

From Dalit Struggles to Irish Defiance: Linguistic and Theological Hegemony as subversive tools of Marginalisation in the Dalit Experience of Himachal Pradesh and Irish Literary Resistance

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Abstract

This paper investigates the manifestation of linguistic and theological hegemony by providing the parallel analysis between internal cultural domination in Himachal Pradesh through Sanskritised divine tradition and external cultural colonial domination in Ireland through British Anglicisation. Through incorporation of postcolonial and subaltern framework, the study explores how religious orthodoxy and linguistic imposition have corroborated hierarchical power, subdued subaltern voices, and shaped cultural memory. Cultural hegemony does not operate through political, economic and military ascendancy but through controlling belief, ritual, language and divine system which becomes the dominant form and processes of representation. In Himachal Pradesh and Ireland the hegemonic ideologies leverage these form and processes to exclude, marginalise and subdued subaltern voices. The primary objective of this study is to focus on Dalit experience in Himachal Pradesh where Sanskritised language and divine tradition are substantiated caste based exclusion. Likewise, in Ireland, colonial English is subjugated indigenous Gaelic traditions and marginalised native cultural identities. Hence, the paper examines how linguistic and cultural hegemony become a significant part of marginalisation showcasing a parallel study of two countries. Through a detailed and comprehensive comparative lens, the research analyses how cultural hegemony, whether internal (caste) colonisation in Shimla (Himachal Pradesh) is sustained by Sanskritised divine tradition and ritualistic power or external (colonial) colonisation in Ireland is operated by subjugating Gaelic tradition, silences subaltern voices, and how literature and oral traditions become significant medium of resistance to such domination.

Keywords: Hegemony, Cultural Domination, Colonial Domination, Sanskritised Language, British Anglicisation, Gaelic Tradition, Dalit.

Introduction

The French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser and the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci provide the most appropriate and viable definition of hegemony. Gramsci proposes the definition of hegemony through his theory of cultural hegemony the reference of which he mentioned in his prison notebooks, is largely displayed his belief that hegemony is "the cultural, moral, and ideological leadership or dominance exercised by a ruling class, not just through force or coercion, but through consent." However, Althusser defends hegemony through his theory of Ideological State Apparatuses suggesting that "the operation of Ideological State Apparatuses that secure the dominance of the ruling class reproduces the conditions of production."

Religion and language occupy a prominent position in human society and are often considered as most notable institutions of shaping culture and morality. Human life is widely

influenced by psycho-socio and cultural factor, among them language and religion are the most notable institutions in human world. Both play an integral part to the development of the societies which not only pave the way for communication but also constitute rituals, traditions and ethics. However, when these two institutions are determined by hegemonic powers they become instrument of marginalisation and social exclusion.

The present research tries to probe into how theological and linguistic hegemony serves as an instrument of marginalisation with respect to two gigantic different geographical and historical countries named Himachal Pradesh and Ireland. The study explores the internal (caste) cultural colonisation of Dalit through Sanskritised divine tradition and ritualistic power in Himachal Pradesh and the external (colonial) cultural exploitation of the Irish people, their Gaelic language and culture by the British. The paper provides a detailed and comprehensive study on how linguistic and theological hegemony leverage to use this as tools to marginalised the subaltern, outlining a comparative analysis between the Dalit experience (lower strata of Varna Aashram) in Himachal Pradesh and a blatant indictment of Irish literary defiance to colonial subjugation in Ireland. In the present research, an attempt will be made to justify the topic with regard to two writers one from Himachal Pradesh and other from Ireland outlining the special reference made by hegemony in their studies.

S. R. Harnot, is an eminent and distinguished Dalit Hindi writer from Himachal whose works offer sharp criticism on caste based discrimination, environmental concern and socio-cultural evil of the Himalayan region. His writing reveals a strong voice against upper caste hegemony which is the solid document of intersection of language, religion and caste that determined rural life of Himachal. Brian Friel, on the other side is an Irish playwright whose work successfully dismantles the linguistic imperialism and expresses himself along the side of his native Gaelic culture. The present study conclusively confesses how the writings of two reveal marginalised communities resistance and indignation through literature. Although both authors are studied and viewed in disparate geographical and historical context yet their writing serve as a powerful vehicle exposing how language and religion are employed to maintain systems of power.

The dominant powers in either country have used this linguistic and theological hegemony to suppress marginal and have been beautifully portrayed through treatment of Dalit experience of Himachal Pradesh and in Irish literary resistance. In Himachal Pradesh Dalit faces social exclusion through caste based religious norms whereas in Ireland the Irish suffers English and Protestant hegemony culminating into dissolution of indigenous Gaelic language and Catholic identity. Hence, the work of both writers provides a remarkable synthesis to leverage literature to subvert the hidden power ideologies. The study not only illustrates the use of literature in exposing hegemonic viciousness but also becomes a platform for re-asserting and reclaiming suppressed identities.

In case of Himachal Pradesh, especially in Shimla and its vicinity, linguistic and theological hegemony is structured through the Devta System and other religious institutions. In the rural regions, caste still remains a threshold to determine access to resources, rituals, and social status which perpetuates the ascending scale of jealous and descending order of hatred among people of different caste. The Devta system is the most significant sign and code through which the ideological suppression is encoded. This is considered the most revered and

sacrosanct institutions in which local deities are worshipped with immense respect. According to the established aphorism, all people belonging to different categories/caste are bound to take part in various religious ceremonies. The rituals concerning various religious events like Diwali, Bhed, Maala, Balraaj and Bhunda are consecrated strictly by Brahmin, the highest social strata of Varna System. All rituals are performed by Brahmin in Sanskrit language which becomes the instrument through which the linguistic ascendancy and domination is imposed on Dalit.

The point of discussion which the current study tries to reinforce is that Dalit are surprisingly debarred to take part in any of the religious festivals. This exclusion is not just social but theological who are viewed as ritually impure, a derogatory status pronounced by Manusmriti/ritual hierarchies. They are not allowed to enter temple, worshipping inside and are completely forbidden from touching sacred instruments and offerings. Interestingly, these impure people offer the major share of their hard labour on the deity on which the so-called priest/Brahmin enjoys their lavish lifestyle. If by chance they touch any sacred replica or dare to enter the temple, their act would consider as sheer case of sacrilege and inflict the wrath of the Gur/Shamman, the custodian of temple on them. They are levied innumerable sanction against them despite of their meagre income and status. This theological hegemony is substantiated through language especially Sanskrit which is the most important document of religious discourses, hymns, and stories. All are narrated in Sanskrit or elite Hindi dialects and are systematically made inaccessible to Dalit communities. While their own oral traditions, rituals, sentiments, folklores, and dialects are marginalised and rebuffed as inferior. Likewise, in Ireland the process of colonisation starts in the 12th century with a series of invasions, settlements, and political subjugation by foreign powers, especially by England. The colonisation deeply transformed Ireland's indigenous and cultural system leading to altering land ownership, religious structure, and social hierarchy. This paves the way for laying the foundation for centuries of conflict, relatively corresponding to defiance to colonial forces (British rule) and the ultimate struggle for independence in the 20th century.

Brian Friel, is the most profound and universally acclaimed writer of Ireland whose works including *Translations* (1980) and *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) have significantly addressed the cultural and political consciousness of the native people by exposing the dominant power structures through language and religion in both colonial and postcolonial era. His seminal works namely *Translations* and *Dancing at Lughnasa* which are taken for making an intent of this research provide an in-depth illustration of linguistic and divine hegemony, revealing how the language, religion and education have been used as sign and code through which exploitation and oppression are applied. In *Translations* he denounces the process of Anglicisation of Irish place names and the effacement of Gaelic identity stating how language is used as an instrument of cultural survival and a tool of colonisation. For example *Ballybeg*, which is Gaelic word meaning small town, signifies the loss of Irish language and place names in the British Literature.

Simultaneously, *Translation* of Brian Friel becomes a seminal work along with Harnot's *Pankhon Mein Aag* which is the powerful exposition of linguistic colonisation. The play is set in the imaginary rustic village of Baile Beg where British army engineers are diligently occupied in translating Gaelic place names into English. The act of translating Gaelic names

of pre-Christian catholic significance with Anglicised/Protestant term is treated as erasure of culture and its root.

Meanwhile, *Dancing at Lughnasa* shows a dominating role of catholic dogma on individual psyche and dissolution of Pre-Christian Irish identity. *Lughnasa* for instance implies to the ancient Gaelic harvest festival which is dedicated to the god *Lugh*, the root of which is embedded in pre-Christian, pagan Irish culture. By using this word the writer registers a tone of resistance against theological hegemony of Catholicism.

A poet and short story writer S.R. Harnot is a renowned Dalit writer from Himachal Pradesh (Shimla) whose writing is specifically focused on Dalit life in Himachal Pradesh exploring the intersecting forces of linguistic and theological hegemony. Through the narrative set in the rural Himalayas, Harnot explains how dominant caste ideologies employed divine domineering and subversive tradition to control the marginalised via religious practices. To mention few of them are the Devta system and caste-based rituals which are significant in this context.

Furthermore, he exposes how the native pahari dialect suffers dominance under the yoke of Sanskrit and standardized Hindi, paving the way for complete linguistic effacement. Likewise, his stories *Pankhon Mein Aag* and *Himachal Ke Dalit* give vociferous voice to Dalit characters who challenge both spiritual and cultural oppression reasserting dignity through resistance, speech, and subversion. By including colloquial and informal vocabulary, mysteries, proverb, local idiom, myth, and lived caste realities, Harnot becomes a pioneer and spokesperson of downtrodden people and becomes literary voice of subaltern against the unjust religious and cultural system, triggering the deep anguish and repugnant to such ideological hierarchies.

In *Pankhon Mein Agni* and *Himachal Ke Dalit*, Harnot raises the concern of Dalit's suffering and resistance in the hills. He held responsible the conniving of caste, state and authority of temple in perpetuating the cultural and social disparity. Making commentary on the social system of the region, *Pankhon Mein Agni* delineates Dalit protagonist who is refused priestly services for funerals. This treatment of exclusion and abandonment to Dalit is sanctioned by caste ridden religious codes. His incorporation and use of regional dialects and vocabulary shows his immense concern to his roots and register Dalit voices to counter linguistic elitism. In Himachal Pradesh especially in Shimla Sanskrit divine tradition and cultural superiority is often used to undermine the native culture and memory leading to the ultimate erasure of Dalit roots.

Similarly, in Ireland the use of English in school and administration is a deliberate attempt of colonial rule to marginalise Gaelic language and catholic identity. Cultural control and social exclusion is further marked by Protestant led institution, debilitating Irish folk tradition and Catholic peasantry identity. The use of English as an official and national language in Ireland is considered as a scathing and blatant disrespect to Gaelic culture and memory, leading to complete dissolution of Irish identity. The process of Anglicisation of Ireland altering Irish places names, religious institutions (catholic) with Protestant references, denying property right, access to education and faith in their own pre-Christian pagan culture is the obvious stratagem to eroding their identity and representation.

In both cases, Himachal Pradesh and Ireland the linguistic and theological hegemony leads to inferiority complex of mind and sense of degradation. In this regard, Karl Marx and Frantz Fanon while making reference to post-colonial countries have rightly observed that the violent and most terrible ramification of Colonialism on the psyche of colonised people is the inferiority complex and negative portrayal. This reference is apt and most appropriate with respect to Himachal Pradesh and Ireland where psychological and cultural hegemony (colonialism) is the alter ego of physical oppression and is remarkably delineated by both writers of either country. What provides synthesis to the work of Harnot and Friel is the use of literature as a testing ground for resistance rather than merely use it to criticising hegemony.

Conclusion

Though contextually and geographically different Himachal Pradesh and Ireland the writers of both countries have painstakingly attempted to show how linguistic and theological hegemony operates through different social and culture form and sign, leading to similar structure of exclusion. Both S.R. Harnot and Brian Friel expose these stratagem and dominant ideologies in their literary works, challenging the pernicious and insidious mechanism of culture and language and its role in the society. Eventually, literature is viewed as a platform to reassert identity and representation through stories, myth, mysteries, proverb and language. Harnot and Friel, by writing in and about the subaltern give ample rays of hope that the very act of literature including storytelling, prose and poem are a wilful act to emancipate people from shackle of oppression. The present study shows that the function of hegemony works as a powerful domineering and subversive ideologies through caste sanctioned religious norms practised in Himachal Pradesh (Shimla) and colonial language imposition functional in (Ireland). By focusing on S. R. Harnot and Brian Friel this paper highlights how literature can both diagnose and undermine systems of power that marginalize through religious and linguistic control. Each writer, in his own cultural and historical context, uses narrative as a tool for deconstruction and reclamation, subverting hegemonic discourse by reintroducing silenced voices.

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