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Topic: Critical Appreciation of Sarojini Naidu's "The Queen's Rival"

Text

I

QUEEN GULNAAR sat on her ivory bed,
Around her countless treasures were spread;

Her chamber walls were richly inlaid
With agate, porphory, onyx and jade;

The tissues that veiled her delicate breast,
Glowed with the hues of a lapwing's crest;

But still she gazed in her mirror and sighed
"O King, my heart is unsatisfied."

King Feroz bent from his ebony seat:
"Is thy least desire unfulfilled, O Sweet?

"Let thy mouth speak and my life be spent
To clear the sky of thy discontent."

"I tire of my beauty, I tire of this
Empty splendour and shadowless bliss;

"With none to envy and none gainsay,
No savour or salt hath my dream or day."

Queen Gulnaar sighed like a murmuring rose:
"Give me a rival, O King Feroz."

II

King Feroz spoke to his Chief Vizier:
"Lo! ere to-morrow's dawn be here,

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"Send forth my messengers over the sea,
To seek seven beautiful brides for me;

"Radiant of feature and regal of mien,
Seven handmaids meet for the Persian Queen." . . . . .

Seven new moon tides at the Vesper call,
King Feroz led to Queen Gulnaar's hall

A young queen eyed like the morning star:
"I bring thee a rival, O Queen Gulnaar."

But still she gazed in her mirror and sighed:
"O King, my heart is unsatisfied."

Seven queens shone round her ivory bed,
Like seven soft gems on a silken thread,

Like seven fair lamps in a royal tower,
Like seven bright petals of Beauty's flower

Queen Gulnaar sighed like a murmuring rose
"Where is my rival, O King Feroz?"

III

When spring winds wakened the mountain floods,
And kindled the flame of the tulip buds,

When bees grew loud and the days grew long,
And the peach groves thrilled to the oriole's song,

Queen Gulnaar sat on her ivory bed,
Decking with jewels her exquisite head;

And still she gazed in her mirror and sighed:
"O King, my heart is unsatisfied."

Queen Gulnsar's daughter two spring times old,
In blue robes bordered with tassels of gold,

Ran to her knee like a wildwood fay,
And plucked from her hand the mirror away.

Quickly she set on her own light curls
Her mother's fillet with fringes of pearls;

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Quickly she turned with a child's caprice
And pressed on the mirror a swift, glad kiss.

Queen Gulnaar laughed like a tremulous rose:
"Here is my rival, O King Feroz."

Sarojini Naidu nee Chattopadhyay was born in 1879 in a Bengali family in Hyderabad. She is also known as the 'Nightingale of India' because of her contribution in the field of Indo-Anglican Poetry. She was a proponent of civil rights and women's empowerment. She was appointed as the first Governor of the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh) after the independence of India. She died in 1949. Her collections of poems are *The Golden Threshold, The Bird of Time, The Broken Wing* and *The Feathers of the Dawn*. The present poem "The Queen's Rival" was published in *The Golden Threshold* in 1905.

Summary (This summary is downloaded from https://sumanabala.blogspot.com/2012/10/the-queens-rival-sarojini-naidu.html?view=flipcard)

Sarojini Naidu was a great patriot, freedom fighter and poetess of modern India. She was born on 13 February 1879 at Hyderabad and was educated in Madras, London and Cambridge. She was influenced by English romanticism as well as by Persian and Urdu poetic traditions. Her first volume of poetry The Golden Threshold was published in 1905. This was followed by The Bird of Time, The Broken Wing and The Sceptered Flute. Known as the 'Nightingale of India' she composed poetry in which swift thoughts and strong emotion sprang into lyrics by themselves. She has given expression to joys as well as to the sorrows of life. She was sensitive to the beauty of living things. She tried to fuse the riches of English vocabulary with subjects of her poetry, very peculiar to the east. As a sensitive poet, Sarojini Naidu proved that English language can be made a vehicle of one's creativity. The poem The Queen's Rival is taken from The Golden Threshold, the first volume of verse by Sarojini Naidu. Poem in Detail Queen Gulnaar sat on her ivory bed; countless treasures were spread around her. The walls in her chamber were inlaid lavishly with agate, porphyry, onyx and jade. The fabric, which she wore around her delicate chest glowed with the colours similar to those of a lapwing's crest. But she gazed in her mirror and sighed saying, "O King, my heart is unsatisfied." King Feroz bent down from his ebony seat saying, "Is your least desire not fulfilled, my sweet heart?" He further

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requested her to express her desire, and he would spend all his life to fulfill her desire by doing away with the circumstances leading to her dissatisfaction. The queen said, "I am tired of my beauty; I am tired of my external beauty without substance and happiness. I have no rival to envy nor there is anyone to dispute my claim of being most beautiful." Queen Gulnaar sighed like a murmuring rose, saying, "Give me a rival, King Feroz". King Feroz spoke to his chief councillor and ordered him to be in the palace before dawn on the following day. The King ordered him to send messengers over the sea to look for seven beautiful brides for the former. The King said that the brides should be of glowing beauty and of royal bearing. They should be. fit to be seven ladies in attendance to the Persian Queen. King Feroz led to Queen Gulnaar's hall seven most attractive beauties in the evening time. The young Queen Gulnaar like a bright morning star, saw the seven beauties with suspicion. She recalled the words of the King, "I bring thee a rival, O Queen Gulnaar". She was not satisfied; she gazed in her mirror and sighed, "O King, my heart is still dissatisfied". However, around the Queen's ivory bed, stood seven queens with such stunning beauty that they looked like a necklace of seven gems of pleasing colours on a silken thread. Furthermore, the even queens looked like seven beautiful lamps in a royal tower and seven bright petals of a most beautiful flower. Yet, Queen Gulnaar sighed like a murmuring rose and expressed her dissatisfaction, saying, "King Feroz, where is my rival?" Then the spring winds gently blew, giving rise to rains that caused flood. The winds also made the tulip buds to bloom into a carpet of reddish flower; the bees began to buzz with louder sound and the summer was already at hand. There was excitement in the peach groves as the orioles began to sing. Against this background, Queen Gulnaar sat on her ivory bed adorning her delicate hair with precious jewels. She gazed in the mirror and sighed, "O King, my heart is still dissatisfied". Queen Gulnaar's two year old daughter was adorned with blue robes with attractive borders of tassels of gold. The child, like a fairy in a forest rushed to the Queen and snatched the mirror away. Then the child quickly wore her mother's hairband with fringes of pearls on her own beautiful curls. Suddenly, with a child-like move, she planted happily a kiss on the mirror. Queen Gulnaar laughed like a quivering rose, saying, "O King Feroz, look, here is my rival".

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Please visit the following links for further study:

1. https://www.poetry-archive.com/n/the_queens_rival.html
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarojini_Naidu
3. https://keytopoetry.com/sarojini-naidu/analyses/the-queen-s-rival/
4. http://kkhuzaima3.blogspot.com/2008/03/queens-rival.html
5. https://mi490.wordpress.com/2016/01/25/the-queens-rival%F0%9F%91%91/

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