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**VOICES OF EVERYDAY INDIA: A SOCIO-CULTURAL
EXPLORATION OF REALISM IN SAROJINI NAIDU'S SELECTED
POEMS**

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ABSTRACT

Sarojini Naidu's poetry is renowned for its celebration of Indian culture, traditions, and natural beauty. However, beyond its lyrical charm lies a realistic portrayal of the socio-cultural realities of Indian life. This paper investigates the representation of everyday India in selected poems of Sarojini Naidu, focusing on themes such as labor, gender, tradition, community, and cultural identity. Through an examination of poems including *Bangle Sellers*, *Indian Weavers*, *Coromandel Fishers*, *Palanquin Bearers*, and *The Village Song*, the study highlights Naidu's ability to capture the experiences of ordinary people while preserving the richness of Indian heritage. The paper argues that her poetry functions as a socio-cultural narrative that documents the lives, aspirations, and struggles of diverse communities. By blending realism with poetic artistry, Naidu creates a vivid portrait of colonial Indian society. The study concludes that realism in Naidu's poetry serves as a powerful medium for representing cultural identity and social consciousness.

Keywords: Sarojini Naidu, Realism, Indian Culture, Social Life, Colonial India, Gender, Literary Studies

I. INTRODUCTION

Sarojini Naidu occupies a distinguished position in Indian English literature due to her ability to portray the cultural essence of India through poetic expression. Her poetry captures the voices of ordinary people and reflects the socio-cultural realities of Indian society. While often associated with romanticism, her works also reveal a profound commitment to realism and social observation.

Naidu's poems are deeply rooted in Indian traditions and community life. They portray individuals from diverse social backgrounds, including artisans, fishermen, women, and villagers. These representations provide valuable insights into the cultural practices, occupations, and social structures that characterized colonial India. Through her realistic portrayals, Naidu transforms everyday experiences into enduring literary narratives.

This paper explores the socio-cultural dimensions of realism in selected poems of Sarojini Naidu, emphasizing her role as a chronicler of Indian life and culture.

II. SOCIO-CULTURAL REALISM IN SELECTED POEMS

Sarojini Naidu's poetry offers a vivid and authentic portrayal of the social fabric of Indian society. While her poems are often appreciated for their lyrical beauty and musical quality, they also function as realistic representations of the cultural, social, and economic realities of everyday Indian life. Through her keen observation of people, traditions, occupations, and social relationships, Naidu captures the essence of Indian society during the colonial period. Her poems reflect the lives of ordinary individuals and communities, highlighting their struggles, aspirations, customs, and values. In doing so, she creates a rich socio-cultural landscape that allows readers to understand the complexities of Indian life beyond romantic idealization.

One of the most notable examples of socio-cultural realism in Naidu's poetry is "Bangle Sellers." In this poem, she explores the position of women in Indian society through the symbolic significance of bangles. The poem presents bangles not merely as ornaments but as cultural symbols associated with different stages of a woman's life. The silver and blue bangles represent the innocence and dreams of young maidens, while the bright and radiant bangles symbolize the joy and excitement of a bride entering married life. The mature colors associated with motherhood reflect the dignity, responsibility, and fulfillment of a woman's

later years. Through these symbolic associations, Naidu realistically portrays the expectations placed upon women within traditional Indian society. The poem reveals how femininity is closely connected to social roles such as daughterhood, marriage, and motherhood. At the same time, it reflects the cultural values and customs that shape women's identities. By focusing on the experiences of women through a familiar cultural object, Naidu provides valuable insight into gender roles and social traditions prevalent in Indian communities.

The socio-cultural realism of Naidu's poetry is also evident in "Indian Weavers." This poem highlights the important role of the weaving community in Indian society. Through the work of weavers, Naidu symbolically connects the three major stages of human life—birth, marriage, and death. The weavers produce garments that accompany individuals throughout their life journey, demonstrating how their labor is deeply integrated into social and cultural practices. The poem reflects the significance of traditional craftsmanship and acknowledges the contributions of artisans whose work often remains unnoticed. Naidu's portrayal of weavers goes beyond mere occupational description; it illustrates the intimate relationship between labor, culture, and human existence. By emphasizing the role of weavers in important life events, she elevates their profession and highlights the dignity associated with manual labor. This realistic depiction challenges social hierarchies that often undervalue working-class occupations and recognizes the essential role these communities play in maintaining cultural continuity.

Similarly, "Coromandel Fishers" presents a realistic portrayal of a fishing community whose livelihood depends on the sea. The poem vividly depicts the daily routines, aspirations, and challenges faced by fishermen. Their relationship with nature is portrayed as both practical and emotional, as the sea serves as a source of sustenance and identity. The fishermen are shown as courageous individuals who face uncertainty and hardship with determination and resilience. Through realistic descriptions of their work, Naidu highlights the significance of fishing as both an economic activity and a cultural tradition. The poem also emphasizes the collective spirit of the community, illustrating how cooperation and shared experiences contribute to social cohesion. By focusing on the lives of fishermen, Naidu brings attention to a marginalized occupational group whose contributions are essential to society but often overlooked in mainstream literature. Her portrayal reflects a deep respect for the labor and perseverance of ordinary people.

Another important example of socio-cultural realism can be found in "The Village Song."

This poem offers a sensitive portrayal of rural life and the emotional experiences of a young village girl. The narrative captures her internal conflict as she struggles between personal desires and familial responsibilities. As she lingers in the beauty of nature and enjoys her freedom, she becomes increasingly aware of her duty to return home, where her family awaits her. This simple yet powerful situation reflects broader themes related to family obligations, gender expectations, and community values in traditional Indian society. The poem illustrates how individual choices are often influenced by social norms and cultural expectations. Through the experiences of the village girl, Naidu explores the emotional dimensions of rural life, highlighting the tensions between personal aspirations and social responsibilities. Her realistic portrayal demonstrates a profound understanding of the psychological and social challenges faced by women in traditional communities.

Naidu's socio-cultural realism extends beyond individual poems to encompass a broader representation of Indian society. Her works capture the diversity of occupations, customs, and cultural practices that characterize different regions and communities across India. She portrays marketplaces, villages, rivers, seashores, and domestic spaces with remarkable authenticity, creating a vivid picture of everyday life. Her attention to detail allows readers to visualize the social environments in which her characters live and work. Furthermore, her poetry celebrates cultural traditions while simultaneously documenting the realities of ordinary existence. This balance between appreciation and observation is one of the defining features of her realist approach.

Another significant aspect of Naidu's socio-cultural realism is her focus on marginalized and underrepresented groups. Rather than centering her poetry on elite or aristocratic figures, she chooses to highlight artisans, fishermen, weavers, village women, and laborers. By doing so, she broadens the scope of literary representation and gives voice to communities that are often absent from traditional literary narratives. Her poems acknowledge the dignity, resilience, and cultural significance of these individuals, emphasizing their contributions to society and national identity.

Moreover, Naidu's realistic portrayals contribute to the preservation of Indian cultural heritage. Her poems document customs, rituals, occupations, and social practices that form an integral part of India's cultural history. Through her literary representations, she preserves aspects of community life that might otherwise be forgotten in the face of modernization and social change. As a result, her poetry functions not only as artistic expression but also as a

valuable cultural record of colonial India.

III. PRESERVING INDIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH REALISTIC DEPICTIONS OF COMMUNITY LIFE

A significant aspect of Sarojini Naidu's poetry is her ability to preserve and celebrate Indian cultural heritage through realistic portrayals of community life. While her poems are often admired for their lyrical beauty and musical quality, they also serve as valuable cultural documents that capture the customs, traditions, occupations, and social practices of Indian society during the colonial period. Naidu's deep attachment to her homeland is reflected in her vivid depictions of everyday life, which present a realistic picture of the people, values, and cultural identities that shaped Indian communities. Through her poetic observations, she creates a literary archive of India's rich and diverse heritage, ensuring that traditional ways of life are remembered and appreciated.

One of the most striking features of Naidu's poetry is her focus on ordinary people who represent the cultural soul of India. In poems such as "Bangle Sellers," "Indian Weavers," "Coromandel Fishers," and "Palanquin Bearers," she portrays workers engaged in traditional occupations that have been an integral part of Indian society for generations. These occupations are not merely sources of livelihood; they are deeply connected to cultural practices and social values. By presenting the daily activities of these communities, Naidu highlights the importance of preserving indigenous professions and the cultural knowledge associated with them. Her realistic descriptions allow readers to understand how labor, tradition, and community life are interconnected within Indian society.

In "Bangle Sellers," Naidu presents a vivid picture of a traditional marketplace where artisans sell colorful bangles to women. The poem reflects the cultural significance of bangles in Indian society, where they symbolize beauty, prosperity, marital status, and femininity. Different colors and designs are associated with various stages of a woman's life, from youthful innocence to marriage and motherhood. Through this realistic portrayal, Naidu preserves an important aspect of Indian cultural tradition while also documenting the role of local artisans in maintaining these customs. The poem serves as a reminder of how cultural practices are sustained through the work of ordinary community members.

Similarly, "Indian Weavers" captures the cultural importance of weaving in Indian life. The poem links the work of weavers to the major stages of human existence—birth, marriage, and

death. By doing so, Naidu illustrates how traditional crafts are woven into the social and cultural fabric of society. The realistic depiction of weavers emphasizes their contribution to preserving customs and rituals that have been passed down through generations. The poem reflects the deep connection between craftsmanship and cultural identity, highlighting the role of artisans as custodians of heritage.

In “Coromandel Fishers,” Naidu portrays the life of a fishing community whose existence is closely tied to nature and the sea. The poem reflects the collective spirit, courage, and resilience of fishermen who depend on the ocean for their livelihood. Beyond its occupational focus, the poem also captures the cultural traditions and communal bonds that characterize coastal communities. The realistic representation of their daily struggles and aspirations provides insight into a way of life that forms an essential part of India’s cultural diversity.

Another important example is “Palanquin Bearers,” where Naidu depicts a traditional occupation associated with Indian social customs and ceremonies. The poem portrays the bearers carrying a bride in a palanquin with care and grace, reflecting cultural practices that were once common in Indian society. Through realistic imagery and rhythmic language, Naidu preserves a historical tradition while highlighting the human experiences connected to it. The poem not only celebrates cultural heritage but also documents a social practice that has gradually disappeared in modern times.

Naidu’s portrayal of community life extends beyond occupations to include festivals, rituals, family relationships, and social interactions. Her poems reflect the values of cooperation, mutual support, and collective identity that characterize traditional Indian communities. She captures the vibrant atmosphere of markets, villages, and social gatherings, providing readers with authentic glimpses into everyday life. These realistic depictions reveal the richness of Indian culture and the diversity of experiences that shape community identity.

Furthermore, Naidu’s poetry serves as a form of cultural resistance during the colonial era. At a time when Western influences were increasingly affecting Indian society, her poems celebrated indigenous traditions and emphasized the uniqueness of Indian culture. By focusing on local customs, occupations, and social practices, she reinforced a sense of national pride and cultural continuity. Her realistic portrayals helped preserve cultural memories and foster appreciation for India’s heritage among both Indian and international readers.

Through her sensitive and realistic depictions of community life, Sarojini Naidu transforms ordinary experiences into enduring literary expressions of cultural identity. Her poetry acts as a bridge between past and present, preserving the traditions, values, and social practices that define Indian society. By documenting the lives of ordinary people and the cultural environments in which they live, she ensures that India's rich heritage remains alive in the collective imagination. Thus, her work not only possesses artistic significance but also serves as an invaluable record of the cultural and social realities of everyday India.

IV. CONCLUSION

Sarojini Naidu's selected poems offer a compelling portrayal of the socio-cultural realities of India. Through realistic representations of occupations, traditions, gender roles, and community life, she creates a vibrant literary record of colonial Indian society. Her poetry not only celebrates cultural heritage but also documents the lived experiences of ordinary people.

By giving voice to workers, women, and rural communities, Naidu broadens the scope of Indian English poetry and contributes to the development of a distinct national literary identity. Her realist perspective complements her lyrical artistry, resulting in poetry that is both aesthetically appealing and socially meaningful. The study concludes that Naidu's works remain valuable for understanding the cultural and social dynamics of India and continue to inspire readers through their authentic portrayal of everyday life.

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