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KIPLING'S SUBTLE ORIENTALIST STRATEGY: A READING OF *KIM* AS AN IMPERIAL NOVEL

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Abstract

This article examines Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* to suggest that the novel embodies imperial elements that helped the British to consolidate their empire at the time of its waning power and strength in India. Focusing on Kipling's tactics in the text, the article argues that by following an Orientalist approach, *Kim* presents a false or an imaginary picture of a peaceful and happy India under the British Raj, remains silent about the deep-seated antagonism between the colonizers and the colonized, overlooks the oppressive actions and manners of the government, and downplays the strong resistance--including the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857--put up by the natives to cut off their allegiance to the colonizers. Though Kipling sometimes critiques British culture, he ignores the suffering of the natives under the tyrannical rule and engages even the most capable Indians at the loyal service of the foreigners in an India seen from the perspective of the colonizers if they selected a ruler like Kim. Advocating for restraint, *Kim* shows the administrators trying to refrain from violence and aggression and provide efficient governance to the natives by learning and imbibing their custom and tradition. However, despite its admiration for the local culture, the novel deprives the Orientals of their voice and agency, establishes the superiority of the Europeans over the Indians, and tries subtly to prove that India can be better ruled by the imperialist British.

Keywords: imperialism, colonialism, strategy, orientalist discourse, falsify history, espionage

A highly complex novel written about colonial India, *Kim* exhibits Rudyard Kipling's¹ desire to further the imperialist cause as it tries to show that the British Administration has been governing the Indian subcontinent in quite a satisfactory manner.

Sometimes discussed by scholars as an anti-imperial or a hybrid work, *Kim* embodies elements to prove it otherwise. Despite some passages critiquing British culture as dull, insipid, and cruel in comparison to the decent and civilized Indian culture, the novel

¹ Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), son of John Lockwood Kipling and Alice Macdonald was a great English short-story writer, poet, and novelist. Winner of Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907, he is remembered for his celebration of

British imperialism, his short stories, and poems about British soldiers in India, and his tales for children such as *The Jungle Book* (1894) and *Just So Stories* (1902). Published in 1901, his novel *Kim* is one of his masterpieces.

tries subtly to establish the superiority of the west. To serve the underlining imperialistic project, the text presents before the readers a peaceful India under Queen Victoria and suggests some ideas and policies to ensure better rule under the perceived all protective, benevolent, and just regime of the empress. *Kim*, as a “master work of imperialism”² works out the strategies as envisaged by the author to further buttress the empire’s power and strength over its South Asian dominion that is almost slipping past its control. This paper discusses some of the tactics Kipling resorts to—including the false representation of contemporary India—for the consolidation of British empire in India.

Because of Kipling’s employment of artfully clever techniques, N. C. Chaudhuri considers *Kim* as the best story (in English) about India which in abundance appreciates “the twin setting of the mountains and the plain...an unbreakable articulation between the Himalayas and the Indo-Gangetic plain.”³ Abdul JanMohamed and John McClure also praise the novel for its non-stereotypical representation of the colonized. If JanMohamed finds Kipling accepting, appreciating, and celebrating different cultures in India, as well as representing uniquely positive portrait of the colonized in *Kim*,⁴ McClure rejects racial stereotyping in the novel⁵. While Tabish Khair emphasizes on the voice and action of the subaltern⁶ Hurree Babu by disregarding the imperial motivation of Kipling, Matthew Fellion argues that the story of Lama in *Kim* functions as a site of resistance⁷ against

the power of the metropolis. Ignoring its political content, Sailaja Krishnamurth and Sailaja Krishnamurti also focus on the novel’s quality of hybridity.⁸ However, there are others such as George Orwell, Patrick Williams, and Edward Said, to name just three, who point out the imperial interest in the novel. Despite his acknowledgement of the novelist being a decent “gentleman and a great artist,”⁹ Orwell suggest that in *Kim* reveals Kipling as “the prophet of British Imperialism in its expansionist phase.”¹⁰ In the same vein, while Williams finds Kipling’s dominant motive to be imperial,¹¹ Said asserts that the novel exhibits its author’s clear intention to further the colonial cause of Britain, as empire, at the time, had become his “principal subject of attention.”¹²

Set in British India, the action of *Kim* takes place at the time of conflict between Great Britain and Russia in Central Asia after the second Afghan War (1878-1880). The novel tells the adventurous story of the title character, Kimball O’Hara (Kim), an Irish orphan in India who becomes the disciple of a Tibetan monk, Teshoo Lama while learning espionage from the British secret service. Kim grows up in the streets of India as a “native” boy under the care of a “half-caste” woman, a keeper of an opium den. Son of an Irish sergeant and a poor white mother, energetic and playful Kim learns the ways of different ethnic groups in India, mixes freely with them and behaves as one of them effortlessly blending into native custom and religion. When he meets the Tibetan Lama in search of a sacred river,

² Edward Said, Introduction to *Kim*, 45.

³ Nirad C. Chaudhuri, “The Finest Story About India—in English,” 51.

⁴ Abdul JanMohamed, in “The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature” observes that Kipling’s *Kim* introduces “a positive, detailed, and nonstereotypic portrait of the colonized that is unique in colonialist literature” (78).

⁵ John McClure, “Problematic Presence: The Colonial Other in Kipling and Conrad,” 154-67.

⁶ Tabish Khair, “Can the Subaltern Shout (and Smash?),” 7-16.

⁷ Matthew Fellion, “Knowing Kim, Knowing in Kim,” 905.

⁸ Sailaja Krishnamurth and Sailaja Krishnamurti, “Reading Between the Lines: Geography and Hybridity in Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*,” 47-65.

⁹ J. C. Viana Ferreira, in “Orwell on Kipling: An Imperialist, a Gentleman and a Great Artist,” observes that “George Orwell, the anti-imperialist and radical socialist who, despite strongly disapproving of both Kipling’s alleged jingo imperialism and his moral insensitiveness, acknowledged that Kipling behaved like a gentleman” (71).

¹⁰ George Orwell, “Rudyard Kipling,” (https://orwell.ru/library/reviews/kipling/english/e_rkip). In the same article, Orwell further remarks that “Kipling does not seem to realize, any more than the average soldier or colonial administrator, that an empire is primarily a money-making concern. Imperialism as he sees it is a sort of forcible evangelizing.”

¹¹ Patrick Williams, “*Kim* and Orientalism,” 410-425.

¹² Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 74.

Kim becomes his follower and proceeds on a journey covering the whole of India. His own quest for a Red Bull end after he comes upon the Irish army regiment that his father served. Colonel Creighton recognizes Kim's great talent for mingling into the diverse communities and cultures of India, sends him to St. Xavier's school and later trains to become a spy and a mapmaker for the British army. Kim's hybrid identity¹³ and his ability to pass as an Indian child allows him to function successfully as a spy for the government as they attempt to thwart internal revolution and invasion of India by the Russians. With the support of a few daring characters such as a Pathan Mahbub Ali, an English Lurgan Sahib, and a Bengali Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, Kim completes his assigned task. Eventually, the Lama also finds his River of the Arrow that would grant him enlightenment and liberation from the wheel of worldly cause and consequence, i.e., actions and reactions. Despite his unwavering devotion and loyal service to the Lama, Kim participates in the "Great Game"¹⁴ of the empire and helps it in its mission to govern India confidently.¹⁵

To realize the goal of safeguarding imperial rule in the subcontinent, Kipling creates in *Kim*, an imaginary version of India which is far from the realities of the time in terms of significant political events and historical facts. It ignores the powerful struggle of the Indians to cut off their allegiance to the British. At the time of the publication of *Kim* in 1901, a restless India was desperately trying to free itself from the foreign yoke. With the establishment of Indian National Congress in 1885, its various activities against the colonial rule of Britain were becoming clearly visible. The nation was spearheading toward independence under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Also, the enactment of Local Self Government Act in 1884 had paved the

path for the Indian Councils Act of 1892, which granted enough power to the Indians to become a threat to the imperial government.¹⁶ By the beginning of twentieth century, a large mass of native population had turned against the empire, became members of organizations, and participated in activities that aimed to win freedom by overthrowing the British government. *Kim* conveniently overlooks all these intense efforts made by the Indians to free themselves from the clutches of the empire and presents a positive picture of British India consciously hiding the harsh reality to mislead people and to ensure the British rule.

As a colonial ruse, Kipling provides a false picture of contemporary India—particularly, the manner of the rulers and the situation of the ruled by overlooking the tyranny of the British government and the miserable life of the native citizens. He remains silent about the oppression and suppression of the Indians by the colonizers who ruled the subcontinent with an iron hand. Instead of showing the truth that the Indians were kept under the British military boots, the novel gives "evidence of a great deal of freedom—freedom of movement, freedom of expression, and more or less easy relations between the people and the police."¹⁷ Although the country witnessed acts of resistance, the novel gives no space to them—it neither speaks about the rebellion of the Indians nor mentions the agitation of the neighboring Pathans¹⁸ against the empire. According to Said, Kipling "rather falsifies this history and makes Mahboob Ali, an accomplice of the British Raj."¹⁹ It is indeed highly ironic that the novelist shows an important Pathan character such as Mahboob Ali helping the British by serving as their spy.²⁰ Kipling deliberately fabricates a deceptive and distorted image of India by concealing the real

¹³ Clara Claiborne Park, in "Artist of the Empire: Kipling and Kim," describes Kim as "white yet not white, Indian yet British" (522).

¹⁴ "Great Game" refers to the contest between Great Britain and Russia to establish authority over the Indian subcontinent and other surrounding countries through the systems of their espionage

¹⁵ Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, states that by the time the novel ends Kim "in effect enters the British colonial service full-time" (136).

¹⁶ Blair B. Kling, "Kim in Historical Context," 304.

¹⁷ Blair B. Kling, "Kim in Historical Context," 298.

¹⁸ Muslim tribes originally from Afghanistan

¹⁹ Said, Introduction to *Kim*, 26.

²⁰ Said, in Introduction to *Kim*, finds it strange that the red-bearded Pathan "is represented as happy with British rule, and even a collaborator with it" (26).

nightmare it offered the British.²¹ As Mark Paffard claims, *Kim* “willfully ignores Indian politics,”²² or rather occludes the disturbing reality of Indian politics [and history] and presents a pleasing picture of the British Raj to legitimize its despotic reign over the Indian masses. Blair Kling too points out that Kipling’s exclusion of important events shows his “political bias”²³ to cover up the colonizers’ cruelty and justify their tyrannical regime.

Misrepresentation of the subcontinent features in *Kim* also through the author’s deliberate misinterpretation of the nature of the glorious military uprising, the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. The Mutiny—also recorded in history as the first war of independence—was brutally suppressed by the British government causing great agitation in the Indian mind. The British Raj had not only infuriated the militaries by asking both the Hindus and Muslims to open greased cartridges containing animal fat (cow’s and pig’s) but also incurred the wrath of the people by their disrespect to the native religion and custom. Therefore, in addition to showing the rising displeasure and unease among the Indians about foreign rule, the Mutiny also forewarned the potential overthrow of the English rule. The racism involved here so enraged the upper-caste, talented, western-educated leaders who had remained loyal during the Mutiny, that they actively radicalized the nationalist movement leading to various antigovernment demonstrations and terrorist activities in the country by 1901.²⁴ Without acknowledging its gravity, the novelist incorporates in the text, such a significant military revolt as a “mere waywardness, not as a serious objection to British rule.”²⁵ Thus, Kipling not only ignores the deep-rooted antagonism between the colonizers and colonized and thereby alters history but also

intentionally distorts the implication of the native army’s rebellion to promote the British cause.

Furthermore, Kipling disregards the natives’ point of view while dealing with the famous Mutiny. He presents things in the novel through the partial perspective of the British people, which, by supporting the colonizer’s cause, harms the native one.²⁶ For instance, while talking about the military rising, the novelist ignores the sentiments of the citizens and picks up a veteran of the Mutiny who fought from the British side. The veteran recounts his experience of the Mutiny to Kim and the Lama, illustrating his loyalty to the British and expressing his views against the mutineers.²⁷ Downplaying the viewpoint of the great majority of Indians, the veteran forwards the British cause and dubs his countrymen’s revolt as an act of madness: “A madness ate into all army, and they turned against their officers. That was the first evil, but not past remedy if they had then held their hands. But they chose to kill their Sahibs’ wives and children. Then came the Sahibs from over the sea and called them to most strict account” (Kipling 100). The native soldier’s version of the military uprising unashamedly presents “the British rationale”²⁸ about the event. The British authority pays due respect to the loyalty he shows to the empire. However, this limited perspective can only present a partial picture of the event. From the point of view of the Indians, the soldier would have been treated in a different manner by his fellow citizens as, like many other citizens, they might have considered the Mutiny as the natives’ first war of independence fought against the British. In this regard, Said rightly observes: “What Kipling simply eliminates is the likelihood that the soldier’s compatriots regard him as (at very least) a traitor to his people.”²⁹ Kipling conveniently conceals this aspect to shed negative

²¹ Ann Parry, in “Recovering the Connection between *Kim* and Contemporary History,” rightly observes that *Kim* not only ignores “the pressure from the frontier and from within the country,” it also “falsifies the historical actuality by representing the internal state of India as a place that rejoices in its cosmopolitanism” (313).

²² Mark Paffard, *Kipling’s Indian Fiction*, 80.

²³ Blair B. Kling, “Kim in Historical Context,” 308.

²⁴ Blair B. Kling, “Kim in Historical Context,” 306.

²⁵ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 75.

²⁶ Looking at India only through the eyes of a British imperialist by ignoring an Indian’s viewpoint, instead of providing a holistic picture of the country, can only show a fragmentary India that a British colonizer would like to see.

²⁷ Nick Scott, in “The Representation of the Orient in Rudyard Kipling’s ‘Kim,’” rightly remarks that the veteran does not even “acknowledge any dissatisfaction within the Indian ranks” (182).

²⁸ Said, Introduction to *Kim*, 25.

²⁹ Said, Introduction to *Kim* 25.

light on the native cause and thereby benefit the empire. Making the Indian veteran condemn the mutiny glaringly shows the imperialist bias of Kipling.

Another tactic the novelist uses to help consolidate British authority in India concerns omission of the picture of violence in the novel. According to Suvir Kaul, *Kim* avoids violence because “any violence is a threat to the legitimacy of empire.”³⁰ Since Kipling is set to justify and extend British rule in India, he shows virtually no violence in the text. The novel not only suppresses violent incidents but also portrays characters who remarkably shun bloody or brutal activities. Except for the Russian spies, all British officials including the rough spy, Mahboob Ali show the power of restraint. Colonel Creighton,³¹ head of the espionage system, frequently advocates for restraint. Kipling creates him to serve the cause of British empire in a highly cool and calculated manner. More than anybody else, Creighton believes in the policy of non-violence and teaches his subordinates to abstain from aggressive action. As the most powerful member of ruling class in India, one of his cardinal principles is to respect the difference, and so he instructs the members of his Secret Service thus: “thou art a Sahib and the son of a Sahib. Therefore, do not at any time be led to contemn the black men” (Kipling 167). He advises his subordinates not to “contemn” the natives as well as directs them to learn the language and custom of the ruled. He even warns them not to pretend “not to understand the talk or the customs of black men” because otherwise their pay will be “cut for ignorance” (167). Creighton, the highest of the British commands, knows that violence must be eschewed at any rate if Britain wishes to continue its hold on the biggest and most profitable of its colonies and devises a master strategy (which is also the author’s ploy) to show respect to the black men and their customs. According to Said, Kipling purposely elides violence from the scene because “for him it was India’s best destiny to be ruled by England.”³²

Kim resorts to yet another crafty design--employed by the British to guarantee their dictatorial rule--to show the south Asian country as a peaceful, exotic place, where everybody is leading a happy, normal life. Instead of depicting tension, aggression, hostility, and bloodshed within and without the colony, Kipling grants much space to the spectacular landscape of India. He presents the picture of Indian life almost in its fullness through the portrayal of Grand Trunk Road with the flow of men, women, machines and animals and the captivating description of life in the hills and dales, and the mountains and plains. Kipling also shows amicable Hindu-Muslim relations, the excitement of the rail travel, beauty and depth of Buddhist philosophy and ethics, not unscientific caste system, and harmonious Indian race-relations. Despite his critique of the systems of private schools, presentation of the fear of Russian imperial intervention, and representation of occasional instances of violence as in the episode of Russian kiltia, Kipling shows India basically as a place of peace and happiness, of exotic beauty and serenity, and of material plenty and blissful spirituality. Through the depiction of happy and peaceful India, the novelist underscores the implication of the importance of British Raj. Kipling tactfully leaves out everything that could speak against British rights to govern India.

Also, the novelist craftily seeks to establish the rightness of the British empire as no one in the novel challenges the British rule. The Lama neither makes any comment on the government, nor argues against any of its pretensions. He accepts the British rule in India as a natural given, which helps Kim in his political mission. Mahboob Ali, the horse-dealer and Kim, the friend of the world, go on happily helping the British authority as insiders. Even the educated Indian Hurree Chunder helps the British empirical project. Although he speaks a little about his dissatisfaction of the British administrative policy with regards to its espionage, his voice is too thin and brief: “The Government knows but does

³⁰ Suvir Kaul, “*Kim*, or How to Be Young, Male, and British in Kipling’s India,” 436.

³¹ Phillip Wegner, in “Life as He Would Have It: The Invention of India in Kipling’s *Kim*,” describes Creighton as

“the very embodiment of the modern imperial presence in India” (137).

³² Said, Introduction to *Kim*, 23.

nothing" (Kipling 271), and "It is all your beastly English pride. You think no one dare conspire! That is all tommy-rott" (271). The government does not carry out Hurree's occasional suggestions because of his Asiatic origin: "I am unfortunately Asiatic" (272). Despite the prejudiced treatment of the raj, he serves the empire with much devotion and dedication that even a British could not boast of. Kipling reduces Hurree Babu to what Homi K Bhabha calls as a "mimic man," a native man who imitates the ways, manners, dress, and discourse of the colonizer to share the power of the master but fails as he becomes "almost the same but not quite."³³

The next trick the novelist employs concerns the choice of his hero who appears most suitable to govern India. Kaul maintains that Kipling seems to have been aware of the deep-seated hatred of the Indians toward the British, especially those trained at the public schools and sent to the sub-continent to govern the natives with iron-hand. Knowing fully well that Ronny Heaslops³⁴ of Britain cannot fulfill the imperialist dream of Queen Victoria and her cohorts, Kipling goes in search of a character like Kim, who satisfies his desire for a hero because he is a white man who can easily switch into the speech and garb of any Indian ethnic community. Kipling believes that Kim who is "Indian enough" and who understands every bone of the natives might stop the agitation of the colonized and enable the empire to continue its dominion forever.³⁵ The author's idea of the most proper ruler for India comes from the Maharani of Kulu who speaks about a District Superintendent of Police: "These be the sort," she says to Kim, "These be the sort to oversee justice. They know the land and the customs of the land. The others, all new from Europe, suckled by white

women and learning our tongues from books, are worse than the pestilence" (Kipling 124). Kim--a man with white skin and a brown/black mask--is a type of Strickland Sahib,³⁶ fittest instrument to rule over the Indians dispensing proper justice to them. In Kipling's opinion, a hero such as Kim, knows India well, can travel across the country in various disguises, understand the minds and ways of the natives, and perform several tricks to help the administration. Hybrid Kim, "the Englishman--ever a boy at heart" can very well understand, love, and efficiently rule over the Lama-like "passive, unworldly and childlike"³⁷ Indians.

Another stratagem of Kipling that contributes to imperialist cause in *Kim* concerns an espionage system, the "Great Game." Based on the actual espionage policy of the British raj, this network functions effectively in the novel by controlling the natives and fighting off the outsiders. According to Paffard, "the expression 'Great Game' originated in the context of the first Afghan War of 1839,"³⁸ and referred to the contest for hegemony in the Middle East and Central Asia between Britain and Russia. Kipling uses a similar hegemonic spying system in India to keep the rulers informed about various happenings throughout the length and breadth of the country, and to subjugate native subjects under the colonial control. In Kim's words, the thread of the "Great Game" or the British Secret Service "runs like a shuttle throughout all Hind" (Kipling 273). The members of the Secret Service travelled disguised as holy men, pilgrims, traders, or doctors to retrieve information for the government.³⁹ The spies in holy disguise, involved also in mapmaking and surveying, used prayer beads to keep track of their measured paces and hid their compasses in the prayer wheels.

³³ Homi K. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 86.

³⁴ A product of British public school, magistrate of an Indian town of Chandrapore in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, who, otherwise an open-minded sensible man, under the influence of herd mentality, becomes prejudiced and intolerant of Indians and cannot rule over them effectively.

³⁵ Kaul, "Kim, or How to Be Young, Male, and British in Kipling's India," 428.

³⁶ Strickland Sahib who features in Kipling's short story "Miss Youghal's Sais," knows India well, and delights in

going native, or passing as an Indian. According to The Maharani of Kulu, the District Police Superintendent (D.S.P), who understands India's customs, tradition, and laws better than the newcomers from Europe, can become a better ruler of India than them.

³⁷ Zoreh T. Sullivan, "Narratives of Empire: The Fictions of Rudyard Kipling," 150.

³⁸ Paffard, *Kipling's Indian Fiction*, 82.

³⁹ John McBratney, *Imperial Subjects, Imperial Space: Rudyard Kipling's Fiction of the Native Born*, 112.

Their names were kept secret and they were referred to only by code numbers. These map makers/surveyors were the “native heroes” who helped the British in the consolidation of their power.⁴⁰ In this regard, *Kim* may be said to be an Orientalist production serving the ends of the British empire.⁴¹

Several natives in *Kim* engage in the act of strengthening imperial government in India as spies. According to McBratney, since the use of white agents proved risky because of the chance of betraying their real identity, the government employed local agents for the task of gathering secret information.⁴² Accordingly, a group of natives including Mahboob Ali and Hurree Babu serve the empire most faithfully aborting the native princes’ plan for dissension and the Russians’ efforts at invasions and other imperial endeavors. However, as Paffard observes, despite the employment of “native heroes” for espionage, “it is nevertheless the white men who hold all the threads of the ‘Great game.’”⁴³ That is why Kim, a Sahib, receives an elaborate education as a spy, in which he is trained and tested as a chainman by experts such as Colonel Creighton, Mahboob Ali, Lurgan Sahib and Hurree Babu. Kipling imagines that Kim with his ability to switch on his identity at any time, and with his insider’s knowledge of India and Indians can help achieve the empire’s objective better than anybody else. With his quick and tricky mind, Kim can function as a most efficient spy and cleverly play the game of espionage to help the British authority further secure their empire.

An effective way to bolster the British empire in India was through the pursuit of local knowledge in the areas of history, geography, topography, language, religion, custom, and tradition. In *Kim*, Kipling shows that it is more essential to cultivate local knowledge of India and its ethics and values than to seek university education or imbibe the

culture of Englishness. Both Kipling and Creighton believe that knowledge rules, and the knowledge of indigenous society enables one to competently rule over the natives. As Kim’s Indianness or Indian identity becomes much crucial here, Colonel Creighton emphasizes more on Kim’s de-Englishization rather than inculcation of English manners of a Sahib. The Colonel himself combines in him the knowledge of science, culture, and politics and exemplifies the fact that “there is no line separating his role as knower and as ruler.”⁴⁴ Therefore, well-informed, and knowledgeable people train Kim in the field of local medicine, magic, and religion. Instead of encouraging to read traditional classroom texts and learn English ways, he is taught mapmaking and surveying and other skills associated with espionage. After a very short academic career, Creighton removes Kim from the school and takes him for the “Great Game.” Hurree Babu tells him, “If you were Asiatic of birth you might be employed right off; but this half year of leave is to make you de-Englishized, you see?” (Kipling 232). De-Englishization of Kim, thus, becomes essential for the imperial authority so that British regime is perpetuated in the Indian soil.⁴⁵

Additionally, Kipling tries to ensure British Raj in India by making the characters in *Kim* either comment like the Maharani of Kulu on the superiority of the British as rulers or simply maintain silence as done by most characters including Mahboob Ali and Hurree Babu. Despite their dissatisfaction, both the English educated Bengali Babu and the sturdy Pathan remain reserved concerning the cruelty of British rule. Heedless of the Indian history that records the struggle of the Pathans and Bengalis to overthrow the empire by organizing and participating in nationalist movements, Kipling shows Hurree Babu and Mahboob Ali leading their daily life as if all is well in the subcontinent. Speaking about British-Pathan relations, Said says that “historically speaking,” they

⁴⁰ Kling, “*Kim* in Historical Context,” 304.

⁴¹ Said, in Introduction to *Kim*, clearly states that Kipling’s novel “represents the empire and its conscious legitimization” (24).

⁴² McBratney, *Imperial Subjects, Imperial Space*, 112.

⁴³ Paffard, *Kipling’s Indian Fiction*, 83.

⁴⁴ Wegner, “Life as He Would Have It,” 147.

⁴⁵ Ian Baucom, in “The Survey of India,” convincingly argues that: “Creighton’s decision to re-Orientalize Kim reflects his decision to guarantee English rule in India through the pursuit of knowledge rather than the cultivation of Englishness” (357).

“were in a state of unpacified insurrection against the British during the nineteenth century.”⁴⁶ In the novel, however, everybody seems to be as happy as Kim to live under the benign umbrella of Queen Victoria’s “benevolent” rule. According to Williams, Kipling evidently shares the contemporary British belief that as Indians were not fit for governing their country, it was better for them to surrender to the more educated and morally equipped British who could give them the most efficient government.⁴⁷ Kipling’s apparent belief in the supremacy of the whites in matters of education, morality, and governance,⁴⁸ provokes him to offer a picture of India “safe in the hands of the ‘benevolent’ Britishers,” unmindful that he is doing injustice to the natives’ capacity to rule, not to mention about their educational ability, or moral quality.⁴⁹

Kipling’s maneuverings to depict Indians as “insidious” and “damning”⁵⁰ emerge because of his desire to “strengthen [the ruling class’s] hold rather than bidding farewell to its power.”⁵¹ Consequently, *Kim* shows most Indians to be lazy, noisy, indifferent, money-minded, and unsystematic about work. The following specific remarks about the Orientals in the novel prove the point: “Swiftly--as Orientals understand speed” [Kipling 190]; “he had all the Oriental indifference to mere noise” [188]; “the indifference of native crowds” (151); “the huckster instinct of the East” (182) and “so he abandoned the project and fell back, Oriental fashion, on time and chance” [154]. The novel states that the Indians/Orientals have no sense of time: “All hours of the twenty-four are alike to Orientals” [74]. They lack proper knowledge of correct speech and indiscriminately produce “the terrible babbling, meaningless yell of the Asiatic” (186), or utter words “what to a European would have been bad language” [113]. The Indians are dubbed liars: “Kim could lie like an Oriental” [71]; and “He lied like a Bengali” (Kipling 330). They are commission

mongers: “the immemorial commission of Asia” [75]; Bengalis are represented as fearful: so, I am Bengali—a fearful man” [272]; the Babu “stowed the entire trove about his body, as only Orientals can” [328]. Readers can see other places where the novel uses racist language to demean the Indians: “Squatted as only the natives can” (149); “All Pathans are not faithless--except in horse flesh” (159); “Trust a Brahmin before a snake, and a snake before an harlot, and an harlot before a Pathan” (158); and “He believed in Brahmins, though, like all natives, he was acutely aware of their cunning and their greed” (124). Also, the text makes stereotypical expressions such as: “Sikhs are money minded, and “Akali’s temper is short and his arm quick” (109). Moreover, Kim has racial prejudice both against the Indians and the Eurasians. About the Indians, he says: “Their eyes are blued and their nails blackened with low caste blood, many of them. Sons of *mehteranees* [sweeper women]-brothers-in-law to the *bhungi* [sweeper]” (Kipling 192).

Williams rightly argues that while Kipling treats individuals such as Hurree Babu, the Sahiba, and Mahboob Ali with certain amount of sympathy, he negatively portrays Indians in general.⁵² Actually, Kipling does not do justice even with Hurree in his representation of this highly skilled, well-informed, and intelligent man. Despite his extraordinary talents, and lovable and admirable personality, his brown skin will never allow him to reach the status of the white Creighton Sahib. He falls short of the height of the sahib for being “not quite/not white,”⁵³ and thus becomes a mere imitator, a “monstrous reflection”⁵⁴ of the colonial rulers. According to Said, Kipling almost always shows Hurree Babu, the bright native anthropologist who can with reason aspire to belong to the Royal Society, to be funny or gauche because he is not white. He unjustly portrays the Bengali Babu as “a stereotype of the ontologically funny native, hopelessly trying to be

⁴⁶ Said, Introduction to *Kim*, 26.

⁴⁷ Williams, “*Kim* and Orientalism,” 410-425.

⁴⁸ In this regard, in “*Kim* in Historical Context,” Kling rightly remarks that Kipling seems to have an ingrained belief in “the theory of White Supremacy that the Britishers . . . applied to justify colonialism, racial discrimination, and economic exploitation” (306).

⁴⁹ Kling, “*Kim* in Historical Context,” 301.

⁵⁰ Williams, “*Kim* and Orientalism,” 412.

⁵¹ Williams, “*Kim* and Orientalism,” 423.

⁵² Williams, “*Kim* and Orientalism,” 413.

⁵³ Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man : The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” 132.

⁵⁴ Sailaja Krishnamurth and Sailaja Krishnamurti, “Reading Between the Lines : Geography and Hybridity in Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*,” 60.

like 'us.'" ⁵⁵ The negative depiction of the Indians shows that "the one thing that remains constant" in *Kim* is "the inferiority of the non-white."⁵⁶

While relegating the Indians to an inferior position, the novel elevates the status of the Europeans⁵⁷ to prove that they must have imperial presence in India to teach and civilize the primitive natives, and by extension, to rule over them. *Kim* makes a frequent statement: "Once a Sahib, always a Sahib," indicating that the westerners are always superior to the easterners. As Williams explains, the text repeatedly uses the word "Sahib" with positive connotations: "To be a Sahib always means: Sahibs tell the truth; Sahibs cannot steal; Sahibs must act; Sahibs must obey [their white superiors]; no Sahib would follow a Bengali's advice; Sahibs are a strong-backed breed who never grow old; Sahibs are the right ones to oversee justice because they know the land."⁵⁸ Thus, the novel presents the whites as a superior breed of race. Although at some places, the racial categories are blurred as in the case of Kim's relationship with the Lama and Mahbub Ali, Kipling never gives scope "to question that the white Sahibs should continue to rule India."⁵⁹ Once again, as the positive portrayal of Europe in contrast to the negative one of India implies "European superiority over Oriental backwardness,"⁶⁰ Kipling envisions a safe and secure Indian empire in the hands of the Europeans.

Kim valorizes the British also by creating a body of false knowledge which Said calls Orientalism. According to Williams, one of the staples of Orientalism is that the Europeans unjustly claim that they provide the Eastern people the accurate knowledge of their history, religion, language, and so on.⁶¹ Despite remarks such as "The Sahibs have not all the world's wisdom" [Kipling 240], their control of the eastern knowledge is so undisputed that even a great Buddhist Teshoo Lama is made to come to an English museum curator to seek information about Buddhism, considering him

to be the "Fountain of Wisdom." Ironically, Kim must also learn Indian ways of life from another white man, Lurgan Sahib. Besides, Kim himself represents the ultimate model of an Orientalist-- "the Englishman who has such a mastery of Oriental culture."⁶²

Finally, more than anything else, Kipling's *Kim* foregrounds the imperial cause by rendering the Lama's pursuit to be of secondary importance. Initially, the Lama and Kim set out for their respective quests for--the River of the Arrow and the Red Bull on a green field. Gradually, however, the Lama's expedition becomes subservient to the cause of the empire. Although the Lama and his spiritual search are not disrespected even a little, Kim's Great Game and its demands are always prioritized in the novel. In fact, the Lama is taken to the hills for the sole purpose of Kim's espionage as he has nothing to seek on the hills. The following lines in the novel state clearly that the Lama's miraculous River must be sought in the plains: "the Arrow fell in the plains—not in the hills. Therefore, what make we here?" (Kipling 311). Although the Lama has no business on the hills and mountains, the innocent old man is relentlessly made to trudge the formidable mountainous regions. As Kim has already chosen his "road" and knows what he is going to do, he drags the Lama to fulfill his own mission. Because Kim is a man of the world, he cannot conceive of anything beyond the world. He enjoys the sights and sounds of the world, rejoices in what is here and the now and revels in action. A world beyond the sense objects is unthinkable for him since he is incapable of appreciating the world hereafter. Spirituality is not Kim's cup of tea for he is clearly not made for contemplation and meditation. Despite his long association with the Lama and his great love and admiration for the "Holy one," Kim cannot renounce this world and what it has to offer him. McBratney rightly remarks that Kim "never lets his guru's teachings change his essential orientation to the

⁵⁵ Said, Introduction to *Kim* 33.

⁵⁶ Said, Introduction to *Kim* 30.

⁵⁷ Nick Scott, in "The Representation of the Orient in Rudyard Kipling's 'Kim,'" observes that Kipling represents "the Orient as inherently inferior to the West" (176).

⁵⁸ Williams, "Kim and Orientalism," 421-422.

⁵⁹ Williams, "Kim and Orientalism," 423.

⁶⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

⁶¹ Williams, "Kim and Orientalism," 416.

⁶² Williams, "Kim and Orientalism," 416.

phenomenal world.”⁶³ He himself makes his choice clear in the following words: “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--solidly planted upon the feet--perfectly comprehensible--clay of his clay, neither more nor less” (Kipling 331). Thus, unlike the Lama’s spiritual quest, Kim prepares himself for furthering the cause of the empire, fully believing in the material world. Indeed, Kim’s friendship and attachment with the Tibetan Lama may be considered “nothing more than a means to absorb an object and thus own it.”⁶⁴

What Kipling does in *Kim* then is to disguise his imperialistic project through the hybrid boy’s special kind of bond to the Tibetan sage. Close attention to the text reveals that the continual disguise of the young spy (Kim) refutes the Lama’s injunction to him: “To those who follow the Way there is neither black nor white” (Kipling 261). The text also gives an ordinary worldly tint to the spiritual import of the saint’s words because Kim must frequently maintain racial difference in his espionage work. Consequently, readers may argue that Kim’s question, “‘What am I?’ Mussalman, Hindu, Jain or Buddhist?” does not relate to the spiritual question but rather to the requirement of the earthly Great Game (Kipling 191). As Parry argues, “Kim’s lack of self-definition may be his most powerful professional weapon” because “[f]or the spy in India racial difference is the stuff of existence” and they must don their disguise as the occasion demands.⁶⁵

The scheme of making Lama’s spiritual journey submissive to Kim’s game, further helps Kipling’s imperial design. The novel persuades the Lama to regard Kim as his own savior through the *Jataka* tale of Elephant and the Calf, where the Lord himself comes as a Calf to rescue his beloved devotee/chela, Ananda in the form of a trapped Elephant (Kipling 214). Kim here signifies the rescuing Lord, and the Lama, the rescued devotee.

The text contains the Lama’s expressions such as: “Child, I have lived on thy strength as an old tree lives on the lime of a new wall” (321); “I must lean on thy shoulders” (244) and, “without thee I should never find my River” (240). These words of Lama show not only the monk’s excessive dependence on Kim for his all-important quest of the sacred River about which the young spy has not even the slightest knowledge, but also Kipling’s strong emphasis on the imperialist project.

Thus, Kipling’s novel contains abundant elements to make it a discourse of the empire. Through various ideas and methods employed in the text, the author serves the cause of the British empire. The strategies in the narrative indicate Kipling’s suggestions to the British government the approach to effectively handle and rule over the Indians. The novelist envisages that new kind of British rulers like Kim would give better administration and help further strengthen the imperialist government. He looks for a peaceful and harmonious India delighted to be ruled by the British and presents a picture of the country as such. As Said remarks the India shown in *Kim* is an India seen by Kipling and shown to other characters such as Kim, Mahboob Ali, and Teshoo Lama--“a part of the empire.”⁶⁶ The text with its lively characters, actions, and atmosphere is the working out of Kipling’s “dream of a rejuvenated empire.”⁶⁷ Kipling visualizes an India that resembles the false image of the country created by the Orientalists. Certainly, the India presented in *Kim* is not a real political and historical India of the time. It is the picture of an India ruled by the British administrators who have the acumen to penetrate its culture and the psyche of its people. This India could become a reality if the British people selected a ruler like Kim and treated the natives and their tradition with ostensible deference and employed some of the game plans mentioned on the preceding pages.

Kim fits well into what Said calls an Orientalist discourse that serves imperial and colonial power,

⁶³ McBratney, *Imperial Subjects, Imperial Space*, 122.

⁶⁴ Karen Piper, *Cartographic Fictions: Maps, Race and Identity*, 53.

⁶⁵ Parry, “Recovering the Connection between *Kim* and Contemporary History,” 320.

⁶⁶ Said, Introduction to *Kim*, 22.

⁶⁷ McBratney, *Imperial Subjects, Imperial Space*, 105.

assuming a radical distinction between the superior west and the inferior east—and in which the two sides of the globe are viewed as a binary of unequal power and status, having the “relationship of complex hegemony.”⁶⁸ The European scholars represent the east through the discourse they create in order to know and control, or define and dominate the east by depriving the Orientals of their self and identity, and voice and agency. *Kim* does exactly this and as an Orientalist work it tries to ensure the safety and security of the British regime in colonial India. Thus, *Kim* might not be “a political tract”⁶⁹ as Said put it, but it is certainly a subtly worked out imperialist novel engaged at enhancing the British cause in India.

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⁶⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, 5.

⁶⁹ Said, Introduction to *Kim*, 46.

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