



# Rudyard Kipling and Imperialism

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# Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

- Born in Bombay; father was an anthropologist and model for Keeper of Wonder House in *Kim*.
- Lived in India until 6 with a Hindu nanny; then went to England to a boarding home where he was bullied
- Poor eyesight kept him out of the military so he worked in India as a journalist
- In 1892, married an American and moved to Vermont. The Kiplings returned to England in 1896 when a wave of Anti-English sentiment erupted over British Guiana, Venezuela and Monroe Doctrine
- First British writer to win Nobel Prize, 1907.
- He urged his son to fight in WW I where he died.

# Kim Described

- “Though he was **burned black as any native**; though he spoke the vernacular by preference, and his mother-tongue in a clipped uncertain sing-song; though he consorted on terms of perfect equality with the small boys of the bazar; Kim was white—a poor white of the very poorest... His mother had been nursemaid in a colonel's family and had married Kimball O'Hara, a young colour-sergeant of the Mavericks, an Irish regiment... O'Hara drifted away, till he came across the woman who took opium and learned the taste from her, and died as poor whites die in India. His estate at death consisted of three papers—one he called his 'ne varietur' because those words were written below his signature thereon, and another his 'clearance-certificate.' The third was Kim's birth-certificate. Those things, he was used to say, in his glorious opium-hours, would yet make little Kimball a man.”

# Tibetan Lama and Museum

- Most of the talk was altogether above his head. The lama, haltingly at first, spoke to the curator of his own lamassery, the Suchzen, opposite the Painted Rocks, four months' march away. The curator brought out a huge book of photos and showed him that very place, perched on its crag, overlooking the gigantic valley of many-hued strata.
- 'Ay, ay!' The lama mounted a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles of Chinese work. 'Here is the little door through which we bring wood before winter. And thou—the English know of these things? He who is now Abbot of Lung-Cho told me, but I did not believe. The Lord—the Excellent One—He has honour here too? And His life is known?'

# British “Know” the Buddhist History better than the Buddhists

- He drew in his breath as he [13] turned helplessly over the pages of Beal and Stanislas Julien. 'Tis all here. A treasure locked.' Then he composed himself reverently to listen to fragments, hastily rendered into Urdu. For the first time he heard of the labours of European scholars, who by the help of these and a hundred other documents have identified the Holy Places of Buddhism. Then he was shown a mighty map, spotted and traced with yellow. The brown finger followed the curator's pencil from point to point. Here was Kapilavastu, here the Middle Kingdom, and here Mahabodi, the Mecca of Buddhism; and here was Kusinagara, sad place of the Holy One's death. The old man bowed his head over the sheets in silence for a while, and the curator lit another pipe.

# Bow of Buddha

'So they made the triple trial of strength against all comers. And at the test of the Bow, our Lord first breaking that which they gave Him, called for such a bow as none might bend. Thou knowest?'

'It is written. I have read.'

'And, overshooting all other marks, the arrow passed far and far beyond sight. At the last it fell; and, where it touched earth, there broke out a stream which presently became a River, whose nature, by our Lord's beneficence, and that merit He acquired ere He freed himself, is that whoso bathes in it washes away all taint and speckle of sin.'

'So it is written,' said the curator sadly.

**The lama drew a long breath. 'Where is that River? Fountain of Wisdom, where fell the arrow?'**

**'Alas, my brother, I do not know,' said the curator.**

'Nay, if it please thee to forget—the one thing only that thou hast not told me. Surely thou must know? See, I am an old man! I ask with my head between thy feet, O Fountain of Wisdom. We know He drew the bow! We know the arrow fell! We know the stream gushed! Where, then, is the River? My dream told me to find it. So I came. I am here. But where is the River?'

# Shared Quest

- 'But the River—the River of the Arrow?'
- 'Oh, that I heard when thou wast speaking to the Englishman. I lay against the door.'
- The lama sighed. 'I thought thou hadst been a guide permitted. Such things fall sometimes—but I am not worthy. Thou dost not, then, know of the River?'
- 'Not I.' Kim laughed uneasily. 'I go to look for—for a bull—a Red Bull on a green field who shall help me.' Boylike, if an acquaintance had a scheme, Kim was quite ready with one of his own; and, boylike, he had really thought for as much as twenty minutes at a time of his father's prophecy.
- 'To what, child?' said the lama.
- 'God knows, but so my father told me. I heard thy talk in the Wonder House of all those new strange places in the Hills, and if one so old and so little—so used to truth-telling—may go out for the small matter of a river, it seemed to me that I too must go a-travelling. If it is our fate to find those things we shall find them—thou, thy River; and I, my Bull, and the strong Pillars and some other matters that I forget.'

## “Lying Oriental”

- Afghan Horse Trader, Mahbub Ali, sends a message with Kim about black market guns. Reflecting on whether he can trust Kim:
- “Kim was the one soul in the world who had never told him a lie. That would have been a fatal blot on Kim's character if Mahbub had not known that to others, for his own ends or Mahbub's business, **Kim could lie like an Oriental.**”

# Depiction of Indians as Money Grubbers

- 'Now another to Amritzar,' said Kim, who had no notion of spending Mahbub Ali's money oh anything so crude as a paid ride to Umballa. 'The price is so much. The small money in return is just so much. I know the ways of the te-rain. . . . Never did yogi need chela as thou dost,' he went on merrily to the bewildered lama. 'They would have flung thee out at Mian Mir but for me. This way! Come.' **He returned the money, keeping only one anna in each rupee of the price of the Umballa ticket as his commission—the immemorial commission of Asia**
- Implies that they only care about money and graft however they can while providing little service in return

# The Black Year, Rebellion of 1857

- 'What madness was that, then?'
- 'The Gods, who sent it for a plague, alone know. A madness ate into all the 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 the Sahibs' wives and children. Then came the Sahibs from over the sea and called them to most strict account.'
- 'Some such rumour, I believe, reached me once long ago. They called it the Black Year, as I remember.'
- 'What manner of life hast thou led, not to know The Year? A rumour indeed! All earth knew, and trembled.'
- 'Merit! We did not consider it merit in those days. My people, my friends, my brothers fell from me. They said: "The time of the English is accomplished. Let each strike out a little holding for himself." But I had talked with the men of Sobraon, of Chillianwallah, of Moodkee and Ferozeshah. I said: "Abide a little and the wind turns.

# Catholic and Protestant fight

- 'There is a River in this country which he wishes to find so verree much. It was put out by an Arrow which—' Kim tapped his foot impatiently as he translated in his own mind from the vernacular to his clumsy English. 'Oah, it was made by our Lord God Buddha, you know, and if you wash there you are washed away from all your sins and made as white as cotton-wool.' (Kim had heard mission-talk in his time.) 'I am his disciple, and we must find that River. It is so verree valuable to us.'
- 'Say that again,' said Bennett. Kim obeyed, with amplifications.
- **'But this is gross blasphemy!' cried the Church of England.**
- 'Tck! Tck!' said Father Victor sympathetically. 'I'd give a good deal to be able to talk the vernacular. A river that washes away sin! And how long have you two been looking for it?'
- 'Oh, many days. Now we wish to go away and look for it again. It is not here, you see.'
- 'I see,' said Father Victor gravely. 'But he can't go on in that old man's company. It would be different, Kim, if you were not a soldier's son. Tell him that the regiment will take care of you and make you as good a man as your—as good a man as can be. Tell him that if he believes in miracles he must believe that—'

# White privilege

- After all, this was the newest of his experiences. Sooner or later, if he chose, he could escape into great, gray, formless India, beyond tents and padres and colonels. Meantime, if the Sahibs were to be impressed, he would do his best to impress them. He too was a white man.

# Is this a critique or illustration of Racism?

- 'What was you bukkin' to that nigger about?' said the drummer-boy when Kim returned to the veranda. 'I was watchin' you.'
- 'I was only talkin' to him.'
- 'You talk the same as a nigger, don't you?'

# Identity Crisis

- **'They'll make a man o' you, O'Hara, at St. Xavier's—a white man, an', I hope, a good man.** They know all about your comin', an' the Colonel will see that ye're not lost or mislaid anywhere on the road. I've given you a notion of religious matters,—at least I hope so,—and you'll remember, when they ask you your religion, that you're a Cath'lic. Better say Roman Cath'lic, tho' I'm not fond of the word.'
- Kim lit a rank cigarette—he had been careful to buy a stock in the bazar—and lay down to think. This solitary passage was very different from that joyful down-journey in the third-class with the lama. 'Sahibs get little pleasure of travel,' he reflected. 'Hai mai! I go from one place to another as it might be a kick-ball. [ It is my kismet. No man can escape his kismet. But I am to pray to Bibi Miriam and I am a Sahib'—he looked at his boots ruefully. 'No; I am Kim. This is the great world, and I am only Kim. Who is Kim?' He considered his own identity, a thing he had never done before, till his head swam. He was one insignificant person in all this roaring whirl of India, going southward to he knew not what fate.

# Sahib as masters

- None the less he remembered to hold himself lowly. When tales were told of hot nights, Kim did not sweep the board with his reminiscences; **for St. Xavier's looks down on boys who 'go native altogether.'** **One must never forget that one is a Sahib,** and that some day, when examinations are passed, one will command natives. Kim made a note of this, for he began to understand where examinations led.

# Russian Spy defiles the Chart of the Wheel of Life

- 'That is enough,' the man said at last brusquely. 'I cannot understand him, **but I want that picture**. He is a better artist than I. **Ask him if he will sell it.**'
- 'He says "No, sar,"' the Babu replied. **The lama, of course, would no more have parted with his chart to a casual wayfarer than an archbishop would pawn the holy vessels of a cathedral.** All Tibet is full of cheap reproductions of the Wheel; but the lama was an artist, as well as a wealthy abbot in his own place.
- **'Perhaps in three days, or four, or ten, if I perceive that the Sahib is a Seeker and of good understanding, I may myself draw him another. But this was used for the initiation of a novice.** Tell him so, hakim.'
- 'He wishes it now—for money.'
- The lama shook his head slowly and began to fold up the Wheel. **The Russian, on his side, saw no more than an unclean old man haggling over a dirty piece of paper. He drew out a handful of rupees, and snatched half-jestingly at the chart, which tore in the lama's grip.** A low murmur of horror went up from the coolies—some of whom were Spiti men and, by their lights, good Buddhists. The lama rose at the insult; his hand went to the heavy iron pencase that is the priest's weapon, and the Babu danced in agony.

# Coming out of an Illness, he realizes who he is

- Then he looked upon the trees and the broad fields, with the thatched huts hidden among **crops—looked with strange eyes unable to take up the size and proportion and use of things**—stared for a still half-hour. All that while he felt, though he could not put it into words, **that his soul was out of gear with its surroundings—a cog-wheel unconnected with any machinery**, just like the idle cog-wheel of a cheap Beheea sugar-crusher laid by in a corner. The breezes fanned over him, the parrots shrieked at him, the noises of the populated house behind—squabbles, orders, and reproofs—hit on dead ears.
- **'I am Kim. I am Kim. And what is Kim?' His soul repeated it again and again.**
- He did not want to cry,—had never felt less like crying in his life,—but of a sudden easy, stupid tears trickled down his nose, and with an almost audible click he 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.

# Religious Pluralism?

- It seems that I stand by while a young Sahib is hoisted into Allah knows what of an idolater's heaven by means of old Red Hat. And I am reckoned something of a **player of the Game** myself! But the madman is fond of the boy; and I must be very reasonably mad too.'
- 'What is the prayer?' said the lama, as the rough Pashtu rumbled into the red beard.
- 'No matter at all; but now I understand that the boy, sure of Paradise, can yet enter Government service, my mind is easier. I must get to my horses. It grows dark. Do not wake him. I have no wish to hear him call thee master.'
- 'But he is my disciple. What else?'
- 'He has told me.' Mahbub choked down his touch of spleen and rose laughing. 'I am not altogether of thy faith, Red Hat—if so small a matter concern thee.'
- 'It is nothing,' said the lama

# The Lama experiences Nirvana; his awakening parallels Kim's

- Meanwhile, during Kim's illness, the lama, having foregone food for two days and nights in the pursuit of meditation, has attained the Enlightenment he has been seeking.
- He relates to Kim how his soul released itself from his body, how he flew up to the Great Soul to meditate upon The Cause of Things. However, a concern came to him suddenly regarding Kim's well-being, and so, for Kim's sake, his soul returned to his body and landed, headlong, in the Holy River of his seeking.
- He declares his Search is over and that he has attained Deliverance from sin for both himself and his beloved *chela*.

# Summary

- Kipling creates a character in Kim who is a synthesis of Western and Indian
- Is Kim an ideal in which the best of East and West are integrated?
- In the novel we see both an appreciation of both Natural and Cultural diversity of India
- But we also see a view of Indians as greedy and unable to rule themselves
- Kim IS nationalistic and imperial—but at the same time it presents India as beautiful, mysterious, and multicultural
- The relationship a metaphorical Dream of British India—to unite the religious factions?