

## Silent Conversations in Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* and Ruskin Bond's Rusty novels

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### Abstract

The essay undertakes an analysis of the connections and conversations between Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) and Ruskin Bond's largely autobiographical Rusty (1955-) novels. Kipling's *Kim* has evoked many literary responses and reactions across India. While writers such as Sarath Kumar Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore, T.N. Murari, and even Sashi Tharoor have boldly written back to *Kim*, Ruskin Bond silently acknowledges it in his Rusty series of children's fiction. At times, Bond's pointed and conscious avoidance of Kipling becomes his means of accepting Kipling's influence on him. The essay traces the implicit dialogue between these two Anglo-Indian authors and their protagonists. It undertakes a close reading of their novels to analyse the evolution of English literature and Anglo-Indianism in India, while also examining the divided identities of the authors and their fictional protagonists.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial criticism, South Asian, Anglo-Indian, colonial fiction, Rudyard Kipling, Ruskin Bond

### Introduction

The Nobel-prize winning author Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) appears to have been a perplexingly complex man. While he's been bestowed with labels such as "the Anglo-Indian, the brilliant spinner of tales, the spokesman for Empire," his biographer Harry Ricketts, in *The Unforgiving Minute* (1999), emphasises Kipling's "chameleon nature, the ability he [also] created in characters like Mowgli and Kim to cross boundaries and switch identities" (xi). A prolific India-born writer whose works have been the subject of much scrutiny by postcolonial scholars, his ideologies are as disturbing to the modern reader as his writing is engaging. Besides being a poet, novelist, and journalist, Kipling, as Ricketts underscores, was also a man of many contradictions:

devoted son/damaged 'orphan'. Precocious aesthete/apprentice sahib, scholar gipsy/rule-bound conformist, would-be American/Empire Tory, innovative craftsman/ fervent jingoist, doting father/ bellicose tub-thumper [...] (xi)

Although he is remembered as an 'Empire Man,' Kipling's memories of his Indian childhood emerge in works like *Kim* (1901) and *The Jungle Books* (1894-1895) as well as his autobiography *Something of Myself* (1937).

Ruskin Bond (1934-) was born to Edith Clarke and Alexander Aubrey Bond in Kasauli (British India) and currently resides in the Indian hill station of Mussoorie. An avid and professed lover of India, he is not only a popular but a critically acclaimed writer whose contribution to children's fiction cannot be undermined. Growing up as an Anglo-Indian in a newly independent nation, Bond grapples with notions of identity, race, and lineage, which he meditates on in his fictional works such as the heavily autobiographical *The Room on the Roof* (1955) and his non-fictional autobiography *Lone Fox Dancing: My Autobiography* (2017). Although Kipling and Bond occupy vastly different time periods and contexts, the shared thread of their British heritage does bind them together.

### Silent Conversations

This paper argues that Bond's largely autobiographical series of Rusty novels conduct a silent conversation with Kipling's *Kim* (1901). There appears to be very little critical analysis which has looked at these works in relation to one another, although Bart Moore-Gilbert's essay "Kipling and postcolonial literature" discusses the various writers who have countered *Kim* by reacting against Kipling's imperial ideologies.

In Sarath Kumar Ghosh's epic novel *The Prince of Destiny* (1909), Kipling is not explicitly mentioned but "his supposed imperial politics are recurrently the object of biting commentary" (155). Rabindranath Tagore, who was furious at being described as 'India's Kipling' (155), also "dismissed *Kim*, which he read in 1902, as exemplifying 'western exaggeration' about India" (155), and his novel *Gora* (1910) "which appropriates many of *Kim*'s themes and tropes" (155) is a "specific riposte to *Kim*" (155). Mulk Raj Anand was "extremely disobliging" (156) about Kipling, and had vowed to "rewrite Kipling's *Kim* [...] from the opposite point of view" (157), while T.N. Murari confesses that "by taking on *Kim* as the central figure of my text" (157), he "wanted to finally turn him against his creator" (157). Anand undermined *Kim* by describing it as a "fairy tale glorifying [...] a fantasy boy" (156), while Murari's *The Imperial Agent* (1988) and *The Last Victory* (1990) allow *Kim* to enjoy a literary afterlife eight years after the events of Kipling's novel, where he continues to engage in espionage, while sailing on the choppy waters of emerging Indian nationalism. Eventually, Murari's *Kim* "becomes progressively disillusioned with British rule and throws in his lot with Gandhi, before being killed in Jallianwala Bagh" (156). Moore-Gilbert argues that "the anti-colonial politics of Murari's texts are unequivocal" (156). In Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) "Kipling appears in a double guise, each facet being equally negative" (156).

Amidst all the noise and negative backlash which Kipling has perhaps justifiably received from subsequent writers of Indian fiction, Ruskin Bond's quiet conversation with *Kim* in the Rusty novels seems to be layered, nuanced, sympathetic and yet critical. Curiously, Bond's conscious avoidance of Kipling becomes a tool he uses to acknowledge his literary predecessor. This might have its roots, at least partly, in their shared

Anglo-Indian heritage, although the concept of being an “Anglo-Indian” has experienced a significant change over time. As an Indian writer, Bond must have found himself in the heart of the tempestuous criticism hurled at Kipling, the flag-bearer of Imperialism, by his peers. Hence, Bond’s allusions to Kipling appear distant and quiet because the latter is a self-proclaimed son of Indian soil. Perhaps the realm of children’s literature allows Bond to make allowances for Kipling, empathise with him and accommodate a more sensitive, solicitous reading of *Kim*. Like *Kim*, the first two novels in the Rusty series, *The Room on the Roof* (1957) and *Vagrants in the Valley* (1987), are set in India, whereas *Rusty Goes to London* (2004) is set in England. *Kim* is set in the pre-partition era of the British Raj and the Rusty novels in the nation’s fledgling postcolonial state. The similarities are conspicuous in that they follow in a picaresque tradition with the titular protagonists seeking out mentors and adventures in an episodic manner as they travel across India. The paper examines the silent conversations through a close comparison of *Kim* and the Rusty novels.

### **Anglo-Indianism: A Shared Thread?**

While Anglo-Indianism might be the shared thread which connects Kipling and Bond, who spent their formative years in India, the status of an Anglo-Indian in postcolonial India is significantly distinct from the exclusive class and status it denoted in Kipling’s time. Kipling’s parents, John Lockwood Kipling (who went on to become the principal of the Jeejeebhoy School of Art) and Alice, considered themselves Anglo-Indians, and their first son was born into a life of relative privilege and power in his ‘Mother of Cities’ Bombay in 1865. Almost 70 years later Ruskin Bond was born in Kasauli, a part of the Punjab States Agency in British India, to Edith Clarke and Aubrey Alexander Bond (a former English teacher who joined the Royal Air Force in 1939), by which time the Anglo-Indian community had begun to face pressure from the mounting momentum of Indian nationalism.

In 1935, the Government of India Act (1935) was passed to define and protect the status of this minority community, which indicates the intensity of hostility that was directed against them. The English government had fixed a deadline for complete British withdrawal from India, a move that further threatened Anglo-Indians who realised that they had to stay on in a free nation alongside the natives. In *Anglo Indian Women and Translation* (2017), Sudarshana Sen meditates on how Anglo-Indians were viewed with distrust by many natives because of their firm allegiance to the British and the Company during colonial rule. Unsurprisingly, Bond, an Anglo-Indian caught at the cusp of Indian independence, has had to fight the oppressive memories of his colonial predecessors like Kipling, in order to establish his loyalty to the India he clearly loves. While Bond cannot ignore the compelling pull of Kipling’s literary legacy, he clearly struggles to accommodate the imperialist and racist ideologies which are evident in poems such as “The White Man’s Burden” (1899).

Despite reminiscing fondly about his Indian childhood, Kipling, unlike Bond, makes it very clear that he is an Englishman whose loyalties lie strictly with the Empire. Ironically, Kipling's Kim is ostentatiously native and furtively British, although Rusty is openly Indian but only grudgingly British. Bond's struggle to reconcile his British and Indian loyalties might result in his acknowledgement of Kipling being hesitant, silent and yet inevitable. However, in an essay titled "Kipling's Shimla" (2018), Bond evocatively recreates Kim's journey as he travels across the hill station:

Simla beckons. I must return. And, like Kim, I will take the last bend near Summer Hill and look up and exclaim: "Ah! What a city".

Furthermore, in "Life at My Own Pace," Bond underscores his obvious associations with Kipling, and draws upon their shared Anglo-Indian childhoods in India. However, while he expresses his love for Kipling's "great gray formless India" (Loc 10340) he also speaks of the difficulty of acceptance he faced in the country, owing to the history of colonialism and its sympathisers:

Most domiciled Europeans and Anglo-Indians were apolitical. That the rule of the Sahib was not exactly popular in the land was made plain to me on the few occasions I ventured far from the house. Shouts of 'Red Monkey'! Or 'White Pig'! Were hurled at me with some enthusiasm but without any physical follow-up. (146)

Bond likely believes that he is being rather unfairly made to pay for the beliefs of 'sahibs' like Kipling, who used their public platforms to promote the ideals of the Empire. In *Vagrants in the Valley* (1987), the homeless Rusty takes refuge in an old and abandoned church, which becomes a synecdoche for the plight of the postcolonial Anglo-Indian, who at his core, is anxious to belong, 'unbelong' and perhaps re-belong. The church valiantly stands tall but is, in reality, a relic of a bygone era which binds Rusty to his lost past. The Church represents a deep sense of displacement and alienation, with its memories of the deceased and empty halls. It is reminiscent of another poem by Bond, "Second-hand shop in a Hill Station", in which he speaks of "lost causes, lonely lives" (261) and "ten thousand broken dreams" (261). Perhaps it questions the failed British Empire which left behind some of its more vulnerable members to be subsumed into a space where they were viewed as outsiders. It also highlights the estrangement Bond (and his peers) feel from their ancestral roots and their desire to gain acceptance from their immediate surroundings.

Like his creator, Rusty learns to accept the "paradox that India could be as cruel as it could be kind" (147). An independent India only reluctantly accommodates Rusty but often forces him to cast a critical yet nostalgic look back at his British roots. For Kipling's Kim, British India is the land he was born into, and he lives in the folds of Imperial rule. He has known and perhaps will know no other India than this, and hence

his contradiction is not as pronounced. Unlike Rusty, his Britishness is not a legacy he struggles with so much as an intriguing, secret life he explores.

### **Reading fiction as autobiography: Exploring the Tropes of Abandonment, Orphanhood, and Alienation**

The tropes of abandonment, orphanhood, and parental alienation are common to Kipling, Bond, Kim, and Rusty and prompts one to wonder how aligned fiction is to autobiography in the context of these novels. Although Kipling's privileged childhood appears to be so far removed from his "street urchin" Kim, one wonders whether *Kim*, much like *The Jungle Books*, can indeed be read as an extrapolated autobiography. Through his protagonist, Kipling explores a version of India he would never dream of engaging with in reality, even though he ironically draws upon his own experiences of an Indian childhood. It is almost as though the 'Englishman' in Kipling is playing out a secret native fantasy, which his upbringing would vehemently disavow and which Kim's status as "a poor white of the very poorest" (Loc 8915) allows. Harry Ricketts, in his biography of Kipling, *The Unforgiving Minute* (1999), convincingly argues that Mowgli is an extension of Kipling's childhood:

What is most striking in Mowgli's story, from a biographical point of view - as it unfolds in 'Mowgli's Brothers', 'Kaa's Hunting', and "Tiger! Tiger!" - is watching Kipling once more rewriting aspects of his own childhood. The pattern of abandonment was repeated no fewer than three times: twice in 'Mowgli's Brothers', which opened with him losing his human parents and closed with him being cast out by the wolf pack; and again at the end of 'Tiger! Tiger!', when he was rejected by the village. Mowgli became, in effect, a super-orphan. (206)

Ricketts asserts that Mowgli's "amphibious" (208) nature is reflected in his name which means frog and foregrounds his ability to blend into different environments, much like the chameleon-like Kim (a master of disguise), and indeed Kipling himself who, according to Ricketts, could lead "a kind of double life, part American, part English, which did not lock him into either (208)." In *Vagrants in the Valley* (1987), Rusty draws a tenuous parallel between himself and the displaced Mowgli, a triple orphan who loses his human parents, adoptive and jungle family. Rusty and Kim are orphans who have been brought up by foster parents, Rusty by the stentorian Mr. Harrison and Kim by a "half-caste woman" (Loc 8915) who "insisted with tears that he should wear European clothes" (Loc 8946). Like Mowgli, who is caught between his identities of man and wolf, Kim and Rusty try to reconcile their lineage with their surroundings.

Kipling records his harrowing experiences in the House of Desolation in Southsea, where his fictional counterpart Punch faces relentless physical and psychological abuse from his guardian Mrs. Holloway in "Baa

Baa Blacksheep” (1888), which deepened his sense of alienation from his parents. The young Kim’s unfettered spirit and free-will, despite having mentor figures, seems to be a wish-fulfilment fantasy for Kipling. Bond’s writing often reveals his estrangement from his mother, who was a lot younger than his father, as he reminisces about the break-down of his parents’ marriage and her subsequent remarriage to a Punjabi gentleman. His father, with whom he shared a deep bond, tragically died of malaria in Calcutta while Bond was a 10-year-old schoolboy in Shimla, and his absence haunts his life and stories. Bond has often claimed that Rusty is clearly autobiographical and *The Room on the Roof*, written during his brief, homesick stint in England, is a tribute to his Indian childhood and that “Rusty the boy was the author as a boy” (Loc 69).

*Kim* and the Rusty novels follow their protagonists on expeditions not just physically across India but also deep within themselves, thereby allowing their creators to reflect on their past lives and fractured identities. Interestingly, the names Kim and Rusty appear to play on the names of their authors; Rusty resembles Ruskin and Kipling and Kim are not dissimilar. Rusty and Kim’s British roots are reflected in their physical appearance which not only distinguishes them from their peers but seems to undermine their affinity with India. However, just as Rusty’s constant wanderings have made his skin scorched by the fierce sun, Kim too has been “burned black as any native” (Loc 8915). When he finally acknowledges his affinity with Kim in *Rusty Goes to London*, Rusty emphasises that “times *have* changed” (53), signifying, perhaps, the transfer of socio-political power from the Empire to the newly independent nation, which has highlighted their differences but also their affinity and kinship.

### **The Ayah as Raconteur**

The presence of servers and *ayahs* (native nannies) was fairly common in the lives of Anglo-Indian children during the Empire. It can be argued that the *ayahs*, with whom these children spent long amounts of time, simultaneously deepened and bridged the gap of their already divided identities. On the one hand they initiated their charges into their native linguistic domain and cultural practices, but their predominantly obsequious behaviour ensured that the presumed racial hierarchy was kept intact. In the unmistakably autobiographical “Baa Baa Black Sheep”, Kipling reveals how Punch’s knowledge of Hindustani, “once his second speech,” (Loc 23792) was picked up from their servants. The stories they regaled their charges with opened up new worlds for the children to explore from the presumed safety of their British identities.

Despite pronounced differences in their social stations, the relationship between Punch-*baba* and his *ayah* was premised on mutual affection and intimacy, in sharp contrast to the treatment he received at the hands of the English Mrs. Holloway and her son in Southsea. Bond fondly recalls relishing the act of chewing ‘paan’ (Indian betel leaves) with his Ayah and mastering the art of Hindustani abuse from his bearer in “The Room of Many Colours” (1994). Mark Tully, another Anglo-Indian writer, recalls how his British nanny was

horrified on realising that their driver was teaching him Hindustani and hit him “across the head” (ix) exclaiming “that’s not your language, that’s the servant’s language” (ix) in *Last Children of the Raj, British Childhoods in India*, (2004). These *ayahs*, who were gifted raconteurs, often entertained British children with oral Indian folktales in the vernacular, which aroused their curiosity and creativity.

Bond recalls that his “*Ayah*” loved him “deeply and was always filling” his “head with strange and wonderful stories” (Bond, 83), often from works such as *The Panchatantra*, an ancient collection of animal stories in Sanskrit. Indeed, Kipling’s “*Rikki Tikki Tavi*”, which appears in *The Second Jungle Book*, was inspired by “*The Loyal Mongoose*”, which appears in the 5th book of the *Panchatantra*, titled *Apariktisitakarakam*. Additionally, Bond asserts that Rusty’s name emerged from the pages of the *Panchatantra*, “that collection of wise and witty fables from India and beyond” (Loc 74). The power of native stories is evident in Kipling’s “*The Potted Princess*” (1893), an alternative version of “*Baa Baa Blacksheep*,” which features *Ayah* enthralled Punch and Judy with a story about a potter, who might be representative of Lockwood Kipling. “*The Potted Princess*” is Kipling’s alternative wish-fulfilment narrative in which he imagines that he’s never left India for Southsea and continues to derive joy from his *ayah*’s stories, which are central to the narrative.

It may be averred that since their parents inhabited worlds which were so vastly different from their *ayahs*, their presence further deepened the gulf between nature and nurture. In his autobiography *Something of Myself* (1937), Kipling recalls his afternoons with his Portuguese Roman Catholic *Ayah* and his Hindu bearer Meeta who would:

...tell us stories and Indian nursery songs all unforgotten, and we were sent into the dining-room after we had been dressed, with the caution ‘Speak English now to Papa and Mamma.’ So one spoke ‘English,’ haltingly translated out of the vernacular idiom that one thought and dreamed in. The Mother sang wonderful songs at a black piano and would go out to Big Dinners. (Loc 127833)

### **Bond’s reluctant but inevitable acceptance of Kipling’s literary legacy and influence**

Despite the presence of these apparent connections between the writers, Bond’s hesitance and reluctance to fully embrace and acknowledge Kipling might stem from Kipling’s active promotion of the Empire. Does Bond wish to only silently converse if not suppress his affiliation with Kipling, in order to prove his allegiance to India? Perhaps he fears being misjudged as a supporter of colonialism if his acknowledgement of their connection is too pronounced? I argue that the realm of children’s literature enables Bond to accommodate a writer whose writings he admires but whose politics he questions.

In the Rusty novels there appears to be a conscious avoidance of Kipling that co-exists with a simultaneous acknowledgement of his literary influence. Bond has often openly declared his indebtedness to writers like Dickens, Stevenson, and M.R. James. In *Rusty Goes to London* (2004), Bond describes a debilitating eye condition diagnosed as Eale's disease which he contracted owing to malnutrition and excessive reading. He must have been aware that Kipling, too, famously suffered from visual debilitation, which had its beginnings in Southsea. In "Something of Myself" Kipling laments upon how his "eyes went wrong, and that he "could not well see to read" (Loc 127954). However, when Bond refers to other authors with visual ailments, Kipling is significantly absent:

I had to go to hospital for some time. The condition was diagnosed as Eale's Disease, a rare tubercular condition of the eye, and I felt quite thrilled that I could count myself among the 'greats' who had also suffered from this disease in some form or another—Keats, the Brontës, Stevenson, Katherine Mansfield, Ernest Dowsnon—and I thought, if only I could write like them, I'd be happy to live with a consumptive eye! (22)

This seems to be a covert evasion that overtly brings Kipling to the fore-front and sets the stage for the imagined conversation which occurs between the two authors later in the novel.

### **Confronting the Conversation**

The implicit conversation between the two writers remains at the margins of the narrative and is only fully acknowledged in the third novel, *Rusty Goes to London*, when the fictional Rusty meets the ghost of Kipling. In *Rusty Goes to London* (2005) Bond finally conjures up an imagined conversation between Kipling and Rusty in the Indian section of the Victoria and Albert Museum and thereby alludes to the shared colonial legacy which had brought them both to India. Bond's resurrection of Kipling allows them to engage in a conversation which attempts to contextualise and criticise the latter's imperialist beliefs and draws upon Kipling's rich literary heritage to interpret the anxious condition of Anglo-Indian identity in post-1947 India. As Bond tells Kipling: "I've spent most of my time in India—not your India, but an India that does still have much of the colour and atmosphere that you captured" (55).

The chapter is titled "The Man who was Kipling" and recalls the name of Kipling's short story "The Man Who Would Be King" (1888). Possibly, Bond is reluctant to engage with Kipling in an independent India, which still nurses the wounds of its colonial past. Therefore, he delays his encounter with Kipling until the third book of the Rusty series (the first two books of which were set in India) and confronts his ghost, a literal shadow of his former self, in distant Britain. The chapter begins on a note of sustained disavowal, because Rusty initially (and almost deliberately) fails to recognise the bespectacled Kipling:



I was sitting on a bench in the Indian section of the Victoria and Albert Museum, when a tall, stooping, elderly gentleman sat down beside me. I gave him a quick glance, noting his swarthy features, heavy moustache and horn-rimmed spectacles. There was something disturbing about his face and I couldn't resist looking at him again. (50)

Bond's use of the word "disturbing" may be significant as several postcolonial readers of Kipling regard him as such, although his undeniable literary genius stops them from complete resistance. Salman Rushdie explores this idea when he says of Kipling "(He is) a writer with a storm inside him, and he creates a mirror-storm of contradictory responses in the reader, particularly, I think, if the reader is Indian" ("Kipling" 74). What is important is that Rushdie realises that there is a tempest raging within Kipling himself, as he is torn between his loyalties to the Empire and his undeniable love for the country of his birth. Rusty maintains his sustained avoidance and hesitates to acknowledge his literary debt to Kipling, who asks him "Tell me, whose books do you read?" (50). Rusty mentions names like Maugham, Priestley, Thurber, Bennett, and Wells and only mentions Kipling when he sees a "sad shadow pass across" his "companion's face" (50). He finally musters up the courage to admit "Oh yes, and Kipling [...] I read a lot of Kipling" (50), almost in spite of himself.

Bond acknowledges that Kipling's works still throb with vividness, verve, and vitality and uses the exchange to fulfil two purposes: firstly, it allows Kipling an opportunity to defend himself and secondly, it justifies his own avoidance of Kipling thus far. Kipling laments to Rusty that "The trouble these days is that people don't know me anymore—I'm a familiar, that's all. Just a name for outmoded ideas" (50). Following the dissolution of the English Empire, Kipling's sensibilities may well seem obsolete in an age when the Empire is a reminder of British exploitation and oppression of India. However, Kipling reminds Rusty that he belongs to a different age and time. He responds to Rusty's allegation of being too "militant [...] too much of an Empire man [...] too patriotic for your own good" (52), with "I believed that the Empire was a fine and noble thing. Is it wrong to believe in something?" (52).

Initially Rusty seems quite patronising towards Kipling but gradually gives the latter an opportunity to contextualise his views. Bond might feel that their shared heritage allows him the prerogative of an assessment. Like Bond, Kipling, too, had started writing very early and slowly evolved as an individual and an artist over the years. Kipling goes on to tell Rusty that much of *Kim* is devoted to action and adventure and that unlike Bond, he does not have the privilege of socio-political hindsight:

You must remember, my seven years in India were very youthful years. I was in my twenties, a little immature if you like, and my interest in India was a boy's

interest. Action appealed to me more than anything else. You must understand that. (52)

The setting of a museum, a place devoted to antiquity, allows Kipling to engage in a tryst with history from the perspective of the present, to re-evaluate his ideologies. However, Rusty (and therefore Bond) firmly feels that Kipling's passion for India is not diluted by his predilection for Empire. His love for the nation permeates each page of *Kim* and invites the reader to appreciate the nuances of the vast and diverse country:

No one has described action more vividly, or India so well. I feel at one with Kim wherever he goes along the Grand Trunk Road, in the temples of Banaras, amongst the Sahranpur fruit gardens, on the snow-covered Himalayas. *Kim* has colour and movement and poetry. (52)

This is the moment when Rusty is in complete alignment with Kim with whom he "feels at one" (52). The fictional platform solidifies their relationship in a way the real world cannot. This duality in *Kim* is discussed by Jan Montefiore, whose sympathetic yet critical reading offers a way to synthesise the seeming contradictions in the novel. She claims that *Kim* is rare as it is "colonial fiction that takes ethnic and cultural otherness as a source of pleasure, not anxiety" (81). She argues:

To recognise how deeply Kipling's imperialist beliefs are interwoven with the narrative harmonies of his fiction does not, as Said emphasised in his own critical account of 'this great work of art,' mean that those who dispute Kipling's beliefs can take no pleasure in this novel. On the contrary, a critical account of *Kim* needs to begin by acknowledging the glowing lyricism of its love for the India of Kipling's childhood, for the people and for the land itself, the 'broad smiling river of life' which is also the dust that heals Kim at the end. (88)

In "The Man who was Kipling," Kipling affirms his identity by quoting several lines from his poem "The Penalty" (1932) in which he laments the faithful "star" he "whistled" and "cast" away. I contend that this star symbolises the beloved India of his childhood from whom he increasingly distanced himself as an adult. Does Bond's choice of poem give Kipling an opportunity to apologise for his imperialist beliefs for which he is criticised and penalised in the present day and age? Kipling's recitation of "The Penalty" therefore prompts one to think that Bond seems to want to redeem Kipling as much as he wants to redeem himself and situate him within his socio-political context. It is difficult to separate Kipling's politics from his writing, but this poem occupies a relatively neutral space which Bond is free to interpret in his own manner. Rusty reassures Kipling that his "star hasn't fallen yet" (54) as they part with one another, which is another way in which Bond acknowledges Kipling's literary genius which sometimes surpasses his outmoded political ideologies.

Ironically, when he asks the English gatekeeper of the museum if he knows Kipling, the former is clueless and confirms Kipling's fears of having been relegated to antiquity. Rusty, determined to rescue Kipling from the peripheries to which he has been banished, further prods the gatekeeper by asking him whether he has read *The Jungle Book* (1894) which he in exasperation confuses with *Tarzan* (1912), thereby justifying Bond's inclusion of this dialogue with Kipling in *Rusty in London*. The chapter ends with Rusty wandering down the streets of London looking for Kipling but unable to find him in the "boom of London's traffic" (54), which juxtaposes with the "boom of the Sutlej river" (54) in his mind. This encourages the reader to ruminate on whether Kipling has indeed been judged too harshly, whether he is increasingly irrelevant and forgotten, and whether he can possibly be forgiven for his beliefs by contemporary readers in both Britain and India.

### **A challenge to the notion of cultural homogeneity**

*Kim* and the *Rusty* novels challenge what Homi Bhabha calls "the validity and authenticity of a pure cultural identity" (83) and "mimicry" as Rusty and Kim occupy a liminal "third space" (143), simultaneously included in and excluded from the experience of Indianness. In *The Location of Culture* (2004), Bhabha argues that native "Others" were coaxed to adopt the values and cultures of the coloniser to fulfil the "civilising mission" of the colonial project. I argue that we see a partial reversal of this in *Kim* and *Rusty*, who attempt to erase certain aspects of their British lineage in exchange for an authentic and meaningful Indian one, since they realise the importance of assimilating with their physical and cultural surroundings. Their behaviour is in stark contrast, for instance, with Macaulay's desire for Indians who were native by birth but English in manners and customs. Bhabha underscores the fallacy inherent in the colonial rhetoric of "mimicry," where the process of imitation is never quite complete, and the gap between the original and the replica becomes a process for sabotaging cultural hegemony. This "gap" becomes a means by which the coloniser can maintain his hierarchical position, which will be threatened if the colonised became exact replicas of them. Notably, Rusty and Kim maintain this "gap" as well and leave their acts of mimicry deliberately incomplete. Kim's decision to uphold this gap may not be as deliberate as Rusty's, as he is a small part of "The Great Game," which is controlled by those much higher than him.

Satadru Sen argues in *Colonial Childhoods* (2005) that to emulate is to not mimic—rather, it is to admire (157). While both *Kim* and *Rusty* admire India, they also keep a safe distance from it. Towards the end of *Vagrants in The Valley*, Rusty sits on a train, having embarked on his long journey to England. When his Indian friends wave to him, certain of his return, Rusty feels that he will never see them again, prompting us to feel that he is coping with simultaneous acts of severance and re-birth. *Kim*, on the other hand, seems more comfortable in his many skins and this very charm makes him an inconspicuous and successful British spy,

and becomes Kim's way of retaining his British lineage. Rusty uses this 'gap' to his advantage as he never completely renounces his British identity which affords him professional opportunities as an English teacher and writer, though he repeatedly expresses his affinity with India. Kim's identity is as fluid as a river. He says he can change at ease, and this serves him well as a spy. He emulates natives through disguise and habit, once a Hindu Street urchin, the next moment a Pathaan, and a "sahib," the next. Bhabha's essay "Of Mimicry and Man," begins with a quote by Lacan:

The effect of mimicry is camouflage [...] it is not a question of harmonising with the background, but against a mottled background becoming mottled. (Jacques Lacan, 'The Line and Light' Of the Gaze 121)

This seems particularly relevant to Kim, who is a master of disguise, but ironically his native disguises only serve to underscore his efficacy as a British spy. He bears a resemblance to Bond's grandfather, who is described in his literary piece "From Small Beginnings", which incidentally begins with a quotation from *Kim*:

A man may have a hundred disguises, but in the end it is his posture that gives him away. Like my grandfather, who was a master of disguise and successfully roamed the bazaars as a fruit vendor or basket maker. But we would always recognise him because of his pronounced slouch. (141)

Kipling's profession as a journalist also afforded him opportunities to juggle many avatars. Bhabha, who belongs to the minority Parsi community himself, engages with the theory of 'hybridity' which claims that "cultures must be understood as complex intersections of multiple places, historical temporalities and sub-cultures" (128). This is seen in the cases of Rusty and Kim who engage in a "translation and negotiation" (38) of their British and Indian identities, to work with the contradictory strains of "languages lived and learned" (x). Rusty is in fact more Anglicised than Kim, having grown up in the European part of Dehra, whereas Kim's rather feral childhood has seen him prowling the streets of Lahore.

### **The Influence of Mentors**

Rusty and Kim align themselves with adopted mentor figures, both alive and deceased, who endow them with purpose and direction. Notably, both their identities are predicated on others to a considerable extent. While on the one hand the boys seem to be travelling through India to fulfil their inner needs of realising themselves, they are also defined by the aspirations of their mentors. Rusty has been brought up under the strict tutelage of an English guardian, Mr. Harrison, whom he despises and rebels against. However, he does not renounce the English language, a legacy which is his biggest professional asset. Kim, brought up by a native half-caste woman, thinks and dreams in the vernacular and uses his native charm to be a successful British spy.

Rusty inherits an expensive first edition of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) from his late father, which he sells to fund his expedition to England, where he hopes to pursue a literary career. It is significant that it is a classic work of English and not vernacular literature which becomes his means of travelling to England, thereby delineating its role in reconnecting him with his lost homeland. Kim, on the other hand, wears a talisman of three papers he inherits from his late Irish father Kimball O'Hara, now an invisible mentor, around his neck. One is his "ne varietur," one his "clearance certificate," and the last is his "birth certificate" (Loc 8923). It is the discovery of these papers which leads him to be recognised as a Britisher worthy of joining the army, receiving an English education (which the Lama sponsors upon discovery) and eventually helps him become a British spy.

Teshoo Lama, who is ostensibly Kim's primary mentor, plays an interesting role in upholding Kim's dual identity, because he literally binds Kim to Indian soil as they wander across the country, but he also funds his English education to help him reconnect with his Englishness. Kim is both guided by and protects the Lama but also seeks refuge in the mentorship of Mahbub Ali, Lurgan Sahib, and Creighton, whose wishes he ultimately fulfils. In a rare moment of self-examination, Kim asks himself, "Who is Kim?" (Loc 10686) thereby encapsulating his quandary over his identity, but it seems that he would rather remain in duality than choose a fixed path or mentor.

In contrast, Rusty's mentors are primarily native children. He consciously rejects the mentorship of the older Mr. Harrison and aligns himself with Somi, Kishen, Ranbir, and Sudheer the Lafunga. Rusty selectively re-aligns himself with India, in the space of the forbidden bazaar. Rusty is initially "angry and ill-mannered" (Loc 332) towards Somi, who introduces him to bazaar life, but is soon spurred to subservience by his laugh and "obeys him without demur" (Loc 332). Ironically, while Somi secures Rusty the position of an English teacher in Kishen's house, he also facilitates Rusty's orientation into the Indian experience in the bazaar and actively discourages Rusty's decision to go to England. Rusty's only adult mentor is Mr. Pettigrew, characterised as a lover of India who is reluctant to leave, post 1947. A comparison might be drawn with Colonel Creighton, who shows an immense degree of attachment to India and speaks in eloquent Hindi and indeed with Bond himself. Ironically, both Creighton and Pettigrew also lead the boys away from India. While Pettigrew urges Rusty to sail forth to England for professional success, Colonel Creighton initiates Kim into espionage service for the British. In *Vagrants of the Valley*, Rusty firmly tells Mr. Pettigrew that he aligns himself with India and is reluctant to travel to England, just as Kim often reassures himself of not being a "Sahib." Similarly, just as Mahboub Ali contributes to handing Kim over to the British, Sudheer the Lafunga funds Rusty's journey to meet his aunt and reunite with his father's English legacy.

While the popular Kim is described as the "Little Friend of all the World" (Loc 8941) Rusty is often referred to by Somi, who has catalysed his entry into the Indian side, as "best favourite of friends" (Loc 332),

underscoring the extent of their attachment to their surroundings and peers. Significantly, Rusty makes the difficult decision of leaving the life he'd built for himself in England over three years and plans to return to India by the end of *Rusty Goes to London*.

### **The Motif of Travel**

The motif of travel through the landscape of India is common to *Kim* and the first two Rusty novels. Although Kipling has described *Kim* as a “nakedly plotless and picaresque” (Loc 129854) novel, his character’s journey is far from desultory. Kim’s wanderings represent his divided identity, as he is involved with both the Lama’s spiritual quest for the River of Arrows and Mahbub Ali’s espionage services for the British government. Significantly, he often tells the Lama that he is not a “Sahib but a chela” (Loc 12864), pitting the one against the other and thereby implying that a “sahib” is a leader. Rusty renounces the idea of being a chela or an acolyte in *Rusty Goes to London* and yet again distances himself from Kim in a direct reference to the novel:

I could have stayed in one of the two ashrams, but I had no pretensions to religion of any kind and was not inclined to become an acolyte to some holy man. Kim had his lama, the braying Beatles had their Master, and others have had their gurus and godmen, but I have always been stubborn and thick-headed enough to remain my own man-myself, warts and all, singing my own song. Nobody’s chela, nobody’s camp follower. (227)

Rusty’s proclamation of his independent spirit is important as he uses it to distance himself from the imperial ideologies with which many of his peers and ancestors were associated. On the other hand, Kim’s desire to join British espionage on behalf of the Empire does not seem to arise from great patriotism. Rather, the intrigue and travel opportunities it offers seduce him as does his awe for the formidable Arab horse-dealer. His native affinity is ultimately tested by the prophecy of the “Red Bull on the Green Field” (Loc 8929), which is revealed to be a flag from his father’s Irish regiment. Yet, he does not yield entirely to the compelling pull of his British destiny. His fondness for and devotion to the Lama and India are never undermined in the novel. Rusty’s journey to England only reinforces his love for India and he yearns to return to his homeland as soon as possible.

### **Affiliations with India**

Contestably, while both Rusty and Kim have strong affiliations with India, they both appear to detach themselves from the country, Rusty by embracing English and leaving for England and Kim by adopting the role of a British spy. In *Kim* (1901), Kipling both embraces different facets of India, and constructs a subversive undercurrent. However, there are conflicting views about the novel’s ending. Evidently, Kim never

leaves India but emerges as a successful British spy and Edmund Wilson, in “The Kipling that Nobody Read” (1941), claims the denouement of *Kim* represents a “betrayal of the Lama” (125) as he becomes a British spy who will “...exploit his knowledge of native life for preventing and putting down any native resistance to the British” (125) and thereby betrays India. David Sergent cites Harish Trivedi, who he feels puts forth a persuasive argument in favour of Kim’s duplicitious behaviour as his visions seem irreconcilably different at the end of the novel. (Sergent, 2013).”

However, in “Kipling’s Art of Fiction”, Sergeant puts forth a different reading of the novel’s ending, by highlighting how “opposites can be complementary and can invite a creative compaction” (162). Kim’s profession as a spy does not necessarily impede his personal predilection for India, or for his native mentors. To further Sergeant’s argument, serving as a British spy might not necessarily be viewed as a betrayal of the Lama, as the latter himself has funded his English education at St. Xavier’s, while his strength as a spy is dependent on his familiarity with India. Additionally, he is oriented into the art of espionage by Mahbub Ali whom Kim admires as a native mentor. Although the Lama often expresses wonder at Kim’s being a “Sahib,” in a voice which seems to be ringing with admiration and wonder, Kim is reluctant to restrict himself to a purely European identity. Ironically, it is the Russian man’s assault on the Lama which leads to Kim uncovering the espionage papers, so Kim’s seemingly disparate quests converge, thereby backing Sergeant’s view of opposites being complementary. Furthermore, by the end of the novel, the Lama has arrived at the “Threshold of Freedom” (Loc 13299) and is bereft of a binding national or racial identity. Despite having no religious bones in his body, Kim yearns for the Lama when he is away, and tells him in the final chapter, “I am not a Sahib, I am thy *chela* and my head is heavy on my shoulders” (Loc 13008). This problematizes the notion of the Tibetan Lama being simplistically associated with India and since Kim’s association with him never wanes, the idea of betraying India remains amorphous as, despite being a *chela*, *Kim* has not made a promise to go down a spiritual path himself.

Arguably, it is Rusty’s decision to physically leave India to pursue a career as a writer in England which may be viewed as a form of disloyalty and detachment, although his ardent aspiration for ‘going native’ is seen in his violent rebellion against Mr. Harrison, whom he physically assaults. More significantly, he decides to return to India after his three-year stint in London where he suffered from immense pangs of homesickness. His willingness to risk being treated as an outsider in India, as opposed to remaining in the relative comfort of England, outlines his commitment to the nation in which he has grown up. His English mentor Mr. Harrison in Dehra is portrayed as a martinet who shuts off native India from Rusty, like a forbidden cesspool of sin, and thereby heightens his desire to escape his refined European surroundings. Rusty’s desire for India lies in the appeal of the forbidden fruit and its seemingly freer and more inclusive community, whereas Kim, who has never faced such restrictions, loves India in a more organic and spontaneous manner.

### The Role of Education

Education plays a seminal role in the lives and careers of Rusty and Kim. Rusty's English education is viewed as an imposition from Mr. Harrison, whereas Kim's English education as a benediction from his Bhotiya benefactor, Teshoo Lama. However, Rusty's education is his asset, and he uses his predilection for English Literature as his passport to England, notwithstanding the fact that it was the tyrannical Mr. Harrison's contribution to his life:

Since his parents had died, Rusty had been kept, fed and paid for, and sent to an expensive school in the hills that was run on exclusively European lines. He had in a way been bought by Mr. Harrison. And now he was owned by him. And he must do as his guardian wished. (10-11)

His role as Kishen's English teacher [and their subsequent friendship] is the logical result of his Anglo-Indianness, whereas Kim, before his exposure to an English education at St. Xavier's, relied on letter writers from the bazaar to communicate with Mahub Ali and Teshoo Lama. However, while Rusty loves the English language, Kim speaks and dreams in the vernacular, although he does eventually write professional letters in English to Mahub Ali. Kim coaxes sahibs like Creighton to speak the vernacular and tells Lurgan Sahib that despite learning 'Angrezi' within two months, he "cannot read it well" (Loc 11341). Kim refers to St. Xavier's School as a "madrissah" but is ambivalent at best towards his education, though it does serve him well. He realises "where examinations led" (Loc 10791) and that St. Xavier's looked down upon boys who went "native altogether" (Loc 10791). His education proves useful as seen by his use of the times-table to counter Lurgan Sahib's hypnotism and later when he's sifting through the Sahib's papers. However, although he appreciates aspects of school, he finds life there restrictive and strangely at odds with his native identity:

The atmosphere suited him, and he throve by inches. They gave him a white drill suit as the weather warmed, and he rejoiced in the new-found bodily comforts as he rejoiced to use his sharpened mind over the tasks they set him. (Loc 10791)

However, he fervently tells Mahub Ali:

To the madrissah I will go. At the madrissah I will learn. In the madrissah I will learn. In the madrissah I will be a Sahib. But when the madrissah is shut, then I must be free and go among my people. Otherwise, I die. (Loc 10955)

The use of the phrase "my people" is a key to understanding his loyalties to native life, despite his English education. Perhaps Kim's resistance or halting acceptance of English in favour of the vernacular might be Kim's conscious way of underscoring his native affinity. English becomes a complex entity which oscillates between Homi Bhabha's analogies of "Bombay Street food, spicy, cheap..." (x) and an "archaic"



“carved almirah that engulfed you in the faded smell of moth-balls and beautiful brittle linens” (x). English becomes a professional tool for the boys but also threatens to alienate them from their immediate surroundings.

It remains unclear as to what language Rusty uses to converse with his indigenous friends Somi, Kishen, Ranbir, and Suri. In the opening chapter of *The Room on the Roof*, Rusty feels alienated and left out as he cannot converse in the vernacular Punjabi, whereas Kim’s knowledge of the vernacular can surpass that of any native. Debashish Bandopadhyay claims that Rusty identifies with “the dialogic nature of the anxiety of a double bind” (18). While partly true, I argue that he needs to discard one identity in order to dress himself in the garb of another, if only for a while. When Rusty is reading an English book, his friend Kishen notices that the extent of his absorption in the process makes him oblivious of his Indian surroundings. Rusty’s linguistic choice may stem from the passage of time into the era of postcolonialism, as English has become a lasting legacy of India and in some ways fundamental to the experience of Indianness.

### The “Third Space” of the Bazaars

Both Rusty and Kim cast off their British identities in the buzzing space of forbidden *bazaars* and native festivals. While Kim is often seen “yelling at a Hindu festival” (Loc 8952), it is at the Hindu festival of Holi to which he is invited by Ranbir that Rusty is ‘coloured’ in the hues of the festival and is literally ‘unwhitened’ to the point of being unrecognisable to Mr. Harrison. An infuriated Mr. Harrison punishes Rusty, which catalyses his rebellion against his European upbringing, although he refuses to ‘unwhiten’ his brain from the influence of English Literature. In a parallel scene, Kim is painted in a thick blue dye with much ritual and ceremony by a blind Muslim woman, Huneefa, presided over by Mahboub Ali and later Hurree Babu. There is, however, a major difference: Kim’s “painting,” will allow him to embark on a successful career as a spy for the British, whereas Rusty’s body, painted with Holi colours, severs his immediate link with his British surroundings. Yet, the severance remains partial, as the legacy of India’s colonial past is tougher to erase than the most stubborn of colours.

The *bazaar* becomes an alluring, feral space, which is symbolic of the ‘real’ India, and is deemed completely unsuitable for refined White boys. As the drummer-boy tells Kim, “...the bazaar’s out o’ bounds. If we go there, we’ll get a dressing down. You come back” (Loc 10409). A similar sentiment is echoed by the missionary’s wife in *The Room on the Roof*, who believes that the *bazaar* is the microcosm of all the misery and evils of the Orient. It becomes analogous to Bhabha’s “Third Space,” brimming over with potential for new identities to be forged. It is here that Rusty befriends Somi and renounces Mr. Harrison’s tutelage. And it is here that Kim communicates with the Lama through letters, defying his peers in his English school. The *bazaar* becomes a key to the ‘real’ India, which hastens their alignment to the country.

In R.L. Stevenson's poem, "Foreign Children," (1885) a white child, wary of the dangers of the colonies, asks his oriental peers, "Oh, don't you wish that you were me?" In the Rusty novels, we see a reversal of these lines. Rusty befriends the likes of Somi, Kishen, and Ranbir who openly pity his boring, white childhood. He begins to experience life only when he can escape from sanitised European boundaries. It is particularly interesting to look at the following lines of Stevenson's poem (of whom Bond is very fond) "Foreign Children" in light of these novels: "have curious things to eat/ I am fed on proper meat" (Loc 82). Rusty and Kim are united in their love for *bazaar* food which further cements their commitment to 'going native'. Rusty favours the *chaats* and *gol-guppas* sizzling with fats in the shops at the *bazaar* over English lemonade, the thought of which "offends" him, while Kim craves *bazaar* mutton curry stewed in cabbages and fat over the European food served at St. Xavier's. In contrast to "Foreign Children" Stevenson too expresses his desire to roam "Eastern cities" where "rich goods from near and far/ Hang for sale in the bazaar" (Loc 82) in his poem "Travel." In *Rusty Goes to London*, the protagonist waxes eloquent about the redeeming qualities of British food but secretly confesses his love for *koftas*, a type of Indian meatball he grew up on. Kim, like Rusty, would obviously recoil at the thought of a genteel 'white' upbringing, but unlike Rusty who consciously rejects it through his choice of food, among other things, he has never had one. Growing up on the streets of Lahore, his life has been full of native adventure, but he does use his access to all things indigenous to become a successful British spy. Kim couldn't have succeeded in espionage had he not been exposed to the 'perils' of the streets and street food of India.

## Conclusion

Bond's silent and repressed loyalty to Kipling's literary works emerges through the space of the 'silent conversations' that he conducts with his predecessor. His simultaneous acceptance and disavowal of Kipling's influence reveals that, like Kipling, Bond too attempts to reconcile and comprehend the divisions that exist within himself. Bond becomes representative of the modern-day Anglo-Indian who owes his presence in the India he loves to the colonial legacy, which Kipling unquestioningly endorsed. His hesitance to unflinchingly embrace Kipling's literary legacy stems from the difficulty of divorcing Kipling from his political perspectives.

To conclude, one cannot help but wonder how these two writers have negotiated their identities through their novels and characters and how Bond quietly establishes his connection with Kipling and *Kim*. A quiet conversation between the two writers emerges from a space of divided loyalties to their inheritance, cultural capital, and immediate contexts. Arguably, Kipling never ceased to be Anglo-Indian in the nineteenth-century sense of the term. *Kim* is dedicated to the eponymous protagonist's adventures, by an author seemingly different from but also strangely aligned to his fictional creation. Kipling recreates a rich native atmosphere

and ambience in his works through the peppering of his prose with vernacular phrases and idioms and an eponymous protagonist who speaks Angrezi haltingly but the vernacular with a poetic fluency. Bond's choice of title, *The Room on the Roof*, is more meditative. Rusty's room is a donated, temporary space atop his friend Kishen's house, simultaneously attached to it and severed from it. This is where he re-constructs his personal history to make sense of his formlessness, give direction to his narrative, and emerge from the ashes of colonialism. Unlike Virginia Woolf, who speaks of the necessity of a private room in which to write, in her extended essay "A Room of One's Own" (1929), Rusty writes nothing in his. Perhaps the English language is not an adequate vehicle to convey his sense of unbelonging and re-belonging to a postcolonial nation of many languages and heterogenous experiences. Rusty's postcolonial imagination has to re-interpret his new reality in a more idiosyncratic language. Since the "self-other" binary is so complicated, it cannot be a simplistic transition for either Kim or Rusty. There always looms large the possibility of a return, the possibility of a collapse.

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