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UNRAVELLING JUVENILE PSYCHE: A COMPARITIVE STUDY OF R.K. NARAYAN'S "SWAMI" AND MARK TWAIN'S "TOM SAWYER"

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this paper is to make a comparative study of two famous child heroes Tom Sawyer in the novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and Swaminathan in the novel *Swami and Friends*. The main aim of the researcher is to show that there is something universal in the experience of every little school boy by making a comparative study of these two boys. Many great writers have dealt with the theme of childhood. The world of children being a microcosm of the adult world both children and adults are mesmerised by books about childhood. R.K. Narayan and Mark Twain are two great writers who dealt with this theme in their novels *Swami and Friends* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Both Narayan and Twain take us to the innocent and boisterous world of children. The two child heroes, Swami and Tom, have difference in their characteristics because they hail from different countries, cultures, and they lived in different times. Swami can be admired as an embodiment of Indian boyhood while Tom can be revered as the quintessence of American boyhood. But irrespective of their cultural difference both the boys shows some common characteristics. Their relationship with their friends, aversion towards their school, skirmishes with their teachers, the problems they face due to their interference with the adult world, rivalry with their peers, fear of examination and fun loving nature are not culture specific.

Key Words: Childhood, Adventures, Friendship, Universal Experience, Heroism.

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We would never have loved earth so
well if we had had no childhood in it

-George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*

INTRODUCTION

Many great writers have dealt with the theme of childhood. The books which portray the alluring world of juveniles mesmerised both children and adults for they portrays before children their adventurous world and antics and reminiscences adults of their insouciant and innocent life of

boyhood. Some of the famous juvenile classics were J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*, Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, R. M. Blantyre's *The Coral Island*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Kidnapped*, France Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*, Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist*, Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* etc. The world of children being a microcosm of the adult

world both children and adults are enthralled by these books and its child heroes and both of them persist in their minds. Some of the child heroes epitomised by readers are Huck Finn, Tom Sawyer, Swaminathan, David Copperfield, Peter Pan, and Sara Crew. Two great writers who have portrayed the juvenile world with great precision and understanding are R. K. Narayan and Mark Twain. Both of these writers take us to the juvenile world which is characterised by their friendship, love, petty quarrels with their peers, their hatred towards the school, their skirmishes with the teachers, fear of examination and the problems they face due to their involvement with adult world. Both the writers portray the juvenile world of children with all its excitement, innocence and reality. Even though both these novels are written during different times and belong to different cultures the childhood portrayed in these novels have something in common which is the universal experience of every boy.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens whose pseudonym is Mark Twain is one of America's best loved writers who is best known for his humorous and satirical writings. He is one of the leading story tellers in the world and both adults and children admire his writings. The timeless *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and its sequel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are classics of American literature. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* first published in 1876 is a novel which portrays the life of a young boy growing up along the Mississippi River. It is set in the fictional town of St. Petersburg. The idyllic town St. Petersburg is modelled on Hannibal, a small Mississippi town where Twain was nurtured. It is in this idyllic town the story of the adventures of Tom Sawyer unfolds. Twain in the preface says that most of the adventures recorded in this book really occurred and one or two were his own experiences and the rest of those boys who were his schoolmates he adds that:

"Huck Finn is drawn from life; Tom Sawyer also, but not from an individual- he is a combination of the characteristics of three boys whom I knew, and therefore belongs to the composite order of architecture."(Tom Sawyer, 3)

The novel is a picturesque description of nineteenth century American society; their culture, life style, superstitious belief etc are depicted in this novel.

R.K. Narayan, shortened from Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanaswami was an English language novelist from India. He is a prominent figure in early Indian English Literature along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. He is best known for his works set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi which has been seen by many of his readers as a site that represents prototypical Indianness. He is often compared to William Faulkner who also created a similar imaginary town. Narayan's mentor and friend Graham Greene's oft-quoted comment, "Without him I could never have known what it like to be Indian" is a famous testimonial to Narayan's quintessential Indianness. Malgudi which was first introduced in *Swami and Friends* can be considered as a microcosm of India. Greene helped Narayan to publish his semi-autobiographical novel *Swami and Friends*. Narayan's first novel *Swami and Friends* is set in British India in a fictional town called Malgudi. The novel can be considered as a classic chronicle of the adventures of a boy named Swami and his friends. Swami along with his friends Rajam and Mani lives in an idyllic south Indian town called Malgudi.

Both Narayan and Twain take us to the innocent and boisterous world of children. Of course these two child heroes have difference in their characteristics because they hail from different countries, cultures, and they lived in different times. Irrespective of their cultural difference both the boys shows some common characteristics. In the opening chapter of the novel *Swami and Friends* we can see Swaminathan's hatred towards his school:

"It was Monday morning. Swaminathan was reluctant to open his eyes. He considered Monday specially 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."(Swami and Friends, 3)

In the novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* we can see a similar situation, Tom's reluctance to go to school

"Monday morning found Tom Sawyer miserable. Monday morning always found him so — because it began another week's slow suffering in school." (Tom Sawyer, 37)

Just as adults, children too have inhibitions in their lives; they too have periods of chaos in their life. The first hurdle that a boy faces is the problem of adjusting to the custom-bound life in school. In order to escape from this custom-bound life of school absconding becomes essential part of these boys' lives. Both Swami and Tom are masters in it. They play tricks to evade school and when compared to Swami Tom is a veteran for he is successful in fooling Aunt Polly while Swami is always caught. Tom acts sick and scare Aunt Polly, just to elude school. Swami is also not different, he approaches a doctor complaining of delirium so that he would be freed from school early in the afternoon and he explains delirium as "some kind of stomach ache." Both the boys hate studies; they cannot cope with the mechanical system of education and examination. They love to roam and play with their friends. Friends add zest to their life. We can Swami's friendship with Rajam, Pea, Sankar and Mani and Tom's friendship with Huck and Joe Harper. There is strong bond between these boys. Huck is standing abashed and uncomfortable after their return from their feigned death while Tom and Joe Harper are pampered by their parents seeing this Tom tells Aunt Polly: "Aunt Polly, it ain't fair. Somebody's got to be glad to see Huck." (Tom Sawyer, 109). Tom's love for Huck is evident in this incident. He can't see his friend in an awkward condition. At the same time we can see Swami's love towards Rajam in the end of the novel when he says to Mani "Mani, he did wave to me and to me alone. Don't deny it." (Swami and Friends, 135).

In both these novels we can a feature of adolescence which is the desire for attention. Both Swami and Tom crave for attention. Both Tom's and Swami's heroism primarily aims for attention, recognition, acceptance and admiration. Swami tries

to get attention by making friendship with the strong and intelligent boys in the class.

"He honoured only four persons in his confidence. Those were the four that he liked and admired the most in the class." (Swami and friends, 6).

First one is Somu, the Monitor, and it is believed that only the Head Master could reprimand him. Next is Mani, the mighty Good-For-Nothing. He towered above all the other boys of the class. Then Sankar, the most brilliant boy of the class and Pea an ordinary boy like Swami. We can also see Swami's friendship with Rajam a studious boy. These boys represent what Swami lacks-physical strength and social recognition and that urged him to make friendship with them. Unlike Swami Tom has much confidence in himself. He tries to show off in all possible ways. Tom tries to exhibit his heroism among the boy-audience and he is the leader of his boy gang and shows enough courage in organizing and executing his plans. We get a glimpse of the boy-hero, when he is trying to help his girl friend Becky. He is even ready to bare punishment on behalf of Becky. Becky feels indebted to him and Tom goes to sleep with Becky's words in mind "Tom, how could you be so noble?" (Tom Sawyer, 126). We can also see his heroism in Muff Potter case and in discovering the box of gold hidden by Injun Joe.

The children in these novels are in constant conflict with the adult world. Both Swami's father and Aunt Polly are strict disciplinarians and want their children to be part of the bourgeois society to which they belong. But the children are not able to adhere to system so they play several pranks to escape from the adult world. They suffer due to the avarice and depravity of the adult world. As a result these children shows a tendency to leave their home in search of a utopian world which is an aspect of juvenile heroism seen both Narayan and Twain. Swami, Huck Finn, Tom and Joe Harper left their home for they have common belief that by leaving their home they will reach some Utopian world and they will be happy for ever. But ultimately they become aware of the fact that their own home is safest place in the world nothing can replace it.

Swami and Tom hailing from different cultural and familial backgrounds have their own characteristic traits. Swami belongs to an orthodox Hindu family and Tom to a Christian family. Narayan's hero Swami is more religious than Twain's, though the whole exercise of religious rituals is ridiculed by the author. For Swami it is easier to approach God than his stern disciplinarian father. He believes that gods are capable of doing any miracle that is why he desires to see the money convert into money. But Twain's hero has a questioning mentality towards God which may be a trait they receive from their author. But both the heroes have belief in superstitions. But these superstitions are specific to their own cultural backgrounds. Tom is more wild, mischievous, and stronger than Swami may be because of the absence of a father figure in his life. Tom feels rivalry towards his half brother Sid. But in Swami's case he doesn't feel rivalry towards his younger brother may be because he is too young to be considered as a rival. Unlike Tom Swami doesn't have any lady love interest may be because the Indian background prevents Swami from experiencing such an infatuation.

CONCLUSION

Narayan portrays Indian life during the British rule in his novel. The novel depicts Indian life style, culture, religious sentiments, influence of the British culture, family set up, love of nation etc. Swami can be admired as an embodiment of Indian boyhood while Tom can be revered as the quintessence of American boyhood. Twain beautifully portrays American society: customs, life style, beliefs, superstitions, social hierarchy etc. In spite of these cultural differences they share the universal experience of boyhood. Their friendship, aversion towards school, rivalry with the peers, fear of examination, fun loving nature, conflict with the adult world etc are not cultural specific. So when we make a study of both these characters we can see that there is something universal in the experience of every little school boy.

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