



## THREE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF NATURE IN 'THE BACHELOR OF ARTS' BY

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### Abstract

R. K. Narayan expresses in his novels the Indian ethos. Though he writes in English language, he writes of India, Indian culture, Indian people, Indian family and Hindu Mythology. He talks of social, economic and religious life in India. Ethos, intrinsically Indian, is expressed in his characters through their respective attachment in relationships in joint family systems, the family ties, rituals, the customs and traditions.

Narayan's novels carry within them explicit and implicit moral values and lay great emphasis on the intrinsic good nature of human beings. In his writings, goodness ultimately triumphs over evil. Deep belief in an ethical and principled value system characterises his novels and their characters. His heroes portray an evolving consciousness, which may begin with a note of uncertainty, turmoil and loneliness, but ends up in certainty, peace and fullness. Combined with this, there is a deep belief in the positive features of the traditional Hindu faith in many of his novels. These attributes have been explored by many researchers, but have not been explicitly classified under the signifying fundamental principles of nature. This paper explores precisely the Principle of Rajas in the main character of Narayan's novel 'The bachelors of Arts.

R. K. Narayan is regarded as one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century. He has written stories about people, their emotions and their relationships. He has portrayed the lives and feelings of teachers, students, parents, grandparents, journalists, artists, financiers, film-makers and movie stars. Narayan has no fascination for upper class society. P. P. Mehta presents his view about Narayan's characters:

"Like most writers, Narayan could only create from the world of his personal experience-the lower middle class citizens of the South. Chandran

belongs to a middle class family....., is not always beyond sort of human beings, human beings are the usual sort of human beings, prudish, cunning and prosaic.<sup>1</sup>" This makes his characters universal. While there is immense research on the novels of Narayan, the implications of Fundamental Principles on the protagonists of his novels have not been explored.

In Bhagwad Gita, Lord Krishna speaks about three Principles of Nature- Sattva (Goodness or Purity), Rajas (Passion) and Tamas (Darkness). Most people live their lives neither in complete goodness

nor entirely in full darkness. Thus the principle of passion becomes the most prominent principle among the three. Most of the time all the three principles remain together, although at any given time, one of these principles predominates over the other two. All three principles are present in all beings but vary in their relative amounts. An individual possesses the unique ability to alter the levels of principles in body and mind. One principle can be increased or decreased through the interaction and influence of external objects, lifestyle practices, thoughts and emotions. All principles create attachment and thus bind the 'self' to the 'ego'. When one rises above the three principles that originate in the body, one is freed from birth, old age, disease, death and attains enlightenment.

Three of Narayan's initial novels- 'Swami and Friends', 'The Bachelors of Arts' and 'The English teacher' are often grouped together as a trilogy about the evolving protagonist, a figure whose name changes from novel to novel, but whose relationships and situations as a young Brahmin experiencing various stages of the English-oriented colonial educational curriculum and gradually making the transition from the first to the second of the four stages of the 'Manusmriti' remains constant.

The portrayal of characters within the framework of the four stages combined with intrinsic Hindu values and ethos impacts the protagonists in such a way that there is predominance of 'Rajas' (Principle). The influence of desire, passion, power, obedience, attachment, action and energy engulfs many protagonists. As described in Bhagwad Gita:

Rajas is passion. Rajas is desire. Rajas is unlit activity. It leads to unrest and strife. Rajas binds the body to action. Rajas stays either with stark dynamism or with blind aggression. Restlessness and Rajas breathe together. To separate toil from Rajas is practically impossible. Rajas is another name for passionate movement. If one dies when Rajas prevails, then he is reborn among those

attached to action (Chapter 14: Bhagwad Gita).

In Narayan's novel 'The Bachelor of Arts', the hero, Chandran shows qualities of action, restlessness, ambition, desire, obedience and passion. He has an ambition to succeed, often gets restless with what he is doing, is passionate about relationships, wishes to please his elders and is full of energy. Thus, he shows predominance of Rajas. To study and understand the impact of this principle on the protagonists in Narayan's novels, the chief four characteristics are undertaken. They are (i) Desire, Passion and Lust, (ii) Attachment, (iii) Obedience, (iv) Ambition and Action.

'The Bachelor of Arts' (1937) is set in the fictional town Malgudi. The story explores the transition of an adolescent, Chandran into adulthood. The novel begins with Chandran's college life after graduation; he falls in love with a girl. The marriage proposal is rejected by the girl's parents, since his horoscope describes him as a 'manglik'. Frustrated and desperate, he embarks on a journey of a Sanyasi where he meets many people. He gets misunderstood as a great sage by some villagers. Due to the compunctions and the realisations, he decides to return home. He takes up a job as a newsagent and decides to marry. This he does to please his parents, thinking of the discomfort he had caused them earlier. He fits perfectly in Rajas (Principle) because his personality leans towards attachment, unrest and action. Through the course of the novel, Chandran is seen as a restless individual, yet to find an identity, or self-awareness. His brief stint as a Sanyasi is more because of a temporary loss of confidence in himself and due to dejection at having lost his love interest rather than due to rising above the pleasure of the flesh. Thus, his character is fit to be studied under the predominating principle of nature, Rajas.

Desire is a sense of longing or hoping for a person, object or outcome. When a person desires something or someone, the sense of longing is excited by the enjoyment or the thought of the item or person and this leading to actions to obtain the goal. The motivational aspect of desire has long been noted by philosophers. Human desire is the

fundamental motivation of all human action. Desire can cause humans to become obsessed and embittered. It has been called one of the causes of woe for mankind. Within the teachings of Buddhism, desire is thought to be the cause of all suffering that one experiences in human existence. The eradication of desire or craving leads to rising above the three principles and ultimate happiness (Nirvana).

Passion means strong emotion, intense sexual love and extreme enthusiasm for something. Lust is an emotion of feeling of intense desire in the body. Lust manifests in many forms such as the lust for knowledge, the lust for carnal desires or the lust for power. It can take such mundane forms as lust for food which is distinct from the need for food. Lust is a powerful psychological force producing intense wanting for an object, or circumstances fulfilling the emotion. Lust is the clinging to, attachment to, identification with and passionate desire for certain things in existence. Thus, lust is the ultimate cause of general imperfection and the most immediate root cause of suffering.

In the Bhagwad Gita, Lord Krishna, an Avtar of Vishnu declares that lust is one of the gates to 'Narak' or hell. States Bhagwad Gita:

Arjuna said: 'O descendent of Vrsni, by what is one impelled to sinful acts, even unwillingly, as if engaged by force?' then Krishna said: 'It is lust only, Arjuna, which is born of contact with the material mode of passion and later transformed into wrath and which is the all-devouring sinful enemy of this world. As fire is covered by smoke, as a mirror is covered by dust, or as the embryo is covered by the womb, the living entity is similarly covered by different degrees of this lust. Thus, the wise living entity's pure consciousness becomes covered by his eternal enemy in the form of lust, which is never satisfied and which burns like fire. The senses, the mind and the intelligence are the sitting places of this lust. Through them lust covers the real knowledge of the living entity and bewilders him. Therefore, O Arjuna, best of the Bharatas, in the very beginning curb

this great symbol of sin---- (lust) by regulating the senses and slay this destroyer of knowledge and self-realisation. The working senses are superior to dull matter; mind is higher than the senses; intelligence is still higher than the mind; and he (the soul) is even higher than the intelligence. Thus, knowing oneself to be transcendental to the material senses, mind and intelligence, O mighty-armed Arjuna, one should steady the mind by deliberate spiritual intelligence and thus--- by spiritual strength--- conquer this insatiable enemy known as lust (*The Bhagwad Gita*).

In the novel, 'The Bachelor of Arts', Chandran is totally under the Rajas of desire and passion. At the start of the novel, he is an Indian college student, who gets his graduation, falls in love and receives a disappointment. During the course of the story, he goes on to become a Sanyasi and learns to live a life free of illusions. However, since he is still under the impact of the Rajas (principle) of passion and lust, his brief phase as Sanyasi fails. Finally, he returns from sanyas, takes up a job and gets married to a beautiful girl chosen by his parents. In addition to the chain of events that make up the mosaic called life in this novel, it is also the journey of Chandran's attempt to come on his own and to carve a niche for him in the intriguing world of adults.

The novel opens and Chandran is introduced as a young man under the influence of Rajas of desire for pleasure of the flesh. He is shown going to a movie with his friend. Narayan writes:

Chandran stopped at a shop to buy some betel leaves and a packet of cigarettes. Attending a night show was not an ordinary affair. Chandran was none of your business-like automatons who go to a cinema, sit there and return home. It was an aesthetic experience to be approached with due preparation. You had to chew the betel leaves and nut, chew gently, until the heart was stimulated and threw out delicate beads of perspiration and caused a fine tingling sensation behind the ears; on top of that you had to light a cigarette, inhale the fumes and

with the night breeze blowing on your perspiring forehead, go to the cinema, smoke more cigarettes there, see the picture and from there go to an hotel nearby for hot coffee at midnight, take some more betel leaves and cigarette and go home and sleep. This was the ideal way to set about night show. Chandran squeezed the maximum aesthetic delight out of the experience and Ram's company was most important for him. It was his presence that gave sense of completion to things. He too smoked, chewed, drank coffee, laughed (he was the greatest laugher in the world), admired Chandran, ragged him quarrelled with him, breathed delicious scandal over the names of his professors and friends and unknown people.<sup>2</sup>

Further when they spot Brown with a girl, Chandran comments that may be she was his wife. When Ramu replies in the negative, he says, "Must be some other girl, then. The white fellows are born to enjoy life. Our people really don't know how to live. If a person is seen with a girl by his side, a hundred eyes stare at him and a hundred tongue comment, whereas no European ever goes out without taking a girl with him" (15). Chandran's desire of want of comfort gets highlighted when he says, "When I start earning I shall buy a car first of all. Nothing like it. You can just see the picture and go straight to bed" (17).

The story unfolds and Chandran's passion for the fifteen years old Malathi leaves him full of her thoughts so much so that he does 'not have room for anything else in his mind' (54). Narayan, the master story teller, showcases the Rajas of passion and lust when he writes:

That night he (Chandran) went home very preoccupied. It was at five o'clock that he had met her and at nine he was still thinking of her. After dinner he did not squat on the carpet in the hall, but preferred to go to his room and remain alone there. He tried to read a little; he was in the middle of Well's Tono Bungay. He had found the book gripping, but now he felt it was obtrusive. He

was irritated. He put away the book and sat staring at the wall. He presently realised that darkness will be more soothing. He blew out the lamp and sat in his chair (56-57).

Chandran's passion for her grows and he shaves with great care and pays a great deal of attention to his chair while awaiting the evening. He dresses in is best clothes and spends two hours on the bank of the river waiting for her arrival. She does not come and when he sets for home, he feel his 'shave, ironed tweed coat, were all wasted' (57). When Chandran sees her at river bank the next evening, he noticed her attire of green sari and playing with her little company and is 'drawn towards her as if drawn by a rope' (59). The desire for her makes him want to stare at her. 'staring was half the victory in love.....and if you don't start an eye friendship immediately, you may not get the opportunity again for a million years' 9600. His desire to contact her makes him find out her house. Through Mohan's co-operation Chandran learns that his 'sweetheart's name was Malathi, that she was unmarried and that she was the daughter of Mr. D.W.Krishna Iyer, Head Clerk in the Executive Engineer's office' (67).

The Rajas principle of passion, lust and desire for Malathi knows no bounds in Chandran's mind who, even though is not yet independent and settled in life, finds courage and talks to his father about his own marriage proposal to Malathi. His emotions are at their peak and thinking of her in the darkness, he is seen moaning:

"Darling, what are you doing? Do you hear me?" (79). He does not want his mother to pose difficulty in marriage by her unreasonable demands of dowry and argues with her: "you care more for your status than for the happiness of your son" (84).

Chandran is devastated when Malathi's parents find a fault in his horoscope and reject the marriage. Fighting his parents' wishes, malathi's parents rejection and going against the logic thinking which is becoming of a man, he gives in to his desire of possessing Malathi as his wife and tries his luck one last time hoping to get it right in his 'last chance' (90). However, luck fails him. His letter remains undelivered and Malathi gets married to someone

else. Narayan's spell of Rajas of one-sided love and desire unfolds yet another journey of Chandran's life in the chapters that follow in the novel.

Dr. B.P.Singh writes:

"Practically the whole part two of 'The Bachelor's Arts' is devoted to the problem of love and marriage. There is nothing of sex in it. It is only the passion of love that is dominant throughout".<sup>3</sup>

Attachment is another quality which comes under the principle of Rajas. Attachment is described as being fond of a certain thing or another person. It also means having an affection or liking for the other. Attachment can also be understood in comparison with its opposite 'detachment'. The Hindu view of detachment comes from the understanding of the nature of existence and the true ultimate state of being 'in the moment'. In other words, while one is responsible and active, one does not worry about the past or future. The detachment is towards the result of one's actions rather than towards everything in life. This concept is cited extensively within Puranic and Vedic literature, for example:

One who performs his duty without attachment, surrendering the results unto the supreme Lord, is unaffected by sinful action, as the lotus is untouched by water (The Bhagwad Gita).

One of the biggest contributions of Hinduism and Buddhism is the teaching that all human suffering is due to the bonds of attachment one experiences to others and to material things. When the object of attachment is separated, the experience is suffering, pain and grief. It is to address and overcome this chronic, inevitable human suffering of loss that the teachings ask men to put aside attachments and to become 'detached' from the objects of desire. Narayan's presentation of human characters is also free from all partiality. Krishna Kant Singh rightly observes:

"All his characters seem real and authentic. The callous husband like Ramani.....the emotional lovers like Chandran and Sriram.....the miserable fathers like Margayya and the fathers of Swami and

Chandran appear to be completely real and true to life."<sup>4</sup>

Obedience as described by the Oxford Dictionary means willingness to do what one is told to do. It is synonymous with being amenable, dutiful and compliant. On one hand it leads to making of law abiding and dutiful citizens who are well behaved and compliant, on the other it may also develop personalities who are submissive, subservient and tamed. Thus, obedience to the commands of preceptors and parents may reflect one's desire to conform to other person's wishes with an intention to please despite the command being right or wrong. Preceptor means a general rule about how to behave and what to think. Many a times, thus, the awareness of right and wrong is compromised. This character is a chief quality of the principle of Rajas for it is closely related to desire and attachment.

In the Indian context this principle of obedience is considered to be a value and Narayan portrays his heroes in most of his novels under the impact of this principle. In this novel, Chandran shows the impact of this principle of obedience throughout the novel. Due to his Indian upbringing where the children are taught to respect and conform to their elders' wishes without questioning them, Narayan writes in a manner which brings out this trait in his protagonist. So afraid is the twenty-one year old Chandran of his father that on returning home late, he does not want to come face to face with his father. Narayan writes:

Chandran came to his gate, he saw his father in the veranda, pacing up and down. Late-coming was one of the few things that upset him. Chandran hesitated for a moment before lifting the gate chain. He opened the gate a little, slipped in and put the chain back on its hook noiselessly. His usual move after this would be to slip round to the back door and enter the house without his father's knowledge. But now he had a surge for self-respect. He realised that what he usually did was a piece of evasive cowardice worthy of an adolescent, he was not eighteen but twenty-one (11).

Chandran as an adult is not made to make his own decisions. Even if he wishes to go for a night show movie with his friends, he is apprehensive of

his father's reaction because 'Father never encouraged anyone to attend a night show' and considered them to be 'very bad for the health' (12). Like a young school boy, Chandran obeys his father. When exams are approaching, he sets an alarm at four-thirty in the morning not only to study, but more so to please his father. Chandran is seen explaining his father:

You see, Father, but for this dreadful meeting. I should have done ninety hours of study, according to my time-table. I shall still make it up. I shall not be available to anyone from tomorrow (40).

Chandran is so much under the influence of the principle of Rajas that he obeys his father even though he mumbles otherwise:

Father said to Chandran: "Take the gate key and open the gate".

"If you leave him alone, he will jump over the wall and go," mumbled Chandran sourly as he took the gate key from the nail on the veranda wall (44).

Narayan has shown equal depth and insight in the presentation of relationship between one man and another. As William Walsh points out;

"The family is the immediate context in which his sensibility operates, and his novella are remarkable for the subtlety and conviction with which family relationship are treated- that of son and parents and brother and brother in 'The Bachelor of Arts'".<sup>5</sup>

The South-Indian upbringing of Narayan makes him portray the hero as hesitating to broach the subject of his own marriage to his father. Chandran prays to God to give him courage when he goes to his father to talk about marriage. His courage fails him at the last moment. He regrets his cowardice, unworthy of Malathi and calls himself 'a spineless worm' (68). In his own words:

Afraid of a father! He was not a baby asking for a toy, but a full-grown adult out on serious business, very serious business (68).

The rational side of Chandran questions: "why should we be cudgelled and nose-led by our elders?...Why can't we be allowed to arrange our

lives as we please? Why can't they leave us to rise or sink on our own ideals?" (71) However, the Rajas of obedience impact his personality and makes him a conformist. When he is offered alcohol by his friends, he refuses. Even after persuasion, Chandran remains firm. In his opinion, he was being asked to 'commit the darkest crime' since he had made 'a vow never to touch alcohol in my life before my mother' (98).

Chandran is shown obeying his father yet again when he wants to take up the job of a government servant and his father disagrees. The father wants to send him to England, but later agrees to his wife's advice of sending Chandran to Madras to her relatives. When Chandran is preparing to travel to Madras, the father still treats Chandran as a child, brings for him a half dozen handkerchiefs, a pair of new dhoties, a woollen scarf and requests Chandran to hand it over to his brother. Chandran takes up a job with the newspaper 'The Daily Messenger', returns to Malgudi and sets up his own office. The Rajas principle of obedience is predominant in Chandran's personality. Later in the novel, he agrees to marry the girl of his parents' choice, Mr. Jayarama Iyer's daughter, Susila.

Ambition and Action involves the process of doing something typically to achieve an aim. It is synonymous with activity, movement, work, effort, exertion and operation, all of which involve frenzied activity. These are typical traits of the principle Rajas. Protagonists under the impact of ambition and action are forced to react, exploit others or manoeuvre situations keeping in mind their own interests. To achieve and accomplish goals, they are a part of effort and activity. Ambition is the ability to influence or control the behaviour of people. Power can be seen as evil or unjust, but the exercise of power is accepted as endemic to humans as social beings.

In this novel 'the Bachelor of Arts', Narayan's hero Chandran shows the predominance principle of Rajas of ambition and action. The novel is broadly divided into four sections. All the parts have significant portrayal of the Rajas of action. When Chandran is a student, aspiring to become a Bachelor of Arts, he is shown to be under the impact

of action for the pleasure of flesh viz. movies and cigarettes. When he gets attracted to Malathi, he is shown pining for her with passion and lust. All his actions therefore are coherent with making Malathi his-whether it is paying attention to his clothes and hair, writing letters to her or even asking his parents to get him married to her. There is no peace in his life and the turmoil of Chandran, embedded in the rajas principle of action with an ambition to marry Malathi has been narrated wonderfully by Narayan. He writes:

The next day he showed with great care and paid a great deal of attention to his hair and awaited the evening. When evening came he put on his chocolate-coloured tweed coat and started out. At five, he was on the river bank, squatting on the sand near the spot where he had seen the girl the previous day. He sat there for over two hours. The girl did not come. Dozens of other towns people came to the river and sprawled all over the place, but not that girl. Chandran rose and walked along, peering furtively at every group. It was a very keen search, but it brought forth nothing. Why wasn't she there? His heart beats fast at the sight of every figure approaching the river clad in a sari. It was scene forty-five when he set his face homeward, feeling that his brilliantine, shave, ironed tweed coat, were all wasted (56-57).

Malathi gets married to another mandue to non-compability of their (Chandran's and Malathi's) horoscope. Chandran gets dejected. The Rajas principle of action impacts Chandran again and he leaves for Madras. Chandran tries to become a sanyasi by shaving his head, dyeing his clothes in ochre. His renunciation of the world is not to attain peace or solace, but in fact it is a revenge on society, parents, circumstances and fate which, he feels, is responsible for not getting the love of his life, Malathi. The final part of the novel sees Chandran, back in Malgudi. Chandran is persuaded by his poet friend, Mohan, to try to become an agent for the Madras-based newspaper, 'The Messenger'. Another visit to Madras helps him to secure this position, thanks to the meditation of his uncle. Chandran sets about devising strategies for increasing the newspaper's circulation in Malgudi. In many ways this is the most important Rajas 'action'

shift in the novel, as it has Chandran metamorphosed from aimless drifter and romantic idealist into a practical businessman. Pankaj Mishra's account of the world of narayan's protagonists reads:

Chandran is one of the first in Narayan's long gallery of young restless drifters who, hungry for adventure, very quickly reach the limits of their world and then have to find ways of reconciling themselves with it. The reconciliation itself can never be complete. You can see again and again in narayan's novels how the encounter with half-baked modernity of colonialism has deracinated Indians like Chandran: has turned them into what Narayan, in an unusually passionate moment in 'The English Teacher', describes as 'strangers to our own culture' and cupflowers'.<sup>6</sup>

Thus Chandran in "The Bachelor of Arts" display all the qualities of the principle of Rajas. His personality shows the effect of desire, passion and lust. His disposition reflects his attachment to people and things. His obedience to the commands of preceptors and parents is embedded in the wish to please, despite the command being right or wrong. His focus on action is because of personal gain as a consequence. Finally, ambition to succeed in the journey of life is what governs his thinking and thus his doing.

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