

Walls and Sexuality as Trans-cultural Symbols: A Study of Rudyard Kipling's Short Story 'On the City Wall'

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to discuss Rudyard Kipling's short story 'On the City Wall' (1888) from the trans-cultural perspective by analyzing the tropes of wall and sexuality. Kipling's attachment to Indian culture and love for it is reflected in his fiction when he gives a detailed description of exotic locations and ethnographic peculiarities. The image wall is quite significant to express different expressions as connector, shelter, veil, and boundary while sexuality is mentioned to unite the different mindsets together at one spot. This article, further, traces that by using the tropes of connector, shelter, veil, and boundary, Kipling depicts the inevitability of the confrontation between the colonizer and the colonized and a sense of unity among the natives. The analysis of the discussion results in Kipling's admission of the failure of racial, cultural, social, and religious hindrance among the different inhabitants of the city-[walled] of an unnamed city [Lahore] before the partition of the subcontinent for being united.

Key words: Trans-cultural, Sexuality, Ethnographic, Escape, Colonization, Walled City

INTRODUCTION

Rudyard Kipling is distinguished to imply the trope of walls and architectural symbols in Indian fiction. His writings reflect the complicated historical and cultural panorama of different segments of society that prevailed in British India¹. Kipling's literary legacy from the position of jingoism and propagation of the mission of the British Raj to make the native land civilized is still criticized and encountered in literary research circles. 'Kipling's India' is the expression neatly describes the imperialist notions and a kind of deceptive in its commonality. Kipling has broad vision involved in his construction of imagination that deals with emotional investment, trans-cultural myth, and political ideology. Wurgraft (1983) describes Kipling as "a myth-maker for culture under-protected stress" (p. xx). An interesting myth associated with the Anglo-Indian era is that during the historical relationship with Britain as a colonial relationship between the two countries, love and marriage metaphor is extremely worthy to mention. Kipling is of the view that the colonial lifestyle produced a huge moral enigma and a belief in the failure of traditional and fundamental extremes of caste, creed, politics, and religion. In his one the most celebrated short story 'On the City Wall' he admires the Indian culture and tradition and also Indian nationalist aspirations.

It (India) will never stand alone, but the idea is a pretty one, and men are willing to die for it, and yearly the

work of pushing and coaxing and scolding and petting the country into good living goes forward (p.2).

This article presents the analysis of Kipling's most celebrated images of the wall, darkness, and Lalun² (prostitution) in 'On the City Wall' (1888). This short story highlights the British Indian society of the late nineteenth century where different people from different cultures and religions live together. British people were the rulers and Indian community; Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs were their colonized masses. Kipling has written about the nature and behavior of the natives in Indian masses and their dealings with each other to support themselves even though they have huge cultural and religious issues. At some points in the story, the narrator can be Kipling, seems confused and tricked by the natives especially a woman, Lalun. Lalun helps the British prisoner, Kem Singh, to escape from the prison in the darkness during the Muharram procession (a religious procession by Shia Muslims in the Islamic month of Moharram).

Thou art late-very late', gasped Lalun, without turning her head. 'help us now, O Fool, if thou hast not spent thy strength howling among the tazias. Pull! Nasiban and I can do no more! O Sahib, is it you? The Hindus have been hunting an old Muhammadan round the Ditch with clubs. If they find him again they will kill him. Help us to pull up. (Kipling, n. d., p.7).

Kipling draws attention towards the conspiracy by getting the benefit of darkness that how Lalun and her maid

helped the prisoner, Kem Singh, to escape from the British control. The narrator, during this conspiracy against the colonizers, is used by the woman to help him free from British control. The wall is used to help a native and also to deceive a foreigner. Inside and outside the wall, there are many events connected in 'On the City Wall'.

Image of a Wall in *On the City Wall*:

Walls are a dominant trope in Kipling's short stories usually written about the context of Lahore. There are many other architectural symbols implied with walls such as windows, woodworks, roofs, small and congested streets, and roads as well. All of the architectural concrete symbols have thematic significance in Kipling's writings particularly in 'On the City Wall', every signal symbol represents literal and figurative meanings from a different point of view such as the symbols work as both concrete and linking agents throughout the story. The figure of walls and other architectural symbols have a significant role in other short stories of Kipling. He has deployed the imagery of the wall in 'The Gate of Hundred Sorrows' as walls are everywhere in the story and streets depicted are too narrow that it's difficult to pass together with any together human or animal (Kipling, 1898, p. 201). In another story 'Beyond the Pale' Bisesa traps in a difficult situation, to find out the way, he lost in the walled area of the town where every person has built a house with huge walls (Kipling, 1898, p. 127).

In the story of little Din Muhammad, Kipling has developed the idea of architect and the protagonist dreams to have his big palace built which would be a 'wondrous palace'. In short, Kipling's fiction is populated with a variety of concrete imagery; however, the story 'On the City Wall' is the most celebrated piece of fiction. In this story, the wall has a multi-purpose role, literal as well as figurative.

Wall works as a symbol of boundary and bridge to link one part of the city to the next one and at the time links one culture to another. The protagonist of the story Kem Singh is a prisoner in a walled-up fort, the writer named that fort 'Fort Amara'. Lalun, the essence of the story, has her house on the east side of the city wall; one of the most important parts of the city from where one can enjoy the life of the rest of the city by just sitting at the window.

Lalun's husband stood on the plains outside of the city wall, and Lalun's house was upon the east wall facing the river. If you fell from the board window sea, you dropped thirty feet sheet into the City Ditch. But if you stayed where you should and looked forth, you saw all the cattle of the city being driven down to the water, the students of the Government College playing cricket,.... the sandbars of the river, red tombs of the dead emperors and away from this all, there is a glint of the snows of the Himalayas (Kipling, n. d., p.1).

The east part of the wall is the center of attraction because it is adorned with Lalun's house situated on it. These geographical divisions of the east part of the wall and Lalun's possession with it have more crucial gestures to be discussed because the location of the house is also symbolic. The house is located on such a central point of the wall that it gains more attraction of the visitors from all parts of the

city. And among those visitors, there were men from different cultural, religious, and political backgrounds who come to sit in, in the eastern city walled house of a woman that is more than a woman in this story. Kipling gives a detailed description of the visitors used to come to Lalun's white room.

Lalun's house is filled in hot nights of April and May as people from every corner of the city come here to smoke and cherish with gossips. There is no description among the visitors; all seem the same in her house without religious or cultural discriminations. Shiahs, Sufis, Hindus, pundits, Sikhs, priests, M. A's of the university, very superior and value able, all these people and more also might be found in her white room (Kipling, n. d., p.3). The walls of the house of a prostitute made all the different rival groups concur at one spot shows the power of the image of the wall and Lalun. They both work as strong symbolic agents to perform the most difficult task to unite the different men from different ethnic backgrounds which was undone by the British Raj in subcontinent even by using force and arms. So the house of a courtesan, one east city wall, has a magical attraction in it. Kipling also relates darkness, a mysterious element in the short stories, with walls and other architectural images in his writings. He used darkness as a permanent theme in his fiction to get the benefit of suspicion and ambiguity. This element of darkness also affects the narrative context as the narrator's experience in darkness is always confused and tricked by the native.

Darkness and life in Kipling's fiction are also autobiographical elements as in his childhood he has experienced the darkness when he was in Bombay. He relates his personal experience in Bombay with emotional attachment and remembers his childhood experience of light and darkness as 'a dark land and a dark room full of cold'. His frequent use and interaction with darkness and light throw glimpse on Kipling's autobiographical sketches, how he spent his time in India especially in cold and dark nights. Janet Montefiore (1977) has discussed in detail about Kipling's use of darkness and light in his writings.

Kipling's perception of life lies in two worlds; the action world and a dream world. This division world is seen to the dichotomy between day and night, British and Indians, foreigners, and the native. And mostly darkness and night time are associated with the native Indians in his fiction. (p. 299).

According to Montefiore, Kipling's style and language usage give a deeper understanding of his concept of the daytime world and nighttime world. The daytime shows the different incidents and events in the story but night time world; darkness proves to be a bridge between all those events and happenings of the story like the wall does the same. This account shows the darkness is moving and driving force behind the action of the story 'On the City Wall'.

Like wall and darkness, Kem Singh also proves to be a trans-cultural agent in 'On the City Wall'. Lalun takes the initiative to help him to escape from the prison, the procession of the mourners at that night also contributed in his escape and the last but not the least, the narrator, the white man also there to help him in the escape. Kem Singh and Wali Dad, the representation of two different religious and

socio-cultural ethnicities, represent the past and coming era of India. So they are the bridge between the past and future and in this way connect many events.

He is an interesting survival, 'said Wali Dad, pulling at the huqa.... He was once a great man. There will never be any more great man in India... (Kipling, n. d., p.5).

For each other, both Wali Dad and Kem Singh proved to be useless as at the time of need, they would not be there to help each other. For example, at the time of Ken Singh's escape, Lalun required support from Wali Dad but he was not there at that time. However, inside and outside walls, Kipling has shown many incidents that prove the failure of extremist thoughts about cultural, religious, and racial differences. The architectural images and Lalun and the narratology developed a new perception that sometimes apparently different things from different ethnic backgrounds lead towards a mutual understanding among the people; a concept of a bridge. And that bridge might be any person; Kem Singh, Wali Dad, Lalun or any event; Muharram procession or any architectural figure; walls, windows, and room or the narrative, darkness, or prostitution.

Image of Sexuality [Lalun]:

Kipling has employed the image of sexuality as a social-connector among different people belonging to different sections of society, culture, and religion to concur with them in one place in a small white room. Lalun is the owner of that small room and she is the only female character in the story 'On the City Wall' that represents a strong, influential and bridging agent to make people close and connect different people and events of the story.

She knew how to make up tobacco for the 'huqa' so that it smelled like the Gates of Paradise and wafted you gently through them.... Also, she knew the hearts of men and the heart of the City... (Kipling, n. d., p.3)

According to Kipling, Lalun; a sexuality figure is a very vital concurring element among different sects of society and enhances Lalun's significance by relating her charming attraction to the beauty of India. In 'On the City Wall' the most celebrated character is of Lalun; an impressive, beautiful, influential, enchanting, and seductive native prostitute. The narrator describes the beauty of her strong feminist image.

Wali Dad admires Lalun's beauty by quoting that a thousand pens of precious Mattel and the ink scented with Musk to write about her beauty are mandatory. She is like a moon, the Dil Sagar Lake, a spotted quail, a gazelle, the sun on the Desert of Kutch, the Dawn, the stars, and the young bamboo. He further adds that her eyes are black, her hair is shiny, curved eyebrows, soft hands, her feet are tiny and have trodden on the naked hearts of many men. In the end, Wali Dad just concludes by saying 'Lalun is Lalun. (Kipling, n. d., p.2).

Lalun's beauty and its impact on the body and mind of the men are very much evident through Wali Dad's description in a detailed manner. It seems that he has been observing her for many years and she also has given him access to her white room to come and interact in such a way that he could know about the softness of her hands and body. Lalun and her small white room on the east wall are the sources of sexuality which attracts and affects the patriarchy, is a center

of attraction. However, the detailed description of Lalun and her association with native as their representative shows Kipling's misogynist attitude towards the British possession of India (Hubel, 1990). Kipling has used Lalun as a metaphor for India, as she has a long list of lovers and in the same way, India has a long list of foreign invaders with whom she (Lalun/India) has dallied.

About Kipling's attitude towards sexuality, Hubel (1990) writes that female India would be over many centuries taken as a beloved by different nations as lovers, but they have a very minute or less than this effect on her character/land. The lovers change but the East doesn't (p. 8).

The British invaders thought that they might have superior power as masculine control over India and they would change her. But as Kipling highlights in 'An Interesting Condition' the metaphor of 'The English husband' for India remains vague and confused in front of Indian culture and civilization as the British Government wanted to make it dependant by quoting the slogan of making Indians civilized nation. He 'the English husband' is going to deceive himself by the nation that he will reform her.

Lalun has deceived the narrator (a white man) during the escape scene by getting the benefit of darkness at night time where there was a procession of mourners outside and the British government was busy tackling the mob to avoid any big mishap during the riots. At the same time, Lalun reads the situation and asks for help from the narrator (a white man) to pull up the man (Kem Singh) who was trying to escape from the British prison. The narrator remained ignored during this process about the identity of the escaper. Here the narrator fails completely to understand the behavior and perception of the native Indians particularly; Lalun. Kipling expresses this idea in his writings that India's 'sexual' inconstancy simply makes political reforms difficult to achieve. He further elaborates "you cannot reform a lady of many lovers" (Kipling, 1987, p. 98).

The narrator in 'On the City Wall' claims that he couldn't resist in front of the Indian women's sexuality. In this very short story, he admits that he has been influenced by Lalun's beauty and he couldn't control himself in front of a charming, beautiful, and seductive prostitute. He further says that his interaction with Lalun has made him speechless and to his extreme gratification, she put her arms around his neck and said enchanting and melodious things near to his ears and at that moment, he didn't feel any hurry at all to stop her by spelling the magic of her refine glamorous personality (Kipling, n. d., p.10)

The narrator's interaction with Lalun shows her sexual impact on him as she isn't weak to be cherished by anybody in such a way. It is her strange impact on him that made him spellbound during his meeting with her. By using her sexual impact, she succeeded in getting the narrator's assistance in making the British government prisoner, Ken Singh, free from prison easily. This notable incident is quite important for the British government that they are being successful in sustaining their impact as an imperial controller over India. Lalun's sexuality manipulates not only the natives to be forgotten their primitive social, cultural, and religious

differences but also the white men too. Kipling gives Lalun's beauty a great compliment by saying;

Her beauty is too marvelous that it has troubled the hearts of the British government and become the cause to lose their peace of mind (Kipling, n. d., p.2)

Kipling's female characters are the most influential, powerful, and game-changers agents in fiction such as Kitty Beighton in "Cupid's Arrows", Miss Youghal in "Miss Youghal's Sais", and Lalun in "On the City Wall". Lalun by making the narrator fool and using his white man's status helped the prisoner in successful escape while the narrator remained in darkness and deception. The narrator himself realized and admitted that he had been in ignorance and darkness about the facts of the incident. Here the white man is supposed to be the dependent of Lalun's plan as she said that;

The Sahib is always talking the stupid talk, returned Lalun, with a laugh. 'in this house, I'm a Queen and thou[Wali Dad] art a king. The Sahib-she put her arms above her head and thought for a moment- 'the Sahib shall be our vizir (minister)- thine and mine, Wali Dad- because he has said that thou shouldst leave me (Kipling, n. d., p.7).

CONCLUSION

Kipling's fiction about the city of Lahore has filled the trope of wall and sexuality as social and communal connectors. The image of the wall is usually used for the division and separation but in the short story 'On the City Wall' wall works as protector and frontier of cultural and social harmony. Walls provide shelter and room for privacy where people can find a hide. Kipling has attached central incidents of the story with the image of a wall as the major incidents directly or indirectly connected with it. In the main event of Kem Singh's escape, the image of the wall provides ground for narrative construction as the narrative is brought to the face of deception and made a fool by the native; Lalun. Kipling writes: Of course, you can guess what happened? I was not so clever. When the news went abroad that Khem Singh had escaped from the Fort, I did not, since I was then living

this story, not writing it, connect myself, or Lalun, or the fat gentleman of the gold pince-nez, with his disappearance (Kipling, n. d., p.11). However, the sexuality which is associated with Lalun demonstrates the role of an Indian woman in an imperialist society as dominating the patriarchy and its principal role in a society where women are considered very low and submissive. She has challenged both power groups in India; the white and the male.

END NOTES

1. British India is the colonial name of the subcontinent which was divided in 1947 into Pakistan and India.
2. 'Lalun' is a female character in this story but in reality, she worked as a catalyst. The whole story revolves around her as she lives near Lahore Fort on the city wall. Kipling has taken this name from Mirza Moorad Alee Beg's novel *Lalun the Beragun*, however, he added some qualities of the women; lived in prostitution and he personally knew her.

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