Vikram’s English Academy (ICSE)

**The Bangle Sellers**

**About the poet:**

**Sarojini Naidu (**1879–1949), was a great Bengali poet, writer and a politician. Her maiden name was Sarojini Chattopadhyay. She was born and brought up in Hyderabad. Sarojini married Govindarajulu Naidu, a physician at the age of 19, after finishing her studies. Sarojini Naidu began writing at the age of twelve. In 1905, her first collection of poems, named *The Golden Threshold* was published. Her poems were admired by many prominent Indian politicians. She was so agitated by the partition of Bengal in 1905 that she decided to participate in the freedom movement.

Her writing was rich in imagery and included themes like love, death and separation. Most of her poems have lines repeated across stanzas. This is similar to a Nightingale’s song – repetitive yet beautiful. It was Gandhiji who adorned her with the sobriquet ‘The Nightingale of India’.

Her works include *The Bird of Time (1912), The Broken Wing: Songs of Love, Death and the Spring (1917), Muhammad Jinnah: An Ambassador of Unity (1916), The Sceptred Flute: Songs of India (1943), The Feather of the Dawn (1961) and The Indian Weavers*

*(1971).*

The poem ‘The Bangle Sellers’ is from her book *The Bird of Time: Songs of Life, Death & the Spring*, published in the year 1912. It is in the fourth section called ‘Indian Folk Songs’.

**About the poem:**

Sarojini Naidu has glorified womanhood through this poem ‘The Bangle Sellers’. She has skillfully woven the various stages of womanhood along with the corresponding colours of bangles. The poem is a narration of a bangle seller who travels to villages and temple fairs to sell his wares. He mentions the nature of his work only in the first stanza. Thereafter, he talks about his customers – the women. He goes on to describe the various stages of a woman’s life and the corresponding hues of bangles worn by her in the different stages of her life. The poet has vividly used imagery to describe the colours of the bangles as well as the changes in a girl from her childhood to adulthood and finally to the evening of her life. There is also a musical element in the poetry which makes it appealing to the ear of the listener.

**Summary:**

The narrator is a bangle seller who says that they (referring to all those who are in the trade) carry the load of bright colorful bangles to various places like the temple fair to sell their wares. He then poses a question as to who would buy the delicate, multi-coloured, bright bangles. According to him these bangles are symbols of the joyous and cheerful

From the second stanza onward the bangle seller lucidly describes the different types of bangles catering to different age groups of women.

He says that the blue and silver bangles which look like the blue mist are suitable for a maiden. Some bangles have a pinkish tinge just like fresh buds and are fit for very young girls who dream about growing up and blooming into beautiful adolescents. He further mentions the bangles that glow like blossoms are symbolic of the girls who have stepped into adolescence.

The bangle seller, then, talks of the green bangles, as lush as the corn fields, worn by the new bride on the day of her marriage. Sometimes the bride wears red bangles which resemble her passion and love for her partner and are like the flame of the sacred marriage fire. The sound of her bangles is compared to the contrasting emotions of a girl who is on the threshold of her married life. She is happy to start her new life with her husband but at the same time sad to leave behind her childhood home and her family.

Finally, the poet throws light on how a woman comes a full circle as she progresses from a girlhood to motherhood and finally a matriarch. At this stage, the color of her bangles is purple and gold spotted with grey, which symbolizes the fact that she has come of age. She has done all her duties towards her household and has now reached the evening of her life. She has no regret but is filled with pride when she looks at her yesteryears. These women now have the honor of sitting by their husband’s side while performing religious rituals.

**Glossary:**

bear - carry

shining loads - (here) the stack of bangles

delicate - fragile, elegant

rainbow- tinted - multicoloured

circles - referring to the circular shape of the bangles

lustrous - shining, bright, radiant

tokens - symbols

radiant - (here) happy, joyful

meet - suitable (archaic word)

maiden - an unmarried girl

mist - fog

flushed - to have a reddish tinge on the face, to blush

tranquil - peaceful, calm

brow - (here) the bank of the stream

woodland - forest

limpid - transparent

bridal morn - the day of the marriage

rich - (here) full of

hue - colour

tinkling - a light sound as of a small bell

luminous - bright

tender - delicate, elegant

flecked - dotted, specked

blest - blessed (archaic word)

cherished - cared for, held dear

cradled - (here) rocked in arms

**Questions and Answers:**

1. **Who is the narrator of the poem? What does he mean by ‘shining loads’? Why does he use the term ‘shining loads’?**

Ans: The narrator of the poem is a bangle seller. He refers to the stack of bangles that he carries every day to be sold as ‘shining loads’. The bangles he carries are bright and colourful as well as in a large quantity. Therefore, he refers to them as ‘shining loads’.

1. **Who are the prospective customers of the bangle seller? What terms does the poet use for them? Why?**

Ans: It is young girls and women who are the prospective customers of the bangle seller. He calls them ‘happy daughters’ and ‘happy wives’. The poem was written in the pre- independence era when women’s identity was determined by the male members of the family. They were daughters, sisters, wives or mothers. Also, according to the Indian tradition, colourful bangles are worn by young unmarried girls or wives. These women were happy and content. Thus, the poet has used the term ‘happy daughters’ and ‘happy wives.’

1. **Where does the bangle seller go to sell his wares? Why does he go there? Which are the other places he could go to?**

Ans: The bangle seller goes to the temple fair to sell his wares. A temple is visited by the Indian women regularly. When there is a temple fair, there is a consistent crowd thronging the place. Thus, the bangle seller chooses the temple so that he can make a good profit in a single day. He could also go to the weekly ‘bazaars’ or markets in the neighbouring villages as those places are also crowded and the sales could be very high.

1. **How does the narrator describe the bangles? What does he compare them to? Why?**

Ans: The narrator says that the bangles are delicate and bright. Moreover, they are round in shape, multi-coloured and very luminous. Thus, he compares them to rainbow-tinted circles of light. As these bangles are adorned by young cheerful women, the narrator says they symbolize radiant lives.

1. **Name and explain the figure of speech in the given line: ‘Rainbow-tinted circles of light’. What is linked to the happiness of daughters and wives?**

Ans: Metaphor. The poet has compared the bangles indirectly to rainbow-tinted circles of light. The poet says that the bangles are shining symbols of the happy and cheerful lives of the young ladies who buy them.

1. **Which different colours of bangles are suitable for a maiden’s wrist? What are these colours compared to?**

Ans: Silver and blue and pink bangles are suitable for a maiden’s wrist. The silver and blue colours are compared to a mountain mist. The pink bangles are compared to the buds that are found on the peaceful banks of a stream flowing in a forest.

1. **Which bangles are compared to the mountain mist?**

Ans: Patches of the blue sky peeping through the mist gives a silvery effect. This is like wearing silver and blue bangles. Thus, the blue and silver bangles are compared to the mountain mist.

1. **Why are the buds said to dream? What is the figure of speech used in ‘the buds set to dream’?**

Ans: The buds know that after some time they will bloom into beautiful flowers. They seem to be waiting for that day when they would blossom and thus are said to be dreaming. This is Personification as the buds are given the human characteristic of dreaming.

1. **Why are some bangles compared to buds? What do they symbolise? Bring out the comparison.**

Ans: The buds are pink in colour like the blush on a maiden’s face. So, the pink bangles are compared to buds. The pink buds symbolise small girls who are about to enter the adolescent age. Just like the buds are about to bloom into flowers, these girls are about to blossom into young adolescents.

1. **Which bangles does a bride wear? What are these compared to? Why?**

Ans: A bride wears either bright green or bright red bangles on the day of her wedding. The green bangles are compared to the vast fields of corn which shine brightly in the sunlight. The bright red ones are like the flame of her marriage fire. The red colour also symbolises the passion of the newly wed. The sound of these bangles is like the laughter of the bride whereas the texture is a clear and tender as her tears.

1. **How are the emotions of the bride connected to the bangles she wears?**

Ans: The bride’s heart is full of contrasting emotions on her wedding day. On one hand, she is very happy to enter into a new world of her spouse. Her heart is filled with passion and desire. On the other hand, she is also sad that she has to leave the comfort and protection of her parents’ house and the company of her siblings and friends. The tinkling sound made by the numerous bangles she wears and their lustre are like her laughter soothing and illuminating. Whereas the tender and clear texture of her bangles is like tears.

1. **How has the poet described red bangles?**

Ans: Some brides wear red bangles on the day of their marriage. In the Indian traditional marriage ceremony, the bride and the groom take seven vows around a fire. The bright red bangles of the bride are like the amber coloured flame of the marriage fire.

1. **What do you understand by the phrases ‘bridal laughter’ and ‘bridal tear’?**

Ans: A newly wed bride goes through a medley of emotions. She is happy because she is on the threshold of a new life anticipating a beautiful relationship with her husband. Thus, the term ‘bridal laughter’ is used to show her happiness. At the same time, she is also very anxious about a new beginning and sad to leave her family and maiden home. Thus ‘bridal tear’ symbolises her worry and sadness.

1. **Which women does the poet refer to in the last stanza? What does she say about them?**

Ans: The poet refers to women who have reached that stage of their lives where they have become the matriarchs of the family. They have fulfilled all their commitments. They have given birth and nurtured their children. These women have accomplished all their duties towards their household and family. Such women feel satisfied having met all expectations in life. They have now earned a position of respect and can stand by their husband’s side while performing all religious duties.

1. **What kind of bangles are suited for the women mentioned in the last stanza? What is the significance of these colours?**

Ans: In the last stanza, the poet mentions the women who have experienced all aspects of womanhood. As they have accomplished all their duties, there is a sense of pride they feel. Thus, purple and gold bangles are suited for them. Also, these bangles are spotted with grey which is a colour symbolising maturity.

1. **Explain: Whose hands have cherished, whose love has blest.**

Ans: In these lines the poet refers to the role of a woman when she becomes a mother. This is the most significant phase of a woman’s life where she makes a lot of sacrifices. She sacrifices her sleep and hunger to nurture her children. Her hands have taken care of the children and her love has blessed them.

1. **Explain: And serves her household in fruitful pride**

Ans: Once a woman gets married, she has to take care of her house and family. She has to perform a lot of duties and meet expectations of her husband, in laws and her children. When she successfully shoulders all her responsibilities, she feels a sense of pride.