

Chandran and His Friends in R.K. Narayan's The Bachelor of Arts

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Abstract

Chandran is the protagonist in R.K. Narayan's great novel *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937). When the novel opens, he is studying B.A. final year at Albert Mission College, Malgudi. The novel deals with the life of Chandran, the ups and downs in his life, and the friendship he develops with Ramu, Mohan, Veeraswami and Natesan. Ramu lives in a house next to Chandran's in Lawly Extension. Chandran and Ramu discuss their college matters with each other. They are endowed with joyous humour. Although they quarrel now and then, they come to a settlement within a short time. Their friendship is so strong that one cannot live without the company of the other. About Mohan, he is a poet and he plays an important role in the life of Chandran. As for Veeraswami, he is also a friend of Chandran; he has revolutionary ideas. Regarding Natesan, he is another friend of Chandran; he serves as Union Secretary, Albert Mission College, Malgudi. In fine, Chandran shares his feelings and emotions with his friends. Also, Chandran discusses with them, his successes and failures in life. As for friendship and the test of friendship, it is useful to remember the words of H.W. Beecher:

It is one of the severest tests of friendship to tell your friend his faults. – So to love a man that you cannot bear to see a stain upon him, and to speak painful truth through loving words – that is friendship. (Mubarak Singh 97)

Keywords: the bachelor of arts, chandran, his friends, life, failure, success

Introduction

Friendship was another illusion like Love, though it did not reach the same mad heights. People pretended that they were friends, when the fact was they were brought together by force of circumstances.

- R.K. Narayan, 2007:118

I do not believe that friends are necessarily the people you like best, they are merely the people who got there first.

- Peter Ustinov *Dear Me* (1977)

Chandran, the hero of R.K. Narayan's second novel *The Bachelor of Arts* is a final year B.A. student in Albert Mission College, Malgudi. He lives with his parents and younger brother in a big house in Lawly Extension. After Chandran becomes a graduate, he loves a girl named Malathi but he is unable to marry her. He leaves his home and wanders as a hermit for about eight months. Then, he returns to home. He gets a job in a publishing company the *Daily Messenger*. He marries Susila, a girl chosen by his

parents. He leads a happy married life, living in his parents' house. This, in brief, is Chandran's story in the novel. Added to this is the story of Chandran's friends: Ramu, Mohan, Veeraswami and Natesan. Chandran's friendship with all his friends is characterised by lively feelings and emotions. They show affection to one another. As regards Chandran and his friends, the relevant questions are: **What are Chandran's views on attending a cinema and the ideal way to set about a night show? What are Chandran's resolutions, in view of approaching examinations? What about Ramu? What is Mohan's request to Chandran? What is Mohan's advice to Chandran? What about Veeraswami's offer to read a paper in the meeting? What about Natesan? What are the views of writers? What is the conclusion? What is needed today?** All these important issues regarding Chandran and his friends are discussed, in detail, hereunder.

What are Chandran's views on attending a cinema and the ideal way to set about a night show?

Chandran, as the Secretary of the Historical Association convenes the inaugural and other meetings efficiently. He sacrifices some of his valuable time to perform service regarding the inaugural function. After the successful conduct of the debate, Chandran and Ramu wish to go to a cinema. About attending a cinema and the ideal way to set about a night show, Chandran has his own views:

It was an aesthetic experience to be approached with due preparation. You had to chew the betel leaves and nut, chew gently, until the heart was stimulated and threw out delicate beads of perspiration and caused a fine tingling sensation behind the earts; on top of that you had to light a cigarette, inhale the fumes, and with the night breeze blowing on your perspiring forehead, go to the cinema, smoke more cigarettes there, see the picture, and from there go to an hotel near by for hot coffee at midnight, take some more betel leaves and cigarettes, and go home and sleep. This was the ideal way to set about a night show. Chandran squeezed the maximum aesthetic delight out of the experience. (Narayan 13)

What are Chandran's resolutions, in view of approaching examinations?

Chandran realises that the examinations are fast approaching. He wants to strengthen himself with several resolutions:

One was that he would get up every day at the same hour, bathe in cold water, and get through three hours of solid work before starting for the college. The second resolution was that he would be back home before eight in the evenings and study till eleven-thirty. He also resolved not to smoke because it was bad for the heart, and a very sound heart was necessary for the examination. (18)

What about Ramu?

Ramu is Chandran's classmate and neighbour. To Chandran, Ramu's company is valuable and enjoyable. Both are happy, especially when they go to a cinema and

when they walk leisurely along the river. About Ramu and his company, Narayan informs thus:

... Ramu's company was most important to him. It was his presence that gave a sense of completion to things. He too smoked, chewed, drank coffee, laughed (he was the greatest laugher in the world, admired Chandran, ragged him, quarrelled with him, breathed delicious scandal over the names of his professors and friends and unknown people. (13)

After the announcement of results of examinations, Ramu disappears. It is learnt that Ramu goes out in search of a job in Bombay; he travels all over North India but he is unable to get any job; afterwards he joins the law course in Poona. Chandran feels very much, because Ramu has not informed him of his whereabouts. Chandran opines that like Love, Friendship is also an illusion.

What is Mohan's request to Chandran?

Mohan is a classmate of Chandran. He is less troublesome than Veeraswami. Mohan is a poet. He is brought in by the Historical Association. Mohan asks Chandran whether a meeting can be arranged to read some of his poems. Chandran asks Ragavachar, History Professor and President of the Historical Association, for permission to arrange the meeting. Ragavachar refuses. Chandran conveys to Mohan the President's refusal.

What is Mohan's advice to Chandran?

Regarding Chandran's employment, he discusses the matter with Mohan. Mohan advises Chandran to take up the agency of the *Daily Messenger*. Chandran, with the help of his father gets the agency and settles in life.

What about Veeraswami's offer to read a paper in the meeting?

Veeraswami is another classmate of Chandran. Veeraswami is aged about twenty two years. His ideas are revolutionary. One day he comes to Chandran and offers to read a poem on "The Aids to British Expansion in India". Chandran is highly pleased because, in general, no one offers himself to speak in a meeting of the Historical Association. On the day of the meeting Veeraswami reads his paper. His paper is considered as the most violent

paper ever read before an Association. Ragavachar, the President of the Association feels very uncomfortable.

What about Natesan?

Natesan is one more classmate of Chandran. Natesan is the old Union Secretary, Albert Mission College, Malgudi. During his earlier years, he takes part in various Associations of the College. "He had been a good friend, very helpful and accommodating; but for his help the Historical Association could not have done any work" (145). Natesan helps Chandran in arranging meetings. He guides Chandran in getting Principal Brown's consent to inaugurate the Historical Association. After the examinations, Chandran has not heard of Natesan.

What are the views of writers?

(i) As regards Chandran and his friends, and shared interests, the views of Vineypalkaur Kirpal are:

Chandran seeks emotional sustenance not only within his family but also outside amongst people of his own age. The presence of Ramu is reassuring to Chandran. The other important factor of their friendship is that they share interests and this adds to Chandran's confidence. This quality of shared interests is absent in Chandran's other peer group relationships such as with Natesan, Mohan and Veeraswami (117).

(ii) About the discovery that Love and Friendship are the illusions, Shiv K. Girda writes:

The theme of illusion-awareness-disillusionment is first seen in the development of this first of Narayan's protagonists who makes the devastating discovery that Love and Friendship were the veriest illusions (39).

Conclusion

Chandran's College days are a gentle reminder of College days of any student of today, in general. Chandran's resolutions regarding examinations bring to memory the resolutions of students of present generation. The relations of Chandran with his friends Ramu, Mohan, Veeraswami and Natesan are cordial and courteous. However, in general it becomes clear that friendships in a College last until one leaves the College. **What is needed today is:** (1) to know that the period spent in the College as a student is the golden period of one's life, (2) to make the best use of one's College life, (3) to remember the fact that all friends in the college may not remain as friends for life and (4) to give due importance to the words of Cyrus about friends and about loving them:

All men have their frailties; and whoever looks for a friend without imperfections, will never find what he seeks. We love ourselves notwithstanding our faults, and we ought to love our friends in like manner. (Mubarak Singh 96)

References

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