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Indian Weavers

We cannot think of life without clothes. They are responsible for our personality and our image in society. We wear clothes of different fabrics in different seasons: soft cotton in summer, thick, warm woollens in winters and silk on special occasions. Yet, do we ever think about those people who weave the fabrics for us? Here is a tribute to all weavers who produce fabric for different occasions.

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

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.

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.

Sarojini Naidu

Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949) was a freedom fighter and poet. Her poems depicted the life and events of the India of her time, and are read in India and abroad.

Glossary

halcyon : a mythical blue-winged bird similar to a kingfisher

wild : untamed

robes : fine, ceremonial clothes

plumes : feathers

veils : head covers which partially hide the face

solemn : serious

shroud : a cloth that covers a dead body, a pall

A Comprehension

A1. Complete the following summary of the poem by filling in each blank with words from the box below.

shroud cheerful/gay weavers peacock
clouds wedding dress morning night
feather cloth serious blue

The narrator notices _____ busy weaving _____. They do this from _____ to _____. She wonders why are they weaving such a _____ fabric, early in the morning. The weavers tell her that they are weaving the _____ cloth for a newborn baby.



At the fall of _____ they are busy weaving a _____ for the queen. The colour of that cloth is similar to the feathers of a _____. The weavers are in a _____ mood late at night as they are weaving cloth for a dead man's _____. It is white like a _____ and the _____. In short, they weave for different occasions in a person's life.

A2. Answer these questions.

1. Which stage of life does the poet refer to in the first stanza?
2. Describe the type of cloth woven by the weavers, as mentioned in the first stanza.
3. Do you think there is a specific reason why the weavers have woven the marriage veils of the queen in purple colour?
4. Why are the weavers described as 'solemn and still' in the third stanza?
5. What is the significance of the white colour of a shroud?
6. The poem refers to three different stages of a person's life. What is typical of each of these stages?
7. Do you think that the weavers are hardworking people?
8. Explain the following expressions:
 - a) a halcyon wild
 - b) fall of night
 - c) funeral shroud



B Appreciation

1. The expression ‘blue as the wing of a halcyon wild’ is an example of simile. Read the poem carefully and find two more examples of simile.
2. Poems are generally marked by rhyming words. This gives a lyrical quality to the poems. Fill in the blank spaces below with rhyming words picked from ‘Indian Weavers’.

day	
	child
night	
green	
	chill
cloud	

3. Poets often use imagery. Sarojini Naidu has not only described the work of weavers, she has used the image of life and its different phases through this poem. Can you guess the three stages described in this poem?
4. There is a lot of repetition in the poem. For example, ‘Weavers, weaving . . .’, ‘Why do you weave . . .?’ and ‘We weave . . .’ Do you think the poet has used repetition deliberately to give the poem the repetitive rhythm of the handloom? Does it make the poem musical?



C Activity

1. The small-scale industries like weaving are dying out due to stiff competition from the machine-manufactured cloth, which is cheaper. Form groups



of four. Each group will find out about the hand-woven cloth in:

- a) Bengal
- b) Orissa
- c) Benaras
- d) Assam

Each group will conduct some research on the topic and submit a report on the plight of the weavers today, the special qualities of the fabrics and other material.

2. Mahatma Gandhi's name figures when we talk about weaving. Discuss this connection in pairs and then share your views with other classmates.
3. Your teacher will divide the class in two groups: Group A will be the narrators who ask questions and Group B will comprise the weavers who answer the questions from the narrators. Now enact the poem in the class.