

Elements of Indianness in the R.K. Narayan's the Bachelor of Arts

Soubhik Karmakar

Guest Faculty, P.G. Evening Section, Department of English, Raiganj University, India

Abstract

The article discusses how different elements of Indian life and culture have repleted R.K Narayan's The Bachelor of Arts (1937). By the employment of realistic mode of narration, Narayan in the fictional town of Malgudi creates a small world of Indian life and culture. The life and the world in this work does not only exhibit the Indian landscape and atmosphere, terrains and flora and fauna, side by side it also exhibits the everyday quotidian life lived by common man of the country, and each of the aspect has been brilliantly captured in a foreign language, English, and thereby giving the language a naturalized identity of being considered as Indian English.

Keywords: Narration, Indian English, Realism, Society, Westernization, Indianization

Introduction

Both M.K. Naik and Srinivas Iyengar held Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer or popularly known R.K. Narayan in high esteem while writing the history of English writing in India. While the pre-independent writing were carrying the baggage of colonial colloquialism in its narrative tone and style, post-independent India saw the rise of three writers namely R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, and Mulk Raj Anand; who brought an Indianness in the writings in English. This Indianness includes the trope of nomenclature, expression of words and emotions by giving the character an everyday Indian name and title and allowing them to freely to engage with the readers. Therefore, unlike the early writings in English in India, the writings of Narayan and the other duo, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, brought a local essence in the whole writing style of the fiction. The Bachelor of the Arts is Narayan's first endeavour which got immense success and immediately attracted the readers. It narrates the development of the protagonist Chandran, who is an undergraduate student in a Missionary college. The novel through the brilliant depiction of a coming-of-age protagonist, Chandran, highlights the nuances of Indian society, its mindset and culture and the thought process that often go in the mind of the citizen. Even though it has been published more than seventy years ago, the novel is still poignant and fresh, and has not lost the emotional charm and curiosity that it evokes among the young mind.

Elements of Indianness in the Bachelor of the Arts:

Indianness and Parenthood:

The noted British cultural critic Raymond Williams in his celebrated piece *Culture is Ordinary* (1958) stated that, "culture is the ordinary life not the elite life that is carefully crafted by the means of artificial medium known as financial resources" The same spirit of everyday common life permeates the plot of *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937). Divided in eighteenth chapter in four parts *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937)

portray the life of an eighteen year old boy, Chandran. Chandran is an undergraduate student in St. Alberts College and is in the final years of his B.A. Degree with English and History. Chandran's father is a retired District Judge, H.C. Venkatachala Iyer, and his mother is an orthodox pious lady. Chandran has young brother, Shenu, who studies in the eighth standard at the St. Alberts School. Chandran father, being a typical middle class English educated mind desires to up bring both of their two sons in the modern style of life of affluence and abundance. Contrary to Mr. Iyer, Chandran's mother wishes a typical Indian value-based spiritual domestic life to be inculcated in Chandran's life. However, Chandran initially builds himself up in the mindset of his father's ideology and prospect and has mind to go abroad to get his higher academic qualification and thereafter will create a prospect of having a healthy life full of majesty and comfort. Such a portrayal of a young boy choosing his aspiration and goal of life following the guidelines of the family and more prominently the father speaks about the Indian family structure where the elderly members being the senior as well as the experienced person in social and professional life, directly influences and shapes the choices and goal of the younger member of the family with the hope and clarity that their self-learning which they have got through the various ups-downs will give the younger people an advance exposure in deciding the right track. Therefore, while reading Narayan's *The Bachelor of the Arts (1937)* the readers do not find the emotion that Narayan's narrative evoke skillfully.

Indianness and the Institution of Marriage:

In formulating the basic idea of family life, the role of the institution of marriage is final. In the novel *The Bachelor of Arts (1937)* we find Chandran growing up in a typical Indian family throughout trained in the Western mode of knowledge has developed his own persona and ego. He has own individuality and thought that guides his thought process and mobilises to take his own self decision. The self-decision processes allow him to assert his words, thoughts powerfully. As for all these factors, when Chandran once upon a time had a chance of having a glimpse of the teenage girl, Malathi near the river bank, it immediately brings a drastic change of his mind. Chandran becomes too much enticed with Malathi's sight that he decided to make Malathi her life partner at the cost of whatever he has to give-up unconditionally. Such an individualistic zeal however does not last long. Being unreciprocated by Malathi and losing the valuable time, Chandran founds himself at the corner of his life. At the same time, Chandran is also at the war with his parents' ethos and consensus as Chandran's mother disapproves immediately disapproves Chandran's wish to marry Malathi on the ground of mismatch of the horoscope tallies between Chandran and Malathi. Chandran's mother firmly believes that marriage is not an unison between two opposite gender at their likeness but it is more than that and is a fortune changing affair in any one's life. Hence looking towards the other factors are also integral to the part of marriage. There cannot be no prospect of whims only turning out to be the major factor of determining the marriage. Beside, Chandran mother also considers that the conjugal relationship in a Hindu family must take between the people from equal caste which will keep the purity of the caste and culture that has been maintained through out the centuries and she being from the same tradition strongly advocates for the same cause. The custom of dowry according to Chandran's mother is another factor that determine the decision of marriage. In *The Bachelor of Arts (1937)* R.K. Narayan time again brings such social dimensions of Indian life and culture which pervades throughout the course of novel.

Indianness and Asceticism:

Ascetism as a way of life focuses on complete concentration on the search of God and the true meaning of life is a millennium old practice in India. A romanticism towards the ascetic form of life has always dominated the Indian lives. If one reason for such a romanticism date back to the philosophical roots of ancient scriptures of Vedas, Upanishads and Gita, where the virtue of sacrifice is held more than anything else, then the another root might be traced into the socio-economic life of the common people, who under many rulers in different time across many centuries did not manage to live a life of abundance or excess, but survived the life despite having the meagre at their dispensation. So naturally it become a cultural idiom of Indian life that have been romanticized and is at times taken as inspiration when even the basic minimum needs were not met. However, idealizing and fantasizing that how much glorifying and nerve of steel it may develop out of following ascetism, it is actually the absolute form of suffering that one may suffer if he had no other option to choose and follow it, but not until before that. As a result, when all the prospect what Chandran had dreamt is at the verge of turning out to be completely ruined and disillusioned he decided to give up every day mundane life, which has no meaning for him at that point, and to find peace of mind and composure he decided to become a sanyasi-to practice ascetism. The same ethos towards the life is being vividly depicted by Narayan through the character of Chandran. It is another element of Indianness that the novel *The Bachelor of Arts (1937)* brings before the reader.

Indianness and the Western Influence

The very choice of writing the novel in English language with an Indian color and essence speak about another element of Indianness which is the influence of Western thought in the regular life. Such a dichotomy of hybridity pervades throughout the narration as well the portrayal of characters in *The Bachelor of Arts (1937)*. Thus, in the course of the plot, through the characters of Raghavachar; the history teacher, Mr. Brown; the Principal of the College, the readers get the sense of historical struggle that people at different level. While Raghavachar directly calls for eliminating the distorted history in order to unravel the real history of the country, Mr. Brown in polite and benevolent gesture dispels the ground of such necessity which Raghavachar is proposing. Thereby after the debacle by Veeraswami, which Narayan notes as “On a fateful day, to an audience of thirty-five, Veeraswami read his paper. It was the most violent paper ever read before an association. It pilloried Great Britain before the Association, and ended by hoping that the British would be ousted from India by force. Raghavachar, who was present at the meeting, felt very uncomfortable. Next day he 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.”

Conclusion:

Language has its own course of evolution. It is not static. With time, use and most essentially under the influence of circumstances in order to express the events, expression of mind language gets moulded and reflects the essence of the newness. The similar thing happened in the case of R.K. Narayan and his novel *The Bachelor of Arts (1937)*(1937). It is written in English and apparently it may appear that the language English in foreign to the land of India and is the language of dominion but it is the ability and the quality of R.K. Narayan that he has been able to successfully capture the Indianness in a foreign

language and thereby has inflected the foreign language with the elements of Indianness giving it a distinctively Indian rootedness and making it a wonderful piece of example of Indian writing in English.

References

1. Iyengar, K.R, Srinivasa. Indian Writing in English. Delhi. Sterling Publication Limited.2012. Print.
2. Mukherjee, Meenakshi.The Twice Born Fiction. New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1974. Print.
3. Naik, M.K. Naik. A History of Indian English Writing. Delhi. Sahitya Academy.2009. Print.
4. Narayan, R.K. The Bachelor of Arts. Mysore. Indian Thought Publication, 2007. Print.