CHAPTER - I

CULTURAL AWARENESS: ITS NATURE, FUNCTION AND VALUES

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The term "culture" means the attitudes and values prevailing in a society. Culture includes life-style, family and other social institutions, learning and education, habits of food and wearing apparel, beliefs and faith, rituals and traditions, celebration of festivals, ceremonies of birth, marriage, and death, belief in salvation or transmigration of souls according to the laws of karma. It also includes such functionaries as perform the rituals in an appropriate manner. In other words, right from birth to death, one finds oneself in the culture of one society.

According to Taylor, "Culture is that Complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, Custom and any other capabilities and habits is acquired by man as a member of society". ¹

The term "awareness" implies the state of being aware or conscious. When "awareness" is linked to "culture", it suggests that a person is aware of his or her "culture" and either feels proud of it or conscious of its shortcomings in the context of the rapid socio-economic, scientific and technological changes taking place all-over the globe, particularly in the developed and developing countries of today.

The term "nature", when used in association with "culture", indicates the kind, the essence, the quality or qualities which make culture what it is. Thus the nature of culture for an individual or community is interpreted as leading a virtuous life to secure peace in the world and an easy passage to heaven.

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The term "function" denotes the particular purpose and performance of any thing. In the context of cultural awareness, the term would mean that an individual should think, feel and act in such a manner that his or her culture comes up to expected standards.

The term "value" means the intrinsic worth of anything, but the plural "values" suggests the presence of moral principles and standards that go into the making of culture.

Having explained the basic concepts of our study, it would not be improper to point out that the purpose of a modern novelist is to entertain his readers by presenting a good and readable story with all its literary and artistic devices and effects, leaving it to his readers to discern what culture the characters in the novel represent and whether it offers them emotional satisfaction or dissatisfaction. If their culture provides them satisfaction, the character will follow the culture in which they have been born and brought up in letter and spirit. If, on the other hand, there is dissatisfaction with some components of culture, the character would want a change.

The culture which R.K. Narayan presents in his fiction is the culture of an imaginary town named Malgudi. This town represents a gradually developing town in South India. It has an overwhelming majority of Hindus, the minorities being marginal. Let us illustrate cultural awareness from the reader's point of view from one of Narayan's early novels The Bachelor of Arts published in London by Thomas Nelson and Sons in 1937 - that is, a decade before India's Independence. According to the Indian publishers of its reprint,
This is the story of Chandran, a young man in his last year of college when the novel opens. Life, half-planned, is before him, Love, as yet half-glimpsed like the fleeting green saree on the river bank that sends his imagination running, makes of Chandran for a long while an exile from Malgudi, from his friends, his family, and from life itself. And love is the catalyst that makes him turn back to all that which he had turned his back on.

Hindu customs, observed as often as they are ignored, are shown with gentle and wry humour.

**Elderly women more religious-minded than men**

Chandran's mother regularly performs puja, because it is a part of good Hindu's culture. She sat in the back verandah, turning the prayer beads in her hand. We find that turning the beads is only a mechanical ritual, because her attention is elsewhere. She was looking at the coconut trees at the far end of the compound. As she turned her beads her lips uttered the name of Sri Rama, but part of her mind busied itself with thoughts of her husband, home, children, and relatives, and her eyes took in the delicate beauty of coconut trees waving against a starlit sky.

**Flowers for puja**

There is usually a small separate room in a well-to-do Hindu family house, or a separate corner in a room if there is shortage of space, reserved for puja. One of the essentials of the worship of the deity or deities is showering flowers or petals on the idol or idols. As Chandran's mother explains to her son:
Your father spends nearly twenty-five rupees on the garden and nearly ten rupees on a gardener. What is the use of all this expense if we can't have a handful of flowers in the morning, for throwing on the gods in puja room? (BA, 22)

Flower-thief

Chandran's father told his son that, if he got up at four-thirty, he should also wake him (Chandran's father) up, because he wanted to wait and catch the scoundrel who stole the flowers in the morning, Chandran's mother added fuel by remarking: "Twenty-five rupees on the garden and not a single petal of any flower for the gods in the puja room." (BA, 41)

One morning at about four, Chandran's father was behind the rose bush, and Chandran had pressed himself close to the compound wall. A figure heaved itself on to the portion of the wall next to the gate, and jumped into the garden. The stranger looked about for a fraction of a second and went towards the jasmine creeper in a business-like way. Hardly had he plucked half a dozen flowers when father and son threw themselves on him with war-cries. It was quite a surprise for Chandran to see his father so violent. They dragged the thief into the house, held him down, and shouted to mother to wake up and light lamp.

The ascetic as the flower-thief

The light showed the thief to be a middle-aged man, bare-bodied, with matted hair, wearing only a loin-cloth. The loin-cloth was ochre-coloured, indicating that he was a sanyasi, an ascetic. Chandran's father relaxed his hold on noticing this.
Mother screamed, "Oh, hold him, hold him." She was shaking with excitement "Take him away and give him to the police "(BA, 43)

The fear of the curse of a holy man

Chandran said to the thief that he wore the grab of a sanyasi, and yet he did that sort of thing.

"Is he a sanyasi?" Mother asked, and noticed the colour of the thief's loin-cloth. "Ah, leave him alone, let him go." She was seized with fear now. The curse of a holy man might fall of the family. "You can go, sir", she said respectfully.

Chandran was cynical. "What, Mother, you are frightened of every long hair and ochre dress you see." (BA, 43)

Queer logic

Chandran asked the thief:

"If you are really a holy man, why should do this?"

"What have I done?" Asked the thief.

"Jumping in and stealing flowers."

"If you lock the gate, how else can I get in than by jumping over the wall? As for flowers, flowers are there, God-given. What matters it whether you throw the flowers on the gods, or I do it? It is all the same."

"But you should ask our permission."

"You are all asleep at that hour, and I don't wish to disturb you. I can't wait until you get up because my worship is over before sunrise" (BA, 43-44).
The ascetic's worship by stolen flowers

Chandran's mother interposed and said:
"You can go now, sir. If you want flowers, you can take them. There couldn't be a better way of worship than giving flowers to those who really worship."

"Truly said, Mother?" said the holy man. "I should certainly have asked permission but for the fact that none of you is awake at that hour."

"I shall be awake," said Chandran, "from tomorrow.

"Do you use these followers for your worship, Mother?" asked the stranger.

"Certainly, every day. I never let a day go without worship. (BA, 44)

The "holy use" of flowers in worship

The sanyasi had thought that, in the Chandran bungalow, as in many other bungalows, flowers were kept only for ornament.

"I am happy to hear that they are put to holy use. Hereafter, I shall take only a handful and leave the rest for your worship. May I take leave of you now?" He crossed the hall and descended the verandah steps.

Father said to Chandran, "Take the gate key and open the gate." (BA, 44)

Attraction between two human beings inexplicable but natural

One evening Chandran came to the river, and was loafing alone, when he saw a girl, about fifteen years old, playing with her younger sister on the sands. Chandran had been in the habit of staring at every girl who sat on the sand, but he had never felt before the acute interest
he felt in this girl now. 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 into 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, but that could not be done. There were a lot of people about.

**Early marriage**

While walking away from there into the fields, he caught himself more than once thinking of the girl. How old was she? Probably fourteen. She might be even fifteen or sixteen. If she was more than fourteen, she must be married. There was a touch of despair in this thought. What was the use of thinking of a married girl? It would be very improper. Narayan describes Chandran's emotional state of love at first sight in some detail. Chandran's thoughts ran thus:

Probably she was not married. He tried to analyse why he was thinking of her. Why did he think of her so much? Was it her looks? Was she so good looking as all that? Who could say? He hadn't noticed her before. Then how could he say that she was the most beautiful girl in the world? When did he say that? Didn't he? If not, why was he thinking of her so much? Chandran was puzzled, greatly puzzled by the whole thing.

He wondered what her name might be. She looked like one with the name of Lakshmi. Quite a beautiful name, the name of the Goddess of Wealth, the spouse of God Vishnu, who was the Protector of Creatures.

That night he went home very preoccupied. It was at five o'clock that he had met her, and at nine he was still thinking of her. (BA, 55-56)
Chandran saw her at the river bank next evening.

She was wearing a green sari and playing with her companion. Chandran saw her from a distance and went towards her as if drawn by a rope. But, on approaching her, his courage failed him, and he walked away in the opposite direction. Presently he stopped and blamed himself for wasting a good opportunity of making her person familiar to her: he turned once again with the intention of passing before her closely, slowly, and deliberately. At a distance he could look at her, but when he came close he felt self-conscious and awkward, and while passing actually in front of her he bent his head, fixed his gaze on the ground, and walked fast. He was away, many yards away, from her in a moment. He checked his pace once again and looked back for fraction of a second, and was quite thrilled at the sight of the green sari in the distance. (BA, 59)

The restraining factor: people passing and repassing

Socialising with the opposite sex in Malgudi is at a conservative level. One can not go near a girl one has fallen in love with, even at such a public place as the sandy bank of river Sarayu, and have a discreet look at her, because of the presence of other people.

Chandran did not dare to look longer; for he was obsessed with the feeling that he was observed by whole crowd on the river bank. He hoped that she had observed him. He hoped that she had observed his ironed coat. He stood there and debated with himself whether she had seen him or not. One part of him said that she could not have observed him, because he had walked away very fast and because there were a lot of people passing and repassing on the sand. Chandran steadily discouraged this sceptical half of his mind, and lent his whole-hearted support to
the other half, which was saying that, just as he had noticed her in the crowd, she was sure to have noticed him. Destiny always worked that way. His well-ironed chocolate tweed coat was sure to invite notice. He hoped he didn't walk clumsily in front of her. He again told himself she must have noticed that he was not like the rest of that crowd. (BA, 59-60)

**The inevitable paradox**

Narayan seems to be quite well-versed in the psychology of a young man who, in spite of himself, falls in love with an unknown girl. Chandran's concern manifests itself in a paradox. He wants "an eye friendship" with the girl and, at the same time, he does not wish to "embarrass her by meeting his gaze."

And so why should he not now go and occupy a place that would be close to her and in the line of her vision? Starting was half the victory in love. His sceptical self now said that by this procedure he might scare her off the river for ever; but, said the other half, tomorrow she may not come to the river at all, and if you don't start an eye friendship immediately, you may not get the opportunity again for a million years.

Finally, when he passed before her, he looked at her for so short a space of time that she appeared only as a passing green blur. Before leaving the river bank he looked back twice only.

Even granted that she had not noticed him the first time, she couldn't have helped noticing him when he passed before her again; that was why he didn't look at her fully; he didn't want to embarrass her by meeting his gaze (BA, 60-69)
**Endeavours to observe the girl's features**

Narayan shows insight into the emotional and mental turmoil of a young man of twenty-two, born and brought up in the conservative Malgudi society of pre-independence days, being irresistibly drawn to an unknown girl not yet out of her teens and trying to know more of her figure, complexion, and looks, and later of her habits—all from a distance and without talking to her.

Chandran realised that friends and acquaintances were likely to prove a nuisance to him by the river. He decided to cut every one hereafter. With this resolution he went to the Sarayu bank next evening. He also decided to be very bold, and indifferent to the public's observation and criticism.

She was there with her little companion.

Chandran went straight to a spot just thirty yards from where she sat, and settled down there. He had determined to stare at her this evening. He might even throw in an elegant wink or smile. He was going to stare at her and take in a lot of details regarding her features. He had not made out yet whether she was fair or light brown; whether she had long hair or short, and whether her eyes were round and almond-shaped; and he had also some doubts about her nose. He sat at this thirty yards range and kept throwing at her a side glance every fifth second. He noticed that she played a great deal with her little companion. He wanted to go to her and ask whether the little companion was her sister or cousin and how old she was. But he abandoned the idea. A young man of twenty-two going up and conversing with a grown-up girl, a perfect stranger, would be affording a very uncommon sight to the public *(BA, 63-64)*
Observation and deduction

Though dealing with a unilateral romance, Narayan is perfectly logical and rational in the conclusions arrived at by his young hero's observation of the girl who had caught his fancy.

This optical communion became a daily habit. His powers of observation and deduction increased tremendously. He gathered several facts about the girl. She wore a dark sari and a green sari alternatively. She came to the river chiefly for the sake of her little companion. She was invariably absent on Fridays and came late on Wednesdays. Chandran concluded from this that the girl went to the temple on Friday evenings, and was delayed by a music master or a stitching master on Wednesday. He further gathered that she was of a religious disposition, and was accomplished in the art of music and embroidery. From her regularity he concluded that she was a person of very systematic habits. The fact that she played with her young companion showed that she had a loving disposition. He concluded that she had no brothers, since not a single soul escorted her on any evening. (BA, 64)

The romantic lover's fantasy

Narayan is convincing when he shows himself knowledgable in matters associated with young love. He seems to record his hero's experiences as if they were his own. That is why the romantic lover's fantasy sounds credible. The desire of a young man for the companionship of a young girl whom he likes seems perfectly credible.

Encouraged by this conclusion, he wondered if he should not stop her and talk to her when she rose to go home. He might even accompany her to her house. That might become a beautiful habit. What wonderful things he would have to say to her. When the traffic of the town had died, they
could walk together under the moon or in magic starlight. He would stop a few yards from her house. What a parting of sweetness and pain. (BA, 65)

The flaw in this fantasy is that the young companion does not exist, or she came to the river and went home all by herself.

**Love and God**

When what is beyond the helpless man’s endeavours, he turns to God who is omnipotent and to whom he prays for succour in the belief that, with God’s blessings, his desire will be fulfilled. This fact is also aptly dealt with by Narayan.

An evening of this optical fulfilment filled him with tranquillity. He left the river and went home late in the evening, meditating on God, and praying to him with concentration that He would bless this romance with success. All night he repeated her name, "Lakshmi", and fervently hoped that her soul heard his call through the night. (BA, 65)

**From passive to practical**

Chandran had lived for over a month in a state of bliss, notwithstanding his ignorance of the girl’s identity. He began to feel now that he ought to be up and doing and get a little more practical. He could not go on staring at her on the sands all his life. He must know all about her.

He followed her at a distance of about half a furlong on a dark evening when she returned home from the river. He saw her enter a house in Mill Street. He paced before the house slowly, twice, slowing up to see if there was any board before the house. There was none.
Answer to prayers

Chandran's friend Mohan, a journalist, lived in Mill Street. Through Mohan's co-operation, Chandran learnt that his sweetheart's name was Malathi that she was unmarried, and that she was the daughter of Mr. D.W. Krishna Iyer, Head Clerk in the Executive Engineer's office.

The suffix to the name of the girl's father was a comforting indication that he was of the same caste and subcaste as Chandran. Chandran shuddered at the thought of all the complication that he would have had to face if the gentleman had been Krishna Iyengar, or Krishna Rao, or Krishna Mudaliar. His father would certainly cast him off if he tried to marry out of caste.

Chandran took it all as a favourable sign, as an answer to his prayers, which were growing intenser every day. In each fact, that Mohan lived in the Hotel opposite her house, that she was unmarried, that her father was an "Iyer", Chandran felt that God was revealing Himself.

Speaking to Father

Indian culture demands that, even in a love marriage, the same procedure as is necessary for parentally arranged marriages should be followed. That is why Chandran went to his father when he found the elderly man alone and said:

"Father, please don't mistake me. I want to marry D.W. Krishna Iyer's daughter".

Father put on his spectacles and looked at his son with a frown. He sat up and asked:

"Who is he?"

"Head Clerk in the Executive Engineer's office".
"Why do you want to marry his daughter?".
"I like her ".
Do you know the girl?".
"Yes, I have seen her often."
"Where?"
Chandran told him.
"Have you spoken to each other?"
"No"
"Does she know you?.
"I don't know ".
Father laughed, and it cut into Chandran's soul. Father asked: "In that case, why this girl alone, and not any other?"
Chandran said: "I like her", and left Father's company abruptly as Father said: "I don't know anything about these things. I must speak to your mother." (BA, 69)

The appendages to marriage

We gather the impression that Chandran feels that the marital qualifications of a girl in the traditional society of a small town are: she must be good-looking, temple-going, accomplished in music or embroidery and having not only systematic habits but also a loving disposition. Chandran finds all these qualifications in Malathi.

In Indian culture, however, it is the mother who plays a prominent role in fixing a marriage. She has to know the family of her future daughter-in-law. The horoscopes have to be matched. The girl's parents should be prepared to marry their daughter. If her parents have kept the girl unmarried till she is sixteen, then something must be seriously wrong.

Chandran's mother asked him who the girl was. Chandran told her. She was very disappointed. A Head Clerk's daughter was not what she had hoped for her son.
Chandran, why won't you consider any of the dozen of girls that have been proposed to you?"

Chandran rejected his suggestion indignantly.

"But suppose these girls are richer and more beautiful?"

"I don't care. I shall marry this girl and no one else."

"But how are you sure they are prepared to give their daughter to you?"

"They will have to."

"Extraordinary! Do you think marriage is a child's game? We don't know anything about them, who they are, what they are, what they are worth, if the stars and other things about the girl are all right, and above all, whether they are prepared to marry their girl at all."

"They will have to. I hear that this season she will be married because she is getting on for sixteen."

"Sixteen!" mother screamed. "They can't be all right if they have kept the girl unmarried till sixteen. She must have attained puberty long ago. They can't be all right. We have a face to keep in this town. Do you think it is all child's play?"

She left the room in a temper (BA, 69-70)

Age at marriage

In Hindu families, in general, the marriage proposal comes from the girl's family. To make this easier, the help of a matchmaker is sought, and so Chandran's parents sent for Ganpathi Sastregal, who was matchmaker in general to a few important families in Malgudi. He knew D.W.Krishna Iyer's family for three generations. He said:

The girl is only well grown, and I don't think she is as old as she looks. She can't be more than fifteen. This has become the standard age for girls nowadays. Everybody holds advanced views in these days. Even in an ancient and orthodox family like Sadasiva Iyer's, they married a girl recently at fifteen."

This was very comforting to Chandran's mother (BA, 75)
Sastrigal was therefore entrusted with the mission to go to D. W. Krishna Iyer's house and ascertain if they were going to marry their girl this session, and to move them to take the initiative in a proposal for an alliance with Chandran's family. Sastrigal was to give out that he was acting independently, and on his own initiative.

**Dowry and marriage expenses**

According to the caste culture of the Iyers a cash money of a respectable amount is a "must". In addition to this, there are costly items like silver vessels and presents and the girl's jewellery of diamonds and gold. The wedding celebrations alone amount to half as much as the cash dowry. This shows that the girl is an economic liability on the part of her parents and, in this customary transaction, the girl's parents are definitely losers and the boy's parents gainers.

Sastrigal brought good news the next day. He said that Malathi "is a smart girl; stands very tall, and has a good figure. Her skin is fair; may be called fair, though not as fair as that of our lady (Chandran's mother) here; but she is by no means to be classed as a dark girl. Her mother says that the girl has just completed her fourteen year." Chandran's mother felt a great load off her mind now. She wouldn't have to marry her son to a girl over sixteen, and incur the comments of her community.

"You can take it from me that they are going to marry their girl this season. She will certainly be married in Panguni month...."

"When I mentioned this family, the lady (Malathi's mother) was greatly elated. She seems to know you all very well. She even said that she and you were related. It seems that your maternal grandfather's first wife and her paternal grandfather were sister and brother, not cousins, but direct sister and brother."
"Ah, I did not know that. I am happy to hear it". She (Chandran's mother) then asked: "Have you any idea how much they are prepared to spend?"

"Yes, I got it out in a manner; very broadly, of course; but that will do for the present. I think they are prepared to give a cash dowry of about two thousand rupees, silver vessels and presents up to a thousand, and spend about a thousand in the wedding celebrations. These will be in addition to about a thousand worth of diamonds and gold on the girl."

Chandran's mother was slightly disappointed at the figures. "We can settle all that later." (BA, 78-78)

**Horoscope and omen**

The exercise of matching the horoscopes of the girl and the boy is often an essential part of marriage according to tradition. If the stars of both the future partners are favourable, it augurs a happy marriage; and, if any star in either horoscope is adversely disposed, the marriage does not take place. The influence of stars on human destiny is a part of Hindu culture so much so that champions of astrology have no hesitation in pronouncing that Indian astrology is a perfect science. There is also an auspicious time for many rituals connected with marriage. Belief in omens governs the behaviour of the orthodox.

The old man, Sastrigal, said:

"Tomorrow, if everything is auspicious, they will send you the girl's horoscope. We shall proceed with the other matters after comparing the horoscopes. I am certain that this marriage will take place very soon. Even as I started for their house a man came bearing pots of foaming toddy; it is an excellent omen. I am certain that this alliance will be completed."

"Why bother with horoscopes?" asked Chandran's
father." Personally, I have no faith in them."

"You must not say that," said Sastrigal. "How are we to know whether two persons brought together will have health, happiness, harmony, and long life, if we do not study their horoscopes individually and together?" (BA, 78)

**Castles in the air**

Narayan presents Chandran in love as a pure optimist. The young man's thinking is parallel to wishful thinking. He begins building castles in the air. In the excitement of his imagination, he sides with his sweetheart at the emotional level. He begins anticipating an idyllic life with his sweetheart as a son-in-law in her parents-in-law's house, often asking God's help in this matter.

Chandran felt very happy that her horoscope was coming. He imagined that the very next thing after the horoscope would be marriage. The very fact that they were willing to send the girl's horoscope for comparison proved that they were not averse to this alliance. They were probably goaded on by the girl. He had every reason to believe that the girl had told her parents she would marry Chandran and no one else. But how could she know him or his name? Girls had a knack of learning these things by a sort of sixth sense. How splendid of her to speak out her mind like this, brave girls! If her mind matched her form, it must be one of the grandest things in the world.

The thought of her melted him. He clutched his pillow and cried in the darkness: "Darling, what are you doing? Do you hear me?"

In these days he met her less often at the river but he made it up by going to Mill Street and wandering in front of her house until her form passed under the hall light. He put down her absence from the river to her desire.
to save Chandran's reputation. She felt, Chandran thought, that seeing him every day at the river would give rise to gossip. Such a selfless creature. Would rather sacrifice her evening's outing than subject Chandran to gossip. Chandran had no doubt that she was going to be the most perfect wife a man could ever hope to get.

As he sauntered in front of her house, Chandran would often ask God when His Grace would bend low so that Chandran might cease to be a man in the street and stride into the house as so-in-law. After they were married, he would tell her everything. They would sit in their creeper-covered villa on the hill-slope, just those two, and watch the sun set. In the afterglow of the evening, he would tell her of his travails, and they would both laugh. (BA, 78-79)

Inferences from the mark of auspiciousness

In *The Bachelor of Arts*, we are told that Krishna Iyer sends his daughter's horoscope. The corners of the paper on which the horoscope was drawn were touched with saffron as a symbol of auspiciousness. In other words, since marriage is a matter of life-time, great care has to be observed that everything works out auspiciously. Even the day of sending the horoscope has to be auspicious. This shows the concentration of power and decision-making in the hands of the person, often a Brahmin pandit, who declares what and when a specific action is auspicious.

Chandran was impatient, but for the sake of his parents he wanted everything to be done in the correct, orthodox manner. When there was delay in receiving the horoscope,

his latest hobby was scanning the faces of passers-by in the streets to see if any one resembled her. She had no double in the world. (BA, 83)

There was good news for him at home. Ganapathi Sastigal came in the evening with the girl's horoscope. He explained that the delay was
due to the fact that the preceding days were inauspicious. He took Chandran's horoscope with him to give to the girl's people.

As Chandran looked at the small piece of paper on which the horoscope was drawn, his heart bubbled over with joy. He noticed that the corners of the paper were touched with saffron - a mark of auspiciousness. So they had fully realised that it was an auspicious undertaking. Did not that fact indicate that they approved of this bridegroom and were anxious to secure him? If they were anxious to secure him, did not that mean that she would soon be his? Chandran read the horoscope a number of times, though he understood very little of it. (BA, 83)

Status and prestige

Status and prestige in one's community, neighbourhood, and town is one of the most cherished values in a family, especially while arranging a marriage. This is sympathetically but firmly explained by his mother to Chandran to check his exuberance.

"Chandran, you must not think that the only thing now to be settled is the date of marriage. God helping, all the difficulties will be solved, but there are yet a number of preliminaries to be settled. First, our astrologer must tell us if your horoscope can be matched with the girl's, and then I don't know what their astrologer will say. Let us hope for the best. After that, they must come and invite us to see the girl."

"I have seen the girl, Mother, and I like her."

"All the same they must invite us, and we must to there formally. After that they must come and ask us if you like the girl. And the terms of the marriage must be discussed and settled. I don't mean to discourage you, but you must be patient till all this is settled."

20
Chandran sat biting his nails: "But, Mother, you won't create difficulties over the dowry?"

"We shall see. We must not be too exacting, nor can we cheapen ourselves".

"But suppose you haggle too much?"

"Don't you worry about anything, boy. If they won't give you the girl on reasonable conditions, I shall get you other girls a thousand times more suitable."

"Don't talk like that, Mother. I shall never forgive you if this marriage does not take place through your bickering over the dowry and the presents."

"We have a status and a prestige to keep. We can't lower ourselves unduly."

"You care more for your status than for the happiness of your son."

**Horoscopy in Hindu culture**

The reader of *The Bachelor of Arts* is not expected to be a specialist in horoscopy. He has no choice but to rely on what D.W. Krishnan Iyer says and what the second astrologer, Srouthigal, says. While Krishnan maintains the horoscopes cannot be matched, Srouthigal asserts there is nothing wrong with Chandran's horoscope. Both substantiate their arguments with reasons, but the ordinary reader is left perplexed. The marital union of a boy and a girl depends solely on the interpretation of the position of the planet Mars.

Three days later, a peon from the Engineering Department came with a letter for Chandran's father who, after reading it, passed it on to his son. The letter read:

Dear and respected Sir - I am returning herewith the copy of your son's horoscope, which you so kindly sent to me.
for comparison with my daughter. Our family astrologer, after careful study and comparison, says the horoscopes can not be matched. Since I have great faith in horoscopy, and since I have known from experience that the marriage of couples ill-matched in the stars often leads to misfortune and even tragedy, I have to seek a bridegroom elsewhere. I hope that you honoured self, your wife, and your son will forgive me for the unnecessary trouble I have caused you. No one can have a greater regret at missing an alliance with your family than I. However, we can only propose. He on the Tirupathi Hill alone knows what is best for us.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

D.W.Krishnan (BA, 86)

Chandran gave the letter back to his father, rose without a word, and went to his room.

Inventing blame as a means of self-consolation

The return of Chandran’s horoscope infuriated his status-conscious mother. She began to heap baseless blame on the girl’s family to console herself. It is obvious that this process is not rationalisation but self-delusion. She fails to understand the significance to the horoscope. She satisfies her ego by saying things which are contradictory to what she had said to her son earlier, even misrepresenting the girl she had never seen before in an exaggerated manner.

"I knew all along that they were up to some such trick. If there is any flaw in the horoscope, it must be in the girl’s, not in the boy’s. His is a first-class horoscope. They want a cheap bridegroom, somebody who will be content with a dowry of one hundred repees and a day’s celebration of the wedding and they know that they can't get Chandran on those terms
They want some excuse to back out now". She remained silent for a while and then said, "So much the better. I have always disliked this proposal to tack Chandran on to a hefty, middle-aged girl. There are fifty girls waiting to be married to him." (BA, 86-87)

**Moon and Mars**

Chandran asked his father to try and find out if something could still be done. Chandran's father wrote to Krishnan if he could come and see him that evening. The gentleman came and was requested to tell why the horoscopes did not match.

"I ought not to be saying it, sir, but there is a flaw in your son's horoscope. Our astrologer has found that the horoscopes can not be matched. If my girl's horoscope had Moon or Mars in the Seventh House there couldn't be a better match than your son for her. But as it is ..."

"Are you sure?"

"I know a little of astrology myself. I am prepared to overlook many things in a horoscope. I don't usually concern myself with the factors that indicate prosperity, wealth, progeny and all that. I usually overlook them. But I do feel that we can't ignore longevity. I know hundreds of cases where the presence of Mars in this house ... I can tell you that ..." He hesitated to say it. "It kills the wife soon after the marriage", he said, when pressed by Chandran's father. (BA, 87-88)

**The second astrologer**

Chandran's father sent for Srouthigal, an eminent astrologer and almanac-compiler in the town. The next day there was a conference over the
question of the stars and their potency. After four hours of intricate calculations and the filling of several sheets of paper with figures, Srouthigal said that there was nothing wrong with Chandran's horoscope. D.W. Krishna Iyer was sent for, and he came.

Srouthigal looked at Krishna Iyer and said:
"These two horoscopes are well matched".
"Did you notice Mars?"
"Yes, but it is powerless now. It is now under the sway of the Sun, which looks at it from the Fifth House."
"But I doubt it, sir," Krishna Iyer said.
Srouthigal thrust the papers into Krishna Iyer's hands and asked: "How old is the boy?"
"Nearly twenty-three."
"What is twelve and eight?"
"Twenty."
"How can a boy be affected by it at twenty-three? If he had married at twenty, he might have had to marry again, but not now. Mars became powerless when the boy was twenty-three years, three months, and five days old." (E.A., 88)

The two almanacs

Chandran's mother is cocksure that the fault lies in the girl's horoscope, not in her son's. But she does not know even the rudiments of horoscopy. Only astrologers know the intricacies of calculations. It will, however, be a rather sweeping statement that no two astrologers agree. Differences in the interpretations of the calculations are bound to arise, because of the different systems of compiling and using almanacs.

That is why Krishna Iyer says:
"But I get it differently in my calculations.
The power of Mars lasts till the boy reaches twenty-five years and eight months."

24
"Which almanac do you follow?" asked Sruthigal, with a fiery look.

"The Vakya", said Krishna Iyer.

"There you are", said Sruthigal. "Why don't you base your calculations on the Drigalmanac?" "From time immemorial we have followed the Vakya, and nothing has gone wrong so far. I think it is the only true almanac."

"You are making a very strange statement", said Sruthigal, with a sneer (BA, 89)

**The killer Mars**

When he went home, Krishna Iyer took the papers with him, promising to calculate again and reconsider. He wrote to Chandran's father the next day that he worked all night, till about four in the morning. His astrologer was also with him. They had not arrived at any substantially different results. The only change they found was that the Sun's sway came in the boy's twenty-fifth year and fourth month and not in the eighth month as he had stated previously.

Any one who was not a fanatic of the Drig system would see that the potency of Mars lasts very nearly till the boy's twenty-fifth year. This was not a matter in which they could take risks. It was a question of life and death to a girl. Mars had never been known to spare. He killed.

Krishna Iyer sought the forgiveness of Chandran's father for all the trouble he might have caused him in that business. He felt unhappy to miss the opportunity of an alliance with the great house of Chandran's father. He hoped God would bless Chandran with a suitable bride.
Mother's raving reaction. The following passage brings out the strong reaction of Chandran's mother to the whole episode. She has mixed feelings of contempt and fear-contempt for Krishna Iyer's family and fear lest the rumour about Mars in Chandran's horoscope should spread and deprive him, at his age, of an opportunity of marrying another suitable girl. We cannot insist that the reaction of Chandran's mother is a component of her culture; it is a psychological reaction; but the line that divides psychology and culture, in this case, is very thin.

Chandran's mother raved: "Why can't you leave these creatures alone? A black dot on Chandran's horoscope is what we get for associating with them. If they go on spreading the rumour that Chandran has Mars, a nice chance he will have of ever getting a girl. This is what we get for trying to pick up something from the gutter. (BA, 89-90)

Mars makes Chandran broken hearted

When his mother was gone, Chandran suggested to his father:

Let us grant that Mars lasts till my twenty-fifth year. I am nearly twenty-three now. I shall be twenty-five very soon. Why don't you tell them that I will wait till my twenty-fifth year; let them also wait for two years. Let us come to an understanding with them. (BA, 90)

Chandran's father knew that it would be perfectly useless to reason things with Chandran. Hence he said he would try to meet Krishna Iyer and suggest this to him. Therefore everyday Chandran privately asked his father if he had met Krishna Iyer, and Father gave the stock reply. That Krishna Iyer could not be found either at home or in his office.
After waiting for a few days, Chandran wrote a letter to Malathi. He guarded against making it a love letter. He explained to her the difficulty in the horoscope, and asked her if she was prepared to wait for him for two years. Let her write the single word "Yes" or "No" on a piece of paper and post it to him. He enclosed a stamped address envelope for a reply.

Chandran gave the letter to his friend Mohan, saying that it must somehow be delivered to her. But when Mohan learnt that Malathi was going to marry her cousin next week he destroyed it. Chandran had fever that night. He had a high temperature and he raved. In about ten days, when he was well again, he insisted on being sent to Madras for a change. His father gave him fifty rupees, sent a wire to his brother at Madras to meet Chandran at the Egmore Station, and put Chandran in a train going to Madras.

Revenge on society, circumstances and destiny

Chandran gave the slip to his uncle's son the Madras Egmore Station and stayed at a hotel. He decided never to return to Malgudi. Everything there would remind him of Malathi. He went out of the hotel with a new-found friend whom he soon abandoned. The simplest solution was to become a sanyasi.

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. He had done with the gamble of life. He could not go on living, probably for sixty years more, with people and friends and parents, with Malathi married and gone.

What was he going to do after finding the hotel? Pay the bill, take the bag, and clear out somewhere? Why should a sanyasi carry a bag? Cast the bag and the hold-all aside, he told himself (BA, 102-103)

27
Chandran slept that night on a pavement. Next morning, he was awakened by a sweeper. He got into a tram and reached Mylapore. He saw the magnificent grey spire of Kapaleeswarar temple against the morning sky. He entered the temple, went round the holy corridor, and prostrated before every image and sanctuary that he saw. He saw a barber sitting on the steps of the temple bank. He told the barber he would give him a lot of money if he would do him a little service.

"You must buy a cheap loin-cloth and an upper covering for me, dye them in ochre, and bring them to me. After that you can shave my head, and take these clothes I am wearing and also the purse in my pocket. He held the purse open before him. The barber saw in it rupees and some notes, wages for six months, work in these days of safety razors and self shaving. (BA, 105)

The barber took Chandran to his house, unrolled a mat for him, requested him to make himself comfortable, and went out. He returned in the afternoon. He brought with him two pieces of cloth dyed in ochre. He brought also a few plantains and a green coconut. Chandran was hungry and did not refuse the coconut and fruits. He sent the barber out again for a postcard. Chandran wrote to his father:

"Reached this place safely. I am staying with a friend I met at the station, and not with uncle. I am leaving this place for ... I won't tell you where. I am going to wander about a lot. I am quite happy and cheerful. Don't fear that I am still worried about the marriage. Not at all. I am going to wander a great deal, and so don't run to the police station if you don't hear from me for a long time. You must promise not to make fuss. My respects to mother. I shall be all right." He added a postcript "Am going with some friends, old classmates, whom I met here." (BA, 106)
Chandran's dress and appearance, the shaven pate and the ochre loincloth, declared him now and henceforth to be a sanyasi - one who had renounced the world and was untouched by its joys and sorrows. He travelled several districts on foot. When he felt tired, he stopped a passing country cart and begged for a lift. No one easily refused an obligation to a sanyasi. Occasionally, he stopped even buses on the highway.

It did not matter to a sanyasi where he was going. One town was very much like another. The difference was only in the name, and why should a sanyasi learn a name? When he felt hungry, he tapped at the nearest house for food, or he begged in the bazaar street for a coconut or plantain.

If anybody invited him to sleep under a roof, he did it; if not, he slept in the open, or in a public rest-house, where were gathered scores like him. When he was hungry and found none to feed him, he usually dragged himself about in a weak state, and enjoyed the pain of hunger. His cheekbones stood out. The dust of the highway was on him. His limbs had become horny. His complexion had turned from brown to a dark tan. His looks said nothing. They did not even seem to conceal a mystery. They looked dead. His lips rarely smiled. His hair grew unhindered. In course of time, a young beard and moustaches encircled his mouth.

Chandran 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. They are perhaps dead in time, but they do not live in enmity.

But Chandran's renunciation was not of that kind. It was an alternative to suicide. He would have committed suicide 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. His renunciation was a revenge on society, circumstances, and perhaps, too, on destiny. (BA, 108)
The ascetic in Hindu culture

After about eight months of wandering, Chandran reached Koopal Village in Sainad District. It was a small village at the foot of the mountains that connected the Eastern and the Western Ghats. He drank water in the channel that fed the paddy fields. He then sat in the shade of a banyan tree. He closed his eyes; and when he opened them, he saw villagers standing around him. Somebody asked: "May we know where our master is coming from?" Chandran touched his mouth and shook his head. Somebody said he was dumb. "Can you hear us?" Chandran shook his head in assent, held up his ten fingers, touched his lips, looked heavenward, and shook his head. "He is under a vow of silence of ten years or ten months or ten days."

A numbers of villagers stood around Chandran and gaped at him. Chandran felt rather embarrassed at being the target of the stare of a crowd. He closed his eyes. This was taken by the others for meditation. An important man of the village came forward and asked: "Won't you come and reside in my poor abode?" Chandran declined the offer and spent the night under the tree.

Next day, as the villagers passed him on their way to the fields, they saluted him with joined palms. Somebody brought a few plantains and placed them before him. Somebody else offered milk. Chandran accepted the gifts, consumed them, and then rose to go. Somebody asked him: "Master, where are you going?" With a sweep of his hands, Chandran indicated a far-away destination.

At this, they begged him to stay. "Master, our village is so unlucky that few come this way. Bless us with your holly presence for some more days, we beg of you."
Chandran shook his head, but they would not let him go. "Master, your very presence will bless our village. We rarely see holy men here. We beg of you to stay for some days more."

Chandran was touched by this request. No one had valued his presence so highly till now. He was treated with consideration everywhere, but not with so much of it as we saw there. He went back to the banyan seat. There was great rejoicing when he consented to stay. Men, Women, and children followed him to the banyan tree. Soon the news spread from hamlet to hamlet and village to village that a holy man under a vow of silence for ten years had arrived, and that he spent his time in rigorous meditation under a banyan tree.

Villagers taking an ascetic's make-up at its face value

Next day, scores of visitors came from all the surrounding villages, and gathered under the banyan tree. Chandran sat in the correct pose of a man in meditation, cross-legged and with his eyes shut. It never occurred to them to doubt. They were innocent and unsophisticated in most matters. They took an ascetic's make-up at its face value.

Late in the evening, Chandran opened his eyes and saw only a few villagers standing around him. He signed to them to leave him alone. After this request was repeated twice, they left him.

Ethics of food

The devotees had brought gifts for him - milk and fruits and food. The sight of the gifts sent a spear through Chandran's heart. He felt a cad,
a fraud, and a confidence trickster. These were gifts for a counterfeit exchange. He wished he deserved their faith in him. The sight of the gift made him unhappy. He ate some fruit and drank a little milk with the greatest self-deprecation.

Sitting in the dark, Chandran subjected his soul to a remorseless vivisection. From the moment he had donned the ochre-cloth to the present, he had been living on charity, charity given in mistake, given on the face value of a counterfeit. He had been humbugging through life. He told himself that, if he were such as ascetic, he ought not to feed his miserable stomach with food which he had neither earned nor, by virtue of spiritual worth, deserved.

**Fallacious reasoning**

The following passage deals with the fake ascetic's self-introspection:

He sought an answer to the question why he had come to this degradation. 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 deserted his parents, who had spent on him all their love, care, and savings. He told himself that he had surely done this to spite his parents who probably had died of anxiety by now. This was all his return for their love and for all that they had done for him. The more he reflected on this, the greater became 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 was a will, there was a way. She had only been playing with him, the devil. Women were like that: they enjoyed torturing people. And for the sake of her memory, he had come to this. He railed against that memory, against love. There was no such thing; a foolish literary notion. If
people didn't read stories, they wouldn't know there was such a thing as love. It was a scorching madness. There was no such thing. And driven by a non-existent thing, he had become a deserter and a counterfeit. (BA, 111-112)

This self-analysis of Chandran is a preparation for discarding his ochre-cloth and return to the comfort and security his parents. It is tainted with fallacious reasoning. Chandran seems to refer to Malathi as if she knew him all along, when the letter he gave to his friend Mohan was never delivered to her. There is no evidence in the novel that she had seen him and identified him as Chandran. At the bank of the river Sarayu, she never knew who Chandran was. He never introduced himself to her. As for love, Malathi did not know that she was loved by a man not known to her and that his name was Chandran. Chandran himself calls his one-sided love for Malathi "a silly infatuation." Therefore the statement "the greater became his anger against Malathi" is rendered meaningless. Chandran behaves like Hamlet who, keeping in mind the solitary instance of his mother, made the untenable generalisation: "Frailty, Thy name is woman." From the single conjectural example of Malathi, Chandran comes to the baseless conclusion that "women ... enjoyed torturing people," and that there was no such thing as love.

The end of the "sanyasi " interregnum

Chandran borrows money from a postmaster and sends a telegram to his father to send him twenty-five rupees. He comes out of the bathroom dressed in the postmaster's dhoti and shirt. He ties his sanyasi robes into a bundle and flings it over the wall into the lane. His father sends him fifty rupees and he returns to Malgudi. He begins to work for a local paper The Daily Messenger and agrees to marry Sushila, daughter of Jayaram Iyer, a leading lawyer of Talapur.
Chandran's mother is a devout Hindu lady. She dominates the house, including Chandran's father. When his new-found friend in a Madras Hotel, Kailas, asks him to have "a little port or something," Chandran replies:

"Excuse me. I made a vow never to touch alcohol in my life, before mother."

This affected Kailas profoundly. He remained solemn for a moment and said: "Then don't. Mother is a sacred object. It is a commodity whose value we don't realise as long as it is with us. One must lose it to know what a precious possession it is. If I had my mother, I should have studied in a college and became a respectable person. You wouldn't find me here." (BA, 98-99)

While writing a postcard to his father from Mylapore, Chandran does not forget to convey his respects to his mother. On his return home, his mother shows great concern for him. She says:

Your are looking like a corpse. How you bones stick out: What sunken cheeks; What were you at all these days?

(BA, 115)

During Chandran's long absence from home, she was greatly worried. Father admits:

She thought something terrible happened to you. Every morning she troubled me to go and inform the police. (BA, 115)

When Chandran went to his room, he found everything as he had left it. The books that had been kept on the table were there; the cot in the same position, the bookshelf in the same old place, his old grey coat on the same hook on the coat stand; the table near the window with
even the writing pad in the same position. There was not a speck of dust on anything, nor a single spider’s web. In fact, the room and all the objects in it were tidier than they had ever been. The sight of things spick and span exited him. Everything exited him now. He ran to his mother and asked panting:

"Mother, how is it everything is so neat in my room?"

Father replied: "She swept and cleaned it with great care every day".

"Why did you take so much trouble, Mother?"

She became red and was embarrassed. "What better business did I have?"

"How did you manage to keep Seenu out of my room, Mother?"

"Mother used to lock up the room, and never left it open even for an hour," Seenu replied. (BA, 116-117)

When Chandran expressed his desire to go to England for higher studies, his mother was twisting small cotton bits into wicks for the lamps in God's room. She said: "Why should he go to England?" It is she who fixes Chandran's marriage with Sushila in the correct traditional manner.

**Summing up**

Having defined the concepts concerning our study, we have attempted to illustrate the nature, function and values of cultural awareness from Narayan's *The Bachelor of Arts*. We have shown components of culture which are several and varied, such as (1) women are often more religious-minded than men, (2) the need for flowers in puja, (3) how Chandran's mother fears the curse of a sanyasi, even though he steals flowers from her garden, might fall on the family, (4) how puja is puja even
though flowers for the deities may be stolen ones, (5) how conservative families believe in early marriage of their daughters, (6) how Chandran connects love and God, (7) how he feels his prayers are answer, (8) what the preliminaries of marriage are, (9) age of the girl at marriage, (10) dowry and marriage expenses, (11) horoscope and omens, (12) inference from the mark of auspiciousness, (13) the consciousness of status and prestige, (14) the role of horoscopy in Hindu culture, (15) how marriage does not take place when the stars in the boy's and girl's horoscopes do not agree, (16) how divergent results emerge in calculations made according to different almanacs, (17) the position a sanyasi holds in Hindu culture, (18) how unsophisticated rustics take a sanyasi's make-up at its face value, (19) what the ethics of food are, and (20) what the status and role of the mother in Hindu culture is.
CHAPTER - I: REFERENCES

