The Outlook: Journal of English Studies
[A Peer-Reviewed, Open Access Journal; Indexed in NepJOL]
p-ISSN: 2565-4748; e-ISSN: 2773-8124; JPPS Star-Ranked Journal
Published by Department of English, Prithvi Narayan Campus
Tribhuvan University, Pokhara, Nepal
http://ejournals.pncampus.edu.np/ejournals/outlook/

Research Article

Cultural Nativism in R.K. Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets*

Arun Singh, PhD
Department of English, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur, India

Article History: *Submitted 20 April 2025; Reviewed 8 May 2025; Revised: 14 May 2025*
Corresponding Author: *Arun Singh;* **Email:** *arunsinghfauzdar@gmail.com*
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.3126/ojes.v16i1.81540*

Abstract

Indian society has faced an inexorable crisis of the appropriation and rejection of the Western culture in the postcolonial phase. During the immediate decades in the wake of Independence, notions of nativism began to surface in the contemporary academic discourses and literary writings and challenged the cultural hegemony of the West. *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967) by R. K. Narayan is a thorough exercise in the concept of cultural nativism, which in its raw form constantly resists the cultural and capitalist hegemony of the West by virtue of its protagonist, Jagan. Jagan derives his ideas of nativism, though sometimes idiosyncratic, from the Hindu scriptures and his Gandhian philosophy. With these ideas, he poses a challenge to the manipulative hegemony, which his son Mali brings to his house after returning from America. The paper seeks to explore the idea of cultural nativism in Narayan's novel and establish that in the name cultural plurality, the West harnesses and manipulates the indigenous cultures and maintains the power-structure through its capitalist ventures.

Keywords: Cultural nativism, cultural hegemony, postcoloniality, Gandhian philosophy

Introduction

During the freedom struggle or in the wake of the Independence, the postcolonial Indian society was bound to face an intractable crisis of conforming to its native cultural heritage/traditions or resorting to the hegemonic clout of the Western culture. The political sphere was also divided on such lines of thought. Nevertheless, a middle path made its sway over the contemporary Indian society: assimilationist culture of hybrid nature, harnessed by the West. Rajee Seth, a well-known Hindi writer, argues,

> . . . that there was no escape from this tragedy. This was the predicament of a country that remained a colony for two hundred years. But more unfortunate than this is the fact that we not only lost the bases of our language and culture but also internalised the propagated idea of "us" and "them". It is precisely at this point that the mentality of having a desire to become "them" or anything other than "us" gains ground. Consequently, mental slavery flourishes, which is even more frightening than the territorial hold. (105)

The famous Indian literary critic, G.N. Devy notes three traditions of knowledge system in India during the British rule in

India: 'desi' (native, regional or peripheral), 'marga' (mainstream or elite) and 'videsi' (European or foreign). He observes that "During the colonial period the *marga* [sic] and the *videsi* [sic] aspects of India's cultural personality came into a greater prominence and the *desi* [sic] aspect remained largely neglected" (10-11). Therefore, the native culture remained marginalized during the British rule.

This trajectory led to "the loss of cultural memory" (Devy 12) in India. Sri Aurobindo claims in his essay "Indian Culture and External Influence" that a certain amount of Western influence is unavoidable; even Indian culture cannot prosper in "separative aloofness" (50), but a "a selective assimilation, subordination and transformation of external elements" (50) is the imperative and in this process the originality and uniqueness of Indian culture must be maintained (46). Sudhir Kumar also expresses a veritable view on this issue:

> If we can better understand and address ourselves to the complexities of the present day world with the help of some of the Western theories, we would rather assimilate them into our own tradition of thinking (or world-view). What is more important here is to know or understand people and their problems in order to reconstruct a better India and a better world ─ irrespective of the use of nativistic/nationalistic or even internationalist (Western) theory. But the continued enslavement to the means of understanding (i.e. our use of Western theory) even after reaching the desired end is harmful. (123)

Gauri Viswanathan argues that the introduction of English education and its literary study in India was also not a simple, benign venture; it was ". . . a mission that in the long run served to strengthen Western cultural hegemony in enormously complex ways" (2). Revealing a momentous contrast she foregrounds: "As early as the 1820s, when the classical curriculum still reigned supreme in England despite the strenuous efforts of some concerned critics to loosen its hold, English as the study of culture and not simply the study of language had already found a secure place in the British Indian curriculum" (3). Krishna Sen also emphasises that the intrusion of English language in India gave rise to "a new social group, the Indian middle class, whose very identity is intertwined with the worldview implicated in its knowledge of English" (115). In this way, the English language became as part of everyday life for many Indians.

Thus, European culture and English language, both congregated, were rendered as a disruptive and dismantling legacy by the British when they left India and they emerged as a powerful force to relegate the thought of cultural nativism to the margins. The cultural consciousness which builds on the age-old knowledge system was also sidelined and denigrated by the secularist methods of cultural critique. Influenced by Gandhian philosophy, R. K. Narayan seeks to revive this cultural consciousness of India in his writings. He possesses a unique sense of India, which manifests itself in his novel, *The Vendor of Sweets*.

The Concept of Cultural Nativism: An Approach

The term 'cultural nativism' refers to one's root/indigenous culture, which is inextricably linked with one's identity or existence. In postcolonial studies, the concept of cultural nativism is often misrepresented or relegated in the process of foregrounding the Western/secular/global idea of culture, as cultural nativism is inexorably related to the sacred, religious tradition, or belief-system of a native culture. The Western hegemony has its bearing even on the contemporary Indian theorists. Revealing the fissures in the discourse of cultural nativism Sudhir Kumar emphatically argues that Indian intellectuals fail to address this issue in the enterprise

of "blindly . . . aping the West" (117). He proposes: "In order to decolonize the Indian mind, it is necessary to harmoniously combine the two signifiers ─ the national and the native. The native should no longer connote, in a pejorative sense, the regional which is, again, pitted against the national" (118). As India is a culturally unified nation, the cultural consciousness which seeps through its vast geographical structure cannot be disrupted by divisive discourses.

The cultural nativism in India underscores its native value system, which pivots on the ancient culture exiting from Vedic times. This value system has transformed and evolved innumerable times in history; it has adopted, appropriated, and assimilated foreign elements and internalised them into its inclusive apparatus, but it seeks to maintain its originality. Cultural nativism in India does not defy assimilation, but it does not pander to the undue influence of the Western/hegemonic culture. And moreover, it is not imperious or hegemonic in its basic nature; instead it subsists in the tenor of being "swarat" (Aurobindo 49). It aims to inculcate the positive aspects of different thought systems, but does not let the basic premises to be replaced, overpowered or transformed.

Apart from criticizing the Western attitudes, Cultural nativism also defies secularist definitions and interventions in India. As Nirmal Verma notes it that in the decades after the Independence, Indian masses were forced to be severed from the social system, which lies at the center of its civilization and a secularist system was imposed on them, where their own "dharmik" integrity was relegated to the margin (90-91). Verma points here towards the perpetuating secular system of the West, which sought to sunder the Indians from their native culture and civilization. Gandhi upholds the nativism of rural India inherited from the ancient Indian civilization and reviles the materialistic, immoral and godless (secularist) aspect of the Western culture in his famous book *Hind Swaraj* (91). Thus, it can be stated that cultural nativists of India are conscious of the probable attacks and evils of the West.

Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets*: Critical Analysis

A Story of Cultural Assertion

Narayan's novel *The Vendor of Sweets*, first published in 1967, is a thorough exercise in the concept of cultural nativism, which in its raw form constantly resists the cultural and capitalist hegemony of the West by virtue of its protagonist, Jagan. Jagan's notion of nativism (desivad) partly inheres in the philosophy manifested in Hindu scriptures like *Bhagavad Gita*. Narayan himself had a strong faith in the "cultural unity" (Rao 82) of India which emanates from the sacred books. Nevertheless, Jagan is an invariable victim of the writer's irony for his idiosyncratic propensity. He is not so much concerned about his external appearance, but about his health. He uses as well as suggests native herbs, plants and products in order to avoid European things and in his view ". . . to view oneself daily in a mirror was an intolerable European habit" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 2). The minimal use of cloths and the use of the leather of dead animals for footwear conform to his Gandhian idealism. Making his footwear at home is just an effort to challenge the colonial apparatus of trade in India. Jagan does not underpin a middle path of cultural assimilation in various matters where his nativism is at risk. He is rigorously at loggerheads with the Western pattern of life, no matter how much successful on this path he is. Abnegation of sugar, salt and rice is also a part of his strategy to lead a healthy life. He stresses the importance of margosa (neem) tree in the daily routine of life. In food he takes boiled vegetables and grains for a healthy routine; spins cotton for his clothing. He believes: "Gandhi has prescribed spinning not only for the economic ills of the country,

but also for any deep agitation of the mind" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 97). He believes that his wife could have been saved and recuperated from the disease of brain tumour with a "nature-cure" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 26). His "immense faith in the properties of margosa" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 12) comes from tradition ─ his belief in the sacred Hindu narratives. Such nativism affords him satisfaction and self-reliance. He feels beholden to his father for planting a margosa seedling in his (father's) time.

The wooden chair which Jagan sits on had been made by his father for some Englishman, Mr. Noble. The "carnivalesque" (Bakhtin) treatment of the photograph of the Englishman by the children of the house insinuates a certain undermining of the colonial authority and restoration of the nativist sacred. The dominant image of the colonial power is challenged and treated ridiculously by Narayan by virtue of the children frolicking and gambolling with the photograph, as if they are mischievous actors on stage, mocking some imperious authority:

> . . . the children played with it for a while, and then substituted in its glassed frame the picture of a god and hung it up, while the photograph in the bare mount was tossed about as the children gazed on Mr Noble's side whiskers and giggled all the afternoon. They fanned themselves with it, too, when the summer became too hot; finally it disappeared back to the loft amidst old account books and other obscure family junk. (*The Vendor of Sweets* 5)

Involved in his sweet-vending business Jagan is often caught by a dilemma between a life of renunciation and the attachment for his son, property and savings. After the death of his wife, he becomes a little obsessed with his son, Mali. This obsession is not aimed at bringing about any negative repercussions. Jagan wishes to launch Mali on a nativist path of life, but Mali turns out to be the contrary. The father holds a Gandhian outlook about the native forms of business, which have been disrupted by the Western capitalism and have augmented poverty in India. He thinks over "the problem of national improvement" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 8) by paying his attention to the vagrant sitting on the culvert. The collapse of the native business of dining leaves is one of the reasons behind unemployment in India according to Jagan.

Jagan's nativism is a cultural asset with which he can confront the hegemonic aspects of neo-imperialist culture. Though in Narayan's hand he occasionally becomes a risible entity, with his raw knowledge of native traditions Jagan strongly challenges the imposed sense of cultural inferiority. The patina of Narayan's comic irony sometimes hides and relegates Jagan's nativism, but Mali's repugnance for the native things foregrounds it. S. C. Harrex posits:

> In general, Narayan's observations of the Indian scene blend conviction with detachment, the former deriving from his personal affinity with the Hindu tradition and its values and the latter from his philosophical attitudes, whimsical irony, and comic technique. It is especially evident in his juxtaposition of 'traditional' Eastern-spiritual values with 'modern' Western-rational values. His commentaries and novels often demonstrate that social disruptions and excessive involvements may be best countered by the *yoga* discipline of withdrawal, renunciation, and non-attachment. (72)

The self-dependence of the obdurate father becomes loathsome to the son, who conforms to the Western standards of life. Mali does not like his father cooking food for him, and Jagan's penchant for Gandhian ideals creates a rift between them. Jagan narrates "his usual theories of nutrition" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 16), emphasizes native herbs and lifestyle for good health. Mali's ideological aversion

is roused, when he feels exasperated with his father's health tips. Jagan is genuinely concerned about Mali's health, education and career, but his nativist approach proves to be a pricking needle to Mali.

Ideational Conflict

Jagan expects Mali to have a decolonising mindset about education and life. The cousin, a confidant of Jagan, accuses the "contemporary educational methods" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 18) for Mali's condition, although the author passes it in irony. Being a 'writer', for Jagan, means ". . . a clerk ─ an Anglo-Indian, colonial term from the days when Macaulay had devised a system of education to provide a constant supply of clerical staff for the East India company" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 19). Jagan feels convinced when he comes to clear his misunderstanding that Mali's purpose is to become a writer, not a clerk in the neo-colonial system.

Mali is a character with postmodern leanings; he does not respect traditional and sacred knowledge and Jagan is a votary of the Hindu sacred; he subverts the Western knowledge system. Mali gets his course books thrown into the fire of a restaurant kitchen, but for Jagan, books are "a form of Goddess Saraswathi" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 22). The cousin looks into the ideological aspect of the books which Jagan is not aware of. He considers Mali's step to be congruent, for the books have been prescribed on the pattern of colonial system. Narayan seems here to point to the perpetuation of the education system stipulated by T. B. Macaulay. The cousin's statement also reveals the condition of education in post-independence India ─ the perpetuation of colonial legacy. He questions Jagan's theory of "simple living and high thinking" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 29) by arguing why Jagan runs a business and accumulates money. Jagan responds that it "grows naturally" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 29) and by performing this duty he supports his employees financially. Nevertheless, by maintaining the purity of his sweets he corroborates the ethics of nativism.

Jagan cherishes an ambition to mould Mali's future in a nativist way. He would narrate *Panchatantra* stories to Mali in his childhood. He considers that if Mali wants to become a writer, he should become one like Kalidasa and serve his nation and its tradition. But Mali does not indulge himself in his father's ambitions. He plans to leave his higher education incomplete and go to America for becoming a writer. He hates Jagan's ideas and considers India to be a retrogressive country. When Jagan learns about his plan for the first time about going to America, it comes as a shock to him. Writing a book in America or learning to write in America is quite an outlandish thing to Jagan.

Living in one's own cultural space is the sine qua non for a writer. A writer's allegiance must be first to his own culture in Jagan's notion. In his essay "India and America", Narayan notes the basic cultural difference between American and Indian ways of life. He manifests that Indians living in America find it impossible to fully adapt to the American culture. The feeling of alienation and dislocation constantly pains them. Narayan expresses his conviction:

> Despite all the deficiencies, irritations, lack of material comforts and amenities, and general confusions, Indian life builds inner strength. It is through subtle, inexplicable influences, through religion, family ties and human relationships in general ─ let us call them psychological "inputs", to use a modern term ─ which cumulatively sustain and lend variety and richness to existence. ("India and America" 239)

Most of the studies on this novel categorise it as celebrating the notion of postcolonial hybridity. Ashok Bery argues that it can ". . . be seen as raising questions about ideas

of a pure Hinduism" (51). But beneath the surface of irony, at times Narayan is a strong advocate of his protagonist. Jagan's essentialism about his native culture is aimed at shielding his son from the neo-imperialist impact of the Western culture, as the elasticity and porousness of cultures put his own culture at stake. His cultural consciousness has developed from the fact that the Western culture harnesses the cultures of the East in the name of cultural plurality. V. S. Naipaul claims that Narayan's fictional world and Jagan's world are both "damaged by the intrusion of alien elements" (39). Nilufer E. Bharucha notes the subversive tendency in Narayan's fiction where native elements are deployed as tools of postcolonial resistance (133). Jagan's cultural nativism aims at shielding the elements bestowed upon him by his tradition. As an ardent follower of Gandhi, he is averse to European industrialization and immorality.

Jagan thinks that to learn storytelling Mali should visit a village granny; to revive his/her cultural consciousness a writer has to visit his/her cultural roots. Elders would narrate stories based on their cultural consciousness, folk traditions and history. This legacy of the indigenous cultural tradition would be led further by the following generations. Jagan considers that Mali should look for his cultural moorings, where a vast store of stories exists. He postulates that Valmiki did not go to America or Germany to write his work *Ramayana*; if Mali aims to become a writer, he should write in his own language, being rooted in his native culture. Pico Iyer writes about Narayan's native appropriation of the English language: "Although his native language was Tamil (as was his characters'), he writes in an English that puts you instantly within the rickety stalls and aromatic streets of almost anywhere in India today" (XI). Even Narayan himself developed a nativised version of the English language ─ Indian English. In his essay "A Literary Alchemy," he writes:

> Passing from literature to language, "Indian English" is often mentioned with some amount of contempt and patronage, but is a legitimate development and needs no apology. We have fostered the language for over a century and we are entitled to bring it in line with our own habits of thought and idiom. Americans have adapted the English language to suit their native mood and speech without feeling apologetic, and have achieved directness and unambiguity in expression. (197)

Though Jagan has limited knowledge about the Hindu scriptures, he is deeply anchored is his native mores and culture. He is often nostalgic about "the light and laughter" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 142) of the joint family. His strong faith in the institutions of family and marriage does not chime in with the traditions of the West, which affect Mali's propensity. The sense of cultural difference emanates from Jagan's understanding of the cultural intrusion of the West. His son's disregard for the Indian institution of marriage and the superficial treatment of Grace pains him. If a couple is living together without being married, it has "evil radiations" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 112) in Jagan's view.

Jagan deems it to be practically unobjectionable if Mali steals money from his coffers for fulfilling his ambition of becoming a writer and abandons his college for this purpose. In his reasonable view it is good to have a desire to become "self-reliant" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 36). If the son wants to be dressed in the American way, as far as his nativism is intact, the father does not object. He becomes obsessed with Mali's visit to America, because it is his son who has gone there to become a writer; it is a matter of pride to the father. The fatherly attachment for the son forces Jagan to be inquisitive about the American landscape and people

and he begins to appreciate America. But this is possible until his nativism is not at risk. When Mali conveys it to him that he has started eating beef after three years of living in America and that it would get rid of "the problem of useless cattle" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 42) if people start eating it in India, it triggers Jagan's anger and strikes his idea of cultural nativism. Eating beef is an unpardonable sin for the father. His Hindu faith strictly prohibits eating beef; even killing a cow is quite unthinkable to him. Jagan does not accept such contamination of his son's thought-process.

Mali's return to India with a foreign wife (as claimed by Mali half-heartedly) becomes the next big challenge to his father. He acquires a certain kind of aloofness in his disposition. "He carried himself like a celebrity avoiding the attention of the rabble" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 47). This renders his father more anxious and chagrined. Mali's Americanised behaviour augments the distance between them. Jagan begins to avoid the people asking him about Mali and his supposed wife, Grace, as it raises question on his notion of nativism. He cannot accept an Indian of his class and culture marrying a foreign girl belonging to some alien culture and origin, as he impugns it might contaminate his own family. Though, when he finds Grace to be convivial and adjusting to the ambience of the house, he gradually approves of her as his daughter-in-law. Her presence in the house makes him happy and sanguine. Jagan asks about her origin and whereabouts to strengthen the relational bonding. He also accepts the changes in the lifestyle of the contemporary youth. He understands the concern that Mali should have his own vehicle for speeding up his work. He tells the cousin with affection: ". . . these are days of speed" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 55). To a reasonable extent, Jagan accepts European influence on Mali, which is vital for his son's growth; he also plans to support Mali financially.

Mali's project of story-writing machine is absolutely a bizarre experience, "something from another planet" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 60), for Jagan. The father is well aware of the fact that, in a country like India, where there has been a rich tradition of oral narratives, artificial story-telling is just a charade. But Mali claims that India is "a little backward" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 60) in the creation of stories. He argues that "Except for Ramayana and Mahabharata, those old stories, there is no modern writing" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 60) in India. With American collaboration he wants to make this artificial story-writing a lucrative business in India. For Jagan, story-writing is not any artificial thing; it is created by writers to give something beneficial to society, to preserve the cultural wealth bequeathed by the ancestors. P.S. Chauhan remarks pertinently about Narayan in this context: "Randomly to go on producing words without a human purpose or a live conscience was, for Narayan, an absurd human project, and a proper butt for ridicule" (51). Jagan appertains to the oral tradition of writing in India from ancient times, as how the epics were composed and perpetually recited ". . . and the great books lived thus from generation to generation" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 61). Mali thinks about culture with a capitalist mindset, contrary to the nativist view of his father. He claims: "Today we have to compete with advanced countries not only in economics and industry, but also in culture" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 61). Jagan is happy with the development of Mali's personality "after years of sullen silence" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 61), but his regressive attitude to his own culture, and civilization disappoints Jagan. Mali's selfishness ─ emerging from his allegiance to the Western capitalism ─ also adds to Jagan's repugnance.

Jagan is impressed by Chinna Dorai,

the bearded man, because the man whets his curiosity in gods, temples and the native sculpture. The bearded man's description of the life-accounts of his guru, Peria Dorai appeals Jagan. It induces him to think about renunciation of attachment to his belongings and "to recognize unsought wisdom" (Argyle 42). The enigmatic experience with Chinna Dorai intrigues Jagan and it opens up new avenues for understanding his life by widening the gamut of his thinking "in the traditional codes of existence" (Mukhopadhyay 84). The man seeks to expose the spiritual side of Jagan's personality, his "real being, which is not mere bone and meat" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 91). Jagan is often embattled by a dilemma about his son's career and his feelings of renunciation. However, he wants to divest himself of it. He talks to Chinna Dorai about 'vanaprastha ashram' (moving towards the forest) prescribed in the ancient Hindu way of life: "'It would be the most accredited procedure according to our scriptures─ husband and wife must vanish into the forest at some stage in their lives, leaving the affairs of the world to younger people'" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 96). The concern about Mali's life has entangled him into the morass of materialistic attachment, but subsequent to Mali's arrest he seeks to procure spiritual solace which his Hindu way of life can afford him. In his review of the novel, William Walsh remarks: "Jagan's renunciation of the world . . . is of a piece with the Indian tradition and the radical disposition of his own character in so far as it is a reflection of that tradition. . . . What is necessary to make this Jagan into the world-renouncing Jagan is supplied by the Indian religious tradition" (122). Studying the character of Jagan in a positive light, Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay remarks that ". . . it can be affirmed that Jagan's retreat from society is no schizophrenic withdrawal and instead, with his own armour of odeology (here Gandhism), Jagan plumbs the depth of his own experiences and in the process re-discovers his native cultural roots in a society of Post-Independence socio-cultural confusions" (86-87). Jagan finds solution to his predicament in his civilizational roots. By virtue of renunciation he comes to realize that he is not bound to a lifelong responsibility of his son; he is only bound to his duty as a father.

The Nativist Hindu Way of Life

Jagan becomes disenchanted with his corporeal existence. The nativist institutions seem to crumble into diversionary ideas of the West. Nevertheless, Jagan does not escape from his familial and social responsibilities. He duly carries out the responsibility of a father by giving a cheque to the cousin for arranging Mali's bail; he also considers it his duty to help Grace in arranging her tickets ". . . if she ever wants to go back to her country" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 151). David W. Atkinson observes the gravity of his character:

> The end of *The Vendor of Sweets* is purposefully enigmatic, as Jagan, even while committing himself to the highest spiritual ideal, remembers to take his chequebook with him. There is suggested, as Narayan does in so many other places, that Jagan's journey is not really over and that he has not completely put aside human needs and desires. The novel ends with Mali in jail, and, while Jagan leaves instructions with his cousin as to how to handle the situation, the suggestion is that Jagan may well be back to handle it himself. (25)

The house which looked vital and congenial to him is felt to be quite unpleasant and dismal when he leaves it. He feels that the 'house' cannot become a 'home' unless Mali and Grace get married. Narayan thoughtfully narrates:

> Puzzling over things was enervating. Reading a sense into Mali's actions was fatiguing like the attempt to spell out a message in a half-familiar script. He

> had no need to learn anything more. No more unraveling of conundrums just as there was not going to be any more feast or music in that shuttered house before him. . . . If one had to shake off things, one did it unmistakably, completely, without leaving any loophole or a path back. (*The Vendor of Sweets* 143)

Jagan is a peace-loving man, though obsessive, who does not aim for a lavish lifestyle and his son, Mali prefers a life of fast pace, of an American style. To an extent, Jagan is not averse to it, but excess is not acceptable to him. Mali's aloofness in his own house disconcerts his father, as Jagan possesses an inherent sociability in his nature. Mali's inordinately formal and outlandish conduct after returning from America stupefies the father. Not having a telephone in the house is "awkward and backward" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 57) in Mali's view. His motto is to earn the highest profit in the business of story-writing machines. Mali is trained in America to become a capitalist in India, but Jagan runs his sweet-making business without being an exploitative capitalist.

Jagan is not devoid of common human failings and ideational orthodoxies, but he has sufficient scope for inculcating liberal standards of life in Mali's case. He also tries philanthropy in his business, but fails due to the opposition of some other sweet-making businessmen and his own lack of experience. He is not in favour of cornering stock of things in business for selfish gains. The "idea of cheating customers" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 63) is abhorrent and immoral to him. If a customer pays the full price of the sweet, he must get the genuine stuff and taste. Though his decision of selling the sweets at a reduced price is sentimental and impractical, but his intention behind it is quite genuine and selfless. He privileges the "sense of service" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 54) over making undue profits in business. He does not invest in Mali's project because it is of no significance to his native culture. He knows that sooner or later Americans are going to co-opt and harness Mali and use his business to their own profit. In his view, this conspiracy has been planned very astutely by the American associates to manipulate Mali into such a capitalist venture. The discourse of this plan manifested "the cultural shortcomings of the country [India]" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 67) and proposed to "lift the country out of its rut" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 67). Jagan deals with this hegemonic conspiracy in the Gandhian method of "non-violent non-cooperation" (Narayan, *The Vendor of Sweets* 68). He strongly holds that Mali can never succeed in his enterprise by neglecting his native way of life and compromising his cultural identity. As a matter of fact, Mali turns out to be a failure in his career due to his immaturity, aloofness and conforming to "a bastard or twy-natured culture" (Aurobindo 44). His Westernised attitude leads him nowhere; this attitude estranges him from his own cultural consciousness.

By means of his protagonist, Narayan emphasises the nativist Hindu way of life, which must not be subdued and harnessed by the Western hegemony. He questions and subverts the imperious and manipulative facets the Western culture, but he does not hesitate in imparting that its genuine and positive aspects can easily be assimilated into the native way of life. Through Jagan, Narayan also points out the drawbacks of the native culture. The native culture is, undoubtedly, not immaculate in Narayan's perspective, but this does not imply that the Western culture is superior to it and can substitute it.

Conclusion

To sum up, a cultural nativist glance into the slightly eccentric tenor of the protagonist defies the secularist and Eurocentric interpretations of the novel. Jagan, a staunch votary of the native Hindu tradition cherishes ambitions for his son's progress

in accordance with the native way of life, but the Westernized Mali is intractably ensnared by the American culture and flouts his father's ideas. Mali's project of story writing machine and his relationship with Grace both fail due to his neglect of the native culture and its deeply rooted ethos. Jagan sets a limit for cultural appropriation and hybridization; being a Gandhian he does not accept the undue interference of the Western culture in his life. His cultural nativism brings him peace and steadiness at a stage where he is grabbed by an excessive obsession with Mali. He cleanses himself of this parental obsession and moves forward on the path of human salvation through renunciation.

Works Cited

Argyle, Barry. "Narayan's The Sweet-Vendor." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1972, pp. 35-44. *Sage Journals*, http://doi.org/10.1177/002198947200700106. Accessed 18 Jan. 2024.

Atkinson, David W. "Spiritual Growth in the Fiction of R. K. Narayan: Explications of the doctrines of dharma and karma." *Journal of South Asian Literature*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1987, pp. 16-27. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40872957. Accessed 12 May 2024.

Aurobindo, Sri. *The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1997.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, 1984.

Bery, Ashok. "Purity, Hybridity and Identity: R. K. Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets*." *World Literature Written in English*, vol. 35, no. 1, 1996, pp. 51-62. *Taylor and Francis Online*, http://dx.doi.org./10.1080/17449859608589235. Accessed 15 May 2023.

Bharucha, Nilufer E. "Colonial Enclosures and Autonomous Spaces: R.K. Narayan's Malgudi." *South Asian Review*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2002, pp. 129-153. *Taylor and Francis Online*, https://doi.org/10.1080/02759527.2002.11932223. Accessed 17 June 2024.

Chauhan, P.S. "Talkative Man and the Semiotics of Malgudi Discourse." *South Asian Review*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2002, pp. 49-69. *Taylor and Francis Online*, http://doi.org/10.1080/02759527.2002.11932228. Accessed 17 June 2024.

Devy, G.N. "*Desivad*: Keynote Address." *Nativism: Essays in Criticism*, edited by Makarand Paranjape, Sahitya Akademi, 1997, pp. 5-13.

Gandhi, M. K. *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. Revised ed. Navajivan Press, 1938.

Harrex, S.C. "R. K. Narayan: Some Miscellaneous Writings." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1978, pp. 64-76. *Sage Journals*, https://doi.org/10.1177/002198947801300107. Accessed 13 March 2024.

Iyer, Pico. "Introduction: Midnight's Uncle." *The Vendor of Sweets*, by R. K. Narayan, Penguin Books India, 2010, pp. v-xvii.

Kumar, Sudhir. "Nation versus Nativism." *Nativism: Essays in Criticism*, edited by Makarand Paranjape, Sahitya Akademi, 1997, pp. 113-128.

Mukhopadhyay, Arun Kumar. "R.K. Narayan's *The Vendor of Sweets*: Problematising the Nation." *Indian English Fiction: A Reader*, edited by Sarbojit Biswas, Books Way, 2009, pp. 81-88.

Naipaul, V. S. *India: A Wounded Civilization*. Penguin, 1979.

Narayan, R. K. *The Vendor of Sweets*. 1967. Penguin Books India, 2010.

---. "A Literary Alchemy." *A Writer's Nightmare: Selected Essays 1958-1988*, Penguin Books India, 1988, pp. 196-198.

---. "India and America." *A Writer's*

Nightmare: Selected Essays 1958-1988, Penguin Books India, 1988, pp. 233-240.

Rao, V. Panduranga. "Tea with R. K. Narayan." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1971, pp. 79-83. *Sage Journals*, https://doi.org/10.1177/002198947100600109. Accessed 13 March 2024.

Sen, Krishna. "Post-colonialism, Globalism, Nativism: Reinventing English in a Post-Colonial Space." *Identity in Crossroad Civilisations*. Edited by Erich Kolig et al., Amsterdam University Press, 2009. Ethnicity, Nationalism and Globalism in Asia. pp. 115-132.

Seth, Rajee. "Nativism: An Area of Introspection." Translated by Sudhir Kumar. *Nativism: Essays in Criticism*, edited by Makarand Paranjape, Sahitya Akademi, 1997, pp. 102-112.

Verma, Nirmal. *Aadi, Ant aur Aarambh* [*Beginning, End and Beginning*], Rajkamal Paperbacks, 2024.

Viswanathan, Gauri. Introduction. *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*, by Gauri Viswanathan, OUP, 1998, pp. 1-22.

Walsh, William. "The Spiritual and the Practical." Review of *The Sweet-Vendor*, by R. K. Narayan. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 3, no. 1, March 1968, http://doi.org/10.1177/002198947000500115. Accessed 16 Sept. 2024.