

Kipling Sahib – India and the Making of Rudyard Kipling.  
Little, Brown 2008.

No one I know of writes about India better than Charles Allen, a writer of surpassing quality with long family connections to the Sub-continent. The latter make him eminently suitable to write a biography of the Indian years that so deeply influenced the life of Rudyard Kipling because it was Allen's great grandfather who gave Kipling his first journalistic job at the age of 16 on the CMG, the Civil and Military Gazette.

Kipling Sahib starts with Kipling's parents, Alice and John Lockwood, she a redoubtable wit and he a draughtsman and designer, and their early years in India which included the birth of Rudyard (named after the lake in the Potteries where they first met) and his sister Trix; these formative years were broken when the children were sent back to England to be educated and Ruddy studied at the United Services College, forming life long friendships that were to influence his later writings.

Though the book is not entirely given over to Kipling's India years, it is to them that the largest part is devoted, and this section is also the richest in colour, atmosphere, individuals and incident. Among the many other things that Allen achieves in Kipling Sahib is to bring to life the background to the stories, Jungle Book and Just So especially, with which I grew up and which I remember so fondly.

Allen quotes copiously from some of Kipling's most splendid poetry of the period, and also some of his weaker efforts, and explains and rationalises the patriotism and attitudes to race which have got Kipling into such hot water with the later assessors of his career.

Kipling Sahib is a marvellous biography of the greatest Anglo-Indian writer of them all as well as a beautiful portrayal of India during the Raj, and will appeal to all those fascinated by either or both.

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