

## THE BACHELOR OF ARTS: CHANDRAN'S ATTAINMENT OF MATURITY AND SELF-REALIZATION

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There are different layers of complexity in Chandran's characterization. The first stage is the post-adolescent stage. The second stage is the infatuation stage. The third stage is the nomadic stage; the fourth stage is the self-realization and introspection stage.

The route of Chandran's characterization travels from innocence to maturity-

### (i) **Study of the First Stage:**

This stage mainly turns around his college years. Chandran was a submissive, enthusiastic and hard-working student. He was able enough to take part regularly in debates, etc. Despite, the fact that he respected and was afraid of his teachers, he somehow, got convinced by Natesan, the secretary to talk against his own subject, namely, History. This reveals his quality of fickle-mindedness. Chandran is not a submissive and passive student. His character is evaluative in nature. He has his own ideas regarding Professor Brown. He knows that Professor Brown is just a hypocrite. Chandran thinks that Professor Brown is a Classical English man, (in the Macaulian sense of the term). Professor Brown is only pretending to be interested in the speeches and arguments of others in the debate. His heart is not really in the debate. According to Macaulay, it is the duty of the English Administrators to civilize the natives in every fashion. It is the white man's burden. Chandran could not stand such an arrogant view. This also shows the independence of mind, He is, indeed, a very good student of history in the sense that he can put theoretical knowledge to practical purposes.

Chandran also notices the class division in the society. He asserts that-

The white fellows are born to enjoy life. Our people really don't know how to live. If a person is seen with a girl by his side, a hundred eyes stare at him and a hundred tongues comment, whereas no European ever goes out without taking a girl with him.  
(1993:15)

Although Chandran is an obedient son, there is a streak of rebellious nature in him. When he was late to his home, he did a lot of introspection he thought that at the age of twenty-one he should not be afraid of his parents, instead he should be friendly with them. But the impulse to sneak in is very boyish. He deliberately let his father know that he was late. According to Hindu dharma, this is the age of competence and fidelity in a man's life. The word 'competence' can be understood as a struggle for recognition from one's friends, superiors and parents. He thought himself to be old enough to check his actions. And like any of the adolescent's behaviour, he only used to spend some time with his peers in the theatre or strolling by the riverbank or on the road. He was a grownup individual with strong likes and dislikes. He knew that whatever he was

up to was not wrong in any way and being the eldest son in the family, he wanted his parents to rely upon his choices and habits.

This paragraph clearly shows the wide-gulf between Indian and western sections of the society. Chandran, with his keen observation, points this fact out to his friends Ramu. Chandran is a systematic person. He plans out everything, which reveals his competence in handling things. For example, he is extremely meticulous in his preparations for examinations. Firstly, he takes the resolution to become sincere and punctual for his examination-preparation. He calculates the time; he is left with and manages to prepare a working- timetable for himself in order to go by it. He begins to wake up early in the morning in order to make the most of the time at his disposal.

There is a generation- gap between Chandran and his parents. When Chandran wanted some clarification on Historical point, his father's vague remark" disappointed him. As a matter of fact, his father was a Science graduate and therefore had no idea about the Arts stream. Thus he could be help to Chandran in his studies. Whereas, Chandran wanted to seek an agreement from his father about the timetable that he prepared and the way he was going about it. This generation gap continues later even, when his mother disagrees for his marriage with Malathi.

Chandran is a responsible brother. In spite of being busy in his studies, he observed his brother's lifestyle and advised him to concentrate on his studies more.

Macaulay wanted to propagate English to create good English Baboos for England. That is their cultural mind-set should be English. A good example of such a type is the Assistant Professor Mr. Gajapathi. He is more English than the Englishmen themselves. Pie arrogantly said that, no Indian could ever write English. This statement hurt all his colleagues. Chandran understood this 'Cultural Imperialism' (As Edward Said puts it.) of Mr. Gajapathi and so refused to be an ideal student in his class. He showed his resentment in such small things as not taking the notes properly etc.

Chandran was a meritorious student and so was honoured for his merit by Professor Ragavachar in the incident when, he offers the post of the Secretary of the History Association- "You will be the Secretary the Association. I shall be its President. The meeting must be held on the fifteenth." (1993:27)

In spite of all the positive aspects in his character, Chandran is a hypocrite when it comes to the opposite sex (like most men in the post- adolescent' stage'). For example, he stares at girls, but pretending to be interested in the children.

Chandran is quite a street-smart person whereas; his father belongs to an elder generation of passive-scholarliness. For example. Chandran proposes that the thief should be caught red handed in the act and for this purpose he is willing to get up at 4:30 in the morning and wait, watch and catch the thief. But his father totally disagrees with his plan and offered to put up wire fencing over the wall. Chandran is not an over-superstitious person. For example, when he realizes that the thief is a Sadhu, his mother immediately says that he should be let off. She's afraid that, "The curse of a holy man might fall on the family. " You can go sir, " she said respectfully.", (1993:43) But Chandran would have none of this. He was cynical'. He thinks that if that person is really a holy man why would he do such a thing.

There is an-artistic streak in his personality. The obscure statements in Mohan's poetry' fascinate Chandran. He wanted to be friendly with him for this purpose. He was mystified by Mohan's' poetry. In spite of that, he enjoyed both Mohan's poetry and his company. He predicts that Mohan'will become a famous man very soon.

Chandran is also a sentimental and emotional person. He felt tender and depressed when he was leaving college. Chandran is also a loyal friend and misses Ramu's company after graduation. He is also not an over-ambitious person. He prefers some quiet lecture ship in some college.

**(ii) Analysis of the Second Stage:**

In one of his strolls along the riverside, Chandran falls in love at first sight with Malathi. Chandran is infatuated with the beauty of Malathi.

He liked the way she sat; he liked the way she played with her sister; he liked the way she dug her hands into the sand and threw it in the air. He paused only for a moment to observe the girl. He would have willingly settled there and spent the rest of his life watching her dig her hands into the sand.

(1993:55)

He is infatuated with Malathi. And one of the factors, which led to this obsession, is idleness. "That night he went home very preoccupied. It was a five o'clock that he had met her, and at nine he was still thinking of her." (1993:56).

But he is quite a reticent person and he could not take the initiative to either talk or further their relation. He was merely introspecting about her age and her marital status.

Chandran's family is an extremely conservative family. Everything between the couple should match. Now in his state of self-doubting, he begins to wonder what would happen if she belongs to a separate caste. Here the scholar in him starts thinking about larger issues. He thinks. "If India was to attain salvation these water tight divisions must go-Community. Caste. Sects. Sub-sects, and still further divisions. He felt very indignant". (1993:56) He wants to engineer the social change by marrying this girl, whatever her caste or sect might be in spite of belonging to an orthodox Brahmin community. He wants to impress Malathi at every stage.

He is quite a timid person and wanted to hide his feelings from others. Another example of his infatuation is that he neither expressed his feelings to Malathi, nor did he tell them to his family and friends.

Finally, he musters enough courage to reveal his love to his parents. (Albeit with a lot of help from his friend, Mohan, whose lodge is in front of Malathi's house). Chandran is not firm in his ideas and others can easily convince him.

Mohan is a person who has a critical view towards the institution of family. He is quite cynical about the family system. He thinks that parents have only a Utilitarian outlook towards their children. He was somehow able to convince Chandran with these ideas so much so that Chandran started hating his father and mother. He infatuatedly took the poem and showed it to his father. The parents were quite disturbed at the change in Chandran's attitude.

Some ego conflicts developed between the two families regarding protocol. Finally Sastrigal went to the girl's place with the horoscope of Chandran. But unfortunately Malathi's father reports that the horoscopes didn't tally. But Chandran's parents suspect that Malathi's parents refused the match on dowry grounds. Chandran's parents again compared the horoscope of Malathi with Chandran but they did not tally.

When Chandran learns that Malathi is engaged to somebody (and that her marriage is about to take place in the near future) he wants to escape from the harsh realities of life. And so he goes to Madras.

**(iii) Analysis of the Third Stage- (The Nomadic Stage):**

After reaching Madras, Chandran received all kinds of inhuman, impersonal as well as indifferent behaviours from the people. They made him realize the harsh truth of life that the world and its inhabitants have nothing to do with the emotions and feelings of an individual. Rather, they run after materialistic pursuits endlessly. He was now remembering the love and care that his parents used to ponder over him when he was there.

While drifting aimlessly in Madras, Chandran became friends with Kailas. Chandran was never a strong person and he always drew emotional support from his friends.

In spite of the fact that (is not firm in his ideas), there is some inner-core in Chandran that never deserted him. That is, only at the surface level he is ambiguous. He will never go away from his traditions and the disciplined and systematic upbringing of his parents. Kailas tried to initiate Chandran into some immoral activities but somehow Chandran got rid of him and he now really feels homesick and really fed-up of the mechanical, sterile and exploitative nature of certain people. For a moment he thought of returning to Madras, but he was afraid of the romantic memories of Malathi. So he decides to stay back.

He now wants to become a sanyasi and renounce the world. This depicts his escapist attitude in life. He thought that by tonsuring his head he would enter the spiritual realm. And for this purpose, he approached the barber named Ragavan and took him into confidence so that he could arrange for the loin ochre-coloured cloth. Despite the fact Chandran renounced the world; he still has reason to rule his mind. This is clear when he writes a letter to his father in order to assure him of his welfare. He also had the sensibility of further asking him (his father) not to go to the police station to know about his whereabouts. In his nomadic stage, Chandran realized many facts about Indian society. One among them is the respect given to Sadhus. As he used to travel several districts on foot. But whenever he was exhausted enough he used to take a lift in any country cart: as a lift is a mere obligation to a Sadhu.

Chandran's renunciation is a peculiar one in the sense that it was just an alternative to suicide. -There is no serious spiritual thinking on his part. A Sanyasi transcends temporal time and lives in an eternal cycle. Chandran does not have the necessary courage. To understand this-

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.,

(1993:108)

Chandran conveniently ignored some difficult questions and acted as if he is dumb.

In this nomadic stage, Chandran also realised that these poor, illiterate villagers have treated him with more consideration and respect than at any point of time in his life. Chandran became a Sadhu only through circumstances. But, somehow, the reasonable person in him could not stand this charity. He began to question himself of how he came to this degradation. Finally, he found his answer in the words 'Malathi' and 'Love'. It was a silly infatuation. Slowly he started coming out of the infatuation - state realizing that it was only a 'foolish literary notion' He was only chasing a mirage (a non-existent thing).

Finally, he asks his father to send him some money so that he can come back home. His is only a glimpse of his self-realization. Thus Chandran enters the fourth stage of self-realization.

**(iv) Analysis of the Fourth Stage:**

Chandran realizes after returning to his place that his parents and brother were really missing him a lot. They suffered (emotionally) quite a lot due to Chandran's absence. They were ill tempered and morose all these months.

Chandran becomes nostalgic and starts thinking about his friends. Further more, he realized that though his friends got settled with the passage of time, as for instance, somebody entered the Imperial Service in Bihar, the other retired as Chief in the Railway Board and yet another got selected for the Civil Services and was even de-ad by now.

He realized that most of his friends have settled down in life and that their golden days of friendship are over. He approached iMohan and could not help enquiring about Malathi. He begins to think about the institution of marriage.

He comes to the conclusion that people only want to live together to satisfy their biological and social desires. This is the most important aspect of his stage of self-realization.

Chandran now turned over into a new leaf, altogether, as he wanted to be serious and mature in his behaviour as well as outlook. "If he dug the garden, the mind was allowed to play about only the soil and the pick. If he read a book, he tried to make the print a complete drug for the mind." (1 993:1 24)

He decided to concentrate in all of his activities. He also took great care in assuring that he not even by chance gets to come across any thing that reminds him of his beloved Malathi whom he dearly loved. The most important aspect of his self-realization is the significance of 'the Samsara Dharma'.

In this poisonous world of Samsara there are only two tilings of great vaiue- great books arid good friends. Chandran was following this dharma before Malathi infatuated him and that led to a prolonged stage of illusion and an-artificial renunciation. But. when he returned to Samsara. he realized his duties and responsibilities as the eldest son of the family.

At such moment's he fumigated his mind with reflections: this is a mischievous disturbance: this is false: these thoughts of Malathi are unreal because Love is only a brain affection: it led "me to bee and cheat: to desert my parents: it is responsible for my mother's extra wrinkles and grey hairs; for my father's neglect of the garden; and a poor postmaster, is a shirt and. a *dhoti* less on account of my love. (1993:124)

Now the notion of unemployment disturbed him a lot as he was getting on for twenty-four. And he did not want to be a parasite on his father any more. He, firstly, decided to go to England and get a nice job but then the idea came to his mind, that this expensive trip would increase the burden of his father. Then, he decides, with Mohan's help, to stay back and become the agent in paper 'Messenger'. He even convinces his father about the job. His father not only got convinced but also extended his help to him.

Now his parents insist him on getting married. They even chose a girl for him. But thoughts of Malathi are still troubling Chandran. Chandran also liked the girl (although mainly for her beauty) and marries her.

Susila is almost an ideal wife to .him and helping him in all his practical matters. Chandran finally becomes responsible, sensible person and settles down happily in domestic life. This is the most crucial aspect in the process of self-realization.

## CONCLUSION

Though a person might be highly qualified, he may be having the same set of feelings, passions, desires which any of the normal person has.

Education does not take away the basic tenets of one's personality. It, rather, adds to the thinking power. Education provides a person with the power to make right decisions in life. It is the man himself, who needs to check against his follies and mistakes.

It happened with Chandran also as he was a young graduate, quite hard working, sensible as well as responsible. In spite of being a scholar (serious student), Chandran faced the same problems in life as any normal adult would. For example, his infatuation stage. In *The Bachelor of Art's* it is premature and ineffective renunciation, which is dealt with.

Reality and illusion are two of the most important aspects in his characterization. He was in an illusionary state in at least two stages of his life. They are-

- Infatuation with Malathi
- The Sadhu episode.

Finally, reality dawns on him and he returns to the normal world of *Samsara* -to-'perform his dharma. We can conclude by saying that the attitude of the society is quite indifferent and harsh towards the innocent feelings of a lover. Traditional and orthodox parents pay no heed to the serious choices made by their growing children. There is, obviously, some kind of gulf between the two. Neither the parents try to change their views according to the time, nor do the children are ready for any kind of compromise.

It is we who can bring about revolutionary change in our society. But, for that to happen one needs to be affirmative in taking decisions and living by one's words.

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