

Depiction of Challenging World of Youth in R. K. Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts*

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Abstract

R.K.Narayan is a pioneer and one among the trio novelists, has never confined himself to a particular theme or viewpoint. His perception towards life is wide and the same reflects in his multidimensional writings with multiple perspectives. R.K.Narayan is a man of worldly knowledge and studies the human mind with his keen sense of observation. His down to earth attitude and simple nature contribute to the realistic portrayal of characters and depiction of theme in his novels. Accordingly, his second novel, *The Bachelor of Arts* is the development of the first novel and it displays the blooming life of a youth. Youth is the phase for an individual to construct the self-concept. It is influenced by various factors like family, peers, society, life style, culture and working environment. The choice made during this period the future. Therefore, the period of childhood is contrast to the period of youth. The former is very innocent and leads a dependent life, whereas the later steps into the society and initiates the independent life. Such a challenging life of youth is depicted by R.K.Narayan in his novel *The Bachelor of Arts*.

Keywords: Challenge, childhood, adulthood, bachelor.

R.K.Narayan's second novel *The Bachelor of Arts* represents the life of youth. It is the period of spring. The story spins around a young man Chandran. He belongs to upper middle-class youth of the pre-independent India. According to John Thieme, *The Bachelor of Arts* takes "the portrait of a young man to the threshold between adolescence to adulthood and has consequently been seen as a bildungsroman that speaks across cultures with a Universalist appeal" (79). The channel from childhood to adulthood is exhibited by the author along with tradition and modernity.

The novel *The Bachelor of Arts* is divided into four parts, which is based on the progression of the protagonist, Chandran a young man in his life. First part of the novel introduces Chandran as the college student pursuing B.A. History. During the early youth of an individual, the college life contributes the golden period of his life. It is the period of freedom and gaining of friends. As in childhood, studies never happen under compulsion, it appears to be a responsible factor. The first part of the novel includes Chandran's ambitions, attitude, pride and superiority.

The second part of the novel concentrates on Chandran's love at first sight with Malathi. Love is an inevitable feel in the life of human being. Though the love is successful or failure, it changes the life of the persons involved. Similarly, Chandran experiences a drastic change in his life and the harmony of the family is lost. The third part of the novel throws the light on the consequences of his lost love. It is the period of temptations. But, with the traditional brought up of his parents, the protagonist manages the situation. And he tries to become a sage, which also ends up in failure. The final part of the novel is about the rehabilitation of Chandran. Experience is the best

teacher and time gives the answers for complicated questions in our life. Accordingly, the period of youth with ups and downs, provides Chandran many experiences, which strengthens his mind and heart with utmost maturity. Thus, the author brings out the progress in the life of Chandran, during the period of youth.

Through the character of Chandran, R.K.Narayan clearly drafts a few phases in the life of youth. The immediate youth stage after the childhood offers independence with responsibilities. Distractions and temptations are the path way of youth. Meanwhile, the experiences teach the importance of the people around and confidence to live a fruitful life on earth. Finally, the novel displays the youthful world with all its experiences.

R.K.Narayan is very choosy in fixing the title of his novels. The same goes with *The Bachelor of Arts*, which is the apt one and relevant to the content of the novel. It sketches the life and career of the protagonist Chandran. He is the Bachelor of Arts. So the novel is named after him. The first part of the novel *The Bachelor of Arts* presents a vivid picture of the college life of Chandran, the hero of the novel.

R.K.Narayan has covered every aspect of college life to illuminate the personality of the hero Chandran. The author put forth the activities of college in a realistic manner. Through the depiction of college incidents, R.K.Narayan exposes the behaviours of the youth, their responses to certain situations and handling of human beings. College is the place where each and every young student, consider himself as hero and possess high self esteem.

The novel opens in the venue of Albert Mission College, Malgudi, where Chandran is pursuing his final year B.A., History. Natesan, the Secretary of college union asks Chandran to be the prime mover for the debate which is to be conducted that evening on the topic 'Historians should be slaughtered'. Though he is not an outstanding student, he is a good speaker in the college. As a youth, he is ready to accept the challenge and the opportunity that comes in his way. College life is a marked one, where the young students consider themselves as heroes and possess a high self - esteem.

Being a history student, Chandran is in oscillation to accept the role and worries about his history professor Ragavachar. "He tried to be off, but Chandran caught his hand and held him: "I am a history student. I can't move the subject. What a subject! My professor will eat me up" (Narayan, *The Bachelor of Arts* 5). But, Natesan guarantees Chandran that the professor will not be present at the debate. Though he is a history student, he is ready to participate in the debate and talk against historians. Youth are responsible in their public commitment. They know that their status lies in their performances. They never accept right away, if so, they work hard to present well.

Accordingly, after accepting the request of Natesan, Chandran visits library for gathering the points for his debate. But there are insufficient books on the topic of the debate. Finally, he manages to accumulate ideas for the debate and also plans for humorous anecdote at the end of the each content. He toils to organize the ideas for the debate. During the speech, Chandran presents well and receives a good applause from the students' audience. Chandran is very happy.

Chandran creates a comfortable zone for the people with whom he is in touch with. This the admiring feature of a youth. They welcome the strangers and accept as friends. Though they lack the knowledge, they come forward to learn things with confidence. They depend on others but finally they prove their best. Same way, Chandran initially struggles to accept the post of Secretary, but later accomplishes his duty without any flaws. His contribution to the inaugural of Historical Association is unbelievable. He makes use of his contacts and friendship in the college and successfully completes the function to the satisfaction of Professor Ragavachar, Professor Brown and the entire audience.

Humans are social beings and they learn to get along with people. The important aspect during the period of youth is to gain more people, especially friends. Friends in the college days remain till the end of the life and this is the perception of Chandran. He believes that friendship gives space to share both personal and academic. Chandran's close friend is Ramu and also his neighbour, who resides in the Lawley Extension. Chandran's first priority of sharing his happiness and griefs is Ramu. According to Chandran, Ramu means everything to him.

Like society, family also contributes in shaping the life of a youth. Peace within the family is the most important factor to develop optimistic attitude in a youth. The mutual understanding among the members of the family and trusting their children always ensures a happy family. Chandran is gifted with such a family. Chandran, his father, mother and the younger brother Seenu have a better understanding among them. They love each other and they never tend to hurt each other at any cost. Later, Chandran remains the sole reason to bring chaos in the family because of his love affair with Malathi.

For the children and the youngsters, the first learning happens at home. To ensure a positive learning on life, there is a demand for a perfect family. Narayan fulfils such demand through his novels, where he has a great concern for family relationships. Chandran's family is wealthy enough to meet the needs of each and every member. So the life of Chandran is a satisfied one without any financial crisis.

The domestic bond in the life of a youth helps to maintain a genuine attitude with the family members. The enough space of understanding must be given to the youth, which enable him to unfold his problems without hesitation. Accordingly, the relationship between Chandran and his father is very healthy and ideal. There is a perfect coordination between them. Chandran is free to express his desires to his father without any hesitation and his father is ready to solve his problems and always concerned about his happiness.

The youngsters span with late teens and early twenties are called "emerging adulthood". This is the important phase of life, as it includes the transition period. Many aspects affect the thoughts, emotions and behaviours of the youngsters. It is also the period of considering oneself as hero or heroine with high self esteem. Above all, the attraction towards the opposite sex is inevitable part of this period. Thus, falling in love is an emotional disturbance at any age, but for youngsters the feelings are likely to be even more difficult to manage.

Chandran's love with Malathi is the unexpected turning point in his life, which spoils the peace of the family and Chandran itself. According to R.K.Narayan falling in love is an unsurprising

factor of human life and the same happens in the life of Chandran. There are many changes within Chandran, after falling in love with Malathi. He focuses much on his dress and mannerisms than before. He always relishes the company of friends at the river, but later, he feels the same as disturbance. He drops his reading habit. He avoids the company of his family members and wishes to be alone in his room. He ponders only about the girl and gives space for critical thinking. Even after his several visits to the river, Chandran is not ready to ask her name. His love is completely one-sided and optical. Even Malathi does not know who Chandran is. It is mere attraction towards her innocence and grace. Thus, R.K.Narayan effectively portrays how love changes the life a youth. But the fact is it not only affects the particular person, but also the family. Accordingly, the same happens in Chandran's family.

Chandran's love finally ends in failure, as there is no match in the horoscopes. Like the love failure heroes of the movies, Chandran also leads a life without interest and hope. He leaves home and stays alone and after few years. The wavering youth of Chandran comes to an end by accepting the marriage proposal of Sushila, a Brahmin girl of his parent's choice. Chandran decides to take up the main agency of a newspaper called Daily Messenger in Malgudi. He does his job with utmost satisfaction. He comes out from the illusion of friendship, Malathi and England. He comprehends the reality. At the same time, he remains as a devoted husband to his wife Sushila. Thus, R.K.Narayan progressively sketches the phases of a youth, which commences with a care free college life, continues with a happy family, develops with friendship, renounces with love failure and returns back to the life with complete comprehension.

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