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AN ART IS A PROOF OF LIFE EXPERIENCE  
A STUDY OF R.K.NARAYAN'S' "SWAMY AND FRIENDS"

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ABSTRACT

An artist often based his art on his own life and experience. If we closely observe an artist's life is an evidence. That incidents which greatly affected the author have often been reproduced in his art. R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, and D.H. Lawrence have written about their experiences in their novels. Narayan, who is considered one of the greatest English language novelists in India, has always written about the world around him. Narayan's takes material from his own life. Certainly This study attempts to prove that an artist may take material for his art from his own life and experiences. His first three novels (*Swamy and friends*, *The bachelor of arts*, *the English teacher*) are semi autobiographical. These trilogies tell the story of Narayan's life from childhood to adulthood. *Swami and Friends* tells the story of a ten year old named Swami, who is a very similar to Narayan's own childhood.

Key words: Unorthodox, adolescent, bereavement, Malgudi, impulsive, trepidation, belligerent

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R.K. Narayan, shortened from Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami, was born in Madras, South India on October 10, 1906. He was an Indian author whose works of fiction include a series of books about people and their interactions in an imagined town in India called Malgudi. He is credited with bringing Indian Literature in English to the rest of the world. *Swamy and Friends*, *The Bachelor of Arts*, *The English Teacher*, are his popular works. Although The present study extract from *Swamy and Friends*.

***Swamy and Friends.***

Narayan's first novel *Swami and Friends* was published on October 24, 1935 in London for which Narayan got a cheque of 15 pounds and 10 shillings. It took Narayan two years to complete this novel. *Swami and Friends* is the story of a ten year old name Swami, a boy full of innocence, wonder and mischief, and his experiences in the fictional town of Malgudi, which is similar to Narayan's own childhood. Most of Narayan's novels are based on his own experience in life. His first three novels are considered autobiographical. These works depict the story of Narayan's life from childhood to adulthood.

Narayan's *Swami and Friends* is a semi-autobiographical novel that depicts the growing pain of an adolescent boy, the tears shed by him after he is hurt and the fears he has of losing a friend. Although the ordinary tensions of maturing are heightened by the particular circumstances of pre-partition India, Narayan provides a universal vision of childhood, friendship and grief. Set against the fictional backdrop of Malgudi, the book is

an emblem of the journeying of mankind through the maze of reality. Appropriately titled, Narayan depicts the relation of Swami and his friends.

The story is about an adolescent boy growing up at that time. Swami, a small boy who is a student at Albert Mission School. It tells the story of Swami and others like, Shanker who is a top at every exam; „Pea“ and Somu, who occupies the middle positions and Mani, who is Swami's best friend and always sits on the last bench and takes more than one year to pass some classes. Swami and Mani rule over the class and barely manage to scrape past the exams. These boys live for summer vacations when they can play all the time in the street with friends. This peaceful setting is disturbed occasionally by the stern headmaster of the school and sometimes by the religious study teacher, Ebenezer and also by a stern father. The 10 year old boy grows up when Rajam joins the school. The monotonous school life of Swami then gains excitement when together with Rajam, he dreams of forming a cricket team. Young Swami gets caught up in the anti-British movement and manages to get thrown out of school. When he runs away from school for the second time, he feels that there is nothing left and so he also runs away from home. Eventually Swami returns home to the relief of his parents. All the children in this novel have unique personalities. Mai is the daredevil, Rajam, though naughty, usually acts as a voice of caution, Swami is shy, but impish and impulsive. Through all this character Narayan takes us to the world of children.

### School Life

In this novel Narayan expressed his own childhood experience to recreate a child's perception of the world. The protagonist of *Swami and Friends* is Swaminathan, a school boy, whose attitude towards school is just like Narayan himself. The opening lines of the novel clearly depicts the moods, behavior of a young boy. Swaminathan... considered Monday is unpleasant day in the calendar. It was difficult to get into the Monday mood of work and discipline. He shuddered at the very thought of school: that dismal yellow building; ...the Head Master with his thin long cane. ...

In his School life, Narayan acquired a lifelong dislike for traditional formal education which is reflected in the novel. In the opening pages of *Swami and Friends*, Narayan convey the silent, jail-like atmosphere of the classroom. Narayan's kindergarten experience resurfaces in the scene where Swami wanders into the infant sections of his school and watches the toddler's effort to shape models from wet clay. It seems to Swami a meaningless activity which they can do in their own home instant of coming to school.

Another incident from his life which resurfaces in this novel is Narayan's attitude towards drill class and the punishment he suffered for skipping them. Narayan used to regularly skip Friday afternoon drill class and consequently get „six whacks“ in his upturned palm from the headmaster's cane first thing on Monday morning. In *Swami and Friends* when Swami skips a few drill classes due to cricket practice he has to endure punishment from his headmaster. Swami had to attend drill class every day after school while his friends played cricket. So he pretended to be sick to skip the drill classes and requested the doctor to talk to his headmaster. As the doctor did not make excuses on Swami's behalf, he got punished by the headmaster, „six on each hand for each day of absence, and the next lesson on the bench“. In *Swami and Friends* the boys formed a cricket team called „M.C.C“. Instead of „Jumping Star“, suggested by Swami the name „M.C.C.“ – short for „Malgudi Cricket Club“ suggested by Rajam was decided for the team. „Jumping Star“ is the name of Narayan's own football team. His „Jumping Star“ experiences of the dust, sweat and excitement of practice sessions is reflected in *Swami and Friends*. You covered the distance half running, half walking, moved by the vision of a dun field sparsely covered with scorched grass.... rays of the evening sun, enveloped in a flimsy cloud of dust, alive with the player stamping about. Swami's evening journey to the cricket field, beset by delays and school imposed obstacles, seems to carry the same urgency of the writer's own efforts to reach the lake everyday to Practice football.

The leadership qualities of Jambu can also be seen in Rajam, the Captain of M.C.C.s. Jambu was the captain of Narayan's football team, who materialized every evening to conduct his team to the practice ground.

**Examination and Vacation:**

Another feature of school life which according to Narayan is considered torture by students in examination. In *Swami and Friends*, the tension associated with the approach of exam is explored with sensitivity. The anxiety and sleeplessness of the night before examination is shown as Swami tries to deflect his rising trepidation by making a list of his exam stationery requirements. The atmosphere of examination hall is grim and tension filled. After the examination the students speculate about the answers. On leaving the examination hall Swami begins to have doubts after hearing other's responses. The reader begins to share his sense of error and mild panic. Though there are trepidations about the result, the joy of having finished the exam is great. Swami and his classmates welcome the summer holidays with a glorious, ink soaked celebration of freedom. As a middling student, the writer finds the examinations a particular ordeal. Narayan expresses his dislike of exams in many essays. Through Swami, Narayan expresses the desperate nervousness and mental anguish one suffers at exam time.

**Religion:**

In E.L.M. school Narayan suffered because of religious intolerance for non-Christian students. Staffed by Christian converts the school appears to have taken a somewhat proselytizing attitude towards its non-Christian students. As Narayan was the only Brahmin boy in his class he suffered much unpleasantness from a teacher called Ebenezer. Swami too faces a fanatical scripture master called Ebenezer at the Albert Mission School in Malgudi, who regularly denigrated Hindu religion. When Swami tries to defend his faith he got his ears twisted for his effort. Swami's father writes an angry letter to the headmaster, which express the writer's own sentiments about fanaticism and which affects the value of religious tolerance.

**Childhood- Fearness:**

In childhood, fears, secrecies and furtive acts are necessary to survive in an adult dominated world. One day young Narayan saw that merchant in his grandmother's garden and hid behind a pile of clothes in his uncle's study. As the evening develops, so does the child's fear and resolution not to reveal himself to his supposed assailant. At last the fear of the dark obscures his other fears and he emerged before his distraught family. In *Swami and Friends* a similar figure emerges to terrorize a substantially older child. The son of the coachman cheated Swami of some money. His pugnacious appearance and possession of a penknife create cold fear in Swami. Like young Narayan, Swami also spent a tension ridden, terror- filled evening and finds it impossible to articulate his fears.

**Pre-Independence Era**

In *Swami and Friends* as Swami participates in the freedom movement. Soon after the break of the First World War in 1914, Madras experienced an early taste of hostilities. The advent of war brought about a quickening of the freedom movement. Student participation in the freedom movement emerged in *Swami and Friends*, as Swami got caught in the political movement. Along with his friend Mani, Swami attends a public meeting in protest against the arrest of a prominent Bombay political leader. Swayed by the speaker's powerful oratory, Swami flings his cap into a Swadeshi bonfire of foreign goods. Swami's father similarly urges the schoolboy not to get involved deeply

**Relation with Grandma:**

Swami's granny is the replica of the grandmother whom Narayan remembers from his childhood and who like Narayan's grandmother Ammani is shown to share her kindness and passion for storytelling. Raised by his grandmother, he formed a special bond with her. In his biography Narayan has repeatedly underscored his debt to his grandmother, describing her as „the most abiding influence“ in his childhood. Ammani, appears like a traditional South Indian grandmother while manifesting certain special qualities all her own. Narayan recreated Ammani in his *Swami and Friends* from his childhood memory. Swami's grandmother, notably more aged and frail than the Ammani of Narayan's childhood, also share her kindness and her passion for storytelling. This shows that grandmothers are the sanctuary or refuge, in times of upheaval, crisis or excitement.

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**Relation with Father:**

Swami's father, a lawyer, shares many traits of Krishnaswami Iyer, The fictional father's character shows a passion for education, strict paternal authority and some other interests like involvement in club activity; these are similar to Narayan's own father. Through Swami and his father Narayan illustrate the distance that used to exist in father-son relationship at that time. In his father's presence Swami displays wariness and apprehension. Swami greets his father's departure from home with hope and his presence at home with trepidation. Narayan also had a similar attitude towards his father in his childhood. Later in the novel, Swami's action of running away from home enables Narayan to explore deeper regions of father-son relationship. The caring and love a father feels for his son but is unable to openly express is shown in this novel. In this novel the attitude and expressions of adult characters like Swami's father, his Granny.

**R.K.Narayan's prose Style:**

Narayan always used simple language to describe the characters of his novels. This is the reason behind his popularity as an artist. Narayan is best known for his use of clean, lucid and wonderfully expressive language and he never complicated his English by mixing the flavor of Tamil or any other Indian language. Narayan is an acute observer of society, and through his art he conveyed the good as well as the evil in society. Narayan expressed human follies and eccentricities by mixing satire with gentle humor but he neither directly comment nor react to them.

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