

ADVENTURE AND PATRIOTISM: A STUDY OF INTERFAITH SOLIDARITY IN NILIMA SINHA'S ADVENTURE BEFORE MIDNIGHT

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Abstract

Literature mirrors society. Different writers throughout the ages have portrayed the significance of culture and the moral fabric of society. Nilima Sinha, an Indian English author of children and young adult literature has explored the themes of courage, justice, friendship and mystery with Indian settings. She has also depicted cultural and historical contexts throughout her narratives. Her 5 Mystery Stories consists of five interconnected tales of adventure revolving around young protagonists. Adventure Before Midnight is one of the stories of the book, which takes the journey of adventure through the Indian freedom struggle movements to the present time. By foregrounding communal identity, unity, historical unrest and complex socio-political realities, she promotes values of empathy and civic duty through young protagonists. The present study situates this portrayal within Nilima Sinha's Adventure Before Midnight through the lens of adventure, patriotism and interfaith solidarity.

Keywords

Adventure, Patriotism, Interfaith Solidarity, Nilima Sinha, Adventure Before Midnight

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Sinha has written on a variety of subjects. Her *Adventure Before Midnight* reflects the themes of patriotism, courage and national pride. The story is a part of *5 Mystery Stories*, which was published in 2004. The short story reflects the themes of adventure and the Indian freedom movement. The young children from diverse religious backgrounds share a common goal for the nation. Their courage in the Indian struggle for independence gives a unified emotion to the readers. The real tale of the Indian freedom struggle takes the readers from 1941 to the present. The young protagonists or young freedom fighters are firm in doing anything for the nation and freedom. They undergo several challenges but their determination does not let them down. The narrative evokes empathy in the hearts of the readers. Each line is filled with emotion, courage, bravery and the dare to do and die for the nation. What make the historical tale more empathetic are the young freedom fighters and their determination. The author throws light on the British Raj and India's freedom struggle movements. The story begins with a fight for a kite that belongs to a boy from a rich family. His father is a prestigious doctor who has brought various valuable toys and antiques from England. His name is Anwar Karim. He has a younger sister, Salma, who is quite generous. He also has a big loan and a big house. The narrator of the story is Harinath Sahai, who is a poor lad and wants to go to the house of Anwar. When Shamu and Mohan, the young, cruel boys, come to snatch the kite from Anwar which they cut and prove their ownership, Hari defends Anwar. The cruel boys don't like the incident and push Harinath and soon Krishna, another brave lad of a freedom fighter and leader of the group, comes to save them.

It is a framed narrative. There are many narrators in the story. Anwar and Hari become very good friends; both play together at Anwar's house. Hari, seeing the antiques in his room, is stunned. Anwar holds numerous toys and colourful treasures in the room. Hari says, "Anwar flung open the doors. I was amazed at the colourful treasure inside. There were toy cars, aeroplanes, ships, boats, building blocks, and guns of all kinds a row of red, uniformed soldiers, rifles in hand stood to attention on one side, while a train set gleamed on another" (349). Both play a game of battle with toy soldiers. Anwar "pulled out the planes, soldiers, guns and boats from the cupboard, and divided them into two piles on the floor. This is yours. You are Germany. I am England. These weapons are mine." (349)

Hari meets Salma, who greets "Adaab, Bhaisaheb" (348) and insists that he bring his sister next time. Soon, Madhu, Hari's sister, also joins them. The author has described the innocence of the children. But they are made for a big task, the author beautifully juxtaposes in her narrative. They meet Krishna, a tall, dark boy who becomes their close friend. In a small discussion on English soldiers, Krishna

tells them about his “wanting them to leave!” (350). He shares about his father, who was killed by an English soldier. He takes them to his house where they meet his uncle, Prakash Chacha, a freedom fighter too, whom they request to tell them about the tales of bravery. Prakash Chacha tells them about Krishna’s father and his bravery, that he was truly a courageous freedom fighter whom they are proud. The author exposes how the British army used to treat the natives and killed the resistance they raised. Chacha tells about the revolution they began to free the nation from the British Raj. He adds,

Today I will tell you stories of other revolutionaries, who laid their lives for the country... you know, things were much more difficult in those early days of the Raj. People used to be punished for minor offences. Just uttering the words, *Bande Mataram*, could sometimes land one in trouble. An officer, Kingsford, became notorious for imposing severe punishments...two revolutionaries, Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki planned to kill this tyrant. Unfortunately, their bomb killed the wrong person! “What happened to the two men?” Well, Chaki committed suicide, knowing he would be hanged. Khudiram was caught. He walked to his death with great courage, holding the Gita in his hand. (353)

Prakash Chacha tells them about many other revolutionaries,
brave men who had fought against the hardcore British
Raj and became martyrs for the nation. He says,

Many other revolutionaries, brave men who had dared to defy the British Government, and when caught, had become martyrs. There was Vishnu Chaphekar, who had shot a British officer called Rand, on the very day that the Empire celebrated the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria’s reign. He had been hanged. Others like Bismil, Lahiri, Ashfaqullah and Roshan Singh were caught after the famous Kakori conspiracy. They had looted a train carrying money which they needed for their revolutionary activities. They also received the death punishment. Ashfaqullah had walked to the scaffold carrying the Koran with him. There were several other courageous young men. People like Bhagat Singh, Rajguri and Sukhdev, who swore to avenge the death of the veteran leader from Punjab, Lala Lajpat Rai. Lala Lajpat Rai was a victim of police lathi-charge who later succumbed to his injuries. Bhagat Singh shot dead the Police Superintendent Saunders who had ordered the lathi-charge. He was later hanged by the British Government...several brave youths have sacrificed their lives for the country...Many others have gone to jail. (354)

Hari also tells about his elder brothers, Ajit and Sujit, college students and freedom fighters. Hearing such inspirational stories of bravery, the children get

encouraged. They take an oath to do anything for the nation. Meanwhile, news breaks in the town of Mahatma Gandhi's visit. Everyone prepares for the man whose non-violent movement created a unique revolution. The young children are also keen to see the man. Everyone shouts, "Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai" (356). When they encounter the grand old man, Hari says, "I stared at the toothless mouth, the large nose on which perched a pair of spectacles, and the merry eyes which gazed through them. So this was our beloved Bapu!" (357). Gandhiji's speech makes everyone energetic and fills courage in their hearts. People chant, "Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram" (357). Finally, he breaks his silence with, "My fellow countrymen..." (357). He calls the nation to be self-reliant and emphasizes on using Swadeshi: home-made fabric, cloth, goods etc. In his speech, people roar, "Inquilab Zindabad!, Bharat Mata ki Jai." (358) Anwar, who is rich and carries a lot of stuff from England now does not want. He takes all his toys and stuff and puts them into the bonfire.

On Gandhi's call, children form the Young Patriots group. They are Krishna, the leader of the group, Hari, Anwar, Salma, Madhu, Mary, Paul, Asha, Ajit, Sujit, Golu, Gopu, Ahmed, Amina, Moti and Kalu. Krishna begins his speech shouting, "Brothers, I hope..." (363). The author has focused on the presence and equal participation of girls. On Krishna's shout, Salma intervenes, "Hey, what about us..." (363). He apologizes and repeats, "I mean, sisters and brothers" (363). They all do practice at Anwar's loan: drill, boxing, fighting practice, defense etc. Salma shouts, "Dilli chalo pukar ke, kaumi inshan sambhal ke...Lal Kile me gar ke, lehraye ja, lehraye ja!" (363) and others also sing with her, heading a march in the garden. They prepare a tricolour, banner, poster of the young patriots group or "Army of the Young Patriots" (367). Girls support spinning the charkha and preparing khadi for the leaders. They made several attempts to support the freedom struggle, the Quit India movement etc. All children plan to practice march and drill.

Krishna carried the tricolour as he marched right in front. Paul,

Anwar and I, the marksmen, walked behind him, our pockets bulging with stones. The slings hug smartly around our necks. After us came Golu and Gopu holding aloft the banner. Behind them marched our band. It consisted of Moti and his dholak, Kalu and his flute, and Ahmed with his mouth organ; last marched the girls, singing the patriotic songs they had learnt. Indeed, it was a wonderful band of soldiers. (367)

The Army of the *Young Patriots* comes into effect, supporting the freedom movement. They march towards the sacristy and try to replace the flag with the tricolour. They resist with slogans, stones, bands and singing patriotic songs. In this

activity, Ajit is caught and thrown into jail. Hari and Anwar plan to take him out; they go to the jail and try to manipulate the gatekeeper, who, in the end, brings them to the superintendent. After manipulating him too, both succeed in meeting Ajit and give him a slip. On their next visit, both succeed in taking him out courageously. They met again and planned to support the Quit India movement and their plan was supported by Prakash Chacha. They make posters and post on the wall with a slogan, "Quit India! (394) They supplied hundreds of posters in the city, painted walls with slogans at night. They block the road with different tactics such as barricades and others. Facing such incidents, Hari's father takes the family to his village. When Hari returns after three years, he finds everyone has become older and has undergone some changes in their physique. He meets Anwar who has become stronger than before. They meet Krishna who is watching the city from his roof which he calls his kingdom. Krishna gives them updates.

Soon, they came to the appointment of Lord Mountbatten as the Viceroy and Governor-General in India by the British Government. It was March 24, 1947 and the new Viceroy "fixed August 15 as the day when India would become independent. A new country, Pakistan, would be carved out of India" (418). Many chose to leave the country, including Ahmed and Amina. The bad boys, Shamu and Mohan, in greed for Anwar's house and antiques, tease him to leave. The riot breaks out in the entire country. The people who left loving before now have become thrust of the blood. The young boy faces such a cruel experience for the first time. He, too, wants freedom like others. He too supported as others in the struggle. He is a kid who experiences this all of a sudden. He asks Hari if he thinks him different; he firmly replies, "you are just the same of chap and a very, very dear friend!" (419). Soon, Shamu and Mohan with some other local people come to attack Anwar's house to kill them, "Mar dalo" (421). Everyone is shocked to hear such hateful slogans. Krishna, Hari, Moti etc. rush towards Anwar's house and inform them about the mishaps. Hari and Moti take the family to a safe location while Krishna decides to stop the people approaching the house with a lathi and other dangerous weapons.

Krishna tries to make them understand: "Stop! Stop! Screamed Krishna. "What do you want?" Blood!" anwere shout. Revenge! For all out people killed!" Blood for blood!" (426) Krishna shout a loud again, "Oh! So Dr. Karim has killed them, has he?" His family has slaughtered the innocents! And that is why you mean to punish them, isn't it?" (426) Meanwhile, Hari and Moti bring Anwar's family to a safe place. Later, Hari takes them to his house, where Dr. Karim's family is welcomed. They spend many days in the dark and fear. Anwar was shocked to see such incidents. He says, "They tried...to kill us! Why, Hari? What harm did we do

to them?...Gandhiji taught us non-violence. I believed in it too. I tried not to hurt anyone. I wanted freedom too, just as much as everyone else!” (429) He further says, “I am going to show everybody! People like Shamu and Mohan. They must know that I love this country!” (429)

The day comes: midnight of August 14, 1947 when all get together on Krishna’s roof. Prakash Chacha pulls the strings of the flag fixed at the top of the roof by Golu and Gopu and all begin singing the National Anthem. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru from Delhi speaks his historic words: “Long years ago, we made a tryst with desnity” (431). The author gives an empathetic feel to the story that everyone connects. The narrative turns into the present. Harinath picks up the newspaper and reads, “Padma Bhushan awarded to Dr. Anwar Karim” (431). He says that he always wanted to prove himself a worthy citizen what he has done. He studied medicine and worked for humanity. Krishna too joined the Army. The author ends the story with Hari’s writing a telegram to his childhood friend Anwar, wishing him “Congratulations, Young Patriot!” (431).

Conclusion

The narrative reflects how young minds played pivotal role in broadening the sense of brotherhood and nationalism. The author fills the hearts of the readers with a sense of patriotism and nationalism. Sinha’s exploration of the theme of adventure through young adult protagonists provides a narrative mode to share the importance of unity. One can regain courage and have pride in the freedom fighters and every single participant of the Indian Freedom Struggle. She has succeeded in taking the readers back into the streets of martyrs; the roar of the patriots, the call for the nation, slogans, the division and the sense of uniformity of the nation.

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