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HYPOCRISY AND POSTURING OF INTELLECTUALS IN KINGSLEY AMIS' *LUCKY JIM*

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Abstract

The academic world with its components: students, teachers and their lives have always been an area of curiosity for the outside world. The realm of academe, with its knowledge, learning, researching and pursuit for intellectual ability, that seems to appeal to the upper strata of mind, has always fascinated the people across different traditions, cultures and geographies. It has always been one of the fertile subjects to peep into the campus, and delve through the realities and psychology of the persons: students, researchers, teachers and their families, associated with academics, which provided substance for a new genre 'Campus Novel' that gained prominence in the mid of the 20th Century. Kingsley Amis, the author, himself a part of the academic world, weaves the story around Jim Dixon, the central character; a university lecturer. *Lucky Jim*, published in 1954, portrays the academics, in a real sense: the embedded hypocrisy, depleting standards, pseudo-intellectualism along with the bleakness in personal relations. The turn of events exposes the barren, unproductive erudition and academic dishonesty.

Keywords: Student, teacher, campus, academic, and dishonesty.

Teaching is a very noble profession that shapes the character, caliber, and future of an individual. If the people remember me as a good teacher, that will be the biggest honour for me. —Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

Introduction

Lucky Jim (1945), a debut novel of Kingsley Amis: a member of Angry Young Men, winner of 1955 Somerset Maugham Award for fiction, gained immediate success as "one of the key books of the English 1950s," (Moseley, 1993: 18-19), by the portrayal of academicians, not in an archetypal manner but with naturalistic luster with all their apathy, superficiality and incuriousness, signaling 'a paradigm shift of clear importance' (Malcolm

Bradbury, 1993: 324). Normally teaching is esteemed as noble profession, of well-read people, that entails imparting knowledge to the next generation, moulding them and nurturing their future; and hence demands excellence. Contrary to the perceptions, they: the teachers, turn out to be the pseudo scholars, shallow and irrational; interested more in polarization and patronage. In a perfectly accurate description, *Lucky Jim* highlights the 'practical incompetence that academic institutions seem to tolerate' (Lodge, 1992, viii).

It is not for the first time that the academic world has been taken to be the subject of treatment in fiction, a new genre 'Campus Novel' gained prominence in 1950's when the reviewers are using the term 'Campus', even before the publication of

Lucky Jim, for the scripts woven around academia: the reality of the life of university and those who are associated with it. Kingsley Amis, himself being a part of the academic world, a famous poet, critic and teacher, created history with the publication of Lucky Jim in 1954, not because it was the first British campus novel (Lodge, 1992, vii); distinct from the Varsity novel, but to take a lecturer of the institute as its central character. Lodge, further, elucidates:

Lucky Jim was a distinctly British version of a kind of novel that hitherto been a peculiarly American phenomenon. My own novels of university life and those of Malcolm Bradbury, Howard Jacobson, Andrew Davis et al., are deeply indebted to its example. Jim Dixon's anxiety about professional future, his dependence on the patronage of a senior colleague whom he despises, is a recurrent feature of the genre. (Lodge, 1992, vii-viii)

Kingsley Amis, in *Memoirs (1991)*, attributed the genesis of the novel, while visiting Philip Larkin, who was Librarian there, to a glimpse of the Senior Common Room at University College, Leicester, in 1948: though University College, Swansea is a possible source of the novel, where he taught from 1949 to 1961.

I looked around a couple of times and said to myself, 'Christ, somebody ought to do something with this.' Not that it was awful – well, only a bit; it was strange and sort of *developed*, a whole mode of existence no one had got on to from outside. (Lodge, 1992, vii)

Discussion

The narrative of Lucky Jim centers on the thoughts and feelings of Jim Dixon, a reluctant junior professor in the Department of History at an unnamed provincial English University. Jim Dixon is not a hero by the virtue of his qualities or scholarly knowledge; but by luck. He, somehow, is about to complete his one year of job, however, the indelible impression he had created among colleagues: because of his manners, faded his chances for a permanent position. Dixon defines himself as who

despises unnecessary complexity, pomposity, hypocrisy, and those who feel that some people—artists, higher classes, for example—have special needs that ordinary people don't have. His actions and reaction, intentionally and casually, are directed to keep Mr. Neddy Welch: his boss and head of History Department, in good-humour, at least for ...weeks; show himself 'present and conscious while Welch talked about concerts' (8), attend his 'professor's arty week-ends' to 'lend a hand with something' (17), deliver lecture titled "Merrie England", on behalf of History Department, on College Open Week programme; though under compulsion. The head of History Department, Mr. Neddy Welch, not a fastidious, is also not a true scholar or truthful employee of the provincial university. He prattles about his talent of music; holds music concerts, with colleagues and friends, at week-ends at his country house, attracts press to get him glorified in print, and be always at the fore. His talk, never entails History, though reverberates with pretensions as of the professors of Oxford and Cambridge universities, always reflects dearth of scholarly qualities. Ostensibly, Jim admires Prof. Welch; under obligation, pretend to be interested in discussion; but is very keen to find out how Mr. Welsh became a professor, "how had he become Professor of History, even at a place like this? By published work? No. By extra good teaching? No in italics. Then how'? (Amis 8)

Mr. Neddy Welch, a specious scholar, whose endeavor always stand reflected in musical weekends and concerts; contended with musical instruments that "no other professor in Great Britain set such store by being called Professor"(7), never sincerely works for his subject. He is always in the habit of beating around the bush; afraid of making straight statements that require scholasticism. He never dares to make eye-contact, and answers need to be "battered out of Welch", as "the old man was well known for an incurable evader"(11). The fragmented and fractured sentences, frequent hesitations, and disrupted thoughts of Prof. Welch not only make the whole communication incoherent but also contribute unequivocally in the evaluation of a person: supposedly of a 'learned' class. 'The misfiring vehicle of his conversation' (9) swerves at

any topic or at any moment. His dismal performance is not restricted to academics only, but also percolates into his dressing sense, his behavior, and his choices and even to his automobile. Not only the husband, but wife's behavior is also replete with such affectations.

Such a dirt and uncertainty; a mood of pessimism, though undesirable, looms in the personal life of those who are parts of this intellectual world. Margaret Peel, a senior colleague in History Department, 'small, thin, and bespectacled, with bright make-up' (18), sincere about her classes, is a complicated character: definitely. After being 'cracked up', she attempted suicide 'a very nasty knock, of course, over that Catchpole fellow'(9): by taking overdose of sleeping pills. She did this: a manipulative act to gain idyllic courtship with Jim, and simultaneously to ensure safety of her life, when she says: 'if you've got nothing better to do tonight I'll be brewing up about ten. What about dropping in for an hour' (21). Though, she is helped and taken care of by the Welch', and emotional support is given by Dixon in this tormented phase of life. Margaret exploits Dixon: emotionally, and schemes him for his 'call of pity' and 'worming from sense of responsibility' (25) by, 'seemed true', a confession: "I do enjoy being with you, I don't get on with men as a rule' (11).

Conundrums that sounded innocuous or even pleasant were the most reliable sign of impending attack, the mysterious horseman sighted riding towards the bullion-coach. (Amis 22)

This sincerity was only for show; actually Margaret ropes Jim, with voice modulations, into a relationship. This façade of Margaret starts falling with Jim's interest in Christine, and finally dashed with revelations of Catchpole: Margaret's ex boyfriend, to Jim:

Don't try to help her anymore; it's too dangerous for you. I know what I'm talking about. She doesn't need any help either, you know, really. (Amis 238)

Jim Dixon, the hero, also sails in the same boat as others: an unremarkable young teacher, offers no solace, but just a replica of others, who admits, about his special interest in Medieval History because "the medieval papers were a soft option in the Leicester course, so I specialized in them.....Haven't you noticed how we all specialize in what we hate most?" (34), and discloses his approach, in choosing career. When enquired by Welch about his article and its probable date of publication, his answer is vague: "well yes, actually I sent it to him first of all, if you remember, and he said the pressure of other stuff was..."(14), and with dexterity he closes the matter; benefiting from Prof. Welch's weak memory. Though Prof. Welch has necessitated the publication of article by Jim, who knows its warranted significance for future career: continuation of his job, and 'the removal of the 'bad impression' he'd so far made in the college and in his department' (16), but the article titled '*The Economic Influence of the Developments in Shipbuilding Techniques, 1450 to 1485*' remained unpublished because of its rubbish contents and absurdity. Dixon, a *lackadaisical* scholar, does no efforts to improve his knowledge and command on the subject: owing to his shallow reading.

These facts had been there for all to read in the Acknowledgments, but Dixon, whose policy was to read as little as possible of any given book, never bothered with these. (Amis 17)

Dixon is always a shirker, both in work and love. He is "well-schooled in giving apologies at the very times when he ought to be demanding them" (17.79). Jim is afraid of Michie, an ex-service student, who 'knew a lot, or seemed to', as he regularly puts questions to Dixon and enquires for the syllabus and classes. Apart from the word 'scholasticism', there are hundreds of words that Michie kept using in his routine life, but Jim is unable to explain their exact meaning. It is very embarrassing for Dixon; he is incompetent to answer all queries that are raised by the students especially by Michie, which irritates Dixon. Jim felt scared, on Michie admission in his subject, and also annoyed when the three pretty girls in whom Jim was interested found the subject heavy and overburdened. Discarding virtues of

fairness and impartiality, supposed to be rooted in a teacher, Jim redrafted the curriculum to suit their interest (three girls), and tried to avoid Michie, 'with smiles and regrets instead of the blows and kicks', who was brilliant, and had special interest to study 'Medieval Life and Culture' rather 'than a fairly elementary course of lectures' (29). Dixon's efforts proved inefficacious: the two pretty girls didn't opt for medieval history.

In Lucky Jim, not only academia is parodied but the people concerned are also a part of the drama. Margaret, though a professor and serious about her duties, takes the extreme step by consuming sleeping pills when faces a setback in affair. Jim Dixon, associated with a noble profession like teaching, consumes an extra amount of liquor when he is in stress. Jim, strained due to Job's insecurity, does not, in the least, try to put serious efforts for his professional destiny, except consumption of liquor and having day dreams. Jim confides to Margaret:

Look, Margaret, you know as well as I do that I can't sing, I can't act, I can hardly read, and thank God I can't read music. (Amis 24)

The undercurrent techniques, prevalent in the education system, to manage the workload of a subject are also highlighted. In the subject of History, six teachers are to be adjusted for nineteen students. The students were coerced to take Professor Welch's subject, against Honours: the subject of their interest, otherwise Professor Welch will fall short of students in his own subject.

Pretension and hypocrisy dribbled into and stacked with the faculty of the college, and with even their families. Professor Welch always brags about his 'Country House' and music concerts. Bertrand Welch, 'the painter' and son of the eldest Welch, who dates Christine Callaghan, has 'unquestionably none' plan to marry with her: seems only a 'usual run'; had secret affair with Carol: wife of Cecil Goldsmith who is a faculty in History Department. He speaks of his career:

I am a painter, Not, alas, a painter of houses, or I should have been able to make

my pile and retire by now. No no; I paint pictures. Not, alas again, pictures of trade unionists or town halls or naked women, or t should now be squatting on an even larger pile. No no; just pictures, mere pictures, pictures *tout court*, or, as our American cousins would say..(Amis 41)

A close dance of Jim and Christine turned the tables, and the academic life of Jim headed towards romance. Carol chastised Jim for his reverential attitude for Christine; being of a class, and cajoled him to pursue Christine and dump Margret; to save her affair with Bertrand. Bertrand was a flirt: Carol disclosed everything in vengeance, who wanted to marry Christine just for the job, but by luck these two pretty things came to Jim Dixon and he became Lucky Jim.

Intolerant of the ostentation and hypocrisy of the college's faculty and their families, Jim, however, was 'getting on for nine months', have channelized his contempt into venomous mental outbursts and a wide array of nasty faces. He frankly admits before Gore-Urquhart that 'they waste my time and I waste theirs' (214). Dixon can be clumsy and careless, and even sneaky and mean to those he truly hates, but is genuine and compassionate as well.

However, Jim's academic career heads towards end, the research paper never see the light of the day with his name. Besides this, the lecture, titled 'Merrie England'; he was entrusted to deliver, turned into a fiasco. Before the event, Bertrand quarrelled with Jim, over the latter's meeting with Christine, and warned to ensure that he would be fired. Arrival of Michie, at that juncture, made Jim heated. Out of nervousness, Jim consumed alcohol in an extra amount, losing his control. Margaret took a jibe at Jim's amativeness for Christine. All this incited Jim, and his delirium was further fuelled by a large swig; contributed from Gore-Urquhart' flask.

All the dignitaries including 'a couple of aldermen with their wives... members of the College Council' (213), Christine and her uncle Gore Urquhart and others were present during that lecture. Dixon surveyed the audience, a largely inhabited hall, with a bit of hesitation: 'jobless,

Christineless, and now grand-slamm'd in the Margaret game' (220), started his public lecture. His tone imitates Professor Welch; unconsciously, and that has startled the students. Jim was caught in Catch-22 situation; a conscious effort, on his part to change his intonation derived him to afresh salvo: to imitate the principal. After one more futile attempt, Dixon presumed that 'this was going to be his public appearance here' (225) and as they had 'frightened him too much' (225), he reverts back to his regional accent and denatured the matter with 'sarcastic, wounding bitterness'. Under drunkenness, Dixon casts off his pseudo-scholarship, employs the text; he has written, as a carrier to express his blatant contempt.

The impact of the lecture was catastrophic; Professor Welch 'would be unable to recommend Dixon's retention' (228), revealed in an unofficial confirmation. Michie and Gore-Urquhart admired his daring attempt, while other professors and faculty members criticized him. However, Christine's uncle, Gore-Urquhart, offers Dixon a job of his assistant, which was reserved for Bertrand Welch, five hundred a year, in London. Dixon then meets Catchpole; Margaret's ex-boyfriend, who divulged that they had never cohabited together. They, both Jim and Catchpole, collated their narratives and realized that Margaret had faked her suicide attempt to elicit pity from her peers. The lapse on the part of Professor Welch, regarding train timings, brings the dawn of another phase in Dixon's life: the meeting of Dixon and Christine at railway station, forever.

Conclusion

The pseudo-intellectualism, posturing and hypocrisy of the intellectuals; of academic world, is unmasked and satirized. Social pretensions, exhibited by the Welches, are ridiculed and mocked at; Bertrand, one of the Welches, is unquestionably, a phoney painter. Margret, a colleague, has theatrical feelings; Carol hibernates feeling outside marriage. Holed up, in a provincial English University, Dixon, never gets a sniff of their ulterior designs; he himself, in the beginning, is caught in the spin and demonstrates affected emotions. He has no empathy towards Margret.

Towards the end of the novel, Dixon retrieves back to his candidness.

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