

Kipling and Yeats at 150: Retrospective and Perspective

ed. Promodini Varma and Anubhav Pradhan

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Despite their valiant attempt at drawing parallels between Kipling and Yeats, the two stalwarts of British literature, in terms of their politics, ideology, and literary output, Promodini Varma and Anubhav Pradhan, the editors of *Kipling and Yeats at 150: Retrospectives/Perspectives*, have only partially succeeded in their endeavour. The need to study the two authors together arises in their ability to raise pertinent and contemporary concerns around ideas of nationalism, tolerance, infiltration, independence, foreignness, communal hatred, hybridity and ethnic distinctions.

The book has 17 articles in all, grouped under four sub-sections focusing on specificities like literary influence, authors' social identification, and political affiliation. The first sub-section is titled "Influences and Legacies" and has four articles covering a wide range of themes. R.W. Desai's article, "Yeats and Kipling: parallels, divergences, and convergences", explains how the two authors were similar yet different on issues like aesthetic appreciation, imperialism, and spiritualism. Exploring their commonalities, Desai contends that Kipling and Yeats shared a common interest in Indian philosophy though holding contradictory positions on political philosophy. The second article, "Mowgli, the Law of the Jungle, and the *Panchatantra*" by Mythili Kaul, underscores the hybridity of the Mowgli stories and argues that they could have been inspired from the *Jataka Tales*. Kaul believes that Kipling was familiar with the *Panchatantra* through his father John Lockwood Kipling. The last article of this sub-section, "Songs of the Wandering Aengus: echoes of the political Yeats in Dorothy Salisbury Davis's *The Habit of Fear*" by Peter Schulman examines Yeats's legacy in contemporary literature. Schulman has studied the inclusion of Yeats by the American crime writer Dorothy Salisbury Davis in her book *The Habit of Fear*

(2014), a historical fiction. Ruth Vanita operates within the framework of Indian Philosophy to evaluate Yeats's poem "A Prayer for My Daughter", but her reading offers relatively limited scope.

The second sub-section, "Self and Society", has four articles reflecting on Kipling's and Yeats's construction of self and their reception and contribution to the Indian and British societies. Malabika Sarkar's essay "Yeats, Kipling, and The Haven-Finding Art" equates sea journeys with creative and artistic abilities. Sarkar argues that voyages have always been given tremendous importance in literature: from Classical Greek literature to British Romantic poets, voyaging symbolizes creative skills and Yeats seems to have taken it to new heights in his poetry. Madhu Grover explicates this in her essay "Transgressed Margins: Reading the 'Other' Kipling". She shows how Kipling's journalistic articles turned him into an outsider enabling him to capture the mysterious aspects of Indian society. Grover defines such acts of transgression as a threat to British ethnicity and culture. K.B.S. Krishna comments on the relevance of hybridity through the character of Kim, whose closeness with natives and his modern education makes him a better candidate to train for espionage than boys educated in British public schools. Krishna suggests that Kipling advocated a hybrid form of education at a time when England was introducing reforms in its education system.

The third sub-section, titled "Craft, Medium, Politics", has five articles by Robert S. White, John Lee, Prashant K. Sinha, Indrani Das Gupta, and Dominic Davies, focusing on themes like the influence of Shakespeare on Kipling's and Yeats's writing, journalism and poetry; Yeats's political vision; censorship, and networks of empire. Robert S. White has used the adjective 'chameleon' to describe Kipling owing to his ability to maintain differences and

diversities within continuity and consistency in his books. John Lee's article "The writer is indebted to *the Pioneer* and *Civil and Military Gazette*': Kipling, newspaper and poetry" delves into the role played by the two newspapers in the early phase of Kipling's literary career and the use he made of them to reach out to the public. Prashant K. Sinha has attempted to explain Yeats's political vision in his four plays, *The Countess Cathleen*, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, *The Dreaming of Bones*, and *Purgatory*. Indrani Das Gupta elucidates different kinds of censorships imposed by the British government in India following the 1857 Rebellion. Das Gupta has studied the literary representation of censorship in Kipling's work with specific reference to the poem 'The Ballad of East and West' that initiated new imperial discourses on boundaries. Dominic Davies's article is a close analysis of the development of infrastructure like the railways, telegraph, and marine ships in Kipling's two early works, *The Light that Failed* and *Captains Courageous*. He explores the reformulation of literature in integrating improvements in imperial networks in the backdrop of developing transport and communication infrastructure.

The fourth sub-section, "Masculinity and/as Empire", has four articles primarily concentrating on the themes of heroism and masculinity. Alexander Bubb, Usha Mudiganti, Nanditha Rajaram Shastry, and Anubhav

Pradhan's articles have found place in this sub-section. Bubb examines how Kipling and Yeats endorsed activism and heroism through their writings in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Contesting the pervasive notion of masculinity, Mudiganti in her essay, "I am not a Sahib: Boys and Masculinity in Kipling's Indian Fiction", propounds that Kipling's children stories formulate a hybrid heroism. Drawing parallels between Hinduism's yogic concept 'Karma' and muscular Christianity, Shastry claims that Kipling collated the two concepts in his stories. The last article "Chaps: Kipling, Yeats and the empire of men" by Pradhan is an attempt to show youth as a common category between the two authors. Kipling and Yeats defined the category of youth within their operating spheres. Pradhan argues that Kipling expresses his faith in characters like Stalky to defend the empire, while Yeats redefines nationalism to accommodate the Irish freedom struggle and the Irish literary identity.

The book encourages academicians, scholars, and teachers to rethink and reimagine these two proponents of British literature. It not only provides an insight into the personal and professional lives of both the authors but also delves into histories, cultures, politics and societies of the Indian subcontinent and Britain. Notwithstanding the use of different approaches of interrogation, the book opens up new avenues and areas for further research.