The Coromandel Fishers by Sarojini Naidu

Activity: Summary and Analysis

Coromandel Fishers has both allegoric and metaphoric value in it. As an allegory, it speaks to the fishermen but holds a metaphor to the nation. The poem consists of three stanzas, each stanza consists of four lines, following the rhyme scheme of AABB.

The poet begins the poem with the lines “Rise, brothers, rise”; it is clear that she is waking up the sleeping. Literally, the phrase indicates to the fishermen, but when you interpret it under the lines we can say that it is a wakeup call to the people to do something for their nation. Here she is singing in the form of a fisherman addressing his brethren, about the life and attitude of the fishermen of the Coromandel Coast on the Bay of Bengal. The poem describes the universality of the notion that how the sea, cloud, waves and human beings are interconnected in Coromandel, as is everywhere else. This song imitates the movement and balancing of waves, its rich musical content and the lines and words are perfectly synchronized with its inborn tune and rhythm, which is exactly why it is especially noted for. She continues with the lines “the wakening skies pray to the morning light” and that the “wind lies asleep in the arms of dawn like a child that has cried all night”. The former line is an example of personification in the poem while the latter phrase is the example of a simile in Naidu’s allegory. The two statements above make a subtle reference to the weather and the poet personifies the dawn gifting its arms.

The poet speaks of catamarans in the next line, which are the fishing boats used specifically in the South; this use of the specific term enhances and personalizes the setting of the poem, which is only explicitly mentioned in the title. The reader realizes that the poem is ubiquitous with personification as the poet continues to talk of the “wealth of the tide”. Fish are the wealth of the fishermen and they get this wealth from the tide that brings it to them. All this description creates a pictorial image of a young Sarojini Naidu rowing the catamaran in the Bay of Bengal. It’s a tradition for the Hindus to worship the early morning rising sun.
The wakening sky is offering its morning prayer to the Sun at the time of the dawn. The fishermen have to rise very early before the first ray of the Sun reaches the sky. Even the wind would not have risen then. In the words of the poet like a child that has cried all night, the wind is in a deep sleep in the arms of the dawn. The idea is scientific since the wind would rise only after the atmospheric temperature rises with Sun. The nets after fishing the day before being spread on the shore for drying, which have to be gathered.

Hasty but systematic preparations are taking place, the catamarans are resting, but now it is time to go to capture the leaping wealth of the tide; from the sand which has to be freed. When we observe this we are naturally forced to ask if it is their paternal property. The answer to this intriguing question is Yes, not fathers, but mothers. Since they are the sons of the sea, they have a birthright over the abundant wealth of the sea. It is an experimental proof that where the sea-gulls call at that point or in that very area the fishes are in plenty. This is why the fishermen do not lag away and without any delay get to the track of the sea-gull’s call. Once the fishermen reach there their job is easy. The poet says that they have no reason to fear the sea, wave or the cloud; because as is known to us the sea is their mother, the cloud is their brother and the waves are their comrades.

Even in the evening when they will be tossed with the waves somewhere in the mid-sea; they needn’t fear, because they would be at the mercy of the waves, even where the sea god Neptune controls everything. For the very simple reason that, the Wind God will hide (protect) their lives in his breast. He, who is all-powerful and strong to hold even the storm by its hair, fatherly affection! The fishermen have sweet attractions on the shore. The shade of the coconut glade, the scent of the mango groves and the sands lit by the full moon at night with the sound of the voices of their most beloved ones nearby are indeed sweet. But to the fishermen, the kiss of the spray wash and the dance of the wild waves are sweeter- so they long to be at sea. Towards the close of the poem, we see the fisherman and his comrades, bathed in broad daylight, row to the bluishness’ of the horizon where the sky and sea are at play. Sometimes it is exciting, and true we are tempted, to imagine that the singer is the young poetess herself, alone, rowing her tender boat in the Bay of Bengal.

We are reminded of the milieu of the poem once again when Sarojini talks of “following the track of the seagull’s call“. In those days, the call of the seagull was what directed fishermen towards the fish. She christens the sea her “mother” and the clouds her “brothers” while the waves are named her “comrades”. This metaphor links to the caring of the family for one another, as the sea does for the fish, and the clouds do for the sea.
The next two lines speak of the link between fear and courage and the fine line between them. She asks us “what do we toss at the fall of the sun?” and lets us know that with success come to some sacrifices and that although we are wary of these, “he who holds the storm by the hair, will hide in his breast our lives”. She has also personified the storm in that line. The last stanza is a comparison between life on land and at sea. She uses vivid imagery here to describe the scent and shade of coconut glades and mango groves but then reminds the fishermen that the “kiss of the spray” and the “dance of the wild foam’s glee” is a taste much sweeter. She reminds us not to be content with temporary satisfaction but to work towards the happiness and joy that we have found elsewhere. This stanza holds a strong metaphoric value, as it talks of the temporary satisfaction that some people faced under the rule of the British, as well as how all Indians knew that there was a real joy to be found in living independently. To conclude, this poem is beautiful and most poetically written. A must read for all the students and poem lovers, who eagerly seek the messages delivered through the secret passages of metaphors and allegories. A poem that reminds us without hurting us about the people and movements that helped us gain our independence. It is a poem of a positive note.

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WORKSHEET

A. Answer the following questions briefly in your words:

a. Who is the speaker? Who are the speaker’s brothers?

b. What does the poetess compare the wind with in the second line of the poem? Why?

c. What does the speaker mean by the ‘leaping wealth of the tide’? Why does the speaker consider themselves to be the kings?

d. What does the speaker consider to be sweeter? Why?

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