Research Paper Social Science

Inauthentic Involvement of Chandran: A Study of R.K. Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts*

Dr. Tanu Gupta Professor, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, Maharishi Markandeshwar University, Mullana-Ambala (Haryana)

Mr. Gulab Singh Walia Research Scholar, M.M.University, Mullana (Ambala)

ABSTRACT

The present paper aims at depicting inauthentic involvement of Chandran, the protagonist in The Bachelor of Arts. It discusses his inauthentic involvement with college professors and his friends. Then he falls in love with a girl named Malathi but this involvement proves inauthentic as Chandran fails to ignore Malgudian traditions. He has to embark on a journey as a sanyasi. In the end, his eagerness for marriage partner Susila shows that all his learning during the journey is inauthentic as he soon forgets the lesson learnt.

KEYWORDS

Inauthentic involvement is the involvement that is not in accordance with one's freedom. If one doesn't commit resolution, determination, freedom and responsibility in the role assigned to oneself, he proves himself an inauthentic person. *The Bachelor of Arts*, published in 1937, is the second novel of R. K. Narayan. It revolves around a young guy named Chandran whose college life in late colonial times is described. After graduation, he falls in love with a girl named Malathi but is rejected by her parents due to non-matching of horoscopes. Due to this inauthentic involvement, he faces an exile from Malgudi, from his parents, his family and from life itself. Thus involvement with Malathi affects his career perspectives. Frustrated and desperate, Chandran embarks on a journey as *Sanyasi*. Due to compunctions and the realizations, he decides to return home and marries the girl chosen by his parents.

The novel is divided into four parts. All the four parts deal with the protagonist Chandran in one way or the other. He is found in different involvements and relations in different parts of the novel. He is inauthentic in one way or the other as we study his involvements and his learning from those involvements.

Part one describes the college life of young Chandran when he is a student of final year in B. A. in Albert Mission College. It discusses his involvements with college professors and his friends. Chandran has some involvement with college secretary, Natesan. Due to this involvement, he is persuaded by Natesan to act as a Prime Mover for the debate. Chandran has no interest in the debate but he has to prepare for his role though he feels anxiety due to this as commented by the novelist when Chandran tells his mother: "I am speaking in a debate this evening. I am now going to my room to prepare. Nobody must knock on my door or shout near my window." (*Bachelor of Arts* 3)

Chandran has a friend named Ramu who is also his neighbour and Chandran passes his time in his company. They are in the habit of going to cinema at late night. On the way, they buy some betel leaves and a packet of cigarettes which is their routine habit while watching cinema. They see the movie and enjoy coffee after the show. Thus we find that Chandran enjoys Ramu's friendship but he is inauthentic in his involvement as he makes night cinema a routine habit while his father forbids him from this. He is addicted to bad habit of smoking in involvement with Ramu which may be injurious to his health. He also wastes his valuable time in his company.

The other inauthentic involvement develops when Chandran acts as secretary of Historical Association. One day, history Professor Ragavachar calls Chandran in his room and tells him to start a Historical Association in the college. Chandran wants to tell that someone else might do better as a secretary, but the commanding of Ragavachar compels him to act in the role though he knows that it would affect his study time table. Robert G. Olson comments:

"Man is the being who is immediately present to the world and who must live out his life in and through his inescapable relationship to the world." (Olson 135)

Chandran is not able to disobey Professor Ragavachar's order and comes out of his room with bowed head. The novelist comments: "He felt a slight distaste for himself as a secretary. He felt that he was on the verge of losing his personality." (*Bachelor of Arts* 28)

Thus Chandran has to act in the role of secretary though he hates it as it disturbs his study schedule. He has to consult Natesan, the Union Secretary about the inaugural day. He has to take the consent of the Principal to deliver the inaugural address. Chandran has to put off his study work till the Inaugural Meeting is over. Thus he wastes a fortnight, but he resolves that now he would study one hour extra daily. Hearing his plan, father remarks: "Since this is the third time you have made a resolution, it is likely you will stick to it, because every plan must have two trials." (*Bachelor of Arts* 40)

Chandran passes a busy period from November to March practicing his iron scheme of study. He gets up at four-thirty in the morning and goes to bed at eleven at night. During this period, he conducts about eight meetings of the Historical Association. Harish Raizada comments:

"The extra-curricular activities of the college absorb his mind so much that he finds it very difficult to carry on his studies properly and make thorough preparations for his final examination. He often makes resolves to start reading seriously but time passes and the resolves made are hardly kept up." (Raizada 18)

The Historical Association is responsible for involvement of Chandran with Veeraswami, the revolutionary. Veeraswami is a dark, stocky person of twenty-two years. He reads a paper on "The Aids to British Expansion in India." This proves the most violent paper before the association. The Principal Brown

orders that in future papers should be first sent to him before presenting. This infuriates Chandran and he thinks of resigning but History Professor Ragavachar warns him that he will not get his degree if he takes that decision. Veeraswami wants to present another paper but Chandran has to decline at which Veeraswami calls Chandran a coward. The novelist comments: "Chandran had a feeling that he had got into bed with a porcupine." (*Bachelor of Arts* 46)

This involvement with Veeraswami puts Chandran into dilemma. He is neither authentic in his role towards association nor in his friendship with Veeraswami. He lives in terror of being caught by Veeraswami and often goes to secluded spot on the river bank. This leads to a misunderstanding with Ramu, who thinks that Chandran is avoiding him. Thus involvement with Veeraswami proves inauthentic for Chandran. Nazar Singh Sidhu comments:

"In his consciousness Chandran is Veeraswami but in the microstructure of the college academic life Chandran is so placed that he has to suppress his authentic voice of freedom." (Sidhu 65)

Part two of the novel deals with the time of six months after passing B.A. in Chandran's life. During this time, Chandran finds that all sorts of people ask him about his career. He feels upset and asks his father. Father tells him that it is due to their courtesy. After talking with Chandran, father finds that he has a plan to go to England. When father asks him what he will do there, Chandran tells him that he will get a doctorate or something. Here we find that Chandran is inauthentic towards his career as he lacks seriousness and doesn't have any specific plan about his future. He is also inauthentic as he doesn't know how he will get doctorate after B.A.

The most inauthentic involvement that develops during the novel is in Chandran's love to Malathi. One evening while loafing along the river, Chandran sees a fifteen year old girl playing with her younger sister on the sands. Suddenly he finds uncontrollable attraction towards this girl.

Chandran finds himself greatly puzzled after glancing at this girl, thinking if she is married or unmarried and belongs to which caste. He also finds that she is the most beautiful girl in the world. Chandran knows that a marriage is not possible if the girl belongs to some other caste or between subjects of the same caste due to Malgudi traditions. Still he decides: "He would set an example himself by marrying this girl whatever her caste or sect might be." (*Bachelor of Arts* 56)

Here we find that Chandran is inauthentic in his decision as he doesn't know anything about the girl, about her name or family. How he can take such type of decision in this short span of time. Chandran continuously goes to the river to see the girl, but he lacks the courage to stare at her. The novelist comments:

"He did not dare to look longer; for he was obsessed with the feeling that he was being observed by the whole crowd on the river bank….He hoped that she had observed him." (*Bachelor of Arts* 59)

Here we find that Chandran is inauthentic as he lacks self courage to approach the girl though he wants to start an eye friendship with her. He sees her from a distance. Chandran makes it a daily habit to stare at the girl and notice her features by close observation. Chandran passes a month in this state of mind by staring at her and following her sometime. William Walsh comments:

"As for Chandran, it is impossible for him to address the girl he has fallen in love with directly, and it is inconceivable that he should introduce himself to her, so that he walks up and down in front of her by the river bank as though she were behind a wall of glass." (Walsh 42)

Chandran is inauthentic in his involvement with Mohan as he tries to avoid him at the river because he is busy thinking about the girl. Here Chandran is inauthentic because he thinks his friends and acquaintances nuisance to him only due to the girl and even decides to be indifferent towards everyone hereafter. However Chandran changes his behaviour towards Mohan for selfishness when he wants to get his help to get involve with Malathi. Thus Chandran is inauthentic towards his involvement with Mohan as it is based on selfish motive.

Through Mohan's help Chandran finds that the girl's name is Malathi and she is unmarried daughter of D.W. Krishna Iyer, a Head Clerk in the Executive Engineer's Office. Chandran prays to God to give him courage to talk to his father about his marriage. He feels afraid of his father talking about his marriage. He regrets his cowardice thinking: "He would be unworthy of Malathi if he was going to be such a spineless worm." (*Bachelor of Arts* 68)

Here we find that such a cowardice person takes the decision to break Malgudian traditions and customs. Chandran is inauthentic as he has only determination and not the courage to fulfill the same. He has not talked to the girl only once whom he wants to marry. Mother tells Chandran that he should consider any of the dozens of girls proposed to him. Chandran rejects this decision saying: "I don't care. I shall marry this girl and no one else." (*Bachelor of Arts* 69)

Thus Chandran is inauthentic because he is against customs of Malgudi but doesn't have the courage to go against it and his mother. He wants his father's support against mother who writes to Mr. Krishnan to come to his house. He also sends for an eminent astrologer, Srothigal to help in the matching of horoscopes. After much discussion, Mr. Krishnan takes the horoscopes with him promising to calculate again. But next day, he writes a letter to Chandran's father to forgive him because the horoscopes could not be matched.

After waiting for a few days, Chandran writes a letter to Malathi as his last hope and gives it to Mohan to deliver to Malathi. A fortnight later, Chandran hears music in Malathi's home while sitting in Mohan's room. Mohan tells him that she is going to be married with her cousin next week. When Chandran asks about his letter; Mohan tells him that he has destroyed the letter that morning after hearing about marriage. Sarbani Putatunda comments:

"The question of Chandran eloping with Malathi or Mohan assisting him in this regard does not arise because neither of them can think of taking such a drastic step. Being true Malgudians, they are too strongly tied to the venerable values of the place. The only alternative left before Chandran now is to suffer from severe heart break and nothing else." (Putatunda 148)

Thus we find that Chandran is not able to talk or write to Malathi throughout his love story or we may say that this love is one sided as the girl doesn't know his emotions. So he is inauthentic as he is not able to convey his emotions to her after crossing over the customs of Malgudi. He is not able to take the necessary freedom to carry this will and so he will have to suffer and go on a desperate journey.

Part three of the novel deals with the journey of frustrated and desperate Chandran from Malgudi after failing in love with Malathi. Chandran's heart is broken and his parents send him to Madras at his uncle's home for a change and Chandran also wants the same. But on reaching Madras, Chandran ignores his uncle's son in the crowd at the platform and takes a jutka to drive to a hotel where he takes a room for three days. Harish Raizada comments:

"Chandran is so shocked by the breaking of his engagement that he loses the balance of his mind and on reaching Madras, avoids going to his uncle's place and instead wanders aimlessly." (Raizada 19)

Chandran feels exhausted and remembers his past while sitting on a pavement. He decides never to return to Malgudi as he hates the place because everything there reminds him of Malathi. He has lost the hope of living a cheerful life without Malathi and finds himself like a *sanyasi* as commented by the novelist:

"He was a *sanyasi*; the simplest solution. Shave the head, dye the clothes in ochre, and you were dead for aught the world cared. The only thing possible; short of committing suicide, there was no other way out." (*Bachelor of Arts* 102)

Chandran forgets his joys and sorrows, declares him to be a *sanyasi*. He travels several districts on foot. When he feels hungry, he begs for food and if he finds no food, he enjoys the pain of hunger as a *sanyasi* deserves. He becomes very weak and his complexion changes from brown to a dark tan. He is different from the usual *sanyasi*. His renunciation is an alternative to suicide. The novelist comments:

"Suicide he would have committed but for its social stigma. Perhaps he lacked the barest physical courage that was necessary for it. He was a *sanyasi* because it pleased him to mortify his flesh." (*Bachelor of Arts* 108)

Thus we find that Chandran is inauthentic in the role of *sanyasi* as he has not accepted it with heart but only as an alternative to avoid the feelings of suicide from his mind. When he fails to get Malathi, he enforces himself to be a *sanyasi*.

Chandran passes eight months in wandering here and there in the role of *sanyasi*. Then he reaches Koopal village in Sainad District where people mistake him a *sanyasi* under a vow of silence when they find him sleeping under a banyan tree. They bring milk, fruits and food for him. They compel him to stay in their village and he has to accept their request. Visitors from surrounding villages gather under the banyan tree while Chandran is sitting in meditation. They also bring gifts for him. Chandran is inauthentic as he is living on their charity while as a true ascetic he ought to live without food. He feels: "He ought not to feed his miserable stomach with food which he had neither earned nor by virtue of spiritual worth, deserved." (*Bachelor of Arts* 111)

After passing eight months as a *sanyasi*, one day after long introspection Chandran finds an answer of his degradation. He feels that he has left his parents without caring their love for him. He finds the answer in Malathi and love. The more he reflects on this, his mind is full of anger with Malathi. Chandran learns that his love was mere silly infatuation due to which he finds himself in such a deserted situation, without home and family. John Thieme comments:

"Subjecting his behaviour to self scrutiny, Chandran comes to the conclusion that he has arrived at this situation as a consequence of his belief in the discourse of romantic love, which he now comes to regard as a 'foolish literary notion.' (Thieme 37)

Now the love for family makes him to leave the role of *sanyasi* and return to his family in Malgudi. He leaves the village, walks all night, takes a bus to Maduram and sends a telegram to his father for money. He gets his face shaved and removes the *sanyasi* clothes and wears the postmaster's dhoti and shirt. Two days later, he reaches Malgudi. P.S. Sundaram comments:

"After eight months of wandering Chandran feels that he is an impostor, not entitled to the faith and adoration of the people. He sends off a telegram to his father for money." (Sundaram 25)

Thus we find that Chandran has not become a true *sanyasi* but has used this role only to surpass his adverse time. He has taken the advantage of this role to feed him without hard work; has meditated only to show people. Thus we find that he is completely inauthentic in the role of *sanyasi* as it has been entirely used by him for a selfish motive. As he gets self awakening, he leaves this role and returns to his family in Malgudi.

Part Four of the novel shows that Chandran is inauthentic in his learning during the journey as he soon forgets the lesson learnt. Chandran's parents and his brother are very happy to see Chandran again. Chandran's thinking towards love and friendship changes; he takes them only as illusions. However when he goes to Mohan's hotel in the evening, he remembers Malathi. In spite of his resolve, he turns at the entrance of the Modern Indian Lodge to see her. Thus he is inauthentic in his resolution and he reproaches himself severely for this. He thinks: "Still a prey to illusions! Was he making for another bout of asceticism and wandering?" (*Bachelor of Arts* 120)

Chandran finds Mohan in the hotel and comes to know that soon after the marriage; Malathi's parents have left the house and gone nowhere. Chandran takes Mohan to the river and tells him his story of eight months wandering. He explains his new philosophy to Mohan. On the same time, we find that Chandran is inauthentic as he compels Mohan to leave his meeting and come to him to the river to listen his story. Thus his actions are contrary to his thoughts and hence inauthentic. John Macquarrie comments:

"A purely individual existence is not possible and could not properly be called an 'existence'; yet existence with the others is to be judged authentic to the degree that it lets individuals be free to become the unique persons that they are. True community allows for true diversity." (Macquarrie 121)

Chandran tries to live in peace but the question of occupation troubles him. He has an ambition of going to England. Chandran is inauthentic in his decision as he has not decided what great he will do in England. He also thinks why he is going to put his father to expense and consults Mohan who suggests him to apply for the Chief Agency of the Messenger by leaving the idea of going to England. Chandran tells his father about his new decision. Thus he is inauthentic in his resolution of going to England as he changes his decision when his father has completed all the necessary requirements. Mother has little confidence over his ability and success in England. Chandran himself is doubtful of his success. Thus Chandran's decision of going to England is inauthentic as he lacks the responsibility, freedom and hard work to carry this decision. Jean-Paul Sartre comments:

"I am responsible for my very desire of fleeing responsibilities. To make myself passive in the world, to refuse to act upon things and upon others is still to choose myself, and suicide is one mode among others of being-in-the-world." (Sartre 57)

Chandran's mother hopes that he will do better in the paper and tells Chandran's father to write to his brother to help in the matter. Chandran's uncle helps him to secure the agency with the help of his contacts. Thus we find that in attaining agency, Chandran uses inauthentic ways and he doesn't attain it on his merit. Chandran puts himself into his work wholly and tries to forget all illusions. Here he is again inauthentic as he is not able to forget his friends and remembers them when he goes to college. Thus his learning that love and friendship are only illusions is inauthentic.

Chandran's parents want to marry him. His mother has found a match for him. Chandran's father tells him that she is the daughter of Mr. Jayarama Iyer, a famous lawyer in Talapur and horoscopes have been matched. The girl is fair and good looking. They are ready to give a cash dowry of three thousand rupees and other presents.

Father's visit arouses old controversies in Chandran's soul. Mohan advises Chandran to marry to please his parents if it doesn't make any difference to him whether he marries or not. After five days, Chandran goes with his mother in a train to Talapur to see the girl. On all the way, he is impatient to

know if the girl is beautiful though he has the photo. When he sees the girl dressed in a blue sari, he at once feels attracted towards her forgetting all his philosophy he had learnt during his journey as *sanyasi*. The novelist comments:

"It was divine; there was no doubt about it. He secretly compared it with Malathi's and wondered what he had seen in the latter to drive him so mad…" (*Bachelor of Arts* 161)

Thus Chandran's feelings of love arise again. When the girl's father tells her to sing a song, Chandran takes her side saying that she seems nervous so it may be very difficult for her to sing at that time and he may hear the song at some other day. John Thieme comments:

"Horoscopes match, the girl is of the right caste and sub-caste and the one possible remaining obstacle to a successful union is removed when Chandran sees her and finds her more beautiful than the girl with whom he has previously been infatuated." (Thieme 41)

Chandran returns with a heavy heart from the bungalow. In the train back to Malgudi, when his mother asks him if he has liked the girl, he answers in affirmative. Chandran insists that they should send a wire to girl's parents next day. Chandran's eagerness for his marriage partner shows that all his learning is inauthentic. He shows same childishness here as in case of Malathi. He asks his mother if she talks quite well and if she is good in study and what her name is. Mother tells the name as Susila. For rest of the journey, he enjoys the music of the word Susila in his ears. Robert G. Olson comments:

"In concrete and commonsensical terms the requirement of authenticity is that man assumes responsibility for his past while simultaneously recognizing his responsibility to surpass it toward a future." (Olson 159)

Thus Chandran is inauthentic and has learnt nothing as he shows impatience in his liking for Susila though he has not talked to her, doesn't know her name. This is the same case as was with Malathi where he had liked her without talking to her and due to which he suffered for almost one year in the streets as a *sanyasi*. Thus he is fully inauthentic in his involvement with Malathi and now with this girl, Susila.

Chandran's wedding notice ceremony is celebrated a fortnight later in Chandran's house. After this the preparation for the wedding starts for which Chandran has to give a lot of time. He feels the Daily Messenger a great nuisance and gives the charge to Mohan who looks after the newspaper in his absence. When Chandran returns, his mind is full of Susila. He talks to Mohan about her and spends his waking hours in writing letters to her and he will have to do this for almost one year. Sarbani Putatunda comments:

"Chandran's love for Susila now overshadows both Malathi episode and his sanyasihood, making them appear in retrospective as adolescent and comical." (Putatunda 148)

Chandran is inauthentic in this involvement as he talks to Mohan usually on the subject of her letters and not on the Daily Messenger. When he doesn't get her letter in a week, he is in despair and starts thinking that she might be ill and her people might not attend her properly. He forgets the responsibility of the Daily Messenger and almost leaves it to Mohan and remains impatient for his future wife-Susila. John Thieme comments:

"Like its hero, the novel has wandered between a variety of positions and evasiveness remains the dominant note to the very last page. This finds Chandran separated from Susila and wondering why she is not writing to him." (Thieme 41)

REFERENCES

1. Macquarrie, John. Existentialism. New York: World Publishing Co., 1972. | 2. Narayan, R.K. The Bachelor of Arts. Chennai: Indian Thought Publications, 2010. | 3. Olson, Robert G. An Introduction to Existentialism. New York: Dover Publications, 1962. | 4. Putatunda, Sarbani. R.K. Narayan:Critical Essays.New Delhi: PHI Learning Private Limited, 2012. | 5. Raizada, Harish. R. K. Narayan: A Critical Study of His Works. New Delhi: Young Asia Publications, 1969. | 6. Sartre, Jean-Paul. Existentialism and Human Emotions. New York: Philosophical Library, 1957. | 7. Sidhu, Nazar Singh. Human Struggle in the Novels of R.K. Narayan. New Delhi: Bahri Publications, 1992. | 8. Sundaram, P.S. R. K. Narayan as a Novelist. Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1988. | 9. Thieme, John. R. K. Narayan. New Delhi: Viva Books, 2011. | 10. Walsh, William. R.K. Narayan: A Critical Appreciation. New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1983. |