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# The Politics of Representations:

‘Self-making’ and ‘Othering’ in Rudyard Kipling and R. K. Narayan

Md. Mamunur Rahman

## 1. Introduction

This paper aims to undertake a comparative study between Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) and R. K. Narayan (1906-2001) with a view to tracing their respective colonial and postcolonial perspectives in their attempt to represent the ‘self’ as against the ‘other’ in the context of the Indian subcontinent. Kipling is generally regarded as a signature colonial writer, whose poetry and novels aptly provide the imaginative backing for the British Empire, commenting, prophesying and encouraging colonial territorial expansion and consolidation. Kipling’s writing career kicked off during the Victorian period of high imperialism. However, as the years rolled on to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, postcolonial writers started to oppose the colonial hegemonic ideology, offering instead an alternative nationalist vision for the colony. R. K. Narayan, whose pre-independence novels are focused on the social and political upheavals in India generated by more than a hundred years’ colonial rule, effectively challenges the colonial discourse of ‘the White Man’s burden’. His novels reverse the colonial subjectivity and agency in favor of the colonized. Therefore, a study of the select works of Rudyard Kipling and R. K. Narayan is likely to deliver a fresh understanding of the operation of the colonial discourse which is later subverted by the postcolonial writers. For discussion, this paper opts for Kipling’s *Kim* and R. K. Narayan’s *Swami and the Friends* and *The Bachelor of Arts*.

Kipling forwarded the idea of ‘the White Man’s burden’ as the nucleus of the British colonial project. In doing so, he appears to conform to the colonial discourse that validated Empire-building. Edward Said shows how the British colonizers, in their attempt to legitimize imperial rule, took recourse to the long-established Western notion about the Orient. ‘Orientalism’, to Said, is the discourse, the “corporate institute” which constituted the Orient in the consciousness of the West “by making statement about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it”, it is “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient”.<sup>1</sup> For centuries, the West, fed by generations of writers and scholars, had defined the Orient as their inferior other, a trend which had confirmed the Western superiority over the East.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward W Said. *Orientalism* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) p. 3.

The idea of civilizing the natives was integral to the rise and growth of the British Empire in the Indian subcontinent. For instance, Thomas Babington Macaulay, an influential member of the British colonial government in India, considered the Indians as “a race debased by three thousand years of despotism and priest-craft and sunk in slavery and superstition.”<sup>2</sup> Even the liberal philosophers like James Mill and John Stuart Mill believed in the superiority of the West and supported enlightened imperialism as the system of government in colonial India. There were many British settlers and rulers who were radicals at home and were attracted by India’s glorious past, yet they advocated an authoritarian rule for India.<sup>3</sup> The missionaries seemed to possess the most unfavorable opinion towards India; they denounced the worship, ritual and beliefs of the Hindus, their caste system and treatment of women. The British colonists tended to circulate the idea that Indian people, especially Bengalis, possessed an inherent antipathy to work, preferring rather to lead a lazy, passive life – Bengali males were effeminate compared to the energetic and proactive Western males.<sup>4</sup> The simultaneous ‘effeminization’ and ‘hypersexualization’ of Bengali people by British colonizers were an effort to naturalize British patriarchy: by drawing a parallel between the characteristics of British women and Bengali men both were deemed incapable of public and political participation.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, Kipling’s imperial ideology seems to be an outgrowth of his working experiences in India whereby he considered colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent as ‘natural’. Besides, Kipling proves to be the bearer of the long-held English tradition that utilized English literature to promote the idea of the racial superiority of the British people. He and other colonial writers contributed to creating an image of the Englishman as a benevolent and altruistic member of the ruling class undertaking the duty of improving the lot of the native people. Edward Said writes:

For the British writer, ‘abroad’ was felt vaguely and ineptly to be out there, or exotic and strange, or in some way or other ‘ours’ to control, trade in ‘freely’, or suppress when the natives were energised into overt military or political resistance. The novel contributed significantly to these feelings, attitudes, and references and became a main element in a consolidated vision, or departmental cultural view, of the globe.<sup>6</sup>

Said contends that the English novel in the nineteenth-century was basically a cultural form which voiced the political hegemony of the British Empire.

<sup>2</sup> Qtd. in Tara Chand. *History of Freedom Movement in India*, Vol.2 (New Delhi: Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 1992) p. 235.

<sup>3</sup> K. Ayyappa Paniker. *Spotlight on Comparative Indian Literature* (Calcutta: Papyrus, 1992) p. 69.

<sup>4</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*. (Oxford & New York: OUP, 1995) p. 86.

<sup>5</sup> Partha Chatterjee. *The Nation and its Fragments*. Omnibus ed. (New Delhi: OUP, 1999) pp. 35-40.

<sup>6</sup> Edward W Said. *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993) p. 88.

## 2. ‘The White Man’s burden’ and Kipling’s *Kim*

Kipling’s theory of ‘the White Man’s burden’ came at a time which witnessed instability and tension among the colonialists. Just at the time when the British faced humiliating defeat in South Africa, Kipling came forward to defend the Empire not as a source of profit but as a means to carry out the English nation’s responsibility. Kipling was particularly nervous about India, the most precious jewel of the British Empire. His largely autobiographical novel, *Kim* reveals his considerable understanding of and attraction to India, the place in which he was born and passed a fair portion of his life. In *Kim*, Kipling appears ambivalent with regard to his attitude towards India. The protagonist Kim’s identity remains partially undefined because of his hybrid personal background – he is born in India, but from Irish parents. Kim’s nursing by a “half-caste” woman facilitates his indoctrination into Indian customs, manner, and language. For all these, his boyhood identity encompasses both Irish-ness from his parents’ side and Indian-ness out of his complexion, language, and early enculturation into Indian bazar culture:

Though he was burned black as any native; though he spoke the vernacular by preference, and his mother-tongue in a clipped uncertain sing-song; though he consorted on terms of perfect equality with the small boys of the bazar; Kim was white – a poor white of the very poorest.<sup>7</sup>

Kim often enjoys the third space of this hybrid existence, drifting frequently in and out between his colonial and Indian identities. The fluidity with which his identity is shifted across the novel is the result of his personality trait and aptitude – he seems to be agile and quick-witted. In their first meeting, the Lama considers him a Hindu. He is addressed as “Little Hindu” by Mahbub Ali (p. 30) and “a casteless Hindu” by the Kulu woman (p. 90). On the other hand, he often swears according to the Muslim customs. Kipling also makes Kim confuse his Irish identity with that of English. In the beginning of the novel, Kim kicked the Muslim boy Abdullah off from the cannon because, “the English held the Punjab and Kim was English” (p. 9). However, he is not a ‘pure English’, rather an Irish whose country was once colonized by Britain. His father, Kimball O’Hara had once served the Mavericks, an Irish regiment in the British Army. Noticeably, the Irish troops in the British Army were rather inferior in status, they were “used simply as mercenaries, with scant regards paid to their national sensibilities”.<sup>8</sup> In his short story “The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney”, Kipling portrays

<sup>7</sup> Rudyard Kipling. *Kim* (1901). Rptd. (New Delhi: Fingerprint Classics. 2019) pp. 9-10. All references to the text are from this edition.

<sup>8</sup> Terence Denman, “‘Ethnic Soldiers Pure and Simple’: The Irish in the Late Victorian British Army.” *War in History* 1993 (3) 3. pp. 253-73. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26004358>.

the character of the Irish private soldier, Mulvany who is not refined enough to have a place in the gatherings of the decent folks.

Kim is forced into adoption by the Irish regiment because of his ‘pedigree’ – he is the son of Kimball O’Hara, a one-time soldier of the regiment. As the years roll by, Kim has to encounter desperation because of his identity vacuum. There are times when he seriously contemplates his identity crisis. Here is one instance: “No, I am Kim. This is the great world, and I am only Kim. Who is Kim?” He considered his own identity, a thing he had never done before, till his head swam.”<sup>9</sup> Kim’s schooling at St. Xavier’s is aimed at making him a ‘Sahib’, but, ironically, it is the ‘Oriental’ Lama who finances his education there. From St. Xavier’s he learns his European taste, vaunting his being “a student of Nucklao” (p. 189). From then on he seems to be more conscious of his superior identity, as he threatens Lurgan Sahib’s boy, “I will beat thee in the morning. I do not love Hindus”.<sup>10</sup>

It seems Kim’s ‘Sahib’ identity is rather forced upon him by the design of Colonel Creighton and his associates with the purpose of making him fit for the’ Great Game’, an euphemism for spy mission. Several times Kim says that he does not want to be a Sahib, he would rather stay as a disciple of the Lama. He feels quite at ease while roaming about Indian countryside and mixing with Indian people. His sense of superiority is not his own doing, rather it is injected by the whole process of his grooming. His subsequent entry into the British secret service in India in charge of curbing an uprising in the Northern Frontier provoked by the Russian agents gradually thrusts him towards his colonial identity. Even then, Kim feels loyal to the Lama, admitting, “I am not a Sahib. I am thy *Chela*, and my head is heavy on my shoulders”.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the issues related to Kim’s identity are so complex that it remains unsettled, a factor which reveals the author’s ambivalent attitude towards India.

The hybridity that is hinted in Kim’s character is also evident in Gora, the protagonist of Rabindranath Tagore’s novel *Gora* (1910). Gora’s English father is killed during the 1857 Sepoy uprising, and his Irish mother dies while giving his birth, leaving him under the care of his Hindu foster parents. In his youth, truth dawns upon the nationalist Gora that he is not an Indian. Tagore, however, resolves the crisis with his typical belief in internationalism *sans* nationalism. The novel ends with Gora’s declaration that “Today I am really an Indian, in me there is no longer any opposition between Hindu, Mussulman, and Christian. Today every caste is my caste, the food of all is my food”.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, Kim is unsure and perplexed of his own identity – he is working for the Sahib’s Great Game without losing his unquestionable loyalty to the ‘Tibetan’ Lama who himself does not represent the majority Hindu creed of India.

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<sup>9</sup> p. 150.

<sup>10</sup> p. 189.

<sup>11</sup> p. 334.

<sup>12</sup> Rabindranath Tagore (1910), *Gora* (New Delhi: Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd., 2002) p. 568.

The novel's plot largely revolves around the theme of journey across the Indian landscapes, depicting Kim's trip with the Lama, which facilitates Kipling's commentary on Indian life and society. Kipling admires Indian landscape with all its beauty and variety. However, his gaze seems to be that of the colonial one – his fascination with India's physical nature stems from his desire to possess it.<sup>13</sup> In the novel, the general people of India are not represented, only those who are cohorts of the imperial interest are given a space – like Mahbub Ali and Huree Babu, the Indian associates of Colonel Creighton. Even the simple-hearted and gullible Lama on his search for the great river of healing is utilized to make the colonial spy mission a success.

In *Kim*, Indian people or Orientals are explicitly presented as 'others', and this 'othering' is mostly done in terms of set stereotypes. For instance, the laziness of the Indian people are highlighted. It is also said that "an Oriental tends to lie" (p. 36). The caste and superstition-ridden Asians are prone to take commissions, whereas Kim "was Irish enough by birth to reckon silver the least part of any game" (p. 51). Mahbub Ali is a Pathan horse-dealer, who must not be believed at any rate. Huree Babu, a hollow Spencerian, is a typical Bengali plot-hatcher: "no Sahib in his senses would follow a Bengali's advice" (p. 295). Conversely, there are ample hints within the text that colonial modernism is contributing to the betterment of the Indian society, facilitating communications and eroding rigid caste system. There is a sweeping reference to the government feeding its prisoners well, confirming the benevolence of the colonial rule.

Kipling's treatment of the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, when Indian soldiers in the British Army rebelled against their officers, may be taken as an evidence of the influence of the colonial gaze on the author. The retired Indian soldier of the British Army recounts the event as a 'madness' deserving immediate suppression. Although Kim and the Lama do not subscribe to this narrative, revealing Kipling's rather ambiguous attitude to it, the novel appears to fail to identify the 'silences' in the account of the event by the British historians – there is no reference to the horrors and brutality with which the British Army suppressed the uprising.

### **3. From self-doubt to self-assurance and challenge**

Kipling's writings represent a period when settlers and travelers from the imperial center used to write on the colonies while retaining the sense of superiority of their home, as if, they were pronouncing their statement about 'native' life and customs from a vantage position. Subsequently, the English-educated people from the colony began to produce literature in which they tended to glorify their indigenous cultural heritage. With the rise of the anti-colonial nationalist movement,

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<sup>13</sup> See Nick Scott, "The Representation of the Orient in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*." AAA: Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 2014, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2014), pp. 175-184. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24329449>.

Indian ‘postcolonial’ writers started to challenge the Eurocentric claim on knowledge and power. They wrote in English, the colonial language, to express the cultural experience of the colonized, “learning how to curse in the master’s tongue”.<sup>14</sup> This moment of appropriation coincided with the decline in faith in imperialism in the mainstream British literature, as is evident in the works of E. M. Forster, Graham Greene, George Orwell and others. While Kipling’s writings deliver the message that the British are ordained to rule, George Orwell questions the very ethics of one nation governing another and describes the British Raj as an “unbreakable tyranny”.<sup>15</sup>

In this respect, the First World War was a turning point, bringing in its wake disillusionment among the Indian people with the colonial government. Later, the great wave of anti-colonial movement inspired by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) in the thirties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century produced a group of Indian writers in English who explicitly wrote about Indian people’s desire for self-rule and self-identity. R. K. Narayan, considered as the father of the Indian Fiction in English, is one such novelist. A number of his novels were written in a period when the British were still ruling India, but English people do not represent much in those works, in other words, they are marginalized. Narayan creates an imaginary Indian town, Malgudi, where the signs of the colonial modernity are visible, yet the basic structure of the society remains quite untouched by the colonial influence. Traditional mythic conception of Indian life and identity feature in Narayan’s novels, and it is this larger conception that, as if, incorporates the little phenomenon of British rule.<sup>16</sup>

Indian postcolonial writings invariably challenge the cultural assumptions reflected in the colonial literature. For one thing, Kipling and Narayan tend to see Indian history from opposite angles. Narayan, in many of his works, repeats his reservations about colonial historiography. In his essay “When India was a Colony”, he writes:

Indian history was written by the British historians – extremely well-documented and researched, but not always impartial. History had to serve its purpose: Everything was made subservient to the glory of the Union Jack. Later-day Indian scholars presented a contrary picture.<sup>17</sup>

Narayan claims that the colonial representation of India is aimed at consolidating the British Empire and, therefore, history should be re-written to dismantle this Eurocentric claim on truth. Similarly, in his essay “After the Raj”, Narayan questions the very idea that colonial writers have the ability to

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<sup>14</sup> Leela Gandhi. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New Delhi: OUP, 1998) p. 148.

<sup>15</sup> Saroj Cowasjee. *Studies in Indian and Anglo-Indian Fiction* (New Delhi: INDUS, 1993) p. 110.

<sup>16</sup> Elleke Boehmer, p. 177.

<sup>17</sup> R. K. Narayan, “When India was a Colony.” *A Writer’s Nightmare: Selected Essays 1958-1988* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1988) p. 231.

represent true India. Colonial fiction writers never address the seamy side of Empire building; rather they deal with elements of adventure and melodrama. Narayan contends that India is too big and varied to be generalized under a single category. Even a native writer with a proper understanding of his or her national heritage, tradition and culture is bound to fumble when attempting to represent India, and it is far more difficult for a foreign writer to accomplish the task. Writers like Kipling and E. M. Forster showed only a narrow understanding of India. Kipling's view about India was confined within barracks, bazars, domestic servants and some bureaucrats. Forster, in his *A Passage to India*, tries honestly to understand this country, yet his novel is "limited in perspective". Therefore, Narayan feels "more amused than angry" when an English writer claims to have presented the picture of the whole India. There was a time when the simpleton's view of India persisted in England: India was the land of snakes, magic and *sadhus* or Hindu saints. Portraying such an image amounts to denial and distortion of the reality of India's past and present. In this way, Narayan calls attention to the limitations of the colonial writers in representing India.

#### 4. R. K. Narayan and the postcolonial politics of representations

Narayan's first novel, *Swami and Friends* (1935), like *Kim*, is considerably autobiographical – the experience of the protagonist Swaminathan corresponds to that of Narayan himself. In this novel, the novelist records the contemporary social reality of India seen through the eyes of a schoolboy. The novel captures the very Indian scenes, characters and events with which Narayan was familiar. In this way, Narayan depicts real India, not its exotic aspect. Graham Greene writes that the novel *Swami and Friends* "first brought India, in the sense of the Indian population and the Indian way of life alive to me . . . with a humour strange to our fiction, closer to Chekov than to any English writer, with the same underlying sense of beauty and sadness".<sup>18</sup>

The novel dramatizes the conflict between the native tradition and the colonial culture.<sup>19</sup> For instance, it delineates the religious tension that stems from the colonists' attempt to spread Christianity. At Albert Mission School, the scripture teacher Ebenezar is a fanatic whose only task is to denounce Hinduism. Here is a specimen of his lecture: "Oh, wretched idiots!" the teacher said, clenching his fists. 'Why do you worship dirty, lifeless, wooden idols and stone images? Can they talk? No. Can they see? No. Why? Because they have no life.'<sup>20</sup> Ebenezar's talks are not only disparaging to Hinduism but also meant to incite religious tension between Hindus and Muslims. His lecture sounds offensive to the Hindu students represented by Swaminathan who protests against it.

By the time *Swami and Friends* was published in 1935, Indian struggle for freedom got

<sup>18</sup> Graham Greene, Int. to *Bachelor of Arts* 1937. Rpt. in *The Magic of Malgudi*. Ed. S. Krishnan (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000) p. vii. All references to the text are from this edition.

<sup>19</sup> See Ahmed Reza and Md. Mamunur Rahman. "Postcolonial ambivalence in R. K. Narayan's *Swami and Friends* and *The Bachelor of Arts*." *The Islamic University Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2. 2009, pp. 269-271.

<sup>20</sup> R. K. Narayan. *Swami and Friends*. 1935. Rpt. in *The Magic of Malgudi*. Ed. S. Krishnan (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2000) p. 5. All references to the text are from this edition.

considerable momentum. The novel reveals the social upheaval inspired by Gandhi's non-violent protest against the British rule. The people of Malgudi are much agitated by the Civil Disobedience Movement.<sup>21</sup> One of the protesters glorifies India's past: "Our ships sailed the high seas and we had reached the height of civilisation when the Englishmen ate raw flesh and wandered in the jungle nude" (p. 71). The rise of nationalistic sentiment is evident in the people's perception that they are now "slaves of slaves" and dominated by a country far smaller than India (p. 71). People also take a vow to abjure English goods. As a schoolboy, Swaminathan feels agitated by the nationalist movement, he flings his foreign-made cap into fire. Swaminathan is punished at school for taking part in the protest, but he exhibits a flush of courage as he leaves Albert Mission School forever, saying, "I don't care for your dirty school" (p. 80). The incident seems to epitomize the whole anti-colonial movement, revealing Indian sentiment at the defining moment of national history.

However, the hybridity that Kipling hints in his novel *Kim*, in the mentality and behavior of the Indian characters, has by now irreversibly ingrained in Indian society. While Indian people detests colonial rule, they are simultaneously attracted to some aspects of the colonial culture. Swaminathan, for instance, has a fascination with cricket, a colonial icon; he admires great British cricketers Hobbs, Bradman, and Duleep. Such enthusiasm for the cricket game signifies the gradual Westernization of Indian society. Again, the colonial English language becomes the signifier of power and prestige. At School, English is the most prestigious subject; Rajam is respected because he speaks very good English, "exactly like a 'European'" (p. 12). While people resist colonial rule, they are also being drawn to some of its attractions, and the society gradually gets a new shape out of this interaction.

Like *Swami and Friends*, Narayan's second novel, *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) shows Indian society in ferment because of the anti-colonial movement.<sup>22</sup> It registers Indian reaction to the British rule through the character of Chandran, a college student. The protagonist's attitude to Principal Brown reflects the attitude of the Indians to the English people. Chandran thinks that the Europeans are in no way friends to the Indians. Although Principal Brown, an Englishman, attends the debate arranged by Indian students and professors, his thoughts are at the tennis court and the card-table in the English Club. As Chandran says:

He is here not out of love for us, but merely to keep up appearances. All the Europeans are like this. They will take their thousand or more a month, but won't do the slightest service to Indians with a sincere heart. They must be paid this heavy amount for spending their time in the English Club. Why should not these fellows admit Indians to

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<sup>21</sup> Civil Disobedient Movement started in 1930 under the leadership of Gandhi on the principle of defying select British colonial regulations and its aim was to paralyze the colonial administration.

<sup>22</sup> See Ahmed Reza and Md. Mamunur Rahman. 2009, pp. 272-275.

their clubs? Sheer colour arrogance.<sup>23</sup>

Chandran's statement confirms the presence of the racial sensitivity between the two races – the English and the Indian, with the latter beginning to think that the colonists are unjustly wasting Indian taxpayers' money. Chandran also resents the behavior of the Europeans who deny the Indians access to the English Club. The incident is reminiscent of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, where Aziz expresses his anger and despair that "Indians are not allowed into Chandrapur Club even as guests".<sup>24</sup> In Forster's novel, the possibility of true friendship and mutual understanding between over-sensitive Aziz and extremely rational Fielding is marred by individual attitudes and values. However, Narayan's Chandran is much ahead of Forster's Aziz in ruminating the possibility of self-rule. Like Chandran, many Indian students and teachers are roused by the anti-colonial sentiment. In the meeting of the Historical Association, Gajapathi, an Indian History professor, seeks to prove how Indian history is distorted, misrepresented and then taught to the Indian students. Gajapathi challenges the British version of Indian history and stresses the need to frame an alternative historiography purified of the colonists' ideologically-charged methods. This urge to record one's own history is an aspect of nationalism: a primary sign of nationalistic consciousness is that "it will not find its own voice in histories written by foreign rulers and that it will set out to write for itself the account of its own past".<sup>25</sup>

In *The Bachelor of Arts*, the extreme reaction to the British rule finds its expression in Veeraswami's violent paper presented to the Historical Association: "It pilloried Great Britain before the action, and ended by hoping that the British would be ousted from India by force" (p. 174). Veeraswami thinks that the colonists have deliberately sickened Indian people so that they may sell their drugs. He believes that violence is the only means of attaining independence. He, like Jagadish in Narayan's another novel, *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), rejects Gandhi's non-violent opposition to the British rule and calls for a sweeping armed resistance after the manner of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

However, although anti-colonial sentiment is rampant among the people, Indian society is already drawn to the colonial influence in some select areas. The impact of colonial education is visible among young people, as is manifested in Chandran himself. Chandran, the hater of the British, enjoys English films. He wishes to go to Britain for higher studies. He is born in a traditional Eastern home, but attends the colonial "Albert Mission College", thus becoming exposed to "colonial educational influences as well as its cultural influences".<sup>26</sup> Chandran's situation is typical of the

<sup>23</sup>. *The Bachelor of Arts*. p. 142.

<sup>24</sup> E. M Forster. *A Passage to India*, 1924 (New Delhi: Surjeet Publications, 1999) p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> Partha Chatterjee in *Subaltern Studies VIII*. Eds. David Arnold, and David Hardiman (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Beatina, O. S. M. Narayan: *A Study in Transcendence* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993) p. 43.

middle-class Indians during the colonial time. English education was appealing to the new middle class to whom it “promised to be the talisman which could open new vistas of wealth and influence, of material gain, and, therefore, of advancement in social status and personal dignity”.<sup>27</sup>

*The Bachelor of Arts* focuses on how Western influence has given birth to the clash of cultures exemplified in the tension between generations. Chandran’s love for Malathi is an example of it. He wants to marry Malathi, a girl from different caste, thinking that by marrying her, he would be an example of a modern man denouncing traditional caste system that strictly prohibits inter-caste marriage. Yet Chandran faces opposition from his own family. In the Indian context, family remains a strong institution where women represent “Custom and Reason” and know “what is and what is not proper”.<sup>28</sup> In *The Bachelor of Arts*, Chandran’s mother is the embodiment of long-cherished tradition. She declares that as long as she lives she will insist on respecting the old custom. Like Chandran’s parents, Malathi’s father, Mr. Krishnan Iyer stands firm against violating tradition. He maintains that the horoscope must be matched. As he writes in his letter, “Since I have great faith in horoscopy, and since I have known from personal 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.”<sup>29</sup> Evidently, the conflict between tradition and modernity unleashed by the colonial cultural impact is quite visible in the society. Some people begin to ignore the age-old customs, but there are others, especially of earlier generation, who remain diehard conservatives.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper, after discussing Kipling’s *Kim*, and R. K. Narayan’s *Swami and Friends* and *The Bachelor of Arts*, finds that these two writers stand poles apart with regards to their ideological underpinnings, cultural assumptions, and views on identity formation and subjectivity. While Kipling defines British identity by ‘othering’ the Indians, Narayan defines Indian identity by ‘othering’ the British. Kipling shows considerable vigor and mastery in detailing Indian scenes and manners, yet he presents India by bracketing it with colonial stereotypes. His outlook is filtered through colonial ideology. However, the situation got changed only within decades, when decolonization appeared as a feasible possibility. Narayan assumes new subjectivity and power for the Indian people who oppose the British politically, wishing them to quit India that would lead to their independence. Narayan foregrounds Indian identity by pitting India against the colonizer Britain, showing the English as oppressors, not welcome rulers. Kipling’s Indian ‘others’ are inferior while Narayan tends to present Indian people on equal term with their colonial ‘others’.

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<sup>27</sup> Tara Chand, p. 180.

<sup>28</sup> William Walsh. *Indian Writing in English* (London and New York: Longman, 1990) p. 74.

<sup>29</sup> p. 207.