, whose life was so powerful, make it so powerful in your death. Far from mortality, you have passed mortality by a supreme martyrdom in the cause most dear to you."

And this cause for which he went alone to Noakhali, for which he

paid the supreme penalty for generosity to the people of Pakistan, was the cause that his oldest comrade-in-arms understood more profoundly than all the others: Hindu-Muslim unity. In their time and for all their work, India had been divided and now Gandhiji paid the ultimate price of absolute knowledge. There would be no peace in India till brother loved brother and love and trust were restored to the people. In the decades since she had spoken so confidently to Gokhale that Hindu-Muslim unity would come in five years, she more than anyone knew it would not be in her life-time.

But in the death of "my master, my leader, my father", Sarojini also saw that for Gandhi death was the triumph, he had always believed, man must be prepared to face. It was said of him "he died as kings die, at the height of their powers". Sarojini was right when she said that it was appropriate that he should die in Delhi, the City of Kings. When she saw women wailing over the dead body of this saintly man, who lay serene and covered with flowers with a bullet in his heart, she exclaimed, "what is all this snivelling about? Would you that rather he died of old age and indigestion? This was the only death great enough for him." And her words suddenly make the cosmic drama plain. This was no ordinary death or assassination. Nathuram Godse was the classic, unwitting instrument of the divine revelation to *man of man*.

A few days after these shocking events, she received a letter from her oldest friend, Nawab Sir Nizam Jung, now seventy-six, whose gentle philosophical letters were a sweet reminder of the long years: hers turbulent and filled with action; his harboured in the still waters of old Hyderabad. From 1911 they had regularly written to each other and his letters were now reminiscent and filled with thoughts on the real meaning of events. Writing of Gandhiji he said, "What I admired about him most was his true spiritual insight, the companion of his innate sincerity. In his cognition of the great and permanent truths he saw how the worst form of slavery was that of self, and how slave mentality really meant submission to evil propensities for wrongful ends...his own essential creeds...confirmed in him the central faith that liberation from slavery can only be achieved by the self-liberating soul working from within itself.

"If Gandhi represents the highest type that India could produce, his murderer represents the vilest type of criminal that the soil of India

breeds. A type devoid of faith, irreverent at heart, incapable of understanding the meaning of humanity and goodness, and above all ungrateful."

In another letter he says: "But for the fear of appearing rude to one of your delicate sensibility, I might venture to remark that the modern politician was already beginning to look like a clumsy craftsman. He is eager to clutch at any tool that come to hand without knowing how to use them.....Is not the professional politician apt to take sounding words for implements? Whenever he professes to be constructive, does he not become dangerously destructive?" He goes on to describe the political values in the old Hyderabad which "aimed at drawing (people) closer together by bonds of human sympathy...instead of merely counting their heads as majorities and minorities....You and I remember the palmy days of our Hyderabad and look round in vain." He talks wistfully of her life in the midst of this kind of political strife and talks of the basic instinct of his own soul, which was "unity with the unseen". "To realise this," he continues, "as you do in the midst of politics is certainly a high achievement. It is a reassurance to me of the unchanging direction of the original impulse of your soul...and this to me is the most consoling message that could have come from you at a time of life when both of us are hastening towards its end. Yes, the end is drawing nigh and I ask you with increasing eagerness, when you are coming?"

This seems to have been his last letter and unfortunately her replies to this dear old friend, with his philosophy and wisdom, cannot be traced. If they were, we might have had some of her gay, incisive comments on the events of those times and perhaps some of those rare disclosures of her pensively sad inner nature that so yearned for human beauty and so often in a long and tumultuous life had been faced with its terrible, destructive ugliness.

In her presidential address to the Second All India Writers Conference in Benares, she bemoaned the fact that Jawaharlal Nehru was not present to inaugurate this function, "Prime Ministers come and go but there is only one Jawaharlal, eager to rise to the stars and bring back messages of hope and courage and that wealth of spirit known as freedom." In talking of Benares, the most sacred of cities, she told her audience of writers and scholars that it was a place where the spirit of man had risen to face the seer and this was essentially the heart of

Indian culture, for both Buddhist and Hindu in this place had sought the great ones who had learnt how to transcend human littleness and petty nationalism. In describing the meaning and purpose of literature, she stressed the enormous importance of the writer whose vision transcended barriers of sects, seas and mountains, and who lived long beyond the emperors and generals, but she asked the assembly, "Have we been true to our mission in India? Trying to become leaders have we not been too busy discussing the academics or trying to find out why people are so busy hating one another in India. Had we been true to our mission, would the difference between Hindu and Muslim been so acute?", and she ends her peroration with the stern reminder, "We have not been able to write, ignoring our false gods, and we see death and division in our midst today. What is not common is not human, what is not universal is not human, what is not life is not human. In whatever language you write, let what you write be a true and real translation of life; let it be the interpretation of human prejudices, a transfiguration of human ecstasy. Be masters of whatever language you like, so long as it is the language of the human heart and spirit. Literature is the only way truth and life can be kept alive. So if you and I are true to our mission, we shall survive in spirit. We shall be part of the ages to come...if we can create beauty and *live* beauty as lovers of the world."

Her life had indeed come full circle. In her life-time she had worked with truth in all its dimensions, from the vision of truth through a poet's eyes, to the *karmayogin* concept of her beloved leader, Gandhiji, that had led her into the heart of the populace and stirred them with her oratory to work for freedom. Now, after this long experience of man, faced with the imponderables of action and reaction, she again moved towards the written word as the most lasting means of touching the heart of humanity. In 1911, she had written to Nizam Jung a long letter analysing his poetry:

"O my friend, You seem to be unaware of all the tears and laughter outside that secluded and jealously guarded grove (of his personal experience and meditation). Come look out...in the highways in the 'dust and heat along life's common way' all men and women waiting for some divinely gifted man or woman that you may be, to give expression to the ultimate things unuttered'...the pain, the pleasure, the hope, the fear, the faith, the doubt, the courage,

the despair, the love, the yearning...all, all the emotions that human souls know how to feel...but because they are not poets, cannot voice.....If you would be true to your responsibilities and your privileges, voice not alone your feelings but all human feeling. For who but a poet can interpret alike the scatheless, tranquil dignity of Socrates in his death hour and the tears of a little maiden frightened in the dark?"

Always she saw the visionary's deepest need...to see the fulfilment of dreams and in each, and in herself too she was wholly aware that the dream is always only partially realised and in some way altered along the way.

Of Maulana Azad she said: "In the length and breadth of India, it would be difficult to find a patriot so staunch, a believer in his idealism so unyielding, a man so steeped in learning, a man so burning with the desire for freedom, a man so free from the virus of that awful, that terrible communalism that has almost destroyed our country, one of the greatest scholars in Asia, one of the great thinkers of India."

Addressing Dr. Radhakrishnan, she asked, "Do philosophers need praise? Only yesterday we were thrilled by your words of magic, so gracious that not a single heart was left untouched. You have earned much praise and much distinction.....I am very proud that in addition to all your great gifts of intellect, you have the delightful endearing quality of humour which makes you not only a philosopher but also a companion, a comrade and a friend. May I give you this scrap of paper as a token of our admiration for your gifts?"

She might have been writing of herself.

It is fitting that barely a month before her death, presiding as Chancellor of the Lucknow University over a special Silver Jubilee Convocation, Sarojini Naidu should have the distinction of conferring Honorary Degrees on some of the most distinguished sons of India. Among them were the great leaders, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Govind Ballabh Pant, Dr. Radhakrishnan, later to be the President of India, and intellectuals and scientists such as Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerji, Meghnad Saha and Homi Bhabha. The last in this glittering list of great men was Shaikh Mohammad Abdullah.

To her beloved Jawahar, her commentation was short and typical:

"How shall I describe you? Crusader, poet, statesman, dreamer,

politician and spiritual heir to our beloved Mahatma Gandhi, you who have raised the stature of India to the very stars, you who are undoubted leader, but also our playmate and friend, and my brother and my son, I hope that you will one day find time to write another book in which you can say 'I have fulfilled my destiny, India has fulfilled her destiny'."

When the time came to confer an honorary degree on her Minister of Education, Dr. Sampurnanand, she mentioned the work he was doing for students in the Province: "No students nor those who incite them, have a right to believe their ministers are not doing their utmost and that he, Shri Sampurnanandji, who is an intellectual of intellectuals." At that moment there was a great clamour in the hall. Sarojini, however, had lost none of her power to quell an unruly crowd and her stern words, "You will keep quiet while I am speaking" penetrated the din and brought about complete silence. This happened so many times in her life that there must have been a special quality to her presence, some magnetic reach of her voice that could have this extraordinary effect.

Perhaps no person receiving an honorary degree could have had so strange a citation. When, addressing the scientist, Prof. K. S. Krishnan, she said:

"I am too stupid to understand all the learned implications of your work. But I have seen with dismay as well as pride your one great great fault, and that is, you are too modest and too unassuming; and in the cause of science you must be arrogant! Do not believe that being assertive in science is being conceited yourself. You have a gift to give to the world; give with pride and give it with certainty."

In conferring a degree on her own Chief Minister, Pandit Pant, she said that praising him was like offering bribery and corruption. But praise him she did for his total vigilance over the problems of the largest State in India and she said:

"I watch his work in this Province from day to day and I do not know when he sleeps. I know that this man is the living symbol of vigilance for this Province. He is one of those men who has transcended all personal, sectarian feeling, even when personal, sectarian feeling might have some vestige of excuse. It is because of his impartial courage. . . that he became the hero of the United Provinces."

Just before her birthday on February 13, 1949, Mrs. Naidu went to Delhi. As she was getting into the Rashtrapati Bhavan car, she hit her head on the low roof of the car and it seems she never really recovered from this blow. Though she carried on her usual work, she began to suffer from excruciating headaches. Nevertheless, the work of her State came first and she returned to Lucknow on February 15 to prepare to receive Rajagopalachari, the Governor-General, who was to come to Allahabad at the end of February, to open the Begum Azad wing of the Kamla Nehru Hospital. She became very exercised over the fact that she, as Governor, might not be able to go to greet the Head of State on his first visit to her Province, and do him the customary honours.

The headache had by now become constant. In desperation, Padmaja agreed to go to Allahabad to represent her and to prepare the large reception in his honour that her mother desired. Lilamani, her second daughter, was in the Ministry of External Affairs in Delhi and her son and husband in Hyderabad. By a combination of circumstances, none of her family could be with her at this time. On February 18, oxygen had to be administered as her breathing was difficult. On the 20th, Dr. Bidhan Roy rushed to Lucknow to examine his old friend and the one who had "acted" as Governor in his stead. Though she was far from well, her condition improved slightly, but on March 1st she was given a blood transfusion. After this she slept a little, and on waking later in the night asked the nurse to sing for her. All her life she had loved songs and her daughter, recalling her childhood days, says of her: when she was frightened of the dark she would advance into a room, lustily singing "Jesus, Lover of My Soul!" This night the dark was approaching, unknown to anyone. Years ago at the Simla Conference, seeing her unwell, the author asked, "what is wrong with you?" and she retorted with her usual spirit, "my child, it would be easier to tell you what is right with me!" But, having seen her, sick as she was, light up like a lamp fed with oil the moment anyone was near her, I remarked jokingly, "You will neither be ill nor could you die as long as there are people around you!" I had little inkling how prophetic this was to be.

When the nurse finished singing, she said, "I don't want anyone to talk to me." These were her last words.

Sarojini Naidu's simple memorial stands on the banks of Lucknow's

Gomti River; children now play on the wide lawns that surround it, lovers whisper together sitting on its steps and the tired citizen, the busy housewife, take a moment of rest as the sun sets. It was here the citizens of Lucknow brought her body in state from the wide verandahs of Raj Bhavan where her loving sons and daughters of Uttar Pradesh had paid their last homage, and the leaders of India had gathered with her family to stand vigil beside her. One Prime Minister and two future Prime Ministers stood stricken beside her bier, and the Governor-General, Rajagopalachari, spoke to the vast assembly of mourners. For someone who through ill health and suffering had always been so abundantly, vibrantly alive, the still form under the Kashmir shawl and exquisitely arranged flowers could not have been her; yet it was—the voice of the *Bharat Kokila* would not be heard again!

Paying tribute to her in the Parliament on March 3, 1949, the Prime Minister, in a long and moving speech said:

“Here was a person of great brilliance, here was a person vital and vivid, here was a person with so many gifts which made her perfectly unique. She began life as a poet, in later years when the compulsion of events drew her into the national struggle with all the zest and fire that she possessed. . . her whole life became—a poem and a song, and she did that amazing thing, she infused artistry and poetry into the national struggle, just as the Father of the Nation had infused moral grandeur to it. . . . We should, no doubt, in generations to come remember her, but perhaps those who come after us, and those who have not been associated with her so closely, will not realise fully the richness of that personality which could not be easily translated or transmuted into spoken words or records. So she worked for India. She knew how to work and how to play and that was a wonderful combination, and she knew how to sacrifice herself for great causes. . . this so gracefully and so graciously that it appeared an easy thing to do and not anything containing travail of spirit, for any sensitive person like her must have suffered great travail of spirit. . . . She lifted up our struggle into higher planes.”

The Prime Minister then reminded the House that:

“she stood more than any single human being in India for the unity of India in all its phases, for the unity of its cultural content and the unity of its different geographical areas. . . It was a passion for her.

It was the very texture, the warp and woof for her life."

Ending his formal speech in a most unusual manner, the Prime Minister told the house that Sarojini had been as close to the thousands and tens of thousands of her countrymen as to her own relations and,

"so we may send that message of condolence on behalf of this House, for it is really we and all of us who require that message to soothe our hearts."

All over the country similar messages from State legislatures, friends and comrades poured in to the bereaved family. Dr. Bidhan Roy's speech in the Bengal Legislative Assembly traced her history and the many significant contributions she had made in turn to the history of India. "Yet," he said, "those of us who had the opportunity of seeing her closer in life knew that she was a beloved wife in a loving household. She was at once a nurse, a cook, a sympathiser in distress in her own family. It was a curious combination which made a fighter for freedom a person who faced the full blast of the British autocracy and yet she was soft. . . she had the gift to make everybody feel at home when they were near her. It is difficult to find an equal: there is only one Mrs. Naidu. There is only one woman perhaps in the whole world who has been given charge of a big province. I think nowhere in the world, not even in Russia nor in the United States, has a woman been given such a big charge whether in the political or administrative sphere." And in paying tribute to her, Dr. Bidhan Roy unconsciously paid tribute to the women of India who learned to assume the highest responsibilities of human life, yet never lost their innate feminine nature. Fortunately for India, masculinity and femininity were never at issue in questions of politics and the state, nor was it a matter of equality. Somehow and perhaps thanks to women like Sarojini Naidu, whose womanliness, warmth and softness were never hammered into the hardness that public life generally imposes, women became emancipated in India without having to become men!

Fittingly enough, February 13, Sarojini's birthday, is Women's Day in India, and it is not the birthdays of the Kasturbas of this world, who so well fulfilled the ancient "Sita" image of feminine devotion, in whose memory Women's Day was created, but is that of one who was abundantly and in every way a whole woman. Here was one who never betrayed her womanliness, whose heart was a mansion where all found a haven, whose compassion took her right out of the normal life of a woman, yet

who never failed her family in love, care and devotion, nor overlooked the so-called small duties of the ardent housewife. In some miraculous way she reconciled the impossible with an energy of epic dimensions, for she had the unique capacity, which was the major element of her greatness, of giving herself completely to whatever or whoever was the immediate focus of her attention. It was this genuine caring for the person or the cause and the full-blooded, instant participation and identity, which made her actions bring people and causes alive.

In the midst of the insoluble problems of the Second Simla Conference, she spared time, day after day, to sit by the bedside of the author's little son, lying almost unconscious with pneumonia. Her constant companion the year before when she stayed in their house, she would come in from meetings of the First Simla Conference with a gay shout of "Where is that child?" This year the happy little fellow was stricken and his self-appointed grandmother was stricken too. Stroking his limp form, she would croon "where are his little arms?" which touched the depths of all who stood around that little cot, for she saw that his life was in the balance.

In Sunderbai Hall, Bombay, in the State that had been Sarojini's home more than any other, Dr. Radhakrishnan presided over a memorial meeting on March 7, 1949 and said of her, "Her life was devoted as much to the cause of our country as to the welfare of the world. She abjured all that divides and worked for all that brings together and unifies. Her brilliance, her open truthfulness, her imaginative genius were all given to the country's cause. In none of her deeds or utterances was there either venom or bitterness. She was never provocative, dogmatic or critical. She was always fair, friendly and firm." As a philosopher, he went on to say, "The battles for civilization are never finally won. It depends on a few voices in each of them whether the battle for civilization is won or lost."

She used to say that "Gandhi is my *Kanhaya* and I am his humble flute". The flute player and the flute together brought dignity and greatness to the struggle for freedom and if it had been one without the other, perhaps the history of India may have been wholly different. In many ways, Sarojini's contribution to the history of India was invisible, but like the air we breathe, essential to its life. Perhaps more than anything else, she was the *Sahadharmini*; the spiritual protector and repository of

life, a role which calls for the highest form of *jiva* in ancient Hindu society, and she brought to modern India and its fight for freedom, through her confluence with Gandhiji, this quality of ultimate womanly service: from the surrender of her self to the work of the nation.

When she was a tiny girl she would dream and say night after night, "what have I done to change the world?" Perhaps no one knows how much she did; the work of a true humanist never reaches records, notes or archives; it lies here and there in letters, but mostly in the hearts of those who knew her and in the deeds of a nation that are the work of many. In calling herself a poetess-singer, she understood her own genius profoundly and how brief man's passage is on earth, how intangible his achievements. So she knew too from very early years that it was not for glorification of the Self that one worked, but to pour out one's gifts prodigally, be they the gift of song or the gift of the spirit. This was a woman who knew the glorious meaning of life, and so, into the hearts of thousands, into the life of her country she brought a radiance and joy that has no equal.

"Long ago," she wrote to Nizam Jung, "when I was little more than a dreaming child, a world-famous man said to me 'child, widen your horizons and grow one with the joy and sorrow of humanity and you will create immortal art'. No words could serve as a better epitaph for one whose horizons were the whole cosmos, whose love was for the smallest creation of God's universe.

The life of Sarojini Naidu was a work of art. In death she was alone, but in life she belonged wholly to the living, and in her life she fulfilled the standard laid down by Tulsidas: "When you come into the world you cry and the world laughs; so live that when thou departest, thou mayest laugh while the world will be in tears."

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AZAD, MAULANA A. KALAM** India Wins Freedom. Orient Longmans. 1959.
- BARNS, MARGARITA** India Today and Tomorrow.
- BRAILFORD, H. N.** Hindustan Review, 1949.
Special Sarojini Naidu Supplement.
- BRECHER MICHAEL** Nehru. Oxford University Press. London. 1959.
- COUSINS, MARGARET E.** The Awakening of Asian Womanhood. Ganesh & Co. Madras, 1922.
- GANDHI, M. K.** Autobiography. Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1940.
- JAYAKAR, M. R.** The Story of My Life, Vol. I & II, Asia Publishing House.
- JOHNSON, ALAN CAMPBELL** Mission with Mountbatten. Robert Hale, London, 1951.
- MIRA BEHN** The Spirit's Pilgrimage, Longmans.
- MITRA** Annual Register, Vol. I, Vol. II, 1924 to 1935.
(Speeches of Sarojini Naidu and Resolutions.)
- MORTON ELEANOR** Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi. Max Reinhardt, London. 1954.
- NATESAN, G. A.** Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu.
- NEHRU, JAWAHARLAL** A Bunch Of Old Letters.
Asia Publishing House, Bombay. 1958.
- NIZAMAT JUNG** Letters and Poems.
Convocation Address, 9th December, 1947.
- PRASAD, RAJENDRA** Autobiography,
Asia Publishing House, Bombay. 1957.
- PYARELAL** Mahatma Gandhi—The Last Phase, Vol. II Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1958.
- SEN GUPTA, PADMINI** Sarojini Naidu. Asia Publishing House, 1966.
- SITARAMAYYA, PATTABHI** History of the Indian National Congress. Padma Publications. Bombay. 1935.
- TENDULKAR, D. G.** Mahatma. Life of M. K. Gandhi. The Times of India Press, Bombay.
- A.I.R. Recordings of speeches of Sarojini Naidu.
Amrita Bazar Patrika, Calcutta.
- ASIAN RELATIONS** Report of First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, 1947.
- Bombay Chronicle from 1912 to 1932—Nehru Museum and Library, New Delhi.
- Encyclopedia Britannica, Edmund Gosse, Vol. 10, 1966, p. 538-539.
- Memorial Volumes: Vishva Bharati News, (1949), Delhi Women's League, (1957).
- MODERN REVIEW** Bhattacharya, Prof. K. K., April, 1959.
- P.E.N. Archives, Bombay.** 'S. Naidu the greatest woman of our times.'
Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad.
- THE GREAT TRIAL** The Trial of Gandhiji
Published by V. R. Shah, Registrar, High Court of Gujarat, Ahmedabad.
- YOUNG INDIA** Mani Bhavan, Bombay.

Index

- Abdul Latif, Dr. Syed, 10fn
Abdul Qayyum, Mulla, 9, 10
Abdullah, Shaikh Mohammad, 160
Adult franchise, 114
Adwani, Col, 131
Africa, 87
Aga Khan's Palace, 134
Agarkar, Gopal Ganesh, 39
Agorenath Chattopadhyay, by R. C. Roy, 6fn
Ahimsa, 101
Ali, Abid, 123
Ali, Maulana Mohamed, 57, 66, 73
Ali, Maulana Shaikat, 90
Alliance for Peace, 102
Allies, 131, 145
All India Congress Committee, 77, 81
All India Home Rule League, 72, 89
All India Musical Conference, 125
All India Social Conference (1906), 2
All India Students' Federation, 144
All-India Women's Conference, 32, 97, 114, 124, 132
All India Women's Educational Conference, 104
All India Writers Conference (Benares), 158
All-Party Conference (Bombay), 91
All-Party Convention (Calcutta), 99
Ambedkar, Dr., 121, 148
Ambulance Corps, 131
America, 99, 100, 103
Amrita Bazar Patrika, 10fn, 16fn, 104
Amritsar, 70
Andrews, C.F., 54, 77
Anjuman-e-Akhwan-us-Safa (Brotherhood Society), 8
Ansari, Dr., 103
Arabian Nights, 22
Archer, William, 17
Arms Act, 57
Arya Samaj, 98
Asian Relations Conference (1947), 1, 2, 149
Attlee, 146
Auslander, Joseph, 27
Autobiography, by J. Nehru, 56
Autobiography, by Rajendra Prasad, 34fn
Awake, 48
Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam, 131, 134, 160
Bajpai, G. S., 115
Banerjea, Surendranath, 34, 40, 55
Banker, Shankerlal, 69, 78
Bapu, by Mary Barr, 122fn
Bardoli, 77
Barns, Margareta, 111
Baroda, 59
Bengal Provincial Congress, 97
Bengali, 49
Bernays, Robert, 4, 109, 110
Besant, Mrs. Annie, 16, 30, 45, 54, 55, 62, 69, 71, 89, 99
Betti, Lydda, 103
Bhakti, 25
Bhandari, Col., 121, 137
Bharat Kokila, 152
Bhupendranath, 10
Bible, 149
Bihar, 146
Bird of Time, 26, 27
Birla, G. D., 91, 111
"Black Bills", 65
Bombay Chronicle, 32, 39, 78, 98, 150, 151
Bombay Gazette, 9
Bombay Provincial Conference, 60
Bombay Provincial Congress Committee, 92
Bombay Provincial Council, 72
Bonnerji, W. C., 40
Bose, Nirmal K., 147fn
Bose, S. C., 128, 129, 143
Brahmo Marriage Bill, 21
Brahmo Samaj, 36
Brahmo Samaj Ashram, 7
British Indian Association, 86
British Liberal Party, 39
British Suffragette Movement, 72
Broken Wing, 27, 58, 59
Broomfield, Mr. Justice, 78, 79
A Bunch of Old Letters, 127fn
Burma, 133
Cabinet Mission, 146
Caliph of Islam, 73
Cambridge, 17

- Canada, 100
 Candy, General, 139
 Canning, Lord, 76
 Cape Town, 86
 Cape Town Agreement, 115
 Central Board of Education, 153
 Central Party Archive of Institute of Marxism-Leninism, 13
 Ceylon, 81
 Chagla, M. C., 65
 Champaran, 56, 71
 Champaran Agrarian Act, 56
 Chanda Railway Scheme, 9
 Chaplain, Charlie, 112
 Chattopadhyaya, Dr. Agorenath, 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 44
 Chattopadhyaya, Harindranath, 5, 6, 11, 74
 Chattopadhyaya, Kamladevi, 11, 37
 Chattopadhyaya, Mrinalini, 11, 12, 15, 53, 143
 Chattopadhyaya, Virendranath, 12, 13, 88
 Chauri Chaura, 78
 Chicago, 101
 Child marriage, 8, 31
 Civil disobedience movement, 34, 105
 Civil marriage, 21
 Class Areas Bill, 84, 85
Collected Works of Lenin, 12
 Commonwealth, 54
 Communal Award, 121
 Communal problem, 113
 Communal riots, 88
 Communist International (Third Congress), 12
 Congress Enquiry Report, 80
 Congress-League Scheme, 69, 71
 Congress-League Unity, 144
 Congress Working Committee, 98
 Cousins, Mrs., 61, 72
 Constituent Assembly, 146, 147, 148
 Cripps Mission, 133, 145
 Curzon, Lord, 34, 40
 Czechoslovakia, 105
- Dancers, Indian, 25
 Das, C. R., 37, 76, 82
 Dastoor, P. E., 20, 28fn, 32fn
 Deccan Education Society, 39
 Defence of India Act, 65
 Depressed Classes Mission Conference, 89
 Desai, Mahadev, 121, 134, 137
 Dharasana Salt Works, 106
- "Direct Action Day", 146
 Doyle, Col. E. E., 122
 Dr. Amir Ali's Diary, 53fn
 Durban, 83, 85
 Dyer, General, 70
- East African Indian Congress, 83, 103
 Edib, Halide, 103
 Education, Women, 7
 Elections, General, 123
 Elphinstone Mills, 90
 Emigration, 87
 English language, 124, 153
 Ezekial, Nissim, 28fn
- Famine, Bengal, 133, 142; Bijapur, 142
 Fascism, 128
 Fast, 138, 139
 Fazl-i-Hussain, Sir, 115
 Fiji, 55
 Films, Indian, 125
 Foreign cloth, boycott of, 34, bonfire of, 90
 France, 75
 Franchise Reform, 62
 Friends Meeting House, 112
- Gandhi-Irwin Pact, 110
 Gandhi, Kasturba, 52, 134, 138, 141
 Gandhi, Mahatma, 1, 4, 37, 40, 43; first meeting with Mrs. Naidu, 78; incident of Chauri Chaura, 78; operated upon for appendicitis, 88; attended Muslim League Meeting, 89; arrested, 90; attended Round Table Conference, 110; commenced fast, 122, 138; and "Quit India Movement", 134; "clinically dead", 139; released from Aga Khan Palace, 143; shot dead, 154
- Gandhi Reader*, 121fn
 Gandhi-Smuts Pact, 40
 Ganges, 60
 Garibaldi, 21
 Germany, 12
 "The Gift of India", 51
 Gilchrist scholarship, 7
 Girton College, 17
Gitanjali, 49
 Godse, Nathuram, 157
 Goin, Seva, 103
 Gokhale, Avantibai, 99
 Gokhale, Gopal Krishna, 27, 32, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 43, 47, 157
 "Gokhale the Man", 32
Golden Threshold, 3 fn, 14fn, 17, 26, 27

- Gosse, Edmund, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25
 Government of India, Home Department Resolution (Political), 67
 "Great Calcutta Killing", 146
 "Gulf of Suez", 110
 Gunnu *See* Chattopadhyaya Mrinalini
- Hardinge, Lord, 40
 Harijan uplift, 88
 Harijans, 121
 Harrison, Agatha, 126
 Heineman, William, 17, 26
 Hertzog, General, 115
Hind Swaraj, 70
 Hindi, 153
 Hindu Mahasabha, 89
 Hindu-Muslim Unity, 27, 32, 34, 36, 38, 44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 78, 98, 105, 113, 157
 Hindustani, 46
History of the Freedom Movement in India, 89
History of the Indian National Congress, 96, 143 *fn*
 Home Rule League, 54, 56
 Holmes, Dr. Haynes, 113
 Horniman, Mr., 74
 Hugo, Victor, 140
 Hume, 40, 54
 Humour, 111, 112, 146, 147, 152
 Hunter Committee, 73
 Husain, Imam, 65
 Hydari, Sir Akbar, 12
 Hyderabad, 8, 10, 19, 25, 26, 46, 158
- ICS, 140
I Found No Peace, 106*fn*
 Imperial Council, 39
In Memorium, 47
In the Shadow of the Mahatma, 91*fn*
 India Bill of 1935, 123
India Today and Tomorrow, 111
 Indian Annual Register, 145*fn*
 Indian Council for Child Welfare, 144
 Indian labour, 55
 Indian National Army, 143
 Indian National Congress, 10, 33, 34, 39, 54, 57, 62, 81, 89, 125, 133, 145, 148
Indian Quarterly Review, 97*fn*
Indian Review, 83*fn*, 143*fn*
 Indian Social Conference on the Education of Women, 35
 Indian Volunteer Corps, 50
 Individual *Satyagraha*, 131
 Interim Government, 133, 145, 147
- Irinberg, Ilya, 13
 Irwin, Lord, 109, 110, 117
 Islamic army, 60
 Islamic Culture, 25
 Italy, 4, 20
- Jallianwala Bagh, 70
 Jambhekar, R. M., 7*fn*, 11
 Jambhekar, Subashini, 7 & *fn*, 2, 11, 12
 Jannadas Dwarkadas, 69, 72, 99
 Japan, 133
 Javeri, Vithalbai, 69
 Jayakar, Dr. M. R., 97, 108
 Jayaprakash Narain, 126
 Jayasurya, 21
 Jewellery, 29, 37
 Jinnah, Mohammad Ali, 27, 33, 34, 37, 41, 47, 48, 57, 58, 88, 133, 145, 146, 148, 150
 Johannesburg, 83, 84, 114
 Joint Committee on Indian Reforms, 73
 Jowett, Sir John, 114
 Jung, Nawab Sir Nizammat, 157, 159, 166
 Jung, Salar, 8
- Kabir, Humayun, 153
 Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal, 76
 Kamala Nehru Hospital, 162
 Kannu, 140
Kanya Maha Vidyalaya, 46
 Kashmiri Poet, 147
 Katra, 71
 Keats, 19, 27
 Kelkar, N. C., 97
 Kemal Pasha, Mustapha, 73, 77, 78
 Kenya, 83
 Kenya Indian Congress, 83
 Kerala Congress Committee, 80
Khadi, 37, 88, 90, 123
 Khalil Gibran, 103
 Khankhoje, P, 12
 Khilafat, 64; movement 65, 73; delegation, 73
 King's College, London, 16
 Kingsway Hall, London, 73
 Krishna, Lord, 125
 Krishnagar Municipality, 97
 Krishnan, Prof. K.S., 161
 Kruger, Dr. Herst, 13
- Labour, Indian, 55
 Labour Party, 146
 Lady Irwin College, 123
 Lajpat Rai (Lala), 34, 96, 98
 Leaders' Conference on the Communal question, 104

- League Against Imperialism, 12
 Legislatures, entry ino, 81
 Lenin, 12, 13
Life and Myself, 11
 Lilamani, 21
 Linlithgow, Lord, 145
 Liquor, disuse of, 90
 London Indian Association, 33, 41
 Lothian, Lord, 114
 Lucknow University, 153, 160
 Lugani, G.A., 12
 Lutfuddowlah, Nawab, 135
- Macaulay, 124
 Macdonald, Mr. Ramsay, 109
 Macpherson, Mr., 67
 Madras Presidency Khilafat Committee, 77
 Maharashtra Provincial Conference, 61, 90
 Madras Students' Convention, 60
Mahatma Gandhi, 52fn
 Malabar, 79
 Malaviya, Pandit Madan Mohan, 34, 110
 Mangaldas Cloth Market, 90
 Mani Bhavan, 69
 Manning, Miss, 16, 17
 Mayo, Miss Katherine, 99, 100
 "Meher Muneer", 16
 Mehta, Hansa, 131
 Mehta, Sir Pherozeshah, 34, 37
Menace of Love, 58
 Menon, Kesava, 80
 Menon, Laxmi, 3, 132
 Meston, Sir James, 57
 "Mickey Mouse", 112
 Miller, Webb, 106fn
 Mirabai, 75
 Mira Behn, 120, 134, 138
Modern Review, 23
 Mohammed Shafi, Sir, 98
 Mombassa, 83
 Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, 62, 64, 65
 Montagu, Mr. Edwin, 62, 63, 74, 80
 Mookerji, Dr Radha Kumud, 160
 Moonje, Dr., 97
 Moplahs, 79
 Morley-Minto Reforms, 39
 Morton, Eleanor, 93
Mother India, 100
 Mountbatten, Lord, 147
 Mulji Jetha Market, 118
 Munich Pact, 128
 Musa (river), 13
 Muslim Community, 46
 Muslim League, 32, 33, 40, 45, 46, 58, 89, 127, 128, 145, 147
 Muslim Women, 47
My days with Gandhi, 147fn
- Naidu, Dr. Govindarajalu, 14, 21
 Naidu, Padmaja, 7, 15, 21, 101, 108
 Naidu, Sarojini, statement on death of Gandhi, 1; born, 1; her letter to Arthur Symons, 4; on Mulla Abdul Qayyum, 9; earned Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal, 13; education in Madras, 14; wrote English poetry, 15; wrote Persian play, 16; endowed with scholarship by Nizam of Hyderabad, 16; went to England, 16, 36; her letters to Edmund Gosse, 18, 22; returned to India without degrees or diplomas, 20, 21; went to Switzerland and Italy, 20; married Dr. Naidu, 21; poems on her four children, 21; plunged into political life, 34; on Indian women, 35; started wearing Khadi, 37; letters to Gokhale, 37, 41, 42; Muslim League, session, 40; returned from England, 44; friendship with Jinnah, 48; President, P.E.N., 49; Tagore's letter to, 49, 59; *Acharya* of Visva Bharati, 49; letter to Tagore, 50, 58; war efforts, 51; death of father, 52; first meeting with J. Nehru, 56; moved resolution on 'Equal Qualifications between men and women', 61; led delegation of fourteen leaders of Womens' Organisation to Montagu, 62; signed *Satyagraha pledge*, 65; speech against Rowlatt Bills, 66; sailed for England, 72; Called Bulbul-i-Hind, 74; letter to Gandhi, 75; returned from England, 75; returned Kaiser-i-Hind Gold Medal, 76; speech on entry into legislatures, 81; deputed to attend Kenya Indian Congress, 83; speech at Mombassa, 83; speech in Johannesburg, 84; comments on speeches in South Africa, 85, 86; letter for Gandhi, 85; President, South African Indian Conference, 87; Secretary of State's telegram to Viceroy, 87; President, Indian National Congress, 93; Presidential speech, 93; Krishnagar Municipality presented address, 97; speech on the resolution on Hindu-Muslim Unity, 98; used handspun silks, 99; sailed for America, 99; letters to Padmaja, 101, 111, 113, 131,

- 134, 135, 136, 139; returned from America, 103; member, Congress Working Committee, 103; letters to J. Nehru, 104, 127, 132; elected President, All India Women's Educational Conference, 104; arrested and kept in Yeravda, 107, 108; letter to Padmaja, 111, 113; on communal problem, 113; sailed for South Africa, 114; acting president of Congress, 117; police reports about, 118; arrested, 120; speech at North Arcot District Conference, 130; arrested, 131; jail life, 136; release from Aga Khan Palace, 141; travelled to Lahore, 143; speech in Constituent Assembly, 147; farewell speech to Mme-Sophia Wadia, 149; Governor, U.P., 150; speech on Independence Day, 151; convocation address to Lucknow University, 153; broadcast on Gandhiji's death, 155; letter to Nizam Jung, 159; died, 162; tributes, 163
- Naked Fakir*, 4, 109
- Naoroji, Dadabhai, 34, 40, 63
- Narayan, Daridra, 111
- Narendra Deo, 126
- Natal, 83
- Natal Witness*, 84fn
- National Council of Women in India, 114
- National Library, Calcutta, 26
- National School for Girls (Mylapore), 61
- National Week, 92, 117, 132
- Nazism, 131
- Negroes, 101
- Nehru, Jawaharlal, 2, 55, 56, 65, 97, 103, 104, 105, 108, 126, 127, 128, 134, 146, 150, 158, 160, 163
- Nehru, Kamla, 126
- Nehru, Motilal, 2, 97, 99, 109, 108
- Nehru, Rameshwari, 2
- New English School, 39
- New Hyderabad College *See* Nizam's College
- New India*, 54
- New York International House, 100
- New York Times*, 96, 100
- Nilambuja*, 5, 26
- Nizam of Hyderabad, 16, 22
- Nizam's College, 7
- "No-changers", 82
- No-tax campaign, 77
- Noakhali, 147
- Non-Co-operation movement, 75, 76
- Non-violence, 130
- North Arcot District Congress Conference, 130
- "Ode to India", 28
- Padmini of Chittor, 45
- Pakistan, 145
- Pan-Pacific Women's Conference, 99
- Pandit, Vijayalaxmi, 132
- Pant, Govind Ballabh, 128, 153, 160, 161
- Pantulu Guru, Pandit Veerasalingam, 21
- Parliamentary Delegation, 63
- Partition of Bengal, 34
- Partition of India, 141, 146, 147
- Passive resistance, 114
- Patel, Sardar Vallabhbhai, 74, 77, 121
- Patil, S. K., 123
- Patna, 47
- Patro, Sir A. P., 104
- Pattani, Sir Prabhashankar, 110
- Patwardhan, Achyut, 126
- P. E. N., 49, 149
- Pillai, Ramachandra, 10
- Plastic surgery, 99
- Poetry Luncheon (New York), 100
- Polack, Mr, 41
- Polygamy, 31
- Poona Pact, 121
- Postal Week, 117
- Prakasam, Mr, 80
- Prince of Wales, 76
- Princely States, 145
- Princes of India, 148
- "Pro-Changers", 82
- Punjab, 73
- Punjab Provincial Muslim League, 98
- Purdah system, 47
- Pyarelal, 121, 134
- Quit India, 134, 141
- Radhakrishnan, Sir S., 148, 160, 165
- Rahman, Dr., 111
- Rajagopalachari, C., 3, 162, 163
- Rajam, Prahlad C., 11
- Rajendra Prasad, Dr., 129, 147
- Rakhis*, 34
- Rama, 11
- Ramaswami Iyer, Sir C. P., 27, 30, 36, 54, 72
- Ranade, Ramabai, 32
- Ranadheera, 21, 143
- Rand Daily Mail*, 85
- Ranendranath, 11
- Reading, Lord, 114

- Reddy, Dr. Mrs. Muttulakshmi, 32
Renaissance, 53
 Responsivists, 97
 Rhodesia, 83
 Ritch, L. W., 84
 Round Table Conference, 109, 110, 113, 123
 Rowlatt Bills, 64, 65, 66, 68, 69
 Rowlatt, Justice, 65
 Roy Chowdhury, P. C., 10fn, 16fn
 Roy, Dr B. C., 140, 150, 162, 164
 Royal Commission, 39, 40
 Ruskin, 70
- Sabarmati Ashram, 65, 105
 Saha, Meghnad, 160
 Salt Law, 106
 Salt satyagraha, 106
 Sampurnanand, Shri, 153, 161
 Sapru, Sir Tej Bahadur, 108
 Sarangapani, M. P., 23
 Sarvajanic Sabha, 39
Sarojini Naidu, by Padmini Sen Gupta, 6fn, 21fn, 28fn, 32fn, 35, 52fn, 53fn, 55fn, 57fn, 60fn, 96fn, 106fn
Sarojini Naidu Memorial Volume, 7fn, 10fn
Sarojini the Singer, 90
Sarvodaya, 70
 Sastri, Srinivasa, 115
 Satvalekar, Damodar, 10
Satyagraha, 50, 56, 64, 65, 69, 70, 71, 131
Satyagraha pledge, 65
 "Save the Children Fund", 144
 Savitri, 61
Sceptred Flute, 27
 Scindia Shipping Company, 133
 Self-government, 54, 63
 Sengupta, J. M., 97
 Sen Gupta, Padmini, 21fn, 35fn, 48
 Sen, Keshab Chandra, 21, 36
 Servants of India Society, 36
 Shah, Col. Bager, 139
 Shah, K. T., 111
 Shanker Lal, Sir, 103
 Shelley, 18, 19, 23
 Shorapur, 26
 Shraddhananda, Swami, 69
Silence of Love, 58
 Simla Conference, 145, 146, 162, 165
 Sind, 98, 153
 Sinha, Dr., Sachchidananda, 147
 Sinha, Sir S. P., 45
 Sita, 60
- Sitaramayya, Pattabhi, 96
 Slums, 101
 Smedley, Agnes, 12
 Smuggling of arms, 88
 Smuts, General, 51, 85, 86
 Sobhani, Omer, 48, 69, 90
 Social Conference (Madras), 31
Sorrow of Love, 58
 South Africa, 40, 42, 50, 55, 59, 83, 93
 South African Indian Conference, 87
 Southborough Commission, 62
 South-East Asia, 133
 Spinning Wheel, 90
Spirit's pilgrimage, 120fn
Star of Johannesburg, 84
The Story of My Experiments with Truth, 51fn
 Stowe, Harriet Beecher, 101
 Students' Conference, Ahmedabad, 77
 Suhashini *See* Jambhekar, Suhashini
 Suhrawardy, 91
 Sunalmi Devi, 11
 Surat, 90
Swadeshi movement, 10, 123
 Swaraj, 63, 81, 91
 Swarajya Party, 82, 91
 Sweden, 75
 Switzerland, 20, 75
 Symons, Arthur, 1, 3fn, 4, 15, 16, 17, 18, 23, 135
- Tagore, Rabindranath, 36, 49, 58, 76, 140
 Tagore Week, 49
 Taj Mahal Hotel, 88
 Taxes, non-payment of, 105
 Teachers' College, Saidapet, 60
 Teggart, Sir Charles, 12
 Tennyson, 18
 Thames, 19
 Theistic Conference, Calcutta, 35
 Tilak, Bal Gangadhar, 34, 37, 39, 89
 Tilak Swaraj Fund, 90
Times of India, 9
Tinkathia system, 56
 Transvaal, 83
 Transvaal Asiatic Tenure Bill, 115, 116
 Transvaal Indian Association, 83
 "Traveller's song", 26
 "Tribute to Gokhale", 41
 Turkey, 73
 Two-nation theory, 58, 145
 Tyabji, Abbas, 106
 Tyabji, Badduruddin, 40
 Tyabji, Raihana Behn, 121, 139fn

- Uncle Tom's Cabin, 101
 United Provinces, 150
 Universal Art Circle, 125
 "Unto This Last", 70
Upanishad, 140
 Urdu, 46, 153
- Varada Sundari Devi, 5, 6, 10
 Virendranath, 10
Vishwa Bharati News, 53fn
- Wacha, Dinsha, 40
 Wadia, Mme. Sophia, 149
 Wavell, Field Marshal Lord, 141, 145,
 146
- Wedderburn, 40
 Westminster Abbey, 19
 "Where the Mind is Free", 140
 Widow re-marriage, 8, 31
 Willingdon, Lord, 80, 117
Women Behind Mahatma, 93, 106
 Women, 57; education, 31, 35; franchise,
 60, 72; rights of, 89
 Women's Day, 104, 164
 Women's Indian Association, 114, 123
 World War (I), 130, 131; (II), 13, 133
- Yeravda Jail, 107
Young India, 75, 78, 85, 90, 101
 Young Men's Muslim Association, 60

