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The Religion of Rudyard Kipling

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Abstract. The paper aims at examining Rudyard Kipling's religious beliefs in terms of his growing maturity as a man and an artist. Although Kipling never subscribed to any particular religion, yet at heart he was a deeply religious man in that he believed in the unity of God and the divine purpose behind the creation of man. In his unformulated philosophy even pain and evil have a purpose to serve.

Introduction

While it must be admitted that Rudyard Kipling is very religious [1] indeed, it is not very easy to see where exactly his religious sensibilities lie. It is, therefore, proposed to make a thorough study of his life and works with a view to determining his religious sensibilities in terms of his growing maturity both as a man and an artist.

It is important to note that throughout his whole life Kipling did not attach himself to any particular religion. Although both his grandfathers were Wesleyan ministers,[2] Kipling does not appear to be enthusiastic about Christianity in general, let alone the methodist Church in particular. Nor was he a Hindu as someone may feel inclined to think.[3] Nor was he a Muslim, nor a Buddhist, nor, for that matter, an

(1) Philip Mason, *Kipling, The Glass, The Shadow and The Fire* (London: J. Jonathan Cape , 1975), p. 113.

(2) Fredric Lawrence Knowles, *A Kipling Primer* (New York: Haskell House, 1974), p. 13.

(3) Kipling makes frequent references to Hindu gods and goddesses and in general seems to be fairly sympathetic to Hinduism. See 'Bridge-Builders' in *The Day's Work*, 'The Miracle of Purun Bhagat' in *The Second Jungle Book* and *Kim*.

adherent of any institutionalised religion. Yet he was deeply religious in the sense that he thought much about God, love and truth, eternity and the meaning of life.(4) Commenting on Kipling's attitude to religion, Philip Mason says:

> Kipling was a religious man at heart, not that he took part regularly in any form of public worship or adhered to any formal creed, but because he thought much about death and eternity and the meaning of life ... Because he was so essentially an intuitive, his religion expressed itself in stories, fables and verses, rather than in a creed or a reasoned philosophy.(5)

That Kipling is essentially an intuitive there is no doubt. But the main reason why he did not subscribe to any particular religion is that he was esentially a seeker with a very independent mind and he "detests the prig, and hates above all the religious prig".(6) Adhering to any particular faith or creed meant forfeiting his freedom of thought which would seriously impede his search for truth. Like Erasmus "With his nose he successfully hunted down everything but heresy."(7) Hopkins rightly remarks:

> One thing is certain: Kipling does not attach himself to any particular creed or party. He evidently thinks that to belong to any party is to be owned by it. Kipling's soul revolts at life in a groove. He dislikes typical men — their ways of life, their sophistry, their stupidity. He likes to be free of all party restrictions, so that he can study in his own sweet way — when at school he was distinguished from other boys by his independence.(8)

Kipling's is a complex personality — not an easy one to understand. In fact it is easy to misunderstand him and easier still to reject him out of hand.(9)Certain events

(4) This can be seen in the earlier works of Kipling as well as his later works.

(5) Mason, p. 113.

(6) Knowles, p. 37.

(7) R. Thruston Hopkins, *Rudyard Kipling*, 2nd. ed. (London: Simpkin Marshall & Co., 1916), p. 40.

(8) Ibid.

(9) In 1971, when I was writing my Ph.D. thesis at London University on Rudyard Kipling I was surprised to see that F.R. Leavis did not make any comments on him. I genuinely thought that Leavis had written about Kipling somewhere which escaped my notice. So I wrote to Leavis, asking whether he had commented on Kipling at all and requested his comments on 'Without benefit of Clergy' (in *Life's Handicap*, which, in my opinion is a great work of art. Leavis's reply is as follows:

> I have never written about Rudyard Kipling. I have to add that I have never read the tale you mention. I was brought up in a Liberal family in which Kipling's name was associated with an odious kind of imperialism. We also felt that his talent was tainted with what was then the new journalistic vulgarity. We did not like his manly knowingness. When I have looked at him since I have always found qualities that repelled me. It is, of course, generally agreed that he was gifted.
>
> I am sorry not to be more helpful.

Leavis is just one example; there are many critics who rejected Kipling out of hand. And among those who misunderstood Kipling is a great critic, Edmund Wilson, the author of *The Wound and the Bow*. For details of Wilson's misunderstanding see Philip Mason's work, *Ibid.*, especially pp. 15, 34, 44, 45, 129, 131, 150, 180-82 and 188-89.

that took place in his life left a lasting impression on him and molded his personality. For a proper understanding of Kipling it is absolutely crucial that not only those events are taken into account but also the context in which he operated. There are "many inconsistent aspects of his personality and a great deal of tension between them."[10] The strange and extraordinary contradictions in him cannot be explained and resolved unless one has the imaginative sympathy to understand the events that shaped Kipling's personality and the context in which he created his works of art.

Among the many extraordinary contradictions in him the most relevant here is his view of Christianity. While on the one hand he is highly critical of Christianity,[11] on the other he seems to subscribe wholly to its essential principles,[12] such as love, compassion, forgiveness, repentance, sacrifice, selflessness, grace, mercy, and above all an unflinching faith in a personal God Who he calls the Great Overseer[13] and to Whom he is wholly devoted and totally committed. In L'Envoi (to *Life's Handicap),* which is one of the most nobly devout of Kipling's poems, he makes a prayer to the Great Overseer:

If there be good in that I wrought
    Thy hand compelled it, Master, Thine;
Where I have failed to meet Thy thought
    I know, through Thee, the blame is mine.

One instant's toil to Thee denied
    Stands all Eternity's offence,
Of that I did with Thee to guide
    To thee, through Thee, be excellence.

Later in the same poem he says,

The depth and dream of my desire
    The bitter paths wherein I stray,
Thou knowest Who hast made the Fire
    Thou knowest Who hast made the Clay.

One stone the more swings to her place
    In that dread Temple of Thy Worth
It is enough that through Thy grace
    I saw naught common on Thy earth.[14]

(10) Mason, p. 84.
(11) See pp. 145-47 of this paper.
(12) Most likely Kipling would argue that the essential principles of all respectable religions are the same and that moral values included in Christianity are not exclusive of other religions.
(13) Rudyard Kipling, *Life's Handicap* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1987), p. 308.
(14) Ibid.

Kipling did not subscribe to any particular creed; he certainly did not embrace Christianity of any denomination. However, there is a letter that he wrote which may give one the impression that he was secretly a Christian. The letter was written when Kipling was courting Caroline Taylor whose father was distressed at Kipling's lack of orthodoxy. In order to satisfy Caroline Taylor and her family Kipling wrote: 'I believe in the existence of a personal God to whom we are personally responsible for wrongdoing — that it is our duty to follow and our peril to disobey the ten ethical laws laid down for us ... I disbelieve directly in eternal punishment ... I disbelieve in an eternal reward ... I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth and in One filled with His Spirit who did voluntarily die in the belief that the human race would be spiritually bettered thereby."(15)

It would be a mistake to give too much credence to the content of this letter. Both Philip Mason and Charles Carrington, who are authorities on Kipling, would not attach much importance to the letter.(16) Quoting Charles Carrington, Philip Mason says, "the words sound as though dragged out by an effort; this was as far as he could go. Carrington suggests that not too much should be made of this,and it should certainly not be regarded as representing what he would have said and believed in later years."(17)

Yet it must not be forgotten that Kipling's knowledge of the Bible was profound and that the Bible had deeply influenced him both as a man and as an artist. Philip Mason observes:

> .... all the evidence suggests that he continued all his life to believe in a personal moral responsibility to some kind of divine purpose. And his knowledge of the Bible often influenced his reactions to circumstances in ways he did not attempt to define or formulate. He was always aware of the majesty of the Hebrew vision of God in the Old Testament — the sanctity of the Law, the purpose of God for mankind, the balance that must be restored by punishment or sacrifice, the sense of man as somehow knitted into Family and People.(18)

Mason is right. Kipling does believe that mankind in its entirety in some mysterious way is knitted into a Family and People. What has escaped the notice of probably every critic of Kipling is that he calls his *Life's Handicap* "Being Stories of My Own People."(19) And who are his people? He quotes a native proverb on the title page itself:

(15) Kipling, quoted in Mason, p. 249.
(16) Ibid.
(17) Ibid.
(18) Ibid.
(19) Kipling, Ibid., see the title page.

I met a hundred men on the road to
Delhi and they were all my brothers.[20]

The influence of the New Testament is no less perceptible. He draws from the New Testament a belief that suffering on behalf of others purifies and ennobles the self[21] and that the forgiveness of wrong is a supreme virtue.[22] Furthermore, he frequently uses Christian symbols to make his point. His style is deeply influenced by the Authorized Version and his works contain many Biblical references. He manifests a natural love of Biblical language by repeatedly going to "Holy writ for sonorous expression."[23] However, Kipling's indebtedness or even attachment to the Bible must not lead one to claim that he was a secret Christian. Mason rightly observes, "Kipling picked and chose his loyalties and admirations. 'The Miracle of Purun Bhagat,' 'The Bridge Builders' and much of *Kim* show Hinduism with sympathy and understanding."[24] Later Mason quotes the following passage from Kipling about a mosque in Egypt which seems to express the essence of Islam:

> ... a deserted mosque of pitted brick colonnades round a vast courtyard open to the pale sky. it was utterly empty except for its proper spirit, and that caught one by the throat as one entered. Christian chruches may compromise with images and side-chapel where the unworthy and the abashed can traffic with accessible saints. Islam has but one pulpit and one stark affirmation — living or dying once only — and where men have repeated that in red-hot belief through centuries, the air still shakes to it.[25]

In 1959, proposing the toast of 'The Unfading genius of Rudyard Kipling,' T.S. Eliot remarked that "Kipling was an intuitive, not an intellectual, and for that reason underrated by intellectuals who were not intuitives."[26] That Kipling is an intuitive there is no doubt, but it is not correct to say that he was not an intellectual, for he was a man of high mental capacity and well endowed with intellect. Intellect and intuition are not mutually exclusive. What is true is that Kipling generally does not express himself in terms of a concatenation of logical arguments; he relies more on his intution because it was natural to him to take a quantum leap, and because he "was so essentially an intuitive, his religion expressed itself in stories, fables and verses, rather than in a creed or a reasoned philosophy."[27]

(20) Ibid.
(21) This can be seen in a number of Kipling's works, e.g, 'The Miracle of Purun Bhagat' in *The Day's Work, Kim,* etc.
(22) See Kipling's 'The Church that was at Antioch' in *Limits and Renewals* (New York, AMS edition), 1970.
(23) Hopkins, p. 43.
(24) Mason, p. 249.
(25) Kipling, quoted in Mason, pp. 249-50.
(26) T.S. Eliot: quoted in Mason, p. 20.
(27) Ibid., p. 113.

The Young Kipling

The younger Kipling was highly critical of Christianity. He started writing at the age of seventeen[28] and the first story in his first published book as "Lispeth." The story begins with the following verses:

> Look, you have cast out love! What Gods are these
> You bid me please?
> The Three in One, the One in Three? Not so!
> To my own Gods I go.
> It may be they shall give me greater ease
> Than your cold Christ and tangled Trinities.[29]

Lispeth was a beautiful girl, who was brought to a Christian mission when she was five weeks old. She fell violently in love with an Englishman whose life she had saved. She had found him unconscious down the hillside and his head had been cut to the bone by something jagged.[30] She took the Englishman's flirtation to be a serious expression of love, and the "Chaplain's wife, being a good Christian and disliking anything in the shape of fuss or scandal — Lispeth was beyond her management entirely — had told the Englishman to tell Lispeth that he was coming back to marry her."[31] Also, she soothed Lispeth when the Englishman left and said, "He will come back,"[32] thereby encouraging the deception. When Lispeth finally learnt that she had been played with, she lost faith in the new religion and modes of life, and returned to her mother's heathen goddess, Tarka Devi, and to the degraded habits of her caste. Notice the conversation between Lispeth and the Chaplain's wife when the latter told the former that the Englishman "had only promised his love to keep her quiet — that he had never meant anything, that it was wrong and improper of Lispeth to think of marriage with an Englishman, who was of superior clay, beside being promised in marriage to a girl of his own people."[33] Lispeth was astonished and said that "all this was clearly impossible becuase he had said he loved her, and the Chaplain's wife had, with her own lips, asserted that the Englishman was coming back."[34]

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(28) Kipling left school, the United Services College, Westward Ho!, in 1882, when he was only seventeen, and the same year he was on the staff of *The Civil and Military Gazette,* Lahore. He was appointed Assistant to the Editor, and in that capacity he had to run a 2,000 word turnover article or story. Many of the stories that Kipling wrote were published as *Plain Tales from the Hills* in 1888.

(29) Kipling, *Plain Tales from the Hills* (New York: AMS, 1970), p. 3.

(30) Kipling, *Plain Tales,* p. 5.

(31) Ibid., p. 6.

(32) Ibid., p. 7.

(33) Ibid.

(34) Ibid.

'How can what he and you said be untrue?' asked Lispeth.
'We said it as an excuse to keep you quiet, child,' said the Chaplain's wife.
'Then you have lied to me,' said Lispeth, 'you and he?'(35)

The Chaplain's wife, of course, had no answer. She bowed her head and said nothing. Lispeth also remained quiet for a short while and then went out down the valley. She came back in the dress of a Hill-girl — infamously dirty.

'I am going back to my own people, 'said she.
'You have killed Lispeth. There is only left old Jadeh's daughter — the daughter of *pahari* and the servant of Tarka Devi. You are liars, you English.'(36)

All this is a castigating comment and sad reflection on Christianity as it was then preached and practised. When the Chaplain's wife tries to rationalise the situation and says, "There is no law whereby you can account for the vagaries of the heathen, and I believe that Lispeth was always at heart an infidel,"(37) Kipling makes a pungent remark and says, "Seeing that she had been taken into the Church of England at the mature age of five weeks, the statement does not do credit to the Chaplain's wife."(38)

Kipling is much more critical of Christianity in a later story, 'Baa, Baa, Black Sheep,' which depicts the life of a small boy, Punch, whose feelings represent "substantially what Kipling thought happened to him at Southsea. Perhaps every incident was not police-court truth that can be sworn to, but the whole is poetic truth and represents what he came later to feel had happened."(39) Separated from his parents and home, which was his world of love, Punch was very unhappy indeed in the House of Desolation, and was unhappier still when the Christianity of Aunty Rosa brand was inflicted upon him. The following sums up what Punch felt about Christianity:

Harry might reach across the table and take what he wanted; Judy might point and get what she wanted. Punch was forbidden to do either. The grey man was his great hope and stand-by, for many months after Mamma and Pappa left, and he had forgotten to tell Judy to 'bemember Mamma'.

This lapse was excusable, because in the interval he had been introduced by Aunty Rosa to two very impressive things — an abstraction called God, the intimate friend and ally of Aunty Rosa, generally believed to live behind the kitchen-range because it was hot there — and a dirty brown book filled with unintelligible dots and marks. Punch was always anxious to oblige everybody. He therefore welded the story of the Creation on to

(35) Ibid., pp. 7-8.
(36) Ibid., p. 8.
(37) Ibid.
(38) Ibid.
(39) Mason, p. 32.

> what he could recollect of his Indian fairy tales, and scandalised Aunty Rosa by repeating the result to Judy. It was a sin, a grievous sin, and Punch was talked to for a quarter of an hour. He could not understand where the iniquity came but was careful not to repeat the offence, because Aunty Rosa told him that God heard every word he had said and was very angry. If this were true why didn't God come and say so, thought Punch, and dismissed the matter from his mind. Afterwards he learned to know the Lord as the only thing in the world more awful than Aunty Rosa — as a Creature that stood in the background and counted the strokes of the cane.(40)

'Without Benefit of Clergy' does not introduce a merciful God either. Ameera is not sure of the goodness of God and later in the story when her small boy dies she says, "It was because we loved Tota that he died. The jealousy of God was upon us ... we must make no protestations of delight, lest God find us out."(41) Kipling frequently refers to the Powers which are detrimental to man. A Deputy Commissioner in the story says:

> We've locusts with us. There's sporadic cholera all along the north — at least we're calling it sporadic for decency's sake. The spring crops are short in five districts, and nobody seems to know where the rains are. It is nearly March now. I don't want to scare anybody, but it seems to me that Nature's going to audit her accounts with a big red pencil this summer."(42)

Two months later, Nature did audit her accounts with a red pencil.

> "On the heels of the spring-reapings came a cry for bread ... Then came the cholera from all four quarters of the compass. It struck a pilgrim-gathering of half a million at a sacred shrine. Many died at the feet of their god; others broke and ran over the face of the land carrying the pestilence with them. It smote a walled city and killed two hundred a day. The people crowded the trains, hanging on to the footboards and squatting on the roofs of the carriage, and cholera followed them, for at each station they dragged out the dead and the dying. They died by the roadside, and the horses of the Englishmen shied at the corpses in the grass. The rains did not come, and the earth turned to iron lest man should escape death by hiding in her."(43)

Death is the dominant theme of 'Without Benefit of Clergy.' Indeed the title itself is suggestive of the fact that no one can claim exception from the apparently arbitrary strokes which crush human happiness. You would recall 'benefit of clergy,' the exemption of ecclesiastics from the King's courts of justice — the question on which Henry II and Thomas á Becket finally split. Blind Chance seems to control

(40) Kipling, *We Willie Winkie* (New York: AMS, 1970), p. 239.
(41) Kipling, *Life's Handicap*, p. 147.
(42) Ibid., p. 149.
(43) Ibid., pp. 149-50.

man's fate and no one can claim exemption when the Blind gods attack at random. Nothing moves them — neither tears nor torments, neither weeping nor wailing, neither faith nor prayer. Kipling observes:

> The city below them was locked up in its own torments. Sulphur fires blazed in the streets; the conches in the Hindu temples screamed and bellowed, for the gods were inattentive in those days. There was a service in the great Mohamedan shrine, and the call to prayer from the minaret was almost unceasing. They heard the wailing in the houses of the dead, and once the shriek of a mother who had lost a child and was calling for its return.(44)

Phrases such as "blind chance," "blind gods," "jeolousy of God," etc., are very reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's conception of the Immanent Will "that neither good nor evil knows" and is the motive power of the universe. This conception of the Imanent Will is implicit in the tragic novels of Thomas Hardy and is clearly stated in *The Dynasts*. This Will is an indifferent and unconscious force and "the results of its impulses are almost invariably disastrous. In *The Dynasts* there is an implication that it may be growing into self-consciousness."(45) The cold indifference to the "screaming conches in the Hindu temples,"(46) "service in the great Mohamedan shrine,"(47) "unceasing call to prayer from the minaret"(48) and "the shriek of a mother who had lost a child and was calling for its return,"(49) apparently does display a merciless God, if not a denial of the very idea of a deity.

But was Kipling really a sceptic or an agnostic? Or are the utterances mentioned above just temporary seemings or impressions, mood-dictated rather than scientific? Or are they indicative of an unformulated philosophy in which pain and sorrow have a purpose to serve? These are difficult questions but they need to be answered in order to understand Rudyard Kipling's religious beliefs.

Unlike Thomas Hardy who "never ceased to complain of chance and change,"(50) (for they are the key to his work and philosophy), which inevitably cause human suffering, Rudyard Kipling was naturally predisposed (and if that is begging a question, he was genetically programmed) to postulate an incomprehensible power at the head of affairs to keep chaos at bay. Indeed he makes fun of those who deny

(44) Ibid., p. 151.
(45) *Encyclopaedia Brittanica*, 15th. ed., p. 646.
(46) Kipling, *Life's Handicap*, p. 151.
(47) Ibid.
(48) Ibid.
(49) Ibid.
(50) F.B. Pinion, *Thomas Hardy and the Modern World* (Dorchester: Thomas Hardy Society, 1974), p. 82.

the Creator. In the 'Conversion of Aurelin McGoggin,'[51] he talks about a brilliant member of the Imperial Civil Service who believed that "men had no souls, and there was no God and no hereafter."[52] The man was obviously extremely bright; he "was all head, no physique and a hundred theories"[53] and he wanted everyone at the Club" to see that they had no souls too, and to help him to eliminate his Creator."[54] Before long he became an unmitigated nuisance at the Club, where he had rattled a number of persons, who out of sheer disgust christened him 'Blastoderm.' One day at the impending approach of the Rains someone said, "Thank God!" and Blastoderm immediately turned in his place and said,

> 'Why? I assure you it's only the result of perfectly natural causes – atmospheric phenomena of the simplest kind. Why you should, therefore, return thanks to a Being who never did exist – who is only a figment–.[55]

Within minutes Blastoderm was "fighting with his speech ... looked at us in a dazed sort of way ... Then with a scream – 'What is it? – Can't – reserve – attainable – market – obscure–' But his speech seemed to freeze in him ... Blastoderm was struck dumb. He stood pawing and champing like a hard-held horse, and his eyes were full of terror."[56] The doctor arrived in three minutes and said that Blastoderm was suffering from aphasia. When he regained his power of speech two days later, the first question he asked was –

> 'What was it? The Doctor enlightened him. 'But I can't understand it! said the Blastoderm. 'I'm quite sane; but I can't be sure of my mind, it seems – my *own* memory – can I?'
>
> 'Go up into the Hills for three months, and don't think about it,' said the Doctor.
>
> 'But I can't understand it, 'repeated the Blastoderm. 'It was my *own* mind and memory.'
>
> 'I can't help it, 'said the Doctor;' there are good many things you can't understand; and, by the time you have put in my length of service, you'll know exactly how much a man dare call his own in this world.'[57]

To my mind the Doctor is Kipling's mouthpiece. Later Kipling adds:

(51) Kipling, *Plain Talkes from the Hills* (London: Pan Books, 1980), pp. 75-79.
(52) Kipling, *Plain Tales*, p. 75.
(53) Ibid., p. 74.
(54) Ibid.
(55) Ibid., p. 77.
(56) Ibid.
(57) Ibid., p. 78.

> The stroke cowed the Blastoderm. He could not understand it. he went into the Hills in fear and trembling, wondering whether he would be permitted to reach the end of any sentence he began.
>
> This gave him a wholesome feeling of mistrust. The legitimate explanation, that he had been over-working himself, failed to satisfy him. Something had wiped his lips of speech, as a mother wipes the milky lips of her child, and he was afraid – horribly afraid.
>
> So the Club had rest when he returned; and if ever you come across Aurelin McGoggin laying down the law on things Human – he doesn't seem to know as much he used to about things Divine – put your finger to your lip for a moment, and see what happens.
>
> Don't blame me if he throws a glass at your head.(58)

Unlike Hardy who "spent too much time shaking his fist at a man-made Creator, who existed vaguely in his own mind,"(59) Rudyard Kipling seems convinced of an incomprehensible power which has created the orderly universe. Furthermore, it is not a cold and metaphysical god that he believes in, for his God seems to be very much a caring God. Notice the expression "Something had wiped his lips of speech, as a mother wipes the milky lips of her child."(60)

But if you take the view that Kipling believes in a caring Creator, can you reconcile such a Being with utterances such as 'blind gods,' 'jealousy of God,' 'blind chance,' etc.? One may argue they are temporary impressions — perhaps 'honest doubts' which have bedevilled even the best and noblest of men off and on. To my mind, however, such utterances are manifestations of something more deep and complex. They are inextricably related to his art and his unformulated philosphy in which pain and suffering have a purpose to serve. Kipling is a very sensitive man and an artist of a very high order. He is aware of the fact that the essence of being a man is to love and laugh as well as to work and cry; and as an artist he realizes that it is incumbent on him to understand these activities of a man in order to show him his own love and laughter, tears and toils in a new light. It is important to note that utterances such as 'blind chance,' 'blind gods,' etc., occur only in the reported speech of the character Kipling creates and not where he speaks in the first person singular, i.e., in his own voice, which only goes to prove that he was true to his vocation. He took his work seriously in that his personal belief in the Merciful God did not make him indifferent to pain and suffering in the world we live in.

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(58) Ibid., pp. 78-79.

(59) Edmund Gosse, who was Thomas Hardy's friend, criticized him for spending "too much time shaking his fist at a man-made creator, who existed vaguely in his own mind", quoted in Pinion, p. 82.

(60) Kipling, *Plain Tales,* p. 79.

Kipling's system of reality seems to be based on a binary principle, i.e., the world of love and the world of work. While the former is generally a source of pleasure, the latter often exposes man to pain and suffering. But human suffering within Kipling's system of reality is not a sport of 'the President of the Immortals.'[61] On the contrary, pain and suffering have a purpose to serve: personal suffering ennobles the soul and makes the heart tender and compassionate,[62] shared sorrow creates a new bond of love[63] and suffering on behalf of others has an ultimate value of its own.[64] And if someone questioned whether the Merciful God could not do away with pain, suffering and evil, perhaps Kipling would answer with Alexander Pope:

> Presume not God to scan
> The proper study of mankind is man.

'Without Benefit of Clergy' is one of the best stories that Kipling ever wrote. It deals with some of the most important aspects of his art, viz., the significance of pain and work in man's life and the shifts from the personal world of love to the impersonal world of work. These themes develop to full length in Kipling's later works but the germinating seeds are visible in this powerful tale. When Tota, the son of Ameera and Holden dies, initially Ameera is driven mad with sorrow[65] and in the state of pain she says unpalatable things to Holden, but later she makes amends for it and says, "I love more because a new bond has come out of the sorrow that we have eaten together, and thou knowest."[66] As for works, Kipling observes:

> One mercy only was granted to Holden. He rode to his office in broad daylight and found waiting him an unusually heavy mail that demanded concentrated attention and hard work. He was not however, alive to this kindness of the gods.[67]

Commenting on Kipling, André Maurois says, "he has a permanent natural contact with the oldest and deepest layers of human consciousness"[68] and Mason adds "This deep archetypal welled — I suggest — intermittently to the surface ... The contrast between the world of love and the world of work comes surely from such a level."[69] Holden was in the world of love when the big wooden gate was bolted from

(61) T. Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1987), p. 489.
(62) See 'They' in *Traffics and Discoveries* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1987), pp. 243-65.
(63) See 'Without Benefit of Clergy' in *Life's Handicap.*
(64) See *Kim.*
(65) Kipling, *Life's Handicap,* p. 146.
(66) Ibid. p. 147.
(67) Ibid., p. 145.
(68) Andre Maurois, *Magiciens et Logiciens,* quoted in Mason, p. 26.
(69) Ibid.

behind. he was "king in his own territory, with Ameera for queen."[70] But when he left Ameera and went to the club where people made fun of his work he was defencelessly exposed to an unloving world. The torment of the contrast between the world of love and an unloving world is not easy to comprehend fully. Only they can understand and appreciate it who have gone through similar torments themselves. Mason understands it because he was "hit three times a year"[71] when he went back to the boarding-school.

Kipling and Hinduism

Hinduism attaches a great importance to unselfish work. So does Kipling. C.S. Lewis is of the opinion that Kipling was the poet of work and it is his creed that the job must be done well and that this is worth sacrifice but does not say anything about the purpose of the job, thus producing a sense of weariness because of 'vagueness at the centre.'[72] There is an element of truth in what Lewis says. 'The Bridge-Builders' questions the whole idea of human effort, displaying its tininess and futility. Men are no better than ants. They scurry about and busy themselves on things of desperate importance, but in the face of eternity their work is really of no significance whatsoever.

India and Indian religions had a deep impact on Kipling, and "of all aspects of Indian culture the one which fascinated Kipling most was probably religion. Indian items falling into the realm of religion can be seen in almost every one of his works."[73] In 'The Bridge-Builders' he introduces Hindu mythology to show that human efforts mean little in the face of eternity. There is a fable within the story. The story begins with Findlayson, an engineer, who had worked extremely hard for four years on his great bridge, which symbolises human efforts to make progress, joining the present with the past. Then a flood comes and Finlayson finds himself in a very difficult situation indeed. He goes over his calculations and finds that his "side of the sum was beyond question, but what man knew Mother Gunga's arithmetic?"[74] which refers to the belief that blind chance controls man's fate and that he is totally incapable of understanding the blind gods who strike at random. In a state of trance Findlayson gets into a boat and then finds himself on an island, where he is the spectator of a Punchayat (committee) of the gods discussing the complaint made by Mother Ganga against the intruders who were insolent enough to put a bridge over

(70) Kipling, *Life's Handicap*, p. 134.
(71) Mason, p. 23.
(72) C.S. Lewis, 'Kipling's World'; quoted in Mason, p. 20.
(73) S.S.A. Husain, *The Indianness of Rudyard Kipling*, (London: Cosmos Press, 1983), p. 188.
(74) Kipling, *The Day's Work* (London: Macmillan, 1964), p. 21.

water. After a long philosphical discussion Indra, the father of the Gods, tells them that no one need have any fear because "Brahm still dreams and till he wakes the Gods die not."(75) The message is clear: all is illusion, the dream of Brahm, which is a Hindu idea to which Kipling apparently subscribes. However, when the boat came the next morning and Findlayson was rescued, he went back to the world of men to perform his duty, i.e., to see that the bridge should stand. So though human efforts amount to nothing but "the dirt digging at the dirt,"(76) nevertheless man must work hard in order that the bridge stands, joining the present with the past.

The significance of work can be seen in another very powerful story 'The Miracle of Purun Bhagat' by Kipling. In this story Sir Purun Das, the Prime Minister (of a native state), K.C.I.E., D.C.L., Ph.D., etc., renounces the world for the salvation of his soul. In his humility and love for life Purun Bhagat calls even animals "my brothers" and they respond to his love. His low call of 'Bhai! Bhai!' draws the animals from the forest at noon if they are within earshot. Finally, Purun Das dies, sacrificing his life to save the life of the villagers. Kipling, of course, shows a great respect for the spiritual strength of Purun Das; but he seems to have a greater admiration for Purun Das, the administrator, for he says that at the ciritcal moment Purun Das was no longer a holy man, but Sir Purun Das, a man accustomed to command, going out to save life — a most noble deed in Hinduism, indeed in any respectable religion. The fact that Kipling shows greater admiration for Sir Purun Das the administrator than for the holy man may lead one to raise the possibility that Kipling's view of hard work (work as an end in itself) is rooted in the Protestant work ethic. This, to my mind, would be inconsistent with the personality of Sir Purun Das, who believes in Hinduism, which postulates three different (but not necessarily mutually exclusive) ways (mārga) to realize God and to achieve salvation, viz., (i) the karma-mārga (the path of duties, i.e., work), (ii) the jñāna-mārga (the path of knowledge), which postulates the use of meditative concentration (yoga) in order to realize the Absolute and (iii) bhakti-mārga (the path of devotion) which means devotion to a personal God. Hinduism also postulates that the universe is a cosmos. Vedic man was deeply convinced that the world is an actually existing organized cosmos *(sat)* governed by order and truth *(rta)* and it is always in danger of being damaged or destroyed by the power of chaos *(asat)*. Purun Das, of course, was a yogi, who had renounced the world to use his time in meditative concentration with a view to gaining a supra-intellectual insight into his identity with Brahman, but it did mean that he could ignore his duty of saving life only to continue his meditation. Indeed he would have seriously marred his chances of salvation had he been indifferent to the impending death and destruction

(75) Ibid., p. 38.
(76) Ibid., p. 32.

death and sin. Man would be good if no one interfered with him and it is possible to achieve happiness on earth if certain external obstacles are removed. For Rousseau the obstacles are Kings and Priests, for Wells and Shaw Capitalists.

Kipling would not approve of Pelagianism. To him death and birth are crude inescapable physical facts. The reality of pain and sorrow is undeniable, for men experience them. Furthermore, Kipling holds man responsible for his acts. Man is a bundle of desires and he has to train and harness them; "the man who truly deserves the name of man is under discipline and master of himself, even though his self-command is something that has to be watched and jealously preserved. He is like the captain of a pirate ship, for whom mutiny is always close."(92) All this sounds like an ideal man of Athens, who is good and beautiful. An aristocrat by training, he controls his sensual desires and selfish ambition. But Kipling goes a bit further. To him watchfulness is just not enough. Fate and metaphysical factors may sweep him away any time. Even civilization is a fragile creation, which may be easily destroyed. History bears out that civilization fell into fragments when men grew idle and arrogant. Kipling is a religious man and he believes that the state would decay if it did not remember beneath Whose hand it was permitted to hold sway. Although man's merit to an extent depends on his suffering and integrity in the face of trial, he would eventually need Mercy. This is what the Sufi believes(93) and apparently Kipling knew a good deal about Sufism. it is not suggested here that Kipling was a Sufi, for there is no evidence that he ever embraced Islam. However, the impact of Sufism is much greater on Kipling than most of his critics think. Even Mason, who talks about the 'one red-hot affirmation of Islam,' is apparently unaware of the place of repentance, forgiveness and mercy in Islam. Perhaps it will not be out of place to inform Mason that a Muslim is obliged to pray to Allah at least five times a day. In every prayer, indeed in every part of each prayer he recites *Sura Fatiha,* humbly beseeching God, "Who is Most Kind and Most Merciful, to show him the Straight Way — the Way of those on whom God has bestowed His Grace, and not the way of those who go astray."(94) And in every call to the prayer there is an affectionate invitaiton from God to Man to come to the Way of Prosperity. The God of Islam is exceedingly kind — indeed the Most Kind, the Most Merciful and Oft Returning.

The Mature Kipling

Kipling in his later years is no longer critical of Christianity. In fact he frequently uses Christian symbols to express his religious sensibilities.

(92) Ibid., p. 252.
(93) For details see *The Hundred Letters,* also *The Way of Sufi* by Paul Jackson, S.J. (Delhi: St. Paul Press, 1987).
(94) See the *Holy Quran* trans. Yusuf Ali (Lahore: M. Ashraf, 1934), pp. 14-15.

There is a story entitled 'Uncovenanted Mercies' by Kipling in which we come across Gabriel, who is in charge of all Guardian Spirits, Azreal (the Angel of Death) and Satan, working together. The Satan here is a servant of the Mercy. He is not the Satan of *Paradise Lost,* but the Satan of the *Book of Job,* whose task is to test men and prove them. A part of his duties is to recondition human souls for re-issue as Guardian Spirits and he has to work closely with Gabriel. There are two human beings in the story, a man and woman. On their foreheads are written orders for life. The man is tested as Job had been in that he becomes poor and ashamed, living on charity, suffering from an incurable disease. Later he appears at a railway terminal, waiting for the woman. But the terminus is actually a replica of that London terminal where the two had first met. In other words Hell's terminus was just like the one in London. Here the most faithful of those who have promised to meet in eternity wait endlessly for each other. Train after train passes by but the beloved is never on it. Finally he receives a telegram which makes him collapse into unconsciousness. He is taken to a doctor who tells him that it is possible to take away his memory, which will relieve him of the pain, but for that his permission is required. When the man refuses to give the authority, the doctor's face lights up, for the man has passed the test. Mason rightly says that this story gives a glimpse of certain truths, and what comes through clearly is the reality of suffering and death, a faith in the power of the human spirit to profit by pain, a faith in ultimate, if very distant and often incomprehensible Mercy."(95)

'The Church That Was at Antioch' illustrates forgiveness, which is essentially, though not exclusively, Christian. Here one comes across a young Roman officer Valens, who has been fatally wounded by a Cilician whose brother had been killed by Valens. Valens is an adherent of the cult of Mithras. Both he and his uncle Sergius, who is Commissioner of Police, have a respect for Paul, the local leader, and Peter, the great leader whom Paul has brought from Jerusalem to settle the dispute between the Jewish Christians and Greek Christians with regard to the problem of how far the old Jewish Law should be obeyed by the new Christian converts. Peter is of the opinion that there might be advantage in having separate tables for those of Greek and Jewish origin, but Paul disagrees. There are trouble-makers from Jerusalem who are eager to pin something on the Christians which will discredit them in Roman eyes, and actually it is they who provided the murderous Cilician an opportunity to kill Valens at a Christian gathering. When Paul and Peter were having a disagreement about separate tables for people of different origins, Valens tells Paul that when they have feasts in honor of Mithras they do not make any difference between

(95) Mason, p. 273.

people. "We are all His children,"[96] says Valens. He also says, "Men make laws, not Gods ... Gods do not make laws. They change men's hearts. The rest is the Spirit."[97] To this Paul says excitedly, "You heard it, Petrus? You heard that? It is the utter Doctrine itself!"[98]

Both Valens and Paul claim the true doctrine and think that the other has it in a borrowed or perverted form. At this point Kipling develops a new theme, i.e., a contrast between Peter and Paul. While Paul is voluble, highly articulate, well-educated and totally dedicated, Peter is dumb and clumsy and his right hand is withered since he raised it to deny his Master. He is inconsistent and is infirm of purpose. Paul believes that God has made all men equal in the spirit and on this issue he is not prepared for any compromise. Peter is dumb, still obsessed with the memory of his denial. He has to be pushed and primed by Paul until he is brought to the point. When at last he speaks, he speaks with a force that Paul cannot match, thus carrying the day.

Another aspect of Peter's personality comes to light when Valens is fatally wounded by the same Cilician whom Valens had spared before. As he lies dying, Valens begs his uncle, the Police chief, "Don't be too hard on them ... They get worked up ... They don't know what they are doing ... Promise."[99] Both Peter and Paul recognize the Word and Paul suggests that they should baptize the dying Roman. Kipling gives a most touching description of what happened then:

> Painfully, that other raised the palsied hand that he had once held up in a hall to deny a charge.
>
> 'Quiet!' said he. 'think you that one who has spoken Those Words needs such as we are to certify him to any God?'[100]

'The Gardener' is another story where Kipling uses Christian symbols. It deals with pain and Christian compassion. The story is so powerful that it is impossible to convey its purport by a summary and it should be read in original. However, the story begins with Helen Turrell who had brought up her brother's son in the village where her parents had lived. Her parents were dead and she was unmarried. Her brother,

(96) Kipling, 'The Church that was at Antioch,' in *Limits And Renewals* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1987), p. 91.
(97) Ibid.
(98) Ibid.
(99) Ibid., p. 99.
(100) Ibid., p. 100.

who died in India, was a black sheep. He got entangled with the daughter of a non-commissioned officer and a child was born soon after his death and the child was named Michael Turrell. He grew up under the loving care of his aunt, Helen Turrell, who had permitted him to call her 'Mummy' at bed-time only. They were truthful at bed-time, and at bed-time only, and they kept the secret from the world. but what was the secret? Actually Helen Turrell was Michael's mother. Helen made a lapse and Michael was born. The village knew about it and were prepared to forgive her as long as the sin was not rammed down their throats. In early twentieth-century rural England sex outside marriage was a sin, an extreme self-indulgence, "but if accompanied by love, it was a part of the Christian tradition — though a part often forgotten — that it would be forgiven as Mary Magdalene's was."(101) But Helen was gentry, who was expected to set the village an example. The village was prepared to forgive provided Helen paid the price — that she would never call Michael her son in public.

Michael grew up into a fine young man and he was about to go up to Oxford when the war came. He was given a commission and later killed in action. First, he was reported missing. Then came the news that his body had been found and he was buried in the war cemetery. Helen was rudely shaken, but she had to keep the secret that Michael was her son even when she was most tormented. Her pain may be compared with that of Holden in 'Without benefit of Clergy,' where Holden had to keep his pain and suffering a secret and could not possibly share them with anybody. It is hard to imagine the pain of a lonely woman who has lost her only son in the war and is not permitted to refer to the grave of the son as her son's grave. When Helen went to the cemetery she saw a man kneeling "behind a line of headstones — evidently a gardener, for he was firming a young plant in the soft earth. She went towards him with her paper in her hand. He rose at her approach and without prelude or salutation asked:

> 'Who are you looking for?'
> 'Lieutenant Michael Turrell — my nephew,' said Helen slowly and word for word, as she had many thousand times in her life.
>
> The man lifted his eyes and looked at her with infinite compassion before he turned from the fresh-grown grass toward the naked black crosses.
>
> 'Come with me,' he said, 'and I will show you where your son lies.'

(101) Mason, p. 293.

When Helen left the Cemetery she turned for a last look. In the distance she saw the man bending over his young plants; and she went away, supposing him to be the gardener.(102)

Conclusion

In summing up Kipling's religious sensibilities it may be said that he is profoundly influenced by Christianity and often uses Christian symbols, but he is not a Christian. He comes very close to Sufism in that he shows a unique insight into the redeeming power of love, human as well as divine, which cuts through the anguish and pathos of his material to end on a note of affirmation; he believes in some divine purpose which he often conceals beneath a flippant reference to Allah, yet he is not a Muslim. He is very sympathetic to Hinduism and frequently refers to Hindu gods and goddesses, but he did not believe in Hindu mythology any more than Shelley believed in Greek myths. There is a consciousness of death and of the smallness of man in the face of eternity and of a vastness of power beyond man's comprehension. In the beginning there is an emphasis on chance, for the gods are blind and they strike at random. Later, however, he seems to believe in something still incomprehensible but certainly not chance. Even pain and evil seem to have a place within a wider purpose behind the creation of man. Forgiveness and mercy are of infinite value, and the greatest achievement of man is self-sacrifice. While Kim was looking for an identiy, the Lama was looking for a means to get rid of the very identity Kim was hankering after. When the Lama has attained union with the Great Soul, the Lama's own soul withdraws itself 'with strivings and yearnings and retchings and agonies not to be told.' He firmly believes that in order to keep chaos at bay men must be ruled by laws and the individual may have to suffer. He sees the need for administration to implement laws, for it is no good merely to have laws and to suppose that they will make mankind virtuous. He is, therefore, usually on the side of the system but often against its manifestations. His attitude to God was like his attitude at school. While he believed in the Headmaster and the purpose of the school, he did not think highly of the house masters. Similarly he believed in the Creator and some divine purpose behind the creation of man, but was sceptical about some human doctrines and interpretations of the divine. In short he was faithful to an unknown God but was agnostic about formulations.

(102) Kipling, 'The Gardener,' in *Debits and Credits* (New York: AMS Press, 1970), p. 299.

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ملخص البحث. يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحقيق الاعتقادات الدينية لرديارد كبلنج من حيث مذهبه كإنسان وفنان. فبالرغم من أن كبلنج لم يعتنق أية ديانة خاصة، لكنه في الحقيقة رجل متدين جدًّا، كما يؤمن بوحدانية الله، والهدف الديني الذي خلق الإنسان من أجله. هذا وحسب فلسفته غير المعلنة، حتى الألم والشر لهما أهداف في الحياة.