

## KIPLING' KIM: USE OF LANGUAGE

**\*Satya Prakash Dhaka**

### **Abstract**

Language plays a significant role in the formation of cultural identity determining the class and socio-political status. During colonial period in India English as a language belonged to the ruling class. English language was the language of power while the local languages belonged to the colonized, the powerless. Ruling class too often used local language structures and words only to engage with Indian life as a communication strategy. The paper tries to analyse writer's and the principal character's use of language in the novel *Kim*. It tries to show the effect of vernacular and also it demonstrates some fallacious usage of some local words.

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Rudyard Kipling being an Anglo-Indian was well-aware of Indian social-political discourse of his time. He understood well the day-to-day life of an Indian, Indian customs and traditions. He had an onlooker's eye on political life and social interactions in India. Being a white he had not lost his authoritative and patronizing voice. In his writings sometimes his voice is more suppressive and imperial but in writing about India, he succeeds in touching the nerve of the common Indian mass. English language belonged to the ruling class and was considered as superior to other languages in India. As the language does play the essential role in everyone's life, Kipling's use of language is somewhat clumsy. He is born in India and knew various Indian languages like Hindi, Urdu as well as English. In 'Kim', Kim is also born in India from British parents, though they died earlier but he has memories enough of his father well as a three years old boy can do. He is grown up in lower Hindu-Muslim society of Lahore. He uses the vernacular. He knows less English but enough more than an Indian. His use of various languages and the vernacular authoritatively and powerfully shows that he knows well the power of 'a superior' language and politics behind it.

The language dominates the facts of life; it determines how the life will be. Lama's use of language is philosophical and much wider in its meaning; which requires much labour. Kim is a man of practical wisdom. He is very pragmatic in using the language for accomplishment of his purposes. Living at an outer edge of society, he has learnt every tone, accommodates himself according to the situation. Mahbub and People of Lahore know that he is a son of Sahib so they are courteous to him. Mahbub's voice to Kim is very friendly and treats him with equality though Kim is much younger than him who lives with his servants. Kim knows all the whereabouts of men and women to whom he belongs and never allows them to take over him. He knows the every way of making something good out of his effective language use. Kim is frequently referred to as a *sahib* throughout the text. However it is the English language that Kim believes will make him truly a *sahib*. "I have learned to read and write a little English at the *madrissah*. I shall soon be altogether a *sahib*." Here Kim equates and makes the

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connection between a sahib and being able to read and write English. Specifically this is the point when English ceases to be intrerlanguage for him. He is learning English from a school, or a *madrissah*. The school allows Kim to have formal knowledge of English which can further his move to become a *sahib*.

The white characters except Kim in the novel may be clever or powerful but the action dominated by them is little. The use of language and dialogues shows that the power comes not by belonging but by an effective use of language. Kipling's use of language in 'Kim' is notable. The protagonist comes with vernacular with powerful dialogues and always keeps the situation in hand but the other characters are never posed in competition with him. They are more or less helpless and answerless. The British Government's highness and generosity is super-imposed over them. Kim surpasses in every regard any white personality or any Indian. It seems that he wants to live among the Indian society so far it gives him pleasure. He doesn't want to bind himself with in it.

Kim thinks in Hindi (Hindustani), 'in the tongue he knows best' as the writer says [Chap.6]. He has inherited Hindustani culture and language. His use of Urdu and Hindi language maintains Indianness in him. Language and culture supersedes over race and ethnicity. The orality of speeches connects the story, the character and even the author to the land upon which it performs itself. The proverbs must come out from that specific place to which the user belong and its user must have also the wide sense and understanding for using it. It is not a days' work and he who knows and uses it, is more of that place than other. Kim uses the proverbs and language splendidly.

The significant thing is that the proverbs have their particular tone and sense that are not found in other languages. They are more Indian than any other things in the novel. The colloquial speeches also give it an Indian colour. Orality and meaning of dialogues both are performative and context bound, and moves away from European styles and influences. These are situated outside the English periphery. It has its own Indian social space. We can clearly see the dominance of pure English over the English mixed with vernacular creating two different levels. Language which is given to Kim by Kipling is Indian in meaning and context. The language of English priests, Lurgan Sahib and Creighton sahib is different from that of Kim. Kim's language is mixed of English, Hindi and Urdu language.

Kipling uses vernacular translating in English without losing any charm and actual sense of it. It appears it is some kind of solidarity to an Indian reader. The setup of novel is in India, so the names and whole atmosphere is Indian. Being an Anglo-Indian though it seems unusual but it is easy for him to use the vernacular words which gives it a local color and casts the character to more close to its role. Kim appears to us as a man from vernaculars. His use of language takes him near to an integral Indian identity. He has used Hindi and Urdu words more precisely to give it whole local color but sometimes he seems to fail in using Hindi-Urdu words. Both languages are born in same ages and same origins and also spoken in closely related areas. So to differentiate between Hindi and Urdu words is sometimes difficult. Sometimes Kipling fails in constructing a correct sentence with the mixture of Hindi-Urdu words in English. Kim's ingenuity of language usage may appear to be ironical. We find some fallacious use of some Hindi and Urdu words like 'But', used in the sense of spirit ; 'Hajji' , Kim uses this word for Mahbub Ali but actually Hajji is one who has gone at least one time for Haj. He is not a Hajji; 'Hai Mai', an expression expressed by Hindi speaker. Here Kim bursts out with this when he is speaking to Lama but without a female partner in conversation it can't be used. Even to male speaker it doesn't suit. It creates humorous effect or imparts some naivety to the characters. In the same manner here I give you some more examples. Ruth is used for bullock cart of Kullu woman, Rani Sahiba. Actually a Ruth requires horses in place of bullocks. 'Belaitee-pani' is used for Soda water. Pani i.e. water will be same whether it is Indian of belaitee. 'Nut-cut' means a child who is very

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active and naughty. Here it is used for rogue totally moved away for its meaning. 'Kichree' is used for vegetable curry but both are different things. 'Bukh' means hunger and Kipling uses the word for babble. 'Chuddar' is used in two contexts first for a covering; second, for curtain which is wrong. 'Chit' is used for testimonial. 'Dustoori' means a gift or a gift to someone higher than himself in authority showing his respect to him. Kim uses this word for commission, improper use of the word. 'Kubbee nahi' means never that is proper but is used in a structure 'Kubbee – kubbee nahin', which gives sense of 'sometimes never'. 'Kismat' is used for 'fate' which is right but without preposition before it causes a defective sentence. 'Prao' is also used in diverted word for the meaning for a resting place, a seraj'. 'Parao' is a place where we rest on our way at any place that is not fixed.

After the process of education is over, as a *sahib*, the English-speaking one, Kim loses his Indian identity he had initially at the beginning of the novel. In their last discussion about Kim, the lama and Mahbub Ali debate about Kim's future. Lama says, "He must go forth as a teacher. Mahbub replies, "That is the right gait for the colt. Certainly he must go forth as a teacher. He is somewhat urgently needed as a scribe by the State, for instance." As a teacher, Kim, *a sahib* would teach in the language of *the sahibs*. Kim's identity shifts from a simple child of the street, Indian, Urdu- speaking, to a sahib with responsibilities to the language of the colonizers. Where Kim and the natives move to depends on their language skills. The identity of each character in *Kim* is directly linked with their language abilities and usage.

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