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## Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Books*: Magic and Wonder Rooted in Common Life

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### **Abstract:**

*The Jungle Book* (1894) by Rudyard Kipling is a collection of tales in which Most of the characters are animals such as Shere Khan the tiger and Baloo the bear, though a principal character is the boy, Mowgli, who is raised in the jungle by wolves. The stories are set in the Seonee forest in India in the central state of Madhya Pradesh. The stories are filled with elements of wonder, magic and his knowledge about India. Kipling's magic is rooted in the reality of common life. All over India there have been tales of a child reared by a wolf pack. In the background to the stories, the Indian village life goes on with its lazy rhythms – buffalo wading through the shallows, women going to the well. And further off one hears the harsher noises of Empire. Kala Nag, the elephant on whose back Toomai, the mahout's son, goes crashing through the jungle, carried tents and guns to the wars in Afghanistan and Abyssinia and hauled teak in the Burmese timber yards. When the escaped elephants meet in the forest for their dance which no man has seen, Toomai can hear the clinking of their broken leg-irons. The White Seal with its brutal description of the clubbing of the baby seals for children as for adults

**Keywords:** *Jungle Book*, Mowgli, magic, wonder, India, wildness, human nature.

An important aspect of the *Jungle Books* is Kipling's close observation of India and his descriptions of the Indian lifestyle. Rudyard Kipling had a power to make men see what he saw. He poured out into his tales what he knew about India and what he saw in India. He embraced everything in the *Jungle Books* from palaces of Oodeypore (Udaipur) to the Himalayan Heights. Kipling wandered throughout India during his journalistic career. He exploited his knowledge about India in his writings. His travels around India had deepened his knowledge of her. He relished the strange scenes he had seen in his works. He had a profound knowledge of Indian

life and character. He had studied Indian ways, languages, trades and customs. He was extraordinarily accurate in his Indian details. The local color has given two whole generations of men an understanding of the Indian Jungle was acquired by Kipling at second hand, according to Charles Carrington (136). The Mowgli stories in the *Jungle Books* are placed in a part of central India which he never visited, the banks of Waingunga river in the Seonee district. But I think that such comprehensive details about anything are not possible without firsthand knowledge of things. It may be true that some details might have been borrowed from books and descriptions from photographs but the fact that he had a close association with the land can not be denied. His keen insight into the Indian society could be seen in his depiction of the caste system, superstitions, ignorance and simplicity of the Indian customs. Charles Carrington has also said that Kipling must have counted on his father Lockwood Kipling's knowledge of jungle lore and ways of wild animals or on Sterndale's *Mammalia of India*, where Sterndale calls stories of nursing of abandoned infants by wolves not improbable.

Kipling's observation of Indian seasons could be best seen in 'Miracle of Purun Bhagat' Kipling has come out with the most exotic descriptions of Indian seasons in Himalayas. "The fields changed their colors with the seasons; the threshing floors, filled and emptied, and filled against and again, when the winter came, the langurs frisked among the branches, feathered with light snow, till the mother – monkeys brought their sad-eyed little babies up from the warmer valleys with the Spring"(*Jungle Books*202).

Kipling is interested in giving details of everything he had seen. Kipling had served in Simla for a short period. He used his experiences in his tales. The summer is equally fascinating in Himalayas for Kipling.

All that time he heard nothing but the sound of million little waters, overhead from the trees, and underfoot along the ground, soaking through the pine-needles, dripping from the tongues of dragged fern, and sprouting in newly – torn muddy channels down the slope. Then sun came out and drew forth the good incense of the devdars and the rhododendrons, and that far – off clean smell which the Hill people call the smell of the snows (*Jungle Books*202).

A keen observer like Kipling is not likely to miss out the operation of caste- system in India and he does not miss it out. He has observed the inner workings of the Indian society and portrays it with expertise. In 'Miracle of Purun Bhagat' he notes down unmistakably that Purun

Bhagat was of “So high caste that caste ceased to have any particular meaning for him(*Jungle Books*191).

Kipling has, surprisingly, given an account of the Ashrama System in the Hindu society and the four stages of life a man must undergo according to that system. This system asks for abandonment of the material life in favour of becoming a Sanyasi, a holy man. The same thing happens to Rudyard Kipling’s Purun Bhagat. Purun Bhagat gives up his active life because. “He had been, as old law recommends, twenty years a youth. Twenty years a fighter and twenty years head of a household” (*Jungle Books*193)

Purun Bhagat becomes a Sunyasi, a houseless, wandering mendicant. But Kipling would have to explain it to the West, how Purun Bhagat will survive. He does not fail to give explanation that such mendicants could depend for their daily bread on the villagers. “And so long as there is a morsel to divide in India, neither priest nor a beggar starves”( *Jungle Books*193). But the deal is not one-sided. Though the people do not ask for return, PurunDass recognizes their debt. He saves them from a landslide. He does it because, “They have given good food daily since – since I came – and if I am not swift, tomorrow there will not be one mouth in the valley”( *Jungle Books*204) So, the act is done just because of moral obligation. Again, Kipling refers to the typical Indian ideology which is to protect the life and interests of the persons whose food they eat. Everything is done by mutual understanding. No one demands anything. It’s just a matter of ‘give and take’ in India.

With Mowgli’s return to the Man-pack, Kipling enters Indian households and does not forget to portray the paraphernalia of Messua’s house. It is new to Mowgli as well as to the people for whom India is a nothing less than a riddle. “Red lacquered bedstead, a great earthen grain-chest with curious patterns on it, copper working pots, looking glass, image of Hindu god in a little alcove” (*Jungle Books*65)

With Mowgli, Kipling goes to graze the buffaloes on the open marshes. The Indian grazing grounds are described as being full of rocks, scrub, tussock and ravines among which the animals disappear. But the herding boys pass their time singing songs and making castles. The village boys are said to take cattle and buffaloes out grazing in the early morning and bring them back at night. The whole affair is described with subtle humour.

“Herding in India is one of the laziest things in the world. The cattle move and crunch, and lie down, and move again, and they do not even low. They only grunt, and the

buffaloes very seldom say anything, but get down into the mud till only their nose and staring china-blue eyes show above the surface and there they lie like dogs” (*Jungle Books*70)

Kipling does not fail to refer to the celebrated ignorance of the Indians. “but India is one place in the world where a man can do as he pleases and nobody asks why” (*Jungle Books*193)

There are plenty of references to Indian religiousness and the extensive use of marigold flowers as a sign of reverence across India. There are descriptions of Indian Gods. There is a reference to Brahma who put a mark on Nag’s head, in ‘Rikki-Tikki-Tavi’ song of Shiva in Toomai of the Elephants’ Goddess Kali in ‘Miracle of Purun Bhagat’ The references to the Kings of India and snakes who make homes in almost all the abandoned homes are recorded without fail and why not, India had always been portrayed as a land of kings and snakes by the English writers. The people, their strange beliefs, their superstitions, their relationships with each other, their God-fearing nature, everything is there. Kipling has unraveled everything he could about India in his *Jungle Books* and that too, with supreme gift of narrating and in a surprising and dramatic fashion.

The fights between the people for land are also emphasized, which obviously is a strange thing for the animals. Kipling observes that carelessness and indifference to suffering and apathy are the tendencies of man towards animals in India.

There is magic as well as terror in the *Jungle Books*. The unique magic of *Jungle Books* starts from the moment child Mowgli enters in the wolf lair. The cave of the wolves, at the mouth of which Shere Khan is arrogantly demanding his prey is magical too. The magic shows itself in its danger-hunted thickets, the strange behaviour of monkeys and the land of which Mowgli is to become a master. There is magic about his animal friends and advisers Bagheera, the wise old bear, Hathi, the elephant, Kaa, the friendly python Akela, the leader of the Wolf-Pack; Bandar – long, the chattering, leader less and lawless outcasts.

The magic is combined with the terror in the Jungle. The terror is experienced in the ruined honeycombed city where monkeys live, where Kaa takes Mowgli to see the white cobra. The cobra is a mysteries underground custodian of the King’s treasure. The Red Dogs are so ferocious and devastating that even tiger and panther turn aside at their approach. There is terror of these Red Dogs. Mowgli lives during these animals which are wild. There wild animals help

Mowgli solve his dilemma whether he is a man or an animal. But in the end, he is sent by his mentors away from the animals on a new trial, to do his duties in the world of man.

In his revenge, Mowgli lets in the Jungle on the village no human blood is shed. But in “Kaa’s Hunting”. “The King Ankus”, and “Red Dog” there is a strong note of the terrible. The corpse – laden waters of the time of Mutiny in “The Undertakers” are as horrible as the gluttonous old crocodile in it. The “Red Dog” gives a sense of terrible as well as heroism. Here, the hunting grounds of Mowgli’s pack are overrun by the inferior but more giant pack of the Dholes from Dekkan, and the wolves fight to the death for their lairs and their cubs.

In these stories, the reader is presented with ancient patterns of desperate valour, like the threat of Barbarian horde, the sacrificial exploit, the fight in the narrow place, the death of the old leader. These strong spells work on the reader’s mind. In the ‘Red Dog’ Won-Tolla, the maimed outlier, whose mate and cubs have been killed by Red Dogs asks for a fight and heroic death. Won-Tolla runs three – legged along the river bank as his enemies come downstream. He seeks revenge on them. ‘The bone is cracked’ says phaon as the Dholes retreat. Won-Tolla dies fighting with his enemies. Akela dies and Mowgli sings a death song to him. The tales are filled with heroism. The laws of life and death have their way with Mowgli’s brethren. All this is conveyed with astonishing conviction and intensity by Kipling.

A sense of strange and wonderful embraces the *Jungle Books*. Up the Arctic, the pack-ice grinds and roars round the unseen shores and the sorcerer sings charmingly in the snow-hut. The wise elephants are tame as well as wild. They live in the Assamese Hills, meet at night to trample their dancing ground. There is an incident of Himalayan mountainside loosened by rain and the animals sense the coming of the landslide and save the holy Purun Bhagat who has shown them kindness and hospitality. And in all places in the Jungle Books, the people live with strange skills and stranger beliefs. Kotuko buckles himself into his belt for the long watch by the seal’s breathing hole, old Baldeo assumes that the Lamé Tiger embodies the spirit of a dead moneylender, the seasonal round of a Himalayan villages takes place at a great depth below the shrine where Purun Bhagat meditates. The refinement of human senses to meet special ponditions and the intuitive knowledge of ancestral habit are often brought to notice. In the Jungle, Mowgli weaves huts of straws like his woodcutter forefathers. The world which unfolds before the readers is varied and wild. Toomai’s mother and even Matkah, the Seal, sing their

lullabies which are highly a human trait. Big Toomal and Sea-Catch grumble, and Kotuko's little brother gnaws a nutty strip of blubber.

In "Kaa's Hunting" the strange Bandar-log are found to sympathize with Mowgli when he is under punishment. They abduct him into tree-tops. They are important figures in this story. It is thrilling for a child to read about the green roads through which the monkeys take Mowgli, his presence of mind when he gives master word to Chil, the Kite, and pleads him to mark his trail. This is raised to an exciting pitch. Before the adventures begin, there is humorous description of the Bandar-log as irresponsible, chattering, and animals without law, shame or memory. Kipling has presented the Bandar-log as a direct contrast to the Jungle virtuousness. Their dangerous futility is brought out by their doings at Cold Lairs, Baloo and Bagheera are beloved animals in the Jungle who are companions of the Man-cub, Mowgli. They are also the mouthpieces of Law. They teach morals to Mowgli and so to the children reading the Jungle Books. "The King's Ankus" is also an exciting tale of hidden treasure and of the following of a trail. A mysterious white cobra guards the treasure which includes King's Ankus. But Mowgli fails to comprehend the value of jeweled Ankus, for which men kill each other. The power of this tale is awe-inspiring. In "Tiger ! Tiger!" The young wolves desert their old leader Akela to accept Shere Khan's new ideology. But in the end, Shere Khan's skin is pegged out on the Council Rock. The note of heroism of Mowgli runs through this narrative. There is mythological imagination in Hathi's tradition of how fear came. The story is told mysteriously in the setting of the Water-Truce and there is Kotick's search for the shore where man has never come to destroy the seals. The magic and wonder is all around us in the *Jungle Books*. It is best represented by the ruined city where king's treasure is hidden in "The King's Ankus" and the sacred cobra and the dexterity of little Gond hunter with the sharp axe in the same story.

According to J. M. S. Tompkins, in the later Mowgli stories, there is a majestic shadow of Adam, the King of the Jungle (65). It is only a shadow because Mowgli moves in place and time, suffers the ill-temper of Buldeo and stones of Man-Pack, lets Messua comb his hair and helps her to escape to the unknown English at Kanhiwara. He has drawn the milk of a woman and a wolf. Messua considers him a wood-god. But to the children, who will read this, Mowgli is just a boy who is helped by kind animals. He establishes a fine communion with his foster brothers. Mowgli supposes himself to be a Master of the Jungle because he spoke to animals in

their own tongues and showed his superiority to them by cursing the Red Flower in a firepot and using it against the tiger.

A delicate stream of humour and pathos runs through the last Mowgli tale ‘The Spring Running’. It is filled with a strange grimness and melancholy, because Mowgli goes back to the human kindred. The time of new talk disturbs Mowgli. This time sends the wild creatures singing and roving through the jungle alienating Mowgli. The compulsion that is driving Mowgli away from the Jungle is hard to convey to children who would not understand it, like Mowgli who too fails to understand it. Mowgli thinks that he has eaten poison and his unhappiness brings tears to his eyes. His wolf-mother explains it as a sign of manhood. But the melancholy is not felt severely as it is felt in the beginning of the story because Mowgli goes with the favour of the jungle and with the company of his four-footed brothers.

Though Mowgli is an interesting as well as central character in the Jungle Books, there are other stories which do not include Mowgli. Some of these non-Mowgli tales are impressive because in these tales, animals play an important part. These are the stories of human beings and interestingly, animals do not speak in these tales. There is exception of “The Undertakers, and “Her Majesty’s Servants”. The stories like “Miracles of Purun Bhagat” are not particularly children’s tales but Kipling was considerate of his childish audience and was often explanatory to them. He used familiar idioms but in the second *Jungle Book*, they become very few and the descriptions expand.

“The Quiquern” is a story of the people of Eastern Ice, Southern Ice and elder Ice and their sufferings. In this story, the jungle is mentioned nowhere in the scene and Kipling’s detailed descriptions of the Antarctic flash on the pages of the *Jungle Books*. It is a story of Kadlu, the Inuit or Esquimou. It was fascinating descriptions of the lifestyle of Esquimoes, their hunting of seals. Quiquern is a dog-spirit which leads Esquimou to a safe land when the ice is breaking.

The white seal, shows, again, Kipling’s interest in giving detailed descriptions of the land, its inhabitants and the natural phenomena of that part of the world. There are fabulous descriptions of the beaches where there are hordes of seals gathered on the shores. Kipling has given a human trait to these seals, which is of singing lullabies. The lullaby which Matkah sings to her baby is full of sea metaphors.



The children are provided with a world which is quite like theirs. The seals have mothers and moreover, they too sing lullabies to their babies. They too care for their children. The reference to man's strange beliefs is here also. This time, it is the belief of the Englishmen. Kerick Booterin and his Patalamon consider Kotick, who is a white seal, to be old Zaharoff's ghost. The cruelty of men towards animals is expressed by giving accounts of skinning of the seals. This cruelty of men drives Kotick to take up a search of a land which is untrodden by human beings. Kipling comes out with a happy resolution when he gives Kotick success in finding an island untrodden by human beings, Kotick leads his friends to that land which is beyond sea-cows, tunnel.

"Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" stresses on the usefulness of animals to the human beings. It is a story of Mongoose, who with the help of a tailor bird, Darzee, wins a terrible fight with the Nag, Mongoose, thus saves the John's family from a big Nag and Nagina. This story fails to make impact on the mind of the reader, except the scene of the heroic fight put up by Rikki-Tikki-Tavi against the Nag.

"Toomai of the Elephants" could be surely placed among one of the best stories in the *Jungle Books*. The atmosphere in this story is enchanting. The event is magnificently described by Kipling which is of Toomai's witnessing the Elephant Dance. The achievement is extraordinary for a little Indian Mahout boy like Toomai, because he has seen what the great hunter of Elephants Peterson Sahib has also not seen. A wonderland is opened to the readers. The prize for Toomai is something a common Indian could not have dreamt of. He gets a crashing salute of the Elephants which is given only to the Viceroy of India. The descriptions of the Mahouts, their skills in their profession, the hunting of the Hathis is remarkable

In "Her Majesty's Servants", the troublesome and savage horses of Afghanistan's Amir come to visit the Viceroy of India. It is a conversation between a mule of screw-gun battery, a troop-horse and the gun-bullocks. Though the imperialist tones are not very significant in the *Jungle Books*. It is not completely devoid of them. In "Her Majesty's Servants", the mule boasts himself of having a white driver. The pride of an Englishman could be perceived when the Amir's Central Asian chief asks an English Officer the secret behind the wonderful parade of the animals. The English Officer tells that the secret lies in following an order and working in proper hierarchy. He says that if they want to be like Englishmen, they should not behave according to their own wills and should follow the chief, which suggests that they should come

under the English Flag. So, if they want to have law and order, they must follow the English. The same note is continued in the “Miracles of Purun Bhagat” when PurunDass is made to understand the importance of English very early in his life. PurunDass is presented as a wise man because he is a man who senses the importance of English and imitates all that English believed to be good. It pays and he becomes the Prime Minister of the Kingdom. So his first step of the ladder to success starts with imitation of Englishmen. Above all, he is given the title ‘K.C.I.E.’ – Knight Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire.

These stories of humanized animals fill the *Jungle Books* with enhancement. In his fables, Kipling explored a spontaneous habit of imagination for its artistic potentiality. The fleeting likeness with the common day to day human life was fixed, and a congruous world elaborated round it. Actually, it is only a small part of the appearance and behaviour of animals and things that can really be compared to those of human beings. The fun arises from a simultaneous perception of likeness and unlikeness. A world of mystery, magic and wonder unravels before the eyes of the readers.

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