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Endorsement of freedom in R.K Narayan's Swami and Friends

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Abstract

Freedom is God's most precious gift to man. Freedom is understood as either having the ability to act or change without constraint or to possess the power and resources to fulfill one's purposes. In a present literary article, the author has put forward an argument that in 'Swami and Friends'(1935), R. K. Narayan, not only reinforced the idea of freedom from the clutches of Britishers, but he also heralded the notion of personal freedom, discriminating, what to opt in varying circumstances, as this sort of mentality offered by various characters in the novel. The novel has its setting in pre-independence India when colonialism was exercised on Indian people. Colonialism is the way to put certain restrictions on the people of particular nation, in which colonialism is exercised. Postulation has been provided with supportive evidences by quoting and acknowledging multiple works. An attempt has been made to examine the strands of freedom which are upheld by R.K. Narayan throughout the novel. The novel 'Swami and Friends' published in 1935, was first novel in the trilogy. Others are 'The Bachelor of Arts' and 'The English Teacher'. R.K. Narayan is called an anti-colonial writer because of his anti-colonial propaganda and subaltern voices which he has introduced in his novels. R.K. Narayan always been a supporter of the cause of freedom. In his novels he has demonstrated the multiple implications of freedom. Freedom for him can be subjected from various forms of life which a character manifests through the voice of protest and freedom can have objective implications in broader sense for larger group who protest to avail it from different ethnic group. Similar thought patterns of freedom are reflected in 'Waiting for Mahatma'(1955), Post-independence novel by R.K. Narayan.

Keywords: Freedom, endorsement, colonialism, domination, subaltern voice

Introduction

According to Swami Vivekananda "freedom is attained by the threefold means of work, worship and knowledge. (a) Work- constant, unceasing effort to help others and love others (b) Worship- consists in prayer, praise and meditation (c) Knowledge that follows meditation" A scholarly article written by S. Savitha, published in International Journal of Linguistics and Literature (IJLL), Vol.4, Issue 4, June-July 2015, she says "two novels of Narayan touch quite specifically on the struggle for freedom. One is first novel he produced before independence, Swami and Friends, and the other a novel he produced after independence: Waiting for Mahatma". As the novel 'Swami and Friends' opens Narayan commences the novel, upholding the very idea of freedom. According to Narayan freedom may have manifold implication. He says "It was Monday morning, Swaminathan was reluctant to open his eyes. He considered Monday especially unpleasant in the calendar. After the delicious freedom of Saturday and Sunday, 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 fire-eyed Vedanayagam, his class teacher; and the headmaster with his thin long cane (page-1)". W.S. Swaminathan aspires for freedom as Rusty yearns in The Room on the Roof by Ruskin Bond. The disparity is Rusty wants to cast aside his guardian Mr. Harrison's (a missionary) stern restriction to avoid contact with Indian influence. He is forced to nurture himself with English values but on the other hand Swaminathan does not pass through such constraints but the very hypothesis of going school rattled him. As Rusty finds freedom with his new Indian friends Somi and Ranvir and have a sensation of unchecked jubilation away from uninterrupted superintendence of his troublesome guardian, corresponding to Rusty is Swaminathan with regard to friendship to his friends.

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He revels on the bank of river Saryu (the pride of Malgudi) with his friend Mani, legs dangling in water. Freedom for R.K Narayan in prevailing novel is not only freedom from colonial rule of Britishers but he also spotlight individual freedom. For instance Rajam and Swami starts a cricket club but Swami's headmaster does not allow him to leave class early for practicing cricket match, abducting his personal freedom. When a confirmed match is scheduled, Swami entreats to his new headmaster to acknowledge him to leave class early but he turns down his entreaty. Stalwart Swaminathan proceeds to a doctor and asks him to produce a fabricated note concerning his deteriorating health. At last he is hammered by headmaster and throw out from the school. His friends communicates a news to him that they are defeated in the match, disconcerted Rajam announces the end of their friendship. From the very initial phase of the novel, Narayan attempts to give a boost to the idea of freedom when Britishers endeavor to impose Christianity on Indian people, disparaging Hindu religion. "The scripture period was the last in the morning. It wasn't such a dull hour after all. There were moments in it that brought stirring pictures before one: The Red Sea cleaving and making way for the Israelites; the physical feats of Samson; Jesus rising from the grave; and so on. The only trouble was that the scripture master, Mr. Ebenezer, was a fanatic. "Oh, wretched idiots!" the teacher said clenching his fists. "Why do you worship dirty, lifeless, wooden idols and stone images? Can they talk? No. Can they bless you? No can they take you to heaven? No. Why? Because they have no life. What did your gods do when Muhammad of Gazni smashed them to pieces, trod upon them, and constructed out of them steps for the lavatory? If those idols and images had life, why did not they parvy Muhammad's onslaughts?" He then turned to Christianity. "Now see our Lord Jesus. He could cure the sick, relieve the poor, and take us to heaven; the kingdom of heaven is within us "Tears rolled down Ebenezer's cheeks when he pictured Jesus before him. Next moment his face became purple with rage as he thought of Shri Krishna: "Did our Jesus go about stealing butter like that arch-scoundrel Krishna? Did our Jesus practice dark tricks on those around him? He paused for breath. The teacher was intolerable today. Swaminathan's blood boiled. He got up and asked, "If he did not, why was he crucified? The teacher told him that he might come to him at the end of the period and learn it in private. Emboldened by this mild reply, Swaminathan asked him another question," if he was a God, why did he eat flesh and fish and drink wine? As a Brahmin boy it was inconceivable to him that a god should be non-vegetarian. In answer to this, Ebenezer left his seat, advanced slowly towards Swaminathan, and tried to wrench his left ear off" (page 3 to 5). Equivalent to 'Swami and Friends' is Lagaan: Once upon a time in India, a film, grounded on India's colonial British Raj. In Lagaan movie when Bhuvan is instigated to play a game of cricket, it aggrieved his self-esteem and he accepts the challenge for playing cricket match with Britishers and in exchange three years tax would be cancelled. Identical to captain Andrew Russell, in a way is Mr. Ebenezer- the scripture master, he galvanized Swaminathan to react, when Mr. Ebenezer caricatures Hindu gods and goddesses, attempts to impose Christian religion on him, underestimating Hindu religion, therefore dissipating his freedom preferred. Denouncing British education system R.K. Narayan in 'The English Teacher' explicates "this education has reduced us to a

nation of morons; we were strangers to our own culture and camp, followers of another culture, feeding on leavings and garbage.....What about our own roots?. I am up against the system, the whole method and approach of a system of education which makes us morons, cultural morons, but efficient clerks for all your business and administration offices. In the chapter Broken Panes, Narayan vindicates freedom struggle overwhelmingly. About two thousand citizens of Malgudi assembled on the right bank of Saryu to protest against the arrest of Gauri Shankar, a prominent political worker of Bombay. An earnest-looking man clad in khaddar stood on a wooden platform and addressed the gathering. In a high, piercing voice, he sketched the life and achievements of Gauri Shankar; and after that passed on to generalities: "we are slaves today", he shrieked, "worse slaves than we have ever been before. Let us remember our heritage. Have we forgotten the glorious period of Ramayana and Mahabharata? This is the country that has given the world a Kalidas, a Budha, a Shankara. Our ships sailed the high seas and we had reached the height of civilization when the Englishman ate raw flesh and wandered in the jungles, nude. But now what are we? He paused and said on the inspiration of the movement, without troubling to verify the meaning: "We are slaves of slaves." Just think for a while. We are three hundred and thirty-six millions, and our land is as big as Europe minus Russia. England is no bigger than our Madras Presidency and is inhabited by a handful of white rogues and is thousands of miles away. Yet we now in homage before the Englishman! Why are we become, though no fault of our own, docile and timid? It is the bureaucracy that has made us so, by intimidation and starvation. You need not do more. Let every Indian spit on England, and the quantity of saliva will be enough to drown England". Fermented by the speaker's persuasiveness Swaminathan shouted "Gandhi ki jai ".V.S. Naipaul annotated about R. K. Narayan "I have grown to feel that he is in some ways like Gandhi. Gandhi's first book is full of religious idiocies. No one would have prophesied a future for him. But he had in a heightened way Narayan's mystical idea of an eternal India; and look what happened to him. Narayan with his glories and limitations, is the Gandhi of modern Indian literature". Now Swaminathan and Mani who materialized the gathering and stirred by the oratory of man, now ruminating miserable predicament of Indian peasant. They become steadfast to boycott English goods, especially Lancashire and Manchester cloth, the reason being Possessors of those mills had cut off the thumbs of the weavers of Dacca muslin, for which India was distinguished at one time. They thought personage who dissects the thumbs of such weavers deserved the worst punishment possible. Swaminathan moved by these thoughts of tribulations of Indian people, decides to wear khaddar, the rough homespun.in Kanthapura when Moorthy goes to street of Brahmin to address them for the cause of freedom, their happens an argument between Nose scratching Nanjamma and Moorthy for indigenous clothes and goods 'May I ask one thing Moorthy? How much does one have to pay? 'Nothing sister. I tell you the Congress gave it free', 'And why should congress give it free? 'Because millions and millions of yards of foreign cloth come to this country, and everything foreign makes us poor and pollutes us. To wear cloth spun and woven with your own God-given hands is sacred, says the Mahatma. And it gives works to workless and work to the lazy. And if you do not need the cloth,

sister-well you can say "Give it away to the poor", and we will give it to the poor. Our country is being bled to death by foreigners. We have to protect our mother'. Similar thought pattern emerge in Swami and Friends, through the character of Swaminathan as he determines to forsake foreign clothes and endorses Khaddar, the rough homespun, when stirred by the moving speech of one Indian man. He decides to discard Lancashire clothes, which are foreign clothes and wished to remain nude instead. Then everywhere slogans of "Bharat Mata ki jai" and Gandhi KI Jai" burst out from the cloud. Multitudes of people discard foreign clothes and foreign clothes bonfire by Indians. "Coats and caps and upper cloth came whizzing through the air and fell with a thud into the fire, which purred and crackled and rose high, thickening the air with smoke and a burnt smoke" One man comes to Swaminathan and says "young man, do you want our country to remain in eternal slavery?" No, no Swaminathan replied "But you are wearing a foreign cap." Swaminathan quailed with shame and removing his cap set it on the fire as he was saving the country (page112). William Walsh is sincere when he says that R.K. Narayan's writing is "a distinctive blend of western technique and eastern material". This becomes evident in 'Swami and Friends', Narayan uses Western technique but his content in the novel is thorough Eastern. Whether Narayan is censuring Scripture master Ebenezer, who is Christian, endearing to impose Christian religion on Indian boys, Narayan upholds Hindu religion and its gods and goddesses, chiding Ebenezer for his nonconformity. As scripture master was insulting Sri Krishna "Did our Jesus go gadding about with dancing girls like your Krishna? Did our Jesus go about stealing butter like that arch-soundrel Krishna? Did our Jesus practice dark tricks on those around him"? Swaminathan becomes exasperated with all his comments, he remarks "If he didn't, why was he crucified? If he was a God, why did he eat flesh and fish and drink wine"? Here in a way Narayan makes an attempt to panegyryze Hindu religion and its gods and goddesses, denouncing Christian religion to some extent. Another instance in which Narayan holds up East as elevated with its allegiance to its soil with the passionate speech of an ordinary Indian man, full-fledged with patriotic sensibility, he says "we are slaves today, worse slaves than we have ever been before. Let us remember our heritage. Have we forgotten the glorious period of Ramayana and Mahabharata? This is the country that has given the world a Kalidas, a Budha, a Shankara. Our ships sailed the high seas and we had reached the height of civilization when the Englishman ate raw flesh and wandered in the jungles, nude. But now what are we? We are slaves of slaves, just think for a while, we are three hundred and thirty six millions, and our land is as big as Europe minus Russia. England is no bigger than our Madras Presidency and is inhabited by a handful of white rogues and is thousands of miles away. Yet we bow in homage before the Englishman! Why are we becoming through no fault of our own, docile and timid? It is the bureaucracy that has made us so, by intimidation and starvation. You need not do more. Let every Indian spit on England, and the quantity of saliva will be enough to drown England....? R.K. Narayan advocates Hindi as "our national language given to us by Mahatma Gandhi himself". Narayan has a nationalistic vision and endorses Hindi as our mother language denouncing English language. Availability of Indigenous words in plethora in his novels show his Indian sensibility. It demonstrates his affection for his nation and

its language. For example in Man Eater of Malgudi, R.K. Narayan uses abundance of Indian languages words. Some words treasured in English language vocabulary used by Phaelwan, Seer, Appa, Ramayan, Paisa, Taluk, Deepavali, Sari, Dhota, Puja, Satyanarayan Puja, Jutka, Bhagavad Gita, Upnishads, Ladli, Kavi, Beedi, Rakshasa, Puranas, Asura, Lungi, Mami, Kumbh Mela, Pandal, Pulao, Ahimsa, Dharma, Namas karam, Garuda, Pyol. R.K. Narayan's novel "Waiting for Mahatma" (1955) set against the backdrop of Indian freedom movement, also shows Gandhi an thoughts and anti-colonial sensibilities through the character Sri Ram and Gandhiji, himself playing a role of character. In the novel Mahatma's love for country, non-violence, concern for truth and simplicity is demonstrated. The novel reflects anti-colonial struggle and its impact on Indian masses. In Waiting for Mahatma, Sriram, who is infatuated to Bharati, who is also active in Mahatma Gandhi's Quit India Campaign, therefore examined by his integrity of ideals? In similar fashion Swaminathan, in Swami and Friends, with the stir of the movement flung his cap, engrossed in feeling that he was saving country. Next day he was hesitating to go to school, the reason being he had apprehension concerning his clothes. He incinerated all his school dress in bonfire of clothes, therefore he is scrutinized with patriotic feeling in stir of movement and his apprehension of beating in the school. His another apprehension was from his father if he would have found his dress missing but fortunately, the matter was not disclosed. He says "what was he going to wear for school today? Telling his father and asking for a new cap was not practicable. He could not go to school bareheaded" (113) But as the luck have it, he found a noisy irregular mob on the school gate. When he asked about the gathering one man said "one of the greatest sons of motherland has been sent to gaol". Swaminathan felt relieved with the answer as it was an opportunity to him to get together with mob, consequently his matter of cap would also be resolved. Swaminathan said "I won't go to school". The time was crucial for mother-land as gradually patriotic feelings were germinated in Indian people, by some hazardous steps taken by British-government against the interest of Indians. People were becoming more Cognizant about exploitation, they were suffering from Britishers. How Britishers were disgracing Indian freedom strugglers by imprisoning them and torturing them in prison. It was the same case when one revered son of mother land was imprisoned with the name Gauri Shanker that was the rationale why mob congregate before school gate. They were putting their utmost exertion, so that today school could be enclosed. Shouting's of "Bharat Mata Ki Jai", "Gandhi ki Jai!" and "Gauri Shankar ki jai" were occurring, so that people mother earth can be encouraged to capsize British-rule. Even children like Swaminathan, were not untouched with the sparkle of patriotic feelings. He was full with enthusiasm, first today he did hear was full with enthusiasm, first today he did not want to attend school because of his incomplete dress, second he was moved with patriotic feelings as earlier he attended an energetic speech by an Indian- man, glorifying Indian way of living and censuring as they are exploiting motherland, being less in number. The man in the speech was saying "let every Indian spit on England, and quantity of saliva will be enough to drown England" (110 page). Such lively speech kindling him from the content of the heart. As novelist says "Swaminathan was an unobserved in the atom in the crowd.

Another unobserved atom was busily piling up small stones before him, and dinging them with admirable aim at the panes in the front part of the school building. Swaminathan could hardly help following his example. He picked up a handful of stones and searched the building with his eyes. He was disappointed to find at least seventy per cent of the panes already attended to" (114-15 page). Swaminathan was so exhilarated with the scenario that he himself craves to attend a nearby ventilator. He picks up the stone and aims it to ventilator. Stone hits the glass and smashes it. Swaminathan extracts pleasure out of the scenario. He did not stop himself to that only, when a man comes and says that work is going on the Board High School. Swaminathan gets together with the mob puffed with chauvinistic feelings. He takes participation in every event whether speaking patriotic slogans or smashing window panes. He assembled together with mob and marks destination to the Board High School. A man from the crowd said to the headmaster "Sir, we are not here to create disturbance. We only want you to close the school. It is imperative. Our leader is in gaol. Our motherland is in the throes of war". Such nationalistic feelings engrossed R.K. Narayan entirely for his motherland, and he put lively and energetic dialogues in the mouth of his characters. As Swaminathan ruminates upon the political map of Europe. Narayan capture the scenario so vividly, narrator says "he opened the political map of Europe and sat gazing at it. It puzzled him how people managed to live in such a crooked country as Europe. He wondered what the shape of the people might be who lived in the places where the outline narrowed as in a cape, and how they managed to escape being strangled by the contour of their land. And then another favorite problem began to tease him: how did those map makers find out what the shape of a country was? (94 page). Narayan quite shrewdly censuring European countries putting some meaningful words in the mouth of Swaminathan than, devaluing European countries in the process, therefore upholding the very idea of nationalism and freedom from the tribulations and torture of British rule. R.K. Narayan was indigenous from the core of his heart as he manifested his senses of freedom in "Waiting for Mahatma", in which he endorses the idea of freedom from the clutches of Britishers, reflecting his patriotic feelings for motherland. Similar attitude is adopted by him in present novel, always glorifying Indians and their way of living, censuring Britishers and their policies of serfdom. When the headmaster objects coming of the mobs in the school and tries to frighten them with police. Swaminathan shouts "we will spit on the police" (116 page). He felt little bit panic stricken with the name of the police but in a moment overcomes the feeling of panic, enthused with howling, jeering, and hooting of the mob and when he finds some window panes untouched over there, he makes a plan to attend them. His cravings were not fulfilled in his own school, therefore it was a tremendous opportunity in possession. He runs round collecting ink bottles and flings them one by one at the very pane that caught his eyes. When Swaminathan finds one boy with cap, Swaminathan, can't tolerate it as he himself was without cap at that time.

Conclusion

Thus a critical analysis of Swami and Friends is done. Throughout the novel R.K. Narayan affirms freedom whether it is the freedom for obtaining independence from

the clutches of Britishers by advocating indigenous cloths and filling phenomenal words of liberty in the mouths of his characters, or individual freedom of thoughts as communicated by W.S Swaminathan when his scripture master Mr. Ebenezer, endeavors to impose Christianity upon students and disparages Hindu gods and goddesses.

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