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**CONTENTS**

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**Research Papers**

<b>SYNTHESIS, CHARACTERIZATION AND ANTIMICROBIAL ANALYSIS OF VARIOUS SUBSTITUTED 2-(3-(5-BROMOTHIOPHEN-2-YL)-1-(4-FLUOROPHENYL)-1H-PYRAZOL-4-YL)-3-CHLORO-4H-CHROMEN-4-ONE</b>	1 - 3
Shirsat A. J., Bhagat S. S., Rupnar B. D. and Kakade G. K.	
<b>DIELECTRIC STUDY OF PROPYLENE GLYCOL USING IMPEDANCE ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE</b>	4 - 6
Badhe S. G.	
<b>R. K. NARAYAN'S <i>THE FINANCIAL EXPERT</i>: A JOURNEY OF MARGAYYA</b>	7 - 11
Bandal V. S.	
<b>ILLUSION AND REALITY IN R. K. NARAYAN'S THE NOVEL SWAMI AND FRIENDS</b>	12 - 13
Bandal V. S.	
<b>SYNTHESIS AND ANTIMICROBIAL ANALYSIS OF SUBSTITUTED 2-(5-(3-(2,4-DIFLUOROPHENYL)-1-(4-FLUOROPHENYL)-1H-PYRAZOL-4-YL)-4,5-DIHYDROISOXAZOL-3-YL)PHENOL</b>	14 - 16
Bhagat S. S., Shirsat A. J., Rupnar B.D. and Gill C. H.	
<b>AQUATIC ZOO FAUNA FROM HARSOOL LAKE DIST: AURANGABAD</b>	17
Budrukkar A. M. and Nimbalkar R. K.	
<b>BIOCHEMICAL STUDIES OF CESTODE PARASITE <i>GANGESIA</i> FROM <i>CLARIAS BATRACHUS</i></b>	18 - 19
Budrukkar A. M. and Nimbalkar R. K.	
<b>CORRELATION AQUATIC INSECT BIODIVERSITY AND WATER QUALITY PARAMETERS OF SELECTD WATERBODIES MAHARASHITRA INDIA</b>	20 - 23
Abdar R. N. and Nimbalkar R. K.	
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS: SYSTEM APPROACH</b>	24 - 26
Helambe H.B.	
<b>DEVELOPMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS</b>	27 - 28
Helambe H. B.	
<b>SOUNDS OF ENGLISH AND PHONETIC TRANSCRIPTION</b>	29 - 30
Jadhav A. M.	
<b>UNIVERSALITY IN RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S WHERE THE MIND IS WITHOUT FEAR</b>	31 - 32
Jadhav A. M.	

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ILLUSION AND REALITY IN R. K. NARAYAN'S THE NOVEL SWAMI AND FRIENDS

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**ABSTRACT**

*Swami and Friends (1935) is the first novel in which R.K. Narayan is realistic in his treatment of characters and society. On the surface level the novel appears to be a story of boys for boys. It novel encompasses all the stock material of a school story: family, particularly Swami's relations with his father, his friendship, his quarrels, his teachers, his idleness, his homework, his examinations etc. From the beginning to the end the novel narrates the adventures and misadventures of a schoolboy's life; Narayan's account of them, according to Gor, is "realistic and psychologically true" (60). As the title suggests, the novel deals with the central character, Swami and his friends, Mani and Rajam. The plot of the novel is held together by the adventures and misadventures of the innocent school-boys. There is a series of nostalgic, anecdotes of boyhood. The perplexities of youngsters are treated with a clever mock-seriousness. The novel is written in a simple style which the novelist was to polish and perfect in his subsequent novels.*

*Keywords: anecdotes, nostalgic, infatuation.*

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**INTRODUCTION**

R.K. Narayan very realistically depicts the impact of marriage on a young man like Chandran. After the marriage, he is a completely changed man, lost in his own thoughts. He is obsessed with his wife "Susila, the fragrance of jasmine and sandal paste, the smokiness of the Sacred Fire, of brilliant lights, music, gaiety, and laughter (164). For a month or so he is absorbed in monologues centering upon Susila and things related to her. What is funny is that he indulges in these monologues in the presence of Mohan, but all this is true to life. Chandran spends much of his time in writing letters to his bride and in reading her letters. Since he has to live away from nearly a year, he depends on these letters to keep emotional and mental company with her. He tells Mohan even the subject of these letters. A few bits of his talks with Mohan show his rapturous infatuation for Susila. The narrator tells:

His talks to Mohan were usually on the subject of these letters, "She has written a wonderful letter to me to-day, has addressed me as 'My Own Darling' for the first time; she has sent me twenty thousand kisses though I sent her only fifteen thousand in my letters..." Or "She likes very much the silk pieces that I sent to her. She says that they are wonderful." Or, touching his inner pocket, in which more than one of her letters always rested, "Poor girl! She writes asking me to take very great care of my health. Says that I ought not to get up so early every morning. She has inquired about the business and wishes me more subscribers. She wishes the Daily Messenger long and life and health. She has a very great sense of humour" (165).

It is not only the joy in married life that Narayan paints; he also paints worries and agonies associated with the love of young couple. He describes Chandran is upset when he does not receive Susila's letter for six days in continuation. He fears that she may be down with high fever, because she had written in her last letter about her catching cold. There is no solution to his apprehension and gloom but to go to Talapur immediately for he does not know "if her people will attend to her properly...I must go in person and see" (166). The Bachelor of Arts is thus a romantic tale of two young minds. When the love does not mature into marriage, *sanyasi* is the result of it. This state too is romantic because Chandran knows that it temporary. This romantic tale allows Narayan to introduce his ironic and comic view of life. This is the novel of youth and its passion, illusion and heart breaking disillusionment-reality.

The novelist's greatness lies in his depiction of boy's psychology and his credulity in his first novel *Swami and Friends*. The issue of illusion and reality becomes prominent when the narrator describes the world of boys. That world is, as already noted, the world of illusion; R.K. Narayan creates illusion of reality when he describes that world. Through Swami's encounter with the scripture teacher Ebenezer, the novelist throw light on the boy's innocence and at the same time he exposes and ridicules religious fanaticism and credulity as well. The scripture master condemns Hindu idolatry and shows Sri Krishna in a very bad light while comparing Him with Jesus.

The world in which Swami occupies the central position is really an interesting world of a boy with his innocence. In Malgudi-the illusion of real world-he can always fall back on his grandmother to take his part against the incomprehensible bad temper of father and schoolmaster. Adults appear quite mad to Swami. His

father is liable to fly off into a rage when he finds his son wandering about the house like an unleashed donkey before the examinations are due to begin. R.K. Narayan creates the illusive town and presents it realistically. The characters who move in its territory are real ones. The novelist explains the life and the people of

Malgudi of preindependence time. That Narayan creates an illusion of the town is made clear by the fact that he never dealt with the physical geography of Malgudi as a set of piece. He simply allows it to reveal itself beneath and between the events. The reader comes to have a strong feeling for the place's identity.

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