

KIM, A PERFECT COLT FOR THE GAME

DR. PEERLA PRASANTHAM

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

Jingoism was widespread in Britain between 1880 and 1915. White people felt that they were morally responsible for uplifting inferior races in the world economically and socially. They also felt that backward countries like India which was the mainstay for the Empire should be ruled by them to obtain respectable status along with other countries. Hutchins in *The Illusion of Permanence* says, "Without the British, there is no such thing as India; without the British, India is not a real country at all" (Plotz 122). Richard Congreve argues, "God has entrusted India to us to hold it for Him, and we have no right to give it up" (Rao 26). "Indian as a child and the ruler as a father had the single aim of endorsing British superiority" (Bharat 113).

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) might be the only writer who supported the British Empire throughout his life among all English writers. At the time of Kipling's birth in 1865 at Bombay, India was a British colony. At the age of six, he was sent to school in England under the care of a foster family. He also studied between 1878 and 1882 at the United Services College in which students were getting trained to become future soldiers of Britain. He was specifically educated to serve the British Empire as seen in *Stalky & Co.*. Throughout his life, he was immersed in the imperialist culture of the British Empire as he traveled and lived in and outside of Britain's colonies. Kipling was introduced to the policies of political and economic dominion over foreign countries by the imperial British Empire. These were the reasons which basically moulded his imperial vision and formed the basis for most of his works. He first got the idea of the Empire which meant chiefly India at the United Services College, Westward Ho! North Devon, United Kingdom. Kipling did not serve the British Empire as a soldier but spoke of its glory as a journalist. He had a firm belief in the inherent superiority of the English and justified its Empire. He felt that the British were "a chosen people with the mission of spreading culture in other lands" (Rao 36). In the story "His Chance in Life" Kipling declares that no native could be trusted to rule because "...he is as incapable as a child of understanding what authority means, or where is the danger of disobeying it" (Kipling, *Plain* 81).

The tragedy of the 1857 Mutiny could not make India independent but Great Britain had to amend its administrative approach towards India and its people. The reader witnesses the transformation of Kipling's "great, grey, formless India" (107) into a modern Western-style society in *Kim*. The historian D.A. Low, in an essay entitled "Empire and Social Engineering" described: "Intensive efforts were made to 'westernize' India through the construction of new schools, Christian churches, and other European institutions and through the legislative restriction of indigenous cultural practices" (Wegner 142). England implemented a plan of action aiming at upholding organizational ability, discipline in the colonial population, and in due course widespread political stability. Despite every effort made by Britain to please Indians, they continued to fight for freedom. The Congress Party of India was established in 1885. Cordial relationship between Britons and Indians started to shrink. A large part of nationalistic resistance arose from the educated people from India, who with their close encounters with the British administrators, were fully aware of the British ways.

Kipling believed strongly in the superiority of Britain over other nations. Kipling had a downright disrespect for the Indian National Congress. He found the thought of Indians commanding English subordinates as absurd. He viewed the British Imperialism primarily as a moral responsibility but it had itself to be maintained, defended, and protected from rival world powers and from the rebellious governed. So he made himself the prophet of the British imperialism. In the poem "Recessional" (1897) Kipling hopefully prays that England should never decline and in another poem "The White Man's Burden" (1899) (meaning offering civilization to backward peoples of Asia and Africa by the Europeans) he welcomes the United States of America to the Club of imperialistic nations. He was jingoistic and an unquestioning chronicler of the British Empire in his time, particularly in India which was central to his life. Kipling's thoughtless imperialism horrified the readers of his times. Kipling was confident that "to be ruled by Britain was India's right; to rule India was Britain's duty" (Nandy 64). India was ruled powerfully by the English, not purely because they found her so ruled, but because they presumed that no other sort of regime would suit a vast population of different races and tongues, divided by the religious hostilities of Hindus and Muslims, and with no sort of experience of self-government on a scale larger than that of the Village Council. In their view, Indians required protection because of their ignorance. It was the duty of British servants in India to care for

them. This is what permitted Kipling to bring out *Kim*, in which danger to India that the British child character Kim helps to foil is external to it. Actual threat was not very dangerous on the north-western frontier of Russian and French agents.

In the late Victorian era educated Indians were explicitly opposing the British rule in India. It was at that moment Kipling wrote *Kim* (1901). Kipling had already sensed a threat to the colonial presence of the British in India. He felt the need to defend the British Empire in some fashion. *Kim* was an attempt made by Kipling to prove that there was a very good understanding between Britain and India; hence we see young agent of Great Game like Kim and the chief of the British Intelligence Force Colonel Creighton. As long as Britain can make use of people like Kim and Creighton to rule Indians, there cannot be any threat to the British Empire in India. Indian Mahbub Ali comments about Kim, "Only once in a thousand years is a horse born so well fitted for the game as this our colt" (190). The novel *Kim* deals with the author's schemes of defending the British Empire in which the eponymous British child character Kim contributes greater share along with some natives of India.

The novel *Kim* opens when the British Kimball O' Hara, Kim, is thirteen, ends when he is seventeen. In the novel, Kim is shaped from an ordinary boy into an adventurous spy and a potential leader in the Great Game of the British Empire. He is English but his upbringing is Eastern. He has no destiny. He learns what he can on the streets of India. He enjoys learning throughout the novel. In the other works of Kipling's juvenile fiction, every hero receives education but with more brutalization: Mowgli of the *Jungle Books*, Harvey Cheyne of *Captains Courageous* and the three boys Stalky, McTurk and Beetle of *Stalky & Co.*. In *Kim*, less brutalization is accentuated.

All young heroes of Kipling go through hard or rough conditions. Kim lives as a vagabond in the British India. He is full of charm, zest and wisdom beyond his years. As "the Little Friend of all the World," (3) Kipling's greatest hero Kim wins the hearts of Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Jains, Christians, Bengalis, Punjabis, Pathans, Irishmen, Englishmen, Tibetans, Priests, soldiers, farmers, householders, ethnologists, and spies of India. He knows every caste of India but does

not stick to any in particular; drawn to all depending on the situation. He regards India as his home. When asked who his people are, he replies, “This great and beautiful land” (153).

Kim’s real education takes place outside the classroom. The lama, a Tibetan monk opens the Gates of Learning for Kim which ultimately prepares him as a significant player in the Great Game. Kim’s long years of schooling in fusty classrooms at St. Xavier’s in Lucknow are squeezed together into a couple of paragraphs, so that he will learn things in the open. India is as big and full as Kim can wish, a “great and wonderful land” (218). Richard Cronin says, “The whole of India from Benares to the Himalayas becomes Kim’s private playground, and the adults allowed to enter must enter on the child’s terms” (204).

Kim is curious, resourceful, adventurous, professional and self-reliant. He knows how to protect himself in the midst of adversity like Mowgli of the *JungleBooks*. It is Mahbub Ali who initiates Kim into the Great Game of the Secret Service. Kim’s early exposure to natives and their customs teach him the nuances of Indian life. He knows the breed of farmers of the land.

The arrangement of Kim’s education at St. Xavier’s is to provide him with necessary equipment for the imperial venture. Children of Anglo-Indian servants at St. Xavier’s learn, besides mathematics and trigonometry, the day to day business of maintaining the Empire. For, a bicultural acquaintance empowers Kim to operate and control this markedly different Indian world which, as Colonel Creighton communicates, is important for a Sahib:

Thou are a Sahib and the son of a Sahib. Therefore, do not at any time be led to condemn the black men. I have known boys newly entered into the service of the Government who feigned not to understand the talk or customs of black men. Their pay was cut for ignorance. There is no sin so great as ignorance. Remember this. (p. 134)

He can adapt himself from an ordinary street urchin to the lama’s dedicated disciple and from a star student of St. Xavier’s to a noteworthy new player in the Game. And in a land of many religions, he can become a Hindu, a Muslim, a Buddhist and a Christian. He dwells in no single identity. As a child of Europe he can break through any world of India but no Indian can go by

the same way. This makes him exceptionally well-matched to play an extraordinary role in the Great Game. Every occurrence in the narrative of *Kim*: Kim's chance encounter with the army of the Red Bull, his education at St. Xavier's and his wanderings with the Tibetan Lama, is, in conclusion, connected straight to the benefit of the British power that is in command of the Great Game.

Kim's characteristic watchfulness marks him within the text as rightly British and makes him a spy. He has been from the beginning a watcher. He is repetitively characterized as one who is seen unobserved. At the museum he is a hidden observer: "Kim laid himself down, his ear against a crack in the heat-split cedar door, and following his instinct, stretched out to listen and watch" (8). He is a watcher in the shadows, "lithe and inconspicuous," (3) "like a shadow" (13). Again and again "Kim watched...considering and interested" (14); Kim "kept his watchful eye" (50) or "watched between drooped eyelids" (80). He habitually positions himself out of sight to watch others. In Mahbub Ali's camp, Kim, unnoticed, spies on the spy searching the tent: "Kim with one eye laid against a knot-hole in the planking...had seen the Delhi man's search through the boxes" (28). After delivering the message to Creighton, "flat on his belly lay Kim" (41) to watch the British officers. Again lurking in shadow "behind the thick trunks in the cool dark of the mango-tope," (89) then "belly-flat" (94) by the mess-tent door, Kim watches the mavericks.

In preparation for the Great Game, the British Kim learns to care for his natural watchfulness so as to see without being recognized as an English boy or as a conscious looker. During the encounter in which Mahbub Ali first recommends Kim to Creighton as a candidate for the Game, the three look at each other:

[Kim] gazed imploringly at the clear-cut face [of Mahbub Ali] in which there was no glimmer of recognition; but even at this extremity it never occurred to him to throw himself on the white man's mercy or to denounce the Afghan. And Mahbub stared deliberately at the Englishman, who stared as deliberately at Kim, quivering and tongue-tied. (p. 123).

Here Kim watches Mahbub who watches Creighton who watches Kim. No one acknowledges the humanity of the other, “no glimmer of recognition,” (123) but each thinks of the other as an object for possible use and control. Assessing vision such as this is what makes an agent influential “on the Ethnological side” (198). It also enables a surveyor, a “chain-man” (133) such as Kim becomes, to map and thereby control new territory.

Kim’s many raw talents are recognized and refined in Lurgan Sahib’s school for spies. His training with Lurgan lays emphasis upon many skills coupled with the literary detective, most notably in the “Jewel Game” (180) in which players are examined on their ability to memorize the minutest facts about a pile of objects. As part of his training, Kim looks at a tray full of mixed objects and notes which have been added or taken away, a pastime still called Kim’s Game. Kim performs extremely well in precisely those areas that Lurgan’s Hindu student fails. The most arresting event in Kim’s interaction with Lurgan is the one in which he tosses a jar onto the floor and it shatters. Then, to the astonishment of Kim, it slowly reconstructs itself. However, this latter event is revealed to be only a trick of hypnotism: “Look! It shall come to life again, piece by piece. First the big piece shall join itself to two others on the right and left – on the right and the left...Look! It is coming into shape” (174). Kim is the first whoever saves himself:

So far Kim had been thinking in Hindi, but a tremor came on him, and with an effort like that of a swimmer before sharks, who hurls himself half out of the water, his mind leaped up from a darkness that was swallowing it and took refuge in - the multiplication-table in English! (p. 175)

Jesse Oak Taylor says, “On the one hand, the ability to break through Lurgan’s hypnosis and see things as they ‘really’ are, the ‘truth’ of the smashed vase, shows Kim’s disciplined, perceptive, rational vision. On the other, the ability to see the whole vase within the fragments is an equally, arguably more valuable form of vision” (62).

“Kipling’s children are not romantic idealisations of perfect ‘innocent’ children. They are all individualised, different, highly aware, informed by the hindsight of the adult creator of the child

narrator” (Bharat 121). In the company of Mahbub, Kim obtains practical knowledge of the world. The British Kim’s warmly affectionate relationships and his extensive friendships are all imperial objects. He is capable of befriending Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, the aristocratic Hindu dowagers, the powerful polyandrous hill woman and prostitutes. Yet the multitudes of different Indians who treat themselves as Kim’s friends are scarcely friends to each other. It is the British train that brings people together otherwise separate and unsympathetic groups. The money-lender, pursing his lips, says: “there is not one rule of right living which these *te-rains* do not cause us to break. We sit, for example, side by side with all castes and peoples” (31). Mahbub Ali holds in Pushtu the lama “an unbeliever and idolater” (322) and the lama holds Mahbub Ali one who “lacks courtesy, and is deceived by the shadow of appearances,” (325). Yet both Mahbub Ali and the lama love Kim a great deal. Mahbub Ali remarks mockingly of the Sahiba’s affectionate regard for Kim as her son, “Hmph! Half Hind seems that-way disposed” (322). It is the British Kim who mediates between Oriental and Oriental. Mahbub Ali is prepared to sacrifice Kim’s life to get his message to Creighton yet he loves him strongly and jealously.

Kim’s travels throughout India relatively map the horizons of the British Powers. Phillip E. Wegner writes of these movements summarized by Said:

Most of his voyages within the Punjab, occur around the axis formed by Lahore and Umballa, an Indian Army (hence British) garrison town on the frontier of the United Provinces. The Grand Trunk Road, built by the great Muslim ruler Sher Shah in the late sixteenth century, runs from Peshawur to Calcutta, although the lama never goes further south and east than Benares. There are excursions made by Kim to Simla, to Lucknow, and later to the Kulu valley; with Mahbub Kim goes as far south as Bombay and as far west as Karachi. (pp. 143- 4)

Angus Wilson argues, “The delights and mishaps which occur as Kim travels through north India from Lahore down to Benares and from Benares up to the Himalayas turn Kim into a man”

(Pickering 167). As a traveller, Kim takes a special sort of journey. He is not, however, self-indulgent. He is a member of the Secret Service and his escapades are part of the Great Game.

Throughout the novel, once Kim has completed his formal education he acts in an approved manner and is likely to advise his supervisors. When Babu, for example, worries about the ways to get the documents from the French and Russian spies, it is the British Kim who retorts smartly: “There are more ways of getting to a sweetheart than butting down a wall” (274). It is the younger British agent Kim who aids the more experienced spy E 23 by helping him quickly prepare a new disguise that fools the local police. In the fight with foreign spies, Kim is able to find and hide the secret documents of spies. He is involved, along with Babu, in preventing the foreign spies. Their job was on the whole successful because the foreign spies can never visualise that Kim and the Babu are secret agents. As far as foreign spies know their expedition has been ruined by a chance meeting with a holy man and his young disciple. The fight and Kim’s success will surely be an accomplishment for Kim to obtain his vocation as a spy.

Paying money for Kim’s education, the lama tells that “Kim’s business...was to get all the wisdom of the Sahibs” (187). Kipling cautiously hybridizes Kim’s education, providing him with a skilful knowledge of the Indian culture as well as a formal British education. Although Kim’s knowledge and understanding of the native culture is Kipling’s tactic to place Kim’s superiority, he makes it seem like a natural acquisition for an intelligent boy whose spirit for adventure motivates him in the pursuit of knowledge. Kim’s Anglo-Indian education makes him rational, clever and well-equipped to “someday...command the natives” (141).

As the chief of the British intelligence forces, Colonel Creighton is the very embodiment of the modern imperial presence in India. Said notes, “Creighton, like Kipling, never tampers with the hierarchies, the priorities and privileges of caste, religion, ethnicity and race in India, he does so only to prevent a further erosion of the British position” (Wegner 147). He represents an ideal colonial administrator who is sensitive to the various cultures and civilizations of India. Upon learning of Kim’s past, he states, “You see, as an ethnologist, the thing is very interesting to me. I’d like to make a note of it for some government work that I’m doing” (128).

Any reader, at the end of the novel, will be confronted with the question that what could be the future of Kim. As Mark Twain does with Huckleberry Finn in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Kipling too leaves an option to reader to guess the future of Kim. Mahbub Ali wants to take Kim “beyond Balkh” (323) in six months, but what lies beyond Balkh is not affirmed by Kipling though one could possibly suggest that Kim will go on with playing an active part in the Great Game because of his inborn love for adventure. He has good hold on Indians’ strengths and weaknesses. When need arises, he can think and speak in vernacular. Colonial rulers had to depend on unreliable natives for translation. The British Kim’s knowledge of various Indian dialects is particularly helpful in such an aspect of maintaining the Empire. His ability to translate represents the colonizer’s acquisition of a highly useful device for the Empire. His capability to mix with all endears him to be called “Little Friend of all the World” (3). Though it is not explicitly stated, the reader is left with the promise that Kim, like Mowgli of the *Jungle Books* and Stalky of *Stalky & Co.* will find reality in action, not in contemplation:

...with an almost audible click, he [Kim] felt the wheels of his being lock up anew on the world without. Things that rode meaningless on the eyeball an instant before slid into proper proportion. Roads were meant to be walked upon, houses to be lived in, cattle to be driven, fields to be tilled and men and women to be talked to. They were all real and true. (p. 320)

The lama himself approves of Kim’s option in his new profession. When Mahbub Ali tells the lama of Kim’s wish to join the Great Game, the lama says:

To that end he was prepared. I acquired merit in that I gave alms for his sake. A good deed does not die. He aided me in my Search. I aided him in his. Just is the Wheel, O horse-seller from the North. Let him be a teacher. Let him be a scribe - what matter? He will have attained Freedom at the end. The rest is illusion. (p. 323)

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