



## LALUN AND LAHORE: COURTESAN CULTURE AND THE SEMI-INFORMED NARRATOR IN KIPLING'S 'ON THE CITY WALL'

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### **Abstract**

This essay examines the image of darkness present in Kipling's short story 'On the City Wall' and links it to various underlying themes in the story. One of the themes is the courtesan culture of Lahore. Lalun is a courtesan and is as much full of beauty, mystery and enigma as the city of Lahore where she dwells, or the quaint location of her house which is paradoxically situated on the city's wall. The essay also explores the role of the semi-informed narrator in the story, who can be Kipling himself or someone who is narrating the story to the readers. This narrator-character is tricked by Lalun to help an escaped prisoner get out from the city under the very noses of the policemen who are trying to control the riots on the streets. The narrator's gullibility and his lack of complete knowledge of his actions can also stand for the entire process of writing, where the narrated event remains partially shrouded in the haze of semi-visibility. Just as Lalun's real motives remain unknown to the narrator and the readers till the end of the story, similarly the narrator's use of authorial perspective entails a semi-reliability of the subjective point of view. Finally, the essay takes up the image of darkness and traces its presence in Kipling's life and writings. The world of the night is an integral part of Kipling's vision of an Indian self, and is further accentuated in the unfathomable person of the courtesan.

### **Keywords**

Lalun, Lahore, city, courtesan, darkness, semi-informed narrator, Kipling

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## Introduction

While the British Crown's regime was making all efforts to erase memories of the legendary heroism of Indian female leaders, such as Begam Hazrat Mahal, the Queen of Awadh and Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi, a Bombay-born Anglo-Indian, Rudyard Kipling (1864-1936), who spoke Hindustani as his first language and worked as a journalist in Lahore and later earned his fame as a short-story writer, created another queen, albeit on paper. Fictional in stature and a courtesan by profession, this new queen, like the power-wielding queens of the past, had the power to 'trouble the hearts of the British Government' and cause them to lose their peace of mind. Kipling is not the only one to associate this courtesan, Lalun, with queenly splendour. Lalun, sitting in her window seat, with her silver hookah studded with jewels by her side, surveyed the city of Lahore's charm and imagined herself as a queen, as we will see later in this paper.

Who was this Lalun? What makes her so important as to be worthy of a subject of academic investigation and study now? Is it the persona of a courtesan that warrants such studies, or is it the undercurrent of events, that were shaping the post-1857 face of India? To answer these questions, we have to know more about Lalun and the story.

It is important to understand that the courtesans of Lahore have a special place in the city's cultural, historical and literary contours. They have always lived in a space marked for them. The identity and the presence of the courtesans gets authenticated through this allocation of a fascinating name to their space. It is *Heera Mandi* – the marketplace for diamonds. Diamonds have always lured men. The *Heera Mandi* similarly has lured men of all descriptions, standings and backgrounds. Situated at the heart of the old city of Lahore, the courtesans' quarters carry a legacy of myths and tales that are both bitter and sweet, and to this day remain an integral part of the city's culture. Like the intricate alleys of Lahore's inner city where this neighbourhood is situated, the lives of its inhabitants are also marked by mystery and enigma. The courtesan's alley, as it is often called, was frequented by men of all types and characters, whether these were local gentry, royal Nawabs, English sahibs, poets, intellectuals, or even secret agents, all making their way to this scene of social and political rendezvous.

One such example can be found in Rudyard Kipling's short story 'On the City Wall' (1888), set in the place where Lalun lived in splendour. This story is about the intrinsic nature of secrecy and covert authority present in the courtesans' lives and, by extension, in the city's reins of power. The current essay aims to capture the image of semi-visibility and darkness in Kipling's story and to link it with the idea of the semi-informed narrator who narrates the story of Lalun. Curiously, the image of darkness also forms the

crux of the story's plot, as the narrator takes the reader – and the character – to a gradual discovery of events and motives that had been hitherto enveloped in a shroud of darkness.

Darkness is a rich theme in Kipling's writings. It stands for many things that bear directly upon the subject, structure and aesthetics of his tales. Sometimes the interplay of light and dark stands for Kipling's childhood memories, sometimes for the paradoxes of life; at times it refers to the indistinct dimensions of courtesan culture, and often it denotes the hidden motives of scheming minds. At the back of all these metaphors we see that the blurred line between light and dark becomes a symbol for Kipling's own plurality of identities, his life that shared the dimensions of both an Indian self and an English mind. Blurred lines, intermingling dimensions and shared attributes can also be seen in the hour of twilight when the day meets the night or when light melts into darkness. It is a time pregnant with stories, containing prospects of many a tale, most of which hover between complete visibility and thorough opacity. 'On the City Wall' is one such story, where darkness works as a moving force that runs throughout the story at many planes. The narrator in this story is the semi-informed participant of the happenings that he narrates. He is both the narrator and a character in the story, yet he is as oblivious to the actual motives of the other characters as are the readers to whom he is narrating the story.

### **The courtesan and the city**

'On the City Wall' is an account of a series of events that are retrospectively narrated by the narrator, and which revolve around the persona of Lalun, the courtesan of Lahore and her connections. Lalun is almost indescribable in her beauty, intelligence, wit and her ability to control matters both inside of her house and outside of it. Her house, situated on the city wall, is the centre of gravity for the men of the city, most of whom come there in the evening to chat and gossip. Among these visitors are the narrator and a young Muslim man named Wali Dad. The narrator is an Englishman and Wali Dad is a disillusioned and sceptical youth. The other main character in the story is a man named Khem Singh, who is an old revolutionary imprisoned at Lahore Fort (which the narrator calls Fort Amara). Although we do not meet Khem Singh very often during the course of the story, he is mentioned and discussed frequently at Lalun's house. The narrator's interest in Khem Singh increases, and although he has never seen Khem Singh, he hears about him first from Lalun and then from the Subaltern who serves in the Fort.

William Strang (1859-1921), a Scottish painter and printmaker and Kipling's contemporary, in a book, *A Series of thirty Etchings ... illustrating Subjects from the Writings of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Macmillan, 1901), presented thirty etchings based on Kipling's short-stories. One of these is of a woman, seated on the window-edge and overlooking, perhaps the panorama of Lahore. A man standing close by reminds one of Wali Dad.<sup>1</sup>



One evening, on the night of the Muslim procession of Muharram, we get to know that Khem Singh has escaped from the Fort. During the procession of Muharram there is a great commotion in the city as we hear of Muslims and Hindus attacking each other; the police are forced to intervene to curb violence on the streets. The story contains a vivid description of the Muharram procession with thousands of mourners. The narrator and Wali Dad are coming to Lalun's house when they see the procession passing through the streets. As the procession goes by, Wali Dad feels a surge of religious frenzy and joins the crowd of mourners and goes off with them. After Wali Dad leaves with the procession, the narrator goes on to reach Lalun's house. Since the door of the house is open, and there is darkness inside, he climbs the stairs to reach the balcony of the house. As he reaches the balcony, he sees Lalun and her maid, Nasiban, trying to pull an old man from over the wall. They cannot pull the man over the city wall by themselves, so they ask the narrator to help them, and the three of them manage to hoist the old man over into the house.

At this point, Lalun tells the narrator that this is an old Muslim man who would have been killed at the hands of the riotous crowd if she hadn't helped him climb into the house. Then, Lalun asks the narrator to help this old man pass through the crowd safely and to lead him out of the city. The narrator agrees and escorts the old man through the charged crowd. As the narrator is an Englishman, he is not stopped by the police officials, and so the two pass safely through the streets and reach one of the Gates of Lahore. There,

a fat gentleman, with golden pince-nez, is waiting for them. He takes the old man and helps him get out of the city. All this while, the narrator thinks that he has helped an old Muslim man and saved him from the violent rioters by escorting him to safety. However, it is only at the end of the story that the narrator tells us that the old man whom he had helped pass through the police contingents and the riotous mob was none other than Khem Singh, the prisoner who had escaped from the Fort.

Lalun was party to this escape plan. In fact, Lalun had used the narrator and his white man's status to facilitate the escape of Khem Singh. The lines towards the end of the story are pertinent and show how the narrator acknowledges that during the course of these events he had been, literally and metaphorically, in the dark:

Of course you can guess what happened? I was not so clever. When the news went abroad that Khem Singh had escaped from the Fort, I did not, *since I was then living this story, not writing it*, connect myself, or Lalun, or the fat gentleman of the gold pince-nez, with his disappearance. Nor did it strike me that Wali Dad was the man who should have convoyed him across the City, or that Lalun's arms round my neck were put there to hide the money that Nasiban gave to Khem Singh, and that Lalun had used me and my white face as even a better safeguard than Wali Dad who proved himself so untrustworthy. *All that I knew at the time was that*, when Fort Amara was taken up with the riots, Khem Singh profited by the confusion to get away, and that his two Sikh guards also escaped. (*On the City Wall*, para. 92, emphasis added).<sup>2</sup>

Later on, however, we get to know that after some time, Khem Singh realises that he could no longer raise a revolution as he used to do in his younger days, and he soon returns to captivity of his own accord. Therefore, we see that in spite of having used the narrator to assist Khem Singh's escape, even Lalun's plan fails because Khem Singh proves ineffective in raising a rebellion against the British. This layering of expectation and outcome, appearance and reality, knowledge and ignorance, all form integral parts of the story.

Critics and readers have responded to 'On the City Wall' in different ways. Some see the story as prescient about the future of modern, postcolonial India. Philip Mason calls the story 'most substantial' (Mason, 1987, p. 78), and Louis L. Cornell points out that 'On the City Wall' is 'more than the account of an exciting night of religious riot in the alleys of Lahore. In its pages the forces that were to shape modern India confront one another and struggle towards a partial and ironic resolution' (Cornell 1966, p. 153). Others interpret the story as revealing Kipling's deep ambivalence about ethnic Indians and their cultures, or even jingoistic about Britain's colony. David Gilmour asserts that 'On the City Wall' is 'a remarkable story in which Kipling managed to display perception and an

appreciation of Indian life at the same time as he mocked the idea of Indian self-government' (Gilmour 2002, p. 40). Shamsul Islam comments that stories like 'On the City Wall' show how 'the negative character of India is further revealed in Kipling's depiction of rampant chaos and confusion' (Islam 1975, p. 65), and Anna Suvorova asserts that through the story Kipling shows Lahore as 'a city of violence and death' (Suvorova 2011, p. 181). More critically, George Orwell criticises Kipling as 'a jingo imperialist' (Orwell 1942), and Salman Rushdie dismisses the story as artistically lopsided, with the central characters limited to Wali Dad, Khem Singh and the riotous mob (Rushdie 1991).

However, Mathew Lyons, responding to both Orwell and Rushdie, asserts that Lalun is among the most important characters of the story and in fact is 'the embodiment of the Eastern, who ultimately controls her destiny under British rule – and implicitly the destiny of the British in India' (Lyons 2012). Here I take Lyons' analysis further and argue that the figure of Lalun holds far greater relevance to Kipling's narrative practice and the representation of Lahore than apparently meets the eye. Lahore, Lalun and her Vizier all come together in this multi-layered story.

### Lalun and Lahore

Lahore, the city, and Lalun, the courtesan, stand for each other in many ways. Lalun is the very embodiment of the city of Lahore itself. To begin with, the courtesan's strangely street-popular name, Lalun,<sup>3</sup> rings with mystery, calm and poise, qualities as enigmatic as the city in which she dwells, or the dimensions of her abode, a house ambiguously located on the city wall. This house is the centre of all activity of the city, whether it is the assembling of men of different types in the evening or their poetic and intellectual discussion, or even the exchange of political secrets in colonial India. Lalun is the most powerful character of the story, one who, in spite of staying within her house, moves the entire action of the narrative.

'On the City Wall' opens with a reference to Lalun and her profession:

Lalun is a member of the most ancient profession in the world. Lilith was her very great-grandmamma, and that was before the days of Eve as everyone knows. In the West, people say rude things about Lalun's profession, and write lectures about it, and distribute the lectures to young persons in order that Morality may be preserved. In the East where the profession is hereditary, descending from mother to daughter,<sup>4</sup> nobody writes lectures or takes any notice; and that is a distinct proof of the inability of the East to manage its own affairs (*On the City Wall*, para 1).

The narrator's last sentence in this passage turns the description into a negative evaluation of Indian morality and competence, one at the very least complicated by, if not at odds with, the narrative actions of Lalun. The narrative links her agency with her professional ability to bring together in her house men of all religions and creeds. Situated on the city wall, her house offers a panoramic view of the entire city. Everything about Lalun reproduces some aspect of Lahore.

Even the narrator's description of her beauty reminds us of the charm of Lahore.

Lalun has not yet been described. She would need, so Wali Dad says, a thousand pens of gold and ink scented with musk. She has been variously compared to the Moon, the Dil Sagar Lake, a spotted quail, a gazelle, the Sun on the Desert of Kutch, the Dawn, the Stars, and the young bamboo. These comparisons imply that she is beautiful exceedingly according to the native standards, which are practically the same as those of the West. Her eyes are black and her hair is black, and her eyebrows are black as leeches; her mouth is tiny and says witty things; her hands are tiny and have saved much money; her feet are tiny and have trodden on the naked hearts of many men. But, as Wali Dad sings: "*Lalun is Lalun*, and when you have said that, you have only come to the Beginnings of Knowledge (*On the City Wall*, para. 11, emphasis added)

Wali Dad's tautology 'Lalun is Lalun' carries strong reverberations of the famous saying in the local dialect, *Lahore Lahore hei* (Lahore is Lahore). Even the narrator himself repeats Wali Dad's description of the woman:

'Yes,' said Wali Dad, 'it is curious to think that our common meeting-place should be here, in the house of a common – how do you call her?' He pointed with the pipe-mouth to Lalun.

'Lalun is nothing but Lalun', I said, and that was perfectly true (*On the City Wall*, para. 42).

The narrative marks how Lalun stands for or reproduces Lahore not only through her physical description but also in the activities associated with her house, what goes on inside its walls. Her house is the multicultural centre of Lahore for men of different religions and cultures: "It is Lalun's salon," said Wali Dad to me, "and it is eclectic [*sic*] – is not that the word?" (*On the City Wall*, para. 13). Curiously, too, Lalun's house is both open, yet well-fortified: 'The feet of the young men of the City tended to her doorways and then – retired' (para. 40). Lalun's maid Nasiban reports that Lalun has jewellery worth many thousand pounds. If some thief were to grab it, 'all the City would tear that thief

limb from limb, and that he, whoever he was, knew it'. Lalun's house is on the city wall, but her identity is distributed throughout the city.

Lalun is also the queen of the house, a key player in this game of politics being played inside and outside of this house. 'On the City Wall' is like a game of chess: some people are used as pawns by the others; others act as kings and queens. The image of chess is linked to the theme of darkness through narrative description. The dichotomy between appearance and reality is further seen in the names and titles of characters. When the narrator realises that he had been in the dark, he sees that Lalun has used him as her Vizier, as she had once jokingly asserted.

'The Sahib is always talking stupid talk,' returned Lalun, with a laugh. 'In this house I am a Queen and thou [Wali Dad] art a King. The Sahib – she put her arms above her head and thought for a moment – 'the Sahib shall be our Vizier – thine and mine, Wali Dad – because he has said that thou shouldst leave me' (*On the City Wall*, para. 42).

A Vizier is the highest official in the court of the king or the queen, and one who stands between the monarchs and their subjects. In making the narrator her Vizier, Lalun is giving him the in-between status that stands somewhere between absolute authority and complete dependence. Like the time of twilight, the Vizier stands as the bridge between two states, a status thoroughly in line with the narrator's own cross-cultural life experiences. The Vizier is structurally and thematically the link between two ends of a spectrum, whether these ends are ruler and ruled, ignorance and knowledge, or light and dark. This bridging narrator is a characteristic device in Kipling's short stories. In another story, 'In the House of Suddhoo' the narrator is a marginal figure but he is also the speaker of the story. The narrator of 'In the House of Suddhoo' self-referentially declares:

This lets you know as much as is necessary of the four principal tenants in the House of Suddhoo. Then there is Me of course; but I am only the chorus that comes in at the end to explain things. So I do not count. ('In the House of Suddhoo', *Plain Tales*, p. 109).

Like the chorus, the narrator relates the story to the readers but is also involved in the action. So the 'Me' is both within the story and outside of it, an actor and a commentator at the same time. Yet, interestingly, he is also the watching eye, the person who reports in first person everything that happens. While the narrator, or the character of the narrator, in 'On the City Wall' has more narrative agency than in 'In the House of Suddhoo', this narrating and narrated 'Me' is a chorus-like figure, one who is present in most of Kipling's short stories. In 'On the City Wall' the narrator is more than just a chorus: he is the bridge

between the knowledgeable author and the ignorant but gradually enlightened reader. The narrative mediation between knowledge and ignorance, white man and Indian, outsider and insider is a persistent theme in Kipling's writings.

Idealistic or utopian as it might appear, this mixing of voices is part of Kipling's attempt to cross over to the Indian character and become one with him. Such cultural hybridity might ultimately be impossible, like mixing oil and water, as Khem Singh says, but literature is all about attempting the impossible, creating other versions of ourselves, and imagining what we don't or can't yet know. Standing as a translator between two cultures, the narrator of 'On the City Wall' is at once inside and outside the action, the bridge between participant and reporter, character and narrator. As Philip Mason says:

'On the City Wall,' the most ambitious and the longest, is an example of one of Kipling's favourite devices, 'the marginally involved spectator' who recounts the events of the tale as they came to him at the time, when he did not always fully understand what was going on. This Narrator, the 'I' person, is by no means always the historical Kipling, though no doubt he is someone Kipling would have liked to be thought to be (Mason, 1, 1987).

Kipling's narrative technique not only shows that the 'I' is someone close to the historical Kipling as Mason points out, but also that the 'you' is not only the reader of the story but also an imaginary onlooker who is presumably watching the story unfold with interest, expectation and anticipation. This 'you' is as central to the narration as the 'I', and is on many planes at par with the narrator. In fact, the narrator allows the reader – this 'you' participant of the story – even more intellectual faculties than he attributes to his own self: 'Of course you can guess what happened? I was not so clever.' (Kipling, para 92). The use of second person voice as well as an admittance of one's own gullibility turns the narrative structure into a frank conversation, where the speaker and the addressee are both in the same shared space of interpersonal understanding.

### **Kipling's preoccupation with night and darkness**

Kipling's Lahore stories abound with images of darkness. Besides 'On the City Wall', other stories thematise darkness as creating illusion or hiding reality. In 'Watches of the Night' the misunderstanding starts in the darkness of the night. In 'Beyond the Pale' the relationship between Bisesa and Trejago takes place and even ends during the darkness of the sunless alley. In fact, moonlight becomes a part of the storytelling as the moonlight strip on the high wall and the blackness of Amir Nath's Gully remain parts of the obscure surroundings which conceal the doomed relationship between the lovers. The entire atmosphere of 'The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows' is made up of a hazy semi-darkness. In

'By Word of Mouth', Dumoise leaves Meridki (a town near Lahore) in twilight for Nuddea, eventually to meet his death. In 'In the House of Suddhoo' the deep darkness of the house is reflected in a belief in the occult, while in 'The City of Dreadful Night' moonlight itself seems to be adding to the heat of the city: 'Overhead blazed the unwinking eye of the Moon. Darkness gives at least a false impression of coolness'.

Darkness apparently had a strong psychological effect on Kipling. Perhaps this was due to growing trouble with his eyesight, causing a 'gray haze upon all his world' (Kipling, 'Baa, Baa, Black Sheep'), or his insomniac night wanderings when the 'night got into [his] head' (Kipling 1936, p. 43). Night-time was a very active time for Kipling during his Lahore years: his night prowling through the city streets led to prolific outpouring of many a tale 'between moonset and the morning' (Kipling, 'The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows' *Plain Tales*, p. 201).

Kipling's preoccupation with light, darkness and semi-visibility can be traced back to his early years. In his memoir *Something of Myself* (1936), Kipling remembers his early childhood in terms of light and shade, when he lived in an idyllic Indian paradise with his parents, his little sister and caring Indian servants: 'My first impression is of daybreak, light and colour and golden and purple fruits at the level of my shoulder' (Kipling 1936, p. 33). On his morning walks with his Ayah and his little sister, Trix, the young Kipling affectionately called Little Ruddy, and his Hindu bearer, Meeta, went to Hindu temples where he looked at the 'dimly-seen, friendly Gods' and held Meeta's hand, being 'below the age of caste' (Kipling 1936, p. 33). By contrast, Kipling felt the menacing darkness of tropical eventides (Kipling, 1936, p. 33), a time during which he also saw the Parsees 'wading out to worship the sunset' (Kipling 1936, p. 33). In his initial dread of darkness when he was afraid of the stuffed animals in his nursery, Meeta came to his rescue and saved Ruddy from his 'night terrors or dread of the dark' by dispersing his fear of these animals (Kipling 1936, p. 34). Disturbing images of darkness remained with Kipling as an almost palpable presence and a concrete part of his childhood memories.

The psychological experience of darkness entered Kipling's childhood in another way when Little Ruddy and his sister were sent to Southsea, England, at the ages of six and three, respectively, to be educated. The days of Bombay's strong light and darkness ended, and the two little children were sent, the older Kipling remembers, to a 'dark land and a darker room full of cold' (Kipling 1936, p. 35). Kipling spent the next six, perhaps hardest, years of his life in that circumstance. Angus Wilson points out that we might think that 'Kipling's lifelong memory of this time was exaggerated in its horror, but it is not possible to doubt the effect it had upon him' (Wilson 1987, p. 47). Kipling records in his autobiography, some sixty-five years later, his childhood experience of living in Southsea, in the boarding house of Captain Pryse Agar Holloway and Mrs. Sarah Holloway, a place he

refers to as the House of Desolation: 'If you cross-examine a child of seven or eight on his day's doings (especially when he wants to go to sleep) he will contradict himself very satisfactorily. If each contradiction be set down as a lie and retailed at breakfast, life is not easy. I have known a certain amount of bullying, but this was calculated torture' (Kipling, 1936, p. 36).

Cold, dark England was a place of childhood trauma for the young Kipling. As a result of his childhood experience in England, Kipling's early memories of Bombay and Southsea remained with him, partly shaping his experience of Lahore and finding their way into his Lahore stories. When he came to Lahore in 1882, the 'night had already got into [his] head' (Kipling 1936, p. 43), and he would wander around the house till daybreak, realising that 'such night-wakings would be laid upon [him] through [his] life' (Kipling 1936, p. 43). These bouts of insomnia led the young writer to view darkness as a time pregnant with stories and thoughts, both fearful and elating. In Lahore the night acquired a new hue, not the cold desolation of his years at Southsea, but the rich darkness of imaginative outpouring.

Janet Montefiore has commented insightfully on Kipling's use of day and night in his fictions and the homologies they are related to:

The essence of his view lies in the division of life into two worlds, one of action and one of dream. In the Indian stories, this division corresponds roughly to the dichotomy between day and night, and white men and native Indians. It is remarkable, even on a literal level, how many of the stories dealing with natives have night-time settings (Montefiore 1977 p. 299).

Montefiore further notes that Kipling creates two worlds in his stories, the daytime world and the night-time world, and the interplay of language and style relates the two worlds together.

The creation of these worlds depends mainly, however, on language and style. In the interplay of styles – 'dialects' is perhaps a better term – the relationships of the two worlds are established and Kipling's preoccupation with what words can mean and what their limitations are, and with what human beings can achieve and imagine, is articulated (Montefiore 1977, p. 299).

Carrying Montefiore's observation further, we see that the narrative of 'On the City Wall' shows the limitations of words and understanding when confronted with events which we had assumed to know. It also shows that Kipling's narrator, in spite of his apparent control

over narrative agency, is as vulnerable to the limitations of words, language and appearances as is anyone else.

Historical truth is stark, prosaic and useful, as when Khem Singh gives up his revolutionary spirit and returns to the convenient life of prison, even though Lalun had done her best to help him escape. Indian and English, narrator and character, ruler and Vizier all prove to be ill-informed and miscalculating when confronted with the expediency of down-to-earth opportunism. Taking the narrator as the voice of the historian, it also seems that in the colonial world, as in the modern age, the historian is the one who can neither fully see through the machinations of the political powers nor be able to record a historical happening from outside the confines of his blinkered vision. Like narrative agency and the moves of chess, the historian too is the actor who can either obliterate all difference between the narrating 'I' and the addressed 'you' in a candid adherence to objective truth, or play the Vizier who can only transfer partially known facts for an intended purpose.

### **Conclusion**

Darkness as a narrative context and image in 'On the City Wall' is full of infinite possibilities. The story shows that while the image of darkness coincides with that of trickery and deceit, it also allows for sight and insight to meander through the intricate maze of political expediency, historical truths and literary endeavours. Focusing upon the use of light, dark and semi-visibility in Kipling's Lahore works, this essay examines how the content, structure and aesthetic effect of the story replay various connotations of darkness.

Of more linguistic interest is the fact that Kipling's use of first, second and third person in the story emphasises the duality of appearance and reality, where perception is coloured by the 'I', 'you' and 'they' of the speaker and the participants of the tale. The essay especially interrogates the use of second person narrative in the story occurring towards the end of the tale, which shows that the proper and true understanding of the narrative requires not only a competent speaker but also an empathetic and involved listener.

The essay also explores how the courtesan culture of Lahore has layers of appearance and reality. Words take on new meanings and apparently innocent comments prove to be artful innuendos and equivocal puns in this scheme of things. Lalun, the courtesan, is as many faceted as the city in which she dwells. Her words display a wealth of courtly language and the subtle turns of phrases which have been the hallmark of this profession for centuries. Language becomes impenetrable, yet is also pregnant with meaning. Semi-visibility, the most active ingredient of this story, reflects the unfathomable dimensions of political machinations.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> *A Series of thirty Etchings ... illustrating Subjects from the Writings of Rudyard Kipling* (London: Macmillan, 1901). [image]. Retrieved from <http://art.famsf.org/william-strang/city-wall-plate-12-book-series-thirty-etchings-%E2%80%A6-illustrating-subjects-writings>
- <sup>2</sup> Textual citations from 'On the City Wall' are taken from an online version of the text. Therefore, I have referred to paragraph number instead of a page number
- <sup>3</sup> The name 'Lalun' (pronounced as 'Lull-en') is not a very common name, but carries the ring of subcontinental street culture. With its alliterating resemblance to the name 'Lahore' it suggests the courtesan as an emblem of the city itself. Further suggestive allusions can be seen in the name being similar to 'lull' or 'lullaby', 'Laila' which is Arabic for the night, or 'Lala' which is Persian for flower.
- <sup>4</sup> In *The Dancing Girls of Lahore*, the prostitute Maha asserts that 'the daughter of a dancing girl always becomes a dancing girl. They pass the occupation and the stigma from one generation to the next like a segment of DNA' (Brown, 2005, p. 18).

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