The next chapter deals with cultural geography and how nature has played an important role in developing the culture of Ireland. The researcher talks about the dichotomy of nature and culture and the various concepts and theories associated with cultural geography.

Chapter IV

Cultural Geography
The setting of a story in any work of art be it novel, play or poem is very important. There are two of its kind the social setting and the physical setting. By social setting one means the culture of that particular society and the physical setting is the geography of the land. Slusser in Mindscapes: The Geographies of Imagined Worlds comments that, “Here on Earth, geography has had a powerful, pervasive, often decisive influence of societies. Civilisation appears to have begun as a set of responses to a set of environmental challenges. Civilisations have had enormously different characters of their own and much of this appears to be due to environment” (Slusser and Rabkin 3). Human beings have always had nature as their background against which they have enacted their drama of life. In literature importance is given to this geographical background and it very much depends upon the lives of the people and their environment.

The discipline of Geography comprises a wide range of studies, “which have one or more of environment, place and space as their foundational concepts” (Johnston 11). It is also a discipline that has been divided into many sub-fields and is sometimes criticised for lacking cohesion as a discipline. Johnston comments that “geography was not bounded around a core…. diversity and divulgence had replaced disciplinary cohesion around a core focus” (Johnston 11). Until the 20th century it was a discipline largely concerned with the description of landscapes and their associated processes. The two major branches of Geography are Physical Geography and Cultural Geography. The latter can also be defined as Human Geography which is the study of many cultural aspects found throughout the world. It also deals with how culture relates to the different spaces and places. The interest of geographers in cultural problems developed early, but the cultural approach was deeply modernized during the last 20 years. As a result, many new paths were explored with different orientations according to countries. There was little systematic research in regard to trying to understand the described patterns. Pidwirny in his
article, “Introduction to Geography” stated that “During the first 50 years of the 1900s, many academics in the field of geography extended the various ideas presented in the previous century to studies of small regions all over the world. Most of these studies used are descriptive field methods to test research questions” (3)

Starting in about 1950, geographic research experienced a shift in methodology and geographers began adopting a more scientific approach that relied on quantitative techniques. The quantitative revolution was also associated with a change in the way in which geographers studied the Earth and its phenomena. Researchers now began “investigating processes rather than merely describing an event of interest” (Pidwirny 4).

The discipline continued to split as “Geography now comprises a wide range of systematic studies” (Johnston 11) and in very broad terms the majority of sub-fields that exist can be categorised under physical geography or human geography. Physical geographers examine the natural environment and how the climate, vegetation and life, soil, water and landforms are produced and interact. However, they often struggle to develop research models and theories to explain the constant processes and relationships in the cultural domain. Head stated that “physical geographers and others are having trouble with culture – it is spreading in both space and time” (Head 3). Human geographers focus on the study of patterns and processes that shape human interaction with various environments. It encompasses human, political, cultural and social aspects. Head elaborated upon human geographers’ research of cultural landscapes by stating that “human geographers and others are also having trouble with culture – it is a complex, multidimensional idea that has both material and symbolic expression” (Head 4).

Geography explores the spatial interpretation of the human relationship with landscapes. It is a discipline that continues to evolve and many sub-disciplines exist, such as physical, human
and cultural geography. Duncan, Johnson and Schein helped to define the nature of cultural geography and described the history and changes within this sub-field. Because of its diversity and interdisciplinary nature, it becomes hard to generate a single definition of what encompasses cultural geography. Duncan, Johnson and Schein stated that “this sub-field has itself had significant shifts in theory and methodology in the past two decades” (Duncan 1). The main cultural phenomena studied in cultural geography are the language of the people, their religion, their economic status, art, music and other cultural aspects. The study of these aspects helps to explain why people behave the way they do in the particular environment in which they live. These aspects of culture are able to travel across the world due to globalization. This chapter deals with the Cultural Geography of Ireland and how it is incorporated in the plays of Synge.

G.S. Mohanty in *Social and Cultural Geography* expounds the idea in his Preface:

> Geography, in simplest terms, is about locations, places, how people and their cultures interact with their environments, how goods, services and ideas move across space, and how dividing the world into regions can help us understand it all. Social and cultural geography is about how people, as individuals and as members of groups, create places and landscapes for their daily lives; how people understand places, regions, and spatial relationships; how places and landscapes are cumulative through time: how places and landscapes are part of larger regional and global systems, and how human societies and nature interact to create the diversity of the humanized world. (vii)

Culture is said to be a learned behaviour and it has been heavily associated in geography with the analysis of landscape. The focus of Cultural Geography has usually been in the rural context with simpler societies. The most important theme has always been and is human
occupancy, the tenancy of the earth. The geographer William D. Pattison talks about the four traditions of geography. He attempts to define geography through these four traditions and they are a spatial tradition, an area studies tradition, a man-land tradition and an earth science tradition. Pattison seems to be talking about Cultural Geography when he explains Man–land tradition. The following topics are part of this tradition: “impact of nature on humans, humans’ impact on nature, perception of environment, cultural political and population geography, natural hazards and environmentalism”

This is the kind of landscape that Synge portrays in his The Aran Islands. Synge like Thomas Hardy chose a particular place in Ireland to be as background setting of his prose and place. Hardy’s Wessex can be equated to Synge’s Aran Islands, Wicklow County, West Kerry, etc. The only difference here is that while Hardy’s Wessex was purely imaginative Synge’s Aran and the other islands are very much real. Synge has expressed in his work whatever he has seen, felt and experienced during his stay in these islands. Synge’s work, more than the plot and the characters concentrates on the physical setting of the play and how that physical setting contributes to the thought processes and the life style of its characters. The present chapter deals primarily with the geography of Synge’s plays and how that geography is instrumental for the cultural development of that area. The researcher believes that if geography is nature or that which exists then culture is something that has been created over the years by the people who have been living in that geographical area for ages.

The researcher in this chapter has dealt with cultural geography, a fairly new concept in literary circles. The term cultural geography sounds paradoxical but the researcher through studying the plays of Synge is attempting to prove that culture is born because of geography and
as geography changes culture also changes. Before venturing into the definition of cultural geography there is another term which needs to be mentioned and that is literary geography. Though nature has been the subject of the works of many writers it has been recognized as a separate field of study very recently. In simple terms what was the study of nature in olden days has now been termed as ‘literary geography’. Wagner in his *The Invention of Culture* says that

Cultural geography can help to analyse and attack the human problems in our own societies that attach to race and poverty, age and gender, ethnicity and alienation. Spatial imagination, historical awareness, cultural sensitivity and ecological insight, as well as that observational gift upon which field work depends, can all play a part in rendering service, and committed engagement will enrich our vision as well. (8)

Before delving deeper into cultural geography it is only appropriate on the part of the researcher to discuss the two terms ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ which form a major part of the study of cultural geography. Raymond Williams in his essay “*Nature*” in the *Cultural Geography Reader* says as follows:

Indeed one of the most powerful uses of nature, since the late eighteenth century, has been in this selective sense of goodness and innocence. Nature has meant the ‘countryside’, the ‘unspoiled places’, plants and creatures other than man. The use is especially current in contrasts between town and country: nature is what man has not made, though if he made it long enough ago – a hedgerow or a desert – it will usually be included as natural. (Oaks and Price 211)
As William says nature is something that is there for man to enjoy, experience and use but he does not have the power to create nature. Williams further explains that though nature is one of the most complex words in the language it “is relatively easy to distinguish three areas of meaning: (i) the essential quality and character of something; (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both; (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings” (Oaks and Price 208). The next most complex term in the English language is ‘Culture’. The answer to the question, ‘What is culture?’ is very complicated. Williams answers this in his other essay “Culture” also found in Cultural Geography Reader. According to Williams “Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language… The immediate forerunner is cultura [Latin], from the Latin root word ‘colere’. ‘Colere’ has a range of meanings: inhabit, cultivate, protect, honour with worship” (Oaks and Price 18).

Williams explains that the primary meaning was husbandry which is the tending of natural growth and culture is manifested through music, literature, painting, theatre and film. Culture is a learned behaviour, says William Sewell Jr. in “Concepts of Culture” found in the Cultural Geography Reader. He interprets “Culture as learned behavior. Culture in this sense is the whole body of practices, beliefs, institutions, customs, habits, myths, and so on built up by humans and passed on from generation to generation. In this usage, culture is contrasted to nature; its possession is what distinguishes us from other animals” (Oaks and Price 43).

In the Handbook of Cultural Geography one reads about five themes which are evident in the discussion of cultural geography. They are namely “Culture as distribution of things, culture as a way of life, culture as meaning, culture as doing and culture as power” (Anderson, and et. al 2). Cultural Geographers have dealt with the values, practices, customs and habits that are found
in the life of the people and “a consistent focus has been the assortment of practices that constitute people and place, life and landscape” (Anderson, et.al 4). From the above discussion on culture and nature one can without a doubt understand that culture and nature are entirely two different entities. Nature is natural whereas cultural is something that is developed by human beings which is in tune with their geographical surrounding. The main problem that cultural geographers face is defining the relationship between nature and culture. The author Bruce Braun in his Essay, “Nature and Culture: On the Career of a False Problem” discusses this issue in a detailed manner. He says that there is no such problem and it is only us human beings who have understood it so. It has been a question of conflict right from the beginning. Braun divides “the career of the nature–culture problematic in post-1950s Anglo-American geography into four ‘moments’: cultural ecology, political ecology, cultural studies of the environment, and actor-network theory (or ‘nonmodern’ ontologies)” (Duncan, Jonhson and Schein151).

Braun finally concludes that culture is influenced by the environment and the environment is also modified by the activities of human beings. So they are inter-related and inter-dependent and hence one cannot exist without the other. If nature exists and is inhabited by man then culture is created by man who is adapted to that nature. Therefore the researcher feels that as culture is determined by nature there need not be a dichotomy between nature and culture. Culture and nature (environment) can be considered as single entities and not as separate factors. Braun, while talking about the Culture-nature dualism says “for cultural ecologists, individuals and communities were merely bearers of ‘culture,’ and culture was itself an adaptation to environmental conditions” (Duncan, Johnson and Schein 163). So Braun felt that all cultural geographers had certain common themes and these themes included the following:
The study of ‘nature’ as a cultural construction; close attention to the relation between power and knowledge in struggles over resources and environment; greater emphasis on representational practices – science, art, literature – as sites where nature was called forth as an object of knowledge and contemplation; and an awareness that constructions of nature were never innocent, but instead intricately entangled with, and enabling of, governmental rationalities, racial and colonial discourses, and the construction of gendered, racial and ethnic/national identities.

(Duncan, Jonhson and Schein 165)

De Groot in his essay, “Visions of nature and landscape type preferences: An exploration in the Netherlands” in *Landscape and Urban Planning* says as follows:

For our distant ancestors – hunters and gatherers without a permanent residence – nature was taken for granted as the immediate, Omnipresent, religious universe. Trees and stones were thought to be animated. In that time, nature and culture were not separated. As agriculture entered human history, people built permanent settlements. Man projected intentions onto places; for example, a place has to be a field to grow corn. Nature and culture become divided. Nature appears as a disorderly thread, producing plagues, weeds and vermin. Nature is an enemy of man. (131)

Groot further explicates that people have different concepts of nature. People with a wild image of nature regard only nature that is untouched by man as real nature and they consider it not right to use nature for exploitation for human purposes, and regard rough nature that does not have traces of human beings as the most beautiful. On the other hand people with a functional
image of nature consider nature that is highly influenced by man to be nature as well and therefore they consider it right to use nature for human purposes and regard nature that is controlled by human beings to be the most beautiful. People have different concepts of nature and so their perception of the relationship between man and nature also changes. People have different perceptions of this relationship, ranging from anthropocentric (man is superior to nature) to ecocentric (nature is superior to man). For example, Groot distinguishes four different perceptions of nature. They are as follows:

Man as the master of nature: man has the right and the skills to dominate nature; nature has no value outside man, Man as the protector of nature: nature has its own value, but is above all a source for man; man has to take care of nature, Man as the partner of nature: nature is something different, outside of culture; man can have a respectful and equal relationship with nature and Man as the participant of nature: nature is bigger than man; man as part of nature cannot master nature at all. (132)

“There is no such thing as human nature independent of culture” (49) says Geertz. The way people experience and behave is intensively affected by culture. For example, the way people dress varies with culture. Many people in the West use a knife and fork to eat, while most people in the East use chopsticks. Lehman et al. in the article on “Psychology and Culture” found in the Annual Review of Psychology conclude in their review study on psychology and culture that “much recent research has demonstrated the strength of culture in influencing the perceptions, construals, thoughts, feelings, and behaviour of its members”(Lehman.A et al 712).

Now that the researcher has elaborately discussed culture and nature and its role in Cultural geography the readers may wonder about its role in literature and also its significance to
this particular study. The part played by geography in literature is indeed enormous. In Writing Worlds: Discourse, Texts and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape Barnes and Duncan noted that “Very little attention is paid to writing in human geography. This is ironic, given that the very root meaning of the word ‘geography’ is literally, ‘earth writing’ from the ‘Greek geo’, meaning ‘earth’ and ‘graphien’, meaning ‘to write’” (Barnes and Duncan 1). This is ironic since the role of geography and literature had been previously linked in Western geographical thought, from the very beginning.

Literature initially played a more prominent role in characterising the nature of geography as a discipline. R. J. Mayhew, in Geography and Literature in Historical Context: Samuel Johnson and Eighteenth-Century English Conceptions of Geography says that before the seventeenth century geography was largely considered to be “a distinct body of knowledge rather than a discipline” (Mayhew 7). Mayhew further argues that “Both geography and literature were far more inclusive and more permeable categories in the eighteenth century, and their flexibility frequently drew them together [. . .] So individuals often considered both as eighteenth century geographers frequently had wider interests and careers in writing comparable to individuals we now consider “literary”. (Mayhew 43). Mayhew goes on to say that during the late mid eighteenth century due to many modern thoughts geography and literature became separate disciplines and “the result was that literature and geography were now separate pursuits, and to discuss them at the same time, was to ‘link’ or work ‘across disciplines’, where previously they had been part of the same scholarly endeavour” (Mayhew 44). When geography and literature got separated the geographer and writer also became two different personalities. Then in the twentieth century a new genre called ‘humanistic geography’ was introduced and this paved way to focus on the subjective experience of place and the study and utilization of
literature and the role of the writer slowly started to reassert itself. Then the human element was
once again introduced into geographical study. Marc Brousseau, in his article *Geography’s
Literature* in *Progress in Human Geography* states that:

> Various currents of the discipline turned to literature in order to explore its relevance to different points of view: regionalists in search of more vivid description of place; humanists seeking evocative transcriptions of spatial experience; radicals concerned with social justice; others trying to establish parallels between history of geographical and literary ideas; or more discursively-oriented researchers addressing the problems of representation. (Brousseau 333)

J.K. Wright was one of the writers who were prominent in the period when modern geography was reconnected with writers and literature. In a brief article “*Geography in Literature*” for the journal *Geographical Review*, Wright stated that “Some men of letters are endowed with a highly developed instinct, as writers they have trained themselves to visualize even more clearly than the professional geographer those regional elements of the earth’s surface most significant to the general run of humanity”(Wright 659). In 1947 Wright wrote a paper entitled “*Terrae Incognitae: The Place of Imagination in Geography*” in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* in which Wright coined the term, “geosophy, ‘geo’ meaning ‘earth’ and ‘Sophia’ meaning ‘knowledge’ to define the study of geographical knowledge from any or all points of view. He discussed the role of imagination in the pursuit of geographical knowledge. During the 1950s and 60s “Sense of Place” studies emerged in humanistic geography and certain geographers employed techniques associated with phenomenology, a practice that “involves the description of things as one experiences them” (Peet 37). According to Peet in *Modern Geographical Thought* the phenomenological depictions
of these places included “seeing, hearing, and other sensory relations, but also believing, remembering, imagining, being excited, getting angry, judging or evaluating, and having physical relations” (Peet 37).

By the 1970s the significance of related factors of phenomenological concepts such as identity, rootedness, imagination, value and intention, became important areas of concern in the study of place attachment. The focus on the meaning and experience of place raised the relevance of literature as a means through which geography as a discipline can be viewed critically. Brousseau, in Geography’s Literature, states that “Humanistic geographers hoped to bring people and human agency back to the core of research from which they had been evicted and replaced by databanks. Literature would soon be associated with this rehabilitation of subjectivity. It was seen as a valuable source for examining more subjectively the sense of place” (334). Edward Relph in Place and Placelessness explored the subjective nature of place attachment as a “phenomenon of the geography of the lived-world of everyday experiences” (38). He claimed that “people are their place and a place is its people. To have roots in a place is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one’s own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular” (38). The concept of rootedness infers that a person identifying strongly with one locality would feel out-of-place in another. Relph coined the term “existential outsideness” (39) to describe a condition “in which all places assume the same meaningless identity” (38). Relph noted that this perspective had “a long tradition in academic geographers’ objective cataloguing of information and neutralization of thought in order to explain scientifically the spatial organisation of places”. In contrast, “existential
insidedness” (39) would be characterized by a person’s “belonging to a place and the deep and complete identity with a place that is the very foundation of the place concept” (Relph 39).

Yi-Fi Tuan applied the concept of phenomenology in his article “Topophilia: A Study Of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, And Values” and describes the term as “the affective bond between people and place or setting,” (245) and acknowledged that the study of environmental perceptions, attitudes and values is enormously complex. In *Humanistic Geography* Tuan stated that “scientific approaches to the study of man tend to minimize the role of human awareness and knowledge. Humanistic geography, by contrast specifically tries to understand how geographical activities and phenomena reveal the quality of human awareness” (267).

Elaborating further on the latter, Tuan asked the question “What is the role of emotion and thought in the attachment to place?” (269) and noted the following:

Human places vary greatly in size. An armchair by the fireside is a place, but so is the nation-state. Small places can be known through direct experience, including the intimate senses of smell and touch. A large region such as the nation-state is beyond most people’s direct experience, but it can be transformed into place – a focus of passionate loyalty – through symbolic means of art, education, and politics. How mere space becomes an intensely human place is a task for the humanist geographer; it appeals to such distinctively humanistic interests as the nature of experience, the quality of the emotional bond to physical objects, and the role of concepts and symbols in the creation of place identity. (269)

In his paper, Tuan listed five themes elaborating a phenomenological approach to studying a sense of place and they are the nature of geographical knowledge, the role of territory in human behaviour, the creation of place identities, the role of knowledge as an influence on
livelihood and the influence of religion on human activity. Viewed through Tuan’s perspective of phenomenology “geography is a mirror revealing the essence of human existence and human striving: to know the world is to know oneself, just as the careful analysis of a house reveals much about the designer and occupant” (Tuan 270). Tuan believed that “the study of landscapes is the study of the essences in the societies which mould them, in just the same way that the study of literature and art reveals much of human life” (270). This view of landscape reflected the cultural turn that shortly followed the humanistic trend in geography. Tuan concluded that human beings over time have persistently searched for an “ideal environment,” (Tuan 245) which varies from culture to culture. In 1981, a collection of papers illustrating the various ways in which geographers were engaging with literature was published as Humanistic Geography and Literature, Essays of the Experience of Place, edited by Douglas C. Pocock.

Pocock declared that geographers should begin their study of literature with the “acknowledgement of the artist’s perceptive insight: literature is the product of perception, or, more simply is perception. The writer therefore articulates our own articulations about place, our fellow men and about ourselves, providing thereby a basis for a new awareness, a new consciousness” (15). While talking about Irish Geography and Literature, Patrick Duffy, in a chapter entitled Writing Ireland: Literature and art in the representation of Irish place, from In Search of Ireland: a Cultural Geography edited by Brian Graham, observes thus:

Irish place and landscape have been variously constructed and interpreted to fulfil the changing requirements of particular segments of society, both inside and outside the island. In this respect, literary texts can be regarded as signifying practices, which interact with social, economic and political institutions so that
they are read, not passively, but, as it were, rewritten as they are read. (Graham 65)

Duffy further explains that “it has been suggested that the strength of feeling for home-place is more deeply embedded in Irish literature than in any other west European culture” (Graham 81). A few prominent Irish geographers have acknowledged the role of literature in their explorations of place and identity upon the island. Duffy concluded that Irish Literature and place are “defined and redefined constantly, negotiated as society is contested along its many and varied axes of differentiation by its myriad actors and their conflicting motivation” (Graham 81).

J.M. Synge is one among the many Irish writers who understood this concept and he wanted to portray the culture of Ireland through his work. In his plays the reader is able to see the love that he had for his land as he talks about the geography of and the culture of the people of Ireland. As mentioned in the previous chapter Synge has used his prose work *The Aran Islands* as a source for many of his plays and so the culture of Aran Islands is seen in each of his plays. The setting for all his major plays is written with the landscape of the Aran Islands in mind. The landscape, flora, geology and archaeology of the Islands are comparable to the nearby Burren, Co. Clare.

The landscape is a karstic limestone environment with thin soil cover. The islands are generally of low elevation except on Inis Mór, which has spectacular cliff scenery to the south-west on which are sited two impressive stone forts, Dún Aonghasa and Dún Chathair. The Islands have a long history of human influence on the landscape that stretches back in time to the New Stone Age.

<http://wwwaranislands.ie/>
Synge wanted to capture the authenticity of peasant life. His writings and his plays reveal a strict loyalty to the homes, clothes, food, artifacts, stories, songs, poems and language of the people. Synge was already influenced by the writings of those who had visited the Aran Islands before him. But it was only when he had arrived in Aran Mor and started to listen to the people, to hear their stories and songs, to witness their daily rites of passage that he began to understand the fragile relationship that existed between them and the unforgiving sea. Synge observed their rocky landscape, devoid of mature trees and how the people were dependent on the land as they created topsoil by manuring seaweed and sand. Synge was also able to understand their need for story and song. *The Aran Islands* records the day-to-day lives of Irish peasants living in small fishing communities on one of the most harsh and windswept islands in the world. Synge’s first impression of the island as he wanders along its “one good roadway”:

I have seen nothing so desolate. Grey floods of water were sweeping everywhere upon the limestone, making at times a wild torrent of the road, which twined continually over low hills and cavities in the rock or passed between a few small fields of potatoes or grass hidden away in corners that had shelter. Whenever the cloud lifted I could see the edge of the sea below me on the right, and the naked ridge of the island above me on the other side. Occasionally I passed a lonely chapel or schoolhouse, or a line of stone pillars with crosses above them and inscriptions asking a prayer for the soul of the person they commemorated.

(Synge 108)

The impact of that particular setting overwhelmed Synge and after wandering alone in a storm along cliffs showered with the foam and spray of waves he comments that “the suggestion from this world of inarticulate power was immense, and now at midnight when the
wind is abating, I am still trembling and flushed with exultation” (The Aran Islands 110). Synge believed that the wildness and vitality that were an urgent requirement for modern literature were present in real life there on these islands where people lived in such proximity to unhampered nature. Synge used the precise names of birds, “curlew” and “pipit,” and included the details of local landscape, such as “a long neck of sand hill that runs out into the sea towards the southwest,” (108). Synge once flatly refused the suggestion that to make Aran seem more exotic and hopefully more marketable the real names of the islands should be omitted. Alan Waters in his article “The Sounds of Aran” says that “A relevant comparison here would be with Hardy, whose pastoral and agricultural Wessex differed in so many ways from Aran, but who correlated human sentiment with rural geography in a way similar to Synge” (Waters 5).

In The Aran Islands Synge marvels over the preservation of Irish identity in an undisturbed island setting. Throughout the work, Synge takes on the tone of an amateur anthropologist and ethnographer. As Castle points out, that “Synge’s work conforms in significant ways to the protocols of the emerging discipline of ethnography” (Castle 100). Synge’s visit to the Aran followed closely upon that of the ethnographers A.C. Haddon and C.R. Browne, who had visited the islands just a few years before him, and who had published their study, The Ethnography of the Aran Islands in 1893. Synge, Haddon, and Browne were part of a larger cultural and disciplinary trend which had arisen with Charles Darwin and others and which would see islands occupy an increasingly privileged place in anthropological field work. As Castle puts it, Synge’s familiarity with these associations, together with the imperatives of cultural revivalism, “prepared him for his experience of the primitive Aran Islanders” (Castle 99). Thus immersed in the discourses of island ethnography and cultural nationalism, Synge
repeatedly characterises the Arans as primitive and timeless, telling his readers that “every article on these islands has an almost personal character, which gives this simple life, where all art is unknown, something of the artistic beauty of mediaeval life” (Synge 13). And as he surveys the inhabitants of the island, he discovers that there are practical reasons for the seeming uniqueness of the Aran Islands.

Synge depicts the Aran as both the epitome of a newly romanticised Irish identity as well as the antidote to the modern forces which are seen to be eroding that identity. As if then to contextualise further the Aran worldview, Synge asserts that life on the islands “is perhaps the most primitive that is left in Europe” (Synge, *The Aran Islands* 10). In Synge’s view the primitiveness is because of the physical separation and geographic isolation of the Arans which have preserved their inhabitants from “the heavy boot of Europe” (Synge, *The Aran Islands* 21). In the words of his modern editor, for Synge the Arans are simply “Ireland raised to the power of two” (Robinson xvii). To Synge, then, the Aran Islands function as a kind of primitive Irish exponent that stands in contrast not just to England and Europe as they threaten to engulf and transform mainland Ireland, but also to a modernising Ireland itself. Synge’s exploration of the Aran Islanders unveils their unique culture in which grief and joy are almost indistinguishable from each other, a condition connected to their paradoxical relationship with the sea as the giver and the taker of life. Pocock uses two artists separated by time, geography and language to demonstrate that “universal” emotions and actions are, in actuality, closely tied to culture, landscape and lifestyle that is, that social patterns of ritual and community are inflected and informed by geography.

But while a great deal of *The Aran Islands* is about the landscape and the terrain and the ever-present roaring sea, it is also about the people whom Synge befriends along the way. And
here, huddled around turf fires, he not only perfects his Irish language but collects stories and folklore from local residents. On his first visit he meets a blind man who believes in the “superiority of his stories over all other stories in the world”. Synge writes these words:

Afterward he told me how one of his children had been taken by the fairies. One day a neighbour was a passing, and she said, when she saw it on the road, ‘That’s a fine child’. Its mother tried to say, ‘God bless it’, but something choked the words in her throat. A while later they found a wound on its neck, and for three nights the house was filled with noises. ‘I never wear a shirt at night,’ he said, but I got up out of my bed, all naked as I was, when I heard the noises in the house, and lighted a light, but there was nothing in it. ‘Then a dummy came and made signs of hammering nails in a coffin. The next day the seed potatoes were full of blood and the child told his mother that he was going to America.’ ‘That night it died, and believe me,’ said the old man, ‘the fairies were in it’. (Synge, *The Aran Islands 3*)

Synge also records the harsh conditions in which the island's tiny population lives and the difficulties that confront them in terms of feeding and clothing themselves adequately. His description of poverty-stricken villagers is, at times, heartbreaking. Because Synge makes several visits over a five-year period he is able to notice small changes to the culture with each visit he makes. Take this example, written during his fifth and final visit, in which he realises that progress has made its mark, and not necessarily in a good way:

I am in the north island again, looking out with a singular sensation to the cliffs across the sound. It is hard to believe that those hovels I can just see in the south are filled with people whose lives have the strange quality that is found in the
oldest poetry and legend. Compared with them the falling off that has come with the increased prosperity of this island is full of discouragement. The charm which the people over there share with the birds and flowers has been replaced here by the anxiety of men who are eager for gain. The eyes and expression are different, though the faces are the same, and even the children here seem to have an indefinable modern quality that is absent from the men of Inishmaan. (Synge, *The Aran Islands* 99)

*The Aran Islands* is a fascinating account of another culture in another time confronted by development. This chapter is an attempt to define the cultural geography of Ireland through the plays of Synge as already mentioned. Since the Aran Islands form the source for many of Synge’s plays the researcher has decided to explore the cultural aspects of the people of Aran and also how it has been reflected in the plays. The aspects that reveal the culture of a particular place and people as argued earlier in this chapter solely depends on the geography of the place. The researcher has identified certain commonalities found in all the plays of Synge and they are food and occupation, clothing, attitude towards death, faith in God, fear of old age and loneliness and the attitude towards marriage. There are still other features which are exclusive of the people of Ireland and they are the immense love of nature and love for their land, the Irish Wake and love for Irish whisky, the love of story-telling and the Gael’s native imagination.

The food and occupation of the people in the island are referred together because the food of the people largely depended upon their occupation. The islanders did not go to the mainland often and they ate whatever they could produce out of their land. Their main occupation was fishing and so they had fish as their staple diet. They could cultivate wheat and potatoes on their
land after much labouring. Hence they had potatoes and bread and cakes made of wheat for their meal. Here Synge comments on their eating habits in *The Aran Island*:

…during the day they simply drink a cup of tea and eat a piece of bread, or some potatoes, whenever they are hungry. For men who live in the open air they eat strangely little. Often when Michael has been out weeding potatoes for eight or nine hours without food, he comes in and eats a few slices of home-made bread, and then he is ready to go out with me and wander for hours about the island. They use no animal food except a little bacon and salt fish… Some years ago, before tea, sugar, and flour had come into general use, salt fish was much more the staple article of diet than at present, and, I am told, skin diseases were very common, though they are now rare on the islands. (18)

In the *Riders to the sea* Maurya seems to talk about their wretched state of poverty now that all the bread earning members of their family are dead when she says that, “It’s a great rest I’ll have now, and great sleeping in the long nights after Samhain, if it’s only a bit of wet flour we do have to eat, and maybe a fish that would be stinking” (96). In *The Playboy of the Western world* one reads about the food that was consumed by the people living in the district of Mayo. Sheep and cattle rearing was an important occupation which supplied them with milk and meat. The people also had poultry meat as an occasional treat. When Sara comes in search of Pegeen, Christy answers that, “She’s above on the cnuceen, seeing the nanny goats, the way she’d have a sup of goat’s milk for to colour my tea” (*Playboy* 33). Sara welcomes Christy as she gives him duck’s egg as a present. She says that, “Then my thousand welcomes to you, and I’ve run put with a brace of duck’s eggs for your food to-day. Pegeen’s ducks is no use, but these are the real rich sort. Hold out your hand and you’ll see it’s no lie I’m telling you” (*Playboy* 33).
Susan and Honor also present him with their share of butter and cake. “And I run up with a pat of butter, for it’d be a poor thing to have you eating your spuds dry...” (Playboy 34). For which Honor replies thus, “And I brought you a little cup of cake, for you would have a thin stomach on you, and you that length walking the world” (Playboy 34).

As fishing was their main occupation other jobs which were associated with fishing were also carried out by the men of Aran. They mended torn nets, built curaghs and stretched skins over them. They reared sheep, goat, cows and pigs. The men also went hunting from time to time and sold their game to the other villagers. The people also wove and stitched their clothing and made footwear which they called as pampooties. Synge comments on this in the Aran Islands as he says these words: “As flannel is cheap—the women spin the yarn from the wool of their own sheep, and it is then woven by a weaver in Kilronan for four pence a yard...” (Synge 10). Synge did not have proper footwear to walk on the rough terrain:

The family held a consultation on them last night, and in the end it was decided to make me a pair of pampooties, which I have been wearing to-day among the rocks. They consist simply of a piece of raw cowskin, with the hair outside, laced over the toe and round the heel with two ends of fishing-line that work round and are tied above the instep. In the evening, when they are taken off, they are placed in a basin of water, as the rough hide cuts the foot and stocking if it is allowed to harden. (Synge, The Aran Islands 16)

Another important work done by the islanders is the making of kelp and Synge describes this as a tedious process:

The work needed to form a ton of kelp is considerable. The seaweed is collected from the rocks after the storms of autumn and winter, dried on fine days, and then
made up into a rick, where it is left till the beginning of June. It is then burnt in low kilns on the shore, an affair that takes from twelve to twenty-four hours of continuous hard work… The kiln holds about two tons of molten kelp, and when full it is loosely covered with stones, and left to cool. In a few days the substance is as hard as the limestone, and has to be broken with crowbars before it can be placed in curaghs for transport to Kilronan where it is tested to determine the amount of iodine contained, and paid for accordingly. (The Aran Islands 27)

In the autumn season one of the many tasks that is done by the menfolk on the island is threshing of the rye. “The Sheaves are collected on a bare rock, and then each is beaten separately on a couple of stones placed on one end against the other. The land is so poor that a field hardly produces more grain than is needed for seed the following year. So the rye-growing is carried on merely for the straw, which is used for thatching”(Synge 69). Rope twisting which is followed by thatching is an event that involves all the people and the whole village gets a festive atmosphere.

In the Playboy widow Quin talks about the occupation in Mayo when she says that, “there isn’t my match in Mayo for thatching, or mowing, or shearing a sheep” (Playboy 29). And “I’ve nice jobs you could be doing, gathering shells to make a white wash for our hut within, building up a little goose house, or stretching a new skin on an old curragh I have...” (Playboy 52). In the Riders to the sea the readers are able to discern even from the stage direction the kind of jobs the characters do. “Cottage kitchen, with nets, oil-sins, spinning wheel, some new boards standing by the wall, etc. Cathleen, a young girl of about twenty, finishes kneading the cake, and puts it down in the pot-oven by the fire: then wipes her hands, and begins to spin at the wheel” (Riders 83). Later on in the course of the play Bartley talks about sheep rearing and selling pigs.
Bartley also mentions Kelp when he says these words to his sisters, “If the west wind holds with the last bit of the moon let you and Nora get up weed enough for another cock for the Kelp” (Riders 86). In the play In the Shadow of the Glen the character Michael Dara is a herdsman and he describes the difficulty of herding sheep when he says these words, “They were that willful they were running off into one man’s bit of oats and another man’s bit of hay and tumbling into the red bogs till it’s more like a pack of old goats than sheep they were. Mountain ewes is a queer breed, Nora Burke, and I’m not used to them at all” (Shadow 110). In The Tinkers Wedding Synge talks about the job of a tinker who makes and sells cans for a living and Sara in the play talks to the priest about their poor state of affairs when she says that, “we hard-working people do be making cans in the dark night, and blinding our eyes with the black smoke from the bits of twigs we do be burning” (Tinkers 187). The same sentiment is seen in his essays found in In Wicklow and West Kerry from which this particular play is fashioned. The Deirdre of the Sorrows, a play which takes its source from the ancient legends also talks about the same occupation of weaving and hunting because Synge had the peasants of Aran in mind when he wrote the play.

Synge found that the people in the Aran wore similar clothes and were identified easily. Almost all women wore red petticoats which were very bright and pleasing to the eye. Synge exclaims that it was a welcoming sight in contrast to the dull, grey and gloomy skies. The men also wore the same kind of clothes which protected them from the harsh winds and the cold weather. Synge admires the simple beauty of the Aran men and women in this passage found in The Aran Islands:

The red dresses of the women who cluster round the fire on their stools give a glow of almost Eastern richness, and the walls have been toned by the turf-smoke
to a soft brown that blends with the grey earth –colour of the floor …the
simplicity and unity of the dress increases in another way the local air of beauty.
The women wear red petticoats and jackets of the island wool stained with
madder, to which they usually add a plaid shawl twisted round their chests and
tied at their back…the men wear three colours: the natural wool, indigo and a
grey flannel that is woven of alternate threads of indigo and the natural the wool.
(9-10)

The characters in Synge’s plays are also portrayed wearing the same kind of clothes. Red
petticoat is always associated with women and in The Playboy of the Western World Synge uses
the same word as a metaphor for women. When Widow Quin asks Mahon if Christy ran wild
with the girls, Mahon replies thus, “Running wild, is it? If he seen a red petticoat coming
swinging over the hill, he’d be off to hide in the sticks, and you’d see him shooting out his
sheep’s eyes between the little twigs and the leaves, and his two ears rising like a hare looking
out through a gap. Girls, indeed!” (Playboy 49). In Riders to the Sea the characters Nora and
Cathleen talk about the clothes of Michael which were found on the shoe. The body is identified
through the flannel shirt and plain stocking which the sister herself had stitched. Cathleen tells to
Nora that, “it’s the same stuff, Nora; but if it is itself aren’t there great rolls of it in the shops of
Galway, and isn’t it many other man may have a shirt of it as well as Michael himself?” (Riders
90). Nora cries out that “It’s the second one of the third pair I knitted, and I put up three score
stitches, and I dropped four of them” (Riders 90).

The people of Aran had great faith in God and almost all of them have a habit of blessing
one another in the name of God. The peasants of Aran firmly believed that God has given them a
purpose in life and that everything, be it a good or bad happens for a reason. Synge writes these
words in *The Aran Islands*, “As I sat in the kitchen to dry the spray from my coat, several men who had seen me walking up came in to me to talk to me, usually murmuring on the threshold, ‘The blessing of God on this place’, or some similar words”(10). In each of the plays the readers would find that the characters constantly call on the blessing of god. In *The Playboy of the Western World* when Christy Mahon introduces himself to Michael, Michael says this, “Well God bless you Christy and good rest till we meet again when the sun’ll be rising to the moon of day” (*Playboy* 21). For which Christy replies thus, “God bless you all” (*Playboy* 21). In *Riders to the Sea* when Bartley goes to sell the horses he says to his sisters and mother, “I must go now quickly. I’ll ride down on the red mare and the grey pony’ll run behind me… The blessing of God on you” (*Riders* 87). In *The Well of the Saints* when Martin Doul recognises Timmy just by listening to his footsteps, Timmy utters with a hint of surprise, “you’ve good ears, God bless you…” (*Saints* 125). Though *Deirdre of the Sorrows* does not take its plot from any of Synge’s work the characters in the play are based on the Aran peasants. The characters throughout the play utter phrases like, “gods save you”(*Deirdre* 215) and “gods shield you”(*Deirdre* 222). The characters in all the plays invoke god’s blessing, forgiveness and mercy in all instances and their deep faith in god is revealed here. Synge’s early up-bringing in a strictly Christian home has also influenced the plays a great deal.

Death is a common occurrence in every family in the Aran Islands and the people accept it as part of their lives as they depend on the sea for their livelihood. The fishermen were in continuous dread of the sea. Synge writes, “The old man gave me his view of the use of fear. ‘A man who is not afraid of the sea will soon be drowned’ he said, ‘for he will be going out on a day he shouldn’t. But we do be afraid of the sea, and we do only be drowned now and again” (*The Aran Islands* 59). Synge confesses that he “could not help feeling that he was talking with men...
who were under a judgment of death” (The Aran Islands 55). This is very evident in the pathetic words said by Maurya in Riders to the Sea. “In the big world the old people do be leaving things after them for their sons and children, but in this place it is the young men do be leaving things behind for them that do be old” (Riders 89). The keening of the women in the funeral scene brings out the collective feeling of the entire island and Synge has noted this in The Aran Islands:

This grief of the keen is no personal complaint for the death of one woman over eighty years, but seems to contain the whole passionate rage that lurks somewhere in every native of the island. In this cry of pain the inner consciousness of the people seems to lay itself bare for an instant, and to reveal the mood of beings who feel their isolation in the face of a universe that wars on them with winds and seas. (52)

Fear of old age and loneliness are also common traits seen among the people of Aran. Old Mahon in The Playboy of the Western World echoes this sentiment when he says, “I’m the sane surely. The wrack and ruin of three score years: and it’s a terror to live that length, I tell you, and to have your sons going to the dogs against you, and you wore out scolding them and skelping them, and God knows what” (Playboy 58). In the Shadow of the Glen is another play where the plight of old age and loneliness are well portrayed especially through Nora Burke’s character. Nora talks about Peggy Cavanaugh when she has become old. She says that, “…there she is now walking round on the roads, or sitting in a dirty old house, with no teeth in her mouth, and no sense and no more hair than you’d see on a bit of a hill and they after burning the furze from it” (Shadow 113). When Michael Dara expresses his wish to marry Nora, she replies thus:
Why would I marry you, Mike Dara? You’ll be getting old and I’ll be getting old, and in a little while I’m telling you, you’ll be sitting up in your bed – the way himself was sitting- with a shake in your face, and your teeth falling, and the white hair sticking out round you like an old bush where sheep do be leaping on a gap…It’s a pitiful thing to be getting old, but it’s a queer thing surely. It’s a queer thing to see an old man sitting up there in his bed with no teeth in him, and a rough word in his mouth, and his chin the way it would take the bark from the edge of an oak board you’d have building a door….god forgive me Michael Dara, we’ll all be getting old, but it’s a queer thing surely. (Shadow 114)

Nora Burke also talks about the cruel state of being lonely when she exclaims thus, “…for isn’t a dead man itself more company than to be sitting alone, and hearing the winds crying, and you not knowing on what thing your mind would stay?” (Shadow106). Martin Doul also speaks of loneliness in the play *The Well of the Saints* when he says these words, “I’ll be destroyed sitting alone and losing my senses this time the way I’m after losing my sight, for it’d make any person afeared to be sitting up hearing the sound of his own breath” (Saints 158). In *The Tinker’s Wedding* Sarah Casey wants to be married and respected in the community. She doesn’t want to end up like Mary Byrne all lonely and miserable and so she say asks the priest to marry her off to Michael Byrne as early as possible. Sarah says these words, “And what time will you do the thing I’m asking, holy father? for I’m thinking you’ll do it surely, and not have me growing into an old, wicked heathen like herself” (The Tinker’s 191). Mary Byrne herself laments about her loneliness in these lines as she utters “what’s a little stroke on your head besides sitting lonesome on a fine night, hearing the dogs barking, and the bats squeaking, and you saying over, it’s a short while only till you die” (The Tinker’s 194). The final
play that Synge wrote is *Deirdre of the Sorrows* which is based on the legend of Deirdre and the sons of Usna. Fear of old age and loneliness are expressed through the character of King Conchubar. Conchubar laments thus:

> How would I be happy seeing age coming on me each year, when the dry leaves are blowing back and forward at the gate of Emain? And yet this last while I’m saying out, when I see the furze breaking and the daws sitting two and two on ash – trees by the duns of Emain, Deirdre a year nearer her full age when she’ll be my mate and comrade, and then I’m glad surely…There’s one sorrow that has no end surely— that’s being old and lonesome. (*Deirdre* 239)

Owen tries to persuade Deirdre to leave Naisi and go back to Conchubar. He says that Naisi will no longer be interested in her once she gets old. Owen expresses that “it’s a poor thing to be so lonesome you’d squeeze kisses from a cur dog’s nose… Queens get old, Deirdre, with their white and long arms going from them, and their backs hooping. I tell it’s a poor thing to see a queen’s nose reaching down to scrape her chin” (*Deirdre* 238). The above mentioned elements are found in the culture of the people of Aran and it is also reflected in Synge’s plays. These cultural habits depend very much on the physical environment.

There are certain other features which are uniquely Irish and this is found common in all Irish plays. Likewise in Synge’s plays also the researcher has identified the following elements which are exclusive to Ireland. Synge in most of his plays talks about the Irish wake. This is a well known custom throughout Ireland and more than mourning one finds the celebration of life. The friends and family of the dead person, though they mourn the loss of their loved one also celebrate their life. They give tribute to the memory of the dead person by toasting their memory with a drink or two and also eat good food. The Irish people never miss a wake and the people
show their unity and support for the bereaved family only in these wakes. Of course for those who are fond of drinking these wakes are almost happy occasions.

In *The Aran Islands* Synge talks about how some people behave during these wakes. “One man told me of the poteen drinking that takes place at some funerals. ‘A while since’ he said, ‘there were two men who fell down in the graveyard while the drink was one of them. The sea was rough that day, the way no one could go to bring the doctor, and one of the men never woke again, and found death that night’” (Synge 26). In *The Playboy of the Western World* Jimmy is ready to leave Pegeen in the hands of Christy, a virtual stranger, in order to go to a wake because he doesn’t want to miss the drinking there. Jimmy tells Michael that, “Now by the grace of God, herself will be safe this night, with a man killed his father holding danger from the door, and let you come on Michael James, or they’ll have the best stuff drunk at the wake” (*Playboy* 21). Michael after attending the wake praises it and scolds Christy for not having such a wake for his father though Christy himself had killed him. Michael says these words:

I hear tell you’re after winning all in the sports below; and wasn’t it a shame I didn’t bear you along with me to Kate Cassidy’s wake, fine stout lad, the like of you, for you’d never see the match of it for flows of drink, the way when we sunk her bones at noonday in her narrow grave, there were five men, aye, and six men, stretched out retching speechless on the holy stones…it is then, aren’t you a louty schemer to go burying a poor father unbeknownst when you’d a right to throw him on the crupper of a Kerry mule and drive him West wards… and not a Christian drinking a smart drop to the glory of his soul? (*Playboy* 67)

The play, *In the Shadow of the Glen*, talks about the tramp who comments on the situation found inside the house. He says now, “I’ve walked a great way through the world, lady of the house,
and seen great wonders, but I never seen a wake till this day with fine spirits, and to good
tobacco and the best of pipes, and no one to taste them but a woman only (Shadow 103). The
next important Irish feature is the people’s great love for story telling along with their flair for
fantasy. Bourgeois in John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre comments on this:

The first and preeminently Irish feature of the plays is the way in which they
bring out the Gael’s native imaginativeness. The Irish peasant, because of the
ardour of his unsatisfied cravings, finds his most joyful moods, his most poignant
griefs, in the life beyond actuality, the life of the imagination—which, in an Irish
mind is apt to become the more real life of the two. This is the very bedrock of the
Gaelic temperament; and Synge has rendered this trait of the Irish nature with
extraordinary felicity… this perpetual antagonism of Dream versus Reality, is the
theme of all his dramatic writings. (Bourgeois 220)

Synge in the Aran Islands found this love for story telling among many men like Pat
Dirane and old Mourteen. They liked to tell stories and would be happy when they get avid
listeners. Synge himself was quite interested to listen to these stories from which he drew the
plot for many of his plays. The stories told by these men had little truth and a lot of imagination
but it was fascinating to listen to these men. Synge comments on this when he talks about Pat
Dirane. He says that, “in stories of this kind he always speaks in the first person with minute
details to show that he was actually present at the scenes that are described. At the beginning of
this story he gave me a long account of what had made him be on his way to Dublin on that
occasion, told me about all the rich people he was going to see in the finest streets of the
city”(Synge 23). The play The Well of the Saints illustrates a supernatural miracle theme which
gains life through the imaginative powers of Synge. Synge was in turn inspired by Pat Dirane’s
method of storytelling. Bourgeois says that, “At the same time the play, with its naturalistic
treatment of the supernatural miracle-theme, beautifully expresses the oft noted tendency in the
Celtic temperament to take refuge in a world of dreams, away from the foulness of an actuality
transfigured, fortunately by imaginative illusion” (Bourgeois 193).

Irish people had great love for their land. Ireland is a place filled with immense beauty
with its unadulterated nature. Naturally the Irish also had the tendency to adore and revere nature
as they were surrounded on all sides by pure nature. They were fiercely patriotic and loved their
land wholeheartedly. The Irish were rooted to their land and only death could separate them from
their land. Synge was also brought up in such a background and Synge’s sentiments on his land
and nature is clearly revealed in all of his works. The Aran Islands and In Wicklow and West
Kerry are filled with descriptions of nature and the people are so in tune with their surroundings.
They depend on their land for even simple things like calculating the time. Synge says thus:

The general knowledge of time on the islands depends, curiously enough, on the
direction of the wind. Nearly all the cottages are built like this one, with two
doors opposite each other, the more sheltered of which lies open all day to give
light to the interior. If the wind is northerly the south door is opened, and the
shadow of the door-post moving across the kitchen floor indicates the hour: as
soon, however, as the wind changes to the south the other door is opened, and the
people, who never think of putting up a primitive dial, are at a loss. (The Aran
Islands 17)

Synge in his plays also praises Ireland and nature whenever he gets the opportunity. Sara
in The Playboy of the Western World talks very proudly about the western land when she says
this, “drink a health to the wonders of the western world, the pirates, preachers, poteen- makers,
with the jobbing jockies: parching peelers and the juries fill their stomachs selling judgments of the English law” (Playboy 37). Fergus in Deirdre of the Sorrows tries to persuade Deirdre to go to Ireland and he advises her that there is no place like Ireland. Now he says these words:

They have not, but when I was a young man we’d have given a lifetime to be in Ireland a score of weeks: and to this day the old men have nothing so heavy as knowing it’s in a short while they’ll lose the high skies are over Ireland, and the bogs. Let you come this day, for there’s no place but Ireland where the Gael can have peace always… it’s little joy wandering till age is on you and your youth is gone away, so you’d best come this night, for you’d have great pleasure putting out your foot and saying, ‘I am in Ireland, surely’. (Deirdre 240)

Bourgeois comments that this intense love of nature was felt by the “Celtomaniacs… as the exclusive appendage of Gaelic and even Anglo-Celtic poetry, and which in the present instance had its roots deep down in Synge’s in most temperament” (Bourgeois 221). Synge as a boy had felt this haunting beauty of the Irish scenery and it has influenced his writing a great deal. Synge did not consider his work as mere literature and as Bourgeois says this, “Nor is this mere literature’, for we know what potent influence Nature’s moods exercise over the changeful Irish heart, so that their power partly explains the development of the characters in Synge’s plays and endows his descriptions of scenery with a peculiar dramatic efficiency” (Bourgeois 222). Synge like all other writers truly expressed not only his country but also expressed mankind. He expressed Ireland and the Irishmen as he saw them and he also saw himself in them. The people do depend on their land and its climatic conditions for their livelihood. Synge has beautifully illustrated this phenomenon in his Aran Islands:
Every article on these islands has an almost personal character, which gives this simple life, where all art is unknown, something of the artistic beauty of medieval life. The curaghs and spinning –wheels, the tiny wooden barrels that are still much used in the place of earthenware, the home-made cradles, churns, and baskets, are all full of individuality, and being made from materials that are common here, yet to some extent peculiar to the island, they seem to exist as a natural link between the people and the world that is about them. (9)

As Bourgeois rightly says “his plays are Ireland; they are mankind; above all, they are Synge” (Bourgeois 247). The researcher in this chapter has made a thorough study of the culture of the people and place found in Synge’s plays and has related it with the geography to prove that culture depends only on the geographical conditions that people are used to. Culture includes the customs and habits of the people with regard to food, occupation, clothing, shelter and attitude towards life. Culture and nature have always been interrelated and will remain so in the future. Nature can exist without man but man cannot exist without nature and nature plays a major role in elevating man from the status of an animal to a human being by giving him culture.

In the next chapter, the researcher talks about cultural landscape which is a sub-division of cultural geography. The Irish landscape was of great importance to Synge because of his intense sensitivity to nature. Though Ireland is a land filled with scenic beauty it also has its fair share of nature’s cruelty with bitter cold and harsh winds. In Synge’s time that nature was unspoiled and yet unexplored by the modern man. Here the researcher explains the landscape and gives varied versions of the definitions of landscape. ‘Landscape’ is a very complex term and landscape also plays a very important role in moulding the culture of a society.