



YOUNG MIND GRADUALLY MOVING TOWARDS MATURITY A STUDY OF R.K.NARAYAN'S "THE BACHELOR OF ARTS"

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ABSTRACT

R.K. Narayan's second novel *The Bachelor of Arts* was published On March 15, 1937. It's the story of a young boy namely Chandran's transition from adolescent experiences into adulthood. This novel is the sequel of his first novel *Swami and Friends*. *The Bachelor of Arts* is the story of a young mind gradually moving towards maturity. Which illustrates the need of possessing a Bachelor of Arts degree and also portrays the dilemmas associated with it. Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts* portrays the failing of incongruities hopes and aspirations of the youth standing in the crossroad of life. Chandran, the protagonist of the novel, is struggling for maturity, survival and for psychological and economical independence. The very concept of the gradual growth of a boy and his acquiescence with worldly affairs is nicely depicted with utmost tenderness. Chandran, attending college and finding a place for Himself in the world. The novel traces his college days, his unfortunate love story, is sanyasi life (ascetic life) and his finding a way to earn a living.

Keywords:Agony, horoscopes, recklessness, loafing, tolerance, custom, grooms, sulks, soars, priming

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"The Bachelor of Arts"

It is the story of a young guy name Chandran, who resembles a typical Indian upper middle class youth of the pre-independence era. Chandran is in his last year of college and enjoying life when the novel opens. After completing his bachelor of arts in history he faces a dilemma about his future occupation. Everybody starts to give him advice on his future profession but, he declines all offers and decides to wait a year to go to England for further studies. He spends his times at home acquiring knowledge. His life changes when he sees a girl called 'Malathi' in town and falls in love with her at first glance. He faces many social barriers when he wants to marry her and is finally rejected

by her parents. Because their horoscopes do not match. Distaught and heartbroken, Chandran decided to visit his uncle in Madras. But there he slips away from his uncle's home. Later, he realizes the foolishness of running away from loved ones. He comes back to Malgudi and became responsible and starts his own business. At the end of the novel he gets married according to the wishes of his parents and fall in love with his new bride, Susila. Chandran's relationship with his father mirrors Narayan's own experience with his father at that age. While the father is still a figure of authority, the son even fully acquires self-assurance. The grown up son is shown trying to discard his childhood apprehension of his father as he consults him on a

range of issues, from his exam revision schedule to his choice of bride. Narayan conveys the tenderness of a father's feeling for his son. Kailash in *The Bachelor of Arts* is molded on Narayan's maternal uncle who was a heavy drinker of wine. He was Narayan's mother's younger brother and was known as junior. He was an automobile salesman and occasionally helped his sister financially. He used to drink wine a lot every evening and behaved wildly. Narayan says that his uncle approaches to other human being, his aggressive talk wherever he went, his dash and recklessness and his fondness for alcohol in every form all through the day had provided him with insight in human behavior. Chandran met Kailash while he was in Madras, trying to cope with his grief of losing his first love. Chandran's friend Ramu is like Narayan's collage friend Ramachandra Rao (Ramu). Both the fictional and original Ramu had a gift for laughter. With Ramu, Narayan used to attend classes, go to the cinema, smoke, drink afternoon coffee and take long walks. Chandran's friend Ramu was not only his classmate but also his neighbor. Ramu was Chandran's companion in every activity. They used to go to the cinema late at night. Later in the novel Ramu moved to Bombay for his job and lost contact with Chandran.

College Life:

In this novel Narayan portrays college life through the eyes of Chandran, a final year student of history and introduces many characters with new name from his own past in his fictional account of college life, Narayan introduces, behind new names, several figure from his own experience. Professor Rollo becomes Professor Brown, a distinguished scholar, whose drama classes are acclaimed and who is endowed with a first rate sense of humor. Professor Raghavachari is the combination of Narayan's history professor Krishna and Venkateswara Lyre. Like them Professor Raghavachari was also a formidable teacher in classes and used to wear a turban and long black clock. Narayan fails in his entrance exam and spends one year at home, reading and taking long Walks. This life style was replicated in *The Bachelor of Arts*, as Chandran after completing his B.A, spent a year in similar fashion. Unlike the hero, Narayan did not

graduate in his first attempt. He failed his history exam and was required to re-sit the exam, which left him free to travel. Narayan has to confront the question of his future like Chandran after he passed the exam. There were many suggestions that he pursue law or the career of a minor civil servant. For a while he considers obtaining a M.A. degree in English literature and became a tutor in English in Maharaja's collage. In *The Bachelor of Arts* Chandran experience similar feeling after his graduation. In the novel Chandran decide to wait a year and go to England for further studies.

Love at First:

Narayan fell in love many times. He has projected the feelings of young love through Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts*. Narayan once fall in love with a girl in a green sari who lived in a neighboring street. Chandran falls in love with a girl in a green sari. "One evening he came to the river, and was loafing along it, when he saw a girl about fifteen years old, playing with her younger sister on the sands. He meets her in the bank of the river, and thinks her to be the most beautiful girl in the world. He starts daydreaming about her. After inquiring from his friend Mohan, he comes to know that the girl is named Malathi, who is a marriageable age and also belong to the same caste. One day he saw a fifteen years old girl drawing water from the street tap and immediately fell in love with her. Like Chandran he was also unable to talk to her. Rajam, like Malathi, did not notice the boy passing and re-passing in front of her to get attention.

Marriage Customs

Narayan portrays a truthful picture of the conventions of the marriage customs followed at the time. The bride and groom then did not have any dare in their marriage. At that time love marriage was very rare. A girl had to be of appropriate age which means that she should be younger than fifteen years of age. If a girl was unmarried till sixteen it was considered that there was something wrong with her. Rajam was fifteen years old when Narayan married her. Chandran's mother highly objects to her son's marriage when she learns that the bride is sixteen year old. Marrying out of caste was not acceptable then. Both the bride and groom has to belong to the same

caste, community etc. A marriage would not be tolerated even between sub sects of the same caste. Chandran knew that his father would through him out if he tried to marry out of caste. The marriage proposal always comes from the bride's parents, anything contrary was not accepted by society. 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 where the bride's parents had to appease the groom's family. The horoscopes are another crucial matter in marriage, as they had to match perfectly. The bride and groom's future happiness depends upon it. Narayan's own difficulty with the incompatibility of horoscopes while marrying Rajam is similar to the experience of Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts*. 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. This means that according to the astrologers life would be threatening for the bride unless her horoscope has similar flaw. The depression Narayan faces when difficulties with the horoscope are shown through Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts*. During this uncertain time Narayan indulged in a certain amount of self-dramatization and did all that one does when, crossed in helpless love. He loses interest in people and food, sulks and immerses himself in gloom and avoided his friends. He expresses his feeling by witting melodramatic and highly philosophical play examining the idea of love, resignation and death. Narayan was able to overcome the astrological hurdle and marry Rajam in Coimbatore on July 1, 1934. Narayan describes the marriage celebration that ...celebrated with all the pomp, show, festivity, exchange of gifts, and the overcrowding, that his parents desire and expected. Chandran was unable to overcome the astrological hurdle and was not able to marry Malathi. In a moment of desperation, misery and anger at his parents and the system, he decides to renounce everything and become a sanyasi and spend an ascetic life. For him becoming a sanyasi was a form of suicide. He soon realizes that living on other's charity was fraud. He feels ashamed of himself and

decides to come home again and assume the responsibilities of the adult world.

As a Journalist:

In *The Bachelor of Arts* Narayan has described his experience of his career as a journalist. Through Mohan, a poet friend of Chandran. Narayan's brief experience from 1934-35 as a Maysor city reporter for a small newspaper *The Justice* and its effect and his frustration is clearly revealed in the process. Narayan's financial obligations had forced him to take up a career as a journalist. The daily routine of a city reporter left little time for creative writing. Mohan becomes the Malgudi correspondent of a Madras-based newspaper, *The Daily Messenger* to support himself. Much of his days are spent news hunting, which left little time for his literary work. Later, this exposure to various situations provided him with material for his fiction. Like Narayan his remuneration is three and a half rupees per column of twenty-one inches. In practice, the process of pruning reduces this to paltry sums. Narayan's columns were also heavily pruned and his copy was occasionally rejected. He was also indifferent of the matter of editorial policy like Mohan. Unlike Narayan, Mohan eventually prospers in his profession. *The Daily Messenger's* circulation soars, unlike that of *The Justice*. Under new management it become a prosperous paper, accepts more columns from Mohan and even publishing his poems in the weekly magazine. Narayan sent his resignation the day he knows that his first novel was going to be published. Narayan has given his reason for resignation through Mohan. "I took up this work as a stop-gap till I should get a footing in the literary world.....Reporting has swallowed me up..... I hardly have any inclination to write a single line of poetry". Mohan is a bachelor who lives alone in a mess, unlike Narayan who had a joint family to support and a wife to take care of the family.

As an Young Author

In college Narayan started reading in earnest the classics of English literature to enrich his writing. He read out his own pieces to a close band of friends, and after priming the audience with coffee and snacks, asked for their opinion. The friends usually had a good opinion about his work as

Narayan provided them with coffee and snacks. He kept on writing and submitting and thought that his work „was going to add to the world’s literary treasure’s few lyrical pieces went to publishers in England, and was returned in due or undue time, along with “...cold, callous rejection slips, impersonal and mocking”. The life of an amateur writer in college is portrayed through Mohan in *The Bachelor of Arts*. Chandran’s friend Mohan is a poet who is trying to publish his work. Though his works have been rejected by publishers all around the world, he is still spending a fortune in postage in the hope that somebody would recognize his talent and publish his work. Like Narayan, writing is his passion. It is as important to him as breathing. He also read his poems to his friends and makes them suffer in the cause of poetry. *The Bachelor of Arts* is called an autobiographical novel although all the experiences of Chandran, the hero of the novel, do not match as it is Narayan’s life. They call it an autobiographical novel because Narayan sketched this novel based on autobiographical material.

CONCLUSION

The Bachelor of Arts Narayan shows the gradual transformation of a carefree young student to a mature young man. The harsh reality of life and hardships help to mature a youth to face the demands of adult existence. The experience of first love and the devastation of loss is shown through Chandran. It is the story of every person who has ever experienced love. The universal feeling of agony when crossed in helpless love, which Narayan himself has felt, is shown in this novel. The selfishness of youth in love, in thinking only about their happiness or sorrow is shown as Chandran runs away from home to become a sanyasi without informing anyone. Finally he came to home for assuming his adult responsibilities. Art is the reflection of life. The experience of an artist is often reflected in his art. To understand the underlying meaning of art we need a deeper understanding of the artist. Literature is a form of art. These incidents which affect writers most usually find expression in their writing through their personal experiences. Narayan has repeatedly talked about horoscopes in his novels because he felt they had a great impact

on his life. Narayan always write about the world around him, about which he has full of knowledge.

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