

White Skin Black Mask: Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* in the Light of Postcolonialism

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Abstract:

As a controversial elusive text, the novel *Kim*, by Rudyard Kipling has created lots of criticisms which have contradictions. Sometimes it's regarded by the critics as pro-Indian novel and again, some critics call it as anti-Indian novel. Mark Kinkead Weekes gives his opinion as the novel *Kim* is an answer to those critics who charges against Rudyard Kipling. He also says that there is a uniqueness and that is the warm affections between race, caste, custom, creed etc. McClure states that *Kim* is a type of novel which repudiates the system of characterization of a racist mode and also bring out the falseness of the utopian portrayal which is actually have more racial antipathies and found in almost all of the novels of Conrad. Lynn Sunderland has invoked the ideas of Eliot Gilbert in *The Good Kipling*. Sunderland also accepts that Kipling believes the theory that makes a separation between men through their genetic formula and their place of living, that means the environment of the place. Sunderland's view exposes the racist attitude of Kipling towards the Indians. Kipling's belief in 'abyss' that separates people of different breeds is a racist idea in itself. Sunderland mentions in his work that the mode of imperialism is very much ingrained in Kipling and that alters the ability of Kipling to perceive his escape as a form of freedom and it becomes a threatening distortion instead, and also a dangerous anarchy at the same time. Sometimes he also says that Kipling consciously becomes a pro-Raj and he used his works of literature as a weapon to promote the Empire and consciously adopted imperialistic objectives. Another critic, Charles Carrington views the novel *Kim* in positive way. According to him, the education of *Kim* as a spy is not the main subject of the novel. Rather, in the novel, the character *Kim* is created to love India and roam around India and to make the people to love it. He explains that law, politics and even the empire are taken for granted. *Kim* is not engaged within it.

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The novel begins in a symbolic way where Kim with his Indian friends are plying under the cannon Zam-Zammah. When it's the question of the loot of the conqueror, canon always remains in first position, representing the hierarchy of colonialism. "[T]he English held the Punjab" hence Kim is on the top of the cannon and explains that a long time ago all Mussalmans and Hindus fell of the cannon. The cannon has become a wheel of fortune defining the rise and fall of the nation and culture. Kipling, in this scene is asserting and defining the English dominance and colonial hierarchy while writing about the hybridity where the border line of class and race have become blurred. Kim is born in between two cockcrow of the first night and he is the child of a young sergeant of Maverick, who is an Irish Regiment. His cry causes the great earthquake in Srinagar. He is called a devil or Shaitan for being mysterious and having supernatural powers. He also has an evil side in his life. He is genetically European and culturally Asian. He has borrowed the things from those countries which he became to know and fell in love. These two cultures European and Asian have an effect in his life. He feels related to the Indian native culture that's why Kim has accused Mahbub Ali for selling him to the English back "for blood-money". Mahbub Ali is called a traitor for betraying him. But Lurgan treated him as an Indian boy. He feels very close to the Indian boy. He feels very close to the Indian people and their culture and enjoys walking on Indian Great Road.

Ironically Kim is called "Friend of all the world". The relationship between him and the natives is characterized by contempt. This characteristic of Kim is revealed more than one time when it's the question of the natives. His colonial attitude is revealed from the young age when he kicks an Indian boy from the cannon to take his place, just because Kim is an English person who can held the Punjab. The narrator also explains that the only democratic land in the world is India. The rich father of that Indian boy is unable to remove Kim off that canon. However, William warns that it seems as the democratic right that the white man gets from their elders to kick those native people whatever they are rich or poor. Kim seems like Tarzan or Mowgli among the other Indians. Kim has done the same as both the Tarzan and Mowgli established their superiority both over the animals and the natives. Kim's superiority over the Indians was also unquestioned. Kim becomes discriminated and looks down on the native boys and treated them badly for thinking himself Sahib. As racism has a huge impact on the children of St. Xavier School. Kim learns how to maintain his superiority over the local native Indians.

Kim is like Titus Andronicus. He thinks himself better than everyone. He started to work in the British Secret Service as an enforcement to colonize enemy. He is compared to Titus Andronicus because as Titus Andronicus in Shakespeare's drama *Titus Andronicus* fought against his own people, Kim also does the same by joining with the British and stands against Indian people. There is always a difference between two races which Kipling enforces us to believe. Kim always behaves like a colonizer which is again proved when Mahbub Ali asks with curiosity who were those people whether they were friends of the land or not. Kim's reply was not related to the people but to the land. A colonizer always has his interest only with the land not with the people of that land. Such answer from Kim draws a line between him and the natives. He is unable to erase the 'white blood' which is within him. Kim's another colonial attitude is revealed through using of two different languages. Kim thinks usually in Hindi but in conversation with Lurgan he changed his language into English from Hindi. The postcolonial white culture, white blood and white language became so superior within him that they made invulnerable to illusion, superstition and that effect of living with the Indians for years. When Kim becomes relaxed or angry, he usually thinks in Hindi like a native but when Kim needs to think rational after becoming confused, he starts thinking in English.

When Kim's 'native self' is present the 'English' or 'Sahib' self is absent or vice versa. These two characteristics of his 'self' forms a binary opposition English Kim/ Native Kim. Kim's each character stands against one another. Kipling, therefore shatters the solidarity, unity and coherence of his identity. Like other natives his skin color is burned black although he has 'white blood' and he is a 'white boy'. Like Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Kim is "wrestling with his soul". He is confused and unable to make decision of becoming a native or a Sahib. At last this crisis is resolved when he chooses to become a colonizer. He stated his decision to Lama "I love thee...and it is all too late." However, lama already knew his intention to become a Sahib – he says that whenever he looks at Kim, he remembers that Kim is a Sahib but it's very strange for him to accept him as a Sahib. Although Kim denies it and told the lama that he is not a Sahib. He is the Chela of lama and he is always ready at lama's service. The lama can feel the crisis of Kim. They are earth borne children of illusion". Kim's one soul is divided in two parts. Once he wants to be a colonizer and again, he refuses his role. For instance, Kim remarks regretfully that he wished if he did not go there to find the Red Bull. He does not want it any more. He also says that he does not want to be a Sahib. He is not a Sahib anymore. On the other hand, he also expresses to Hurree that he is a

Sahib and his heart has become heavy. However, Kim always had that ‘psychological readiness’ and ‘genetic’ tendency to be a colonizer. His colonizing mind is always within him when he commands the native which is seen while asking the Hindu boy of Lurgan that this is not the way to answer a Sahib. He does not have permission to lie a Sahib. He warns that in the morning he will beat him as he does not love Hindus. After graduating from the school of the Sahibs he treats the native people with hatred and violence. Kim’s desire to gather power and knowledge is also the evidence of becoming a colonizer. For Kim, to be with other colonizers is a feeling of living at home. When Kim is left with the children and women of the soldiers, he shouts “farewell excitedly”. “Life of a Sahib was amusing so far”. Further Mahbub Ali and Colonel Creighton describe Kim as a pole pony who “know the game [of secret service] by divination”. During the most vital moment between Creighton, Kim and Mahbub Ali, Kim does not seem to be inferior. He is genetically ready to accept the role as a colonizer, which confirms the theme of Kipling that “once a Sahib always a Sahib”. The natives are regarded as ‘subhumans’ or sometimes ‘animals’ by the colonizers for their racist attitude towards them.

Kim makes his ‘white blood’ or genetics as the source of redemption. However, he is succeeded to escape from the situation of falling into the native underworld by “go[ing] native altogether”. He reforms the binary English Kim/ Native Kim structure by taking the decision of becoming a colonizer. Its reinforcement is stronger than before. This decision is Kim’s metaphorical death. After reclining beside a bullock-cart, Kim’s new position is assumed more perfectly. People are different genetically and “once a Sahib, always a Sahib” and that is demonstrated by Kim’s new role as a colonizer. Eventually his futility of escaping his ‘white blood’ is realized.

Rudyard Kipling’s novel Kim comprises an interwoven colonial discourse. The legitimization is promoted by Kipling and the presence of the British colonial power in India is clearly demonstrated in this paper. The presence of the Sahibs, born in colony is promoted but not any imported one. Kipling nominates these Sahibs as the best to understand and deal with the Indians. The presenting of negative stereotypical characteristics of the natives are contrasted with the characteristics of the Europeans. Kipling’s representation of the native is negative to justify the colonialism. The discussion of this research article shows the racist attitude of Kipling towards Indian natives. The discussions also demonstrate how Kipling mobilizes ethnography to present the colonizers ‘genetically’ superior to the natives and how they became dominant over the natives. The British

government's aim was to alienate the natives like other colonial institution. The novel also promotes myths of the white men. In the of lama's personal quest, white man's 'presence' becomes must to be succeed. Colonization also mobilizes the religion which becomes a distinguished discourse where natives are labelled as heathens. The process of hybridity is needed to be stopped. The products, created through hybridism becomes monstrous and they suffer from the inferiority complex and they are incapable to achieve the status of a white man. only to emphasize and reassert Kipling, using hybridity, blurs the distance between two races. There are many destructive effects of colonization on the identity and culture of the people who are colonized by the British colonizers. The analysis of the novel Kim exposes the role and characteristics of colonization in exploitation of the colonized natives which keeps them under the dominance of colonization.

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