

CHAPTER – IV

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER-IV

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Farrell is a great novelist of Empire who has been consistently ignored by critics after his death. Most critics and writers on Farrell have marginalized his fictional explosion of the imperial mystique. A brief look at the critical focus in some discussions of the Empire fiction would substantiate researcher's viewpoint. John Mellors described *The Singapore Grip* as "an exciting adventure story, with powerful descriptions of air-raids, fires on the docks and fighting in the jungle" (1978:410). According to Binns, "The underlying philosophy of the novel has less to do with loving other people than with sustaining a stoic detachment in the face of the tragic condition of humanity"(1986:44). Again in his analysis of *The Siege of Krishnapur*, Binns further compares Farrell with Forster and Paul Scott to Farrell's utter disadvantage and concludes, "Farrell's interest lies less in the causes of the Mutiny or its historical developments than in the condition of an isolated community caught up in the dramatic experience of being besieged" (1986:64). Margaret Drabble argues that Farrell's novels work towards a "revelation of the absurdity and injustice of things as they are" and goes on to say that "Farrell combined a sense of the pointless absurdity of man with the real and increasing compassion for characters caught up in decay and confusion" (1981:181). M. K. Naik, while commenting on the Anglo-Indian fiction, considered *The Siege of Krishnapur*, as a Mutiny novel, "where the focus is not on stirring external action, but on the psychology of the besieged" (1991:7). Thus, most critics on Farrell have played down the imperial theme in his fiction. Though the fact that Farrell's Empire fiction can be interpreted even in

purely a historical terms speaks volumes for the richness and complexity of Farrell's work, such interpretations would have the totally unintended effect of dethroning Farrell from a privileged position in the literary canon of English historical fiction.

Farrell's fictional recreations of the decline of imperial power are distinguished by a unique style which is markedly different from the earlier masters of imperial fiction. While the rhetoric of power latent in novelists like Kipling, Conrad, Orwell, Forster and Paul Scott was profoundly capable of dismantling the apparent and anti-imperialist 'structure of feeling' in their works, Farrell has been able to resist and go beyond the pressures of this rhetoric of power. Farrell's distinctively eclectic fictive imagination fruitfully exploits the realist and anti-realist notions of fictional theory and successfully transcends the limitations of die-hard traditionalism and narrow experimentalism, bringing in the process novelistic masterpieces which are characterized by a judicious blend of realism and symbolism and of history and historical imagination.

The present research modestly attempted to show that Farrell's language is fundamentally metaphoric and poetic rather than conventionally realistic and prosaic as most of his critics believe. Edward Arnold writes: "..... Farrell writes omniscient prose about the past, in the past tense, using a tough narrative voice to prevent his work appearing to be pastiche or uneasy current Victorian" (1979:30). Unlike most writers on the theme of British imperialism, Farrell's novels rely for their magnificent effects on the powerful use of symbolism, of a fundamentally figurative language which is anything but Victorian. Farrell never attempts to prevent his work appearing to be pastiche or uneasy

Victorian; on the contrary, he makes a generous use of pastiche and of numerous uneasy metaphors to critique the disease of Empire and its civilization.

Through his exposition of or an enquiry into the theme of disintegration in his Empire fiction, Farrell seems to suggest that the cultural and racial superiority of the British is an imperial construct and as such cannot have any significance or meaning outside the realm of imagination. Farrell seems to suggest that the idea of a superior culture leads the colonizers to assume a self-righteous posture of unbounded self-confidence which results in an adaptational breakdown in times of acute crisis, personal or governmental – a theme gloriously handled in *The Siege of Krishnapur*. Farrell pictures the ordinary spokespersons of this imperial creed and shows how they are too crippled by this faith to face out the pressures of native resistance. Both the Empire novels address this vexed issue in a subtly postmodernist fashion. The opening sections of these novels focus the colonizers' luxurious routine of dreadful complacency whereas later sections place their states of abject misery and vulnerability in sharp contrast. The topics of their discussions, formal or informal, change from civilization and progress in the peaceful days to the bare needs of survival in turbulent times. Under the mounting pressures of militant nationalism, the usually self-assured and often arrogant British revert to a primordial state of instinctual existence which is anything but civilized. As A. P. Thornton has aptly put it: "Every doctrine of imperialism devised by men is a consequence of their second thoughts Imperialist ideas are less ideas than instincts" (1965:8). Farrell treats of this feature of the imperialist in a skillful manner in *The Siege of Krishnapur* – by presenting a strange world in which people ground their

lives on chimerical abstractions. As Mannoni pointed out, “‘civilization’ is necessarily an abstraction. Contact is made not between abstractions, but between real, live human beings” (1956:23). It is quite interesting and enlightening to see how a people nurtured on a set of abstract notions of superiority conduct themselves when they are forced, for the first time in their colonial life, to fight desperately for survival against a group of ‘real, live human being’. The sub-section titled ‘*Civilization and Imperialism*’ of Chapter-II explores this component of Empire Fiction.

Farrell’s masterful use of the rhetoric of disease to critique the imperial rhetoric of power is undoubtedly unprecedented in the entire body of the literature of imperialism. No other novelist of Empire before Farrell has attempted, in a fundamentally postmodernist fashion, to make the subject of imperialism available for parodic treatment.

It is important to note that Farrell’s ‘Metafictionality’ is not only an attempt to assert his experimentalism but also to go beyond what Edward Said calls “the textual attitude”- an attitude based on the fallacious assumption that “the swarming, unpredictable and problematic mess in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what books – texts-say” (1978:93). This ‘textual attitude’ has always characterized the imperial discourse. By suggesting the possible variants of fictional history of the Empire precisely at the point where his fiction ends, Farrell conveys the idea that “to apply what one learns out of a book literally to reality is to risk folly or ruin” (ibidem:93).

One of the most interesting ways in which Farrell affirms his endorsement of the values of postmodernist fiction is his parodic use of

extended metaphors and clichéd rhetoric with tremendous comic effect. Farrell's parody of clichéd metaphors and usages in the Empire fiction serves to unveil the unmistakable self-reflexiveness of his fictional consciousness. A careful reading of Empire fiction would bring to light how Farrell's acute dissatisfaction with clichés and hackneyed expressions leads him to parody them in his works.

Each novel in the Empire Trilogy is unique in its own way- *Troubles* (1970) is the only experimental novel on the Irish troubles of 1919-21, *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973) is estimated as the only postmodernist novel on the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Further, it can be asserted that the novel, *The Singapore Grip* (1978) is the most ever comprehensive fictional critique of economic imperialism ever written to this date.

The question of economic imperialism has fired Farrell's imagination so powerfully that his most ambitious novel *The Singapore Grip* is devoted to an exploration of the Empire's intricate conspiracy of economic exploration of the native population. The third Chapter of the present study attempted to explore the issue. It is in *The Singapore Grip* that Farrell's critique of imperialism attains maturity and fullness. By centering the novel on the life and fortunes of two formidable English business families of Singapore, Farrell exposes not only the heinous ways in which the representatives of the imperial mission amassed fabulous wealth but also the rhetoric of power which was used to achieve their economic aims. The second Chapter deals with the Empire fiction from this view-point.

While Farrell successfully goes beyond the ‘Kiplingesque rhetoric’ of power, it is important to note that his critique of imperialism never degenerates into what Edward Said calls “rhetoric of blame” (1993:19). In other words, Farrell’s novels do not represent direct tirades against the British Empire; they are artistically perfect laughing reflections on the follies, discrepancies, foibles, cruelty and indignity of the imperial encounter. Despite his strong antipathy to the imperial enterprise, Farrell’s treatment of the disintegrating Empire is rather a fusion of compassion and sympathy. As Victoria Glendinning has aptly put it: “His [Farrell’s] dislike for the tyranny and distortions of colonialism is always apparent, as is his respect for the most hopeless individual.he has sympathy for those caught up in good faith in a decaying system of Empire – such as the Major in *Troubles*. May be it was this compassionate ambivalence that made him such a good writer” (1981:18).

Living in an age where post-colonial rule puts even the colonial exploiter to shame, Farrell’s diagnosis of the imperial malaise does not end on a clear note of rosy optimism. At the end of the most ambitious novel in the Empire fiction *The Singapore Grip*, Farrell discusses a piece of news about underpaying millions of plantation workers even years after the end of British Imperialism and significantly, voices his dark misgivings about the independent nations : “....if even after independence in these Third World countries, it is still like that, then something has gone wrong, that some other, perhaps native elite has merely replaced the British” (SG,P.567) and immediately, Farrell recalls a remark “about King William and the boatman who asked who had won the battle, [‘What’s it to you? You will still be a boatman’.]” (P.568). Though

Farrell felt that it was still too early to see the fruits of freedom from imperial domination, his Empire fiction clearly expresses the hope that the end of British Empire would be ultimately beneficial to humanity at large because, as the dying novelist, Reagan says in *A Man from Elsewhere* (1963), “the relationship between master and servant is a crime against the liberty and dignity of man” (P.55).

Viewed from a contemporary global perspective, though a span of thirty to thirty-five years has passed since its writing, Farrell’s Empire fiction still holds a significant relevance to the realities of the present. Despite the high-sounding rhetoric of international peace, the fact that the unprecedented proliferation of conventional and nuclear arms continues to hold the world in a constant threat of war for economic and political power and the consistently unashamed use of the rhetoric of power by neo-colonialist countries like America has become more alarmingly widespread than ever serves to make Farrell’s critique of the rhetoric of power exceedingly pertinent today. As Said puts it in the context of his analysis of Conrad’s *Nostramo*: “Much of the rhetoric of the ‘New World Order’ promulgated by the American government since the end of the Cold War- with its redolent self-congratulation, its unconcealed triumphalism, its grave proclamations of responsibility – might have been scripted by Conrad’s Holroyd: We are number one, we are bound to lead, we stand for freedom and order and so on. No American has been immune from this structure of feeling ... Yet it is a rhetoric whose most damning characteristic is that it has been used before, not just once [by Spain and Portugal] but with deafeningly repetitive frequency in the modern period, by the British, the French, the Belgians, the Japanese, the Russians, and now the Americans” (1993:xviii-ix).

Viewed against the backdrop of this global scenario, exposure to study of Farrell's fictional discourse on imperialism would not only improve interaction between different cultures but also help to stem the tide of aggressive neo-colonialism. It is this profound concern with abiding issues of universal significance that gives Farrell's Empire fiction its characteristic tone and appeal and perhaps, ensures that a future of peaceful co-existence based on timeless principles of human dignity and equality will ultimately come to pass.

Farrell was profoundly aware of the infinite potentials of language, of the way in which language asserts and denies the possibility of precise reference – an aspect of his work which is significant in that it confirms his postmodernist identity as a self-conscious experimenter of form. Though Farrell does not declare like certain postmodernist novelists that “the treachery of words is notorious” (Vidal, 1989:46), his novels can be cited as instances of the virtual celebration of such treacheries.

In short, Farrell's novels are intensely intellectual and hence their realistic descriptions have symbolic significance which requires active reader participation. This fact – that Farrell's novels can be approached from a variety of angles – and the use of techniques like parody, pastiche and intertextuality serve to link Farrell closely to the postmodernist discourse on fictional representation of reality in general and on historical fiction in particular.

Thus, the comprehensive and masterful handling of the theme of imperial decay gives an added dimension to Farrell's treatment of history

and serves to underscore Farrell's uniqueness as a writer of the 'end-of-the-empire' genre of fiction.

REFERENCES

- 1) Mellors, John (1978) *Five Good Novels*, *Listener*, PP 410-12.
- 2) Binns, Ronald (1986) *J. G. Farrell*, London Methuen.
- 3) Drabble, Margaret (1981) *Things Fall Apart*, in J. G. Farrell, *The Hill Station , an Unfinished novel with two appreciations an a Personal Memoir, and an Indian Diary*.
- 4) Naik, M. K. (1991) *Mirror on the Wall: Images of India and the Englishman in Anglo-Indian fiction*, Sterling publications private limited, New Delhi.
- 5) Arnold, Edward and D. Palmer (Eds) (1979) *The Contemporary English Novel*, London: Edward Arnold Publications.
- 6) Thornton, A. P. (1965) *Doctrine of Imperialism*, New York: Wiley.
- 7) Mannoni, Dominique Octave (1956) *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonisation*, trans. Pamela Powsland, New York: praeger.
- 8) Said, Edward (1993) *Culture and Imperialism*, London: Vintage.
- 9) Glendinning, Victoria (1981) *Farrell's Last Words*, *Listener*, 23 April.