


# VILLAGE SONG

SAROJINI NAIDU



**ABOUT THE POET** Sarojini Naidu (13 February 1879–2 March 1949) was born in a middle-class Bengali family settled in Hyderabad and was the eldest of eight children. Her father Aghorenath Chattopadhyaya, an eminent professor of chemistry at Nizam's College, was a poet, philosopher, scientist, social reformer and teacher all rolled into one. Her mother Varadasundari, was a good musician, who had to her credit many lyrical compositions in Bengali. The family followed the tenets of the Brahmo Samaj. Sarojini and her siblings thus grew up in an atmosphere of culture and refinement. Sarojini was educated in Hyderabad and Madras. In spite of poor health, she did extremely well in her studies. She took to writing poetry at an early age and her work reflected her mature outlook on life. The untimely death of her brother made her realise the transitoriness of life. She then turned to the world of nature to overcome this loss. This depressing experience was fortunately balanced when she met Dr Govindarajulu Naidu, whom she later married. After her marriage she lived a happy and contented life, but the desire to look beyond the narrow limits of personal pleasure was very strong. The strongest of these was that of patriotism and she responded to the call of the motherland with all her heart. She was perhaps the most prominent woman, among

the leaders of the mass movement, who fought for the independence of India. Closely associated with the nationalist movement, Sarojini tried to spread her personal observations through her books. Her first volume of verse *The Golden Threshold* was published in 1905 which was followed by *The Bird of Time* in 1912 and *The Broken Wing* in 1917. Her poetry was intensely emotional and lyrical, reflecting the deep influence of the Romantic poets. Her life and career took a new direction after she met Mahatma Gandhi in 1914. She plunged into active politics and participated in all the movements with other freedom fighters. She became the first president of the Indian National Congress and after Independence, was also appointed the first woman Governor of Uttar Pradesh. Her death in March 1949 was mourned by millions of Indians.

Full are my pitchers and far to carry,

Lone is the way and long.

Why, O why was I tempted to tarry

Lured by the boatman's song?

Swiftly the shadows of night are falling,

Hear, O hear, is the white crane calling,

Is it the wild owl's cry?

There are not tender moonbeams to light me,

If in the darkness a serpent should bite me,

Or if an evil spirit should smite me,

Ram Re Ram! I shall die.

My brother will murmur, 'Why doth she linger?'

My mother will wait and weep,

Saying, 'O safe may the great gods bring her,

The Jamuna's waters are deep'...

The Jamuna's waters rush by so quickly,

The shadows of evening gather so thickly,

Like black birds in the sky...

O! If a storm breaks, what will betide me?

Safe from the lightening where shall I hide me?

Unless Thou succour my footsteps and guide me,

Ram Re Ram! I shall die.

## NOTES AND MEANINGS OF DIFFICULT WORDS

1. **betide:** happen
2. **crane:** a kind of aquatic bird with a long neck and long legs
3. **doth:** does
4. **linger:** delay
5. **lured:** tempted; charmed
6. **murmur:** speak in an unintelligible voice
7. **pitchers:** a vessel for carrying and storing water
7. **Ram re Ram:** the sacred name of Lord Rama the saviour, used in moments of fear and excitement
8. **serpent:** snake
9. **shadows of the night falling:** darkness approaching
10. **smite me:** cast wicked charms on me
11. **succour:** help; strengthen
12. **tarry:** to stay; to delay
13. **tender moonbeams:** soft moonlight
14. **thou:** God
15. **wild owl:** a bird treated as ominous

## SUMMARY

“Village Song” is a folk song which was a part of Sarojini Naidu’s second volume of poems *The Bird of Time*. The setting is rustic and describes the daily custom followed by Indian village women of fetching home their daily pitcher of water from a long distance. The village girl in the poem has filled her pitchers with water from the Yamuna River and is returning home. The way to her home is lonely, and she is afraid as darkness is approaching rapidly. She regrets giving in to the temptation of waiting to listen to the mesmerising song of the boatman. The hooting of the white crane frightens her and makes her think that it is the hooting of the owl. With no moonlight to guide her, she is afraid that some serpent might sting her. Brought up in a remote Indian village where belief in folk-superstitions is strong, she fears that evil spirits haunting the place would cast wicked charms on her and she would die. The exclamation ‘Ram re Ram’ is a typical exclamation uttered by Indian men and women in moments of fear or excitement. The serpent and the evil spirits also represent the invisible dangers



inherent in modern society. The background to this lyric may have been provided by the popular Radha-Krishna myth which is known even in the most remote villages of India. Personal safety is not her only concern. She is worried that her delay will trouble her parents and her brother. Her mother would be weeping and praying to the Gods to protect her daughter and to bring her home safely. Her brother would be anxious to know the reason for her delay. All are aware of the dangers associated with a mighty river like the Yamuna. The comparison of the increasing darkness to blackbirds gathering in the sky is suggestive of the fear and anxiety of the maiden. The maiden is afraid that very soon there will be a storm and lightening may strike her. Helpless against all these inherent dangers, she prays to God to protect and guide her home safely. The maiden's deep and unwavering faith in Lord Rama is reasserted in the last line as she exclaims "Ram re Ram! I shall die" in the hope that her saviour will rescue her from death.

**Answer the following questions in one or two words.**

1. Who is the poet of the poem "Village Song"? *Sarojini Naidu*
2. What tempted the girl to tarry?
3. Who will smite the village girl? *Evil spirit*
4. What will bite the girl in the darkness? *Serpent*
5. What words does the speaker utter when fear overcomes her? *Ram re Ram*  
*I shall die*

**Answer the following questions in a few words.**

1. What will be the mother's reaction?
2. Why will the speaker's brother murmur?
3. What are the things the speaker is afraid of?
4. With what are the shadows of the evening compared?
5. How does the girl realise that night is approaching?

**Answer the following questions briefly in your own words.**

1. What does the girl in the poem say about her mother and brother?
2. What do the birds referred to in the poem symbolise?
3. "Ram re Ram! I shall die" — why does the girl utter these words?

**Give suitable answers to the following.**

1. Describe the feelings of the girl in the course of the poem.
2. How does Sarojini Naidu represent the form and spirit of Indian folklore in the poem "Village Song"?

1. A)

(a)

(b)

(c)

(d)

(e)

(f)

(g)