

## **Potrayal of Mothrs in Thewritings of R. K Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand**

**Amogh A. M**

Assistant Professor, Dos in English, Government First Grade College for Women, Chikkaballapur-562101.

### **Abstract**

The present article looks at the portrayal of motherhood in the novels of the “Holy Trio” of Indian English literature i.e. R. K Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. It begins with the conceptualization of theme of motherhood. Then the article looks into the select novels of R. K Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand which focus mainly on the concept of motherhood.

**KEYWORDS:** mother, motherhood

### **Introduction**

The mother-child relationship is the most essential and basic human relationship, but the patriarchal set up uses mother as a means to imbibe the patriarchal values to child. Initially a child sees everything through the eyes of the mother. For patriarchy the mother exists to do the job of bearing and nourishing of the child, but the mother-child’s relationship is not just about to bear and to nourish. It is much beyond that. For Sigmund Freud “A mother is a satisfaction..... this is for her child; this is all together the most perfect and the most free ambivalence of all human relationships. The relationship between mother and child furnishes the purest example of unchanging tenderness, undisturbed by any egoistic consideration” (Kristeva 13-35). A mother plays multiple roles. She acts as a healer, helper and acts as a security for her child. Mother assumes the responsibility of her children. She not only brings them to earth but also raise them and makes them responsible adults. A mother instills human and social values in the child. But the institution of motherhood is the root cause of oppression of women. The mothers produce daughters with mothering capacities and sons who are prepared systematically by patriarchal society to discharge the duties as fathers. For women, the desire to become a mother arises through mother-daughter relationship. Further, motherhood acts as a means to subjugate the female body. Hence, for women, marriage is basically a powerless sexual relationship. A mother is a powerless creature and could be manipulated by man. Men look to destroy the dignity and creativity of a mother. Hence, patriarchal set-up came up with stringent laws which curtailed the role of mother.

### **The Concept of Motherhood in Indian Ethos**

The concept of mother or motherhood holds an important position in Indian scenario. The concept of mother goddess was integral part of Vedic culture. In fact, the earth is referred as mother figure in the Vedic culture, though the notion of mother is attributed or elevated to the level of divinity, the poor mortals i.e. mothers suffer a lot in a traditional Indian set-up. A mother in Indian household has a very little role to play. The decision-making powers are left with the head of family inevitably a male,

representative of patriarchal values. In the Indian society mother is expected to be passive and docile. She never raises her voice against the injustice meted out to her by the other members of family. There is a sharp contrast between how the Indian male novelists look at the mothers and how women novelists treat mothers in their novels. The stalwarts of Indian English fiction such as R. K Narayan, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand stressed the necessity of the liberation of woman in an emphatic way.

R. K Narayan in *The Dark Room* portrays the character of Savitri, a typical south Indian housewife and mother. The novel showcases the plight and submissive nature of Indian woman. Savitri, the protagonist is no more than a cook and a baby sitter. Savitri does not have any decision-making authority regarding her children's future. All the power rests with Ramani, her husband. Ramani firmly believes that a woman's primary duty is to be wife and mother. He is of the opinion that being a wife and mother is in fact, the divine privilege bestowed upon woman by the creator himself. Savitri is meant to do two things i.e. housekeeping and child-bearing. Savitri reminds of her inferior status in the family when she comes up with a suggestion "Mind your business. Do you hear.... Go and do your work in the kitchen, but leave the training of a grown-up boy to me. It is none of woman's business" (Narayan 1). The only place where she can let her frustration out is in the room, a dark, windowless entity. Savitri's entry into the dark room shows her dissatisfaction with the dual roles of wife and mother prescribed to woman by patriarchal order. At one point, Savitri is fed up with playing the dual roles of wife and mother, and decides to come out of it after long painful years of marriage with Ramani. In the process Savitri let's go her right over children, and she brutally exposes hollowness of myth of motherhood.

'Yes, you are right they are yours, absolutely you paid the midwife and the nurse you pay for the clothes and teachers. You are right. Didn't I say that a woman owes nothing?' (Narayan 118).

For a woman from a Brahman community to take such a drastic step during that time is unimaginable. It is nothing short of a rebellion! It is a rebellion against the rigid patriarchal norms. Hence, Narayan must be hailed for standing up for woman's cause. But contradictions set in and Savitri goes back to her domestic life again and feels content and secured in playing the roles of wife and mother. It is ironical that Savitri is the same woman who rejected the role of wife and mother and as an act of protest decided to sever marital ties. Then the question arises, why she came back to the fold of family again. One can find an answer in the novel itself. It is said that Savitri was homesick and was feeling restless for her children. The author writes,

'Nostalgia for children, home and accustomed comforts seized her.... Her soul racked with fear' (Narayan 195).

When Savitri is away from the family, motherly feelings evoked in her and she could not resist them. Hence, she is back into the familial fold and accepts the docile passive role of wifery. Savitri believes that her prime role is that of mother preceded by wifery. She identifies herself as a mother first and foremost. She does not want to let go at any cost. Hence, it can be said that Savitri had makes peace with herself and gets ready for grinding her in the custom-ridden, tradition-bound familial set-up. Contradictions could be seen in Narayan's writing. By the mid-way Savitri becomes a figure of resistance but soon she turns into a helpless creature wanting to go back to her husband's house and to become a part of family which is the primary

site of oppression. Though Narayan tries to speak for woman he fails to address the issue properly.

Raja Rao's concept of mother or motherhood can be explored in his epic novel *Kanthapura*, and short stories like *Akkayya*. During the struggle for independence the concept of motherland i.e. Bharathmatha bound all Indians together and the only goal was to free motherland from the clutches of English. One can witness the concept of motherland, mother goddesses and presence of mothers in *Kanthapura*. *Kanthapurais* a factious village in Karnataka. The people of the village believe that the presence of Kenchamma, mother goddess or Gramadevata protects them from famine, disease, death and despair. Kenchamma, the village goddess performs dual functions of protecting and nurturing according to villagers. They believe that she can perform miracles and can bring rains and can cure diseases. Hence, Kenchamma, the mother goddess represents religious faith of rustics. Rangamma is a simple woman of *Kanthapura* comes under the influence of Gandhi and mobilizes woman to fight against the mighty Raj. She does not have any child. Rangamma establishes sevika sangha and mobilizes women. The village women draw inspiration from that tails of Lakshmibai of Jhansi, Kamala Devi, Sarojini Naidu and Annie Besant. They fought courageously to free the motherland. The concept of mother is used as a vehicle to evoke the spirit of nationalism. "Our country is being bled to death by foreigners, we have to protect our mother" (Rao 23).

Narasamma is the mother of Moorthy, the protagonist. She is an orthodox woman from Brahman community. She has high hopes on Moorthy. She wanted Moorthy to become a collector and wanted him to marry a girl from a good family. But Moorthy is very much influenced by Gandhian ideology and he decides to join freedom struggle. Hence, the dreams of Narasamma are dashed. Narasamma receives a death blow when she hears about Moorthy's Pariah mixing. In those days it was considered a sin. In those days it was unimaginable to think that a person from Brahman community mixed freely with a man of low caste. It was believed that such a union might ruin them. It is believed that such a union might devil into the village. Hence, Narasamma could not identify herself with Gandhian ideology. the orthodox Brahmin community supported Gandhi to a large extent, had reservation about Gandhi's ideologies. The reservation could be showcased in the novel when Narasamma decides to sever ties with Moorthy. For, Narasamma had to face the community and is to be excommunicated due to the desecrating act of her son. Narasamma could not come to terms with the rejection of her own people and laments:

"Oh, I have a son excommunicated oh I to have gone to Banaras and Rameswaram and to Gaya to Gokarna and to have excommunicated! I wish I had closed my eyes with your father instead of living to see you polluted! Go away you pariah" (Rao 53). Narasamma has deep rooted religious faith. She is very much attached to village life. Hence, Narasamma is broken into pieces when she hears the news of excommunication Narasamma is not interested in leading life anymore and the very day Narasamma dies on the river banks. The mother goddess Kenchamma enslaved mother Bharata and suffering mother Narasamma forms the trinity and they are the integral part of the narrative. They are the part of symbolic structure. At the end of the novel Radhamma, a pregnant woman gives birth on the street amid the police fire. The Birth of the infant signals of independence to the country. The new

mother Radhamma is given shelter in the temple of Kenchamma. It marks a culmination of a nation in infancy stage and mother goddess.

In *The Cow and The Barricades*, Raja Rao uses the metaphor of cow exquisitely to highlight the Indian culture as a whole. Here Gauri, the cow dies of a bullet fired by the police during the freedom riots and in the process the life of many people was saved. Here Gowri becomes a mother figure who sacrifices her life to save the life of other people. Subsequently Gowri attains the cult figure of mother India. The villagers think Gowri as Aditi, the primal mother.

Iyengar says that, “With sure racial insight Raja Rao has made the cow mother figure and silent tears symbolic of India’s mother’s travail and the cow’s infinite patience and veiled power as symbolic of mother’s genius for surviving her sorrows...” (Iyengar 305).

Iyengar points it out clearly that focus is on the motherland. Hence, Raja Rao uses the image of mother to evoke nationalist feelings among the leaders. Iyengar commends Raja Rao for ideological glorification of motherhood. Raja Rao showcases surrogate mothering through Akkayya, the protagonist of the story. Akkayya, is a child widow. She takes up the responsibilities of raising up orphans in the family. Akkayya always feels that her life is empty, for she did not have children to fulfill the emptiness of her life. She raised orphan children in the family and yet, she always feels alone. Akkayya never feels that the children as her own. She never feels any attachment to her foster sons. Akkayya embraces the role of mother primarily for two reasons: her intense desire to rare children and to have some sort of social identity. Akkayya becomes old and diseased and her foster sons turn away from her. The true faces of the sons are unmasked as no one is willing to perform funeral ceremonies after Akkayya’s death. The story highlights the plight of childless widows in the Brahmanical set-up. The poor creatures utilized in the upbringing of children and later are ignored to the core. Hence, motherhood is far from just a biological process of children. It has cultural implications.

Mulk Raj Anand’s *Gauri*, throws the notion of female subversion out of the window. Here, Gauri, the protagonist is expecting a child. Gauri rejects her husband and decides to bring up the child on her own. Here Gauri the mother asserts her individuality. Mulk Raj Anand opens up new horizons in the narrative as he emphasizes on single parenthood and women empowerment. Gauri is the wife of Panchi, a peasant. The roller-coaster ride begins in her life when she tells her husband that she is expecting. Panchi rudely tells Gauri to go to her mother’s home for, the fear at the prospects of feeding another mouth in the family. Lakshmi, mother of Gauri thinks of her as burden and sells Gauri to a banker and reclaims her house and cow. Selling of Gauri is a cruel and shameful act on the part of Lakshmi. All the unfortunate incidents make Gauri stronger. She has the tenacity to come out of any situation. As a first step towards autonomy, Gauri finds a job of nurse in a reputed hospital in the city. Gauri returns to Panchi. Panchi is amazed to see the change in Gauri’s attitude. She is no more a meek, submissive wife. “No longer was she ... the gentle cow. She had been ..... she is alert and dignified; her movements are full of strength...” (Anand 271).

Gauri breaks the tradition in the village when she refuses the services of a midwife. She tries to educate village women about sanitation, healthcare and so forth.

Gauri stresses on the need to be educated. Thus, Gaur makes a conscious effort to awaken a sense of individuality among the women. Men of the village did not buy the point and felt unsecured. Hence, they raise questions about the legitimacy of the child. Panchi also doubts legitimacy of the child. Gauri decided to let go relationship with Panchi and decides to move on in life. Gauri continue to work as a nurse in a hospital. Here economic independence brings autonomy for Gauri. Anand brings in the mythical background in the narrative. Sita is renowned as one of the five greatest 'pativratas' of the world. The others being Tara, Mandodari, Anusuya and Ahalya. Yet questions were raised about Sita's chastity. Rama rejects her, and it is ironical that society considers him as ideal husband! Sita had to go through passive suffering without her fault. In a similar vein, Gauri's chastity comes under scanner. But she boldly rejects the passive suffering. Instead, she starts life afresh with a new identity. "I am not Sita that the earth will open up and swallow me. I shall go out and be forgotten of him. She waved her head to forget Sita and thought of the road to town..... Rhythms of love for the unborn babe urged her on though she still sobbed..." (Anand284). Thus, Gauri completes the journey of transformation from being a meek and submissive wife to a responsible and decisive individual. Gaur learns the lessons of life in a hard way. Which enable Gauri to be self-confident and precise in decision-making as an expectant mother.

Mulk Raj Anand while talking to Fisher in an interview asserts that his focus is more on the change of consciousnesses as sudden revolt would not be possible in Indian life. I didn't want to show anything alien to her consciousness. But the growth of consciousness in Gauri from innocent experience is a very important purpose of the novel" (Anand 101). The awakening of the conscious prompts Gauri to be pragmatic and enables her to visualize life with the lens of autonomy. Thus, Gauri the self-sufficient and autonomous individual enters into the new horizons of life which makes her an ideal mother. Gauri emerges as a cult figure of mothering one who rejects the age-old norms and carves out a new path for herself.

### Conclusion

To conclude, the three stalwarts of Indian English literature showcased the characters of mothers in their own way. R K Narayan in *The Dark Room* pens the mother in two shades. In the beginning as meek and submissive who later transforms into a rebel for a brief period. But soon the rebellious attitude vanishes from the mind of Savitri, the mother in novel and she again goes back to her routine life. Raja Rao shows the plight of mother in *Akkayya*. on the other hand he equates a cow first to a mother then to mother India in *The Cow and The Barricades*. He also showcases mothers who are willing to sacrifice their lives for the sake of freedom in *Kanthapura*. Gauri, the protagonist and the expecting mother in Mulk Raj's novel Anand breaks the norms of patriarchy in order to achieve self identity for herself.

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