The Bangle Sellers by Sarojini Naidu

Bangle sellers are we who bear  
Our shining loads to the temple fair…  
Who will buy these delicate, bright  
Rainbow-tinted circles of light?  
Lustrous tokens of radiant lives,  
For happy daughters and happy wives.  
Some are meet for a maiden's wrist,  
Silver and blue as the mountain mist,  
Some are flushed like the buds that dream  
On the tranquil brow of a woodland stream,  
Some are aglow with the bloom that cleaves  
To the limpid glory of new born leaves  
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,  
Tinkling, luminous, tender, and clear,  
Like her bridal laughter and bridal tear.  
Some are purple and gold flecked grey  
For she who has journeyed through life midway,  
Whose hands have cherished, whose love has blest,  
And cradled fair sons on her faithful breast,  
And serves her household in fruitful pride,  
And worships the gods at her husband's side.  
  
The Bangle Sellers as a poem reminds us of the palanquin bearers, sailors, shipmen, punkah pullers, water men, washer men, fisher men, boatmen and so on. Tagore too wrote a story about Kabuliwallah and Kipling about Gunga Din charming to the core. William Hazlitt’s Indian jugglers too can never be forgotten. We leave it the stories of Indian thugs and dacoits. But in the context of Sarojini Naidu it was Arthur Simons and Edmund Gosse who brought her to light and introduced her to a wider range of public and readers. Had Gosse not suggested writing about the things of India, Indian scenes and sights, landscapes and people, it would have been otherwise. But whatever be that, Sarojini is a poetess of love and lyricism, the mystical flame of love ever burning, ever lighting, amorous and spiritual both at the same time. Krishnabhakti not, Krihnaprem entices her with the adoration of Radha of Brindavana, the banks of the Yamuna, the kadamba trees and Krishna fluting on her mind-set. Sarojini, with her education in the West, marked the temperament as for presenting those things only which are but so endearing to the Western readers.  
  
The poem deals with the bangle sellers going to the temple fair with the shining loads overhead willing to have a good sale of the bangles, coloured differently, red, pink, green, blue, gold flecked and so on, the glass bangles looking beautifully. The Indian churiwallah with the words, churi, churi saying and going is the thing of deliberation and discussion. The bangles for daughters, wives, mothers and small girls, all types of bangles he is with to sell and make them wear. The seller goes on calling, asking to buy and see the glistening bangles. There was also a craze for when so many stalls and shops were not then in those times of yore when the poem was written. The hawkers and peddlers used to go about peddling in the country and streets and lanes. Still now fairs attract the people and on special occasions the cosmetic goods are sold. Later, she discusses which bangles who should wear; about the colour combination. But today’s time is of the beautician and the beauty parlour who like to align the things without bothering about the age and conventions, demolishing superstitions. There was a time when the widows used to be forbidden from wearing bangles. The rainbow-tinted bangles tell of the rainbowish seven colours and the glass bangles being so delicate if pressed or out of measurement may give way or crack. These are the things to be handled delicately. The jingle and tingle of the bangles appear to be lucid and have a special charm of their own. As the rainbow gives a glowing impression of the colour mixture so do the churis give out to be roped in and sometimes kept under cover.  
   
The poetess speaks in the version of the bangle sellers as well as the customers. The bangle sellers and the customers exchange views with regard to choice and the trend of buying the bangles and also as per traditions and rituals. The bangles are for happy daughters and wives. As the bindis add to so are the bangles in appearance.  
  
With the bangles emitting the rainbowish light, the sellers go about calling for a purchase. They call, ask for to purchase bangles, meant as the lustrous tokens of radiant lives, for happy daughters and happy wives. Those who are happy and gleeful will definitely come to buy them. The bangles are delicate and bright, looking like rainbow-tinted circles of light. A young girl lives in young dreams, youthful dreams of love and life unmindful of all that comes the way. What it strikes her, she selects dreamfully; what it catches her fancy and imagination.  
  
Some of the bangles are for a maiden’s wrist, as such silver and blue colour bangles looking like the mountain mist. Some of the bangles are light red, bud-like which seem to be dreaming or taking our dreams away to the tranquil brow of a woodland stream. Some of them aglow with the bloom shining from being in the mist of newly-cast leaves. Blue, silver and green are alright for the maidens, young unmarried maidens.  
  
Some of the bangles are like the colour of the sunlit field of corn and these can be for a girl of a marriageable age. These will also suit the brides on the eve of their marriage with the smiles and tears of memories. Some like the flame colour, fiery red bangles or as they like to take to suit, as per the hue of the heart’s desire, bridal laughter and bridal tear. But red colours suit the married women the most representing the heart’s desire, the marriage fire and the promises made together for going together with and sharing the things and their test and ordeal.  
  
Some are purple and gold flecked grey bangles which will suit those on the way of life, middle aged and blest with children and the husband looking after the household. Women of such an age must wear the bangles of this colour. Such an age group woman likes it not to wear the deep colour things, often busy with household affairs, husband and children; service gods and performance of rites and rituals. Her dream, desire and inclination now lie in with the children, house and husband.  
  
The bangle sellers with the bundle into their hands or kept overhead and the sample into the hands keep calling, showing and passing through the locality:  
  
Who will buy these delicate, bright  
Rainbow-tinted circles of light?  
  
The bangles are but the lustrous tokens of radiant lives as the people dream and live with it which is also a colour of life, a thing of beauty, love and joy:  
  
Lustrous tokens of radiant lives,  
For happy daughters and happy wives.  
  
Some bangles are mainly for a maiden, her wrist, so dreamy to catch her fancy and imagination taking us to the mountainside for overlooking them, covered in mist and smoke:  
  
Some are meet for a maiden's wrist,  
Silver and blue as the mountain mist,  
  
The reference to the buds tells of the light red colour which may suit the young maidens taking to the woodland stream and the natural scenario:  
  
Some are flushed like the buds that dream  
On the tranquil brow of a woodland stream,  
  
The below-quoted lines tell of the green, light or dark green colour matching with the wrists of the young maidens:  
  
Some are aglow with the bloom that cleaves  
To the limpid glory of new born leaves  
  
It is also a fact that the young maidens like to keep dreaming, taking life lightly as they are not aware of its joys and sorrows. Only the dreamy side cannot add to our hardcore realities.  
  
What do the brides choose for? Let us see it:  
Some are like fields of sunlit corn,  
Meet for a bride on her bridal morn,  
  
Some of the bangles resemble the colour of the marriage fire taking to saat pheras, seven rounds around the sacred fire and the sacred oath taken:  
  
Some, like the flame of her marriage fire,  
Or, rich with the hue of her heart's desire,  
The bangles of such a sort tell a different story of life:  
Tinkling, luminous, tender, and clear,  
Like her bridal laughter and bridal tear.  
  
One who has journeyed across and is of sometime past or some experience gathered with worldliness may opt for otherwise:  
  
Some are purple and gold flecked grey  
For she who has journeyed through life midway,  
Whose hands have cherished, whose love has blest,  
And cradled fair sons on her faithful breast,  
Such a fellow rejoices in her household values and companionship:  
And serves her household in fruitful pride,  
And worships the gods at her husband's side.  
  
To look after the family, to maintain and manage the things, handles the affairs is primarily her motto and apart from it, she has nowhere to go crossing the Lakshamanrekha.  
  
The Bangle Sellers reminds us of the hawkers, peddlers moving around the country, into the streets and lanes of the towns as for selling bangles, the bangles of different shining colours and together with lies the different stages of life reflected through. How are our norms and values connected with? How are our sensitivities connected with? How are our spirits and feelings? Through the selection of bangles, the poetess also tells about the life of a woman since the start. How do the options, selections, impositions and tastes vary from time to time? Once she had been a girl child thereafter she turned into a young maiden and from there into a married off woman to the woman of a middle age. When the mother buys the bangles, the girl daughter also asks her mother to buy small bangles to wear and play with, such a psychological as well as feminine thing one generally comes across in patriarchal India. On feeling it, there crops up a question, is this the life of a woman, the periphery of her life, for which we get no answer at all. Whatever be that, through the bangle colours the writer has shown the colours of life and that too of a woman’s life encircling the bangles and the choice connected with showing the societal mind-set, nomenclature and protocol. A poem of colour imageries, it all about bangles, bangle-selling and purchase taking us to the country and into the streets and lanes of the past times; to temple fairs and festive occasions. Wearing bangles falls within one of the shringaras, sixteen Indian shringaras from the feminine decorative point of view. The churis are a must for an Indian bridal beauty or a country woman and from this point of view she has viewed the whole spectrum of our society and households. The lilting sound of the churis and the anklets adds to the beauty of the Indian bride if of a tender age. The fashionistas and socialites may not approve of the conventional viewpoint.  
  
When we read the poem and keep analyzing, paraphrasing and discussing, we feel ourselves around an art gallery and seeing art exhibitions or participating in to view the beauty pageants or pictures from life. At the same time we cannot avert our gaze from peeping in beauty parlours and salons and studios. The mind also goes to the make-up, dress-up men who take time to dress and make before any rehearsals, theatrical, dramatic or choric. The credit must go to the bangle-makes and the beauticians too apart from the poets describing the scene or taking a note of that. When we read and re-read the poem, a young bridal girl in sholah shringaras stands before us, call her, whatever you like to call Chandramukhi or Suryamukhi? She herself is a jasmine standing with a pack of jasmine sticks full of heavily-scented blooms to give.