

The Influence of Maternal Grandmother and Mother in R. K. Narayan's Childhood

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***Abstract:** Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Narayanswami is one of the pioneers of Indian English literature and a world renowned literary figure of the 20th century. Along with Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand , R. K. Narayan has established the Indian novel in English with some of his noteworthy contemporaries. His literary works are characterized by simplicity and pellucidity. Reading the novels of R. K. Narayan it seems that we are experiencing the events of our day to day life. The setting of R. K. Narayan's story is a fictional South Indian town Malgudi. The touch of humanity is another most interesting aspect of Narayan's writing style. The two women who have great influence in R. K. Narayan's life specially in his childhood are his maternal grandmother Parvati /Ammani and mother Gnanambal. He pays tribute to these two vital women of his life through his novels , through his fictional women characters. Little Kunjappa , nick name of our respected R .K. Narayan was brought up by his maternal grandmother Ammani, a respected lady. She had the most enduring influence in his childhood. Gnanambal, R. K. Narayan's mother also has a great influence in his life. The novelist's interest in society, believe in Gods, Goddesses, and respect for traditional religious values, special gift of humour, helping mentality and involvement with neighbor came from his maternal grandmother Parvati/Ammani. The ethical and purposeful activity , rational thinking and deep observation as a writer these qualities have come from R. K. Narayan's mother Gnanambal.*

Keywords:Childhood,Grandmother, Malgudi, Madras, R. K. Narayan etc.

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Introduction

R. K. Narayan is one of the leading Indian English writers. According to R. K. Narayan, . The setting of R. K. Narayan's story is a fictional South Indian town Malgudi. " I remember waking up with name Malgudi on Vijayadasami day on which initiation of learning is celebrated..... Malgudi was an earth shaking discovery for me."Malgudi is a world of ordinary folk but these people possess extraordinary qualities. Most of R.K.Narayan's female characters are based on novelist's personal recollections of Indian middle class women. The

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touch of humanity is another most interesting aspect of Narayan's writing style. According to R. K. Narayan, "Malgudi was inescapable as the sky overhead." His fictional characters have uniqueness in their own way. They have different class values, some of them are local Malgudians and some of them are new comers of Malgudi. His early childhood and literary career were greatly influenced by his grandmother Parvati /Ammani and mother Gnanambal. They play very crucial yet contrasting roles in R. K. Narayan's life. His grandmother is main, primary care giver of him in Madras while his mother Gnanambal remains far from him in Mysore to manage her other children and family. R. K. Narayan was born slightly premature on 10th October, 1906 in his maternal grandmother's home in Madras. Little Kunjappa, nick name of our respected R. K. Narayan was brought up by his maternal grandmother Ammani, a respected lady. She had the most enduring influence in his childhood. Parvati's upbringing shaped R. K. Narayan's story telling method, his respect and understanding of Indian culture and values, his focus on the psychology of children. R. K. Narayan was brought up by his maternal grandmother since his childhood away from his parents of Mysore. R. K. Narayan talks about his grandmother to his biographers Susan and N. Ram as a woman of "high principle and purposeful activity."

She is an ideal figure to many, and has a great knowledge of Sanskrit and English. She is very disciplined type of person and has a passion for teaching. She teaches little Narayan Sanskrit shlokas in prayer and praise of Goddess Saraswati. She is extremely hardworking woman and has a great helping mentality. She has served her neighbourhood in various ways by giving education to the deprived children, giving shelter and foods to the distressed. She has kept a room in the upstairs as labour room for her relatives and neighbours. According to R. K. Narayan Parvati / Ammani is an "extraordinary character...deserving a book on her own right."

The novelist pays tribute to her maternal grandmother in many of his fictions like *Swami and Friends* and *Grandmother's Tale*. R. K. Narayan's keen and deep empathy for ordinary people, using simple and lucid language which is close to our daily lives, social consciousness, the touch of Indian sensibility in his writings – these have come from his maternal grandmother. Under the guidance of his grandmother Narayan learnt how to play Veena. He is fond of Karnataka music through out his life. Doraiswamy Iyengar told one of the autobiographers of R. K. Narayan N. Ram,

"Narayan played well as a non – professional and that he had an effective style."

R. K. Narayan's unique narrative technique with the touch of humour has also come from his maternal grandmother. During her old age she was affected with a dangerous disease, unable to eat properly. Then she said,

"You can give me anything. Whether it is honey or castrol, its all the same to me."

The reader find reflection of R. K. Narayan's grandmother and mother in many of his fictional characters. In his famous first novel *Swami and Friends*, Swami's grandmother taught little Swami the Sanskrit shlokas in praise of Goddess Saraswati, the Tamil alphabet and multiplications. The grandmother plays an important role of sharing and caring in the socio – psychological development of the child.

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“ My grandmother’s preoccupations were several and concerned a great many others, she was a key figure in the lives of many. My grandmother was an abiding influence. Grandmothers were in those days very important. They are no longer so – have disappeared.”

In his childhood Narayan listens story from his loving, educated maternal grandmother Parvati /Ammani. His story telling technique and imaginative power as a writer grow since his innocent days under the caring guidance of his grandmother. She is such a good story teller that she nurtured R. K. Narayan’s love for tales as noted in R. K. Narayan’s biography Vedantu. we go through the novels of R. K. Narayan it seems that we reading events of our everyday life. According to R. K. Narayan, “I am only interested in ordinary people. If I find a character I like, I tell his story, that’s all.... I find I write best when I have no burden on my mind, when I am absolutely at peace with myself.” *Swami and Friends* is an excellent story with two women , swami’s grandmother and mother in the background. R. K. Narayan has given description of Swami’s grandmother through twenty pages. The reader become nostalgic while going through the pages of the novel and feel joy and recollect their childhood memories. Swami’s grandmother is loquacious and narrates the stories of the past events. R. K. Narayan gives a humorous description of Swami’s grandmother’s elaborate bed “In the ill- ventilated dark passage between the front hall and the dining room, Swaminathan’s grandmother lived with all her belonging, which consisted of an elaborate bed made of five carpets, three bed sheets and five pillows, a square box made of jute fiber, and a small wooden box containing copper coins, cardamoms, cloves and arca nuts.”

As an aged woman sometimes she talks lengthy and confused statements. Swami is actually Narayan’s own reflection, like him and most of the kids Swami does not want to go to school, dislikes education and likes to spend time with his friends and grandmother. Like Swami’s grandmother the most loveable person of Narayan’s family is his maternal grandmother Parvati with whom he spends most of his time in Madras. Though his parents stay far away from him , R. K. Narayan finds solace and comfort in his maternal grandmother’s care along with his uncle who rises and nurtures Narayan’s interest in photography. Narayan also spends time with pets like monkey and peacock which encourage his imaginative and observant nature. She is so influential and inspiring that R. K. Narayan has written a novella *Grandmother’s Tales* dedicated to his grandmother and great – grandmother Bala. The grandmother always pays great attention about upbringing of R. K. Narayan and his behaviour. Parvati /Ammani is not only a key figure in Narayan home but also becomes an ideal of all grandmothers in his novels. Like child Narayan Swami also listens stories of Hindu Gods and Goddesses of Indian myths and legends from his grandmother in her lap.

“ After the night meal, with the head on his granny’s lap, nestling close to her, Swaminathan felt very snug and safe in the faint atmosphere of cardamom and cloves.”

The woman presented as grandmother in R. K. Narayan’s novels has a special role in the socio- psychological development of the child. Swami’s grandmother passively present in

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Swami's world of dreams, promises, betrayal, excitement like R. K. Narayan. All the incidents can be seen in the intense light of their immortal relation. Parvati / Ammani has introduced R. K. Narayan a world which is full of Hindu values, moralities, Malgudi, the fictional South Indian town of R. K. Narayan's novels is the result of it. The novelist is very interested about the common people and their lives. He brilliantly portrays the pictures of struggles, enjoyments of the common folk in his writings. The readers feel emotional and mental attachment with his characters. This excellent craftsmanship of R. K. Narayan to depict the innocent, simple, common people's life stories makes him immortal and brings him excellent fame and respect through out the world. The second feminine influence in R. K. Narayan's life is his mother Gnanambal. She is as energetic and spirited as her mother Parvati / Ammani. Gnanambal is educated and modern type of woman at that time. She plays badminton, tennis, cards and very sympathetic to her children. The ethical values, purposeful activity has come from his mother. R. K. Narayan has said that his novels are the studies of human relationships, in both codified marital and sometimes extra marital environments. The touch of ghumanity and sympathy for the sufferings of women are revealed in many of his literary works. According to R. K. Narayan, "I was somehow obsessed with a philosophy of woman as opposed to man, her constant oppressor. Man's assigned her a secondary place and kept her there with such subtlety and cunning that she herself began to lose all notions of her independence, stature, strength. A woman in orthodox milieu of Indian society was an ideal victim of such circumstances. My novel dealt with her, with this philosophy broadly in the background.

R. K. Narayan has real life experience about them since his childhood in his maternal grandparents' houses. His maternal grandmother has very kind-hearted, generous, helping mentality about them. R. K. Narayan has witnessed their sufferings and their journey of life both within his locality and within his family. Some of them succeed and find their own identity and attain to fulfill their quest of life and while others succumb to the situations. Some of his female characters are representative of educated, empowered, elite class of woman.

"R. K. Narayan is a man of letters, pure and simple."

The character of Swami's mother and her relationship with her son in Indian tradition is very touching and sublime in *Swami and Friends*, his first novel published in 1935. Swami's mother is actually a reflection of R. K. Narayan's own mother Gnanambal. Swami has a very caring and conscious, affectionate mother but she does not like to spoil her son by giving too much indulgence. Swaminathan's father is very ill tempered, so he feels comfortable and shares his feelings to his mother. Swaminathan's mother is very pious, affectionate lady who loves her children very much and always taking care of her household works and makes tasty, delicious dishes for little Swami. When Swaminathan's mother has given birth her second child, Swami feels uncomfortable and lonely without the companion of his mother.

"Mother had been abed for two days. Swaminathan missed her very much in the kitchen, and felt uncomfortable without her attention."

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She tries to give Swami rational thinking when he tries to bunk school. She has a self denying personality. Swami's mother is actually a reflection of R. K. Narayan's own mother Gnanambal. R. K. Narayan's mother was pivotal though more distant figure during his earliest years. Due to her weak health and frequent child birth she is not always remain available with him during his childhood , early days. R. K. Narayan in his childhood days lives in Madras with Parvati /Ammani and his mother lives in Mysore with Narayan's father and his siblings though she has an important ,vital role in the development of R. K. Narayan. Gnanambal, like her mother is very dutiful and responsible homemaker dedicated to her family. Narayan also depicted his mother through his fictional character like Raju's mother in the novel *The Guide*. At young age R. K. Narayan stays with his family members in Mysore. The childhood experience living with his grandmother Parvati in Madras and sometimes visiting his parents in Mysore, this combined experience has given a sense of curiosity , detachment that characterized his writings. This also enables him to portray intricate family relationships in his novels and pure, merryful world of childhood innocence as depicted in *Swami and Friends*. His later novel *Grandmother's Tale* is a testament of the influence of the stories he has heard from his maternal grandmother and mother. This experience of living together with family members makes him a sensitive man.

Conclusion

R. K.Narayan also says that family is very important to him. While his maternal grandmother Parvati provides him traditional cultural values and ethical moral attitude , his longing for his mother during his early age of life adds a valuable , deep layer of observation and understanding of human character. All the influences of his grandmother Parvati /Ammani and his mother Gnanambal has made him a remarkable, sensible , Indian voice in Indian English literature.

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