

CHAPTER – II

THE SIEGE OF KRISHNAPUR : **TREATMENT OF IMPERIALISM**

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2.1) Introduction :

In many ways the process of imperialism is disseminated from within. What is often little realized about empire is that in the act of ostensibly colonizing its subject nations, these nations themselves, even though, unwittingly, colonized empire. Agency is not merely uni-directional but is, in fact, multivalent. A system of cultural territorialisation and capitalist eccentricity is deconstructed, disseminated and fragmented under the burden of its own expansion. The act of colonial- imperialism changed empire irrevocably from the moment of initial imperial impulse. Empire stood less for territorialisation than for the Anglo-conception of that territorialisation. The lines of trade, communication and discourse linking Great Britain to its colonies, while controlled and maintained by the agents of empire, simultaneously masked a plethora of alternative stories told and retold along the same lines and the stories of counter- cultures proliferated among lines within across, and underneath the direct and 'official' systems of communication, trade and exchange represented by the first. Thus, the ominous spread of 'chapatis' that portend the nativist uprising of Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973) represents an alteria symbolic function to the enactors of the revolt while spreading alarm among the colonists over the ambiguity of the portent.

The present chapter attempts to explore the full implication of Farrell's sustained engagement with India and to show how Farrell fictionalizes the British India encounter from a fundamentally post-modernist perspective thereby claiming an important advantageous position in the Anglo-Indian canon of imperial literature. Most critics have played down Farrell's significant contribution to the post-imperial fictional discourse on British India. It is true that Farrell is not an Anglo-Indian novelist in the manner of Forster or Paul Scott; nevertheless, he is an Anglo-Indian novelist in his own distinctive way.

Farrell towers above the rest of his ilk by employing innovative fictional techniques in his presentation of colonial India. The fact that Farrell's fictionalization of British India is unique in several ways underscores the need for, and justifies the relevance of, a study of Farrell's Indian connection. India has captured Farrell's imagination in a way that no other colony of the empire ever managed to do.

Ever since the Mutiny began to set literary imagination on fire, the question of historical objectivity was much debated. While the novelists loyal to the empire fictionalized the Mutiny as a life-and-death struggle between British civilization and Indian barbarism, the Indians primarily looked upon it as a rebellion against the white colonizers. While M.M. Kaye and John Masters perpetuate many of the myths which have surrounded the British portrayal of the Mutiny, Manohar Malgaonkar in *The Devil's Wind* (1972) sets out to tell the story of the Mutiny from an Indian point of view. This points to Farrell's unique achievement in objectively functionalizing the Mutiny. R.J.Crane remarks:

“*Nightrunners of Bengal* was enthusiastically described by one reviewer as ‘the best historical novel about the Indian Mutiny’. This was arguably true at the time of writing; however, (Bhupal) Singh was moved to write, ‘it must be said the best novel on the Indian Mutiny is yet to come,’ I would argue that with the publication of J.G.Farrell’s *The Siege of Krishnapur*, that novel has finally been written” (1992:14).

2.2) *The Siege of Krishnapur* : The Historiographic Metafiction

The Siege of Krishnapur, is surprisingly humorous, gripping and seriously profound novel with regard to the uniquely human aspects of imperialism from the perspectives of the Victorian British. The book rewards the reader with fascinating historical detail, enriching a story containing a genuine depth of human insight.

The Siege of Krishnapur, perhaps, is the only historiographic metafiction among the Anglo-Indian fictional output on the Mutiny. With the postmodernist re-discovery of the use of history in fiction in the 1960s and 70s, giving birth in the process to what has now come to be called ‘historiographic metafiction’, the writers of historical fiction began to employ stunningly original techniques in their novels. While all the Mutiny novelists of the 60s and 70s stuck to the conventional mimetic mode, Farrell’s fictional representation of the Mutiny is postmodernist in the sense that his language technique is fundamentally metaphorical and subversive. Using subversive techniques of fictional recreation of the Mutiny, Farrell succeeds not only in subverting the hallowed concepts of British race superiority and the Empire’s vaunted invincibility but also in throwing fresh light on the horizon of newer possibilities of fictionalizing

the Mutiny. When one considers this disruptive component of Farrell's fictional technique, most of the charges leveled against *The Siege of Krishnapur* fall wide of the mark, as those charges are made on the simplistic assumption of Farrell's fictional mimeticism. Roger Sale's complaint, that "Farrell does not take much interest in his characters" (1974:18), and Byron Farwell's charge that "women do not change at all" (1974:19) are quite untenable from the postmodernist viewpoint. As Hutcheon argues, characters, including protagonists of postmodern historical fiction are "the marginalized, the peripheral figures of fictional history" (1988:14) whose lives are not worth anyone's special interest and who do not undergo any major transformation during their life. As for Binns's lament over the historical absences in *The Siege of Krishnapur*, the postmodern concept of historical fiction- "refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refutes the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems and both derive their major claim to truth from the identity" (1988:93).

In an interview with Malcolm Dean, Farrell said that the Mutiny was "a traumatic eventdestroying the myth of the grateful and obedient natives being led onwards and upwards by the paternal white ruler" (1973:43). *The Siege of Krishnapur* captures the real trauma of the British when the natives, offended beyond endurance, suddenly started behaving like 'paternal rulers', leading 'the white onwards and upwards'. By imaginatively reconstructing the turbulent days of the Mutiny, Farrell attempts to show that the period of 'the Siege of Lucknow' was a time

when the British population was forced to live (for the first time in imperial history) just like the teeming millions of Indians who have been living for decades under foreign rule. Thus, Farrell's novel gives, in metaphorical terms, a subversive account of the Mutiny.

Viewed from this perspective, the Residency under a siege of sepoys becomes a metaphor for India which has long been under British siege. *The Siege of Krishnapur* offers illuminating glimpses into the hearts of the British at their most unassuming and least romantic. Deromanticising the 1850s in *The Siege of Krishnapur*, Farrell shows that the superior race of Britons, shorn of all pretensions and pushed to the extremities of a life of the most penurious of Indians, are at heart far more ill-equipped and incapacitated than the natives to face the harsh realities of life. Once this argument that *The Siege of Krishnapur* is implicitly a fictional treatise on how the British would conduct themselves if they find themselves unexpectedly colonized by the colonized is accepted and amply illustrated through a critical readings of the texts, Crane's charge that Farrell's lack of knowledge of Indians is reflected in the novel(1992:26).

2.3) [Ironic] Treatment of Imperialism :

The Siege of Krishnapur, divided into four parts, pictures the progress of the white community from a state of dreadful complacency, resulting from political and individual security, through periods of acute stress and strain, brought on by the unexpected insubordination of a conquered race, to a state of utter helplessness, poverty and constant fear of imminent extinction. With meticulous attention to detail, Farrell has successfully shown that the real significance of 'the Sepoy Mutiny' lies in

the fact that it gave the haughty British colonizers a taste of what it is to be colonized and subjected to abject states of misery and indignity.

The ironic tone of *The Siege of Krishnapur* effectively highlights the basic ridiculousness of the idea of British colonial rule in India. Meanwhile, the very inappropriateness of the tone of the book makes a point about the inappropriateness of that rule, while the mismatch between the tone and the subject combines with a number of ludicrous images to suggest the absurdity of the Raj.

A major thrust of Farrell's book is the deconstruction of British pretensions to grandeur by showing the utter relevance of British fantasies of power and glory to Indian social reality. Not only do the British have far less control over their Indian subject than they would like to think, but they also have little control over certain elemental aspects of their own lives.

Farrell sprinkles his book with images of disease, excrement, and death that call attention to the physical limitations of British colonials who would rule as gods but have serious problems with their personal hygiene in the heat and dust of India. Trapped in the compound at Krishnapur and surrounded by hostile sepoys, it is understandable that the British, however exalted their self-image, would have special difficulties with food, sanitation and other physical aspects of life. But even in better time, the inappropriateness of British cultural traditions to India is often highlighted by physical symptoms. Thus, when George Fleury arrives in India he attends a grand ball at which a number of young British men and women dance European dances in European costume, as if all this were

taking place not in India but in some temperate land far away. But Calcutta in April is far from temperate, and Fleury, despite the finery displayed on the ball- room floor, is unable to avoid noticing “what a strong smell of sweat there was drawn here on the floor” (P.38). This scene sets up the later one in which “Lieutenant Stapleton (one of the attendees at the earlier ball), leads a relief force into the British compound at Krishnapur, only to find the once immaculate Louise worn, emaciated, and (much to his surprise and discomfort) downright smelly” (PP.338-39).

At times, such descriptions of physicality are combined with reminders of the lack of British hegemony in India, as when Indians, regarding the British as unclean, refuse to eat food or drink water that they have touched. Farrell also combines his comic absurdism with reminders of British physicality. In one bizarre scene, an object pariah dog (fresh from devouring two British lapdogs that unwisely fell asleep in his presence) contemplates the romantic Fleury with loving tenderness (and hunger).

“Now it was ready for another meal and was keeping a hopeful eye on the battlefield in case some appetizing Englishman or sepoy should fall conveniently near.... But most of all it should like to eat Fleury; such was the power of its love for this handsome, green clad young man” (P.231).

This reduction of Fleury to dog food radically undercuts his romantic fantasies, while the dog’s willingness to devour Englishman and the sepoy alike functions as a carnivalesque dismantling of Orientalist

distinctions and hierarchies. Meanwhile, Farrell's emphasis on the physical bodily functions of the English enacts a similar leveling of colonialist racial hierarchies.

In the beginning the novel focuses on the luxurious lifestyle of the English expatriate community. Farrell comically portrays the English making conscious effort to be unlike Indians in their everyday life. The Collector, like the others, finds it hard to believe that one was in India at all. But, ironically as the siege begins and progresses, they are pushed into situations in which they become like the most desperate and helpless of Indians. The Collector, with his faith in the 'superior culture' of his own country, fails to forge any meaningful ties with India. Harry Dunstaple's knowledge of the Indian language is "limited to a few simple commands, domestic and military" (P.43), the Magistrate is too "rational for Indians and cannot see things from their (Indians') point of view (P.98). The English ladies have only a hearty contempt for the natives. And most characters in *The Siege of Krishnapur*, including the Maharaja's son, Hari, have been brought up on the express instruction that anything Indian is despicable and therefore should be shunned like the plague. The English characters in the novel never try to understand the Indians probably because Farrell wants to stress the fact that the Mutiny itself was the tragic result of British indifference to the Indian way of life which led to a profound misunderstanding between the two people, but Farrell's knowledge of the country and its people and the British perception of both are clearly reflected in *The Siege of Krishnapur*.

The true beauty of the novel, however, lies in its discussions about civilization, colonialism and “ideas” of progress. All the characters, at one point or another, have to examine how they feel about their position in both India and in the greater construct of “civilization”. There is a lot of pride, of course. Farrell does an excellent job displaying that pride with ironic undertones.

In the first five chapters of *The Siege of Krishnapur*, the Englishmen and women live as though they were in England, throwing lavish parties, going out for picnics and arranging ball dances in the typical English style. Farrell sharply focuses the gluttony of the well-fed colonists which indirectly leads to their adaptational breakdown under the apocalyptic stress of the siege. During costly dinners and parties, they glut themselves with ham oysters, pickles, cheese, tongues, chickens, fried fish, curried fowl, roast kid, creamy mango fowl, chocolate and other delicious items of food. The full stomachs of the British are sharply contrasted with “those hundred and fifty millions of people living in cruel poverty in India” (P.223). But, as the siege begins, the white community is forced to give up one luxury after another. As most *punkahs* become defunct, the ladies ‘fight polite but ruthless battle’ for a place under the working *punkahs*. As flies and mosquitoes begin to torment them, they long for a fall in the temperature to stay away from the unbearable heat. The pitiable state of these women herded together in extreme contiguity and robbed of the luxury of servants, looks quite similar to that of poor Indians. These white ladies were “had to look after themselves for the first time in their lives. They had to fetch their own water.... . They had to light fires for themselves and to boil their own kettles for tea.... delicate creatures accustomed to *punkahs*, now exposed all day long

to the hot wind No wonder they were in such a poor frame of mind” (P.172).

During his round at the residency, the Collector is deeply disturbed by a distressing scene in which women weep due to the discovery of the lice in their hair. The Collector lectures them on the need to help each other through difficult times and live as a community but his efforts to keep them in harmony suffer a serious setback in a scene which becomes an ironic comment on the proverbial public- school morality of the British: “A row has developed because Miss Lucy had felt justified in keeping her maid occupied exclusively with her own comfort, while the other ladies believed that the girl’s services should be shared” (P.173).

With their consumptive appearance and lice-infested heads, the colonizers are forced to live the life of Indian untouchables. Farrell pokes fun at the Englishman’s class-consciousness which throws into ironic contrast the British condemnation of untouchability among Indians. The women in the billiard room had divided themselves into groups according to the ranks of husbands or fathers: “Mrs. Rogers who was the wife of a judge, found herself unable to join any of the groups because of her elevated rank, and so she was in danger of starving to death immediately, for to make things worse, rations were issued collectively a fact which had undoubtedly hastened this social satisfaction” (P.173). Deprived of the English style of cooking they are accustomed to, the English at the residency began to eat the common food of the poor Indian, “dal and chapatti” (P.219) of the type which ironically had earlier filled the Collector with over shadows of an impending epidemic.

As days go on, the demand for food begins to exceed the supply but even in such adversities, some of them try to take shameless advantage of the situation. The Magistrate holds an auction of the private stores which had accumulated due to the deaths of people during the siege. But at the end of the auction, it is found that almost all the food items are bought by Mr. Rayne who employed a number of servants to bid for his sake. When he was asked why he bought such large quantity of food he says that he intends to sell them again to the famished occupants of the Residency at an exorbitant rate of profit because, as he puts it, “.... It’s a question of fortune.....one has to make the best of a situation” (P.287). This, by implication, is Farrell’s ironic comment on the Empire’s ruthless instinct for economic exploitation. Witnessing such instances of barbaric selfishness, the Magistrate loses his ‘interest in humanity’ and concludes that “the poor just as stupid as the rich” (P.285).

As the pressure of the Siege continues unabated, Farrell describes the rattled English citizens in Indian terms. As poverty strikes, the *dhobis* hike their prices and even the Collector begins to wash his own clothes ‘like a low-cast dhobi’ (P.260). When the shortage of food becomes very acute, the white community ‘spent more time watching the native Princes eating their banquets than they did watching the enemy lines’ (PP.305-6). As their life is reduced to that of the poorest Indians, “the wealthier natives brought picnic hampers in the European manner and their servants would unroll splendid carpets on the greensward” (P.305) - an event which is an ironic counterpoint to the white community’s lavish picnic in the Botanical Gardens described in the first part of the novel. In their search for food, the British resort to desperate and barbaric remedies. An old horse was captured, and put to death and the meat was distributed as

rations: “Any piece of rotten meat that would still be found in the enclave was slipped over an improvised fish hook, attached to a rope and hurled over the parapet in the vain hope of catching a jackal or a pariah dog that might swallow it (P.306). Gradually, the British are reduced to the point of being savages, eating anything that came their way. The Collector spots a black beetle on the stairs, catches it between his fingers and pops it into his mouth and crunches it “with as much pleasure as if it had been a chocolate truffle” (P.314). Finally, the Collector rallies the defenders ‘like a muezzin’ (P.315) and when the relieving troops arrive, the General is disturbed to find them looking like ‘poor devils’: “he had never seen Englishmen get themselves into such a state before; they looked more like untouchables”(P.340).

Farrell, thus, by presenting the Mutiny as a reversal of British fortunes, subverts the concept of British courage and sangfroid and explodes the myth of the perfect colonizer. In other words, Farrell has demythologized the 1850s. He has successfully recreated the feelings of that time while stripping it of romanticism and adding truths not found in the literature of the day. In a perfectly unique manner, Farrell has debunked the myth of the Raj.

2.4) Images and Symbols signifying Imperialism:

The use of various images and symbols in the novel signifies imperial attitude of the white expatriates. Farrell treats this imperial attitude ironically and with full of humour.

The Siege of Krishnapur evokes India through a cluster of powerful images and symbols. One such image is that of the tennis court: “picture

a map of India as big as a tennis court with two or three hedgehogs crawling over it" (P.102). This typically Farrellesque image of India as a tennis court beautifully conjures up a picture of the way the British saw or treated India in the 1850s. By a metaphorical extension of this image, it could also be argued that Farrell is suggesting that the British are as out of place in India as hedgehogs are on a tennis court.

The image of 'the vast and empty plain' recurs throughout the novel. As Ronald Binns has pointed out, "Farrell's India, like Conrad's Africa, is portrayed as a vast, incomprehensible land that makes the pretensions of the white man seem puny and absurd"(1986:68). The indifference of the vast expanses of India to the affairs of the British is suggested in many parts of the novel. The Collector delivers a declamatory speech on progress and civilization, but his 'shouts rang emptily over the vast Indian plain which stretched for hundreds of miles in every direction' (P.81). when the occupants of the Residency contemplate flight from the enclave, "the vast plains of Indian sap their confidence and courage. Even if they succeed in breaking through the sepoy lines, where would they go? Where did safely lie on that vast hostile plain?" (P.248). This indifference of the Indian subcontinent is reflected in the Indian character, the Prime Minister to the Maharaja, who even after a month in British captivity remains, to the Collector's surprise, totally unaffected by and indifferent to the stresses of the Siege: "the siege simply had made no impression on him whatsoever" (P.232) while, Farrell ironically remarks, "the siege can be very dull to a man of culture" (P.203). Looking at the Prime Minister, the Collector "realized that there was a whole new way of life of the people in India which he

would never get to know and which was totally indifferent to him and his concerns” (P.232).

And finally it is the vast plains of India that enlighten the Collector about the Siege, India and life itself. “Crossing for the last time that stretch of dusty plain which lay between Krishnapur and the railhead, the Collector experienced more strongly than ever before the vastness of India; he realized then.... What a small affair the siege of Krishnapur had been? how unimportant?, how devoid of significance?” (P.343) the ‘terrible days of the siege’ which were ‘the dark foundations of [his] civilized life’ (P.343) in Krishnapur give him a poignant awareness of the reality of India, its people and its life. The naked ugliness of the poverty which struck the ‘superior culture’ during the siege awakens him to the tragic significance of the starving millions of India. He resigns from Fine Arts Communities and progressive societies, disposes of his art collections, feels a ‘cautious contempt for the greedy merchants of England for whom the Exhibition had been an apotheosis’(P.332) and believes that “culture is a sham”(P.345).

By portraying this complete transformation of the protagonist under the effect of the Siege and the utter changelessness of the Indians in the novel, Farrell persuades us that while the Mutiny exposed the spiritual and physical clinks in the British armour, for the Indians it was just another painful episode in a dull routine of painful life, thereby stressing the permanence of India in contrast with the transience of imperial glory.

Farrell uses another Indian image to portray the inscrutable permanence of India. The very description of the village in the opening

pages of the novel connotes the ominous potentials of a country whose various aspects remain shrouded in mystery ... “the village crouches in a grove of bamboo and possesses a frightful pond with a water buffalo or two; more often there is just a well to be worked from dawn till dusk by the same two men and two bullocks every single day in their lives” (PP.9-10). After the siege which effects significant changes in the British characters as well as the political life of imperial Britain (the Queen Victoria was declared the Empress of India in 1857), the Collector is struck by the permanence of India which is symbolized in the two men and two bullocks. Again, soon after his last meeting with Fleury, “he was thinking again of those two men and two bullocks, drawing water from the well everybody of their lives. Perhaps, by the very end of his life, in 1880, he had come to believe that a people, a nation does not create itself according to its own best ideas but is shaped by other forces, of which it has little knowledge”(P.345). These closing lines of the novel, juxtaposed as they are with an inscrutable component of Indian life read like a profound commentary on the imperial folly.

Farrell makes marvelous use of the billiard room as a powerful symbol of the serene British India before the siege and its turbulence during the siege. As a symbol of the luxurious component of British life in India, Farrell’s billiard room evokes the English countryside with its greenery, peace and tranquility. It’s “...ceiling, very high for the sake of coolness, bore elaborate plaster moldings of foliage in the English fashion” (P.170). In the days before the Siege, the billiard room was “like some gentle rustic scenethe green meadows of the tables, the brown leather of the chairs, and the gentlemen peacefully browsing amongst them. Then there had been no other sound but the occasional click of

billiard balls or the scrape of someone chalking his cue. Above the green pastures the bellowing blue clouds of cigar smoke ha drifted gently by beneath the ceiling like the sky of a summer's day" (P.170).

But, as several rooms of the Residency fall into disuse due to the sepoy offensive, the billiard room becomes filled with the ladies living in close proximity. Gradually the billiard room gets transformed into a Indian bazaar and the Collector "dreaded to enter there" (P.170). The room, which used to tranquilize the British senses begins to have an oppressive effect on them. Farrell's description of the Collector moving through the billiard room during his rounds evokes the picture of a British citizen moving through one of the bustling bazaars of India: "alas, the ears were rolled by high-pitched voices raised in dispute or emphasis; the competition here was extreme for anyone with anything to say: it included a number of crying children, illicit parrots, and mynah birds" (P.170). Thus, Farrell uses the billiard room as a strong symbol of the strife-torn British India of 1857.

Farrell's critique of imperialism in the Empire Fiction is achieved primarily through images and symbols. Margaret Drabble locates the reason for this acceptance of the symbolic mode in awareness on the part of Farrell about a "curious dislocation between thought and language, as though the words of the thought can't quite catch the painful complexity without an undue formality" (1981:188). In the light of this reflection, it is argued that Farrell took recourse to a 'disease symbolism' to avoid an undue formality in his subtle critique of imperialism. In *The Siege of Krishnapur* the disease hits from inside just as the mutiny rags from outside. The images of disease are integrated into the text in such a way

that the connection between the sickness of characters and certain external events becomes incontestably self-evident.

2.5) Civilization and Imperialism :

In *The Siege of Krishnapur*, Farrell uses two major tools in his critique of civilization and imperialism. In the first place, he resorts to the use of disease symbolism on a large scale. In the second place, Farrell presents two equally important characters in the novel which represent conflicting responses to the concept of a superior civilization. Fleury who seems to represent the author's voice in the novel is in perfect disagreement with the Collector, who speaks and acts out the rhetoric of power.

In his book *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Edward Said explores the puzzling paradox which was at the heart of the imperial rhetoric of power: "Most professional humanists.... Are unable to make the connection between the prolonged and sordid cruelty of such practices as slavery, colonialist and racial oppression, and imperial subjection, on the one hand, and the poetry, fiction and philosophy of the society that engages in these practices on the other" (1993:xiv). Thus, with a notion of civilization which was 'antiseptically quarantined from its worldly affiliations' (Ibidem:xv), Britain went on to destroy native cultures so as to bring light to the dark continents of the world.

Ronal Binns has complained that Farrell's critique of Empire in *The Siege of Krishnapur* is devoid of an 'underlying seriousness' and that the 'predominantly comic tone' of Farrell's novel "conjures away the problem of evil" (1986:59) involved in the imperial enterprise. On the

contrary, the ‘predominantly comic tone’ of Farrell’s narrative underscores the seriousness with which he tackles the question of imperial evil. As Margaret Drabble has aptly put it, Farrell’s “comedy is serious, and although there are moments of mock- epic and mock-heroic, we remain convinced that Farrell is deeply engaged with his subject matter” (1981:178). In *The Siege of Krishnapur*, Farrell undertakes an attack on imperialism with consummate skill, unmatched in the fictional literature of imperialism.

In his description of the landscape of Krishnapur, Farrell has made clear in a typically Farrellesque manner that *The Siege of Krishnapur* is a serious and cunningly accomplished attack on the civilization of the Empire. He proceeds to debunk the myth of the imperial civilization by maintaining an ironic narrative stance and by introducing characters who represent conflicting responses to the colonial experience. Fleury calls the Empire’s civilization a “beneficial disease” (P.24) and returns to Britain with profound misgivings about the theory of a superior culture. Unlike Conrad’s Kurtz who, delving deep into the heart of darkness in the hope of dispelling it for ever merges with its symbolic landscape, Fleury comes to the Indian subcontinent to compose a volume on its darkness, is distressed to find his own people blinded by the dazzling light of an alien and elusive culture and goes back home enlightened. Fleury’s description of civilization as a ‘disease’ suggests that in his Empire fiction Farrell is attempting a final diagnosis of this colonial disease.

The collector, another protagonist like Fleury, is one of the staunch exponent of the theory of the superior culture of the Empire on which he bases his administration and personal conduct in Krishnapur. He is the

champion of the Great Exhibition where 14000 exhibitors displayed their goods The Collector had attended the exhibition in an official capacity and regards it as a 'a collective prayer of all civilized nations' (p.48). Farrell's attitude to the idea of a superior culture becomes quite evident when he makes the Collector assert that some articles brought from the Exhibition which are bizarre, tasteless and even comically preposterous to modern eyes are synonymous with civilization. The Collector's obsession with the Exhibition as symbolizing civilization and progress becomes a powerful critique of civilization itself.

2.6) The Title : Its Imperial Significance

The titles of Farrell's novels lend themselves to a multiplicity of interpretations. In *The Siege of Krishnapur*, though the meaning is not fixed, it is flexible. The title of this novel has primarily two interpretative dimensions- the historical or the actual and the individual or the metaphysical, and the text of the novel enacts a vibrant oscillation between these two poles of possible reference. The title 'Siege'- activates these dimensions so powerfully and consistently that this term remains in a state of creative oscillation from one pole to the other. While an examination of the historical dimension of the titular significance of this Empire novel brings to light Farrell's ironic vision of the past, an enquiry into its metaphysical aspect reveals Farrell's concern with what life was like in those violent days of imperial expansion and finally, with man and his predicament.

In its immediate historical context, the 'Siege' of *The Siege of Krishnapur* refers to an event widely known as 'the siege of Lucknow' in the first struggle for Indian Independence during which a group of

Englishmen and women were besieged by the rebellious sepoy. By inventing a fictitious place called 'Krishnapur' [meaning 'the place of Lord Krishna'], Farrell consciously activated other dimensions in the title. Farrell has clearly pointed to the metaphorical overtones of the 'Siege' in *The Siege of Krishnapur*. In an interview with Malcolm Dean, he remarked that a siege "is a microcosm of real life and the human condition – with hostility all around you with the individual in a rather temporary shelter" (1973:31). Viewed from this perspective, the siege of the novel becomes a profound lesson in British psychology as the Britons fail to withstand the rigours of the siege with grace.

In the light of the forgoing discussion of *The Siege of Krishnapur*, it can be argued that Farrell deserves a place of no mean distinction in the Anglo-Indian cannon of Mutiny fiction on imperialism. Farrell's novel is both a reading of all the textual histories of 'the Indian Mutiny' and an invention, an extension and a supplement to it. Farrell is undoubtedly the only postmodernist Mutiny novelist in Anglo- Indian literature. By successfully breaking away from the shackles of the romantic adventure tradition of mutiny fiction, Farrell has been able to demonstrate that the popular picture of the Mutiny was a distorted one.

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