

## The Sense of Belonging in Kipling's Kim

### Kipling'in Kim Romanında Aidiyet Duygusu

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#### Abstract

The Great Britain has the major role in the colonization of India. The colonisation has led to an interaction between two countries for centuries. Due to the profound differences in cultures, traditions and life styles of English and Indian nations, the social and cultural interaction between the two cultures has been a good source for writers. Rudyard Kipling has experienced the colonial process as a child and as an adult. The story of Kim has been written as a result of these experiences. This study focuses on the main character's sense of belonging. The themes of Kim are serious subjects, such as colonialism, identity problem and sense of belonging. However; the story is actually structured around Kim's conflict in sense of belonging.

Key Words: Rudyard Kipling, Sense of Belonging, Colonization, Kim, Britain, India.

#### Özet

Hindistan'ın sömürülmesindeki ana rolü üstlenen ülke Büyük Britanya'dır. Bu sömürgecilik süreci her iki ülke arasında yüzyıllar süren karşılıklı bir iletişim sağlar. Fakat her iki ülke arasında kültürel, geleneksel ve yaşam tarzı olarak büyük farklılıklar bulunmaktadır. İki toplum arasındaki sosyal ve kültürel etkileşim sonucu ortaya çıkan veriler, yazarlar için önemli bir kaynak olagelmıştır. Rudyard Kipling sömürgecilik sürecini hem çocukluğunda hem de olgunluk çağında yaşamış bir yazardır. Kipling, Kim adlı yapıtını bu deneyimlerin sonucu olarak kaleme alır. Bu çalışma, yapıtın ana karakteri olan Kim'in aidiyet duygusunu ele almaktadır. Kim'in kişilik sorunu ile ilgili çok çalışma yapılmasına karşın onun en büyük sorunu aidiyet duygusu çıkmazdır. Aslında bu yapıt Kim'in aidiyet duygusu sorunu etrafında yapılandırılmıştır. Küçük yaşta ebeveynlerini kaybetmesi, aile otoritesinden uzak köksüz bir birey olarak büyümesine neden olur. Bu nedenle aidiyet duygusu zayıf bir karakter ortaya çıkar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rudyard Kipling, Aidiyet Duygusu, Sömürge, Kim, Britanya, Hindistan.

#### Introduction

India had been exploited by the western world for centuries before it gained its ultimate independence in the twentieth century. The Great Britain has the major role in the colonization of India. The British Empire has treasured India as an important colony. There are profound differences in cultures, traditions

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and life styles of English and Indian nations. This massive diversity can be observed in all levels of life. The colonisation has led to an interaction between two countries for centuries. The social and cultural interaction has generated plentiful data for writers not only during colonization but also after colonization. Rudyard Kipling has experienced the colonial process both as a child and an adult. The story of Kim has been written as a result of these experiences. This study focuses on the main character Kim's sense of belonging. Nowadays, the problem of sense of belonging becomes an important issue as the world becomes globalized.

### Discussion

Kipling's main character in Kim is a young boy, however; Kim is not a juvenile novel. On the contrary the themes which are handled are serious subjects, such as colonialism, identity problem and sense of belonging. Kim is a thirteen-year old boy whose ethnic origin roots in Ireland. There has been much debate on the identity problem of the main character, however; the most important theme of the story is the sense of belonging. The story actually centres on Kim's confusion in his sense of belonging. Kim's parents are from the western world but he is culturally an Indian boy. His mother dies of cholera; he is left with his father at the age of three. Shortly after his mother's death, his father dies as poor whites die in India. An Indian woman in charge of an opium house takes care of the boy until he is thirteen. Kim grows up without familial authority. Without real parents he grows up rootless. That's why the sense of belonging has not grown up completely in his personality.

Kim's physical appearance is in harmony with his environment. Since he has been burned black as any native boy and speaks the vernacular by preference, it is not possible to distinguish him from other natives. He has become so Indian physically that later when Reverend Bennett quests him, he hardly believes that Kim is an Irish boy. Yet, unlike his skin, his soul has not become Indian thoroughly. At the very beginning of the novel he kicks one of the boys and he attributes this action as a right because he is well aware of the fact that "English held the Punjab and Kim was English" (Kipling, 2008; 1). This indicates Kim's mercurial character. He has the ability to access any cultural group. Shortly after they met, lama sees the multi faces of Kim, indicating that he bears two faces and two garbs (Kipling, 2008; 33). His acts depend on his self-interest. He is aware of his real identity and he uses it as a source of power when necessary. Actually Kim's Indian identity is the dominant one, however; English identity also shows up in certain cases. He is repressed to the purgatory of identity by his real nation. His English identity does not emerge as a source of pride; it functions as a source of power.

India is a deep rooted ancient civilisation and the British constitute the ruling class in India at that time. Kim staggers between the two strong civilisations because there are opposing values and cultures. The colonization results in an interruption of a society by another reigning society. A social interruption causes a loss of meaning in concepts because the values and

cultures may oppose among the two groups. Individuals on both sides can question the new concepts; is the good really good or is the bad really bad? As the meaning attributed to notions differ from society to society the chaos becomes inevitable. In colonies, the parties concerned are not even. In all colonies the colonized are regarded as inferior. So the superior group imposes its values to inferior group. As Brantlinger states that anyone can trail Britain's influence in streets of India even today, but it is hard to claim the opposite for India (Brantlinger, 1996; 466). In Kim's case the terms are a little bit different because he belongs to both groups partly. His parents are from colonizers and he grows up in India, India functions as the dominant side in his world. However; there is another problem with this Indian side. The rigid caste system acts as a barrier to determine an Indian nationality concept. There are lots of religions, different classes and minorities in India. It is hard to claim that there is a harmony between all classes and groups. The lack of unity causes a problem in the sense of belonging in terms of a united nation. Being Indian does not comprise a strong bond. In order to strengthen the connection further notions such as religion or nation are required. Kim's religious and social background does not fit into Indian society. Kim's friends call him 'The Friend of all the World' (Kipling, 2008; 4). He does not belong to a certain place and even the boys know this fact and call him friend of the entire world.

The caste system depends on limited interaction between classes. As an Indian, Kim should be enrolled to shudras which is the lowest varna in caste system. The occupation group, shudras are associated with are generally labourers, servants and farm workers. The woman who takes care of Kim is a shudra. As a white boy he is a sahib but as an Indian boy he is just a shudra. The certain rules about interaction between castes should be obeyed, that's why Kim asks lama which caste he is affiliated with because he cannot identify his caste. The lama is an outsider from Tibet who is in search of the holy river. Kim embraces the old lama shortly. The lama also embraces the boy as a comrade. Kim abruptly decided to join the lama in his journey. Such a decision can be the result of immaturity but the real cause is lack of sense of belonging. The destination with the lama is to obscurity. However, it is not a trouble for Kim, because he neither belongs to where he is nor any other place. He is so readily captivated by lama to a journey routeing to unknown.

Kim's broad knowledge of Indian customs and cultures makes their journey proceed smoothly. Kim is of service to lama and this service makes him more self-confident. As they trespass the field of a farmer, they are affronted by the farmer as beggars. Kim is offended by the insult on behalf of lama not for himself. He brings lama's holiness into the forefront. "Is he not wise and holy? I am his disciple" (Kipling, 2008; 43). His existence is attributed to the existence of the lama. Lama's character and simplicity towards the incidents increase Kim's admiration to him day by day. As his admiration increases, he becomes more attached to the lama. He identifies himself with the lama. During their journey, they encounter many people. Sometimes Kim behaves as an adult and people treat him as if he is an equal and sometimes he acts as a child. On the one hand he is mature and on the other hand he is immature. It can be suggested that the

Kim is the story of the main character's maturation from boyhood to adulthood. But whether the maturation occurs healthy or not is a matter of debate.

Kim and lama's relation takes a form of brotherhood. Kim's attachment is responded and the lama relies on Kim. Yet, a complete submission of lama is still out of question. "I consider in my own mind whether thou art a spirit, sometimes, or sometimes an evil imp" (Kipling, 2008; 61). Kim has not given a total confidence to the lama. He serves the lama devotedly but he behaves truculently to people in some cases. Nevertheless, he has a brilliant wit to tip the scales in his favour. Hai states Kipling's chameleon-like stance in her study (Hai, 1997; 606). This feature can be observed in Kim's character as he turns an abusive hill man into a lavish person within few minutes. He figures out the weak point of the opponent and uses it for his benefit. He takes advantage from people:

If Kim had walked proudly the day before, disciple of a holy man, today he paced with tenfold pride in the train of a semi-royal procession, with a recognized place under the patronage of an old lady of charming manners and infinite resource. (Kipling, 2008; 75)

His pride depends on the existence of the lama. When he is accompanied by a socially stronger person, his pride increases tenfold. This happens as a result of lack of sense of belonging and lack of familial authority. He seeks a place to attribute himself subconsciously. He needs assistance to determine where he belongs, but his haplessness begins when he meets the Irish regiment. He is at the critical age to develop the sense of belonging but the process is interrupted by the Irish. As he is detained by the Irish, a new period starts in Kim's life. He is already aware of the fact that his parents are from the sahib class. Once a sahib always a sahib is a social principle that cannot be disregarded. His social role as a sahib strikes him profoundly for the first time.

The improvement of Kim's sense of belonging is interrupted by Irish. Colonel Creighton and Reverend Bennett believe that Kim is wasted and he should be saved before he melts away. Kim is sent to school for two purposes; first he will regain his Irish identity and he will be used as an agent. However, Kim is very uncomfortable at school and he longs for his journey with the lama. He does not feel as if he belongs to this new environment. He feels as an outsider. Mason claims that Kipling himself felt as an outsider at school (Mason, 1973; 432). If this claim is true, Kipling also experienced a problem of sense of belonging like the character in Kim. Life as a sahib gives an amusing feeling to Kim but he prefers being a servant to a holy person. Kim's sense of belonging becomes a serious problem after his cooperation with Irish. During his education he looks for opportunities to run away. Since there is not such a chance he stays obligatory. Becoming a sahib is a burden for him. School is a kind of slavery. Kim does not internalize the role of being a sahib. His future plan after school is to continue to serve the lama again. School cannot eradicate his Indian identity.

The three-year education does not make a contribution to Kim's sense of belonging. On the contrary he becomes more isolated. "'Now am I alone-all alone' he thought. 'In all India is no one so alone as! If I die to-day, who shall

bring the news-and to whom?"(Kipling, 2008; 185).At first he partly used to feel that he belonged to India. However; after school he loses even the sense of belonging to India. His identity becomes meaningless and at the middle of the novel Kim quests who he is. "Who is Kim-Kim-Kim?" (Kipling, 2008; 185). This question comes up as a result of identity problem. Despite the tumultuous state of mind, he becomes more mature:

Kim considered for a while, tingling with pride. Three years ago he would have made prompt profit on the situation and gone his way without a thought; but now, the very respect the Jat paid him proved that he was a man. Moreover, he had tasted fever once or twice already, and knew enough to recognize starvation when he saw it. (Kipling, 2008; 187)

Kim used to take advantage of such opportunities but he is more dignified now and he helps the person instead of exploiting him. Kim has a more important concern now. He has two identities; a spy and a spiritually handicapped person trying to determine the place of belonging. His condition offers an advantage for a spy but it is a barrier to determine his road. The only person to take refuge is the lama, but he feels lonelier than ever even when he is with lama. He is no longer innocent as he used to be. Being a spy contaminates his peaceful spirit. By the end of the novel the question "what is Kim?" indicates the problem of sense of belonging. The identity problem becomes less important than the sense of belonging. He is no more a boy and there is no place to be attached. As the lama's search comes to an end, Kim's tragedy becomes inevitable. The journey was a kind of shield covering the problem of sense of belonging. As the lama's journey is finalised Kim faces the inevitable question: Where do I belong? There is no certain evidence in the novel to give an answer to this question. At the end of the novel lama is spiritually satisfied, he has reached his goal, but Kim is in the middle of nowhere. He has not proceeded to his goal; on the contrary he has fallen away when his current position is compared to his beginning position. However what makes the situation sarcastic is that as stated by Hubel, for decades scholarshave noticed that, of all his characters, Kim is Kipling's ideal, and he is, certainly, the stuff of Kipling's fantasies. He gets to live his creator's dream life (Hubel, 2004; 235).Such an interpretation does not have a valid reality. Kim's dilemma in life does not fit into a desired situation.

### **Conclusion**

Conflict and dilemma are indispensable from Kim's sense of belonging. The novel itself takes its form and meaning from the dilemma.Kim's conflict about the sense of belonging is somehow the symbol of the conflict between the west and the east. West symbolizes the worldly life, whereas India represents a spiritual life. Kim's identity is split between these conflicts. Being a servant to the lama in the "Wheel of Life" or to be a sahib in the "Great Game"; this divided identity does not let him belong to any of the group completely. Kim is obviously a traitor because he takes place in imperial espionage against India. 'If I eat thy bread,' cried Kim passionately, 'how shall I ever forget thee?' (Kipling, 2008;

122). This claim is not based on rectitude. Because Kim turns his back on the country nourished him. Sarath-Roy takes it to a larger scale and considers Kipling as an ingrate because;

He was born in India; he worked in India, the first employment he got was in India; he attained fame writing about Indian scenes, about the men that lived, worked, became rich in India, with money drawn from the people of India; in short, owing to India his first breath, livelihood, and fame, this man misrepresented, ridiculed, and maligned the people of India, without just cause or provocation, The man as a man is an ingrate; the man as one of the conquering race is without chivalry and manliness when he ridicules a conquered nation. (Sarath-Roy, 1914; 271)

This accusation goes to extremes. However; it is true to a limited extend in Kim's case. Kim is not loyal to India. Betrayal is a low quality of a character. Despite Kipling's efforts to make Kim an attractive personality, his treason makes him an unfavourable character. The writer represents India from a colonial point of view. He does not question the truth or falsity of exploitation of country by an Imperial power. Wegner states that not a single Indian character represents dissatisfaction in Kim (Wegner; 1994; 139). This idea supports the claim that Kipling seems to take place on colonizers' side. Meyers' idea is just the opposite of aforementioned scholars, he states that; "Kipling's concept of the Law, which includes discipline, generosity, bravery and fidelity, is expressed in the capable and responsible Kim" (Meyers, 1984; 98). This idea is extremely optimistic on behalf of Kipling and Kim. It is hard to attribute these qualities to Kim. Woodcock's claims seem milder; he states that Kipling's virtue was that, in books like Kim, he came nearer than any other English or Indian writer other than charismatic swami-politicians like Gandhi and Nehru to reconciling the diversities (Woodcock, 1973; 110). In reality, there is an effort to represent peaceful India scenery. For the sake such an intention the bad sides of colonialism are disguised. At any rate there is the reality of a spoiled boy who loses his sense of belonging. However, the person to be blamed is not Kim. It is the elder ones who motivates and uses Kim for their plans. The western characters exploit the child. Yet, the Lama, as the representative of the east, does not impose any malignity to the little boy. As the novel concludes, Kim is left without an exact sense of belonging.

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