

General Introduction

This research is a study of the Canadian writer Michael Ondaatje's, critically acclaimed, booker prize winning novel *The English Patient*. It examines Almasy redrawing his identity through his character, his work and his interactions with others. He deliberately tries to negate his nationality by living in the desert where he creates for himself an alternate identity.

Michael's Ondaatje's *The English Patient* is a novel cherished by readers for its lush subliminal prose. It is rich, very stylistically written, about the lives of the four individuals whose lives have been damaged by the Second World War. At the end of the war four characters find themselves in the remains of deserted Italian Villa. There is the nurse, Hana, who has lost her father and lover in the war and is so immune to death that she fears she has lost the capacity to feel. She walks around the villa like an empty shell tending to the mysterious patient who has been badly burnt beyond recognition in a plane crash in the Libyan Desert. Everyone assumes he is an Englishman because of his speech and mannerisms. Then there is the former thief, Caravaggio, who has lost his thumbs during the war and cannot steal anymore. The only thing he can do is come to the villa to find Hana, his friend's daughter whom he knew back in Canada before the war, and try to reimagine himself. Stumbling upon them is the Sikh sapper, Kip, who has lost himself fighting the war in the uniform of his imperial masters. Through his interactions and affairs with them, he comes to see who he is.

This is a novel of revelation, and just as the identity of the English patient is slowly revealed as the novel progresses, so too are the inner selves and spiritual identities of the other characters in the novels. Ondaatje, writes his novel of discovery very much in

the manner of Virginia Woolf, revealing things only briefly, like “flashes of lightning.” Indeed, lightning abounds in this novel, lighting up the dark and melancholic landscape for a very brief period, but long enough to reveal hints of the truth. Surrounding these flashes of lightning is a heavy and dreary darkness in which the characters navigate, trying to find themselves and others. It is almost as if the novel is an exploration of the way we understand things and discover the truth. People are always meeting the dark, and the only way we can know them is through casual, occasional bumps in the darkness and through brief flashes of light.

Ondaatje incorporates a number of characters with different nationalities. Hanna and Caravaggio are Canadian, Kip is Indian and the English patient is Hungarian. Culturally all the characters are in swinging position. The main character Almsy, the English patient, whose face is severely disfigured by burns, exists as the centre and the focus of the action despite the fact that he is without name or identity.

Almsy is known at first as ‘The Patient’ because his identity documents were lost in a plane crash North African desert. Badly burnt, he was rescued by the Bedouin and cared for by them because he distinguishes gun ammunition by touch, telling them which should be married with, which the patient apparently can not remember his own identity but has been treated as an British officer because he speaks English and is clearly of right social class .He has been in hospital in North of Florence when one would have expected him to be shipped from North Africa back to hospital in England .The enigma of the English ‘s identity is a major focus of novel.

Hana asks the English Patient about his past, name, nationality and career but he doesn’t reveal all those things. Their conversation goes like this:

I was perhaps the first one to stand up alive out of burning machine. A man whose head was on fire. They did not know my name. I didn't know their tribe.

Who are you?

I don't know. You keep asking me.

You said you were English. (TEP 5)

Almasy is not sure of his own identity. People who come in contact with him too get confused with identity. A conversation with the Arab children is also very significant. They think him as Egyptian.

The Arab children were wonderfully amused when I spoke to them in their own language. A little girl immediately asked me if I were an Egyptian. When I said no, the choir of children shouted: "you are lying, lying, you are Egyptian, and we can see it from your skin". I took my sunglasses off and asked them whether Egyptian had blue eyes. The crowd became silent and finally the little girl decided: "your mother was Egyptian. (25)

Events like this create more uncertainty to his identity. In a number of times he refers to himself with third person pronoun. He strongly believes that nations are dangerous inventions. Without associating himself with nationality, he is completely rootless. His identity is fractured, he belongs to nowhere. His own acceptance as an international bastard creates a problem in the question of locating him in a particular time, place and nationality. When the protagonist of the novel, Almasy's name is revealed, the readers discover the great irony of the novel. The 'English patient' is not

even English, but rather Hungarian by birth, an ‘international bastard’ who has spent much of his adult life wandering the desert. Nationality and citizenship do not matter him. He is without name, without rank or battalion or squadron.

‘Identity’ is a term that has to do with who or what an individual is. It is related to individual, national, social, cultural, as well as spiritual and existential aspect of human value. “Identity” may be taken and synonymous with ‘self’, ‘being’, ‘subject’, ‘ego’, and everything else that constitute the individual as defined differently in different aspects of life, from different perspective, and in different disciplines of knowledge. In many respects, the sociological concept of identity is also synonymous with psychological concept of ‘ego’, or the philosophical ‘self’. In the present study the term is taken as a quest for identity in a state where they are isolated from nationality and at the same time cultural components do not seem important for them.

The text has been examined and interpreted from different perspective. The present study will explore the role of nation and culture in shaping one’s identity and so its perspective will be of post colonial studies and cultural studies. This research will primarily focus on different issues related to post colonial studies and cultural studies like nation and national identity, identity formation and identity politics, ambivalence and hybridity. Since the author himself is a diaspora (born in Sri-Lanka) the research will also draw relevant ideas from his life.

Identity is the meaning or self-concept that one gives to oneself or the meaning in general that human beings give to them. In other words, it is the sum totality of values attached to individuals by an age and a community, in terms of their class, caste, group or culture and institution of any kind. Thus, with the change in values, or the intellectual

developments in human history, man's self concept has always changed. It has sometimes only modified and at other times radically changed. For instance people have changed from 'subjects' to 'citizens', from their constant 'class' of 'birth' to being 'potentially able to achieve any status', and from 'restrictions' to 'rights'; this is because of socio-political changes. Similarly, from a religious point of view, people have changed from being 'mortal servants' in the hands of the God to being their 'own masters', free to contemplate or refuse God himself. Also, they have changed from being in a firmer place in the family to being in a much looser family structure, this change has also influenced man's self-image and has also entailed problems like alienation and isolation in modern times. In terms of nationality too, the change in its concept as being determined by race or birth to being determined by will and law has also influenced man's self-definition. In general, the historical changes in social, moral, religious, philosophical and any other values have determined man's self-definition or identity, too.

Man is a thinking animal. From all the evidences in written history, it is very much clear that man's curiosity, questions and debates about their existence, identity and values for life have lasted "as long as man has lived on this planet" (Gaarder 12). Ideas arising out of the simple sense wonder, which we now call philosophy, were a part of even the ancient men's thoughts and common values that they lived by, besides food and shelter.

The first world picture that included man's self concept was the "mythological world picture" as Jostein Gaarder discusses in his book *Sophie's World*, men saw themselves as a part of a system that their religious myths explained. The Greeks, for instance, saw themselves as the descendants of the "fifth generation of mortals" made of

iron (Lohani 12). In the Vedic ages in the East, the Hindus conceived themselves as being the children of sages like Kashyap, Bharadwaja, Mandabya etc. And strangely enough, later transforms into Hinduism like the Nepalese have also attached themselves with these clans or 'gotras'. The mythological self-concepts have descended to our times and have even caused overt conflicts of races, castes and religious groups. Such mythological self-concepts have permeated all cultures through ages. This dimension of identity may also be called the religious self-concept. But new dimensions or modifications have emerged with time. The Greek for example started recording and discussing their myths. "For the first time (around 700 B.C.) it was said that the myths were nothing but human notions"(Gaarder 26), by philosophers like Xenophanes. The Greeks then began to base their understanding on experience and reason. This mode of thinking reached its apotheosis with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. But, the rational thought of classical Greece was not widespread outside the thinkers of the city-states. The rest of the world continued with the mythico-religious concepts. With the rise of the Roman Empire, the Greek rational outlook was undermined, and it remained underground: it underwent a setback due to the political system of totalitarian authority under which powerless men were always deemed inferior and the powerful was constantly supreme. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the European world remained dominated by the Hebrew mythico-spiritual world-picture for many centuries, and has actually been mostly influenced by it since then. Religion also aligned with politics and made stronger barriers between men and men who were defined differently. But all were inferior to God and all saw themselves at the mercy and will of the omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God.

In the West at least, and for a time, the attempt to rationalize the religious doctrines failed with the all-pervading resurgence of human-centred thought during the Renaissance. Martin Luther, for example, said that every man was in a sense his own priest, and the old hierarchy was threatened. The Renaissance mind conceived of man as of “divine lineage in mortal guise” (Gaarder 199). The unrestrained worship of genius in this new view of mankind posited man and his potentials at the center of everything. Thus, the Renaissance man was probably the most self-confident and with the highest self-esteem in history.

The following age showed two contrary concepts of idealism and materialism. On the one hand, science and determinism went side-by-side defining man in terms of matter. But these materialist thinkers emphasized man’s power of reason and intellect. Beginning with Descartes, man was seen as a rational being: “cogito ergo sum”. The rational, thinking subject only could define itself or anything in terms of its perception, and that intellectual perception was trusted as more or less reliable. Locke, Hume, Kant, Voltaire and Rousseau represented, broadly, the new spirit that contributed to a high evaluation of the individual. That was followed by the ideas of liberty and equality, in the French American revolutions. The Romantic philosophy also taught the same: man was not a puppet in the hands of god, king, priest and the landlord; every individual was now a potential genius to explore experience and interpret the world, life and himself. He was now politically free to live and follow his own “pursuit of happiness”; he was free to establish his own relationship with the divine; he trusted his own reason and intellect to conceptualize anything including his own life and meaning. On the other hand, the

idealist kept sticking to the religio-mythical concept of man, his identity and 'purpose' of life.

In the age that followed, the high estimation of both the rational man as well as the spiritually ideal man encountered a setback. The Darwinian man was only a special monkey, and the Freudian man was nothing more than an animal in its basic instincts. In these deterministic views, man is decided and driven by heredity and inherent sexual fantasies though his environment also plays some role. Man's self-concept received a serious blow when the Freudian science flattened his ego, which had always given him all the height and pride. Since then, men have conceived of themselves as more and more vulnerable to forces outside of their own will and reason. Subjected to heredity limitations, unconscious impulses and inevitable conditions of existence, human beings now seemed to be less free and powerful than ever before. Men in the past used to conceive of their identity as comprising of several concrete and reliable components like religion, culture, caste, class, family, traditions, nationality, regional identity, historical features of identity, and so on. Some of the strongest pillars on which the individual or the collective identity of human beings depended have themselves been questioned and doubted about their reliability. The individual doubts what good there is to be introduced as a Christian rather than a Jew, as an Irish rather than a Swedish, as a Brahmin, a relative of some royal family, a grandson of a poet laureate, or the like. What good is it if values attached to these things are themselves artificial, uncertain, provisional, or illusory? Uncertainties have given rise to skepticism and disillusionions.

From the viewpoint of another school of thought that was gradually becoming influential, man was also free, in the sense that he was 'condemned to be free'. Jean Paul

Sartre, one of the most influential philosophers in this mode of thinking, experienced man's freedom as a curse: "Man is condemned to be free ... condemned because he has not created himself – and is nevertheless free. Because having once been hurled into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (73).

The present research has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of Ondaatje and his writing. It reveals the writer's basic concern for writing that results somewhere from the idea that he is the voice of culture and identity crisis.

The second chapter is entirely devoted to look at identity from various perspectives. This part of the work will define some terms related to identity.

The third chapter deals with textual analysis. On the basis of the second chapter, the third chapter will analyze the text at a considerable length. It will sort out some extracts from the text to prove the hypothesis of the study Almasy by negating his identity redraws the boundaries of his existence in the alien world. This portion of the work should serve as a core of this study.

The fourth chapter is the conclusion of this research. It will conclude exploration and arguments put forward in the preceding chapters and show Almasy doing his best to create his identity.

Thus, the present work touches a contemporary issue, the issue of independent existence especially in connection to the people who are socially, culturally and linguistically uprooted. Their existence is blurred in the postcolonial milieu. It is hoped that the present study will be of interest to general readers as well as scholars.

CHAPTER - II

Notions on Identity: A Theoretical Modality

Conceptual Development of Culture and Identity

The word 'culture' in English is derived from the Latin 'cultura' which means the act of cultivation of the soil. Later, the term is applied to any custom, art, social institution, literature, music etc. that is cultivated in society. Culture, thus, belongs to the broader human consciousness that is both developed and shaped by society, religion, history and geography (Saraswathi 223; "Culture").

It surprisingly gives the individuals their identity. Since there is no single history, religion, society and geography, cultures vary; and the literatures as the reflections of culture also vary. And when someone nurtured in one culture is placed in another he/she may face "cultural shock" and the reactions may be anger, frustration, fear, curiosity, fascination, repulsion, hatred or confusion (Saraswathi 223). The totality of culture as a frame of reference shapes and controls man's view of the world around him/her.

Culture is not only an indispensable but also a multi-accented term with a complex and still open history which in itself expresses the complexity of general human history. Apart from the notion of culture discussed in the above paragraph, the term is also used to refer to intellectual or artistic works or practices which in their very forms and meanings define human socially constructed rather than naturally acquired. So, culture can be used to refer to individual style or character, to a state of artistic or intellectual development, to the expressive life and traditions of a social group, to a social historical moment or a broad epoch. In this sense, we can talk of the culture of football,

film culture, Indian or Nepali culture or the culture of the 1990s or the turn of the century.

The mutability of the term, culture, however, has a very broad meaning, and a simple definition or analysis appertaining to its fluctuating nature can be misleading. According to a British Marxist and culture expert Raymond Williams, the term culture in its most widespread use in later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, refers to the world of the arts (literature, music, painting, sculpture, theatre, film). Williams, thus, receives the term as being intricately related to changing history, exposing different forms in different periods. Culture, has therefore been defined in relation to this historical form of society and the forms may oppose each other. As a result, culture is seen as a reflection of necessary automatic and spiritual values of a particular period, but demands a continuous and often superstitious continuation. Mathew Arnold directs F.R. Leavis' and T. S. Eliot's notion of culture by saying it as "mobilized to serve a liberal or radical conservative of ideology" (Daiches 4:51). Similarly, Theodore Adorno and some other Marxists from Frankfurt School valued culture as that of a minority or an elite, though the authors, artists, genres and individual works may be as different as the Greek classics. The thinking of and concept of popular culture can also be adjusted in the same line. Culture appears to Said as "a protective enclosure" (xiv). Nevertheless, it is to be noted that Said does not digress from his point that, "Culture is a sort of theatre where various political and ideological causes engage one another" (xiv). A Harvard professor, Samuel Huntington continues Said's idea of culture and highlights the point that power in relation to culture and civilization is shaping the consciousness of people (13).

Culture has been differently viewed in different periods by different thinkers. All the views, nevertheless, share the assumption that culture can have an active and shaping influence upon ideas, attitudes and experiences, and its use and meaning may be inconsistent and more or less descriptive or evaluative. However, the study of culture can never be free of assumptions, of value or an involvement in meaningful, value-making activity on the part of the researchers or the works or social action being studied.

The variant uses of the word, culture, are now more readily understood as the necessary expression of a range of signifying practices across different media and discourses. We have said that literature reflects the mechanism of culture. The attempt after realizing this fact to analyze literature in relation to culture should wedge through all the confusion about culture itself and see how culture as such is manifest in expression, whether that is direct or oblique. To put it in another way, it is to be noted that man always expresses his/her culture and thereby tries to establish his/her belonging and identity. One's expression of culture is inseparably bound up with the question of identity and belonging.

The term identity has several facets of meaning. It is essential, first of all that an individual exists in order to have any identity. In other words, "existence precedes essence" (Sartre 13), which is the basis requisite of any kind of value and recognition of the individual. It is necessary therefore to mention, as do the existentialists, that the individual must first exist so as then to get a meaning, essence or identity. But that, too, is dependent on a thinking or conscious subject; in this sense the individual's self-conception of who or what he is the aspect of identity. "First of all man exists, (then) turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself" (Sartre 15).

Besides, it is also the conscious man's "will" that conceives himself to be and wills himself to act that gives him an individual identity. In this sense, man is nothing else but what he makes of himself, and his identity too is first of all what he conceives of himself. It is whatever meaning the individual assigns to himself.

Secondly, identity is the meaning of the individual as a part of groups or communities of various kinds, varying in the number and type of its members. In fact, even when the single individual defines himself, he does so vis-à-vis the community he lives in, or is somehow related to. In choosing to create or conceptualize an image and identity of himself, the individual creates a universal image of man in general. Moreover, the individual does so in terms of common values that defines individuals in his society. In short, this facet of identity is that of the social aspect in the individual's self-definition. It is his social identity. The individual conforms to the collective behaviour and common codes in gaining this social recognition. Those common codes give him a social space and value within a larger whole.

From the social point of view, the self is expressed as the group level as well as at the personal. Personal identity is based on idiosyncratic life experiences and individual traits that make each individual distinct from all others, whereas social identity refers to the identity of the individual as a social member. Thus, the individual is the combination of uniqueness and belongingness. To 'identify' oneself 'with' others, therefore, means to share common qualities of recognition. When individuals conceive of themselves as someone, they do so as physical, social, moral and existential beings. Identity involves reference to the essential self, including values of behaviour, attitude, belief and experience of the individual as a social member, rather than a simple reference to mere

‘appearance’. That includes not only the individual’s evaluative and affective components such as self-evaluation and self-esteem but also the society’s recognition of him. Even the term ‘I’, which individuals so commonly use to refer to themselves, actually refers to a complex set of attributes of identity, ranging from self-evaluation to social status and many other elements of social recognition. The loss of one or more attributes of recognition – for instance, one’s job, title or prestige – definitely threatens the identity of the individual. The modern age, with all its uncertainties, is more likely to bring about identity crisis than ever before in the life of an individual as well as that of human beings in general. Human beings have lost, weakened or discarded the many attributes that used to give them recognition, security and satisfaction. They are losing the sense of belongingness more and more. Among other reasons the rapid change in social values is more common and intense in today’s world than ever before. The values that define human beings as moral and rational beings or the like have themselves been diluted.

For some people identity is a matter of desire and death. How we construct our identity is predicated on how we construct desire and how we conceive of death: desire for recognition; quest for visibility; the sense of being acknowledged; a deep desire for association. There is also a profound desire for protection, for security, for safety, for surety.

Identity, Identity Formation and Identity Politics

In this selection, attempts will be made to show what is identity, how it is formulated and how identity politics is practiced for regulating existing system on behalf of people who are holding power and authority.

Identity is a discourse of culture. It is an acquisition out of power exercise. The powerful West continues the profoundly sexist and racist legacy of their predecessors. A large number of people have been culturally degraded and politically oppressed. Discourse produces identity through supplying and enforcing a regulatory principle. Identity, in other word, is a subject in the process of being produced. Always being in the process of evolution, identity is never fully constituted.

Identity can never be fully totalized by the symbolic. Name, though an identity marker, is not a proper name but a social category. Hence a signifier that is capable of being interpreted in a number of divergent and conflicting ways. Disciplinary discourse does not unilaterally constitute a subject. The fixed subject becomes the place and occasion for a further making. Judith Butler a cultural critic writes: “A subject only remains a subject through a reiteration or rearticulation of itself as a subject. It may be that this dependency of the coherence of the subject on repetition constitutes the incoherence, the incomplete character of the subject” (242).

The repetition and reiteration becomes the non-place of supervision. In this way, subject gets established in the symbolic. But this establishment does not get permanence. Identity transforms from one category to another but the transformation is not finished project. Though an identity is formulated, there is a plurality of resistances. They can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. The discourse produces the possibility of its own subversions. These subversions are unanticipated effects of symbolic interpretation. Power not only consists of the reiterated elaboration of norms but power is productive, multiple, proliferative and conflictual. Power plays direct role in forming and reforming identity. Identity is not a transparent and unproblematic as we think. Instead of

thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, it should be thought as a production which is never complete. Identity is always constituted within representation.

The disciplinary apparatus of the state operate through the totalizing production of individuals. This totalization of the individuals extends the jurisdiction of the state by transforming individuals into subject of state. It is remaking of subjectivity beyond the shackles of the juridical law. Judith Butler says: "Identity politics is produced by a state which can only allocate recognition and rights to subjects totalized by the particularities that constitutes their plaintiff status"(242).

By inventing negative stereotypes, especially the West practices identity politics upon the East. The texts written during the colonial period showed the natives as heathen, demonic, exotic, barbarian and feminine. It was white man's burden to uplift the uncivilized natives. In order to provide pious justification to their oppression the colonizer's invented certain identity markers to denote the so-called inferior and 'Other'. Identity politics is not so simple to understand. Directly and indirectly, it is related with power.

Colonial writing is noted for revealing the ways in which that world system could represent the degradation of other human beings as natural, an innate part of their degenerate or barbarian state. The blacks representing the African, Yellow, Brown and Red were represented as less human, less civilized, as child or savage or heedless mass. They were depicted as inferior only because they were different from the whites. When imperialism was at its zenith, the writers cherished the idea of white superiority. They maintained and celebrated the dichotomy between 'us' and 'them'. They represented the 'whites' as the civilizer of the world and apostle of light and the 'blacks' as degenerate,

barbaric and in need of European masters to civilize and to uplift them out of their filthy ditch. Elleke Boehmer in her book *Colonial and postcolonial Literature* writes:

“Stereotypes of the other as indolent maligners shirkers, good for nothings, layabouts, degenerate versions of the pastoral idler, were the stock-in-trade of colonialist writing. In contrast, the white man represented himself as the archetypal worker and provident profit-maker”(38).

An interesting issue that really draws an attention of the postcolonial critics is the rejection of colonizing people to include indigenous people and to reject them any significant role. If any role is given, that is always a negative one laden with stereotypes and injurious terms. Such kind of strategy is governed and guided by the ethos of identity politics.

The hegemonic culture mobilizes the classic syndromes of purity and danger and acts out a kind of defense of the boundaries of the primary group against this threat perceived to be inherent in the other's very existence. Group loathing in the form of modern racism is a political programme. Negative stereotypes are developed out of racial hatred. Stereotypes are imaginary entities. No individual mind is able to intuit it concretely. Stereotype is the place of an illicit surplus of meaning. Stereotype is the abstraction by virtue of which our individuality is allegorized and turned into an abusive illustration of something else, something not concrete and non individual. In this regard Fredric Jameson says:

For group loathing the group must be abstracted or fantasized, on the basis of discrete individual contacts and experiences which can never be generalized in anything but abusive fashion. The relations between groups

are always stereotypical in so far as they must always involve collective abstractions of the other group, no matter how sanitized, no matter how liberally censored and imbued with respect. (“On Cultural” 274)

Loathing and envy are very precisely the affective expressions of the relations of groups to one another. So group loathing is also nothing more than a form of identity politics.

As a conclusion, what we can confidently say is, in reality there is no identity only identification, either with the institution itself or with other subjects by the intermediary of the institution. Identity is only the ideal goal in the process of identification. Identity is an imaginary referent.

Diaspora

The concept of diaspora goes back to human history. The term was initially used by the ancient Greeks to describe their spreading all over the then known world. But, the term traditionally refers to Jewish community. In this context, diaspora refers to the Jews who scattered after Babylonian captivity and in the modern period to Jews leaving outside of Palestine and latterly Israel. For them the concept of diaspora implies a traumatic exile from historical homelands and dispersal throughout many lands. They try to create cultural form of their own. The concept of forming own culture in an alien land is a special feature of diaspora.

Irrespective of its traditional meaning, in recent times the term is associated with colonial experience. When we examine Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, they believe diaspora can't be separated from colonialism, as it was this historical condition that led to the displacement of people across the world. Ashcroft et al. view “Colonialism itself is

a diasporic movement” (Ashcroft, 69). Under colonialism the meaning of diaspora has been extended to cover a range of different cultural and ethnic groups held together by shared cultural or religious commitments and having some sense of ‘exile’ from a place or state of origin belonging.

Within cultural studies the term is used to describe the dynamic network of communities without the stabilizing allusion to an original homeland or essential identity. Diaspora has been used in the studies of race and ethnicity to describe a range of cultural affiliation connecting the groups dispersed voluntarily or involuntarily across national borders.

The term with the transformation of time has also been extended now to include the descendents of diasporic movements generated by colonialism, which have developed their own distinctive cultures, which both preserve and often extend and develop their original cultures. Observing diaspora from this standpoint critic Thomas Blom Hansen views diaspora as:

The term ‘diaspora’ not only transmits a certain sense of shared destiny and predicament, but also an inherent will to preservation and celebration of the ancestral culture and equally inherent impulse toward forging and maintaining link with the ‘old country’ (Hansen 12).

To live in diaspora is to experience the trauma of exile, migration, displacement, rootlessness and the life in a minority group haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back. As Rushdie in this regard says:

I have been in a minority group all my life – a member of an Indian Muslim family in Bombay, then Mohajir – migrant – family in Pakistan

and now as a British Asian...creating an 'Imaginary Homeland' and willing to admit, though imaginatively, that s/he belongs to it. (Rushdie 4)

Place and Displacement

The idea of place and displacement is a very complex experience of colonized people. A large population of colonized people has been physically alienated through forced migration, slavery or indenture. A sense of displacement and a sense of lacking fitness between language and place may be experienced by those who possess English as a mother tongue or by those who speak it as a second language.

Displacement can be defined as erosion resulting from migration, the experience of enslavement, transportation or voluntary removal for indentured labour. A supposedly superior racial or cultural model may oppress the indigenous personality and culture consciously or unconsciously. The dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of postcolonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention or a mixture of the two. Displacement produces the alienation of vision and the crisis of self-image. Social, linguistic and cultural alienation results from an oppressive form of colonization such as slavery and conquest.

Normally, displacement is substituted by dislocation. Dislocation is the occasion that occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event. Dislocation may be a result of transportation from one country to another by slavery or imprisonment, by invasion and settlement. It is a consequence of willing or unwilling movement from a known to unknown location. Dislocation is also an experience of those who have willingly moved from the imperial home to the colonial

margin. Because of colonial practices, those people need to be reinvented in language, in narrative and in myth.

The experience of dislocation indeed becomes the mother of invention. The disruptive and disorienting experience of dislocation becomes a primary influence on the regenerative energies in a postcolonial culture. The writers of *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies* write: “Diasporic communities formed by forced or voluntary migration may all be affected by this process of dislocation and regeneration”(74).

The concept of dislocation is similar to the concept of exile which signifies the separation and distancing from either a literary homeland or from a culture and ethnic origin. Exile implies involuntary constraint, expatriation implies a voluntary act or state.

The situation of a diaspora is a problematic one. Where is the place of home to be located for such people? In the place of birth, in the displaced cultural community into which the person is born or in the nation-state in which diasporic community is located? Exile was produced by colonialism as pressure was exerted on many colonized people to exile themselves from their own culture, language and tradition. The production of this ‘in between’ class, white but not quite was often a deliberate feature of colonial practice.

Representation

The Oxford English Dictionary defines representation primarily as ‘presence’ or ‘appearance’. Representation can be clear images material reproduction and also can be performances. It can also be defined as the act of placing or stating facts in order to influence or affect the action of others. So, the term, representation has a semiotic meaning in which something is ‘standing for’ something else. But presently

representation is a much debated topic not only in postcolonial discourse but in the larger cultural arena too.

Representation, in cultural studies, focuses on how the world is socially constructed and represented to and by us. Indeed the central strand of cultural studies can be understood as the study of culture as signifying practices of representation.

For cultural critic, Chris Brooker, representation plays a key role in the formation of cultural identities. Representation for him is “bound up with the object of study (texts, events, social processes), the preferred conceptual armature (discourse, ideology, institution, economy) and the methods of investigation which map out these changing fields” (Brooker 192). Representation is thus verbal formations, which are the ‘ideological product’ or ‘cultural construct’. So, they are produced, enacted, and understood in special social context.

In contemporary postcolonial theory ‘representation’ is closely related with Foucauldian concept of ‘discourse as representation’. He takes discourse as inseparable from power. For Foucault ‘discourse’ unites both language and practice and refers to the production of knowledge through language which gives meaning to material objects and social practice.

Edward Said in *Orientalism*, following Foucault’s point, argues that ‘images’ and ‘stereotypes’ about the east are formed by western discourses aimed at governing and controlling the Orient. Said’s *Orientalism* explores how the east (the orient) is created through western discursive practices. Orient can, however, be known by the dominant discourse of the west thus assimilated in practices pronounced as inferior or as ‘the other’

as it does not come up to these representation. Representation then can never really be natural depiction of the orient. Instead, it is constructed.

Orientalism is a set of western discourses of power, which have constructed on Orient. According to Said “Orientalism is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient but a created body of theory and practice with considerable material investment for generations” (Said 6). He further adds that Orientalism is the system of representation bringing the Orient into the western learning and the relationship between Occident and Orient is that of complex hegemony.

Hybridity

The term ‘hybridity’ is generally used in horticulture referring to third species produced by mixing or grafting plants of different species. But understood within the domain of postcolonial discourse, hybridity is the result of the bringing together of people and their cultures from different parts of the world. The term is related to the traumatic colonial experience. Hybridity, as defined in Bill Ashcroft’s Gareth Griffith’s and Helen Tiffin’s book *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, is “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (Ashcroft 118). In cultural theory these meanings have been extended to refer the mixed or hyphenated identities of persons or ethnic communities.

Once the colonial settlers arrive in alien land they feel the necessity of establishing new identity since they are displaced from their point of origin. In a colonial society there emerged a binary relationship between the peoples of two cultures. It is the ‘in-between’ space that carries the burden and meaning of cultures, and this is what makes the notion of hybridity and its importance. Recently within the domain of

cultural studies the term has also been associated with the analysis of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

Hybridization for Ashcroft, Gareth and Tiffin takes many forms “Linguistic, cultural, political, racial etc. Linguistic examples include ‘Pidgin’ and ‘Creole’ languages” (Ashcroft 118). The term hybridity has been most recently associated with the work of Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of ‘ambivalence’. For him ‘ambivalence’ is the “complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizer and colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer” (Ashcroft12).

Hybridity, Bhaba argues, subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant colonized cultures. Although it borrows from these both cultures, Bhaba believes hybridity is a position in which hybridized do not belong clearly to the world of either colonizer or the colonized. They are rendered as ‘other’ from both the culture. So, hybridity becomes a cultural mix and creates a new form of identity.

Hybrid culture exists also in colonial society where people occupy an in-between space by the ‘mimicry’ of the colonizer. European colonialism has left its cultural mark across the globe and the impact of ‘external’ culture influences on once colonized society in more complex way than the simple cultural imperialism. In the post imperial era, neither the colonizing or colonized ‘culture’, ‘race’, ‘language’ can remain in ‘pure’ form. At the same time they can not be separated from each other which gives rise to hybridity.

Hegemony and Discourse

Hegemony is now generally understood to mean the domination by consent. This broader meaning was coined and popularized in the 1930s by Italian Marxist, Gramsci. He investigated why the ruling class was successful in promoting its own interest in society. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in the book *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies* write:

Fundamentally, hegemony is the power of ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all. Domination is thus exerted not by force, nor even necessarily by active persuasion, but by a more subtle and inclusive power over the economy, and over state apparatuses such as education and the media by which the ruling class's interest is presented as the common interest and thus comes to be taken for granted. (116)

Hegemony is an acceptance of imperial domination as a natural process.

Hegemony is important because the capacity to influence the thought of the colonized is by far the most sustained and potent operation of imperial power in colonized regions.

Consent is achieved by the interpretation of the colonized subject by imperial discourse so that Euro-centric values, assumptions, beliefs and attitudes are accepted as a matter of course as the most natural or valuable. The inevitable consequence of such interpretation is that the colonized subject understands itself as peripheral to those Euro-centric values, while at the same time accepting their centrality.

Hegemony and discourse are repeatedly deployed in cultural studies. The process of making, maintaining and reproducing ascendant meaning and practices has been called

hegemony. Hegemony implies a situation where powerful groups exercise social authority and leadership over subordinate groups through the winning of consent. The production of consent implies popular identification with the cultural meanings generated by the signifying practices of hegemonic discourse. The concept of discourse suggests not only the written word though it is one of its senses, but all practices which signify something. This includes the generation of meaning through images, sounds, objects and cultural activities such as dance and sport. Since images, sounds, objects and practices are sign systems, which signify with the same mechanism as a language. We may refer to them as discourse.

Identities are not things which exist permanently. They have no essential or universal qualities. Rather they are discursive constructions, the product of discourses or regulated ways of speaking about the world. In other words, identities are made rather than found, by representation, notably discourse. In the book *Cultural Studies* Chris Barker, concerning discursive practices comments on Foucault:

Foucault argues against structuralist theories of language which conceive of it as an autonomous rule-governed system. He also opposes interpretive or hermeneutic methods which seek to disclose the hidden meanings of language. Foucault is thus concerned with the description and analysis of the surface of discourse and their effects under determinate material and historical conditions. For Foucault discourse concerns both language and practice and refers to the regulated production of knowledge through which gives meanings to both material objects and social practices. (19-20)

Discourse is the system of statements within which the world can be known. It is the system by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing specific knowledge, disciplines and values upon dominated ones. Discourse constructs, defines and produces the objects of knowledge in an intelligible way which at the same time excludes other ways of reasoning as unintelligible. There can be no truths, subjects or identities outside of language which does not have stable referents and is therefore unable to represent fixed truths or identities. Truth and identity are not fixed universal things but descriptions in language which through social conviction come to be counted as truth. Truth is temporary stabilization of meaning. Discourse is a social formation. The concept of discourse was originally used from about the 16th century to describe any kind of speaking, talk or conversation. It became increasingly used to describe a more formal speech, a narration or a treatment of any subject at length, a treatise, dissertation or sermon. In recent use, discourse, knowledge and power are inter-related. If a discourse is not controlled, it may represent a very great threat to the authority of the discourse. It constitutes reality not only for the objects it appears to represent but also for the subjects who formulate it. Colonial discourse is the complex structure of signs and practices that organize social existence and social reproduction within the colonial relationship. Colonial discourse constructs the colonizing subject as much as the colonized. Discourse is important because it joins power and knowledge together. Those who have power have control of what is known and the way it is known. Those who have such knowledge have power over those who do not. This link between knowledge and power is particularly important in the relationships between colonizers and colonized. Truth is a question not of true discovery but of the construction of interpretation about the world which are taken

to be true. Truth is not a collection of facts, for there can be only interpretations and there is no limit to the ways in which the world can be interpreted. Truth has historical purchase. It is the consequence of power. Power who hold power, formulate discourses. Discourses are instruments to practice hegemony especially on the part of the colonizers over colonized.

Now, let us have a look at when and how colonialism initiated and expanded. Moreover, the issue like how colonial discourse operates and what is decolonization will be discussed. European colonialism in the post-renaissance world became a sufficiently specialized and historically specific form of imperial expansion to justify its current general usage as a distinctive kind of political ideology. Denoting different forms of colonialism Chris Barker writes: “Colonial control manifested itself as military dominance, cultural ascendancy and the origins of economic dependency. Occupied lands were converted into protected markets for imperial powers as well as sources of raw materials” (116).

The European post-renaissance colonial expansion was accelerated with the development of a modern capitalist system of economic exchange. New colonies were established to provide raw materials for the burgeoning economies of the colonial powers. The relation between the colonizer and colonized was locked into a rigid hierarchy of difference whether economic, cultural or social. The idea of the ‘evolution of mankind’ and ‘survival of the fittest’ race in the crude application of social Darwinism went hand in hand with the doctrines of imperialism that evolved at the end of the nineteenth century.

Cultural diversity avoids universal prescriptive of cultural definitions.

Ambivalence is implicit in all colonial discourse. The structuralist critic Saussure suggested that signs acquire meaning through their difference from other signs. The same notion can be applied even in culture. A culture may be identified by its difference from other cultures. Ambivalence itself is the space in which cultural meanings and identities always contain the traces of other meanings and identities. Homi K. Bhabha argues: “Claims to inherent originality or purity of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity”(Qtd. Ashcroft 61). Colonialism made a mixture of people from various backgrounds. People residing in multicultural location are confused about their association with a single and specific cultural paradigm.

The process of decolonization started quite later. Decolonization denotes the process of revealing and dismantling colonialist power in all its forms. The decolonizing process advocates to democratize culture, and recuperate and reevaluate it. The continuing influences of Euro-centric cultural models privileged the imported over the indigenous: colonial language over local languages, writing over orality and linguistic culture over inscriptive culture of other kinds. Dance and graphic culture had often been designated as folk culture. A majority cultures had been invaded and suppressed or denigrated by colonialist practices. At present, the process of resisting and overthrowing these assumptions has been more obviously active. The process of decolonization started to be rapid and it is still continuing. Writers from the part of our world such as Michael Ondaatje, Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul embrace a transnational identity and seek to critique the contemporary postcolonial state. They are often dismissed as not contributing

to a decolonizing process. Decolonization, what else it may be, is a complex and continuing process rather than something achieved automatically at the moment of independence. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin write:

Decolonization includes dismantling the hidden aspects of those institutional and cultural forces that had maintained the colonialist power and remain even after political independence is achieved. Initially in many places in the colonized world, the process of resistance was conducted in terms of institutions appropriated from the colonizing culture itself. (63)

Decolonization does not operate only at the level of politics though it may be preliminary. The most extreme forms of decolonization would suggest that pre-colonial cultures can be recovered in a pristine form by programmes of decolonization. Ultimately, even the loud slogan of decolonization gives birth to a situation of hybridity. The promise of complete decolonization is not possible because culture in postcolonial scenario can not affirm indigenous purity.

Nation and National Identity

It is difficult to make a universal consensus about what a nation is. Arising in the late eighteenth century and particularly in the French Revolution, the political theory of nation was developed by Diderot and Condorcet. They defined nation as “a union of individuals governed by one law and represented by the same lawgiving assembly”(Qtd. James Snead 231). A nation is a collection of individuals united in supporting a perceived interest.

Germanic invasions in the fifth century AD up until the final Norman conquests in the tenth century introduced into the world the principle which later on was to serve as

a basis for the existence of nationalities. Norman conquests consolidated patriotic feeling. The essence of nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things. For Renan, ethnographic principle which is substituted for a national one is a great error. He writes, "Ethnographic considerations... have played not part in the constitution of modern nations. France is [at once] Celtic, Iberic and Germanic. Germany is Germanic, Celtic and Slav. Italy is the country where the ethnographic argument is most confounded" (14).

There is no pure race and that to make politics depend upon ethnographic analysis is to surrender it to a chimera. The powerful countries such as England, America, France and Italy are those where the blood is the most mixed. Race is something which is made and unmade in the long run of history. The politics based on racial hatred and ethnographic sentiment is in no way a stable thing. About nation Renan further writes:

The nations are not something eternal. They had their beginnings and they will end. A European confederation will very probably replace them. But such is not the law of the century in which we are living. At the present time, the existence of nations is a good thing, a necessity even. Their existence is the guarantee of liberty which would be lost if the world had only one law and only one master. (20)

We live in a world obsessed with national pride. The world is rampant with boundary wars, and the feeling of nationalism, on the banner of countless parties. No matter how conflicting their place and destination is. Nation as myth acts as a charter for the present day social order. It supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values, sociological order and magical belief. The function of such things is to strengthen

tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher, better and more supernatural reality of initial events.

The British cultural historian, Raymond Williams says: "... the modern nation state is entirely artificial" (Qtd. Bernnan 45). A nation like an individual is the culmination of a long past of endeavour, sacrifice and devotion. It is a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past.

It is especially in the third world fiction after the second world war that the fictional uses of nation and nationalism are most pronounced. The nation is a discursive formation. It is not simply an allegory or imaginative vision but a gestative political structure which the third world artist is consciously building or suffering the lack of it. Nationalism is a trope for such things as belonging, bordering and commitment.

Race, geography, tradition, language, size or some combination of these seem finally insufficient for determining national essence and yet people die for nations, fight wars for them and write fictions on their behalf.

Nations are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role. By using national allegories national narratives were and are written to provide legitimacy to the idea of nation as an essence. Many of the novels often attempt to assemble the fragments of a national life and give them a final shape. They become documents designed to prove national consciousness with myriad components that display an active communal life. We undoubtedly find narration as the center of nation. Stories of national origin, myths of founding fathers and genealogies come under national narrative. At the origin of the

nation, we find a story of the nation's origin. In contrast to this tendency, writers like Michael Ondaatje cross the boundary of nationality and project the characters who as an alter ego of the novelists, show transnational attitude.

The nations were and are profoundly unstable formations, always likely to collapse back into subdivisions of clan, tribe, language or religious group. Nations are not natural entities. The instability of the nation is the inevitable consequence of its nature as a social construction. The process of globalization requires that the individual be free to act in an economic realm that crosses and nullifies these national boundaries and identities. The link between nation and expansion is much older. The emergence of the nation-state and the imperial capitalist economies of post-renaissance Europe are inseparable. During and after the discovery of the new world, long distance trading ventures developed in the renaissance period. The trade generated further demands for manufacture, and the raw materials for this expansion were supplied by the new economies of the colonized world in the form of plantation and mines which fuelled the industrialization of Europe.

The French orientalist Earnest Renan noted that nations emerged only after the classical and medieval idea of an empire had broken down. Ironically, it was the newly emergent nations of the post-renaissance world that initiated the new colonizing form of the nineteenth century imperialism. Imperialism now became an extension into the wider world of the ideology of a nation formation based on the unifying signifiers of language and race. The imperialism of the second half of the nineteenth century nation states to prevent the reemergence of order divisions based on earlier conceptions of the 'nation' or to resist the emergence of new internal divisive forces based on theories of class.

Anti colonial movements employed the idea of a pre-colonial past not to reconstruct pre-colonial social state but to generate support for the construction of postcolonial nation-states based upon the European nationalist model.

Postcolonial states incorporated models and institutions based on the European concept of a nation created the continuing linkages that allowed the neocolonialist control of these states to operate so effectively. The use of nationalist myths and sentiments to control, suppress and discriminate against minority groups within many postcolonial states has been the subject of much recent comment. These groups claim their distinctive place and argue for a greater tolerance and acceptance of cultural diversity.

CHAPTER - III

Textual Analysis

General Outline of the Novel

The English Patient comprises two interwoven narratives set in the years 1930-1945. The earlier narrative concerns the love of the English patient, Hungarian explorer and Katharine Clifton, the wife of another explorer. The later narrative concerns Hana, a twenty-year old Canadian who is nursing the English patient as he lay dying of burns received in a plane crash and grieving for her father and her lover, both of them have died in the war. Hana has a self-confessed father complex about the English patient, but as the novel develops she comes to love Kirpal Singh, a British army sapper. The novel is set in April 1945 in the Villa San Girolamo, 20 miles north of Florence, a half-destroyed Italian monastery where Hana is nursing Almasy and where the sapper comes to stay as he clears the region of German bombs and mines. The narrative of the dying Almasy's lost love for Katharine Clifton is woven through Hana's love for him and her developing love for Kirpal.

Almasy is known at first as 'the English patient' because his identity documents were lost in a plane crash in the North African desert. Badly burned, he was rescued by the Bedouin and cared for by them because he could distinguish guns and ammunition by touch, telling them which should be married with which. The English patient apparently cannot remember his own identity but has been treated as a British officer because he speaks English and is clearly of the right social class. The enigma of the English patient's identity will be a major focus of the novel.

The two stories are presented through Ondaatje's characteristic method of discontinuous sections, generally of a page or two in length, but sometimes a merely a paragraph. The first section, 'The Villa' introduces Hana and the English patient and weaves fragments of the English patient's recollection of his plane crash and rescue by the Bedouin into an account of their life in the villa.

The second section 'In Near Ruins', introduces David Caravaggio, a charming thief and a friend of Hana's father. Caravaggio has had his thumbs cut off by the Italians as punishment for his activities as British thief and spy. The third section 'Sometime a Fire' introduces Kirpal Singh, the Sikh sapper who has been given the nickname 'Kip' by the British. He is usually associated with guns which he holds with a nonchalant male confidence, and with bombs which he defuses with a calm and dangerous skill. He is first felt by Hana to be an intruder into her space and it is clear that she is physically drawn to him. Kip and the English patient share a sophisticated understanding of weapons, the intricacy of fuses and bombs.

The fourth section 'South Cairo' gives the historical and biographical context for Almasy's life as a desert explorer and introduces his critique of the nations and of the fixed identities given to persons by words. The fifth section 'Katharine' sketches the quality of the love-affair between Katharine and Almasy, told in fragments from separate points of view.

In the sixth section 'A Buried Plane', Caravaggio tells Hana about the Hungarian desert explorer called Almasy. He was educated in England and explored the desert with a party of English friends but in 1942 Almasy had guided the German spy Eppler through the desert into British held Cairo, then turned back into the desert alone and disappeared.

The seventh section 'In Situ' relates the introduction of Kirpal Singh by Lord Suffolk into an elite bomb-disposal squad. This group welcome Kirpal like a son and he experiences the ambiguous pleasure of being treated with respect and affection by members of a ruling-class which he is more used to see as imperial snobs. Sadly, Suffolk, Harts and Morden are all blown up when the German's invent a new kind of fuse. It then falls to Kirpal to defuse a second bomb, knowing his chances are slim. He succeeds, realizing that the first fuse conceals another, a success which confirms him as the rightful inheritor of Suffolk's mantle.

The eighth section 'The Holy Forest' tells of Kirpal's defusing a 2000 pound Esau bomb in a pit of icy water and mud in 1942. The ninth section 'The Cave of Swimmers' takes us back to Almasy's romance with Katharine Clifton. The section ten 'August' moves the novel towards its close, sketching in more of the relations between Kip and Hana, and between Hana and Caravaggio, and going back to describe Kip's work defusing mines in Naples during October 1943. It then comes to a climax when Kip hears of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on the radio. He reacts intensely, accusing the Whites of only being able to drop such a bomb on an Asian people and blaming the British as the origin of all the bombing of brown-skinned peoples. He jumps onto his motorcycle and drives for two days towards Italian coast, finally skidding off a bridge in the rain but surviving the accident. A coda has him fourteen years later, living as a doctor with a wife and two children in India, thinking nostalgically about Hana in 1945 and somehow remain in touch with her in contemporary Canada.

Cultural Identity in Making

People express their identity in the situation when it is questioned or threatened. The people who face 'other' culture(s) feel themselves insecure and an unknown fear haunts them. This is the feeling of cultural alienation which is shown in the chosen book. The characters of this book expose the complex cultural scenes, and by which Ondaatje tries to describe what he sees in the world around himself. The characters live the life of complete hopelessness and frustration. They have the trauma of identity crisis that underlies the loss of roots which becomes universalized and is expressed with a disquieting energy. Almasy, the central character of the novel and other major characters are dislocated and alienated in the places where they do not belong. They find themselves in a new situation; a situation that is unfamiliar, alien and unwanted. Their sense of 'rootlessness' and the question of 'belonging' give them a sense of 'alienation' which is manifest in their language and activities.

Characters in the novel *The English Patient* speak among them across the frontiers. Identity became central area of concern in cultural studies during the 1990s. Cultural studies explores how we come to be the kinds of people we are. Identity is not an essential entity. It is without universal quality. Identity is discursive construction. In other words, identity is constituted. It is social representation. Cultural identity in those characters' case is always open to being deferred, staggered and serialized. Their identity is an arbitrary and contingent ending rather than permanent and natural. Identity is positioning and repositioning. Diasporic identity is constantly producing and reproducing itself a new dimension through transformation and difference. Their cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some

universal and transcendental spirit inside them on which history has made no fundamental mark. It is something, not a mere trick of imagination. Cultural identity of a diaspora is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth. It is not an essence but positioning. It is a matter of becoming as well as being. Identity is not something which already exists transcending time, place, history and culture. Cultural identity of Almasy, Hana, Kirpal and Caravaggio is an outcome of the surrounding where and how they live. Like everything which is historical, cultural identity undergoes constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power.

Hana asks the English patient about his past, name, nationality and career but he does not reveal all those things. Their conversation goes like this:

I was perhaps the first one to stand up alive out of a burning machine.

A man whose head was on fire. They didn't know my name. I didn't know their tribe.

Who are you?

I don't know. You keep asking me.

You said you were English. (5)

Almasy is not sure of his own identity. In a number of times he refers to himself with third person pronoun. He strongly believes that nations are dangerous inventions. Without associating himself with nationality, he is completely rootless. His identity is fractured. He belongs to nowhere. His own acceptance as an international bastard creates a problem in the question of locating him in a particular time, place and nationality. He admits:

Kip and I are both international bastards – born in one place and choosing to live elsewhere. Fighting to get back to or get away from our homelands all our lives. Though Kip doesn't recognize that yet, that's why we get on so well together (176).

When the protagonist of the novel Almasy's name is revealed, the readers discover the great irony of the novel. The 'English patient' is not even English, but rather Hungarian by birth, an 'international bastard' who has spent much of his adult life wandering the desert. Nationality and citizenship do not matter him. He is without name, without rank or battalion or squadron.

Hana "wanted Kirpal to know her only at the present" (268). To identify one culturally, one should be known in totality. A full account of one's identity can not be anchored detaching one from his past. One who is uprooted from his culture remains at the frontier, one time longing for one thing and another time for another thing. Kirpal Singh shows exactly the same tendency. Towards the end of the novel, he grows anti-imperialist and defies English ways of manner. He is quite threatening when he openly resists English people and their colonizing tendency:

I grew up with traditions from my country, but later more often from your country. Your fragile white island that with customs and manners and books and prefects and reason somehow converted the rest of the world. You stood for precise behaviour. I know if I lifted a teacup with the wrong finger I'd be banished. If I tied the wrong kind of knot in a tie I was out. Was it just ships that gave you such power? Was it, my brother said, because you had the histories and printing press? (283).

Europeans wanted others to observe strictly the behavioural patterns that were regarded standard by them. Typically indigenous values were not respected and promoted on the part of the colonizers. If something did not fit into their model, then it was outcast. Kirpal, at the Italian villa remembers his brother's nativism that asserts for a return or reconstruction to pre-colonial state. Nativism is a desire for returning to indigenous practices and cultural forms as they existed in pre-colonial society.

Kirpal says his brother thinks him a fool for trusting the English. He would say Asia is still not a free continent. He would appall at how they throw themselves into English wars. Kirpal's brother has jingoistic feeling. Remembering his brother, Kirpal talks about European hegemony: "My brother told me... never trust Europeans... never shake hands with them. But... we are easily impressed – by speeches and medals and your ceremonies" (284-85).

Hegemonic power of Western people does not operate directly in a vertical manner. It is that kind of power which tries to rule over subjects by winning consent. Their speech, medals and cultures make 'others' accept it unknowingly. When Kirpal hears on the radio of the atomic bomb that the United States had dropped on Japan, he becomes enraged. He concludes that a Western country would never commit such an atrocity against another white country. He takes his gun and threatens to kill the English patient whom he sees as a symbol of the West. By using four letter word, Kirpal generalizes all Europeans as Englishman: "American, French I don't care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you're an Englishman. You had king Leopald of Belgium and now you have fucking Harry Truman of the USA. You all learned it from the English" (286).

At this juncture, Kirpal takes an essentialist cultural position. In his brother's case, some fixed practices become iconized as authentically indigenous and others are excluded as hybridized or contaminated. Kirpal's brother thinks that certain kind of practices are peculiar to one culture and not to others, and these may serve as important identifiers and become the means by which those cultures can resist oppression and oppose homogenization by global forces. Unlike Kirpal, his brother refuses to give into anything that implies English domination. He is put in prison and remains there for a long time. He is not upset and is confident that Kip poses the trick of survival.

Caravaggio does not attach himself with European solidarity. When Kirpal expresses his agitation upon the bombarding Westerners, Caravaggio easily accepts the attacks as a barbaric invasion. From the perspective of Caravaggio, the novelist writes: "He knows the young soldier is right. They would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation"(286).

Unlike his brother, Kirpal embraces the Western world, especially the English. He sings Western music, wears Western clothes, and makes it his job to defuse bombs in order to save English lives. Far from being nationless, Kirpal has strongly attached himself to the English nation, and know he could never imagine doing the same job for the Germans. Kirpal gets shocked at the premature demise of his mentor Lord Suffolk. But Kirpal's attachment to English and Englishness is not permanent. It goes on fluctuating as he is at the frontier of cultures.

Nationality and Identity

Nationality and identity are interconnected in *The English Patient*, functioning together to create a web of inescapable structures that tie the characters to certain places

and times despite their best efforts to evade such confinement. Almasy desperately tries to elude the force of nationality, living in the desert where he creates for himself an alternate identity, one in which family and nation are irrelevant. Importantly, he chooses his identity rather than inheriting it. Certain environments in the novel lend credence to the idea that national identity can be erased. The desert and the isolated Italian villa function as such places where national identity is unimportant to one's connection with others. Almasy gives an account of desert:

There were rivers of desert tribes, the most beautiful humans I have met in my life. We were Germans, English, Hungarian, African – all of us insignificant to them. Gradually, we became nation less. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation states. Madox died because of nations.

Despising national boundaries, Almasy remains at the frontier. Frontier is the place of connection and disconnection. He hates national and cultural boundaries in order to recreate a wider horizon of humanity. The concept of nationality is just a myth for him. His cultural identity is in the process of formation. Almasy nullifies the national and racial boundaries. His consciousness is transnational. He does not associate himself with any name and nationality. He doesn't like to define himself through colonial discourse that puts European at the top of hierarchy regarding non-Europeans as inferior. Almasy, the English patient takes part in decolonization. His cultural identity is fluid. He is at the frontier of European and indigenous cultures. Readers find no pride of colonial legacy on his part. The reiterated phrases such as 'sons and daughters of empire,' 'Europeans unfinished' to denote non-Europeans is colonial discourse formulated to provide

legitimacy for ruling over 'other'. Almasy, the hero of the novel, whose consciousness is beyond the parochial framework of nationality.

The plane crash has made the English patient forget his national origins. It appears that this amnesia has brought his earlier wish to "erase name and the place he had come from"(139) to full realization. He gets the name 'Almasy' in the novel. The name appears without any direct reference to its bearer. The English patient establishes his slipperiness when he mentions that, "after ten years in the desert, it was easy for him to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation"(137). The fictional construct of Almasy's identity reveals that Ondaatje propels us into yet another realm of fragmentation, questioning, imagination and ambivalence.

The English patient acquires characteristics of a 'wolf' a threatening and concealed presence in the wilderness. Yet, at the same time he also appears as a saint who the members of a specific community visit for their own edification. He is explicitly referred to as a "despairing saint" (3) and an "effigy" (161) at certain points in the narrative.

Almasy is on a mapping expedition, which defines boundaries and lines of ownership. It is perhaps his inability to reconcile these two attitudes that lead to his crimes later in the novel. Almasy shifts nationalities throughout the course of the story; he is originally Hungarian, but is thought at some times to be British, at other times, German. He speaks several languages; he cares not for loyalty to country, his one desire being to map the desert that so captivates him. "I wanted to erase my name and the place I had come from. By the time the war had arrived, after ten years in the desert, it was easy for me to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation" (139). Almasy goes

into describe his desire to do away with his own name in the presence of the desert: “I didn’t want my name against such beautiful names. Erase the family name! Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert”(139) Almasy loses himself in the desert, which he feels is a holy place, which can never be owned or named:

The desert could not be claimed or owned – it was a piece of cloth carried by winds, never held down by stories, and given a hundred shifting names long before Canterbury existed, long before battles and treaties quilted Europe and the East... It was a place of faith. We disappeared into the landscape. (139-140)

The English patient shows us that while we may seek to remove boundaries from our lives, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to move beyond those traditional roles/names that define who we are. When Katharine laments “you killed almost everything in me” (257), she refers to Almasy’s fierce determination to name her for his own, and his desire to strip away the things that she used to identify herself: her name, her husband, and her heritage. In a way Katharine was as elusive as the desert to Almasy; he believed, owned her body, her heart, and her name, yet he was as foolish as those he condemned for thinking they could own the desert. He could not more own his beloved Katharine than he could desert that he also loved.

Characters in Ambivalent Position

The concept of ambivalence highlights cultural mixing and the emergence of new forms of identity. Culturally ambivalent people destabilize and blur cultural boundaries. Cultural and national identities form and uniform over time and across a variety of spaces. Cultures are translocal and involve global flows. Ambivalence occurs out of

recognition of difference and produces something new. The bed-ridden English patient, the bomb discharging sapper Kirpal, the shell-shocked Hana and the former thief Caravaggio, all of them blur the national and cultural identities. They possess transnational and transcultural identities.

All the four characters living in the Italian villa, Kirpal, Hana, Almasy and Carrvaggio are psychologically bruised. “All through the night, weeping and shouting, they had to stop each other going crazy”(129). Culturally, all the characters are in swinging position. The main character Almasy is almost completely burned away out of recognition. His face is severely disfigured by burns. Kirpal lost his mentor, Caravaggio his thumb and Hana her father. They are not the victors. Readers are not given any glorious account of war. The atomic bomb is depicted as a tragedy, an act of cruelty – Europeans flaunting their power over all of Asia and Africa. Almasy does not tell his real name. He constantly retells portions of his story. Portions just like the desert oases appear, disappear and reappear. Almasy in a number of times refers to himself in the third person. His exterior is burned away. Any definite sense of his identity is gone away. Almasy carries with him the History of Herodotus. Herodotus did not simply tell the story of the victors. He wrote about and experienced for himself the cultures of all people of the Middle East. Almasy has the same desire to seek out the stories of the people of the desert. He attempts to understand the culture of Bedouins, a nomadic tribe. His attempt is to recover the buried history of the desert. Almasy also records the story of his own love of Katharine Clifton in the desert. The severely burnt Almasy swings in between past and present. He loves his nurse Hana at the Italian villa at the same time he goes back with Katharine Clifton in his memory.

Kirpal is from India, a British colony. He has worked for the English government as a sapper. His job is to search for mines and disable them asking his life for the safety of European soldiers involved in a war completely unrelated to his homeland. He is sent on very dangerous and sensitive missions. He admires the efficiency of the English. He learns to understand the way that bombs are built, enemy bombs that pose a threat to those around him. He seems not to think about the destructive power of the bombs the Allies build. Finally, he becomes disillusioned after the atomic bomb is dropped in Japan. At that time, he feels more kinship with the Japanese opponents than with the English he works for. He comes to realize that his people have been exploited for their mechanical skill. He grows to despise the English colonization of India. Kirpal Singh, with his anti-colonial attitude says: "You and then the American converted us with your missionary rules. And Indian soldiers wasted their lives as heroes so they could be 'pukkah'. You had wars like cricket. How did you fool us into this? Here... listen to what you people have done"(283).

Kirpal is an innocent rural Indian who is in love with Western consumer goods and hums along to big-band music on his crystal set while he dismantles bombs. Finally, he is grown up as an outsider and leaves the Italian villa forever. Years later, in his homeland India, Kirpal thinks of the time he spent with Hana, Caravaggio and the English patient in a small villa of Italy. He is now a doctor with a wife and two children, and is permanently busy taking care of his patients. He is happy with his family whose hands are all brown and who are comfortable in their way of life. Nonetheless, he often thinks of Hana. Where is she now, who is she with and what does she look like? She sent him letters for a year but after receiving no replies, eventually gave up. His emotional tie

with Hana transcends time and geography, and transcends even the great realities of nationality. Being at the frontier of cultures, he swings in between the West and the East.

The young Canadian nurse, Hana serving the Allies in the Second World War is another shell-shocked character. She is also facing the same problem of cultural identity. Her identity bears a contradiction. It happens so because she is engaged at the frontier of cultures. In the Villa San Girolama, she loves Kirpal. She says: "Kiss me, it's your mouth I'm most purely in love with your teeth"(128). She is very much attracted to the Indian sapper and to the dark colour of his skin. So, she loves him transcending the boundary of race, place, culture and nationality. She also "hold an Indian goddess in her arms"(218). Hana has not only fascination to foreign culture, she also understands the East with paralyzing stereotypes such as lazy. The novelist accounts her vision: "She imagines all of Asia through the gestures of this one man. The way he lazily moves, his quiet civilization"(217).

Hana's father forsook her step-mother Clara for a war. Hana and Clara, they are the lost ones in the family. Hana also has a certain sense of European superiority. The novelist on behalf of the nurse writes about Caravaggio as an immature and uncivilized in order to denounce the people of Western world:

He sits with his hands below the table, watching the girl eat. He still prefers to eat alone, though he always sits with Hana during meals.... She has seen him from a window eating with his hands as he sits on one of the thirty-six steps by the chapel, not a fork or a knife in sight, as if he were learning to eat like someone from the East. (39-40).

Hana denounces Caravaggio as a barbarian who does not know even the way of eating. At this particular point, Hana is showing her imperial burden to civilize the colonized subjects. Hana's character is too complex to analyze. She says: "I was almost going to have a baby a year ago.... I lost the child. I mean I had to lose it. The father was already dead. There was a war"(82). She is very kind to the patients as Florence Nightingale. Contrary to it, she took no more hesitation to murder her baby. The cause of such contradiction is her ambivalent attitude not only in the relationship with people. More than that, she poses love and hate relation to whole humanity. She worked harder in the villa than other nurses. She wants to save the nameless and faceless patient. She would bathe him and give his dozens of morphine. She has made the hall of the villa a war hospital. The nurse had initially lived with other nurses but all of them transferred gradually. The war was over. All the coastal parts were then filled with North American and British troops waiting to be sent home. Hana refused to return with others to a safer place. She was warned of the unclear mines, lack of water and food. The Allies dismantled water pipes when they left. They thought that would make Hana leave. She loves Almasy and Kirpal at different times. On the one hand, Hana does not want to leave the villa, on the other she says: "I wanted to go home and there was no one at home. And I was sick of Europe"(85) It shows her ambivalent nature longing for both sides. Sometimes, she hugs the image of an Indian goddess and sometimes sees her English patient as a "despairing saint" with "hipbones like Christ"(3). She is engaged at the frontier of cultures. Love and hatred, the both phenomena operate on her part regarding her relation with people, nationality and culture.

Some reflections on the phases of Diaspora

Like adopted children who stop investigating the new family framework at the moment when a minimum nucleus of security crystallizes in their psyche. Kirpal, makes European culture his own but his standpoint is not constant and permanent. He will not be content to be affiliated with either culture. The hunting memory of his past life and family members makes him aware of his cultural root. When Hana, a young nurse of Canadian root and Kirpal, an Indian sapper sleep in the tent, they sometimes recall their past. The narrator says:

In the tent there have been nights of no talk and nights full of talk ...

During the verbal night, they travel his country of five rivers. The Sutlej, Jhelum, Ravi, Chenab, Beas. He guides her into the great gurdwara, removing her shoes, watching as she washes her feet, covers her hand.

(270-71)

Though Kirpal is physically restricted in and around the Italian villa, he visits back India in memory. As a diaspora, he can not totally detach himself from the images, landscape and culture of his native land. Kirpal further says to Hana:

If I took you before you morning you would see first of all the mist over the water. Then it lifts to reveal the temple in light. You will already be hearing the humans of the saints – Ramananda, Nanak and Kabir. Singing is the center of worship. You hear the song, you smell the fruit from the temple gardens – pomegranates, oranges. The temple is a heaven in the flux of life, accessible to all. (271)

Kirpal, a brown man in a white nation feels himself a stranger to his own land. He through the medium of culture has filtered into Western civilization. He has managed to

become part of the body of European culture. In other words, he has exchanged his own culture for another. At other moments, he comes to realize that the cultural matrix which he longs for, is not his own. He is terrified by the void, the degradation and the savagery that he sees flourished in Western way of life. Now he feels that he must get away from the white culture. He must seek his culture elsewhere, anywhere at all.

In the case of diasporic characters, we would find spread out before us a panorama on three levels. In the first phase, they assimilate the culture of the occupying power. Kirpal Singh adopts Western culture as the armour for his existence. Wearing a turban as his Indian identity, the young sapper is fond of listening and humming American song while dismantling bombs. He feels a kind of affinity with English music. The novelist writes:

He opened his bag and with scissors clipped the grass away. He laced a small hammock of rope around it and after attaching a rope and pulley to the tree branch slowly lifted the concrete into the air. Two wires led from the concrete towards the earth. He sat down, leaned against the tree and looked at it. Speed did not matter now. He pulled the crystal set out of the bag and placed the earphones to his head. Soon the radio was filling him with American music from the AIF station. Two and half minutes average for each song or dance number. He could work his way back along “A String of Pearls”, “C-Jam Blues” and other tunes to discover how long he had been there, receiving the background music subconsciously. (98)

Kip is conflicted and complicated character. Ondaatje takes free license with Kip, employing him as a lens through which to explore Anglo-Indian relations during a period

of chaos for the British Empire. In the second phase, a diaspora is found disturbed and decides to remember what he is. But a diaspora is not totally devoted to his culture. Since he only has exterior relations with his culture. He is content to recall their life only. Past happening of the bygone days of his childhood will be brought out of the depths of his memory. In the third phase, a diaspora feels a need to speak to his nation and culture. But these phases may not be coherent and static but fluctuating. As a diaspora, Kirpal Singh undergoes through all these phases. His cultural identity is fluctuating. So, he is at the frontier of cultures bearing diasporic identity.

The process of conversion in colonization is far more subtle and potent. Imperial power over the colonized subject may not be necessarily as direct and physical as it is in total institution. Power over the subject may be exerted in myriad ways enforced by the threat of subtle kinds of cultural and moral disapproval and exclusion. The colonized subject may accept the imperial view, including the array of values, assumptions and cultural expressions on which this is based and order his or her behaviour accordingly. This will produce colonized subjects who are more English than the English. Such conversion will be ambivalent leading to mimicry. Kirpal Singh tries to be more English than English. For that he listens to American music and follows English way of life sheepishly. The narrator says: “Although he is a man from Asia who has in these last years of war assumed English fathers, following their codes like a dutiful son”(217). As an Indian man serving in the British army, Kip straddles two worlds, walking a fine line between adopting Western customs and losing his national identity. But he cannot always sustain this tendency and fails many times which shows his fluid and fluctuating identity.

CHAPTER - IV

CONCLUSION

Cultural identity is expressed in writing among other things. People both consciously and unconsciously, and both explicitly and implicitly express their cultural identity through writing. This sense of articulation of the identity appears to be more rigorously and endlessly expressed when people find their identity in question. In the novel, *The English Patient*, the central character is haunted by cultural belongingness and is expressing his trauma of cultural belongingness; it is presumed that the problem of cultural identity appears in the situation where people are culturally dislocated, and when they try to create their unified cultural identity. The idea of cultural and belonging calls forth the issue of nostalgia of the past cultural values.

In today's world, culture has become a defining principle of people. Because of immigration, mass media and other elements most notably globalization, cultural shapes have been fading up. People are facing the problem of cultural identity and belonging, and as a result, they need its expression. Cultural values have been transferred to other cultural groups and the cultural loss appears to be a dominant problem among people. People have been alienated and dislocated, and that sense always haunts them. When Ondaatje became aware of himself and his place in the world around him, he has never thought of his future except as a writer. Culture, thus, finds a powerful expression in his writings. This, according to Hall, is caused by the decline of the old identities which stabilized the social world for so long. It gives rise to 'new identities' and has thus fragmented modern subject. This is the crisis of identity. This is also the firmness of Huntington that the world affairs are in the grip of culture. The identities as both of them

highlight, arise from our 'belonging' to distinctive ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious and above all national cultures. When we find the above stated belongingness, all or some of them lacking in us, we face the danger of becoming nobody. Moreover, the globalization and fundamentalism have endangered the traditional concept of cultural identities.

Culture as a source of identity appears to be critical and important throughout history, providing a sense of belongingness. People get sense of relief whenever they are in it or with it. The cultural conflicts as Huntington says are probable in the immediate face to face level which is more vividly expressed by Ondaatje in his *The English Patient* where Almásy, the central character, and other characters find themselves in the immediate face to face to level. The role of culture is considerably important in defining the behaviours of the people who face it. The characters in the novel also embody the attributes of the real man. The culture which they confront shapes them. When they find themselves in a new culture, geography and people, their identity becomes more important. A sense of nostalgia, therefore, always haunts them since they find a great division between the past and present. Culture, thus, is a shaping force that shapes our thinking and consequently our action. Whenever we find ourselves detached from our culture, we feel a sense of alienation as the characters in *The English Patient* do.

The loss, nostalgia and the continuous sense of hatred toward other culture appear, and we as individual suffers them. This problem of cultural identity is vigorously felt elsewhere.

Culture is also the source of binding and dividing people. People belonging to the same nation can not feel being the citizen of their own state when it is the matter of cultural difference. People think that there is no meaning of life without culture. It gives

us a sense of living. Thus, we consider the situation that to be cut off from civilization is to be without future. Then, we can ask these questions in relation to the novel scrutinized in the present study: do they (the characters) have no future? Are they living a life away from future? Do they have their life or not? The change in the time suggests that there is the inevitability of future that it must loom. The characters in the novel find themselves in a new land and culture that gives them a sense of loss. They seek for belonging but they do not find it. Nor do they succeed in establishing their meaning of having been there. So, it appeared to them as an unsolvable problem created by culture.

The cultural theory used in the present research shows the suffering of the people who are facing the sentence of history – subjugation, domination, diaspora and displacement. Ondaatje himself can be culturally understood as a rootless citizen of the world, who has been forever displaced from his origin. An individual is a sum total formation of historicities. Nation is displayed in the displacement by the culturally displaced writers. Ondaatje also projects the vista of the India-sub continent and its relation with the West in his novels and memoirs with an attitude of ambivalence. Identity in this case resembling his characters is a dynamic process developed out of historicity. So, it is fluid instead of fixed. Ondaatje, in the novel *The English Patient* shows his interracial attraction as a narrator: ‘A man not of your own blood can break upon your emotions more than someone of your own blood’ (90). It is a diasporic to get fascinated by others’ culture that in preliminary phase is alien and foreign. In course of cultural mixing the boundaries blur and disappear. In an interview published in *New York Times* Ondaatje says: “I could say, I was someone living in a new country and all that, and I would see myself as the outsider”(5). In the same interview he says: “The best art is

always mongrel”(5). If we analyze these two statements of Ondaatje as a narrator and an interviewee, it can be easily concluded that he bears a hybrid identity with an ambivalent attitude. The exact reflection of his identity is visible in his writing. *The English Patient* is not an exception to it.

Ondaatje, as a novelist doesn't pass judgement on cultures. He grants freedom to his characters to articulate themselves from their own cultural and social position. He just presents them. There is no categorization of superior and inferior culture. In this sense, he nullifies the hierarchy of master/marginal culture. His characters come out of the restricted arena of a particular culture and engage at the frontier of cultures. A sense of nostalgia always haunts the characters since they find a great division between past and present. Everywhere it is found that Ondaatjean characters bear the burden of culture with an unstable cultural identity aspiring to form new identity. But the formation of new cultural identity is not accomplished. So they remain swinging at the frontier. In the novel *Anil's Ghost*, Anil belongs to nowhere belonging to both her Sri-Lankan origin and metropolitan West.

His almost all characters are entangled and confused in between past and present. *The English Patient* moves basically round the lonely gathering of those four scattered people in the Villa San Girolamo. Alone and in shifting combinations, the lost souls of the villa San Girolamo read and talk, forage for food, tend garden shoot up morphine, make love and aimlessly stalk each other through the villa's twenty rooms. Out of these routines grows a quietly crazed but truthful community, patched together in the dying months of the World War. The four individuals without an anchor, without a horizon become stateless and rootless. Their cultural identity without concrete shape, in the

present research has been analyzed at different levels of cultural components, namely: religion, nationalism, costume, language and so on.

Almasy, Kirpal, Hana and Caravaggio, all of them diasporas. Their culture does not take essentialist position. Almasy had worked for British Intelligence as an aerial photographer on the desert for whenever that area broke out as a theatre of war. Almasy also speaks of himself in the first person, sometimes in the third, yet never refers to himself as Almasy. It is symbolic to his fractured identity. He denies any naturalistic determinism of the boundaries of nation. For him, nation is not dictated by language, geography, race, religion or anything else. He dislikes ethnographic claims and expansion about nation. Taking nation merely as a myth, he crosses and transgresses national boundaries. When Almasy gets entangled with aboriginal cultures at African and Arabian world, he loses his monolithic faith over English culture. His cultural identity is fluid without solid form.

Kirpal mocks and mimes at English culture at the same time. Kirpal wears turban as a cultural signifier and as an identity marker. Turban shows his Indianness. Contrary to it, he also wears English clothes and gets entertained listening to American music. Kirpal accepts his nickname with a certain extent of narcissism. He takes a pleasure of English music while dismantling bombs. In this way, he is hegemonized by English codes and culture. On the one hand, he is hegemonized by English way of life, on the other, he has certain values that are typically indigenous. So his identity is not a confirmed one.

Almasy and other major characters of the novel lack a sense of wholly belonging to either culture. Fluid cultural identity is the predicament of these characters. They are in the process of forming concrete cultural identity bearing multiple subject positions.

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