

**TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVE IN “SWAMI AND FRIENDS”****S. Parvathi Devi**Communication & Soft Skills Dept.
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Abstract

In molding different characters, taking the theme, delineating various situations, Traditional elements can be seen in “Swami and Friends” in R.K.Narayan, one of the most reputed Indian writer’s novel in English’s first published and most popular novel, which is set against the backdrop of Indian tradition and culture. The elements such as the portrayal of Indian family, dominating husband, submissive wife, innocent children with many inhibitions, the village environment - all these clearly manifest traditional perspective in the novel. The character of Swami, Mani, Pea and Sankars’ innocence is wonderfully portrayed in the novel.

Key words: Traditional environment, children, cricket, summer, affectionate

Swami

The protagonist of the novel and how he represents the element of tradition - Swami is the principal character of the novel. He is in I A. The boy is an average student and never concentrates on his studies. Arithmetic, English Literature, Scripture and History are the subjects that will be taught to students. He is interested in spending time with his friends Somu, Sankar, Mani and others. Generally he commits mistakes in his homework and is slow in his performance which infuriates his teachers, particularly his arithmetic teacher, the fire-eyed Vedanayagam. Usually the boy is reluctant to go to the school particularly on Monday mornings. He annihilates Arithmetic teacher as well as scripture teacher. Theirs is a team of four members. They have a dream to play cricket and win the cup. They plan to get the permission of their head

master and drill master to practice cricket in their last hour. In spite of getting permission they are seriously treated and swami voluntarily leaves the school with fear.

In traditional environment children do not dare to question parents, particularly fathers. Swami's father is strict and never allows the boy to join with undisciplined children roaming in the streets. Swami asks his father about the necessity of studying even in the summer.

“Should I read even when I have no school?”

“Do you think you have passed the B.A.?” Father asked.

“I mean, Father, when the school is closed, when there is no examination, even then should I read?”

“What a question! You must read.” (Swami and Friends p-83&84)

Swami is very sensitive and innocent and believes in friendship very strongly. He has been very much fascinated by Rajam, the police Inspector's son. Rajam is the representation of colonial power and modernity. At the end of the novel when Rajam has been leaving the vicinity of Malgudi and of course, the total place, it was a heart moving scene to Swami as well as to the readers. Swami feels morose and became frantic at the thought of losing a good friend. He has acquired a nick name also for being friendly with Rajam at the time of his new arrival at which the former disillusioned and a great brawl took place among the friends. All his old friends stopped talking to him and teasing him and Somu, Pea, Sankar and all of them were torturing the boy and trying to avoid him. being overwhelmed by the anger and frustration, Swami slapped pea and Sankar and soon there took place pandemonium. They have been rolling over tearing, scratching and kicking one another. Since the interval has been over, with the arrival of their teacher they have got separated and as the teacher is a pleasant personality, first of all Mani asked for permission and without being given the four boys go out of the class and reached a seclude place adjacent to their Albert Missionary School and started a fierce fight. puzzling Swami reached the school and able to bring the news to the notice of the Head Master. They have been easily got separated with the intervention of the latter about which Swaminathan falls into confusion about the strength of Somu and Mani whom he believes the mightiest in the world.

How Swami has been caught in the trap of school authorities and gets expelled- the quality of ostentation in traditional children: Swaminathan, a boy who has been brought up in traditional environment, with a sort of childlike innocence, confusion, not able to distinguish differences between fictitious stories and reality, make the boy believe everything foolishly. That is why he has been blamed by his friends as a tail of Rajam, since he falls in fascination of the latter, believing whatever he says. With his childlike imagination he wishes to prove that he has also been rich and worthy enough to befriend with him and invited him to his house. Swaminathan requests his father to allow him to use his father's room for a day so as to show it to Rajam ostentatiously. Then his father guffaws and sanctions his request.

“Father, I want your room.”

“What for?”

“I have to receive a friend,” Swaminathan replied.

“You have your own room,” Father said.

“I can’t show it to Rajam.”

“Who is this Rajam, such a big man?”

“He is the Police Superintendent’s son. He is.....he is not ordinary.”

“I see. Oh! Yes, you can have my room, but be sure not to mess up the things on the table.

“Oh, I will be very careful. You are a nice father, father.” (p-37)

He goes to his mother and requests her to make something very nice for the afternoon when Rajam has been visiting their house so as to show that theirs is an affluent and decent family. Mother tells that still there is time enough to think of afternoon’s tiffin. He begs his mother about it elucidating the importance of that day’s, Rajam’s visit and makes her get convinced. He proposes that at that time coffee should be very fine and special and he doesn’t want to come out of his room and their cook should bring the tiffin and snacks. He orders their cook not to come in dirty dhoti and he should wear a clean white dhoti and shirt.

“Mother, don’t make the sort of coffee that you usually give me. It must be very good and hot. He remembered everything how in Rajam’s house everything was brought to the room by the cook.”Mother, would you mind if I don’t come here for coffee and tiffin? Can you send it to my room? He turned to the cook and said,” Look here, you can’t come to my room in that dhoti. You will have to wear a clean and white dhoti and shirt.” (p-36)

The concept of unity between Swami and his friends: Even at the age of ten years, the concept of unity can be observed among children belonging to different families. Though they fight for trivial things such as calling with pet names, crazy about a European-looking boy, Rajam, they love and like one another a lot. Theirs is a team of four members namely, Somu, Mani, Sankar and Samuel, known as ‘the Pea’ on account of his size. (p-7) The former is the monitor, who carries himself with such an easy air. He never indulges in others matters and behaves with utmost confidence and calmness. He is treated as a chummy even with his friends. Swaminathan believes that even teacher cannot question him in relating to the academics which doesn’t mean that he is brilliant in studies. swami feels that only head master can reprimand him and more or less he is the uncle of the class. (p-6) Next one among those is Mani, the Mighty, Good-For-Nothing.(p-6) He scarcely brings books to the classes and bothered little about the homework. He even sleeps in the class and once when a new teacher tries to control him nearly loses his life. Being easily carried away by the tales Swaminathan asks Mani innocently how can he possess that much of energy and control over others. Mani replies indifferently that he has a pair of wooden clubs at his home and if anybody tampers with him he would break the backs of those. As everybody gets frightened of Mani in the class, Swami alone can address him as ‘Mani’ and pat him on the back familiarly. Sankar, the other among those is the most brilliant and according to Swami and others if he starts questioning, even the teachers can’t confront him. Some jealous students assert that he will get his ninety percent result just because of washing clothes at their masters’ houses. Grammar is a child’s play to him. He can repeat all the history even in his sleep.

Mani and Sankar become good friends and Mani feels how he can become very brilliant and why he even can't a bit of it. The last one among those is Samuel, "the Pea." He is neither outstanding intellect nor possesses muscle power. He is as apprehensive, weak and nervous as Swaminathan is. The thing that unites them is the laughter. They find absurdities and incongruities in surrounding things and laugh until they die. Eventually when he comes to know the departure of Swami, he can't imagine their friends circle without Rajam,, the most modern and clever boy according to Swami. has been frantically waving towards Rajam. Swami presents a book, which he loved most, to his friend. He enquires innocently whether Rajam could remember him. Mani assures that he would definitely remember him and even though in the hurry of moving train he couldn't talk to him he would definitely write to him. Swami's innocent questioning illustrates that he had been complexly a child brought up in the traditional backdrop.

"Swaminathan broke down and sobbed.

Mani said, "Don't be foolish Swami,"

"Does he ever think of me now?" Swaminathan asked hysterically.

Oh, yes, said, Mani. He paused and added: "Don't worry .If he has not talked to you, he will write to you."

"He will write to you." (p-184)

The unity and integrity between Mani and Swami can be found in these lines. They love a lot each other. In sophisticated and technologically highly developed world we can't see children with that much of affection.

He prefers playing happily in streets along with his other friends. He always goes to his mother and grand father and tries to get the support of those whenever he is in fear of facing his father. They readily support the boy. Once Swami's father stopped the boy from going outside to play with his friends and asked him to solve a small mathematical problem which involved fractions and multiplications. In spite of repeated efforts to solve the sum, the boy failed and severely punished that almost his ear has been reddened by being pinched by his father and the day ends with a lot of sorrow. In modern days of technology both the parents as well as managements do not like and encourage corporal punishment more over it is unlawful and those who does such things will be prosecuted.

Swami's life in Board High School is miserable he has to do a lot of homework and extra hours after 4.30 P.M. suffer the boy a lot. Swami has been joined in tuition where the boy enjoyed a lot. The teacher after explaining certain things will go home and eat something or do something. In the meanwhile the students will fight among themselves, some will cry. Some times they make hell of noise involving in so many mischievous things. Sometimes even the children go near to the kitchen and peep in to see what the master has been doing. Whenever he is found eating or helping something in cooking they laugh loudly and the master infuriates and beats the boys and threatens them not to come to him and he says angrily that that he was going to complain their parents about their mischievous deeds and ask them not to send which actually threatened the boys caused for the repentance.

Conclusion

R.K.Narayan's portrayal of traditional aspect with natural and efficacious manner attracts the reader to read and the researchers to research. Through the characters of Swaminathan, his father, mother and cook represent tradition throughout the novel. His realistic and subtle humoristic approach is indeed creditable and won many accolades through out the world. Swami, Shankar, Mani and the Pea are ambitious about winning reputation for their cricket team. They go for so many innovative proposals to make their match appreciable. Innocence, roughness, audacity in practicing the game, every element focuses traditional perspective.

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