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Inauthentic Involvement in Swami and Friends (1935)

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ABSTRACT

The paper applies at depicting inauthentic involvement in Swami and Friends in which many characters are inauthentic in one way or the other. The protagonist Swami is inauthentic in his role of a student as he spoils his student life due to his inauthentic involvement with Rajam and Mani. Rajam is second inauthentic character as he leaves Swami in depression only at his single mistake of not turning up for the match in time. Similarly Swami's father and mother are inauthentic in the role of responsible father and mother. Mr. Ebenezar is another minor inauthentic character in the role of a teacher.

KEYWORDS

R.K. Narayan's first novel *Swami and Friends (1935)*, first of his early novels, is the story of a nine-year old school boy, Swaminathan, who is full of innocence, wonder, and mischief. The novel depicts a series of juvenile incidents and experiences of Swaminathan while growing up in the fictional town of Malgudi. Human relationships in Narayan are studied on sociological, political and economic levels. R.K. Narayan presents human relationships in Indian society and his characters are typically Indian despite their strangeness. The present research paper aims at presenting inauthentic involvement in *Swami and Friends*. Many characters in the novel are inauthentic in one way or the other. The main inauthentic characters are Swami, Rajam, Swami's father and mother.

The central concern of the novel is Swami's inauthentic involvement with Rajam. All other incidents in the novel take place as a result of this involvement. Swami has four friends in Albert Mission School in Malgudi. They are Somu, the monitor; Mani, the tallest boy; Sankar, the brilliant boy and Samuel, the Pea. He likes and admires them in his class. But his deepest relationship is with Mani among four friends till a fresh arrival Rajam takes admission in their class. He impresses the whole class on the very first day. He comes to the school in a car and speaks English like a European. Mani considers him his rival as he returns Mani a jab in the ribs on the first day. P.S. Sundaram describes:

"A fresh arrival Rajam, son of the Superintendent of Police, makes a notable impact on the class, upsets Mani by dislodging him from his eminence as the uncrowned king of his form, and takes possession of Swaminathan's heart". (Sundaram 15)

One evening, Swami and Mani are sitting on a river-step. Mani tells Swami that he will throw Rajam into the river. Swami advises him to keep out of the way of Rajam as his father is the Police Superintendent. Mani tells that he is not a coward like him. He warns Swami to keep him away from Rajam. Swami tells that he hates Rajam and there is no comparison between Rajam and Mani. This pleases Mani greatly. Here Swami shows inauthentic involvement as he tells a lie to Mani though Mani has been a close friend to him. Thus he lacks sincerity and commitment in his friendship with Mani.

One day, Rajam and Mani start quarrelling through Swami. But Rajam comes with a gun and fires a shot in the air. He warns Mani that the next shot would be in his body. Mani surrenders to Rajam. Rajam offers for friendship which Mani accepts. Swami feels happy when Rajam lowers his gun and Mani drops his club because he wanted Rajam's friendship. Here one finds that Swami wastes time in idle activities with Mani and Rajam. He lacks resolution and determination towards his actual work of study. Thus he is inauthentic in the role of a student as one finds throughout the novel.

Swami's increasing friendship with Rajam destroys his relations with his old friends: Somu, Sankar, and the Pea. One day Rajam and Mani are not in the school. Swami wants to play with Somu and company, but they don't allow him to play with themselves. They make fun of him by calling him 'Rajam's Tail'. Swami gets a mental shock to think how his friends have turned into his enemies. He is astonished at the change in their behaviour. But his attachment with Rajam is such that he thinks: "What was wrong in liking and going about with Rajam? Why did it make them so angry?" (*Swami and Friends* 35)

Thus we find that Rajam takes possession of Swami's heart and this friendship creates friction between his earlier friends. But here one should also remember that Swami's relation with his earlier friends lacks sincerity and so it suffers only at the entry of Rajam, a new arrival. Thus Swami's involvement with earlier friends proves inauthentic as they start moving away from him.

Swami's attachment to Somu, Sankar, and the Pea ceases during vacation, but his attachment to Rajam and Mani, which is more human, continues even during school break. Swami, Mani and Rajam find the noon and the afternoon the most fascinating part of the day in the vacation. There is no effect of Sun on their wandering. Sometimes they pass their time by teasing the cart driver going nearby. Here again one finds that all vacation time is wasted in idle activities of wandering here and there in the heat of summer. Thus Swami's involvement with Rajam and Mani proves inauthentic because he doesn't dedicate his mind towards study, but only in enjoying.

The civil disobedience movement affects Malgudi on the 15th of August 1930. Swami reaches school and finds that there is a strike. The student mob is crying slogans of patriotism. The headmaster is appealing to the boys to go to their classes quietly, but they boycott classes and start breaking windows and other school furniture with stones in which Swami also takes part. Thus we find that Swami gets along with the crowd not by thinking, only by involving and this involvement soon proves inauthentic for him. Jayant K. Biswal comments:

"The children's participation in the Freedom movement without any mature understanding of the problem is manifested in the burning of clothes and breaking of glass panes in the schools. (Biswal 35)

After destroying the Board School, the crowd comes in the centre of Market Road. The D.S.P., Rajam's father, comes with fifty constables to disburse the mob and orders to charge. Swami joins group of panic-stricken runners. His knees are badly skinned. He also falls in front of a shop while running. Sarbani Putatunda comments:

"The Indian freedom movement had overpowering impact upon the consciousness of all the common citizens of our country. And even the school boys were not exempted from the tide. (Putatunda 161)

Next day, the headmaster asks all those boys to stand on the benches who were absent the previous day and to offer explanations one by one. When Swami's turn comes, he keeps quiet. The headmaster canes him again and again till his eyes are filled with tears. But suddenly: "He restrained the tears that were threatening to rush out, jumped down, and, grasping his books, rushed out muttering, "I don't care for your dirty school." (*Swami and Friends* 125)

Thus, Swami has to leave Albert Mission School due to his involvement in strike. His father admits him to the Board High School. There is no contact of Swami with Somu and company now. But he is still in contact with Rajam and Mani. Mani meets him every-day. Rajam tells him that he himself is responsible for leaving Albert Mission to which Swami agrees. Thus we find that Swami is deeply attached to Rajam. He agrees with him instantly without any argument because he craves for his friendship. We also find that the same eagerness is not found in Swami's heart for Mani, though Mani has same liking for Swami as for Rajam.

Rajam suggests Swami to form a cricket team. When Swami tells that he doesn't know how to play, Rajam encourages him saying that he himself doesn't know to play cricket. Then they work to decide the name of the team and to register it. After much labour, they name it M.C.C. (Malgudi Cricket Club). Now the involvement of three friends is based on their infatuation for cricket. They forget all other things and dream only about playing cricket as soon as their supply of cricket material reaches. Sarbani Putatunda comments:

"Cricket, which has proved its worth in Indian games and sports ever since pre-independence era, covers a considerable part of the novel. It controls the activities, aspirations and fallacy of Swaminathan and his friends. (Putatunda 163)

Rajam is made the captain of the team. Rajam chooses other players from his class to form M.C.C. eleven. They start playing cricket in a ground adjoining Rajam's bungalow. Swami bowls first ball and Rajam is bowled out. All the players give him the title 'Tate' on the spot and thus M.C.C. starts playing cricket.

Rajam and company play cricket regularly in the evening, only Swami is not regular. Swami reaches late for cricket practice in the evening due to his drill class in Board High School. Rajam asks him the reason of coming late. Swami tells him about drill class. In fact, Swami reaches ground when all the players are tired and the sun is about to set. This becomes the general routine for him.

This attachment and inauthentic involvement for cricket makes Swami to forget his study and books. His primary concern is only for cricket and that is too for Rajam whom he likes passionately. There is just a week in the match. Swami doesn't think of drill class and reaches the field in time. On Friday, the headmaster comes with the cane in hand. He beats Swami on his hand and uses cane again and again. Swami's emotion gets changed into rage; he plucks the cane from the headmaster's hand and throws it out of the window. He takes his books and runs out of the room, climbs the school gate and leaves the school. John Thieme comments:

"Swami attends Malgudi's Board School, where he becomes involved in a similar confrontation with the headmaster, when he seeks to be let out early in order to attend cricket practice with his friends, who have formed the 'M.C.C.', the Malgudi Cricket Club." (Thieme 29)

Due to fear of his father, Swami decides to run away to Madras. Swami loses his way after leaving Malgudi. At night he finds himself in the forest and doesn't become able to return to Malgudi though he tries much. Swami is brought back to his home next evening. In the evening, Mani comes to meet him. Swami tells him the whole story. Mani relates to him that the M.C.C. has lost the match to the Y.M.U. Swaminathan asks about Rajam. Mani tells him that Rajam thinks that Swami has ruined the M.C.C. Mani tells him: "Rajam says a lot, which I don't wish to repeat. But I will tell you one thing. Never appear before him. He will never speak to you. He may even shoot you on sight." (*Swami and Friends* 204)

Mani tells Swami that he should have told Rajam before going away. Swaminathan weeps and requests Mani to pacify Rajam. He also asks him to convey his attachments and love to Rajam. Swami is confident that Rajam will be all right after meeting him

Ten days later, Mani gives Swami the news that Rajam is leaving Malgudi on next morning as his father has been transferred to Trichonopoly. Mani also tells him that Rajam has forbidden him to tell about it to Swami. All of a sudden, Swami feels his life blank without Rajam. He can't think of a world without Rajam, though he has not met Rajam even once after his return. Mani tells him that Rajam's train is leaving at six the next day.

Next morning, Swami reaches Malgudi station with a neat, tiny book to present it to Rajam and bid him good-bye. He finds Rajam unapproachable. There are police officers and policemen all around. He also feels inferior and small. Swami sees Mani and asks him to present the book to Rajam. Swami asks Mani if Rajam will not speak to him. Swami cries to Rajam when he will come back. Rajam keeps looking at him without saying anything. The train begins to move. Swami requests Mani to give book to Rajam saying that it is from Swami. Rajam waves a farewell by his hand, Swami waves back. P.S. Sundaram comments:

"The central event in Swami's boyhood is his passionate love for Rajam. Without meaning it and merely as a victim of circumstance, he betrays his friend in his greatest need. He is not allowed to explain. He gives the most valuable of his possessions as a parting gift, but he is by no means sure that the gift will wash out the guilt and his friendship will be restored." (Sundaram 22)

Swami tries to console him that Rajam has taken the book. He asks Mani if Rajam has waved to him and he breaks down weeping. Mani tries to pacify him that Rajam will write to him. He also tells him that he has given Swami's address to Rajam. When Swami asks what his address is, Mani's face exposes reality. Thus the novel ends leaving Swami and Mani together in each other company without Rajam. Mani proves himself a true friend as he soothes weeping Swami. He even tells lies to pacify him.

The second major character who plays inauthentic role in the novel is Rajam, a fresh arrival in Swami's school. All students are impressed with him as he comes to school in a car and is fluent in English speaking. Soon he takes possession of Swami's heart due to his qualities. In the beginning, he finds himself in tussle with Mani, but at last Mani has to surrender himself to Rajam. Swami's attachment with Rajam creates friction with his earlier friends Somu, Sankar and the Pea. Rajam,

due to his leadership qualities, plays a positive role to end differences between the friends. This personality of Rajam brings Swami and Mani close to Rajam as he proves them that he is the leader.

Rajam forms Malgudi Cricket Club (M.C.C.) with Swami and friends. After some practice, they fix a match with Y.M.U. Rajam is captain of M.C.C. and wants to win the match against Y.M.U. in every condition. He helps all the boys to prepare themselves for the match. Swami is main bowler for M.C.C. but Rajam feels that Swami is getting less practice.

One evening, Rajam warns Swami that he is neglecting the game by having no practice. Swami tells him about the headmaster. Rajam decides to meet the headmaster the next day. Mani offers to go with him. Rajam enters headmaster's room and Swami is compelled to accompany him. He requests headmaster to permit Swami to leave school after four thirty so that he may do some practice as a bowler. He also gives the example of Albert Mission where students are exempted from drill if they play games. The headmaster orders them to get out of the room.

The M.C.C.'s challenge for cricket match is accepted by Young Men's Union. The match is to be played on Sunday two weeks later. Rajam feels confident that his team will defeat Y.M.U. But he thinks about Swami day and night, who is the Tate of the team. He arrives at the field when darkness has fallen. Rajam requests Swami to have one hour practice in the evenings due to which Swami has to miss his drill class. When he is punished by headmaster, he leaves the school and runs away from home due to afraid of his father.

M.C.C. loses the match in absence of Swami. Rajam feels the lack of a clever bowler. During the match, Rajam's father informs him about Swami. He feels that he has no interest in Swaminathan. About the ending of the novel, John Thieme writes:

"The novel ends in anti-climax, in another respect, as Rajam, the most 'English' of Swami's friends leaves Malgudi and there is no comfortable healing of the rift that has opened up between the two boys as a result of Swami's letting the side down." (Thieme 30)

Thus Rajam's involvement with Swami proves inauthentic as he forgets his friend Swami only at his single mistake while Swami is authentic in his friendship towards Rajam. He takes part in cricket club and also leaves his school but unfortunately is not able to turn for the match. This annoys Rajam and he leaves Swami without talking to him. In fact, Rajam's heart is not committed and determined towards his friendship with Swami. The irony is that he even doesn't talk to Swami when he goes leaving Malgudi perhaps forever due to transfer of his father. In fact, he has made up his mind tough against Swami after losing the match. He doesn't say anything when Swami cries to him when he will come back. Thus we find that Rajam proves himself an inauthentic character as for as the involvement with Swami is concerned.

The other inauthentic characters in the novel are Swami's father and his mother. His father is a lawyer while his mother is a housewife. Swami's father is hard towards him and so he feels glad when he is not at home. Swami leaves home to wander as soon as his father goes. He persuades his mother by giving excuses. Thus the mother has little control over the child. Thus she is not able to act as a true mother as she doesn't take full responsibility and freedom in the role of the mother towards Swami. This inauthentic involvement of mother affects Swami's student life. Examination days also have an effect on Swami. He has to stay at home because his father has forbidden him to go out till the examinations are over. He waits thinking that this ban is only for one week. Two days before his examination, he prepares his examination material list to show to his father. He is afraid of his father and has to cough twice to show his list.

In fact, this harsh and rude behavior of father plays a negative role in Swami's development. Father's behaviour towards small baby and his wife is also hard, due to which Swami is not able to disclose his problems to his father. Even mother doesn't take proper care of him. Hence Swami's interest increases in Rajam and Mani, his friends, to whom he can share his problems. P.S. Sundaram comments about Swami's mother:

"His mother will not let him go out in the sun, but otherwise gives most of her attention to the new-born baby. The baby himself is an interloper who has come between Swami and mother." (Sundaram 16)

Swami's enjoyment during vacation is disturbed because his father's courts are closed in second week of May. He has to spend the afternoons at home. He asks Swami to read his books. Swami tells that his father has said that he will not have to read after the examination is over. But father doesn't heed to his remarks. Swami has to dust his books. He remains thinking about Rajam and Mani, waiting for him. Father gives him a sum to solve. Swami solves it in half an hour that too with many hints from his father. P.S. Sundaram comments about Swami's father:

"His father is busy most of the time, stingy in the matter of pocket-money, and mindful of Swami only in insisting that he should study and do sums even in the vacation after the examinations are over." (Sundaram 16)

In the evening time, father takes Swami with him when he goes to play tennis. Swami feels a pleasant state of mind but only till he sees the coachman's son acting as play boy. After this his mind is filled with fear until he reaches home, but he doesn't tell his father about this. Thus there is a long gap between father and son though father shows some signs of attachment during court holidays when he finds time, but it is not enough to erase his already existing image in mind of Swami.

Swami sits under a tree to collect his thoughts. He has left two schools in this style and there is no more school in Malgudi. Then he thinks about his father:

"His father would not allow him to remain in the house if he did not go to school. He might beat him. He would neither go home that day nor on any other day. He could not face his father." (*Swami and Friends* 172)

Due to fear of his father, Swami decides to run away to Madras. Swami starts running on a new track leaving his family in Malgudi thinking about his stubborn father and cruel headmaster. P.S. Sundaram comments:

"The reason why Swami is led to his thoughtless betrayal is that there is no one either at home or in the school whom he can trust, of whose love he is absolutely assured. His teachers are callous, his father a terror, his mother indifferent, his grandmother weak and old." (Sundaram 22)

Swami's missing from home and Malgudi make his family restless. All family members think that the father's rude behaviour is the main cause of this. Swami's father feels ashamed of himself. He searches him everywhere. Granny and his wife hold him responsible for Swami's disturbance. He reviews his behaviour with his son and feels himself blameless. But we find that both father and mother are inauthentic in their roles. Father doesn't carry the responsibility of being a father and proves him inauthentic. Mother also lacks the sincerity in her role and hence she is also inauthentic.

The other inauthentic character in the novel is Mr. Ebenezar, scripture master in Swami's school. Swami is a student of Albert Mission School in Malgudi. Being an average student, he finds Monday morning unpleasant to go to school after the break of two days. Swami is a Brahmin boy and being a Hindu, his tender mind is involved and filled with Hindu philoso-

phy. P.K. Singh comments:

"Swami lives in an English ruled atmosphere of Malgudi. He is sent for education in the Albert Mission School where teachers are apt to convert their boys into Christian and are all the time insulting Hindu Gods." (Singh 10)

Swami doesn't like when his scripture master, Mr. Ebenezar, who is a fanatic criticizes Sri Krishna and praises Jesus. Swaminathan asks teacher why Jesus was crucified and why did he eat flesh and fish. At this the teacher tries to wrench his left ear off.

Swami tells this incident to his father who writes a letter to headmaster. The headmaster asks Ebenezar and Swami about the incident in his office. He advises Swami to come to him before going to his father. Thus one finds that a small boy of eight years old takes this step only because his mind doesn't accept Ebenezar's remarks because it has involvement and affinity for his religion, Hinduism, in which he has been brought up. Similarly Ebenezar's views about Hinduism show inauthenticity as his own religion makes him to behave inauthentically towards his criticism of Sri Krishna. He forgets his actual responsibility of teaching which he has chosen himself and gets involved in the task of lampooning Hindu gods. Thus his involvement towards his profession is inauthentic as he lacks resolution, determination, freedom and responsibility in the role assigned to him.

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