



## PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE RELATED TO A PASSAGE TO INDIA: RUDYARD KIPLING AND EDWARD MORGAN FORSTER

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**Abstract:** Rudyard Kipling called his superb master-piece Kim as most ambitious work on India. Maria Couto evaluates this novel in his outstanding article "Rudyard Kipling". He describes Kim as the first novel in the English language with an Indian theme, but also a one of the greatest English novels in spite of the theme Kipling's evocation of Indian People's habits, language, and distinctive ways of thought has led to recent critical debate on Kim as the a apogee of the kind of orientalism which suggests that the Englishman could meet the orient on its own terms and outwit. The best realised characters are Indian, with Kim as one of them, a fact which is used to illustrate the point that Kipling not only wrote about India but belonged to India. Yet the novel is not free from stereotypes. The oriental lack of sense of time, 'the happy Asiatic disorder', and the oriental's disregard for noise and his ability to lie, are instances of it. In Kim, the Indian Westerner recreates his own consciousness of Indian life, in a visual and aural evocation of man and nature amid the bustling and shouting, the bucking of belts, and beatings of cows or bullocks, creaking wheels, and bright fires, when India was awake and Kim in the middle of it, more awake and more excited than any one.

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### Introduction

A fairly large number of short-stories written by Kipling are on the background of Indian sub-continent. He also wrote many poems on this background. But among all of his writings, his master-piece novel Kim, published in the year 1901, is the most widely loved book. This novel has retained its popularity ever since its publication. Writing in the year 1901, Andrew long wrote about this novel:

Mr. Kipling in Kim in Cassel's magazine is once the Kipling who won our hearts. His theme is India, where he is always at his best; and we learn more of populace, the sects, the races, the Lamas, the sounds, sects and smell from a few pages than from libraries of learned authors.<sup>1</sup>

About sixty years later, J.I.M. Stewart writes in almost similar vein:

Kim is not merely a picturesque book and not merely a dazzling exercise in the erotic picaresque either. It is a book filled with the poetry of being young in a world rejoicing in the divine abundance. If it is a novel that is a little less than a novel, so too is it a book for young reader that is much more than that.<sup>2</sup>

At first sight, Kim may appear as the story of an orphan white boy gone native cloak, he is

indistinguishable from the natives of the soil. He uses his native cloak of invisibility and becomes a peerless secret service Agent. J.I.M. Stewart finds him, "sheerly and superbly a boy's dream boy and he is really that".<sup>3</sup> It is his proud privilege even in his proud privilege even in his infant years to be thrilled by the words as "warn the Pindi and Peshawar brigades". His playthings are not dummy and insensate dolls but "a mother of pear; nickle-plated, self extracting, 450 revolver" (Kim Pg.229). He is equally adept at driving cows from the mountain hut and Russian emissaries from the forbidden valleys of China and Busahar. These things are significant, but more significant are the fact that he never thinks that he belongs to the ruling class. He is too much a part and parcel of India to think in that light.

Incidentally, the Lama's great attachment to Kim is also to be considered. He pays for the education of Kim, forces him to bear with dignity the pangs of separation from him, "glorifies the values of education in glowing terms". At the time of parting, standing before the gates of learning, the Lama says,

Do not weep; for, look you all Desire is illusion. Go up to the Gate of learning. Let me see thee go.... Dost you love me? Then go, oh my heart cracks....(Kim. Pg.165)

The novel portrays the potentially tragic Conflict of sneer and faiths in the erstwhile British India. It can perhaps scarcely be denied that this conflict has been harmoniously resolved in this novel. The contemporary critic, Mark Kinkead Weeks, pays a glowing tribute to this novel in these words: Kim is a triumph of exploratory vision. It is the answer to the nine-tenths of the charges labelled against Kipling and the refutation of most of the generalization about him.<sup>4</sup>

Lionel Trilling is, however, not satisfied with Kipling's portrait of India. He observes that: Even here where his devotion to the Indian life is most fully expressed, he falsely represents the Indian.<sup>5</sup>

This view, however, doesn't seem tenable. Moreover some critics comment that "a very few Indians regard A Passage To India as conveying an accurate picture of Indian life and characters, yet no one seems able to produce a picture of India which is either superior in its cogency or even notably different in essentials from Forster is equally appreciable to the novel Kim.

Kim is a product of Kipling's remembrance of India from his own childhood – a reminiscences lovingly described in the form of book – which is in author's own Words, not a novel but "nakedly picaresque and plotless". Carrington appreciably suggests that no other Englishman has written of India with such a loving interest as Kipling and A Passage To India is the only work which can be laid beside it and in this instance Forster, not Kipling, is the political writer.

The publication of Kim surely was Kipling's valediction to his old life and the book might be regarded as his last work on India – which is a symbol of the unchanging East- a land as he remembered from his childhood and lovingly recorded in this superb master-piece.

The Himalayas play their own part in the novel. To him, it appears that the Himalayas as described in this novel express a mystic vision: Kipling makes the Himalayas serve the same function as Forster wanted from his Marabar Caves, they make manifest a vision of the world as inhuman, incredible, unintelligible and utterly daunting man.<sup>6</sup>

Yet the Lama teaches Kim that the mountains are ultimately illusion. He apprises Kim of his deeper vision of reality. For about three years (from his thirteenth to the sixteenth years), Kim plays the role of Chela (disciple) to the Lama; they are together in city, country, train, bazars, monastery; they wend their way along the Grand Trunk Road and they together negotiate the Himalayas heights; and off and on they part and rejoin and part again, the disciple-ship, however, being unaffected by these forced separation. Throughout the course of this unique relationship, Kim is subject also to other pulls – notably the claims of the game (the secret intelligent service) as externally typified in the power and personality of Mahbub Ali. Kim knows that the Lama is 'quite mad', while Mahbub is altogether a sane and safe person; and Lahore is a teeming interesting city- especially its slums. Yet Kim is bored and tired of Lahore; and the Lama is interesting and irresistible; and Kim is resolved to have new air and water. The Lama and his search, Mahbub and his game and Kim is oscillating between the two, yet not wholly absorbed by other. Such is the theme of the novel. Such a theme may have made any tight plotting difficult, but it at least gave Kipling abundant scope for a wide and almost total comprehension of the scenic richness and variety of India, and scope too for presenting a bewildering cross-section of the people of the sub-continent. Thus in Kim Kipling could create a master-piece, a prose epic of modern India (the old pre-partition India).

#### PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPE

It is up among the hills on the edge of Tibet that the later episodes have their setting, and Kipling transmits the very sensation of those colossal depths and heights. When the Ao-chung man throws the empty whisky bottle out of the window- No need to listen for the fall. This is the world's end, he said, and swing off. The Lama looked forth, a hand on either sill, with eyes that shone like yellow opals. From the enormous pit before him and white peaks lifted themselves yearning in the moonlight. The rest was as the darkness of inter-stellar space. (Kim. Pg.334).

In the village clinging to Shamleigh hill it was 'like sitting in a Swallow's nest under the eaves of the roof of the world.'

Idiomatically, the power that India exerts over Kim and, indeed, over most of the characters – differs little from that which it exerts over Fielding in Forster's A Passage To India: it is the power which destroys values, reduces sustaining categories to meaninglessness and sends Fielding back to the world of definitions, and distinctions, back to the other Peninsula 'smaller and more exquisitely' shaped;

back to the form and beauty just as it sends Kim back to the secret service.

Rudyard Kipling called his superb masterpiece Kim as most ambitious work on India. Maria Couto evaluates this novel in his outstanding article "Rudyard Kipling". He describes Kim as the first novel in the English language with an Indian theme, but also a one of the greatest English novels in spite of the theme Kipling's evocation of Indian People's habits, language, and distinctive ways of thought has led to recent critical debate on Kim as the a apogee of the kind of orientalism which suggests that the Englishman could meet the orient on its own terms and outwit. The best realised characters are Indian, with Kim as one of them, a fact which is used to illustrate the point that Kipling not only wrote about India but belonged to India. Yet the novel is not free from stereotypes. The oriental lack of sense of time, 'the happy Asiatic disorder', and the oriental's disregard for noise and his ability to lie, are instances of it. In Kim, the Indian Westerner recreates his own consciousness of Indian life, in a visual and aural evocation of man and nature amid the bustling and shouting, the bucking of belts, and beatings of cows or bullocks, creaking wheels, and bright fires, when India was awake and Kim in the middle of it, more awake and more excited than any one.

The novel was written at a time when Britain's fears of a Russian invasion determined British Secret Service activities. Kim becomes involved in a secret service plot to defeat a Russian-inspired conspiracy to stir up an insurrection.

The Great Game holds Kim in thrall, energising the narrative with his appetite for life and adventure. The process paves the way for reflection on the life of action and the life of renunciation and meditation: the occidental and the oriental way, with qualities of observation, the acquisition and use of knowledge as the prerogative of white men. In the end, the imperial vision dominates. And though Kim is torn by conflicting loyalties he does not recently have any doubt about his future commitment to the Great Game. Kipling's art creates and enthralling adventure story with lovable and credible Indian characters while endorsing imperial rule. Although the struggle for independence was under way, Kipling's class at the time thought it was India's best destiny to be ended by humane leaders. Kipling's sense of being at home in India merges with his imperial theme. And his boy characters live a charmed life, and it is in this remembrance of things past that his art endures – even when the work is read in the light of decolonisation.<sup>7</sup>

But Forster calls his novel *A Passage to India*. This title itself suggests the scale of his work to live up to it, the novelist would have to present a wide range of experience representative of the sub-continent and

at the same time it suggests that the view will be that of incomers, birds of passage, rather than an indigenous one.

*A Passage to India* offers an intensely personal view of India under British rule, and Forster himself would have been the first to identify the book as such. He detested authors' claiming to be purveyors of universal truth about the real India. It is intended here to illuminate something of his description of Indian geography.<sup>8</sup>

As noted earlier Forster's involvement with India commenced in 1906, when he met the young Syed Ross Masood at Oxford. This friendship eventually led to the author's first visit to India, from October 1912 to April 1913, during which he travelled extensively throughout North and Central India. Since this journey was the one that spurred him to begin his passage. An attempt has been made to focus this discussion on it.

When *A Passage to India* appeared in 1924, the dedication read "To Syed Ross Masood and to the seventeen years of our friendship", which was an obvious indication of Masood's crucial role in shaping Forster's vision of India. All the attributes Syed Masood had or were disclosed by his close-associates, are equally found in Dr. Aziz in *A Passage to India*. The foremost of these is a passion for reciting Urdu and Persian poetry, as Aziz does in the very first scene in which he appears, when he regales his dinner guests with the poems from Hafiz, Hali, and Iqbal.<sup>9</sup>

Truly, Masood's love of poetry went hand in hand with his dramatic and arresting physical personality that attracted nearly every one, whosoever met Masood, commented upon Aziz at Fielding's Garden party is pure Masood "utterly charming, very much the centre of attention; and given to picturesque exaggeration that even the doggedly honest Fielding is too entertained to refute. Both Aziz and Masood are "Islamic Modernists" who support the removal of Purdah, and Aziz's facetious and off hand comments to Fielding about British rule. For instance:

When I was a student I got excited over your damned countrymen, certainly, but if they let me get on with my profession and not be too rude to me officially, I really don't ask more.<sup>10</sup>

This is an adaptation of Masood's favourite pronouncement on the subject:

As for your damned countrymen, I pity the poor fellows from the bottom of my heart, and give them all the help I can.<sup>11</sup>

Aziz later comes to regret his light-hearted attitude, telling Hamidullah after the trial, "my great mistake has been taking our rulers as a joke", but Masood, even while engaged in anacronomious debate with British officials, never lost his good humour about the follies of the Ruling Race. All of these

details clearly indicate that Masood was the model for volatile young doctor, but it must be said that Aziz at times emerges as a rather limited character, almost monochromatic, in comparison to Masood, whose complexity, and depth of personality Forster often commented upon.

Early in 1912, Masood returned to India to take up practice as a barrister at Patna, and several months later in October 1912, Forster embarked by ship from Naples to Join him, accompanied by his two friends from his Cambridge days. They were the poet R.C. Traveleyan and Goldsworthy.

Forster's voyage out to India provided him with his first sour taste of cold India, who found the three Cambridge intellectuals unspeakably amusing and dubbed them as, "The Professors' and 'the Salon'". It is reasonable to suppose that some of the rigid lessons of racial etiquette that Forster encountered on the ship remained in his mind when he sat down to write passage. Forster recorded a comment that exemplified the fear and resentment that so many Anglo-Indian felt:

Lady Neighbour: "They tell me that the young Indians lovely. I may well ought to be. They won't let us know their wives, why should we know them? If we are pleasant to them, they only despise us."<sup>12</sup>

As Bombay came into view and the journey neared its end, Forster came to an important personal realization; whatever he might make of India itself, he was not one of the 'herd' as we later called the Anglo-Indians in his novel.

He was unwilling to subscribe to the ideas of solidarity with one's own kind, a solidarity which is broken in passage, both by Mrs. Moore, who openly criticises a countrywoman to Aziz at their first meeting in the Mosque and by Fielding, who resists the communal hysteria when Aziz is arrested. But Forster never shut himself from individual Anglo-Indian; he made several new satisfying friendships with those who had rejected the conventional prejudices of their community.

Another portion of Forster's travels that shaped his negative vision of Anglo-Indian society was his visit to Shimla in November 1912, it took place after his several weeks arrival in Bombay. This small town clinging improbably to a ridge in the foothills of the Himalayas, was the seat of the Government of India during the hot weather. It had become in the popular 'imagination' the legendary abode of Viceroys and small functionaries, growing civil servants and handsome young subalterns, elderly dowagers and bored but beautiful young wives. All of these were thrown together in a setting carefully contrived to popularize England in every possible detail – cheery English flowers, a proper Anglican Church, rows of shops with mock-Tudor facades,

fancy dress halls, and rustic summer homes. Forster's stay in Shimla proved to be an important part of his Indian education, for it helped to crystallize in his mind exactly what he found so disturbing about Anglo-Indian society. Shimla's Olyampian atmosphere, as if the gods enjoying their leisure in splendid isolation; this also aroused Forster's distaste, for it seemed to him only another example of distance between English and Indians, a distance that encouraged the essential 'Connections' between human beings which he actually sought.

Indeed, Forster's forbearance in the face of blatant Anglo-Indian prejudice was often tested, as an incident which occurred several months after his Simla visit illustrates. He and his companions were the guests of the Maharaja of Chattarpur, whose small state was nestled among the rugged ravines of the Bundelkhand region of Central India, just West of the famous temples of Khajuraho. Since the Maharaja was under the watchful eye of the political Agent at Nowgong, a nearby British cantonment, the ruler considered it wise to take his English guests in a brief social call. Forster's diary seethed with annoyance at the place and its inhabitants:

Nowgong, a small cantonment, bore polo, officers' wives with hideous voices and faces of that even pink.<sup>13</sup>

Among the predictable cast of characters was the political agent himself, an Irritating man who shattered Forster's enjoyment of the scenery with his narrow-minded talk, and the Army Chaplain, a cheerful boor who shouted: "Come, come, Maharajah! why don't you eat more beef? Do you good!"<sup>14</sup>

The attitude of the Indians present towards the offensive man is the indicative of the equanimity and subtle humour with which they had learned to treat such insults. Forster records that he and Trevelyan, "wincing with horror", at the remark, but were reassured *satto voce* by one of Maharajah's advisers, who calmly told them,

The Padre Sahib is a very nice man indeed; he has no interest whatsoever in religion and that is suitable for the clergyman.<sup>16</sup>

In sharp contrast to all of this Forster's visit in March 1913 to Jodhpur, a dramatic sandstone city in the heart of an Anglo-Indian community living in harmony and mutual respect with Indians; all of the unpleasant characteristics he had come to expect in a small English enclaves in India, were absent here. Writing of Jodhpur's Anglo-Indian residents after his return to England, Forster elaborated on the human qualities he had found so attractive there he wrote:

They had none of the indifference to their surroundings that is considered good from elsewhere. They loved the city and the people living in it, and an outsider's enthusiasm instead of boring them, appeared

to give pleasure. Men and women, they shared the same club as the Indians, and under its gracious roof the 'racial question' had been solved.<sup>17</sup>

Jodhpur is notable because it suggested to Forster a new standard for human relation in the colonial context, one that had been only a vague notion in his mind. He wrote that it was: "as if each race had made concession to the other's peculiarities, thereby creating a new basis for friendship and understanding."<sup>18</sup> This sense of harmony was epitomised for Forster by an Englishman in Jodhpur whom he knew only slightly, George Goyder, who was chief finance officer of the Jodhpur Bikaner Railway. Goyder was leaving Jodhpur the next day for another part, and he took Forster with him in the final ride around the city. The novelist was moved by the Indian who came out to say goodbye:

Goyder took me for the drive, promised so long, in the evening, too sad to speak, and taking farewell of the city he has helped and loved. More charming than any, and prosperous. White raised loggias with coloured turbans in them, new market place, revealing fort, tank edged by Temple wall, two deep fissures under the fort full of water and that of fish that Brahmins fed, obscene figures ready for Holi – he showed me all...." Here at least is the perfect Anglo-India, seeing the poverty of the Indians but not brooding over them till he stifles enthusiasm and love: no wonder people crowded round the car to say how found they were of him.<sup>19</sup>

In this new acquaintance Forster found an honest and straightforward Anglo-Indian, whose attempt to meet Indians on an equal basis had been rewarded with love and respect. Just as the Indian earth in his novel so often mirrors human affairs both good and bad, so in Jodhpur, Forster found the positive state of personal relation reflected in and nourished by the beauty of the surroundings. Physical landscape and emotional landscape were one.

Physical setting is, of course, a most important feature of *Passage*, and it is endeavoured here to determine which places were the inspiration for Chanderpore. After a careful examination of the diary and visits to the town in question, two locations emerge: Indore, which is located in Central Asia, and Patna, the principal city of Bihar located on the banks of the Ganga.

Between these two towns, Forster's visit to Patna (or Bankipore, as the British section of the city was called) was important because it offered to him the physical composition of Chanderpore. As he wrote in the 'Authors Notes to the Englishmen edition of *Passage*:

Chanderpore was suggested geographically by Bankipore, its inhabitants are imaginary.<sup>20</sup>

It was built around a large Oval Maidan, Bankipore contained the solid houses of the British civil authorities, many of them surrounded by lush gardens and tropical trees. Next to the Maidan was a long, meandering hospital. It would be, of course, reductive to say that Chanderpore is Bankipore; all of the characters and settings in the novel are first and foremost imaginative ones, and it would be misleading to suggest otherwise. Nevertheless, it seems clear that during his stay in Patna (Bankipore), Forster's mind was constantly at work, giving shape and form to his random impression of the place, and storing and form to his random impression of the place, and storing them up for future one. All of the basic features of Patna – the dusty bazars, the Oval Maidan, surrounded by European houses, the long low-sking hospital building, the luxuriant vegetation –figure to some extent in the geography of Chanderpore.

Another vital setting in the novel, the native state of man in the final section, Temple, was based on Dewas and on Chattarpur, but in the latter principedom, however, it was Forster's hosts, the Maharajah of Chattarpur, who captured his imagination. In Forster's words, the Maharajah was: "a tiny and fantastic figure, incompetent, ruse, exasperating, endearing."<sup>21</sup>

From his dress, an eclectic mixture of East and West, his insistent longings for Union with the divine, the Maharajah of Chhatarpur is recreated in the figure of Godbole. Forster sees Godbole's longing for the god Krishna as an essential aspect of Hinduism, and the final section of the novel presents the festival celebrating the birth of Krishna on a joyously affirmative expression of this seeking after the divine. The Maharajah of Chandarpore was also devout worshipper of Krishna, and the following dialogue, rather from the Forster's diary reminds one a great deal of Godbole and Forster:

"Do you meditate?" H.H. (His Highness): "Yes, when I can, for 2 hours, and when I'm busy, for 45 minutes". "And can you concentrate and forget yours trouble?" "Oh, no, not at all; they come in with me- always – when I can meditate on love, for love is the only power that can keep through-out. I try to meditate on Krishna".<sup>22</sup>

A final aspect of *Passage* that we discuss is the all-important business of the Marabar caves. They are the physical centre of the novel, in that the crucial action around which the plot revolves, take place there and the echo of the Marabar caves resound again and again throughout the book. For Forster the caves represent an India entirely separate from that of either the British or the Indians, and their sheer isolation from the others. India is emphasised entirely by the failure of the various characters to comprehend or describe them in any way. The caves and their echo are simply beyond the powers of human understanding,

and they cause Mrs. Moore to have her negative vision of human relationship, which is so central to the novels meaning.

Forster has stated explicitly that the Marabar caves are based on the Barabar caves in Bihar, about sixteen miles north of Gaya, which he visited in late January of 1913. The Barabar caves differ from those in the novel in several ways: There are only seven caves (not twenty-four or more that Forster mentions), and the entrances to some have fragmentations of ornamentation which enable the visitor to distinguish one from the other. Furthermore, the interiors of the caves are not all identical, as they are in the novel. Some contain stone platform that once supported the images of deities, and the arrangement of circular chambers and tunnels varies slightly from cave to cave. Forster's account of his own journey to these caves illustrates the type of transformation for life to art that frequently affected him also. He takes a rather straightforward personal experience and changes in his novel into an ambiguous moment of drama and confusion. He himself heard the new famous echo, but at times it struck him only as curious and not ominous and dispiriting.

A visit to the Barabar caves reveals that they do indeed have a remarkably powerful echo. Every footstep sounds for at least several sounds, and vocalised sounds, whether high-pitched or low-pitched, produce a deep, rumbling echo which sometimes last up to half a minute.<sup>23</sup> India, no doubt, with her irresistible appeal of balance physical and spiritual ideas, filled him with religious awe and though consciously he has several times denied that he has anything to do with religion, even Hinduism, *A Passage to India* and *The Hill of Devi*, from which the novel draws heavily, both testify to his preformed attraction for religious symbolism.

The Maharaja of Dewas Senior himself was a Krishna disciple and curious conversation with him, recorded in *The Hill of Devi*, attracted Forster to Hinduism. "Salvation then is the thrill we feel when God again becomes conscious of us" (HD. Pg.25) the Maharaja remarked. Similar mystical axioms repeatedly referred to Godbole, the spokesman of the Hindu Philosophy in the novel. He sings a song inviting Krishna and explains it in the following words. I will explain in detail. It was a religion song. I placed myself in the position of a milkmaid. I say to Shree Krishna "come! come to me only" The God refuses to come. I grew humble and say:

"Do not come to me only. Multiply yourself into a hundred Krishnas, and let one go to each of my hundred companions, but one, a lord of the universe, come to me". This is repeated several times. The song is composed in a raga appropriate to the present hour, which is the evening (PI. Pg. 259).

Godbole, by virtue of being a Brahmin as well as the Minister of education in the state of Madhya Pradesh, is the chief priest in the Gokul Ashtami Celebrations. His singing and dancing before the Deity and Participation in the procession, all have been recorded in minute details in the novel. And he stands in the presence of the God Krishna.

Forster's close study of Hindu scriptures like *Bhagwad Purana* and his love of the Indian deity Krishna must have left a deep imprint of the principal Hindu doctrines on Forster's mind.

Thus Forster has strived to comprehend India through several strategic angles, and though Fielding, Adela and Mrs. Moore individually face defeat at the hands of forces active on the physical and spiritual planes.<sup>24</sup>

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