

**TEHRAN UNIVERSITY**

 **FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

A Cultural Materialist Analysis of Rudyard Kipling's Selected Short Stories

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**2- Abstract:**

Cultural materialism is a theory that was founded by Raymond Williams. It stresses that every text is equally important due to its non-aesthetic value, which shows the environmental conditions of its time. Additionally, it argues that literature is a product of its environment. The dominant forces in an environment usually influence the production of literature while stifling the voices of the powerless. Cultural materialism aims to unearth the voices of powerless by identifying the positions of the dominant forces in a text and the political commitment of a writer. “Black Jack,” “Poor Dear Mama,” “In Flood Time,” “With the Main Guard,” “The Wreck of Visigoth,” and “The Big Drunk Drag” are selected for study. Most of these short stories are set in British India are part of Kipling’s “Soldiers Three and Other Stories” collection. Their setting in British India will help me explore imperialism and militarism from a cultural materialist perspective. The study will employ close reading to identify the political commitments of the writer and the hegemonic positions of the selected stories. Hopefully, the study will reveal the effects of imperialism, militarism and other social evils.

**3- Definition of Key Terms:**

**Culture**: The behavior, practices, customs, and ideas of a particular people (Boesel). It refers to the conventional meanings that people share and the prevailing direction of a society. It relates to the organization of society and the functions given to different groups within the society, and the meaning attached to various actions in a society. Raymond Williams simply summarized it as the ordinary in a society (Williams, Culture).

 **Environment**: The social, political, and economic conditions of a particular place. The social conditions are the family, religion, law, and traditions. The political conditions refer to the system of government in society. It also relates to the level of obedience a government accords the rule of law. Does the government obey the law or disregard the law by abusing its powers? Lastly, economic conditions refer to the status of the wealth of a majority of the population (Pankaj 22).

**Imperialism**: Employment military forces and other means by one country to conquer and control another country. In this paper, imperialism's synonym is colonialism. The rule of the British in British India is an example of imperialism (Said 12). Imperialism is evident in the selected short stories, particularly “With the Main Guard.”

**Militarism**: It is regarded as a package of ideas, like an ideology. Militarism refers to a compilation of assumptions, values and core beliefs reproduced within and by civil society. Among those distinctively militaristic, core beliefs are: a) that armed force is the ultimate resolver of tensions; b) that human nature is prone to conflict; c) that having enemies is a natural condition; d) that hierarchical relations produce effective action; e) that a state without an army is naïve, scarcely modern and barely legitimate; f) that in times of crisis those who are feminine need armed protection; and g) that in times of crisis any man who refuses to engage in armed violent action is jeopardizing his own status as a manly man (Enloe 219).

**Infrastructure**: It is a combination of demography, economy, and technology. Cultural materialists observe that infrastructure are the forces that shape the culture of a society. Demography provides labor while economy supplies equipment. The interaction of labor, equipment, and technology determine the way of life of people (Harris 32).

**Structure**: it is the pattern of a society’s organization such as governance systems and kinship systems. Kinship systems are family systems. They are different types of family systems such as nuclear families, extended families, single-parent families, monogamous families, and polygamous families. Governance systems are the structures put in place by to promote peaceful and beneficial relationships among people that are good for economic growth and development. Examples of governance systems are parliamentary, presidential, monarchial, military, and autocratic systems of governance (Harris 35).

**Superstructure**: It is the institutions of a society, such as religion, values, and law (Harris). Religion is the specific practice of belief in and reverence of a deity. Value is the subjective judgment and consideration of the things that are significant in life. Religion and law usually influence values. Law refers to rules that regulate behavior. The combination of law, religion, and values form the superstructure of a society (Harris 42).

**Historical context**: the social, economic, and political conditions that are present in an artist's environment at the time he/she creates an artwork. The social, political, and economic conditions have been elaborated under “environment” above. They affect the artist, which motivates the artist to create works on them. Different periods in history experienced different challenges. Therefore, artwork produced in different periods are often different. The ages and locations where artworks were produced make up their historical contexts (Kirk 34).

**Political commitment**: a writer's devotion to a course and a writer’s convictions about the course. Political commitment relates to the clear stand of a writer on a specific issue affecting his/her society, which arises from the writer's deep consciousness of the various views others have of the particular subject (Pankaj 43). Political commitment refers to a writer’s dedication to advocating for certain beliefs, which he/she sees that can aid in social reform. It refers to an ideology that a writer firmly holds and a perspective that he or she adheres to with dedication and zeal (Stewart 5).

**4- Thesis Statement:**

Do Kipling's short stories support Imperialism when they are analyzed through the perspective of cultural materialism? Raymond Williams introduced the cultural materialist approach in the analysis of literature because he felt that there was more to literature than the aesthetic qualities of its text. He argued that every piece of literature was important because inferences about the society at the time of its production could be drawn (Williams, Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review). This research will explore Williams’ theory of cultural materialism and uses it to analyze the selected works of Rudyard, which are mentioned above. Hopefully, Williams theory will help to understand how imperialism during Kipling’s lifetime influenced his selected works. We also hope that the theory will help to establish the dominant positions of the selected short stories and the marginal voices that are subdued in the selected short stories.

 The selected short stories for review are mainly set in British India. Five out of the six chosen stories are from Kipling's short story collection titled "Soldiers Three and Other Stories." "The Wreck of Visigoth" is the only short story that is not part of the "Soldier Three and Other Stories," but it is also set in British India. The common thing about these short stories is that they deal with the British rule of British India. Additionally, they are part of the "Soldiers Three and Other Stories," which is an unpopular collection of Kipling's short stories compared to other popular collections such as "Plain Tales from The Hills" and "American Notes." Williams Marxist theory explains the affection of imperialism in the society and its community. He believed that imperialism should be replaced by liberty and equality. Besides, sex, color and heritage should not act as a controlling element in any individual or social life and power. Therefore, this research will help bring to light a neglected part of Kipling's works while also providing information on the circumstances of the British rule in British India.

**5- Literature Review:**

### *Cultural Materialism*

Cultural Materialism is a theory in the literature that originated from the works of Raymond Williams, a 20th-century left-wing literary critic. It uses the Frankfurt School’s critical theory to analyze literature. Like the Marxists, Williams observed that culture was a product of the interaction of the various means of production (labor, equipment, and technology) (O'Connor 23).

Marvin Harris, an American Anthropologist, who contributed significantly to the development of cultural materialism believed that culture is influenced by factors that he categorized into infrastructure, structure and the superstructure. Infrastructure comprises of demographics, economy, and technology; structure includes kinships systems and cultural systems, and the superstructure consists of religion and ideology. Marvin Harris argues that factors categorized under infrastructure are the primary influencers of culture. He identified economy as productive force and demography as the reproductive force. He claimed that these two forces (factors) in particular are the most instrumental in shaping a society (Milner). Harris argued that production and reproduction dominate in all societies, which makes them shape the structure and the superstructure, which are the elements of culture. Therefore, economy and demography are the forces that drive the development of culture. Marvin Harris further claimed that all the other factors, in the structure and superstructure categories, are developed to benefit the productive and reproductive abilities of a society. Therefore, kinship systems, religion, ideology, law, and government are constructs of the productive and reproductive forces that aim at improving production and reproduction (Jones 20). Harris also believed that culture is not static (Harris 3). Culture changes with the changes in economy and demography, which usually influence it.

Graham Holderness, a British literary critic and a pioneer cultural materialist, claimed that cultural materialism is a politicized type of historiography (Milner 23).Holderness observed that cultural materialism is politically oriented. It has a Marxist orientation that is geared towards political intervention. Holderness claimed that cultural materialism focuses on changing the social order that discriminates and exploits populations on the basis class, race, sexuality, and gender (Jones). Cultural materialism seeks to bring to light the techniques used by the contemporary power structures like the state, academy, and the church, to disseminate ideology. Holderness observed that cultural materialism analyzes the methods used by these dominant forces in society to influence the creation of meaningful historical and canonical texts, such as the works of Kipling, to inscribe and validate particular beliefs, values, and attitudes on the social imaginary (Milner 27).

Jonathan G. Dollimore, an English social theorist and philosopher, and Alan Sinfield, an English theorist in the field of sexuality, observed that Cultural materialism explores the historical context and political implications of a literary piece. It uses close reading to identify the hegemonic position a work of literature and tries to determine whether that dominant position can be rejected or subverted. Therefore they came up with three essential attributes of cultural materialism. These are historical context; social/political commitment, and close reading/ textual analysis (Jones). These characteristics are discussed in great details below.

#### Historical context and Historicism

Historical context is the social, economic, and political conditions that are present in an artist's environment at the time he/she creates an artwork. These conditions play a part in influencing the artist and how he/she creates the work. According to Roland Barthes, a French literary critic, theorist, and philosopher, an artist is a product of his time. An artist only imitates his/her environment; therefore, his/her work can never be original (Kirk). Literature is the product of its age. One can only understand an artwork by relating it to the social, political, and economic environment of its artist at the time of its creation. It is the artist's environment that motivates him or her to create an artwork of what he/she has learned from that environment then. The message portrayed by an artist's work is entangled with the society where it was created. Therefore, art provides information on its contextual society. It helps people understand the history of their societies both intellectually and emotionally (Fleming). On the hand, as mentioned earlier, history influences art. Artists are influenced by their political context, the people they know, and their broader society. Therefore, it is impossible to understand a work of art without understanding the historical context of the work. Unlike formalist who judge a piece of literature by its aesthetic value, cultural materialists give all texts, be it literary or non-literary, equal weight. They consider all writings of a given period equally crucial in understanding the period (Kirk 24).

One can only gain a broad and deep understanding of a work by looking at it from its historical context. Exploring the historical context of a literary piece makes one understand specific ideas that one may not grasp if one does not consider the time that the work was created. For example, the “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” by Mark Twain has been a target of modern critics because it uses racial epithet casually in describing Jim, Huck’s friend, who is an escaped slave. Today, many people consider the use of such a language offensive, shocking, and derogatory. However, when one considers the time the novel was published, in the mid-1880s, one realizes that Mark Twain did not mean to be offensive or derogatory in his statements. In the 1880s, attitudes towards freed African American slaves were indifferent and sometimes even hostile. It was normal to use racial epithets to refer to them. Therefore, one might judge those who call Jim with racial names as being disrespectful, but they are not. In fact, considering the historical context, Huck treats Jim as an equal, which is unbelievable. The 1880s was a period when blacks were deemed to be inferior as shown by the literature of the time (Fleming 32).

Another example is “Frankenstein” by Mary Shelley. One cannot appreciate this novel fully if one is unaware of the Romantic movement of the early nineteenth century. This time was when the European societies faced a lot of turbulence due to the technological disruptions that came with the industrial age. Artists of the time (romantics) captured mainly fear and isolation in their works, which were the feelings the public developed due to the social changes that were brought by technology and industrialization. Therefore, "Frankenstein," observed from its historical context, is not just a story about a good monster. It is an allegory of how technology destroys people (Fleming 37).

Historical context is imperative in finding the meaning of an artwork. One should not ignore it. It helps one know and understand an aspect of a text which allows one not to miss the real sense of a text.

#### Political Commitment

Political commitment refers to a writer's devotion to a course and a writer's convictions about the course. It refers to the writer's observation of life in the society where he/she lives. Political commitment relates to the clear stand of a writer on a specific issue affecting his/her society, which arises from the writer's deep consciousness of the various views others have of the particular subje (Pankaj 63). Political commitment refers to a writer’s dedication to advocating for certain beliefs, which he/she sees that can aid in social reform. It refers to an ideology that a writer firmly holds and a perspective that he or she adheres to with dedication and zeal (Stewart 52).

A writer's political commitment arises from the writer's sense of righteousness and morality. Writers live in the society. They do see the good and bad sides of their societies. They are sensitive to the events that occur within their societies. Therefore, they set out to create work on these everyday occurrences where they portray their deepest convictions on these mundane occurrences (Pankaj 43). Thus, their works are results of the events that occur around them during their lifetime. As writers portray these events that happen around them in their works, they also try to shape these activities according to their convictions of right and wrong (Stewart).

Writers are analysts of their societies. They identify the good and evils of their societies. They then create works that approve the good and violently disapprove the evil as a form of protest. Protesting against atrocities in the society is one of the significant functions of literature in society. Writers are conscious of the vital political issues in their societies (Pankaj 34). Thus, they engage in political commitment as an essential sociopolitical activity. A writer can only keep his integrity through political commitment (Pankaj 35).

There are fundamental human values that need protection and preservation. A writer must promote and preserve these values. Writers must be alive socially. They must openly join the ordinary people in their struggles, especially in the preservation of human values. Writers cannot afford to be neutral on issues affecting their societies. When they assume a neutral position, they may become representatives of oppressive rulers, which may turn them into caged writers (Stewart 21).

Thus, literature is thorough scrutiny of the society and the criticism of evils in the society. It acts to dethrone and destroy all values that are undesirable in the society. It creates the hope of the possibility to improve the society. Literature achieves all these through political commitment.

*Rudyard Kipling's Stance toward Imperialism*

Twentieth-century novelist, Rudyard Kipling, brought the imperialism world into the heart of fiction: Soldier Three, Kim, In Black and White, The light that failed, Captain Courageous and so on.

Kipling was born and lived extensively abroad. He was alien in England, so he scrambled for roots, created an image of England to suit his foreign appearance. Kipling cultivated an exotic air. He wrote early stories under the pen name Yussuf. Kipling believed that he was a bizarre figure, but he was innovators. He made a romantic identification with the East. (Raskin 46)

Kipling is writer of contrasts and compromises. He had an official role as defender of the Empire. In 1915, when James, in the midst of the imperial holocaust, became a citizen of the empire, Kipling wrote him and told that his act was of the utmost significance for the British Empire and for all the civilized world. At long last, Kipling sighed, James had won his deepest admiration, not for his literary work, but because James had taken a stand against barbarism. It was a day Kipling would remember proudly for the rest of his life (Raskin 54).

Eliot was the first critic to Kipling. He had praised Virgil. He was aware of the dilemma his admiration for Kipling got him into. Eliot knew that Kipling’s critics argued that since the architect of the white man’s burden “dwelt upon the glory of empire . . . he helped to conceal its more seamy side: the commercialism, exploitation and neglect.” But Eliot’s response is that all attentive reader of Kipling's stories can claim that he was not aware of the faults of British rule: clearly, he does not doubt the British Empire to be a good thing. And Eliot, too, condemns the exploitation of the earth but believes that the British Empire is a virtuous institution. He proclaims his hostility toward industrial and commercial society, but he praises Kipling. He believed that Kipling was the chief celebrant of the machine and the industrial state. Knowing its exploitation and commercialism, Eliot also supported the British Empire,. Below his appeal to Christianity, order, harmony, tradition, is his objective stance—side by side with the masters of empire against the colonized peoples of the earth. His emphasis on the imperial tradition in literature is in agreement with his preoccupation with the British Empire, his belief in continuities and harmonies. Luckily, no one took Kipling for the great artist Eliot did. Near the end of his life he was a rabid Kipling fan. In 1958, he stated that his and Kipling’s feeling about England resulted from causes which were not wholly dissimilar. Kipling had praised James for becoming a citizen of the empire. Now Eliot joined the imperial order. He became a British subject, and he paid his tribute to the foremost imperialist-artist. He declared that Kipling was the “greatest English man of letters of his generation.” (Raskin 58)

Five days after Rudyard Kipling died on 18 January 1936, George Orwell published a short essay in the New English Weekly. This essay was a kind of obituary or a sort of tribute to the “household god” with whom he had grown up: For my own part, I worshipped Kipling when I was thirteen, loathed him when I was seventeen, enjoyed him when I was twenty-five and now again rather admire him. The impossible thing was that, if one had read him at all, was to forget him. (Ferreira 61).

All the stories mentioned above testify to the complexity of Kipling’s portrayal of native Indian peoples, and undermine any attempt to reduce Kipling to a mere racist imperialist. As Orwell remarked, Kipling was the only English writer of his time to have added phrases to the language, such as “East is East, and West is West”, “The white man’s burden”, “What do they know of England who only England know?” and “He travels the faster who travels alone”. Orwell deeply regretted that Kipling had paid to work on and lend his genius to imperialism, and becoming “a kind of enemy, a man of alien and perverted genius (Ferreira, 67).

## **6- Methodology:**

The first step in the analysis of these selected short stories will be to identify their historical context. The identification of a stories' historical context requires the knowledge of the dates when the short stories were published and the knowledge of the geographical settings of the short stories. This information will help me determine the social, economic, and political conditions of the places where the stories were set. All of these short stories were published in the late nineteenth century. Additionally, most of them are set in former British India. Therefore, I will look into the social, economic, and political conditions of British India in the late nineteenth century to determine the historical context of these short stories. I will also look into the life of Kipling. There may be occurrences and experiences in his life that may have influenced his works. This knowledge will help me in profoundly understanding the short stories as discussed earlier under literature review.

The next step in my analysis is to engage in the close reading of each of the selected short stories. Close reading will help me identify the hegemonic positions in the selected short stories. It will also help me identify the political commitment of Rudyard in those short stories. Identification of hegemonic opinion and the political commitment of the writer will unravel issues relating class, race, sexuality, and gender. It will help to reveal matters facing the marginalized in the historical context of those short stories, which is the primary focus of cultural materialism.

**7- Anticipant Findings:**

A majority of the selected stories are set in British India. The analysis of these selected short stories from a cultural materialist perspective will help reveal how British imperialism affected the local people of British India. It will also help expose the social evils that existed in the societies of British India. For example, the short story, “In Flood Time,” one can already identify the religious discrimination present in the society that prevents two lovers from living happily together. Additionally, "The Wreck of Visigoth" already shows the division of people into social classes and maybe races. Moreover, the study will show how militarism affected minds of young people in the late 19th century. For example, in the story, “With the Main Guard,” one wonders how these men value their roles as army officers, such that they leave their cool temperate homes to come endure the high temperatures and heat waves of British India. The study will also reveal why ladies of the 19th century loved military men as revealed shown by the stories, “Black Jack” and “Poor Dear Mama.” In the end, this study will contribute further to our understanding of British imperialism and militarism from the eyes of British settler (Rudyard Kipling) in British India, who is considered part of the dominant force, under cultural materialism.

Actually, Rudyard Kipling is a renowned writer, who lived between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His short stories were mainly set in British India. Raymond Williams is a distinguished literary critic. He laid the foundation for cultural materialism, a theory that elevated the significance of the non-aesthetic value of literature in the analysis of works of literature. This proposal puts the basis for research that will use Williams' theory of cultural materialism to analyze the selected works of Rudyard Kipling. Hopefully, the theory will help unravel the dominant positions in those short stories and also help identify the marginal voices that are subdued in those works.

**8- Thesis Outline:**

Chapter one: Introduction

Chapter two: The definition of imperialism and its effects on the literary works of the end of nineteenth century

Chapter three: Kipling and his relationship with the imperial world

Chapter Four: Cultural Materialism and Kipling’s selected short stories

Chapter five: Conclusion

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