



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 3. Issue.4.,2016 (Oct.-Dec.)



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE IN R.K. NARAYAN'S *SWAMI AND FRIENDS*

Dr. C. ARUN

Assistant Professor, Department of English
Thiruvalluvar University College of Arts & Science(Govt)
Thiruvannainallur-607 203, Thirukoilur Taluk, Villupuram District, Tamilnadu, India
E.Mail: drcarunenglish@gmail.com



Dr. C. ARUN

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to bring out the historical perspective from R. K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* which represents the Indian colonial period especially the Indian society from 1920 to 1930. The novel explains how the long British rule transformed the century-old Indian culture into a hybrid one making its people accepts certain aspects of the colonizer's culture even as they were struggling against the colonial rule politically for the country's freedom. He was an Indian writer, a leading author of early Indian literature in English, best known for his works set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. It was first introduced in *Swami and Friends*. Narayan highlights the social context and everyday life of his characters, and he was highly esteemed writer.

©KY PUBLICATIONS

Introduction

R. K. Narayan, was born in the age of British India , has been regarded as one of India's greatest writers of the twentieth century. He is compared with William Faulkner and Chekhov in writing style and humour. R.K. Narayan started his prolific writing career with this novel *Swami and Friends* written in 1935. Narayan's mentor and friend, Graham Greene involved in getting publishers for Narayan's some books, including the semi-autobiographical trilogy of *Swami and Friends*. Graham Green called this novel is a work of "remarkable maturity, and of the finest promise...and is the boldest gamble a novelist can take". When Narayan was twelve years old, Narayan participated in a pro-independence march, for which he was reprimanded by his uncle; the family was apolitical and considered all governments wicked. With this novel, Narayan created Malgudi, a town that creatively reproduced the social sphere of the country; while it ignored the limits imposed by colonial rule, it also grew with the various socio-political changes of British and post-independence India.

A general perception on Narayan was that he did not involve himself or his writings with the politics or problems of India, as mentioned by V.S.Naipaul in one of his columns. Srinivasa Iyengar says that Narayan wrote about political topics only in the context of his subjects, quite unlike his compatriot Mulk Raj Anand who dealt with the political structures and problems of the time. Paul Brians, in his book *Modern South Asian*

Literature in English, says that the fact that Narayan completely ignored British rule and focused on the private lives of his characters is a political statement on its own, declaring his independence from the influence of colonialism.

The novel describes the rainbow world of childhood, socio-political background of pre independence India and early boyhood of boys of the likes of Swami growing up in the interior of South India. It seems that Narayan's personal experience at school has gone into the making of the novel. The readers can get a vivid portrayal of the thoughts, emotions and activities of school boys. It is as though everyday reality has taken over Narayan's pen and written this universal epic of all our boyhood days.

Colonial Perspective in *Swami and Friends*:

Wikipedia defines;

“Colonialism is the establishment of colony in one territory by a political power from territory, and the subsequent maintenance, expansion, and exploitation of that colony. The term is also used to describe a set of unequal relationships between the colonial power and the colony and often between the colonist and the indigenous peoples”.

Similarly Rajam and Swami are the fine examples of unequal relationship of Colonial power and colony in *Swami and Friends*, is the story of a 10-year-old boy. It is the novel which defines the Indian history of freedom struggle along with school children's life. “Swami” the young protagonist shines through this novel. He is a student at Albert Mission School, a school established by the British which gives importance to Christianity, English literature and education. His life is dramatically changed when Rajam a symbol of colonial super power joins the school and he and Rajam become friends. Narayan represents the movement against foreign made cloths through the male protagonist. He participates in an insurgent activity and burns his British-made cap but later excuses himself for this insurgent act to his father who rebukes him for his act of defiance against the British rule, thereby supporting the colonizer's authority indirectly.

Swami is a spontaneous, impulsive, mischievous and yet a very innocent child. His character is a child in the fullest sense of the world. Through Swami's the reader may understand the peak of pre-independence days in South India. The life portrayed in the novel is accurate in its description of the colonial days. The revolutions, the rebellions, the contempt and the reverence the natives had for their subjugator, together with varied elements that have become one, such as cricket and education.

It is clearly identified that Narayan does not assault the colonial system, though the aspects of gentle criticism and ironical elements directed towards the colonial system which is spotted right through *Swami and Friends*. He has presented the life of people at that time. It is not clear that he had attacked on the British colonial system out of choice or admiration. The nonappearance of criticism on the colonial system maybe also owing to the fact that Narayan simply believed the colonizer and the colonized could live together in harmony, benefiting each other.

Swami is with four persons with his confidence' Somu, the Monitor, who carried himself with such an easy air; Mani the mighty lazy; Sankar, the most brilliant boy of the class and Samuel who was known as the Pea, who had nothing outstanding about him, like Swami, but they were combined in their ability to laugh at everything. Swami's relationships with each of these friends were dissimilar, but he appreciated them all. This harmonious existence is threatened with the arrival of Rajam. Narayan introduces that Rajam is the colonial superpower. Narayan also introduces Rajam; “He (Rajam) was a new-comer; he dressed very well- he was the only boy in class who wore socks and shoes, fur cap and tie, and a wonderful coat and nickers. He spoke very good English, exactly like a European” (*Swami* 12).

Only a few companions could understand what Rajam speaks. He brought up a complete strange circumstance than his fellow classmates. He is always symbol of colonial power. He wanted to be the best among his friends, role model to others. Narayan depicts him as European character who is neither affectionate, loyal faithful to his friends. Rajam is confident, intelligent and brilliant in communication. Thus Swami was attracted by Rajam and wanted to be friends with him. And when he eventually achieves so, this friendship initially forms chafing between his earlier friends. As a son of a police superintendent under the colonial

administration, holds an anti-political attitude: "Swaminathan (Swami) felt that the safest course would be to agree with him (Rajam)" as "his father was a government servant, and his family was anti political and Rajam himself thought nationalist activities as dirty politics and strikes"(110).

In Swami's life, he spontaneously decides to join a rebellion against the British. He was however, not a patriotic person, but he was enjoying breaking windowpanes of Albert Mission School by throwing stones when the political activist was arrested, named Gauri Sankar, who is one of the greatest sons of the mother land (98). Swami is punished cruelly by the principal and in a moment of anxiety runs away from the school. Then he is later admitted to another school – Board High School. It is the time that Rajam, Mani and Swami form a Cricket Club and set a date for a match against another cricket club. Swami is now unrest by Rajam to attend cricket practices; he skips his drill classes in order to do so, and faces trouble with the drill teacher. In yet another moment of extreme anxiety he runs away both from school and home. He gets lost on the road, but he is brought home by a cart-man. He became skilled at that he had indeed missed the cricket match, which he took such pains to practice for.

Rajam stubbornly refuses to see him after this, and after a lapse of some days Swami comes to know through Mani that Rajam's father was transferred and was moving the next day. Swami is crushed, but in his innocence, he erroneously thinks that Rajam will relent and forgive. Rajam had decided otherwise and hardened himself against forgiving. There is immense poignancy in the parting seen between the friends. It is heightened by the fact that the reader knows that Rajam has not and will not forgive Swami, while Swami believes that he is forgiven and is grieving for his "dearest friend's" departure.

Swami did not have the money to buy a lavish gift for Rajam, but had thoughtfully decided to give him an English book "Anderson's Fairy Tales" and writes on the flyleaf 'To my dearest friend Rajam'. Finally, Narayan insists the difference between the thoughtless Rajam and his devoted two friends Swami and Mani. Rajam was 'dressed like a European boy', his very appearance was alien to them, but it is not only on the outside that Rajam was different, but even within, as the reader sees throughout the novel and especially at the end. To Narayan, Rajam's ways and thinking are different, much like the "Europeans." Rajam in his superiority does not feel he owes anybody explanations or farewells. He came, he conquered and he will go as he pleases. This attitude of Rajam's is akin to that of the colonizer who came, conquered, made drastic changes in the lives of Indians and then left just as abruptly as he had come, leaving chaos behind. Rajam was the symbol of that 'class of people' the British colonizer bred, who invariably became alien and even contemptuous to their very own culture.

Narayan brought out brilliantly swami's life and the contradictions of pre-independence India, the sporadic distant and obsessive nature of the people, the confusions that includes the mind of a child in such an explosive milieu. Narayan also makes a quarry at the educational system too as visualized by the British masters. The use of the cane and corporal punishment, the heavy workload are all shown up by Narayan. These are the aspects which reflected the colonial period vividly.

Conclusion

Swami and Friends is more than the story of a child. It is the story of a generation of Indians who are born and brought up in the shadow of the British colonial Raj and who inherit the confusions of the cultural and social conflict. The novelist gives a negative picture of colonial authority and unambiguously shows that Narayan steadily speaks for India's freedom. It is clearly identified that Narayan was not a political writer and that he was not writing the novel as a political propaganda to accelerate the place of independence movement. He did as a politically conscious writer and he recorded the anti-British sentiment and the nationalist movement activities of the time. He has just shown in the novel how earnestly Indians were struggling for freedom as it is seen through children like swami were greatly affected by the nationalist movement. In this novel Narayan not only brings the life of school children and their growing up but also represents the contemporary history, pre independence struggle.

Works Consulted

1. Brians, Paul. "Modern South Asian Literature in English", Greenwood Press, Westport, Connecticut, London, 2003, Print.
 2. <http://www.wikipedia:colonialism.html>.
 3. Iyengar, Srinivasa. "Indian Writing in English", Sterling Publishers, 1987, Print.
 4. Narayan R. K. Swami and Friends. Mysore: Indian Thought Publication, 1964. Print.
 5. Naipaul,V.S. India: A wounded Civilization. London: Penguin Books, 1979. Print.
 6. Rajan,Gita. "Colonial Literature as Oppositional: R.K.Narayan's Secular Register". R.K. Narayan: Narayan, R.K. A Writer's Nightmare. New Delhi: Penguin, 1988. Print.
-