



RUDYARD KIPLING'S LITERARY SKILL IN BLENDING THREE IMAGES OF INDIA –SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS IN A WONDERFUL UNITY IN *KIM*: AN APPRAISAL

Dr. S. Chelliah

Professor, Head And Chairperson, School of English & Foreign Languages, Department of English & Comparative Literature, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai.

Abstract

*This paper explores the literary skill of Kipling in portraying the image of India in his *Kim* and shows how *Kim* is considered remarkable novel with its portrayal of diverse religions of India, its people and culture with a Kipling's power of emphasis on the realistic portrayal of Indian life. It neatly examines the uniqueness of Kipling's belief in the oneness of humanity which shows his tendency towards national integration.*

Key Words: *Indian Culture, Landscape, Social Image, Political Image, Religious, Humanity.*

Truly speaking, when one speaks about the image of India or any other country, one naturally has in mind, the culture, tradition and heritage of that country. In this respect, Rudyard Kipling has caught the image of India successfully in his works. His image of India is a life-like picture of India during the nineteenth century when India was under the British rule. In his works, one can find portraits of India, teeming with millions of people, their customs and manners, beliefs and superstitions. Kipling's identification with the image of India is very obvious in his works. No doubt, Kipling's early life in India inspired him and his constant association of things being Indian helped him to form the image of India.

The images in **Kim** are taken from the common aspects of life. He has blended the three images social, political and religious in a wonderful unity making the image of India remarkable. Kipling, no doubt, stands for the essential unity of human beings. He affirms that one must cultivate human qualities in order to love ones' fellowmen like Frost who declares that "there is something that does not love a wall". It is this love which gives moral strength to the lam to abandon his Eden and return to mankind. This love extends to animals and objects just as Whitman and Emerson interrelated in a single oneness. Like Virginia Woolf, Kipling is aware of the confusion and mystery that lie at the heart of life. Though he knows the paradoxes of existence, he has faith in duty, loyalty and service. The inescapable bond of shared experiences between man and men gives a touch of universality to his literary creations. As a champion of the good in life, Kipling delights in beauty, nature and the warm impulses of man. The life of action and the life of contemplation, the man of this world and the men of the other world, youth and age are perennial archetypes brought together brilliantly juxtaposed in **Kim**.

The different images in **Kim** have a significance and relevance establishing the overall totality of the novel in which familiar objects get revealed in a new light and the unfamiliar suddenly become real. In this sense, **Kim**, is "about the infinite and joyous variety of India for him who has eyes to see it and the heart to rejoice it" (Shanks 215) Unlike the modern novelists Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and Henny James who narrate a story with a succession of images which have different levels of meaning, Kipling is concerned with giving an image of India, which is rich and comprehensive. Even if Kipling usually takes the images from the common aspects of life, the various incidents and episodes in **Kim** are blended into a wonderful unity by the social, political and religious images. The social image projected does really reveal the permanent truths of life. The realistic representation of daily life, scenes of nature and people give a touch of universality. "The red bull on a green field", a significant image in the political background is a vision of Kim's sacrifice of his Indian ways and growth as a Sahib in St. Xavier's. The religious image "water" is ambivalent as it has destructive and purifying properties. All these three heterogeneous images, social, political and religious are blended into a harmonious whole so that **Kim** ends in a note of hope.

The great strength of *Kim* is not in the story proper but in the pulsating background of India. It is Kipling's recollection of an image of India in his early childhood. "The drafting of this book was for the author a rediscovery



of the past” (Giants of Literature 42). Kipling has not just touched in or hinted at India as in some of his short stories but it is minutely described with the social, political and religious images. The images are drawn with the richness of a painter’s brush. Kipling is said to have had the unfathering touch and the observant eye of a meticulous painter. He has projected the three images as effectively as the Japanese arrange flowers. Through these images, Kipling creates a strange atmosphere of Oriental life dealing with the spirit of wild adventure, the bravery and courage of Kim and the glamour and strangeness of a distant world foreign to the English consciousness and experience. In the words of Ernest A. Baker, “**Kim** is a panorama of the Indian world, a procession of the different aspects of that multitudinous life passing one after the other before the eyes of Kim and the wise old Lama” (P 122).

The events of Kim’s strange tale, picaresque wandering and spy adventures are set in a background of India. Left as an orphan in an early age, Kim was brought up in the town of Lahore nominally by a native woman of no character. Receiving a late education, Kim acquired a considerable knowledge of men and their ways. He met a lama from Tibet on pilgrimage in search of the River of the Arrow, a river, “whose bathes in it washes away all taint and speckle of sin” (**Kim** 16). In his desperate attempt to free himself from the wheel of things, he had left his monastery and came to India. Kim, “the Little Friend of all the world” (Kim 9) became his “Chela”. Both the lama and Kim set off, one in quest of peace and the other in quest of the red bull in a green field. “If it is our fate to find those things we shall find them-thou, thy River and I, my Bull” (PP 23-24). Their travels “provide the author with an excuse to describe India” (Giants of literature 43), its mountains, rivers, merchants, the natives with their customs and conventions constituting the social image of India; the soldiers of the British Empire, the system of espionage or Great Game making up the political image and the “holy men” “Stammering gospels in strange tongues”, (Kim 40), the life of the bazaar mystics and the followers of Budha, especially Teshoo lama standing for the religious image. Through these three images, Kipling projects his own desires and ideas.

The image of the landscape the inhabitants of India, the cities and the pastoral setting help to form the social image in **Kim**. The Indian landscape is inseparable from the image of India in **Kim**. The novel abounds in descriptions of the Indian landscape with its age old tall cliffs, beautiful valleys with its sunrise and sunset, its moon-blanching roads and dew-drenched fields. Kipling describes:

“By the time, the sun was driving broad
Golden spokes through the lower branches
Of the mango-trees; the parakeets and
Doves were coming home in their hundreds;
The chattering grey-backed seven
Sister, talking over the day’s adventures
Walked back and forth in
Twos and threes” (Kim 74).

Through the image of morning, Kipling brings to one’s mind’s eye the strange sights and sounds in India. “Golden, raised, saffron and pink, the morning mists smoked away across the flat green levels” (P 39). Then, the noon came and it “painted for an instant the faces and the cart-wheels and the bullocks, horns as red as blood” (P 74). Kipling portrays vividly the physical sensations connects with the night:

“Then the right fell, changing the touch
Of the air, drawing a low, even haze, like
A gossamer veil of blue, across the face of
The country and bring out, keen and distinct,
The smell of wood-smoke and cattle and
The good scent of wheaten cakes
Cooked on ashes” (Kim 74)



There are also the flat green levels of the Punjab, the cultivated fields near umballa, “where the hard-worked soil gives three and even four crops a year, sugarcane, tobacco, long white radishes and nol-kol”. The lama and his chela, “followed the rutted and worn country road that wound across the flat between the great dark-green mango-groves, the line of the snow- capped Himalayas faint to the west ward” (61). The sun rises to dispense the morning mists. It sets across the mango-groves, “filling it with mealy gold light”. When Kim travels to Simla, he sees the distant heights, the snow, rosy hued at dawn, dazzling beneath the glare of the sun by day and sparkling in the soft evening light. The road winds up stony hillsides clothed with “balanced Cacti” and “Solemm deodars” full of chattering monkeys. The glorious scene in the Himalayas is something unfortable. The young hero Kim and the Tibetan lama encounter a cobra, glimpses a squirrel, parrots, parakeets, doves and bats, all integrate elements in the image of the Indian landscape. Through the image of the landscape, Kipling harmonises the moods of man. The beautiful landscape is always a background for reflecting some human emotion. In depicting moods of indolence, of sorrow, of love, he chooses such scenic background as may best accentuate these moods. His imagery seems to vivify a scene and present it to the imagination of the reader. The constant journeys of the lama and his disciple through the landscape and the township of India is suggestive of man’s life, ever changing like the seasons, its ups and downs like mountains, miseries and sorrows like clouds and aspirations and ambitions like the tall cliffs. K.S. Ramamurthi points out rather evidently thus:

“It is the teeming landscape, townscapes
And cityscapes of India which really
Educate Kim and make him grow, grow
At two levels almost on a parallel, at the
Plane of contemplation and moral and
Spiritual idealism” (P33).

It is against this background that the teeming population of India lives its daily life. Cities and villages are occupied by the millions of Indians. Their cultural heritage, their sense of devotion for their country, their inimitable Indian ways while travelling along the Grand Trunk Road or in the crowded trains are associated with the social image in **Kim**. Along with the people in India, colonel Creighton represents the English in India. His bungalow with its “open plan” its veranda, its garden with plumed grass and rose hedges is characteristic of the homes of many English people living in India. “The house blazed with lights, and servants moved about tables dressed with flowers, glass and silver. Presently forth came an Englishman dressed in black and white humming a tune” (P 44). He represents the typical Army officer, a member of the local Masonic lodge, playing tennis and Polo, living with his wife. The Indian along with the Anglo-Indians forms the image of the inhabitants in India. Kipling’s cities are saturated with the images of India. Bombay was the place where Kipling spent the first five years of his life. He reminds the readers that it was the squeen of all cities. Second to it comes Lucknow adorned with fantastic buildings, richly endowed, a place for retirement in the evening of life. Simla is the famous hill station where the Viceroy and his retinue used to retire in summer from the heat of Calcutta. Simla’s repulacion for adulterous liaisons and its bizarre fascination do not escape the eye of Kipling. Banares strikes him as particularly dirty and its clamour day and night is as incessant as the surging of the sea. It is the “oldest of all earth’s cities” (P 64). It is remembered for the temple of the Tirthakers which shelters the lama between his travels. Lahore is a city that Kipling knows well. The city “is violently alive swept by Hindu and Muslim crowds” (Cornell 102). During summer, it lays dead and silent, paralysed by the summer heat. Bhopal Singh observes:

“The summer of Lahore has been immortalized
In words that may creditably bear comparison
With the most vivid descriptions of Zola” (P 71)

The image of the cities and glimpses of some of their buildings are balanced by pastoral scenes. On their first evening out from umballa beyond the belt of market gardens, the lama and his “Chela” find themselves resting under the tree of a mud walled, mud roofed hamlet. While they talk to the headman of the hamlet, the cattle return from the gazing grounds, the women making preparations, for the evening meal. The villages in the mountains are “huddled on tiny flats half-way down a three-thousand-foot glissade; jammed into a corner between cliffs that



funneled and focused every wandering blast “(Kim 252). Most spectacular of these is Shamlegh, with its tiny cluster of soil and timber huts perched on the edge of a precipice which fell two thousand feet to Shamlegh middle. The rustic surroundings remind one of the golden world of Arcadia. The life of the villagers, Simple, unsophisticated, untroubled and unperplexed is made one with Nature by Kipling. “All India was at work in the fields to the creaking of well-wheels, the shouting of ploughmen behind their cattle, and the clamour of the crows” (P 61) The “River of Life” suggests the multitude of people. The Grand Trunk Road becomes for Kim, “a broad, smiling river of life”. At every stride, he cites new people, long-haired, strong-scented sanyasis carrying baskets of lizards and given a wide berth by other travelers, a wild eyed, wild haired Akali, gaily dressed crowds hurrying to a village fair, gangs of sturdy women laborers, joyous noisy wedding processions, strolling jugglers soldiers and showmen, money lenders, bands of native soldiers on leave, sellers of Ganges water and shouting carters. Kim feels their beauty as he watches them across the plain in their colorful costumes. An old soldier describes thus:

“The Great Road in the backbone of all Hind.
For the most part it is shaded, as here, with
Four lines of trees;... Left and right is
The rougher road for the heavy carts-grain
And cotton and timber, fodder, lime
And hides..... All castes and kinds of men
Move here. Look! Brahmins and Chumars,
Bankers and tinkers, barbers and bunmas
Pilgrims and potters – all the world going and
Coming” (Kim 67).

In all these groups of people, thronging the bazaars, crowding into trains, gathering in the evening at the Serai Parao, visiting Lurgan’s shop, Kipling makes use of the image of colors and the sense which play a very significant part in his perception of India.

The customs and manners are the integral part of the social image. As the way farers move along the strange customs are brought before one’s mind’s eye. Cleaning one’s teeth with a freshly picked twig is of ritualistic importance. An Indian meal is followed by the companionable smoking of the hookah or chewing the betel leaves. Though there are occasional caste disputes, every caste has its own ethics and beliefs. Lurgan’s Hindu child’s marriage is arranged at the age of ten. There is widespread prostitution and ten thousand prostitutes are there in Amritsar alone. At meal time, the native Indian is not in the act of eating together. When the leaf which serves as a plate has been loaded with food, the diner turns his back on the company. For Kim, having to conform to the Whiteman’s customs when he lives in barracks with the Mavericks, eating at one table is therefore “peculiarly revolting”. Even though Kipling describes the Indian scene and enriches it with the various images of landscape and people, he does not judge the Indian social system.

The political image is interlaced with the social image. Kipling knew the politics and the secret powers in India. As a reporter for Magazines and Newspapers, he was interested in these affairs. **Kim** pictures five kings of independent Northern Indian States preparing for war against British India. The Agent R17, Huree Chunder Mookerjee has discovered the plan. (25, Mahbub Ali who passes as a horse dealer makes Kim carry the important secret message that “the white Stallion’s pedigree is fully established” (P 27), to colonial Creighton As he hurries with the lama, he secretly bears and delivers messages. The Irish born cum Indian boy Kim and his life are associated with the first significant image “Red bull on a Green Field”. According to the archetypal pattern, “red” signifies blood, sacrifice and disorder; green signifies growth, hope and fertility. The green on which the Red bull is to be found is the Irish sign of growth and prosperity, as the regiment of Kim’s father, the Mavericks is an Irish Regiment. Kim remembers very distinctively the only piece of information from his father that one day he would be looked after by a colonel and nine hundred “first class devils” whose God was a Red Bull on a Green field. His horoscope too said that his life would change at this sign. A Hindu Priest also confirmed it through his prophesy. “Great Game” is another image with significance. It is a terms used in Hunting. Through the image of “Great



Game” Kipling reveals the British secret service in India. It operates under the name of the Indian Ethnological survey Department. Its work is known as the Great Game. Like a hunter the five kings and their policy because they are a threat to the British power. With his intelligence, power of mimicry and disguise, Kim seems to be a fit person in the game to thwart the plan of the Kings.

Kiplings’ keen eye does not leave out even the religious image in **Kim**. Teshoo Lama, a Tibetan monk represents Buddhism, Rev. Benneth stands for the church of English and Fr. Victor stands for Roman Catholicism. “But Kipling had no real religion. He exploited, in his poems and his fiction, the mythology of a number of religions” (Wilson 145). The three images being connected with Biddhism are “the River of Arrow” “the Wheel of Life” and “the Middle Way”. The lama or “the Holy one” as Kim calls him is the follower of Buddha. He is in search of a holy river called “River of Arrow”. Water is an ancient image of purification and destruction. The place where Buddha’s arrow fell sprang a river which would wash away all sins. Then men will be purified and they will be free from the “wheel of Life”. ‘The Wheel of Life’ is an image of many Eastern religions. The lama paints the “Wheel of life” to show a disciplined ordered life of moderation. Like a true Buddhist the lama recognizing that life is transient and insubstantial finds his release from this sad temporal existence in a spiritual discipline. This freedom from attachment is not something which can be looked forward to in death because death itself is another phase of man’s experience of transience.

By pursuing the “Middle Way, which is a path to freedom” (Kim 65), another religious image, a Buddhist seeks to free himself as Teshoo lama makes clear from the wheel. When the lama come to Lahore, “what is his castle, where is his house, has he come for? These are the obvious questions in India about a stranger (Iyengar 84). The lama Answer “we be followers of the Middle way, living in peace in our lamaseries, and I go to see Four Holy Places before I die” (P12). By the image of “Middle way” the lama means leading a life of virtues with all the passions spent. “The lama is a man who has attained simplicity of heart in the singleness of his pursuit of the way” (Shanks 219). When the lama gets angry with the Russian who tears the wheel, he repents and fasts and follows very strict spiritual discipline. The image of wheel or circle symbolises wholeness and unity, complexity of existence as the following diagram of “the wheel of life” shows.

To conclude, the works of Kipling have the vision of a bridge that joins the orient and the occident. Not only does Kipling transcend all barriers and beliefs in the oneness of humanity but his works also show his tendency towards nation’s integration. The modern critics like Sukeshi Kamra in **Kiplings vision**, Gilbert in **The Good Kipling** and Noel Annan in “Kiplings place in the History of Ideas” try to analyse that the stories of Kipling are often bleak, full of despair, alienation and death. These problems lie in the inescapable fact of the isolation of man. They sum up all the images which Kipling had in mind. But in India, this very aspect of confusion brings to light the cultural heritage. Thus, myth, legend and contemporary life jostle and all weave their threads into that enviable mosaic in which is found the image of Kipling’s India.

Works Cited

1. Baker, Ernest A. **The History of the English Novel** New York: Barnes & Noble Inco, 1969.
2. Cornell, Louis L. **Kipling in India**. London: Macmillan, 1966.
3. **Giants of Literature: Kipling** Berkshire: Sampson Low, 1977.
4. Iyengar, K.R.S. “Kipling’s Indian Tales. “**The Image of India in Western creative Writing** Madras: Macmillan, 1971. P. 84.
5. Ramamurthi, K.S. “Rudyard Kipling and the Indian Novel in English” **The Literary criterion** 22, No-4, 1987, P. 33.
6. Shanks, Edward, **Rudyard Kipling: A Study in Literature and Political ideas**. London: Macmillen, 1940.
7. Singh, Bhupal **A Survey of Anglo-Indian Fiction** London: Oxford University, Press, 1934.
8. Wilson, Edmund. “The Kipling that Nobody Read” **The wounded and the Bow: Seven studies in Literature** London: Methuen & Co, Ltd, 1961. P. 145.