



THE 'VIBRANT WORKING CLASS' AS DEPICTED BY SAROJINI NAIDU

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Introduction

The nightingale of India and a mesmerizing poet, Sarojini Naidu, symbolized the pride of India worldwide during the early twentieth century. As a beacon for Indian women poets, she was an inspiration for the people of her times and is still an impetus for literary men and women around the globe. Having a multifaceted life of being an eminent poetess, ardent freedom fighter and efficient leader, Sarojini Naidu is a memorable personality of the Indian political and literary history. Her poems are explicitly Indian to the core. She exhibits the Indian locale and society of her times with intense passion. Sarojini Naidu's poems are well known for its powerful lyrics and portrayal of the Indian ethos. Naturalness, gentleness and gusto are the mark of her poetry. Beauty and liveliness in the lyrics have given her poems a perpetual position in the Indian poetic history. "Sarojini Naidu springs from the very soil of India, her spirit very Indian, manipulates the English language a foreign language effectively as a vehicle, to convey very Indian thought and themes" say (P Sreenivasulu Reddy & B Sandhya 3).

The palanquin bearers, bangle sellers, weavers and fishermen verbalize their simple, positive, bright and enthusiastic thoughts through the poems Palanquin Bearers, The Bangle Sellers, Indian Weavers and Coromandel Fishers. These profound thoughts highlight the feelings of ordinary people who earn their living with a customary lifestyle. This paper highlights Sarojini Naidu's depiction of the constructive attributes of simple working men who carry palanquin joyfully, sell colorful bangles, weave clothes (for the new-born, women and the dead) and the fisher folk (who rise early in the morning to go to the sea).

A Succinct on the Poems – Palanquin Bearers, The Bangle Sellers, Indian Weavers and Coromandel Fishers

The "Palanquin Bearers" depicts the emotions of Indian brides and the culture of Indian marriages. With extensive usage of imagery, the poem reflects the delight and sadness in Indian marriages. Though the bride is overjoyed about her marriage yet she is sad to leave her family and friends. The palanquin bearers sing as they carry the bride. They carry the palanquin lightly, softly and "bear her along like a pearl on a string". The bride is not a burden to them, but swings like a flower in the wind of their song and glides like the bird on the foam of a stream. By comparing the bride to the flower and bird, Sarojini Naidu portrays the light and soft hearted moods of the Indian bride.

The "Indian Weavers" briefs on the different stages of the human life (birth, marriage and death). When it is the day break, they joyfully weave the blue garment for the new-born. During the "fall of night" they weave the bright purple and green garment, which is like the "plumes of a peacock". This clothing is for the queen to embellish her on her marriage day. In the third paragraph the mood of the poem shifts from joy to sorrow. The weavers are no longer cheerful but are now "solemn and still" since they are weaving the white "dead man's funeral shroud" on a chill moonlight. The poem ends with a melancholic disposition briefing on the garment that the weavers weave for the dead. The poem highlights the life cycle of human existence and the emotions and thought process of the weavers.

In the poem "Bangle Sellers" Sarojini Naidu associates the shining colorful bangles with the "happy daughters and happy wives" of India. The poet expresses the spiritual and symbolic value of the "lustrous", "flushed", "tinkling" and "luminous" bangles. The poet uses diverse imagery to bring about brilliance and

ecstasy in the poem. Lyrics like “rainbow-tinted circles of light”, “Silver and blue as the mountain mist”, “like fields of sunlit corn”, “purple and gold flecked grey” exhibit the not only the beauty and extravaganza of the bangles but also the gusto of the bangle sellers.

Coromandel Fishers is one of Sarojini Naidu’s excellent musical compositions. She echoes the profession of the fishers with melody and rhythm. (Chavan 25) remarks aptly: “The folk songs evoke a characteristically passionate response from the lyrical sensibility of the poet. In them, the poet tends to elaborate recurrent rhythmic patterns with the help of repetitive images and musical sounds”. In the poem ‘Coromandel Fishers’ the fishermen are invited in the early hours of the day, to venture into the sea “to capture the leaping wealth of the tide.” The sea is compared to the mother, cloud to brother and waves to friends. The poem takes a spiritual highness when the poet says that the sea god will protect the lives of the fishermen.

“What though we toss at the fall of the sun where the hand of the sea-god drives?

He who holds the storm by the hair, will hide in his breast our lives.”

(Para 2, Line 3 and 4, Coromandel Fishers)

The poet further invokes the fishermen to ride into the sea to kiss the splashing waters and the dance of the wild waters. The poem ‘Coromandel Fishers’ is an invocation to the fisher folk to begin their work with joy and enthusiasm.

Sarojini Naidu’s poems possess the intense aesthetic sense and an admiration for colors and Indian tradition. Her poems beautifully paint the pictures of various occupations that were common during her time.

Simplicity in thoughts

Sarojini’ Naidu’s poems are marked with the air of simple thoughts. Bangles sellers, who are a group of simpletons, express their views on the “lustrous tokens” (bangles) that they carry for the Indian daughters and wives. The lifestyle of the simple Indian folks and their professions are exhibited with lyrical genius and extravagant colorfulness. In the poem “The Bangle Sellers”, the simple bangle sellers account their experience in bearing the shining and “rainbow-tinted” bangles to the temple trade fair to decorate the cheerful women folk. Throughout the poem we find beautiful imagery used to define bangles and the maidens of India. These imagery and vivid lyrical depiction takes the reader into a world of joy and bliss.

The language in “Palanquin Bearers” is simple and unaffected. The thoughts sway like how the bride sways “like a flower in the wind” to the palanquin bearers’ song. The comparison of the bride to the flower, bird, pearl and star with brilliantly colored vocabulary startles the readers. The poet picturizes and expresses the in-depth feelings of the palanquin bearers with astounding imagination. Sentences like “she falls like a tear from the eyes of a bride” express the artistic quality of the poet.

The poem “Indian Weavers” expounds in simple vocabulary the lifestyle and thought process of the weavers. Whether they weave for the new born gaily or a bright purple and green garment for the “marriage-veils of a queen”, the weavers weave with the simple thoughts that happiness. But when weaving the white shroud for a dead man’s funeral, the weavers convey thoughts of somber and tranquility. The poem expresses the journey from life to death.

Positive reflections

The lively working class in Sarojini Naidu’s poems voice their positive thoughts in “Coromandel Fishers”. “The Coromandel Fishers’ not only express the fishermen’s identity with the sea and with the community, but also the folk sense of order and discipline it evokes a folk vocation which is yet untouched by modern technologies and sophistication” say (Prashant Mohan and Pragyaa Gupta 1).

The poem commences with optimistic words like “rise, brothers, rise”. The poet encourages the fishers not to delay in venturing into sea but heed to the call of sea gull. In addition to this, a request is given to the fishers:

“Come, let us gather our nets from the shore and set our catamarans free,

To capture the leaping wealth of the tide, for we are the kings of the sea!”

(Lines 3 and 4, Para 1, Coromandel Fishers)

In the above lines the fisher folk given hope to set sail with their boats to acquire the riches of the sea. Sarojini Naidu phrases the poem beautifully by making the fishing vocation as a means to capture the affluence of the seas. She entitles the ordinary fisher folk as “kings of sea” and boosts up their vigor to an extraordinary mood of professional pleasure. These lines resonate positive vibrations to the readers and lift the reader to a lively state of mind. The positive thoughts reverberate not only showcase the deliberations of the early twentieth century fishermen but also plea to the readers of all times to confront their daily work life with optimism and energy. The poet further says,

“What though we toss at the fall of the sun where the hand of the sea-god drives?
He who holds the storm by the hair, will hide in his breast our live.”

(Line 7 and 8, Para 2, Coromandel Fishers)

The above lines states though the fishers are tossed by toiling all day yet they will be protected by the sea-god. A spiritual tenor is imparted in the poem in order to give a positive mood to the readers. The poet tries to hint that the spiritual powers will also aid the hard working fishermen. This message is to be taken home by the readers also. When a person is devoted his profession, the Almighty guards and aids them to attain success in their occupation. Apart from positive thoughts Sarojini Naidu’s poems also resonates brilliance in outlook.

Bright musings

Sarojini Naidu’s poems which depict the working class portray bright thoughts that astonish the readers and stimulate their imagination. “The Bangle Sellers” is full of vivid imagery. The deliberations of the simple bangle sellers of the poet’s times are described with extravagant color and luster. The description of the bangles with various shades and usage of intense lyrical excellence demonstrates the highly artistic attribute of the poet.

“Some are flushed like the buds that dream
On the tranquil brow of a woodland stream”

(9 and 10, Para 2, The Bangle Sellers)

The above lines express describes the bangles as rosy, glowing buds that dream on the still edge of a forest brook. These expressions are power-packed lexis, which takes the readers to a world of ecstasy and bliss. The poem expounds that the profession of bangles sellers is not an ordinary one but a livelihood which brings the “sunlit corn” (bangles) to “meet for a bride on her bridal morn”. “The Bangle Sellers” points out that even a regular work can be made colorful when with the right attitude towards one’s profession. The radiant and glowing bangles not only describe the bright bangles but also the vivid thought process of the bangle sellers. Sarojini Naidu reveals that occupation is not just a regular routine but an obligation that can be enjoyed to the maximum. The poetic genius of Sarojini Naidu is shown in the lines:

“Sweet is the shade of the coconut glade, and the scent of the mango grove,
And sweet are the sands at the full o’ the moon with the sound of the voices we love;”

(Lines 9 and 10, Para 3, Coromandel Fishers)

When the fisher men are called to start their sail in the sea, the above lines are mentioned. The poet’s mastermind expounded when she impresses upon the need to venture into the sea - though the shade of coconut glade, scent of the mango grove, sands of the full moon being filled with the voices of the loved ones, is sweet.

Enthusiastic thoughts

Enthusiasm and excitement amongst the working class marks the poems of Sarojini Naidu. The simple working folks enjoy their profession and bring in an air of gusto. In “Indian Weavers”, the weavers are not sad or heavy laden with work, but they cheerfully make garments for the newborn and the queen. They start the work at daybreak itself and seem to weave happily the robes for the infant. The zealous weavers also weave bright a garment during the night, for the nuptial veils of the queen. They are not weaving an ordinary marriage veil, but a veil that will adorn their ruler. The poet brings in a picture of color and grandeur while describing the dress which is like,

“Like the plumes of a peacock, purple and green”

(Line 7, Para 2, Indian Weavers)

The poem "Bangle Sellers" expresses fervor and zeal for the profession. Though the weavers weave for different kinds of people like the newborn, queen and the dead man, they are passionate in their work and embody sincerity in profession.

The palanquin bearers in "Palanquin Bearers" exhibit zealousness and joy in carrying the palanquin of the bride. They gladly bear the bride and sing, while the bride sways like a flower". Further, the palanquin bearers sing,

"Gaily, O gaily we glide and we sing,
We bear her along like a pearl on a string."
(Line 5 and 6, Para 1, Palanquin Bearers)

The above lines express the joy and contentment that the palanquin bearers have while carrying the palanquin. They are concerned about the bride and smoothly bear her along. They do not consider their work as a burden, but as a pleasure to perform their duty. The lines indicate the responsible and caring nature and the love for the occupation that the palanquin bearers possess.

Discussion

The vibrant working class of Sarojini Naidu's poems represents vigor, optimism, zeal and strength. Be it the bangle sellers, weavers, palanquin bearers or the Coromandel fishers, they all voice the message of doing work with delight and gratification. They are simple village folks of the early twentieth century who pronounce the importance of gladness and fulfillment while performing their work. This message is important even for today's technology driven workforce. Thousands of employees who work in the burgeoning business organizations have become addicted to their jobs and have lost the pleasure to work. They are obsessed to the computers, laptops, tablets and mobile phones. The present day working class has been trapped in the complex network of labor. But, vocation has to be seen with a positive attitude and needs to be carried out with delight and accomplishment. The vibrant working class of the Sarojini Naidu's times enlightens the twenty first century readers and professionals with these inspirations.

Conclusion

Color, vividness and dynamism symbolize Naidu's poems. She expresses the lifestyle of simple working folks with powerful lyrical and melodic excellence. (Priyanka Datta 5) refers to the "The Yorkshire Post", which has admired Sarojini Naidu as, "Mrs. Naidu has not only enriched our language, but has enabled us to grow into intimate relation with the spirit, the emotions and glamour of the East."

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