



RUDYARD KIPLING AS AN ADEPT IN PICTURIZING THE IMAGE OF INDIA AND THE ANGLO-INDIAN SOCIETY IN HIS SHORT STORY WORLD: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

This paper throws light on the use of image of India and the Anglo-Indian society as reflected in the works of Rudyard Kipling. His writings conjure images of India and Anglo-Indian social set up centering mostly around India so as to depict the vast knowledge of India, its culture, religion, lives of common people especially the poor and the neglected Kipling's love for India can be seen in his novels, with a focus on description of exotic locations, and environment by picturizing Anglo-Indian society along with Indian society. Thus, this paper beautifully projects an image of India and Anglo-Indian society through his ironic scrutiny.

Key Words: *Image, Realism, Indian Atmosphere, Customs, Personal Experience.*

Rudyard Kipling has established himself as a great force in Anglo-Indian literature. He is hailed as a great realist with a romantic – stuffing, a spokesman of militant Imperialism, a mouth piece of classes and types and the young seer in India. He is so popular that the English and the Indians read him alike because his works are a record of the image of India. Kipling's image of India is a life-like picture of India during the nineteenth century when India was under the British rule. In his works, one finds portraits of India, teeming with millions of people, their customs and manners, beliefs and superstitions. The image of India as a land of gold and jewels, magic and marvels and "the glory that was Ind" had fired Kipling's imagination. As a poet, story teller and novelist, Kipling has caught and reproduced the picturesqueness of India. S.T.Sharma observes: "Deeply influenced by the national character of India Kipling identifies himself with the various aspects of Indian life" (P 55).

Kipling's interest in India is not that of a critical westerner but that of one who has a sense of belonging to the country of his choice. Edward Shanks observes:

"Obviously Kipling spent most of his time in India, and for that matter, a good deal of his life, eagerly picking up title pieces of knowledge" (p 42).

Hence, Kipling's short stories and novels present authentic glimpses of Indian society. Giving an impression of "real" India, his short stories portray the India of the British Raj.

It is said that Kipling like Meadows Taylor and Joseph Conrad wrote from direct observation. "It seemed as if he must have been born mature, so infallible were eye, judgement and pen, the reason being that he had learned assurance and swiftness in the school of journalism" (Baker 105) Kipling enjoyed India freely as a child till he was six. He says;

"I have loved the voices of night-winds through palm or banana leaves, and the song of the tree-fogs" (Kipling 2).

Those happy carefree days and his journalistic career in India between 1882-87 formed the backcloth of his short stories and novels. As a boy, Kipling was entrusted to a Roman Catholic Ayah from Portuguese Goa. In the course of their walks, She would stop to offer up a prayer at a way side shrine. He had neither pre-conceived views on religion nor any deep feeling for one particular faith. Both Christianity and Oriental mysticism did help in nourishing his mind towards spiritual matters. "Kipling was always tender to those of any religion who needed the support of faith" (Dobree 9). He wrote thus:

"Ye who tread the Narrow way
By Trophet – flare to Judgement Day,
Be gentle when "the heathen" pay
To Buddha at Kamakura" (Kipling 92).

His extended vision of religion hovered between the Christianity of the West and the mysticism of the East. It is an attitude of comprehensive tolerance. He is not an unbeliever. On the contrary, he can accept all faiths: that of the Moslem, that of the Hindu, that of the Buddhist, Parsee or Jain. He lived by a curious religion of his own. In India, Kipling not only developed an attitude to be tender to any faith but also imbibed the spirit of India by being always in the company of the children of the native servants. He knew the vernacular and had to be prompted to speak in English. The numerous stories and legends that the natives knew by heart and narrated in such a vivid language kept him spell bound. In the words of Louis L.Cornell, "It was a pleasant way of life for a child, and Kipling returned to it nostalgically in several of his stories". The Parsee friend of his father too influenced the boy at an early age. "If they left no definite mark upon the child's mind, atleast they must have filled



it with a consciousness of the mystery of India” (Clarke 26). This very background is a move towards national integration. Even after his entry into the United Services at Westward Ho, on his return to India, he discovered that he had a proprietary and hereditary claim to the Indian soil. He once remarked, “My English years fell neither away, nor even I think came back in full strength” (Wilson, 44).

In order to understand Kipling’s images one should know of India herself. When Kipling arrived in India in 1882, its political condition was complex. “The world he entered was very different from the world we live in now” (Maughan 7). There were two major forces at work. There was the pressure of the Indians towards national unification and self-government and an equal pressure of the English national conscience towards more efficient and beneficent government of the Indians. Kipling was exposed to a land with its bewildering variety of people, rich cultural traditions, social organizations, intellectual achievements, speculative thoughts, emotional and aesthetic sensibility in art forms. Above all, there were the metaphysical truths of Indian philosophy stamped on the general mind of the people. He realised the potential value of British India as a subject for fiction and wrote about the society that he knew best. A series of his short stories published weekly soon earned him a reputation in the Anglo-Indian community. “These delightful stories, full of action and local colour, were collected in 1888 and published as Plain Tales from the Hills” (Kipling 14).

Kipling’s love for India gets reflected in that he named his house in Vermont “Naulakha”. He could not feel at home in England when he went there leaving India for good. When Kipling sailed from India in March 1889, he was “a returned Anglo-Indian... who had left a vital part of himself in the East, a writer whose view of the world was inexorably conditioned by the land and the people amongst whom he had grown to maturity” (Cornell 165). The literary experiments Kipling started at the age of twelve with **The School Boy Lyrics** in 1877 did reach its culmination in 1907. When he was honoured with the Noble Prize for Literature at the age of forty two, but what gives Kipling’s universal value is his insatiable curiosity about ordinary men and common things in India. In the club at Lahore of which he became a member at seventeen, he eagerly listened to men discussing their workaday jobs. “He met the army officers, engineers, railway men and civilian officials” (Clarke 26) and he came to know barrack life. At Simla, he was enthralled at seeing the jobs from a different point of view. In both the places he met the idle gossip of social intercourse and realized its boredom and its excitements, its pretty bitterness and its heroism. Everywhere in India, in the bazaars, on the slope of the Himalayas and in the native states, he met the creditable diversity of creatures which go to make up the social image of India.

In the short stories, Kipling has presented the many faces of India in all their beauty, power and truth. “This great and beautiful land” as Kipling described India, is not the India of today. The real India of Kipling’s short stories is the old partition of India about the 1880’s when the English were ruling over the natives of India. His short stories are nothing but a record of his vision of the Anglo-Indian Empire. In 1865 when Kipling was born in India, the political unification of India under British rule was taking shape. Sweeping reforms in India were designed to encourage moral progress and social advancement. Though the rural existence remained untouched the rural existence remained untouched by progress, Madras, Bombay, Lahore and Calcutta were being transformed into modern cities. “With the slow decline of native culture and the gradual breakdown of the caste system there emerged in the cities an intellectual middle class, no longer restricted by local taboos, which chose to adopt the life style of the British Raj “ (P7). They read Shakespeare, Dickens, played Polo and hockey attended garden parties and took afternoon tea. The new middle class expanded, swelled by graduates from Universities and acquired an intellectual quality. Macaulay described them as Indians in blood and skin colour but English in taste, opinions, morality and intelligence.

The social vision of India that Kipling projected in the short stories is not a prejudiced or narrow vision of an Englishmen in India. Kipling presents a larger vision of a greater India, the vision of a country with its age old mountains, views, cities, highways, multi-racial and multi-religious Indians who have their roots in a very ancient past. It is the vision of a story teller, “who looks at the world around him through Indian eyes rather than with the Western eyes and whose sensibility too is more Indian than western” (Ramamurthi 34). This is because Kipling was intrinsically connected with India by his birth. In **Something of Myself** written in his seventieth year, Kipling recollected India of his early days as:

“My first impression is of daybreak,
Light and colour and golden and purple
Fruits at the level of my shoulder.
This would be the memory of early morning
Walks to the Bombay fruit market with
My ayah and later with my sister in
Her perambulator, and of our returns
With our purchases piled high on the
Bows of it” (Kipling 1)



The short stories are the young man's discovery of India. "As an artist, he continued to aim at verisimilitude, at the portrayal of a 'real India' free from the obscurities of ignorance, timidity and sham romanticism, as a journalist, he saw India with the personal discriminating vision that we with the personal and discriminating vision that we associate with writers of fiction" (Cornell 141). All the short stories have a genuine Indian atmosphere about them. They are the product of a vividly realized personal experience, shrewd observation and intimate acquaintance with India. As W. Somerset Maugham puts it, "It is true that Kipling seems to have been intimately acquainted with the north-west. Like any other sensible writer, he placed the scene of his short stories in the region he knew best" (P 5). It is said that Kipling travelled far and wide and gathered materials for his short stories. He saw India with his own eyes and realized the potential value of British India as a fit subject for fiction. Kipling, describes India with its dark forests, the fierce animals which inhabit them and also the people of India. In the words of George Sampson, "He made it interesting to a large general public who had never before given it serious attention" (P 739).

Kipling sees life around him and transforms this life into art with his analytical criticism of man's activities not simply creating "a fairy world, as perfect and useless and beautiful as a soap bubble". Truly speaking, he is affected by the actual conditions of life around him. As a realist, Kipling who projects the social vision of India cannot shut himself in a distant bower where he cannot hear the cries of the mob. As Kipling is teased by an emotional consciousness of social reality, he gives expression to it in his works. The most distinguishing trait of Kipling's short stories and, novels from the beginning has been 'realism'. Sir Walter Besant rightly comments:

"The first essential in fiction is reality.
The story must be real; the figures must
Be real; the dialogue must be real; the action
Must spring naturally from the situation.
So real is the story, with such an air of
Reality does he [Kipling] present it, that
We see it as we see the moving pictures
With the new photography throws upon the
Canvas" (P 252).

His short stories have caught and fixed forever the atmosphere of the latter half of the 19th century India. Kipling's collection of stories in **Plain Tales from the Hills** (1988) teaches more of India than many blue books. He has used his short stories realistic by using Anglo-Indian phrases and scraps of native dialects. "Kipling is the only English writer of our times who has added phrases to the languages" (Orwell 109). He has used the slang of the people who describe dining as "mangling garbage"; they play "tennis with the 7th commandment". With the help of native dialects Kipling makes us regard the continent ... as an enchanted land, full of marvels and magic which were real" (Green 71). Kipling's social vision penetrates through India's majestic mountain sides and wide rivers, sandy deserts and follows lands. The Indian landscape with its white roads and gnarled knotted trees, its scented gardens beautifying the palaces of by gone kings comes alive in his pages. He paints the Indian scene with its eternal contrasts in vivid colours. "There are Sadhus in India, authentic Sadhus and bogus ones as well; there are snakes in India, deadly snakes and innocuous ones as well" (Iyengar 74). The title Indian village is set in the midst of a wolf infested jungle or at the foot of a precipitous hill or fringing a river with a history of unpredictable floods. A gold sun set is followed by a storm which uproots trees or causes a landslide. In "False Dawn", Kipling describes a dust storm vividly. Four couples, one triplet and the narrator were moving ahead happily enjoying a moonlight picnic. In spite of all the amusements related to the picnic the narrator says:

"I had felt that the air was growing hotter and hotter; but nobody seemed to notice it until the moon went out and a burning hot wind began lashing the orange-trees with a sound like the noise of the sea ... the air was heavy with dust and sand from the bed of the river, ... with the thunder chattering over head and the lightning spurting like water from a sluice, all ways at once" (False Dawn 46).

The rattling of the hills, the howling of the mind, the splitting of tremendous lightening, the dust clouds, the glimmer of the moon, the heat of the Indian day, the torrential rains and the consequent floods give Kipling's short stories a typically Indian climate. Land slide is one of the common natural disasters in the British India. Whether at night or day, the landslides unexpectedly perishing numerous lives and demolishing villages. Puran Bhagat shouts: "The Hill falls! The Hill is falling!

The hillock followed him. He gave the alarm to the cottagers and all were safe in the shadow of the deep pine wood. Then came the landslide, toppling down the hill they had just abandoned – one mile in width and two thousand feet in sheer depth



had come away bodily, planed clean from head to heel. “Of the village, of the road to the shrine itself, and the forest behind, there was no trace” (The Miracle of Purun Bhagat 285).

Kipling is very successful in his truly lurid vision and indications of what Indian heat can be and its effect on the minds and bodies of the Europeans who have to suffer it. The Englishmen in England seem to take it for granted that India is hot, but scarcely one of them makes any attempt to realize what that heat really means. Pill Garron who went to work in a plantation in India between Darjeeling and Kangra found the climate to be good and “it really did not seem to him that there was any reason to return to England” (Plain Tales 39). On the contrary, “At the End of the Passage”, one finds the strains endured by the Englishmen during the rigours of an Indian summer. “There was neither sky, sun, nor horizon – nothing but a brown purple haze of heat” (69). Hammil suffers first from insomnia and then from hallucinations.

India herself remains Kipling’s great subject, for the bewildering profusion of his newspaper writings reflects the diversity of the land. The young man’s discovery of India proceeded at an accelerating rate and he set down “what he discovered in verse, fiction and newspaper essay” (P 69). People hunt elephants and train them to do work. “My Lord, the Elephant” tells how Mulvaney restrained and quieted an elephant which had become enraged through being required to work in an elephant battery. The unwieldy elephant is a symbol of assurance and strength just as the plumed serpent is a sign of beauty and mystery. “Moti Guj” is the story of an elephant’s loyalty to its mahout. Palanquins and chariots are royal conveyances in India. The Queen travels usually in veiled and decorated palanquins carried by the native footmen. In “The Incarnation of Kirshna Mulvaney”, Mulvaney having purloined the palanquin of some princes, finds himself introduced into a temple in Banares during a big queen’s praying “The tradition of retirement from the world for study and meditation was already long established in India, when Prince Siddharta renounced wife and child and all worldly ties” (Iyengar 79). The tradition is an unbroken one. Puran Bhagat is but a modern illustration of this living tradition.

Kipling is said to have an uncanny insight into immemorial modes of living and grasped the quiet essential truths of Indian actuality which have eluded thousands of intellectuals. Kipling presents men and women in India with their unique likes and dislikes. These people are inclusive in the social vision of India. In “Yoked with an unbeliever”, Miss Agnes Lailer was weeping to part from her lover Phil Garron because he was going out to India to the tea plantations near Darjeeling, “and India, as everyone knows, is divided equally between jungle, tigers, cobras, cholera and sepoys” (Yoked with an unbeliever 35). India is an abode of all religions. People are free to worship their own gods. There are occasional breaches and disloyalties. The festivals of the Hindus and the Muslims, the pilgrimages undertaken by thousands, the marriages and funerals, the worshipping of God – all these go to the paint the religious aspect in India. The riot between the Hindus and Muslims was a regular feature in the pre-partition India. Kipling shows the enmity and the hatred between these two people in “His chance in Life” Tisabu was a place occupied by a few Orissa Mohammedans. They despised the Hindu Subjudge and arranged to start a little Mohurrum riot.” But the Hindus turned out and broke their heads: when finding lawlessness pleasant, Hindus and Mohammedans together raised an aimless sort of Donnybrook just to see how far they could go. They tooted each other’s shops and paid off private grudges in the regular way” (His chance in Life in **Plain Tales** 81). “On the city Wall” present Wali Dad, the young Moslem and through him, Kipling generalizes the bitter feelings of the Muslims towards the Hindus. Kipling had real sympathy for hill girls. His social vision includes the beauty of hill girls. Kipling describes Lispeth, the daughter of Sonoo, and Jadeh as:

“When a Hill-girl grows lovely, she is worth
Travelling fifty miles over bad ground to
Look upon. Lispeth had a Greek face –
One of those faces people paint
So often, and see so seldom. She was a
Pale, ivory colour, and for her race,
Extremely tall. Also, she possessed eyes
That were wonderful; and had she not
Been dressed in the abominable print
Cloths affected by Missions, you would,
Meeting her on the hillside unexpectedly,
Have thought her the original Diana of
The Romans going out to slay” (Lispeth in **Plain Tales** 2).



Dunmaya, the girl whom Phil met in “Yoked with an unbeliever”, “had a strain of Hill blood in her and like the Hill-women, was not a **purdah – nashin** or woman who lives behind the veil” (P 38). People in India are highly superstitious. The various superstitions in India are adequate to fill or colour the stories of Kipling. “The Return of Imray” shows how the servant is superstitious of the touch of the Whitemen. “The Mark of the Beast” illustrates the idea that a man who desecrates a temple would receive heaven’s punishment. There are numerous stories about witches and ghosts. “A Churel is the peculiarly malignant ghost of a woman who had died in child-bed. She haunts lonely roads, her feet are turned backwards, on the ankles, and she leads men to torment” (Kim 130). Charming against all devils and dangers is very common in India. Allied with the superstitions is the belief in Metempsychosis. It is an involuntary experience in which the spirit of a person passes into other bodies. Supernaturalism is intrinsically connected with metempsychosis “They” is the story of commerce with the dead. The children are elusive. They are more heard than seen. “The Mark of the Beast” deals with the possessed man who develops the characteristics of a wolf. “The strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes” is an experience of Jukes near the burning ghat of the Hindus. Kipling shared a profound appreciation of the values and the ideals of India’s old civilization. Thus, “In Kipling’s Stories, the supernatural – one manifestation of the unempirical – often intrudes as that which is incomprehensible to empirical man” (Kamra 10).

The Anglo-Indian Society in holiday mood, its feelings of racial arrogance and its duty in India are painted with the master hand of Kipling. “The story teller tears aside the veil that hides Anglo-Indian life from the average Englishmen and makes him realize its struggles, its failures, its glories and its shame” (Rickett 669) Kipling gives a true picture of the Anglo-Indian society in the 19th century. The critical Heritage comments:

The very scenes are strange, scenes of
Anglo-Indian life; military and official;
Of native life; of the life of half-castes
And Eurasians. The writer presents with
Unusual vivacity, freshness, wit and
Knowledge of things little known –
The dreams of opium smokers, the
Ideas of private soldiers, the passions of
Pathans and wild Border tribes, the
Magic which is yet a living force in
India, the lovers of secluded native
Widows, the habits of damsels whose
House like Rahab’s is on the city
Wall – nothing but these qualities
Keeps the English reader awake and
Excited” (Green 47)

Kipling’s social vision includes the snobberies, frivolities, fashions and customs of the Anglo-Indians. This is because he travelled extensively in the Empire recording for his paper the lives of Englishman and women in India. The Anglo-Indian society is a very frivolous world where the English are among themselves and the natives hover somewhere in the distance playing minor roles. “They are a good and lovable people... but we never seem to come to a true and thorough knowledge of them” (Buckland 139). Its Edmund Wilson puts it, “The whole Anglo-Indian situation is studied with certain objectivity” (P 105).

To conclude, Kipling’s purpose in the short stories is not to glorify the British Empire ... but to interpret it to the English, make them indeed, aware of its existence, and of their responsibilities towards it” (Dobree 25). He was never a man to lay bare his feelings. Through the social vision, Kipling projects an image of India in which he is ambivalent on Indo-British relationships and his ironic scrutiny of the Raj and its image.

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