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Impact of Colonial Education on Development of Selfhood in R. K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends*

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Abstract

The *Bildungsroman* has been a symbolic mode through which the conflict between the self and society existing in the real world are resolved. The *Bildungsroman* grooms the reader through a growing up narrative to balance individual fulfillment and social roles. In the colonial society, the magnitude of gap between the self and society is too wide to be bridged, and their nature too disparate for a resolution. The rigid and oppressive colonial apparatus is too rigid to compromise with individual aspirations and deviations, which results in the rupture the *Bildungsroman* narrative which ends with the protagonist where he was in the beginning of his journey or degradation of the protagonist, deprived of any tangible growth, development or maturity. R. K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* traces the life of a ten-year-old adolescent schoolboy Swami, in his transitional phase of growth and development between childhood and adulthood in a fictional town in South India named Malgudi, in the 1930s, and in a society in struggling to free itself from colonial rule. It presents the adventures and

misadventures of Swami groping with the problem of growing up in a colonial society. The novel presents Swami's individuation in the context of his family, a strict father, a colonial education system, the colonial game of cricket, and the colonial resistance movement in India. Swami's self develops being at the center of a tug-of-war between the pulls of a traditional society and the pressures of a colonial society.

Keywords: Bildungsroman, colonial education, childhood, development

R. K Narayan's *Swami and Friends* (1935) is a narrative about a child's idyllic growing up and his confrontation with the problems of adulthood. Inspired partly by Narayan's own experiences, the novel presents Swami's endeavors to reconcile his individual aspirations with his social expectations. On his quest for identity, Swami finds himself at odds with the colonial society especially, his family

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members, school teachers and his local friends. The novel begins like a typical *Bildungsroman* of a ten year old boy towards maturity and explores the tension, conflict, and resolution between the individual and society.

The novel is a story of a young protagonist rebelling against powerful authoritarian forces while seeking to develop an identity. The novel presents Swami losing his identity, alienating from the people of Malgudi, re-constructing his identity through encounters with new obstacles and characters, and other identity-driven processes to seek his self-formation and social integration.

The typical *Bildungsroman* strikes a compromise between the individual aspirations and social expectations but in *Swami and Friends*, this compromise is rendered unattainable due to peculiarities of the colonial society of Malgudi. Despite being an imaginary South Indian locale, Malgudi is not free from the undercurrents of colonial India and is representative of the typical colonial town of British India. Towards the end of the novel, Swami alienates himself from his father, school and his local friends, suffers disillusionment, and unsuccessfully attempts to escape the constricting and repressing society of Malgudi. Swami's return home after his failed attempt of self-exile indicates an unsuccessful and curtailed *Bildung*. The narrative, like a

typical *Bildungsroman*, promises growth and maturity for its protagonist Swami, but disappoints at the end as Swami is left as he was at the beginning of the novel with his attempts at self-development thwarted by the oppression of colonial education and society of Malgudi.

Swami and Friends is the first novel by R.K. Narayan and the first novel of a trilogy which consists of two other books: *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) and *The English Teacher* (1945). Narayan's first novel was first published in 1935 on the recommendation of a British writer Graham Greene. Narayan had originally titled the novel as *Swami, the Tate* which was changed to *Swami and Friends* on the advice of Greene as it would resemble Rudyard Kipling's *Stalky & Co.* (1899). Interestingly, Mulk Raj Anand's first novel, *Untouchable* (1935), which also came out in the same year, was also published on the recommendation by a British literary figure E. M. Forster.

Narayan's writings are to a great extent autobiographical. Ramesh K. Srivastava writes, "The autobiographical element is so dominant in his novels and short stories, particularly in the characters of children that his own childhood can easily be reconstructed from them" (58). In his novels, Narayan, through his graceful, elegant and simple style imbued with genial humor, portrays the eccentricities of human relationships and

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the irony of everyday existence, in which colonial modernity clashes with indigenous tradition.

R. K. Narayan wrote the novel in the 1930s when the national movement was at its pivot. However, Narayan doesn't portray his characters strongly swayed by the anti-colonial movement. Rather, he depicts his characters going about their usual day to day life. Except a one-off instance of Swami participating in a strike, there is not much portrayal of colonial discrimination and oppression in the novel. To some extent Narayan has been rightly criticized for non-engagement with the socio-political aspirations during his times. Born in 1906 in British India, R.K. Narayan grew up as the struggle for India's freedom was raging across the length and breadth of the nation; yet there are very few political overtones in his fictional works, which sets him apart from his politically engaged counterparts like Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. While Anand's writings fumes with socialist resistance and political radicalism, the novels of Narayan novels are about the ordinary middle class characters going about their uneventful everyday life in a fictional South Indian small town Malgudi in the final decades of the British Raj.

Narayan's shying away from explicit engagement with political issues has drawn the flak of several critics. In his book *India: A Wounded Civilization*, V. S Naipaul expresses his astonishment that, “[Narayan]

had never been a political writer, not even in the explosive 1930s” (9). Along the same line, Meenakshi Mukherjee in her milestone essay “The Anxiety of Indianness: Our Novels in English” describes Narayan's fictional town as “resistant to change, eternal and immutable” and that he wrote for an “audience far and wide, within India and outside, hence the need for an even-toned minimalistic representation that will not depend too much on the intricacies and contradictions in the culture and the inflections of a voice which only an insider can decipher” (2608).

Narayan's aloofness from political issues is attributable to his temperament and his upbringing in the princely state of Mysore which, being ruled by a benevolent ruler, was immune from the political agitation which shook the rest of the nation. To the criticism of his apolitical stance, Narayan retorts, “Critics say that I don't talk about the aspirations of the people, of the political agony that we have gone through, and of all those plans for economic growth. I am not interested in that. I am interested in human characters and their background” (“An Interview” 232). Narayan, in an essay in his book *A Writer's Nightmare*, reiterates his role as a “story-teller” and not as an activist:

The man who really puts me off is the academician who cannot read a book for the pleasure (if any) or the pain

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(in which case he is free to throw it out of the window). But this man will not read a book without an air of biting into it. I prefer a reader who picks up a book casually. I write a story or a sketch primarily because it is my habit and profession and I enjoy doing it. I'm not out to enlighten the world or improve it. But the academic man views a book only as raw material for a thesis or seminar paper, hunts for hidden meanings, social implications, "commitments" and "concerns," of the "Nation's ethos." (200)

R.K. Narayan uses the *Bildungsroman* in his trilogy which consists of *Swami and Friends*, *The Guide* and *The English Teacher*. Unlike the other two novels of this trilogy, *Swami and Friends* doesn't satisfy all the criteria of the classical *Bildungsroman*. However, a novel needn't fulfill all the criteria of the *Bildungsroman* to qualify as one but has to fulfill the most essential elements. According to Francois Jost:

[w]hile in pre-modern period's writings were judged by the standards of a single genre--and genre

specified a fixed form and a mode as well--today they are often classified according to a complex set of criteria. The contemporary scholar's indispensable nomenclature resembles that of natural history textbooks in that a subtle classification, based upon essential characteristics, leads readily to the identification of a group (*Introduction* 135).

Swami and Friends embodies many essential elements of the *Bildungsroman*, but also makes certain interventions in the form. In her book *The Novel of Formation as Genre: Between Great Expectations and Lost Illusions* Marianne Hirsch defines the *Bildungsroman* as a novel which focuses on one main character and his formation through a series of "progressive disillusionment ... in his encounters with the social reality" (300).

Hirsch unfolds her model of *Bildungsroman* through a series of seven criteria beginning with the first requirement that the novel should be focused on one main character. The criteria entails that the *Bildungsroman* should have one primary character who is round, dynamic and multi-dimensional among secondary characters who are flat, static and one-dimensional, who undergo little or no transformation through the narrative. *Swami and Friends*

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has one primary character, Swami, a ten year old school going boy who is dynamic, sensitive to his environment, and able to muster the courage to rebel against his school and colonial rule which his fellow school mates, teachers and family members are not capable of.

The novel *Swami and Friends* appears at the surface level to be a light hearted and unserious story about a young boy's growing up, escapades, adventures and misadventures in the fictional locality of Malgudi. On a deeper look, beneath the petty quarrels, rivalries and skirmishes of the schoolboys against their teachers, lies a matrix of pro-colonial and anti-colonial impulses. The novel depicts Swami's personality as he enters into the world of adolescence characterized by charming amalgamation of innocence, impulsiveness, fears, fantasies and confusion regarding the ways of the adult world. The narrative begins with Swami, a young schoolboy, waking up in the morning reluctantly as he fears getting reprimanded by his teacher at school as he has not completed his homework that he was assigned. Swami is presented as a youthful character who is only concerned with mundane matters such as his homework. Swami is a mediocre pupil who has to endure the pain of undergoing classroom instruction in order to satisfy the elders of his family who believe that formal education is the only path to get well-paid government jobs.

Although prima facie Swami appears to be a simple and innocent character, on a deeper look Swami appears to be a complex, sensitive, perceptive and dynamic personality, which is evident when he protests against the fanatic school teacher Mr. Ebenezer. He takes part in a strike to protest against the arrest of a freedom fighter, and attempts self-exile to escape the stifling atmosphere of Malgudi.

Swami is a typical example of colonial subjectivity fraught with hybridity and ambivalences. Throughout the British Raj there were a section of Indian populace who were convinced of the benign nature of British rule and were pro-British. R. K. Narayan juxtaposes the anti-colonialists and the pro-British which brings into the prominence the antipathy of certain sections of the Indian society towards the freedom struggle.

Swami loathes the oppression and discrimination of the colonial rule, and is attracted towards the *Swadeshi* campaign and Gandhi's *Civil Disobedience Movement* agitation. Yet on the other hand, he is captivated by the new comer at his school Rajam, who adopts the manners, customs and culture of the British. He is fascinated by the English game of Cricket, and forms the M.C.C. which stands for Malgudi Cricket Club, a kind of colonial implantation of the original M.C.C., the Marylebone Cricket Club at St John's Wood, London.

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In colonial India there were subjects who showed ambivalence in their attitude towards the British. They abhorred the discrimination and oppression of the British but admired their manners, customs and culture at the same time. Ambivalence is a term which was originally used in psychoanalysis to describe a continuous vacillation between impulses of attraction and repulsion experienced towards a person, race, concept or object. The term was adopted into postcolonial theory by Homi K. Bhabha to describe the complicated combination of admiration and abhorrence which is characteristic of the colonizer-colonized relationship. This relationship is dubbed as ambivalent as the colonized subject neither completely accepts or opposes the colonizer. Complicity and resistance exists within the colonial subject as well as outside. In other words, in a colonized country not only there are some subjects who are complicit with the colonizers and subjects who are resistant to the colonizers, but there are other subjects which show fluctuating attitudes of complicity and resistance towards the colonizer in a single personality.

Swami's *Bildung* shows that one and a half century of colonial rule had produced hybrid subjects who fostered ambivalent attitudes towards the British, who on one hand fostered aversion towards their colonial rulers and on the other hand

displayed admiration for the colonizer's culture. The Albert Mission School in which Swami studied subtly signifies the colonial oppression India was going through in the first half of the twentieth century. It is to be noted that Swami goes to a Mission School which is one of the chief vehicles of colonization which is the most prominent sign of British rule in India. The Headmaster of Albert Mission School whose "thin long cane" represents violent repression which the colonial government unleashed on the natives (1). It is pertinent to note that the Headmaster is the only English character in the novel who is not named. Narayan doesn't name the English character in order to emphasize that the Headmaster was a typical representative of the English in India.

A mission school also known as missionary school is a school run and managed by Christian missionaries. These mission schools were accorded official recognition and were granted financial assistance by the British government in India. The mission schools divided colonial society by producing a class of colonial elites who were considered superior to others schooled in non-mission schools and who looked down upon the latter. Such schools adopted a highly evangelical approach to education, were the chief agencies of colonization of the mind and civilizing of the uncivilized colonial subjects and was commonly used in the

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colonial era for the purposes of Westernization of indigenous people. They executed Thomas Babington Macaulay's vision to produce "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (729) which he postulated in his famous 1935 "Minute on Indian Education."

The manifestation of this ideology is seen in the scripture class of Mr. Ebenezer in Swami's school. In his class, Mr. Ebenezer denigrates the beliefs of non-Christian students. The "fanatic teacher" is notorious for his rants against Hinduism in general and Lord Krishna in particular with the sole intention to convert his non-Christian students into the folds of Christianity. He spent a significant portion of his class ranting against the absurdity of the Hindu religion:

'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 see? 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 Mohammed of Ghazni smashed them to pieces, trod upon them, and constructed out of them steps for his lavatory? If these idols and

images had life, why did they not parry Mohammed's onslaughts?' (3)

Mr. Ebenezer after his beginning denigrations of Hinduism in general, turned his ire against Lord Krishna in particular in comparison to Jesus Christ:

Now see our Lord Jesus. He could cure the sick, relieve the poor, and take us to Heaven. He was a real God. Trust him and he will take you 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 Sri Krishna: 'Did our Jesus go gadding about with dancing girls like your Krishna? Did our Jesus go about stealing butter like that arch-scoundrel Krishna? Did our Jesus practice dark tricks on those around him?'" (4)

Mr. Ebenezer himself a native Christian convert represents one of the products of Macaulay's civilizing missions and the worst example of the colonized mind. Such denigrations of Hindu culture

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and religion were common among mission schools in colonial India.

Mr. Ebenezer's abusive criticism of Hinduism and derogatory remarks against Hindu gods made Swami's blood boil and prompted him to question innocently, "If he didn't why was he crucified? ... If he was a God why did he eat flesh and fish and drink wine?" (4). Swami stands up in protest against this denigration of Hindu gods by Mr. Ebenezer in comparison to Jesus Christ. However, Swami's protest was rewarded with a twisting of his ear by the scripture teacher. Thereafter, Swami's father writes a letter to the Headmaster and as a result Mr. Ebenezer is reprimanded and is forced to tone down his fanatic preaching. After this episode, Swami was advised by the Headmaster not to turn to his father with problems of the school and this made Swami realize that he was growing up and must learn to face his problems on his own.

Swami's consciousness of his limitation as a colonial subject is manifest when he writes his address in a Tamil exam which is reminiscent of Stephen in Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Swami differs from Joyce's protagonist in stopping short at Asia and does not proceed further by locating himself in the world and universe. Swami's writing of his address shows that Swami a colonial subject cannot claim affiliation to the world and universe

beyond the Third World due to his status as a colonial subject:

Tamil Tamil
W. S. Swaminathan
1st Form A section
Albert Mission School
Malgudi
South India
Asia. (62)

The intermingling of cultures created immense confusion in the minds of the generation concerning their identity. Swami's patriotism is aroused by the eloquent speech of the freedom fighter. He feels guilty that he may be wearing "Lancashire cloth" and throws his cap into the nationalistic bonfire. When Swami takes part in a strike to protest against the arrest of a freedom fighter Gauri Sankar, the Headmaster of the school canes him for his defiance. Swami takes part in the strike against the British and burns his cap which he believed to be foreign-made:

A great cry burst from the crowd: 'Bharat Mathaki Jai!' And then there were cries of 'Gandhi ki Jai! 'After that came a kind of mournful 'national' song. The evening's programme closed with a bonfire of foreign cloth...Somebody asked him: 'Young man do you want our country to remain in eternal

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slavery? 'No, no,' Swaminathan replied. 'But you are wearing a foreign cap. 'Swaminathan quailed with shame. 'Oh, I didn't notice,' with a feeling that he was saving the country (Swami 95).

The next morning he fears his father's wrath as he will enquire about his cap. His father reprimands him for this act against the colonial government which shows his support for the colonizers. However, his father did not tolerate the fanatic scripture teacher of Albert Mission School, Mr. Ebenezer's who denigrated Hinduism in the scripture class. He supported Swami's protest and wrote a letter of complaint to the school. Thus, on one instance, his father doesn't approve of Swami's participation in the strike and vandalism against the colonial government, but when it comes to Hinduism he supports Swami in his protests against the frantic scripture teacher Mr. Ebenezer. This is another instance of ambivalence towards colonial rule shown by the characters in the novel.

Swami also shows ambivalent attitude toward the colonizers when on one hand he protests against the fanatic scripture teacher Mr. Ebenezer and takes part in the anti-British strike, and on the other hand he greatly admires Rajam, his anglicized school mate. Rajam, a new

comer to the class, is held in awe by all the students as he is the son of the Police Superintendent. It is to be noted that the Police Superintendent is a very important position in colonial administration through which the colonial power controlled the colonial subjects. All the students especially Swami were impressed by Rajam as he was the only student who came in a car and dressed very well and wore socks, shoes, a fur cap, a tie, coat and knickers. Swami was chiefly overwhelmed by Rajam by his ability to speak "English like a European" and reckoned him as the "new power in the class" (12). Rajam's description in the novel showcases him as the symbol of colonial power among the schoolboys of Albert Mission School. Gradually, Rajam tries to dominate and control Swami and his friends. Rajam is feared and respected by all the school boys as his father is a Superintendent of Police, a very important position in colonial administration. Rajam takes an apolitical stance and considers the nationalist movement as "dirty politics and strikes" (109).

Swami is liked by Rajam and other boys as he knows about the Rolls Royce cars and Junior Williard Cricket Bats. Swami is delighted when his friends give him the name "Tate" for his bowling prowess. Swami like other young school boys of his times also had to go through this intra-personal conflict towards the

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British. In Swami's school, the most highly regarded subject was English. Students who spoke good English were held in awe and admired by all the schoolboys including Swami. Shankar is well known in his school only by virtue of his ability to speak to the teachers in English. Rajam a new comer to Albert Mission School represents colonial mimicry. He is well off, well dressed and "spoke very good English, exactly like a European, which meant that few in the school could make out what he said" (12). His school mate held him in awe and Swami admired him and yearned to befriend him.

On the one hand Swami is attracted towards the *Swadeshi* and *Civil Disobedience Movement*, and on the other hand, he is fascinated by the English game of Cricket. He forms the M.C.C. a kind of colonial implantation of the Marylebone Cricket Club at Lords in Malgudi. The Malgudi Cricket Club founded by Swami and Rajam and called fondly as M.C.C., is a colonial implantation of the famous Marylebone Cricket Club at St John's Wood, London also called as M.C.C. throughout the world.

Eventually, Swami has to quit Albert Mission School and take admission in the Malgudi Board School. Eventually, Rajam's father is transferred from Malgudi. Rajam leaves Malgudi and leaves behind Swami and his friends. Swami gifts Rajam a book of fairy tales without any address for

correspondence. Consequentially, the novel ends with Rajam the colonial superior snapping ties with Swami the colonial other. The novel shows that the diabolical structure of colonialism not only affects adults but also children. Rajam the colonial elite will not miss Swami and Malgudi but Swami will miss Rajam.

The *Bildungsroman* also subtly delineates the impact of colonial rule on Swami and his schoolmates. In the 1930s, India as a colonial country was coming of age and saw the emergence of a mass political movement against colonial rule and assertion of its indigenous identity through the Swadeshi Movement. This was a time when Indians harboured conflicting attitudes towards the British. Indians in general detested the British yet at the same time they were smitten by colonial power, culture and language. English, the colonial language, had acquired tremendous prestige and power during the colonial period in comparison to vernacular languages. Macaulay's statement that a "single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" (729) epitomises the attitude towards the vernacular languages. This attitude was not only harboured by the colonisers but also the colonised.

Hirsch's second criteria is that the antagonist of a *Bildungsroman* should not be located in any character but in the society. As Hirsch puts it, "[s]ociety is the

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novel's antagonist" (297). The genre explores the antagonism between individual and society and its implications on the formation of the self. In the novel, Swami's antagonist is the society of Malgudi with its military-like schools which stifle the full flowering of the personalities of its children. Swami is reluctant to go to the school and instead wants to get educated in the arena of the world. Swami's growth of his self is shaped in the world and not in the four walls of his school classroom. The world is his practice ground in which he can unleash his individuality and not the colonial schools of Malgudi which believes in suppressing the personalities of its pupils.

The narrative of *Swami and Friends* maintains a peculiar balance between the social and the personal exploring their interaction. Swami's *Bildung* is a successive occurrence of conflict between individual needs and an unbending colonial education system and society. Swami's antagonists are located in Mr. Ebenezer his school scripture teacher, the headmaster of Albert Mission School, headmaster of Board School, his father, Rajam, and the Coachman.

The third characteristic, according to Hirsch, is that the antagonistic pressures of the society should shape the all-round personality of the hero. Family, friends, teachers, lovers and change of place are factors which affect the formation of the

self-hood of adolescent protagonists. *Swami and Friends* fails on this parameter of the *Bildungsroman*. Swami is a character who hardly undergoes any change or is able to change his circumstances or people around him. The characters who come in contact with Swami repress and restrict the character formation of Swami instead of shaping his personality. Although Swami acts significantly different towards the end of his adventure, he does not appear to have learned anything at all. In fact he seems to regress back to the impressionable and compliant young boy he was before he began his journey.

Throughout the novel, ten year old Swami struggles to achieve his unique individuality but he finds himself at odds with his society especially, his family, school and his local friends. Swami, a lover of freedom, rebels against the military-like discipline of Albert Mission School and Malgudi Board School. Instead of generating an environment for learning and full flowering of the individual's potential, the schools emphasized on discipline and utmost obedience to rules and authority.

Therefore, he gradually alienates himself from his father, school and his local friends, struggles to survive, and suffers disillusionment. Swami attempts to achieve freedom of choice and action to develop his own identity by leaving his hometown and the direct influence and control of his family but in the end comes back to the

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society he had alienated himself. Swami's return home after his failed attempt to escape does not indicate a successful social accommodation or successful completion of his journey.

The fourth characteristic of a *Bildungsroman* is that the focus of the novel should not be on the plot but on the protagonist's formation of selfhood. It should emphasize the psychological and moral growth of its central character. Like the traditional *Bildungsroman*, the focus is not on the plot which is largely episodic but on the character of Swami. The novel's focus is on Swami's transition from innocence toward maturity. In the words of Hirsch:

It is the development of selfhood that is the primary concern of the novel of formation, the events that determine the life of the individual, rather than all the events of that life: this type of novel is a story of apprenticeship and not a full biography. Its projected resolution is an accommodation to the existing society. While each protagonist has the choice of accepting or rejecting this projected resolution, each novel ends with a precise stand on his part, with his

assessment of himself and his place in society. (298)

Unlike the traditional *Bildungsroman* which have closed endings, Narayan leaves his novel open-ended, indicating the failure of the protagonist's desired development, maturity and continuance of his journey towards it. The novel ends with Swami's journey from innocence to mature selfhood incomplete. The novel doesn't end like the classic *Bildungsroman* novels like *Wilhelm Meister*, *David Copperfield* or *Jane Eyre*. Narayan's rejection of the closed ending of the traditional *Bildungsroman* where the protagonist attains his desired social acceptance and selfhood is a conscious subversion of the form of the traditional *Bildungsroman*.

The novel doesn't trace the *Bildung* of Swami from childhood to adulthood as would be expected from a typical *Bildungsroman*. The novel covers only two years of Narayan's adolescent protagonist. In fact, it is one of the distinguishing features of the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* that most of the works in this category cover a relatively short span of life of the protagonists.

Marianne Hirsch's fifth condition concerns the narrative point of view and voice which "is characterized by irony toward the inexperienced protagonist, rather than nostalgia for youth. There is always a

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distance between the perspective of the narrator and that of the protagonist" (298). The narrative perspective is one of the identifying factors of a *Bildungsroman* that enables the readers to recognize the genre from the manner of narration. A *Bildungsroman* is always focalized through the main character. All the events and persons in the novel are described and narrated from the subjective point of view of Swami.

Hirsch's sixth condition is about the relationships that the growing young hero forms with his peers, family, lovers and authority. According to Hirsch, "[t]he novel's other characters fulfill several fixed functions: educators serve as mediators and interpreters between the two confronting forces of self and society; companions serve as reflectors on the protagonist, standing for alternative goals and achievements (298). Throughout the novel Swami struggles to come to terms with relationships with his family, friends and teachers and is faced with moral dilemmas due to contradictions of a colonial society. The major secondary characters in the novel like his doting granny, his exasperated and stern father, his fanatic scripture teacher, and his peers like Somu, Shankar, Mani, and Rajam are fairly flat characters. The Head Master of Albert Mission School does not support the anti-British strike which is an example of the contradictions and dichotomy in Indian

society. Swami is desperate to be accepted in the group of Rajam, or, at the very least, not left out of the group. Swami's doting grandmother represents the orthodoxy and the continuity of the indigenous tradition through oral culture.

Hirsch's seventh and final characteristic of a *Bildungsroman* is that it should be didactic and should educate the "reader by portraying the education of the protagonist" (298). The novel shows the devastating effects of colonialism especially colonial education on Swami's development. The young male protagonist unable to mature into a decisive individual is also a metaphor of colonial India not being able to come out of the British colonial rule. Though the adolescents depicted in the novel belong to the fictional small town Malgudi, they are representatives of all adolescents in the 1930s in India under British Raj.

Narayan does not adopt an explicit stance against colonial apparatus but very insidiously presents the disastrous impact of the colonial reality on the growing up of its young protagonist. Swami's coming of age is a metaphor for India's coming of age. The novel is an assertion of indigenous selfhood and an effort to free oneself from British imperialism. Swami's *Bildung* is characterised by growth towards Indianness and his desire not be identified with British imperialists.

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The novel traces the life of a ten-year-old adolescent schoolboy Swami, in his transitional phase of growth and development between childhood and adulthood in a fictional town in South India named Malgudi, in the 1930s, and in a society in transition from colonial to postcolonial. It presents the adventures and misadventures of Swami groping with the problem of growing up in a colonial society. The novel presents Swami's individuation in the context of his family, a strict father, a colonial education system, his peers, the colonial game of cricket, and the colonial resistance movement in India. Thus, Swami's self develops out of a tug-of-war between the pulls of a traditional society and the pressures of a colonial education system.

Although the novel covers a very short period in the protagonist's life like most of the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* novels, it establishes its affiliation to the genre by its use of the unmistakable elements of the *Bildungsroman*. Firstly, the novel describes Swami's transition from innocence of childhood towards maturity of adolescence. The story is episodic and presents vignettes of the psychological growth of the protagonist.

Within two years of his life, Swami has several psychologically significant events which shape his individuality: he has a conflict with his scripture teacher Mr. Ebenezer for his denigration of Lord

Krishna, he suffers social ostracism by his friends for his proximity to a colonial elite Rajam, he joins a strike against the British, he protests against his English Headmaster by refusing to accept his punishment and quits the mission school, he forms a cricket team, and he leaves home. Each of these events has significant effect on Swami's consciousness and selfhood.

The protagonists of the postcolonial *Bildungsroman* symbolize the coming of age of the postcolonial nations. Swami's *Bildung*, the dilemmas he experiences between colonial modernity and indigenesness, colonial language and the vernacular, egalitarianism and colonial elitism are some of the dilemmas which India as a nation faced at that moment in history.

The *Bildungsroman* has been a symbolic mode through which the conflict between the self and society existing in the real world are resolved. The *Bildungsroman* grooms the reader through a growing up narrative to balance individual fulfillment and social roles. In the colonial society, the magnitude of gap between the self and society is too wide to be bridged, and their nature too disparate for a resolution. The rigid and oppressive colonial apparatus is too rigid to compromise with individual aspirations and deviations, which results in the rupture of the *Bildungsroman* narrative and ends with the protagonist where he was in the beginning of his journey or

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degradation of the protagonist, deprived of any tangible growth, development or maturity.

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