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# J. G. Farrell's *Troubles*: A Rare Portrayal of the Troubles Occurred in European Colonial States in Contemporary World due to Ambiguous Nature of Imperialism

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### ABSTRACT:

The drastic and adverse effects of imperialism in different parts of the world were visible after the Second World War. A large number of intellectuals and creative writers came out with their masterpieces in which they presented the compassionate and pathetic tales of the states suffering badly on account of European imperialism. This paper tends to study the adverse conditions caused by British colonialism in different parts of the world and how the British Empire failed to show any kind of moral responsibility for the maintenance of humanity and morality which were on the verge of collapse. The havoc and commotion witnessed by the colonized states were the worst sufferers. Farrell, in this novel, has presented the fall of the British Empire with the symbolic delineation of the fall of the Majestic hotel in Ireland.

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**Key Words:** Imperialism, Colonized, Collapse, Sufferers, Colonialism, Moral Responsibility, Collapse.

James Gordan Farrell was an English – born novelist of Irish descent. Born in 1935, Farrell is well – known for his great contribution in the field of fictional writing. He is much interested in bringing colonial effect in his writings with merging reality and imagination in his fictional world. His creativity has a unique sense of literary truth and literary beauty and these things are well displayed in his fictional world. Like other novelists of his time, he was much interested in watching the decline of the British Empire. So, obviously, the various thematic perceptions related to the decline of the British Empire naturally find place in his fictional world. In one of his interviews to George Brook for *The Observer*, he says:

The really interesting thing that's happened during my lifetime has been the decline of the British Empire.

*Troubles* is all about the collapse of the British Empire in the different parts of the world. The thematic perceptions related to the colonial background and its repercussions have been adequately presented in the book symbolically. Not only the colonized people but even the intellectuals belonging to the side of colonizers did not like the attitude of the rulers in the shape of the colonizers. The exploitation and suppression evident in European dominance during colonial period in different parts of the world even shocked the European intellectuals, especially the European creative writers who came out with more and more creative works to show their resistance in this connection. In this way Farrell's *Troubles* is not an exception which seems to be the real embodiment of the fall of British glory after the colonial period. The reviewer like Sam Jordison in his blog in *Guardian Books Blog*, writes in these words:

I can't praise this book enough. It's a good race that reviewers should be forbidden from using the word genius. But it's hard to know what else to say when faced with a book like 'Troubles.' There's no avoiding it. J.G. Farrell was a genius.

*Troubles* denotes that the British exploitation was not only evident in the other parts of the world but also in Ireland which struggled for a longer period. The fall of the British Empire was being celebrated in Ireland with upper hand. The writers like W. B. Yeats had supported the freedom struggle of the Irish people in his large number of poems composed by him. Even in his book *Something to Answer For* written by Newby, he has remarkably presented the effects of British exploitation in more bitter words. So, *Troubles* seems to be the continuation of the same extinct visible in Irish literature. A critic writes about this book in *Irish Independent* in these words:

No fine work has ever been written about this transitional period in Irish History it remains a landmark in 20<sup>th</sup> century Irish literature, and one that deserves to win the one and only great retrospective Booker.

*Troubles* tells the story of the final years of a grand Irish hotel. The hotel was the symbol of all majesty and grandeur. The hotel was in full majesty during the Irish war of independence (1919 – 21). It is the first instalment in what is sometimes described as Farrell's Empire Trilogy. This book has wonderful plot and story revolves around the struggle shown by the Irish people symbolically. The story – line in this novel is quite straight and clear because of several things altogether. The message and the moral the novel gives, is full of universality because the narrative of the novel is attached with

one of the most burning issues of the European history. The story – line of *Troubles* is well appreciated by the critic and reviewers. A critic writes about the universality of the story in these words:

‘*Troubles*’ has everything: great story, compelling characters, believable dialogue and big ideas. It’s a book good enough to win the Booker in any year. Not just 1970.

The plot of the novel centres round the consequences which took place after the first world war ended in 1919. The novel opens in 1919 when Major Brendan Archer travels to Ireland. Major Archer was somehow survived in the First World War physically. But the Major travels Ireland with some psychological wounds. Major Archer visits Ireland to try and discover whether he is engaged to Angela Spencer, a young woman who he met while on leave in England, and who wrote to him thereafter describing herself as his fiancé. The novelist writes about this fact in these words:

He remembered declaring that he would come back to her, but not very much else. (p.89)

Angela has the double or the hyphenated identity because her family belongs to Anglo – Irish family. Angela’s Anglo – Irish family owns the ramshackle and ironically named Majestic Hotel. The hotel is enormous, big and full of grandeur. It has more than hundred rooms and each and every kind of facility is available with the hotel. The modern facility related to swimming pools to squash courts is available with the hotel with all comfort and luxury. According to the critics, one of the more surreal aspects of the novel is the way the hotel seems to expand in scale all the time, with new floors, cellars, grounds, etc. constantly being revealed. But now, the hotel is falling apart. But in the summer of 1919, the major has some other motives in his mind. He has strong desire to meet Angela Spencer. The novelist writes about his notions in these words:

In the summer of 1919, not long before the great victory Parade marched up white hall, the Major left hospital and went to Ireland to claim his bride, Angela Spencer. At least he fancied that the claiming of her as a bride might come into it. But nothing definite had been settled. (p. 05)

Both fact and fancy run simultaneously in the novel. The events during the two world wars have been narrated in order to provide a rare coherence in the novel. In the very beginning of the novel, the writers gives that kind of clue in the narrative:

The situation in Petrograd is desperate. According to manifesto issued by the Soviet, the evacuation of the city is going on with nervous eagerness. Trotsky has ordered that Kronstadt shall be before it is surrendered. (p. 08)

The Majestic Hotel is the symbol of grandeur and stateliness for the British Empire as the novelist depicts in the book. But now the hotel is falling apart. Now, it barely functions as a hotel with only a handful of guests. Herds of cats have taken over the upper stories. The novelist uses the term ‘herding cats’ in this novel to describe the difficulty of getting a large group of cats to do what you want them to do – it is possibly the origin of the phrase, although all online references refer to later origins. Farrell says, “It is impossible to control a herd of cats; each one makes up its own mind where it wants to go.” Here the novelist would like to present the futility of human existence metaphorically. He is of the opinion that all human arrogance and vanity are the subject matter of decay in the course of time. Nothing is permanent. Human beings are the victims of time and space, and nothing in their hands as it happens in the case of the well – known Majestic Hotel. The fall of the Majestic Hotel symbolizes so many things altogether at the same time. Thus, we find a little bit of surreal notes in the novel from time to time as the narrative of the novel moves from one part to another. The present action of the lost glory of the empire might seem to be the thematic perception but it is also assisted by some other perceptions as well. The hotel is not only a place having so many empty rooms waiting for the arrival of the guests, but it forms the central part of the plot and it stands like one of the central figures in the novel.

On the other hand, the Major seems to be the natural victim of his own cobweb. He himself assumes so many things without considering the materialization of the events which come in his way every time. He has so many assumptions about Angela Spencer. At one place, for instance the novelist writes in these words:

The Major had considered it possible that his ‘fiancée’ would be waiting to embrace him inside the front door, a massive affair of carved oak which was so heavy that it was by no means easy to drag open. There was no sign of her, however. (p. 13)

The Major is quite aware of the majestic appearance of the hotel. It seems to be the symbol of rapture as well as highness. The Major observes all these things with upper hand. His motive is quite clear because he has in his mind the basic idea of comparison and contrast. The novelist considers all these facts with great contrast and he writes in these words:

The Majestic’s grounds were laid out on such an expansive scale that the Major was surprised to find that Edward’s game of tennis was taking place on a rather cramped and glassless court tucked in the right angle formed by the dining – rooms and another wings of lighter and less weather – worn stone, evidently an addition to the main buildings to cope with the hotel’s former popularity. This court had an advantage for spectators, however; outside the French windows there was a terrace with comfortable deck – chairs which the Major, who was exhausted, eyed hopefully. (p. 30)

*Troubles* is a candid manifestation of the exploitation and problems faced by the Irish generations due to the apathetic consideration of the British Empire. The people of Ireland seem to forget their sense of humanity as well as human status. The writer is highly critical about the role of the British Empire in any country of occupation. There is a lack of motivation and morality in British administration. For instance, at one place, the writes in these words:

For the important fact was this; the presence of the British signified a moral authority, not just an administrative one, here in Ireland as in India, Africa and elsewhere. It would have to be matched by the natives themselves before self-government became an acceptable profession. So thought the Major, anyway. (p. 191)

The novel has the series of descriptions in which the novelist writes about the causes and effects of the Irish Civil War which is still continuing with some sense of remorse. The partition of the country is the major causes of civil war. The novelist writes about the sign of the treaty and partition of the countries in these words:

The Irish war of Independence, which ended with the treaty signed between the British government and Michael Collins's I.R.A. in 1922. Under the treaty Ireland was partitioned, with twenty – six southern countries becoming a free state, and the six Northern countries remaining under British sovereignty. The result was civil war. (p. 204)

Thus, the novelist is highly critical about the role of the British rule in any part of the world, and not only in Ireland. The horror and terror witnessed by the Irish people naturally generates a sense of compassion as well as anger in the mind of the novelist. He is highly critical about the pathetic and compassionate condition of Irish people who always fought for their survival. British rule everywhere in the world was the symbol of suppression and exploitation. The novelist writes about this fact in these questioning words and thought:

Did the people of Ireland want to govern themselves? They most certainly did not. They know on which side their bread was buttered. Ask any decent Irishman what he thinks and he will answer the same thing. It was only criminals, fanatics and certain people with a grudge who were interested in starting trouble. (p. 216)

It is quite clear in the novel that the novelist does not support the horror and terror resulting due to Irish civil war. On the other hand, he is highly critical and warns people for that. The violence and bloodshed evident in such condition is not appreciated by the people of Ireland. The novelist is quite worried about such things and he does not support such incidents any more. He writes about that:

In late 1919 hardly a day went by without any eye – witness account of such horrors being confided to the press by some returned traveller who had managed to escape with his skin. (p. 312)

The effect of the Irish civil war was quite everlasting because still some problems occur on account of the division of the country not because of geographical boundaries but due to division in the sects. The conflict between the Protestants and Catholic is still evident in many parts of the world. So, the failure of balancing the counter effects of the civil war is too noticed every time such problems occur. The writer hints about such problems and their impact in these words:

Effectively the country had been portioned out between the Protestants of the North and the Catholics of the South. (p. 318)

The title of the novel is quite suitable, apt and appropriate because of the troubles which occur in the life of innocent people due to the unwanted civil war. The brutal civil war in Ireland which began in 1919 produced a devastating effect as well as impact on the life of Irish people. They were bound to suffer from horror, terror, violence, bloodshed and mental trauma. But the British rulers did not have any kind of accountability. J. G. Farrell himself writes about the title of this novel in these words:

The 'Troubles' of the title is the euphemism which the Irish – peasant, merchant, or protestant aristo – applied to the ragged, sporadic, but brutal war that began in 1919 between Sinn Fein I.R.A. and the British army of occupation. (p. 340)

The universality of the novel lies in its broad plot which gives an opportunity to the novelist to dive deep into human emotions and passions for many reasons altogether. The central motif in the plot is to highlight the causes of the lost glory of the British Empire but at the same time, the Irish civil war also occupies a good place in the story – line and it gives a sense of contemporaneity. It allows the novelist to see the facts on the one hand and the fancy of the major on the other hand. Not only J. G. Farrell, but W. B. Yeats and some other poets of the Irish origin also were more curious about Irish civil war which impact was quite devastative on that time and these intellectuals were also worried about the future. The brutal suppression of the people of Ireland by the British army is well presented by the writers. The civil war in Ireland might have started in 1916 when so many Irish people were executed. The novelist writes about this fact:

In fact, that war might be said to have started three years earlier, with the abortive Easter Rising of 1916, which lasted a week and ended with the summary execution of fourteen of its leaders. (p. 340)

The Major is well concerned with the problems of such racial riots in the different parts of the world. The novelist has narrated the entire events of violence with much compassion and pathos. In such unwanted events, a large number of innocent people were killed and all these things produced a great set back as far as the loss of humanity and morality is concerned. The effect of the war was so devastative that no one could be out of its brutal clutch. Farrell narrates the happenings in America in detail manner in these words:

Unlike the Irish troubles one knew instantly which side everyone was on. In the Chicago's race riots people were using their skins like uniforms. And there were none of the devious tactics employed by the Shinners, the pettifogging ambushes and assassinations. In Chicago the violence was naked, a direct expression of feeling, not of some remote and dubious patriotic heritage. White men dragged Negroes off street cars; Negroes fired rifles from house tops and alleyways; an automobile full of Negroes raced through the streets of a white districts with its occupants promiscuously firing rifles. (p. 110)

The burning situation in Ireland and Chicago was compared with shape instinct and notion. How human beings had become enemy to each other just for the sake of power and pelf. The situation was totally out of control because of the lack of leadership's decision. The world was not going in the right direction. Tragedy was inevitable and the people were bound to face the consequences without any resistance. This tragedy was not natural

but man made. The novelist has given the detail of racial violence just in order to the gravity of the situation. At one place, the novelist writes in these words:

Chicago was only a fragment of the competition that Ireland had to face. What about the dire behaviour of the Bolshe visits? The gruesome murders, the rapes, the humiliations of respectable ladies and gentlemen? In late 1919 hardly a day went by without an eye – witness account of such horrors being confided to the press by some returned traveller who had managed to escape with his skin. And India: North - West Frontier ... Amritsar? No wonder that by the time the Major's eye had reached the news from Ireland his palate been staid with brighter, bloodier meat. (p. 110)

The novel is full of the descriptions of contemporary events which took place on that time. What was happening in India on that time, also finds the place in the novel. That shows the universality of the narrative Farrell seems to be highly critical about the hardships and oppressions shown by the British Empire. But the novelist is in dilemma in discovering many facts of British Empire. For instance, General Dyer's action was universally condemned but no one was able to understand the dilemma of General Dyer. The novelist has narrated the entire event with some dilemma:

The findings of the Hunter Commission in regard to the disturbances in the Punjab in the spring of last year were issued last night as a Book... General Dyer's career as a soldier is over. All the members admit that firing was necessary.

So, there seems to be an extreme sense of parallelism in the book which provides a unique connectivity between the past and the present. Even though the Major and the Majestic Hotel seem to be the point of discussion but there are some other events in the novel narrated which give clues of that unique kind of connectivity which is necessary for establishing a pact between the past and the present. Farrell gives much importance to such events in the novel which are extremely important for bringing the causes of the fall of the Majestic Hotel symbolically related to the fall of the British Empire and the British glory. But the contemporary events which took place in the first quarter of the twentieth century find place in the novel in abundance and that provides his much interest in contemporary political scenario. The political unrest in the different parts of the British occupation has been narrated with much interest because of many reasons altogether. The novelist is highly critical and concerned with these things. He writes about the unrest both in India and Ireland. The novelist is not happy with the fierce fighting in the streets of Derby. He writes in these words:

Armed parties of Unionists and Sinn Feiners took possession of some of the streets and rifle and revolver fires was almost continuous during the greater part of the night. Our Londonderry correspondence, telegraphy last night says: 'The fiercest and most fatal rioting of modern times in Londonderry occurred on Saturday night when several people were killed and many wounded. A state of the greatest terrorism prevailed throughout the night. On Sunday morning looting took place on an extensive scale and there were instances of actual and attempted incendiarism. (p. 187)

The exploitation and suppression shown by the British Empire was not appreciated by the intellectuals in the different parts of the world. The freedom struggles in the different parts of the world were suppressed by misuse of power and using armed forces. It seems to be the domination of will and power was not like by the people at all. The Irish events had a very critical influence in the different parts of the world. The murders of innocent people and suppression was the matter of great concern. The agitations which were suppressed by the British Empire are till the subject matter of discussion and provide ample plot for the novel. For instance, at one place, the novelist writes about the cruel attitude of the policemen and their crime in these words:

No matter from what quarter the encouragement came, the policemen committed a fearful crime in gutting the sleeping town with shot and fire. The town was vengefully and ruthlessly sacked by the official guardians of the peace and if the government did not make immediate compensation and reparation for the damage done, the sense of crying injustice would remain as a further menace to peace and good will. (p. 213)

The novel poses some basic questions regarding the role of the British Empire in the different parts of the world. It also unfolds the relation between 'Colonizers' and the 'Colonized.' This subject matter has been the matter of discussion right from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in which the dramatic presented the relationship between Prospero and Caliban in order to show the unrest in the land of colonized people. The British occupants in the shape of the colonizers did not have any sense of acceptability and accountability. This thing is quite evident everywhere every time. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare writes about the dominance of Prospero over Caliban and Ariel with the help of the imagination and fancy. But still, such condition is quite apparent in the different parts and corners of the world. Obviously, the condition of India and Ireland in which the writers like Farrell has much interest tells the bitter truth of the reality of colonization in the nineteenth and in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The exploitation of Indians and the Irish people in the hands of the British Empire is not the hidden fact. Farrell is able to present the contemporary tragedy with display of humour and pathos. Kate Vane writes about the universality of the thematic perceptions of *Troubles*. He writes '*Farrell makes the behaviour of the characters both ridiculous and entirely believable. Confronted by crisis, events beyond their control, they focus on what is immediate playing whist or planning a ball.*' So, the novel seems to unfold some of the bitter truths of contemporary world with literary beauty and literary truth.

There seems to be a unique kind of similarity in the thematic perceptions of Newby's *Something to Answer For* and J. G. Farrell's *Troubles* because of several reasons altogether. Like *Troubles*, *Something to Answer For* also deals with the darker aspects of colonialism in the different parts of the world. John Berger writes about this aspects of these two books in these words:

It is a coincidence that I read this novel immediately before 'Something to Answer For,' which address the end of the next phase of colonialism. 'Troubles' makes a great companion piece to the Newby novel, sharing a similar structure – a colonial possession seen through the eyes of an Englishman abroad as the period of English rule draws to an end. But while 'Something to Answer For' is unstructured and a mess, *Troubles* is a carefully controlled dark force. It is one of the best, most original novels I have read in a long time, it could so easily have descended into chaos but manages to balance considerable skill.

Certainly, the novel is full of fact and fancy and this combination of fact and fancy provides a unique stability in the narrative. Apart from the romantic life of the Major which finds an ample place in the book, the main concern seems to be the depiction of the darker face of colonization in the different parts of the world. The character of the Major seems to provide a sense of connectivity in the narrative. The British occupation in South Africa has also been discussed in the novel with some symbolic delineation. The novelist writes about the adverse condition of South Africa under the British Empire:

The Union of South Africa is passing through a period of stress and danger. On Saturday last serious rioting broke out in Port Elizabeth... The police showed admirable restraint but were powerless to cope with the frenzied crowd of maddened natives. Military came on the scene and opened fire, killing several of the rioters... Every effort is being made to localize the trouble, but, in view of the fact that in the whole Union there are only one and a quarter millions of natives, the possibility of widespread disturbances cannot be ignored. (p. 265)

The Major and the Majestic Hotel provide structural beauty to the novel. Around the Major, the plot revolves and around the Majestic Hotel, the entire events take place. There seems to a unity of action and place in the novel because of above mentioned things. The majestic reminds the Major the glorious part but its present tattered condition also reminds him the reality which is full of chaos and anarchy. The Majestic has deadly lost its grandeur and stateliness because of the loss of its importance. The novel is quite aware with this fact and he writes:

Now that the Major's mind had been set at rest about the structure of the Majestic it seemed less important to him that the guests should be encouraged to leave. However, the collapse of the building itself was not the only factor involved. There was also the increasing violence in the countryside, where the Majestic stood in vulnerable isolation. There was the simple absurdity of continuing to run the place as a hotel since ceased to resemble one. (p. 408)

So, *Troubles* presents the troubles faced by the people of not only Ireland but the people belonging to different parts of the world under the British Empire. The novel questions about the accountability of the British rulers who seemed to be failed in their responsibility in making the law and order in their colonies. Even though, the novel deals with the events generally take place in Ireland, but it also symbolizes the chaos and anarchy prevailed in the British colonies everywhere. The fake and masked morality of the so-called moralistic civilization has been decoded with natural progress of the narrative.

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