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## **‘LOW PATRIARCHY’ AND FEMININE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN R. K. NARAYAN’S *GRANDMOTHER’S TALE***

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### **Abstract**

Within patriarchy men enjoy almost absolute authority that relegates women to a seemingly powerless entity. India is a case in point. However, historically mothers have often been instrumental in parental control in Indian households. According to Hagan’s Power-control theory of gender difference in risk preference, sons are subjects to weaker maternal parental control because they are mostly occupied with the outer world. Hence, unlike daughters in a patriarchal household, they are more risk prone and delinquent. On the other hand, daughters are generally risk averse for their mothers’ direct instrumental control. They deploy a powerful emotional intelligence through strong interpersonal network. This paper argues

that R. K. Narayan in *Grandmother’s Tale* takes such aspects of feminine strength into consideration and relays that through the story of Bala, as told to him by her grandmother; thereby revealing a kind of position of power for women in society which can be characterized as ‘low patriarchy’. By depicting different levels of parental control placed upon children in her story, Grandmother raises the narrator of the story in a female-headed household which induces him into understanding the differences between him and children brought up under patriarchy. This paper will explore how the narrator, along with his Grandmother, advocates a new domestic sphere where male and female children can be equally dutiful and well-behaved through the intervention of higher feminine intelligence and low patriarchy.

**Key Words:** Patriarchy, Emotional Intelligence (EI), Delinquency, Mother, Parental Control, Power Control Theory

In criminology, “the central hypothesis of power control theory” is: “gender differences are produced in children” among those families where fathers are the active decision makers and mothers are just their passive companions. For the existing patriarchal conditions, this gender difference persists into adulthood” (Collet and Lizardo, 8). In comparison to daughters, sons are subjects to a lesser amount of maternal parental control in a patriarchal family. As a result, they are more risk prone and delinquent. On the other hand, women in a patriarchal household are risk averse because their behavior is often monitored and controlled by their parents (Collet and Lizardo, 3). They stay closer to their mothers and through a strong interpersonal network; these women develop a high level of emotional intelligence. In R. K. Narayan’s *Grandmother’s Tale*, Bala and her husband Viswa come from a strong patriarchal background. Both of their fathers are strict and demanding. However, in comparison to Viswa, Bala’s life is monitored under a strong maternal parental control. On one

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hand, this makes her less delinquent and less risk prone; on the other hand, it helps her to explore and operate the world through feminine intelligence. Keeping this framework in mind, Grandmother Ammani, raises the narrator of the story in a household where patriarchal control is almost absent. By playing both the roles of a male and a female parent, she makes the narrator become aware of gender balanced ideals and by exhibiting a certain level of maternal parental control, she becomes able to bring him up as a less delinquent son. Thus, with a combination of women's better emotional understanding and the implication of Hagan's Power-control theory, R. K. Narayan's *Grandmother's Tale* can be interpreted as Grandmother's attempt to promote the new gender balanced ideal of low patriarchy.

In a household, where "men have the majority of power" (Collet and Lizardo, 7) and women prepare the children to follow the men's command is referred to as patriarchal. Here, apparently the husband has the leading power to control, manage and give orders; his wife is generally thought as his subordinate, but to be more specific, mothers in a patriarchal household are assigned "primary socialization roles as instrumental agents of social control" (Collet and Lizardo, 7). In light of this definition, it can be said that Bala's household in Grandmother's story is patriarchal. Her father is the head of the family; he administers all the familial matters. He commands and others are bound to obey, for example, Bala was ordered by her father to get married. While the decision was taken, he did not provide her any support. After hearing from her father about her wedding Bala rushed back home to her mother and expressed her anger and reluctance. In contrast to her father, Bala's mother was supportive: she soothed her and "explained patiently that she was old enough to marry." This would be an occasion "when she would be showered with

gifts and new clothes and gold ornaments"(10). Now, the issue of men's having a superior power over women has an explanation. "Husbands in patriarchal families translate the authority they gain in the workplace into the dominion of their households" (Collet and Lizardo, 7). That is why; the concept of patriarchy is related more to wage earning and giving commands. Here, either "the mother does not work outside the home" or "she occupies a less dominant class position in the labor force than her husband" (Collet and Lizardo, 8). Bala's father was only interested in "his coconut grove, the price of coconut, coconut pests" and "he left all the domestic matters to his wife's care"(23). In his work place, he secured an authoritative position; he earned money for the family and his wife did not work outside the house. However, without her wife's assistance, it could have been impossible for him to maintain his authority.

Moreover, in order to stop delinquency among children, a mother's instrumental control is equally important as the father's disciplinary measures. As a matter of fact, "girls are subject to greater control than boys in patriarchal households" (Bates, Bader and Mencken, 174) and parents "can exert greater amounts of control" (Bates, Bader and Mencken, 177) over daughters for they stay more in front of their eyes. "Power-control theory argues that patriarchy determines the levels of control placed upon youth" (Bates, Bader and Mencken, 174) and "because of the greater levels of control placed on girls in patriarchal household", "boys are more delinquent than girls" (Bates, 170). With a thorough instrumental control, Bala's parents, (specially her mother) were well aware of their daughter's activities. After the date of the wedding was fixed, Bala was strictly kept indoors and was not allowed to go out and play (10). Her "life changed after her

marriage”; she was unable to go out freely, or join her friends playing in the street”(14); she had always been under the control of her parents. As a result, she was less delinquent than Viswa. On the other hand, after his marriage, Viswa joined school and he continued his usual caprice. In his case of paternal control, “higher levels of patriarchal attitudes were associated with lower levels of control” because his mother was not exercising her share of control. According to the study of Bates, Bader and Mencken, it is known that “patriarchal attitudes in the household might actually lead to less paternal control” (Bates, Bader and Mencken, 184) because excessive paternal control will be resisted by children after a certain period of time (Bates, Bader and Mencken, 182) or perhaps because in patriarchal households the everyday parenting rests significantly with the mother (Bates, Bader and Mencken, 184). Inside Viswa’s patriarchal household, his authoritative father could not help beating him whenever his teacher came and reported ill about him, for example, when he heard from the teacher that Viswa had thrown cow dung on him, he slapped him and thrashed him (27-28). His mother was unable to take a stand there. She could only “burst into tears” (27) when these facts were disclosed in front of the crowd after Viswa’s disappearance. With his higher level of patriarchal control, Viswa’s father was unable to manage Viswa’s delinquent behavior because of the absence of Viswa’s mother’s influence on him. His “highly traditional gender role attitudes” (Bates, Bader and Mencken, 182) could not stop Viswa from engaging in his wrong doings rather, Viswa started to culture negative feelings towards him. Ultimately, this played a significant role in his running away from the house. Therefore, Bala was less delinquent than Viswa because in her life, her mother’s careful gaze was very much present along with her father’s authoritarian patriarchal commands.

On top of that, In *Grandmother’s Tale*, Narayan portrays a supremely powerful Indian Patriarchal society where women are conditioned to a role from a very early age and they accept it as an “ideal through myth, art, literature and common sayings” (Lahiri, 14). The narrator of the story reminds of learning a Sanskrit lyric from his grandmother that defined “the perfect woman”. It said that the perfect woman “must work like a slave, advise like a *Mantri* (Minister), look like Goddess Lakshmi, be patient like Mother Earth and courtesan-like in the bed chamber-” (5). In this way, Patriarchy defines what women’s role should be and any digression of that assigned responsibility calls upon retribution. Bala got married at only ten years, but she was unable to meet her husband as a wife. It was an ordeal on her to attain her puberty and “then go through an elaborate nuptial ceremony before she could join her husband” (21). Occasionally Viswa found an excuse to visit Bala on the pretext of wanting to meet his father-in-law” (16) and though Bala desired to be with her husband, she “kept herself in the deepest recess of the house for fear of being considered too forward” (16). Similarly, even when she set out to find her husband she could not roam around much. “She reached a public rest house, a charity institution” and “made the rest house the central point” of her stay (36). “She was afraid to move about after dusk for fear of being mistaken for a loose woman soliciting custom”. She safeguarded herself inside the rest house and stayed there (36). Henceforth, women are unable to go against the patriarchal custom because they are raised with a belief that they are to live their lives within the custom and, any departure from that can provoke severe reactions.

This being the case, Grandmother knew that her demands could only be raised under a proper condition and the audience was required to be prepared in order to hear her story. Thus, she

conveys through her story of Bala about how uniquely she accommodates herself within the accepted framework of society and “yet asserts her individuality” through a cultivated patience developed from her interaction with other female relatives. Bala knew that a direct attack upon the forces of the centuries-old dominant patriarchal order” (Lahiri, 146-147) could lead to “her alienation or even annihilation” (Lahiri, 146-147). When she hears from the priest about the “God’s wrath”, she rushes “out like a storm” in between his and her mother’s conversation but very moderately expresses her anger and disgust in front of them. She convinces them that though everyone thinks that she is a widow, she is actually not a widow and she is going to prove that her husband is not dead (30-33). She makes an attempt to assert her position, and she does not directly fight back. She gradually establishes herself as a responsible and sensible individual. She evidently differs from other temple going women while speaking about her demands by staying very much within the patriarchal context.

In addition to that, Grandmother portrays through the character of Bala that “the female gender possesses more and better emotional abilities” (Fernández, 80) as women develop a high level of intelligence because of their early interactions with their mothers (Brackett, 1399). Mothers generally use more vivid facial expressions when they communicate with their daughters (as compared to their sons). This helps girls to develop better skills at “recognizing each others emotions” (Brackett, 1399). When Bala secretly began to worry about Viswa's absence and “She suffered silently”, “Others at home did not bother”. Only her mother “noticed her brooding silence and gloom” and asked about her worries (23). With an adequate support from her mother, Bala proves to have “a greater emotional knowledge”. She gains the capacity to express “positive and negative emotions more fluently and

more frequently”, she exhibits “more interpersonal competencies”, and she becomes “more socially adept” (Fernández, 79), for instance, Grandmother Points out that:

even in her hurry, before leaving home Bala did not forget to pack a small bag with a change of clothes, some money she had saved out of her birthday and other gifts, a few gold ornaments, and above all a knife in case she had to protect her honour and end her life (34)

Bala remains alert to fight against difficult situations. She gets competent enough to handle harsh conditions. She does not run away from the troubles occurring in her life. She proves to be always prepared to stand for herself. She becomes able to support herself and she gains this strength from her mother.

Consequently, grandmother suggests that in comparison to Bala, Viswa has a lower emotional intelligence and this often relates to self destructive behaviours (Brackett, 1387); since he could not interact with his mother as Bala could, he turned delinquent. Bala’s mother being the mother of a daughter not only speaks more to her but also displays a wider range of feelings to her. In contrast to that, Viswa’s mother as a son’s mother tends to hold back her emotions in front of him. She responds to his interactions less expressively” (Brackett, 1399). Bala comes to know about marriage and the customs related to marriage from her mother (10). Viswa’s mother did not give him any idea about marriage. He also did not know how to pray; his mother never taught him that. Bala informed him that if he would not say his prayers, he will be sent to hell. When he inquires, how can that happen? She replies that her mother has told her. She makes them all pray in the evenings. Viswa goes to the temple because he gets to eat wonderful things out there. His mother has never warned him against the punishment for not praying (20-21). In addition to that, males who have a

lower emotional intelligence generally have poor quality peer relations, they have trouble in establishing meaningful social interactions (Brackett, 1398), for instance, when it was decided that Bala would get married, “her playmates visited her and whispered their sympathies” (10), but for getting married, “Viswanath the bridegroom”, “was ragged by his class-fellows” (13). Viswa lacked the skill to disclose his plight. Similarly, “men from their early childhood” are taught to minimize certain emotions related to sadness, guilt, vulnerability and fear” (Fernández, 79), and Viswa here is not an exception. He ran away from his house without even thinking about his parents or his bride. He was not sad about leaving the place he belonged to. He did not feel any regret for deserting Bala. Later, he eloped with Surma because he was unable to ask Surma’s father for her hand. He could not make a proper negotiation with a man who trusted him absolutely (49). On the other hand, Bala was resolute; she stood still on her own decision. She designed to take Viswa back so flawlessly that “Viswa stood dumbstruck, not knowing what to do” (69). He left himself in Surma’s care earlier and when Bala was later proved stronger “for the check of Bala” he just stared in silence (69). All of these incidents prove that Viswa is emotionally weaker than Bala.

However, apart from these differences it should also be noted that the story is set at “the later period of the East India Company, before the Sepoy Mutiny” (8); coincidentally, it was a time of glorifying the role of mothers. During the British era in the subcontinent, the ideological response of nationalism to the colonial rule suggested that the outer world was dominated by the material culture of the West, but “the home” was safe from this aggression. “Women became the guardians of this uncontaminated inner space. Their spiritual superiority was expected to compensate for the concessions that men were

being compelled to make to western culture” (Lahiri, 136) and all reforms advocated by nationalist leaders took this distinction between the social roles of men and women into account (Lahiri, 136). Women were expected to be responsible for care giving and nurturing on the basis of this ideal. Narayan’s novel bears this idea as well.

Therefore, with her narration of Bala’s story, grandmother Ammani is trying to suggest that within a family, it is better to be commuted by intelligent, sensible and strong women instead of being commanded by men who remain careless about home; here Bala provides her a model to redesign a new form of family system. Ammani has been carefully guided by her mother Bala. She informed the narrator that whenever her mother felt like it, she would gather them around “and tell her story” – so that her children might realize “how strong and bold she was at one time” (35). The narrator’s mother was raised in a patriarchal household and Grandmother Ammani could not create a balanced household for her daughter, but she was successful in creating a less patriarchal household for the narrator by keeping Bala’s story in mind. The novel opens with the line “I was brought up by my grandmother in Madras”. Grandmother took the narrator away with her “in order to give relief to an over-burdened daughter (1).” From a patriarchal family the narrator was placed in a single parent household. Grandmother’s support helped him to ignore his chauvinistic junior uncle who ridiculed “grandmother’s tale” (6) and who was himself the son of a patriarch sub-magistrate (77). Grandmother’s household was female headed as *she* herself was the head of a family of six: herself, two sons, two daughters-in-law and a grandson. In this way, she created “a special example of a balanced household” since there was no “power imbalance” there (Bates, Bader and Mencken, 172). In other words, it was a house of “low patriarchy” (Bates, Bader

and Mencken, 172). Grandmother valued education above anything; so the narrator learned “songs, prayers, numbers, and the alphabet” from her. She gave him supper only when he completed his lessons “to her satisfaction” (1) She was very authoritative and disciplined. If he felt “hungry and sleepy”, she sprinkled cold water from a bowl on his eye-lids. The narrator wondered why she bothered so much to make him learn (5) but he never protested or went against her orders. As a single parent, grandmother fulfilled “the roles of both masculine and feminine parent” (Bates, Bader and Mencken, 173). She believed “in the appropriateness of less sex-role behavior” (Bates, Bader and Mencken, 173) while performing “a variety of tasks all through the day”. She did the job of a housewife by “cooking and running the house for her two sons” and by gardening. She also did the job of a man by “settling disputes, studying horoscopes and arranging matrimonial alliances” (1). The narrator saw the grandmother taking “a wider range of responsibilities in the family and thus” she became “a more non-traditional role model” for him (Bates, Bader and Mencken, 173). As “in less patriarchal households sons have more controls placed on them” and this decreases “their level of delinquency” (Bates, Bader and Mencken, 171), the narrator was turned into a loyal and faithful grandson. Since the grandfather was absent, the narrator was not affected by patriarchy in his childhood and he grew up as a responsible individual under his grandmother’s control and care.

R. K. Narayan’s *Grandmother’s Tale* supports the idea that instead of strong and demanding patriarchal household, low patriarchy with strong maternal control can prevent delinquencies among children. It also suggests that women with their maternal parental control developed from a high

feminine intelligence can largely contribute in maintaining a proper family life.

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