

An Exploration of Feminine Identity in Sarojini Naidu's *The Bangle Sellers*

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Abstract:

Sarojini Naidu's *The Bangle Sellers* is a comprehensive examination of the Indian feminine experience. She explores the various phases of a woman's life, from youth to marriage and motherhood, using the colorful imagery of bangles. The poem reflects both individual experiences and societal expectations by using the symbolism of bangles to symbolize the complex nature of feminine identity. This paper aims to examine how *The Bangle Sellers* portrays feminine identity by analyzing the poem's use of symbolism, its cultural context, and its depiction of women's emotional lives.

Keywords: Feminine experience, Identity, Symbolism, Motherhood, Women's emotional.

The Bangle Sellers offers a profound exploration of feminine identity within the cultural context of Indian society. She portrays the various stages of a woman's life of maidenhood, marriage, and motherhood each marked by distinct emotional experiences and societal expectations through the symbolic imagery of bangles. The poem reflects the cultural significance of these roles, while also delving into the emotional and psychological depth of women, challenging the traditional view of women as mere symbols of domesticity. This paper analyzes how Naidu's work crosses border of culture to present a global depiction of womanhood through exploring the symbolism of the bangle and its relationship to the feminine experience. The poem offers a nuanced reflection on the complexity of feminine identity, celebrating both the beauty and the inner strength of women in Indian society.

Bangles have long been symbolic of femininity in Indian culture. They are traditionally worn by women during important life events such as weddings, childbirth, and religious rituals, symbolizing beauty, prosperity, and marital status. Naidu taps into this cultural significance, using bangles as a metaphor for the different roles women play throughout their lives in this poem. She promoted social reform and women's rights as a poet and political figure who was actively involved in the feminist movement of her era. *The Bangle Sellers* is not an exception to her attempt to use poetry to express the unsaid hardships and experiences of Indian women. Naidu's poem is set against the backdrop of traditional Indian society, where women's lives are often shaped by cultural expectations. However, Naidu does not depict these roles in a one-dimensional manner. She acknowledges the grace and beauty that come with these traditional roles, but she also provides a glimpse of the emotional depth and complexity of women's lives, implying that these roles, although important, do not fully capture a woman's identity.

Sarojini Naidu uses the bangle as a powerful symbol of feminine identity in *The Bangle Sellers*. The different colors and types of bangles described in the poem represent various stages of a woman's life. Bangles in the poem symbolize femininity, tradition, and the milestones in a woman's life. The bangle

sellers proclaim their wares as “Lustrous tokens of radiant lives, For happy daughters and happy wives” (Naidu, lines 5-6), signifying their role as markers of significant life events. From maidenhood to marriage and motherhood, the bangles embody the evolving identity of women. This imagery evokes the purity and beauty of youth, with the bangles representing the dreams and aspirations of young girls on the brink of womanhood. The colors of the bangle’s delicate hues like silver and blue reinforce the sense of innocence and promise associated with this stage of life. “Some are meet for a maiden's wrist, Silver and blue as the mountain mist,” (Naidu, lines 7-8). These colors represent the purity and innocence of young maidens, brimming with dreams and unspoiled by life’s complexities. Naidu’s imagery of “Some are flushed like the buds that dream” (Naidu, line 9), emphasizes the potential and aspirations of youth, highlighting a phase of life filled with hope and promise.

The transition to marriage is marked by bangles that are:

Some are like fields of sunlit corn,
Meet for a bride on her bridal morn,
Some, like the flame of her marriage fire,
Or, rich with the hue of her heart's desire (Naidu, lines 13-16),

These vibrant hues symbolize joy, love, and the sacredness of the marital bond. The fire imagery here represents the intense emotions and the transformative nature of marriage, where a woman steps into a new role and identity. The metaphor of the “hearts’ desire” further underscores the romantic and emotional aspect of this life stage. The bride’s emotional duality is captured in the description of bangles “Tinkling, luminous, tender, and clear, Like her bridal laughter and bridal tear” (Naidu, lines 17-18). She poignantly portrays the blend of excitement and apprehension that accompanies this life-altering event.

Finally, the bangles for mothers are “purple and gold,” representing the wisdom, maturity, and fulfillment that come with motherhood. Naidu writes: “Some are purple and gold flecked grey, For she who has journeyed through life midway,” (Naidu, lines 19-20). The colors purple and gold evoke the richness and depth of experience that come with motherhood. These colors signify dignity, experience, and the fulfillment of a woman’s duties as a mother and wife. The symbolism of the bangle reflects the cultural expectation that women’s identities are tied to their roles in relation to family and society. However, she also uses the bangle to suggest that women’s identities are not limited to these external markers. The poem invites readers to consider the emotional and psychological depth of women’s lives, beyond the surface level roles they play.

Sarojini Naidu portrays the various roles women occupy in Indian society in the poem *The Bangle Sellers*. Woman’s life in each stage is marked by a different set of expectations. Women are expected to carry out the responsibilities of marriage as brides, as mothers and women are revered for their wisdom and nurturing qualities, with their bangles reflecting the maturity and strength they possess. She presents a complex picture of women's lives with these portrayals. The poem implies that women's identities are influenced by more than just their social roles, even as it honors the beauty and importance of these roles. The poem’s portrayal of women’s emotional lives of their dreams, desires, and inner strength challenges the simplistic view of women as mere symbols of tradition and domesticity.

Naidu’s portrayal of feminine identity also reflects a certain universality. The poem is situated in Indian society, but women's emotions transcend culture. The bangle, as a symbol of womanhood, represents not just the roles women play but also their emotional depth, their personal struggles, and their resilience.

Sarojini Naidu’s *The Bangle Sellers* offers a rich exploration of feminine identity in Indian culture. She depicts women as complex individuals whose identities are shaped by their roles in society by capturing

the emotional and social aspects of womanhood through the symbolism of bangles. The poem emphasizes women's inner lives while acknowledging the cultural significance of these roles, implying that their feelings and experiences are equally as significant as the roles they are expected to play. *The Bangle Sellers* remains a powerful reflection on the feminine experience, one that continues to resonate in contemporary discussions of gender and identity.

Through *The Bangle Sellers*, Sarojini Naidu provides a rich and nuanced exploration of feminine identity, using the metaphor of bangles to symbolize the joys, responsibilities, and transitions in a woman's life. The poem is a tribute to the resilience, grace, and emotional depth of women, framed within the cultural and spiritual ethos of Indian society.

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