



## THE LITERARY FORTE OF RUDYARD KIPLING IN PRESENTING EAST AND WEST ENCOUNTER IN HIS FICTIONAL AND SHORT STORY WORLD: AN APPRAISAL

**K.M.Keerthika**

*Ph.D Scholar (full-time), Department of English & Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai.*

### **Abstract**

*This paper analyses the East and West encounter as picturized in the fictional and short story world of Rudyard Kipling. This paper analyses the difference between east and west particularly in their behavior, habits, customs and conventions and especially the racial arrogance that kept them apart. As Kipling experienced both the oriental and occidental mindsets, his portrayal of clashes between both these aspects are purely lively. Finally, this paper conduces by giving the hope of openness of humanity that helps in transcending all religions.*

**Key Words:** *East and West, Barriers, Differences, Ambivalence, Prejudices, Behavior, Orients, Accidents.*

“Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the Twain shall meet” said Kipling in his “Ballad of East and West”. Truly speaking, there are obvious differences between the orient and the occident because they belong to two different climates of ideas, two different regions of the world representing two different cultures. There can be no compromise among cultures so widely different as the Indian and the English. Being intimately acquainted with the East and the West, Kipling is found presenting the clash between the East and the West, especially the racial arrogance that kept the two apart. In their behavior, habits, customs and conventions, the East is different from the West. A certain distance is maintained by the Sahib towards the natives. “He may make a fool of himself at the club or the regimental mass, he may gamble, drink, incur debts and fight, but the moment he is dealing with an Indian, He only knows that not through him shall England come to shame” (Singh, 2).

The relationship between the East and the West is that of the master and the servant, the ruler and the ruled. Most of the Anglo-Indian stories and novels record the gulf between the two races. As Louis L.Cornell puts it, “Kipling’s vision of India reflects his consciousness of this gap between the dark and the light” (P 144). Kipling had a great attraction towards things Eastern, particularly India, its mountains, rivers, forests, woods, towns and cities. “Furthermore, his heart would never remain in India” (Giants of Literature, 128). The true perspective of the Orient is from his direct allusions. The magic of the East has charmed Kipling tremendously. The great novelists are capable of creating a distinct world. Sometimes it is a world which can be mapped out in some area of the globe like Hardy’s Wessex, Dicken’s London, Kafka’s Prague or R.K.Narayan’s Malgudi. Kipling too is capable of creating his world with India as the backcloth and his western characters move and act in the Eastern world. William Walsh observes:

“Kipling not only evoked the rash, self-confident attitudes of the ruling class in India, but he also realized and expressed with uncanny fidelity and subtleties of insight the experience of the Indian folk themselves as well as the unique quality of the Indian landscape.” (P.258).

It is quite obvious that Kipling has two sides, or he is Janus faced, one turning towards the East and the other turning towards the west. “A drawing of him made by a schoolmate shows a swarthy boy with lank straight hair, who might almost pass for a Hindu” (Wilson, 96), though he was a white boy. Chesterton in a famous chapter of Heretics finds the essential characteristics of Kipling’s mind to be two. The words of Jawaharlal Nehru in his work *The Discovery of India* that he is a queen mixture of the East and the West, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere, can be applied to Kipling too. As Kipling has created two distinct worlds, the East and the West, Baker



comments that Kipling has “a two-fold vision”. In a snatch song that proceeds one of the chapters in *Kim*, Kipling says:

“Something I owe to the soil that grew  
More to the life that fed –  
But most to Allah who gave me two  
Separate sides to my head.  
I would go without shirts or shoes  
Friends, tobacco or bread,  
Sooner than for an instant lose  
Either side of my head” (Kim, 145)

This is a proof of evidence to indicate the existence in Kipling of a two-fold outlook, almost of two cultures, two racial souls, implanted one by his English Schooling and the other by his intimacy with the oriental mind. In the words of Ernest A. Baker, “The visionary East with its craving for the absolute and the infinite held him spell-bound” (P. 110). Yet he came back invariably and inevitably to the realistic point of view of the English. This is because of the fact that Kipling was born in India and grew up largely as an Indian child, but he was not Indian; nor could he call himself English. In a crisis of identity, Kipling might have looked upon himself as a citizen of the British Empire which would give him a sense of belonging to both the worlds. His pleasant childhood experiences in India had a lasting impression upon him. His own boyhood in India and England gave Kipling two diverse images of childhood. India came to be associated with his idea of “safe delight” and the only “real home” he had known.

The novel *Kim* shows the richest source of understanding the paradoxical hold which India could exercise on an India-born English writer in an age of Imperialism. Kipling is at once a racist, preaching White supremacy and at the same time a man whose love of India and the Indians knew no bounds. “He believed in the chosen status of the English builders, yet at the same time viewed, the lower classes and ‘the lesser breeds without the law’ as the salt of the earth and ‘nature’s gentleman” (Maley, 9). His love for tradition does not exclude a healthy desire for change. Kipling was responsible for the maxim that “East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet,” only when he was just twenty four. After his school days, he spent most of his time in the office of a daily paper. Though Kipling had written that “the twain shall never meet”, it is quite evident from his short stories and novels that East and West are not poles apart. In fact, East has met West and Vice-versa. There is no doubt about the meeting of races but one can meet in several different ways.

The characters from East and West meet and part as friends as Kim and the Pattan Mahbub Ali. Often the characters from the East are a servant, a peon, or an attendant and the West plays the dominant role of the master. The Indians are minor characters, “a khansaman, a khitmatgar, a Sais, or a subordinate” (Sing, 70). In “Moti Guj,” Mutineer Deesa is the mahout who works under a coffee planter, Bahadur Khan is a servant to Imray Sahib, Findlay son and Hitch cock employ native women to build the bridge. Though the master and the servant live under the same roof, a certain distance is kept as in Lispeth and the Chaplain’s wife. “Certainly he presented them in literature as nobody had ever done” (Wilson 104). The Englishmen in the stories of Kipling have associations with India as workers in the tea plantations like Phil Garron. The wounded traveler in “Lispeth” is a mere traveller in the East, to hunt for plants and butterflies. After his tour de force in India, he wrote a book on the East. Trejago continues to look at “things from a we stand standpoint” (Kipling in “Beyond the Pale”, P.177), though he is no longer in the West.

Another example of the East meeting West is through the language spoken by a character. Colonel Creighton, unlike the majority of his compatriot has a thorough command, “fluent and picturesque” of Urdu. The Lahore Museum Curator, the White bearded Scholar in *Kim* also converses in fluent Urdu to Teshoo Lama. He is also deeply versed in the Buddhist faith. The lama recognizes a kindred spirit in this gentle learned Englishman. “William the conqueror” is a story of two western hearts drawn together and the birth of their love is on the Indian



soil where values of life are different. Kipling plants the sapling of European love in the Indian soil, waters it with unspoken gestures, manures it with toil and human sympathy and love blossoms with a typical Indian fragrance. The women of the West like some flower transplanted to bloom beneath alien skies, make effort to adapt themselves in the Eastern environments. Their counterparts in India imitate their fashions and frivolities. As soon as Phil married Dunmaya, she managed to become “a very passable imitation of an English lady in dress carriage” (Plain Tales, 39). The narrator comments humorously:

“It is curious to think that a Hill man  
after a lifetime’s education is a  
Hillman still; but a Hill-woman  
can in six months master most of the  
ways of her English sisters .....  
Dunmaya dressed by preference in black  
And yellow and looked well” (Plain Tales, P.39).

The people in the East are fond of imitating the western ways in appearance and apparel. Their fashions and pretensions attract the East. In the words Wilson, “It is true that there is always the implication that the British are bringing to India modern improvements and sounder standards of behavior” (P.104). Often the stern civil servant or the Sahib is fascinated by the Indian woman. The Anglo-India abounds with men who have native mistresses. “Without Benefit of Clergy” is a picture of an Anglo-Indian union. An English official Holden chooses to live with a Mohammedan girl Ameera. All the doubts and fears are forgotten, however in the meeting of the two individuals from East and West. According to the narrator, “those were months of absolute happiness of Holden and Ameera – happiness withdrawn from the world, shut in behind the wooden gate that Pir Khan guarded.” (PP.295-296). Their offspring tota represents the outcome of the two different worlds and two opposing forces.

In the case of Lispeth, East is attracted towards West at the first sight of a wounded Whiteman. The Hill girl who has no pretensions speaks plainly, “This is my husband. I found him on the Bagi Road. He has hurt himself. We will nurse him and when he is well, your husband shall marry him to me” (Lispeth, 3). When the man of her choice deserts her and goes to England to marry his fiancé, the girl is heart-broken. She returns to healthiness dispelling all the Western attractions and identifying herself with the East. In “yoked with an unbeliever”, it is the Englishman who is enraptured by the beauty of Dunmaya, a hill girl from the East. Both the East and the West are united in holy matrimony, keeping all the differences apart. In all these three stories of Kipling, East and West, the unlike poles attract each other and find happiness and fulfillment in each other. Kipling makes his Western characters remember their past, a place where the orient thought operates through the occident. Kipling had very deep associations with India which is known for its mysticism and superstitions. He blends them in his stories.

Metempsychosis or the remembrance of one’s earlier birth is a belief in Hindu sensibility. “In the Finest story in the world”, Charlie Mears remembered his past as a slave in a ship and in “The Wireless”, a Chemist’s assistant who died of tuberculosis remembered that he was none but John Keats. In “The Brushwood Boy” George Cottar, a young major in the army marries a girl who has been dreaming for years richly, strangely, the identical dreams that Cottar has been dreaming. This identical dreaming goes beyond rational explanation. In “The Bridge Builders”, Findlay son and his assistant Hitchcock while toiling at a large project of constructing a bridge over the Ganges, there is floods. Findlay son directs the emergency measures. Taking opium pallets from a native foreman, he finds himself in a hallucination. In that reverie, he witnesses the synod of the Indian gods who try to appease Mother Ganga. It seems that Krishna himself is seen taking the side of English engineer. The title “Bridge Builders” suggests building a bridge between Britain and India, between Western and Eastern cultures and explores the age old Indian philosophy and its relevance to the modern context, of East and West meeting.

In his novels too, Kipling presents the interaction of India and Britain on each other. *Kim* is the picture of an orphan white boy gone native Unlike Lispeth who is drawn to her Western counterpart, it is the other way round in



Kim, Irish by birth Kim is a “Pakka Sahib”. He is immersed in and assimilated to the native Indian life. He is the bosom friend of the Hindu boy Chota Lal and the Mohammedan Abdullah. He is neither Indian nor is he English. The Eastern trait becomes dominant in Kim, the white boy. He dresses like many Indians, feels like an Indian with Indian prejudices, finds public communal eating in school revolting. Like an Indian he regards “Sahib’s as people with dull fat eyes” (Kim 131). His oneness with the Indians makes him long for “the caress of soft mud squishing up between his toes” (P 139) from the confines of his school room. His mouth waters for “rice speckled with strong scented cardamoms” (139). In a symbolic moment, Kim forgetting his blood, forgetting even the Great Game stoops Mohammedan fashion, to touch his master’s feet in the dust of the Jain temple. When Whiteman came to take him, he instinctively uses phrases like, “Hai, mai ... It is my *Kismet*. No man can escape his *Kismet*” (131). The East is seen through his eyes as an alternative source for knowledge about the west. This is Kim’s eastern personality. Contrary to the eastern self, Kim knows that the West too is part of his true self. In a bewildering volte face, Kim is proud of his Sahib self.

Kim oscillates between two poles, the East and the West. He himself is aware of his warning, contradictory dual self, his ambivalence and bicultural tradition. Like Hamlet and his conflict “to be or not to be” Kim too has a conflict between East and West. It is the symptom of a “neurosis” or a “split personality” in terms of the psychoanalysts. Anyway through Kim, Kipling has established with dramatic effect the pull between two great forces, the oscillation of Kim as he passes to and fro between the East, “with its mysticism and its sensuality, its extremes of saintliness and roguery and the English, with their superior organization, their confidence in modern method, their instinct to brush away like cobwebs the native myths and beliefs” (Wilson 110). The west rewards the East in “the title of plain love” and Kim says, “Mother, I owe my life to thee “(Kim 299). It is a place where the west completely surrenders itself to the East. Kipling reveals that all distinctions of colour, caste and creed give way to the universal oneness.

Kipling’s short stories and novels include the spiritual concept of the East and the West. India of the nineteenth century was a land of many races and religions. It was a queer mixture of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Jainism. The different idols at the Hindu temples are viewed by Kim. Mahbub Ali represents the Muslims and their faith in Allah. The lame from Tibet is a representative of Buddhism. All distinctions of castes and religions melt away in human oneness. Purun Bhagat “was a Brahmin, so high caste that caste ceased to have any particular meaning for him” (P 274). The idea of love as the pathway to God is common both to the religions of East and West. Generally speaking, in the works of Kipling, the West has been self-consciously superior and the East self-consciously inferior. But a meeting between East and West at a personal level is always possible because human nature transcends all barriers. The union between Ameer and Holden indicates the possibility of hearts meeting in spite of racial obstacles. But the political and other forces have the power to estrange and to separate the East and the West. The traditions and values of East and West show fundamental differences. Kipling too felt the pull between the East and the West. When it comes to human nature and attitudes, these transcend all barriers. Kipling too admits:

“But there is neither East nor West  
Border, nor Breed, nor Birth  
When two strong men stand face to face,  
Though they come from the ends of the earth (PP.3-4)

In modern times, it is possible to transcend old conceptions with the dawn of modern science and technology. Especially now when the world seems to be a small place, the gap between East and West does not look so wide as it did for Kipling. Moreover, human nature is the same everywhere all over the world. To conclude, though Kipling said that “the twain shall never meet” despite the tumult and excitement, the perplexities and ambiguities, East and West have met to work for a new world with all the strength and capacity, where there is oneness of humanity that transcends all religions.



## **References**

1. Baker, Ernest. A. *The History of the Novel*. New York : Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1969.
2. Cornel, Louis. L. *Kipling in India*. London: Macmillan, 1966.
3. *Giants of Literature : Kipling*. Berkshire : Sampson Low, 1977. Print.
4. Kipling, Rudyard. *Kim*. London: Macmillan, 1969. Print.
5. Kipling, Rudyard. "Beyond the Pale." *Plain Tales from the Hills*. London: Macmillan, 1960. P.177.
6. Malay, Alan. " Kipling" *The Literary Criticism*. 22, No.4, 1987. P.9.
7. Maugham, W. Somerset (ed.) *A Choice of Kipling's Prose*. London: Macmillan, 1952. PP.295-96.
8. Singh, Bhupal. *A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction*. London: OUP, 1934. Print.
9. Walsh, William. "India and the Novel." *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature* (ed.) Borisford. New York: Viking Penguin.Inc, 1986. P.258. Print.