

## "VILLAGE SONG" by Sarojini Naidu: Explanation

**Instructions for the students:** The students are advised to read the main text (marked with red colour) and the explanation that follows. The word meanings are given for the better understanding of the text.

The speaker of the poem is a small girl living in a village who has gone to fetch water from a river which is far away from her home. There are many places in India where people do not have the facility of running water and for that they have to walk a long distance to collect water from wells, rivers, ponds or similar water bodies. It is a chore usually done by women of the house where they carry the pitchers or vessels full of water to fulfill the need of water at home. Here the poet talks about such a situation where a girl has gone to fetch water from a river. The poem deals with the traditional living style of villages and the attachment of the young girl to her family and how fear is created in her mind because of the darker environment.

### **The poem:**

#### **Stanza I:**

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 boatmen's song?

pitchers: vessel for carrying and storing water  
tarry: to stay, to delay  
lured: tempted, charmed

The girl explains that the pitchers she is carrying are full of water and she has not reached her home yet. She has to walk a long distance carrying the water filled pitchers to reach her home. Then she explains the reason of her being late as she was attracted by the song sung by the boatman and slowed down.

Swiftly the shadows of night are falling,  
Hear, O hear, is the white crane calling,  
Is it the wild owl's cry?

swiftly: quickly, in a fast manner  
shadows of night falling: darkness approaching

crane: a kind of aquatic bird with a long neck and long legs  
wild owl: bird treated as ominous

The time is almost evening, it is getting dark very fast and the girl is getting scared by the sound of the birds surrounding her. She questions if the sound is made by the White Crane or it is the wild Owl's cry. The reader need to remember that the girl is going home in the twilight and nothing is clearly visible to her. The road she has taken is also not clean and plane, it passes through a jungle.

There are no 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.

smite: to cast wicked charms on someone  
serpent: snake  
tender moonbeam: soft moonlight

As the time referred in the poem is the twilight and it is getting darker and the moonlight is not present at that moment. The girls says that the tender moonbeam could give her a relief from the fear she is facing. The path taken by the girl is not plane and clean, she fears that a snake may bite her or the evil spirits may haunt her. In this deep state of fear she takes the name of God Rama to save her from the misery. It is also notable that in many Indian traditions it is believed that chanting God Rama's name keeps the evil away from people and there is a possibility that the girl is taking Rama's name to keep such evil energies away.

## **Stanza II:**

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 ...

doth: does  
murmur: speak in an unintelligible voice

linger: delay

The second stanza shows a shift in the speaker's thinking process where she is now imagining the reaction of her brother and mother. She gets anxious as she remembers her brother and mother. She imagines that her brother will murmur in concern at her delay. On the other hand her mother will wait and weep looking far for her and would fear if something bad had happened to her daughter as the water of the Jamuna river is deep and rush by so quickly. And would pray to God to guide her daughter safely home as the swift and deep water of Jamuna river or the thick shadows that have gathered in the evening like black birds in the sky are impediments on her daughter's path.

O! if the storm breaks, what will betide me?  
Safe from the lightning where shall I hide me?  
Unless Thou succour my footsteps and guide me,  
Ram re Ram! I shall die.

betide: happen

thou: usually means "you", here it is used to refer to God

succour: help, to strengthen

Her mind comes back to the fearful thoughts of self. She weeps thinking what will happen to her if a storm breaks. Or if the lightning starts where should she hide to save herself. Her fear increases as she thinks about these things. She calls her god again and again to protect her footsteps and guide her to reach her home safely.