

Rationalistic Variations in the Short Stories of Rudyard Kipling

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Abstract :

Rudyard Kipling is one of the few English writers who have written extensively on India and its regional variations. In his writing India occupies a central position. India has a special place in his heart as he had spent his impressionable years of childhood and spend many young years in India. Therefore the main characters in his works are focusing the Indianness. His many short stories are giving insights of rationalistic variations of India. He wrote many short stories and the base of these stories are socio-cultural flavour of India. This paper focusing the Rationalistic approach of Rudyard Kipling short stories which showcases the Indianness in his literary creation.

Keywords :indianness, regional

About Rudyard Kipling :

Rudyard Kipling is one of the best-known of the late Victorian poets and story-tellers. Although he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1907, his political views, which grew more toxic as he aged, have long made him critically unpopular. In the New Yorker, Charles McGrath remarked "Kipling has been variously labelled a colonialist, a jingoist, a racist, an anti-Semite, a misogynist, a right-wing imperialist warmonger; and though some scholars have argued that his views were more complicated than he is given credit for to some degree he really was all those things. That he was also a prodigiously gifted writer who created works of inarguable greatness hardly matters anymore, at least not in many classrooms, where Kipling remains politically toxic." However, Kipling's works for children, above all his novel *The Jungle Book*, first published in 1894, remain part of popular culture through the many movie versions made and remade since the 1960s.

The Kiplings lived in America for several years, in a house they built for themselves and called "Naulahka." Kipling developed a close friendship with Theodore Roosevelt, then Under Secretary of the Navy, and often discussed politics and culture with him. "I liked him from the first," Kipling recalled in *Something of Myself*, "and largely believed in him. ... My own idea of him was that he was a much

bigger man than his people understood or, at that time, knew how to use, and that he and they might have been better off had he been born twenty years later.” Both of Kipling’s daughters were born in Vermont—Josephine late in 1892, and Elsie in 1894—as was one of the classic works of juvenile literature: The Jungle Books, which are ranked among Kipling’s best works. The adventures of Mowgli, the founding child raised by wolves in the Seonee Hills of India, are “the cornerstones of Kipling’s reputation as a children’s writer,” declared William Blackburn in *Writers for Children*, “and still among the most popular of all his works.” The Mowgli stories and other, unrelated works from the collection—such as “Rikki-Tikki-Tavi” and “The White Seal”—have often been filmed and adapted into other media.

The Kiplings returned to India without stirring the emotions of their children. Thus, Rudyard was left to discover the meaning of separation from father and mother at a very tender age. His sister was too small to know the nature of their misfortune. They found themselves with a pair of strangers, Uncle Harry and Aunt Rosa. The woman was a fanatically religious lady and with the assistance of her adolescent son, she tyrannized over Rudyard. Both of them beat him regularly. They tried everything to break the spirit of this child by keeping him away from books and his beloved sister, Trix. This period was of calculated torture in the 'House of Desolation'. He describes it as, ‘It was an establishment run with full vigour of the Evangelical as revealed to the woman. I had never heard of hell, so I was introduced to it in all its terrors’. In 1882, Rudyard Kipling joined as an assistant editor for the widely read *The Civil and Military Gazette* at Lahore. From 1882 to 1887, he was working mainly at Lahore and Simla, which was a hill station of the Government of India during the hot weather. He lived a bachelor's life, gathering through his journalistic work a variety of information about India, its customs, government and army. His travels all over India enhanced his knowledge about the land. For a boy of seventeen, his knowledge of Indian life and character was amazing. He acquired immense information about Indian ways, language and traditions. He was extraordinarily accurate in his Indian details. In between, he kept on writing short stories which were originally printed as newspaper columns and were later collected together. In Lahore, Rudyard enjoyed the closest family contact with his father, mother and sister, which he always strived for. His father worked as a Curator of the Lahore Museum after he had finished his job in Bombay.

In December 1907, Kipling was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Kipling was only forty-two years old when he received this honour. Above all, he was the first Englishman to get the Nobel Prize for Literature. It was an achievement in itself. He was Lord Rector of St.Andrews from 1922 to 1925 and in 1933 he was elected a foreign associate member of French Academie Des sciences et politiques. The highest of all awards, the Order of Merit, he refused, but in 1926 he was given the gold medal of the

Royal Academy of Literature, which only Scott, Meredith and Hardy had received before him. Kipling died on 18th January 1936 in London and was cremated at Golders Green Crematorium on the evening of Monday, the 20th January. His ashes were buried in Westminster Abbey on 23rd January beside those of Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy.

Kipling's Literary Journey :

Rudyard Kipling worked as a journalist in the early stages of his youth. The profession of journalism demanded a lot of hard work and traveling. Rudyard was a keen observer who would record places, people, their customs and traditions in his mind. These recorded experiences gave him inspiration to write. He used these experiences in his novels, short stories, essays and poems. His fame rests principally on his short stories dealing with India, the sea, the jungle and its beasts, the army, the navy and a multitude of other subjects. His verse was comparatively less appreciated than his short stories in spite of being as diversified in subjects as his tales. There is a large variety in his short stories. Some of the Kipling stories were criticized as being trivial in subject, vulgar in conception and immature in execution. But his best stories show a "common technique of a hard clear form, a strong and occasionally garish descriptive brushwork and an all pervading economy" (Henn, Kipling¹⁹) He produced his first volume of short stories in 1888 called Plain Tales from the Hills. In this collection, Kipling dealt with the adventures of British soldiers in Simla and the lives of civil servants in India, their plight and racial problems. These stories bear the structural marks of their journalistic origins. Some stories in this collection are also concerned with the macabre and supernatural aspect of Indian life. The next volume Soldiers Three (1888) achieved a peculiar fame. Kipling's treatment of soldier was very interesting and different. This collection served a useful purpose in drawing attention to the British soldier of 1880s. These stories provide real insights into the life of a common soldier of the day. The stories contain some superb descriptions of the heat, the discomfort, the disease and the monotony of a soldier's life in the eighties and earlier.

Regionalistic Approach of Kipling Short Stories :

Many of Rudyard Kipling's earliest short stories are set in the India of his early childhood years in Bombay and his newspaper days in Lahore. The intervening years at school in England had perhaps increased his sensitivity to the exotic Indian locale and British imperial presence. Kipling was a voracious reader of English, French, and American writers, trained by his newspaper experience in the virtues of

conciseness and detail. His art arrived almost fully revealed in his earliest works. Kipling focused, however, not on the glories and conquests of empire but on the lives—work and activities, passions and emotions—of ordinary people responding to what were often extraordinary or inexplicable events. Love, especially doomed love, terror and the macabre, revenge and its consequences—these were the elements upon which his stories turned, even later when the settings were often English. His fame or notoriety was almost instantaneous, in part because of the locations and subject matter of the stories, because of his use of dialect in re-creating the voices of his nonestablishment characters, and because Kipling's early writings appeared at a time when England and Western civilization as a whole were caught up in imperial dreams and rivalries.

A number of his stories pivot around the relations between men and women. Kipling has been called a misogynist, and often his characters, particularly those in the military, blame women for their own and others' misfortunes. Most of his stories employ a male voice, and many critics agree that Kipling's women are not often fully realized, particularly in his early years. The isolation of British soldiers and officials in India could itself explain these portrayals. There were boundaries in that esoteric environment—sexual, social, racial—that were violated only at a cost, but in Kipling's stories they are crossed because his characters choose to do so or cannot help themselves.

Beyond the Pale

In "Beyond the Pale," Christopher Trejago seduces and is seduced by a fifteen-year-old Hindu widow, Bisea, before misunderstanding and jealousy cause the lovers to terminate the relationship. Later, Trejago returns to their place of rendezvous only to discover that Bisea's hands have been cut off at the wrists; at the instant of his discovery, he is attacked by a sharp object that injures his groin. One of Kipling's shortest stories, it exhibits several of his continuing concerns. Love, passion, even understanding are often doomed, whether between man and woman or between British and Indians, while horror and unexpected shock can occur at any time and have lasting effects; revenge is a human quality. Stylistically, the story is rich in the descriptive detail of the dead-end alley where Bisea and Trejago first met but is enigmatic in explaining how the affair became known, leading to Bisea's maiming. The story does not end with the assault on Trejago. As often with Kipling, there is a coda. Trejago is forced to carry on, with a slight limp and the remembrance of horror leading to sleepless nights.

Love-o'-Women

Dangerous boundaries and illicit relationships also feature in his "Love-o'-Women," the story of Larry Tighe, a gentleman who had enlisted as a common soldier, a gentleman-ranker who stepped down out of his proper world. Kipling often used the technique of a story-within-a-story, told by a narrator who may or may not be telling the total truth but whose own personality and perception are as important as the plot itself, accomplished most notably in "Mrs. Bathurst." Here, in "Love-o'-Women," the tale opens with Sergeant Raines shooting one of his own men, Corporal Mackie, who had seduced Mrs. Raines. After Raines's trial, several soldiers ruminate on the dead Mackie's fate. One of them, Terrence Mulvaney, comments that Mackie is the lucky one: He died quickly. He then tells the story of Tighe, who claimed the nickname of Love-o'- Women and made a career in the military of seducing daughters and wives, governesses and maids. When Tighe attempts to commit suicide by exposing his body to enemy fire during a battle, Mulvaney saves him and learns that Tighe deeply regrets what he has done, including his treatment and loss of his only real love, a woman named Egypt who turned to prostitution. Dying of syphilis, Tighe collapses in Egypt's arms; she then shoots herself. Kipling did not necessarily believe in justice in the world, and, although reared a Christian, he was not orthodox in his religious beliefs but believed that there was a mortality for which one must answer. In "Love-o'-Women," sin required confession, contrition, and penance.

The Phantom 'Rickshaw

Ghosts or phantoms also often played a role in Kipling's stories. In "The Phantom 'Rickshaw," Jack Pansay, an English official in India, begins a shipboard flirtation with a married woman, Mrs. Keith-Wessington, while returning from England. The affair continues in India, but Pansay grows tired of her, becoming engaged to someone else. Mrs. Wessington refuses to accept the termination of the romance and subsequently dies after losing control of her rickshaw while attempting to renew the affair. Soon, as a ghostly presence, she and her rickshaw begin to appear to Pansay, and feeling that his rejection had killed her, he himself sinks into decline. Although his doctor believes that his illness is merely the result of overwork, Pansay believes otherwise: His death is the payment required for his treatment of Mrs. Wessington.

The Wish House

From the beginning of his literary career, Kipling was considered to be a master in the use of dialect. Mulvaney's telling of Tighe's tale was rendered in an Irish dialect. In Kipling's Indian stories, Mulvaney's Irish was joined by characters speaking London Cockney, Yorkshire in northern England, and others. In many of his later stories, Kipling incorporated various English dialects, such as the Sussex dialect spoken by Grace Ashcroft and Liz Fettle in "The Wish House." He generally used dialect when portraying the speech of persons from the undereducated classes or foreigners—persons different from his middle-class readers—and his treatment is often successful, even though some critics have claimed that his dialect re-creations were not entirely accurate. It has also been argued that, at times, the use of dialect gets in the way of the reading and understanding of the story itself, although this is more true of his early stories than his later ones.

In "The Wish House," Grace Ashcroft goes to an abandoned house, inhabited by wraiths, where it was possible to take on the pain of some loved one; for her, it was her former lover. Like the blind woman in "They," however, she is driven by a love that is ultimately a selfish one: She is willing to accept his pain as hers not only because she loved him but also because she hopes that he will never marry and find happiness with anyone else.

Conclusion :

Kipling writing has flavour of Indian culture and traditions. Many of Kipling's earlier themes are elaborated and incorporated into Kim. There is the vivid picture of the Indian army. British rule is never challenged; instead Kipling uses several minor characters strictly for the purpose of advocating British rule. Although Kipling shows a knowledge of a number of Indian languages and the capability of using many voices, there is no variety of viewpoint. All voices hold one style and one dominant point of view in favour of British imperialism. Kipling's use of Indian words and phrases lacks any attempt to represent their cultural specificity. Kipling's stories portrays the Indianness. Kipling adopted the rationalistic approach to showcase the Indianness in all his short stories.

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