

**REAL AND IMAGINED WORLDS: A STUDY OF THE  
IMPERIAL STANCE IN THE NOVELS OF KIPLING,  
FORSTER, ORWELL AND PAUL SCOTT.**

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## CONCLUSION

Kipling's literary career reflects the confrontation between literature and imperialism. Close on its heels came the Great War which triggered off a series of changes that were to alter the face and character of British imperialism and later lead not only to the break-up of the empire but also to the intellectual proscription of imperialism. Kipling reached his artistic maturity and the heights of literary fame by the beginning of the twentieth century - when England was still a great imperial power. Forster, Orwell and Paul Scott wrote their novels on India when imperialism had lost much or all of its magic. Their fictions reflect the decay of the values that sustained the British rule in India and they, consciously or otherwise, throw up a critique of Kipling's imperial beliefs. However, the influence of the Bard of the Empire is palpable in their fictions. When the empire faced the threat of dissolution and was eventually wound up, the novelists were forced willy-nilly to relate their readings of the situation to Kipling's construct of the empire. His shadow falls across the fictions of the later British novelists writing about imperial India. Kipling was attacked, mocked at but never ignored. The world of letters that expelled him could not really exorcise the impact of his ideals on the sensitive minds of the later novelists.

In his writings, Kipling combines the British imperial designs with his love for India. He truly believed in the humanitarian work done by the raj. British imperialism, he felt, was a reaching out to other lands as the energetic, altruistic and supremely gifted British people assumed control and devised a more effective system of administration. It was a two-way traffic because the Anglo-Indians, who distributed their material largesse, sought to learn the ultimate meaning of life from a more spiritual East. In Kim, the Lama knows the secret of life which the players of the Great Game, despite all their worldly knowledge and élan, know nothing of. Kipling's writings show that in his time it was still possible to believe in the empire and continue to be stirred by an affection for India and her people.

Forster's A Passage to India moves away from the certainty of Kipling's position. There is actually a pattern in the progression of the British disillusionment with the imperial dreams. If Kipling's writings represent the energising myth of the empire builders, the later writers like Forster, Orwell and Paul Scott subject the myth to critical scrutiny. On the basis of a close reading of the novels relevant to the study one is led to surmise that Scott, Orwell and even Forster, to an extent, recall the

Kiplingesque ideals in their fictions in a variety of ways. Their fictions bring into focus the interactive relations between literature and society. However, it would be wrong to suppose that literature upholds a vigorously coherent vision of a society at a given point of time or is fully identified with the thought patterns of the times. The Indian fictions of Kipling, Forster, Orwell and Paul Scott are not just a reflection of the "extrinsic" reality but also of the "intrinsic" one. This study takes into account not merely the depictions of the cross-cultural conflicts or people caught in problematical situations, but also the dialectical patterns within the novels that inform and validate these representations of imperial India. The depiction of the social reality depends on the author's understanding of it. Such representations have their own validity because they become the literature of self-revelation where India functions as a unifying theme or metaphor. The private and public worlds converge - as the writers pour out their intense emotions, convictions and obsessions. The special problem of the émigré authorship can be an advantage because it stimulates an unconventional response to reality. The real world is viewed from an off-centre vantage point. As the authors' sensibilities militate against the impressions of an "alien" culture, their stance becomes varied, ironical, and at times even satirical. A study

of their fictions, consequently, becomes a richly rewarding experience. In "The Conversion of Aurellian MacGoggin" Kipling wrote : "In India ..... where you see humanity - raw, brown, naked humanity with nothing between it and the blazing sky, and only used-up, overhauled earth underfoot, the notion somehow dies away and men come back to simpler theories." The quotation explains his position. Even Forster who was more sympathetic to Indian views did not discern any coherent or intelligible core to the Indian reality. India, to him, was a "vague jumble of Rajahs, Babus and elephants." She was a muddle, a grand chaos. Kipling, Forster, Orwell and Paul Scott perceive the vast land mass as monotonous, sinister and enigmatic and they seek to contain it within the limits of their particular metaphors for India. Their constructions reconcile the real with what is perceived which explains the ambience of their fictional worlds (where fascination exists with horror) and the ambiguity of their positions.

Modern novels mirror the crisis in modern life. The early European novels were novels of adventure. Don Quixote faced a world that appeared to him in all its fearsome ambiguity, the single divine truth decomposed into myriad relative truths parcelled out by man. The "thinking self" became the basis of everything as man heroically faced

the universe alone. Kim's experience is somewhat similar, and even at the time of writing the novel, Kipling acknowledged his debt to Cervantes. Actually the seeds of his Indian dream were sown in his mind when as a child in the home of his foster-parents at Southsea he played Crusoe. To him, and to many other writers before and after him, the empire represented an extended field of action.

It is interesting to recall Forster's comment in "The Job Done" (Listener XVII, 19th March, 1937) where he said that an "immature" man like Kipling can become a great writer "when he turns from his superficial worldly experience which he can formulate rationally to the 'daemon' at the centre of his being. "Forster seems to be quite justified in thinking thus. The success of Kim is wholly due to the fact that it is Kipling's inwardly realised dream in which he combines his experience of life and his awareness of the spiritual values with his objective view of the Indian reality. There is no evidence of the jerky movement and the superficial handling of the subject that we find in his early poem titled "Sudder Bazar" (1883). This poem bears an uncanny affinity with some of the scenes and stock figures of Kim. The poem begins by first identifying the occasion for it -

The motive that calls for my ditty  
 Is to tell you how many things are  
 To be found on the road to the city  
 Which we call Sudder Bazar.

Then come the images - following one another in close succession : the voice of the "muezzin" calling the faithful to prayer, the kites circling overhead, the sweet-seller, the Kabuli horse dealers, the letter writers of the bazar, the staid Brahminy bulls, the Jat from the cane fields, the Sikh gentleman and the bridegroom in a marriage procession. Kipling is unable to relate to any of them. The odd figure of a white soldier - a Tommy - seems to review his faith in the British suzerainty -

In the midst of this turmoil pell-mell met,  
 You may catch from the spot where you stand  
 Some glimpse of T. Atkin's helmet -  
 The power that governs the land.

India appears in the poem as a frieze - the way a journalist or a travel writer would see her. Kipling does not enter into the spirit of the place. The sympathy that is so much in evidence in Kim is oddly lacking here. Like Tarvin, Kipling is more concerned with fleeing from "the gamut of face-tints/ That ranges through yellow to tar"

But what do I care for their faces,  
 For the Jat, the fakir, or the Sikh,  
 When here, in these populous places,  
 I meet ninety thousand a week ?

He goes on to recall the reality of the English landscapes, clutching at it like a proverbial straw to prevent himself from being overwhelmed by the Indian reality.

Oh, give me the wet walks of London,  
 And a tramp with my sweetheart as well,  
 And our "Power in the East" may be undone,  
 And the Sudder Bazar go to ... well.

The poem ends on a note of self-justification as Kipling writes:

So this is the reason, my dearest,  
 When I walk where those infields are,  
 That I bang the small boy who stands nearest  
 And flee from Sudder Bazar.

The subjectivity and the conceptual hollowness of the poem reveal a dimension of imperial experience - to which even the later writers relate positively or otherwise. In Kim, the lines are not so sharply drawn. Kim's journey, like Don Quixote's, is symbolic of man's journey into a world

where he encounters the relativity of his own experiences. The language of relativity and ambiguity is basic to both novels, as indeed to Forster's, Orwell's and Paul Scott's Indian fictions. In all of them the principal characters are shown in the process of encountering a complex reality where good and evil are so mixed up that religions, ideologies and even the Self stand threatened. A Passage to India is informed by Forster's awareness of the impossibility of reconciling different perceptions and interpretations of reality. The dissonance is the outcome of a clash of cultures. The central dilemma of modern life is this awareness of the contestability and contingency of particular beliefs and values. The epistemological complexity of Forster's novel underscores the view that political truths and social functions have so obscured the "world of life" that the spirit of the modern novel is the spirit of inquiry into the complexity of the human experience. It reveals the fact that life and reality are too complex to be encompassed and the elusiveness of truth makes simple categorising impossible. While A Passage to India repudiates the western urge to know and control reality, it also maintains a continuity of sorts with the earlier empire fictions - from the Post-Mutiny fictions to Kipling's. Like Burmese Days and the Raj Quartet - which address themselves to the earlier fictional representations of the Indian reality, A Passage

offers a veiled response to the literary revolution brought about by Kipling in his genre of empire fiction. Since the political equations and social realities are constantly altering, the British novels about the empire outline the difficulties of pursuing the ideals of imperial governance when the existentialist dilemma and the solipsist threats are only too tangible. Kipling created a vagrant hero in Kim - one who reveals his image through his action. The Lama provides a counterpoint to this image, suggesting that the Self is not to be grasped through action. He invites Kim to turn away from the world of action and examine instead the invisible inner life. The novel ends before the choice made can really counter the Lama's claim. Kipling must have also been aware of the fact that even Kim's activist creed is likely to be challenged and even thwarted. Kim ends - like A Passage to India - with a recognition of the limits of its own form.

The Great War that so transformed the world, prompted novelists to search for existential meanings in their fictions. The modern novels interrogate not only the preceding ones but also Life, society, politics, epistemological claims and their own discourse patterns. Mrs. Moore's problem reads like an existentialist dilemma. The cave incident and its aftermath - like Mrs. Moore's pathetic self-examination- show that knowledge is perspectival and

inevitably brings particular perspectives into conflict with other standpoints. A Passage is supposed to have raised the hackles of some Anglo-Indians and it also irked some Indians. Its ambiguity suggests that imaginative interpretation of a given condition can work in many directions.

Adela's experience in the caves interrogates the entire raj discourse which fitted the categories of racial and sexual stereotypes into the Anglo-Indian mechanisms of cultural self-definition. In a feminist reading of A Passage - "The Unspeakable Limits of Rape : Colonial Violence and Counter-Insurgency" (published in Genders No.10, Spring 1991) Jenny Sharpe locates the novel within the frame of 1857 with Forster rendering the rape indeterminate and thereby focusing the racialisation of the imperial discourse. She relates the significance of the rape to the historical production of the colonial discourse on the native assault of the white women in India. Recent revisions of the raj in Attenborough's Gandhi and The Jewel in the Crown, according to her, show signs of nostalgia for the empire which masquerades as self-criticism. This is precisely the point that I make in my analysis of the imperial stance of the giants among the writers of empire fiction.

Another of my contentions is that the novelized historiography is perhaps the only way to mitigate the public

dissatisfaction with historical accounts of the cultural encounters. The empire novels not only accommodate the real with the imagined but also interpret the historical facts to explain the predicament of people in problematical situations. A novel is not a dogmatic discourse. A knowledge of ambiguity and relativity of experience prompts the novelists to create existential situations out of historical circumstances. Existence, however, is not dependent merely on what has occurred, on facts. It visualises possibilities. Ultimately, the world of the novel is not just a picture of a known reality, it is also a configuration of an ethos that extends beyond the real world. One has to only examine the final scenes in Kim, A Passage to India, Burmese Days and the Raj Quartet to understand the implications of their designs. So the insistence on fidelity to historical reality is irrelevant to any serious valuation of a novel. The novelist, unlike the historian cannot be coerced to function within the limits imposed by verifiable facts. A novelist is an explorer of experience. If the seeds of the present were there in the past and each beginning prefigures an ending and another beginning and so on, the reality of a fictional work acquires its own legitimacy and truth. Perhaps a novelist's method of imagining relative truths and mirroring them through experimental selves is the only satisfactory way of confronting the enigma of Self, and of Life.