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# **CHAPTER IV**

**A Comparative Study**

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## CHAPTER - IV / A COMPARATIVE STUDY.

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The Indian critic C.N.Srinath has said:

*"All comparative studies by definition should present differences or similarities which enable the readers to respond to either work of art in a proper perspective and then to arrive at a value judgement ... ".<sup>1</sup>*

This comparative study is limited to two specific novels, one by Frank Clune and another by Thomas Keneally, both Australian writers. The novels are *Jimmy Governor* (1959) and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1972). The two novels deal with the same subject matter, namely, an event in Australian history, which involved the natives, i.e. aborigines or half-caste blacks, murdering about nine white men and women and children indiscriminately, at Breelong, near Gilgandra, New South Wales, in 1900. Both novels are based upon the contemporary newspaper cuttings and other reliable sources, which add to the authenticity of the theme as well as the urgency of the central theme of racism. M.A.Goldsmith comments on this aspect of interdependence of Frank Clune's novel and Thomas Keneally's novel:

*"Jimmy Governor 'resounded' in Keneally's imagination is obvious first on a merely superficial level, in that both authors were preoccupied with the plight of half-castes in white Australia. Passages in Clune which must have* •

affected Keneally are those which 'modernise' the racial problem in terms of the heroes' personal dilemma. For example:

*Jimmy Governor was not a primitive aboriginal. There was as much white in him as black, yet, while belonging partly to both races, he belonged fully to neither. This was his tragedy and he brooded on it."*<sup>2</sup>

Thus, Frank Clune's hero, Jimmy Governor, is a model for Thomas Keneally's Jimmie Blacksmith. Hence, the central themes of both these novels have a direct bearing on the important modern problem - 'racism'. Although themes and characters of both the novels are more or less the same, their treatment at the hands of Frank Clune and Thomas Keneally is different. And this is important from the point of view of literary criticism as well as the value judgements involved in the comparative process. Jimmy Governor in Clune's *Jimmy Governor* becomes Jimmie Blacksmith in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. Also Jimmy's halfbrother Joe in Clune's novel becomes Mort in Keneally's novel. Then, the schoolteacher Helena Kerz in Clune's novel becomes Miss Petra Graf in Keneally's novel. Helena Kerz's fiance is Bert Byers and Graf's fiance is Dowie Stead. However, the hero is the same, Jimmie, the halfcaste black. He yearns to carve out an independent personality in order to acquire white respectability. He wants freedom and respectability but his relentless battle to achieve this desire is nullified by the stiff opposition from the white community and subsequent death by hanging. The story of the hero is in a sense,

representative of the age-old problem of racism in general and in Australia, in particular.

Keneally retains so many details of the original events in his novel. The characters used by the novelists are aborigines who are fullblood, halfblood and white characters. The households which the Governors attacked, for example, consisted of almost the same occupants in both the novels, including schoolteachers.

Schoolteachers from both the novels have their fiances. The fiances vow revenge on the murderers for the killing of their beloveds.

The other similarities, we can notice in these novels are - the flight of the fugitives; hot pursuit of the criminals by the Police and civilians; the shooting of Joe and Mort to death and the capture of Jimmy, his subsequent trial and his death by hanging.

Clune's *Jimmy Governor* is a source of inspiration for Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. Chris Tiffin remarks:

*"Inevitably, there are numerous small narrative changes from the Governor's story to the Blacksmiths."*<sup>3</sup>

Thus, we notice many differences between these novels from a literary or

stylistic point of view. In the first place, Clune's *Jimmy Governor* is more a documentary type of novel than an imaginative, fictional creation. Clune narrates the incidents, giving concrete examples, dates, names of places, persons, etc. For example, the first murder in the novel takes place at about 10:30 P.M. on Friday, the 20th July 1900 at Breelong, near Gilgandra, at the Mawbey's homestead. Mrs. Mawbey, her three daughters and the schoolteacher Helena Kerz are murdered. In September, Governor brothers kill Alexander McKay, at Ulan near Gulgong; the murder of Mrs. O'Brien and 15 months child takes place near Merriwa; and the murder of Kierman Fitzpatrick at his home at Wollar. Similarly, Jimmy's marriage takes place on 9th April 1898 at the Church in Gulgong and Ethel gives birth to her child on 23rd July 1898, etc.

Secondly, Clune gives the list of persons injured and murdered by Governor brothers in a journalistic style:

*"He did not know that three of the women they had struck down still lived, though grievously injured. These three were Elsie Clarke (18) at Breelong; Mrs. McKay (60) at Ulan; and Mrs. Bennett (30), the midwife at O'Brien's, near Merriwa.*

*He could suppose that these three were dead, as, in fact, were nine others that he could compute in his grim list of victims - Mrs. Mawbey (44), Helena Kerz (21), Grace Mawhey (16), Percy Mawhey (14), Hilda Mawhey (11), Alex McKay (70), Mrs.*

*O'Brien (30), James O'Brien (15 months) and Kierman Fitzpatrick (70)."*<sup>4</sup>

This type of listing, quoting names, dates, places, etc., is not adopted by Thomas Keneally. Thus Clune uses journalistic style giving picturesque account, making it more dramatic and sensational. Also, Clune uses 'a map' at the beginning of the novel showing the track of the fugitive blacks (See Appendix I).

Chris Tiffin considers that though there are numerous changes from Governor's Story to Blacksmith's, two are very important:

*"The first is the capture of Jimmy Governor, who was taken sleeping by a fire, not in convent; the second is the protracted incident of the hostage McCreadie."*<sup>5</sup>

Clune's Jimmy Governor is captured by the fire in a hut, whereas Jimmie Blacksmith is captured in the guest room of the convent of the Ursuline Sisters at Kaluah.

*"'The McCreadie-Blacksmith connection', Keneally's own phrase, is more than just such an incident. Psychologically, it allows for a richer presentation of the tensions between Mort and Jimmie as they flee, and provides a ready method of exposing Jimmie's need for some self-image to conform to."*<sup>6</sup>

McCreadie acts as a spokesman for the wider historical view of the Aboriginal in Australia. He supplies the historical facts of Jimmie Blacksmith's career.

Bert Byers and Dowie stead take oath of killing the murderers. The newspaper accounts give little information on Byers. Clune features him as a combination of outraged and bereaved lover. He gives him a chance to shoot the protagonist in the mouth and buttocks. Whereas Keneally's Dowie Stead is a hollow character, galloping aimlessly backwards and forwards. He fails to act according to his oath. The protagonist in Keneally's novel is wounded by an unnamed marksman, in the mouth only. The shot in the buttock is not mentioned.

Frank Clune starts his novel with the angry, abusive and revengeful words of the schoolteacher Helena Kerz, addressed to Jimmy Governor:

*"POOH, you black rubbish, you should be shot for marrying a white woman."*<sup>7</sup>

Keneally's novel starts with the news of Jimmie's marriage to a white girl. For example:

*"In June of 1900, Jimmie Blacksmith's maternal uncle Tabidgi-Jackie Smolders to the white world-- was disturbed to get news that Jimmie had married*

a white girl in the Methodist Church at Wallah."<sup>8</sup>

Tribal tradition is more strongly depicted in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* than in *Jimmy Governor*. Their strict rule of inter-tribal marriages highlights this matter. Tribal elder, Tabidgi Jackie Smolder's opinion is that tribal men should continue to wed according to the tribal patterns. For example:

"... Tullam should marry Mungara, Mungara should wed Garri, Garri should wed Wibberra, Wibberra take Tullam's women. But here was Jimmie, a Tullam, married in Church to a white girl."<sup>9</sup>

They feel that a tribal man marrying a white girl is against their tradition and it would cause danger. So after the marriage of Jimmie to Ethel, Tabidgi visits Jimmie, with his initiation tooth to eradicate the danger of the marriage. As he says:

"You get married t' white girl. Tooth'll keep you safe."<sup>10</sup>

There are other aspects of tribalism in Clune's novel. About the habits and tricks used cleverly by Jimmy and his half-brother Joe, M.A. Goldsmith says:

"During his account of the long pursuit for the murderers, Clune capitalises briefly on certain



*entertainment - value inherent in newspaper accounts. Besides creating some narrative suspense about the State - wide chase itself, he gives details of quaint tricks devised by the fugitives to throw police and civilians continually off the sent."*<sup>11</sup>

For example:

*"Here they tried of Jimmy's favourite tricks. Standing on the bottom wire of the fence, and holding on to the top wire, they walked sideways themselves from post to post, and thus leaving no tracks on the ground. They left the fence by jumping lightly on to a heap of mullock from an old pot-hole in the gold diggings, and then took a zigzag course across a flat littered with heaps of mullock, on which tracking would be difficult."*<sup>12</sup>

But Keneally uses no such tricks demonstrated by Blacksmith brothers.

Governor Brothers steal horses from different huts, a number of times during the course of their flight. For example, at Wollar, they steal a horse, and at a place named Round Swamp, they steal another horse. Again these brothers steal two grey horses at McMaster's hut, and they also take two bridles and one saddle. But Keneally changes this and describes Blacksmith Brothers flight always on foot. Thus, the danger to Blacksmith brothers' life is more imminent. There is, however, one scene in which we do see Blacksmith mounted the

horse. This is Jimmie's raid on Verona, with Farrell in search of the killer of Jack Fisher.

Keneally reduces the number of actual murders and the raiding of houses by the Blacksmith brothers. Clune's Governor brothers murder nine whites, whereas, Blacksmith brothers murder eight persons. Jimmy Governor's offence is further supported by the rape of a white girl. During his flight, he happens to commit this crime. Raping of white girls by blacks or halfcastes is treated strictly punishable. But Keneally's Jimmie is not portrayed as a rapist.

The tribal chants of Tabidgi, Mort, Jimmie and other aborigines, thrum through *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, with lyrical power. For example, Wongee Tom once sings:

*"Black feller kin eat,  
Black feller kin drink,  
Black feller can't do both  
And drinkin's happier!"*<sup>13</sup>

Before the murder of Mawbeys, Tabidgi starts to chant at random for boredom and weariness:

*"Men vault rivers,  
Fear in their eyes.  
Women surrender,  
At dawn, we are beyond your hill,*

*At midday, we stalk you on top-toe  
from a distance,  
At dusk, we are at your throat,  
Closer than child to pap."*<sup>14</sup>

During the course of their flight, Mort sings a chant called "Here are we, Tullam men" as follows:

*"Dressed in the night,  
Dressed the grey hue of sleeping plants,  
Our sholders press the wind towards newer moans,  
We are in its change of voice,  
Be careful and do not sleep,  
For nothing more terrible than Tullam man,  
Will ever break the sleep of living man.  
Be careful,  
When the moon turns pale,  
It is for Tullam man.  
When stars run for the cover of thunderheads,  
It is for Tullam man ..."*<sup>15</sup>

Jimmy welcomes this chant of Mort. Through this chant, Mort tries to fit their movements into a tribal pattern. With these chants, Thomas Keneally tries to ritualise the novel. Such chants are hardly used by Frank Clune, in his *Jimmy Governor*.

Unlike Frank Clune, Thomas Kenneally uses the technique of incorporating documentary materials into the narrative. The insertion of extracts from the 'Sydney Morning Herald', the 'Mail' and the

'Bulletin' and also the letters written by different persons, prove this point.

The weapons used by the protagonists at their initial murders are differing from novel to novel. Clune's Jimmie uses his boondee (a throwing stick made of hard yaraan wood), whereas Keneally's Jimmie uses an axe. Jimmie's axe is flecked with the strange mucus of Mrs. Newby's brain.

The timing of hanging in both the novels is not uniform. Jimmy Governor and Jacky Underwood are hanged in the month of January 1901, whereas Jimmie Blacksmith and Jackie Smolders are hanged in the month of May.

The character Neville is not the same in both the novels. Clune's Neville is entirely different from Keneally's Neville. Clune portrays his Neville as one of the enemies of Governor brothers like other whites. The novel *Jimmy Governor* gives an account of his hatred and enmity for Governor brothers:

*"The bloodthirsty brothers rode on to Neville's hut near Wollar, but Neville was not there. He had probably heard of the murders at Gilgandra, and knowing that the Governors had a grudge against him, with or without reason, cleared out from his hut."*<sup>16</sup>

But Keneally's Neville is a different man. He is missionary, having friendly and cordial relations with Blacksmith brothers. Unlike other whites, he has deep love and sympathy for Jimmie. For example:

*"...Mr.Neville had thought he had a chance of bringing off the trick with eager, sober, polite Jimmy Blacksmith."*<sup>17</sup>

An important aspect of both the novels is the treatment of the Australian ladscape. Clue as he is more interested in the facts only, does not bother about giving details of the landscape; whereas Keneally makes his narrative evocative by giving more details. For example:

*"The train crossed mountains he had not seen before, and came down to Muswellbrook, a green town on river flats. There was a broad still river, and weatherboard and stone houses from the curve of the high street all the way down to the banks."*<sup>18</sup>

or

*"...the valley had flooded; enriching the top soil of the lower flats to a pitch of improbable green. The sweet pastures and vineyards ..."*<sup>19</sup>

or

*"By now, the Blacksmith brothers had crossed to the rainy side of the mountains. Dying trees wore long mosses, the tree ferns were tall, and underfoot was deep lush mould full of prosperous insects."*<sup>20</sup>

To deal with the language of both the novels, we can say that Keneally's characters use dialect unlike Clune's characters who use, more or less, standard English. The tribal dialect is presented throughout Keneally's novel. The natives speak the creol version of English. For example:

Dulcie addresses Jimmie:

*"Where yer bin, yer palely bastard?"<sup>21</sup>*

Jimmie addresses Mort:

*"If yer couldn' work like yer do, I'd boot yer black arse out of here."<sup>22</sup>*

Mort answers to Mullet:

*"We brung all our food," Mort sang. "We jest want t' sleep in front of yer fire. We bin goin' all day. Blakets've got all wet."<sup>23</sup>*

Nancy's addresses to Mort:

*"Yair, yer ripped up some people, didn't yer? Yer ain't goin' t' rip me up though, are yer, Mort?"<sup>24</sup>*

About the similarities and differences between the two novels.

What M.A.Goldsmith says is quite relevant:

*"...if it had not been for Keneally's chance reading of Jimmy Governor some time in 1970, The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith would never have been written."<sup>25</sup>*

From a comparative study of these two novels, we came

to the novelists' attitude towards the 'problem of racism'. Clune's attitude seems to be rather simplistic. He places before us the fact of the horrible murders, in a journalistic objective manner. And in the 'Aftermath', at the end, he says:

*"I had nightmares for months after viewing this horrible sight, and I avoided aborigines for years, until I found that they are decent, loyal and true friends."*<sup>25</sup>

This shows rather patronizing and condescending. This kind of liberalism has not solved the problem anywhere. This is because the problem is more serious and complicated. Keneally attempts to give a complex picture of the story. Keneally's Jimmie Blacksmith is a character turned against itself. Keneally has portrayed his dilemma very convincingly. The mixture of black and white blood in him makes his situation extremely problematic. He represents, on the one hand, the white values as he aspires to them, and, when he finds that this does not lead him anywhere, his black heredity asserts itself, leading him to his tragic end. And, so Keneally's novel seems to grapple with the problem in more convincing way than Clune's novel.

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