

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**Transition from Adolescence to Adulthood in R. K. Narayan's**

*The Bachelor of Arts*

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of  
Master's of Arts in English**

**By**

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This thesis entitled "Transition from Adolescence to Adulthood in R. K. Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts*," submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Basant Kumar Bhattarai has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## **Abstract**

R. K. Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts* depicts the national consciousness growing towards maturity i.e. towards independence and self-confidence. R.K. Narayan allegorizes the transformation of the national consciousness of pre-independent India towards maturity through Chandran's transition from adolescence to adulthood.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

This research is a study of R. K. Narayan's novel *The Bachelor of Arts*, published in 1937. It is the second book of a trilogy that began with *Swami and Friends* and ended with *The English Teacher*. It is again set in Malgudi, the fictional town Narayan invented for his novels. Socio-historical condition of pre-independent India has affected the writings of many Indian novelists including those of R.K. Narayan. In this context, how Narayan reflects the condition of the nation in his novel *The Bachelor of Arts* becomes an important area of inquiry. In *The Bachelor of Arts*, R.K. Narayan reflects the transformation of the national consciousness of pre-independent India towards maturity by portraying Chandran's transition from adolescence to adulthood.

The story of *The Bachelor of Arts* revolves around a young guy named Chandran, who resembles a typical Indian upper middle class youth of the pre-independence era. First, the college life of the main character Chandran in late colonial times is described. After graduation, he falls in love with a girl, but will be rejected by the bride's parents, since his horoscope describes him as a *manglik*, a condition in which a *manglik* can only marry another *manglik* and if not, the non-*manglik* will die. Frustrated and desperate, he embarks on a journey as *Sanyasi*. On his journey he meets many people and he is also misunderstood as a great sage by some villagers. Due to the compunctions and the realizations, he decides to return home. He takes up a job as a newsagent and decides to

marry, in order to please his parents. With the growing up of the main character, Narayan beautifully shows the transition of an adolescent mind into adulthood.

His writing career began with *Swami and Friends*. The magic contains this famous first novel of Narayan with the very next, *The Bachelor of Arts* published in 1935 and 1937. The third novel is *The Vendor of Sweets* published in 1967. By that time he had become a name in the Indian writing in English and the novel which gave him name and fame was *The Guide*. He got the Sahitya Akademi Award and thereafter the novel was made into a movie in English and Hindi.

Human relationships, more particularly familial relationships, constitute a major theme in Narayan's novels. Narayan typically portrays the peculiarities of human relationships and ironies of Indian daily life, in which modern urban existence clashes with traditions. The family is the immediate context in which his sensibility operates and his novels are remarkable for the subtlety and conviction with which this relationship is treated – that of son and parents, brother and brother in *The Bachelor of Arts*.

Parental love is one of the more significant refrains in Narayan's fiction. Another facet of his writing shows that Narayan's heroes are constantly struggling to achieve maturity and each one of his novels is a depiction of this struggle. This theme is present in a lighter, less developed character of Chandran in *The Bachelor of Arts*. But Narayan's heroes ultimately accept life as it is, and this is a measure of their spiritual

maturity. And this maturity is achieved within the accepted religious and social framework.

In *Swami and Friends*, the normal life of Swami and his friends, the peace, harmony and friendship is momentarily disturbed due to some misunderstanding between friends. But in the end normalcy is restored because the crisis has been resolved. Likewise, in *The Bachelor of Arts*, when the hero fails to marry the girl of his choice, he renounces the world for a time and becomes a *Sanyasi*. Ultimately he returns home and marries the girl of his parents' choice and lives happily ever after.

In *The Vendor of Sweets*, when Jagan, the father, is unable to inject some sense in the mind of his profligate son Mali, he decides to retire from his business to lead a life in an "ashram" across the river.

Malgudi forms the backdrop of almost all his works. It is a symbol for India and it is a typically South Indian town. It has been presented vividly and realistically and we see it changing and growing and becoming different in successive novels. The Malgudi of *Swami and Friends* is different from the Malgudi of *The Vendor of Sweets* written after a gap of 30 years. In fact, "Malgudi" is the real hero in Narayan's fiction. All things pass and change, but Malgudi asserts itself and continues to live, change and grow. In short, he gives kaleidoscopic images of life's little ironies happening in Malgudi, vis-a-vis in India on a larger scale.

*Swami and Friends* (1935) was at once hailed by critics as a great work of art. The novel describes the rainbow world of childhood and early boyhood of boys of the likes of Swami growing up in the interior of South



India. It seems that Narayan's personal experience at school has gone into the making of the novel. We get a vivid portrayal of the thoughts, emotions and activities of school boys. It is as though everyday reality has taken over Narayan's pen and written this universal epic of all our boyhood days.

The novel is remarkable for the author's understanding of child psychology, for depiction of the carefree, buoyant world of a school boy. *Swami* is one of the immortal creations of Narayan. Chandran, Raju, Jagan and others came much after in his fiction. Some writers have the tendency to covert their childhood into shrines and further to mythify their own boyhood. Narayan has consciously avoided that because he never wrote any more tales of boyhood after *Swami and Friends*.

*The Bachelor of Arts* is a more mature work than the earlier novel and it deals with a later stage in a young man's career, when he is about to leave college and enter life and settle in some job. It is divided into four parts. Part one gives us a slice of college life of the hero Chandran – a sensitive youth caught in the whirlpool of Western ideas of love and marriage instilled in him by his education and the traditional social set-up in which he lives.

Part two deals with the young man's search for a job and his frustrations at not getting a decent job. The only ray of hope is the love interest in the beautiful girl Malathi, whom he encounters during one of his walks on the banks of the Sarayu River. The parents of the girl have no

objection to this "love alliance" but the tangle of fate obstruct as their horoscopes do not match.

The autobiographical element intrudes. A couple of years earlier Narayan had married against astrological warnings. Happy in his marriage, he must have thought the idea of Chandran's possible marriage being wrecked by horoscopes, a dramatic one but his own wife died about two years after the publication of this novel. There is an irony here. Frustration in love makes him take recourse to wandering like *Swami/Sanyasi* but for a time only. He finds the life of a *Sanyasi* difficult at so young an age and he returns to the fold of his house, to get married to the girl of his parent's choice.

At last, *The Bachelor of Arts* takes a job as a newspaper correspondent. The novel, however, leaves us with a feeling that the writer has made no attempt to probe the real implications of the conflict in the mind of the hero Chandran and has made the hero return to the safety of the home life.

After the publication of *The English Teacher* in 1945 Narayan's novels altered and matured. Without losing their humor or sentimentality, they started focusing on small men with big mouths — a venal vendor of sweets, a penny-wise money lender, a staid painter, a fake swami — who all face disruption in their ordered world. How they restore their equilibrium is the comedy, the plot and the philosophy. The novels are too Indian in their themes and that delights the academics all over the world and they go on doing doctorate theses on themes like "Malgudisation of

reality or Brahminness in the novels of Narayan'' without forgetting the role of women in his fiction.

*The Vendor of Sweets* continues the Gandhian motif of his earlier novel *Waiting for the Mahatma*. Jagan, the sweet vendor, who is out and out a Gandhian, finds his only son, Mali lured away by the West. By the time he came to write this novel Narayan had himself been exposed to American living and also its thought processes. So he makes Mali, the son of the sweet vendor, go to America only to return with a half-American and half-Korean girl (to whom he is not married) and with an out-of-the-world idea for devising a novel-writing machine (the computer revolution was about to commence in the 1960s. All this makes Jagan think of renouncing the world and he takes Mali as the spoilt thread of his life.

Due to such brilliant works, R.K. Narayan was short listed for the Nobel Prize in literature several times but never won. Literary circles often joke that the Nobel Committee ignored his works, mistaking them instead for self-help books due to their curious titles (*The English Teacher*, *The Painter of Signs*, etc.).

His works were translated into every European language as well as Hebrew. His admirers included Somerset Maugham, John Updike and Graham Greene, who called him the "novelist I admire most in the English language" (Introduction iv).

Though Narayan's writing has been extremely popular amongst the masses, the upper, literary classes never really warmed up to him. It has been said that his writing was pedestrian, with his simple language and

stories of village life. One of his most outspoken critics has been Shashi Tharoor.

Graham Greene observes a strange mixture of humor, sadness and beauty in Narayan's novels. He comments to Narayan: "Complete objectivity, complete freedom from comments" (qtd. in Prasanna 189).

Another critic, William Walsh comments that "his writing is a distinctive blend of western technique and eastern material and he has succeeded in a remarkable way in making an Indian sensibility at home in English art" (qtd. in Saran 340). Walsh also gives emphasis on Narayan's writing technique as the blend of East and West.

K.V.S. Murti notices the mythical parallel with the representation of characters where Tara and Sasanka could not get married as Chandran and Malathi in the novel. The social codes of mythical background and consent of parents in Indian society go parallel.

According to KVS Murti, it is here that one notices the mythical parallel – that of Tara and Sasanka. (The Moon God). Sasanka or Chandra as he is more commonly known, falls in love with Tara, wife of his guiu, which is out of bounds of the ethical code and hence unsuccessful. Chandran too falls in Love with Malathi, a phenomenon which is unheard of in a society where marriages by parental consent and arrangement are common.

S. Krishnan comments on the book, *The World of Malgudi* as an autobiographical work where he writes: "There is a good bit of Narayan in this book, especially in the episode of Chandran falling in love with a girl,

whose horoscope unfortunately does not match his” (3). Here, Chandran’s marriage incident resembles with that of Narayan’s.

In short, most of the critics have dealt with the idea of Narayan's craftsmanship, autobiography, myth, and so-on. But, nobody has yet made an adequate effort to study the text from Indian national interest. It is one of the important aspects of the novel which the present researcher wants to research.

The study has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of the work, a short introduction to R. K. Narayan and a short critical response. Moreover, it gives a bird's eye view of the entire work. The second chapter tries to briefly explain the theoretical modality that is applied in this research work. It discusses nationalism and Indian nationalism.

On the basis of the theoretical framework established in the second chapter, the third chapter analyzes the text at a considerable length. It analyzes how Indian national consciousness grows mature with the transformation of typical Indian character Chandran. It sorts out some extracts from the text as evidence to prove the hypothesis of the study – the novel reflects the transformation of the national consciousness of pre-independent India towards maturity by portraying Chandran's transition from adolescence to adulthood. And, the fourth chapter is the conclusion of this research work.

## **Chapter II**

### **National Allegory and Third World Literature**

The term "nationalism" refers to an ideology based on the notion that people who have a sense of homogeneity rooted in a conception of a shared history and common ethnicity, cultural heritage or religion should be united in a single nation-state free of alien political, economic or cultural influence or domination. This explains that nationalism is an ideology which demands that people who share a common history, culture and ethnicity should live unitedly in a nation-state where there is no influence or domination from another nation-state.

Like other ideologies, nationalism offers an interpretation of the historical and contemporary reality in which a nation finds itself a critique of that reality together with a conceptualization of an ideal or preferred reality as a goal to be striven for, and a plan or set of guidelines for reaching that goal. In effect, nationalism can be used to mobilize people for political action by cultivating or even creating through propaganda and education, a national consciousness based on myths of common identity and differentiation from others. Most often these myths are defined in terms of a heroic, glorious, or otherwise romanticized past or conception of a threat of the existence of the nation. Ernest Gellner elucidates:

Because nationalism is an ideology that acquires its specific content from the particular grievances, fears, and ambitions of a nation from the political context or social and economic circumstances within which it arises it assumes various forms

and plays different roles in the history of a given people or nation. (129)

Although ideological representation can be considered either as "false consciousness," "a deception," and a "conscious lie," many nation states have nationalists for whom the ideology of nationalism has been a great unifying force, an accurate reflection of the objective condition and contradiction – colonial exploitation – that was central to the corporate life of society at large (Manheim 123). This nationalist consciousness spread to the entire mass of people, welding them towards a corporate will to be a nation in the past.

Nationalism is an ideology held collectively by people of a nation-state. Theorizing on nation, nationality and nationalism in general has proceeded rather exclusively along either the subjective or the objective factors that constitute such phenomenon. Nations are presumed to have certain objective characteristics such as language, race, religion, territory or history which either singly or in combination distinguish them from other nations. Protection and promotion of these, in competition and conflict with other nations, then becomes nationalism. Alternatively, nations are considered as collectivities built on the subjective consciousness of identity of kind, commonality of interests, and a will to be a nation.

Here political assertion and actualization of such a consciousness or will becomes nationalism. On the basis of such divergent theoretical orientations, nationalism has been classified as cultural or political

respectively. Most scholars see Western nationalisms as political and the Eastern ones as cultural. On the other hand, the alternate classification of the nineteenth century nationalisms is described as political and the twentieth century ones as cultural.

Nationalism as a form and manifestation of modern politics is about groups in conflict for power-social, political, and economic – and "as an ideology it is always articulated in the context of multiple ideologies" (Therbon 41).

In his landmark study in "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism," Benedict Anderson opens what has become a continuous debate on the idea of the nation and nationalism by defining the nation as "an imagined political community--and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (15). He explains: "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them. Yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (15). In fact, he adds, "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined" (15). To imagine the nation that way is to focus on its physical structure, that is, as a landscape with fixed boundaries, rather than as an inscape, amorphous and fluid. For as Anderson contends, the nation is "imagined as limited because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations" (16). To think of the nation as sovereign, that is, an independent, self-governing



entity modeled on monarchies at a time of great historical and intellectual changes in Europe, a period of increasing religious pluralism, adds yet to that false notion of the nation. Yet the question remains: how can such a recent, false notion as nation cause so many to be willing to die? Or, as in the case with some African writers, be willing to create works that “[offer] blueprints of national formation?” The answer lies perhaps in the political leaderships' or, indeed, pseudo-sovereigns' abilities to dictate this false notion to his people as truth.

In recent years, however, writers like Sony Labou Tansi, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Nuruddin Farah, disillusioned by the broken promises and betrayed by postcolonial rulers who have appropriated national discourses, conscious of dictators' human rights abuses within their imagined sovereign space, have turned their creative endeavors into weapons to challenge, indeed to deconstruct what Jean Franco has called in another context "any signified that could correspond to the nation" (204). Such subversive activities of de-centering the nation, of questioning established national boundaries, have taken various forms. Some of the writers have created grotesque, ubuesque, composite political figures and endowed them with larger-than-life qualities that transcend national boundaries while undermining their flattering attributes by also endowing them with self-destructive tendencies as well, tendencies that together nullify their existence.

For many women writers, who, to borrow from Homi Bhabha, "have always been placed on the limits of [their] nations' narratives"(302),

contesting various boundaries has often come through their way of framing what might be considered personal, individual, local issues, everyday life stories in ways that transcend the boundaries of their imagined communities. Indeed, for all those writers and critics, the nation can no longer be interpreted as Walker Connor puts it simply as "a social group which shares a common ideology, common institutions and customs, and a sense of homogeneity" (333), but must be seen in its complexity as "a contested referent" (Esonwanne), a "shifting referent" (Cobhan), "imagined communities" (Anderson), an "imagined construct" (Paredes), or, indeed, a contested construct. These competing descriptions of the nation reflect scholars' and critics' fascination with the concept and represent current debates on the idea of the nation in the American academy.

In the opening paragraphs of his essay "The Nation as a Contested Referent," Uzo Esonwanne makes a "tour d'horizon" of that debate prompted by Fredric Jameson's article "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" in which he characterizes all "Third World" texts as "national allegories." As he explains, "Third world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic necessarily project a political dimension in the term of national allegory." The story of the private individual destiny, he adds, "is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society" (69). Jameson's assertion may have some validity in that studies by Walter Benjamin, the allegorist par excellence, have led the latter to

conclude that allegory reflects a cultural situation in which "any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else" (175). In the field of allegorical intuition, Benjamin contends, "the image is the fragment, a rune" (176).

Patrick McGee's reading of Benjamin in the light of African literature seems to explain Jameson's contention. Allegory, he argues, "arises from a culture in which the real world has become meaningless, devoid of intrinsic value, fragmented yet mysterious" (241). McGee's comments clearly depict the colonial situation that had disrupted the coherent picture of pre-colonial reality. It had also distorted the African past and in its place had introduced a copy of the colonialist's own traditions, or simply invented new ones. In either case the result was the fragmentation of the Africans' perception of their own world, making that world meaningless for them. The allegorist, according to McGee, "merely arranges the fragments of this world, its images, to produce a meaning the fragments could not produce by themselves--a meaning not identical to the intention of the allegorist but reflecting his or her relation to the given historical context" (241). Jameson's qualification of allegory as "national" places the individual allegorist in the larger context of the nation which in this case, should be understood as what Homi Bhabha calls that "curiously hybrid realm where private interests assume public significance" (2). Bhabha's "realm" is today being undermined and abused by dictators who have arrogated the imagined national space for themselves by inscribing

their personal stories in the narrative of the nation in the guise of collective history.

Jameson's assertion has other implications. It seems to pigeonhole all 'Third World Writings,' keeping them from transcending the conceptual boundaries of their imagined national communities. Guy Ossito Midiohouan's comment about national literatures is appropriate here. He decries "many a practitioner of nation-specific criticism [who] has stumbled when attempting to determine the locale and context of a number of African novels; so much so that we can claim that quite a few writers have found themselves pigeonholed, against their will, within air-tight mythological constructs which have very little to do with their work" (37). Moreover, it does assume, and falsely so, that the writer in these so-called Third World societies can always, and does indeed, recapture the collective memory of the people since his/her own individual memory is always subsumed. Furthermore, Jameson assumes that the concept of the nation from which he derives the adjective "national" is in itself a fixed, stable and an easily definable entity.

Literary and cultural critics as Jean Franco challenge assumptions and broad generalizations of that nature in other contexts. She questions whether "national allegory" "can be any longer usefully applied to a literature in which nation is either a contested term or something like the Cheshire Cat's grin -- a mere reminder of a vanished body" (204). Her reading of contemporary Latin American literatures leads to the conclusion that "not only is 'the nation' a complex and much contested

term, but in recent Latin American criticism, it is no longer the inevitable framework for either political or cultural projects" (204). Going back to the forties and fifties she adds, "[T]he novel more and more became a skeptical reconstruction of past errors. The novel made visible that absence of any signified that could correspond to the nation. [. . .] In place of an identifiable microcosm of nation, such works offer a motley space in which different historical development and different cultures overlap. In her lucid and thought-provoking chapter "Women and the Nation," Partha Chatterjee searches for a theoretical framework to analyze the women's question in Asia and Africa, introducing the concept of inner/outer, home/world, and spiritual/material. Her discussion of those dichotomies indirectly provides an answer to those critics. As she explains:

Applying the inner/outer distinction to the matter of concrete day-to-day living separates the social space into ghar and bahir, the home and the world. The world is external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests where practical consideration reign supreme. It is also typically the domain of the male. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by profane activities of the material world--and woman is its representation. (120)

Indeed, the space and role assigned to women in the preceding quotation is typical of "gender roles in traditional patriarchy." According to R. Radhakrishnan, such nationalist rhetoric makes women "the pure and ahistorical signifier of 'interiority'" (84). "Ahistorical" here need not be negative in that it is on the fringes of historical processes that these signifiers generate antihegemonic, anticolonialist discourses. For as women writers point out in an interview conducted by Margaret Busby, they have had "to struggle against colonisation by their own men and by those traditional attitudes that reserved formal education for male children"(33). Moreover, conscious of the fact that what truly matters in the life of the nation are practices in the inner space, the domains of women, some women writers have used their insider position to subvert nationalist discourses by challenging their objectification and the roles that they have been conditioned to play; to question what Kenneth Harrow calls "their subordinated position in the emergence of new patriarchal structures or the revalidation of old ones" (23).

### **Indian Nationalism**

Indian nationalism refers to the consciousness and expression of political, social, religious and ethnic influences that help mould Indian national consciousness. Indian Nationalism describes the many underlying forces that molded the Indian independence movement, and strongly continue to influence the politics of India, as well as being the heart of many contrasting ideologies that have caused ethnic and religious conflict in Indian society. It should be noted that Indian nationalism often imbibes

the consciousness of Indians prior to 1947; India embodied the broader Indian subcontinent and influenced a part of Asia, known as Greater India.

Indian nationalism is as much a diverse blend of nationalistic sentiments as its people are ethnically and religiously diverse. Thus the most influential undercurrents are more than just Indian in nature. The most controversial and emotionally-charged fiber in the fabric of Indian nationalism is its culture. Ethnic communities are diverse in terms of linguistics, social traditions and history across India.

India's concept of nationhood is based not merely on territorial extent of its sovereignty. Nationalistic sentiments and expression encompass India's ancient history, as the birthplace of the Indus Valley Civilization, and of four major world religions - Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Indian nationalists see India stretching along these lines across the Indian subcontinent.

### **Swaraj (Freedom)**

The Swaraj, the complete freedom is associated with India's Independent Movement during the British rule in India. The flag was adopted in 1931 by the Congress and used by the Provisional Government of Free India during the Second World War. In the Indian rebellion of 1857, Indian soldiers and regional kings fought the forces allied with the British Empire in different parts of India. The war arose from the racist viewpoint and disregards the British exhibited to Indian religious traditions, and the desire for Indians to retain religious purity and freedom regardless of war or violence as its expense. There were also kingdoms

and peoples, such as Holkar, Scindia and the Sikhs, and Indian soldiers, who supported the British. This event laid the foundation not only for a nationwide expression, but also future nationalism and conflict on religious and ethnic terms.

The Indian desire for complete freedom, or Swaraj, was born with Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who looked to the glories of Indian history and heritage, and condemned the racist and imperialistic discrimination of common Indians, who were not permitted a voice in the affairs of their own country. Tilak and his followers were the first to express the desire for complete independence, an idea that did not catch on until after World War I, when the British attempted to exert totalitarian power with the Rowlatt Acts of 1919. When the Amritsar Massacre of hundreds of unarmed and innocent civilians by British forces took place in the same year, the Indian public was outraged and most of India's political leaders turned against the British. The Bengal famine of 1943, regarded by some as genocide of the ethnic Bengalis sponsored by the British Crown, further led to growing discontent between Indians and the British.

Quit India procession was first viewed at Bangalore, India. Mohandas Gandhi pioneered the art of Satyagraha, typified with a strict adherence to ahimsa (non-violence), and civil disobedience. This permitted common individuals to engage the British in revolution, without employing violence or other distasteful means. Gandhi's equally strict adherence to democracy, religious and ethnic equality and brotherhood, as well as activist rejection of caste-based discrimination and untouchability



united people across these demographic lines for the first time in India's history. The masses could participate in India's freedom struggle for the first time, and the membership of the Congress grew over tens of millions by the 1930s. In addition, Gandhi's victories in the Champaran and Kheda Satyagraha in 1918-19, gave confidence to a rising younger generation of Indians that the British hegemony could be defeated. National leaders like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad and Badshah Khan brought together generations of Indians across regions and demographics, and provided a strong leadership base giving the country political direction.

While Gandhi's leadership attracted the vast majority of Indians, Subhas Chandra Bose led a forceful initiative of military revolution when he formed the Indian National Army in the early 1940s, out of Indian POWs and indentured workers in South East Asia in World War II, with the help of the Japanese. Just as Gandhi had brought Indians together for peaceful, mass revolution, Bose united Hindus, Muslims and different ethnic groups in a military outfit aimed at liberating Indian Territory from British control.

The whole social and political philosophy of traditional India is founded upon the concept of harmony. Nationalism is the key that unites people, and an idea of how nationalism can be achieved differs from the ways in other countries. Bipin Chandrapal reads Indian nationalism as:

the youngest in age among those who stand in the forefront of the nationalist propaganda in India, but in endowment,

education and character, perhaps superior to them all-  
 Aravinda seems distinctly worked out by providence to play  
 in the future of this movement a part not given to any of his  
 colleagues and contemporaries. . . . (88)

The Indian Nationalism is much expressed in the national anthem;  
 the song was composed in 1875 by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and  
 adopted as the national song at the Bewares session of the All Indian  
 Congress Committee on September 7, 1905. A controversy broke out as  
 some minority leaders felt it glorified Hindu deities, idol worship and had  
 a regional biasness. In October 28, 1937 a committee comprising Mahatma  
 Gandhi, Maulana Azad and Subash Chandra Bose observed Gandhi's  
 nationalistic attitude:

Gandhi is taken as the most remarkable nationalist. Nehru  
 was also in relation with Gandhi. Jesse S. Palsetia comments  
 on their relationship as: Nehru was attracted inexorably to  
 Gandhi, and the nationalist thought went along at every step  
 with Gandhi, Nehru, the supreme rationalist, was attracted to  
 the indefinable thing that is personality. Furthermore,  
 emotionalism coupled to political expediency united the  
 nationalists to Gandhi up to the 1330s, as the popular Gandhi  
 was 'democratizing' nationalism and bringing supports to  
 congress. (qtd. in Radhakrishnan 30)

Jesse S. Palsetia further comments on Gandhian nationalism as:

Gandhi's coupling the means of attaining independence with goal accounts for the vicissitudes to which he subjected the nationalist movement. The rationale nature at Gandhi's actions to some degree explains the convergence of Gandhi's and Nehru's worlds and answers why Nehru was struggling with his Indian identity, both its emotional and rational sides.

(35)

Gandhi is a remarkable for the Indian independence and Indian nationalism N.B. Sen commenting upon the Gandhian view about Nationalism comments: "It is impossible for one to see that internationalism is possible only when nationalism becomes a fact, there is no uncertainty about my patriotism or nationalism [. . .]" (158).

Gandhi is taken as the important Indian and cultural leader. The role of Gandhi for the Indian independence is immense, Nehru's appraisal of Gandhi as being more an idealist than a realist answers why leadership eventually fell to Nehru and other nationalists. Gandhi's active non-violent protest was a logical, moral and political goal. It shaped British-Indian relations, attracted peaceful followers, and achieved a goal that Indian could be proud of.

Indian nationalism is basically a cultural one. Cultural nationalism defines the nation as shared culture. The articulation of cultural nationalism revolves around "the beliefs concerning the distinctness, integrity, uniqueness and superiority of one's culture" (Aloysius 131).

Cultural-nationalist articulation is a process that sets forth the nation as an ideological-cultural construct.

The process of piecing together the cultural nation began during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The historical cultural discoveries of the early orientalist, working in and around Fort William, Calcutta, regarding the Aryan myth, the Sanskrit language, and the sacred texts, laid foundation for all subcontinents. Cultural pride in the subcontinent predated colonialism and it occurred simultaneously in several regions as a reflection of the social power-position of articulating groups. The first significant aspect of this cultural, nationalistic ideology was this:

Ever since the late eighteenth century the cultural core of the nation to-be, though variously named as Aryan, Indo-Aryan, Sanskritic, Sanatan, Caste-Hindu, Hindu or even Indian, come to be identified with the Sanskritic, textual traditions of Vedic, Brahminism. (1334)

Vedic Brahminism as an ideology re-engulfed the subcontinent now transformed into the colonial state, thus creating Indian religious-cultural nationalism on the models of pre-modern Islam and Christianity. The values and principles of the social organization of this cultural nation were to be derived and defined through a presumed polar opposition to those of the west, Europe, and British imperialism or simply modernity. G. Aloysium writes if the west was materialist, we were spiritual, if individualist, then we were corporate, if competitive and conflicting then our culture was organic and harmonious. And finally perhaps the most

decisive presumption was that if Western society was based on uniform rights for individuals then Eastern society was organized around differential duties for naturally ordained stratified groups. (134)

Indeed this hierarchical *Varna*-based ordering of groups with presumed natural tendencies and aptitudes was hailed as the great national-social synthesis effected by the Aryan culture that contained the core of the continuity from the past, through the present to the future of the cultural nation. So, G. Aloysius describes Hindu genius, and national legacy as;

the appropriate foundation to build the nation on, the great Indian message to the strife-ridden modern world. The ideology the called upon the nation to recognize its uniqueness in these (above) terms, to feel collective, cultural pride in its heritage and to unite and oppose everything that threatened its continuance, regeneration and reassertion in modern times. (134)

In this way, national sentiment has helped India grow culturally, socially and economically since the time it was ruled by Britain. It was this sentiment which played crucial role in establishing sovereignty and unity in India. All this above discussion on nationalism gives enough insight to interpret Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts* from the viewpoint of Indian nationalism.

### Chapter III

#### Transition from Adolescence to Adulthood in the Novel

Indian writing has always been reflective of socio-historical conditions of different times. The writers of pre-independent India have been particularly attentive to such conditions as they directly experienced the situation at the time. These writers have especially focused on the scenario during the time of British Raj. In doing so, they have projected the situation of Indian people under the British rule in India; in their writings we can see that how the Indian national interests had been subjugated by the British who occupied all the important government posts at the time. R.K. Nayrayan's one of the early novels, *The Bachelor of Arts* reflects the transformation of the national consciousness of pre-independent India towards maturity by portraying Chandran's transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Indian history is the history of subjugation and domination at the hands of British rulers during the 1930s. Indian people were aware of this situation and they were gradually growing mature in terms of this awareness. So, in *The Bachelor of Arts* the representative Indian character, Chandran's transition from adolescence to adulthood allegorizes India's maturity during the late thirties. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist Chandran is presented as innocent and immature youth though he is quite conscious of his national interests. When the college secretary Natesan proposes that Chandran should act as a "Prime Mover" of the debate "historians should be slaughtered first," Chandran is taken aback as

he has to face such an issue all of a sudden (1). Though he has the ability to deal with such issues, he sounds hesitant at the thought of his history professor, Ragavachar. He says to Natesan, "I am a history student. I can't move the subject. What a subject! My professor will eat me up" (1). Later on, When he jots down the notes for preparation of the debate, he considers this "a very important piece of self-realization" (2). This shows an adolescent's transition towards adulthood, which reflects an Indian's consciousness of one's history. In this way India becomes more mature because of its conscious citizens like Chandran.

When Chandran actually moves the subject at the Union debate, he does it brilliantly. He really holds the audience spell bound because everyone listens to his speech with great enthusiasm. As a "prime mover" in the debate Chandran really cuts the professor to size a size with which he feels quite satisfied. It is this attitude which makes survival possible for Narayan's heroes.

The first spurts of nationalistic sentiment that rose amongst the people in India were seen in their desire to be represented in important decision making bodies of social and political sector, of which they were always deprived during the colonial period. Chandran's involvement in the College's activities albeit as a hesitant youth at the beginning reflects his desire to have his say in the authority. He possesses the potentiality to lead India on the path of progress and prosperity through nationalism and democratic practices. After the debate is over, Chandran wants to hear something about his speech. As he is a conscious Indian from the very

beginning, he seeks recognition and praise for his performance at the debate because he is elated at being represented in College Association.

He was never offered such an opportunity before. Nayrayan mentions:

Chandran hoped that the secretary would tell him something about his speech. But the secretary was busy with his own thoughts. "I am sorry! Ever took up this business," he said, "Hardly a time is left over for my studies" [. . .]. Chandran felt sympathy for him, but was still disappointed that he made no reference to his speech. There was no use waiting for him to open the subject. He was a born grumbler. (7)

Chandran was not interested in the travails of a secretary. He wanted him to say something about his own speech in the debate. For the first time his capacity is recognized, which had been ignored before because of British ruler's autocratic rule. Chandran would be a graduate very soon and he was already "a remarkable orator" (11). However, as an adolescent he feels nervous when he is called by the history professor. He has never been given such responsibility before. Nraryan writes:

Chandran sat alone, worrying. Why had Ragavachar called him? He hadn't misbehaved; no library book overdue; there were one or two tests he hadn't attended. But Ragavachar never corrected any test paper. Or could it be that he had suddenly gone through all the test papers and found out that Chandran had not attended some of the tests? If it was only a reprimand, the professor would do it in the open class. Would



any professor waive such an opportunity and do it in this room? For that matter, Ramu, had not attended a single test in his life. Why was he not called? (23)

As he comes near the Professor's room, Chandran feels very nervous. He adjusts his coat and buttons it up. It is the British ruling system which has marred the creativity of the youths. He hesitates for a moment before the door. He suddenly pulls himself up:

Why this cowardice? Why should he be afraid of Ragavachar or anybody? Human being to human being remove those spectacles, the turban, and the long coat, and let Ragavachar appear only in a loin-cloth, and Mr. Ragavachar would lose three-quarters of his appearance where was the sense in feeling nervous before a pair of spectacles, a turban and black long coat? (26)

In fact, the professor recognizes great potential in Chandran and he wants to start a Historical Association in the college and make Chandran the secretary of the Association. Because of Chandran even the professor gets support and reinforcement to start the Association as a platform for discussion on national issues. He sees in Chandran the courage and nationalistic vision. This is the example of India's maturity. The professor is really impressed with Chandran's talent and consciousness of Indian history and legacy at the pre-independent time. Though there were still "a few inevitable dark corners in his mind concerning a few impossible

periods in History like the middle that was called the medieval south Indian History” (45)

Chandran is very much conscious of the activities of college principal Professor Brown, who is the representative of imperial power. Brown acts as an authority because he presses the ball allowing and disallowing the participants at the debate. Chandran observes Mr. Brown’s activities right from the very beginning. So he keeps gazing at Brown’s pink face. Chandran thinks:

Here he is, he thought, pretending to press the bell and listen to the speeches, but really his thoughts are at the tennis-court and the card-table in the English club. He is here not out of love for us, but merely to keep up appearances, all Europeans are like this. They will take their thousand or more a month, but won’t do the slightest service to Indians with a sincere heart. They must be paid this heavy amount for spending their time in the English Club. Why should not these fellows admit Indians to their clubs? Sheer color arrogance. If ever I get into power is shall see that Englishmen attend clubs among with Indians and are not so exclusive why not give the poor devils so far away from their home a chance to club together at least for a few hours at the end of a days work? Anyway show invited them here? (5).

This shows how the Indians were fully aware of the British ruler’s activities during the thirties, which made it possible to launch a movement

against to drive away the invaders from India. This is the maturity of Indian people and India as a whole.

The forming of the Historical Association is important in Chandran's life because it brings him into contact with two revolutionary personalities such as Veeraswami and the poet, Mohan. This meeting with such personalities proves a milestone in his college life as Chandran gets to know more about the prevailing situation. Besides, Veeraswami's paper on "The Aids to British Expansion in India" presented at the Association which ends by hoping that the British would be ousted from India by force delights Chandran and offends Prof. Brown. And Prof Brown demands censorship on any papers before they are presented at the Association Narayan writes:

Next day he [Chandran] received a note from Brown, the custodian of British prestige, suggesting that in future papers meant to be read before the Association should be first sent to him. This infuriated Chandran so much that he thought of resigning till Ragavachar assured him that he would not get his degree if he tried these antics. Chandran sought Veeraswami and consulted him on the ways and means to put an end to Brown's autocracy. (46)

This shows Chandran's growing maturity towards national consciousness about Indian nationalist interests. This proves that though Indians held moderate views on imperialism, they carried the potential seeds to oust colonizers from the Indian land. Chandran resents the denial of freedom of

expression for nationalists, and the lack of any voice or role for ordinary Indians in the internal affairs of their nation. Obviously, he is for *Swaraj* (complete freedom) as the natural and only solution. Apparently, India, at this juncture, is quite ready and mature enough for revolt against the British rulers. This became possible only because of conscious Indian citizens.

After graduation Chandran is out of college life, and he is found groaning in the struggle of life. He is passing through physical as well as emotional transitional period. Within six months of his becoming a graduate, Chandran is faced with the knotty problem securing a job for himself. Although all sorts of people suggest different government jobs and lousiness to him, Chandran does never feel impressed by them. He neither wants to do the job nor can he get any under such system unless he has some resourceful persons. Neither does he want to go for further study. This is because he is disillusioned by the political situation of the time. So, he confides in his father in this way:

“I am sorry, father, that I ever passed the B.A.”

“Why?”

“Why should everybody talk about my career? Why can’t they mind their own business?” (53)

In order to evade the people Chandran gives his father the hint that he wants to go to England for further study. After that Chandran went about with a freer mind. To his persecutors he would say: “I am going to England next year,” some demanded why he was not starting immediately.

Chandran told them: “we can’t go to England on an impulse, can we?” (53). This implies Chandran does not go to England in reality. Once when Veeraswami starts a heated discourse on the value of going to England saying “what have we to learn from the English? I don’t know when this craze for going to England will stop. It is a drain on the country’s resources what have we to learn from the English?” (61). At this, Chandran retorts, “I may be going there to teach them something” (61). This shows how Chandran feels hatred towards the Westerners. India grew mature because of such nationalist people.

After that Chandran manages to organize his life without his friends. He becomes a member of the town Public Library and reads an enormous quantity of fiction and general literature ranging from Indian to whole Shakespeare to Carlyle. This is the process through which Chandran is getting mature as he is slipping into adulthood.

In the meantime, Chandran goes for a stroll on the banks of the river. But there comes a strange phenomenon in this carefree atmosphere and it influences the whole course of his adolescent life overlapping his later life as well. This phenomenon is his seeing a beautiful girl beside the river, whom he develops an adolescent infatuation. Later he finds that the girl’s name is Malathi. He imagines her in a quite Indian typical ways:

What was the use of thinking of a married girl? Probably she was not married. Her parents were very likely rational and modern, people who abhorred the custom of rushing a young child into marriage. He tried to analyze why he was thinking

of her, what did he think of her so much? [. . .]. He wondered next what her name might be. She looked like one with the name of Laxmi. Quite a beautiful name, the name of the goddess of wealth, the spouse of God Vishnu, who was the Protector of Creatures. (56)

The girl, Malathi's wearing a dark *sari*, a typical Indian dress greatly attracts Chandran. In addition to what draws him more to Malathi is her Indian way of living as he found that "she was of a religious disposition, and was accomplished in the art of music or embroidery, and that she was a person of very systematic habits" (64). This shows that though Chandran is still young, he is beginning to appreciate the Indian way of life. No where in the text is the example of his being influenced by the Western way of living. This shows how India had not been influenced by the Western lifestyles even when it was under their direct rule.

However, while sticking to the Indian way of life, Chandran makes up his mind to do away with irrational practices of Hindu society. Narayan writes:

Suppose, though unmarried, she belonged to some other caste? A marriage would not be tolerated even between the subsets of the same caste, if India was to attain salvation these water tight divisions must to community, caste, sects, subsets, and still further divisions. He felt very indignant. He would set an example himself by marrying this girl whatever her caste or sect might be. (56)

This reflects Chandran's awareness about the Indian social construct. As he is growing adult he grows bold and follow good aspects and opposes negative practices. India has reached this stage in terms of its holistic development because of its conscious people.

These are the views of a young social rebel who is ready to do away with all shackles and barriers. He has firm determination to discard those stale customs which make life poor, insipid and born as an adolescent, Chandran's love for Malathi is a one-sided affair, Chandran developed such a strong liking of Malathi that it was impossible to compromise with the existing systems and norms of society. He revolts and raves before his mother, "to the dust to with your silly customs" (70). But it does not mean that Chandran is less devoted to his mother. When Kailash, the drunkard, insists on taking wine, Chandran gives a touching reply: "Excuse me. I made a vow never to touch alcohol in my life, before my mother" (98). This is enough to show that he is devoted to his mother and holds her in very high esteem.

For Chandran, the plausible escape from the pangs of physical love is to become a *Sanyasi*. This is the simplest but Indian solution to the complex problem. He takes the help of Ragavan, the barber in his becoming a *Sanyasi*. When the barber wants to know the reason for escape from this wide world, Chandran gives a heartfelt reply: "my heart is dead, Ragavan" (106). It becomes very difficult for Chandran to adapt to the changed situation. In the initial stage, his system craved for coffee. He suffered actually. One part of him derived a peculiar satisfaction in saying

to him: “go on: suffer and be miserable, you were not sent into this world to enjoy. Go on: be miserable and perish. You won’t get coffee” (107).

The novelist thinks it fit at this stage to define the nature of Chandran’s renunciation:

He was different from the usual *sanyasi*. Others may renounce with a spiritual motive or purpose. Renunciation may be to them a means to attain peace or may be peace itself. They are perhaps dead in time but they do live in eternity. But Chandran’s renunciation was not of that kind. It was an alternative to suicide he would have committed but for its social stigma perhaps he lacked the barest physical courage that was necessary for it. He was *sanyasi* because it pleased to mortify his flesh. His renunciation was a revenge on society, circumstances, and perhaps, too, on destiny. (108)

Thus, becoming a *Sanyasi* is an Eastern way of living, which reflects Indian roots.

Renunciation has always been an Indian ideal of life, be it renunciation of worldly possessions, selfish motives, passion or emotional bondage. In *The Bachelor of Arts* we find how striving is there for “a life freed from distracting illusions and hysterics” (123). In course of his wanderings Chandran teaches a county and is seated under a banyan tree. He has grown a beard and put on saffron robes. The appearance, the place, and the simple peasants- all help to achieve the desired effect. The



situation reminds us of the Railway Guide, Raju who turns a *swami* in Narayan's later novel, *The Guide*.

Chanadran, in ocher-cloth, had been living on charity, charity given in mistake, given on the face value of a counterfeit. Even in this state of asceticism Chandran does not forget to introspect himself. He tries to seek an answer to the question why he has come to this stage. In the words of Narayan,

He was in no mood for self deception, and so he found the answer in the words 'Malathi' and 'Love.' The former had brought him to this state. He had described his parents, who had spent on him all their love, care and savings. He had told himself that he had surely done this in spite his parents, who probably had died of anxiety but now. This was all his return for their love and for all they had done for him. The more he reflected on this, the greater become his anger with Malathi. It was a silly infatuation. Little sign did she show of caring for a fellow; she couldn't say that she had no chance. She had plenty of opportunities to show that she noticed him. Where there was a will there was a way. She had only been playing with him, the devil women are like that, they enjoy torturing people. And for the sake of her memory he had come to this. He railed against that memory, against love. (111)

In this way Chandran gradually overcomes his infatuation with Malathi as he grows into maturity and adulthood. Chandran again transforms himself

into a man of the world and settles down to a life of quiet and calmness. This reflects mature Indian national consciousness of pre-independent India through Chandran who explains his 'new philosophy' in a different way:

He then explained his new philosophy which follows the devastating discovery that love and friendship were the veriest illusions he explained that people married because their sexual needs or appetite had to be satisfied and there must be somebody to manage the house. There was nothing deeper than that in any man or woman relationship. (123)

During his wonderings, the place of the temple impresses him and he turns a *Sanyasi*. He then visits many south Indian villages and districts on foot and lives on alms. After eight months of such wonderings he gets tired of his new role because he is still in transitional stage. He, therefore, renounces his ideal and returns to his parents in Malgudi.

The home-coming of Chandran and his acceptance of life forms the ultimate entry into adulthood because he has become more mature as a result of his travel to different places. On the whole, he has now gained sufficient knowledge about the geographical, historical and cultural knowledge of India in Malgudi. The first change that he notices is in his own garden, which symbolizes mature stage:

He stepped down in Garden. He found the garden paths overgrown with grass, and lands in various stages of decay.

Thick weeds had spring up everywhere, and were choking a few cretins and roses that were still struggling for life. (119)

This above passage about the change in the garden shows that Chandran is like grass, plants and flowers which have grown and struggling for life. He now wants to be settled in his life. So, he turns into the chief agent of the daily messenger of Madras which provides economic support for living. This job of daily messenger fascinates Chandran who decorates his office in the following way. Chandran returned to Malgudi and plunged himself in work. He took a small room in market road for a rent of seven rupees month, and living on the doorway an immense sign: "THE DAILY MESSENGER (local offices). He furnished his office with a table, a chair and a long bench" (139).

In this way, Chandran gets settled and finally marries a girl of his parents' choice, an Indian way of marriage, and he lives happily. The novel ends on an optimistic note and gives us the message of the continuity of life following on in spite of some of the big setbacks and rule shocks which threaten to near its progress.

Like Chandran, India at the time went through different unsteady stages, however finally it becomes mature and stays the Indian way. On the mid way, many fluctuations are seen because of immaturity.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Conclusion**

Although the Western writers and critics have dismissed the Eastern writing as a national allegory in much narrower sense, many third world writers like R.K Narayan have made every endeavor to glorify the Indian cultural, traditions and Indian national interest in his remarkable writings. His works give a lively picture of the socio-political and historical situation of pre-independent India. In this context, Narayan depicts the condition of India as a nation in this novel, *The Bachelor of Arts*, because Narayan allegorizes the transformation of the national consciousness of pre-independent India towards maturity by portraying the protagonist, Chandran's transition from adolescence to adulthood.

From the very beginning of the novel, Chandran is presented as a conscious youth at college though there is seen some element of immaturity in his character. This is because he is passing through transitional stage. As a prime mover at the college union debate, he catches the attention of his history professor including the prince who is a British. This proves his great potential as a promoter of Indian legacy and national interest. He proves himself as an expert in Indian history. This shows Chandra's devotion to his country. And this Chandran's consciousness represents whole India's consciousness.

The principal of the college is Professor Brown who is the agent of imperial power. Though Chandran is aware of this bitter reality, he cannot directly oppose him because he is not yet ready for revolt. He indirectly

expresses his hatred towards Brown to his friends. When a revolutionary Veerswami presents a paper criticizing Europeans, Brown demands that any papers to be presented at the college union should be sent to Brown for final permission. This really infuriates Chandran. This is the example of how he is concerned for national interest.

After graduation Chandran is faced with the problem of leading his further life. His answer to others to the question what he is going to do irritates him as he does not want to go to England for further study. Though he cannot say frankly, he says that he in this care-free atmosphere and it influences the whole course of his life. Chandran as well as India as a whole does not want Western influence.

During one of his ramblings he comes across Malathi, a beautiful girl of about fifteen years. He is so much overpowered by the maddening spirit of love for the girl that he persuades his parents to arrange his marriage with her. But destiny is not always kind. Owing to a freak of destiny their horoscopes do not tally and the proposal is ultimately discarded. This is typical of Indian cultural practice that is emphasized.

The homecoming of Chandran and his acceptance of life forms the concluding essence of Indian lifestyle. To his surprise, he notices considerable changes in Malgudi. Most of his friends have secured one or the other job and settled down to a life of quiet and sobriety. Chandran too decides to make a compromise with life. He adapts himself to his changed circumstances. In this way, both Chandran and India go through difficult times before they reach a mature stage.

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