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Kipling's Imperial Anxiety: A Study of *The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes*

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Although generally acknowledged as pro-imperialist, Kipling betrays his uncertainty and fear about the fate of the British Empire in his fictions and poetry. With decolonisation under way in India and erstwhile colonies, recent researches reveal several aporias in Kipling's works. The object of this article is to explore the anxieties and uncertainties in Kipling's short story "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes". Endowed with a prophetic farsightedness Kipling sets about the task of warning British people about the danger from within and without: from the Liberals in England and from the colonies where White rulers proved themselves unworthy of the burden assigned to them. Finally the traditional discourse of postcolonialism which generally rests upon binomial opposition seems to be inadequate to take into account the subjectivities of the colonizer.

Nineteenth century British literature cannot be properly understood, as Spivak points out "without remembering that imperialism, understood as England's social mission, was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English". (Ashcroft et al, 269) The British imagination, however, responded to the Empire in different ways. Even during the heyday of the Empire, there had been conflicting attitudes towards the Empire. In 1883, Sir John Seeley wrote in *The Expansion of England*:

There are two schools of opinion among us with respect to our Empire, of which schools the one may be called the bombastic and the other the pessimistic. The one is lost in wonder and ecstasy at its immense divisions,...this school therefore advocates the maintenance of it as a point of honour or sentiment. The other is the opposite extreme, regards it as founded in aggression and rapacity...a kind of excrescence upon England...this school therefore advocates a policy which may lead at the earliest possible opportunity to the abandonment of it. (qtd. in Smith 36)

Seeley's analysis lays bare the unpalatable fact that one section of the British population viewed the Empire as a potential subject for assault and would prefer its dissolution. If patriotism is the watchword for Charles Kingsley, Alfred Austin, Henry Newbolt, William Ernest Henley figures like C. A. Parnell, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, Robert Buchanon, Hilaire Belloc raised their voice against the imperial enterprise. Between these two opposite extremes literary analysts are often at pains how to place Kipling. The majority of critics applaud or castigate him on the same premise that Kipling expresses a form of jingo-imperialism in his works. In the recent years we have the authority of Jeffrey Meyres, Edward Said, Ashis Nandy and more recently Homi K. Bhabha, Zoreh T. Sullivan and Gail Ching-Liang Low who unearthed the anxiety and unease lurking beneath Kipling's apparently joyful proclamation of the Empire. The modest object of this paper is to analyze Kipling's short story "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes" (1885) from this perspective.

The story "The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes", which belongs to Kipling's early phase of Indian stories first appeared in *Quartette*, the Christmas Annual of the *Civil and Military Gazette* in 1885. The protagonist is Morrowbie Jukes, an English civil engineer working in

the desert of Bikanir. Typical of Kipling's style the story is begun by a frame narrator who stands witness for the credibility of the apparently unbelievable story of Morrowbie Jukes. Hardly after one and a half page the narrator introduces the readers to Morrowbie Jukes and quietly departs from the narrative. One evening delirious with a slight fever Morrowbie Jukes was in his camp. A number of dogs were barking outside which got on his nerves. In a wild frenzy he mounted Pornic, his horse, to pursue them. The horse bolted and on a headlong gallop Jukes fell into a horseshoe-shaped sand pit. Waking up Jukes finds himself entrapped in an Indian leper colony from where there is no escape due to the sandy slope. The only escapade lies to the way to the river Sutlej. But this one, too, is infested with quicksands and a maniac rifleman who loses no opportunity to shoot whenever anyone tries to run away. The colony is peopled with natives who escaped death by showing signs of life at the last moment upon the funeral pyre. Detached from the outside world in every respect, the dwellers of the Village of the Dead pay little reverence to Europeans and Jukes is subsequently greeted by cackling and howling of the natives:

The ragged crew actually laughed at me—such laughter I hope I may never hear again. They cackled, yelled, whistled and howled as I walked into their midst; some of them literally throwing themselves down on the ground in convulsions of unholy mirth. (Kipling 45)

There is little room for doubt that the behaviour of the natives towards Jukes makes the reader recognize the Englishman as inferior or at least equal to the natives. Unnerved by their incessant jibes and thinking it incumbent upon him to remain a pukka sahib at any circumstance Jukes knocked some of them down to the ground. Here, notices Louis L. Cornell, Jukes faces a twofold problem: "he has not only to escape, but to maintain his identity as a representative of the dominant race, though helpless as a child and completely at the mercy of his native neighbours".(Cornell 104) Distraught beyond measure Jukes is suddenly confronted with one of his former Indian acquaintances, Gunga Dass, an English educated Deccanee Brahmin who was in charge of a branch telegraph office. Cut off from the civilized world in every other way for his bare necessities Jukes has to depend on this sadistic person who leaves no stone unturned to insult Jukes. Pointing to Jukes's dead horse Pornic he proclaims: "We are now republic, Mister Jukes, and you are entitled to a fair share of the beast. If you like we will pass a vote of thanks. Shall I propose?"(Kipling 59) John A. Mc Clure is of the opinion that the leper colony actually acts as a Benthamite republic.(Mc Clure 34) It is a well known fact that Kipling had a lifelong aversion to the Liberals. In the poem "The English Flag" (1891), Kipling fumes against the Liberals : "And what should they know of England who only England know"? (Kipling, *Complete Verse* 221) For a man like Kipling who spent a large part of his life in India will know India better than any average Englishman. It is quite natural for him to be irritated at the ignorance and lack of awareness of the hardship (for which the Liberals are often blamed) required to keep an unwilling people under control. Thus it is not improper to assume that the leper colony is the projection of Kipling's fear of a post-imperial democratic period where the Whites have to depend for their very existence upon their erstwhile non-White subjects. Acting as the representative of the Whites visibly threatened by the non-Whites Jukes decides to save his skin putting up with all these malicious indignities. Eventually he does not only survive but discovers the dead body of an Englishman presumably shot down by Gunga Dass. Jukes also found a note explaining a safe passage from the crater. Gunga now confesses to Jukes that the former Englishman was on the verge of success. But fearing that the Englishman will escape alone Gunga shot him. However both Gunga and Jukes agreed to escape at night when the rifleman would be off guard. But when the time comes Gunga Dass treacherously slipped the note and

as Jukes stooped to pick it up Gunga knocked him down and disappeared. Jukes is later rescued by his dog keeper Dunnoo who tracked Pornic's footprint alone to trace his master.

In his critique of Edward Said's pioneering work *Orientalism* (1978) John M. Mackenzie argues that the colonizer's power is prefigured by vulnerability. The Empire is at once triumphal and traumatic, as productive of comprehension as well as apprehension. (Mackenzie 12) Although Morrowbie Jukes manages to overwhelm the legion of unruly natives he was really at the mercy of Gunga Dass who could kill Jukes whenever he pleased. While pointing towards the imperial note in Kipling's works Edward Said writes that like his English precursors Kipling got

the culturally sanctioned habit of deploying large generalizations by which reality is divided into various collectives: languages, races, types, colors, mentalities, ... each category being not so much a neutral designation as an evaluative interpretation. Underlying these categories is the rigidly binomial opposition of "ours" and "theirs", with the former always encroaching upon the latter (even to the point of making "theirs" exclusively a function of "ours"). (Said 227)

There is no mistaking that by portraying the natives as only a little better than animals and showing Jukes as holding courage in an extremely adverse situation Kipling conforms to the pattern of binomial opposition. It is also true that Jukes is the sole spokesperson for the natives and the only representative of the Raj. Here the frame narrator, observes Gail Ching-Liang Low, employs a shrewdness which makes the reader believe in Jukes's account blindfold. (Low 115) Citing Liang Low it may be explained that the narrator, instead of presenting Jukes simply as an embodiment of those virtues generally attributed to colonizer and obviously masculine, also focusses upon his limitations. Thus Jukes, apart from being a civil engineer with a head for plans is capable of very little imagination and appears a bit eccentric. But the reader does not fail to notice how Jukes memorises his experiences in India where he is staying for a long time. Placed in the metropolitan city of Bombay Jukes too, like any level-headed man heartily laughed at the news of the existence of the Village of the Deads some sixteen years back. Endowed with accuracy and precision Jukes scrupulously measured the slope of the sand crater as 65° having 83 lairs in the ground. His sanity is best exemplified when he searched the dead Englishman's possessions and planned an escape with Gunga Dass. All these evidences only put credibility in Jukes's version of the story. But while we ponder over Said's assumption that in postcolonial discourse "ours" (i.e. the voice of the colonizers) always encroaches upon "theirs" (i.e. the voice of the colonized) doubts begin to creep in our mind regarding the veracity of the claim. True, this assumption is one of the major pillars upon which the superstructure of binomial opposition exists. Yet in recent years theorists and critics like Homi K. Bhabha, John M. Mackenzie, Gail Ching Liang-Low find fault with these assumption and are either in favour of propagating new theoretical dimensions or to mend the traditional discourse of binomial opposition. This revisionist approach to traditional postcolonial discourse puts Said's notion of unchallenged Occidental dominance over Orient in question.

In the fourth chapter entitled "Of Mimicry and Man" of his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha theorises the subversive qualities of mimicry thus:

...colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a *subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order

to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference...mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. (Bhabha 86)

Any casual reader of this text has every reason to believe that Gunga Dass is an uncouth, beastly and treacherous one time servant of the Raj. All his thoughts and actions only foreground the low morale of the Indians and by large the non-Europeans. Yet the fact that Gunga Dass is capable of delivering unctuous speech in English and is renowned for making pun in English makes him, albeit unwillingly, way better than his semi-naked peers. Here, observes, Zoreh T. Sullivan the mastery of the colonized over the language of the colonizers shows “the evolution of the babble of uncouth tongues into eloquence.” (Sullivan 75) While in service of the Raj Gunga Dass retains the stature of an educated Brahmin, a person upon whom the Whites may rely. This tendency to rely upon the natives is clear when Jukes, again observes Sullivan, takes Gunga Dass as his “natural protector” (Sullivan 71): “...it was indubitably Gunga Dass, and—for this I was thankful—an English speaking native who might at least tell me the meaning of all that I had gone through that day.” (Kipling 46) From then on with his acquired expertise on English language and custom, Gunga Dass took every opportunity to censure Jukes making him literally eat crow. The frustrated outburst of the colonizer finds expression in Kipling’s pen:

Here was a Sahib, a representative of the dominant race, helpless as a child and completely at the mercy of his native neighbours. In a deliberate way he set himself to torture me as a schoolboy would devote a rapturous half-hour to watching the agonies of an impaled beetle, or as a ferret in a blind burrow might glue himself comfortably to the neck of a rabbit. (Kipling 52)

Thus Gunga Dass fulfils all the criteria for being the “Other” who is both reformed and recognizable. His very difference with Jukes empowers and enkeens him to pursue a series of retributions against the colonizer.

This retribution is impinged upon Jukes by a person whose sadism knows no bound. Had he been equal to Jukes the thought of singling Jukes out to torture could not even occur to the sadist. It is the barrier set up by the colonial power which infuriates Gunga Dass and his native peers against the Europeans and on the other hand forces Jukes maintain a façade of courage all the while. This phenomenon is quite natural as Said states while discussing his notion of White colonizer:

[Being a White Man] involved a reasoned position towards both the white and the non-white worlds. It meant—in the colonies—speaking in a certain way, behaving according to a code of regulations, and even feeling certain things and not others...It was a form of authority before which nonwhites, and even whites themselves, were expected to bend...Being a White man, in short, was a very concrete manner of being-in-the-world, a way of taking hold of reality, language and thoughts. (Said 227)

From the very outset of the story Jukes scrupulously adheres to the distinction between White and non-White world. He did this successfully with the multitude of natives but failed to do this with Gunga Dass. Well aware of the weird content of his story Kipling himself vouchsafes for the sanity of Jukes. Doing this the writer only laid emphasis upon the European norm of rationality, i.e. what is being narrated by a White man cannot be discarded as hallucinatory ravings.

But the ease and authority with which Jukes discarded the natives at first, is bound to receive a jolt in the case of Gunga Dass because Gunga Dass is, to cite Bhabha again “almost the same but not quite”. To confront Jukes he does not resort to laughter or bodily insinuations which are the prerogatives of the illiterate slaves suddenly let loose from chain. But Dass did it with words, words derived from European maxim of utilitarianism: “greatest good of the greatest number is political maxim”. To this Jukes simply had not any answer and had to witness the hideous dissection of Pornic’s body. The more Jukes feels helpless, the torture inflicted upon him augments:

The sensation of nameless terror which I had in vain attempted to strive against overmastered me completely...I verily believe that, for a few minutes, I acted as one mad. I hurled myself against the sand-slope. I ran round the base of the crater, blaspheming and praying by turns...I dared not face the death of a mad dog..No one had taken the slightest notice of an exhibition which makes me blush hotly even when I think of it now. (Kipling 49)

An exact resonance of this heart-rending lamentation can be traced back to the opening lines of Edgar Allan Poe’s short story “The Pit and the Pendulum”(1842) from which Kipling derives largely:

I WAS sick—sick unto death with that long agony; and when they at length unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me. The sentence my senses were leaving me. The sentence—the dread sentence of death—was the last of distinct accentuation which reached my ears. (Poe 246)

While acknowledging Kipling’s debt to Poe, Louis L. Cornell observes that “both tales deal with man made-traps and the futile attempts of the victims to extricate themselves, and both end with fortuitous and unexpected rescues which allow the narrators to tell their stories afterwards” (Cornell 103) The Spanish Inquisition and a nameless Hindu sect play the role of perpetrators of agony in the narratives of Poe and Kipling respectively. Poe’s influence on Kipling is also corroborated by Burton R. Pollin who informs the readers that the recovery of the presumed to be dead Hindu pariahs from “trance or catalepsy” is itself a typical Poeian characteristic and the comparison between the sand crater and the trap set up by ant-lion alludes to the plot of Poe’s story “The thousand –and–Second Tale of Scheherazade” (1850). (Pollin 76-77) Coming back to the present story, the reader finds Jukes’s stature underwent a radical transformation from the colonizer to the colonized which his fall into the sand crater shows on a symbolic level.

Only a short while ago he replied with guns to the baying of the dogs outside his camp. The natives too, only a little better than the four legged creature, at first received blow from Jukes. While treating both native men and dogs contemptuously Jukes feels no compunction. But after realizing his own wretchedness far away from the civilized world of Raj, Jukes finds himself a destitute, fears to face the death of a mad dog at the hand of natives. It is but natural that the natives finding Jukes as one subjugated and not the vice-versa will not pay any heed to his outburst. The traditional postcolonial discourse of binomial opposition falls short of explaining this situation which to cite MacKenzie again is “the white man’s subjectivity”. (MacKenzie 12) In accordance with MacKenzie’s view one may argue that this new approach tends to emphasize the effect of colonization upon the mother country. In doing so the author forebodes the colonizer’s fear of confronting a post-imperial world of potential disintegration.

Gunga Dass actually acts as the harbinger of that dream world of fear and fantasy when he utters:

There are only two kinds of men, Sar—the alive and the dead. When you are dead you are dead, but when you are alive you live...If you die at home and do not die when you come to the ghat to be burnt you come here. (Kipling 46)

The word “here” apart from its literal meaning connotes a state of both desire and fear. It is a state where the essential barriers between the colonizer and the colonized is disavowed thereby came to be known as ‘fetishism’. (Bhabha 74) This disavowal is possible only when the colonial self is threatened and destroyed. As has been pointed out before, the first sign of liquidation of the barrier occurs when Jukes feels relieved at the sight of Gunga Dass. It reaches its apogee when before the colonizer’s eyes Gunga Dass parades the fate of a fellow colonizer who was forced to meet his death “like a rat in a hole” (Kipling 62) The mutilation of Pornic’s body symbolically embodies the mutilation of colonial self and the scene of Jukes’s sharing the roasted crow actually equates him with the natives. True, at times Jukes shows signs of resistance but he was really in the custody of Gunga Dass who kept him alive only for accomplishing a safe passage from the sand crater with the help of Jukes. Thus dispossessing Jukes of his money, horse and most importantly Sahibhood, Gunga Dass places him with the second type of man, namely the dead and treats him accordingly.

While concentrating on Kipling’s portrayal of the colonizer’s deep seated unease and fear in the present story, Zoreh T. Sullivan finds its comparison with Franz Kafka’s “A Country Doctor”(1919), written some thirty years later. (Sullivan 72) Indeed many instances of similarity can be detected by a sensitive mind. Like Kafka’s story this one too is written in the first person thereby making an atmosphere of immediacy. Kafka’s doctor commences his disastrous visit to his patient by responding to a call which itself is a hallucination of frustrating mind. Admittedly Kipling’s protagonist too starts his riding all on a sudden. To put it in his own words: “In the beginning it all arose from a slight attack of fever”.(Kipling 40) Sullivan takes note of the fact that Jukes’s opening line blames the “slight attack of fever” but together with it the full moon, the baying dogs and his own irritation all combine to make him enter into a “pathologized India”. (Sullivan 73) But the language of both the authors, far from being incongruous, strikes a perfect note of harmony between fantasy and reality. The sexually virile and mysterious groom in Kafka’s narrative finds his parallel in the figure of Gunga Dass. In Kafka’s story the groom is simply irresistible who will have his own way. The groom actually unfolds the doctor’s and hence Kafka’s hidden fear in failing to get close to Rosa (Felice Bauer in real life with whom Kafka was twice briefly engaged). In Kipling’s narrative Gunga Dass materialises the colonizer’s fear of encountering his own colonized self which after being deprived of its authority, prejudice and worldly possessions is left to hollowness and impotence. The unnamed doctor, to quote Sullivan again, finds it impossible to cure the ailing boy, a projection of his own self while Morrowbie Jukes envisaging the dead Englishman’s body senses the doom that awaits him too. (Sullivan 76-77)

To conclude it might be said that the sphere of nightmare which is only confined to the mysterious pit threatens to invade the Raj’s broad daylight. Citing John C. McClure it may be argued that Jukes’s entrapment in the pit only foregrounds the Englishmen’s general confinement in India. (McClure 34) It is here that Jukes’s nightmare merges with the nightmare of British residing in India. Ironically instead of any Englishman Jukes’s native servant Dunnoo turns out to be the saviour of his master. This phenomenon once again establishes MacKenzie’s notion that the relation between the ruler and the ruled can surpass the domain of binary opposition and needs to be appropriated in the context of “repeated

realignment of sympathies”. (MacKenzie iii) This sympathy, existing between two opposite poles generally supposed to be at loggerheads, only enriches the multifaceted discourse of postcolonialism. Kipling, himself having Indian experience for many years, could not turn a blind eye to those few instances of loyalty and love in a country where people are thought to be either obsequious or inimical. The moment the colonizer accepts love and sympathy from the colonized he questions the Empire’s omnipotence and its taken for granted ability to brave any oddity. Thus by making the colonizer vulnerable to both enmity and affection—the first being supposed to be firmly quashed while the second to be derided— Kipling, generally held as one diehard imperialist, creates a subversive undercurrent in the discourse of Empire that had hitherto been little noticed.

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