

The Grandson Effect ___A Short Story

Because of an unusually large brain to body ratio, a human child at birth is one of the most helpless among mammals. It is a simple 'compromise' for the relative safety of both child and mother, which is later compensated by a complex behavior of parental care. However, high mortality of reproducing human females at childbirth is a fact.

In primate evolution, the human race has come to dominate the earth because of many reasons. Human females, in human evolution are believed have played the role of a 'protector' of the species by ensuring the survival of their immediate descendants. Because of the high neonatal mortality of mothers, more often than not the surviving females took care of even their grandchildren. In the process, to put it crudely, they had to invest more 'energy' in parental care than in active reproduction. Hence, the present day human female unlike her ape counterparts, remains reproductively active for about 40 years out of an average 80-year life span. Arguably, the evolution of a defined reproductively active phase in the life cycle of human females has contributed to the success of the species at large. From a strategic viewpoint, this trait is an important one. Some evolutionary biologists like to call this "The Grandmother Effect" or "The Grandmother Hypothesis".

My grandmother, in her prime was a real time athlete, who could do many physically demanding household jobs at will. At 70, she recovered from a serious leg fracture purely because of her physical stamina. Although she was not even half of what she used to be, her vigour was much more than an average Indian woman half her age. All these stopped a couple of months ago, when she suffered a stroke at the age of 90.

She was admitted to a local hospital. The doctors were astonished to see her quick response to the treatment. She was discharged after five days of observation.

Now, at home, it is hard to convince her that she has to take rest. Like many of her generation, she is extremely unhappy about her inability to move without support. She is very sad that she cannot celebrate festivals with her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. She hates the horizontal body exercises, which she has to do on the bed. Nevertheless, when I (one of her many grandsons) go home every day after work and stand beside her, she has a child like smile on her face. She is happy and sure that I will take her for a routine steady walk in the verandah.

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December 28th, 2007