



Roots and Wings: Granny's Presence that Grows and Stays for Life In R. K. Narayan's *My Days*

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Abstract

In My Days, R. K. Narayan fondly recalls his childhood spent in his grandmother's house, presenting a simple yet vivid picture of early life shaped by affection, tradition, and observation. The granny's house becomes a warm, protective world where Narayan experiences freedom, security, and moral guidance. His granny's love, discipline, and storytelling deeply influence his character and imagination. Through every day incidents, family routines, neighborhood scenes, and small childhood adventures. Narayan highlights the innocence and curiosity of a growing mind. These memories reveal how the calm, intimate atmosphere of the granny's house nurtured his sensitivity and creativity, laying the foundation for his later development as a writer.

Keywords: childhood, granny, character

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R.K. Narayan composes his novels as a genuine artist. This sets him apart fundamentally from both Mulk Raj Anand, the progressive humanist, and Raja Rao, the philosopher-novelist. R.K. Narayan aims to provide his readers with the pleasure of a purely artistic creation. While he has a deep affection for humanity, he remains neutral. In his novels, there is an absence of moral instruction, philosophical musings, or propaganda, instead, he presents Indian life through an aesthetic lens, maintaining an unbiased perspective. However, he expresses a deep empathy for his characters. Each of his characters, whether they are flawed or virtuous, is portrayed with remarkable sensitivity and care. In his compassionate portrayal, they become captivating and entertaining figures that enhance the vibrancy of life through their existence and actions.

The life of R.K. Narayan, an Indian of the purest Brahmin lineage who lived in Mysore, South India, and wrote English-language literature, might be interpreted as the history of the state and the English language. R. K. Narayan's use of language in the last century is an example of a new literary movement. The writer's genius for deeply registering the idiom of his own environment finds the new voice, which is necessary for the new thinking.

Born into a Brahmin family in 1907, R. K. Narayan's family eventually settled in Rasipuram, just like the majority of Indians. His family had settled in Madras for a long time. At home, people spoke Tamil, the language of the Madras province. His first memory was of himself sitting half-buried in sand with a monkey and a peacock for companionship at his granny's home at No.1 Vellala



Street in Madras, where he resided with her and a maternal uncle who attended the nearby college. With the exception of a minimum set aside for the Narayan family, the massive, sprawling mansion had been divided and rented out as offices, stores, and flats. The grandmother's primary source of income was the rent:

"The massive Indian-style court yard served as the focal point of the house's construction. Its doors were made of large teakwood slabs that were four feet in width and six or seven feet in height. They were adorned with studs and decorations, and they were flanked by smooth pillars with small brass representations of pigeons, elephants, monkeys, and eagles on top." (MD 1)

Even among the middle class, it was not unusual to be raised outside of one's direct family in a society where familial ties, no matter how long-lasting, were extremely strong. When Narayan was a small toddler, he was taken to Madras so that his fragile mother could take care of the younger children. As a headmaster in the Government Education Service, Narayan's father was frequently transferred between schools and locations, sometimes over great distances. For Narayan, living with his grandmother was a far better and more desirable arrangement.

Narayan's uncle was an enthusiastic photographer who forced little Narayan to pose as his unyielding, stiff model all the time. He was often photographed with his buddies, Rama and the monkey, and the boy Narayan was delighted to see how much his face resembled that of the monkey in his uncle's pictures. He hoped that other people would see the similarity as well. The idea that having his picture taken shortened the subject's life appalled his granny.

Pets and photography, a kitten with a bushy tail, a mynah, a green parrot, and a small hairy dog purchased for one rupee from a butler working in a European home succeeded the peacock and the monkey. However, Narayan's early experiences were primarily shaped by the local streets. The streets provided this early-aware observer with an endless supply of material, whether he was walking them hand in hand with his uncle as a young child or, a little later, on his own, sneaking out of the house undetected. These materials included nourishment for the imagination, education for the

emotions, provocation to wander, and reminders of the harshness of life and the nearness of death. The storytelling impulse was already beginning to take shape. We may observe how this is enhanced by visual acuity, unrestricted creativity, curiosity, and expressiveness. For instance, one day on his trip to the stores, his uncle marched him through the streets.

The lamplighter, moving from lamp-post to lamp-post with his bamboo ladder, drew Narayan's attention. He was an elderly man wearing a blue turban and khaki coat. In addition to the ladder, he carried a can of oil, rags, and a box of matches. After mounting his ladder, he opened the small ventilator, cleaned and wiped the lamp with a rag, filled it with oil, lighted the wick, shut the shutter, descended, picked up his ladder once more, and so on.

Granny, whose authority was restricted to the house, had the most impact on Narayan's life, notwithstanding the friendly uncle's helpfulness in introducing him to the streets. She is unmistakably the ancestor of the sturdy, dry, and erratic elderly women who thrive in Narayan's fiction. She was eccentric in her opinions, we recall her thoughts on photography and deeply orthodox in her religious beliefs. It was through her that Narayan inherited Brahmin orthodoxy, which itself had been stiffened by Victorian ethics and blanched by British gentility.

Granny was an enthusiastic gardener who cultivated various types of jasmine and over twenty hibiscus species. She doggedly attempted to raise some delicate plants that were native to Bangalore's 3000-foot heights in Madras' low, maritime air in a corner of her garden. She loathed the Madras environment and sobbed over the wilting plants. She had a significant role in many people's lives as a matchmaker, horoscope reader, and marital counselor.

Granny spent most of her free time in the garden with pruning shears. She was brought in to treat to people who were wailing with pain from scorpion bites. She treated snakebite, paralysis, convulsions, and whooping cough. She also had aspirations of becoming a teacher. In fact, Narayan believed that this was her true calling rather than being a grandmother. After gardening in the late evening, she would change into new clothing, chew betel nut and leaf, set up an easy chair with a stool next to it,



install a lamp for light, and then start her grandson's extra tuition session. She taught him how to sing classical songs, multiply, recite the tables, acquire the Tamil alphabet, and perform Sanskrit prayers in honor of Saraswathi, the goddess of learning. She meticulously recorded the lessons in a little journal. No matter how tired he was, Narayan would only eat dinner after finishing his studies, and he often had to keep himself awake by wiping cold water from his eyes. After his uncle got married and had kids of his own, she took care of them and turned out to be a violent teacher who beat her students with long broomsticks. When she went to her lesson, Narayan's cousin Nayaki, a very diligent student, brought her books and a selection of broomsticks.

A child from this particular class and caste in India was exposed to classical Indian stories, mythology, and Vedic poetry at a young age. In Narayan's instance, this exposure occurred at his grandmother's knee, 'in a comfortable nook of the home after the day's chores are completed and the lamps are illuminated. 'Similar to the non-conformist hymns from Lawrence's youth, these tales shaped the man's awareness, ultimately defining the course of his life.' (MD 3,4)

The process of learning to write was akin to being introduced to a profound mystery, accompanied by the requisite religious rituals:

"After being instructed to repeatedly utter the name of God, I was guided to inscribe the initial two letters of the alphabet on corn laid out on a tray, using the forefinger of my right hand, which was directed by the priest. I was instructed to form the letters of both the Sanskrit and Tamil alphabets, with Sanskrit being the classical language of India and Tamil being the language of my native province and my mother tongue." (MD 5)

Granny's supervision, while strict and methodical was more beneficial compared to the numerous Madras schools that Narayan attended in the subsequent years. His existence was marked by the yearly eight-week breaks spent with his family after an exhausting journey on a third-class train.

Granny was convinced that any other mode of transportation, even though the family could afford it was simply a luxury which Narayan approached with hesitance. He perceived the lively and varied atmosphere

of the streets in Madras as not being adequately replaced by the dull provinces. When he returned home, he often felt a wave of sadness leaving behind the comforts of family life for the more rigid surroundings of his grandmother and uncle.

During his academic experience, Narayan did not excel as a student and clearly faced notable challenges in this area. He started his schooling at the Lutheran Mission School, where he was one of the few non-Christians and the sole Brahmin in his class. The lessons about scripture often involved ridiculing Hindu gods and Brahmins were mocked for purposely proclaiming vegetarians while they supposedly indulged in eating fish and meat, which was said to lead to increased prices for those items. In the classroom setting, English was the main language of instruction, provided by the most skilled teachers. Conversely, Sanskrit and Tamil, the classical language of India and the regional language of Narayan were treated as less important subjects, taught by less capable instructors. The English curriculum mirrored that of England during that era. The initial lesson came from a colorful primer that began with A for apple, B for bite it and C for cut it.

"For boys who were used to bring bananas, guavas, pomegranates and grapes were just as foreign language, prompting Narayan to comment, we were left free to guess, each according to his capacity, at the quality, shape and details of the civilization portrayed in our class books." (MD 121)

What Narayan ultimately chose to do was compose novels and remain at home, a situation facilitated by the joint family structure that accommodated someone in his position:

"On a particular day in September, which my grandmother deemed fortunate, I purchased a notebook and penned the opening line of a novel; while sitting in a room, absent mindedly chewing on my pen and contemplating what to write, Malgudi appeared in my mind's eye with its small train station, featuring a character named 'Swaminathan' darting down the platform, inspecting the faces of travelers, and making a face at a man with a beard; this visualization seemed to guide me toward writing success, as day after day, interconnected pages emerged from it.



The narrative that Narayan presents in *My Days*, marked by a perspective that is neither self-centered nor direct, provides an intriguing glimpse into his life, embodying his recurring interest in the complex interplay of honesty and self-deception which pervades human existence, a theme frequently explored in his literary works. With remarkable agility and subtle humor, Narayan thoughtfully dissects this collective enigma of humanity or the interpretation embedded within the soul of seventy-year-old Indian author.

The manner in which he became the person he unfolds in a relaxed and indirect manner through his charming and humor-filled memoir. His unique personality comes through distinctly because the qualities that infuse his stories with warmth and originality are also prominent here. Primarily, his skill at depicting the surface representation of reality with remarkable precision and creativity and additionally, he exhibits significant human motivation and he crafts a concise and moderate elegance in referring how key moments resonate with ancient Indian mythologies. It is plausible that the monkey marking the beginning of his life symbolizes Hanuman, the deity embodying wisdom and kindness, while the peacock, incessantly scavenging at every ant that comes into its sight, which reflects his keen, discerning and playful perspective.

Since Narayan penned, *Swami and Friends*, he has continually been illustrating the Malgudi narrative, producing novel after novel that focuses specifically on the middle-class environment. One cannot help but ponder the idea that Narayan enjoys the liberties

that come with being a writer, allowing him to choose his subjects to their fullest extent. Regarding the novelist's focus on the middle-class setting might further disclose that Narayan situates it in Southern India. With a deep familiarity with his community and an understanding of their mind set as intimately as he knows his own hand, Narayan appears to have decided to concentrate solely on his social class and never redirect his gaze to other human groups.

It is worth noticing the distinct traits of the middle class that are authentically represented in Narayan's works. An average person involved in the typical and unremarkable aspects of life through his granny. His tendency to seek security and his desire to evade or delay facing the challenges that time presents his childhood growing. His propensity to rebel, yet ultimately favoring acceptance and retreat his passive disposition that aligns with a life of inactivity and non-intervention from his ancestral lineage. His exceptional sensitivity and profound sense of spirituality as well as his timidity and his inclination to fantasize about trivial matters in life has reflected through his childhood upbringings.

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