# INDIA AS A SOCIAL - HISTORIC METAPHOR IN KIPLING'S *KIM*

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**Abstract**

*Kim is the expression of Kipling's tremendous insider knowledge of India as it was in Victorian times, as well as of his love and admiration for the country and its people. The novel "embodies a panoramic celebration of India, presenting as it does, a magnificent picture of its landscapes, both urban and rural, and a fascinating array of native characters. At the same time the novels construct reveals a move from India as site of desire to that of power and control which is Kipling's own re-territorializing of his desire within colonial system with its basic! concepts of control and domination.*

*Kim* is as unique in Rudyard Kipling's life and career as it is in English literature. It appeared in 1901, twelve years after Kipling had left India, the place of his birth and the country with which his name will always be associated. More interestingly, *Kim* was Kipling's only successfully sustained and mature piece of long fiction. The manipulation of the narrative, the actual putting together of the story, is excellently done: Kipling's combination of a journalist's training and experience with his clear sense of the shape and pattern of things helps to account for this.

Kipling together with Conrad succeeded to have rendered the experience of empire as the main subject of their work with such force; and even though the two artists are remarkably different in tone and style, "they brought to a basically insular and provincial British audience the color, glamour, and romance of the British overseas enterprise, which was well-known to specialized sectors of the home society"[1].

The first half of the nineteenth-century agenda in India was characterized publicly in terms of sentiment, mission, reform and Orientalism, ideals subsequently institutionalized in the Asian Society, the Royal Geographic Society, and the Royal Colonial Institute; "yet imperialism was also

[1] Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism, p.159.



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privately understood to be a necessary material enterprise to handle burgeoning unemployment, surplus population and excess production"[2].

As an artist Kipling couldn't be disinterested by India. Contemporary readers and critics noticed that in his works he cared little for love – even though remote and exotic places like India, could create a predisposition – and but for deeds, especially deeds that display "vigor, tenacity, courage, determination and contempt of ease. He likes nothing so well as to portray strength, strength of will and daring individual men"[3]. It is this love of strength in Kipling that gives him his fondness of war that makes him 'the poet of the soldier' and that puts him into sympathy with British imperialism. "His sympathies are always on the side of the strong, he is never the poet of liberty, he is patriotic, glorifying England, her power not her freedom"[4]. In the spirit of the time he praises England's physical might and mastery in the world and the higher fact that she did so much to advance civilization in the world. Intuitively those remarks suggest what has later become to be called orientalism.

Then we can read *Kim* as a great document of its historical moment and, likewise as "an aesthetic milestone along the way to midnight August 14-15, 1947, a moment whose children have done so much to revise our sense of the past's richness and its enduring problems"[5].

*Kim* is a major contribution to this Orientalized India or imagination, as it is also to what historians have come to call invention of tradition. But at the same time the book may be regarded as the "authorized monument of nineteenth-century European culture, and the inferiority of non-white races, the necessity that they be ruled by a superior race, and their absolute unchanging essence was a more or less unquestioned axiom of modern life"[6].

The novel is not overt propaganda, and on the surface what comes across above all else is Kipling's tremendous insider's knowledge of India as it was in Victorian times, and his love and admiration for the country and its people. The novel "embodies a panoramic celebration of India, presenting as it does, a magnificent picture of its landscapes, both urban and rural, and a fascinating array of native characters who, for the most part, are warm, generous and tolerant"[7].

The Darwinian survival of the fittest became in Kipling's simplified imperialist vision a perpetual struggle between the upholders of the law and the rest, "a perpetual cricket match between decent people and outsiders (not necessarily identified with administrators and

[2] Zohreh Sullivan, Narratives of the Empire, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.6
[3] Jabez Sunderland, p. 4.
[4] Ibiden
[5] Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism, p. 196
[6] Ibiden, p.
[7] Ian Makean Kipling, Kim, Rudyard Kipling, titlu p. ….



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administered), where the latter had to be constantly watched to prevent disobedience of the rules and punished if they did disobey"[8].

Reading Kipling demands recognition of his alternation between unstable opposites - home/England/empire and home/ India/jungle - with himself eternally divided in non-reconcilable longings for both. "Reconciliation could, however, be found in metaphor: Kim and Mowgli are both divided between their desire to be loved and their need to control and be feared"[9]. However they end up in the scheme of the empire. Mowgli enters the service of the British government as a forest guard. So too will Kim leave his much-loved streets of Lahore for the British service. This move from India as site of desire to that of power and control is Kipling's re-territorializing of his desire within colonial system with its basic concepts of control and domination. This opposing pattern of desire to be loved and to control in a world where mother England would be the caretaker of the lesser children of imperial Gods was produced by the very political machinery of empire.

The nineteenth-century colonial discourse witnessed certain changes. After the loss of the American colonies, English Imperialists felt the threat of separatism and started to discuss relations with empire in familial terms: "It is pretty much with colonies as with children; we protect and nourish them in infancy; we direct them in youth, and leave them to their own guidance in manhood; and the best conduct to be observed is to part with them on friendly terms."[10] This familial metaphor imposes the familiar upon unknown territories and a certain linguistic order on uncontrollable relationships. However, it seems that it neglects the differences between the two worlds. More than that, the reaction of the repressed in the form of Mutiny gets an irrational and brutal response even from the humane creator of *David Coperfield*: in a letter to Miss Cotts, Charles Dickens, whose second son Walter was in India in 1857, justifies blasting Indians out of cannons and proclaims that, were he commander-in-chief in India, "I should do my utmost to exterminate the Race upon whom the stain of the late cruelties rested " (Moore-Gilbert 1986: 76), certain of course that the "savages of Cawnpore and Delhi" were, as ungrateful rebellious children, the culprits.

The colonial construct of British imperialism in India embraced the metaphor of empire as "family" and Queen Victoria was seen as "ma-baap" (mother/father), the native as untrained child, and the empire as drawing room – "a refined and civilized space where appropriate rules of conduct would ensure permanent occupancy"[11]. This metaphor, used by both Imperialists and Separatists ignored the personality of the child and the stress to which it was subjected is suggestively

[8] David Daiches, A Critical History of English Literature, The Romantics to the Present Day, Volume 4, Morrison and Gibs Ltd, London and Edinburgh, 1979, p. 1091.
[9] Zohreh Sullivan, Narratives of the Empire, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 2.
[10] *The Quarterly Review*, April 1829, p.342; quoted in Bodelson 1968:13
[11] Zohreh Sullivan, Narratives of the Empire, p. 3.



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expressed in Forster's novel *A Passage to India* by the famous quarrel between Ronny and Mrs. Moore. He admits, "India isn't a drawing room" (p.50) and that the balance of power with England as 'mother country' has changed; the 'child-colony', "India likes gods". Therefore mother's hope that the domestic virtues of kindness and courtesy could create a passage between the two worlds and make "the British Empire a different institution" fails.

Kipling reproduces and complicates these imperial ideological structures but at the same time one can sense his ambivalence about India, his inability to decide either for the cause of empire or for his "best-beloved" India. This was probably because of his primary identification with the land of his childhood, yet his narratives betray the ambivalence of his position as colonizer. Angus Wilson, for instance, recounts an anecdote about the child Kipling walking hand in hand with a native peasant, calling to his mother in Hindi, "Goodbye, this is my brother" (1979: 4). Wilson perceives this as a paradigmatic moment that conveys Kipling's persistent sense of India as a Garden of Eden before the Fall and of" the Indian peasantry ... his first love, his beloved children for the rest of his life" (p. 4). India was the land of Kipling's birth, his golden childhood, and his first, lost family. And it is also the primarily source of the contradiction in Kipling's discourse because India and empire are those who raise the problem of identification, they are sources of personal loss and oppression. India becomes in his writings an extension of 'home' where the symbolic boundaries that circumscribe individual, familial and communal identity (Kipling's inner circles) are emphasized, often pathologically, in proportion to Kipling's anxieties about self loss as he loses a sense of the geographical or structural boundaries defining his own community and himself. Who, after all, are "Mine own People" -the subtitle of *Life's Handicap*?[12] These contradictions follow the pattern of colonial discourse, which according to Edward Said produced representations of the Orient as negations of the West and actually served the official ideals of the imperial mission as means of power and knowledge. Kipling's writings translate a way of knowing a world whose race, gender and power are configured in binary terms which are still with us. This is a world where the colonizer and the colonized are both made up of moments of hybridity, where the Self defines the Other out of similarity and difference. The contradictions he exposes in the words of Macaulay, for instance, ("Be the father and the oppressor of the people; be just and unjust, moderate and rapacious") are also those that can be seen in Kipling's ideal administrators from Strickland and Colonel Creighton to Kim.

The fact that Kipling chose the familial model to describe his disturbed relationship with the empire is, on one hand, metaphorical as it attempts to transcend social, political margins but, on the other hand, it displays a claustrophobic, self-destructive space revealing a split self who was for empire to provide him with what he lacked in childhood- the impossibly extended family. Kipling's

[12] Zohreh Sullivan, Narratives of the Empire, p.5



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lack in his childhood "House of Desolation" is rewritten in the psychic and physical geography of colonial protagonists in perpetual pursuit of lost objects of desires, of surrogate homes. Their quest inscribes Kipling on a bivalent position. He becomes the master and the child, the lama and the chela, the teacher and the student, the Englishman and the native, the 'quintessentially divided imperial subject'.

Victorian imperialism had as central tropes-family and home- and that was not because it was an age of faith but because it was an age obsessed with the disintegration of faith and of the old structures of religion. The old structures, however, were not discarded; rather, the age found suitable surrogates for them in such systems as work, home, imperialism and nationalism - and each was a construction designed to ward off its undesirable Other. If work was defense against neurosis, home was the fortress to be guarded against the work-a-day world. India provided the chance for the Englishman to play at " the Great Game," to play the authoritarian parent, and to rewrite the failed family romance. England enjoyed playing again the role of a mythical Prospero, the stern father who, having failed in maintaining power at home, now tries to do better the second time around by controlling a Caliban's kingdom of "stinkin'heathens" as Carnehan in *The Man Who Would Be King* calls the natives. Actually a promised land for the unemployed, for the surplus of population and a new market for the excess production, India was to be ruled by schoolboys who had learned the rules of world government on the playing fields of Eton. Inspired by economic need and defeated by political reality, British imperialism in the second half of the century was marked by what Hutchins calls the reactionary ideology of permanence: "The certainty of a permanent empire... seemed to increase in proportion to its fragility, and to serve for many people as a defense and retreat from reason"[13]

Kipling's stories also problematize the breaking point of boundaries, of the lonely nightmare of the private self in India; but, in addition to that knowledge, there is an awareness of other multiplicities that strain against it and resist its control from within. He sensed a disturbing analogy between the inner and the outer circles, between the private truths known by the colonizers about themselves and cracks in the larger system. Said's reading of Kipling displays the eastern "Other" as a silent object incapable of representing itself. Knowledge of others reflects the power of the knowing colonizer who represents natives because they cannot represent themselves[14]. The "Oriental" therefore is never allowed the position of subject. The Westerner who mediates our knowledge of the Orient either stereotypes the native or becomes an "unmediated expert power- the power to be, for a brief time, the Orient". Yet, in spite of the self-imposed framing we hear voices of evasion and resistance, a "dynamic, slippery and sometimes oppositional discourse which, while

[13] Ibiden, p.7
[14] Ibiden, p. 8.



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mimicking the varied voices of its uneasy and half-denied ideology, yet questions official structures and raises the possibility of repressed and alternative rereading of official imperial mythology."[15]

A man who praised Allah for giving him "two sides to my head," Kipling at his most lyrical (Kim) celebrates diversity by using a discourse apparently marked by unified, single minded stances towards empire that are then undermined by other decentering and "centrifugal" forces. Kim's numinous celebration of his journey on the multicolored, musical and jewelled Grand Trunk Road, "broad, smiling river of life," for instance, is made possible by his chosen, temporary identity as Indian and beloved "chela" (disciple) to his lama; but that position is later reversed by his confirmed identity as an Englishman whose "fettered soul" will see only a "great, grey, formless India." These Contradictory images of shifting identities that construct different Indias are repeated in a series of other historically inscribed contradictions, chief among which are Kim's desire to be loved by India as "little friend of all the World" and to be its master-sahib-imperialist[16].

The vision of the united procession on the Grand Trunk Road in Kim can be read as an imaginary construct of a visionary prefallen India; or it can be historicized in terms of a golden age (which some historians might read as pre-1857) before mutual distrust and suspicion led the British to adopt increasingly harsh authoritarian stances towards natives; or to a time before the British felt justified in reneging on the 1858 proclamation promising that entry-level jobs in the government would be based on merit. (Kiernan says that "statues of Queen Victoria were to multiply faster than jobs for Indians in the higher civil and military grades" [1969: 51]). Quite contrary to Kipling's Grand Trunk Road vision of a multicolored empire marching towards the ultimate family reunion, the British began to adopt increasingly repressive police methods to contain revolution and relied on an India divided against itself as the structure necessary to sustain their presence. Yet Kipling's vision of colonial relationships is an important intervention in the construction of a mythology of empire that became part of national memory[17].

*Kim* is a reading of Kipling's writings about India as narrative interventions between past anxieties of the self and present crises of empire. These fictions are necessarily political because they are part of the defining discourse of colonialism and of the contradictions embedded within it.

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[15] Ibiden, p.10
[16] Ibiden, p. 11.
[17] Ibiden, p. 14.



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