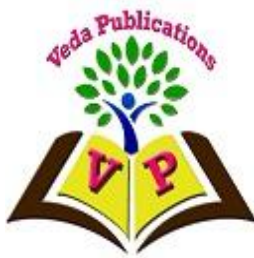


CHARACTERIZATION IN R.K.NARAYAN'S *Mr.SAMPATH*

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Malgudi of Mr. Sampath has acquired all the emblems of an unconventional township including its own market, business premises, schools, perfect houses, studio, printing presses, industries, Mexican music, and cinematography experts from Hollywood and so on. Srinivas, living in the philosophical world of the Upanishads, remains inexperienced in the art of living. Prior to the inception of *The Banner*, he has tried his luck at various jobs and has proved an utter failure. Sampath, with whom Srinivas gets acquainted in connection with the printing and publication of his paper is printer of Malgudi. Mr. Sampath, from whom the novel derives its name, is essentially a man without moral scruples. He is all against conventionality and tradition. Like Falstaff, he is a law-breaker. Sampath is a self-seeker and opportunist who can dupe anyone in pursuit of his aim. He joins the Sunrise Picture Studio as one of its partners. His sole aim is to make money without having anything of his own to invest. He entraps Somu and Sohan Lal to become his partners and to invest the lion's share. It is on his persuasion that Srinivas's rich but miserly landlord risks his fortunes in the studio business.

Keywords: *Modernization, Self-Seeker, Opportunist, Pursuit.*

Mr. Sampath (American title *The Printer of Malgudi*) is Narayan's first novel published after the transfer of power by Britain to India and Pakistan. It begins at a point where his previous novels tend to end, depicting the effects of a fast approaching modernization on the tradition ridden society. The novel opens with a description of Srinivas's weekly, *The Banner*, through which he has been ceaselessly trying for "the abolition of slums and congestion." Its aim is to expose "the tenements, the pigsties constructed for human dwellings in the four corners of the town by rapacious landlords."

The Banner has made a name by constituting itself an enemy of landlords, institutions and conditions. "Within twelve pages of foolscap it attempted to set the world right." Much like *The Spectator* of Addison and Steele, the journal has two-fold task to do: "On the one hand, attacking ruthlessly: pigheadedness wherever found, and on the other prodding humanity into pursuing an ever-receding perfection."

Malgudi of Mr. Sampath undergoes many noticeable changes. All sorts of people come here to live and seek their livelihood. There is a sudden influx of the outsiders, who bring "comic disorder (verging on madness in some cases) to a normal community with its own brand of eccentricity." There has been a tremendous progress in the sphere of commerce and industry. In the words of H.M. Williams:

Malgudi is much larger now, more corrupt and partially industrialized. Congress politicians are active now that India is independent, laying foundation stones for buildings that never seem to materialise, or changing the names of streets in honour of national Indian heroes, causing confusion to postmen and conservatives.

The pompous editorial of *The Banner* highlights the fact that Malgudi is no longer a sleepy old community, but a semi- industrial town afflicted with the fever and fret of a modern metropolis:

Plenty of labour from other districts had been brought in because the district board and the municipality had launched a feverish scheme of road development and tank building, and three or four cotton mills had suddenly sprung into existence. Overnight, as it were, Malgudi passed from a semi-agricultural town to a semi-industrial town, with a sudden influx of population of all sorts.

Mr. Sampath actually reminds one, though not as frankly and harshly as Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers*, of the war-years with their uncertainties, sufferings and frustrations for the people in general and for the have-nots in particular. It also brings back to the memory the pain of the partition of India in 1947. Almost every town of India sustained the Malgudian trauma and tension, vividly painted in this novel:

The labour gangs, brought in from other districts, spread themselves-out in the open spaces. Babies sleeping in hammocks made of odd pieces of cloth, looped over tree branches, women looking on the road-side, men sleeping on pavements-these became a common sight in all parts of Malgudi. The place was beginning to look more and more like a gypsy camp.

Malgudi of Mr. Sampath has acquired all the emblems of an unconventional township including its own market, business premises, schools, perfect houses, studio, printing presses, industries, Mexican music, and cinematography experts from Hollywood and so on. Life, as presented here, is very brisk with all its “multitudinous and vastness.” Life in Malgudi means “continuous work, night and day, all through the week, and even on a Sunday.” It is a society where science and religion have been juxtaposed in the most ludicrous and awkward manner. The installation of camera in the Sunrise Picture Studio, for instance, is done almost in manner of an orthodox ritual. The camera is decorated with flowers and sandal paste. Priests officiate at the inaugural function and worship the camera like a deity. They pray to gods for successful functioning of the camera. Quite naturally, therefore, De Mellow, the man from Hollywood, is made to realise that:

“In this country, Sir, one does not know when a religious susceptibility is likely to be hurt. A mere sneeze will take you to the stake sometimes-better be on the safe side.”

Srinivas, the hero of the novel, looks at this funny situation and remarks to himself: “They are initiating a new religion, and the camera decked with flowers is their new God, who must be propitiated.” People in Malgudi have become grossly materialistic and worldly. The world is too much with them and they seem to have given their hearts away for sordid boons. They hold that “God, at the present moment, was a being who might give them profits and ruin them with a loss.” In such a society, man, as Srinivas reflects, has no significance, “except as a wage-earner, as an economic unit, as a receptacle of responsibilities.”

Srinivas, living in the philosophical world of the Upanishads, remains inexperienced in the art of living. Prior to the inception of *The Banner*, he has tried his luck at various jobs and has proved an utter failure. Not knowing the technique of existence, “the question of a career” seems as embarrassing as a physiological detail.” Discontentment in his life is purely intellectual. Through the editorials of his weekly, he attacks politics, municipality, cinema or other affairs “like a pugnacious fellow.” He has a “questioning mind” which thunders against “municipal or social shortcomings.” He needs a closer acquaintance with life and the world “to summarise, in terms of modern living, some of the messages he had imbibed from the Upanishads on the conduct of life.

Sampath, with whom Srinivas gets acquainted in connection with the printing and publication of his paper is printer of Malgudi. “A vociferous and effusive man” that he is, he takes the entire responsibility of publishing the paper on himself. True to his promise, he works hard, and sees that each issue is made available to his readers on time. He advises Sriniva, the editor, on matters of account-keeping. He is active, smart, dynamic, and knows how to keep good humour even in moments of despair or difficulty. Besides being insincere to Srinivas, Mr. Sampath is sincere or true to none, he is altruistic and evasive. He cannot face his customers straightaway. But none can match his ingenuity, his tact and genius to satisfy his customers and send them back completely satisfied.

Mr. Sampath, from whom the novel derives its name, is essentially a man without moral scruples. He is all against conventionality and tradition. Like Falstaff, he is a law-breaker. The short and humorous incident, narrated by him to Srinivas after his return from the court, speaks volumes about his outlook on life:

“You know, I have achieved an ambition in life. I’ve always wanted to crack nuts and eat them in a court-something to foil the terrible gloom of the place. I have done it today.

On the face of it, the incident seems quite trivial, but tells us lot about his way of thinking. Sampath is, in fact, brie of the most complex of beings, and can only be described in paradoxes. He is at once old and young, aged and enterprising, strong in fortitude and weak in principle, a man with a wife and five children and yet carrying romance with another woman. He is a knave, a liar who never loses his self- confidence. He is, as it were, born with an ability to defy the accepted norms and customs. Unlike Srinivas he is neither puzzled by moral considerations nor by pricks of conscience. He is a practical sort of man without any sense of self- discipline. Like Falstaff, he is convinced that “Modesty has done no good to anyone in this world,” and he discards it in every field. He calls himself an “Optimist,” and takes delight in “Keeping people happy.” But his actions prove that his a self-aggrandizing, optimist, and cares little for others.

Sampath is a self-seeker and opportunist who can dupe anyone in pursuit of his aim. He joins the Sunrise Picture Studio as one of its partners. His sole aim is to make money without having anything of his own to invest. He entraps Somu and Sohan Lal to become his partners and to invest the lion’s share. It is on his persuasion that Srinivas’s rich but miserly landlord risks his fortunes in the studio business. Knowing that the old man affects some knowledge of the sacred books, he approaches him on the pretext of getting some of his metaphysical doubts cleared, and then takes him for a ride. Sampath very tactfully convinces the old man how by investing his five thousand rupees, he can multiply his money and marry off his granddaughter in a much nicer way. He also promises his help in settling the girl’s marriage with Ravi, who works in his studio. Sampath can make any promises when he has an axe to grind. But once the purpose is served, he forgets everything about the grand daughter and her marriage. The film “The Burning of Kama” has to be dropped in the middle, as a lot of damage is done to the studio by the reckless acting of Ravi. Sampath runs away after the pandemonium in the studio, and hides himself from his partners to whom he owes a lot of money. He admits his sense of guilt to Srinivas: “I shall have to become invisible too. Otherwise, Sohan Lal and Somu have enough reasons to put me in prison.” Even when the old man dies, Sampath keeps mum over the borrowed money before the old man’s sons and daughters, who go on fighting over his property. Thus, Sampath remorselessly practices the art of success on the people he comes in contact with, hand in the wake of it he dupes a number of people for the sake of his selfish ends.

Sampath plays fast and loose not only in matters of money, but in matter of sex also. He lacks a sense of responsibility, reliability and moral commitment. Shanti, who acts as

Parvathi in the film, is his mistress. He calls her his cousin, but treats her as his beloved. He falls head over heels in love with her. They steal a few erotic moments from the hectic business of shooting. He openly ignores his wife and five children. He feels no pricks of conscience or moral compunction when Srinivas advises him to be faithful to his family. Instead of paying heed to Srinivas's sane counselling, he only laughs away the whole matter and resolves to marry Shanti because "religion permits us to marry many wives." Love makes him blind and he fails to see reason in things. He fondly cherishes the foolish idea that his wife and Shanti, when he marries the latter, "will bury the hatchet and become friends again. obviously, his, lust for wealth and woman has made him oblivious of his obligations towards his wife and children. His bemused eyes fail to notice anything but his ownself and Shanti.

Sampath is "the typical product of the amoral civilisation of the modern age." He excels in the art of opportunism. As a friend he fools Sonu, Sohan Lal and Srinivas whose paper he drops in the middle. As a printer he cheats his customers. As a student he takes for a ride the old landlord by depriving him of his five thousand rupees. He is a proper example of Narayan's definition of an upstart:

He is one who generally feels, "all the world owes me a living." The world outside has no. meaning for him except as a storehouse of opportunities....

He holds society to be a mass of ignorant people who can be beaten with a compliment. Nevertheless, as evil ultimately recoils on its own head, Sampath, too, finds himself totally alienated from the rest of society. His own villainies and misdeeds alone are responsible for his isolation in the world. He does not like "to be seen by anyone" and vice versa. Even Srinivas, through whose eyes the whole world is seen, resolves at the end not to get entangled in "a whole series of fresh troubles." He is sympathetic to Sampath in the days of his misery, for "God alone can rescue him."

Shanti, the unconventional heroine of Mr.Sampath, is another variation on Shanta Bai of The Dark Room. She is the young pretty widow of a forest officer. She has "a perfect figure, a rosy complexion, and arched eyebrows and almond shaped eyes everything that should send a man, especially an artist, into hysterics." Even Srinivas, the most sensibly detached person, is enchanted by her impeccable personality. He goes into raptures by saying "what a pleasure to watch her features....No wonder then that it has played such havoc with Ravi's life." More than this, this Indian Belinda is conscious of her bewitching beauty and adorns "her personality, part by part, with infinite care." Her feet are encased in "velvet sandals, over her ankles fell the folds of her azure translucent saree, edged with gold; at her throat sparkled a tiny diamond star." Below her close-fitting sheeny jacket, one can peep at "her fair skin." True to her profession as a cine-star, she believes in glamour and physical attractiveness. She cares a fig for the conventional propriety. Leaving her home and son behind, she adapts herself to the modern culture of hotels and cinema world. She lets Sampath call her his cousin, but acts as his mistress in private. Before Ravi Srinivas and Sampath's own wife come to know about their affairs, they have already "taken to each other

very well.” The perceptible change in Sampath’s dress and general bearing suggests the arrival of a new woman in his life. He becomes fastidious and fashionable in dress like a Romeo. He has cast away his “faded tweed coat,” and put on “silk shirt and muslin dhoti and lace edged upper cloth.” They are seen exchanging “side glances,” driving a car “sitting close” to each other. Their ironic pranks against each other, their mutual assents and dissents, flirtations and oglings prove how strong are their infatuation for each other and how little they care for social conventions. Once while chatting, Srinivas sees Sampath’s finger nails “touched with the garish horrible red of a nail polish,” and asks him how it has happened, Sampath feels at a loss and hiding his weakness answers:

“Oh that cousin of mine: She must have played same joke on the when I was not noticing, she has all kinds of stuff on her table.”

This is all a cock and bull story devoid of any truth Sampath’s own uneasiness and exasperation belie his words. He feels guilty of having done something unusual and unconventional. It is certainly not the doing of a cousin. He may try to hide his clandestine relations with Shanti, but his behaviour betrays the whole truth.

Love outside marriage has always been considered as utterly unconventional and grossly immoral in the Indian ethos. No man or woman, intrinsically deferential to our cultural norms, customs and traditions, will indulge in extramarital sex of Sampath-Shanti type. Sampath, swayed by his passion for Shanti, assumes the role of her guardian and treats her as his exclusive possession. He becomes indifferent to his wife and children, “spending all his time in the Studio and running about, completely lost in his new interests.’ Despite Srinivas’s efforts to bring him back to his senses and to his family duties, he remains completely enamoured of her.

With the impunity of a lusty lover, he tells Srinivas that he loves and intends to marry Shanti:

“Some people say that every sane man needs two wives-a perfect one for the house and a perfect one outside for the social life.... I have the one why not the other. I have the confidence that I will keep both of them happy and if necessary in separate houses. Is a man’s heart so narrow that it cannot accommodate more than one? I have married according to Vedic rites: let me have one according to the civil marriage law.”

This “spiritual corruption” has polluted his entire self and only unusual occurrence or some kind of acute crisis alone can remove from his mind and heart the visions of a romantic life. That unusual occurrence takes place when Shanti as Parvathi and Sampath as Shiva move into each other’s arms for a shot in the film. Losing the equipoise in the characteristic fashion of the Hollywood films, Ravi wrests Shanti from Sampath’s grip and carries her to glut his repressed passion. A state of utter confusion and pandemonium prevails in the Studio:

A piercing cry, indistinguishable, unworded like an animal's, was suddenly heard, and before they could see where it originated, Ravi was seen whizzing past the others like a bullet, knocking down the people in his way. He was next seen on the set, rushing between Shiva's extended arms and Parvathi, and knocking Shiva aside with such violence that he fell amidst his foliage in Kailas in a most ungodly manner. Next minute they saw Parvathi struggling in the arms of Ravi, who was trying to kiss her on her lips and carry her off...

Peace descends on the studio when Ravi is put in the police lock up for his lunacy. Sampath and Shanti retire from this disorderly world to the secluded bungalow on the Mempi hills. On the advice of the exorcist, Ravi is taken for a cure to the holy temple at Sailam.

Though the passion of love has held its sway over human heart ever since the creation of the world, yet there is a hell of difference between the love in its pristine forms-majestic, unalloyed and having social sanction-and the one existing between Sampath and Shanti. Theirs is undignified and depraved passion most aptly summed up in Ravi's remark that "Love is lust." It is devoid of true devotion. It does not evince their ultimate sense of belonging to each other. For them, love is nothing more than a physical enjoyment. As a matter of fact, in the guise of love they are self-seekers. Hence when they are separated, they do not feel the pangs of separation. Shanti gets tired of the sensual pleasures in the end. So far she has been tolerating Sampath not so much for her love of sex as for the security of her job. She succumbs to the needs of a living, and not to any genuine passion of love. A lover-mistress relationship, however intense, leaves a woman unfulfilled and frustrated in the end. Hence, Shanti's romance with Sampath without any clear prospects for future fills her heart with a sense of helplessness and despondency.

The whole situation is reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's poem, "The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock." Shanti's tragedy is similar to that of Prufrock. Through Shanti, Narayan, like Eliot, has tried to bring out the boredom, ennui, frustration and indecisiveness of the modern Indian woman, who has romantic dreams but no commitment to fulfil them. Baffled and at bay, she wants to enjoy her life but does not have the necessary courage to accept her lover's proposal for marriage. On his return from the bungalow, Sampath himself conveys his impressions about Shanti to Srinivas:

"As you might know, we should have gone upto a registrar before leaving for Mempi, but she always made one excuse or the other of her and put it off. Finally, we decided that we were to go through the formality on coming back here..."

Shanti saves herself as well as Sampath from further complications when she leaves him dozing at the station, and boards the train to Madras. She leaves behind a note for Sampath which shows her return from unconventionality to tradition. She confesses in the note:

"I am sick of this kind of life and marriage frightens me. I want to go and look after my son, who is growing up with strangers. Please leave me alone, and don't look for

me. I want to change my ways of living. You will not find me... I had different ideas of a film life.”

The status of a mother in the Indian culture is much higher than that of a mistress. A woman without child is like a desert land or a fruitless tree. Home, husband and other relatives have their meaning only for this noble achievement in life.

The short conversation between Sampath and the station master is quite significant, as it tells that Malgudi of Mr. Sampath is much more unconventional than Malgudi of Swami and Friends. The old and traditional husband-wife relationship with husband as the lord and master of the house no longer exists. To the station master's question, "Don't you know that a husband and wife have got to go together" Sampath replies. "Not always, not necessarily." The arrival of cinema houses, hotels and new culture and above all, the economic independence of women has played a vital role in emancipating them from the shackles of a slavish existence. Like Shanti, they have discarded the purdah, and despite so many constraints, they are ready to face the world bravely and boldly. Thus, Malgudi and its denizens in Mr. Sampath no longer lead a sheltered life lost in the cobwebs of superstition. Innocence of men and women is replaced by experience and awakening. The influx of outside men, money and ideas is continuous and irresistible, telling upon the stability and certainty of life.

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