

# **Rereading Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* in the Light of the Notion 'Dialogue of Civilizations': A Multicultural Perspective**

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*"To those who follow the Way there is neither black nor white, Hind nor Bhotiyal. We be all souls seeking to escape."* (Kim 198)

In fact, this paper traces the intercultural interaction in the light of the notion of the dialogue through the cultures' representatives portrayed in the novel with a particular focus on Kim's interaction with the Tibetan Lama. Kipling, in his novel, presents an image exposing the positive interaction of the cultural identities which rather validates the tolerance among cultures than clash. He is aware of the fascination of, and amazed by, the Indian subcontinent diversity where multiple cultures blend together. Interestingly, with an actual observation, he delineates the intercultural setting in its religious and traditional differences through fictitious representatives.

Rudyard Kipling's fascination of the Indian milieu extends to include the cultural coexistence and tolerance among its people. To illustrate the point, Kipling portrays an intercultural mosaic which culturally-diverse characters are homogenously blended. Kipling affirms the human identity as a pivotal criterion to blend all human groups. Kipling assumes the idea that the diverse human groups and individuals can rather embed coexistence and correlation than conflict. The universality and timelessness of literature strengthen this humanely propositions in *Kim* which highlight a contemporary notion, i.e., the dialogue of civilization. Therefore, this paper traces the perspectives proposed in Kipling's *Kim* which come in conformity with presuppositions of "the dialogue of civilizations".

The notion, Dialogue among/of Civilization, was first used by the French thinker and philosopher Roger Garaudy whose propositions are based on the idea that all the cultures/civilizations all over the world share common ground where positive communication and understanding are possible (Moltmann 112). The Austrian thinker, Hans Köchler, used the term to mean the same idea. The notion proposes that cultures are

rather in conformity than in conflict. Actually, there are two perceptions of diversity; one sees it as a threat and the other as positive component of humanity growth. In the opinion of the theorists of the dialogue, interaction among civilizations/ cultures are possibly valid due to the awareness of the cultural positive commonalities, and tolerance and understanding the fundamental sets of values each group has. Further, the notion validates that cultures/civilizations can interact in terms of give-and-take interrelationship regardless race, religion or belief (Segesvary x).

Dialogue among civilizations/cultures, which is proposed on ethical perspectives, is in fact an invitation to disregard what might be termed the power oriented will, for the sake of a love oriented one. Within this domain , any individual can secure his own cultural identity and propose what he enjoys in the same respect to other members of other cultures.

Later, the notion has been elaborated and employed as a reaction to Samuel Huntington's proposition of Clash of Civilizations. Indeed, Huntington's proposition of the conflict is based on political, economic and ideological destinations which articulate an image of the cross powers. According to Huntington, civilizations clash to maintain the binary status of the controller and the controlled, the exploiter and the exploited, the master and the servant. However, dialogue among/of civilizations negates Huntington's notion and affirms the ethical values that binds all cultures under the inborn human identity.

Basically, while journeying from Lahore to the northern border, the Kim and the lama serve an inspection eye of the setting which draws an interpretative diagram of several cultures blended in India where Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Muslim positively live and interact. The novel exposes a touch of limitless intimacy of various members who share one setting linked by a responsible humanism. Kipling enormously affirms the importance of appreciating others' cultural idiosyncrasies in maintaining sound human relationships. This has been accomplished by a list of racially different characters whose emotional and affectionate ties

provide support for one another and never impede any integral human growth.

Kim is of an Irish descent who is left to grow up interdependently in a Hindu environment. His relationship with the Tibetan Buddhist lama gives a distinctive sense which remarkably puts the two characters into a wider space than being racially different individuals. This, further, puts the term dialogue of civilization into effect proposing a possible tolerance and coexistence. In other words, their friendship disregards the issue of the cultural differences which underline the simplest human context. Kim, the Irish-born and Hindu raising boy, and the Tibetan Buddhist lama are destined to follow a journey of quest. Namely, the quest for the promised Red Bull and the River of Arrow which may symbolically bring the two characters' into one desirable destination. The prophecy of Kim's Irish father is mingled with the lama's spiritual destination. Kim's destiny is determined by his ancestor's prophecy of the meeting with the Red Bull which brings him glory while the lama is in a quest of the River of the Arrow which brings purity and enlightenment. This correspondence between the two destinations symbolically brings the two racially different individuals into an area where they can maintain an integral human growth, coexistence and sometimes nobler than this experience. In other words, Kim's western prophecy of the Red Bull and the lama's eastern spiritual quest of the River of the Arrow could have found a particular point of integration regardless the diverse objectives. Consequently, Kim and the Lama are able to be befriended, and disregarded any disturbances in relation to their cultural backgrounds. The lama is aware of the importance of Kim's presence in the quest of the River of the Arrow; he acknowledges Kim's efforts in his quest:

He (Kim) also has a Search of his own. No river, but a bull. Yea, a Red Bull on a green field will someday raise him to honour. He is, I think, not altogether of this world. He was sent of a sudden to aid me in this search, and his name is Friend of all the World. ( *Kim* 43)

However, worthy to say, the above words are quite referent to Kipling's biased view of the significance of the Whiteman's practicality. This signals the fact that Kipling never questions the dependency of the non-White lama on the White Kim. Kim seems to be the saver of the very critical situations the lama faces in the journey (Scott). But, at the same time, Kipling discloses his attraction in the spiritual and moral values of the Buddhist lama through Kim's words of appreciation and his deep attachment and faithful discipleship to the lama, "I owe to the lama here. Also to Mahbub Ali—also to Creighton Sahib, but chiefly to the Holy One. He is right—a great and a wonderful world..." (*Kim* 210)

Though being of Irish origin and brought up by Hindu woman, Kim has been equipped with a capacity to be aware of his environment, i.e., the multicultural fabric he lives within. It seems that Kipling deliberately manufactures his protagonist to comprehend the outer world of diversity. Sociably, Kim is aware of every minute detail in his world, therefore he is noticeably able to handle the Hindu, Muslim cultural construct. This capacity affirms the human inborn attributes that sociably relate man with others regardless of race, religion and ethnics. Kim does not seem to be so invested in any belief that he, therefore, raises the question, "I am Kim. What is Kim?" (262) or "I am only Kim" (110). Kim sees himself racially detached from all the world around him but at the same time this can be read as a feeling of the belongingness to everybody, every race and community in his environment. He shares the area of belongingness to the very pure humane identity. He rejects the colonial notion that imprisons him to one particular exclusive religion or race; he instead embraces all people of the world.

According to Kipling, India is microcosm of the macrocosmic multicultural context. In other words, India stands for the outer world of the interrelated cultures, religions and races. Therefore, while being discoursed with father Victor in relation to theology in Christianity and how he has to pray for gods in the Christian terms, Kim reactively undergoes a self-reconsideration to realize

that he has ever to be only Kim, the Friend of all World. This idea has clearly been stated in his thoughts:

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. (110)

However, Kim never denies his identity as a Sahib in more than one possible occasion. His identity is formally declared in the Maverick regiment after the papers hidden in amulet disclosed to transform him to the Sahib's world. But still, he tells the lama in the English regiment that he knows he is white man after being discovered a Sahib by Mr. Bennet:

Holy One, the thin fool who looks like a camel says that I am the son of a Sahib." 'But how' 'Oh, it is true. I knew it since my birth, but he could only find it out by reading the amulet from my neck and reading all the papers. ( 83)

Likewise, in chapter thirteen, while the lama instructs Kim to abstain from “Doing” except to acquire merit towards Enlightenment, Kim responds that “to abstain from action was unbecoming a Sahib.”(*Kim*: 198 ) In another occasion, Kim tells the girl of Shamlegh, who keeps hinting to his European identity, before his departure that he is a Sahib not any other thing just to identify his race:

... if thou wast a Sahib, shall I show thee what thou wouldst do?" Then he replies," How if I know, though? Said Kim , and putting his arm around her waist, he kissed her on the cheek, adding in English: thank you verree much my dear." Kissing practically unknown among Asiatic, which may have been the reason that she leaned back with wide-open eyes and a face of panic. Next time, Kim went on, 'you must not be

so sure of your heathen priests. Now I say  
goodbye.' He held out his hand English fashion.  
(246)

Likewise, his father's prophecy of the Red Bull never detaches him from his ethnics. His royalty to his race and attraction of being a Sahib has enrolled him in the Great Game. However, Kim's relationship with the lama seems stronger and more devoted than any other loyalty, that when the lama gets injured by the Russian spy, Kim tells him, "Thou hast said there is neither black nor white....I am not a Sahib, I am thy *chela*" (*Kim*: 251). It is quite noticeable that Kim's moral attachment to the lama is superior than the identity of colonialist's (Sahib). Kim overturns the narrow interests of racism for the sake of that wide scope of sharing the lama the very valuable characteristics which purely and highly identify human beings together. In the early meeting between Kim and the lama in the museum up to the end of the novel, they involve in a noble mission which is fit to convey a universal message of being humanely together—though racially different. Kim's devoted character to the lama is extraordinary. The lama is capable of winning Kim's admiration in his manner of perceiving the world without any biases. It seems that both have involved in area where they can interact in a way that dismissed any selfish interests. The lama sees that his search is in vain without the company of Kim, and in return Kim's journey of the Great Game is impossible without the lama's wisdom. Though being a student in Catholic school of St. Xavier's—a school for Sahibs, Kim has failed to be a true Christian. The true religion that he advocates is his true friendship with all, and the lama in particular.

Noticeably, Kipling is extrovert on all religions and sects with a particular spiritual attraction to Buddhism which the lama stands for in the novel. This has been depicted through the lama's influence on the spiritual atmosphere of the novel which is quite recognizable. The lama colours the novel with his mystic spirit which attempts to involve the whole in a world of positive humane interaction. He spiritually fights to free himself out of the

clutches of (the Wheel of Life)—to successfully accomplish this end, the lama racially and religiously keeps unbiased. The very idea of the coexistence and cultural tolerance is uttered through the lama's tongue in his talk with Kim:

To those who follow the Way there is  
neither black nor white, Hind or Bhotiyal.  
We be all souls seeking escape. No matter  
what thy wisdom learned among Sahibs,  
when we come to my river thou wilt be  
freed from all illusion- at my side. (198)

The influence of the lama has moved Kim, the Kulu old woman and others, and made a difference in their lives. This is basically due to the lama's unbiased interaction (Middle Way) with people around him and unworldly realization of things. The lama is in a search of Enlightenment, therefore he has to fight all the earthly emotions of evil inside his soul, particularly ethnic and religious intolerance. His spiritual construct has evolved him to be a symbol of attraction in the eyes of Kipling and consequently in the eyes of other characters in the novel. For instance, one of the Ooryas of the old woman of Kulu states the magical influence on his lady:

One of the Ooryas half apologized for his  
rudeness overnight, saying that he had never  
known the old lady in so good a temper, and  
he ascribed it to the presence of the strange  
priest.( 71)

In *Kim*, religion does not appear as a matter of conflict; it is rather a representation of personal faith that never deepens distances among people. Kipling depicts religion from a secular point of view; it is depicted as an cultural idiosyncrasy. Therefore, Kim in the belief of Mahbub Ali is unbeliever, and the lama is a critical of those who do not follow Buddhist way of perceiving the world. However, all bind and never diverge in a critical clash resulting from any cultural backgrounds. The Buddhist unworldly and devout manner of involving in life



comes in conformity with the secular Kim, the Muslim, Mahbub Ali, or the Hindu widow of Kulu.

While in the carriage train to Umballa, an interesting crowd of passengers meet there who belong to the multicultural setting; the Sikh soldier, the Hindu cultivator and his kind-hearted wife and the money-lender who all involve in a religious talk with Kim and the lama. The two rivers of purification, namely, the sacred Hindu river, the Gunga and the Buddhist River of the Arrow are the focus of the talk in the carriage. Kipling depicts the intimate and the very dialogic talk that never irritates the idiosyncrasies of any belief. While listening to the lama's story of the River of the Arrow, though religiously different, but the folk listened reverently and attentively. The narrator praises the multi-religious and multi-cultural fabric that India is characterized with , and respectively refers to the religious tolerance of its people. Kipling finds an expression in this context which possibly relates the overall society, by means of coexistence and affirms the idea of accepting the *other*:

He ( the lama) began in Urdu the tale of the Lord Buddha, but , borne by his own thoughts, slid into Tibetan and long-droned texts from a Chinese book of the Buddha's life. The gentle, tolerant folk looked on reverently. All India is full of holy men stammering gospels in strange tongues; shaken and consumed in the fires of their own zeal; dreamers, babblers, and visionaries: as it has been from the beginning and will continue to the end. ( 31)

Kipling goes further to stress the atmosphere of accepting the other by depicting the vital dialogue that takes places in the cultivator's cousin younger brother's house. The dialogue between a Hindu priest and the lama deals with theology in which the power of the lama's speech impresses the Hindu listeners though they consolidate the Hindu priest's evidences:

The family priest, an old, tolerant Sarsut Brahmin, dropped in later, and naturally started a theological argument to impress the family. By creed, of course, they were all on the priest's side, but the lama was a guest and the novelty. His gentle kindness, and his impressive Chinese quotation, that sounded like spells, delighted them hugely; and in this sympathetic simple air, he expanded like the Bodhisat's own lotus, speaking of his life in the great hills of Such-zen, before, as he said, " I rose up to seek enlightenment." ( 37)

This theological interaction is obviously a representation of the values of tolerance and coexistence which expose a reciprocal cultural or ideological interactions without any reduction to a state of abuses or aggression. All the members in the house, though diverse in beliefs, simply share an atmosphere of exhibiting a lively interactions that initiate a humanely paradigm.

The lama is immensely able to bridge the gap in the social communication even with a woman, though his Rule as a priest forbids to converse with women. The current social state necessitates his occurrence as a normal individual who has to maintain a lively social interaction," he clean forgot the Rule which forbids converse with women" (*Kim*: 38). Chapter two ends with a quite affectionate and friendly scene in which the Hindu family offer Kim and the lama food and money to continue their journey .

While resting in a village in their journey, Kim and the lama get intimated with the village members, the headman, the old soldier and the priest. Their hospitality has brought the lama a sense of a holy oneness to think that the Hindu priest ,in the terms of the Buddhist lama, is to be rewarded with Enlightenment in the other world. According to the lama, man is judged on the bases of goodness. Further, he feels the need to donate to the Hindu temple as an ethical duty, and as a part of this holy oneness. In this sense, the lama converses with Kim:

Let us go. But how thinkest thou, *chela*, to recompense these people, and especially the priest, for their great kindness? Truly they are *but-parast*, but in other lives, may be, they will receive Enlightenment. A rupee to the temple? The thing within is no more than stone and red paint, but the heart of man we must acknowledge when and where it is good. ( 47)

The search for the river and the bull has always come to mingle with others' searches. Symbolically speaking, this has made a noticeable association among the representatives of the cultures whose appearance in the novel serves the idea of the coexistence. Their meeting with the old lady of Kulu ( the Rajah widow), who is in pilgrimage to pray for grandson, particularly interrelates the old royal Hindu lady with the attractive spirituality of the strange Buddhist. The old lady of Kulu requests the lama to pray for a second son for her daughter as she loses faith in her local priests. She immensely confides in the lama's spiritual prospects ,and in return she wins the lama's appreciation. Though being a Hindu, but still, according to him, she is a truthful follower of the Buddhist Middle Way. This affectionate holiness is remarkable to create a touch of oneness among the followers of the diverse religions. Likewise, she maintains an integral human interaction with the lama. In this respect, the lama is appreciable of her generosity and her Way:

A virtuous woman—and a wise one. The lama slackened off, joint by joint, like a slow camel. 'The world is full of charity to those who follow the Way.' He flung a fair half of the quilt over Kim. ( 67)

As a diversion from the dominant anti-racial atmosphere of the novel, Kipling portrays the colonial authority and its association as dull and lifeless in comparison to the natives who are generous, friendly and kind-hearted. He implicitly criticizes the racial discrimination that is advocated by the colonialists who despise other races, particularly the natives. The tone of the novel

goes against this mode of discrimination—racially and politically based—that Kipling seems to negate. This comes as a diversion from the atmosphere of the immersion which Kipling creates in the novel. Therefore, Kipling highlights the colonial society which acts racially, particularly, when Colonel Creighton warns Kim of behaving like the Sahib boys who despises the black men as this will spoil his duty in the Great Game:

'I think that there is a good spirit in thee. Do not let it be blunted at St. Xavier's. There are many boys there who despise the black men.' Their mothers were bazar-women, said Kim. He knew well there is no hatred like that of the half-caste for his brother-in-law. "True ; but thou art a Sahib and the son of a Sahib. Therefore, do not at any time be led to contemn the black men. I have known boys newly entered into the service of the Government who feigned not to understand the talk or the customs of the black men. Their pay was cut for ignorance. (111,112)

Unlike Kim's relationship with the lama, we have no idea about the roots of Kim's relationship with Mahbub Ali, but we have an indication in chapter eight that six years is the age of it. Kim, the Irish boy and Mahbub Ali's, the Afghani Muslim, relationship is a fusion between affectionate friendship and practicality. However, this friendship is devoid of that depth of spirituality which features out Kim's tie with the lama. Kim's practicality is well known to Mahbub Ali who he has chosen him to the mission of dispatching a letter to colonel Creighton. According to Mahbub Ali, religion does not impede coexistence. In the simplest opinion of Mahbub, religion does not matter ; it is like horses of various origins to the wise horse trader. That is to say, one's religion is, out of dispute , the most reliable in relation to other religions but still one can share an area of interaction with other religions' followers as a mode of human integral growth. Kim to Mahbub Ali, is an unbeliever who will be definitely damned in the law of

his religion but love and friendship have bridged this doctrinal gap between the two. It is the affectionate humane impulses that overcome any differences among the members of diverse races or creeds. Consequently, Kim and Mahbub seize an area where they can construct an interrelated human link. Therefore, Mahbub Ali states this point with Kim:

Thou art beyond question an unbeliever, and therefore thou wilt be damned. So says the *Canoon* of my Law— or I think it does. But thou art also my Little Friend of all the World, and I love thee. So says my heart. This matter of creeds is like horseflesh. The wise man knows horses are good—that there is a profit to be made from all; and for myself , bet that I am a good Sunni and hate the men of Tirah. I could believe the same of all the faiths. Now manifestly a Kattiwari mare taken from the sands of her birthplace and removed to the west of Bengal becomes lame—nor is even a Balkh stallion....of any account in the great Northern deserts besides the snow-camels I have seen. Therefore I say in my heart the faiths are like horses. (134)

This is a positively a recurrent view that Kipling advocates in his novel which reconsiders the cultures' differences to mould them in a mode of dynamic interaction.

In chapter ten, impressively and heartedly Kim and Mahbub Ali express their mutual son-father affection. Mahbub Ali states his fatherly care and worry as Kim inaugurates his mission in the Great Game, and in return Kim expresses his gratitude for Mahbub's well-care. The dialogue shows that the Pathan Mahbub Ali and the Sahib Kim are of one creed and identity. The prevalent mode is not of believer and unbeliever as Mahbub claims; their relationship, at the end, turns after a long term of interaction into a comprehensive human bondage:

Stand up and let me look.' He clapped Kim on the shoulder.' May you never be tired, Pathan! Oh , the hearts to be broken! Oh the eyes under the eyelashes, looking sideways!' Kim turned about, pointed his toes, stretched, and felt mechanically for the moustache that was just beginning. Then he stooped towards Mahbub's feet to make proper acknowledgement with fluttering, quick-patting hands, his heart too full for words. Mahbub forestalled and embraced him. 'My son,' said he ....(161)

As a part of Mahbub's care to Kim, he takes him to Huneefa, a witch whose spell guards Kim from the risks of the mission. Noticeably, Mahbub's relationship with Kim operates in various levels; Mahbub to Kim is the caretaker, the friend and the trainer.

It is not arbitrary that Kipling ends his novel with a thorough humane mosaic of coexistence and cultural interaction. The culturally and geographically diverse characters gather and meet in the Hindu Kulu woman's house where the Sahib Kim is motherly nursed in her house. The Tibetan Buddhist lama after overcoming his spiritual crisis and attaining salvation indulges in friendly talk with the Muslim Mahbub Ali to determine Kim's future. The message conveyed at end of the novel reaffirms the possibility to fill the gap to maintain integral interaction and positive human growth regardless race or religion.

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