

THE COLONIAL ASPECTS OF KIPLING'S AND FORSTER'S FICTION

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« This world where much is to be done, and little to be known. »⁽¹⁾

In this article, we shall discuss how two major British authors of modern times, Kipling and Forster reacted to a developing country, India, and how they presented this country in their fiction. Each writer has been dealt with separately because the work of one is quite different from that of another.

Apart from basic differences among them as writers, there are enough important issues common to the fictional situations like – evocation of the landscape, race relations, primitivism, imperialism etc – in the light of which each can be and has been examined. The greatest common denominator is, of course, that each is a Western writer reacting to a non – Western country. This situation has generally been examined by Western scholars like Susan Howe, Allen Greenberger, Jeffrey Myers, etc...

Now, we shall give our view-point and see how the vastness and variety of this land attracted these two English novelists and how the outline of the vision of India was manifested in their stories, essays and verse.

KIPLING

Let us now begin by Rudyard Kipling and see what Louis Cornell in **Kipling in India** says about him.

« The youngman's discovery of India proceeded at a continually accelerating rate, and he set down what he discovered in verse, fiction and newspaper essay... As a journalist, he saw India with the personal and discriminating vision that we associate with writers of fiction. »⁽²⁾

Thus, Rudyard Kipling identified himself with Britain's imperial destiny and yet also empathised with things Indian as is evident from his writing. Rudyard Kipling was clear in his mind. He knew which side of the great divide between imperial Britain and subject India he stood. He was certain that to be ruled by Britain was India's obligation: To rule India was Britain's duty. But is it the whole story? Or is it the last line of a story which began many years ago in India?

In **The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling**, Angus Wilson begins his new biography of this author by saying that Kipling « *was a man who throughout his life worshipped and respected children and their imaginings. He took part in children games. That magic came from the incorporation into adult stories and parables of two of the principal shapes which are to be found in the imaginative world of the children. The first is that transformation of a small space into a whole world which comes from the intense absorption of a child. The second is the map-making of hazards and delights which converts a child's smallest journey into a wonderous exploration.* » (3)

Kipling was not merely born in India (December, 30 th, 1865) but also brought up there by Indian servants: The "ayah" (4) and the "meeta" (5). They exercised an influence strongest than that of his parents.

« *To-gether they [the ayah the meeta] symbolised the cultural pluralism of the Indian scene, the staggering array of sects, tribes, castes and faith that intermingled in the great city around him and throughout the huge subcontinent beyond.* » (6).

In fact, Kipling thought and felt in hindustani mainly communicated with Indians and even looked like an Indian boy:

« *A drawing of him made by a schoolmate shows a swarthy boy with lank straight hair who might almost pass for a Hindu* » (7).

Even, he went to Hindu temples for he was « *below the age of cast* » (8).

Rudyard Kipling was deeply impressed by the romance, colour and mystery of India and the country became a permanent part of his idea of an idyllic childhood a private "garden of Eden before the fall". Kipling's first vision of this land is then romantic.

J.M.S. Tompkins says:

« *It is a youthful, enthusiastic and acquisitive vision* »⁽⁹⁾ and « *Kim is a limpid eye through which he [Kipling] looks back on the great and beautiful land of Hind.* »⁽¹⁰⁾.

India of Kipling, then, stands for beauty. The world of Kipling is in fresh contact with nature and we can say that no other writer of English has equalled Kipling's sensitivity to Indian words, to India's flora and fauna, and to his human folk who inhabit India's villages. His book, **Kim**, is in this sense the best representative story and whenever [Kim - Kipling] walks to the road in India, he is struck by the charm of the men's brightly coloured turbans and the women's shimmering veils and voluminous skirts. Kipling likes these Indians and against this affinity to things Indians, it was through his parents that he was exposed to the most painful experience of his life because after his six idyllic years in Bombay, he was sent along with his sister in Southsea in England to be educated like an "English". He lived in an English family the Holloway. There he was persecuted by "Aunty Rosa" and his son 'Harry'. This unlucky period of Kipling is revealed in "*Baa Baa Black Sheep*" [1888], *The Light That Failed* [1890], and in *Something of Myself* [1937]. He describes Mrs Holloway's establishment as "A House of Desolation".

After the great feeries of India, Kipling was confronted with the hard realities of the cold England and as a matter of fact, India in Kipling's life has been valorised in this contrast. In England, Kipling has been humiliated and has lost his social caste. Without his servants, he leaved in this foggy town a monotonous life without joy.

« *His spirit belonged to India, with its many shaded mysteries, its warm teeming landscape, its endless variety of sounds, shapes and colours.* »⁽¹¹⁾.

In his detestable life of a child in England, came a new chagement. In 1878, Kipling left the "House of Desolation" to enter a college at Westward Ho! The school emphasised military and masculine virtues and sport was compulsory but Rudyard was a sedentary child who hated sports partly because of his (dangerously) weak eye-sight and partly because he wanted to live

a life of mind. In this public-school, he learnt his first imperial lessons and his vocation of a writer was asserted. What he never lost is the learning of those he called: "The Famous Men."

*« There we met with famous men
set in office o'er us.»
And they beat on us with rods ⁽¹²⁾.*

Fortunately, there, he met two friends George Beresford and Lionel Dunsterville with whom he founded the Kipling Society in 1927.

Yet, his English years inevitably gave Kipling the message that England was a part of his true self.

At 17 years old he returned to India to work from 1882 to 1889 but there he saw another aspect of India, not the exotic one, but the real one. Being at first an exotic country, India appeared to him as a cruel land. It is why in his Indian stories, he enchanted us or terrified us in visions of feeries or nightmares. As a physical presence, India was cruel and its climate was a force which destroys everything and makes of India "The Grim Step Mother" and "the Land of Regrets." The sun and the heat were the most destructive elements in India. The world of the sun is normally the world of light, intelligence and intellectual activity. It is a symbol of life. But, here in India, the excessive power of the sun is harmful to men. The dazzling sun becomes an instrument of blindness and this intense light sterilises the mind:

« On account of its vastness and variety, India is treacherous ground for all foreign writers... ⁽¹³⁾ Nature's relentless enmity to man in the tropics destroys his self confidence and leads him to seek the intervention of occult powers whom he tries to persuade, wheedle or coerce by means of worship, offerings and spells, to override natural laws. It is the ever present spectacle of gods yoked to wordly ends which makes Western observers think that they are seeing an all pervasive spirituality.» ⁽¹⁴⁾.

India, symbol of Hell, mystery and evil is lead by fatal forces and put the men in face of death. In this hot Indian universe, the women, creatures of mirage and sorcery are omnipresent. The woman "is as old as the sphinx and twice as mysterious" ⁽¹⁵⁾. Like in Forster's books, Kipling shows the woman as a permanent

threat for the men. Mrs Hawksbee for example “symbol of the spell that India cast over the young Kipling” is presented for the first time in “Three and an Extra:”

« At Simla, her by-name was the stormy petrel »... She was a little, brown, thin, almost skinny woman, with big, rolling, violet blue eyes and the sweetest manners in the world... she was clever, witty, brilliant, and sparkling beyond most of her kind; but possessed of many devils of malice and mischievousness. She could be nice, though, even to her own sex. But that is another story.» (16).

If by its climate and its women, India is a Hell, it is considered in Kipling’s memory as a garden of Eden, counterpart of the misty Albion. But being a symbol of the British Empire, India is indissociable of the Victorian power and its men are essentially a society of soldiers and civil servants. If universe is hostile to man, he is the sole responsible of his own destiny. He can make of his universe a Paradise or a Hell. For Kipling, being imperialist is the passion which governs his life:

« As to my notion of imperialism, I learned them from men who mostly cursed their work, but always carried it through to the end under difficult surroundings without help or the hope of acknowledgement.» (17).

Kipling was the admirator and the friend of Cecil Rhodes, the builder of South Africa and the influence of this man who wanted to annex the planets was very important for Kipling. This later thought that the English were the “best people in the world” and Rudyard Kipling looked at the British Empire as “the White Man’s Burden”, principal instrument of civilisation because that is the destiny of the white race. The duty of the English is therefore to civilise the inferior races:

*« Take up the White Man’s Burden
Send forth the best ye bread
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives need
To wait in heavy harness
On fluttered folk and wild
Your new caught sullen peoples
Half devil and half child.»* (18).

In his stories like the *Bridge Builders*, *The Jungle Books*, or the *Brushood Boy* the heroes are politically motivated to serve the cause of the British Empire. But it is in *The Seven Seas* that is concentrated the thoughts of Kipling concerning the superiority of the White. In fact, the White Man's Burden is summarized also in the *Song of the English*:

« *Keep ye the Law – be swift in all obedience
Clear the land of Evil, drive the road and bridge the ford,
Make ye sure to each his own
Take the reap where he hath sown.
By the peace among Our peoples let men know we serve the
Lord!*» ⁽¹⁹⁾.

The English, master of the World were chiefly master of India. All the Universe is for Kipling a great lesson of Discipline, Obedience and Order, and Imperialism had given to these men who lived in India a sense of life. They had a mission to do and they sacrificed themselves for the cause.

In the Anglo-Indian work of Kipling from 1888 to 1901, India became the symbol of the Imperial domination. However, Kipling knows that this imperial dream will end one day, and effectively India gets its independence in 1947. It is why in *Mac Andrew Hymn* he writes:

« *Lord thou hast made this world below the shadow of a dream.*» ⁽²⁰⁾.

FORSTER

Now, before discussing about E.M. Forster, let us begin his story, not as custom decrees with his birth, but perversely with his motto one of his characters inscribed over his wardrobe:

« *Distrust every enterprise that require new clothes.*» ⁽²¹⁾.

He penned his own motto, intent on embodying in a few pungent phrases the essential aspect of his character, that special vision he had of himself and wished posterity to respect. Nevertheless his vision of himself as suggested by the motto is at times

misrepresentation. Lionel Thrilling says:

«It is a maxim of only limited wisdom; new thoughts sometimes need new clothes and the seriousness of Forster's intellectual enterprise is too often reduced by the unbuttoned manner he affects.» (22).

Many of his works and much of his career testify to an abiding concern for the Plight of Man. Like so many other literary geniuses of his time, he is a man of action, but he is not an easy man to place either as a person or a writer. All his life he seemed to have avoided labels and slogans.

His early years in England left no ineffaceable scars. The place of his birth, the position of his family have a symbolic bearing on his development. Born in London in 1879, Forster is a lover of the City. He is essentially metropolitan. His father died in 1881, so he was brought up by his mother who comes from a middle-class intellectual family. He was surrounded by a lot of women. It is why women are particularly striking in his last novel: **A Passage To India**.

He first attended Tonbridge's school. He didn't like it. There, he felt a sense of inferiority towards his friends *"Sawston Tonbridge may have made Forster miserable, but it gave his thought its great central theme. This is the theme of the undeveloped heart"* (23), says Lionel Thrilling. Forster learnt his first lessons there, which are, the artificiality and especially the meanness of the class-barrier. He never forget the public-school system as being the machinery that produce the typical English ruler. Thrilling writes:

«In his essay, "Notes on the English Character", Forster speaks of the public-school system as being at the root of England's worst national faults and most grievous political errors. For, he says, the faults of England are the faults of the Middle-Classes that dominate it, and the very core of these Middle-Classes is the English public-school system, which gives its young men a weight out of all proportion to their numbers and sends them into a world "of whose richness and subtlety they have no conception", a world into which they go "with well-developed bodies, fairly developed minds, and undeveloped hearts.» (24).

After Tonbridge, Forster went to King's College. Here, he moved in an atmosphere of culture and enlightenment. He read widely and fruitfully and came to know several prominent persons who later entered significantly into his life. He became friend with a number of men and women who founded "the Bloomsbury Group". This group was essentially composed by intellectuals and aristocrats and liberals like Lytton Stachey, Virginia Woolf, Bertrand Russell and so on.

It was under the Cambridge influence of his tutor that Forster made his first political choice and later, when in 1903, his friends Wedd and Dickinson founded the "Independent Review", he soon contributed to it and like Kipling, he began to write some political and literary writings. He took an important step and solidified his positions as a rising journalist and a great writer.

When Forster finished his studies in Cambridge, he was 26. At this time, he published his first novel called **Where Angels Fear To Tread** (1905). Then he travelled a lot and like Kipling, he went to Italy, Greece, and was sent, during the first world war, in Egypt, as a non-combattant with the Red-Cross. The war was a decisive point in Forster's career and it developed in him the interest of imperial conduct and policy. His stay in Egypt was a period of crucial development. There, he writes a nostalgic guide through Alexandria which is an historical essay of colonialism. After that, he travelled to India several times, in 1912-1913, then in 1921-1922 and in 1925. He returned also in 1945. In India, Forster found peace and happiness. His Indian experience had profoundly marked him and he brings back different essays from his journey but his best writing on India was his novel: **A Passage to India** which he began in 1912 and finished in 1924. The book is a mixture of his experience and his personal reflexions. An outline of the vision of India was manifested in this book.

Biography and criticism have reciprocal influences, and the conception of Forster as a man has been greatly influenced by the criticism of **A Passage to India**. The masterpiece became the man. One might enter a caveat against selecting a single work of an author who wrote many [**The Longest Journey** 1907. **A Room with a View** 1908 **Howards End** 1910... **The Hill of Devi** 1953 etc...], and finding in that particular work a final explanation of his personality and ideas. These years in India represented for

him a full tide of excitement and achievement. Although this novel has some interest for Forster's political theory, it is also significant for personal reasons. By means of it, he achieved influence and reputation.

A Passage to India is a rich document of an infinitive variety. Forster's India is presented from the first page as a diversified country. There are hundred of India. Indeed, India has always been a collection of countries rather than a single country. No other English novelist has described such a range of geographical and social backgrounds and capture with so sure an instinct, the spirit of each. The dominant symbolism in **A Passage to India**, is from the landscape which is used as an image. At all events, Forster like Kipling got to know the vast complexity of India, with its agglomeration of racial and religious groups and on that basis built up his conception of the Indian Empire.

« For the first time Forster has put himself to the test of verisimilitude. Is this the truth about India? Is this the way the English act? always? sometimes? never? Are Indians like this? all of them? some of them? Why so many Moslems and so few Hindus? Why so much Hindu religion, and so little Moslem? And then, finally, the disintegrating question, What is to be done? » (25).

In India, nobody can make a unity and the main theme of the book is the theme of separateness. There is a desunion between Men, British and Natives, and India itself. The fissures in the Indian soil are evident. There is everywhere a sense of opposition on the Indian earth. India is hostile, but much of this hostility can be explained by the climate itself, by the exhaustive heat. Because of this, Adela's experience in the Cave is not completely cleared up. It remains a mystery. The day is very hot and the possibility of an hallucination is quite possible. Forster gives to the Earth a live and he gives to his novel a sort of cosmic dimension. He seems to perceive living forces in the Universe. Even food emphasizes India's divisions. Aziz in organising his party challenges *"The spirit of the Indian earth which tries to keep men in compartments"* (26).

In the opening chapter, Forster presented a series of contrasts which showed the separation of the people living there. In Chandrapore, the Native section is separated from the British

section. The Natives are themselves separated into Moslems and Hindus, and Indians are separated in various casts. The British also are divided among themselves. The characters are not free. As we have seen, the milieu makes them. All these men appear to be in the novel a sort of muddle.

« The separation of race from race, sex from sex, culture from culture, even of man from himself is what underlies every relationship. The separation of the English from the Indians is merely the most dramatic of the chasms in the novel.» (27).

Like Kipling, Forster has noticed in India, the domination of the English Rulers and he also studied the "ecrasement" of man by the colonial administration, by modern civilisation. As a secretary and confidant to the Maharajah of a little state, in India, Forster observes with a certain sensibility, a deep insight and intelligence, with a keen eye for observation, the problem of the Anglo-Indians, the Indians, and the Educated-Indians. He studied especially these latter and the conflict of the cultures. The effect that the Educated Indians made upon the English are in Forster's novel, sympathetic but they have no dignity. Kipling, as we know bore those Educated-Indians, that he called "*The Hybrid University Graduates*," (28). These Educated-Indians "wander between two worlds". They forgot their heritage and have not the courage to adopt the West. To Kipling, they are artificial products of the English educational experiment in India; but they are also the Englishman's rival and so, they would be supplanted.

In Forster's novel, Aziz can be seen as mediating in a way between East and West. He tries to be friend with Fielding, an Englishman, and he is anxious to show that an Indian can be as efficient as an English. For Aziz, friendship is a matter of feeling and the same goes for politics:

« We can't built up India except on what we feel.» (29).

This theme of friendship is central to the book and subsumes the whole question of politics. What the Indians want from the English is kindness instead of their cold justice.

Moving from the Heart to the Head, we move from Moslems to Anglo-Indians. Both the British and the Moslems scorn the mysteries and religion of India for they are alike conquerors. Of

the Anglo-Indian society, it is perhaps enough to say that "more that it can hope to do in England", "it lives by the beliefs of the English public-school. It is arrogant, ignorant, insensitive – intelligent natives estimate that a year in India makes the pleasantest Englishman rude." (30).

Roony, in **A Passage to India**, declaims the Anglo-Indian creed:

« We're out to do Justice and keep the Peace... India is not a drawing-room. We don't intend to be pleasant. We've something more important to do.» (31).

In fact, if the English has some regret from the heart "it would have made him a different man and the British Empire, a different institution" (32).

As a symbolical figure in Forster's book, the women in a **Passage to India** are revealed as the most powerful and the most crudest. They want to be superior to men and despise the Indians much more than the English men do. In this Forster joined Kipling in his ideas about women when he says that they are too difficult to understand. Kipling sees in woman "une sorcière, un centre de forces puissantes et dangereuses" (33) because "la femme qui ne sait pas être la camarade de lutte devient bientôt le mauvais génie" (34). Anglo-Indian women are even more obnoxious than their men. "It's the women, more than the men that are at fault. There, they are without their children, with no duties, no charities with empty minds and hearts, trying to fill them by playing tennis and despising the natives" (35) declares Turton in **A Passage To India**. "They make everything more difficult out here." (36).

The best caricature of English women in India is Turton's wife. We see her rudness to the Native at the Bridge Party in chapter V. She is not interested in the Indians as people. She has a pleasure in humiliating quite gratuitously the Native.

Like Kipling, we see that Forster was interested by the people of India as well as by its landscape and when he says, in his book "How can the Mind take hold of such a country" (37), what the message, he sought to convey? In one sense it was no more than the idea that India stands for something else, for the supreme presence and she knows the trouble of the people living there. The novel is not only the relationship between Indians and

Anglo-Indians, but it is also the relationship between Men and Nature. The solution of all the political conflict is there in the answer of the sky. It's not a solution that will be brought about by men. The friendship between Fielding and Aziz is the novel's chief demonstration that a bridge between them is present. Earth and Sky alike are made to agree in the impossibility of reconciliation between them. The conflict between the Anglo-Indian and the Indian has broadened into a conflict between Earth and Sky. The Sky approves the parting of Aziz and Fielding.

« Why can't we be friends, now » ? Says, Fielding. It's what I want, it's what you want.» But the horses didn't want it. They swerved apart. The Earth didn't want it sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file... They said in their hundred voices. « No, not yet. and the Sky said. No, not there.» (38)

The India of Forster taken between two people, two civilisations and two cultures seems to demonstrate the failure of inadequacy of liberalism to solve Indians problem. The novel is not engaged directly but universally.

CONCLUSION

Now we have reach the end of our survey and our principal view is that the colonial aspects of Kipling's and Forster's fiction were only incidental to their main purposes: The exploration of human character. They naturally wrote about the environment which they knew best and while Kipling struck us by the magma of humans and animals clogging the roads of the Northern India, by the cacophany of cries, horns, and strident rickshaw or horse drawn tonga bells that penetrates right into the heart of the streets where all the races and casts of India are seen. Forster pictured a very small part of India, a fictive civil station called Chandrapore with its world of disorder, but, however we have different incursions showing a greater India. The macrocosm is only the microcosm of India.

The description powers of the two writers are different because it should be remembered that Kipling spent two important periods of his life in India, the six years of childhood at Bombay followed by the second period, that of adolescence spent at Lahore

and Allahabad, while Forster has only been in India as a visitor when he was a man, at 33 years old. In between the two residences of Kipling in India falls his bitter and hard House of Desolation experience and his stay in an English public school with his severe discipline and imperial education. The public schools were dreadful at this time and their horrors helped to equip boys with the necessary qualities for long and obedient service in faraway places. Forster has been unhappy too in these public-schools.

Kipling was a local colorist in most of his writing. He has seen more than he has felt. He is a realist and a great writer of pure prose. He can tell us more in a few words. With him, we have a romantic vision of India, but the horror is never far away. Nature is pitiless towards men.

Forster may be inferior to Kipling, but he can move us also with his prophetic vision, the force that gave heart and light to his humanism. Human relations are permanent interest in **A Passage to India**. He presents a given reality without beautifying it. He invites man to achieve a better India, which is only a microcosm of the world.

Their works are an historical and social document on India under British rules and before the partition with Pakistan. In the British Empire, they found themselves possessed of a dimension to operate in, which afforded them a physical and mental freedom almost beyond our conception. And because the term "Imperialism" still survives in common usage, we think we know what Empire meant for them.

For Rudyard Kipling, Empire was a milieu where young men could perform outside tasks in outside circumstances, with life constantly in hazard. Kipling's heroes know they are doomed. The White Man's Burden philosophy was thought to give aid and comfort. It is why he glorified the image of the Anglo-Indian as a soldier, an empire builder, an exile and a martyr. According to Kipling, man was the conqueror of India and if India was to be ruled by a foreign power, the English were the best. The building of roads and bridges, the laying down of railway system was to him the main part of the imperial task. Kipling loved the hierarchy of order transmitted from aristocracy through all the grades of human responsibility and he is also the great admiror of the team-work. It is well explained in the **Jungle Books** and **Kim**.

For Forster, the image of the British Imperialism is the difficulty for men to communicate and unite. *A Passage to India* exposes its bases of the Imperial system and this without demagoguery without any moralism. This novel presented us a pessimist and anxious drawing of India of the years that followed the first world war, an India devoid of the exoticism which hides in Kipling's novels the problems and the cries of poverty of this country. It is a book showing the faults of British rule in India and suggesting a solution: better human relationship between the ruled and the rulers on the personal level. In his book, Forster shows that he does not approve of imperialism. This was a courageous position at that time, and if the first name that was associated to the word "Imperialism" was that of Joseph Chamberlain, the second was undoubtedly that of Rudyard Kipling. He was not only an Imperialist, but he seems to have taken his role of imperialist leader. While Kipling is concerned by the illiterate Indians, the servants, the farmers and the Educated Indians, Forster in his novel speaks only of the latter. For Kipling, real India, was found among those illiterate people, the other doesn't represent the country for they are rebels. Education made the Indian aware of the backwardness of his country. This awareness resulted into the organisation of the Indian National Congress. Forster better than Kipling recognised this growing unity among the people when he had Aziz express at the end of the book:

« Then, he shouted: « India shall be a Nation. No foreigners of any sort. Hindu and Moslem and Sikh and All shall be one Hurrah! Hurrah for India; Hurrah! » (39)

Finally, what we have noticed is that the India of Kipling and that of Forster have basic differences: differences in the field of physical and geographical presentation and differences in the field of moral and political ideas. And what differences these two men is obvious in what they write about their country, England. While Kipling says: *"Right or wrong, my country still"*, Forster answers: *"If I have to choose between to betray my country and to betray my friend, I should have preferred to betray my country."*

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