CHAPTER-III

ORWELL AND IMPERIALISM:

BURMESE DAYS

Imperialism is the policy of extending the control or authority over foreign entities as a means of acquisition and/or maintenance of empires, either through direct territorial or through indirect methods of exerting control on the politics and/or economy of other countries. The term is used by some to describe the policy of a country in maintaining colonies and dominance over distant lands, regardless of whether the country calls itself an empire. Insofar as ‘imperialism’ might be used to refer to an intellectual position, it would imply the belief that the acquisition and maintenance of empires is a positive good, probably combined with an assumption of cultural or other such superiority inherent to imperial power.

George Orwell remonstrates against the taste of imperialism and its abuse of power. He wishes to resolve the Black-White discord for he believes earnestly in the integrity and viability of man. He extends profound sympathy on behalf of the natives because they are exploited and squeezed from different angles. He extends sympathy for the oppressed, and he expresses disgust and anger against any kind of oppression and tyranny. He perceives the imperialists’ abuse of power and denounces them for the torment and hatred the imperialists inflicted on the poor natives. The Asians did not enjoy equal status and liberty. They were kept under the British heads were humiliated and subjugated as racially inferior. The imperialists showed the Asians to be culturally inferior and helpless. Orwell wished to rescue the native from being exploited by the imperialists and totalitarians. (Rahman 39) Such sense of responsibility might be felt earnestly in Orwell’s poem:
Awake! Oh you young men of England,

For if, when your country’s in need,

You do not enlist by the thousand,

You truly are coward indeed! (Quoted by Hammond 3)

The aim of British imperialism was to spread wisdom, learning, education and to civilize the Orientals racially, morally, culturally and spiritually.

In *Burmese Days*, Orwell bring out the pretence and hollowness of the British imperialism. In “Why I write”, Orwell writes:

> When I sit down to write a book I do not say to myself
> “I am going to produce a work of art”. I write it because
> there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to
> which I want to draw attention and my initial concern is
> to get a hearing. (George Orwell 194)

*Burmese Days* is a powerful exploration of Anglo-Burman life. Orwell unveils the fact that the Blackmen did not get the proper place before the White imperialists. They were deprived of social, political, economic and cultural status. The imperialists were aware of their concept of white superiority. Therefore, they tried to uphold the ruler-ruled relationship. The offspring of the natives were yoked to work in diverse physical jobs. The natives in the British Raj were embodiment of integrity and uprightness. They hankered after establishing their identity when they found themselves surrounded by exploitation, snobbery and hypocrisy. Orwell has tried to present the native Burmese in correct perspective, their exploitation, their struggle and their aspirations. He has boldly exposed the falsity of the Whites who were governed not by human values but by their imperialistic designs. In *Burmese Days*, Orwell’s
quarrel is with the empire. “The main points in his indictment are straight forward. Imperialism is a system which enables one kind of man, if so minded, to pick another kind of man with impunity. Its primary aim is profit and since few imperialists can bring themselves to admit this openly, or at any rate officially, it also involves an endless amount of humbug.” (Gross 32)

_Burmesse Days_ is the revival of memories of his stay in Burma for five years as a police officer. Here he has openly voiced his views against imperialism, colonialism and hypocrisy of the ruling class. The lovelessness and hatred towards human being on the grounds of colour, class, and region have been severely criticized. Orwell set out for Burma as a young man of nineteen filled with idealist and essentially romantic notions of serving the Empire.

Five years of living in the steamy, humid climate surrounded by strange sights, smells and impressions whilst still an impressionable young man left a permanent mark on his personality and philosophy. But the man who returned to his parents’ home five years later was a totally different person: his health ruined, his illusions destroyed, his attitudes hardened by long exposure to cynicism and corruption. There remained with him a detestation of imperialism so deeply ingrained that he was unable to voice it for some time and a profound sense of the inherent dishonesty lay at the heart of it:

“It is a stifling, stultifying world in which to live. It is a world in which every word and every thought is censored. In England it is hard even to imagine such an atmosphere. Everyone is free in England; we sell our souls in public and buy them back in private, among our friends. But even friendship can hardly exist when
every white man is a cog in the wheels of despotism.

Free speech is unthinkable.” (Burmese Days 66)

Orwell at each stage in his life was aware of this sense of inadequacy, a feeling of not belonging: as a schoolboy at St. Cyprian’s and at Eton, as a policeman in Burma, as a tramp and as a struggling author. Orwell saw the dirty work of Empire at close quarters and ‘the horribly ugly, degrading scenes which offend one’s eyes all the time in the starved countries of the East’, ‘where an Indian coolie’s leg is often thinner than an Englishman’s arm.’ (Orwell CEJL 11.217) By the end of five years, writes Orwell, ‘I hated the imperialism I was serving with a bitterness which I probably cannot make clear… it is not possible to be a part of such a system without recognizing it as an unjustifiable tyranny… I was conscious of an immense weight of guilt that I had got to expiate.’ (Orwell 126-129)

Orwell managed to relieve this intense guilt in two ways. He resigned his position, and to expiate his political sin submerged himself among the oppressed poor of Paris and London and took their side against the tyrants by becoming one of them. But for Orwell the European working classes ‘were the symbolic victims of injustice, playing the same part in England as the Burmese played in Burma’ (Orwell 130). Orwell also relieved himself of guilt through creative exorcism (as he did in “Such, Such”), for he writes that ‘the landscapes of Burma, which, when I was among them, so appalled me as to assume the qualities of a nightmare, afterwards stayed so hauntingly in my mind that I was obliged to write a novel about them to get rid of them’. (Orwell 97) Writing Burmese Days was his way of clarifying his ideas and expressing his deep ambivalence towards the country and its people.

Lionel Trilling suggests the complexity of emotion, which is representative of Orwell’s best style and technique: ‘He has spoken with singular honesty of the
ambiguousness of his attitude in the imperialist situation. He disliked authority and the manner of its use, and he sympathized with the natives; yet at the same time he saw the need for authority and he used it, and he was often exasperated by the natives.’ (Trilling 61) The striking opening sentence emphasizes the paradox of hatred and importance, and expresses political hostility in terms of human vulnerability:

‘In Moulmein, in Lower Burma, I was hated by large numbers of people – the only time in my life that I have been important enough for this to happen to me.’ This hatred, expressed in the chromatic detail of Burmese spitting red betel juice on white English dresses and in the irony of Buddhist priests jeering instead of praying, shows a tension quite different from Orwell’s statement that, when he was there, ‘nationalist feelings in Burma were not very marked, and relations between the English and the Burmese were not particularly bad’.

(CEIL III 403)

Torn between hatred of the colonized, Orwell uses a personal experience to illustrate a political truth.

As a policeman, Orwell’s summoned to help when an elephant in heat breaks loose from chains and trainer and wreaks violence on the Burmese community. Orwell’s entrance into the ‘labyrinth of squalid bamboo huts’ to slay the huge beast that has claimed human victims ironically suggests the mythic overtones of Theseus and the Minotaur. He finds the dead coolie, and describes him in vivid and precise detail that contrasts the martyred pose with the meaningless death, the grin with the torture: he was ‘lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to one
side. His face was coated with mud, the eyes wide open, the teeth bared and grinning with an expression of unendurable agony.’ (Orwell 93)

He realizes that political oppression is self-destructive which is the major theme of the essay referred to: ‘When the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys.’ (“Shooting an Elephant” 95)

The death of the elephant is described with a lively compassion that reinforces its ‘grandmotherly air’: (“Shooting an Elephant” 96) ‘A mysterious terrible change had come over the elephant.... He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old… But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him, he seemed to tower upwards like a huge rock toppling, his trunk reaching skywards like a tree’. (97)

The elephant, Orwell writes, ‘was dying, very slowly and in great agony, but in some world remote from me… It seemed dreadful to see the great beast lying there, powerless to move and yet powerless to die.’ (98) There is a reference to this incident when the protagonist, John Flory relates to Elizabeth, “the murder of an elephant which he had perpetrated some years earlier. (Burmese Days 82)

*Burmese Days* is an attack on imperialism, the system where men rule over others on the supposed strength of the superiority of colour. Orwell has also pointed out that money is a power in itself in the present world, whose lack brings great misery. If often leads an individual to accept without murmur adverse and odd situations, it is the cause of human degradation, which proves fatal and suicidal for the characters in *Burmese Days*.

It is in Kyauktada, a town in Burma that the characters belonging to two races, one ruling and the other ruled are introduced. They have their different modes of
living and standards of life. Although both are of human beings, yet each looks upon
the other as different from itself. The race of whitemen, the ruling class has its
representatives like Macgregor, Ellis, Maxwell, Lackersteen, Wrestfied and Flory.
Ellis, too hates the Orientals “with a bitter, restless loathing as of something evil or
unclean.” (Burmese Days 23) Ellis can never tolerate the idea of being friendly to
natives. For him any hint of “friendly feeling towards an Oriental seemed to him a
horrible perversity.” (Burmese Days 23) Further, he expresses his attitude towards the
natives and the friendly feelings of some Europeans in these words:

Good god, what are we supposed to be doing in this
country? If we aren’t going to rule, why the devil don’t
we clear out? Here we are, supposed to be governing a
set of damn black swine who’ve been slaves since the
beginning of history, and instead of ruling them in the
only way they understand, we go and treat them as
equals. (Burmese Days 24)

Ellis is an imperial bigot. He blinds a boy with his stick and invites a storm of
trouble for him and his other fellow Europeans. For these extremists Orwell says, “He
was one of those Englishmen common, unfortunately who should never be allowed to
set foot in the East.” (Karl 155)

From the ruled class the author has portrayed two main characters U Po Kyin,
a Burmese Official and Dr. Veraswami, an Indian doctor. Both these native characters
are temperamentally different, but one thing is common between them that they
admire the ruling class. They are also in race with each other to secure the
membership of the club of whitemen for the sake of their reputation.
Both Versaswami and U Po Kyin, native officials are also equal to Europeans in holding their views regarding class distinctions. U Po Kyin from the beginning has always understood that “his own people were no match for this race of giants. To fight on the side of the British, to become a parasite upon them, had been his ruling ambition, as a child.” (*Burmese Days* 6) He is the person who rises to heights by managing to kill his own people in the pseudo-rebellion. His mind is best in doing intrigues. To get rid of his rival Veraswami, to acquire the membership of the European club, and to add to his reputation, he manages to hit the weakest spot and pave his way for the membership.

Veraswami has always been fascinated by the Britishers as the superior race. He always termed his own race much below as compared to the standards of the ruling class. The omniscient narrator has presented this view with a sardonic humour:

Dr. Veraswami had a passionate admiration for the English, which a thousand snubs from Englishmen had not shaken. He would maintain with positive eagerness that he, as an Indian, belonged to an inferior and degenerate race. His faith in British justice was so great that even when, at the jail, he had to superintend a flogging or a hanging, and would come home with his black face faded grey and douse himself with whisky, his zeal did not falter. (*Burmese Days* 38)

Orwell presents the viewpoint that moral hollowness is the ethos of imperialistic system. He puts forward his point of view regarding the differences and class-consciousness, leading to the exploitation of one human race by the other. Flory falls in love with Elizabeth and nourishes the desire to marry her. His love is true and
sincere but Elizabeth, on the other hand, is completely different in her attitudes in life and does not give encouraging response to Flory’s overtures. She is mainly concerned with the protection of her career, for she wants to settle down with a colonial officer, who can give her the comforts of the upper middle class life. Her family background is responsible for it. In her past, she has spent hard days and does not want to return to her old days of poverty. To search a match for herself she lands in Burma, where she has Mr. Lackersteen, her uncle. Elizabeth remembers her past days full of the memories of poverty and pains:

It was a mean, beastly existence. In fact, it reached levels of ‘beastliness’ which Elizabeth had not previously known to exist. But the thing that most depressed her, most filled her with the sense of sinking into some horrible lower world, was her mother’s studio. Mrs. Lackersteen was one of those people who go utterly to pieces when they are deprived of servants. She lived in a restless nightmare between painting and house-keeping, and never worked at either.

(Burmese Days 88)

With the sudden descent of poverty in her early life, Elizabeth had to take up the job of a tutoress, where she faced odd situations. Her heart burned whenever she saw her old schoolmates enjoying luxuries:

There they all were, her old school fellows, with their horses and their cars and their husbands in the cavalry; and here she, tied to that dreadful job, that dreadful pension, her dreadful mother! Was it possible that there
was no escape? Could she be doomed forever to this sordid meanness, with no hope of ever getting back to the decent world again?

It was not unnatural, with the example of her mother before her eyes, that Elizabeth should have a healthy loathing of Art. (Burmese Days 90)

Here in Burma she comes in contact with Flory, who saves her from a buffalo in a pond. Their introduction turns into friendship and they reach a stage when Flory is ready to propose to her. But his proposal is out in midway, because of the earthquake that snaps his talk with Elizabeth over the proposal of marriage.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth comes to know of the affair between Ma Hla May and Flory. She develops a dislike for Flory: it is rather a negative hatred, as she has found a better match in a military police officer Verall, a newcomer in Kyauktada. Verall earns more than Flory and has aristocratic fondness like playing polo and horse-riding. But Verall is not the person who would get entangled with girls for getting married. Instead, he is a pleasure seeker. Verall gets transferred, leaving behind Elizabeth to repent on her decision to have shifted her loyalties of love from Flory to Verall. During the period of friendship between her and Verall, Elizabeth’s attitude to Flory is that of indifference. She neither replies to his letters, nor talks to him in a proper manner.

After being ditched by Verall and scared of the regular amorous advances of her uncle towards her, she decides once again to seek protection from Flory and settle down with him. When she is ready to be with him, the destiny of Flory takes another turn and he has to pay the price of being a friend of Veraswami. U Po Kin, the rival of the oriental doctor in the matter of seeking membership to the European club has
already written anonymous letters to Flory warning him of the consequences of being a friend of the doctor. In his letters he has accused the doctor of treason and other nefarious activities. When he finds that his warnings are proving ineffective, he decides to hit at the weakest spot of Flory - his love for Elizabeth. He pays Ma Hla May some money to put up a false show at the church to create tension between Flory and Elizabeth. This trick works well, and the two get separated. Elizabeth refuses to marry Flory, and pushes him back to his old life of isolation, which he cannot bear. Here the omniscient narrator, for depicting the inner-conflict of the character’s mind has used the technique of stream of consciousness:

“No, it was not endurable any longer. Since Elizabeth’s coming the power to suffer and above all to hope, which he had thought was dead in him, had sprung to new life. The half-comfortable lethargy in which he had lived was broken. And if he suffered now there was far worse to come.” (Burmese Days 265)

Instead of living through the horror of insult and loneliness, he chooses to embrace disintegration in death, which he has seen by shooting Flo, the dog. He shoots himself and dies as an alienated person what follows is presented thus:

Elizabeth has grown mature surprisingly quickly, and a certain hardness of manner that always belonged to her has become accentuated. Her servants live in terror of her, though she speaks no Burmese. She has an exhaustive knowledge of the Civil List, gives charming little dinner-parties and knows how to put the wives of subordinate officials in their places in short, she fills
with complete success the position for which Nature
had designed her from the first, that of a burra
memsahib. (Burmese Days 272)

The story of Burmese Days shows that the world based on human exploitation
in imperialistic society is hollow. Flory, is an alienated person in this colonial society.
He represents human isolation and alienation in the world of human beings turned
beasts in the jungles of Burma. He loves Elizabeth sincerely but the response from her
side is not encouraging. She has herself been poor, and has experienced poverty. She
has also been exploited in other ways in the past. But she does not have any soft
feelings for the natives, who are being exploited by her own race. She dislikes even
Flory’s moving among them. On the plane of human relations, she is a creature who is
money-minded and a worst of kind of European snob. In fact, her class is that of poor
natives, but she refuses to acknowledge this and behaves as superior to them. On the
other hand, Ma Hla May has also the desire to see herself as the mistress of a
whiteman. She wants to leave her race and class for money and reputation.
Ultimately, when she finds her chances slim in this respect, she humiliates Flory for a
paltry sum of money she gets from U Po Kyin.

The central figure, John Flory, is one of Orwell’s most convincing character in
the sense that the reader is made to extend full sympathy to him and move closer to
his innermost thoughts. The character is not intended to be an autobiographical
representation of Orwell himself, although some commentators have regarded him as
such. Christopher Hollis has observed in an illuminating aside: ‘Flory was clearly to
some extent Orwell as he imagined that he might have been if he had stayed in
Burma. Flory embodies many of Orwell’s opinions and attitudes, and it is not difficult
to see in such passages as the following a direct commentary on his own life as he had experienced it in Burma in the years 1922-27:

Time passed and each year Flory found himself less at home in the world of the sahibs, more liable to get into trouble when he talked seriously on any subject whatever. So he had learned to live inwardly, secretly, in books and secret thoughts that could not be uttered. But it is a corrupting thing to live one’s real life in secret. One should live with the stream of life, not against it. It would be better to be the thickest-skulled pukka sahib who ever hiccupped over Forty years on, than to live silent, alone, consoling oneself in secret, sterile worlds. (*Burmese Days* 66-67)

Imperialism reduced all democratic professions to mere hypocrisy. Flory attempts to find a base in Burma. He is now twice-alienated, both from his countrymen and the natives. Flory’s loneliness is racial as well as emotional. The British Empire, is in Flory’s opinion, only a device for giving trade monopolies to the English.

Flory is thirty-five year old timber merchant who is suffering from a sense of alienation when he sees his own countrymen exploiting and discriminating against the natives. He extends sympathy to the natives who were victimized and assaulted by the imperialists and is conscious of the hatred they bore against the Englishmen. He denounces the British for such inhuman and callous acts. (Rahman, 41) Flory, in spite of being White himself denounces what is corrupt and mean. While talking to Dr. Veraswami, Flory says, “My beloved fellow, empire builders, British prestige, the
Whiteman’s burden, the ‘Pukka Sahib’ sans peur et sans reposer you know. Such a relief to be out of the stink of it for a little while.” (Burmese Days 93)

Flory attacks the snobbery and pretence of the British imperialists who were posted at Kyauktada and tormented the natives:

You don’t have to listen to the honourable gentlemen talking, doctor, I start it as long as I could this morning. Elli’s with his “dirty nigger”, Westfield with his joke, Macgregor with his Latin tags and please give the bearer fifteen lashes? (Burmese Days 93)

Flory’s consciousness of the purpose of his being in Burma makes him a typical imperialist. “God forbid: I’m here to make money, like everyone else” – is a simple statement of facts. Yet this utterance reveals the designs behind the pose of a ‘Pukka Sahib’. (Burmese Days 94)

Running though the novel as a leitmotiv is the birthmark which disfigures Flory. “The first thing that one noticed in Flory was a hideous birthmark stretching in a ragged crescent down his left cheek, from the eye to the corner of the mouth. Seen from the left side his face had a battered, woebegone look, as though the birthmark had been a bruise for it was dark blue in colour. He was quite aware of its hideousness. And at all times, when he was not alone, there was a side longness about his movements, as he manoeuvred constantly to keep the birthmark out of sight.” (Burmese Days 16) The birthmark suggests Flory’s separateness and thus his superiority to corrupt values and moral lassitude. (Lee, 3) Flory is clearly ashamed of the birthmark which disfigures his face and therefore he constantly endeavours to hide it. Elizabeth Lackersteen finds the mark repugnant and at the end of the story it is this which brings about his downfall:
He might have committed a thousand abominations and she could have forgiven him. But not after that shameful, squalid scene, and the devilish ugliness of his disfigured face in that moment. It was, finally, the birthmark that had damned him. (*Burmese Days* 264)

For Orwell the birthmark was a powerful symbol; it was as if he felt that some men were branded by a stigma either of poverty, cowardice, guilt or failure – which clung to them all their life and could not be removed.

Deep in Orwell’s mind was a sense of failure, a feeling that whatever he attempted was foredoomed. This sense of inadequacy was not overcome until he had enjoyed the assurance of his literary success and its importance as a shaping factor of his personality. This can be judged from his essay about his schooldays, “Such, Such Were the Joys” where he says:

“All through my boyhood I had a profound conviction that I was no good, that I was wasting my time, wrecking my talents, behaving with monstrous folly and wickedness and ingratitude and all this, it seemed, was inescapable, because, I lived among laws which were absolute, like the law of gravity, but which it was not possible for me to keep. Failure, failure, failure, failure behind me, failure ahead of me – that was by far the deepest conviction that I carried away.

(“Such, Such were the Joys” 57)

It is significant in this connection that when the central character, John Flory, has a chance of returning to England and the opportunity is withdrawn at the last
moment he realizes the he does not wish to return. ‘This country which he hated was now his native country, his home. He had lived here for ten years, and every particle of his body was compounded of Burmese soil … He had sent deep roots, perhaps his deepest, into a foreign country.’ (Burmese Days 68)

In Burmese Days Flory condemns British imperialism as it did not provide any opportunity for social understanding or cultural exchange. Ellis says: “We are; and what’s more, we’re damn well going to go on holding out. I’ll die in the ditch before I’ll see a nigger in here”. (Burmese Days 84)

Flory is a rebel; and as such he is outside the Establishment. As a gesture of this rebellion he has a Burmese mistress, Ma Hla May, and an Indian friend, Veraswami. The relationship with Ma Hla May underlines various attitudes. For instance the impossibility of such a relationship becomes a permanent one as it is based on assumptions of inequality. The relationship with Veraswami provides the basis of a long drawn out argument where Veraswami, the Indian doctor, spells out what are conventionally considered the advantages of imperialism. It is a case of inverted patriotism. Veraswami admires the British for their industrial progress, and for their sacrifice for coming so far from their home in order to improve the lot of the dark races. The natives, he is of the opinion, are ignorant and backward, incapable of any independent political or economic action.

Burmese Days brings out the slow corrupting effect of imperialism. The rulers themselves are inhibited in their affection and their friendship, living in world of artificial confines and narrowness. Flory is the loner in that he tries to build a bridge of understanding. He takes Elizabeth to see the Burmese dance “pwe” and is able to enjoy it while it lasts; his pleasure in the luxurious richness of nature is sincere (Burmese Days 37-74). His appreciation of the East is closely related to his ability to
cross the barriers imposed on him. He is able to enjoy communication only when there is positiveness in his relationships. When he is forced to withdraw he does it completely, and the final withdrawal takes the shape of suicide when Elizabeth rejects him because of Ma Hla May’s public exposure of his relationship with her.

In this novel, the local people had to cultivate the hard unyielding land with the help of animals and out-dated implements. Life for them had no meaning outside their daily struggle. They were condemned to rigorous imprisonment and death even before they were born. Orwell observed the harshness of their lives, and wrote:

> When you see how the people live, and still more how easily they die, it is always difficult to believe that you are walking among human beings. All colonial empires are in reality founded upon that fact. The people have brown faces, besides there are so many of them! Are they really the same flesh as yourself? Do they even have names? Or are they merely a kind of undifferentiated brown stuff about as individual as bees or coral insects? They rise out of the earth, they sweat and starve for a few years, and then they sink back into the nameless mounds of the graveyards and nobody notices that they are gone. (*Burmese Days*)

What shocked Orwell was the naturalness with which these people accepted their lot and the respect they felt for the white races. The very basis of imperialism was thus founded on an attitude of callousness. It denied equality and it denied humanity.
Flory develops friendship with a native doctor, Veraswami, which shows Orwell’s desire to build a society on the basis of personal relationship. Orwell, believed that many races may create cultural, racial and spiritual harmony if they cultivate a sense of personal relationship. In Orwellian dynamics of humanitarian perspective, common decency and dignity alone can make life complete and happy, the basis being balanced personal relationship. He himself has written, “every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been for democratic socialism”.

(“Why I Write” 38)

Stephen Jay Greenblatt says:

“Orwell believed that a regime based on the democratic socialism could enable men to live in a tolerable, even mildly pleasant life and that such a regime could isolate and destroy the forces of violence, injustice and tyranny.” (Greenblatt 47-48)

Veraswami being a native, justifies the dominion of the British Empire in order to enjoy favour and facilities after developing friendship with the whiteman, Flory. Veraswami is one of those native officials, who have anglicized themselves. He believes that the Britishers belong to a superior race. In a way, his friendship with Flory has a purpose. The motive for the friendship is quite obvious: it adds his reputation in the native society.

Veraswami has a different temperament from U Po Kyin. He lives in constant awe of the Sub-divisional Magistrate and his intrigues. He is a character with weak personality. He makes it clear to Flory on many occasions that it is his friendship which can get him into the European club. He represents a different ethos of native society. He is the representative of the class of honest workers under the British rule.
He recognizes the superiority of the white men over his own race, yet he does not hate his own race or try to kill them in order to secure paltry benefits from the rulers.

For Veraswami, to be a native is to serve the Empire. The natives are deemed to be the slaves of British Imperialism. Veraswami accepts the white people as his masters in order to pass himself as a superior among the inferiors. Dr. Veraswami says to Flory:

But truly Mr. Flory, you must not speak so! Why is that always you are abusing the ‘pukka sahibs,’ ass you call them? They are the salt of the earth. Consider the great things they have done consider the great administrators who have made British India what it is, consider Clive, Warren Hastings, Delhousie, Curzon. They were such men – I quote your immortal Shakespeare – ass, take them for all in all, we shall not look upon their like again! (Burmese Days 93-94)

Veraswami fails to understand the integrity of his own countrymen and goes onto support the British Empire. The doctor admires the Englishmen for their “Glorious loyalty to one another! The public school spirit! Even those of them whose manner is unfortunate some Englishmen are arrogant, I concede, have the great, sterling qualities that we Orientals lack. Beneath their rough exterior, their hearts are of gold.

Of gift, shall we say? There’s a kind of spurious good-fellowship between the English and this country. It’s a tradition to booze together and swap meals and pretend
to be friends, though we all hate each other like poison. Hanging together, we call it. It’s a political necessity. Of course drink is what keeps the machine going. We should all go mad and kill one another in a week if it weren’t for that.” (*Burmese Days* 37)

This conversation between the two friends shows how much they are temperamentally different. One is admirer of the race, which rules on him. Another hates his own race.

It is stated by Orwell in the book that an order was passed by the British Empire to include a native member for the representation of orientals in the club. Ellis, Mr. Macgregor, Mr. Lackersteen, Maxwell, Westfield and other members of the European club were not ready to have a native member among themselves. Ellis, a member of the European club, expresses his anger and disgust at the nomination of a native Blackman, Dr. Veraswami and is not ready to accept a Black native with them:

‘My God’, sais Ellis a little more calmly, taking a pace or two up and down, ‘my God, I don’t understand you chaps. I simply don’t. Here’s that old fool Macgregor wanting to bring a nigger into this club for no reason whatever, and you all sit down under it without a word. Good God, what are we supposed to be governing a set of damn Black Swine who’ve been slaves since the beginning of history, and instead of ruling them in the only way they understand, we go and treat them as equals. And you silly b——s take it for granted.

(*Burmese Days* 85)
This signifies that to be a native is to serve the British Empire. Slavery has been imposed upon the natives so that the whites should realize their roles as masters.

If the natives and slaves do not work, they are bound to be persecuted. Michael Carter says, “Any Black who deviates from this concept threatens not only the continuing dominance of the Whites but the White’s concept of themselves.”

(Flory is ill at ease amongst his compatriots. His views on the imperial issue are different from theirs and he has nothing in common with them. Amongst the other white inhabitants is Ellis who hates the natives, and any hint of friendliness towards them seems to him a horrible perversity. Lackersteen is addicted to drink and has low moral standards. Macgregor has taken to drink and has low moral standards. He has a closed mind the lacks imagination and initiative. Westfield believes in the use of force. They are all closed, stunted human minds in whom the very values of behaviour advocated in the public schools have been subverted. On the upper fringe of this assorted group is Verral, who like Flory is an outcast. Clustered together they try to uphold what they understand to be the traditions of the British Raj and to hold their own against the onslaught of the natives.

The white community is as much an object of pity as the natives. They are herded together and compelled by their circumstances to go on falsifying all human values, and human relationships. One really doesn’t see in them any remnants of imperial glory. The system has destroyed them as much as it has destroyed the natives. The whole idea is to exploit the situation and no one really worries about any idealistic hangovers of any previous age. There are internal conflicts and pulls in several directions. The same problem cropped up everywhere, in India, in Burma, and in Britain itself. In Burma the hatred was not only a reciprocal emotion between the
British and the natives, but also between the Indians and several other tribes and racial minorities.

The club becomes the symbol of white Europeans in which unfolds the deepening myth of Black and White dichotomy. The club is both a symbol and locale of the society of white men, who live among the Burmese and yet keep off from them within the boundaries of the club to maintain their self-claimed stature of superior human beings. The racial and colonial hatred between the two races can be felt when Maxwell shoots two natives while crushing a rebellion. Guided by hatred and anger, the natives also kill Maxwell, which exposes the deep cleavage among the natives and the Britishers.

Upokyin, a sub-divisional Magistrate is guided by power and prestige. U Po Kyin is basically a power-hungry creature and who for the sake of his ambition can stoop to the lowest level of misconduct. One of the villainous qualities in him is that he can do any intrigue against the persons who stand in the way of his cherished ambitions. U Po Kyin has been successful in his life by sticking to dishonesty, intrigues, and sycophancy of the Britishers. “It had been a brilliantly successful life. U Po Kyin’s earliest memory, back in the eighties was of standing a naked pot-bellied child.” (Burmesse Days 5) He has risen from a “naked pot-bellied child” to the post of Sub-divisional Magistrate of a district, but does not have any regard for his own race. He does not work for his countrymen but for the Britishers as he thinks of them belonging to a far superior race to his own. “To fight on the side of the British, to become a parasite upon them, had been his ruling ambition.” (Burmesse Days 6) He not only betrays the natives but also the British Empire. There is a spurious duality in his voice. To become a native member, he wants to eliminate the civil surgeon, Veraswami, whose membership of the club he obstructs. Veraswami’s friendship with
Flory entitled him the Europeans’ support for his membership and other facilities, too.

There is cunningness in U Po Kyin’s character. His hunger for power is reflected in the following description:

At seventeen he had tried for a government appointment, but he had failed to get it, being poor and friendless, and for three years he had worked in the stinking labyrinth of the Mandalay bazaars, clerking for the rice merchants and sometimes stealing. Then when he was twenty a lucky stroke of blackmail put him in possession of four hundred rupees, and he went at once to Rangoon and bought his way into a Government clerkship. The job was a lucrative one though the salary was small. At that time a ring of clerks were making a steady income by misappropriating Government stores, and Po Kyin (he was plain Po Kyin then; the honorific U came years later) took naturally to this kind of thing. However, he had too much talent to spend his life in a clerkship. (Burmese Days 6)

Not only is U Po Kyin a dishonest and intriguing person but the rotten and corruption ridden imperialistic system also comes out clearly through his actions. Veraswami, says that U Po Kyin ‘strikes always at the weakest spot, like a crocodile’ (Burmese Days 143) His victims are Flory and Veraswami, the two friends. They meet their disaster at his hands. But he achieves for himself the position of an officiating deputy commissioner. His other desire is to get elected to the English Club is also fulfilled.
The trampling of the natives’ liberty by their own countrymen makes Flory burst with anger. Michael Carter says, “Flory is loathed because his association with Blacks injures the White prestige for it blurs the distinction between White and Black.” (Carter 82) Flory is hated by his own countrymen because he has deep ties of friendship with Dr. Veraswami and it irks the Whites. This confirms their master-slave relationship, beyond which they could not see:

“Butler! Yelled Ellis, and as the Butler appeared, ‘go and wake that bloody chokra-up!’

‘Yes Master’

‘And Butler!’

‘Yes, Master?’

‘How much ice have we got left?’

‘Bout twenty pounds, master. Will only last today, I think. I find it very difficult to keep ice cool now.’

‘Don’t talk like that, damn you – “I find it very difficult”’

Have you swallowed dictionary?

“Please, master, can’t keeping ice cool”- that’s how you ought to talk. We shall have to sack this fellow if he gets to talk too well. I can’t stick servants who talk English. D’ you hear, butler”? ‘Yes master’, said the
butler and retired. (*Burmese Days* 25)

Orwell attacks man-made rules which were viewed from imperialistic and capitalistic pursuits. Seeing his own countrymen and debasing and violating the code of human conduct, Flory becomes an alien to himself. Of course he developed a sense of guilt-consciousness which made him suffer from isolation under this pressure. “I’ll give you my note, but I can’t do more than that. I am sorry, but I simply can’t?”

(*Burmese Days* 100)

Suffering from a sense of failure, Flory the protagonist, wants to shed his guilt-consciousness by bringing harmony and reconciliation between the two races. Orwell, exposes the ‘inauthenticity” and false pride of the natives. Orwell unfolds the suffering of “aged peasants”, (*The road to Wigan Pier*, 247) coolies and prisoners in the dock: “For five years I had been part of the oppressive system and it had left me with a bad conscience, I was conscious of an immense weight of guilt that I had got to expiate.” (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 247) This shows that Orwell, with ‘full throated ease’, writes not only against sinister designs of imperialism but also against all forms of totalitarianism which cause relentless suffering to the mankind. He writes: “I felt that I had got to escape not merely from imperialism but from every form of man’s domination over man.” (*The Road to Wigan Pier* 247)

The Europeans posted at Kyauktada lack the capacity to understand the nature of their friends and foes. Terry Eagleton is of the opinion that Flory lacks sincerity. He writes:

> It is difficult to believe of Flory, we are externally shown that his anti-imperialist feelings are merely selfish; but the point once more, is to qualify the possibilities of explicit commitment by insisting upon
the “unremarkable” bond between moral judge and
situational judge, by seeing man as a puppet of his
environment. (Terry Eagleton 12)

Structurally the novel has a strong narrative line which reveals Orwell’s no
mean prowess in the art of storytelling. The hunting expedition and the attack upon
the English Club at Kyauktada are both spirited pieces of writing which offer further
evidence of his fondness for adventure stories. The exclusive English Club, with its
members who are at pains to preserve it as a white domain, provides the novel with a
point of reference a commanding centre which exerts an influence, directly or
indirectly, on each character in turn. When the Club is directly attacked by a Burmese
mob it is damaged but remains in all essentials unchanged. At the time of writing the
novel Orwell clearly felt that British rule in India would continue indefinitely; he
could have no inkling that it would end during his lifetime.

Orwell has expressed, too, his view on money, human isolation and human
degradation. All these views are the outcome of one major point of class and race
distinction, which is the essence of imperialistic order.

In Orwell’s opinion imperialism causes decay of culture and life’s basic
values. An imperialist no longer remains a man if he becomes a tyrant and therefore,
Orwell wants to expose the fallacy and hollowness’ of the British Empire which
claimed to carry the ‘Whiteman’s Burden’. (Kipling) The imperialists do not
understand the loyalty of Veraswami. Therefore, they are caught in the act by the
tricky and crooked strategy of Upokyn. Veraswami is assumed to be a true subject
and is hailed and rewarded in the British ‘durbar’. Orwell believes firmly that the
Burmese did possess more human values, integrity, uprightness and truth than the
imperialists. Orwell believes that racial and cultural harmony might be achieved if
people wipe out the sense of racial and cultural superiority as well as cultivate a sense of common decency and democratic socialism. It is rightly said, “Orwell was a humanitarian always moved by sympathy of human values.” (O’ Brien 158)

The Anglo-Burman landscape as it emerges in the book, has lost its colour, warmth, verve and joy of the individual’s communion with it. It has become spiritually sick and decadent. The atmosphere of imperialism is full of hatred and disgust: “There is a prevalent idea that the men at the ‘outposts of empire’ are at least able and hard working. It is a delusion.” (Burmese Days 113) This ‘delusion’ exposes the discrepancy between the white man’s burden and the English bureaucracy in the contemporary world. Orwell writes how oppression and authoritarianism caused the vanishing of personal relationship and vigour which were part of the pre-imperialistic period. “But even friendship can hardly exist when every white man is a cog in the wheels of despotism. Free speech is unthinkable.” (Burmese Days 113) Further, Orwell ironically writes that drunkards, idlers, cowards, backbiters and fornicators had a free hand in oppressing the natives. He writes:

“All other kinds of freedom are permitted… You are a creature of despotism, a ‘pucka sahib’ tied tighter than a monk or a savage by an unbreakable system of tabus.”

(Burmese Days 13)

*Burmese Days* powerfully evokes a sense of cultural shock when the native offspring, the victim of apartheid are not given proper place in modern society. Under this view, the imperialistic image of a ‘sahib’ has to be maintained at every cost. This shows the process of dehumanization as well as the puppet-like action of the Britishers. Orwell writes:
For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the natives and so in every crisis he has got to do what the ‘natives’ expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. I had to shoot the elephant. I had committed myself to doing it when I sent for the rifle. A ‘sahib’ has got to act like a ‘sahib’. (CEJLI 269)

The act decided upon may mean death. But even that has to be accepted for the imperialist has to play the role of the superior and master. This way Orwell could see through the mask and myth of the Whiteman. He not only exposes to the malignancy of imperialism but also the whiteman’s myth. Imperialism is heartless and anti-human. It unleashes forces of darkness. Orwell shows that human love and understanding alone can bring happiness and joy to mankind. For it alone can bridge the gap between races, communities and continents. Then master will not be master, and slave will not be slave. All will be one.

George Orwell is a committed writer, who is conscious of his times and its problems. He strives for equality and freedom for individuals. In *Burmese Days* he shows that the world of exploitation of human beings in a colonial rule is not worth putting up with, let alone accepting. Flory the hero is fed up with the system and commits suicide. He prefers death to the horrors of colonial rule, which is a society devoid of conscience and love. *Burmese Days* is not only a story of human exploitation by other human beings but also a story of exploited people striving for a classes society.
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