

**SHADES OF PURANIC AND FOLK STREAKS IN THE LARGER
CANVASS OF R.K.NARAYAN'S MR. SAMPATH**

By

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When Narayan wrote 'Mr. Sampath' his fifth novel, he was in his forties and had obviously reached a point where his fascination for certain aspects of Hindu religions and philosophical tradition had grown into a full-fledged conviction of their truth and relevance, particularly with reference to an individuals' persistent quest for identity and self- knowledge. The theme owes to folk belief systems and view of life. With Mr.Sampath, Narayan plunges into the zany, eccentric and, at the same time, true to life world of Malgudi, which is to be the special back ground of his tales from now on though we have known it earlier. The narrator, Srinivas is an edition even as Narayan was at this point in his life. Sampath, the printer, a character taken from real life, when he finds that he can no longer run his press, takes to film production, an endeavour into which he draws Srinivas half-heartedly.

According to Labov (Chatman, 1972) language is “ a sensitive index of many

other social processes” ; it is a relatively easily studied matter that allows us to draw conclusions about the structure of society. Therefore, the language reflects its society. A study of language by way of its dialects, idioms, idiosyncrasies help in understanding the social set up at micro and macro levels; for it throws light on the cultural and economic background. (Social Stratification)

Narayan's pattern was fixed. The protagonist is initially engaged fruitfully in the pursuit of some aspect of social reality. After realizing the futility of this "illusory" world or after gaining fresh insights into the nature of reality from his encounters with this world, he returns to the world of his former activity. The novel thus ends with an acceptance of the world as it exists, the novel thus is a reflection of Narayan's own experiences, the manner in which he came across things echoed in his works, the acceptance is because of the new knowledge gained by the protagonist helps him overcome his reservations about the actual world. The novel derives its name from Mr. Sampath, the printer of Malgudi, but its real protagonist is Srinivas, the editor of 'The Banner,' through whose eyes the whole world is seen from a perspective of non-attachment. Srinivas feels that the problem of one's identity is basically philosophical.

Srinivas appears to think here that the problem of one's identity can be

solved by abstract speculation and meditation on the nature of

A little later in the novel Srinivas is shown writing a series of articles, entitled "Life's Background" :

“Life and the world and all this is passing – why bother about anything ? The perfect and the imperfect are all the same. (*Mr. Sampath*, 1983, p30)

With this philosophical line of thinking, Srinivas also realizes the futility of interfering in other people's lives, because his mind perceived a balance of power in human relationships. He marveled at the invisible forces of the universe which maintained this subtle balance in all matters: criticize and attempt to set things right anywhere." (*Mr. Sampath*, 1983, p63) According to this philosophy of inaction, any form of human intervention in any matter is unnecessary, for things are likely to balance themselves in a scheme of things where a perpetual balancing act goes on continuously.

But, somehow, Srinivas also desires to have a comprehensive view of all humanity" to get 'a correct view of the world". While one part of his brain decries all action and protest as futile, the other part aspires to have a total and comprehensive view of humanity to arrive at a correct understanding of the world. The same dilemma that Narayan was when in between crossroads in life, the same thoughts came up in his mind to

which finally he arrives at an understanding by and by. Ideas were to march straight on from him in all their pristine strength, without the intervention of language :ideas walking, talking, and passing into people's minds as images like a drug entering (*Mr. Sampath*, 1983, p93).

But as he is gradually drawn into the maddening whirlpool of the film world, he begins to grow disenchanted. He felt he is missing his true vocation - his search for truth and self-realization-which he could have more conveniently and fruitfully pursued through his journalistic career: thinking to himself of 'the Banner' again, he makes a mental note of the things he would like to have in his paper. After his foray into the film world proves a maddening disaster, he returns to his paper and gets it printed at the Empire Press.

"You know the old fable of a man who mounted a tiger – I'm in the same position.

"The Banner' has to be kept fluttering in the air if I'm to survive." (*Mr. Sampath*, 1983, p198)

The final meaning of his quest for identity and of non-attachment and withdrawal is yielded to Srinivas, when his mind begins to telescope history,

while Ravi, the artist gone mad, is being treated by an exorcist :

Dynasties rose and fell. Palaces and mansions appeared and disappeared. Half the madness was his own doing, his lack of self-knowledge, his treachery to his own instincts as an artist, which had made him a battleground. (*Mr. Sampath*, 1983, p207)

Madness or Sanity, suffering or happiness seemed all the same.....it was like bothering about a leaf floating on a rushing torrent -whether it was floating on its straight side or wrong side. (*Mr. Sampath*, 1983, p208)

This novel obviously provides a significant peep into Narayan's thinking about the relationship between individual and the society, particularly in the context of the Gita's philosophy of non-attachment at the fruits of one action which gets degenerated here into a kind of nihilistic and negative quietism and inaction. The trouble with the Narayan's protagonist is that he seeks his identity not in terms of social and economic relationships which really govern its formation, but in terms of abstract speculation. Man, as a concrete individual, can be identified only by the sort of role that he plays in the social productivity. If, however he seeks the meaning of his identity in isolation from his socio-economic obligations, he will only be wandering in a

world of glorious illusions. The example of Srinivas is a case in point. If each man is considered to be an island, into himself, the entire social fabric loses its cohesion and becomes a torn and fragmented entity.

In Mr. Sampath, myth is recalled by being used as the plot for a film while the actual events that take place both in the film and in the novel are contrary to the myth. Throughout the novel we are aware both of the difference, between present day India and its mythic past. The omnipresence of the past, never pure, always expressing itself in parodies of ideals, is the basis of Narayan's vision; he accepts his society regardless of its faults. If Narayan seems passive and accommodating, it should be remembered that the Indian sensibility has always placed a high regard on inactivity and acceptance of the flow of life. Narayan has been criticized for not having the social concerns of Anand as also for not explicitly examining cultural conflicts as does Rao. Such disapproval ignores precisely those qualities that make Narayan a major novelist.

"That deluded man is called a hypocrite who sits controlling the organs of action, but dwelling in his mind on the objects of the senses." (Swamy, Chidbhanand, 1975, ch.3, sl.6)

Infatuation, madness, and desires of Ravi comprises the cycle of events of the novel. Srinivas with his friends is involved in this attachment by various reasons and in varying degrees. Here Narayan takes up the old myth of the burning of Kama to show comic implications of his involvement. The handling of the plot has reversed the myth. The old myth tells that Kama tempted Shiva while he was meditating at Mount Kailash. This scene of temptation of Lord Shiva appealed to Srinivas as a script writer. The film gets a vulgar and provocative slant. Ravi's and Sampath's infatuation and jealousy come to their climax in this central scene of the novel. It causes great physical and emotional confusion.

Srinivas is portrayed as an idealist. Years of reading the Upanishads has made him indifferent to his family life. He holds a philosophical attitude towards this world. He seldom bothers about worldly anxieties but perceives a balance of power in human relationships. 'The Upanishads' prompted him to ask 'Is it right to be family-centred?' My children, my family, my responsibilities I must guard my prestige and my duties to my family - who am I ?

For a moment it seemed to him a futile and presumptuous occupation to analyse, criticize and attempt to set things right anywhere." (*Mr. Sampath*, 1983, p63)

While he thundered against Municipal or Social
Shortcomings a voice went on asking life and the world
and all this is passing - why bother about anything ?
Why really bother ?(Mr. Sampath, 1983, p30)

Srinivas is the centre of all the actions of the novel and his role is
N. Mukherjee sums up :

Structurally speaking, the role of Srinivas is very important.
Mr. Sampath is 'The Printer of Malgudi'. 'The Truth
Printing Press'. Nobody returns empty and he pleases
everybody simply with words. Mr. Sampath is sensual,
sentimental and lustful. Every sane man needs two wives -
a perfect one for the house and a perfect one for the
outside for social life.... (Mr. Sampath, 1983, p179)

Shanti becomes his mistress.

“I am sick of this kind of life, and marriage frightens me....
If I find you pursuing me, I will shave off my head and
fling away my jewellery and wear a white Sari. (Mr.
Sampath, 1983, p218)

Mr. Sampath strikes others to be a man of strong personality and impresses
them by his obliging attitude, prompt service and hospitality. He is the
custodian of accounts - income and expenditure of Srinivas. 1957, p. 14)

presents Mr. Sampath as :

A masterly first impressionist in whose spacious gestures and rich evasive words a greaky press and one exhausted boy somehow becomes a big establishment.

In the opinion of N. Mukherjee (1969, p82), -

The moment he enters the novel, he not only takes the charge of the publication of the weekly 'The Banner', but also takes the novel from the hands of Srinivas. It no longer remains the story of Srinivas, the editor, it becomes his story - the story of the printer of Malgudi. Sampath is above all other characters. One meets all kinds of people in the Printer of Malgudi. Schemers, adventures, speculators, get-quick-rich financiers, eccentrics, absurd dreamers, impassioned reformers, and crooks.

The novel is named after Mr. Sampath, but in the first 64 pages of the novel there is no reference to his name. He emerges as a stranger in Chapter IV, page 66 where Srinivas happens to visit Bombay Anand Bhawan Hotel giving up all ideas of printing his work in Malgudi. He finds a man 'with his fur cap and the scarf flung around his

neck' sitting in a chair next to the proprietor at the counter speaking Hindi as North Indians. In a dramatic manner Srinivas lets the readers know about Mr. Sampath, who would print his journal - 'The Banner'.

In Mr. Sampath Narayan finds himself close to Srinivas as he also seems to perceive the world as a complicated system of checks and counter-checks, the final outcome being the absurdity :

His mind perceived a balance of power in human relationship. He marveled at the invisible forces of the universe which maintained this subtle balance in all matters, it was so perfect that it seemed to be unnecessary for anybody to do anything. him futile and presumptuous - occupation to analyse, criticize and attempt to set things right any where.... If only one could get a comprehensive view of all humanity, one would get a correct view of the world. circle (N. Mukherjee ,1969, p63):

Apart from this, one finds Narayan's deeper philosophy of life when one goes through the old verse of the old man - the landlord of Sampath and Srinivas. The quoted verse of the old man appeals to Narayan and he feels that 'Life and the world and all this passing - why bother about anything (N.

Mukherjee, 1969, 30).

Here is Narayan's unconscious affiliation with the puranic tradition of switching from fantastic to the reality of life in order to create emotional conflict and to make the readers realize the ultimate truth of life. To this context of Narayan, Stephen Hemenway remarks :

The Hindu attitude towards the individual's life - transitory, a small part in a continuing process, the need to strive for dharma or right action is upper most in the formation of his characters. (Hemenway Stephen, p32)

Mr. Sampath is a lovable rogue, innocently crooked, cunningly foolish, unselfishly selfish and sadly cheerful. Shades of puranic and folk streaks in the larger canvass of R.K.narayan's Mr. Sampath work in a very calm and subtle way allowing the reader for a simple judgement of the work at the outset.

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