

## **A Portrayal of Chandran's character in R.K. Narayan's novel "The Bachelor Of Arts"**

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### **Abstract**

The life stages such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age are developmental phases, each with its own biological, psychological, and social characteristics, through which individuals pass over the course of their lives. The most complex stages which we find difficult to understand is *Adolescence* because, this stage is a critical mixture of unique needs and problems. Adolescence is the period of developmental transition between childhood and adulthood, involving multiple physical, intellectual, personality, and social developmental changes. Adulthood is a state or condition of being fully grown or mature. The aim objective of this research paper is to throw light on the theme of this transition of an *Adulthood* in R.K. Narayan's novel "The Bachelor Of Arts".

**KEY Words** – *Chandran, Principal (Brown), Friend (Mohan & Ramu), His parents*

### **Introduction**

R.K. Narayan is one among the best known and most widely read Indian Novelist who wrote in English. His novels help us to understand children and their psychological problems in a very good and organized manner. R.K. Narayan's full name was Rasipuram Krishnaswamy Iyer Narayanaswamy, was an Indian writer, best known for his works set in the fictional south Indian town of Malgudi. He was a leading author of early Indian literature in English, along with Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. He is the most artistic of the Indian writers, his soul aim being to give aesthetic satisfaction. Most of his novels depict the condition of colonial India, childhood period, familial relationship etc.

R.K. Narayan witnessed nearly a century of change in his native India and captures it in fiction of uncommon warmth and vibrancy. In a review of Narayan's work published in *The New Yorker*, Updike called him a writer of vanishing breed – the writer as a citizen; one who identifies completely with his subjects and with a belief in the significance of humanity. The novel named *The Bachelor of Arts* were written during British rule, bring colonial India into intimate focus through the narrative gifts of this master of literary realism. In this novel, the place *Malgudi* had been mentioned prominently. It is a typical a South Indian town and it has been presented in his work vividly and realistically. The novel have the theme and a role regarding a transition of adolescent mind to adulthood.

**The Bachelor of Arts is a very apt and suggestive title:**

The title, Bachelor of Arts chosen for R.K. Narayan's novel is very apt and suggestive. A good title indicates what the reader should expect of the novel besides highlighting its theme. Seen from this light, *The Bachelor of Arts* combines admirably the sense of something plain and concrete and the sense of poetry in the background as pointed out by Graham Greene. The novel as its title indicates traces the life and career of Chandran. He is indeed *The Bachelor of Arts* and the protagonist of the novel.

**The Bachelor of Arts is closely organized under four parts:**

The novel is closely organized under four parts. Each part presents a certain stage in the growth of the protagonist Chandran as he leaves college as a graduate to face the odds of worldly life before he finally settles down as a happily married and contented man with a loving wife and a lucrative job. *Part one* is mainly concerned with Chandran's college life and its comedy. It gently exposes his ambitions, vanities and snobbery. It also shows him at home in the company of his parents and his younger brother Seenu. *Parts Two and Four* give a more detailed picture of his relationship with the different members of his family including his uncle, aunt and cousins at Madras. It is in these parts of the novel the family theme becomes an important strand of the narration.

**Chandran hero of the novel is justified in the full sense of the term:**

Chandran is the hero of the novel in the full sense of the term and the novel has been justifiably named after him. It relates the life and adventures of Chandran, the 'unheroic hero'. *The first part of the novel* deals with Chandran's life at Albert Mission College, Malgudi tracing his studies as a final year B.A. student of B.A. History, his participation in the college extra-curricular activities, his interaction with his professors and friends at college leading to his ultimate passing of his B.A. Examination and becoming, Chandran, B.A. *The second part of the novel* traces Chandran's infatuation with a young girl Malathi frequenting the Sarayu sands with her little sister and ends with his frustration and despair when his efforts to marry her end in smoke. As his memories of Malathi torment him, he decides to quit Malgudi for a change.

*The third part of the novel* deals with his strange experiences at Madras, his decision to become a sanyasi, his aimless wanderings from district to district as a sanyasi till he becomes disenchanted with his fake sanyasiness, gives up ochre-clothes for good and returns to his parents at Malgudi. *The fourth part of the novel* deals with his efforts to reestablish himself in life by taking up the Malgudi agency of The Daily Messenger issued from Madras and improving its circulation by his excellent canvassing techniques and uncompromising dedication. He marries the girl; Susila suggested to him by his parents and becomes a loving husband of the charming young girl. The novel ends with his flying visit to see her at her parents 'house at Talapur' as he has not heard anything from her for the past six days.

### **Narayan straightaway takes his readers to the hustle bustle of the college:**

Narayan straightaway takes his readers to the college where his hero, Chandran is doing his final year B.A. in History. Characteristically enough, the novel opens in a humorous note with Natesan, the Secretary of the College Union asking Chandran to be the Prime Mover for the debate the following evening and move the topic that the historians should be slaughtered first. Chandran being a student of history is in a fit to move a topic debunking historians and earn the displeasure of his history professor, Ragavachar. But Natesan, the Secretary assures him that he will not invite his professor. Chandran goes to the college Library but finds volumes and volumes of history but nothing concerned with slaughtering the historians. In his worry to prepare for the topic, he does not even pay attention to his lecture classes. Finally, he manages to muster some points and a humorous anecdote as footage for his speech. His speech is received very well. Even Principal Brown is said to have enjoyed his speech. At the end, the House with a

majority of votes decides in favor of the proposal and Chandran feels quiet happy at the outcome.

### **Chandran prepares hard for his final B.A examination :**

Time passes on swift wings with Chandran immersed in extracurricular activities. Soon the month of November dawns. Chandran realizes all of a sudden that he has wasted almost half of the session, and he must make good the last time by studying extra-hours during the remaining part of the session. He chalks out an elaborate study schedule and shows that to his father. He tells his mother that he is not to be disturbed in his studies in his room. But a mystery shrouds with the strange disappearance of the flowers in their garden. So he has to sacrifice his morning study hours to help his father nab the culprit. Soon they find that the flower-thief enters at dawn and steals away the flowers intended for his mother's morning worship at her prayer room. As the flower-thief turns out be a man in ochre dress with his funny explanations, his theft is condoned when he agrees to spare some flowers for mother's worship too! However, Chandran studies hard and clears his B.A. final examinations and becomes a Bachelor of Arts.

### **Chandran's plans to go to England for his higher studies but gets bogged by his infatuation for a young girl called Malathi:**

Now that Chandran has finished his studies, his relatives and friends ask him about his future plans. Chandran becomes irritated at this and complains to his father. He tells him that it is natural for them to ask such questions to a relative or friend who has finished his graduation. He tells him that he can go and study in England if he likes. He has asked his brother at Madras to collect details for sending Chandran to England. So Chandran tells his well-wishers that he intends going to England for pursuing his higher studies. Chandran plans to take a research degree there and return to his home and take a lectureship in some college. But his dreams to go to England receive a setback when he chances upon a young girl [Malathi] playing with her young companion on the sands of Sarayu one fine evening.

### **Chandran's optic-communion with Malathi:**

Chandran falls in love with her at his very first sight. He has not even fully seen her nor spoken to her or anything like that. He sees her from a manageable distance and finds that she has a good figure. But as her head is bent, he is not able to see her face properly. He assumes that she must possess a beautiful face too. The girl comes daily to the river sands every evening with her little companion and Chandran too comes to have a look at her. This optic-communion lasts for quite some time. At times he wishes that he goes near her and look at her straight. But the presence of other people in the beach and the impropriety of staring a young girl from close quarters prevent him to have a close look at the object of his admiration and love. He then realizes that if he goes on like this, he will have to spend the rest of his life on the sands of Sarayu without any positive outcome.

#### **Chandran learns about Malathi and her family through his friend Mohan:**

Chandran follows her one evening when she returns home. She finds her entering her house in Mill Street. He notices that her house is just opposite to Modern Indian Lodge where his friend Mohan lives in Room No. 14. So he visits Mohan in his room and tries to collect all information regarding the girl. He learns that the girl's name is Malathi, she is unmarried and her father is Mr. D.W. Krishna Iyer, Head Clerk in the Executive Engineer's office. Chandran feels happy that the girl's father is an Iyer so that he can move further in this affair. After one or two attempts, Chandran opens the topic of his intention to marry Malathi, the daughter of Krishna Iyer to his father. He asks information about the girl and her father and Chandran tells him whatever he knows in the matter. Though his father takes a lenient view of this issue, he passes on the information to his wife for further decision. Chandran's mother at first makes much fuss about entering into an alliance below their status. She tells Chandran that they cannot proceed in this matter abruptly. They have to see that the horoscopes of the boy and the girl tally. And then there is the question of dowry and other things to consider. Chandran becomes dispirited and brooding when his mother throws cold water on his dreams of marrying Malathi. On finding their Chandran's pathetic condition, his parents tell him that they are ready to consider the proposal if the girl's parents send the horoscope of their girl and seek that of Chandran for comparison. They summon their family astrologer, Sri Ganapathi Sastrigal and ask him to

contact Mr. Krishna Iyer and advise him to seek an alliance with them by sending the girl's horoscope.

### **Malathi's father informs Chandran's father to drop the alliance:**

Soon Chandran's parents receive the girl's horoscope from Mr. Krishna Iyer and they in return send Chandran's horoscope to him as is the convention. When Chandran thinks that things are moving in the proper course, he is shocked to learn from Mr. Krishna Iyer saying that the horoscope of Chandran does not tally with that of his daughter and so he expresses his regret at his inability to have an alliance with such a noble family as that of Sri Venkatachala Iyer. Chandran appeals to his father to do something to set right things. He brings in a Sastrigal [a learned astrologer] to study the horoscopes of Chandran and Malathi by calling in Mr. Krishna Iyer to his house. The Sastrigal suggests by overruling the objections raised by the bride-side astrologer that the marriage can be solemnized as the evil aspect of Mars in Chandran's horoscope gets nullified with Chandran now attaining the age twenty. But Mr. Krishna Iyer who himself knows astrology is not ready to buy the argument of the Sastrigal and does not want to risk the life of his daughter. So the talks fail and Chandran becomes terribly disgusted with customs and conventions; caste and status; horoscopes and almanacs standing in the way of marrying the girl of his liking.

### **Chandran goes to Madras after disappointment:**

When Chandran visits the room of Mohan next, he finds the wedding- notice for Malathi is being observed with traditional music and all. This is the last straw that breaks the camel's back. Chandran falls ill and develops fever. He is confined to his bed for a few days. His father and mother become worried and visit him every now and then to see if he is improving. Even his younger brother Seenu becomes much upset at his brother's illness and visits him. On his recovery, Chandran desires a change of place and tells his father about it. He asks him to go to Madras to his uncle's house and gives him fifty rupees. He wires to his brother there to receive Chandran at Egmore. He asks Chandran to write to him if he wants more money. When Chandran reaches Egmore, he finds his uncle's son waiting to receive him at the platform. As he does not want to go to his uncle's house, he avoids his cousin, engages a jutka and moves to a lodge opposite People's Park.

**Narayan's ironic vision is revealed in his depiction of Kailas :**

At about five in the evening, Kailas takes Chandran to 'Hotel Merten'. He asks Chandran to have a glass of beer with him. Chandran tells him that he does not drink any sort of alcohol. Then Kailas orders a glass of lime juice for Chandran and a gin and soda for him. He asks Chandran to have at least a little port or something. Chandran asks Kailas to excuse him for he has made a vow to his mother never to touch alcohol in his life. This affects Kailas deeply. He remains solemn for a moment and says that Chandran should not drink alcohol if he had promised to his mother not to touch it. One must respect the word given to one's mother. Kailas too was a good son to his mother. The moment she died, he has changed. Where she alive, Kailas would have studied in college and become a respectable person. Chandran could not have found him there. Kailas goes on a drinking spree with gin following whisky and whisky following gin till about eight-thirty in the evening. Narayan is highly ironical about Kailas's mother-sentiment. He says that he was a good son as long as his mother was alive. But after his death, he fell into evil ways. If she had been alive, he would have been to a college and become a very responsible person and Chandran could not have met him in a hotel like that. Narayan does not miss to point out how the taxi driver befools the drunken Kailas by landing him in the house of some other prostitute in Mint Street instead of the house of Kokilam. Again Narayan is highly ironical about the middle-aged prostitute who asks Kailas 'what is there in a name?' when he asks her if it is Kokilam's house.

**Chandran becomes a sanyasi:**

Chandran sleeps on the platform and early next morning, he catches a train bound for Bezwada. He gets down at the terminus and walks towards Kapaleeswarar Temple. He finds a barber at the steps of the temple tank. He seeks the help of the barber to shave his head and get him a pair of ochre-dyed loin cloths and upper cloths for him. The barber advises him against becoming a sanyasi at a very young age as his. But Chandran promises him to gift his present dress and enough money for his services. The barber obliges him and Chandran becomes a sanyasi. He goes from place to place and from district to district on foot, and he is able to get food as people respect a sanyasi and are too willing to feed him. Whenever he becomes tired, he gets a free lift on a cart or a bus. He stops shaving his head and face and so he grows long hair and beard.

**Chandran decides to give up his fake-self as sanyasi and return to his parents:**

After eight months of wandering, he reaches Koopal village in Sainad district. He is treated with respect by the villagers and offered gifts of fruits and food to him. Chandran begins to feel that he is exploiting the faith of the simple villagers and cheating them with his ochre cloths. He is different from other sanyasis who practice renunciation. He has become a sanyasi as an alternative to suicide. His action is vindictive against his parents and society which smothered his love for Malathi. He decides that this won't do. He decides to give up his mask and return to his parents to whom he has caused a lot of anxiety. He catches a bus and reaches a place called Maduram. There he meets a post-master and tells him his entire story. With his help he gives a wire to his father asking him to send him twenty five rupees. His father at once sends him fifty rupees. He has his head shaved and puts on an old shirt and a white dhoti of the postmaster. He discards his ochre dress for good. He then leaves for Malgudi by train.

### **Chandran becomes the Malgudi agent for The Daily Messenger through his father's support:**

Chandran's parents are very happy to see him back. Though his father says that his mother was very much worried about his long absence, he himself is not free from nagging worries about his missing son. The very neglect of the garden tells Chandran how much his father must have felt worried about him. His brother Seenu also tells him that he has missed him all these days. Chandran finds that his room is kept by his mother the same way he has left it. He is moved by his mother's concern for him. Soon Chandran rallies round and decides to work and earn without being a parasite on his father. He also tells his father that he does not want to waste his money by going to England. He seeks his father's help to get the Malgudi agency for The Daily Messenger which has fallen vacant. His father asks his brother at Madras to help Chandran secure the agency. Chandran goes to Madras and meets the concerned people of the daily with his uncle's friend and secures the agency.

### **Chandran sets up his office to improve the circulation of The Daily Messenger at Malgudi significantly:**

Chandran sets up his office in the Market Road and by his publicity tactics manages to improve the circulation of The Daily Messenger at Malgudi significantly. His friend Mohan who is a



correspondent of the daily for Malgudi is of immense help to him in the promotion of the sales of the daily. Chandran's father one day comes to his office and tells him that a good alliance for him has come from one Jayarama Iyer, a leading lawyer of Talapur for his daughter. At first, Chandran says no to the proposal and his father does not want to press him further. But on the advice of his friend Mohan, Chandran decides to accept the offer of marriage. He goes to Talapur with his mother and sees the girl, Susila. He is impressed with her beauty and her attainments. He feels sorry for having doted on Malathi whose very name is tongue-twisting and whose beauty cannot stand comparison with Susila who is 'divine'. Soon Chandran marries Susila and describes her merits to Mohan in poetic terms. As she is still studying her final year schooling, she stays with her parents. Chandran writes to her regularly and gets replies from her equally regularly. But as he does not get any letter from her for the past few days, he becomes worried and rushes to see her asking Mohan to look after the agency of The Daily Messenger till he returns.

### **Theme of the Novel:**

In this novel "*The Bachelor of Arts*" the protagonist Chandran faces and suffers lot of harsh experience which have a great impact on his innocent mind. There are some circumstances which changed his adolescent mind into adulthood. The maturity in his character is due to his friends, family, teachers etc. Chandran is a college going student living in *Malgudi* and friendship plays a considerable role at various points of his life. His friendship provides him in leeway for sharing his emotions, feelings, his success and failures on an equal footing. His family bond plays a significant role in his growing up from adolescent to adulthood. So in the novel the protagonist ends up as a mature person from his life experiences. R.K. Narayan's most of the novels also deal with the same concept. The novelist has not merely looked at the boy world from the boy point of view. In the novel, the protagonist Chandran's mind has a lot of growth in emotional maturity. Step by step he has become a much matured person. All his dreams and aspirations have changed in the story. Human mind has many stages but when we are going to cross the particular stage, then have to face many difficulties. Same is the case with Chandran who has a different mind in college and when he is a wanderer in *Madras*. He is greatly influenced by his History Professor when he appreciates him for his success in declamation. There is a sense of maturity in his character when he has ordered his younger brother to concentrate in his own studies. Then there is another incident when he feels upset after get to know not matching of stars with the girl. He gets angry with the brothers question when he asks him. These conversations show how he is disturbed psychological with the present conditions. There is a sense of maturity when he starts to participate in the debate and accept the proposal of secretary of the society. The behavior of his English teacher also disturbs his mind. There is an impact of colonial rule in India over his thinking. Family and familial values also helps him in molding his mind. In the present story step by step his psychology has changed

according to the changing conditions and has made him an emotionally matured person. When he gets to know about his rejection in a marriage proposal with Malathi then he runs away from the house and goes to *Madras*. This is due to his adolescent mind but after sometimes his psychology takes a more matured turning point and he comes back to his home. All these incidents make a great change or a growth in his emotional maturity. The psychology of every person changes due to the ever-changing circumstances and causes. It is aptly said that the behavior of the person is the mirror of his own psychology. That is why she tells her husband that Swami goes out in the afternoon and loafs about with his friends. The impression created by Narayan in his novels is that of an ordinary living his humdrum day to day life, struggling with circumstances and growing wiser and more matured through this struggle.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we can say that R.K. Narayan's novels always depict universality. The present novel which I have taken are the best examples of his opinion about complex transition from adolescent mind to adulthood which mentioned a Portrayal of Chandran's character in the novel. The role of circumstances is very essential and powerful to build emotional maturity and complexity in human nature in the characters of both the novels. Psychological growth and complexities of human mind help to understand the theme of the novels. These are written, in simple but in dignified language. It is an ideal work for study in the school and colleges of the English speaking world. In his novel, there is a vivid description of children's world, through school and colleges. Firstly, we deal with the growth of human mind in R.K. Narayan's novel *The Bachelor of Art Chandran*, after facing a lot of difficulties in his life, turns into a much matured person. Family, friends and society have been the essential parts in molding Chandran's psychology as a grown up person. Secondly we deal with the circumstances, causes, complexities in changing human psychology. The story of A Complex Transition Of Adolescent Mind To Adulthood In R.K Narayana's *The Bachelor Of Arts* has been discussed in second chapter. The present circumstance in Chandran's life also changed his psychology. In the novel he is greatly influenced by the character of Mohan. Understanding the meaning of adolescence is important because adolescents are the future of any society. The impression created by Narayan in his novel is that of an ordinary living his humdrum day to day life, struggling with circumstances and growing wiser and more matured through this struggle.

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