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**BEYOND ROMANTICISM: UNVEILING REALIST
PERSPECTIVES IN THE SELECTED POETRY OF SAROJINI NAIDU**

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ABSTRACT

Sarojini Naidu is widely celebrated as the “Nightingale of India” for her lyrical poetry, rich imagery, and romantic sensibilities. While her works are often associated with romanticism and aesthetic beauty, they also contain significant elements of realism that reflect the social, cultural, and economic realities of Indian life. This paper explores the realist dimensions embedded within selected poems of Sarojini Naidu, highlighting her portrayal of ordinary people, traditional occupations, social customs, and national identity. Through a thematic analysis of poems such as *Palanquin Bearers*, *Indian Weavers*, *Coromandel Fishers*, *Bangle Sellers*, and *The Village Song*, the study reveals how Naidu combines poetic elegance with realistic observations of everyday life. The paper argues that her poetry transcends romantic idealization and serves as a valuable literary record of colonial Indian society. By presenting the struggles, aspirations, labor, and cultural traditions of common people, Naidu contributes to the development of a distinctly Indian literary voice. The findings demonstrate that realism in her poetry complements rather than contradicts her romantic style, creating a balanced representation of Indian life and culture. This study highlights the significance of realism in understanding the depth and social relevance of Sarojini Naidu's poetic contributions.

Keywords: Sarojini Naidu, Realism, Indian Poetry, Romanticism, Socio-Cultural Themes, Colonial India, Literary Analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian English literature has witnessed the emergence of several distinguished poets whose works have contributed significantly to the development of a unique literary identity. Among these literary figures, Sarojini Naidu occupies a prominent place due to her lyrical brilliance, nationalistic spirit, and profound portrayal of Indian culture. Often celebrated as the “Nightingale of India,” Naidu's poetry is characterized by melodious language, vivid imagery, and romantic themes. Her collections such as *The Golden Threshold*, *The Bird of Time*, and *The Broken Wing* have earned widespread recognition for their aesthetic beauty and emotional appeal.

Traditionally, literary critics have categorized Sarojini Naidu as a romantic poet because of her emphasis on nature, beauty, love, and imagination. Her use of colorful imagery and musical rhythm often reflects the influence of English Romantic poets. However, limiting her work solely to romanticism overlooks the significant realist dimensions present in her poetry. Beneath the lyrical elegance lies a keen observation of Indian society, culture, occupations, and everyday experiences. Her poems frequently depict the lives of common people, including fishermen, weavers, bangle sellers, farmers, and village women, thereby providing authentic insights into colonial Indian life.

Realism as a literary movement emerged in the nineteenth century as a response to excessive idealization and imagination in literature. Realist writers sought to represent life truthfully by focusing on ordinary people, social conditions, and everyday experiences. In the Indian context, realism became an important literary tool for portraying the complexities of colonial society and preserving cultural identities. Sarojini Naidu's poetry reflects this tendency through her detailed descriptions of traditional occupations, cultural practices, and social relationships.

The coexistence of romanticism and realism in Naidu's poetry creates a unique literary synthesis. While her language remains lyrical and evocative, the subjects she chooses often originate from real-life experiences and observations. Her poems celebrate the dignity of labor, the richness of Indian traditions, and the resilience of ordinary people. Through these portrayals, she transforms everyday life into poetic expression while maintaining a realistic connection to social reality.

This paper aims to examine the realist perspectives embedded within selected poems of

Sarojini Naidu. By analyzing thematic elements related to labor, culture, social identity, and everyday life, the study seeks to demonstrate that realism constitutes an essential aspect of her poetic vision. The analysis contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Naidu's literary achievements and her role in shaping Indian English poetry.

II. REPRESENTATION OF LABOR AND EVERYDAY OCCUPATIONS

One of the most remarkable aspects of realism in Sarojini Naidu's poetry is her vivid portrayal of traditional occupations and working-class communities. Unlike many romantic poets who often focused on idealized landscapes, mythical characters, or aristocratic lifestyles, Naidu turned her attention toward the ordinary people who formed the backbone of Indian society. Her poems celebrate the lives, struggles, aspirations, and contributions of workers whose labor sustains communities and preserves cultural traditions. Through her poetic lens, these individuals are not merely background figures but central characters whose experiences reflect the social and economic realities of colonial India.

In "Coromandel Fishers," Naidu presents a realistic depiction of the fishing community living along India's coastal regions. The poem portrays fishermen as hardworking individuals whose survival depends on the sea. They are shown rising early in the morning and venturing into uncertain waters in search of their livelihood. The sea is depicted not only as a source of income but also as an integral part of their identity and existence. Naidu realistically captures the risks associated with fishing, including unpredictable weather conditions and the constant struggle for economic security. At the same time, she highlights the courage, resilience, and collective spirit of the fishermen. The repeated call to awaken and sail demonstrates their determination and hope despite the hardships they face. Although the poem contains lyrical beauty and rhythmic musicality, its core remains grounded in the authentic experiences of a fishing community, making it a fine example of realism in Indian English poetry.

Similarly, "Indian Weavers" offers a profound representation of the weaving community and their indispensable role in Indian society. The poem uses the activities of weavers to symbolize the three major stages of human life—birth, marriage, and death. The weavers create garments that accompany individuals throughout their life journey, from the vibrant blue cloth woven for a newborn child to the colorful attire prepared for a bride and finally the white shroud woven for the deceased. Through this simple yet powerful narrative, Naidu underscores the social and cultural significance of the weaving profession. The poem reflects

the close connection between labor and human existence, illustrating how the work of artisans becomes intertwined with important life events. Moreover, the realistic portrayal of the weavers' craft highlights the value of traditional skills and the dignity associated with manual labor. Rather than portraying the weavers as anonymous workers, Naidu acknowledges their contribution to cultural continuity and community life.

Another notable example of realism is found in "Bangle Sellers," where Naidu focuses on the lives of artisans engaged in the traditional occupation of selling bangles. The poem vividly depicts the bustling atmosphere of Indian marketplaces and the important role that bangle sellers play in social and cultural ceremonies. Bangles are presented not merely as decorative objects but as symbols of various stages in a woman's life, including childhood, youth, marriage, and motherhood. Through detailed descriptions of colors, designs, and meanings associated with different bangles, Naidu captures the cultural richness of Indian society. At the same time, the poem offers insight into the economic realities of the artisans whose livelihood depends on this trade. The bangle sellers serve as representatives of countless workers who contribute to the preservation of cultural traditions while earning their living through skilled craftsmanship. By highlighting their profession, Naidu demonstrates her appreciation for the labor and creativity of ordinary people.

The realist dimension of Naidu's poetry extends beyond the mere description of occupations. Her poems reveal a deep respect for the dignity of labor and the social importance of working-class communities. She portrays workers not as passive figures but as active participants in shaping society and sustaining cultural values. Whether depicting fishermen battling the sea, weavers creating fabrics that accompany human life, or bangle sellers enriching cultural ceremonies, Naidu emphasizes the meaningful contributions of these individuals. Her poetry reflects an awareness of the interconnectedness between labor, culture, and social identity.

Furthermore, Naidu's focus on everyday occupations serves as a literary documentation of Indian society during the colonial period. At a time when industrialization and modernization were gradually transforming traditional ways of life, her poems preserved the memory of indigenous professions and community practices. The realistic details embedded in her work provide valuable insights into the socio-economic conditions, customs, and values of Indian communities. By bringing these ordinary experiences into the realm of poetry, Naidu challenged conventional literary hierarchies that often privileged elite subjects over common

people.

Through her sensitive and realistic portrayals of labor and everyday occupations, Sarojini Naidu elevates ordinary workers to the status of literary heroes. Her poems celebrate the resilience, skill, and cultural significance of working-class individuals while offering an authentic representation of Indian life. These depictions demonstrate that realism is an essential component of her poetic vision, complementing her lyrical style and enriching her portrayal of the diverse social realities of India. Consequently, her work stands as a testament to the value of everyday experiences and the enduring contributions of ordinary people to the cultural and economic fabric of society.

III. REALISM AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATION

Sarojini Naidu's poetry serves as a rich repository of Indian cultural traditions and social customs. Her realistic descriptions of festivals, rituals, occupations, and community life provide valuable insights into the cultural landscape of colonial India.

In *The Village Song*, Naidu presents the emotional experiences of a village girl navigating the expectations of family and society. The poem reflects the realities of rural life, gender roles, and traditional values. Through the protagonist's voice, Naidu captures the tensions between personal desires and social responsibilities.

Similarly, *Palanquin Bearers* portrays a traditional occupation associated with Indian social customs. While the poem employs romantic imagery, it simultaneously documents a cultural practice prevalent during the colonial period. The realistic depiction of social interactions and occupational roles enhances the poem's authenticity.

Naidu's focus on Indian customs, attire, jewelry, and ceremonies further strengthens the realist character of her poetry. Rather than presenting abstract themes detached from reality, she grounds her poetic imagination in the lived experiences of Indian communities. Her works preserve cultural traditions while offering realistic portrayals of social life.

Through these cultural representations, Naidu contributes to the formation of a national literary identity. Her poetry celebrates Indian heritage while documenting the realities of everyday existence. This combination of cultural pride and social observation distinguishes her work from purely romantic literature.

IV. CONCLUSION

Sarojini Naidu's poetry is often admired for its lyrical beauty, romantic imagery, and emotional depth. However, a closer examination reveals that realism constitutes an equally important dimension of her literary artistry. Through her portrayal of traditional occupations, cultural practices, social relationships, and everyday experiences, Naidu presents an authentic representation of Indian life during the colonial period.

The analysis of selected poems demonstrates that realism and romanticism coexist harmoniously in her work. While her language remains musical and imaginative, her subjects are firmly rooted in social reality. Poems such as *Coromandel Fishers*, *Indian Weavers*, *Bangle Sellers*, *Palanquin Bearers*, and *The Village Song* highlight the lives of ordinary people and celebrate their contributions to society. These portrayals reflect a deep understanding of Indian culture and a commitment to representing the experiences of common individuals.

Naidu's realist perspectives enrich her poetry by adding social relevance and cultural authenticity. Her works function not only as artistic expressions but also as historical and cultural documents that preserve the traditions and values of Indian society. Through her realistic observations, she transforms everyday life into a source of poetic inspiration.

In conclusion, Sarojini Naidu's poetry extends beyond the boundaries of romanticism. Her realist depictions of labor, culture, and social life reveal a multifaceted literary vision that combines aesthetic beauty with social awareness. Recognizing the realist elements in her poetry allows for a deeper appreciation of her contributions to Indian English literature and her enduring relevance as a poet of both imagination and reality.

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