

Sarojini Naidu's poems on Indian communities: An assessment

Umesh Chandra Mahapatra

Lect. in English, Panchayat College, Bargarh Dist-Bargarh, Odisha, India

Abstract

A literary artist is a veritable savoir of human values through his/her creations. Violence, rivalry, human trafficking, jealousy, fanaticism etc. make life almost intolerable at present. In the perspective of deteriorating human relationship, Sarojini Naidu's works offer a powerful panacea for the restoration of a social life worth living, spreading the message of the long lost cultural harmony the world over.

Keywords: community, harmony, brotherhood, give and take, integrity

Introduction

We inhabit a world at present which is considerably driven by science and technology. Science in general and information technology in particular has, in fact, made our life easy and comfortable. But has it really made us happy? Such a question perpetually disturbs the mind of sensible people now the world over. We are proud of being global citizens. We have made considerable progress in space technology. We have achieved incredible feats in the field of industry, commerce and medicine. Is it that we have accomplished the development at the cost of our happiness? Do we equate the illusion of happiness to happiness itself? There is always a flip-side to progress as automation renders manual labour useless. The greatest casualty of the so-called progress at the moment is humanity. Dehumanization continues unabated which is manifested in terrorism, infanticide and crime against women. Our morning tea is easily poisoned by the media coverage of some scam, scandal, fraud, smuggling or human trafficking. Such a situation naturally leads us to be sceptic about the progress. We grow less human every day.

The degeneration rapidly taking place with the so-called progress points to a sorry state of affairs. The so-called development necessitates multi-tasking and over time work. It makes our life hectic. We have no time to stand and stare at nature. Our neighbour remains a stranger for us till infinity. Our children are deprived of parental care which is their indisputable due. There is a growing sense of isolation lurking in everybody's mind. There exists no intimate human bond either in the family or outside as it used to exist in the past. To put it another way human relationship is relegated to the background. Standing in sharp contrast to such a vicious circle, 'Sarojini Naidu', poetry offers the much needed relief from it. Her poetry is akin to a gust of fresh and soothing cool wind in a hot summer noon.

Sarojini Naidu's poetry is a joyful lesson in humanity. She excels in the art of delineating human relationship, be it between the lover and the beloved, the mother and the children or among the members of a community. The picture of the Indian family and household in her poetry is deeply moving. The bright human traits she emphasizes in her writings are relevant even after seven decades of her death. We can draw inspiration from the community spirit she aptly captures in her poems on Indian Communities such as 'Coromandel Fishers',

'Indian Weavers', 'Indian Dancers', 'Wandering Singers', 'The Snake Charmer', 'Harvest Hymn', 'Awake', 'The Indian Gipsy' etc.

In 'Coromandel Fishers', a beautiful lyric on the fishing community of India, Sarojini focuses on punctuality, dignity of labour, the sense of togetherness, brotherhood and faithfulness to the source of livelihood. A spirit of peaceful co-existence and harmony springs from almost every line of the poem:

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
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 sons of the sea. (OJES 59)

Her sketch of the weaving community of India is also highly commendable. Weaving, as such, is an interactive art that calls for high discipline and utmost concentration. These two traits are extremely necessary for success in every human pursuit. So the poem 'Indian Weavers' imparts lessons on deep concentration and interactive skill in addition to the joy of collective existence. The patterns the weavers weave in the poem correspond to the different stages of life very aptly which symbolise the latter's unconditional acceptance of human life. The integrity of the weavers among themselves and with life is exemplary.

The beautiful and rhythmic physical movement of the performers in the poem 'Indian Dancers' throws light on another important aspect of community life. In a group performance, each of the artists contributes to it in equal measure but without retaining her individual identity. This is a case of the individual self-merging into the whole for the larger benefit of the society. Again, the performers might be belonging to different social or economic classes or to different castes and creeds. In the perspective of human relationship, the lyric can be perceived as a record of unity in diversity.

'Bangle Sellers' is another poem on community life that teaches us how to be happy in the happiness of others. The bangle sellers make the Indian women happy and watching

them happy, they become happy themselves. That is why they call the load of colourful bangles on their heads 'shining loads':

Bangle-sellers are we who bear
Our shining loads to the temple fair.....
(Bhushan 99-100)

'Harvest Hymn' celebrates the simple joys of the Indian farmers. Humility and expression of gratitude are two integral values in the community that we find in the poem.

While the people of the so called civilized society entertain prejudices and fight with one another over pretty matters, the wandering singers are eternally cosmopolitan in their outlook. They impart people a joyful lesson in humility and humanity. We must quote these unforgettable lines from the poem 'Wandering Singers' to learn about the creed of the nomadic community:

Where the voice of the wind calls our wandering feet,
Through echoing forest and echoing street,
With lutes in our hands ever-singing we roam,
All men our kindred, the world is our home.
(Sharma POSN 101)

'The Indian Gipsy' is another poem that focuses on the life of an ancient wandering race. The lyric is not on an individual girl but on the nomadic race represented by her. The gipsy girl is, no doubt, needy but never greedy. She fulfils her modest wants with utmost honesty. She has inherited from her ancestors the art of living life in complete harmony with nature. Her love for free and daring life is quite typical of her community as exemplified in the poem:

Behold her, daughter of a wandering race,
Tameless, with the bold falcon's agile grace,
And the lithe tiger's sinuous majesty.
With frugal skill her simple wants she tends
(Lahiri 135)

The Snake-Charmer Community is a speciality of India. Sarojini observes very minutely the traits that are typical of it and renders them beautifully in the poem 'The Snake Charmer'. The keenness of desire and perseverance in pursuing the community profession of snake-charming is quite clear in the poem.

Similarly, we can see different professional classes engaged in their respective vocations with complete dedication in the poem 'In the Bazzars of Hyderabad'. Sarojini's poetic preoccupation with community life is so profound that even more than we community finds mention in the same poem as in 'In the Bazzars of Hyderabad'. We can move forward to the poem 'Awake' in which people belonging to different religions and creeds join hands with we another for the prosperity of the nation. Hindus, Muslims, Parsees and Christians are seen in the poem inspired by a spirit of universal brotherhood. Forgetting their individual identities, they are committed to build a happy and prosperous India. The unity and solidarity expressed by them for a common cause is what constitutes the core of the poem. All of them sing together:

Shall not our dauntless devotion avail thee?
Harken! O queen and O goddess, we hail thee.
(Grover and Arora 03)

Sarojini Naidu discovers the very spirit of human life in collective existence. Therefore, no community in India escapes her poetic attention. The simple joys of the communities, their innocence and honesty, unity, solidarity, love for work move her to the core. Her poems discussed above along with many others left thanks to the limited scope of the study, are loving tributes to them.

In view of Sarojini's immeasurable love for the human world, it may be noted that she cannot afford to remain indifferent to anything human. This is the reason why we find her poems very fertile in the exploration of human relationship. She portrays community life with amazing skill and perception. Her poems on community life are highly educative to the present generation which has lost the intimate human bond due to self-centredness. We can draw inspiration from her poems on Indian Communities to make our contemporary world a better place in every respect. Needless to say, Sarojini Naidu as a poet continues to be enormously relevant even today given the increasing disintegration of the human bond around.

Abbreviations

OJES-Osmania Journal of English Studies
POSN-Perspectives on Sarojini Naidu

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