



Dimensions Of Developmental Psychology In Children: A Study Of R.K. Narayan's Swami And Friends

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Abstract: The world of children is most intriguing and warm. They have a vast kingdom of their own populated with images and experiences that are inconceivable to adults. Acquainting with their experiences and seeing the world of children as they see it is not easy but imperative for discussion. The development of children to adults is credited to the environment. They influence the shaping of the children's psyche. However it is the child's ability to transform those experiences to wisdom as they grow that will lead to their development. Their developmental process is widespread and tracing it requires an in-depth study of the individual and the environment. The multitudinous sources that contribute towards their growth should be recognized. How these sources influence the mental development and the thought process of the children is yet another area of research that is interesting and demanding at the same time for its very nature where, unlike adults who can verbalize their experience, a child cannot describe its experience in words. Undeniably any attempt at representing the world of children can only remain partial. As is the world of children inexpressible, so is the definition for Children's literature. The plausible explanation that could be given is that the children's literature is that which is written on children and for children. Their origin can be traced to the ancient storytellers.

Keywords - child, cultural influences, introjection, projection, self-actualization.

R K Narayan, the Indian writer stands out for his compassionate outlook on the mundane life of ordinary people. He has a keen insight into the aspirations and motives of people's activities. His work, like his characters, are sans pretensions and affectation. His stories team up with people whom the readers meet every day with whom they can relate to. He presents his characters for what they are with no artificial embellishments thereby showing them in their native simplicity. He is known for creating a fictional town 'Malgudi' which streams with lively characters.

This paper aims at a deliberation on how societal and cultural experiences influence the perspective of children as they move into adulthood with reference to R K Narayan's novel. The paper also discusses how in responding to these experiences children assimilate, adopt and outgrow certain beliefs leading to their self-development. Children form various relationships in their lives of which some are significant contributors to their development. This developmental process of the children in RK Narayan's Swami and Friends is analyzed in the light of Object Relations Theory.

ORT in psychoanalytic psychology is the process of developing a psyche in relation to others in the environment during childhood. An adult's response to the environment and others around depends on the adult's experiences during infancy. This theory deals with the relationships between people. It substantiates the belief that human beings have a determined urge to form relationships with others. This way the events and images from the past life are transferred as objects to the unconscious memory of the person. These objects have a strong hold over its subject. Swami, the primary subject in the novel and the objects influencing Swami are studied here. Few other characters in the novel have also been taken up for the study.

Swami and Friends is the first of a series of novels written by R K Narayan. The novel is set in Malgudi. It is the story of a ten year old boy Swaminathan called Swami, and his friends. The author documents his metamorphosis from the innocent child with all the rudiments that make up his life.

Swaminathan has internalized the habits of a "Brahmin boy". The object is the culture of a Brahmin boy and Swami is the subject. The internalization here is the part of the object that has not attained its maturity as a whole object. For its maturity, the subject requires a conducive environment where it has the opportunity to analyze the habits adopted by it. In the scripture class, when the teacher was speaking about a European God, Swaminathan- as a "Brahmin boy", was not able to conceive that a God could be a non-vegetarian (SF 4). This part object is perplexed by the ambiguity which is the result of partial development. The part object becomes whole object when Swaminathan the subject develops the ability to understand the differences in beliefs and cultures

Culture is the object here influencing the subject. The good or bad effect of the object is recognised and responded accordingly by the subject as it gathers experience. In what follows, Swaminathan is influenced by the culture of the boys termed by the author as "usual abstracted way" (10) and the Brahmin boy culture that was aggravated earlier in the scene is now subdued due to the dominance of the boys culture. In this state the study of Hinduism or the nativity of Christ does not make any difference.

Melanie Klein (1882) is much associated with the development of the modern theory of "ORT". According to her, a mother is a highly influential object over a child. And this is a decisive factor in the formation of the child's structure of drives. The child is prone to a series of emotions as a response. Anger and frustration dominates in the beginning as the subject relies completely on the mother's breast as its object. When the mother herself instead of her breasts is introduced as the object, the child is not able to understand it. This recurs with every object that influences the subject.

Swaminathan's momentary response in the scripture class is his reaction at understanding that his cultural preferences and ideologies are more than part objects that influence his thoughts. Consequently, this complexity in the subject's understanding of the object as a whole and the gradual resolving of the conflict by the subject is reflected in the formation of the adult's personality. This association and dissociation of part objects and the whole object is repeated throughout Swami's childhood. His annoyance at the beginning while faced with the idea of a non-vegetarian "God", the indifference towards the nature of Gods; and later the "great relief" to shoot out of the room as a way of ending religious controversies are the aspects of Swami coming to understand the complete nature of the religious objects that populate his world.

In the developmental process of a person, sometimes, relating oneself to the other dominates and sometimes individuation dominates. However both of these conditions are present to some extent at every stage of the process. Nagy suggests that the subject and the object should reverse their roles at times for interaction that is beneficial to either side. This is an important part of the making up of one's personality through interpersonal relationships.

Swami's friend Mani is held in reverence by the other boys around him for his physical assault. He was not able to stand Rajam, the new arrival at the school. Rajam was not to be threatened by Mani's strength; "If Mani was the overlord of the class, Rajam seemed to be nothing less" (15). Swami's admiration for Rajam had to be suppressed in order to pacify Mani. The two boys plan to meet outside the school for a combat to prove their might. The conflict arises due to one group of children unwilling to understand the others whom they see as a rival to their old friendships. But the absence of any desire to fight on either side (for they are merely children who have no place for serious enmity) resolves the conflict. And again, the boys carry weapons to fight which demonstrates their internalization of the society's belief in violence as a means for arriving at solutions. The world of the adult and the world of the children are in conflict where the children's world takes an upper hand and no violence ensues.

When Mani decided to befriend Rajam, Swami who admired Rajam was happy. The three friends sit in the banks of Sarayu river "eating, and glowing with new friendship" (21). ORT substantiates the determined urge in people to form relationships with others which is primordial for sustenance. Throughout the novel, the struggle to form and maintain relationships is dominant. In the beginning, Swami and his four friends, accustomed to the differences in the other, get along admirably well with each other. Though Rajam, the new arrival at the school did not pose any threat to them, the friends of Swami were not able to accept him with his differences. But the desire to form new relationships which is internalized in human beings comes to the fore and unites the boys.

It is imperative that children understand the importance of forming new relationships. This is also important in making them learn to maintain a balance between the newly formed relationships and the already existing.

The formation of interpersonal relationships is pivotal in gaining experience. The interaction of an individual with the environment, through time, leads to an increasing awareness of its influence on mental growth. These experiences, by the virtue of their being derived from the human's psychological necessity to form relationships, provide concrete principles of loyalty, fairness, accountability and trustworthiness within the individual. Swami and his friends widening their circle is a progressive move for being understood by the other which forms the basis of humanity. The theory notes that those who are not able to develop relationships in their early life, face problems at later stages in life. Throughout the novel, these boys who are successful at forming relationships can be seen actively involved in various activities. They take up responsibilities, interact with people around, relate with the others around. Some of these relationships turn disastrous. However, they are instrumental in the formation of their personality. Swami breaks the window panels of the Principal's office giving in to the mob pressure at the protest against the Englishmen. He is thrashed by the policemen but narrowly escapes from being arrested. This chastisement is adequate for him and it leaves him with the wisdom to be cautious while choosing his actions. Similarly, when he is angry at his headmaster he throws his cane out of the window. He feels guilty in retrospect. He is never seen repeating these mistakes.

The person, place or thing in the surroundings serve as objects working on the psyche of a person thus having a strong hold over the subject. The mob, school, teachers, father, mother & granny and friends serve as Swami's objects. More than the object, its actions are first represented by the subject's mind. This object which is called a "part object" turns into a "whole object" when it is completely understood by the subject when circumstances are conducive. However this is left to the subject's ability to tolerate ambiguity and to differentiate between the good and the bad influence of the object.

Swami stands "face to face with his soul" (149) in a mood of self-reproach having refused to buy lemon for his granny that she asked for. He felt guilty and on returning home he sat with her feeding her ears with topics whatever he could think of as a penitence. According to Klein the psychodynamic battleground occurs in an infant when it realizes that the mother known to it is more than the breast that is fed. Klein believes that how the infant finds a solution to the conflict reflects the adult's personality. The physical and mental representations are strong when the child does not know the difference between fantasy and reality. Various psychic mechanisms like projection, introjection and splitting are involved in this.

When Rajam told Swami that he killed a tiger while camping with his father, it was an incident of valor without doubt to Swami. His innocent world naturally, could not comprehend the unreality of the scene. In its naivety it disregards the improbabilities. At the same time the process of mental development has begun in him reasoning whatever is experienced. This condition is visible where Swami narrates the tiger incident to his granny and expects her to be equally surprised like him. But when he finds that she is indifferent, he who has already begun doubting the possibility of the incident and asks her if she did not believe the tiger incident. (25)

A child's world is too crammed with images and ideas which are inconceivable to an adult. Their beliefs and ideals undergo rapid transformation based on experiences. Swami and his friends, seeing Somu and Mani fighting, report to the headmaster that there are two murders being committed at that very moment (47). The headmaster was disposed to laugh at first but checks it. When the headmaster and the peon easily pick apart Somu and Mani who were rolling in the ground Swami, who had been believing that his friends are stronger than any in the world was shocked.(47)

The ongoing acknowledgement and reciprocation of ideologies derived from the objects around a child are unfathomable like Swami's arithmetic sums with its whole brood of Ramas and Krishnas and their "endless transactions with odd quantities of mangoes and fractions of money" (103) with which his father harasses him. In the subject and object relationship by Nagy, similar to how the subject is benefited by the object, the object is also benefited by the subject. The object arrives at its own individuality in the process.

Swami is criticized by his friends in the beginning for his growing friendship with Rajam. They ignore him, addressing him as "Rajam's Tail". The boy is not able to comprehend this anger from his friends. This is his "first shock in life" which "paralyzed all his mental process" (35). He was puzzled by the fact that he was hated by his friends because he liked Rajam. Though he was mocked at by his friends, Swami continued to look for chances to make friends with them again. He also encouraged Rajam's friendship with him. He is invariably seen attempting to build relationships with those around. He is surrounded by his father, mother and granny at home. In school he is always around his friends and teachers.

From his mother and granny he is assured of safety they could give him. He is a keen observant of his father's manners and habits. He is clean, organized and sensible while his father is around. With his friends he is open, silly, compromising and caught between giving in to temptations and the guilt that follows. He is constantly seen reflecting over his experiences, be it beneficial or calamitous. This analysis is rewarding for his development as a responsible adult in the society. As per the theory these events and images from the past life are transferred as "internal objects" to the unconscious memory of a person. This characterizes their social relationships and characteristics.

Melanie Klein emphasizes on biological drives and instincts and their representation in children. For instance, the death instinct in Swami is transferred to the coachman's son who was overpowering in his fantasies. These physical and mental representations are strong in the earlier stages of childhood that knows no difference between fantasy and reality. This state is explained by one of the psychic mechanisms called "introjection"- a state of mental fantasy where the subject internalizes the feelings and emotions that persist in the world. Annoyed by the coachman's son's brutality that may kill him, Swami walks in front of his father and not behind him imagining "the unknown dangers lurking in the darkness around" (107). When he leaves home afraid to face his father after his misbehaviour at the school, there are score of wild imagining in the deserted road "now a leopard, now a lion, even a whale, now a huge crowd, a mixed crowd of wild elephants, tigers, lions and demons," (193) and it goes on. These mental phantasies are felt by the hearsay ineligible to a child's mind.

In Klein's psychic mechanism, Mani expecting Swami to replicate him is called "Projective Identification" where he attributes his insolent nature on Swami to control him. According to St. Claire "fluctuation of introjection and projection create amalgamation of ego and object that is the core of the developing ego." It is then the resolving of the conflict begins and when this is achieved, projection and introjection lessens and as the child grows it understands the qualities of the object better.

Swami, with a child's naivety in the beginning is seen transforming to a boy with a greater sense of responsibility towards his society. His reflections over his experiences with his environment leads to self-actualization. His understanding of the 'internal conception of the self' and the 'internal conception of the other' furthers his development.

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