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## A Critical Study of Indian Culture and Literature in Western Writing in “ J.G. Farrell’s *The Siege of Krishnapur*”

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### ABSTRACT

History continuously has been a true site for creative imagination of culture and society of a nation. Almost all the major writers and historians have tried their best to bring back the historical experiences to the contemporary situation. The Indian concept of history, culture and literature took their shape in historical writings under the European Rule. The effect of the colonial rule was a dominant factor in framing the Indian concept of history. The Indian mind has been controlled by the mythic structures and their mythical imagination. It is sustained by a perception of the past or the cultural memory. The European is supporting the historical imagination by facts, data and evidences. The Colonial and the Post-Colonial Indian context present this contest. The conscious trial to reconstruct the past, according to the contemporary requirements under the oppression of the colonial rule has really been prominent in the Indian historical literature. The British rule has created anxiety in the Indian people’s mind and psyche, which is displayed very clearly in historical fictional work.

This paper focus on Farrell’s *The Siege of Krishnapur* and highlights the contrasts between Indian and western culture. This book describes about Hindu, Muslims and Christian religions. It illustrates the East India Company’s administration system and different policies about opium trade, such as income taxes.

Keywords: History, East India Company, Administration System, Opium Trade, Indian Mutiny, Western Writing in Indian Literature.

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### Introduction

Farrell in *The Siege of Krishnapur* describes how a cultural encounter took place during the British Empire period. Farrell had studied Indian cultural, political and religious beliefs, so that his appreciation of Indian politics and culture was reflected in this novel. India is a country of rich cultural inheritance. Here, people of different castes, religions and different faiths, live together. The basic principal of Indian culture is tolerance, non-violence, morality, love, and humanity. In contrast, European countries have a materialistic approach which is the root of their cultural inheritance, and, consequently, a man lives a lonely life. In England, the king was supreme ruler and enjoyed absolute power, and then appeared the feudal system. Thereafter, Feudalism was changed into capitalism. Traders and merchants came to exercise political power and this class expanded itself by exploitation and taking advantage of countries like India and other colonies. This class contrived to safe a firm hold on social and political life. With an advantage of capitalism, it was supposed that the aim of life was to hold material wealth. India, on the other hand, has rich tradition, culture, customs, faith, and economic life. This whole organization and culture came into crisis because of the policies of the British Empire. The British officers behaved badly with Indian people. Their mistakes and exploitation is inexcusable. They enjoyed gambling and drinking. At the same time, they tortured Indian people physically, mentally and economically. Farrell finds out root causes of exploitation of Indians done by the British colonizers. He describes economic exploitation; torturous treatment given by the British to the natives. Industrial progress thus gave birth to tire capitalism.

*The Siege of Krishnapur* discusses about the opium trade, which was completely controlled by the British. The British got the profit from the opium trade through the state controlled monopoly. Firstly, The East India Company established a trade monopoly on Bengal opium and then the production and operations were controlled by the contractor. The policies of the taxes and revenue of this trade were decided by the British contractors. The contractors would advance funds to farmers and purchase the opium produced, and then sell the opium product to the East India Company. The Collector, Mr. Hopkins was the head of the opium trade and collects all taxes and revenues in Krishnapur and Mr. Rayne was the agent of the opium trade. They increase the revenue and taxes related to the opium for their benefits. The Collector says to Mr. Rayne:

Mr. Rayne, you are perfectly right to mention this increase of revenue from opium, but consider for a moment ... what is it all for? It’s not only to acquire through wealth, that superior way of life which we loosely term civilization and which includes so many things, both spiritual and practical ... and of the utmost diversity ... a system of administering justice impartially on the one hand, works of art unsurpassed in beauty since antique times on the other. (54)

The British collector and agents took heavy revenue from the Indians. They made the policies of revenues and taxes, to complete their selfish purpose for earning more. They increased the amount of revenues for their sake of wealth, which increased the exploitation of the Indians. They decided the high rate of the revenue and taxes, which they took from the Indian farmers. They forced the farmers to grow the opium plantation in their

fields in place of the eatable crops and then purchase it from them at less cost and sell it on high rate. The farmers and workers worked hard in various farms and factory of opium and got small salary. The British took long time service from Indian labor and paid them a little amount. The British earned a big amount of the opium trade, but they did not give any share of the benefits to the labor. The British officers controlled all over profit of the opium trade and did not share it with workers and farmers. Farrell has described the opium trade workers' situation and the Government profited in *The Siege of Krishnapur*:

The workmen making the finished opium into great balls, each as big as a man's head, which would be packed forty to a chest and auctioned in Calcutta. Each of these head sized balls, explained Mr. Simmons quietly but with the air of someone speaking his words into a high wind, would fetch the Government paid a mere four shillings a pound. (90)

Religion plays an important role in deciding political policies and study of the nation, which help the government to rule the nation. Any king or government cannot rule the nation by making policies against their religion. Farrell highlights the difference between the religion of the Hindus and the British, because the British would like to eat non vegetarian, which was completely opposite in the Hindu religion as most Hindus practice vegetarianism. The British opened a meat shop in the middle of the town of the Krishnapur and they killed the animals and supply meat to other places. All these types of activities provoked the Indian freedom fighter for the revolt. The writer described all these activities in Krishnapur:

Here Mr. Rayne conducted the slaughter and butchery of the Commissaries sheep, commandeered at the outbreak of the mutiny from Krishnapur Mutton Club on the Collector's instructions. The smell, which was so atrocious that butchers had to work with cloths tied over their noses, came from rejecting offal which they were in the habit of throwing over the wall in the hope that the vultures would deal with it ... already thoroughly bloated from the result of the first attack ... an olfactory background, silent but terrible, was unrolling itself behind the siege. (199)

The Indian Mutiny revolt was successful to move the political root and empire of the British. The Mutiny was not sudden or unexpected thing rather than; it is a gradual process which rose against the British exploitation. This exploitation and moral corruption had become unbearable for the Indian people. The Indian had followed some ethics or principles. However, the British for their empire purpose spoiled social life of India. Scientific development changed old concepts of man. Here, Farrell defined the revolt of the Cartridge, where the Sepoys were starting the revolt of 1857 concerning the new Enfield rifle as the latter were made from pork or beef. When the Sepoys used these rifles they had to tear its top with their teeth. Thus, they have to touch these rifles with their teeth, which is against their religion. As most of the Sepoys were Hindus and Muslims the soldiers refused to touch the cow and pig meat respectively. This revolt brings a great change in the political environment also. Due to this incident, the British were forced to think about Indian religious perspectives in making their new policies and laws.

Farrell in *The Siege of Krishnapur* raises questions that the Muslim religion's rules and laws. The Muslims law of Fatwa issued by their recognized authority jurist and the head of the jurist was called Cazeer or Molvi has to be followed by Muslims that contributed in political, social and religious life of Indian Muslims. In Krishnapur, the Collector was not satisfied with this principal. Farrell gives two different point views on the Muslim religion law of Fatwah. Farrell has described about the different opinions of The British and The Muslims had on Fatwa:

The Collector was not convinced by this precedent and doubted whether the Mohammedans would be very satisfied with it either, particularly as the Cazeer was already letting it be known that the *Futwah* had been extorted from him. Yet even the dire risk of arousing Mohammedan resentment was not at the heart of the Collector's disquiet, for beside the practical reason, the question of resentment, there lay its moral shadow, the fact that a civilized man does not countenance the destruction of places of worship. (118)

The epidemic of cholera was identified as another reason for popular unrest, accentuating social conflict, and provided a means for municipal reform and improvement of the public health. The subcontinent was the starting place of the cholera epidemic and it became the cause of a million deaths. It disturbed the commercial, social life and political system. Farrell's novel *The Siege of Krishnapur*, elaborates about epidemic Cholera accurately on the basis of two reports. First report of the *Medical Times & Gazette* of 1854 mentioned explicitly in his handwritten notes, and second General Board of Health Report based on the different methods of treatment pursued in epidemic Cholera in the provinces throughout England and Scotland in 1854, which was published in 1855 by the Royal College of Physicians. These sources based have a number of articles and reports which deals with contemporary debates, treatments and publications on cholera, including case histories of outbreaks in 1832, in London in 1849 and in Newcastle and London again in 1853.

Farrell used realistic source matter into the fictional fabric of his novel. He was using the historical novel to play multifaceted games with time and place along with position and different outlooks. The delight for Farrell's readership is in his knowledge with the airborne disease of Cholera, which was the cause of spreads in Krishnapur. Farrell gives a description of Krishnapur hospital scenario remarks:

In the hospital the constant retching of the cholera patients made breathing a torment; the air was alive with flies which crawled over your face and beneath your shirt, covered the food of those who were able to eat, and floated in their tea. The Padre found that they even sometimes flew into his throat while he was reading or praying with a dying man. By the last week of August the mortal sickness in the wards had become so general that he could no longer hope to pray individually with the dying. The best he could do was to take up a central position in the ward, using a hassock, and to make general that supplication for all the patients collectively. (296)

The writer invites his readers to examine more closely to the record of the British colonialism and its prospective effect on their own beliefs; where the religious people like, Padre lost their faith in God, and life. Within a few days, many people were trapped by the disease of cholera. Dr. McNab and Dr. Dunstaple give treatment too many people, but all is vain, because the doctors could not able to understand the reasons and provide exact medicine for this disease. Dr. McNab remarks, "The blood continues to be black and carbonated ... the treacle aspect of the blood in cholera is well known ... and due course the heart becomes asphyxiated. This is the true and basic pathology of cholera. The disease is, however, attended by secondary symptoms, the well known purging and vomiting, and indicating the primary seat of the infection" (302). The reports of Chinese missionaries authenticate the work of Farrell, "That they have been cured by having needles stuck in their bellies and arms, yet this is not thought too strange to mention ... and almost every variety of chemical substances has been proposed at one time or another, all of which is a sure sign that our profession remains baffled by this disease" (303). The writer satires on his contemporary audience and shows how they had misguided adherence to the pseudo-science of phrenology. The steady trickle of death from wounds and sickness continued. Miriam as well as collector Mr. Hopkins and Fleury suffer from ill health and his face is swollen and looking red. The Collector suffers from Cholera. Many of the British people died from Cholera disease. Their dead bodies are buried by the British. Padre himself buried many dead bodies. Mrs. Bennett's baby also died within few days. Collector's condition has become awful and there is a dance of death everywhere. Soon the British living in colonies settled down. Dr. McNab's wife dies due to cholera, where doctors and Miriam have recovered from illness and they get married. The collector returns back to England by train and experiences stronger than ever before, the vastness of India and thinks that he was unable to change anything in Indian political system in his preceding thirty years. The survivors returned to live their civilized lives in England and show their dissatisfaction in Indian political system.

Farrell describes an administrative system of the British Empire in Krishnapur gives an insight into the political strategies. The Collector, Mr. Hopkins was the chief administrator of the East India Company in Krishnapur district. During the British Raj, Mr. Hopkins held multiple responsibilities with overall responsibility for revenues and tax collection and keeping peace in the district. The important British officers were accountable to the Collector for their job and work such as, the Superintendent of Police, Inspector General of Jails, the Surgeon General, the Chief Conservator of Forests and the Chief Engineer. George Fleury, the son of Sir Herbert, who is a director of the East India Company comes to India. Mr. Rayne was an Opium agent. There were two doctors, who provided medical services to the people and face a lot of problems in the treatment of the epidemic of cholera. The officers' duties towards the East India Company but without any result: The Magistrate had performed his duties for the Company conscientiously, but they had not had a good effect on him ... there was not very much the Collector could do to remedy his inability to make rapid decisions ... (15)

Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* is about British officers who were victim of the Empire system based on wrong principals that disturb human's peaceful life. Mr. Hopkins is more stressed; while performing his role as an administrator and as head of the family. Many of the British officers in India suffered a lot physically, psychologically and emotionally and those who survived lived in disordered condition and disastrous conditions. Like Mr. Hopkins, the magistrate is also a victim of the Empire system, who suffered from psychological crisis. He was confronted with his family problems, and also faced many problems and troubles in administration. Farrell states about Magistrate's condition:

Tom Willoughby, the Magistrate, who suffered from the disability of a free thinking turn of mind and from a life that was barren and dreary to match. To make things worse, he was married, but in the celibate owner of so many English 'civilians'. The Collector had eyed the Magistrate's marriage with complacent pity: his wife, imported from England, had stayed two or three years in India until driven home by the heat, the boredom and a fortuitous pregnancy. Ah, the Collector had witnessed this sad story so often during his time in India! And now, though later than most, it seemed that his own marriage, which had survived so long climate, must suffer a similar fate, for his wife, Caroline ... (14)

Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins, both were victims of the British Empire system. Mrs. Hopkins was suffering from ill health and became mentally and spiritually suppressed. Mr. Hopkins was tense both by domestic problems and administration problems. Native, culture, tradition, religion and language were unknown to him. The British administrators had to face from all those difficulties and problems a lot. All of them were forced to do so by their government, but on civilized base, they disliked to take advantage of the natives. Farrell's characters in his novels are human beings first, and then administrators and officers. The collector, Mr. Hopkins was the British administrator, who was sympathetic towards the natives. They were forced by the British government to obey their duties and to perform their role in their position.

**Conclusion:-**Farrell has further contemplation on the administration of the Krishnapur demonstrating British policies and rule through the Collector, the Magistrate, Fluery, who was the opium agent and the two doctors, who handled over the medical issues. The British officers were imposing heavy taxes, thereby earning big profits, but never sharing it with the Indian workers and the farmers. *The Siege of Krishnapur* provided a different picture of the British lifestyle, before and during the upheaval time where they equaled Indian kings and queens. Indian servants did the household works were misbehaving and being treated like slaves. The roles have changed when there was war; British women had to finish all their work by themselves in hot Indian conditions.

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