



The Pattern in the Projection of Working Women in R.K Narayan's *The Dark Room* and *Mr. Sampath*

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Received: 31 Jul 2022; Received in revised form: 20 Aug 2022; Accepted: 25 Aug 2022; Available online: 31 Aug 2022

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Abstract— Working women is not a recent phenomenon but in India they still face a bias and prejudice against them. This prejudice and stereotyping can also be traced into the works of literature. This paper aims to analyze the depiction of some of the working women's characters in the early Indian English novels by R.K Narayan. It will try to throw light on the patriarchal ideology in the narration and projection of working women's characters in the select novels. How women are often put under certain labels which work for patriarchy and specifically working women who do not conform to this ideology, have to face more social prejudices. This paper will examine these biased patterns which are prevalent in RK Narayan's select novels. It will showcase how a working woman is perceived by the society and also how the writer deals with these patriarchal ideologies.

Keywords— Family, Indian English Fiction, Patriarchy, Working Women, Workspace.

I. INTRODUCTION

R.K Narayan is one of the most celebrated and widely read writers of India. He is known for his stories set in fictional town of Malgudi. His writing style has a simplicity and a humor. This paper will view the representation of working women in two of his novels, namely *The Dark Room* and *Mr. Sampath*. *The Dark Room* is a story about a traditional Indian Hindu wife, Savitri. The novel portrays that how the conjugal relationship between Savitri and Ramani becomes tensed when Ramani gets into an extra marital affair with one of his co-workers Shanta Bai. Shanta Bai is the working woman in this novel whose character will be analyzed.

Mr. Sampath is a story about a writer, Srinivas and his friend Mr. Sampath who was a publisher and later got into a movie business. The story follows how Mr. Sampath ruins his business and his marital relationship because of his indulgence into an extramarital affair with Shanti, the lead actress of the movie. Shanti is the subject of analysis in this novel.

A working woman according to *thefreedictionary.com* is a woman who earns a salary, income or regular wages by getting herself employed outside her home. Women face societal and traditional restrictions to work in India. Even in 21st century relatively very few women are able to find work (Flecher 3). Udit Mishra in his article, "India is no Country for Working Women. Here's Why" says that India is a conservative society with orthodox beliefs and practices violence against women. And this leads to women's low participation rates in the labour force. According to the World Bank data for 2019, India has one of the lowest female participation rates in the world at 21% according to World Bank LFPR (Labour Force Participation Rate). This figure is not even the half of the worldwide average of 47%.

This paper purposes to examine the patriarchal ideologies against working women present in these texts. And how these ideologies shape the representation of working women in literature.

II. DISCUSSION

There is a prominent pattern in the projection of these women's characters concerning their family backgrounds, moral values and working capabilities. Shanta Bai was married to one of her cousins who was a drunkard so she left him and pursued her studies. She does not have any family. After getting the job she lives alone in the office. She does not show any concern about taking care or nursing the kids. She does not follow the traditional norms for women as wives. She does not uphold any moral values as she gets into an affair with a married man. Shanti in *Mr. Sampath* also has same kind of character. She also lives alone. Her family is not mentioned. She is a widow. She also gets into an illegitimate affair with Mr. Sampath.

2.1 *The Dark Room*

The representation of working women in their work spaces is also biased. Shanta Bai is represented as amateurish and not even ready to learn. She is seen as nuisance in the office by other male workers. The patriarchal ideology prevalent in the *Engladia Insurance Company* in the novel can be seen when company advertises to take women to train in office and field to assist insurance policies on female lives. The employees joke about how women's applications are for harem. As the accountant Kataiengar says, "A nice treat the boss has arranged. You can have your pick for the harem between fifteenth and the twentieth. Don't miss the office at any account" (Narayan 48). He further asks, "Do they want to convert the company into a brothel?" (Narayan 49). It shows how women and their profession is perceived by the male counterparts. Women are viewed as sex objects only. Shanta is a beautiful woman who has left her husband as he was a drunkard. She is referred as *houris*, fairy, fresh rose and "something to relieve the drabness" in the office by her co-workers. As she joins the office other employees feel distracted by her presence itself. Shanta Bai has been appointed to the post with the recommendation of Ramani, so he expects a thanks from Shanta for his recommendation and also for, he arranged a room for her. But instead she was dissatisfied by her salary. She was portrayed as an overambitious and a thankless person. Shanta Bai has been given a month to show progress but as the narrator tells, "Shanta Bai had been in the office for a month and yet she exhibited no aptitude for canvassing work" (Narayan 66). Instead, she develops an illegitimate affair with Ramani to progress in her job. This leads to yet another stereotype against working women that they use men to progress and not their abilities and skills. She is represented as a very temperamental person. She shows tantrums and puts on acts of breakdown to gain sympathy. Ramani and Shanta Bai both were equally responsible for

their affair but Ramani defends himself through the narration of the novel. But she has no direct encounter with the readers. She is at a distance and presented as a third person about whom readers get to know from other characters or the omniscient narrator. Shanta Bai's character does not speak like other major character speak for themselves in the novel.

2.2 *Mr. Sampath*

Shanti is an actress in the novel *Mr. Sampath*. She has been chosen for the role because of her beautiful face and not for her acting abilities. As Mr. Sampath says at the time of her appointment, "Of course; we can call her up. Her face struck me as the most feasible type for Parvati" (Narayan 127). She comes late for the rehearsal as Sampath tells that she takes extra three hours to get dressed up. It represents her unprofessional nature and her obsession with her beauty without any concern for her work. She has been married to a forest officer but she got separated and later became a widow also. She also has a kid, whom she has left with some of her relatives as the readers come to know later in the novel. Sampath tells everyone that he and Shanti are cousins but they were indulged in an affair. Sampath wants to marry her. She becomes a distraction to one of the characters, Ravi in the novel. Ravi tries to molest her on the sets during the shoot. This also shows the violence which women face in their workspaces. This incident leads to the devastation of the film as well as the set. Shanti was so depressed that Sampath takes her to Mempi hills for a rest. But Sampath finds it hard to live with her fits and hysteric temperament. As he puts it, "Well I didn't much mind her physical condition. It was her temperament that disgusted me. She was quarrelsome, nagging.... wouldn't leave me in peace." (Narayan 214). Her personality is described as awful and a kind with which a man cannot live.

III. CONCLUSION

To conclude the nature of representation of the working women by RK Narayan in these novels, there are some basic similarities between these two characters named Shanta Bai and Shanti which come forward. Their character attributes, family background and their morals are similar to each other. They come from parallel background and also come across as similar to each other. Both of the characters have broken marriages, they are ill tempered and incompetent for the assigned jobs. In both of the novels RK Narayan has not given them space to narrate their side or to defend themselves against these projections. This representation leads to the stereotypical and a biased image of working women in these novels. It stereotypes that working women are incapable of having a

successful marriage, can not and do not want to take care of their kids and not at all family oriented. They do not adhere to the moral codes of the society in order to climb the ladder of success. It forms a rift between a traditional Indian woman who holds her morality high and a family-oriented person and a working woman who has none of these specific features of an Indian woman.

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