
CHAPTER II

Jimmy Governor



CHAPTER - II / JIMMY GOVERNOR.

Francis Clune's novel *Jimmy Governor* was published in 1959 and reprinted in 1970. It was the documentation of the Governor story, by Clune, which took place in 1900. Jimmy Governor, a halfcaste, commits atrocities in Australia, protesting injustice against the aborigines. The account of Governor brothers' murderous activities appeared in newspapers like - "Sydney Morning Herald", the "Bulletin", the "Sydney Mail", etc.. Then, Clune read these accounts in the newspapers and was inspired to write his novel. Chris Tiffin writes:

*"Clune synthesizes from the newspapers of 1900 the events of the killings and the pursuit, the interest in approaching Federation, and the interest in the Boer War, and combines these with an attitude of unsympathizing horror at the killings."*¹

Further he visited the effigies in wax of Jimmy and his brother Joe and was stunned by the horror the aborigine brothers had indulged in. Clune at the end of the novel - *Jimmy Governor* under the title 'After-maths' writes:

"Many people, aged seventyfive and upwards, can still remember the "Governor Outbreak", and I am one of them. My memories are vivid. I was seven years of age, and highly impressionable. I was making a living selling newspapers on the streets

of Sydney, and I had very little idea what I was selling, but I imitated other boys in calling out, "Here y'are! All about the black murderers! Jimmy Governor caught! Paper! Paper!" and hopping on and off trams barefoot on to sharp bluemetal as I did my roaring trade, "Here y'are! Jimmy Governor hung! Paper!"

I didn't properly understand it until one day I paid threepence of my hardearned money to go into the Alhambra Waxworks, opposite the Central Markets in George Street, Sydney. At that time, there were no cinemas, no newsreels. The owners of the waxworks, Christofani and Ghiloni, were talented Italians, who modelled realistic tableaux in wax, depicting famous people and the events of the day.

Among the famous people were Queen Victoria, Ned Kelly, Deeming, Mary Queen of Scots, W.E.Gladstone, Charles Parnell, General Gordon, Prince Bismarck and Jimmy and Joe Governor.

The marrow of my young bones froze with horror as I gazed on the terrible scene. Pop-eyed, I peered at the savage saturnalia, where Jimmy Governor, his brother Joe and their mate Jacky Underwood, tomahawks in hand, were attacking Mrs.Mawbey, who devotedly tried to protect her children, as blood ran down her defenceless skull. On the floor were dead and dying children, except one tiny tot, who had crawled under the bed in terror.

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".²

Jimmy Governor is more a chronicle of facts than a work of fiction. It records the occurrence of events, in order of time. The plot of the novel narrates the events related to the atrocities caused by Governor brothers. The main action of the novel is killing of nine white people by Jimmy Governor, his half-brother Joe and another aboriginal Jacky Underwood. Governor brothers' first murder occurred at Breelong, near Gilgandra, in New South Wales, on the night of 20th July 1900. The pretext for this murder is the harsh and cruel treatment suffered by Jimmy and his wife, at the hands of Mawbeys and the schoolteacher Helena Kerz at Mawbey House.

Jimmy Governor is a half-blood aborigine, an educated sensitive youth. He is a hard-worker who starts earning his own living as a bushworker from the age of fifteen. The white part in him forces him to be a free man earning his living by his own initiation. The plot of the novel achieves seriousness with the marriage of Jimmy Governor. ON 10th December 1898, Jimmy marries Ethel Mary Jane Page, a sixteen year old White girl. White people who are proud of their race and who consider themselves superior to aborigines and halfcastes, feel outraged at this marriage. White women start taunting and insulting Ethel. They avoid her and treat her as a stranger:

"No friendly, motherly or sisterly helping hand of Christian kindness was extended to her, the white girl bride of a "blackfellow" ".³

Tolerating this unhealthy situation, Ethel stays with Jimmy in his slab hut at Reedy Creek. Four months after their marriage, on 9th April, Ethel gives birth to a child. When their baby is nine months, Jimmy and Ethel go to Breelong. At Breelong, Jimmy gets fencing contract from John Mawbey, a prosperous settler.

Jimmy intends to lead a quiet and happy life with his wife and child at Breelong. But Jimmy's hopes are hardly realised. His solitary living is disturbed by the arrival of four aborigines, namely Joe Governor, Jacky Underwood, Jacky Porter and a boy Peter. Joe is Jimmy's half-brother from the same mother but different father. He is darker-skinned than Jimmy. Jacky Underwood is a native of Queensland, aged forty, fullblood aborigine. Jacky Porter is another fullblood aborigine. He is accompanied by a boy Peter, son of Jimmy's sister. With all these people, a real blacks camp is settled at Breelong.

Jimmy completes fencing work with the help of his brother Joe and his people, to his satisfaction. But the payment made for his work by Mr. Mawbey, is not satisfactory. Mawbey criticises some of the posts and offers him less money:

"One hundred of your pcsts are no good! I condemn them, and they'll have to be taken out and replaced with better ones".

"I won't pay you for posts that are not good enough".⁴

The real cause of Jimmy's later atrocities is the attitude adopted by Mrs.Mawbey and her daughters, and their boarder, school-teacher - Helena Kerz. They humiliate and insult both Mrs.and Mr.Governor. For example, Mrs.Mawbey addresses Ethel:

"Any white woman who marries a damned blackfellow ought to be shot".⁵

Helena Kerz to Jimmy Governor:

"You black rubbish!" sneered Helena Kerz, "You ought to be shot for marrying a white woman."⁶

These insulting and humiliating words of Mrs.Mawbey and Helena Kerz, calling him a 'black rubbish', attack at Jimmy's sense of equilibrium. Being proud of his heredity, he is greatly hurt with these words. He loses his patience, even balance:

"It was then that something snapped in Jimmy Governor's brain, so that he did not remember afterwards what he had done ...".⁷

He strikes Mrs.Mawbey and Helena Kerz, in the mouth with his 'boondee', a throwing stick made of hard yaraan wood. Mrs.Mawbey falls on the floor; all start screaming. He kills Helena Kerz by battering on

her skull. He also batters Grace as she falls down, while running. Underwood batters Mrs.Mawbey, Hilda Mawbey and Percy Mawbey. The murderers do this horrible deed; a deed of vengeance and blood within two or three minutes. These murders take place on 20th July 1900 at Mawbey's new homestead.

The news of Breelong murders spreads everywhere. It shocks the citizens of Sydney, in the morning newspapers of Monday, the 23rd July 1900. The inquest on the bodies of the victims is started at Mawbey's home. The crowd of people from near and far, come and assemble at Mawbey's residence. One of them is Bert Beyers, the fiance of Helena Kerz. He is engaged to be married to her. He is allowed to look for the last time on Helena's face. Clune pictures Byers grief and his vow of vengeance as follows:

"Emerging from the house, Byers was almost demented with grief. His friends stood by him to comfort him, but he mastered his emotion, and said with chilling calm, "I'll follow him ... and I'll get him ... and I'll shoot him like a dog ..."

"Then, giving strange emphasis to his words, he put his hand in his pocket and brought out a piece of paper. It was a five-pound note. "I'll soak this in his blood", vowed Byers, "and I'll keep it in memory of the girl he killed!"⁸

The hunt for murderers starts. Military force, Police

and civilians, all are in hot pursuit of the murderers. Among these are Bert Byers and his mates. In the beginning, the flight starts of seven members, including Governor brothers, Ethel and Underwood. But after covering some distance, Jimmy thinks of abandoning away all members, except his brother Joe. At Jimmy's instance, Joe murders Alexander McKay. Alexander McKay, aged seventyfive, is a Scot, native of Ross Shire. He is murdered at Ulan, near Gulgong. Joe Governor strikes McKay on the back of his head, with his tomahawk and kills him at his homestead. After killing McKay, these bloodthirsty brothers kill Mrs.O'Brien, a pregnant woman and her fifteen months child, near Merriwa. Thus, each day brings the news of a new murder. Terror spreads everywhere. Slogans are carried by the people:

"Catch them! Kill them! Shoot them!"⁹

No doubt, Jimmy is a good tracker, who worked in Police department, this helps him very much, not to be caught by the Police, till the moment they kill all whom Jimmy wanted to kill. Therefore, search parties find it difficult to catch Governor brothers. But the number of their victims increases day by day. To control this mounting number of murders, Police order all aborigines to remain in their camps. Further, on Wednesday, the 25th July, the Government declares a reward of £200 for the apprehension of each of the brothers. Again the reward is increased to one thousand pounds. In spite of the reward and strict orders issued by the Government, Governor brothers kill Mr.Kierman Fitzpatrick, an old Irishman. Thus, the total number

of white persons killed by Governor brothers and Jacky Underwood is nine. Besides these multiple murders, the other crimes committed by Governor brothers are raiding of houses for food, ammunition and clothes and raping of a white girl.

On 2nd October, a summons is issued calling Governor brothers to surrender within fourteen days. As they fail to surrender Governor brothers are proclaimed as outlaws. On 12th October, Byers shoots Jimmie. Chris Tiffin comments:

*"Byers was a kangaroo shooter from Ulan who pursued the Governors until Joe's death (which occurred after, not before, Jimmy's capture). It was he who wounded Jimmy in the mouth (and also, in fact, in the buttocks)."*¹⁰

The Governors' "reign of terror" comes to an end as Jimmy is captured and Joe is shot dead by the grazier, John Wilkinson, and his brother, George. Jimmy is taken to Sydney on 2nd November, 1900, for trial. He is charged with the murder of Helena Kerz and rape of a white girl. At the time of the trial, Jimmy tries to defend himself by saying:

"He said that his wife had complained to him that the womenfolk at Mawbey's were continually insulting her. He went to complain about this to Mrs. Mawbey, but Mrs. Mawbey and Miss Kerz "laughed at me with a sneering laugh, and called

*me black rubbish, and said I should be shot for marrying a white woman. With that I got out of temper and got hammering her, and lost control of myself. I do not remember anything after that."*¹¹

Chris Tiffin says:

*"Jimmy Governor's motives for the killings are obscure, although the trial records seem to indicate that the most substantial reason was retaliation for ridicule both of himself and of Ethel about their marriage".*¹²

The judge gives the verdict and the Executive Council decides to hang both Jacky Underwood and Jimmy Governor:

"The bench ruled that a proclamation of outlawry could not be revoked except by an Act of Parliament. Not only was an outlaw's life forfeited, but also his property.

*"This argument, though interesting, was mainly theoretical. All that it determined was that Jimmy Governor, even though he was an outlaw, could now be lawfully hanged."*¹³

Jacky Underwood was hanged on 14th January, 1901, at Dubbo and Jimmy Governor was hanged at Darlinghurst Gaol, Sydney, on 18th January 1901. The hangman for both these ceremonies was Robert Howard, known for

the public as "Nosey Bob".

In the present novel, *Jimmy Governor*, the protagonist Jimmy Governor is presented by Clune as the common lot of his race (aborigine and halfcaste). Jimmy expects to earn his place in white society with his hard work. But his expectations are all shattered. He is insulted, cheated and exploited by whites. He and his wife, Ethel, suffer a lot under the exploitation and punishment by his white employer, namely, Mr. Mawbey and his family members, including the schoolteacher Helena Kerz. They are also ill-treated by other employers Alexander McKay, O'Brien, Kierman Fitzpatrick, etc. These employers have nothing to do with Jimmy as reformed or reforming halfcaste, or his initially innocent nature. They look upon him like any other aborigine or halfcaste; worse, he is married to a white girl. This marriage is as it were regarded as pollution of the white blood. Mr. Mawbey and his family members are the main targets for Jimmy's resentment. They want to separate Ethel from Jimmy, offering her another whiteman. They insult Jimmy calling him 'black rubbish'. The schoolteacher Helena Kerz's words "you ought to be shot for marrying a white woman" corrodes Jimmy at the depth of his heart. This makes the matters worse and the whites are outraged to insult and hurt Jimmy. So, the racial prejudice which already exists in the minds of the whites gets hindered and it takes a violent turn on both sides.

As a documentary, writing this novel *Jimmy Governor*, contains

historical characters rather than imaginary characters. Frank Clune selects his characters from within the local communities. The characters in the novel can be classified into three categories - fullblood, halfblood and white characters.

Jimmy Governor, the protagonist of the novel is a halfblood aborigine. He is a hard worker, good tracker and sincere fellow. Jow is his brother by the same mother but different father:

"Joe was neither as intelligent, nor as well-educated as Jimmy. He was a throwback to the aboriginal side, rather than to the white. His arrival, to share in the work and to live at their camp, put an end to Jimmy's hopes of living with his wife and child in isolation from his aboriginal connections.

"To make the situation worse, Joe brought with him a mate, a fullblood aboriginal named Jacky Underwood, who had been living at Dubbo. This man about forty years of age, was a native of Queensland. He had arrived at Dubbo fifteen years previously, with drovers, who after selling their cattle there, had simply turned Jacky adrift."¹⁴

Jacky Underwood, Jacky Porter and the boy Peter are all fullblood aborigines. Farmers like Mr.Mawbey and his family members, Mr.McKay, Mrs. and Mr.O'Brien, Kierman Fitzpatrick, Ethel and Mr.Neville, etc. are white characters.

Character

1 Clune casts his main characters, hardened in their respective prejudices. Jimmy Governor belongs partly to both races. He is mentally and physically equipped as most of the young whites. He is troubled a lot when he is called by others as a 'blackfellow'. Mawbey menfolk, Helena Kerz and all other whites are proud of the supremacy of the white race. So, they do not tolerate Ethel's marriage to Jimmy, a halfblood aborigine. Hence, these people try to separate Ethel from Jimmy using taunts, insults, for both husband and wife.

Clune does not glorify his characters. On the other hand, he condemns them and their deeds. As Chris Tiffin has pointed out:

*"Clune's account of the Governor killings is far from a simply factual one, and he enthusiastically condemns them as "murderous curs - slayers only of women, children and old men"."*¹⁵

2. (Secondly, as an anti-hero, Jimmy loses the self-control so quickly. Whenever he loses his control and balance, he takes law in his hands and goes on murdering people blindly. But he regains self-composure too.)

About the action of the novel, Terry Sturm says:

"The novel's central action is an imaginative reconstruction of events in the life of Jimmy Governor, a halfcaste Aboriginal from Breelong,

New South Wales, who in 1900, declared war on white society and set out on a mission of revenge against the families of his former white employers".¹⁶

The central action of the novel takes place in New South Wales, Australia. Hence, the setting of the novel covers a vast area in New South Wales.

Jimmy Governor was born at Talbragar, on the Talbragar River, in Central New South Wales. He works as a stockman on cattle stations on the Talbragar and upper Castlereagh rivers. He travels as a horse-breaker from Station to Station at the Hunter River Valley, Taree and Port Macquarie. He is well-known in the town of Gulgong. Jimmy works as a tracker at Cassilis Police Station. After his marriage, he visits Breelong with his wife Ethel. At Breelong, Jimmy takes fencing contract in John Mawbey's estate.

The action of the novel moves rapidly from place to place, as the flight and pursuit follow. Ethel takes her journey to Dubbo and Jimmy's destination to Wollar. At Dubbo, Ethel is taken into Police custody. Similarly, Jacky Underwood is also caught at Leadville Police Station.

Jimme and Joe reach the mountain ranges near Ulan in the Gulong district. One Sunday, they murder Alexander McKay at his

home at "Sportman's Hollow" near Ulan. After McKay's murder, they ransack the hut of Mr.Neville at Wollar. They kill Mrs.O'Brien and her 15 months child and also injure Mrs.Bennet at Poggie.

Search parties find it difficult to follow the Governors, as they use many tricks to hide their tracks. Again, at Wollar, Governor brothers kill Kierman Fitzpatrick at his home. After this murder, they cease murdering and raid houses at different places, namely - Yamble, Merriwa, Yarraman, Walcha, etc. At Cobark Creek, Jimmy commits rape on a white girl.

Jimmy is captured at the tent of John Wallace at Bobbin Creek and Joe is killed in between Falbrook Creek and Goorangoola Creek. Jimmy is taken to Sydney for trial and Joe's body is buried outside the cemetery fence at Singleton. The setting of the novel ends with the hanging of Underwood at Dubbo and Jimmy at Darlinghurst Gaol at Sydney.

In conclusion, we can say that Frank Clune's novel *Jimmy Governor*, as a "fictional source", along with newspaper material can be described as a "documentary" novel. Clune seems to be concerned with facts and figures, which in themselves are considered most 'interesting'. Clune begins his novel with generalizations about the aborigines murdering the whites and subsequently punished by hanging; and the novel ends with the moralising observations that:

"I had nightmares for months after viewing this horrible sight [the waxworks of the murders], and I avoided aborigines for years, until I found that they are decent, loyal and true friends."

Thus, the novel can be said to be well-rounded off.

So far as characterisation is concerned, Clue does not seem to attempt penetrating characterisation; nor does he seem to analyse from a sociological and psychological point of view the causes and remedies of racism.

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