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ROMANTICISM AND PATRIOTISM IN THE POEMS OF
KUNTALA KUMARI SABAT AND SAROJINI NAIDU: A
COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Keywords	Abstract
<i>Romanticism, Patriotism, Indian women poets, Nationalism, Comparative literature, Colonial modernity.</i>	The early twentieth century in India witnessed the emergence of poetry that combined romantic sensibility with fervent nationalism. Among the significant women poets who articulated this synthesis were Kuntala Kumari Sabat in Odia literature and Sarojini Naidu in Indian English poetry. This paper undertakes a comparative review of romanticism and patriotism in their poetic works. It examines how both poets negotiated emotional lyricism, nature imagery, feminine subjectivity, and nationalist discourse within colonial India. While Sabat's poetry reflects a culturally rooted Odia romantic nationalism shaped by regional identity, Naidu's works exhibit an aesthetic romanticism enriched by musicality and pan-Indian patriotism articulated in English. The study highlights thematic convergences and stylistic divergences, situating both poets within broader Indian Romantic-nationalist traditions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Romanticism in Indian poetry evolved differently from its European counterpart. Rather than merely celebrating individual emotion and nature, Indian Romanticism became deeply intertwined with anti-colonial consciousness. During the nationalist movement, poetry emerged as a cultural instrument that fostered collective identity and resistance. The lyrical impulse was not confined to



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aesthetic delight; it became a medium of political awakening and cultural regeneration. As scholars observe, Indian Romanticism reoriented the European emphasis on individualism toward a collective spiritual and national self (Naik, 1982; Paniker, 1991).

Within this milieu, Kuntala Kumari Sabat (1901–1938) and Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949) stand out as pioneering women poets who blended romantic lyricism with nationalist fervor. Though separated by language—Odia and English—they shared a commitment to poetic activism. Sabat wrote primarily for the Odia-speaking public, contributing to regional awakening and social reform, whereas Naidu addressed both Indian and international audiences through English verse. Their poetic expressions, therefore, represent two complementary strands of Indian literary nationalism: the regional-cultural and the cosmopolitan-national.

The emergence of women poets during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries marked a significant shift in Indian literary discourse. Women writers not only entered a male-dominated public sphere but also reshaped nationalist rhetoric through emotional depth and symbolic femininity. According to Tharu and Lalita (1993), early Indian women’s writing transformed private emotional experiences into public cultural statements. In this context, both Sabat and Naidu utilized romanticism to articulate a gendered vision of patriotism—one rooted in empathy, sacrifice, and spiritual devotion rather than militant aggression.

Furthermore, Romanticism in colonial India functioned as a mode of cultural resistance. The revival of indigenous landscapes, myths, and folk traditions in poetry served to counter colonial narratives of cultural inferiority. Paranjape (2000) argues that literary nationalism often preceded organized political nationalism by shaping the emotional imagination of the masses. Naidu’s celebration of Indian markets, festivals, and seasons, and Sabat’s evocation of Odia soil and heritage, exemplify how romantic imagery could reinforce cultural pride and national belonging.

Another important dimension of Indian Romantic-nationalist poetry lies in its synthesis of aesthetic beauty and ethical responsibility. Unlike European Romanticism, which often privileged individual rebellion, Indian Romanticism frequently linked beauty with moral purpose (Iyengar, 1985). Both Sabat and Naidu transform romantic longing into collective aspiration: love becomes love for the motherland; sorrow becomes grief for colonial subjugation; hope becomes the promise of freedom. Their poetry thus reflects what might be termed “ethical romanticism,” wherein emotion is inseparable from civic duty.

Finally, the comparative study of Sabat and Naidu is significant because it bridges linguistic and regional divides within Indian literature. While Naidu’s English poetry gained international readership and contributed to India’s global literary image, Sabat’s Odia verse played a crucial role in regional identity formation and women’s awakening in Odisha. Examining their works together reveals how romanticism and patriotism operated across linguistic traditions yet retained distinctive cultural inflections. Such a comparative approach enriches our understanding of Indian literary modernity and foregrounds the vital contribution of women poets to nationalist discourse.



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2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Scholarly engagement with Indian Romanticism has emphasized its distinctive evolution under colonial modernity. Unlike European Romanticism, which privileged subjective emotion and rebellion against industrial modernity, Indian Romanticism merged lyrical sensibility with cultural nationalism. M. K. Naik (1982) argues that Indian English poetry of the early twentieth century transformed romantic aesthetics into a vehicle of nationalist self-assertion. Similarly, K. R. S. Iyengar (1985) notes that Indian poets writing in English infused romantic imagery with indigenous ethos, thereby resisting colonial cultural dominance. This conceptual framework provides a foundational understanding for examining the romantic-nationalist synthesis in the works of Kuntala Kumari Sabat and Sarojini Naidu.

Critical studies on Sarojini Naidu have frequently highlighted her lyrical romanticism and musical artistry. Iyengar (1985) regards Naidu as a poet of melody whose imagery of flowers, birds, and seasons constructs an aestheticized vision of India. However, later critics argue that beneath the ornamental surface lies a subtle political consciousness. Paranjape (2000) contends that Naidu's poems such as *The Gift of India* reveal an emotive nationalism that transforms maternal grief into anti-colonial protest. R. R. Diwakar (1963) further observes that her poetic romanticism cannot be separated from her active participation in the freedom movement, making her work a fusion of art and activism.

In contrast, scholarship on Kuntala Kumari Sabat has primarily emerged from Odia literary criticism. Mayadhar Mansingh (1962), in his history of Odia literature, situates Sabat within the socio-cultural renaissance of Odisha, emphasizing her role in shaping modern Odia poetic sensibility. Das (1997) highlights her emotional intensity and reformist zeal, arguing that her poetry combines romantic longing with regional patriotism. Unlike Naidu's pan-Indian projection, Sabat's nationalist impulse is deeply rooted in Odia identity and social reform.

Feminist literary scholars have examined early twentieth-century women poets as cultural mediators who reshaped nationalist discourse. Tharu and Lalita (1993) argue that women's writing during the colonial period often redefined patriotism through affective and domestic metaphors. In this light, both Sabat and Naidu employ romantic tropes—love, devotion, sacrifice—to articulate political commitment. Susie Tharu (1991) further notes that women poets reconfigured the symbolic image of "Mother India," transforming it from passive emblem to active moral force. Such feminist perspectives enable a gendered reading of romantic patriotism in both poets.

Postcolonial critics have also addressed the intersection of language, identity, and nationalism in Indian poetry. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) argue that colonial subjects appropriated the colonizer's language to articulate resistance. Naidu's use of English exemplifies this strategy; her romantic imagery serves as a counter-discourse within imperial linguistic structures. Conversely, Sabat's choice of Odia reinforces linguistic nationalism, aligning with what Anderson (1983) describes as the formation of "imagined communities" through vernacular print culture. Thus, language itself becomes a site of romantic-nationalist expression.



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Scholars have debated whether Naidu's romanticism is escapist or politically engaged. Early critics like Arthur Symons (1916) emphasized the exotic and decorative qualities of her verse, often overlooking its nationalist dimensions. However, later reassessments challenge this view. Raza (2005) argues that Naidu's romantic lyricism should be interpreted as strategic aestheticism, masking subversive patriotism within mellifluous diction. This shift in critical perception underscores the layered complexity of romantic expression in nationalist poetry.

Regional literary historians have similarly reconsidered Sabat's contribution beyond mere sentimentalism. Mohanty (2006) asserts that Sabat's romantic vocabulary—imbued with emotional fervor—functioned as a mobilizing force for social change, particularly in advocating women's education and moral reform in Odisha. Her poetry, therefore, exemplifies what Chatterjee (1993) terms the “inner domain” of nationalism, where cultural regeneration precedes political emancipation. Romantic emotion in Sabat's work thus serves as ideological groundwork for patriotic awakening.

Despite substantial scholarship on Indian Romanticism and nationalism, comparative studies between Sabat and Naidu remain limited. Most research examines them within separate linguistic canons—Indian English and Odia literature—without exploring their shared thematic intersections. Comparative literature theorists such as Bassnett (1993) emphasize the importance of cross-cultural analysis in revealing parallel literary strategies across linguistic boundaries. Applying such an approach to Sabat and Naidu reveals convergences in romantic patriotism while highlighting differences in linguistic medium, regional focus, and stylistic execution. This gap in scholarship justifies the present comparative inquiry.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Romanticism in the Indian Context

Indian Romanticism absorbed influences from Western Romantic poets like Wordsworth and Shelley but transformed them to align with indigenous spirituality and socio-political urgency. Nature often symbolized the motherland; love frequently merged with devotion to the nation.

3.2 Patriotism and Poetic Nationalism

In colonial India, patriotism in literature was not merely political but cultural. Poetry revived myths, landscapes, and collective memories to construct a national consciousness. Women poets played a crucial role in shaping this emotive nationalism.

4. ROMANTICISM IN THE POETRY OF KUNTALA KUMARI SABAT

Sabat's poetry reveals a profound emotional intensity rooted in Odia culture. Her romanticism is characterized by:

4.1 Nature as Emotional Landscape

Nature in Sabat's poems often mirrors inner turmoil and aspiration. Rivers, flowers, and dawn imagery symbolize hope and awakening. Unlike purely aesthetic romanticism, her nature imagery carries nationalist undertones—Odia land becomes sacred space.



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4.2 Feminine Subjectivity

Sabat articulates a distinctly feminine voice, blending personal longing with collective identity. Love poems frequently extend into metaphors of devotion to the motherland.

4.3 Romantic Nationalism

Her patriotic poems evoke sacrifice and moral courage. Romantic emotionality intensifies patriotic appeal, making nationalism not abstract ideology but heartfelt experience.

5. ROMANTICISM IN THE POETRY OF SAROJINI NAIDU

Naidu, often called the “Nightingale of India,” integrates romantic lyricism with political symbolism.

5.1 Musicality and Imagery

Her poetry is marked by rhythm, melody, and vibrant imagery. Poems such as *The Golden Threshold* reflect a romantic fascination with color, fragrance, and Indian life.

5.2 Nature and Cultural Exoticism

Nature imagery in Naidu is lush and sensuous, portraying India as a land of beauty and spirituality. Romantic celebration of Indian landscapes subtly reinforces nationalist pride.

5.3 Patriotism as Emotional Devotion

In poems like “*The Gift of India*,” Naidu transforms patriotic grief into lyrical lament. Her romanticism heightens emotional resonance, making patriotism deeply personal and maternal.

6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

6.1 Thematic Convergence

Table 1: Thematic Convergence Kumari Sabat vs Sarojini Naidu

Dimension	Kumari Sabat	Sarojini Naidu
Nature	Symbol of regional identity	Symbol of national beauty
Love	Personal and patriotic fusion	Emotional and aesthetic expression
Patriotism	Regional-national awakening	Pan-Indian and global appeal
Feminine Voice	Assertive, reformist	Lyrical, maternal

Explanation: Both poets integrate romantic feeling with nationalist ideology. Their poetry humanizes patriotism by embedding it in personal emotion.

6.2 Stylistic Differences

Sabat’s diction is intense and direct, reflecting urgency of regional reform.

Naidu employs ornate language and lyrical structure influenced by English Romantic tradition.

Sabat’s nationalism is regionally grounded; Naidu’s is internationally articulated.

6.3 Cultural Positioning

Sabat contributed to Odia literary modernization and women’s awakening. Naidu functioned as both poet and political leader, bridging literary romanticism and Gandhian nationalism.



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7. ROMANTICISM AS POLITICAL STRATEGY

In both poets, romanticism becomes a strategy for resistance. By aestheticizing the nation, they transform political struggle into emotional experience. Their poetry mobilizes affect—love, grief, pride—to strengthen nationalist consciousness.

8. FEMININE NATIONALISM

A significant contribution of both poets lies in their gendered articulation of patriotism. Rather than militant aggression, their nationalism is nurturing, sacrificial, and morally persuasive. This aligns with the symbolic construction of India as “Mother.”

Through romantic imagery, both poets redefine women’s role—from passive subjects to active cultural agents.

9. CONCLUSION

The comparative study of Kuntala Kumari Sabat and Sarojini Naidu reveals that romanticism and patriotism are not separate aesthetic and political categories but mutually reinforcing forces in early twentieth-century Indian poetry. Sabat’s emotionally charged Odia verse and Naidu’s melodious English lyrics converge in their devotion to the nation while differing in linguistic medium and stylistic orientation.

Their works exemplify how women poets transformed romantic expression into nationalist activism. By blending beauty with political consciousness, they created a poetic discourse that continues to resonate within Indian literary history.

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All authors declare that any kind of violation of plagiarism, copyright and ethical matters will take care by all authors. Journal and editors are not liable for aforesaid matters.

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