

Abstract

In his seminal work on the image of the Empire in the Victorian period, Sir John Seeley identifies two opposing groups of literary artists with reference to their attitudes towards the Empire — those who are ardent votaries of this enterprise and wish its continuance for an inordinate number of years and those who loathe this imperial establishment as a crime against humanity and prefer its dissolution (cited also in Smith 36). Between these two opposite poles there exist a few writers who refuse to be placed in either category. The most prominent name here is that of Joseph Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) whose writings both acclaimed and critiqued the imperial enterprise leading the readers and critics to change and revise their opinion about him from time to time. The author is equally comfortable in every literary genre possible — novel, shorter work of fiction, poetry, travelogue, epistle and even public speeches. The most interesting thing about him is that both in his acclamation and defamation of the Empire he gives the impression through fictional characters that he has been the witness to those commendable or nefarious activities for which the Empire is praised or censored. This also makes a good number of critics form, erroneously enough, a stereotypical opinion about him, namely either a spokesperson of the Empire or a severe critic of the Crown. In consequence, critics are led either to admire or condemn the author according to their literary tastes and personal choices. Most of the critics failed to see through the multifaceted perspectives of the author's approach to the Empire reflected through his narratives.

My initial reading of Kipling's texts and a number of accompanying critical output on those texts leads me to think of the existence of two distinct schools of Kipling criticism — admirers of the author with a leaning to bracket his name with the imperial glory and detractors of the author with their strong anti-imperial predilections. This classification is itself naïve as critics belonging to either category, I believe, interpret and appreciate Kipling's works at their face value. A third and visibly more complicated form of literary analysis, different versions of which were written in a politically decolonized world since 1950s, attempts to defend Kipling against the charges of blindly supporting the Empire. However their defence is far from appreciating those sections of Kipling's works which allegedly

glorify the Empire. Rather their attempt to bring Kipling from the status of a colonial and prejudiced author to a time-honoured litterateur includes an acknowledgement of the author's familiarity with the colonial reality across the globe, his ability to sketch the minute details of imperial affairs at both Home and abroad and, of course, a few shortcomings of the enterprise. Belonging primarily to the discipline of postcolonial studies, these writers, like Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha, Gail Ching-Liang Low, Bart Moore Gilbert, Nirad C. Chaudhury, Ashis Nandy, Joseph Bristow, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak attempt a 'writing back' to the traditional Kipling criticism of praising or castigating the author without critical merit. In their interpretations of Kipling's works an image of the author emerges that is self-contradictory. To put it in other words, the 'self' of the author manifests itself in more than one colour to diverse colonial situations — reminding the empire builders of their responsibility to the colonial subjects and the imperial citizens back at Home, reproaching the colonial administrators for their alleged high-handedness and curiously enough, echoing a need for that very high-handedness in colonies when the situation demands. But more than all these facets, the works penned at a mature age of the author, seek a solution to the racial conflicts between the Whites and their non-White subjects through mutual understanding, tolerance and love. All these works, therefore, shed light on the varied responses of the authorial 'self' which itself undertakes a long journey to attain a more humane vision of the world. In my thesis I have made an endeavour to make a comprehensive analysis of Kipling's works from the perspectives of Postcolonial Criticism. My reading of Kipling includes his novels, short stories, poems and travelogues to trace the said journey of the authorial 'self' just mentioned.

Key words: Race, Empire, Postcolonial discourse in Kipling's writing