

The Path to Nirvana: Exploring Buddhist Concepts in *Kim*

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Abstract

This research paper investigates the Buddhist concepts of 'nirvana' in Kipling's Kim mainly through the lens of the central character Teshoo Lama. In Buddhism, 'nirvana' is a key term that refers to achieving mental peace and a supreme state of bliss by extinguishing the flames of tempting desires, attachment, and ignorance. I have mainly focused on some of the authentic texts and opinions of the Western and Eastern Buddhist scholars for the theoretical aspects of this article, and it claims that Kipling makes the Buddhist notions of 'nirvana' explicit through the portrayal of the Tibetan Buddhist Teshoo Lama, who seeks mental peace by ending his desires through enlightenment. He strives to detach himself from earthly desires to achieve a deeper understanding of life and ultimately reaches to the state of 'nirvana'. This article also explores how Kim's secular journey for identity and material gratification is influenced by his companionship with the Lama and his gradual immersion in the Lama's teachings, transforming his quest into a pursuit of higher enlightenment and mental peace. Furthermore, this article concludes that humankind's attachment to ephemeral objects is a source of suffering, and inner peace can be achieved through knowledge, wisdom, and ethical conduct, rather than becoming entangled in illusory materialistic pursuits such as love, affection, ego, and greed.

Keywords: Buddhism, detachment, illusion, impermanence, nirvana, wheel

Introduction

This article tries to provide a descriptive and analytical account of the Buddhist notion of 'nirvana' and the Buddhist way of life in Kipling's *Kim* (1901). It also observes how the Lama's teaching of the Buddhist way of life transforms the protagonist Kim, who is seeking material gratifications such as identity, power, and recognition. Kipling has highlighted the central concept of the Buddhist doctrine of 'nirvana', 'karma', impermanence, illusion of self, and interconnectedness of things in the novel. Kipling teaches the importance of religious life, spiritual knowledge, and wisdom through his portrayal of the Tibetan Buddhist monk, Teshoo Lama, who is searching for the mythical

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‘River of the Arrow’ to cleanse himself of all the taint of sin. Additionally, Kipling depicts a distinct secular world where the characters are focused on material prosperity, power, identity, and prestige.

The Lama, who is on pilgrimage to many religious sites of Buddhist relics in India, is detached from cravings such as greed, passion, lust, and aversion, the major sources of suffering. Being detached from all these attachments, he wants to cease the ‘Wheel’, the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, which is known as ‘Samsara’ in Buddhism. The Lama’s simplicity, spiritual quest, and wisdom greatly influence Kim, who becomes his *Chela* and assists the Lama in his spiritual journey. Kim’s desires for identity, sahibdom, and the great game of international espionage transform into a quest for enlightenment. Through the portrayal of the Lama’s character and his spiritual journey, Kipling underscores the relevance of Buddhist philosophy and its significant influence on individuals’ lives and worldviews. Likewise, he dramatizes mankind’s transformation from ignorance to enlightenment, highlighting the power of spiritualism over materialism.

Review of Literature

Kipling’s *Kim* has received extensive critical comments since its publication in 1901. The critics discover multifarious themes such as British colonialism, imperialism, identity crisis, racism, dominance, and cultural conflict in British India during the late nineteenth-century. Postcolonial critics interpret the novel as promoting the image of the British Empire, racism, and the superiority of the Occident over the Orient. Said in his seminal text *Orientalism* (1989) argues that the depiction of Oriental soil and people from Occidental perspective has become a common trend in literature since the rise of colonialism. According to Said, this popular Western discourse, “aims at dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (p. 3). Judging the novel from this lens, *Kim* provides a glimpse of a large number of negative stereotypes about the Orient which foregrounds the idea of European superiority and dominance. Kinkead-Weekes (1964) aptly says that the novel is “the product of a peculiar tension between different ways of seeing” (p. 233).

In the novel, Kipling’s portrayal of Kim as a powerful street waif, who controls, dominates, and influences the Indian characters and the land, signifies Oriental’s timidity, subjection, and inability to govern their own life and native land. The Whites’ narrative statements such as “Kim could lie like an Oriental” (p. 23), “all hours of twenty-four are alike to Orientals” (p. 26), and one can never fathom the Oriental mind” (p. 86) suggest negative stereotypes about the Orient and “reveal a key mechanism that has been used since the late eighteenth century to assert and maintain Western

dominance, namely the subjection of the Orient to a form of temporal stasis” (Scott, 2014, p. 175). Scott also argues that Kipling’s *Kim* “presents the Orient as inherently inferior to the West” (p. 176). He observes the dichotomy between cultural superiority and inferiority as an underlying theme of the novel.

Shandilya (2014) finds out the theme of British imperialism in the novel. She affirms: “Written at a period of high imperialism, *Kim*’s narrative establishes the supremacy of British rule through the trope of the Great Game” (p. 346). In the novel, the young street urchin Kim is forced to give up Indian habits and manners, and he is sent to St. Xavier’s in Lucknow to learn the business of empire after being recognized as a White. He is trained as a spy in the service of the Great Games of international espionage. Supporting Shandilya’s observation of the novel, Fellion (2013) writes: “The novel abounds with examples of ethnic stereotypes and stock information from the archive Edward Said has named ‘Orientalism’” (p. 897).

The critics, who refute the postcolonial reading of the text, admire Kipling’s use of realism and objectivity. These critics find Kipling’s xenophilic sentiment in the novel. His birth and his seven years of journalism in India grew his infatuation with the Indian soil, citizens, rituals, and different religious places. Bristow (1991) foregrounds Kipling’s doting description of India and its culture as “an enchantingly colorful, rather magical place with plenty of remarkable scenery along the Grand Trunk Road” (p. 196). In the novel, Kipling encompasses different places of religious, political, and historical importance, and he also depicts panoramic views of Lahore, Lucknow, Benares, and the highest ranges of the Himalayas where the Lama attains salvation. Similarly, McClure (1985) claims “*Kim* actively rejects racial stereotyping in its characterization” (p. 154).

Observing Kipling’s love for the Indian people and his tremendous knowledge of India, critic JanMohamed (1985) argues that *Kim* represents “positive, detailed and non-stereotypical portrait of the colonized that is unique in colonialist literature” (p. 78). The novel displays a sense of intimate relationship and fraternity where the characters of different origins and religious and cultural identities seem to be living and working in harmony. The Indian characters love and admire the young Kim as the ‘friend of all the world’, and the Lama is revered and greeted cordially by the white curator in the Lahore Museum. Kim, despite his Christianity, becomes the Lama’s faithful disciple and helps him accomplish his spiritual journey.

Some critics note Kipling’s growing interest in Buddhism by examining the portrayal of the typical character, Tibetan Teshoo Lama, who is searching the ‘River of the Arrow’ for his salvation. Kreisel (2018) puts: “*Kim* engages deeply with the several aspects of Buddhist thought that were also of central concern to Nineteenth-Century psychology:

the nature of consciousness, the problem of free will, and the formation of identity” (pp. 228-229). Within the novel, Teshoo Lama is an embodiment of a rudimentary idea of Buddhism which is based on “the notion that we live not one but endless lives, each existence conditioned by what we have done in the past” (Leoshko, 2001, p. 57). Kipling makes use of both the Mahayana and Theravada Buddhist paths to show enlightenment of the Buddhist monk, Teshoo Lama.

Departure

The existing critical stances focus on *Kim* as a novel representing colonial politics, and denounce Kipling as being propagandist, racist, and imperialist. However, these critics are mainly concerned with the role of the protagonist Kim who is seeking power and authority in the Indian subcontinent. They have not paid much attention to the role of the old Buddhist monk Teshoo Lama, who preaches Buddhist teachings and illustrates how the Buddha attained enlightenment. The critics see less concerned with the Buddhist concept of ‘nirvana’, soteriology, and deliverance. The novel teaches ethics, morality, and peace of mind rather than colonial power, racism, and domination. Thus, this article seeks to fill the gap by exploring the Lama’s spiritual quest for enlightenment and deliverance from the cosmic and mundane worlds.

Methodology

This study is the qualitative content analysis method to draw ideas and concepts of theoretical perceptive from authentic Buddhist texts to fulfill the research gap. The Buddhist doctrine of ‘nirvana’ and the Buddhist ways of life have been the theoretical tools for the interpretation of the text. For the entire information, the researcher has applied a thorough thematic analysis of the novel and also used secondary materials such as internet, the e-library, and other relevant books, journals, and articles for critical comments and theoretical concepts. The research findings are analyzed and discussed in the context of the relevant literature, and the conclusion is drawn from the analysis of the text in detail.

Discussion

Kipling seamlessly explores the Buddhist concept of ‘nirvana’ in *Kim*, illustrating its significance within the narrative. ‘Nirvana’ is the central term in Buddhism, even though it has multiple interpretations and controversies across different religions and philosophical contexts. In Buddhism, it refers to an individual’s deliverance from poisons such as greed, desires, and lust, which are the main source of suffering. Thus, ‘nirvana’ is the state of being free from suffering by the act of blowing off the flames of sinful desires, lust, and attachments. Most schools of Buddhism explain ‘nirvana’ as the

realization of perfect bliss and peace achieved by detachment from these harmful defilements. When the Himayana (small vehicle) school defines 'nirvana' as an act of 'extinction of self', the Mahayana (great vehicle) school of Buddhism defines it as 'the complete attainment of truth'. In his book *Essence of the Heart Sutra* (2005), His Holiness Dalai Lama defines 'nirvana' as the "state beyond sorrow" or a "state of freedom from cyclic existence" (p. 3).

'Nirvana' is a central concept in Buddhism, particularly in the context of the Four Noble Truths, which teaches that human liberation from suffering, sickness, and death is achieved through the realization of 'nirvana'. Welborn (1966) defines 'nirvana' "is the absence, the destruction of suffering. It involves the eradication of ignorance through the attainment of wisdom" (p. 301). The Buddha's teachings, according to Giri (2020) is to "eliminating ignorance by understanding and seeing dependent origination and eliminating desire (p. 94) to attain 'nirvana'. 'Nirvana' is the highest or ultimate good or tranquil bliss or ecstasy. Rhys Davis (1900) affirms that "Nirvana' does not mean the annihilation of the soul . . . but the dying out, in the heart, of the three fell fires of lust, ill-will and delusion" (p. 520). He claims that one can attain 'nirvana' by "self-mastery, by a gradual inward perfection" (p. 520). Moreover, 'nirvana' is an act of extinguishing or blowing off the flame or fire of anger, greed, aversion, ego, and delusion to attain permanent peace and noble truth.

In the novel, the Lama's quest for nirvana is similar to Siddhartha Gautama's quest for enlightenment. The Lama does not belong to any "culture of extreme path of living" (Paudel, 2022, p.75). The Lama is simply a Tibetan Buddhist monk and a "follower of the Middle Way, living in peace in lamaseries" (Kipling, 1901, p. 5). The Buddhist doctrine of the 'Middle Way' emphasizes avoiding extremes like self-indulgence and self-mortification to achieve freedom from physical attachment and maintain inner harmony and peace. The Lama is steered by the "value and practicality of the Middle Way living without bonds with cosmic things" (Paudel, 2022, p.77). The old itinerant Lama is on pilgrimage to the four places of Buddhist relics – Buddha-Gaya, a place where the Shakyamuni Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment; Buddha's birth place; the Deer Park, where the Buddha preached his first sermon; and Kusinagar, the death place of Buddha. Above all, he wants to cleanse all the taint and speckle of sin bathing in the 'River of the Arrow', a mythical river broken out by the arrows of Siddhartha in a bride-winning contest. In the novel, the River is a metaphoric representation of the spiritual journey toward enlightenment which is similar to the Buddhist notion of 'nirvana'. The Lama believes that he can attain salvation and free himself from all illusions by visiting these Buddhist sites, thereby liberating himself

from the 'Wheel of Things' called 'Samsara', an endless cyclical journey of birth, death, and rebirth.

At the start of the novel, we see the Lama engaged in a long conversation with the white curator of the Buddhist Museum in Lahore. He is much impressed by the collections of the images of the Buddhist artifacts in the museum as he finds them a source of his insights into his quest for enlightenment and understanding of the Buddhist teachings. After revealing his purpose of coming to India from Tibet, he requests the curator to assist him in completing his spiritual journey. The young Kim, an orphan son of a sergeant of the Mavericks, an Irish regiment in India, overhears the conversation, and he is inwardly moved by the Lama's simplicity, knowledge, and spiritual quest for enlightenment.

Kim decides to become the Lama's faithful '*Chela*' and assist him in completing his sacred journey. Interestingly, Kim is on a quest for a Red Bull in a green field, a prophecy from his father told to him by a half-cast woman who raised him from infancy. The prophecy told that "Nine hundred first class devils whose God was a Red Bull on a green field would attain to Kim" (Kipling, 1901, p. 2), and bring him fortune and shape his future life. This prophecy becomes Kim's inciting force, and he is seeking the time to make the prophecy come true. Thus, Kim's quest evolves into a dual mission – assisting the Lama's spiritual quest and fulfilling his secular quest. The two distinct journeys are intertwined and run in parallel throughout the novel. The Lama believes that Kim is instrumental and resourceful in his search for the 'River of Healing' because he is well-acquainted with the vast geographical and cultural landscape of India.

The Lama's detachment from earthly affairs and human dealings becomes apparent when Kim and the Lama arrive in Kashmir. He listlessly moves through the hot and crowded bazar, the crowded vehicles, and the crowd of people with various business affairs has no influence on him. Similarly, in a 'Grand Trunk Road', a very long road built up by the East India Company which is a central hub for social and economic interaction, the Lama is deep in meditation whereas secular Kim is utterly thrilled with delight with the open and long road, the bustle of people, new sights, marriage procession with music and shouting. For the Lama the people's pageantry is a strong bond to the Wheel of Life, as he tells Kim: "And they are bound upon the Wheel! Bound from life after life. To none of these has the Way been shown" (Kipling, 1901, p. 63). On the train, the Lama appears to be serene and contemplative. Sitting on the floor of the train, he meditates and recites Buddhist invocation 'Om mane pudme hum', counting his rosary beads without any interest in conversations among his fellow travellers. He teaches them about the Buddhist concept of human life, the soul, and the impermanence

of all things. He advises them to break the endless cycle of existence by detaching themselves from desires and worldly attachments.

Kipling highlights the Buddhist notions of the Middle Path, a fundamental principle that guides individuals in finding balance in life. Buddhism tells us that one can maintain the balance in life incorporating harmony and equanimity. According to Buddhism, human beings are interconnected with other sentient creatures including environment and all lives are deeply affected by one's ill actions that bring disharmony in their relationships. To build harmony and balance in life, one should follow the Eightfold Path - right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, non-attachment, meditation, compassion, and kindness - in life. Within the novel, the Lama adheres to the Path for ethical and mental development and teaches its importance in life to Kim and other characters he comes across during his journey.

The Lama advocates for the Buddhist concept of nonviolence, which is the first precept of Buddhist teaching. This precept discourages killing or causing harm to other living beings and instills respect, compassion, and empathy for all sentient creatures. This is the reason the Lama forbids Kim to kill the cobra because he thinks it as a part of the larger interconnected web of life. Believing all sentient creatures are equal and all lives are caught in the endless wheel of life, he tells Kim: "He is upon the Wheel as we are – a life ascending or descending – very far from deliverance. Great evil must the soul have done that is cast into this shape Let him live out his life" (Kipling, 1901, p. 43). In Buddhism, taking other's life is a serious ethical violation which is itself a negative action that generates bad 'karma'. The Lama, who enhances the sense of love, compassion, and kindness, thinks the act of killing is mankind's madness, moral failing, and folly. He says: "And to say that I would take life is – not a sin, but madness simple" (Kipling, 1901, p. 284).

From the beginning of the novel, we see the Lama advocating for social harmony and promoting a humanitarian and egalitarian approach. Thus, he comments on the old retired soldier, who boastfully tells that he fought and killed the enemies in the Mutiny of 1857 as a warrior. In response to the soldier's pride, the Lama questions the value and result of violence: "What profit to kill men?" (Kipling, 1901, p. 52). For the Lama, people's involvement in killing, quarreling, and fighting is futility and counterproductive to the true purpose of life. He preaches to the soldier the merits of detachment from earthly things, emotions, and harmful actions so as to attain enlightenment. Likewise, the Lama considers pride as a form of attachment and ignorance that can generate suffering and hinder spiritual progress.

The Lama supports the Buddhist teachings that suggest cessation of extremes of arrogance, ego, and self-deprecation. Human anger, like other negative emotions, is a form of craving and delusion that ultimately leads us to suffering and conflict. One can bring peace and harmony in life through practicing patience, compassion, and equanimity. This fundamental Buddhist philosophy the Lama teaches Kim when he becomes angry at the Arian farmer's abuse and scold while they accidentally intrude in his garden. The lama simply calls the farmer's impolite and angry remarks 'Red Mist of Anger' without any complaint. Pointing it a common disease of human demeanour, he tells Kim: "He is as we are, bound upon the Wheel of Things; but he does not tread the way of deliverance" (Kipling, 1901, p. 43). When Kim praises the Lama's wisdom and holiness in front of the discourteous farmer, the Lama retorts: "There is no pride among such as follow the Middle Way" (Kipling, 1901, p. 43). He advises Kim to use Right Action and Speech, teaching Kim the temporality of human pride, ego, and position.

Similarly, the Lama discards social hierarchy based on caste. He advocates the Buddhist view that an individual's spiritual progress and enlightenment are not determined by his/her caste, wealth, and power, but by his/her pious efforts, ethical conduct, and wisdom. All human beings have the potential for spiritual progress and enlightenment irrespective of their social status and position. The Lama asserts this principle through his interaction with Kim and his observation of the culturally diverse Indian society and its rigid caste system. In response to the Afgan horse dealer working for the British Mavericks, Mahabub Ali's question regarding Kim's race and nationalism, the Lama responds: "Why should I ask? There is neither high nor low in the Middle Way" (Kipling, 1901, p. 20). Claiming the caste system as a conventional social construction which is itself a delusion, he tells Kim: "To those who follow the way there is neither black nor white, Hind nor Bhotiyal. We be all souls seeking escape" (Kipling, 1901, p. 212).

Kim does have unswerving loyalty for the Lama, and has deep reverence for his knowledge, wisdom, and spirituality. He wholeheartedly cares for the Lama calling him his mentor, companion, and father figure. However, he differs from the Lama in his pragmatic approach to life. He is undertaking a journey with the Lama so that he will be able to find his identity and better future. The Lama is quite perceptive about Kim's primary motivations, desires, and attachments to material and superficial ambitions. Thus, he imparts a great deal of knowledge to Kim about the negative effect of his attachment to the physical world. He teaches Kim the insignificance and impermanence of the earthly things and the benefits of detachment from the mundane things. He advises Kim to practice compassion, wisdom, and inner tranquility to attain 'nirvana'. Thus, for the Lama, Kim's fantasy of the Red Bull in a green field, which would make him king, is

merely an ephemeral and tempting desire that is ultimately an illusion. The Lama says, “All desire is illusion and new binding upon the Wheel” (Kipling, 1901, p. 123), and Kim’s obsession with the image of Red Bull “is the world’s illusion and no more” (Kipling, 1901, p. 80). According to the Lama, human desires create a false sense of satisfaction that is fleeting and do not last, binding us to the wheel of suffering, and prevent us from attaining ‘nirvana’. Thus, he calls “All desire is red – and evil (Kipling, 1901, p. 93) indicating its disruptive nature which can lead to harmful actions. He advocates that one can achieve spiritual goals and inner tranquility by transcending fleeting desires and understanding their illusory nature.

Kim, who was awaiting his fortune seeking the Red Bull in the green field, is complete in the middle of the novel when he suddenly comes upon an English army regiment bearing a green flag with a red bull thereon. The protestant Chaplain, Arthur Bennet arrests Kim and comes to know that Kim is not a Hindu mendicant, but a son of Kimbal O’Hara, once a member of the same regiment, after searching Kim’s amulet by Father Victor which contains his father’s signature, Kim’s birth certificate, and the prophecy. They think him an instrumental in their British intelligence network, despite his outward appearance as a mere street imp. Colonel Creighton, whom Kim calls a father figure, also identifies Kim’s unique skills, his keen observation, and his ability to blend into various environments in British India. He decides to enroll Kim in the missionary school St. Xavier’s in Lucknow as an act of benevolence and a strategic move to prepare him for a future role in the political and espionage activities of the British Empire and the Great Game. The Lama, who is ignorant of the chaplains’ strategic move, believes that Kim can lead an educated and disciplined life than his former life as a street urchin after receiving formal education. He decides to pay Kim’s school fees for the benefit of Kim’s merit in life.

Kim is involved in espionage training after his study is over, despite his intense desire to visit the Lama and live with him permanently. He is sent to Lurgan Sahib in Lahore, a British intelligence agent, who is an expert in the complex network of espionage and manipulation for his training and experiment in the great game of spying. He trains Kim in the act of disguise, espionage strategy, and the intricacies of intelligence work. To examine and develop Kim’s talent in observation, deduction, and intelligence works, Kim is asked to play a jewel game with Lurgan. The most interesting thing is that his skin has been dyed so that he is not noticed among people who would otherwise think of him as an outsider.

Likewise, Huree Babu, an intelligent officer with a full understanding of Indian culture and secret society, teaches Kim the code of a secret tantric society through ritual and

practical demonstration. He introduces Kim to the members of a secret tantric society who are skilled in various mystical and occult practices. He is taught the symbols, gestures, and coded language which may serve him as a means of communication and signaling in his secretive network. Now, Kim, who was once carefree and vagabond in the streets of Lahore - climbing rooftops and water pipes – transformed into a sahib, earning the Mavericks' trust and reputation. Kim's fortune has changed, and his problem is solved, at a time when he was anxious about his identity in the multicultural Indian territory, where he frequently questioned himself: "What am I? Mussalman, Hindu, Jain, or Buddhist? That is a hard nut" (Kipling, 1901, p. 143).

Kim reunites the Lama after being a sahib, and he performs his first act of charity by healing a sick child of Jat. As the Lama foregrounds the Buddhist concept of compassion, kindness, and alleviation of suffering, Kim's act of treating the child, impresses the Lama. Kim expresses his gratitude to the Lama saying: "I was made wise by thee, Holy one. . . . My teaching I owe to thee. I have eaten thy bread three years" (Kipling, 1901, p. 189). The Lama further teaches Kim the cause of things by drawing Buddhist Wheel (Bhavchakra) whose center is the conjoined Hog, Snake, and Dove, a symbolic representation of three poisons that perpetrate suffering and cyclic existence. The Hog stands for ignorance and delusion, humanity's lack of understanding and awareness of the true nature of reality; the Snake symbolizes anger and hatred, human's destructive emotions that arise from ignorance and contribute to suffering; and the Dove represents human desire, attachment, and cravings that forces us to seek ephemeral pleasures sustaining the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth dynamics. The Lama shows the picture of the Wheel of Life to Kim to encourage his deeper contemplation and practice to cease the cycles.

At the climax of the novel, Kim plays a dual role as a guide to the Lama's search for the River in the Himalayas and a British spy. Kim is assigned a mission to intercept the foreign spies, one Russian, and the other French who are involved in political espionage in the Himalayas. Kim along with Huree Babu succeeds in thwarting the foreign spies because they fail to identify Kim and Babu are secret agents. The Lama confronts with the Russian spy who demands the Lama's drawing of the Wheel of Life, and tears half of the chart striking the Lama with a blow on his face. The Lama defends with his pen case as a weapon and comes into a fit of rage, but recoils himself showing no malice and hatred to the Russian. At this turning point of the novel, there comes a significant change in the Lama and it seems to precipitate the end of his quest, making him aware of his intense attachments. The Lama becomes frail due to the Russian's blow and his sickness. Kim also falls sick, however, he manages the local people and passengers across the

mountain to carry the Lama down to the plains, where Kim provides the dying Lama better medical attention and care along with food and water.

The Lama calls the Russian's blow "a shadow upon a shadow" (Kipling, 1901, p. 252) indicating the Buddhist notion of impermanence and insubstantiality of cosmic events and phenomena. He observes the physical blow as fleeting and ultimately illusory, as the shadow cannot have fixity and stableness. However, at this juncture, he realizes his sin against his spiritual practice by choosing the hills for his fulfillment. He feels he has failed to overcome his attachment, passion, and yearning for the 'River of the Arrow' that led him astray from the path of detachment and purity. He gradually internalizes the deceptive and illusory nature of the physical body, which constantly demands pleasure, comfort, and longevity, deceiving us into believing that these needs are permanent and inevitable. The sensations of our bodies, such as hunger, pain, and pleasure often mislead and distract us from achieving spiritual bliss and a higher truth. Pointing to the deceptive nature of the human body, the Lama tells Kim: "There are many lies in the world, and not a few liars, but there are no liars like our bodies, except it be the sensations of our bodies" (Kipling, 1901, p. 272).

The Lama and Kim undergo significant change in the plain. The sick Kim gets cured by the compassionate Kulu woman, whom he calls mother. At this moment he recalls the series of events that occurred in his life – the death of his mother, his deceased father's boozing, and his situation when he was a street waif roaming and begging for his subsistence on the streets of Lahore as a 'poor white of the very poorest'. In the course of his maturation, Kim's search for a parent is fulfilled when he finds the Lama, his father figure, who calls him 'son of my soul', and Colonel Creighton, who plays a fatherly role since his schooling at St. Xavier's. Kim has achieved significant personal growth and spiritual insight from his ongoing journey with the Lama. Now, he has reached a level of spiritual realization, his self, the value of compassion, and spiritual existence. He compares himself with a cog-wheel of a sugar-crusher which is unconnected with any machinery to indicate his isolation, detachment, and disconnection from the world around him. He envisions the nature of different elements of life and their purposes when he says: "Roads were meant to be walked upon, houses to be lived in, cattle to be driven, fields to be tilled, and men and women to be talked to. They were all real and true. . . . (Kipling, 1901, p. 282). Here, Kim internalizes the elementary roles and practical and intrinsic functions of these things in the world in the day-to-day lives of people.

The Lama, on the other hand, feels lost and confused about the deeper truths behind existence and reality, the cause of things, the nature of suffering, and 'karma', despite his years of efforts. He practices fasting even without water to maintain a form of

asceticism, but he realizes that physical sustenance and ascetic practices are not the ways to achieve spiritual insights. Thus, he chooses the Buddhist Eightfold Path, which is the correct meditation or concentration. He sits under a tree and forgoes food and water for two days and nights in the pursuit of meditation, and he finally attains enlightenment, which he has been seeking.

The enlightened Lama realizes the River he has been seeking for years is not a physical location rather it is spiritual realization and one's inner peace, which can be achieved through knowledge. He says: "I was dragged from no river . . . I found it through knowledge" (Kipling, 1901, p. 284). He acknowledges that one's true healing is within himself/herself, and the quest for the physical object, here the River, is just for spiritual satisfaction. Similarly, he realizes that his soul is liberated from the 'silly body' and no longer constrained by the physical body. He states: "My soul went free, and, wheeling like an eagle, saw indeed that there was no Teshoo Lama nor any other soul" (Kipling, 1901, p. 288). In Tibetan Buddhism, the concept of the soul or self is viewed as an illusion, distracting from the conventional sense of self or ego. The Lama internalizes this truth to liberate himself from the conventional notion of self, ultimately discovering that the self is void and illusory.

Additionally, he feels his soul has released itself from his body and merged into the Great Soul like a single drop of water merging into the sea. He explains: "As a drop draws to water, so my Soul drew near to the Great Soul which is beyond all things . . . By this, I knew the Soul had passed beyond the illusion of Time and Space and of Things" (Kipling, 1901, p. 288). He realizes the merging of his soul into the Great Soul a spiritual union. As the ocean is a unity of a single drop of water, he does find unity and integration among people, place, and things, where distinctions of time and space dissolve. However, in the moment of enlightenment and knowledge, the Lama realizes the workings of attachment within himself, which he has been trying to escape. At this moment, feeling Kim might miss the way, his soul returned to his body for his disciple's well-being. His soul detached from a state of profound unity within the Great Soul in a natural process of transformation and the cyclical nature of existence as "the egg from the fish, as the fish from the water, as the water from the cloud, as the cloud from the thick air, so put forth, so leaped out, so drew away, so fumed up the Soul of Teshoo Lama from the Great Soul" (Kipling, 1901, p. 288).

As stated above, 'nirvana' is a process of extinguishing the flame of desires and attachments, the Lama cannot extinguish his desire, the influence of love, and the realization of the need for guidance to his faithful '*Chela*'. His flame of attachment to his disciple and desire to lead him to life is still burning. Consequently, he remains with

Kim “crossing his hands on [Kim’s] lap and smiled, as a man may who has won salvation for himself and his beloved” (Kipling, 1901, p. 289). He hears a voice within himself: “What shall come to the boy if thou art dead? And I was shaken back and forth in myself with pity for thee; and I said: I will return to my *Chela*, at least he miss the Way” (Kipling, 1901, p. 288). The Lama’s long striving to merge his soul with the Great Soul fails here, indicating that his quest for ‘nirvana’ is still ongoing. In Buddhism, ‘nirvana’ is seen as an ongoing process of spiritual development rather than a single endpoint, a realization that can be continuously deepened. The Lama’s journey continues, even though his quest for the ‘River of the Arrow’ is fulfilled. Thus, ‘nirvana’ is not just sudden events, but a dynamic and ongoing process which is cultivated step by step.

Conclusion

Kipling expounds the Buddhist notion of ‘nirvana’ in this novel through the Lama’s spiritual journey and his teachings. His search for enlightenment aligns with the Buddhist pursuit of ‘nirvana’. The Lama’s search for the ‘River of the Arrow’ is a symbolic representation of spiritual liberation and the Buddhist goal of attaining salvation. Similarly, Kipling makes the key Buddhist concepts of impermanence, interconnection of phenomena, and the pursuit of enlightenment explicit in the novel. The Lama, who is undertaking a spiritual journey to attain ‘nirvana’, imparts knowledge to Kim about the importance of spiritual enlightenment and the truth behind the phenomenal world. Kim, whose quest is to find out his identity and material gratification, is ultimately influenced by his long companionship with the Lama and his gradual immersion into the Lama’s teaching, which transforms his quest toward attaining a higher state of enlightenment and mental peace. Although he goes on to play the ‘great game’ of international espionage, he finally realizes that his experiences and relationship with the Lama transform his sense of self, and he admits the complexity of his dual identity and the importance of his spiritual journey. At the end of the novel, like the Lama, he internalizes the value and meaning of nonattachment to things. Although the Lama has gained immense knowledge about the soul, self, and truth, he still seems to be caught in the illusion of ‘Maya’ and attachment. Thus, the Lama does not attain ‘nirvana’, but he is in the continuous process of spiritual development.

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