

SENSE OF SELF AND BELONGING IN RUDYARD KIPLING'S THE JUNGLE BOOK

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Received: 18 Dec 2023

Accepted: 26 Dec 2023

Published: 30 Dec 2023

ABSTRACT

This paper undertakes to explore the concepts of identity and belonging in the literary work The Jungle Book written by Rudyard Kipling. Through a thorough analysis of this work, the complexity of personal and cultural identity, as well as sense of belonging to a specific community or nation is explored. Kipling's storytelling unravels the dominance of these concepts offering profound insights into the human experience. In his writing, we often encounter characters that are grappling with questions of identity. These characters are trying to make a sense of their own self and they have a longing to belong somewhere and find their place in the world. Kipling explores the idea of identity from various angles, including individual, cultural and national identity. One of the recurring themes in Kipling's works is the concept of belonging. His writing reflects about the urge of an individual to belong to a particular community, whether it is a nation, a social group, or even a family. His characters often face challenges and conflicts that arise from their desire to fit in or assert their individuality within these communities. His works prompt us to consider how these aspects shape our lives and influence our relationship with others. This research paper aims to analyze and interpret the various manifestations of sense of self and belonging in The Jungle Book shedding light on the significance of these concepts and to gain a deeper understanding of their relevance in our own lives.

KEYWORDS: *Self, Identity, Belonging, Social Group, Community, Jungle.*

INTRODUCTION

In Rudyard Kipling's literary classic The Jungle Book, the story takes place in a beautiful Indian jungle setting, offering a fascinating investigation of two essential human aspects including self and belonging. The main character of this popular book, Mowgli, sets off on a deep voyage of self-discovery, navigating the difficulties of forming an identity and the universal human need for acceptance and connection. A complex story that intertwines the themes of personal identification and the need for a place to call one's own develops as we dive deeper into the nuances of Mowgli's interactions with the human and animal residents of the forest. This research paper aims to analyze the deep subtleties present in The Jungle Book, highlighting how Kipling's story highlights the shared human experience of struggling with the entwined notions of selfhood and belonging.

An individual's knowledge and comprehension of their own identity, character, and uniqueness is referred to as their "sense of self." It entails accepting one's ideals, ideas, feelings, and life experiences, all of which contribute to a unique sense of self.

The feeling of being a member of, accepted by, or fitting into a specific group, community, or setting is referred to as "belonging." It fosters a sense of belonging to something greater than oneself by including a shared identity and mutual

acceptance.

When combined, a "sense of self and belonging" suggests that a person not only recognizes and defines who they are, but also finds acceptance and a sense of connection in a broader setting, such as a community, social group, or cultural identity. A person's general sense of fulfillment and well-being can be greatly enhanced by this link.

When there is a contradiction or friction between a person's own identity and the standards or expectations of a broader group or society, conflict in the context of sense of self and belonging can occur.

In the literary world, concepts of identity and belonging hold a significant place, with writers offering profound insights into the human experience through a vast number of characters. Among such writers Rudyard Kipling holds a significant place who despite a lot of criticism maintains relevance when it comes to exploring the concepts of self, identity and belonging. Through his diverse range of works, Kipling delves into the complexities of personal and cultural identity, as well as sense of belonging to a specific community or nation. From his iconic *The Jungle Book* to his thought provoking poems, Kipling's writings explore into the complexities of these fundamental aspects of human existence.

The human child Mowgli, who is reared by wolves in the forest, serves as the vehicle through which *The Jungle Book* addresses the idea of belonging. Throughout the story, Mowgli battles identity issues and tries to figure out if he really belongs in the wild with the animals or among people. The concept of finding one's place in society and fitting into a community is explored in the story.

Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* features Mowgli, a small child raised by wolves in the Indian jungle. Mowgli represents the conflict between human society's norms and the rules of the wild throughout the stories. His encounters with a variety of jungle creatures and his quest for self-discovery highlight themes of survival, belonging, and the conflict between the wild and the civilised. In Kipling's writings, the figure of Mowgli serves as a metaphor for the precarious equilibrium between nature and society. In the beginning of the story we see Mowgli being found by wolves and they started taking care of him from the very beginning.

'Man!' he snapped. 'A man's cub. Look!' Directly in front of him, holding on by a low branch, stood a naked brown baby who could just walk—as soft and as dimpled a little atom as ever came to a wolf's cave at night. He looked up into Father Wolf's face, and laughed. 'Is that a man's cub?' said Mother Wolf. 'I have never seen one. Bring it here.' (Kipling 6)

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

When an individual's own values and ideas diverge from the cultural standards of their group, they may encounter conflict. This may make it difficult to strike a balance between one's own identity and the cultural identity that the greater group has imposed. Being a human Mowgli's values often clash with the laws of the jungle. Raised by wolves, Mowgli takes up the habits of the forest creatures. But when he interacts with others, he realizes how drastically different their cultures are from his own, which causes him to question his own identity. Moreover Mowgli is initially introduced to a new way of life with its own set of laws, traditions, and social expectations when he first arrives in the human village. Mowgli's reaction to the dread and distrust of the villagers highlights the cultural difference between the human population and the jungle-raised youngster.

"The herd rounded up in the misty twilight, and when they got near the village Mowgli saw lights, and heard the

conches and bells in the temple blowing and banging. Half the village seemed to be waiting for him by the gate. 'That is because I have killed Shere Khan,' he said to himself. But a shower of stones whistled about his ears, and the villagers shouted: 'Sorcerer! Wolf's brat! Jungle demon! Go away! Get hence quickly or the priest will turn thee into a wolf again. Shoot, Buldeo, shoot!'" (Kipling 81)

BROTHERHOOD VERSUS SOCIETY

Mowgli develops strong relationships with the Animals of the forest, especially Bagheera the panther and Baloo the bear. This gives him feelings of identity in the forest, but because of his wild upbringing, people frequently fear or misunderstand him, which leads to difficulties when he interacts with them. Unaware of Mowgli's unusual upbringing, the villagers view him as a danger because of his animal communication abilities and forest knowledge. The cultural gap that exists between the conventions of human civilization and Mowgli's primitive, jungle-influenced behaviour is the source of this dread.

Fire Conflict

Another incident which shows cultural conflict is when Mowgli uses fire. The fire known as the "Red Flower" comes to represent the might and civilization of humans. Tension arises between Mowgli and the other forest animals because of their dread of fire's destructive nature. Mowgli uses and understands fire as a symbol of his connection to the human world.

Opposition of an Antagonist

The antagonistic tiger Shere Khan represents the jungle's animosity against Mowgli. The struggle between Mowgli's chosen jungle society and the natural predatory tendencies is reflected in his defiance.

"The jungle is a wild and untamed place, and we must learn to survive in it" (32). Kipling examines the difficulties of balancing two distinct worlds, cultural identity, and belonging through the lens of Mowgli's adventure. The story considers the possibility that cultural disputes may occur not just between various human groups but also between people and the environment they live in.

Kipling's characters often grapple with questions of identity and yearn for self-discovery and search for their place in the world. Whether it is Mowgli, the young boy raised by wolves, who struggles to reconcile his dual identity as both human and animal or Kim, the orphaned protagonist torn between his Indian heritage and his British upbringing, Kipling's characters embody the complexities of identity formation.

Moreover, his writings also explore the ways in which individuals strive to find their place within their communities. His stories depict characters that are caught between different cultures, traditions, and social expectations, highlighting the tensions and conflicts that arise from the desire to fit in or assert one's individuality. Through his vivid storytelling and evocative imagery, Kipling invites readers to reflect on their own experiences of identity and belonging. His works prompt us to question the factors that shape our sense of self and the role of community in our lives.

"the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack"

This line from the second jungle book emphasizes the importance of belonging to a community and finding identity within it. The Jungle Book offers exploration of belonging through the character of Mowgli, a young boy raised by wolves in an Indian Jungle. As Mowgli grows up among the animals, he struggles to find his place and understand where

he truly belongs. Kipling uses Mowgli's journey to depict the challenges of fitting into different communities and the search for the sense of belonging.

There is one another sentence in the book which shows the conflict Mowgli faces as he tries to reconcile his human identity with his unfathomable relation to the jungle and its inhabitants. "You are of the Jungle and not of the Jungle" (49)

Mowgli's encounters with various animal species, such as Baloo the bear and Bagheera the panther, highlight the importance of acceptance and finding place within a community. Kipling emphasizes that belonging goes beyond mere physical attributes and is rooted in shared values, experiences and connections. Mowgli's ultimate realization that his place is neither solely in the human world nor in the animal kingdom exemplifies the complex nature of belonging.

Mowgli suffers because he feels divided between two worlds: the animal kingdom and the human world. He feels as though he is stuck between two worlds, neither truly belonging to either. He loves the woods, but he laments losing his pack membership. He regrets not being able to take part in significant occasions like the Time of New Talk and yearns to fully immerse himself in the culture of the forest. He also bemoans the fact that he cannot smell as the animals, feeling inferior to them. Mowgli has internal struggles and a sense of exile as a result of these problems.

The Jungle Book demonstrates the intricate relationship between identity and belonging. Kipling's characters face the challenges of self-discovery, cultural influences, and societal expectations, all while seeking a sense of belonging. The struggles they face reflect the universal human experience of reconciling personal identity with the need of social acceptance. Kipling's works serves as a timeless reminder of the universal human quest for self-discovery and connection and readers are prompted to reflect on their own journeys of self and belonging.

CONCLUSIONS

In The Jungle Book Rudyard Kipling explores concepts of self, Identity and Belonging through his crafty storytelling and insightful characters. He delves into the complexities of individual and collective identities, highlighting the importance of embracing one's true self while finding a sense of belonging in a diverse and ever changing world. Through Mowgli, Kipling examines the intricate interaction between the process of forming an identity and the need for a sense of belonging. The difficulties of self-discovery and the need for acceptance are metaphorically reflected in the jungle. Through his interactions with a variety of animal and human characters, Mowgli brings to light the universal human need for identification and a sense of belonging. This symbolism resonates across cultures and determines the importance of locating one's position in the world.

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