

The Amir's Homily of Rudyard Kipling: A Binary of Colonial Attitude Towards Afghans

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Received on: 18-01-2022

Accepted on: 21-02-2022

Abstract

This article deals with the analysis of the short story, 'The Amir's Homily' of Rudyard Kipling'. It questions the colonial attitude of the very prominent British poet, short story writer and novelist of 20th century whose depiction of the natives is based on stereotyping. Kipling penned down number of poems, short stories, and novels from the last decade of the 19th century to the third decade of 20th century. The story "Amir's Homily" mirrors the character of Afghan nations and a subsequent coercion of the iron ruler, Amir Abdul Rahman Khan. Analysis of the contents shows that throughout the story, the author sticks to the binary construct of 'Self and Other'. His commentary and dialogues in the story show a narrative that determine Afghans the most unruly people under the stars and they deserved to be ruled and subjected to consistent oppression. On one hand, the story conditions Afghans and their Iron Amir (ruler) as dialectical opponents while on the other hand, he discards both parties and compares English Queen and people who are entwined in a human relationship. It reflects how English Queen is praised and honored and presented as a demi-god to be worshiped and idealized. On the other hand, his word choice and vocabulary for Afghan king and natives are completely harsh and dehumanizing. His ideal social and political order is only English order while others are crooked and uncivilized and do not deserve to be respected and valued.

Keywords: Kipling, The Amir's Homily, Afghan Culture, Self, Other, Colonial Imagery, Post-Colonial Theory.

Introduction:

Started from the expeditions of Christopher Columbus in 1492, European colonialism thrived, expanded and eclipsed almost all the continents dwelled by humans. The evolution of European and most importantly British imperialism took several tides, but their hegemony on the world could not halt till the devastating World War-II from 1939 to 1945. British

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Empire kept its iron hand on India proverbially known as "Golden Bird" for almost two centuries. The wealth, natural resources and Geo-strategic position of Indian sub-continent paid off a lot to the expansion and stability of British Empire. British colonial rivals like France and Russian also had an eye on the "Golden Bird". British had a strong naval force and it was not feasible to invade India from waters. The only option left with Russian and French colonizers was to enter to Indian Subcontinent through its only gate "Afghanistan". Consequently, Afghans remained under the influence of European colonizers for almost 110 years. British direct control on Afghanistan through its closed boarder policy resulted in two devastating wars in 1839-1842 and 1878- 1880 respectively. Despite large scaled wars between British and Afghans, there were consistent violent conflicts, ambushes, and battles between the Afghans of the frontiers and the British Indian Army. In the wake of Afghan's consistent retaliation, and resistance, a peculiar image of Afghans erupted in the collective historical consciousness of British colonial learning brigades, story tellers, travelers, administrative reporters and authors. The tropes of Afghans as warlike, unruly, savages, turbulent, violent, rough, and noble savages, started floating in the discourse created by the British colonial masters in the world.

Emergence of Postcolonial Discourse:

After the end of European colonization, a discourse on the deconstruction of the subjective knowledge base was started. The landmark work of Michal Foucault, and Edward Said created a parallel discourse on deconstructing the world views, subjective and prejudiced knowledge base created by the colonial learning brigades regarding the nations once ruled by them. Postcolonial theory was an outcome of the discourse waged by the dissent voices and public intellectuals in the second half of the 20th century. Edward Said's groundbreaking work "Orientalism" put the question of representation, and he courageously unpacked the nexus between representation and control in a very short phrase, "To define is to control"(Said,2006,43).

Hence, postcolonial theory analyzes the colonial representations and questions the presentations of the natives in the colonial texts. It touches upon how the colonized 'Other' is portrayed in the colonizers' literary texts. Furthermore, it investigates the political and cultural agenda behind it. In the same way, postcolonial theory brings into discussion the problematic colonial strategies of presenting the natives and their cultures; marginalization, dehumanization and degradation of the native inhabitants. Said (2006) analyzed the means by which Euro-centrism affects, changes or even produces other cultures. He investigates the intellectual authority used by the West over the Orient. He sees the authority as a product of systematic discipline and order using which the West was able to make, construct and control the Orient over the years. Everything occidental is celebrated and valued and considered superior to the oriental 'Other'. The orients and other races are shown inferior and uncivilized. Adding more to it, cultural imperialism stresses the cultural superiority of the West and neglects the native cultures and traditions as exotic and barbaric. The colonizer always tried to identify his collective self as European and differentiated it from the 'Other', the colonized which is non-European. For this, Occidentalism signified the concept of European superiority in opposition to the non-European cultures. In their terms, ignorance and backwardness became synonymously attributed to natives and knowledge and awareness for the colonizers. The systematic knowledge of the 'Orient' which is formed and created out of domination, in a way, forms 'orient', oriental, and his strange existence. Thus,

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the idea of 'Otherness' of the colonized people lay at the core of colonial ideology. It aimed at creating stereotypes to justify the Western domination in the Eastern lands on the pretext of civilizing mission. For this purpose, literary texts were used as instruments and colonial tools to establish and fulfill their agenda of dominating the other races in various parts of the world.

Amir's Homily: An Introduction and deconstruction to the Story

The Amir's Homily is a short story which is taken from the collection of Life's Handicap. The story deals with a man who is alleged of theft and is produced in the court of Afghan King, Abdur Rahman. He gets angry over this act of robbery and narrates him incident. The Amir of Kabul is depicted as the very inhuman king who is barbaric; that he rules with strong tactics. In the story, Kipling admires Amir but subsequently attacks and criticizes the Amir by calling him a barbarous man who governs by force. Later, Kipling considers entire Afghan race murderers and thieves. He completely degrades their established notions about respect, love and honor altogether.

Kipling appreciates the role of Abdur Rahman in the context of the Great Game and considers him the trusted ally of the British Queen. Moreover, Kipling portrays Amir as a cruel heartless man who is concerned about justice and takes all the decisions on personal desires and wishes. His word is called the final law. His government is considered an autocratic one as it had been in the reign of Harun al Rashid.

Afghan Amir Abdur Rahman who is portrayed by Kipling as "Gentleman for all right thinking people". It stands to the reason that gentleness as described by Kipling is due to his loyalty to "Her Majesty the Queen of England and Empress of India". Hence, Kipling justifies his rule due to the following reasons in the story.

"Like most other rulers, he governs not as he would, but as he can, and the mantle of his authority covers the most turbulent race under the stars." The phrase "Turbulent race under the stars" could be noted as a problematic generalization over the entire race and hence he justifies that the race deserves to be dealt with iron hands. This was not only peculiar to Rudyard Kipling rather such generalized attitude was very common in the 19th century orientalist who saw the eastern through the specific lens of Euro-centrism.

Kipling does not stop here rather goes on to paint the whole race in a very biased way as portrayed in the story.

"To the Afghan neither life, property, law, nor kingship are sacred when his own lusts prompt him to rebel. He is a thief by instinct, a murderer by heredity and training, and frankly and bestially immoral by all three. None the less he has his own crooked notions of honor, and his character is fascinating to study."

In the above-mentioned part of the story, binary portrayal of Afghans could be carefully noted and Kipling himself defines what is crooked and what is civilized. For him, all notions are unruly and not acceptable. Being an orientalist, Kipling justifies all means to subjugate and control the particular race. Furthermore, he favors the cruel king to use violence in order to control them as according to author, they lack civility and common good of virtue.

Importantly, specific image creation and building reconstruct all the tropes and metaphors that were used by the initial orientalist like Mountstuart Elphinstone (1810), Alexander Burnes (1831), Charles Masson (1842), Lady Flourenta Sale (1843), and several others. These orientalist were on specific design and hence coined and termed Afghans as warlike, unruly, turbulent, savages, uncivil, and masculine (Kakar, 2022).

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Kipling expands the list of vices in the character of Afghans and term them as the blood-brother of "Grey Wolf" who does not follow any moral sense and is ready to create chaos and turmoil by playing his negative role.

For Kipling, it is a sort of undisciplined herd which could only be controlled through the shepherd who could wield his authority through violence and the fear of death and punishment. He passes a generalized and a sweeping statement here that only fear of death could create a sort of wisdom among the Orientals. He takes the case of Abdur Rahman Khan and applies it to all the orient at large; how fear operated as a balancing factor in the late 19th century in afghan capital; Kipling goes on to say.

"His word is red law; by the gust of his passion falls the leaf of man's life, and his favor is terrible. He has suffered many things, and been a hunted fugitive before he came to the throne, and he understands all the classes of his people (Kipling, 1891)."

This was purely a subjective narrative on the part of Rudyard Kipling and puts forth that rulers like Abdur Rahman and the Abassid Caliph Harun Rasheed will be ruling eastern lands. Kipling gives an example of a specific case in the story before Amir Abdul Rehman in his open court where he had his routine work along with his staff. Kipling writes;

"All day long sweating couriers dashed in with letters from the outlying districts with rumors of rebellion, intrigue, famine, failure of payments, or announcements of treasure on the road... The Court and the long tail of feudal chiefs—men of blood, fed and cowed by blood—stood in an irregular semicircle round the table, and the wind from the Kabul orchards blew among them.; and all day long the Amir would read the dockets, and pass such of these as were less private to the officials whom they directly concerned, or call up a waiting chief for a word of explanation. It is well to speak clearly to the ruler of Afghanistan (Kipling, 1891)."

Before narrating the case, he comes up with a comic tone about a divorce issue in which a woman had complaint to the king and she sought the help in taking divorce from her husband who had no hair on his head. Eventually, the justice dispensed by the Amir is put down in the following satirical words by Kipling.

"The Amir, hearing both sides of the case, bade her pour curds over the bare scalp, and lick them, off, that the hair might grow again, and she be contented. Here the Court laughed, and the woman withdrew, cursing her king under her breath (Kipling, 1891)."

After this case, then he considers the main case; a trembling man was presented before the Amir who had stolen three rupee. Amir probes into the reason of stealing; the poor fellow shows poverty and destitute were the main reasons of the act he carried out. However, Amir rejects his justification and starts narrating his own story of how once he was poor and penniless. He further told he starved and had nothing to eat and which forced him to work for four annas per day. Amir's account was validated by one of his subordinate. Then Amir concludes, as narrated by Kipling:

"There was a pause, and the Amir cried hoarsely to the prisoner, throwing scorn upon him, till he ended with the dread 'Dar arid,' which clinches justice (Kipling, 1891)."

Kipling's Otherness of Afghans: A Post-Colonial Perspective

During the colonial era, indigenous people suffered at the hands of the colonial powers. They were marginalized and subjected to hard labor. They were given secondary space. Indigenous voices were less valued. They were given a negligible authority in the political process and policy making. They were considered inferior and irrational beings (Boehmer, 2005).

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Colonialism was a social and cultural mission of the colonizers. It was crucial for the colonizers to advance and perpetuate the Western agenda of domination and cultural superiority over the non-white races. Finding the self-superior and rational, the West considered it its duty to civilize the non-white/Eastern races. The task was given to the colonial authors, particularly the ones who remained in the conquered lands, and wrote about the native people and their cultures (McLeod, 2000).

In this connection, colonial texts give high esteem and respect to the white race and on the other hand, native and indigenous races are shown derogatively. Such texts often attribute superior status to the colonial masters and their cultures. Hence, the representation of the native is made through animalistic images. For example, George Curzon considered the local people wild animals (Tahir, 2017). As Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* misrepresented Africans and used a biased and prejudiced language against their culture and ways of living. Marlow tells about the group of Africans as whirl of black limbs (Conrad, 2016).

The *Overland Mail* by Rudyard Kipling depicted the colonizer and the colonized Indians by comparing the wild Indian jungle with the systematic and civilized British mail system. This showed the Indian landscape as destructive, uncivilized and savage while colonial master is shown as organized and civilized entity. The mail carried by the runner to an elevated place suggested not only physical superiority of the colonizer but also the imperial highness. The Indian jungle is not only shown in physical darkness but also metaphorical darkness which seemed to imply a sort of backward society attached to that landscape. More importantly, the scene in the poem is meant to depict two opposite cultures of the occupier and the occupied equally. Wild and dangerous stood for India while structured and organized presented the supposed superior colonial master, the English (Kipling, 1996). Close and critical reading of western literary texts revealed the description of the native inhabitants of the colonized lands ridden with racial hatred and bias. This is facilitated by creating the dichotomy and division of 'self' and 'other'. The texts showed European whites as 'Self' represents the empire and the natives as the "Other" representing the opposite of western civilization and modernity. In this regard, Kipling stated "*We are a high-caste and enlightened race*" (Kipling, 1890, p.2). This indirectly contrasted the colonized as 'they' who according to the author have "low caste" and are 'darkened and barbarous'.

Hossain and Rahman (2013) studied and analyzed Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* that the texts showed colonial India from colonizer's view point, lowering its status to the order of a mysterious place with inactive and lethargic people. Both the novels reflected India in binary opposition to Europe. The study explored binary division of imperial approach of Kipling and Forster through postcolonial lens and made a deconstructionist critique of the images depicted in the texts regarding the natives. Approach of Kipling and Forster towards the characters and figures and the Indians are grounded on binaries of 'Self' and 'Other' which denoted the whites as superior and civilized while the native Indians as inferior and uncivilized respectively.

Subsequently, Anand (2007) believed that cultural representation of non-western 'Other' is at the very base of colonial and Neo-colonial notions and narratives. The local people like any other people in the occupied lands were dishonored and stereotyped and constructed in a way to fit to the entire scheme of the orient. It was generally a biased approach to other races and cultures. As a spokesperson of the empire,

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Kipling showed Afghanistan as uncivilized country and strategic asset in the colonial management. His insight into the Afghans and his ideology has by and large been of colonizer concerning the interests of the Empire (Kipling, 1901). "Ford o' Kabul River", a poem, he wrote of the threats awaiting the British forces in Afghan land. For Kipling, Kabul was hell-like and blasted place (Kipling, 1879). Kipling's other poems 'The King's Mercy' and The Ballad of the King's Jest depicted Afghans cruel, brute and uncivilized (Kipling, 1889).

Analysis and Discussion: Binary Division of 'Self' and "Other" in the Story

Rudyard Kipling is preoccupied with English racial superiority. He has very less regards for the natives of Afghan land. For him, English men have reached to the peak of development. They know the manners of life. They are entitled to rule and civilize the natives. Therefore, the empire should extend this so-called civilizing agenda to the other races too. While portraying the characters in the story, he shows high regards to the Queen of England and Empress of India, Queen Victoria who ruled from 1837 to 1901. At the same time, the author pays very rich tribute to the Amir of Afghanistan because he is the trusted ally of Britain. Therefore, he deserves respect and honor. In the following lines of the story, Afghan Amir, is presented as gentleman who is capable and competent enough to rule the country. In this way, Kipling (1891) writes;

"His Royal Highness Abdur Rahman, Amir of Afghanistan, G.C.S.I., and trusted ally of Her Imperial Majesty the Queen of England and Empress of India, is a gentleman for whom all right-thinking people should have a profound regard" (p. 1).

However, in the subsequent part of the story, this gentleman and G.C.S.I. Grand Commander of the Most Exalted Order of the Indian Empire of Kipling is reduced to hunted fugitive, terrible, house-less dog, Prince of wandering beggars and a thief. It could be argued here that as far as he serves the interests of the Empire and Queen even if he is cruel, he is a trusted ally and a gentleman and for whom all the people who think rightly should have great regards. Binary of 'Self' and 'Other' is quite evident here. When the Amir is shown with Queen, Kipling uses words like Royal Highness but away from Queen, he becomes a cruel tyrant and Prince of wandering beggars.

Otherness in Morality, Culture and Race

For Rudyard Kipling, Afghan culture is nothing but code of barbarism and cruelty. He compares them with animals that do not have any set rules of life.

".....the most turbulent race under the stars. To the Afghan neither life, property, law, nor kingship are sacred when his own lusts prompt him to rebel. He is a thief by instinct, a murderer by heredity and training, and frankly and bestially immoral by all three. None the less he has his own crooked notions of honor..." (p. 1).

He uses superlative degree of adjective about the whole race, the most turbulent race on the face of the earth which shows his extreme form of racial approach and latent hatred. It is quite injustice on the part of literary artist to portray the whole race with such negativity while keeping the positive aspects aside. Making abstract

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generalizations over the entire race is the key feature of colonial ideology.

Kipling never visited Kabul. He did not generally encounter and interact with the common Afghans rather he saw and viewed the whole idea of depiction through orientalist lens which is to degrade the non-white people (Afghans) systematically and to pave the way for so-called civilized Empire building.

For Kipling the notions of Pashtunwali like honor, respect, and sacrifice and hospitality seem crooked and barbarous. Furthermore, such sweeping statements and generalization lay at the core of colonial mind-set which is always concerned about the imperial interests and designs in the colonized lands. As Said (2006) states;

"We are immediately brought back to the realization that Orientalists, like many other early nineteenth-century thinkers, conceive of humanity either in large collective terms or in abstract generalities. Orientalists are neither interested in nor capable of discussing individuals; instead artificial entities, perhaps with their roots in Herderian populism, predominate (p.154-155)."

Otherness through Dehumanization

Kipling never visited Kabul and did not see the court of Amir himself in Kabul.

Therefore, his depiction seems one-sided and cannot be termed realistic and factual.

His drawn picture is purely based upon his Eurocentric lens which is colored with bias and prejudice. He attaches animalistic images to human beings and reduces their worth to gray wolf, bastard scum, and son of lies, house-less dog and thief. By drawing such a dark picture inhumanly could not be justified in any way. Moreover, after reading the story, one gets an impression that they are no human beings but beasts and blood thirsty creatures having no civilization and culture. Objective observation would be different in this regard; the fire that Afghan land is burning in today is not their own started rather the war started by great powers for their strategic and economic interests. Historically, Afghans have not gone for any aggression against the European powers. They have defended their homeland from the time of Alexander to British Raj and then From Russian aggression down to American pursuit in 2001. Ironically, defending one's homeland is violence and barbarism for Rudyard Kipling.

Conclusion:

Said (2006) explained that colonial representation relies on two binaries of Occident and Orient. In the Western literary texts, Occident is shown rational, logical and developed. On the other hand, Orient (the East) is shown irrational, illogical and underdeveloped. The natives are deemed savage and least-cultured. Their cultures, traditions and customs are discarded. Their economic, social and political exploitation is justified. This study analyzed the story through Saidian Framework and found the binary colonial attitude towards the non-white race (Afghans). The binary of self and Other is evident and is carefully noted. Misrepresentation of Afghans is at the core of this work. Throughout the story, English and white characters are represented as the "Self" which symbolizes superiority, progress and rationality. He glorifies them and attaches all good qualities to them only. On the other hand, Afghans, (the orients) symbolize irrationality, darkness and barbarism in the texts. Furthermore, Afghans are portrayed immoral, liars, untrustworthy and violent "Others" in the selected text. Such portrayal is of course not realistic rather could be termed the personal views of the author.

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Attaching dehumanized qualities to Afghans are quite frequent in the story in which they are called pigs, dogs and wild animals. Quite contrary to this, the white characters are protectors of the poor, virtuous and Emperors of the Earth.

The researchers have carefully noted his words choice and selection of vocabulary for the two characters (Afghans and the white colonizers). His selection of words in the selected works proves him a thorough orientalist who is on specific mission to expand the British empire and its interests even if it is at the cost of defaming and criticizing the other races.

In the texts of the story, he sticks to few negative images and ignores the all positive traits of pashtunwali. He nowhere mentions the rich Afghan cultural traits and its history. Thus the idea of "Othering" is constructed by Kipling to create a negative and wild image of the native, Afghans which is of course not a true and factual image. Therefore, it stands to the reason that he uses such words for the Afghans characters to prove them barbaric and savage others; while ignoring their good qualities, to legitimize the colonial occupation.

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