Abstract

The advent of postcolonialism has resulted in significant changes in literature and culture around the world. The publication of Edward Said’s epoch making oeuvre *Orientalism* (1978), Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Homi Bhabha’s *Nation and Narration* (1980) and Helen Tiffin, Gareth Griffiths and Bill Ashcroft’s *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) have changed the shape of literary studies. Postcolonialism, since then, has allowed an extensive range of investigation into the relations of power in various contexts. It explores the creation of empire and its colonial impact on the history, economy, culture and other cultural production of colonized society such as language, identity, race and gender. There have been substantial arguments over specific domains and definitions of postcolonialism. In a general sense, postcolonialism investigates the interaction between European nations and the countries they colonized. Postcolonialism attempts to achieve decolonisation of native traditions, culture, language, etc. which are lost in the colonial fabrication. It serves both as a struggle for freedom and the redefinition of new identities.

In the postcolonial world colours are regarded not just as strokes of fashion- white has more negative connotations than positive-it is laden with the sense of supremacy. The governing pattern in the hegemony of divisions in the British Empire is the dichotomy of black/white as it was the case in the colonizations of Caribbean countries and the Indian subcontinent. The superiority of White identities were imposed on the Blacks and Browns, the racial ‘other’ of the White complexions. However, in the case of Ireland it has negligible importance. The Irish share the skin colour with the British and once shared the same religion. Before the advent of Reformation in 16th century, the English, like Irish were Catholics. The national identity of the Irish was now also infused with a religious identity and the Irish Catholics became the newly constituted ‘other’, in conformity to Protestantism, both in Britain and Europe. The colonization of Ireland raises many exigent questions about the ideologies and discourses which form the framework of the contemporary cultural theories.
The issues of language, identity and history take central positions in postcolonial criticism. The construction of identity is a complex phenomenon. In Ireland the construction of racial and individual identities was a consequence of colonial expansion. British colonizers stripped the Irish people of their native identities and oppressed the natives in order to reconstruct their identities. Thus, identity is a product of history and culture. The age-old colonialism and the successive colonial discourses deprived the Irish people of their capacity to reconstruct their own identities. There have been differences in the versions of history written by the colonizers and colonized. The re-writing of history with the advent of postcolonialism, gives the writers an opportunity to deconstruct the hegemony. The postcolonial theory examines and analyses representations and construction of identities of the colonized in literary, cultural and historical texts. The theory also provides detailed method for researching the various strategies of power, domination and hegemony used by the colonizers. It also uncovers the ideological undertone of divisions, otherness, stereotyping and power affairs of the dominant.

Seamus Heaney hails from Ireland, a country torn by colonial strife, as well as by religious and political conflicts for centuries for centuries. Heaney's poetry mirrors the plight of the marginalized Irish people and the impact of colonization on the culture, traditions, identity, language and economy of Northern Ireland and throws into relief the attitude of hegemonic societies. His negotiations are based on the binaries of metropolis/periphery, self/other, colonizer/colonized, England/Ireland. The major impact of centuries of colonizations in Ireland has been the dislocation of Irish identity. Despite the noble veil of cultural and moral missions, one of the basic motives of colonial enterprise is economic exploitation. Heaney's poetry has the objective of rehabilitating culture and traditions, manners and morals, language and identity and history and politics of Northern Ireland. His negotiations are pleas for reconciliations and peace. Heaney deconstructs Irish anxieties and preoccupations from a universal perspective. He identifies common metaphors that interrogate the compromises and the compensations of all colonized people and also the impact of these negotiations on the colonizers.
Heaney analyzes the intricacies of the marginalization strategies of the colonizers. The impact of colonization on the world was always a complex process that took many forms. The suffering and loss of life was on an immeasurable scale. The sense of cultural dislocation, alienation and disintegration of rural life was a result of industrialization which colonialism had brought with it under the veil of a civilization mission. Heaney strives against the fragmentation of rural identity. Identity is a product of history and, on a personal level, of memory. The identity of rural Irish people was fractured by colonization. The identity of ‘colonized’ was imposed on them. The inheritances of loss, sense of living in a cultural vacuum are common feelings shared by all the colonized people of the world. Culture is entangled with history. So, too, is literature. Writers have registered the events of colonization from its very advent. Heaney shares the feeling of suppression. With his umbilical cord still attached to the traditional rural world and Celtic Christianity, the poetic consciousness of Heaney seems deeply embedded in nostalgia. He laments the losses and subsequent changes and he longs for a peaceful Ireland. He deals with thousands of people and is sensitive to each one. The canvas of his poetry is crowded with people from different strata of life and society.

Memory and imagination, for Heaney, are compensatory faculties through which he converts absence into presence, cultural vacuum and fragmented selves into consolidated identities. He sees himself as the custodian and the celebrant of a lost culture, forgotten history and diminishing heritage. Heaney deals with a wide spectrum of themes. His poems are marked with the awareness of relationships between the personal, the political and the historical. He evokes his Irish identity with different strategies and writes back against the dominant discourse. The allusion to myths and history and local Irish places are some of the over powering concerns of his poetry. He registers intimacy with Irish people and places. The familiar and filial occupy special places in his poetry.

The educational empowerment of Irish people attracts Heaney’s attention. He believes that the power of education will change the condition of Ireland. He emphasizes proper supervision for the children. The theme of ruined childhood and its compensation through education and supervision is dealt with thoroughly in his works. Heaney’s poetry
is the ‘poetry of visions’. He believes that vision is the foundation of some of the concrete realities of the world. He has visions of a better Ireland and a healthy world. He believes in humanism as a necessary component. He returns to his roots to revive society. Seamus Heaney’s poetry is for the promotion of causes he believes in. The present world of uncertainties evokes mixed responses in the poet’s psyche. On the one hand he feels that scientific progress and globalization have turned the world into a neighbourhood and on the other hand he feels unhappy about the circumstances that have remained unchanged since prehistoric times. The poet is poignantly aware of his responsibility. Earlier Heaney focused on the violence and plight of Ireland but in later poetry he has gone global with a vision of peace, love and harmony. It seems that the conferment of the Nobel Prize in 1995 made him conscious of greater responsibilities and widened the horizon of his poetry. He steps out of his national consciousness and treats the entire world as his arena. The influences, intertextualities and translations widen the dimension of Heaney’s poetry. He compromises with influences to widen the domain of Irish literature.

Heaney deals with a number of people with handicaps. He deals with this less explored field in literature. He shows how these physically challenged people become the ‘other’ of the society because of the indifference of people. He also appreciates the will power and uncompromising courage of the people who stand out against all the odds with their own identity in the faceless, numberless crowd. Heaney pleads for the revival of a value-based vision which will encompass all humanity. The ‘others’ of the society may be physically challenged people, women, the people from the lower strata of society, unlettered rustics or the colonized natives. His endeavour is to compensate for the wrongs done to these people through his poetry.