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R. K. Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts*: Self-Realization in Hindu Traditional Family

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Abstract

The Bachelor of Arts (1935) is one of R. K. Narayan's best Indian novels written in English designed with the intent to show a mirror to the society of the false love, attractions and reality. It bespeaks of the key character's Chandran's struggle and determination to live a second life after much retrospection. What Narayan endeavors and aims to do in this novel is to set right the societal issues and check before it slips out of the clutch. Chandran is shown both as a real man and everyman because of his realistic attributes. Thus, Narayan depicts the problems of Chandran as everyman's. Chandran's life is categorized into three stages in the first term as student in the last year of his college life, in the second term as a romantic lover and in the third term as a sanyasi. For Narayan, life is full of charm; one has to only choose the right dose of happiness and joy to make a pleasurable living.

Keywords: Struggle, Determination, Retrospection, Societal Issues, Realistic

R. K. Narayan is one of the most prominent and prolific Indian writers and his *The Bachelor of Arts* one of the best set in Malgudi. It is poignant coming-of-age novel about a young man (Chandran) and his first love, but whose freedom to pursue it hindered by fixed ideas of his traditional Hindu family. This pioneering novel luminous in its details and refreshingly free of artifice is a gift to twentieth century literature. This story says about bachelor life of Chandran and his aims in life. It basically shows the difficulty he faced in his life. It is good romantic inspiration of the today's youth and their struggle in real life. The main protagonist Chandran is handsome young man. Narayan's characters are always authentic, typical, unique and mostly taken from the middle classes of the Indian society.

Chandran in his struggle to achieve a life freed from distracting illusions and hysterics is shown to human nature. William Walsh particularly praises the second novel *The Bachelor*

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of Arts for revealing the writer's ability to bring together the comic and the serious in an intricate, inseparable alliance so that a comic surface exists above deeply serious depths.

Chandran being modern and educated is not able to set himself in the traditional set-up of the society. He is introduced as a sensitive young man of twenty one studying at Albert Mission College. He is shown as a representative of the youth who goes through a variety of pain in their life. Here, he is an epitome of a frustrated young man. The writer beautifully paves to portray how young men like him were carried by a wave of Indian renaissance and how difficult it was for them to confine themselves to the curricular activities during the years of the British rule in India. Right from the beginning of the novel, the readers can find Chandran trapped into becoming the Prime Mover of the union debate on the subject, "In the opinion of this house historians should be slaughtered first" (Narayan 1).

Chandran is the hero of the novel in the full sense of the term and the novel has been justifiably named after him. He did not set himself in traditional set-up of the society. He was studying at Albert Mission College in the degree of *The Bachelor of Arts* in History. He always goes late night film with his close friend Ramu.

According to Raymond Williams (in *Marxism and Literature*), "Tradition is an actively shaping force" (11). Raymond's attention to gender goes beyond his in culture and materialism states that many forces concerned with the power struggle between youth on many levels and remaking of an effective dominant culture, as built in to our society, which is reality depends. His statement in his work "Culture and Materialism" is again helpful in understanding young Chandran's new ideas, opinions, consciousness about social science as, "...new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences are continually being created. But there is then a much earlier attempt to incorporate them just because they are part and yet not a defined part of effective contemporary practice" ("Culture and Materialism" 41).

Chandran was passing after graduation, a major change comes into his life and felled in love. He got his graduation degree. Then he decided to go to England for higher study. He spends much time in his college library. All his friends including Ramu have left Malgudi. He wants to marry with Malathi (the beautiful damsel). As soon as Chandran sees a fifteen years girl named Malathi, he asks several questions to himself as: How old was she? Probably fourteen, might be even fifteen or sixteen. If she was more than fourteen she must be married there was a touch of despair in his thought. What was the use of thinking of a married girl? It would be very improper. He tried to force his mind to think of other things... (Narayan 55-56).

Chandran faces many hardships and marrying out of caste was not acceptable then. Both the bride and groom has to belong to the same caste, community etc in order to be eligible for the marriage. A marriage would not be tolerated even between sub-sects of the same caste. Narayan diverted from this custom when he took the bold step of declaring his

feeling for Rajam to his future father in law. Then came the dowry arrangements (one of the social evil till date) where the bride's parents had to appease the groom's family. Here another crucial matter did not match horoscopes in marriage. Like Chandran, Narayan's father also has no faith in horoscopes but for social purpose horoscopes are exchanged and Mars is found to occupy the Seventh House of the prospective bridegroom's life document (Ram & Ram, 1996). This means that according to the astrologers life would be threatening for the bride unless her horoscope has similar flaw.

Malathi's parents refuse the match because their horoscopes do not match. Frustrated and angry, Chandran leaves his home and becomes a sanyasi. He is able to recognize his selfishness and resist and reject his desire for Malathi as something alien to his cultural values. "His love was a scorching madness and driven by a non-existent thing he had become a deserter and a counterfeit" (*The Magic of Malgudi* 227). It is his personal realization that love is illusory and non-existent. The whole rejection of the selfish pursuit of romantic love, as something alien to cultural values, comes a little later when he realizes that:

Love is only brain affection; it led me to beg and cheat; to desert my parents; it is responsible for my mother's extra wrinkles and grey hairs, for my father's neglect of the garden. (ibid 237)

Malathi and Kalyani Raga played at her wedding haunted him into the state of depressive reaction. He tells himself that is nothing to live for and he decides to enter sanyas "the only thing possible: short of committing suicide, there was no other way out. He had done with the gamble of life. He was beaten" (Narayan 102).

Chandran is not interested toward the social evil dowry system. But Chandran's parents are interested in dowry system. Chandran's mother who says: "My father gave seven thousand in cash to your father and over two thousand in silver vessel and spent five thousand on wedding celebrations. What was wrong in it? How are we any the worse for it? It is the duty of every father to set some money apart for securing a son-in-law. We can't disregard custom." (Narayan 84-85)

Chandran's father did not obstacle in Chandran's way as Chandran is interested to be free and to arrange his life. He was working as a business man and happy to working in office. He comes to home after a year. His father was asking him very hesitatingly. He may be interested in a new marriage proposal for his son. He can't agree this proposal. Ramu and Mohan who helped him in all his difficulties and trials and tribulations which Chandran himself pays his best are responding to that. Here, Mohan's advice to him to agree the new offer for this marriage if you marry that girl and getting benefits of a permanent helpmate.

The plasticity and resilience of Chandran's mind is revealed when Mohan's advice loaded with practical wisdom, finds a quick favour with him. Endorsing the callous realism of Mohan, Chandran regards love to be an illusion. He remarks, "There is no such thing as love.

If I am not unkind to my parents, it is because of gratitude and nothing else. If I get a wife I shall not wrench her hand or sweat at her, because it would be indecent..." (Narayan 156).

Chandran's parents choice another girl her name is Susila and falls love with her at first sight. He was always thinking about Susila. Her name was over follow in his mind to think. Finally he decides settle with Susila, year old daughter of Talapur Advocate. Here Chandran proved to be much loving husband to Susila and his life seemed to be peaceful and happy as he feels:

Susila, Susila, Susila, Her name, music, figure, face and everything about her was divine. Susila, Susila-Malati not a spot beside Susila; it was a tongue twister; he wondered why people liked that name. (Narayan 162)

Chandran reaches koopal village in sainad district after eight month of wandering. He got good treat and respect from people. He decided to go home and thought about his parents. He wanted to live with his family. Then he went to Maduram. He met a postmaster there. He told him his entire story. His earlier negative nature changed by more positive nature. He feels very well. He could able to achieve what he aims in life.

Chandran is a real lover of both Malathi and life. He could have sacrificed himself on the altar of a spiritual life. Here, he is completely accounted of the period of his sanyas hood resultant of his failure in love. First, he considers love as the greatest thing in life, he enjoys moments of being in love. Chandran's life is categorized into three stages in the first term as student in the last year of his college life, in the second term as a romantic lover and in the third term as a sanyasi.

After his major heart break Chandran concluded that love and friendships are mere illusions, while living as a sanyasi at various places. When his marriage was successfully arranged with Susila, he started deviating from the concrete principle that the he had made for his life. The very last chapter shows us that Chandran fell in love with Susila. He was worried when Susila did not write to him for 6 days. He left his work immediately, jumped on to his bicycle and rode off to see if Susila was fine. The beautiful conclusion is that a person can fall in love again, even after a major heartbreak. Almost Chandran committed suicide while living the life of a Sanyasi. Thus, by depicting the harsh life of Chandran, Narayan endeavors to set standards for retreating to the normal self after much failures and setbacks. He depicts the problems of Chandran as everyman's.

Writer gets inspiration for their writing from the world around them. Art is the reflection of life. The experience of an artist is often reflected in his artistic life. They cannot product great writing based on situations about which they have no knowledge. Not every piece of writing based on situations about which they have no knowledge. Many incidents which one had impact on the author's lives are expressed through their works. If we observe the greatest artists of the world, we will find that their subject was based on reality, that is to say, the life they have observed around them. It proves that reality is greater than fiction. Art

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achieves timelessness when it touches people's emotions. Literature is a form of art (which mirrors the societal traits) and Narayan always write about the world around him about which he has full knowledge. He shows the harsh realities of life. In his fiction he mostly expects a happy ending but real life is tough. For him, life is full of charm; one has to only choose the right dose of happiness and joy to make a pleasurable living on this mundane earth. The right attitude towards life is what stands out for a clear vision.

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