



Sarojini Naidu’s Poetry: A Realistic Portrayal of Indian Society and Culture in English Literature

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ABSTRACT

This research paper analyzes the works of Sarojini Naidu, an iconic poet in Indian English literature whose poetry not only showcases Romantic elements but also offers a realistic portrayal of Indian society, culture, and the natural environment. Often hailed as the “Nightingale of India,” Naidu’s poetic voice captures the essence of her people’s lives, aspirations, and struggles. By highlighting themes such as gender roles, cultural identity, social issues, and patriotism, Naidu blends Romanticism with realism, grounding her poems in authentic depictions of Indian life. This paper explores how Naidu’s poetry reflects realism and positions her as a bridge between the Romantic and Realist traditions in Indian English literature.

Keywords: Sarojini Naidu, Indian, English Literature, Realism, Romanticism, Indian society, Cultural identity, Gender roles social issues, Nature in poetry.

INTRODUCTION

Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949) was an influential Indian poet, feminist, and freedom fighter who played a significant role in India’s literary and political spheres. Often remembered as the “Nightingale of India” for her lyrical and evocative verses, Naidu’s work primarily explores the beauty of Indian culture, the challenges faced by Indian society, and the strength of its people. While her style is often linked to Romanticism, with its emphasis on aesthetic beauty and emotional depth, Naidu’s poetry also provides a realistic portrayal of Indian life. Realism in literature emerged as a counter-movement to Romanticism, prioritizing the authentic representation of society over-idealized depictions. This study examines how Naidu’s work embodies realism through her honest portrayals of Indian culture, social dynamics, and the natural world.

Naidu’s poetry often paints a vivid picture of Indian marketplaces, traditions, and social issues, bringing Indian experiences to life for her readers. Through poems like *The Bangle Sellers* and *Village Song*, she explores themes of identity, womanhood, and the struggle between societal expectations and personal aspirations. This paper analyzes how Naidu’s poetry serves as a unique blend of Romantic and Realist elements, illustrating her importance in Indian English literature as both a poet and a social observer.

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The Emergence of Realism in English Literature

Realism as a literary movement emerged in the 19th century, particularly as a reaction to Romanticism's focus on emotion, imagination, and the idealization of nature. In contrast, Realist writers sought to depict life accurately, portraying the struggles of everyday people and addressing social, political, and cultural issues. The movement emphasized objectivity and authenticity, with writers like Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy illustrating the challenges of life for the working class and exploring the social inequalities of the time. In India, realism emerged as writers began to respond to the cultural and social transformations occurring during colonial rule. As a part of this trend, Sarojini Naidu's poetry reflects a keen awareness of Indian social realities, presenting Indian life with both authenticity and empathy. Although Naidu's work retains Romantic qualities, such as a deep appreciation for nature and lyricism, her focus on real-life issues grounds her poetry in the principles of realism.

Realism in Sarojini Naidu's Depiction of Indian Culture and Society

Naidu's poetry reflects realism through her depictions of Indian culture and social issues, as she provides readers with a nuanced understanding of Indian traditions and the lives of its people. Her use of symbols, imagery, and vibrant language draws readers into scenes of everyday life, highlighting her society's beauty and complexity.

1. Celebration of Indian Life and Culture

Poems like *The Bangle Sellers* and *In the Bazaars of Hyderabad* illustrate Naidu's fascination with Indian cultural practices. In *The Bangle Sellers*, Naidu uses the symbol of bangles to portray the different stages of a woman's life:

**"Some are meet for a maiden's wrist,
Silver and blue as the mountain mist..."**

Here, bangles are not just ornamental objects but represent significant phases in a woman's life, from youth to marriage and maturity. By embedding cultural symbols in her poetry, Naidu reveals the traditions and customs that shape Indian identity. This realism is central to Naidu's style, as she grounds her poetic imagery in genuine cultural practices rather than abstract ideals.

2. Exploration of Gender Roles and Social Constraints

Naidu frequently addresses social issues, particularly those concerning the roles and expectations placed on women in Indian society. In *Village Song*, Naidu tells the

story of a young girl who is torn between personal desires and societal obligations. The girl's longing for freedom contrasts sharply with the traditional expectations awaiting her:

**"O mother mine, I cannot stay,
The fairy folk are calling me..."**

The poem subtly critiques the limitations faced by women, portraying the inner conflict between individual aspirations and societal duties. By exploring such conflicts, Naidu's work takes on a realist approach, bringing the constraints of Indian social expectations into focus. Her nuanced portrayal of women's lives underscores her commitment to realism, as she gives voice to their experiences and emotions without embellishment.

3. Nature and the Realities of Rural Life

While Naidu's poems often celebrate the beauty of nature, she does not idealize it. Instead, she portrays nature as an integral part of Indian life, affecting the daily realities of her characters. In *The Coromandel Fishers*, Naidu describes the bravery of fishermen as they face the sea:

**"Rise, brothers, rise; the wakening skies pray to the
morning light, The wind lies asleep in the arms of the
dawn like a child that has cried all night."**

Here, nature is both a source of livelihood and a challenging force, underscoring the fishermen's dependence on it. Naidu's portrayal of nature resonates with realism by highlighting its impact on her characters' lives, offering readers a balanced perspective that acknowledges both the beauty and hardship of life connected to the natural world.

4. Patriotism and the Indian Struggle for Independence

Naidu's poems often reflect the socio-political atmosphere of colonial India, particularly through her expressions of patriotism and her desire for independence. In *Awake*, she calls upon her fellow Indians to rise and fight for freedom:

"Awake, O India, to the call of freedom's light!"

Though she employs a romantic tone to convey her patriotic fervor, Naidu's realism shines through as she addresses the challenges her people face under colonial rule. This blending of patriotism and realism positions her

as a vital voice in Indian English literature, connecting her to the socio-political context of her time.

CONCLUSION

Sarojini Naidu's poetry represents a fusion of Romanticism and realism, capturing the beauty and complexity of Indian life while addressing the social, cultural, and political issues that define her era. Through her realistic portrayals of Indian culture, gender roles, and the natural world, Naidu provides readers with an authentic glimpse into Indian society, positioning her as a pioneering figure in Indian English literature. Her work not only celebrates Indian heritage but also reveals the human struggles embedded within it, giving her poetry a timeless quality that resonates with readers across generations. In blending lyrical expression with realistic themes, Naidu's work transcends traditional literary boundaries, making her a lasting influence on Indian English literature and an important voice for both Romantic and realist traditions.

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