CHAPTER-IV
IMPERIALISTIC PERSPECTIVES IN J. G. FARRELL’S NOVELS

4.1 Introduction:

James Gordon Farrell resembles a philosopher for whom facts are curious in themselves. Farrell has ideas of his own; although he is not doctrinaire. His ruling idea is that man is caught between the irresistible temptations of thought and the resistant nature of the physical world about him. He set his empire novels at three points in the century before he began to write and he argued that this distancing gave a freedom to his vision of life. The books deal with three of the most disastrous episodes in the course of the British Empire: in Troubles (1970), Ireland between 1919 and 1921; in The Siege of Krishnapur (1973), the Indian Mutiny; and in The Singapore Grip (1978), the Japanese Invasion of 1942. The people of these stories are in historic difficulties which they find hard to interpret, while struggling in mental and physical turmoil. Here, the researcher uses the phrase ‘Empire novels’ rather than the oft-used ‘Empire trilogy’ as the last unfinished novel of Farrell The Hill Station (1982) set in the middle of the long period of peace which followed the suppression of the Mutiny brings to light interesting contrastive affinities between itself and The Siege of Krishnapur which set in the troubled times of the Mutiny. Margaret Drabble’s essay on Farrell’s The Hill Station (‘Things Fall Apart’) comments on the abundance of ideas which obsess the characters and of things which beset them. It is the most pervasive characteristic of these novels.

It should be noted that Farrell’s empire novels can sensibly be set alongside a number of post-war texts by socialist or Marxist historians anxious to revive forgotten or suppressed aspects of our history [for
example, E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), E.J. Hobsbawm and George Rude’s *Captain Swing* (1969) and Angus Calder’s *The People’s War* (1969)]. Of course, Farrell was writing fictional, not factual historical narrative nevertheless, as Margaret Drabble has noted, the empire novels are “at heart political” (190). At the end of the politics of the major empire novels seem elusive and ambiguous. Here Victoria Glendinning in her essay ‘Farrell’s Last Words’ has succinctly noted that nothing in Farrell’s world was simple:

His 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 (In *Listener*, 23 Apr. 1981).

At the core of Farrell’s empire novels an anguished, conflicting and perhaps unfashionable liberal humanism expresses its sense of compassion and helplessness before the dark, violent and ultimately tragic forces of history.

But a number of critics on Farrell have assigned and acclaimed his fictional work of imperialism to an unimportant position. For instance, John Mellors critiques *The Singapore Grip* as “an exciting adventure story, with powerful descriptions of air-raids, fires on the docks and fighting in the jungle” (410). Ronald Binns in his *J. G. Farrell*, thinks that “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” (44). He also compares Farrell with Forster and Paul Scott in his analysis of *The Siege of Krishnapur* and concludes
that “Farrell’s interest lies less in the causes of the Mutiny or its historical developments than in the conditions of an isolated community caught up in the dramatic experience of being besieged” (64). Margaret Drabble argues that Farrell’s novels function towards a “revelation of the absurdity and injustice of things as they are” and further adds 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” (181). John Spurling in ‘As Does the Bishop’, estimates that the most superior theme in Farrell’s novels is the horror at the instinctive competitive nature of man: “competition is built into human beings from their mating habits to their recreations to their personal and national relationships to their religious and political creeds” (145). In this way, a number of critics on Farrell seem to have minimized and undermined the imperial theme in his imperial fiction.

In fact Farrell is no apologist for colonialism. Almost all his novels reveal the absurdity of colonial pretensions. He puts his colonial characters under the microscope, and then criticizes sharply their arrogant and superior attitudes with the help of his wit, subjecting them to satire, depicting them with irony an understatement, and juxtaposing them and their narrowly focused lives against the realities of the world. His empire novels are implicitly about the decline of modern Britain and significantly he selected moments in history which involved blows to imperial self-esteem and a loss of cultural self-confidence.

Though Farrell is not an Anglo-Indian novelist like Kipling, Forster or Scott, he undoubtedly deserves a significant place within the rich tradition of British fiction about India. This research work, therefore, modestly tries to connect Farrell more firmly to this tradition. It should be noted that the early novels of Farrell are examples of pure fiction which are set against contemporary backgrounds while in his later novels, i.e.
the empire novels, he turned to historical settings. For example, *Troubles* (1970) depicts the tragic-comic story of a group of British people in a worn-out hotel called the Majestic during the Irish troubles of 1919-1921; *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973) deals with the disturbances in India in 1857 which culminated in the first struggle for Indian Independence; *The Singapore Grip* (1978) depicts the collapse of British imperial supremacy from an economic standpoint and *The Hill Station* (1982) is a sequel to *The Siege of Krishnapur*. On the whole, the Empire novels deal with the jerky blows that British rulers received from three of its impressive colonies. And the inclusion of *The Hill Station* in the empire fiction strengthens the argument that despite his interest in other colonies, Farrell takes India as the key. In concentrating on India in the way Farrell does, one gets an idea of Farrell’s insight into the Raj. In this connection Shamsul Islam’s opinion is worth mentioning when he views: “the key to the understanding of British imperialism and the imperial idea in general for the pattern of British colonial policy was framed in India” (Islam, *Chronicles of the Raj* 3).

It should also be noted that Farrell is a writer of epic scope and scale and stunts his contemporary writers and stalwarts in the field of imperial fiction by what might be called a highly comprehensive treatment of the end of Empire in his fiction. In his book *The British Image of India: --* (1969), Allen Greenberger speaks about three different periods in the history of literature on the imperial theme. Greenberger mentions the first as the ‘Era of Confidence’, a period from 19th to 20th century, the second period beginning with the World War I is called the ‘Era of Doubt’ and the last period extending from 1940 to the end of the 20th century the ‘Era of Melancholy’. And each of Farrell’s three major empire novels is set in these three periods. For example, *The Siege of
*Krishnapur* is set in the middle part of the Era of Confidence i.e. the Indian Mutiny of 1857, *Troubles* in the Era of Doubt i.e. the Irish struggle between 1919 and 1921, and *The Singapore Grip* in the Era of Melancholy i.e. the Japanese invasion in 1941. Farrell isolates the Mutinous moments of British imperial history and fictionalizes the initial blows to imperial pride in the first two novels and the last novel centers round the disintegration of British economic imperialism. Thus, landscaping the imminence of imperial judgment in three formidable colonies of the British Empire, Farrell depicts representative pictures of the three important periods in the history of the decline of British imperialism.

It is significant thing to note that disintegration of all the structures relating space and time within the text of the novel is Farrell’s magnificent obsession. This idea of disintegration, powerfully conveyed through recurrent images of disease, death and decay is emphasized to such an extent that it undertakes an allegorical significance, foreshadowing the doom of empire. In other words, Farrell’s Empire fiction is an intensive allegory of the decaying imperialism of British power. Through his 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 structure and as such cannot have any significance or meaning outside the realm of imagination. Many novelists who have written on the imperial theme have mostly resorted to the realist mode of fictional representation, but Farrell’s novels rely for their sublime effects on the powerful use of symbolism. He makes magnanimous use of pastiche and of many difficult metaphors to criticize the disease of Empire and its civilization.

Farrell’s Empire novels initiate an extensive review of the concept of superior civilization. In other words, his Empire fiction is an
extended fictional example of the decline of a superior civilization founded on a perishable body of myths. Farrell suggests that the idea of superiority leads the British rulers to assume a narrow-minded position of unbounded self-confidence which results in an adaptational breakdown in times of acute crisis, personal or institutional. This theme is handled gloriously in *The Siege of Krishnapur*.

The Empire novels of J. G. Farrell address this issue of imperial decline in a subtly postmodernist fashion. The opening part of all these novels focuses the British colonizers’ luxurious routine of extreme self-satisfaction whereas later sections place their states of submissive misery and vulnerability in sharp contrast. The topics discussed in these novels change from civilization and progress in the peaceful days to the usual needs of survival in violent times. The usually self-assured and always arrogant British colonizers under the pressure of militant nationalism revert to a primary state of instinctual existence which is anything but civilized. A. P. Thornton in his *Doctrine of Imperialism* (1965) has put it aptly as: “Every doctrine of imperialism devised by man is a consequence of their second thought ----- . Imperialist ideas are less ideas than instincts” (8).

In *The Siege of Krishnapur* Farrell negotiates this feature of the colonialist in a skillful manner by presenting a strange world in which people base their lives on improbable abstractions. Dominique Mannoni in *Prospero and Caliban* (1956) also points out this issue as: “Civilisation is necessarily an abstraction. Contact is made not between abstractions, but between real, live human beings” (23).
It is quite interesting to see how people nourished on a set of such abstract notions of superiority conduct themselves when they are forced, for the first time in their colonial life, to fight desperately for survival.

Farrell is an intellectual experimenter of form in historical fiction and his work suggests possibilities of experimental fictional techniques. He goes beyond his contemporary writers in the complexity of his narrative. He is postmodernist and his fictionalization of history does not imitate the traditional mode. Farrell’s use of postmodern techniques like pastiche and parody are closely connected with his ingenious critique of imperialism. Through these postmodern techniques, he suggests the obsolescence of primitive literary style of fictionalizing imperial history.

To conclude, it can be said Farrell’s novels are highly intellectual and hence their realistic descriptions have symbolic significance which require active reader participation. This and the use of postmodern techniques like pastiche, parody and intertextuality serve to connect him closely to the postmodernist discourse on fictional representation of reality in general and on historical fiction in particular.
4.2 TROUBLES: The theme of decaying imperialism

4.2.1 Introduction

Troubles (1970) is the debut work of Farrell’s Empire novels about the decline of the British Empire. The novel is set in the locale of Irish countryside in 1920s, at the height of the turbulence resulting in the creation of the Irish Republic and the eventual partition of Ireland. Yet this novel is not entirely political. Human beings live within its covers, complete with their loves, their follies, their prejudices, and their madness. It is a rich, imaginative and funny work, even as its atmosphere is morbid and gothic. Troubles is a novel of extraordinary, charming achievement. It depicts the declining fortunes of the country’s political class, but within the greater narrative of imperial decline, and against the backdrop of emerging Irish anticolonial resistance. It also chronicles the ambivalence of colonial elite through the eyes of a not-entirely sympathetic outsider, a strategy that evokes a level of political uncertainty around the very notion of Empire.

J. G. Farrell has used the art of fiction and the brilliance of his imagination to bring us through the fog and into the dining hall of the Majestic, an oversized 300 – room collapsing and pathetic monster for the British Empire itself in the early 1920s. Farrell carefully constructs a unique pocket of society in Ireland, which is living within the fantastically dying hotel. The society consists of old men and women who are relics of the golden age; Edward Spenser, British owner of the hotel and loyal British subject; and the vaguely depressed Major Brendan Archer, a shell-shocked English World War I veteran through whose sensitive, dazed, overwhelmed, properly British, and love-struck eyes the action is seen.
In the summer of 1919 the Major leaves the army, after a period of recovery from injury following shell-shock in the trenches, and goes to Ireland for the first time to seek out Angela Spenser, whose father owns the Majestic. She is an Anglo-Irish girl he once met briefly on leave; she has corresponded with him ever since and they rather vaguely appear to be engaged. Although Angela declines and dies early in the story, the Major is drawn into the life of her family, the hotel, and its neighbourhood. Angela’s brother Ripon upsets their father, Edward Spenser, by marrying a Catholic heiress. Edwards come to depend on the Major to help preserve the hotel, although relations between them become strained when both are in love with Sarah Catholic girl. A cheerful note is provided by Angela’s teenage sisters, twins who involve the major in their pranks. Sinn Fein militants (Sinn Feiners) are a constant threat but the darkest shadow is cast by the presence of Auxiliaries who make themselves a nuisance at the hotel and at the golf club. The story reaches a climax on the night of the Ball which has been arranged in the hope of reviving the hotel’s former glory. The result is a disaster, partly because of the indiscretion of Edward and Sarah, partly because of the Auxis’ loutish behavior. A denouement quickly develops. Sarah runs away with the leader of the Auxiliaries, the hotel guests are driven away by the news that the republic is to be recognized and British troops withdrawn. Only then does Sinn Feiner appear, to be shot dead by Edward for trying to blow up Queen Victoria’s statue. When a Black and Tan arrives he is drowned by Sinn Feiners, who would have drowned the major too but for the timely arrival of some last-ditch old lady residents. While they are rescuing the Major the hotel butler sets fire to the Majestic which burns to the ground.

There are key incidents in the novel which are minor in themselves but very memorable and very concentrated in effect. It would be difficult
to forget the moment at which the great metallic letter ‘M’ becomes detached from the rest of the name on the hotel’s façade and falls on a terrace-table where an old lady is about to take afternoon tea. She is unhurt but annoyed only at the destruction of her tea. Henceforth, the hotel proclaims itself ‘AJESTIC’. Edward Spenser soon stops worrying but the Major, who worries about everything at Kilnalough, thinks that the hotel may be on the point of collapse.

4.2.2 Title: Its imperial significance

The novel takes its title from the famous phrase ‘the troubles’ characteristically taken to refer to the first Irish Civil War of 1919 – 1921. Though, now-a-days, sometimes it is connected with the civil unrest which began in North Ireland in 1968 and which has continued till the end of the century, the novel is set exactly over two year period from July 1919 to July 1921. During that time Ireland was part of the British Empire and governed by the English from Dublin Castle. The Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) was formed in January 1919 to fight against the British administration in Ireland. The I.R.A. began a guerilla war against the British. This was the worst phase of the civil war, during which the British brought in the Black and Tans and then the Auxiliary Division or the ‘Auxis’, a group of skilled men with a taste for fighting and brutality, who later became an autonomous terror squad in the history of Irish Civil War. In this connection the historian A. J. P. Taylor has made his comments in his *English History* (1975) as:

The ‘troubles’ as they were called had a topsy-turvy character. The I.R.A.; though stigmatized as rebels, fought in the name of an exciting republic against the British ‘invaders’. The British, though
claiming to maintain order, were fighting to recover an authority which they had already lost (206).

Though the setting of the novel had shifted to the past, most of the reviews were highly appreciative of its contemporary relevance. For example, Bridget O’Toole in his essay ‘A Bizarre, Coherent World’ says that “taking into account the different historical setting, it is extraordinary how much seems relevant” (59).

Elizabeth Bowen who had herself written a novel on the same theme (*The Last September* (1927)) observes:

*Troubles* is not ‘a period piece’; it is yesterday reflected in today’s consciousness. The ironies, the disparities, the dismay, the sense of unavailingness are contemporary” (Bowen, *Ireland Agonistes* 58).

This contemporary relevance of the title indicates that the novel has primarily two interpretative dimensions – the historical and the metaphysical, and the text of the novel oscillates between these two poles of reference. The word ‘troubles’, unfavourably repeated for a number of times and in a variety of context in the novel. The novel provides the prelude to Farrell’s Empire novels, for, as the Major pessimistically acknowledges, “there had always been some corner of the Empire where his Majesty’s subjects were causing trouble” (*Troubles*, 215). Historically, the word refers not only the Irish struggle of 1919-1921 but also argues on an international level. The novel accepts a general perspective and shows the readers that the period of Irish troubles was actually a point of time in the history when the British Empire and other nations all over the world got into troubles, external as well as internal or
both. And metaphysically, the word constitutes an essential aspect of the human situation in which man is made by fate to enact a continuous process of being caught in one trouble after another.

Thus, troubles in various parts of the world act as a background against which Farrell foregrounds the troubles of Ireland. And this foremost perspective, he intensifies his focus on the troubles experienced by real people, the characters of his novel.

Most characters in the novel are troubled by various diseases. For instance, though Sarah is frequently attacked by illness, she is the main source of troubles for other characters in the novel. Though she is in love with the Major, she maintains secret affairs with two other men, with one of whom she finally manages to elope. For Edward Spenser, his own children constitute the major troubles of his life while his children consider him as a storehouse of troubles. Ripon, his son falls in love with the Protestant girl, Marie Noonan, an event disorders life at the Majestic. As Sarah is Protestant, the ladies at the Majestic give her a wide berth. This crevasse between the Catholics and Protestants deepens as the Irish troubles continue to expand. Such troubles, internal as well as external, threaten individual lives and imperial fortunes alike. To conclude, Farrell infers that living in the period of the Irish troubles was like living in ‘troubles’, without hope of peace – individual or general.

4.2.3 Towards Decaying Imperialism

It must be noted that Farrell’s novels do not represent direct attacks against the British Empire; they are artistically perfect laughing reflections on the follies, foibles, disagreements, cruelty and indignity of the imperial encounter. His treatment of the disintegrating Empire is rather a coalition of compassion and sympathy. He has sympathy for those who caught up in good faith in the decaying system of Empire. His
obsessive pre-occupation with the theme of decay in his Empire novels can be seen to be closely bound up with his serious and prolonged engagement with the decline and decay of British imperialism.

Majestic, the hotel symbolizes the British connection of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy rather than the Anglo-Irish themselves. It is clearly intended as an allegory for the British presence in the country. To the Irish people, the British are indolent parasites and it is not difficult to identify which side Farrell falls on when he depicts the English in the hotel whiling away the days playing whist and golf while the countryside runs with blood around them.

In the beginning of the novel, Farrell gives an elaborate description of the worn-out and rotting hotel which functions as a dominant metaphor for the declining state of the Empire. Only a few of the three hundred rooms are occupied by aged guests who can no longer pay their bills. Reviewing the novel In *New York Times Book Review* (12 Sept. 1971), Martin Levin pointed out that “The Majestic, decaying from within even faster than it is being battered from without, goes the way of the Empire” (38).

In the beginning of the novel, the Majestic is depicted in an advanced stage of disintegration. Further Farrell describes it in terms of a living organism:

The rooms they had been staying in for twenty years were dotted here and there over that immense building and, though whole wings and corners of it might be dead and decaying, there would still be a throbbing cell of life on this floor.... Slowly, though, as the years went by and the blood pressure dropped, one by one they died away (11).
Here, the phrases ‘throbbing cells’ and ‘dying away as years went by’ symbolize the gradual loss of the Empire.

The novel reminds us that the Majestic had a glorious past. “Here and there among the foundations one might still find evidence of the Majestic’s former splendor” (7). We are told in the very first paragraph of the novel that the house “was still standing”. But today there are charred remains. From the Major’s first encounter the state of disrepair of the Majestic and its occupants is almost lovingly explored. The house (the Majestic) is perhaps held together by its ivy and tropical vegetation, covered with dust, like everything else inside the house. The gateposts, although still mounted by their stone crowns, retain the ‘skeletons’ of great iron hinges which once supported gates.

As the Major investigates the building, bewitched and weakened, Farrell chronicles and details a vast, intricate ruin, whose furnishings and equipment recall its former luxury, and prove to the stamina of those who still live in the wreckage. The room the Major chooses has a fine view of terraces leading down to the sea, but a faintly unpleasant smell; in a bedside cupboard he finds a sheep’s head smothered in maggots; these sheep-heads, Edward explains, unembarrassed, are what they feed to the dogs. So intensely lived in, once, and now so abandoned, the house asserts itself against its remaining occupants, in various ways. The size of the hotel makes human relations complicated. The Major spends hours vainly searching for his fiancée, and unable to learn that she has been dying from leukemia until he attends her funeral. Edward and the rich miller Mr. Noonan, whose daughter Ripon marries with, failed to meet after wandering the corridors, always on different floors. At one point Edward attacks the encroaching foliage with a kitchen knife but its hold on the framework is irresistible. The upper rooms of the hotel are
dangerously infested with cats, whose raids into the uninhabited regions can result in horrible outbursts of violence. Animal life in the house abounds; there are piglets, peacocks, sparrows, owls, rats and mice, all vulnerable; the cats fight back with magical tenacity against all attempts to exterminate them until their blazing finish. The fall of the initial letter ‘M’ seems both surrender and a spiteful act of violence on the part of the house.

The decay of the house and the physical struggles with its framework and its animal life convey the tensions and the hatreds within British Ireland. The British house in which Edward and his guests shelter is out of order and the falling ‘M’ should recall to them as it does to the reader that danger is as likely to come from ‘their’ side as from the enemy outside.

It is ironical and amusing thing that Edward is quite unaware of any connection between the state of his house and his own situation. Like the house he was solidly built; but as with the house, his position is now indefensible. He remains optimistic; the Major doubtful, as curious cracking sounds are heard in the brick-work, or a black hole appears in the slates of the roof of the servant’s wing, or bulges of new vegetation grow in the walls. Thus the Majestic is in the forefront of our attention. As Edward fences against Catholicism, or Irish Nationalism, or ‘traitors’ in general, asserting the stock of slogans which serve him for ideas, these interpretations of the greater troubles seem simply irrelevant.

Ideas in Troubles are repeated, not developed. The wider and conscious discussion takes place when a group of English undergraduates visit the hotel; they are on a vacation study-tour and are sure of getting ‘to the bottom of the Irish question’. At dinner they infuriate Edward with their pacifist and democratic opinions; in the rage of which follows he kills the Sinn Feiner. That the undergraduates are right that Britain must
respect the results of the elections, which have given Sinn Fein a sweeping majority, seems less important than their shallowness. They are so sure of their ideas (all second-hand) that they cannot see where they are. They play croquet and rag in the corridors while the post-war Majestic creaks emptily about them.

In the novel the transience of life and the ruin of health are potentially connected to the condition of Ireland and of the Empire. The Major enters in the majestic from a long stay in hospital, with, “a bitter weary expression in his eyes” (14), still suffering from depression and nervousness. Angela, the major’s beloved, is dying of leukemia, and after her death he falls in love with Sarah, who is suffering from mysterious, unidentified disease. In other words, the physical decay of the living representatives of the old order is materially present. Every character in the novel suffers from one or other illness.

The Majestic itself is the sickest character in Troubles. In the beginning of the novel it is described in terms of a living organism, with the occupants having a biologically beneficial role:

The rooms they had been staying in for twenty years were dotted here and there over the immense building and, though whole wings and corners of it might be dead and decaying, there would still be a throbbing cell of life on this floor or that which had to be maintained (11).

Thus, to the Major the decaying condition of the Majestic is immediately apparent. The palm trees have burst out of their wooden tubs and grown up to the skylight, while areas of mould sustain rubber plants, ferns, elephant grass and creepers. This multiplying foliage inside the hotel at first seems romantically alien but is actually charge with evil
significance. In short, metaphorically, though the disease is not properly identified, the Majestic has cancer. In this connection, Susan Sontag in *Illness as Metaphor* (1983) points to a primitive definition of cancer as, “anything that frets, corrodes, corrupts or consumes slowly and secretly” (14) and analyses some of the implications of the figurative language:

In cancer, the patient is ‘invaded’ by alien cells, which multiply, causing an atrophy or blockage of bodily functions…. Metaphorically, cancer is not so much a disease of time as a disease or pathology of space. Its principle metaphors refer to topography (cancer ‘spreads’ or ‘proliferates’ or is ‘diffused’) (18-19).

The Majestic in fact is very sick indeed and this disaffectedly spreading vegetation becomes increasingly visible as the novel progresses. The growth of alien and uncontrollable vegetation at the Majestic runs parallel to the growth of militant Irish nationalism – something which through British or Anglo-Irish eyes is equally alien, equally beyond control. The ivy “advancing like a green epidemic over the outside walls” (287) foreshadows the arrival of Sinn Fein; the Majestic’s condition is near-terminal.

The political overtones of the spreading vegetation and of the multiplying cats are indisputably powerful. As the novel nears towards its end, everything that happens in and to the majestic acquires these political overtones. As the multitude of cats weaken the condition of the Majestic, Edward shoots down all cats and justifies his inhuman action in terms of his sincere concern for the health of the majestic. And a final irony emerges as the Major finds some days later that the shoot-out of cats has led to the proliferation of rats which is even more dangerous. To
this Farrell properly adds: “a cat, however savage and wild, can be passed off as a pet. Not so with rats” (307). The massacre of cats requires the slaughter of rats and one brutality leads to another and then to another in any system of imperial governing.

But the notable Farrelllean attack on imperialism and Empire builders is seen in the scene of the re-erection of the statue of Queen Victoria by the Major and Edward on their final day in the hotel:

In the last afternoon at the Majestic, he (Edward) and the Major took sledge-hammers and rained blows on Queen Victoria and her horse in an attempt to restore her to a more vertical position. … As they worked, her delicate green metal became pocked with brown marks, but little else was achieved. She was still leaning drunkenly sideways. At most, they had managed to correct her position a few inches by the time they retired, perspiring, to drink some tea. … After tea they returned to hammer down her ruffled skirts. That was all they could do for her (394).

Metaphorical implications of this activity convey a dark humour and biting satire.

This decaying condition of the Majestic echoes Edgar Allen Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher* which is a rotten, widely decayed building isolated in a deserted landscape and inhabited by the diseased lady Madeline and her “cadaverously wan” (In *Selected Writings*,152) twin brother. Although the narrator meets Madeline on the evening of his arrival at the house she thereafter takes to her bed and he does not see her again, something which Farrell seems to have adopted in his presentation of Angela and the Major. The Majestic hotel, like the House of Usher, is inevitably condemned and collapses into ruins at the end of the narrative.
But *Troubles*, though sometimes described as Gothic novel, and while it makes use of some of the properties of this genre, leads the idea of decay and sickness in a rather different manner from Poe. Farrell is interested in material physical decay rather than mental disorders and the atmosphere at the Majestic too often dissolves into comedy or irony over to seem terrifying.

### 4.2.4 Images and Symbols signifying decaying imperialism

As James Vinson in his *Contemporary Novelists* (1972), aptly puts it: “Farrell has an eccentric and highly sensuous imagination finding expression in a powerful and suggestive use of imagery, much of which takes on the force of symbol” (427), Farrell’s criticism of imperialism in his Empire novels is achieved primarily through images and symbols.

Like any troubled period in the history of a nation, the period of Irish turbulence has also been looked at from various points of view and consequently, has fired the imagination of the intelligentsia too. The novel begins with an elaborate description of the dilapidated and deteriorating Majestic – a rambling hotel which provides a powerful metaphor for the decaying state of the Empire. As the novel starts, the Majestic is in an advanced stage of disintegration. Though some critics of the novel were really thrilled by the metaphorical implications of the ‘diseased’ Majestic, no attempt has yet been made to read the Majestic’s slow disintegration in terms of a telling commentary on the gradual disintegration of the Empire itself. As Patrick Skiene Catling in his essay ‘Majestic Decay’ has noted:

> One of the many imaginative and technical marvels of the novel is that the metaphor of the Majestic is sustained and continually developed and embellished throughout (*Spectator*, 29).
Farrell in *Troubles* employs the symbolism of the Big House as a metaphor for the loss of political power like Maria Edgeworth’s *Castle Rackrent* (1800), Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Last September* (1927), and William Trevor’s *Fools of Fortune* (1983) – all texts of the Big House tradition. The novel chronicles the various political alignments and negotiations taken by the tenants of the Big House (the Majestic).

Several critics have drawn attention to the physical decay of the Majestic, linking it symbolically to the decline of the Ascendancy’s influence, while situating it within the context of gothic literature. The presence of the aptly named Palm Court and Imperial Bar within the Majestic, however, demonstrates the strongest indication of colonial intertextuality, of a relatively isolated Irish landscape incurring the debris of Empire. The Palm Court is described as a ‘vast shadowy cavern’ in which conversations, and sometimes individuals, are lost in ‘the gloom and the dust’ (20). As suggested earlier, most critics focusing on the Palm Court as evidence of increasing Republican Confidence – and of course, of decreasing British control – read its flourishing state in mainly those terms. The greater the growth, the further down the line towards Irish political insurrection. But the developing foliage and creepers so lavishly described by Farrell suggest a wider sense of despair. The purpose of the Palm Court, Farrell seems to imply, is not so much to act as the centerpiece of what is wrong with Ireland, but what is wrong with Empire generally. Throughout the novel the Palm Court ties the various threads of the Empire together, connecting one to another in the spirit of menacing collapse.

Through the skillful employment of disease symbolism, Farrell throws light on the undermining and corrupting impact of imperialism. Similarly, his use of disease or illness as a metaphor combines with the novel’s concurrent theme of the tragic vulnerability and brevity of human
life. In this connection, Ronald Binns in his book *J. G. Farrell* aptly points out that, “In *Troubles* the transience of life and the collapse of health are implicitly connected to the condition of Ireland and of the Empire” (58). In other words, the Majestic is seriously ill. Further Binns, in metaphorical terms, views that “the Majestic has cancer” (58). Since the Majestic suffers from cancer, Farrell describes it in terms of a living organism.

As troubles become uncontrolled in Ireland, the illness of the Majestic steadily increases. The qualities of the hotel go from bad to worse. The food quality goes down. So Edward decides to announce an ‘economy drive’. At this situation, Farrell interpolates a newspaper cut out which serves as an ironic thrust at the imperial discourse of power: “We have won the fight, but we have gone into debt in buying the ‘gloves’. It was a glorious fight for humanity, but the creditors call regularly for interest on the loan …. (69). This appeal for financial help for colonizing weaker nations is symbolized in the economy drive carried out effectively in the Majestic while the Majestic continues to disintegrate and decline.

Farrell makes use of some other images also which are emphatically satiric. The Major knows for sure that the Majestic is beyond diagnosis and recovery. The poisonous ‘abscesses’ have come to stay and the death of the Empire is only a matter of time. The significance of the ‘abscess’ becomes quite obvious towards the end of the novel. The decaying condition of the hotel is immediately apparent to the Major upon his first arrival. In the beginning, the Major identifies the potential threats to the safety and security of the hotel: they are the proliferation of cats and rats, the deplorable state of the roof, and the poor state of the foundations. The multiplications of cats weaken the state of the Majestic’s roof while the injuriously spreading vegetation threatens to
pull it down by the foundations. Here, cats symbolize an evil force which is potentially capable of declining the majestic. Thus, the Majestic becomes a scene where disturbing elements are developed just as the Empire disseminates the seeds of militant discontent in its ‘endless forest’ of colonies.

The defeat of British colonizers in ‘cricket matches’ is another symbol properly used by Farrell for their loss of colonies. As the Majestic continues to disintegrate, the cats to multiply and the vegetation to advance and overwhelm the hotel, Britain continues to lose cricket matches in Australia. Farrell juxtaposes the slow destruction of imperial power and the continued loss of cricket matches in such a way that it becomes an obvious satire on the British sense of superiority. Farrell proves that most British people considered the loss of a cricket match as regrettably and wretchedly un-English as the loss of a colony.

In the last part of the novel, Farrell uses the image of ‘sinking ship’. The image has been continually and astonishingly developed for decaying imperialism throughout the novel. On one night in the hotel, the Major reams that he was in a ship and that the captain and the crew had fallen overboard. The dream comes true at the end and everybody except the Major leaves the hotel. “that night he (the Major) lay awake listening to the wind and the waves, thinking that he might have been alone in a great ocean liner, drifting in the eyes of a storm” (358). At the end, the Major again realizes that he “must continue to row furiously for the nearest land, for the boat continued to settle lower and lower in the water” (392).

Here Farrell depicts few colonial characters as the images of declining state of the Empire. The foremost is the image of Mrs. Rappaport, the old colonial who is enfeebled with age and confused in
her thoughts – as well as sightless – provides a fitting image for the dissolution of empire. But her weakened state, though at times curiously entertaining, perfectly reinforces such a breakdown, suggesting a sluggish mentality, unfit for government, yet determined to preserve nevertheless.

In this way, the decay is everywhere in Troubles, in society, in the structure of the hotel, in the bodies of the animals and in the minds of the human beings and the colonial characters. The novel concentrates on Farrell’s unique use of various symbols, images and metaphors as a device for his criticism of decaying imperialism.

To sum up, Farrell’s Troubles evokes a picture of confused interpersonal relationships, an agonizingly complex politics, and an imperial decline into anarchy. But although the story develops in such a way as to relate the end of the British presence in Ireland, the threatening collapse of a global authority is simultaneously evoked.
4.3 THE SIEGE OF KRISHNAPUR: The Ironical Treatment of Imperialism

4.3.1 Introduction

The Indian Mutiny was – “a traumatic event … destroying the myth of the grateful and obedient natives being led onwards and upwards by the paternal white ruler”

- J. G. Farrell

*The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973) captures the real trauma of the British when the natives hurt beyond endurance, suddenly started behaving like ‘paternal rulers’, leading ‘the white onwards and upwards’. By imaginatively rebuilding the stormy 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 the imperial history) just like the millions of Indians who have been living for decades under foreign rule. *The Siege of Krishnapur* gives, in metaphorical terms, a subversive account of the Mutiny.

*The Siege of Krishnapur*, Farrell’s historically based novel, like Paul Scott’s *Staying On*, depicts a crisis in the Raj. Unlike Scott’s novel, which chronicles the decline of the Raj from the time of Indian independence, Farrell’s novel reinvents a significant moment in the history of the 19th century Raj in a fictitious Indian location, Krishnapur. The novel is set in the Dalhousie regime of Indian history, which culminated in the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the proclamation of Queen Victoria as Empress of India. In the novel, Farrell takes histories and memoirs of the Siege of Lucknow and makes some changes so as to use history in a fictional way. Thus, the setting of the novel is changed as “the
fictitious town of Krishnapur (city of Krishna)” (Crane and Livett, *Trouble Pleasures* 84).

In the novel it is narrated that during the Sepoy Rebellion British in India experience very difficult times. The British government does not take the rebellion seriously and take measures against the sepoys on time relying on the mistaken assumption that Indian people would not dare break the colonial word since they do lack the power to resist the British dominance in India. Meanwhile, the sepoys continue to put their plans into action and they surround the English Residency in Krishnapur. The British people in the Residency begin to lose their hope of survival, but in the end, the British relief forces come to their rescue and the British control over India is regained. But though the British dominance is reached, in the novel, Farrell adopts a critical look towards the British imperial policies in India.

The novel is both an action story and a less successful novel of ideas. Where Farrell wrote his novel *Troubles* intuitively, from his bones, he composed *The Siege of Krishnapur* from the archives, attempting a full-scale historical re-creation. But his labored pastiche of a Victorian novel moans under the accumulations of his enormous research, which extend from social conventions to phrenology to 19th century ecclesiastical disputes. Gathered together in the compound at Krishnapur is not only a group of deterred men and women, but also intellectual curios of high Victorian culture.

Farrell’s characters sometimes are not much more than placards, each playing his allotted role as a signpost for various tendencies. The central figure is Mr. Hopkins, the Collector (in British India, the chief of a district), who, like Edward Spenser, is slightly absurd, though he is
drawn with much less care. He is given to sonorous pronouncements about progress and civilization. To be sure, such ideas underwrote the British imperial venture in India, but Farrell’s way with his characters can be a very painful and obvious as their high-flown conceits on the gospel of progress. Thus the novel is ultimately a work that aims to shatter illusions. Farrell’s point of view is that of his characters who are fighting for their lives, and also for their worldly goods, and for all they have believed; in all these respects he imagines it as a shattering experience. The Collector survives and lives into old age, unburdened by any odd notions he used to entertain about his civilizing mission; they were buried along with the dead of Krishnapur.

However, the besieged British colonizers are no heroes, but – as shown by means of variable internal concentration – have many things on their minds which do not exactly contribute to the Victorian image of superior Christians. Quarrels over food, over money, over Protestant and Catholic corpses (between the two clerics of the Anglo-Indian community), and finally over moral standards and social positions (there is a ‘fallen woman’ in the Residency) seem to take up most of the energy of those who will be remembered as the ‘heroes of Krishnapur’. In a strict sense there is no hero in the novel, no character the reader would be led to empathise with continuously. There is not even an anti-hero or a complete villain. This strategy is part of the deconstruction of the British ‘stock-figured’ memory of 1857 with its extraordinary heroes and villains.

In *The Siege of Krishnapur*, Farrell undertakes an attack on imperialism with perfect skill, unmatched in the fictional literature of imperialism. The novel is not a historical record of the Indian Mutiny; it is the fictional recreation of a historical reality. Farrell wanted to affect a shift of focus in his treatment of the Mutiny. In a fiction which concerns
itself with a subtle yet effective criticism of imperialism and its civilization, accurate representation of historical facts is immaterial. It is important to note that Farrell was writing a novel on the Mutiny at a time when more than fifty novels had already been written on the subject. The following extract from Ralph J. Crane’s *Inventing India* (1992) embodies this point:

The events which began on 10 May 1857 are known variably as the Indian Mutiny, the Sepoy Mutiny, the Sepoy Rebellion, the Sepoy Revolt and the First War of Independence. That those events should have come to be known so many names illustrates the vastly different ways in which they have been interpreted and suggested the general air of confusion, fuelled by emotion which has always surrounded them. It was not an Indian Mutiny because the revolt was largely restricted to the northern region of India. It was not simply a Mutiny or rebellion by the Bengal sepoys, as many Victorians saw it, because although it was by no means embraced by the whole population, it was not confined solely to the Sepoys either. Nor was it truly regarded in a certain way as a war of independence, though it may well have been the seed which gave rise to the independence struggle in later years (11).

What distinguishes Farrell’s work from other Anglo-Indian novelists of empire such as John Masters and M. M. Kaye is that he recognizes the basis of imperial modes of self-perception in cultural forms and rethinking of, a past which still bears on the present can best be achieved through an ironic of such cultural forms. In *The Siege of*
Farrell attempts not only cultural revival by using the popular 19th century genre of imperial adventure fiction, but also its subversion through a technique of ironic distancing i.e. pastiche and mock-heroic. He foregrounds issues of representation and those fantasies of power through supervision seen in the novels of writers such as Kipling and Masters, by inverting the gaze and making the colonizer suddenly the object of the ‘othering’ view of the natives who came to watch the progress of the siege from a nearby hillside. In the novel, Farrell implements an ironic distance in time between a contemporary implied reader and the society of the 19th century.

4.3.2 Title: Its Imperial Significance

Farrell makes good use of metaphors in *The Siege of Krishnapur*. The title of the novel itself is metaphorical. Farrell based his narrative largely on histories and memoirs of the Siege of Lucknow but transferred the action of his novel to a fictional town, Krishnapur (which means ‘city of Lord Krishna’). By inventing a fictional place, Farrell consciously activated other dimensions in the title.

Multiplicity of interpretations is one of the salient features of Farrell’s novels. In *The Siege of Krishnapur*, the meaning is not fixed, it is flexible. Primarily, the title of this novel has two interpretative dimensions like *Troubles* – the historical and the metaphysical, and the narrative of the novel oscillates between these two poles of possible reference. The title activates these dimensions so powerfully and coherently that this term remains in a state of creative oscillation from one pole to another. While an examination of the historical dimensions brings to light Farrell’s ironic vision of the past, and an enquiry into its
metaphysical aspects reveals Farrell’s concern with what life was like in those violent days of imperial expansion and in the end, with man and his perplexing situation. 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 English colonizers with their families were besieged by the rebellious sepoys. In metaphysical context, Farrell has clearly pointed to the metaphorical overtones of the ‘siege’ in the novel. These metaphorical overtones are explained in the following words by Farrell himself in an interview with Malcolm Dean from the *Guardian* on 1st September 1973, quoted in Binns’ *J. G. Farrell*: “(a siege) is a microcosm of real life and (the) human condition – hostility all around you with the individual in a rather temporary shelter” (18).

Considering this explanation, it can be suggested that Farrell anticipates the coming end of the British Empire. In relation to these issues such as temporariness and insecurity which are felt more acutely during events like wars and sieges, Ronald Binns makes the following statement:

In Farrell’s mature fiction human beings and their communities are in perpetual states of siege, battered by circumstance both from without and within (23).

**4.3.3 Colonial Civilisation: An Imperial Disease**
In this section the researcher would like to expose how the concept and the claims of bringing civilisation to India fails as a result of the manipulation of these concepts by the British colonizers themselves. In *The Siege of Krishnapur* Farrell makes a thorough analysis of these issues in order to raise awareness among the British imperialists. For example, an incidence during the Sepoy Rebellion, which depicts the fight between the sepoys and the British colonizers in which the later use teaspoons and forks, is very illustrative of this point:

A sepoy here was trying to remove a silver fork from one of his lungs; another had received a piece of lightening–conductor in his kidneys. …; others had been struck down by teaspoons, by fish-knives, by marbles; an unfortunate *subadar* had been plucked from this world by the silver sugar-tongs embedded in his brain (317).

This illustrates the process of the decline of the British Empire in India, giving reference to the wrong policies of the English colonizers and the wrong behavior of the English people in India. Thus, Farrell is pointing out that the use of violence against the civilians in India is one of the wrong policies of the British there. Moreover, instruments of civilisation such as teaspoons and forks become a means of violence and destruction since the English colonizers use them as weapons. Hence, rather than civilisation, the British colonizers bring violence and bloodshed in India. In this way, Farrell draws the readers’ attention to these wrong imperial policies of the British colonizers since he believes in colonization through persuasion, not colonization through violence.
Farrell, by deriding the British colonizers, tries to raise their consciousness about the importance of the application of the right methods of colonization. In other words, Farrell is concerned with “the gap between imperial ideals and imperial practice(s)” (Christopher Taylor, ‘Commentary’ *New Statesman* 41). Despite the claims of the English colonizers having a superior and a deep rooted civilisation as it is also illustrated through the statues of Plato and Socrates in the novel, the invalidity of this claim becomes obvious in the following remarks of Peter Morey:

European civilisation is personified by the giant marble busts of Plato and Socrates that gaze implacably over the hostile plain, and which provide cover for Harry Dunstaple’s cannon on the ramparts. Their final appearance, “terribly pocked by round shots and musket-fire” (*The Siege of Krishnapur*, 308), reveals the inability of Western systems of thought to contain and speak for the East…. With his collection of artefacts from the Great Exhibition, the Collector begins the novel as the embodiment of that part of Victorianism which sought to exploit the potential offered by cultural and technological innovation to bring Western civilisation to the ‘uncivilised’ East. The wealth engendered by capitalism (and colonialism of course) should also be used to this end. He says, “It’s not simply to acquire wealth, but to acquire through wealth, that superior way of life which we loosely term civilisation and which includes so many things … both spiritual and practical” (*The Siege of Krishnapur*, 80), (Morey, *Fictions of India*, 116).
In the end, the Collector realizes two facts; first the inability of the British colonizers to bring superior culture and civilisation to India, as they end up bringing bloodshed and violence and secondly, the Indians actually already have a civilisation of their own. Thus, Farrell seems to be making the following points: The British have to accept that the native people have their own unique culture, which deserves the respect of the English as well. British colonizers should learn to mingle with the Indians more easily and to colonize them not from the outside but from within the Indian society.

While depicting British mission of bringing civilisation to India, Farrell makes fine use of metaphors in the novel. Even the title itself is metaphorical. Through the metaphorical depiction, Farrell foresees the coming end of the British Empire and the British civilisation and also feels the rising hostility of the Indian people against the British colonizers.

Through the metaphorical depiction of some diseases in *The Siege of Krishnapur*, Farrell illustrates the theme of temporariness, particularly the temporariness of the British civilisation and culture. For example, due to myopia, the Collector can see the near future i.e. the Sepoy Rebellion, but unable to see the distant future i.e. the end of the Empire. After the treatment on his illness, the Collector abandons his social idealism and realizes that “his confidence in the superiority of his own time over all past times has quite vanished” (100). Thus the Collector loses his faith in the superiority of his civilisation and culture over the Indian one and utters, “Culture is a sham. …. It’s a cosmetic painted on life by rich people to conceal its ugliness” (349). This indicates his realization of the difference between the British as well as Indian civilisation. He also
realizes that two different things cannot be compared as superior and inferior to one another.

Farrell suggests that the British colonizers, pompous with a sense of false confidence in the glory of their superior civilisation, looked down upon the colonized in general and the sepoys, in particular merely as exploitable persons. Farrell implies that the Empire had to overcome a dishonourable withdrawal from most of its colonies because the imperial rulers were firmly based in the misconception that the British civilisation is a cure-all for all the cultural, political and administrative obstacles to nation building. James Morris in his *Farewell the Trumpets* (1968) ironically puts it:

Never mind the true motives and the methods of imperialism; in the days of their imperial supremacy, the British genuinely believed themselves to be performing a divine purpose, innocently, nobly in the name of God and the Queen (37-38).

And Farrell explores and exposes the ‘true methods and motives of imperialism’ in *The Siege of Krishnapur*.

Here the imperial civilisation is a poisonous disease which attempts to infect the innocent Indian population. At the very beginning of the novel, after the inauspicious distribution of chappatis which “swept the countryside like an epidemic” (11), the Collector, filled with depression and to avoid the supposedly mounted whip, orders the digging of a deep trench combined with a thick wall around the perimeters of the Residency. But ironically enough, the disease hits from inside – a fact
which forces the readers to reflect deeply on the significant metaphorical connotations of the disease which threatens to exterminate the imperial community left on its fate in the Residency. Thus, the disease remains undiagnosed and this diagnostic incapacity is potentially related to the hitherto undiagnosed disease of imperial civilisation which finally resulted in the collapse of the health of the Empire. When Farrell finds that the walls are made of bricks, he thrusts with an ironic aside: “Bricks are undoubtedly an essential ingredient of civilisation; one gets nowhere at all without them” (10). Thus, in his description of the landscape of Krishnapur, Farrell has made clear in a typically Farrellean manner that *The Siege of Krishnapur*, is a serious and cunningly accomplished attack on the imperial civilisation.

Farrell’s expert criticism of a mistakenly imagined notion of a superior civilisation is potential in the very description of the existence of the land of Krishnapur which is the metaphorical centre from where the disease of imperial civilisation extends like an epidemic:

Anyone who has never before visited Krishnapur and who approaches from the East is likely to think that he has reached the end of his journey a few miles sooner than he expected (9).

Thus, Farrell advances to expose the sham of the myth of the imperial civilisation by maintaining an ironic narrative stance and by introducing characters who represent conflicting responses to the colonial experience.
Fleury, who seems to be Farrell’s mouthpiece on civilisation, calls the colonizers’ concept of civilisation a “beneficial disease” (42). Fleury has been commissioned to compose a book on “the advances that civilisation had made in India under the Company rule” (24) and returns to England with enough misgivings about the so-called superior culture and civilisation. Unlike Conrad’s Kurtz (in *The Heart of Darkness*) who excavating deep into the heart of darkness in the hope of dissipating it forever immerses with its symbolic landscape, Fleury comes to India to write 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 to his home country enlightened. Fleury’s description of imperial civilisation as a ‘disease’ suggests that in his Empire novel Farrell is attempting a final diagnosis of this colonial disease.

The Collector, another major character, is one of the substantial exponents of the theory of the superior culture and civilisation of the Empire on which he relies his administration and personal behavior in the Residency. The advent of the siege makes the Collector reflect on British rule, although rather than interpret it as evidence against the superiority of British rule he asks, “the perplexing question of why, after a hundred years of beneficial rule in Bengal, the natives should have taken it into their heads to return to the anarchy of their ancestors” (159). It is as if the colonial process is completely one-sided, and the Collector’s mental landscape is devoid at this stage of any real empathy with the Indian population. He cannot see past his enshrined ideals of progress through civilisation through colonization. Through a Great Exhibition (a so-called landmark of Western civilisation), Farrell ridicules the colonizers’ ‘diseased’ concept of civilisation. The Collector is the staunch advocate of the Great Exhibition. He has spent much money to bring over to India
a number of exhibits like statues, sculpture, paintings etc. Through the display of these exhibits, he wants to display his “progressive and rational civilisation” (Binns, 66). Here Farrell’s attitude to the idea of a superior culture becomes quite evident when the Collector asserts that some articles exhibited in the Exhibition are bizarre, tasteless and even comically absurd to modern eyes are synonymous with civilisation. This obsession of the Collector with the Exhibition as symbolizing superior civilisation becomes a powerful criticism of civilisation itself. Fleury’s attempt to break into the subject of ‘superior culture and civilisation’ as ‘a doubtful proposition’ meets with rigid opposition. But when the Collector, in the end says that “a superior civilisation such as ours is irresistible” (177), Fleury staunchly remarks: “It’s wrong to talk of a ‘superior civilisation’ because there isn’t such a thing. …. It mars the noble and natural instincts of the heart. Civilisation is decadence!” (177). Here, Farrell consciously attempts to lay bare the imperial hypocrisy using simple ironies serve to make the incidents look all the more ironical from the standpoint of his fictional structure.

In the novel, not only the Collector, but many characters suffer from illness. Relating to diseases and illness, Ronald Binns remarked that they are metaphorical and also pointed out that in the novel

Sickness functions as a metaphor for the rottenness of the imperial order. The Joint Magistrate is absent from Krishnapur, having ‘gone to the hills for a cure from which it was feared he would not return’ (Te Siege 42). The Collector’s wife is in a poor health and is dispatched home to England; her youngest child has died of ill-health only six months earlier. Dr. McNab’s wife has died from
cholera. Mr. Donnelly dies of a heart attack and so, too, does Dr. Dunstaple. …. This inventory of sickness and death is in a sense more credible and realistic than that found in *Troubles*, since India in the nineteenth century was a land with a high mortality rate amongst Europeans” (69-70).

Cholera outbreak in the Residency can be taken as the “manifestation of moral decay and sickness” (70), Binns thinks. He also expresses that not only cholera and other diseases, but “partial blindness” and “swollen heads” also influence the imperial community and these illnesses become the “psychological manifestation of their moral myopia” (71).

In *The Siege of Krishnapur* the Collector, Mr. Hopkins is the representative of the company. Therefore he is the stereotype of a nineteenth century English man in India, who is a believer of British colonial policies. Even his choice of a job as a Collector is functional and is used functionally by Farrell. As Ralph Crane in his *Troubled Pleasures* suggests:

His ‘collecting’ represents the whole British philosophy which urges the accumulation not only of objects but of colonisable (usable) countries, a philosophy of dominion, possession, materialism, all in the name of ‘the spread of civilisation’ (94).
The reference to the Great Exhibition in the novel works in two opposing ways to show the two different facets of the British Empire. On one side, the power of the British Empire and on the other, its frailty in the face of Indian culture is shown. In fact, the Collector has fears about the frailty of the colonially imposed order from the beginning of the novel. He is one of the first who foresees the coming of the Rebellion. Due to this fear, he suggests to “disarm the native regiments” (65) to deprive them from rebelling. Rumors of the Mutiny received the least attention from the imperial authorities, except the Collector: “only the Collector remained convinced that trouble was coming” (14). So he ordered “the digging of a deep trench combined with a thick wall … round the perimeter of the Residency compound” (15).

On the other hand, in spite of the English blood in his veins, Fleury differs from the other Englishmen in the novel. Fleury is in the habit of criticizing the so-called services of the British in India. He is described as an idealist liberal humanist since he has a more positive approach towards the Indian people and Indian culture and civilisation in general. He is against the concept of civilisation which is solely linked with materialism and technological development. His idealism continues despite the onset of the siege. He continually resists the prevailing idea that British culture is a “superior culture”, explaining to Louise that a “civilisation of the heart” is needed in India, rather than “sordid materialism”: “Only then will we have a chance of living together in harmony. Will there even be classes and races on that golden day in the future?” (118). Therefore, at some points in the novel, he questions if civilisation is only railways or channels or if it has an emotional or spiritual side. Fleury is moderate and tries to establish a balance in his conduct.
The Collector, however, does gain some awareness of the grandeur of his mistakes and the blindness of his rhetoric. Overcome by a feeling of helplessness, he realises that his experiences in India have largely been reflections of his own culture; that he has not experienced the indigenous Indian culture in any real sense. As he crosses for the last time the dusty plain between Krishnapur and the railway while leaving the Residency, the Collector gains a kind of self-knowledge and acknowledges the emptiness behind the authority associated with his imperial role. He experiences finally the vastness of India: “he realised then, because of the widening perspective, what a small affair the siege of Krishnapur had been, how unimportant, how devoid of significance” (311).

Relating to this dilemmas stemming from the discrepancy between the policies of British imperial rule and humanistic ideals, most of Farrell’s characters experience a dilemma whether to follow liberal humanist ideology or not. In the end of the novel, Farrell does not celebrate the end of the siege as a great victory, but he gives the impression that this victory is actually a defeat or a failure as it is the beginning of the end, the end of the British Empire and of the British culture and civilisation. The refusal of the Indian culture and civilisation by the British people results in the refusal of the English culture by the Indians as well. This rejection of the English culture by the Indians means the end of the Empire in the long run, which is an undesirable end for Farrell.

4.3.4 Images and Symbols signifying imperialism
The use of various images and symbols in *The Siege of Krishnapur* signifies imperial attitude of the white colonizers. Farrell deals with this imperial attitude of the British colonizers ironically and with full of humour.

Through *The Siege of Krishnapur*, Farrell evokes India through a cluster of powerful images and symbols. ‘Tennis court’ is one such image: “picture a map of India as big as a tennis court with two or three hedgehogs crawling over it” (102). This typically Farrellean image of India as a tennis court beautifully imagines a picture of the way the British treated India in the 1850s. By metaphorical denotation of this image, it could also be argued that Farrell is suggesting that the British colonizers are as out of place in India as hedgehogs are on a tennis court.

‘The vast and empty plain’ resorts as an image throughout the novel. In this connection, 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” (68). The indifference of the vast firmaments of India to the affairs of the British is suggested in many parts of the novel. The Collector harangues on progress and civilisation, but his “shouts rang emptily over the vast Indian plain which stretched for hundreds of miles in every direction” (81). When the British occupants of the Residency meditate freedom from the enclave, “the vast plains of India sap their confidence and courage. Even if they succeed in breaking through the sepoy lines, where would they go? Where did safety lie on that vast hostile plain?” (248). Finally it is the vast plains of India that instruct 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 realised then …. What a small affair the siege of Krishnapur had been? How unimportant? How devoid of significance? (343).

The ‘terrible days of the siege’ which were ‘the dark foundations of (his) civilized life’ in Krishnapur give him a poignant awareness of the reality of India, its people and its life.

‘Description of the Indian village’, as an image, Farrell uses in the opening pages of the novel to portray the mysterious permanence of India. It connotes the inauspicious potentials of a country whose various aspects remain concealed in mystery … “the village crouches in a groove 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” (9-10). After the siege which effects the significant changes in the British characters as well as the political life of imperial Britain (declaration of the Queen Victoria as the Empress of India), the Collector is struck by the permanence of India which is symbolized in the two men and two bullocks. Soon after his last meeting with Fleury,

he was thinking again of those two men and two bullocks, drawing water from the well. 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 (345).
These concluding lines of the novel, juxtaposed with a mysterious component of Indian life read like a complete commentary on the imperial evil.

Farrell makes miraculous use of ‘the billiard room’ as a powerful symbol of the tranquil British India before the siege and its violence during the siege. Farrell’s billiard room, as a symbol of the luxurious component of British life in India, invokes the English countryside with its greenery, peace and serenity. It’s “… ceiling, very high for the sake of coolness, bore elaborate plaster moldings of foliage in the English fashion” (170). In the days before the siege, the billiard room was like some gentle rustic scene …the 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 bleu clouds of cigar smoke had drifted gently by beneath the ceiling like the sky of a summer’s day (170).

Gradually the billiard room gets transformed into an Indian bazaar and the Collector “dreaded to enter there” (170). The room used to pacify the British senses begins to have a tyrannical effect on them. As several rooms of the Residency fall into disuse due to the sepoy attack, the billiard room becomes filled with the English ladies living in close nearness. Farrell’s description of the Collector moving through the
billiard room during his rounds invokes the picture of a British citizen moving through one of the crowded 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 (170).

Here, Farrell uses the billiard room as a strong symbol of the violence-infected British India of 1857.

Thus, Farrell’s criticism of imperialism in his Empire fiction is achieved primarily through such images and symbols. Margaret Drabble settles 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” (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 expert criticism of imperialism. In The Siege of Krishnapur the disease hits from inside just as the Mutiny torments from outside. The images and symbols of disease are integrated into the text in such a way that the connection between the sickness of characters and certain external events becomes indisputably self-evident.
4.4 THE SINGAPORE GRIP: The Economic Imperialism
4.4.1 Introduction

*The Singapore Grip* (1978) is the third novel in J. G. Farrell’s so-called ‘Empire Trilogy’. In the novel, Farrell convincingly recreates Singapore of 1942, on the verge of its fall to the Japanese. Unlike its predecessors, *The Singapore Grip* suffers perhaps from a slight case of an excessive wordiness; even so it is impressive, fascinating, at a times absolutely funny book. The novel is a book of epic proportions, playing off, often humorously, the pomposity of British colonizers and the grim onset of occupation by the Japanese. The blindness of the colonials, their arrogance and their disregard of native people is significant, in that the readers know that humility in the form of a ruthless invading Japanese war machine is just over the horizon. Farrell has an uncanny ability to root out and deflate pretentions and hypocrisy wherever it exists, and that is what he does here, to incredible comic effect. Farrell’s spotlight is always on the follies of the colonizers.

The novel describes the pre-war wealth of Singapore that dominates trade in South-East Asia and that permits its ruling classes to maintain a luxurious and comfortable lifestyle. In an involuntarily fitting metaphor, one of the protagonists, a rubber tycoon celebrating the anniversary of his business, casts Singapore as an octopus that holds its South-East Asian trading partners in a friendly grip. The novel portrays the British colonialists as a wealthy caste that is merely interested in acquiring more material goods while disregarding the plight of the native and immigrant population or even actively exploiting them. The Second World War and the Japanese invasion take this society by surprise and Farrell carefully outlines how the various characters react to the menacing
disaster right up to the fall of the city to the invaders. While the narrative is set in the time preceding the Second World War and up to the yielding of Singapore in the war, the reader learns a great deal about the economic history of the city by means of a series of flashbacks that relate a range of episodes in the history of the city’s expansion as a centre of trade.

*The Singapore Grip* combines thoroughly an impressive body of history: of the development of the Island, Singapore, of the growth of the rubber industry, of the progress of the Japanese war in the East in 1941 and 1942, seen against a background of world events. Farrell was a child of seven years when Singapore fell i.e. the distance between the story and the story-teller is only forty years. So the novel belongs to the borderline group of novels, where the author has written about a period he has discussed with those who lived through it. But the world changes quickly and between 1940 and 1978 the British Empire came to an end. In this connection J. M. Pluvier in his book *South East Asia from Colonialism to Independence* (1974) writes that,

> whatever the ultimate outcome of the Pacific War, 15 February 1942 (the day of the surrender) was the end of the British Empire; it was also the end of European colonialism in Asia (179).

Capitalism has been at the root of the British Empire’s post-Krishnapur troubles is the central argument of *The Singapore Grip*. Capitalism is represented as a nightmare world of voracious profit-seeking: “seething, devouring, copulating, businesses rose and fell, sank their teeth into each other, swallowed, broke away, gulped down other firms” (*The Singapore Grip* 12). The novel is full of interpretation and
practice of disputation, including an extended satire on capitalism, but the only message the readers are left with is that men create enterprises larger than they can manage or understand. In the novel one encounters the rise and fall of the British Empire in the East. The history is strongly debated among the more intelligent characters as they struggle with the physical collapse of their immediate surroundings.

Though Farrell describes the events of the fall of Singapore to the Japanese, the main focus of the book is on the civilians, especially the merchant princes whose forefathers founded the colony at the southern region of the Malay Peninsula in the early 19th century, and the fictional firm of Blackett and Webb in particular. The central figure at the start of the novel is the rubber millionaire Walter Blackett, immensely proud of his firm’s tradition, but concerned about handing it over to the next generation. Recognizing that his son Monty is a useless playboy, he concentrates on finding a suitable match for his elder daughter Joan, who has both brains and beauty.

The philosophical contrast to Walter is Matthew Webb, the alienated son of his long retired business partner, who arrives to take over his father’s estate. Innocent and idealistic, he provides a pair of fresh eyes with which to view the colony. And what he sees first entangles then horrifies him: exploitation of native growers, the creation of a dependent economy rather than one that can be locally self-sustaining, and the manipulation of prices through a rubber cartel that holds the rest of the world to ransom. In a rather confused way, Matthew eventually discovers passion and by the end he has become a strong man of action; but his native idealism never leaves him.
Thus the novel focuses on the life of a wealthy colonial family and provides an intelligent insight into the rubber industry, one of the major parts of the Asian part of the Empire. The Japanese invasion changed Singapore forever, and it is difficult to revoke what the settlement founded by Sir Stamford Raffles in the 19th century on the sight of a small fishing village was once like.

Though the novel is most experimental and anti-realistic, it has an unquestionably firm foundation of historical facts. Farrell, in the Author’s Note to the novel, pointed out that “although many of its bricks are real, its architecture is entirely fantastic” (7). This note of Farrell clearly points to the two vital aspects of the novel – the realist and the anti-realist – and therefore, any reading that fails to take into account the factual foundations.

The novel deals with the first major threat to the British Empire presented by an external Asiatic power, while Troubles and The Siege of Krishnapur treat to the internal disturbances caused by the native people. ‘The fall of Singapore’ as it came to be called is widely held to be one of the greatest diplomatic disasters of imperial Britain. In this connection, Colin Cross aptly described it as “the worst single military defeat the Empire ever suffered” (Cross, The Fall of the British Empire 240). Therefore, the British surrender of Singapore to the Japanese came as a totally unexpected and humiliating shock to the British national consciousness and to the official colonizers of the imperial attitude. This shameful surrender of Singapore to a numerically inferior Japanese force turned out to be an anti-climatic setback to imperial supremacy. And the bitter irony of history becomes very evident when one considers the air of stylish confidence which characterized the official attitude towards the defensibility of Singapore. And the very fact that historians have always
been very reluctant to focus the fall of Singapore implies certain ideological assemblage. Farrell pointed out that Britain’s loss of Singapore was “an episode of British history largely left alone by historians perhaps … because it was a defeat, not a victory” (Caroline Moorhead, ‘Writing in the dark and not a detailed missed’ The Times 9 Sept. 1978, 46).

Thus, Farrell’s main focus in The Singapore Grip falls on the way in which Britain held feebler nations in its squeezing ‘grip’ suppressing the native economy. Similarly, he presents the readers with enough facts about the economic reasons for the Japanese invasion of Singapore. Primarily, he is concerned with the politics of economic imperialism.

4.4.2 Title: Its Imperial Significance

In The Singapore Grip, interpretatively, the meaning of the title is not fixed; it remains in a state of creative instability. In the novel the ‘grip’ of the title is so exchanged about that the readers lose their ‘grip’ on the referential axis of the word. Singapore is described as an octopus holding other business centers in “a friendly grip” (250). Walter wishes to bind Matthew in his daughter Joan’s ‘grip’. In its prosperous days, Blackett and Webb had a firm “grip on the destinies of individual companies” (314) while, due to the Japanese attack, the company begins “to lose its grip on the country and its own destiny” (528). The British grip is slipping and that of Japan is about to take hold of Singapore, while both nations are in the grip of forces they do not understand.
Another confirmed use of the term ‘grip’ occurs in authorial comments on the unreality of the fictional world of the novel. The characters of the novel lose their ‘grip’ on reality very frequently. Walter feels that “his grip on reality had loosened” (365). Matthew loses “his hold on the passage of time” (533). Almost every important event in the novel tends to loosen the characters’ ‘grip’ on reality. This method of ‘dis-realizing’ the fictional world of his historical novel is part of a conscious attempt by Farrell to discourage notions of dogmatic clarity of perspective in judging the colonial experience. The novel’s texture seeks to highlight the unreality which pervaded the imperial enterprise. But it is with reference to the concept of the ‘Singapore grip’ that the meaning of the title is irrecoverably, disseminated, and made unstable.

When Matthew opens the subject of the ‘Singapore grip’, it “proved a failure as a conversational opening. Nobody replied or showed any sign of having heard him” (108). After some time, Matthew receives an explanation from Dupingy who thinks that ‘grip’ derives from la grippe (the French word for influenza) and says that ‘Singapore grip’ is a “grave tropical fever” (146); but when he communicates on the issue with Ehrendorf, Matthew withdraws and says that “it was a suitcase made of rattan, like Shanghai basket” (200). Joan Blackett suddenly adds a confusing statement by saying that ‘Singapore grip’ was actually “a patent double-bladed hairpin which some women use to curl their hair after they had washed it” (200).

But Matthew is not convinced with any of these interpretations and comes to realize that ‘Singapore grip’ refers to a special embrace of the Chinese which again is quickly rejected. In the end, when the term ‘Singapore grip’ is discussed for the last time in the novel, Ehrendorf
gives an interestingly new description from a particular point of view which comes at an anti-climatic digression in the scene in which Matthew seriously attacked against the self-interested West deteriorating human affairs across the world. Here Matthew gives a final interpretation of the ‘Singapore grip’:

“It’s the **grip** of our Western culture and economy on the far East -- --. It’s the **stranglehold** of capital on the traditional cultures of Malaya, China, Burma, Java, Indo-China and even India herself! It’s the doing of things our way…; it’s the pursuit of self-interest rather than of the common interest” (498, italics mine).

Whatever may be the meaning of this well-known expression for the historians, the readers who encounter the term for the first time from the novel will only be confused about its actual signification. Though the explanation provided by Matthew might sound politically more suitable than others, the fact that other characters refuse to accept it as the final word on the meaning of the expression points to Farrell’s self-consciousness about the abundance of linguistic reference.

To conclude, the titles of the Empire novels (‘troubles’, ‘siege’ and ‘grip’) and the variety of interpretations that they invite readers is a measure of Farrell’s sharp awareness of fluidity of linguistic reference. Thus, delicately balanced on quick shifting sands of differing interpretations about the meaning of words and of crucial concepts (like ‘grip’), the readers of Farrell’s fiction are made to reflect on the way language asserts and denies the possibility of precise reference.
4.4.3 The Economic Imperialism

In *The Singapore Grip*, Farrell attempts to investigate the merciless politics of British economic imperialism through an excellent use of the discourse of the ‘grip’ and through a presentation of the mutability in the life and wealth of a British rubber tycoon and his family. Here, Walter Blackett is a living symbol of the imperial impulse of greediness; Matthew Webb almost functions as Farrell’s ironic mouthpiece on the discourse of imperial power which almost always masked the harsh reality of economic exploitation. Walter’s conduct of family life is “based on commercial logic” (5). According to him, “sons are assets, daughters a liability” (50). So he considers his daughter a good business proposal and he goes to absurd lengths in finding her a husband who would promote his commercial profit. His ascendency from rags to riches is a shameful history of inhuman utilization and exploitation of the workers. For him imperialism is a ‘law of nature’ and he tells Matthew that strong nations will take advantage of the weak: “… weak nations go to the wall. That has always been the way of the world and always will be” (140). He further as that in real life people are guided by self-interest. But Matthew feels unconvinced and answers: “But surely a government has a duty to act in the moral as well as the material interests of its people” (32)

The novel provides abundant evidence of the mischief brought about in the name of trade and Walter is the ablest villain. But he is extremely likable as rogue. Farrell’s inclination to expose and condemn Walter is contravened by his interest in the character’s inner life, and also by his respect for energy and practical intelligence. Walter stands for
gilded self-interest and he finds his children Monty and Joan disappointing. He envies an American associate who has managed to procreate five sons, all businessmen, who help him, pursue family interests far more efficiently than Joan or Monty helps the Blackett cause. Walter, moreover, quite sincerely believes – blind to all evidence to the contrary – that his private good and public advantage are the same wherever business operates freely. Farrell is intrigued and amused by this mentality and he sympathizes with the character although not with the ideas.

All the colonizing merchants such as Walter Blackett, Matthew’s father, Mr. Webb and others, who at one time left the British Isles for South East Asia in order to find a job that would nourish the family. Though Farrell says little about the motives and movements that took them there, he is extremely outspoken in the history of how these European merchants succeeded in acquiring wealth by destroying the pre-colonial Burmese village culture. Describing how Walter Blackett and his elder partner, Mr. Webb, became powerful in the process of colonization, Farrell has his character narrate how the British traders intentionally destroyed the traditional Burmese village culture in order to gain profit. The resulting poverty gradually transformed the formerly autonomous landowners into seasonal workers, “from the producer’s point of view a much more efficient and much cheaper system” (44). Moreover, the established Burmese village communities were broken up and their male inhabitants had to live and look for work elsewhere. While this ‘success’ story boastfully related by Walter Blackett, depicts an overwhelming economic achievement and documents how British traders showed unity in manipulating and cheating the native population, it reveals, at the same time, a shocking disregard for other cultures and human suffering. Thus,
Farrell expresses a somewhat outraged dread at the economic valour of one of his chief protagonists, the rubber tycoon Walter Blackett in *The Singapore Grip*.

Walter rose through the ranks of Webb and company powerfully enough to enable him to enter into partnership with Mr. Webb and take over the business on his own. Old Mr. Webb had started out as a merchant in tropical produce, a largely non-exploitative occupation, but as the complexity of the company gradually grew, and particularly as Walter Blackett came to prominence, respect for the local economies in South East Asia and the associated welfare of farmers, peasants and workers decreased at a cartel, destroyed the trade of the independent, locally-run Burmese rice mills plunging the people into destitution, and all for profit.

As the war advances, Walter decides to celebrate the jubilee function of his firm, Blackett and Webb which in his words is “the living diagram of the colony’s economic growth” (249). Against the background of these grand celebrations, Farrell discloses the grim reality of imperial exploitation. Walter assures everyone that the real purpose behind the celebrations is to improve the natives of Singapore, but this so-called lofty purpose aims at tightening his company’s ‘grip’ on the international rubber market. Walter never compromises his love for the Empire and its policy of economic extension. He is one of those blood-thirsty businessmen who would not hesitate to justify the imperialism. He believes that “there comes a point when the justice of the matter becomes irrelevant” because “justice is always bound to come a poor second to necessity” (140). Even from the Japanese point of view, the war was the ultimate solution for economic survival which depended heavily on silk and cotton. Near about half of Japan’s total export trade then was silk.
The calamitous effects of the economic decline at home forced them to look for foreign markets. At that time when the average Japanese price for textiles was ten cents a yard, it was twenty cents for the same product in the markets in the Far East which were under the ‘grip’ of imperial Britain. After having conquered the markets of China and Manchuria, the Japanese began to extend their influence far and wide, an attempt at survival which gradually grew into the dream of an economic empire which was “an excellent imitation of the sort of economic imperialism … which Britain herself had been making in Asia since the 1880s” (139).

As the novel progresses it becomes obvious that Walter has two major preoccupations: the first to secure control of the company completely for himself by managing a marriage between his high-spirited daughter Joan and the innocent Matthew Webb; and the second, to ensure that the New Year’s parade provides a spectacle to celebrate Blackett and Webb such as Singapore has never seen for abundance and taste. Despite the war in Europe, the government is insisting the parade goes ahead with a message which will counter the Japanese propaganda that the white man in Asia is there merely to exploit the natives and turn them into slaves. Walter sees no irony in attempting to produce a parade, with all the races of Singapore included, for these very propaganda purposes. The theme chosen, perfectly unselfconsciously by the board of Blackett and Webb, is ‘Continuity in Prosperity’. Proud as he is of the British traditions which have made him so prosperous, Walter does not hesitate to plan how he might best collaborate with Japanese to preserve his rubber Empire in the region, as South East Asia is overrun by the Japanese. As might be expected, Farrell plots a rather ridiculous denouement for Walter. As the Japanese advance continues, as his trading interests suffer, as the bombing raids on the godowns which house his
merchandise and that of the other major traders on the docks are bombed by the Japanese, Walter becomes a socially dysfunctional solitary.

However, Farrell is much more interested in the pursuing processes of colonization and what impact these actually had on the people involved. First and foremost, colonization is very much about “the struggle to possess” territory, as Edward Said in his essay ‘Narrative, Geography and Interpretation’ in New Left Review writes, with the further intension “to dispossess, ruin, maim and distort the lives of many, all in cause of land” (82). This view may be confirmed with reference to J. A. Hobson, an early liberal critic of imperialism, who in his critical book Imperialism: A Study (1988) offers the following observation on colonial expansion:

Imperialism is a depraved choice of national life, imposed by self-seeking interests which appeal to the lusts of quantitative acquisitiveness and of forceful domination surviving in a nation from early centuries of animal struggle for existence (368).

The events following the British control of Singapore accurately document Hobson’s analysis of how imperialism functions.

Singapore, according to Farrell, was simply called into existence by the economic and strategic prescience of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles:
Although people had once lived there, the island of Singapore, when he arrived, was largely deserted except for a prodigious quantity of rats and centipedes. Rather ominously, Raffles also noticed a great many human skulls and bones, the dropping of local pirates. He wasted no time, however, in negotiating for the island with an alarmed native and then proceeded, his biographer tells us, to set up a flag-pole thirty-six feet high (8).

Language and imagery here are highly symbolical and may remind readers of other emblematic representations of taking possession of territory where “alarmed natives” yield beneath the imperial flag set up by ‘heroic’ conquerors. The “skulls and bones” in Farrell’s novel do not only refer to the Malay pirates that may have used the island before the arrival of the British but prefigure the imperial piracy to be committed by the merchants of Singapore.

Thus, *The Singapore Grip* is Farrell’s most obviously accessible and cinematic novel, offering an alien location, romance and dramatic wartime events. Similarly, Farrell certainly seems to have intended the reader to have *War and Peace* (1869) in mind when reading *The Singapore grip*. According to many reviewers, Matthew Webb seems to be modeled on Tolstoy’s Pierre Bezuhov and the death of Mr. Webb echoes that of Count Bezuhov.

**4.4.4 Images and symbols signifying imperialism**

Farrell’s Empire novels are pervaded by images of physical illness, death and decay. Majority of the characters in these novels suffer from various diseases, some of which are not even diagnosed. In *The Singapore Grip* though the use of disease as symbol is limited, Farrell
makes use of it in a very effective manner. In other words, Farrell is undoubtedly the first novelist who used disease as a symbol to explore and expose the colonial pathology. The rubber tycoon, Walter Blackett, begins to feel that, with the beginning of Japanese invasion of Singapore, the existing rubber stock is a cancerous growth on his business career:

It (rubber stock) seemed to him like a tumour, disfiguring his career in Singapore. And like a tumour it continued to grow because although diminished in quantity by Japanese advance and by the increasingly chaotic state of the roads in Johore, new consignments of rubber continued to arrive from across causeway (399).

And to the native people, Walter’s rubber empire is a cancerous growth which takes its toll from the indigenous economy and pushes them to the extremities of adversity.

Though the use of disease as an important symbol is relatively limited in scope in the fictional structure of the novel, Matthew persisted to use the disease symbol whenever he refers to the impact of the stream of Western capital into the Far East. He remarks: “The native masses are worse off than before. For them the coming of capitalism has really been like the spreading of a disease” (174).

Farrell’s protagonists are no more the fittest to survive. On the contrary, plagued by various unidentified illnesses throughout their lives, they fluctuate about in life. By depicting characters troubled with a
touching awareness of the mystery of human life. “People are like babbles… they drift about for a little while and then they burst” (463). Farrell suggestively emphasizes the fugitiveness of earthly power.

In the dying-house scene, Farrell disinters a new dimension of capitalist exploitation. The dying-house scene symbolizes how the discourse of imperialism was ruthlessly employed to remove the indigenous population of their traditional sources of income, it also symbolizes of how the imperialists tightened their ‘grip’ on native economy. Though described in a basically Gothic manner, the dying-house scene has a distantly realistic dimension as a graphic picture of life situated on the brink of death. Unlike the ‘cities of the silent’ (i.e. cemeteries) described in The Siege of Krishnapur, the dying-house presents a death-like world of ghostly voices expressing their deep-rooted pathos to the dehumanizing discourse of economic imperialism.

Farrell’s depiction of the British General, Percival’s shaving episode shows symbolically an extremely funny picture of the failed tactics of British resistance:

He (Percival) stood poised, razor in hand, gazing at his leathered face in the mirror … with due care he began to attack the fringes of the leather, driving it inwards from its perimeters at ears and throat with tiny strokes of the blade in the direction of the chin and moustache. …. Gradually as the razor advanced and the white beard fell away, the features in the mirror had grown more uncertain: a rather delicate jaw had appeared followed by a not very strong chin and a mouth not sufficiently assertive for the moustache on its upper lip (450-52).
The whole description reads like a stinging satire on Britain’s strategic plans. Here the fall of Singapore symbolically parallels the fall of the beard which exposes ‘a rather delicate jaw’ with ‘a not very strong chin’. Percival’s thoughts on war policies are showed against the background of the shaving which very playfully parallels the British scheme of attack, with the moving razor symbolizing the untenable advance of the Japanese force. A similar satire is implied in the depiction of Dupingy’s vain attempt to kill a cockroach with the help of a book – “The book had missed, however, and the cockroach darted away at an unnatural speed” (330). Symbolic interpretation of such descriptions in the novel is motivated by ironic vision of imperial history. In other words, in making readers laugh at the strategic limitations of imperial Britain which led to the catastrophic loss of Singapore, Farrell emphasizes the processes by which language makes such subversive laughter possible.

Most of Farrell’s characters could have been very interesting but they were just one dimensional representations of a certain idea or group of ideas. The nominal characters were meaningful symbols of various relevant perspectives- i.e. well enough chosen stereotypes. None of the characters changed or developed within the narrative and through the last pages they still held the opinions they expressed at the beginning. Walter returns to the godown on the river, Matthew in internment is still grumbling about global harmony and Francois is still cynical. Joan, Nigel and Monty never came close to becoming characters.
To conclude, through the brilliant use of various symbols and images, Farrell successfully attempts to oppose and overcome the limitations of the rhetoric of imperial power itself.


4.5 THE HILL STATION: The Sequel to *The Siege of Krishnapur*

4.5.1 Introduction: Hill stations and their Imperial Significance

Established on peaks that appear like vigilance over heat-glimmering plains, hill stations remain among the most inquisitive evidences to the British colonial presence in India. Their origins can be traced to the effort in the early 19th century to establish therapeutic centers within the subcontinent where European invalids could recover from the heat and disease of the tropics. To these cloudy and cool hill stations the British expatriate elite came for seasonal relief not merely from the physical toll of a severe climate but from the social and psychological toll of an alien culture. Here the British imperialists established closed communities of their own kind in a setting of their own design. As self-proclaimed custodians of the Raj, however, they also
sought to oversee their subjects from these commanding peaks. Here they settled political headquarters and military cantonments, centers of power from whence they executed orders with a lofty air of omnipotence.

In effect, hill stations provided both as sites of shelter or protection and as sites for supervision. These were the places where the British attempted at one and the same time to engage with and to disengage from the dominion they dominated. This paradox and its implications for the imperial enterprise bestow the hill stations their imperial significance.

Hill stations generally have been seen as places where the British went to frolic. These were the colonial resorts where jaunty officers, vampish ladies, aspiring bureaucrats, and bored housewives engaged in endless parties and gossip. Rudyard Kipling did a great deal to figure this image in the popular mind with his stories about Simla in *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1888). Yet his pictorial representation drew upon perceptions that were already widespread among his contemporaries.

Most of the historical fiction on Indian hill stations has a separately nostalgic version. For example, James Lunt’s *Simla: The British in India*, History Today (1968), Charles Allen’s *Plain Tales from the Raj* (1976), Pat Barr and Ray Desmond’s *Simla: A Hill Station in British India* (1978), Morris and Winchester’s *Stones of Empire: The Buildings of the Raj* (1983), Philip Davies’ *Splendours of the Raj: British Architecture in India 1660-1947* (1987), Vipin Pubby’s *Simla Then and Now: Summer Capital of the Raj* (1988) etc. These scholars have shown that the hill station was a variant neither of the traditional Asian city nor of the modern colonial or postcolonial metropolis, both of which flourished by embodying a combination of trade, industry and government. Rather the hill station was a unique urban being, a seasonal site for the recreational
activities of a highly temporary expatriate population, whose memories of a distant homeland it lovingly imagined. Hence, the reverberation of particular features, of the natural and social environment of Britain was central to the hill station’s distinctive identity. Both the morphological patterns of the hill stations and the social practices of their British inhabitants promoted this nostalgic significance.

In their physical shape, hill stations had far more affinities with the pleasingly old-fashioned villages of a romanticized England than with the desolate cantonments of a regimented India. Rather than transform the grating patterns of civil and military stations on the plains to these mountain settings, the British accepted the complex shapes of the coarse landscape and constructed their cottages along the top lines of hills and mountains and around the shores of lakes without proper planning. They encircled the stations’ rambling avenues footpaths with trees and flowers native to their homeland and cultivated English fruit orchards and vegetable gardens in their backyards. Their houses were more often gabled Gothic bungalows and other European architectural imports than the familiar, verandah-enclosed, Public Works bungalows that positioned the British across the rest of the subcontinent.

Yet the fact remains that the hill stations were a part of the imperial system i.e. a part of the machinery that allowed the British to rule India and a far more constituent part than their nostalgic costumes suggested. They served as active centers of political and military power, particularly after the 1857 rebellion. Pamela Kanwar’s study of Simla in *Imperial Simla* (1990) demonstrates quite clearly that the history of this quintessential hill station was profoundly shaped by its political role as the so-called summer capital of India. This attraction to the hills and mountains occurred at the regional level as well. Nearly every branch of
officialdom that had access to a hill station endeavored to spend more of its time and transfer more of its operations there. Military as well as civil authorities established highland headquarters. Simla became the official residence of the commander-in-chief of the Indian Army. Many smaller stations were military cantonments, occupied almost exclusively by troops. Thus, all but a few hill stations in British India had some sort of official sanction.

For the British colonizers who lived and worked in India, these hill stations presented a rare opportunity to reproduce the social conditions that gave their native country its distinctive dynamic force. The authoritarian responsibilities of power over alien masses impoverished the conditions under which the dialectical interaction between the public and private orbits could take place. Only the hill stations provided a public place where the British could simultaneously seek their private interests. They provided a public place where the perfectionists pretensions of imperial authority could be set aside and the necessity to conform to colonial normative codes could be moderated by the desire to satisfy personal needs. Here sociability held dominance, debate and gossip flowed freely, and men and women engaged in the personal transactions that became the principal bridge between the separate spheres.

Thus, whereas the British population of India as a whole consisted extremely of men, this was not the case in the hill stations (except the military cantonments). Here the number of women usually equaled and sometimes predominated the number of men, and children composed a maximum presence as well. Thus hill station communities came closer to the gender and age distributions found in society at home than almost any other clusters of British in India. On the other hand, the Indian population
of the hill stations lacked the demographic balance it held across the rest of the country. Most of these Indians were young and adult males who had came in search of work. Virtually, hill stations turned the comparative locations of population of colonial India upside down: the Indian population was the ones who became fragmented sojourners separated from their social framework, while the British population was the ones who developed somewhat lasting and sustainable communities. In this way, what is often seen as the frivolous and chimerical atmosphere of hill stations was solely functional to the operation of the raj.

Anthony King in his book *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power and Environment* (1976), has observed that hill stations existed to “maintain the social structure and social behavior of the British colonial community in India” (196). Private intensions were thereby intertwined with public purposes. Thus, hill station put up enclaves where the British could restore the physical and mental power they needed for their imperial tasks, repeat the social and cultural environments that incarnates the values they sought to project and regulate and reproduce the individual agents who were vital to the permanence of their rule. Hill stations were unapologetically imitative of a nostalgically remembered homeland that they played an important role in the maintenance of the British presence in India. Their service to the Raj and its rulers finally derive from the degree to which they seemed a part of England and at the same time, apart from India.

To conclude, the chief requirements for the establishment of a hill station were an altitude high enough to provide an interval of relief from the summer heat and a location remote enough to provide isolation from the native masses. However, the development of hill stations became a matter of state policy. The great turning point, however, was the 1857
revolt which deepened British uneasiness about their security on the plains and elevated their awareness of the safety of the hills. As a result, civil and military authorities began to shift their headquarters to hill stations wherever suitable and for however long possible.

4.5.2 The sequel to The Siege of Krishnapur

Shamsul Islam in his book Chronicles of the Raj (1979) viewed that India is “the key to the understanding of British imperialism and the imperial idea in general for the pattern of British colonial policy was framed in India” (13). Observing Farrell’s concentration on India, one gets an idea of Farrell’s insight into the Raj. The term ‘Empire trilogy’ for Farrell’s major Empire novels is incomplete in that it rules out The Hill Station (1982), Farrell’s unfinished sequel to The Siege of Krishnapur. Farrell himself wanted his novels to be considered as

a triptych rather than a trilogy with each presenting a picture of the Empire at a different historical watershed and by their association shedding, I hope, some light on each other. I can’t promise that I won’t add other (Malcolm, Dean ‘The Grip Empire’. 68).

This is how the inclusion of The Hill Station in the Empire fiction strengthens the argument that, Farrell, in spite of his interest in other colonies, takes India as the key.

The Hill Station, which develops a kind of an unpretentious sequel to The Siege of Krishnapur, is set mostly in Simla in 1871. The novel is
set in the middle of the long period of civil peace in India which lasted from the suppression of the Mutiny up until the 1890s. The plot of the novel centers on a dogmatic way about ritualism which has broken out in Simla between Kingston, a tubercular clergyman, and his Bishop. A parallel sub-plot follows the luck of Mrs. Forester, a pariah from polite society because of her objectionable interrelationship.

The novel reintroduces from *The Siege of Krishnapur* the figure of Dr. McNab, still living in Krishnapur with Fleury’s sister Miriam. Dr. McNab is now middle-aged and struggling to complete a heavily researched treatise on Indian Medicine. In the very beginning of the novel, Dr. McNab gets an advanced indication of things to come when he, on his way to Simla with his wife and Emily (his niece), finds Kingston reading a book. Mr. Lowrie, the owner of the Lowrie’s Hostels in Simla and Kalka, provides McNab the details of the dogmatic struggle:

> …there have been certain difficulties at St. Saviour’s in the past few weeks. The parishioners have been upset by certain rituals of what one would have to call …a puseyite cast, quite unknown to our protestant traditions (*The Hill Station*. 35).

Here, the narrator’s concise observation that “Fashion has this in common with religion: if you believe in it, it works” (94) settles the connection between religious form and the stiff rules of fashionable Simla society. Though Simla is a cool, fashionable and heavenly and very different from the hot and dusty India of the plains below, itself is a divided realm, both spiritually, in the clash between high and low church, and socially, in the decent from Elisium House to the lower Bazaar. The
ultimate contrast is between the remote, high Himalayas and the insignificant petty quarrels of Simla populace.

The principal objective of *The Hill Station* would apparently have been less concerned with either religious rituals or social satire than with a development of Farrell’s interest in the theme of illness. Farrell, once again portrays a world where sickness is ubiquitous. Emily, Dr. McNab’s niece, has a paralysed hand, Mr. Lowrie, the hotel owner, suffers from a heart disease, Mr. Forsythe, the curate, is feverish, and one of the curates in Elysium House has a swollen gland in his neck. The main focus of interest is Mr. Kingston, who displays all the symptoms of suffering from tuberculosis, a subject Farrell clearly intended to explore with the same inclination for encyclopaedic detail that he brought to cholera in *The Siege of Krishnapur*. In this novel, Farrell seems contesting with a serious attempt at an explanation of the indisputable connection between human disease and social developments. Throughout the novel, Dr. McNab investigates the possibilities of this connection:

McNab had come to sense that there was another dimension to sickness than the one he had considered until now in his writings on specific diseases: this was a moral or a social dimension, he was uncertain even how to define it. If you had insisted that he explain to you what he meant and show you his evidence he would have had to admit that all it amounted to this ‘moral dimension’, was a conviction based not on objective evidence of the kind he had hitherto always cherished, nor on experiments which could be repeated, not even on experiments of any kind, repeatable or not, but simply on an instinct that all things were one, one of many
fruits of an underground plant in the community as a whole. The illnesses propped up, here and there like mushrooms, apparently individual growths but all in fact the fruit of the same plant (66).

Again subsequently, Dr. McNab feels proven that

just below the surface of what was evident in sickness there lay this moral or social or even spiritual aspect to it which if he could grasp it, would permit him to understand medicine in a more fundamental way (62).

And when the voracious but very somber Bishop Kingston attains a simple victory over the Reverend Grenville (who is thirty years younger) in arm-wrestling, Dr. McNab believes undisputable that it demonstrates his theory that “physical strength is in some way connected with moral strength” and that “illness was all one, its apparent variety being merely the fruits of his underground plant” (69). In this way, in *The Hill Station*, Farrell almost succeeds in identifying the essential connection between physical disease and external fact. The novel would evidently have taken Farrell’s interest in illness a stage further by analyzing some of its psychological and spiritual aspects, demonstrated in the clash between Mr. Kingston and the Bishop. Both men are ill and both are able to overcome physical incapacity by utter power of will. Farrell’s indications for the unwritten part of the novel hint that Kingston would have quitted from the church at the request of the visibly dying Bishop, leave Simla and die. An indication by Farrell suggests the poignant and melancholy
conclusion which the book would have had: “The Bishop, recovered, is playing croquet again. Another curate-challenger, McNab does not wait; he knows how it will end” (175).

In both the India-centred novels Farrell insinuates a ‘fallen woman’ (Miss Lucy in *The Siege of Krishnapur* and Mrs. Forrester in *The Hill Station*) not only to emphasize the real character of the Victorian environment but also to exhibit the British social structure yielded a close resemblance to the Hindu caste system. In Victorian society, the two groups of women – the pure and the fallen – was almost a perfect category. According to George Watt, “the fallen woman had no power to assert herself; she had few rights, if any” (Watt, *The Fallen Women in the Nineteenth Century English Novel*. 4). The manner in which the ‘fallen’ Lucy is treated at the Residency in *The Siege of Krishnapur* by her own companions is entirely parallel to the way the Indian untouchable is treated by the superiors.

Dr. McNab is astonished when Mrs. Forrester requests Emily to accompany her owing to, “the rigid caste system among the British in Simla which prevented social contact between the official and non-official” (36). Similarly, Farrell’s observation of the manner in which Mrs. Cloreworthy rebukes the ‘fallen’ Mrs. Forrester when the latter prolongs a respectful greeting is distantly ironic:

The lady (Mrs. Cloreworthy) turned her face resolutely and quite deliberately to look in another direction, where, as ill-luck would have it, one tattered mongrel had just mounted another and was pumping vigorously, unaware that ladies were in the vicinity (84).
In the novel, Farrell ridicules the genre of adventure fiction in a typically postmodernist manner. Teddy Potter’s description of the road journey to Simla reads like a striking parody of the genre of the adventure fiction:

Teddy Potter, meanwhile, was explaining to the ladies and especially to Emily that the road to Simla was positively infested with hostile tribesmen, with thugs and dacoits of every shape and description who were, moreover, particularly interested in making away with fair young English damsels .... Yes it was jolly lucky that he and Woodleigh and Arkwright, under the ‘awe-inspiring command’ of the ‘universally dreaded’ Captain Hagan, should be on hand ‘in the nick time’, to prevent Miss. Anderson being carried off to become the unwilling bride of a book-posed Pathan chieftain with a dagger in his belt. Why most likely the rascal was already watching them from behind those very trees (44).

Besides, Farrell introduces the love-affair between Emily and Teddy Potter from a necessarily parodic viewpoint. He consciously approaches the parodic potentials of the hackneyed discourse of romantic relationship. The following thoughts of Emily, after having been deeply angered by Teddy’s associating with other women even before she confesses her love for him, highlight Farrell’s parodic treatment. Emily thinks,
his only sin was that he had lingered with other women, unaware that Emily’s imagination, galloping on as usual far ahead of the reality, had snatched him up to her saddle and made off with him, hoof beats drumming, as a prize of her very own. He could hardly be blamed for not behaving towards the new proprietor of his heart in a way that acknowledged the change of ownership when he had still to learn of it (135).

Here, in this passage, the use of lofty figures provides to awaken the readers to the critical ironic distance which Farrell accomplishes through a conscious inversion of the general agreement.

*The Hill Station* would obviously have been Farrell’s tribute to one of his favourite novels, Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* (1924), a book which also considers how a man at odds with his times may suffer a certain laming of the personality … a sort of palsy, as it were, which may even extend from his spiritual and moral over into his physical and organic part” (Trans. H. T. Lowe Porter (1960), 32).

Mann’s novel portrays a sick community on the edge of the apocalypse of the First World War. Simla in *The Hill Station* is not under such an immediate threat of annihilation but the reader is nevertheless authorized a glimpse of its eventual end.

It is significant thing to note that for Farrell, the so called golden period of British Empire was not totally free from anxieties about the
interruptions of civil peace. Had Farrell lived to complete this novel, maybe he would have outlined, more effectively than he does in the completed novels in the Empire fiction, the manner in which “the broad living basis of historical events” creates even inferior characters “experience the smallest oscillations in this basis as immediate disturbances of their individual lives” (George Lukacs, The Historical Novel. 45).

To sum up, Farrell’s distinctively chosen fictive imagination duly utilizes the realist and anti-realist conceptions of fictional theory and successfully overcomes the limitations of strongly devoted traditionalism and narrow experimentalism, originating in the process novelistic masterpieces which are characterized by a discreet blend of realism and symbolism and of history and historical imagination. No other novelist of Empire before Farrell has tried, in a basically postmodernist manner to make the subject of imperialism available for ridiculous treatment. Each novel in the empire fiction is unique in its own way – Troubles is the only experimental novel on the Irish troubles, The Siege of Krishnapur is the only postmodernist novel on the Indian Mutiny, The Singapore Grip is the most ever inclusive estimate of economic imperialism and The Hill Station exhibits the first endeavour at writing a non-adventure novel.