

Chapter 1

A. Formation of Nationalism in Ireland

Rise and formation of nationalism in Ireland has been seen as intrinsically related to its long tenure of colonial subjugation. Colonialism exerted a deep and lasting pressure in various fields of Irish life, namely economic, political, cultural and religious. But the Irish experience is by no means anomalous. It shares a number of basic features of nationalist movements in Africa, in Arab countries, in China and especially in India, the other major area of study in this thesis. While in big, imperial countries, the rise of nationalism is explained in terms of ‘xenophobic expressions of identity’, racial purity and material prosperity which encourage the imperialist, as if with a cue from Providence, to capture, extend and control the empire, to civilize, teach and collect its cost, a little heavy, from the people, who are ‘the white man’s burden’; in the colonized countries nationalism is seen to rise and crystallize following certain common steps in a sequence : imitation, reaction, resistance, reflection, revival. Of course the list does not end here and in different historical, political contexts the order may differ, but in most cases these are the steps and they provide sufficient ground for further discussion.

In the colonies, the colonized people accept imitation of the customs, conventions and behavioural pattern of the masters as the first alternative way to avoid further exploitation, punishment and retreat. The first impulse is to make the master happy by agreeing to his formula of life. Added to this, however, there exists a soft ambition to rise to

the master's level, to speak his language, to work like him in offices, to imitate his footprints in trade and commerce so that an economic up gradation is achieved early. As there is no ready model to follow and prosper in their own, indigenous culture, and as there is little scope in the hurry of self-defense to invent any other alternative model, the native people are content to revere or to be allowed to revere the culture of the colonizer masters. If anything is imagined at all in this stage, it is, in reality, all modeled on borrowed materials from the rulers. Thus commenting on Irish nationalism in James Joyce's opening episode of *Ulysses*, Enda Duffy observes that it is "a way of imagining community that has been borrowed by a colonized people from their colonial masters" (31).

But soon the natives arrive at the second stage of reaction and confrontation. If defiance is not plausible wholly at this stage, at least a drive to ensure difference, works underneath. Frantz Fanon here offers an effective model. Fanon considers the colonized world as essentially divisive, formed of two exclusive parts where actions and counteractions soon get influenced by a mechanism of reflexive contradiction. For, whereas the external force in order to ensure its tight grip on the colony, encourages further divisions and separations of the colonized people by introducing an internal, hateful hierarchy of power that attempts to freeze the population's captivity into a sullen torpor, "new outlet . . . engender aims for the violence of colonized peoples" (Fanon 59). Fanon specifies such initial responses like declarations of human rights, clamors for free speech, trade-union demands, but after a period of preparation for final take off, as violent confrontation escalates, there is, in the words of Edward said,

an entirely new history that unfolds subterraneously, as a revolutionary class of militants, drawn from the ranks of the urban poor, the outcasts, criminals and declasses people who have fallen in social status, takes to the countryside, there

slowly to form cells of armed activists, who return to the city for the final stages of the insurgency. (88)

Fanon's real contribution thus lies in this imagining of a counter narrative of the colonized to the aboveground force of colonial regime, which is finally forced to accept defeat and quit. And in the making of this counter narrative the operating force is the colonial insult and exploitation engineered by the colonizers. The concept of 'negritude' for example, explains Fanon's study of the decisive character of colonial pressure in the formation of the reactive impulse of nationalism. "Exalting whatever is black", Fanon says,

was the emotional if not the logical antithesis of that insult which the white man flung at humanity. This rush of negritude against the white man's contempt showed itself in certain spheres to be the one idea capable of lifting interdictions and anathemas. (212)

The impulse of reaction and resistance is a powerful one, especially when it is triumphant in removing and lifting up the interdictions and anathemas imposed by the colonizers. In and around its seedbed, nationalism did germinate in India, in Ireland and eventually bore fruits of liberation, even though, as Fanon warned earlier, some of them were sour and hollow, smelling strongly of racial, regional prejudice and offering mere, political rhetoric.

If Fanon concentrates on the reactive force of nationalism, Edward Said in his study of culture under the threat of imperialism, locates resistance and its crystallizing power in a new term 'nativism' which in his view, reinforces the imperial distinction of colonizer and colonized. The nativist impulse transcends the reactive phase and denotes the arrival of a special moment of self-awakening in which a search for self identity makes the nation pause and reflect about its own hidden and unknown treasures. Where it is exactly stored, is still unknown, but the search begins, first in the collective memory, then in lost heritage, and

remote resources of religion, culture, science, sports, language, history, nature and territory. Some of these resources indeed were not remote, but lack of awareness, knowledge and care on the one hand and mechanical habits of a materialist life imitated from and supplied by the colonizers, on the other, have turned the once known and familiar world into something foreign and alien. Nativism initiates exploration of those indigenous resources, and finally enables the community to stand upon its own feet and reveal to the world its unique blossoms and achieve nationhood, that legitimizes the right of self-assertion. Nativism thus promotes revivalism as it is conducive to, what Said in his book *Culture and Imperialism*, calls, “compelling but demagogic assertions about a native past, narrative or actuality that stands free from worldly time itself” (228). Said’s ideas of nativism in the Irish context refers to the celebration of the Celtic spirit and the sense of continuity with the Gaelic past. And it does more. Thus Mustafa, in his article, “*Revisionism and Revival: A Post Colonial Approach to Irish Cultural Nationalism*” explains the further implications of the theory of nativism:

In his analysis, a more liberated condition follows the nativist moment and differs from the later in being more pluralistic and hybrid. Clearly Said builds on the Fanonian notion of a divided colonial world in suggesting that such celebrations of essences or the past are prompted by colonial domination, but he specifically identifies nationalism’s reflectiveness in relation to identity. (39)

The ‘pluralist’ and ‘hybrid’ concept of native culture did figure in Irish nationalism and created further complications, especially in the early years of twentieth century , but this needs not make one forgetful of its positive contribution to the formation of nationalism by providing a steadfast impetus for revivalism. In Said’s words, “to become aware of one’s self as belonging to a subject people is the founding insight of anti-imperialist nationalism” (*Culture and Imperialism*, 214). This ‘founding insight’ led the native colonized in Ireland to

the next inquiry: who are we? and from there to the final demand of ‘Ireland for the Irish’, which, interestingly, is not born of a reflective, but reactive revivalism.

At this point, a vital and fundamental question crops up: does ‘reaction’ precede ‘reflection’ in nation formation? Do they occur simultaneously? Or recur continually gathering required momentum to replace one another? The final word of course, cannot be said here easily, as many more matters are involved in it, other than history. But an interesting model has been offered by Partha chatterjee, to illuminate this shadowy region. Leaving aside the intricacy of binaries, Chatterjee in his book *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, simply concentrates on what he calls ‘the domain of sovereignty’. Anticolonial nationalism, in his opinion, considers the structure of its community as divided into two major domains, the material and the spiritual:

The material is the domain of the ‘outside’, of the economy and of state-craft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. In this domain, then Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is the ‘inner’ domain bearing the ‘essential’ marks of cultural identity. The greater one’s success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one’s spiritual culture. (6)

Outwardly, this offers a critique of nationalism in India or Ireland, since he and scholars of Subaltern studies in general, view this political nationalist struggle as incapacitated by imperialist hegemonies of the colonizer and hence the emerging resistance, however effective and enticing it may be, is essentially derivative in nature. But, this of course, should not generate an inferiority complex , for as Said notes in *Culture and Imperialism* itself, “the colonial enterprise is a cooperative venture” (223). Despite the fact

that at the heart of imperialism one finds the central concept of colonizer and colonized, the imperial project indeed introduced modernity in the colonies and produced positive changes at least in the material domain. Still inferiority complex did matter and forced the nationalist leaders to invent indigenous means of resistance, like *ahinsa satyagraha* (non-violent struggle for truth) in India or *sinn finn* (We ourselves) in Ireland, in the external, political domain also. They worked hard but forgot that, however indigenous they might make their movements, the very idea of resistance was essentially a derivation, for it was built as a reaction upon the action of colonizing. In contrast to this, and here was the vortex of the argument, lay the spiritual domain, a site to excavate indigenous cultural resources and by dint of the creative force of reflection, proclaim native superiority over the colonizer's material culture. According to this theory, the derivative reaction of the community in the material domain may be seen as modeled upon imitation, but the domain of real sovereignty is preserved within, guarded by the passion and collective pride of the colonized and expressed by its poets, singers and other cultural activists. Thus, as Mustafa comments, "Chatterjee's designation of the domain of inside as the exclusive site of nationalist operations, then problematizes the mimetic formula and criticizes such approaches as Benedict Anderson's general characterization of non-European nationalisms as structures duplicating their Western models" (40).

It is easy to detect from above discussion the most important element of anticolonial nation formation, which is the impulse to project the nation as an exclusive entity, keeping sufficient *distance* and *difference* from the colonizers' stand and thereby opposing its imperialist hegemony. The exclusive identity is wounded and injured, in the loss of territory, religion, language and other similar external items, which however, can again be recovered. But the loss of chastity is a greater loss; the fatal penetration of the master's culture, pollutes the exclusive chastity of native culture and literally gives birth to a hybrid culture. The

moment resistance is imitated from the colonizer, it is regarded as a contamination in blood, but if it is unimitated, there is little hope to offer resistance at all. The culture of the colonized then comes under the threat of total absorption or having been swamped (Fanon 169) into the culture of the colonizer. Exposed to this double crisis, anticolonial nationalism concentrates on promoting and building on the exclusive difference of its identity by a steady move not only to violent reactionism but also to reflective revivalism. This is evident in history of Irish nationalism also, which sought to differentiate itself from British imperialism by reclaiming Gaelic culture. David Llyod in *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post Colonial Moment*, seeks to analyze this nationalist antagonism to urban Ireland, as originating in the “constitutive contradiction of a modernizing ideology forced to seek its authenticating difference from the imperial culture on which it remains dependent by way of an appeal to a rural and Gaelic culture already in decay” (92-93). The decay was a sign of shame and failure of the imitation in the materialist domain. But this very shame becomes an object of pride, the moment the argument shifts to cultural domain where poverty stands for purity and possibility. Irish anticolonial nationalism thus contests colonial domination, which asserts the principle of ‘material difference’ as a basis for its command and authority, by asserting its own cultural or rather ‘spiritual’ differences from the colonizers and consequently demands recognition as an independent entity.

Colonialism however, is bent on denying that recognition, lest anticolonial nationalism succeeds in transcending to nationhood. The nation has been defined in many ways, objective and subjective. The objective elements like language, ethnicity, religion, common history, territory and cultural traits work up to a point, but the problem is that they seldom match in perfect balance. One point or other, in different contexts, always takes lead to dominate over the rest. Such criteria are therefore marked by Eric Hobsbawm in *‘Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality’* as ‘fuzzy, shifting and

ambiguous' (6). The alternative subjective element again is inadequate by itself, since without the support of the objective elements it cannot get the right atmosphere to flourish. Thus the working definition of nation for Hobsbawm is "any sufficiently large body of people whose members regard themselves as members of a 'nation'" (8). Colonial rule, as Mustafa rightly detects, "was based on a denial of the rights of a subject nation to define itself as such" (42).

The history of this continual tug of war between denial and struggle to achieve the recognition of nationhood is so vague and cloudy that it is extremely difficult to locate the actual 'point of birth' of the nation. Only after the birth, from the shrill cry of the baby nation, one detects that a new chapter in its history has begun. The entire fact thus forces some scholars to arrive at a new concept that the birth of nation is after all, a product of communal imaginings. In late nineteenth century Ireland, this self imagining definitely provided a new impetus to the formation of nationalism, especially when politics failed, after the fall of Parnell, to provide new direction or dimension in national crystallization. The nation in Ireland, then, can comfortably be seen as an 'invention' of a self image by the community.

Here again a debate arises between 'invention' and 'discovery'. Benedict Anderson in *"Imagined communities: reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism"* takes side with 'invention' and considers nationality, nation-ness and even nationalism as 'cultural artefacts' which are born of the imaginings of the community and then 'build up' their 'emotional legitimacy' over time (4). Revivalism on the other hand speaks of exploring and regaining a resourceful past which the native people already possess. They had been unaware or forgetful of that rich past and the wealth of that heritage is now revived to ensure their reawakening. Reawakening leads to the unity of culture, not only among the various clans and sections of the colonized, but between the colonizer and colonized too, as well as between past and present. From unity of culture, the nation, more specifically, the hybrid

nation originates. During reawakening and after, during the formation of unity of culture, communities may, and in practice do, imagine and invent various formula, – after all, it is the phase of ‘reflection’, – but the principal source of consolidation is derived, not invented from the past. This can be exemplified in the contexts of both, Indian and Irish nationalism, where both Tagore and Yeats played an immensely important, revivalist role.

But revivalism may inspire a false discovery also, the revivalist with a specific propaganda or prejudice may concentrate to revive only part, not the whole, he may be selective to dig up only those issues which match to his intended model of nation making and thus ‘invent’ history which is but a subversion of the original totality. In fact similar charges have been raised against Yeats and other cultural nationalists in Ireland that the history they have constructed is merely romantic, false and mythical and the only purpose behind that construction is to legitimize a particular ‘imagining’ (Mustafa 43). Here ‘invention’ purposefully leads the native community to go back to a historical past, rich and glorious and to draw inspiration from there for further reflection and imagining. The attachment with the past is essential in another sense too, since it confirms the colonized and his history to be non derivative and originally different from the colonizer and his culture. This again has an interesting relevance to the case of Irish nationalism where the majority of the native populace sought to explore and revive the Gaelic past with which they easily identified themselves and which confirmed their ethnic distinction from the Anglo Irish community.

The models of Chatterjee and Anderson here meet together interestingly. To confirm its purity and difference in the spiritual/ cultural domain, which Chatterjee sees as the ‘domain of sovereignty’, the community revives its ethnic originality, draws inspiration from past feats of glory and builds upon that confidence through untiring reflection. But these reflections then turn out to be imaginings and they not only supply the missing elements of the ethnic history but ‘invent’ a set of communal obligations like patriotism, loyalty, duty, to

ensure continuity and legitimacy of the nationalist struggle. From these then, originate models and mechanisms to promote unity of culture, which is a derivative lesson and which needs to be accomplished in the external, materialist domain of political and economic development. Thus, contradictory pulls of maintaining difference from the colonizer in the spiritual domain and the need to utilize derivative lessons and supports from him in the material domain, ensure the establishment of a hybrid culture where various ethnic elements of the colonized and colonizer work together, and a whirlpool of cultural cross-currents is produced that often leads even to civil war.

Again this finds a unique relevance in the nationalist struggle of Ireland. The identity, 'Anglo-Irish' for instance, refers to the kind of hybrid culture that emerges out of colonial encounter in the country. By rejecting the polarization of 'modernity' and 'tradition' the revivalist, nationalist struggle accepts, what Mustafa calls, "the central dynamics of cultural decolonization" (44). It accepts 'industrialization and its material implications' but it also asserts its 'right to an exclusive cultural domain'. In fact, as Chatterjee also points out, accepting modernity does not block but intensifies resistance and mobilizes a counter hegemony based on indigenous traditions, as the native colonized more passionately rush to reclaim a heritage continually threatened by the colonizer's culture. But when through hybridity, the colonizer or its representative comes to dominate in the spiritual domain also, the real crisis of civil war begins, at least so it began in Ireland.

The validity of this political and cultural theory of nation formation in Ireland can easily be tested by an analysis of the concerned phases of Irish history. History provides the data and record of what actually happened. Political and cultural theories explain why and how did it happen so.

The history of Ireland marks it as a country, 'constantly invaded and resettled' (Welch 272), but the impetus for its search of national identity has been supplied chiefly by

its colonial subjugation to England which as early as in 1557, under Henry VIII wanted to incorporate the island into the realm of British control. What proved instrumental in this enterprise was, as Ian Lustick explains in his seminal study, *State-Building Failure in British Ireland & French Algeria*, “the implantation of British settlers into Ireland who were supposed to Anglicize the natives” (6-7). There were successive waves of these settlers until the eighteenth century, but interestingly, this could not legitimize the British rule among the Catholic majority. These settlers, who were Protestants and who turned into landlords, interrupted the process of the British co-option of the local elites and barred as well the native population from enjoying the political rights, so necessary for the arrival of enlightenment and emancipation in consequence. This harmed the interests of Britain also by blocking native loyalty which otherwise could have been redirected to the new central authority, thereby producing a political situation, conducive to the successful building of the empire (Lustick 8). The settlers rightly perceived, as the Protestant ascendancy would do later, that the native elites who had been Catholics themselves and who commanded the loyalty of the native majority of Catholics, were threats to their own, privileged ruling positions and economic and political interests (Lustick 18).

Hence, as Shirley Galloway rightly detects in his essay ‘*Irish Nationalism: Themes of Survival and Transcendence in Modern Irish Literature*’, in spite of periodic attempts by the central British Government to assimilate Ireland into the British Empire and almost equal willingness shown on the part of the native Irish elites to develop an eco-political alliance with Britain, the Protestant settlers “continually opposed and frustrated these efforts” (2). With support from Britain they succeeded in enacting laws in the eighteenth century that prevented Catholics from political participation and, as Lustick shows, made it quite impossible for the “descendants of Catholic landowners” to protect the family estate (32). Restrictions were drawn on Catholic landownership, education and enfranchisement, so that

proportionate growth of wealth and influence could be ensured for these settlers and their descendants, who eventually formed 'the Ascendancy' and introduced themselves by a new identity as Anglo-Irish community.

At the end of eighteenth century a resurgent Irish rebellion took place, which prompted the British government to go for complete and permanent union between Ireland and Britain through the 1800 Act of Union. But the accompanying promise of full emancipation for the Catholic majority could never be implemented due to the steadfast opposition of the Anglo-Irish settlers who were more interested to safeguard their higher status and privilege and never agreed to extend the full rights of British citizenship and corresponding advantages to the Irish Catholic majority (Lustick 36-7). As a result, though Britain finally and grudgingly conceded voting rights in 1829, the Catholics gradually came to realize that the solution of their problems lay primarily and exclusively in separation from Britain which would weaken their immediate enemy, the Anglo-Irish masters, by abolishing their supportive supply line. Thus nationalism was born in Ireland and began to solidify itself under the thunder of the slogan 'Ireland for the Irish'.

But if this analysis of Irish history sees the native Catholic majority as victimized under both British imperialism and Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy, it presents only one side of the coin; on the other side, the Anglo-Irish settlers also had many things to say. Lustick too, recognizes this, when he concludes that just as "the powerful influence of the settlers in [London] politics . . . prevented permanent incorporation by blocking treatment of the native inhabitants of peripheral territories as equal citizens of the state, their influence also insured that Ireland could not be disposed of in a straight forward way" (84). For indeed, it was these people who, as George Boyce records in his book *Nationalism in Ireland*, "often for their own ends – formulated and articulated Ireland's 'ancient historic rights'", they "not only provided political precedents and precepts for Irish nationalists; they also and

especially after 1890, helped give Ireland a distinctive cultural identity, a sense of the individuality of the Irish nation, and of its peculiar linguistic, social and racial characteristics” (228). Boyce recognizes that such leadership in Irish nationalist struggle the Anglo-Irish offered, both wittingly and unwittingly:

Wittingly, in the attempt made by some prominent Anglo-Irishmen to identify with and save Irish culture in the hope that it would provide a common ground for Irishmen of all political persuasions; and unwittingly, by the fact that the ‘colonial’ dominance of Ireland stood for what came to be regarded as an alien culture, against which the Irish identity must assert itself, and which it must absorb, or itself suffer absorption. The ‘battle of two civilizations’ was fought, not only between England and Ireland, but, and perhaps more fiercely, within Ireland. (228)

The paradox had its origin in their own identity. As new comers and conquerors, the Anglo Irish Protestant settlers destroyed much that was native, but as people who had come to stay and settle in Ireland, they preserved and valued much of that culture which otherwise would have disappeared. Many of them felt Ireland to be their mother land, and irritated upon the British imperial strategy of territorial encroachment and colonial oppression, they not only joined the Catholic rebellions but often provided leadership in these. True, some of them remained unionist, but the majority revolted. Boyce carefully explains their shifting allegiance and the positive impact it had on Irish resistance in general, from historical standpoint:

[They] sought to salvage what they could of Irish culture and offer it as a contribution to the contemporary European literary and scholarly world. Grattan’s Parliament was not, at least in any direct way, inspired by enthusiasm for the Celtic past, but the general glow of Irish nationalism encouraged an interest in the

Gaelic tradition, and helped Protestants feel that here was something in which they could be proud: an ancient literary, social and linguistic tradition that enabled Ireland and Irishmen to hold up their heads in the world a little higher even than they were normally disposed to do. The energies released by late eighteenth century nationalism were the background to the work of Sylvester O'Halloran, whose enthusiasm led to the foundation of the Royal Irish Academy in 1785, devoted to the study of 'science, polite literature, and antiquities' and Charlotte Brooke, whose *Reliques of Irish Poetry* were published in 1789, and Joseph Cooper Walker, who pursued antiquarian researches of considerable distinction. (229)

This helped Ireland not only to proceed to a cultural rebirth, but its success was more significant in the emergence of poets like Samuel Ferguson, Mongan, Allingham and Davis. Ferguson, as Boyce records, "sought to stimulate all Irishmen, especially Protestants, to take an interest in the history and antiquities of Ireland in order to develop a distinctively Irish contribution to literature" (229). Taste and discernment, not propaganda, were highlighted, and efforts were made to prove that Irish literature was a worthy brand of learning; it was something in which the Irishmen could take pride.

Such practice, no doubt produced a sense of patriotism, but still it was not overtly or adequately nationalist. It grew nationalist with Davis and his Young Ireland group, for whom the first priority was not 'literary standard' but Ireland's distinct and separate political identity. Davis's call was to "educate that you may be free" and it was the goal of freedom that took precedence over all other considerations (Boyce 231).

So far the cultural nationalist movement had been a predominantly Protestant movement, with little or no role played by the native Catholics. But Davisite influence did succeed in drawing a positive response from them. And it did more. Once the Catholic

majority joined the nationalist movement and aspired for emancipation, the Anglo-Irish, equally under threat of British domination now, after the 1800 Act of Union, came to arrange a unification of culture. Now their ambition was to arouse and provide leadership to the Catholic mass and use it as an organized force against the audacity of British imperialism. It is in this context that surging waves of nationalist emotion, almost like a gale, blew over Ireland and paved way for the arrival of poets like W.B. Yeats whose anticolonial stand has been aptly recognized by Edward Said in the essay '*Yeats and Decolonization*'. Michael Faherty elucidates Said's observations on Yeats:

Yeats's nationalism also served an anti-imperialist purpose, beginning where all postcolonial cultures do with an attempt to redefine Ireland against the imposing imperial power but eventually moving towards a postnationalist way of thinking that involves neither Ireland as it has been nor Irishness. (148)

Had the Anglo-Irish venture succeeded in that enterprise, Ireland could have achieved its political freedom from England without achieving a distinct nationhood for itself. For at home, the Anglo-Irish minority could still remain the masters, dominating over the Catholic native majority and relegating them to the farthest margins where their long aspired emancipation was supposed to be blocked in every possible way. That would have been indeed a journey against history and that could not occur. Its failure was ascertained by the failure of the 'Home Rule'.

When Davisite nationalism succeeded in involving the Catholic natives in the nationalist movement, it simultaneously passed the button to the hands of the politicians. Political nationalism did not want, at least in the early stages, to declare its complete separation from British imperialism. Emphasis was given rather to the redress of colonial exploitation which, with the aid of famine, affected the Irish natives in a most severe way. Home Rule raised considerable hope among them since, among many other things, it

demanded a right of the native peasant cultivator over the land. Immense popularity of home rule movement aroused Ireland so vehemently that all energy was directed towards its success and other fields of resistance, more or less dried up. J.S. Kelly notes the crisis in his essay, “*The Fall of Parnell and the Rise of Irish Literature: an Investigation*”:

The times, *United Ireland* observed in 1899, are highly unfavourable for the cultivation of the intellectual faculties of Irishmen, save in the direction of devising means of resisting naked tyranny. Once the political crisis was resolved, wrote Justin McCarthy in 1890, ‘the minds of Irishmen and women will begin to settle down and the lecture halls, the studies and the studios will be opened again’. (17)

Fall of Parnell, himself an Anglo-Irish Protestant, and failure of Home rule, however proved that national independence was still a far cry, and as such, there was no further excuse for postponing extra political activities – cultural , literary or artistic. Thus a new phase began in Irish history and its nationalism stepped into a new spiritual domain which contested the material and the political gain. Drawing inspiration from the glorious past and reclaiming the energy of folk and fairies, it prepared for a Revelation. The terrible beauty had to be born, though its cost was unknown then.

.....

B. From the Early Years to Home Rule and its Failure

The origin and development of Home Rule movement in Ireland has played an interesting part in the national struggle for independence, even though, gaining political power was its more immediate goal than formation of nationality or nationalist awareness (Mansergh 80-83). Of course it was not approved by the Empire. In 1833, Lord Salisbury, presented the argument that if the forces of nationalism and revolution were allowed to gain a victory in Ireland, a country at a stone throwing distance from England, the centre of the Empire, they must triumph at far away countries where British power was less consolidated. “Should Irish question be met, then the Empire would disintegrate ‘step by step’ as if set off by ‘a chain reaction’ ” (Curtis 427).

On the face of such strong opposition, Irish nationalism examined three alternative ways. At one extreme a partnership policy was advocated to secure for Ireland most of the advantages of self-government without sacrificing any of the benefits of British association. In the first Home Rule Conference of November 1873, Isaac Butt recognized the ‘true solution’ neither in ‘separation’ nor in ‘simple repeal’ which would be hopeless and injurious, but in the ‘federation of the Empire’ (cited in Brasted 87), where Ireland, as per the *Proceedings of the Home Rule Conference*, was supposed to enjoy a special privilege of an ‘imperial partner’.

But Buttite nationalism was soon rejected on the ground that it misrepresented the genuine feeling of the Irish people. Butt’s policy was one of conciliation, of convincing the English mind by reasoned argument and impeccable manners that Irish government could be safely devolved on Irish gentlemen. Obstruction and belligerency were always discussed and controversial issues were dubiously avoided for fear that the English leaders might take grievance not to consider the just claims of Ireland. But buttering could not advance the

demand of Home Rule and the concept of imperial partnership was soon rejected as ‘ideologically unsuitable and politically bankrupt’ (Brasted 88).

The impetus came from American Fenians and their most distinctive institution Clan na Gael, which demanded complete separation from England, chiefly on anti-imperialist, humanitarian grounds. Patrick Ford, the chief advocate of this second wave of nationalist struggle, preached to Irish nationalists that if they sought justice on the principle of self – determination, “they must learn to apply it universally rather than merely parochially” (Brasted 88). In an article in the columns of the very popular newspaper *The Irish World* (12th August, 1877), Ford considered nationality to be absolute but opined that it could overcome its limitation through a respect for world humanity, the seed-bed of internationalism: “If the people of Ireland have a right to their country, the people of India have as just a claim to theirs; if it is wrong to plunder the Irish, it is also wrong to plunder the Hindoos”.

Ford recognized the Empire, not only as the chief enemy of nationality, but in biblical terms, as ‘a work of the devil’, ‘a system of diabolism’, which intended to suck blood everywhere.

The immediate effect of Ford’s nationalist gospels on American Fenians was to prepare them to strike England at her crisis hour with an uprising in Ireland. British Empire was seen as ‘a vast agglomeration of hostile races’ and it was decided that while England would be distracted by military engagement, at a number of weak points in her Empire, Ireland could sue for independence (Brasted 90).

But though it roared much, the cloud rained little. Numerous plans of ‘armed insurrections’ were devised but it was not easy to actualize them and nothing came out to advance national struggle, in reality. Russia and Spain, the two countries from where military assistance was particularly sought, were not convinced that home ground of Ireland was sufficiently prepared with a strong nationalist feeling and a common antagonism to the Empire.

Imperial dissolution having been proved as much an impossible project as imperial partnership, a third alternative was required for Ireland at this moment, to carry forward its nationalist struggle. This was provided by Charles Stuart Parnell. In essence Parnellism represented a compromise between the flagrant imperial perspectives of Butt and the frantic anti-English approach of American Fenians. It accepted that the Empire might remain intact, but only with the condition that it would be a commonwealth of free and equal nations where Ireland, however, would play a leading role, as the Irish Home rulers, by their significant presence in the House of Commons were to be regarded as “the natural representatives and spokesmen of the unrepresented nationalities of the Empire” (Brasted 92).

Home Rule under this ‘New Departure’ strategy incidentally got the support of another great figure, who from an enemy camp, exerted supreme influence in its chequered career. The man was William Ewart Gladstone, who considered Ireland much sinned against than sinning and so wanted her to stand on her own feet. Himself a conforming Protestant, Gladstone nevertheless had a broad sympathy with the nonconformists who bulked large in the Liberal party, and could carry them with him in his understanding that “the establishment of a Protestant church in a predominantly Catholic country, with all the endowments and revenues that the establishment brings with it, was an injustice” (Fry 245).

A census, taken in Ireland in 1861, recorded that out of a population of 5.75 million, Catholics accounted for 4.5 million and members of established Protestant Church, a mere seventy thousand. Over half of them lived in Ulster; in Leinster they comprised 11 percent of the total population, in Munster 05 percent and in Connacht 04 percent. When Gladstone put these figures before the British electorate and explained Catholic grievances, the Liberals were brought back to Parliament with a sizeable majority.

In 1869 Gladstone’s bill for the disestablishment of Church of Ireland was passed. All the properties, land, buildings and tithes were confiscated by the State, one half was set

aside to provide annuities for the clergy and ecclesiastical officials, the other to be administered for the benefit of the people of Ireland (Fry 246). Much church land was to be sold. But instead of conventional transactions with the land lord section, Gladstone incorporated provisions in the Act which enabled Church tenants to purchase their holdings with the help of mortgages given at a fixed 04 percent interest. Over the next ten years, out of eight thousand four hundred tenants, more than six thousand took advantage of the offer, thus making Irish Church Act supply a powerful impetus for a comprehensive Irish Land Act.

Meanwhile J.C. Bigger, a Belfast pork butcher, newly elected to Parliament, introduced a new technique of obstruction in the House of Commons that blocked and disrupted all other official Parliamentary works. Parnell, whose grandfather fought as an American admiral against the British in 1812, and who drew a virulently anti-British impulse from his mother, took Bigger's Parliamentary obstruction technique to perfection and turned it into an art.

In 1877 the potato crop failed. The people of Connacht, who had been particularly dependant on potato, found themselves starving. In 1878 the potato failed again. Peasants already under severe debts to banks and money-lenders could not pay either debt or rent. The number of evictions grew high. Whereas four hundred families had been evicted in 1877, the number crossed a thousand in 1878 -79 and over two thousand in 1880. Taking an average of six persons in a family, more than twelve thousand people had been rendered destitute in that single year (Fry 251). Michael Davit, a Fenian, freshly released after seven years of toiling servitude in English prison, harnessed the starving peasants of county Mayo into a Land League, that was supposed to protect them from eviction and lead them finally to land ownership. Parnell, intent to use the pressure of Land league in the cause of Home Rule, addressed and won the support of the peasants by a passionate speech.

In 1880, the conservative Government fell, Gladstone returned to Power, but forced by Parnell, who brought sixty one Home Rulers with him to the House of commons, he had to present a second Land Reform Act in an under prepared condition, without blocking the loopholes. House of Commons passed the bill, but as it was apprehended, the House of Lords rejected it outright.

Ireland protested. But Protestant landlords went on evicting the starving tenants. The Land League stood by them and set up courts to deal with disputes. Parnell directed the peasants to a new form of passive resistance. “When a man takes a farm from which another has been evicted”, he said “you must show him on the road side when you meet him, you must show him in the streets of the town, you must show him severely alone, by putting him into a sort of moral Coventry, by isolating him from the rest of his kind as if he were a leper of old, you must show him your detestation of the crime he has committed” (cited in Fry 254). The tactic was applied first on captain Charles Boycott, an evicting land agent in Mayo. As no local labour agreed to help him in harvesting, he brought fifty Orange men from Ulster and the British army provided seven thousand troops, one sixth of the garrison in Ireland, to protect them. When Boycott went to Dublin, he was refused admission by the city hoteliers. His nerve could not endure anymore and he left Ireland altogether for a while, his name being notoriously immortalized.

Gladstone with reluctance had to approve two Coercion bills to control anarchy. But as a true Liberal he introduced a much more improved Land reform bill, that emphasized on three Fs, fair rules, fixity of tenure and tenant’s freedom to sell his right of occupancy. But the Irish were suspicious of some hidden provisions protecting the interest of the Landlords’. The atmosphere was already embittered by the Coercion Acts. It demanded its toll.

The government needed Parnell’s support to make the Act a success, but Parnell opposed Gladstone. He feared that a satisfied peasantry could lose interest in his real mission

of Home Rule. The Chief secretary W.E. Forster arrested Parnell under Coercion Act and put him into Kilmainham jail. After six months the Kilmainham treaty was signed between Parnell and Gladstone where the former agreed to assist to bring back rule of order in the country and also to secure acceptance of the Land Act in return of an amendment to protect suffering tenants, a relaxation of the Coercion Acts and his own release. On second may he left Kilmainham, crossed to England to appear in the House of Commons and on sixth, met Davitt, back to London from Portland, where the later served a similar term of imprisonment under the Coercion Act. On the same day, the new Chief Secretary, Lord Fredrick Cavendish, and his under Secretary, T.H. Burke, were stabbed to death, just outside the Viceroy Lodge.

In October 1882, the suppressed Land League was superseded by the Irish National League. The party cut an influential impact and in the 1885 General Election, Parnell managed eighty five members from Ireland, and one more joined his group from Liverpool. The Liberals required the support of just that magic number of 86 to form the Government. In 1886, Gladstone, with the support from Irish Home Rule party formed Government and prepared his first Home rule Bill for Ireland. The bill failed. Englishmen still considered the Irish as enemies, especially after the Phoenix Park murders. Gladstone took the issue to the people in a general election where Parnell kept his eighty-five seats intact but the Liverpool seat was lost and the Liberals could not get the mandate.

The Conservative Government did nothing to extend Home Rule, but when in 1887, *The Times* opened a vicious campaign against Parnell, accusing him particularly for treason of Phoenix park murder and when in 1889, at the end of a government inquiry, it was proved that *the Times* itself made conspiracy against Parnell by forging the letter on which accusation was based, the popularity of the Home Rule leader reached climax.

Anticlimax, however, followed quickly. The divorce petition of Captain William O'Shea, an Irish Home Rule member of Parliament, revealed that Parnell had maintained an

adulterous relation with his wife for a long time. Gladstone tried to save Parnell initially, but with increasing pressure upon himself from his own Liberal party members, who refused to support Home rule under the leadership of so unclean a man as Parnell, he gave Irish Home Rulers an ultimatum to choose a new leader. Parnell, defeated by a vote of 45 against 29 among his colleagues, went for a split of the party (Fry 260) and Ireland lost all hopes for the third alternative too. Parnell married Mrs. O'Shea in 1891, worked hard to come back in three by-elections, but all his nominees lost their battle and the leader had mud flung to his face. His body could not endure anymore, and he died, worn out at the age of forty five.

Gladstone did introduce a second Home Rule bill in February, 1893, but as everybody knew, the Lords rejected it again by an overwhelming majority of 419 votes against a mere 41. Ireland was desperately in search of a way out and it came up through the literary revival, to add an interestingly anti-imperialist, anti-materialist, spiritual fervor to the nationalist struggle.

.....

C. De-Anglicization after Parnell

Irish nationalism, after the fall of Parnell, was led by Catholic resistance. It concentrated first and foremost, on the need of 'De -Anglicization' of the country. This found expression in three exciting movements, each having firm theoretical roots in the proposed cultural backfire that aimed to weaken the tight grip of England on the island. The first one was the Irish language movement, the second one was the establishment of Gaelic Athletic Association and the third one was Irish Literary Revival.

The basic foundation of these movements was an urge as well as rising confidence among Irish nationalist leaders, to introduce a new philosophy that could be used as a testament in the cultural and national battle. It was supplied and elaborately explained by Douglas Hyde in a lecture entitled "*The necessity of De-Anglicising Ireland*" which was delivered before the Irish National Literary Society in Dublin, on 25th Nov, 1892. At the very beginning, Hyde assured that 'de-Anglicising' was not to be taken in a narrow sense, it did not intend to discard "what is best in the English people, for that would be absurd, but rather to show the folly of neglecting what is Irish, and hastening to adopt, pell-mell, and indiscriminately, everything that is English, simply because it is English" (1).

Hyde , first of all, recognized the problem which, in his view, was responsible to lead Ireland to 'present debasement':

I shall endeavour to show that this failure of the Irish people in recent times has been largely brought about by the race diverging during this century from the right path, and ceasing to be Irish without becoming English. I shall attempt to show that with the bulk of the people this change took place quite recently, much more recently than most people imagine, and is, in fact, still going on. I should also like to call attention to the illogical position of men who drop their own

language to speak English, of men who translate their euphonious Irish names into English monosyllables, of men who read English books, and know nothing about Gaelic literature, nevertheless protesting as a matter of sentiment that they hate the country which at every hand's turn they rush to imitate. (1)

Hyde did not conceal his bewilderment at the obvious paradox in common Irish day to day living:

It has always been very curious to me how Irish sentiment sticks in this half-way house – how it continues to apparently hate the English, and at the same time continues to imitate them; how it continues to clamour for recognition as a distinct nationality, and at the same time throws away with both hands what would make it so. . . . you ask, why should we wish to make Ireland more Celtic than it is – why should we de-Anglicise it at all?

I answer because the Irish race is at present in a most anomalous position, imitating England and yet apparently hating it. How can it produce anything good in literature, art, or institutions as long as it is actuated by motives so contradictory? (1 – 2)

Directly from the point blank range, he fired the cultural bullet and questioned the validity of the bargain that is lured to buy a shallow, material prosperity from England, at the high cost of forgetting the family roots, destroying the glorious past of the country and eating up its rich, vibrant heritage:

Let us suppose for a moment – which is impossible – that there were to arise a series of Cromwells in England for the space of one hundred years, able administrators of the Empire, careful rulers of Ireland, developing to the utmost our national resources, whilst they unremittingly stamped out every spark of

national feeling, making Ireland a land of wealth and factories, whilst they extinguished every thought and every idea that was Irish, and left us, at last, after a hundred years of good government, fat, wealthy, and populous, but with all our characteristics gone, with every external that at present differentiates us from the English lost or dropped; all our Irish names of places and people turned into English names; the Irish language completely extinct; the O's and the Macs dropped; our Irish intonation changed, as far as possible by English schoolmasters into something English; our history no longer remembered or taught; the names of our rebels and martyrs blotted out; our battlefields and traditions forgotten; the fact that we were not of Saxon origin dropped out of sight and memory, and let me now put the question – How many Irishmen are there who would purchase material prosperity at such a price? It is exactly such a question as this and the answer to it that shows the difference between the English and Irish race. (2)

To fight back this silent death of a nation, even before its complete blossom, the weapon Hyde chiefly relied upon was language. Irish language, he assured his countrymen, would play an instrumental role in their collective resistance:

I have no hesitation at all in saying that every Irish-feeling Irishman, who hates the reproach of West-Britonism, should set himself to encourage the efforts, which are being made to keep alive our once great national tongue. The losing of it is our greatest blow, and the sorest stroke that the rapid Anglicisation of Ireland has inflicted upon us. In order to de-Anglicise ourselves we must at once arrest the decay of the language. We must bring pressure upon our politicians not to snuff it out by their tacit discouragement merely because they do not happen

themselves to understand it. We must arouse some spark of patriotic inspiration among the peasantry who still use the language. . . . (5)

Along with the language, Hyde knew, the support of a befitting literary movement was also required to ensure positive results. Hence he emphasized the potential power of the literay revival to carry forward the essential spirit of ‘de-Anglicising’:

Every house should have a copy of Moore and Davis. In a word, we must strive to cultivate everything that is most racial, most smacking of the soil, most Gaelic, most Irish, because in spite of the little admixture of Saxon blood in the north-east corner, this island is and will ever remain Celtic at the core, far more Celtic than most people imagine. . . . (8)

Like a true and experienced nationalist, Hyde picks up here, towards the climax of his lecture, the racial line to win back his target audience. He expresses his strong dislike to see the Irish merely as a race of blind imitators:

On racial lines, then, we shall best develop, following the bent of our own natures; and, in order to do this, we must create a strong feeling against West-Britonism, for it – if we give it the least chance, or show it the smallest quarter – will overwhelm us like a flood, and we shall find ourselves toiling painfully behind the English at each step following the same fashions, only six months behind the English ones; reading the same books, only months behind them; taking up the same fads, after they have become stale there, following them in our dress, literature, music, games, and ideas, only a long time after them and a vast way behind. We will become, what, I fear, we are largely at present, a nation of imitators. . . . (8)

The Irish language movement, that strengthened the demand of “Ireland for the Irish”, did not evaporate after Hyde, but was powerfully taken forward by his followers, notable among them, D.P. Moran and James Connolly.

Moran expressed his ideas in several contemporary news papers, and these appeared in a collected form in his book *The Philosophy of Irish Ireland*. Insistent that "the Gael [was] the matrix of the Irish people," throughout his career, Moran maintained that any commentary on Ireland must start with an affirmation of the foundational importance of the Irish language (5). He linked such assertions to the historical importance of religion and argued that definitions of nationality must recognize the coterminous existence of Catholicism and Gaelicization in an Irish setting (6). Such principles, by implication, ruled out the role of the Protestant Irish within the nation; they were, rather, assigned the status of "the English who happened to be born in Ireland" (7). In Moran's argument Protestants could never be truly Irish, regardless of acts of apostasy or cultural repudiation; they could never fully participate in the life of the nation, no matter how they might learn to speak or write Irish; and they would always be adjudged alien by so-called "thoroughgoing Irish" considerations (8).

In his book “*Socialism and Nationalism*” James Connolly on the other hand, stressed on the crushing force of capitalism, that in his view was responsible for the crushing of Irish culture and language:

You cannot teach starving men Gaelic, and the treasury of our national literature will and must remain lost forever to the poor wage-slaves who are contented by our system of society to toil from early morning to late at night for a mere starvation wage. Therefore, I say to our friends of the Gaelic movement—your proper place is in the ranks of the Socialist Republican Party, fighting for the abolition of this accursed social system which grinds us down in such a manner; which debases the character and lowers the ideals of our people to such a fearful

degree, that to the majority of our workers the most priceless manuscript of ancient Celtic lore would hold but a secondary place in their esteem beside a rasher of bacon. (345)

Connolly sought assistance from all the members of Irish lower and lower middle class people, who by historical reasons happened to be the Catholic majority, “ to secure to all our fellow-countrymen, a free, full and happy life”, so that “all the noble characteristics of our race [and Irish language being chief of them] will have full opportunity to expand and develop” (346).

Yeats in his turn, answered back all these theories and proposals as he met and cut his way through them in his career. Those are to be discussed in their proper contexts. But one thing is obvious that as intolerance and muscle power gradually came to the forefront, the path to achieve ‘unity of culture’ which Hyde so passionately dreamt of, was discarded and Irish cultural politics gathered an extremist voice that increasingly sought to become rough, rigid and radical.

.....

D. The Gaelic Revival: GAA

The aim of the Gaelic revival movement spearheaded by the League (1893) was to give a sense of Irishness back to the people. Along with language, athletics and sports were identified as important fields to motivate and reshape popular culture, and the native athletic uprising preceded the language movement. The man who contributed most to this enterprise and helped to develop Irish athletics, games and sports distinctively was Michael Cusack (1847–1907). A native of Carron, Co. Clare, and himself an athlete in his youth, Cusack was very much interested in Gaelic culture, language and literature. He saw that Irish games were in danger of dying out. Athletics in particular, witnessed a decline in participants as the athletes were then under the control of the English Amateur Athletics Association. Rugby was seen as typically English and was getting popular in Irish towns. Football, also popular in towns, was thought to be more like English soccer than the traditional ‘Gaelic’ football. Hurley, a version of hurling played in Dublin, was more like hockey than hurling. Cusack wanted to revive Irish games and promote an Irish Ireland. He wrote in the *Freeman’s Journal* in 1885 about his plan to ‘nationalize and democratize sport in Ireland’. Initially he worked to establish a Dublin Hurling Club in December 1882. When it failed under the pressure of opposition, he founded another club in its place, the Metropolitan Hurling Club, in December 1883. This was the first club to be affiliated to the later Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA).

Cusack now concentrated on founding a national organization to preserve Irish games, and published anonymous articles about this in nationalist newspapers. On 11th October 1884, the papers published his article “*A Word about Irish Athletics*” where he appealed to the Irish people to reject English sports and customs, which he described as ‘imported and enforced’. He believed they would destroy Irish nationality. He apprehended that Irish people were abandoning their sports and activities, chiefly for two reasons: they

were badly affected by the terrible Famine of 1846-52 which led them to dire poverty, and they were uprooted from their native culture by English laws, which forced them 'back to their cabins'. Cusack urged them to come out and play distinctively Irish games. He felt they would improve their physical condition and morale. This would also discourage Anglicization, give people an interest in Irish culture and traditions, and stimulate the formation of nationality.

A few days after, a man named Maurice Davin , himself a talented and successful international athlete, wrote to the papers supporting Cusack's ideas and he declared he was willing to help establish and run a new sporting organization. Cusack and Davin joined hands and through the columns of the popular news paper, *The United Ireland*, called for a meeting on 1st November 1884, to discuss the future of sports in Ireland and the establishment of a society to promote national games such as hurling.

At the first meeting of what eventually became the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), a resolution was taken on general agreement to request Dr Croke, Archbishop of Cashel, Charles Stewart Parnell, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, and Michael Davitt, head of the Land League, to become patrons of their organization. All agreed to be associated with the new organisation. A second meeting was held in the Victoria Hotel, Cork, on 27th December 1884. It passed a resolution that the governing body of the GAA was to consist of the officers already elected, the committee of the National League, and two representatives from every athletic club in the country. The nationalist MP, William O'Brien, offered the GAA space in his newspaper, *United Ireland*, for weekly articles and notices.

At another important meeting, held at Hayes's Hotel, Thurles, on 17th January 1885, rules were drawn up to regulate sports. It was decided to establish a club in every parish in the country, and special attention was paid to promote national integrity through membership of the GAA. The GAA held its first official social function at the end of January 1885 in the

Ancient Concert Rooms, Dublin, to commemorate the Scottish poet, Robert Burns. This sporting and literary festival was intended to bring Irish and Scottish ‘Celts’ together, and thereby to spread and popularize Celtic sports and culture in the countries. Alarmed by the rising influence of the Association, the British administration however, sent report to London that the GAA was ‘a thinly masked Fenian conspiracy’.

The Government interference, and various types of organized disputes in the GAA could not destroy the general enthusiasm for sports that sprung up along with it. The Association continued to grow at an impressive rate. A report claimed that the membership was then over 50,000, only three years after its foundation. Hurling and football matches were held all over the country in the summer and autumn of 1887 in preparation for the All-Ireland competition. Although the final did not take place that year, it was clear that Ireland was gaining strength slowly but steadily in its roots and popular culture was ripening fast to get integrated to the tune of rising nationalism.

.....

E. W. B. Yeats, Celtic Revival and Unity of Culture

The Gaelic Revival movement intended to call back and glorify Irish identity, Irish race and Irish culture. It owed much to the groundwork of scholars and antiquarians—George Petrie, John O’Donovan, Eugene O’Curry, William Reeves, Whitley Stokes, William Maunsell Hennessy and others—who had investigated the literature and antiquities of Ireland. The work of some of these had been popularized in the 1840s by Thomas Davies but later chiefly by Standish James O’Grady (1846–1928) who in his two-volumed *History of Ireland* (1878–80), translated the early mythological and heroic tales of Ireland and inspired a new generation of writers and poets about the unknown treasure. There originated numerous cultural clubs and societies in late nineteenth-century Ireland to participate in the rising, but the formation of the Gaelic League in July 1893, led the cultural movement to a climax.

In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon observes that it is difficult to have a distinct and separate national culture without having a distinct and separate nation: “. . . in the colonial situation, culture, which is doubly deprived of the support of the nation and the state, falls away and dies. The condition for its assistance is therefore national liberation and the Renaissance of the state” (197).

From this Fanon makes the link between cultural nationalism and the violent struggle for freedom in colonized societies. Between 1890 and 1920, the selected time zone of this study, Ireland passed through the process. In their desperate struggle, the Irish Irelanders developed a deep-seated intolerance for Britain and all things British, but their immediate target was the Anglo-Irish community which with its unaltered allegiance to Protestantism and English language could never be assimilated into native culture. The Gaelic leaders clearly saw that the nation formation process had reached its last lap in Ireland and they were determined to establish their cultural and political authority over their

philistine compatriots. Denying the Protestant role in Irish nationalist struggle, D.P.Moran for example declared in the popular Irish news paper, *The Leader* (August 10, 1901), that “the Irish nation is de facto a Catholic nation”. In his *Philosophy of Irish Ireland*, he examined the political oxymoron ‘non-Catholic nationalism’ and specifically inquired “whether a Protestant could ever be declared national”. His finding was that since “he does not understand Ireland, the Protestant cannot be considered Irish” (65).

W.B. Yeats arrived in the arena of Irish nationalist politics at this crisis hour, when in the background some important changes had come or had been coming:

- a) Parnell fell and Home rule was a lost hope.
- b) Douglas Hyde called for de-Anglicization and revival of Gaelic.
- c) Catholic middle class was rising to become the chief force of resistance.
- d) Anglo-Irish Protestants were fast losing their grounds and command in Irish politics.

Yeats (1865-1937) was born in a Protestant family in County Sligo in the West of Ireland. He did not learn and never could use the Gaelic language. His father wanted to make him a painter, he became a poet. But influenced early by John O’ Leary, his mentor, Maud Gonne, his lady love and Young Ireland Society, he joined the nationalist movement and played a significant role in it for a considerable period of time.

In Ireland’s nationalist struggle, Yeats recognized his position clearly and distinctly as an Anglo-Irish poet and behaved accordingly. He accepted and emphasized the claim that Ireland should highlight and glorify the true Irish spirit only, and himself took a leading part in the cultural and literary movement, known as Celtic revival.

In 1859, Earnest Renan, in his introduction to *The Poetry of the Celtic Races* found the Celtic race as “having its own original way of feeling and thinking and that no other could equal its genius for penetrative notes that go to the very heart” (viii). Although he credited

these people with pride, charming softness, reserve and infinite delicacy of feeling, Renan considered the Celts as representing their instinctive weakness which never had any “aptitude for political life” (xi). Lacking manliness and progressive instinct of the people of other European nations, the Celts in Renan’s judgement, appeared to be a romantic and politically ineffectual people, stuck by choice, in an unworldly way of life, hoping for a miracle to allow them to stay there. But Renan himself could not discard the possibility of the arrival of miracle: “Who shall say what in our own times has fermented in the bosom of the most stubborn, the most powerless of nationalities?” (xxi)

Matthew Arnold, in his *Study of the Celtic Literature* (1866) recognizes the views of Renan and in fact, carries them forward. He claims a brotherhood with the Celts and adopts the Celts’ characteristics as part of his own heritage. They, according to him, include “a lively personality – keenly sensitive to joy and sorrow, quick perception, warm emotion, a peculiar and intimate feeling of nature and the life of nature” (28). He goes further and intends to locate the reason behind that nature:

The passion for nature comes from the mystery of it, imbuing it with charm and magic. The imaginativeness is a vigorous defense against the harshness of reality and the melancholy comes from something about the Celt that cannot be accounted for but is defiant and titanic. (39)

Even though the Celts had been “sentimental, airy and unsubstantial”, Arnold in his study, considers them sociable, hospitable, eloquent and admirable (31) . He expects England to renew and revive its cultural band with Ireland by introducing Chairs of Celtic studies so that “we might reunite ourselves with our own better mind and with the world through science” (47).

Yeats takes his cue from both Renan and Arnold and with an astonishing maturity focuses early on the chief Irish characteristics as means to build on and consolidate the composite culture of Irish nationalism. Marie C.E. Burns, in her essay "*The Celtic Revival*" elaborately analyzes Yeats's stand:

Yeats defends the Celtic temperament. Its leaning towards the mysticism is as old as time itself. That it features so in the imaginative Celtic literature is an affirmation that these works are in keeping with folk traditions, all of which delight in the ethereal nature of unbounded and immortal things. His defense needs no flights of fancy. "Surely if one goes far enough into the woods there one will find all that one is seeking". In merely discussing a work of Gaelic poetry, Yeats manages to convey the art with which he is endowed. Does not 'dreams withering in the winds of time' evoke an appealing melancholy?

It is from this emotion that Yeats believes all art emanates. The Celtic movement, with its abundance of Gaelic legends . . . [was to] stir the imagination and emotions of the world, a world which needs a new intoxication to counteract the rationalism and materialism of the previous two centuries. Yeats envisages the Irish legends being an inspiration for the art of the twentieth century. (5-6)

Yeats relied upon this essential spirit of Irishness to wage war against the English and European materialism which he interpreted as the 'despotism of fact' and hated as 'abstract meditation'. To him these were the chief enemies of human civilization, and he exposed them in the essay '*The Celtic Element in Literature*':

The Celtic passion for nature comes more from a sense of her 'mystery' than of her 'beauty', and it adds 'charm and magic' to nature, and the Celtic

imaginativeness and melancholy are alike ‘a passionate, turbulent, indomitable reaction against the despotism of fact’. (1)

Yeats assures in the essay that he wants to restore Celtic elements in order to test “where they are helpful and where they are hurtful”. His fear was that the enemy might root up “our rose garden and plant a cabbage garden instead” (1). Incurribly romantic as he had been, it matched his character well to adorn with myth, dream, folk and fairy, the “spiritual domain” which had been relevant to him in its literal meaning too. But that of course, did not interfere with his realistic and practical sense. This he expressed in his steadfast adherence to English language as the most useful means to expose the treasury of Irish myths, legends, folklore and history. Gaelic in modern Ireland had already lost its appeal. Only 18% of Irish population was recorded as Irish speaking in 1881. Yeats keenly observed that the advocates of Gaelic language, including Hyde and Moran, expressed their valuable opinions of de-Anglicization, in English after all, as it could reach the maximum number of Irish people, their target audience. Yeats offered the example of America, which created its literature according to its own very different form of culture and pointed out that the use of English language could not mar its individual character. By selecting English as the medium of expression, Yeats intended to free Irish nationalism from its miserable confinement to Ireland only and wanted it to get European and world recognition.

Under the surface, his defense of English, helped Yeats also to secure the approval of the Anglo-Irish people, who had been mostly English speaking and whose contribution to Irish nationalism Yeats counted as no less important than that of the native Catholics. With his friends and companions like Maud Gonne, Lady Gregory, J.M. Synge, Douglas Hyde, Edward Martyn, George Russell, Lionel Johnson, Arthur Symons and many others, coming from both the Protestant and Catholic sections, he introduced Irish literary movement and later, the Irish National Theatre movement where his chief mission was to weave for his

country a unity of culture. In that enterprise, he was often brutally attacked, savagely opposed, terribly wounded and fanatically condemned, but he never gave up, rather with support from only a few friends continued his struggle to unify the binary marks of Irish identity like native – settler, Irish – Ascendancy, Catholic – Protestant, Gaelic – Anglo-Irish and so on. Thus he became the chief contributor to the formation of the spiritual domain of Irish nationalism. The Easter Rising of 1916 puzzled him no doubt and the civil war thereafter definitely forced him to reconsider his position and reconstruct his response. But the worth of the role he played in Ireland’s national emancipation can be grasped even from an analysis of his major literary works, written between 1890 and 1922.

.....