A literary trove found in a grain market

Sarojini Naidu’s unseen private collection will soon be available for research

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A treasure trove of private papers, books, paintings and scribblings of poetess and stateswoman Sarojini Naidu was discovered after a massive hunt ended in the Mahankali Grain Market attached to the famous Ujjaini Mahankali temple in Secunderabad.

Now, books and documents filling about eight almirahs have been moved to the Marri Chenna Reddy Human Resource Development Institute (MCRHRDI) for safe-keeping and cataloguing. They will soon be available for researchers and historians. Though Sarojini Naidu hailed from Hyderabad, most of her personal papers and collections were donated to the Nehru Memorial Museum in New Delhi by her daughter Padmaja Naidu while some are with the National Archives of India.

The hint

A hint about these lost documents first came when former Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh was writing the biography of the founder of Pakistan Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Then again while former journalist and author Sheela Reddy was writing a book about the Jinnahs, she began searching for the documents and located them in the upper floor room of a busy grain market.

“It was 7.20 p.m. on August 2, 2017, and it had already become dark when the custodian of the market opened the door. Without any light, I could not see anything. The next day I reached there at 6 a.m. and the treasure in the almirahs blew my mind away,” said Raghavendra Singh, Director-General of the National Archives of India who was helped in tracing the papers by Ms. Sheela Reddy.

Among the collection were a few autographed portraits of Sarojini Naidu. “See this. This one has been drawn by the brother of W.B. Yeats (John Butler Yeats),” says Mr. Singh, showing an image clicked with his cellphone.