A White Orphan’s Educational Path in British India

A Postcolonial Perspective on Rudyard Kipling’s Novel Kim

Author: Karin Uhlén
Supervisor: Johan Höglund
Examiner: Per Sivefors
Date: 11 January 2016
Subject: Modernist Literature
Level: G3
Course code: 2EN20E
Abstract

In this essay Rudyard Kipling’s novel *Kim* (1901) is dealt with from a postcolonial perspective, and the aim is to show how three father figures - Colonel Creighton, Mahbub Ali and the lama - individually influence Kim’s education. Furthermore, how their point of view on education and parenting can be used to understand the larger concepts of postcolonialism and the pedagogy of Empire. This essay will argue that Kipling provides three different approaches to education that each can be considered the most suitable for a white orphan in British India during the late nineteenth century. Colonel Creighton is the personification of the imperial mindset, an authoritarian leader who strongly believes in institutions such as schools. Whereas Mahbub Ali, the wild horse from beyond the border and a servant of the Great Game, advocates freedom and a non-institutionalised form of education. Last but not least, the Buddhist lama from Tibet wishes to make Kim his *chela* and teach him the Wheel of Life. Reading Kipling’s novel *Kim* helps us to create an awareness of how the world order has changed during the decades and also gives us the opportunity to look at our present time in different lights.

Key words

Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, postcolonial theory, pedagogy, the British Empire, India, white orphan children, father figures.
Table of Contents

1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1

2. Postcolonial theory .............................................................................................................. 5

3. The Pedagogy of Empire ..................................................................................................... 8

4. Analysis ............................................................................................................................... 12
   4.1 Colonel Creighton ........................................................................................................... 12
   4.2 Mahbub Ali .................................................................................................................... 16
   4.3 The lama ......................................................................................................................... 19

5. Conclusion ........................................................................................................................... 24

Works Cited ............................................................................................................................ 27
1. Introduction

Rudyard Kipling was born in Bombay, India in 1865. He spent his first five years in India with his parents before he had to move back to England to go to school. It was not until he became a teenager that he was able to return to his beloved India. The years that Kipling spent as a child in London and as a young adult in the Orient came to be a great inspirational source to his poems and stories throughout his lifetime. He was indeed a product of a globalized world as stated by Alexander Bubb in his article ‘The provincial cosmopolitan: Kipling, India and globalization’ (392).

This essay will focus on a unique piece of colonialist literature found in Kipling’s long list of published works, namely the novel *Kim* (1901). *Kim* is a story about a young Irish boy named Kimball O’Hara, set in the late 1890’s in British India. This young boy loses his parents at a very young age and because of this there is a clear absence of the nuclear family structure in the novel. His mother, whom ‘had been nursemaid in a colonel’s family’ (Kipling 31) died of cholera and his father, ‘a young colour-sergeant of the Mavericks, an Irish regiment’ (Kipling 31) tried to drink away his sorrows and later fell into an opium addiction which eventually took his life. However, this does not mean that the main character Kim is left completely alone without supervision or love. He is in fact surrounded by a number of surrogate fathers that care for him deeply. The three men whom I have chosen to bring into the analysis are Colonel Creighton, Mahbub Ali and the lama.

The aim of this essay is to look at these three characters individually in order to depict how they influence Kim’s educational path and how their point of view can be used to understand the larger concepts of postcolonialism and the pedagogy of Empire. This essay will argue that Kipling provides three different approaches to children’s education that each can be considered the most suitable alternative for a young white orphan in British India during the late nineteenth century.
It has been said that ‘[n]obody can teach you British India better than Rudyard Kipling’ (Watts 5). Cedric Watts writes in the introduction to *Kim*\(^1\) that Kipling ‘[i]n this unconventional narrative,… takes us on a cleverly-guided tour of India as he had observed it during British rule towards the end of the nineteenth century; and the tour is remarkably informative, socially, philosophically and politically’ (5). In order to make sense of this prodigious story this essay will begin with presenting a section of valuable background knowledge about the colonial era and how postcolonialism can be understood in relation to this novel.

According to Ania Loomba colonialism refers to a type of settlement in a new country, where a group of people settle and begin to develop a society which is bound to the country where the settlers originate from, the mother country (19). The colonisation of a country can appear in different shapes and forms, and the one that will be of use in this essay is the one that Loomba refers to as *the modern colonialism* (21). In India, where Kipling’s novel is set, Britain focused on the ‘military, administrative and economic apparatus’ (Loomba 23). They wished to govern India through already existing local authorities by providing a helping hand in order to steer their colony in the direction that would be most profitable to the British Empire (23).

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, the authors of the book *Postcolonial Studies – The Key Concepts* (2013), all agree on the fact that the term postcolonialism has been forced to widen itself in order make room for all of the numerous studies and areas that are included in the theory (205). Violet Bridget Lunga’s article “Postcolonial Theory: A Language for a Critique of Globalization?” explains that postcolonial theory can be classified ‘into three different categories’ (192). Lunga believes that these three categories can be separated into either geographical or historical interests, or that postcolonial theory can be looked upon ‘as a critique or a textual approach to realities of oppression and subjugation’ (192). In conclusion,

it is safe to say that postcolonialism is a very complex theory due to the many different areas of study that are included.

Some of the previously mentioned authors stand behind the fact that it is very difficult to decide where colonialism ends and where postcolonialism begins (Loomba 28, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 205). This debate is exactly what makes postcolonial theory so interesting when approaching Kipling’s novel. The novel was published in 1901, which can be counted as the glory days of the British Empire. It allows readers from different time periods to explore how Kipling viewed his beloved India and also Britain, the country where he spent some parts of his life. Due to his ability to capture the essence of different attitudes towards the British Empire in his characters, not only allows us to reflect on how our current world order actually looks like. It also makes it possible for us to ask ourselves if superiority among e.g. countries still exists, or if the world can be understood as postcolonial altogether.

Furthermore, a section about the pedagogy of Empire will serve as a foundation for the analysis as it will describe the British Empire’s attitude towards education. Two different aspects of pedagogy will be brought up here. First of all, a historical perspective will provide examples of how Britain chose to implement their view on education in their crown colony, India. As a result of the actual colonisation of India, many children lost their parents and were put in orphanages (Sen 463-64). It soon became evident that these children were in need of proper education. The British saw a perfect opportunity to steer these children in right direction and place them wherever they believed the children would serve the empire most effectively. It was also a way to protect their own race - the white race – from going ‘native in the bazar’ (Sen 470). These orphan children needed to be put in the right hands, in the hands of the British Empire. By doing so, these children would become an imperial asset and not an inconvenience to the empire (470).
Second of all, it will be of interest to bring in a present day perspective on colonial literature into this essay. Novels such as Kipling’s *Kim* has been appreciated by readers and critics over a long period of time, and it has also served as an inspirational source for e.g. Lord Baden-Powell. A man who initiated the Scouting Movement in England in the early twentieth century (Flynn 56, Said 13).

In order to tie it all together in the analysis, both postcolonial theory and the pedagogy of Empire will be discussed in relation to the novel and other source material that deals with Kipling’s *Kim*. 
2. Postcolonial theory

In order to reach a proper understanding of the term *postcolonialism*, it would be useful to begin with a short description of the term *colonialism*. According to the description in *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) that Loomba uses in her article, the term colonialism derives from ‘the Roman [word] “colonia” which mean[s] … “settlement”’ (20). It is a description of a settlement in a new country, where a group of people settle and begin to develop a society which is bound to the country where the settlers originate from, the mother country. This alliance is said to exist as long as the union between the new colony and the colonisers is maintained (19). To be able to form, or re-form, a new society within the borders of the colonised country or area, the colonizers had to use several different methods, such as negotiations, pillage, warfare, genocide, enslavement and trade (20). What Loomba finds remarkable about this description from Oxford English Dictionary is that it does not mention the original inhabitants that lived in the country before it became a colony. The notion colonialism is more or less only seen through the eyes of the coloniser and is stripped from events like dominance, conquest and confrontation. Colonialism can thus be defined as the conquest and control of other people’s land and resources (20).

Furthermore, Loomba makes a distinction between the different periods of colonialism. The one that will be of use in this essay is the one that she refers to as *the modern colonialism*. The modern colonialism did not only settle for tribute, wealth and merchandise, the colonisers also chose to restructure the economy in the colonies, which created an interdependence among colonisers and colonies. This interdependence is what separates the so called modern colonialism from earlier colonialism according to Loomba (21).

‘[M]odern colonialism was established alongside capitalism in Western Europe’ (Loomba 21). Both colonial and colonised countries could gain something from the ‘flow of human and natural resources’ (21) that occurred during this period. In India it was more of an
administrative colonisation, especially if the movement from ‘the colonising country to the colony’ (23) is taken into consideration. The movement ‘was controlled through [a] military, administrative and economic apparatus’ (23) and the colonisers, Britain, did not make that many changes to the already established power structure within India. Britain operated from within existing local authorities, which did not disturb the hierarchy that the natives had already built up (23).

Postcolonialism ‘was first used to refer to cultural interactions within colonial societies in literary circles’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 204), but later on the term post has been used to describe and debate the changes, traumas and experiences that took place within the societies and countries that once were occupied or ruled by Europeans (204). With the years that have passed since the colonial era, postcolonialism has in a sense been forced to widen itself to be able to include numerous studies and analyses within different areas (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 205).

Postcolonial theory can be classified ‘into three interrelated categories’ (Lunga 192). First of all, postcolonial theory is used to acknowledge what happened in certain geographical territories. It is of interest to investigate what happened to the people within a former colony, as well as what happened to the ex-colony as a whole. Secondly, postcolonial theory refers to a specific period in history, the period that follows after a country has been colonised, but it could also deal with ‘the time following independence’ (192). Last but not least, the theory is used ‘as a critique or a textual approach to realities of oppression and subjugation’ (192). The main interest here is to focus on literature that has been written in or by an author that originates from colonised countries, especially those who once were colonised by European countries. In addition to this, the postcolonial theory also takes an interest in literature that ‘draws on colonial experiences for subject matter’ (192). What is of interest within postcolonial literature is how
the writers depict cultural identities and how they ‘delve into questions of agency and resistance’ (192).

According to Lunga, ‘[p]ostcolonial theory sets out to deconstruct notions of colonial power and superiority’ (193). Furthermore, it is not a secret that postcolonial theory is very complex due to the fact that there are so many different areas of study included in the theory, such as e.g. identity, race, ethnicity and gender. Although it is evident that postcolonial theory contains a lot of perspectives and approaches, there are still some things that keep them all together. It is safe to say that ‘postcolonial theory involves a plethora of critical thinking and questioning’ (Lunga 193).

It is easy to assume that the concept ‘postcolonialism’ means that the era of colonialism is over ‘because the descendants of once-colonised people live everywhere’ (Loomba 28). The term has, however, been a topic for discussion as previously stated above. One of the main issues that Loomba, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin find is the prefix *post*. Loomba believes that the prefix ‘implies an “aftermath” in two senses’ (28), namely temporal, as well as ideological. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin agree with her, and wish to add that it is difficult to decide when colonialism ends and when postcolonialism begins (205). Critics have expressed the need to question the later meaning of postcolonialism by claiming that it might be too soon to say that colonialism does no longer exist, since so many inequalities from the colonial age still remain. Some countries may still be economically or culturally dependent on their former mother countries which creates an ‘imbalance between “first” and “third” world nations’ (Loomba 28-29). Our current world order still allows superior countries to influence and ‘penetrate’ (29) other nations, especially when it comes to culture, economy and politics. Due to this, critics feel the need to question if one could actually say that a country that once was colonised by another, ‘can be seen as properly “postcolonial”’ (Loomba 29) today. When speaking of postcolonialism today, one can clearly understand, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, that the term is
used to ‘examine the process and effects of, and reactions to, European colonialism from the sixteenth century up to and including the neo-colonialism of the present day’ (205).

With this in mind, it is therefore of great importance to study postcolonial literature in order to understand that the injustice in power relations between nations has not changed much since the colonial era. These injustices may have presented themselves in different disguises over the years, but they cannot be overlooked due on the fact that they are still present in today’s society. The rise of new superpowers, such as the United States, along with former colonial powers, ‘continue[s] to play a decisive role in [Third World countries’] cultures and economies through new instruments of indirect control’ (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 178). Neo-colonialism is a term that has been used ‘to refer to any and all forms of control of the ex-colonies after political independence’ (178). The new superpowers and former ex-colonies are still able to control or influence other countries through e.g. multinational corporations, international monetary bodies ‘and through a variety of other educational and cultural NGOs’ (178). Furthermore, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin claim that neo-colonialism has been associated with Third World economies and their inability to develop a sustainable economy, due to the pressure of globalisation. The nation that now holds a steady grip of the baton today is the United States, ‘whose expansionist policy past and present, … constitutes a new form of imperialism’ (178).

3. The Pedagogy of Empire

This essay will deal with two different aspects of pedagogy which will be of use in order to conduct a thorough analysis of Kipling’s Kim. The following sections will begin with providing a historical perspective on how the British Empire looked upon education and how this was implemented in their crown colony, India. In addition to this, it will be of interest to bring in a present day perspective to examine how colonial literature, such as Kim, has been used as a
source of inspiration and what it can teach us about the British Empire – many years after the actual events occurred.

An empire, in a traditional sense, is described as a consequence of imperialism by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin. It refers to the sovereign nations, such as Britain, that during the colonial period took the power over other countries beyond their own borders (93).²

In the middle of the nineteenth century, many children from different nationalities, races and social classes became orphans due to events directly in connection to the British colonisation of India. Satadru Sen claims that some “‘disappeared’ through bureaucratic and political inventions’ (463) and there were others who died from events that was of interest to the state. Their children were left without someone who could look after and care for them, but ‘the colonial state and its semi-official allies, usually from the church’ (Sen 463) saw their chance to step in. The state and the church began to form relationships with e.g. children of diseased white subalterns, poor Indians and aborigines, whom all became ‘objects of wonder, anxiety, debate, coercion, and assorted other pleasures of colonialism’ (Sen 464) due to their unique traits. The amount of children that were put in orphanages during this time increased quite quickly and it soon became evident that these children were also in need of education. A man named Henry Lawrence established the Lawrence Asylum in 1846, an orphanage ‘[s]ituated in the Himalaya foothills’ (Sen 468) in Sanawar. This orphanage was the first of many that came to be associated with Lawrence (Sen 468). He, and his wife, acknowledged that there was ‘a mismatch between the environment of the colony and a racialised and sentimentalised childhood’ (Sen 468) and hoped that his new orphanage would be ‘an asylum from … the demoralising influences of barrack life’ (Sen 469). This orphanage was meant to function as a stable environment for white European soldiers’ children, where they could live and be trained to fit the purposes that the British Empire had decided for them (469).

² From here on now, whenever the word empire is used in this essay it will refer to the British Empire.
Lawrence’s establishment can according to Sen, be seen as an indication of the political and intellectual value that white orphans had gained in India after the war. The government decided to fund the Lawrence Asylum and had strong beliefs that this sort of training, ‘in habits of order, industry and religion’ (Sen 469) would without a doubt be beneficial to society. It was also a matter of taking precautions in order to protect their own race, to be able to keep the white children white, and not risk that they would ‘go native in the bazaar’ (470), as Sen puts it. As understood in Sen’s article, the children of white subalterns could have become an inconvenience to the British Empire, but when put in the care of ‘parents of the right sort’ (470), they no longer remained a threat. If white children, however, were to grow up embracing the lifestyle and values of the natives, the Indians, and later wished to claim their right as Europeans, they would threaten the very existence of the white populations ‘racial prestige of the Raj’ (470). These so called Eurasians created a fear in the colonisers, a fear of losing the grip and letting an unprofitable community consisting of ‘Indianised English … [exposing] the worst qualities of both races’ (470) compete with the colonisers positions in society.

Not all agreed that the Eurasians would bring nothing but trouble. Gautam Chakravarty has made a very interesting claim saying that Eurasians should also be seen as an imperial asset (Sen 470). Furthermore, he suggests ‘that colonial counter-insurgency bifurcated the nineteenth-century European discourse of war by relegating the definitive immortality of “irregular” warfare to the “irregular” races’ (Sen 471). If Eurasian children were cared for at an early age, some believed that they could actually become an asset to the British Empire, as well as to India. With the correct type of training they could serve the government ‘more efficiently than the natives’ (471) and from an economical perspective they would not cost as much as the Europeans did either. The colonial state took advantages of the fact that these stray children were not natives and their ‘latent biological roots in whiteness’ (471) and they became a part of ‘larger experiments of matching bodies, places and institutional regimes’ (471).
Kipling’s *Kim* is first and foremost a piece of children’s literature. Jerry Phillips and Ian Wojcik-Andrews acknowledge the importance of what we teach children through different kinds of medium, such as movies or books (69-70). They argue that we must acknowledge these mediums not only as ‘a pedagogical apparatus actively involved in diverse identity formations, but also for the construction of national identities in the service of global expansionism and colonialism’ (71).

As pointed out by Richard Flynn, Kipling’s novels and short stories have been appreciated by readers and critics for a very long time, mainly due to the fact that the stories invite the readers to take part of the ‘the tensions “between two worlds” – the worlds of innocence and experience, child and adult’ (55). Kipling’s way of depicting, for example, the British Empire did not only attract readers and literary critics. Edward Said fills in and claims that Kipling’s writing also inspired Lord Baden-Powell to develop ‘ideas about “boyology”’ (13), ideas that were greatly influenced by the boys in Kipling’s novels, especially Mowgli. Later, Lord Baden-Powell came to develop and initiate the Scouting Movement in England, in 1907 and 1908 (Flynn 56, Said 13). Flynn argues that ‘Kipling’s Mowgli and Kim… tell a distinct and specifiable political story in which adventure is indistinguishable from surveillance, pleasure intertwined with power, and the values of childhood a thin allegory for imperial ideology’ (56). Lord Baden-Powell believed that the adventures of Kim could be seen as a great way to demonstrate how a Boy Scout can serve his country if given the correct training and education (Flynn 56). Many have also criticised the Boy Scouts for only serving ‘the self-interest of the upper classes’ (56) due to the emphasis on discipline and for controlling young children’s will in order to summon them to serve the community as a whole. The Boy Scouts was described as ‘a service designed to produce row after row of bright-eyed, eager and resourceful little middle-class servants of the empire’ (Said 14).
4. Analysis

It has been argued that although Kim lost both of his birthparents at a very young age, he has become ‘the adopt[ive] son of many substitute parents’ (Plotz 114). Among all the characters in *Kim*, the substitute parents have by Judith A. Plotz been narrowed down to the following; Colonel Creighton, Lurgan Sahib and Hurree Babu. I would however, like to argue that there are other characters that play a much bigger part than Lurgan Sahib and Hurree Babu, and fill the roles as father figures in Kim’s life, namely Mahbub Ali and the lama. Kipling has filled his novel with ‘wonderful fathers, all dedicated men in their different ways, each representing a different possibility of experience’ (Plotz 114). Colonel Creighton, Mahbub Ali and the lama all view life from different perspectives and they approach Kim’s need for education in three separate ways. Through these three different perspectives, the reader is able to see the difference in Kim’s persona as his surrogate fathers influence him between the ages of thirteen to seventeen. The following sections will focus on these three characters individually in order to depict how they influence Kim’s educational path and how their point of view could be used to understand the larger concepts of postcolonialism and the pedagogy of Empire.

4.1 Colonel Creighton

As a consequence of the British colonisation of India many children lost their parents and were left to live with relatives or even strangers. Kipling’s Kim is one of those children, left all alone in the care of a half-cast, opium-dealing woman who ‘pretend[s] to keep a second-hand furniture shop’ (Kipling 31) in Lahore, India. It is rather fascinating to follow Kipling’s story about Kim and to be able to see how much it corresponds with the India as it has been described in history books during the beginning of the nineteenth century. Sen points out the fact that both the state and the church took an interest in orphan children during this period, as previously presented in the theory section (436). Sen argues that these white children were meant to be used for purposes that would be beneficial to the British Empire. Kipling decides that his Kim
is to be protected from missionaries, and does this by letting the woman who takes care of Kim lie and tell the missionaries ‘that she [is] Kim’s mother’s sister’ (Kipling 31). Otherwise there is a great risk that Kim will be taken off the streets, which they all want to avoid at any cost. Kim does however turn into an ‘object of wonder’ (Sen 464) as the story develops which Sen describes as a ‘pleasure of colonialism’ (464).

There are a many characters that take an interest in Kim, one of them being Colonel Creighton who works within the Ethnological Survey. He has been described as ‘a figure of watching and control’ (Plotz 121) and as ‘the prime mover of the Great Game’ (354) by Krupa Shandilya. Colonel Creighton is a man who in a sense can be seen as the personification of the mentality of the British Empire. He is a man who radiates authority, or as Said describes him - ‘a man whose power is eminently worthy of respect’ (32). Furthermore, Colonel Creighton is portrayed as a ‘discrete director of events’ (Said 32) and that he has an immense interest in everything that is Indian due to the fact that it is ‘so significant for his rule’ (32).

As he is introduced to Kim by Father Victor and Mahbub Ali, they try to convince Colonel Creighton that the best place to send Kim is to ‘St Xavier’s in Partibus at Lucknow [as it is] the best schooling a boy [can] get in India’ (Kipling 108). The other alternative is to send him to ‘the Military Orphanage at Sanawar’ (Kipling 117) where he can live until he will be old enough to enlist and become a soldier. After much consideration Father Victor, Colonel Creighton, the lama and Mahbub Ali all reach an agreement and decide to send Kim to the school at Lucknow (Kipling 125). Colonel Creighton believes that it would be a waste not to take on a boy with such talent ‘“if he is as advertised”’ (Kipling 122).

Just like the white orphanages, such as the one founded by Henry Lawrence in 1846, St Xavier’s is depicted in *Kim* as an institution that honours discipline and education (Sen 469, Kipling 132-33). Here Kim will be trained to serve the British Empire well, which was the main purpose to why the orphans of white subalterns were sent away to places like this (Sen 469).
Kim attends school with a promise from Father Victor that “[t]hey’ll make a man o’ you, O’Hara, at St Xavier’s – a white man, an’, I hope, a good man” (Kipling 128). At the madrissah [school] Kim will be protected from the world outside, a safe place where the white race will not be in contact with the native people of India. Here Kim learns how to read and write in English and to draw maps of mountains, rivers and roads (Kipling 128, 138). Kim also shows ‘a great aptitude for mathematical studies’ (Kipling 166).

At the madrissah all of Kim’s native traits are supposed to be washed away to hinder him from becoming one of the boys that ‘go native altogether’ (Kipling 134) which is not appreciated at all at St Xavier’s. When Kim has followed through with his studies he will become a person who commands natives, just like Colonel Creighton (Kipling 134). The school does however turn out to be a bad match for Kim as he feels like a slave and therefore decides to take a holiday, which lasts for about sixty days (Kipling 140, 152). He will return to the madrissah on one condition, ‘that [his] time is given to [him] without question when the madrissah is shut…. At the madrissah [he] will learn. In the madrissah [he] will be a Sahib. But when the madrissah is shut, then must [he] be free and go among [his] people. Otherwise [he] die!’ (Kipling 142-43). This can be interpreted as a failure for Colonel Creighton, and to the white race in general, as well as for the British Empire. Their inability to educate their own people and to keep them from embracing the lifestyle and values that Sen argues were very important in order to protect the state and the pureness of the white race (470). “At the Gates of Learning we were taught that to abstain from action was unbefitting a Sahib. And I am a Sahib [says Kim]”’ (Kipling 207). This is a clear example of how the Englishmen put their own values, culture and people above and in front of others, which in turn indicates that this power structure was indeed very natural for the English people at the time (Shandilya 350).

As Colonel Creighton takes on the role as Kim’s mentor he strongly believes that Kim also needs to master these white, English skills, which is why he sends Kim to Lurgan Sahib
when Kim refuses to go back to St Xavier’s (Shandilya 354). Here Kim it taught to play the ‘Jewel Game’ (Kipling 161), a memory game. This is the beginning of the Great Game for Kim. The beginning of his training to become a spy within the Secret Service, without him even realising that he is actually being schooled (Kipling 152). It is no coincidence that Kim is taught this game, for it will be very useful for him as spy, as his eyes and ears will become everything. Colonel Creighton operates through Mr Lurgan, making sure that Kim’s talent is not wasted just because he is not in school with him.

Nevertheless, Colonel Creighton fascination for Kim develops and he finds himself thinking that it is ‘absurd that a man of his position should take an interest in a little country-bred vagabond’ (Kipling 137). Kipling on the other hand, wished for his readers to understand that ‘Colonel Creighton’s interest in Kim was directly paternal’ (177). Therefore it perhaps becomes even more difficult for Colonel Creighton to let Kim go altogether and once again he acts as a discrete director of events, as he orders Hurree Babu to watch over Kim and the lama during the six months that they spend together in their search for enlightenment and the holy river, the River of Arrows, towards the end of the novel. Afterwards Colonel Creighton wishes for Kim to return and work ‘as an assistant chain-man in the Canal Department’ (Kipling 176).

Kipling allows Kim to move freely between and among different casts, religions and people and it becomes more and more clear that Kim can be recognised as Eurasian. Although Colonel Creighton only focuses on himself and what he can gain from it all, I will argue that there is no sign of fear from this coloniser when it comes to Kim and his heritage. Colonel Creighton takes an advantage of the fact that Kim has ‘latent biological roots of whiteness’ (Sen 471), but is still convinced that he will be able to turn him into a Sahib altogether. The fact that Kim has grown up among natives fascinates Colonel Creighton a great deal. Shandilya argues that the main reason that Colonel Creighton believes that Kim is in need of a proper education is so that he can learn how to ‘operate the Orient’ (354). She explains that through his job, the
Colonel is able to reveal ‘how the Orient operates by creating geographical and ethnological maps’ (354). According to Colonel Creighton there is “‘no sin so great as ignorance’” (Kipling 129). Furthermore he also says that “[t]he more one knows about natives the less can one say what they will or won’t do”’ (Kipling 123). Said claims that ‘Creighton embodies the notion that you cannot govern India unless you know India, and to know India means understanding the way it operates’ (34). Kim can in other words be turned into the perfect imperial tool for Colonel Creighton. Here Kipling’s novel coincides with Sen’s theory about white orphans and the fact that they were looked upon as a valuable asset to the state, if put in the care of ‘parents of the right sort’ (Sen 470).

4.2 Mahbub Ali
The main difference between Colonel Creighton and Mahbub Ali is, of course, the fact that Mahbub Ali originates from the Orient and Colonel Creighton from Britain. They do however seem to share the same joy for the Great Game, but from different starting positions. As previously mentioned Colonel Creighton is depicted as the leader, whereas Mahbub Ali is the exotic man from the Orient whom accepts the presence of the British Empire in India, and is also grateful towards the protection that the English can provide for them. Even though he is an employee within the Secret Service, Mahbub Ali is still a man with great authority, exactly as Colonel Creighton, which seems to be something that Kim finds appealing.

When Kipling introduces Mahbub Ali as an old friend of Kim, the readers are led to believe that this man has played a big part in the little boy’s life, which also turns out to be true. Mahbub Ali comes from ‘that mysterious land beyond the Passes of the North’ (Kipling 45), namely Afghanistan, and he is a Sunni Muslim (Kipling 149). As recognised by Donna Landry and Caroline Rooney, he is ‘a representative of the wilderness that lies beyond the frontier’ (62). To the large masses he is known to be working as a horse-trader (Kipling 45), but as
Kipling’s readers get to know him a little bit better it turns out that this is in fact only his official title. Behind this disguise Mahbub Ali operates as a spy, known as C25, within ‘the Indian Survey Department’ (Kipling 47). Mahbub Ali does in a sense operate as a talent scout as he moves around in India, being able to scout for potential new talents to bring into the Secret Service. He befriends Kim at a very early age, which coincides with Gautam Chakravarty’s notion about Eurasian children being viewed an imperial asset (Sen 471). Mahbub Ali does not seem to care about the fact that Kim has gone ‘native in the bazaar’ (Sen 470), and he does not believe that this is something that need to be washed away in order for Kim to become a good servant of the Empire. Between the ages of ten and thirteen, Mahbub Ali many times asks Kim to spy on people for him and in return Kim is offered a proper meal from the cook-shop or money (Kipling 45). He is also the first one to introduce Kim to the Great Game, as he asks Kim to deliver a message from him to an Englishman in Umballa, more specifically to Colonel Creighton (Kipling 47).

Mahbub Ali’s character represents an alternative approach to Kim’s education. Although he has a positive attitude towards the British Empire, he is not convinced that Kim should be put in an institution such as St Xavier’s. “‘They will send him to a school and put heavy boots on his feet and swaddle him in these clothes. Then he will forget all he knows’” (Kipling 120). Mahbub Ali cares deeply for Kim and refers to him as his son as Plotz points out in her article, and Kim has played with Mahbub Ali’s horses since he was a little baby (Kipling 120, 173, Plotz 114). It is therefore not a great surprise that Kim turns to him for advice and comfort as the white men try to put Kim in school against his will (Kipling 123, 173).

When Kim decides to take a holiday from St Xavier’s he lets Mahbub Ali know where he is, and he becomes the one who has to tell Colonel Creighton that Kim will not come back to school just yet (Kipling 136). It also turns out that Mahbub Ali was right all along, “‘[t]he madrissah wearied him… It is as though a polo-pony, breaking loose, ran out to learn the game
alone”” (Kipling 136). Colonel Creighton is not pleased with this sort of behaviour, but Mahbub Ali steps in as ‘the Hand of Friendship’ (Kipling 138), as a mediator between the two and explains that Kim ‘is but perfecting his knowledge’ (Kipling 137). Mahbub Ali tries to convince Colonel Creighton that if Kim wish to take another holiday in the future, it should be with him. Then Mahbub Ali will be able to keep a watchful eye on the boy. The Colonel seems to worry that Kim might get hurt as he walks the road all alone, but Mahbub Ali is calm. Kim was ““born in the land. He has friends. He goes where he chooses. He is a chabuk sawai [a sharp chap]”” (Kipling 120). Mahbub Ali shows great support and stands up for Kim on several occasions, almost like a big brother, or a father that allows his child to learn from his own mistakes. Mahbub Ali also has an immense amount of trust towards Kim, as he is ‘the one soul in the world who ha[s] never told him a lie’ (Kipling 49).

Kim wishes to follow Mahbub Ali and not go back to school, because he believes that ‘now [he learns] every day’ (Kipling 144) and Mahbub Ali takes him on as his ‘new horse-boy’ (Kipling 143). Later on they are however forced to follow orders from Colonel Creighton and Kim is placed in Sahib Lurgan’s care (Kipling 152). Mahbub Ali is far from pleased with the fact that Kim is kept away from him and the Great Game. ““[T]hey take the best years of a man to teach him what he can only learn upon the Road.… The pony [Kim] is made – finished – mouthed and paced, Sahib! From now on, day by day, he will lose his manners if he is kept at tricks. Drop the rein on his back and let go…. We need him’ (Kipling 173). Kipling introduce an alternative way for children’s learning than the previous one that Colonel Creighton prefers, which takes place behind a desk. The one that Mahbub Ali’s character imposes, involves more hands on practices where a teacher engages with the child, in other words learning by doing.

Mahbub is also very keen on letting Kim go to be with his lama (Kipling 174). Colonel Creighton finally agrees and Kim is allowed to follow his dear lama for six months, before he has to return to take employment as a chain-man (Kipling 175-76, 187).
As have been pointed out above, Mahbub tends to refer to Kim as a pony, which can be connected to the native traits that is found in Kim (Kipling 136, 173). Both Kim and Mahbub are born in the Orient, and Kipling chooses to enhance some of their non-English traits throughout the novel. Kim is a wild horse just like Mahbub Ali. Mahbub Ali is not as well polished as Colonel Creighton. Among other things – he gets drunk, he makes a lot of money selling horses and seduces women (Kipling 49). Colonel Creighton does not always trusts that Mahbub Ali is the best choice when it comes to protecting Kim. He believes that Mahbub Ali is capable ‘of leading [Kim] into … danger’ (Kipling 175).

It is possible to argue that Mahbub Ali’s intentions might not be as friendly as they come across. One example that is worth mentioning is the fact that he never tells Kim that he is working as a spy (Kipling 47). There is also the fact that Mahbub Ali so desperately wants Kim to become a part of the Great Game and therefore tries to push people in the direction where he wishes for Kim to end up. Without him, Kim would perhaps never have been introduced to Colonel Creighton, nor the Great Game. Landry and Rooney argue that Mahbub Ali sees Kim as a horse that has to be broken in. Kim becomes a person that both of his masculine, authoritarian father figures wish to tame and manipulate to fit their own political purposes (Landry and Rooney 62). They see ‘the breaking-in process’ (62) as a way to educate and civilise both the native and their own people. In conclusion, Mahbub Ali does in many ways resemble Colonel Creighton and he adopts the imperial mindset that coincides with descriptions found in both Sen’s and Shandilya’s articles presented above.

4.3 The lama
Said acknowledges that Kipling’s novel is dominated by male characters and that the Great Game is thereby presented as a game that only men are fit to play (Said 12). As mentioned in the previous sections about Colonel Creighton and Mahbub Ali, it is evident that the novel here
has two very strong male role models. Due to the distinct difference between these two and the lama, Landry and Rooney evoke the following question – ‘Would the lama be mama?’ (63). It is possible to make such a claim as it can be argued that the lama is in the possession of traits that come across as rather feminine in comparison to the two other masculine father figures. Neither Colonel Creighton, nor Mahbub Ali, express strong feelings of affection towards Kim throughout the novel, at least not to the extent that the lama expresses his feelings about the young boy. After only three days on the road together, the lama tells Kim that he has never loved a person as much as him and that he admires Kim for being ‘thoughtful, wise and courageous’ (Kipling 88).

Based on this information, the obvious answer to Landry’s and Rooney’s question about the lama being mama would in a sense be yes, but I beg to differ. The main reason is due to the fact that Kim does not refer to the lama as his mother. Although there is a clear absence of female characters in the novel, there is one character that seem to have captured Kim’s heart, namely the Kulu woman. This woman appears several times in Kim, and is the one who takes on the responsibility to nurse Kim back into health in the end of the novel (Kipling 259). Kim expresses that he will be eternally grateful to her for saving his life and here he addresses the Kulu woman as mother (Kipling 259).

Plotz argues that the most central relationship of the Kipling’s novel is the one between the lama and Kim (Plotz 118). The two characters begin to form a relationship right from the opening pages of Kipling’s novel. Kim is utterly amazed as he first lays eyes on the lama, he ‘who though he knew all castes, had never seen [such a man]’ (Kipling 33). Kim and his friends in the bazaar believe that this foreign old man is a Khitai3 or a Pahari4, but he is in fact a Tibetan lama who follows Buddhism of the Middle Way (Kipling 34-35). The description of the lama’s appearance and profession indicates that there is a clear presence of otherness in the novel

---

3 A Chinaman, description provided by Rudyard Kipling.
4 A hillman, description provided by Rudyard Kipling.
Landry and Rooney argue that the lama really stands out from the other character in this strong imperial setting, which is indeed an accurate observation (69).

It is very interesting that Kipling has chosen to bring in a Buddhist lama into the novel, as stated by Young Hee Kwon in the article, “The Buddhist Sub-Text and the Imperial Soul-Making in Kim”. Kwon explains that Buddhism hit Britain in the 1860s and was considered a strong contender to Christianity. This so called ‘cultural invasion from the East’ (Kwon 21) was a result of Britain’s interest in expanding their own borders. The British did however reach a point where they could not see how ‘the moral demands of Buddhism’ (Kwon 21) would be a good fit to their own ‘ideal of material progress, the foundational value of Western capitalism’ (21). They also began to fear that Buddhism would rule out Christianity altogether due to the fact that a lot of people took an interest in the new and exciting influences that flowed through Britain during the shift between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That is to say that when Kipling’s novel was published in 1901, it flirted with an ‘audience [that was] eager to consume narratives of Buddhist terminologies, mantra, exotic priests and so on’ (Kwon 22).

Both the lama and the imperial characters try to win Kim over and make him a participant of either ‘the Wheel of Life’ (Kipling 40) or the Great Game. Kipling has chosen to portray his lama as rather apolitical and thereby also allowing the imperial characters to make fun of him and diminishing his spiritual quest (Kwon 21). A perspective that can be understood as a desire to shed light on the situation that Kipling was a part of during the late 1800s described above.

The main reason why some characters make fun of the lama and Buddhism, can be understood by the facts that are brought up in Kwon’s article. They are afraid of the exotic and religious influences that the lama practices, and believe that these values are not suitable for a white, English boy like Kim. The servants of the empire have decided that the lama is not a
good influence on Kim, as they cannot ‘see what concern this fakir has with the boy’ (Kipling 103).

The lama, on the other hand, only desires to do good deeds in the world that he lives in. Despite that he is devastated over the fact that Kim is leaving him to follow the white soldiers and go to St Xavier’s, he quickly accepts Kim’s fate. The lama blames himself, for it is not okay for a follower of the Middle Way to give in to personal desires or attach themselves to anything or anyone (Kipling 106-07). In order to stay true to his faith, he decides to pay for Kim’s education. The lama says ‘[t]o help the ignorant to wisdom is always a merit’ (Kipling 108). At the same time, he is worried that Kim will end up like the white men – ‘men [who] follow desire and come to emptiness’ (Kipling 107). Kim on the other hand could not be more satisfied or grateful towards the lama. Although he is upset about the fact that he has to leave the lama in order to enter ‘the Gates of Learning’ (Kipling 131), Kim is in strong belief that the lama has changed his life for the better. Kim says, “I was made wise by thee, Holy One” … “My teaching I owe to thee. I have eaten thy bread three years. My time is finished. I am loosed from the schools. I come to thee” (Kipling 188). He is finally allowed to once more take the road with the lama, to be his disciple. Then again, there is a huge difference in their relationship now that Kim identifies himself as a Sahib (Kipling 188).

Plotz points out that no matter how much Kim loves his lama, his involvement with the Great Game comes in between them and hinder a real relationship between him and India. In this case then, Colonel Creighton and Mahbub Ali are to be blamed for dragging Kim into their world, and for depriving Kim of his freedom (Plotz 118). Then again, Plotz also claims that Kim is the perfect mixture between ‘a good British subject as well as a loving son of India’ (116) and that Kipling saw this as an ideal person to govern his birth country.

With that being said, it is of great importance to bring in the following dialogue between the lama and Mahbub Ali:
‘He is my disciple. He was sent, I think to guide me to that River. Sitting under a gun was I when he came suddenly. Such things have befallen the fortune to whom guidance was allowed. But I remember now, he said he was of this world – a Hindu’ [says the lama].

‘And his name?’ [Mahbub Ali asks]

‘That I did not ask. Is he not my disciple?’

‘His country – his race – his village? Mussalman – Sikh Hindu – Jain – low caste or high?’

‘Why should I ask? There is neither high not low in Middle Way.’ (Kipling 46)

This can be interpreted as a way for Kipling to challenge the British Empire and their approach to the wild Orientals. A person’s race, colour or religion should never be the deal breaker, not then, not now, not ever.

In addition, the lama wishes to sit ‘side by side with all castes and peoples’ (Kipling 53). To him there is no need to rank a certain race, caste, profession or religion before any other. Each living thing on this earth serves its own unique purpose, just like the snake that the lama hinders Kim from killing. Even though this cobra represents pure evil, the lama explains to Kim that his life is not worth less than theirs. ‘He is upon the Wheel as we are – a life ascending or descending – very far from deliverance…. Let him live out his life’ (Kipling 66). Everyone is ought to be treated with respect, for we are all equal. The lama wishes his ‘brother’ [the snake] (Kipling 66) all the best and that his release may come soon.

As pointed out by Shandilya, ‘Kim suggests that the only way to govern India wisely is to respect and accommodate its differences – whether racial, historical or religious’ (349). We are all different and we can all learn from each other. We can all gain from working with each other and not against one another.
5. Conclusion

The aim with this essay was to show how Colonel Creighton, Mahbub Ali and the lama individually influence Kim’s education and how their point of view can be used to understand the larger concepts of postcolonial theory and the pedagogy of Empire. With the analysis in mind it is evident that Kipling has managed to incorporate three distinctively different characters that all stand for their own unique approach to Kim and his educational path.

What is truly remarkable about this novel is that it gives the impression of being very positive towards the British Empire and the way the British operated during the late nineteenth century in India. Kipling provides a nice portrayal of the British Empire and has chosen to leave out such things as the many casualties that was brought upon both countries as a consequence of the British colonisation of India. Kim’s childhood is filled with adventures, life and the freedom of choice. There is hardly any sign of hardship or misery. It is no wonder that Lord Baden-Powell was so inspired by this story about the little white boy who plays the Great Game so well. Since the novel was intended for children, a lot of boys maybe dreamt of becoming like Kim, and what could be better than joining the Boy Scouts to live out that dream.

Kipling was able to foresee the need for Britain to govern India well, which is well portrayed in the character Colonel Creighton. He is able to incorporate what he believes is the best way to approach the Orient, how to govern the natives and make the people act as the British pleased. If everyone were to be like Colonel Creighton, then everything would end up well. His interest in the natives, their customs and their culture, is important in order to move forward and to enable change. The epistemological curiosity in Colonel Creighton was the key in order for him to become the great leader. The truth is that one country cannot govern another, if there is a lack of knowledge or understanding between them. It is easier to stay civil and maintain peace if the countries involved are able to understand each other’s differences.
In Mahbub Ali’s character we are able to find a person who accepts the British rule over India, whom obey to their authority and guidance. He is willing to work for the British Empire and in return receive protection against those who wish to harm him. Being born in the Orient he is also considered a wild animal that needs to be tamed, which he seems perfectly fine with. He is keen on getting Kim involved in the Great Game and is perhaps the only one of his substitute fathers that is able to appreciate and accept Kim for who he is. Throughout the novel he wishes to make sure that Kim is able to stay true to what makes him so special and unique. Kim’s Eurasian traits are under no circumstances allowed to be washed away. This is what makes Kim an imperial asset to the British Empire.

The lama on the other hand, is a character that has been brought in to flirt with the readers who found Buddhism to be exotic, a very well thought through decision by Kipling in order for him to attract a larger audience. The lama serves as an important reminder that there is always an alternative way to live. His calm, collected persona and the way he lives his life challenges the beliefs of the British Empire which creates a very interesting twist in the novel. He forces Kim to see that there are other options in life available for him and that those could work out just as fine as those provided by the two other imperial characters.

Kim finds a way to accept the British Empire through the help that he receives from all of his substitute fathers. They all try to remind him about the fact that he is Sahib, and that he is entitled to all of the privileges that come with it. Kim does struggle with his identity throughout the whole novel, but in the end it does seem like he finally reaches a point of acceptance regarding his destiny and what is to become of his future.

It is also possible to see Kim as India, and him being colonised by the British Empire. The little boy is content with his everyday life in the bazaar, thinking that this is how the rest of his life is going to look like. When the three men take Kim on, they are all in the midst of their own lives, yet they find themselves benefitting from their relationship with him.
Creighton wishes to create an imperial leader, while Mahbub Ali wishes to create a new, improved leader with different skills. Last but not least the lama needs Kim to walk beside him as his chela in the search of his river. They all act as the British Empire, trying to take control over the situation in their own separate ways. Kipling was in his novel able to prophesy the independence of India, a new and improved country ready to take on the future.

The question is if India actually has managed to thrive since the colonial era. Novels about the colonial era and about the British Empire are very important for us to take part of to be able to understand how former colonies have developed from a historical point of view. Unfortunately, the development in India has not been able to keep the same pace as the rest of the world and some issues brought up in *Kim* still exist today. India is for example still struggling with a very large population where the level of education is very uneven. Furthermore, the caste system still separates the inhabitants from each other which also hinders a more rapid change in society as a whole. In addition to this, India has to deal with the economic aspect of not being able to compete with countries such as USA, China and others.

Reading Kipling’s novel *Kim* helps us to create an awareness of how the world order has changed during the decades and also gives us the opportunity to look at our present time in different lights.
Works Cited


