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## A BRIEF CRITICAL REASSESSMENT OF *KIM* WITHIN THE TRADITION OF BRITISH COLONIAL NOVEL

Doç.Dr. Kamil AYDIN\*

Throughout history there has always been a close relationship between the political, cultural and socio-economic situation existing in a period on the one hand, and the intellectual, literary and critical ethos on the other. In this respect, therefore, a work of art can be viewed as a stratified structure of values and norms. In other words, one should take into account that a work of art is a structure of cultural values expressed in terms of certain norms or formal principles pre-existent in the literary tradition to which the work itself belongs.

Despite the fact that there were some isolated and rather uninspiring attempts at criticism from the nineteenth century, such as that of Francis Adams, actual momentum in this has only been apparent in the period after the 1950s. For instance, when Adams criticises the colonialist attitude of the British Empire in the late nineteenth century, he mainly refers to Kipling's works, since he finds Indians in these works as "viewed merely as huge mass of raw, brown, naked humanity to be manipulated by the civil and military officials for the arcane purposes of the great Indian Empire" (Green, 153). But his short career, which ended in a trip to Alexandria to write against the British occupation, and where he committed suicide in 1893, seems almost symbolic of the defeat of the anti-imperialist lobby and its relegation to the fringes of the cultural milieu.

\* Atatürk Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü

The gradual rise of the deconstructive process as a new critical perspective from the 1950s onwards has conspicuously paved way towards a re-evaluation of the works of previous times, especially those of the nineteenth. That is, most nineteenth and early twentieth century British colonial works such as *A Passage to India* and *Heart of Darkness* have been reassessed from various critical perspectives as they are assumed to undertake the cultural and political discourses of the period. In this respect, a great number of critical works are mainly focused on the assumption that there is an explicit relation between the British imperial ideology and the literary works covering the period from 1800 to the 1940s – a period which is considered to be the colonial era by critics such as Spivak, Said and Bhabba. In this period “there were scholars, administrators, travellers, parliamentarians, merchants, novelists, theorists, speculators, adventurers, visionaries, poets and every variety of outcast and misfit in the outlying possessions of these two imperial powers (England and France), each of whom contributed to the formation of a colonial actuality existing at the heart of metropolitan life” (Said, 8). The aim of this short article is to reassess the general literary attitude of the colonial era in its cause-and-effect relationship with particular reference to Kipling’s *Kim*, through deconstructing it not as a children’s classic but rather as a clear-cut reflection of the political and socio-economic conditions of the colonial period in Great Britain.

*Kim* has been studied, analysed, discussed and finally categorised as a particular type of novel for many years. Among the diverse and conflicting views and judgements about the book, the most striking one is that the book represents Kipling’s innate quest for

selfhood as he strives to transcend the boundaries of his self in search for a new identity. Moreover, A.B.Maurice fiercely criticises *Kim* as cold, dead and lifeless whereas T.S.Eliot sees it as Kipling’s greatest book (Shahane, 11), and some other critics state that this novel is a mere boy’s tale of adventure:

We find in *Kim* an adventure story with spy plot of suspense and sudden action; a picaresque novel depicting the teeming human life of India present both in brilliant, chattering, bustling crowd scenes, and in loving, delicately humorous studies of Indian types and ‘characters’; and, seemingly an impossible ingredient to mix with the other two, a delicate study of man’s search to free himself from the yoke of human existence and to find transcendence (Wilson, 43).

In the light of all these views and comments, it would be quite difficult to say that it is a simple novel, a secret service romance or a spy drama, as its apparent simplicity of narration and description has presumably deceived many critics into formulating oversimplified judgements. On the contrary, it is rather a complex work of art requiring more analyses and discussions from other a variety of viewpoints.

In order to shed more light upon a better understanding of the colonial works, it is very important to note that most of them came into existence either out of the personal observation and experience of writers who had been to the countries involved, for official or imperial reasons, or out of the personal fantasies of those who had by no means visited such places. Apart from the imperial factor, another crucial element in the tendency to write about a particular geographical area, people or culture - ranging from Asia to Africa and the Mediterranean - stems from an artistic or literary tendency of the period. This seems to be quite similar to the case of American

novelists who tended to prove or justify their literary competence or credibility by travelling to Europe, especially to Paris. By the same token, the writers and intellectuals of the nineteenth or early twentieth century Britain used to travel to the East as it was considered conducive to advancement in one's career in Disraeli's terms (Disraeli, 141).

It can also be pointed out that a number of the works concerning mainly British colonies in Africa and Asia indicates another crucial fact, namely that they were written so as to fulfil the curiosity or exotic fantasies of the writers about these places and their peoples, especially as such fantasies were usually regarded as taboo in conservative Victorian society. Criticising imperial Victorian attitude in terms of conservatism and taboos, Rana Kabbani makes direct reference to nineteenth century travel writers who visited the Orient, such as Richard Burton:

The Orient for Burton was chiefly an illicit space and its women convenient chattels who offered sexual gratification denied in the Victorian home for its unseemliness. The articulation of sexism in his narrative went hand in hand with the articulation of racism, for women were a sub-group in patriarchal Victorian society just as other races were sub-groups within the colonial enterprise. Oriental women were thus doubly demeaned (as women, and as 'Orientals') whilst being curiously sublimated. They offered a prototype of the sexual in a repressive age, and were coveted as the permissible expression of a taboo topic (Kabbani, 7).

Similarly, M. Keith Booker remarks that "the prevailing spirit of *Kim* is not science but fantasy. Kipling's India is a land of great natural beauty where young men can pursue adventure free of the constraints of polite European society" (Booker, 40-1).

Being an authentically popular writer in every sense of the

word, Kipling wrote *Kim* at the turn of the twentieth century as a fantasy of an imperial rule, a dream of colonial hegemony. In this hegemony knowledge yields sufficient power to assure the continuation of British rule in India. In other words, as one cannot separate the Victorian culture from the ideology of imperialism, *Kim*, a typical reflection of the period in any sense, can clearly be seen as the depiction of an India under the absolute control of its British masters, and it justifies the British domination of India as quite right and natural. This image of India was also shared by the British public by the time of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Although the late nineteenth century is regarded as the zenith of the British imperialism in India, a high-point which lasted until the first two decades or so of the twentieth century, the actual period of the British presence in India can be traced back to the mid-eighteenth century, when the British became masters of Bengal on 23 June, 1757. Thereafter, the British empire dominated India for two hundred years. The major source from which the average Englishmen formed an idea about India, was either the travel accounts or fiction set in this country. In other words, in the course of such a long period of time, and even afterwards, the British public was saturated by a great number of writings by those who spent years in India. As a natural consequence of such a long tradition of imperial attitude towards India and Indian people, Kipling "was conscious of the inherent superiority of the English people and deemed such superiority as one of the reasons of the English being rulers of India" (Bose, xi). From the standpoint of such general statements concerning Kipling's image of India as a typical colony (advocated by his use of the myths of the

justifiability of British rule in most of his short stories and poems) it would not be unfair to suggest that *Kim* is quite a suitable vehicle to accommodate those images through the function of various characters in the novel. One of the central motifs which seem to be dominant throughout the novel stems from the importance and function of the main character. Kim, the hero of the novel, is, above all, presented as having a strong blood tie with the English, which is the deciding factor, putting him on a superior platform, although he is apparently sunburnt and looks as black as Indian.

Another crucial motif is identified with the charismatic anthropologist-spy Creighton, who is apparently depicted as highly intellectual and paradigmatic, and thus in charge of the Survey of India as the head of British intelligence services in India, the Great Game to which Kim belongs. With reference to the character analysis of Creighton it can be pointed out that the novel often reflects the application of epistemological techniques of power in India in ways that are well-defined and discussed in the theoretical comments of Michel Foucault. In this respect, setting up a clear-cut relationship between knowledge and power, Foucault induces us to consider the significance of epistemological themes in British colonial fiction, as knowledge equals power in the nineteenth century. In other words, Foucault tends to demonstrate an extensive complicity between colonial ideology and European epistemological disciplines such as science, anthropology, ethnography, philology, history and literary criticism. Of all these modern sciences, anthropology in particular is the one most closely tied to colonialism, since it was often the case that anthropologists and ethnologists advised colonial rulers on the

manners and mores of the native people. In works like *Discipline and Punish* and *the History of Sexuality* he describes the development of these disciplines as part of a general shift in the deployment of power in Western society; for he sees them as a major part of the transition from feudal-aristocratic to modern, bourgeois practice of power (Foucault).

As far as the close link between epistemology and power is concerned the Foucauldian attitude has inspired some other critics such as Edward Said and Thomas Richards with more or less the same emphases. In *Orientalism*, Introduction to *Kim* and even in *Culture and Imperialism* Said asserts that the science of anthropology identified with Creighton is explicitly aligned with the history of colonialism as many colonialist administrators were rather inclined to rely on the advice of anthropologists in the course of their rule: "Kipling was simply one of the first novelists to portray a logical alliance between western science and political power at work in the colonies" (Said: Introduction, 33).

Furthermore, when Richards investigates the contributions of epistemological disciplines like anthropology, geography and biology to the development of the great European empires of the late nineteenth century, he concludes that a great deal of the fiction produced by European empires is mainly employed for their own survival and continuity through imaginary narratives: "the narratives of the late nineteenth century are full of fantasies about an empire united not by force but information" (Richards, 1). Therefore, as he roughly paraphrases, the relationship between epistemology and imperial power was particularly important in the British empire, and

this is more productive of knowledge than ever before. In short, anthropology within the colonial context of knowledge or science plays a central role in *Kim* as well as in the imperial project as a whole, and of course, in order to provide a better understanding, it should be examined within the larger context of the development of an entire array of social sciences in the late nineteenth century.

On the basis of such inter-relationship between colonial power and epistemology, as Creighton clearly indicates in *Kim*, there appears to be attempt to know better and to be able to control India and the Indians under British colonial rule. In the light of such an imperial attempt there another crucial factor comes out, which might also be considered within the epistemological borders of the nineteenth century: it is education itself. The emphasis on education is quite dominant in the generic structure of *Kim*, paying a great deal of attention to the education of its protagonist. However, it does not only cover a literal schooling of Kim, but it is also concerned with the parallel enlightenment of the Lama. In other words, his education goes far beyond his class work at St. Xavier's or his extracurricular instruction by under agents like the Babu and Sahib.

At the beginning of the novel when Kim is shown as almost entirely ignorant of Western culture and sciences, he is sent to school to get a kind of hybrid education which is definitely twisted towards the West. After his education at St. Xavier's, he shows a great desire to return to the Lama in order to demonstrate his new Sahib's knowledge. The best example of his demonstrating the knowledge gained through western education occurs when he meets a Muslim farmer who has desperately, but unsuccessfully, sought a cure for his

sick child from various native mystic healers. Kim, functioning like *dues ex machina* in classical tragedy solving the crisis with magical power, comes out immediately armed with a knowledge of Western medical practices and diagnoses the child's ailment as a fever caused by inadequate nutrition. For the fever he dispenses Quinine tablets, and for the malnutrition he provides meat Losengés:

'Take then these six'. Kim handed them to the man. 'Praise the Gods, and boil three in milk; other three in water. After he has drunk the milk give him this (it was the half of a quinine pill), and wrap him warm. Give him the water of the other three, and the other half of this white pill when he wakes. Meantime, here is another brown medicine that he may suck at on the way home'. 'Gods, what wisdom!' said the Kamboh, snatching... (Kipling, 163).

The treatment proves to be successful, gaining the Lama's approval and the father's devotion, and Western science is shown once more to be superior to Eastern religion through the Western education of the hero.

Closely related to the motif of education is another crucial comparative motif or image, which bears explicit reference to the idea of belief or religion itself, as British colonial fiction about India portrays the operation not only of education but also of culture, religion and some other knowledge-based practices of hegemonic power in India. In other words, the British presence in India is justified once more as a consequence of the general colonial interpretation that Indian spiritual customs, religions and superstitions create a bizarre problem, which the whiteman proceeds to solve. Despite the exotic natural beauty and cultural abundance of the country, India is reflected in *Kim* as timeless and steeped in religion and superstitions: "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" (Kipling, 28).

It is also pointed out that India as a land of deep religious commitments and belief in superstitions and ancient *mores*, is presented as a backward country in which even the college-educated Babu is fearful of devils and spirits, while the Maharanee displays a decided preference for the spiritual or metaphysical East over the rational and scientific West. Kipling draws this pejorative panorama again in a comparative way, emphasising another major issue, that British colonial power is not only set out through secular institutions or figures such as Colonel Creighton but at the same time by religious ones mainly represented in the figure of the father Victor.

In addition to the racial aspect within the colonial context throughout the novel there appears another crucial example of discrimination: the so called the gender factor in which the male is highly idealised and praised whereas the female is misrepresented or devaluated. Such negative and biased attitude towards women could also be interpreted as a clear indication of the masculine-oriented Victorian policy: "It is an overwhelmingly male novel, with two wonderfully attractive men at its centre – a boy who grows into early manhood, and an old ascetic priest. Grouped around them are other men, some of them companions, others colleagues and friends; these make up the novel's major, defining reality" (Said, 165). On the contrary, the women in the novel who are not insignificant in number and usually portrayed as minor characters, at best help things along such as buying tickets, cooking, tending the sick and seducing men or

engaging in prostitution: "... all of them are somehow debased or unsuitable for male attention-prostitutes, elderly widows, or importunate and lusty women like the widow of Shamlegh; to be 'eternally pestered by women', says Kim, is to be hindered in playing the Great Game, which is best played by men alone" (Said, 165).

Despite the fact that a great number of western scholars of English literature perceives *Kim* as a masterpiece or a classic (in terms of the technical and stylistic standpoints of literature such as the dramatic effect of establishing the contrast between the East, with its exotic, sensual and mystic features, and the West, with its superior organisation and confidence in modern methods), a non-western scholar or even an ordinary reader may read it with a critical urgency not felt in quite the same way by an English or American one. In other words, the work seems to occupy a very special place in late Victorian society as it learnt to describe Indians as black men from the clear example provided by Colonel Creighton. Creighton is no mere invention, but almost certainly a character drawn from Kipling's experiences in the Punjab, and the work's pejorative reflection of India remains in a deeply antithetical relationship with the development of the movement for independence in various colonies.

To sum up, Kipling lived as a Tory imperialist till the end of his life as he thought and openly declared that there was nothing wrong with the system of Empire and when he died he was accorded the honours reserved by England for its greatest writers and buried in Westminster Abbey. However, it should be noted that Kipling's pro-imperial ideas, celebrating the British control over India, later might have inspired some other powerful countries to perpetuate the process

of colonisation in the world as there has always been the appeal to power and national interest in running the affairs of lesser or the 'third-world' people

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### Özdek'in Varoluş Biçimlerini Kuşatan Sınırsızlık Kavramının

#### Poincare Çözümlemesi Üzerine Bir Deneme

Uzunluk, genişlik ve yüksekliğin  
Ve zaman ve yerin kaybolduğu  
Boyutsuzlukta  
Karanlık  
Sınırsız ve Sınırlandırılmayan bir okyanus  
Kayıp Cennet (Milton)

Kutsi KAHVECİ\*

Varlığı anlamlı kılan şey, yeryüzünde insanın kendisinin de içinde bulunduğu evreni anlama çabasıdır. Şüphesiz ki bu çaba insanın belli bir zaman ve mekan içerisindeki yaşamıyla kayıtlı görünmektedir. İnsan olmanın gereği olarak tüm varolanları içinde bulunduran sınırsız yer-uzay-düşüncenin kaçınılmaz problemi olmaktadır ve bu problem ilkçağlardan günümüze kadar pek çok düşünürün uğraş alanı olmuştur.

Bilindiği gibi uzay; tüm varolanların akışı içinde birbirlerinin yerini alarak zincirlendikleri sonsuz süreyi dile getiren zaman kavramıyla sıkıca bağımlı olarak özdeğin var olma biçimlerinden başlıcasını dile getirir.<sup>1</sup>

Uzay ile zaman evrende olayların içinde meydana geldiği ortam ya da çevre olarak kabul edilegelmiştir. Aynı zamanda uzay-hareket ve özdek birbirlerinden ayrılamazcasına bağıntılı kavramlardır. Bu koralasyon öğelerinden biri olmaksızın diğerleri düşünülemez.<sup>2</sup>

Bizce uzayın önemi fizikteki nesnelerin zaman ve uzayda gömülü olmalarından ileri gelmektedir. Eğer biz bunu gözardı edersek nesnelerin varlığından bağımsız bir varlığa sahip olan bir zaman ve uzayın varlığını düşünme tehlikesiyle karşı karşıya kalırız. Bu kaçınılması çok kolay olmayan bir soyutlamadır. Bizler aynı zamanda biliyoruz ki uzay diye tanımlamaya çalıştığımız şey bizi çevrelemekte ve karşımızdadır.

Antikçağda uzay özellikle Demokritos ve Epikuros gibi atomcularda durağan, her zaman ve her yerde aynı olan bir boşluk olarak

\* Atatürk Üniversitesi, Fen-Ed. Fak. Felsefe Bölümü

<sup>1</sup> Orhan Hançerlioğlu Felsefe Ansiklopedisi. Remzi Kitabevi. İstanbul 1980 Cilt 7 s. 65

<sup>2</sup> A.g.e. s. 65