

Various stages of man's life as depicted in The Indian Weavers (Sarojini Naidu) and The Seven Ages (William Shakespeare)



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Abstract

The study of human life has been a fascinating subject to almost all the writers. Many literary figures – Indian or English – have been talking about the life of man in their works whether in poetry or in pros. Two of the eminent literary figures – Sarojini Naidu and William Shakespeare – have been taken up in this paper for their depiction of human life. Sarojini Naidu in her poem *The Indian Weavers* has talked about man's life through various images. Weavers weaving at day break are feeling happy and are weaving the robes of a newborn child. In the next stanza they weave the bride garment signifying the youth mentioning the words like Purple and Green, marriage veils of a queen. The last stage of man's life is depicted through the expression that the weavers are weaving the robe 'white as a feather and white as a cloud Weaving the dead man's funeral shroud.'

The Seven Ages by William Shakespeare presents the life of man in the form of a stage where men and women are merely players. They have their entrance and exit at the fixed time. Each man in his life plays various roles- his roles divided into seven ages by the poet. The first stage begins when the newborn is puking in the nurse's arms. Other stages are the schoolboy creeping like snail going unwillingly to school, the young man playing the role of a soldier bearded like a pard, the justice with beard of formal cut, the old man with his spectacles on nose and in slipped pantaloons and so on.

Many literary figures – Indian or English – have been talking about the life of man time and again. Since a child takes birth, he passes through various stages in his life till the time he faces his end. How different poets have portrayed and talked about the different stages in the life of man has been a fascinating topic.

'The Indian Weavers' by Sarojini Naidu and 'The Seven Ages' by William Shakespeare – both have portrayed man's life in their own way. Sarojini Naidu is an Indian poetess and Independence activist. In her poem 'The Indian Weavers' she has vividly described the life of Indian weavers

and has reflected different phases of human existence through their work. The tool of trade used by the weavers, which is the loom, metaphorically brings forth various stages of the life of man from the time he takes birth till he dies.

The beginning of life, that is, the birth, is represented through the symbol of loom. The yarn represents the thread of life that has just begun.

*'Weavers weaving at break of day
Why do you weave a garment so gay?
Blue as the wings of a halcyon wild
We weave the robes of a newborn child.'*

The garments being woven by the weavers for a newborn child are associated with the feeling of happiness as it is the time of the child's stepping into the world. The use of simile – the comparison of the child's garment with the blue wings of the halcyon – adds to the element of cheer, joy and gaiety. We carry precious memories with us into adulthood, which is represented through the golden threads.

Youth is the next stage in the life of man. The imagery of "Bright – hued pattern" is used to

convey the vigorous stage of youth. The poem states thus:

Weavers weaving at fall of night

Why do you weave a garment so bright?

Like the plumes of a peacock purple and green

We weave the marriage veils of a queen.'

Strength, energy, excitement, emotional intensity are the feelings peculiar to the stage of youth. The bright-hued pattern, which has been compared to the purple and green plumes of a peacock, represents the exuberance, potential and optimism of youth. The image of "marriage veils of a queen" brings out the feeling of hope and emotional intensity. The "rich-toned strands of manhood" represents the next stage of a man's life, that is, adulthood. It is the time when a person is responsible, dutiful and hard working. The sense of maturity and strength of adulthood is symbolized through the loom. A man gains wisdom and experience with age and this is depicted through the rich-toned strands.

The last and the final stage of a man's life is death. It is a time of sadness, parting, grief and loss. The weaver's loom here is the symbol of the end of life's journey.

'Weavers weaving solemn and still

What do you weave in the moonlight chill?

White as a feather and white as a cloud

We weave a dead man's funeral shroud.'

The weavers being "solemn and still", the night represented through "moonlight chill", the comparison of the white cloth to the cloud and white feather- all add to the feeling of grief at the time when a man leaves the world and comes to the end of the journey of life.

Thus the poem captures the essence of different stages of a man's life beginning from the stage of innocent childhood to the old age which is full of experience and wisdom.

'The Seven Ages' written by William Shakespeare compares the world to a stage where every person is an actor with a fixed time of entry (birth) and exit (death) on the stage of life. He plays various roles assigned to him and these roles have been presented as the seven stages in the life of man beginning from birth to old age. The journey of human life which is full of adventures, hustle bustle, struggle and wonder is presented in the poem.

The first stage, according to the poem, is the infant who is "mewling and puking in the nurse's arms". This expression shows that a child in his first stage of life is helpless and dependent of others. Childhood is the second stage of life as mentioned in the poem. The description of this stage goes as follows in the poem:

"..... whining schoolboy

With his satchel and shining morning face

Creeping like snail unwillingly to school"

The child does not feel like leaving his home as he finds it the most comfortable place for himself. "Creeping like snail" clearly brings out how reluctant the child is to go to school.

The lover, the adolescent, comes in the third stage. In this stage, "the lover sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad made to his mistress' eyebrow". The expression "sighing like furnace" has aptly been used to bring out the emotional intensity of a lover, that is, the age of adolescence. In the next stage the person becomes responsible and yearns to be successful in his life. This forms the fourth stage and is termed as "adulthood" by the poet. The image of a soldier has been used to describe the stage of adulthood. In this stage, a man is "a soldier, full of strange oaths and bearded like a pard", depicting courage and vigor of the soldier. The comparison with pard highlights the fact that an adult man is strong and ferocious. After the crossing the stage of maximum strength and power, comes the time of the decline of physical and mental power. This fifth stage of man's life is named as "the middle age". In this stage the man's role is similar to that of a judge and he is "the justice, in fair round belly with good capon lined, with eyes severe and beard of formal cut." By this time a person has already strived and gained success and the truth about mortality starts striking him.

The stage which further faces an increase in physical weakness and memory loss is the old age, the sixth stage in the life of man. "The sixth age shifts into the lean and slippered pantaloons, with spectacles on nose and pouch on side." The old man becomes frail and weak and is again dependent on others. Death constitutes the final stage, the one which brings an end to the journey of life. In this stage a person is "Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything". The word "sans" has been used by the poet repeatedly to

emphasize the fact that with death a man loses everything thus facing a complete loss.

Thus both the poems “The Indian Weavers” and “The Seven Ages” depict the various stages in the life of man. Both present the fact that human life is transitory. Whosoever takes birth has to die one day and lose everything.

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