

**R. K. Narayan's Novel Swami and Friends****Prof. Kumar Madar**Lecturer in English,  
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Karnataka, India**Abstract**

*This study has traced the evolution of the writer and his genius in character portrayal. It is noted that although Narayan enjoy a general critical consensus as a comic – ironist, his critics often register a note of dissent as regards his unchanging and undeveloping characters. It is also pointed out that the Forsterean terms (flat and round) the other western parameters and even the existing Narayan criticism, although helpful to a certain extent, remain inadequate to fully deal with the preordained conceived and traditionally realized Narayan characters. The spirit of place thus, seems to reveal itself not merely as the locale, setting, background or socio-geographical feature but also as the living presence in the meliece, the pattern of structure, the treatment of the themes, the presentation of characters and the expression of the world view of the novelist.*

**Keywords:** Life and Works, Objectives, Narayan's Swami and Friends and Characters.

**Introduction:**

India's greatest writer in English in the 20th Century "absolutely authentic sans pomposity", "A learn lucid and understated but wonderfully expressive style", "A writer's writer", such were the phrases used to describe the man who created the immortal town of Malgudi – R.K. Narayan

**Life and Works:**

Rasipuram krishnaswamiIyer Narayanswami was born in Chennai, India on October 10, 1906. His father, Rasipuram Venkatarama Krishnaswami Iyer, was a provincial head master. He was the third of eight surviving children. In South India, the given names are usually written last. His first name is homonym and his second name is a patronym. For this reason all of Narayan's brothers have the same first two names, see for example, R.K. Laxman. The writer become R.K. Narayan at the suggestion of Graham Greebe, who felt his full name was simply too long.

Narayan's mother Gnanambal was quite ill after his birth and enlisted a wet nurse to feed her young son when she become pregnant again, the two-year-old Narayan was sent to Madras to live with his maternal grandmother Pravati, who was called "Ammani". He lived with her and one of his uncles T.N. Seshachalam, until he was a teenager. He only spent a few weeks each summer visiting his parents and siblings. Narayan grew up speaking

Tamil and learned English at school. In his autobiography, My Days, Narayan writes of visiting his parents in Mysore and being unable to understand the shop beepers who spoke Kannada, a language he later learned.

**• Education**

After completing eight years of education at the Lutheran Mission school near his grandfather's house in Madras, he studied for a short time at the CRC High school. When his father was appointed headmaster of the Maharaja's High School in Mysore, Narayan moved back in with his parents. To his father's consternation, Narayan was an indifferent student and after graduating high school, he failed the college entrance exam in English because he found the primary textbook to be too boring to read. He took the exam again a year later and eventually obtained his bachelor's degree from the University of Mysore.

**• Purposive Writer**

Everyone thinks he's a writer with a mission. Myself absolutely not, I write only because I'm interested in a type of character and I'm amused mostly by the seriousness with which each man takes himself. I try to write from the inside, of even villain, and then see his point of view that's all some of identification. Their identity is recognized. I can't be hostile because I see it from his point of view. That's

why even if I write about a politician; it would be a justification for him (laughs).

Politics is the least interesting aspect of life, in my view. I don't attach too much importance to it as literary material because most politically inspired novels die in good time. They don't last. It's only the human elements which last, not the political concepts or the pressures. They become just insignificant.

Chennai, May 13. The renowned novelist, Mr. R.K. Narayan, died at a private hospital here in the early hours of Sunday. He was 95. He is survived by his brother, Mr. R.K. Laxman, famous cartoonist.

**Writing Style**

Narayan's novels are characterized by Chekhovian simplicity and gentle humor. He told stories of simple folks trying to live their simple lives in a changing world. The characters in his novels were very ordinary, down-to-earth Indians trying to blend tradition with modernization often resulting in tragicomic situations. His writing style was simple unpretentious and witty, with a unique flavor as if he were writing in the native tongue. Many of Narayan's works are rooted in everyday life, though he is not shy of invoking Hindu tales or traditional Indian folklore to emphasize a point. His easy-going outlook on life has sometimes been criticized, though in general he is viewed as an accomplished, sensitive and reasonably prolific writer.

**Research Methodology:**

The methods and approaches adopted for this research work will include the analytical, interpretative and comparative study in the research topic.

**Research Problem:**

Exploring the Vision of Indian Childhood to find out the social condition of contemporary period

**Objectives:**

1. To know the ironic vision of R.K.Narayan.
2. To know the R.K.Narayan's conscious on Indian life.
3. To know the childhood elements in the R.K. Narayan's novel Swami and Friends.
4. To explore the concept and content of his present novel Swami and friends.

**Awards and Recognition:**

Mr. Narayan won numerous awards and honours for his works. He won the National Prize of the SahityaAcadami, the Indian literary Acadami for

Padmabushan, a coveted Indian award, for distinguished Service to literature in 1964. In 1980 R.K. Narayan was awarded the AC Benson Medal by the Royal Society of literature. He was an honorary member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and letters in 1982 and nominated to the Rajya Shaba – the upper house of the Parliament of India – in 1989. In addition University of Mysore, Delhi University and the University of Leeds conferred honorary doctorates on him. He was awarded Padma Vibhushan in 2000.

**R. K. Narayan's Swami and Friends:**

Swami and friends had its genesis in September 1930 on Vijayadashami. The novel is largely autobiographical though the incidents are so filtered that personal is universalized. It local is a sleepy town – Malgudi, and its protagonist a lad – swami, studying in a primary school in the British era. The novel was published in 1935, a time colored with nationalist movements and anti – British sentiments. Swami's life has its little, blitzkrieg when he is fired with the Swadeshi zeal and goes about vandalizing his school rusticated from it. The novel is a paean to childhood - its innocence, bungling, friendship, breakups and its own non – duplicable unique world. Narayan is the greatest Indian writer who has marvelously crafted a world of childhood for his readers, a world to which each one of us relates irrespective of our national trajectories.

Meenakshi Mukherjee rightly says, "R. K. Narayan successfully achieves a universal vision through his non – metropolitan situation.

**Monday Morning; (The Exposition)**

The novel open with unpleasant Monday routines of Swaminathan, getting up in the morning, doing his home work, getting ready and going to Albert mission school. Character like swami's headmaster fire-eyed Vedanayagam, his History teacher D.Pillai known for his kindness. And his scripture masters Mr.Ebenezer a fanatic are introduced. It is in Scripture class his swami's blood is heated up, as his teacher criticizes his religious faith in Hinduism. It was British India and so Christianity was imposed on the students by teaching it as a subject (religious imperialism). But the Brahmin Swami did never accept Christianity as eating flesh and drinking wine was permitted in it, Swami's friends are also introduced – some the



monitor, Mani the mighty, good for nothing Shankar the most brilliant and Samuel the pea (based on his size).

- **Rajam and Mani**

River SARAYU the pride of Malgudi is introduced. It is here swami and his friends spend most of their leisure. Rajam a new student in their class who spoke English Exactly like a “European” was respected above all (English was to be feared and respected in British India). In addition he was police superintendent’s son. Thus Rajam was rival to Mani and so swami would act as a cord of communication between them. Soon they became good friends at the banks of Sarayu.

- **Swami’s Grandmother**

Swami spends most of his time with his granny (which is absent in today’s kids) and shares his admiration for his new friend Rajam. Soon the weekend comes and swami waits for his dad to leave and then sets out to meet his friends. He spends time at Rajam’s home with Mani. Rajam shows his attitude as superintendent’s son.

- **What is a Tail?**

Somu Shankar and Pea refuse to talk to swami and name him “tail”- a long thing that attaches itself to an ass or a dog referring to Rajam which upsets him. According to them, ‘how can everyone be a son of superintendent, swami’s attention But swami, being upset with his new name considered them to be enemies and thus could not enjoy. Rajam and Mani were absent when all this happened,

- **Father’s Room**

Rajam had promised swami that he would visit his house on Saturday. Swami desires to show his attitude as a lawyer’s son. He borrows his father’s room and pleads his mother to cook better than other days. Everything goes smoothly as he planned. Swami entering the class finds the word ‘tail’ written on the blackboard. A fight begins. Mani and Rajam appear and try to stop them. Mani is infuriated as he understands the issue and starts fighting with Somu.

- **A Friend in need**

A few days later Rajam invites Swami and Mani to his house promising them a surprise house. After gathering Rajam delivers a lecture on friendship and also warns them of the punishment for the ones who have ‘enemies’ as mentioned in that he

got for them. In this way ‘enemies’ become close friends. Swami’s mother Lakshmi is about to give birth and stays in her room and thus swami loses her food and attention. He sleeps with his granny. One fine day doctors and nurses appear at his house. The new baby ultimately arrives swami being excited shares about the ‘funny looking creature’ to his friends at school.

- **Before the examination**

The final examination is about to come and everyone started focusing on his studies. Swami’s father forces him to study (which happens at every home even today). He missed his chat with his granny and his fun time with his friends at the banks of Sarayu. He develops an interest in the new member of his family.

“Now a day’s beauty is taken for granted, yet we take time to notice it when it is uploaded to social media”. Swami was the only one still focusing on friendship while his friends shifted their focus to studies; Swami tries his best to study and starts practicing maps. He say “Europe was like a camel’s head” (Europe five sense animal’ – might be author’s voice, in British India) commenting on the shape of the content, and questing for the origin of maps.

- **Schools breaks up**

During the examination, swami writes short answers and completes his exam before his friends. After the exams vacations began with the final ‘prayer’. Students leave the campus with a lot of fun throwing ink on each other shirt that marks the colorful beginning.

- **Coachman’s son**

Vacations were boring for swami without a hoop (metal part of the cycle wheel to play with). He meets a coaching and requests a hoop and gets cheated. In the rage, swami and his friends kidnap the coachman’s son by showing him a colorful top (an object to play with). How he comes out to be wise enough to run away with it.

- **In his Presence**

Swami makes fun with his friends after his father leaves for the court. Soon vacation began for his father too and he forces his son to learn the previous year lessons It irritates swami. In the evening, his dad takes him swami to his club as a compensation for the morning torture.

**• Broken Panes**

There is a protest at the banks of Sarayu against the arrest of Gauri Shankar, a prominent political leader of Bombay. Swami's which it is said "let every Indian spit on England and the quantity of Saliva will be enough to drown England (author's voice – shows the anger thought it appears to mean also the fact that Europe can be defeated anytime by Indians).

**• The MCC**

Swami is admitted to Board High School, His friend Shankar leaves the town. His friend circle Shankar and is limited to Rajam and Mani. Rajam visits swami as he had forgiven him and inquires about his new school. Swami talks his Muslim classmate Akbar Ali who irritates Rajam because he is a Hindu. Rajam treats Muslims as his enemies because they destroyed their temples and tortured them (Hindu Muslim dispute is one of the unsolved issues till date). Rajam's dad was a Brahmin but his didn't participate in religious ceremonies (he was in the process of assimilating the western principles). His family did not intervene in the political affairs as his father was a government servant. Rajam plans to start a cricket team (imperialism, of Indians). MCC (Malgudi Cricket club) is made the name of their team. Soon the issue of tax comes up. "The government seems to tax everything in the world", is the omniscient comment in the text (Tax were collected from Indians). They start making a list of materials that their team requires.

**• Swami Disappears**

After meeting Rajam he runs off into a forest. Soon he feels homesick and decides to return back home but loses his way. He really suffers from delirium. On the other side his parents are worried and search for him everywhere. Swami he faints, he is rescued by a traveler and is taken to the forest officer. He doesn't even know that it is the day of the match.

**• The Return**

The forest officer sends a letter to Rajam's father, and also informs Rajam about it but he acts indifferent towards the issue as he is worried that his team was losing because of swami's absence. Soon swami is brought back to home. All his relatives come to meet him, but swami's heart longs for his friends. Mani comes to meet him and it is through

him he gets to know that the match is over and their team lost. This grieves swami because he did all this only for that match and for his friend and now he lost both.

**• Parting present**

Swami learns from Mani that Rajam is leaving Malgudi as his father has been transferred. Swami is upset because his friend is leaving him with anger. He sets out to meet Rajam at the railway station with a book to gift him. The station is crowded with men in uniform. He and Mani cannot get near Rajam. As the train starts moving swami runs with a hope and apologizes to Rajam. Before he could utter a word the train leaves but he succeeds in giving the gift Rajam. However he is never fully convinced.

R.K.Narayan covered all the political issues with a safer theme of friendship. Here lies the intelligence of the writer.

**Swami's Friends**

Swami had a lot of friends but he limited himself to Rajam and Mani.

**• The character of Rajam**

Rajam was the guy with an endearing personality. He is smarter and grown-up than Mani. He believes in self-respect. Rajam is very sincere in academics. He likes assisting or helping his friends in academics. Mani possesses a propensity for domination amongst every one of his age but Rajat didn't feel that within him. In fact, Rajam tries to put forward a hand for friendship with Mani.

**• The character of Mani**

and on the other hand, Mani never brings books to school or submits his homework on time. He is completely opposite to Rajam in the field of academics. In fact, he is also known for sleeping bravely in the class. Mani always sits on the last bench of the class.

Mani reckoned Rajam as his enemy as he is jealous of his lifestyle. Unlike Rajat, Mani comes from a very poor family. His parents hardly afford to pay his schooling expenses. During the enmity, Swami acted as a middleman in delivering the pieces of chats to each other. Mani is fond of dominating the entire class of his power. He likes bullying his juniors and also some his classmates. He is tagged as the hero of his class. Mani is a very weak student



academically. He is superstitious and believes in ghost.

#### • **Swami's Teachers**

Vedanayakam was Swami's class teacher. He was also the Head Master of the school. He scourges Swami for doing arithmetic sums wrong. This is the reason why Swami hates doing arithmetic.

Besides, he likes his history teacher, Pillai. He is portrayed as a very kind person.

Swami once came on bad terms with the teacher of Scripture Class, Ebenezer. He keeps on praising the holiness of Jesus. Swami felt really exasperated for this. Moreover, he also called Krishna as the Arch Scoundrel as he stole butter and danced with girls. In response to that, Swami asks his teacher, on why did Jesus ate flesh and wine. The teacher pinched Swami on his left ear for putting forward his question.

#### • **Innocence of youth**

The innocence of youth is the fundamental theme of Swami and Friends. Swaminathan and his friends are 10 years- old at the beginning of the story, and are prone to all the typical behaviors of young children: they are fascinated with toys; they daydream in class; they take their families for granted, and they disdain schoolwork. Rather than plotting or planning out their adventures with deliberate intention, these boys participate in the risk – taking and spontaneous mischief characteristic of young children. At their youthful age, they are not yet fully equipped to understand the world around them, the class difference that already work to inevitably divide them, or to understand the repercussions of their actions.

#### **The Friction of British – Colonial Rule**

Swami and Friends opens in the year 10, which is precisely seventeen years before India gained independence from its British administration. With this in mind R.K. Narayan's first book is set right at the height of British colonial rule. Mr. Ebenzar's bigoted lectures against Hinduism in the opening chapter are our first originals of this growing cultural friction much like the colonial British authorities. Mr. Ebenzar is Christian, and he berates the Hindus of Swaminathan's Biblical scripture class with the mocking contempt of intrinsic, colonial bias. Later in the book this cultural friction moves from the classroom to the streets of

Malgudi when British authorities arrest the prominent Indian politician, Gauri Shankar. In the angry violent and destructive mob scene that follows this arrest and in Swaminathan's own belligerent participation the friction between colonized and colonizer not only illustrates the established order.

#### • **Friendship**

Friendship is the main theme in the novel Swami and Friends. He has Swami was not an extraordinary character like all the other boys of his age. He likes spending time with his companions'. Mani is Swaminathan's best friend. Swami's family is comfortable in the sense of finance as a lawyer. But Mani isn't. His family lives in poverty. He is not backbencher. Even though he is fainthearted and timid he becomes aggressive and undisciplined at times with all his companions, Mani stand be the strongest and Rajam's life is the complete opposite of Mani. He is sincere in his academics and has self-respect. The author portrayed him with a towards Rajam as he was living a rich lifestyle and feels Rajam to be doing showoffs. But later, Rajam solves this problem and he forwards his hand of friendship to him. He also invited them to his home which played a vital role in suppressing the enmity. Apparently Rajam justifies everything with a concrete reason. On the other hand Mani was smart enough to accept his friendship.

#### • **Cricket in life**

The rest of the novel deals with cricket and the match which was played and lost swami had to be absent in the drill class for which he gave various excuses. When the Head master exposes him and punishes him, Swami runs away to Madras, but collapse on the outskirts of Malgudi. This is followed by prayers and offerings to gods if they descend from their heights and rescues him. Finally Swami returns home.

#### **Conclusion:**

In the preceding chapter an attempt has been made to analyse the typology of the characters that R.K. Narayan has created in his novels. In the process, this study has traced the evolution of the writer and his genius in character portrayal. It is noted that although Narayan enjoy a general critical consensus as a comic – ironist, his critics often register a note of dissent as regards his unchanging and undeveloping characters. It is also pointed out

that the Forsterean terms (flat and round) the other western parameters and even the existing Narayan criticism, although helpful to a certain extent, remain inadequate to fully deal with the preordained conceived and traditionally realized Narayan characters.

It is stressed that the protagonist in Narayan's novels, imbibing the spirit of their creator as the faithful follower of the sacrosanct tradition, seem to have been precluded from growth, at least in the material plane of realization, as most of them, in the final analysis, seem to accept the norms and the codes of the society. Since rebellion in the sacrosanct tradition is interpreted as deviation or aberration, the so called rebels (taken as the deviants) in Narayan's novels almost invariably with from their rebellion and return to the world of the ordinary life of sanity. Most importantly, the apparently unchanging protagonist seems to have no other go but to remain flat.

It is also underlined that the undeveloped protagonists in Narayan's novels unmistakably suggest the growth in their consciousness, especially as they seem to realize the illusory nature of their existence (at the end of the novel they are seen returning to the world of normal life). This subtle growth, mainly realized on the mental or spiritual plan of meaning, may not be measured by the parameters mentioned earlier. It is at this that the present typological approach comes into being as a framework, primarily conceived to realize the typical characters in Narayan's novels.

The character – oriented approach considers four major types of the Narayan character formed on the basis of their overall nature. It may also be noted that the typological games – innocence, rebellion, eccentricity and sanyasa – seem to accommodate most of the major and minor characters in Narayan's novels. It may also be stressed that although the types focused in the present study show an unmistakable kinship with the well known types considered by Ben Jonson, Forster, Scholes and Kilgob and Northrop Frye, they basically have a typically Narayanesque stamp or realization. It may be worthwhile to underline the characteristic feature of each typological operation to see how far it fulfils the three tier purpose and finally to deduce certain overall conclusions emerging out of it.

Significantly most of the characters in Narayan's novels with their umbilical frame likened to a large joint family. Each typological frame has been realized through its distinct family trait. Thus, the characters in the first typological family seem to share the common trait of innocence. Although every Malgudi character has a nuclear innocence, the first family has only those characters that are primarily realized through innocence. Understandably the children characters happens to be first to be dealt with. The typological study reveals that most of the children characters, especially in *Swami and Friends* have been realized for their commonly known trait of innocence viewed in the sense of "divine innocence". *Swami and Friends* being the only full – fledged study of childhood innocence has been dealt with underlining all the shades of like naive ignorance at all. The typology has also noted that the novelist seems to project innocence through the brahmacharyaashrama. Excepting Swaminathan in *Swami and Friends*, most of the children play secondary roles. In the final analysis, most of them are treated ironically (creating a kind of innocent humor) and are realized as flat characters. Most importantly Narayan employs the strategy of rite passage to suggest a subtle realization (and growth) in *Swami and Friends*.

R.K. Narayan's novels are known as the Malgudi novels because all the characters find their existence in Malgudi and human relationships are presented by Narayan within the limits of Malgudi. The locale Malgudi in Narayan's fictional corpus remains the element of great importance and it is the real force in the presentation of his characters. Malgudi is ceaselessly presented in the novels by R.K. Narayan and becomes a real character of blood and flesh. The place Malgudi watches the sudden rise and fall of its heroes and heroines. According to importance to natural landscapes and natural beauty R.K. Narayan values the human emotion and passion.

The important places in Malgudi town are linked with characters and action of the novel. In the early novels i.e the river Sarayu is on the local level just like of the holy river Ganga because it is believed that the river is born of a scratch made by Rama's arrow on his way to Lanka. The mythological story mentions that Goddess Parvati had jumped into the fire and water arose from the

spot. On the banks of the sacred river Sarayu, friendships are made in 'The Swami and Friends'.

In the final analysis, these approaches to the handling of the setting will establish the fact that Malgudi is the only character that grows, changes reacts to time and circumstances and constitutes the real essence or the spirit of the novel as practiced by Narayan. The place Malgudi in Narayan's fiction is given a new dimension and significance and it has become necessary element of Narayan's novels. The spirit of place thus, seems to reveal itself not merely as the locale, setting, background or socio-geographical feature but also as the living presence in the meliece, the pattern of structure, the treatment of the themes, the presentation of characters and the expression of the world view of the novelist.

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