Chapter III

Demarcation of Caste and Race

Diasporic Writing:

Diasporic writing has taken a heavy sweep on all the countries in the last century. The theories of post colonialism, subaltern, deconstruction and marginalization were discussed and portrayed by different diasporic writers in their respective works. These prevailing socio-political theories marked a distinct trend in Indo-Canadian diasporic writings, giving birth to a number of writers such as Bharati Mukherjee, Suniti Manohar Namjoshi, M.G. Vassanji and so on. Emerging in the same trend was Rohinton Mistry who won a number of accolades for his works. Rohinton Mistry is a South Asian-Canadian writer. Unlike most Indo-Canadian writers he has chosen not to concentrate on life outside South Asia. Mistry is seen to draw abundantly from Indian history, but more purposely to rewrite the history of the marginalized and the oppressed.

Social Evils in India portrayed in *A Fine Balance*:

*A Fine Balance* published in 1995 depicts the traumas suffered by the marginalized and subaltern section of Indian society. This book deals with the realities of Indian society and “the predatory politics of corruption, tyranny, exploitation, violence and bloodshed” (Randhawa 80) and discusses the social evils and shortcomings existing in rural and urban areas of India. The novel throws light on the injustice, cruelty, the traumas and the disparity suffered by the untouchables in rural India. Through a complex, splendid and merciful story, Mistry has brought out a very dark but
prevailing side of India in which the subaltern section and marginalized people of Indian society, like Dalits, women and minority, inhabit and inherit their lives in margin.

The life of the chamaars in a village and their traumatic existence in a caste-ridden society is evoked realistically by Mistry without any over-dramatization of their tragic plight, as it often happens in the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, the champion of the oppressed in Indian English fiction. Dukhi Mochi learns to survive with “humiliation and forbearance as his constant companions” in the village. The silent suffering of his wife Roopa and the ruthless punishment meted out to his sons Narayan and Ishvar for transgressing the caste code by entering into the school premises makes Dukhi Mochi a much dejected man. How can education strive to break the caste barriers if it is very forcefully promoting it in the name of upholding traditions and mere rituals? When Dukhi unable to bear these humilations goes to Pandit Lalluram seeking justice, he is told that everyone has their duties laid out by the governing rules of Dharma. He then courageously decides to “break the timeless chain of caste” by sending his sons to Ashraf in the nearby town to be apprenticed as tailors.

Edward Said identifies a European cultural tradition of ‘orientalism’, which is a particular and long-standing way of identifying the East as ‘other’ and inferior to the West (qtd. in Barry 186). In the same way the Dalits present to the upper class people “as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (Barry 186). In the life of Dukhi, Ishvar and Om, we see how caste decides everything. Though Ishvar and Om were transformed from cobblers to tailors they were not different in the eyes of the upper caste.
The Unjust World of Caste Atrocities in 21st Century India:

As Glasco states majority of the population are Dalits and they live in villages where there is a slow progress. But nevertheless progress is being made, Dalits are on a rampage for a better life where they are also respected as human beings and have a decent pay for their work. Caste has been highly politicized in India and the various Dalit movement have increased caste consciousness and brought about awareness to many people along with caste conflict.

The outcastes are answering back, and in some cases biting back. The extent of this shift still remain undereducated and under-represented, and their collective importance as an Indian community is not recognized . . . .

If every sixth person on the planet is an Indian, every sixth Indian is a Dalit (French 261).

The existence of untouchability has its roots going back to the vedic era and is still prevalent even after 65 years of independence where “the constitution of India incorporated several laws to abolish untouchability by imposing severe punishments” (Randhawa 59). Yet the laws were not able to abolish untouchability. Its prevalence in the 21st century can be clearly seen by going through the local dailies, as establishing laws are a different matter from enforcing them.

The article written by Deepa Kurup states that, Anand Patwardhans film “Jai Bhim Comrade” probes into caste atrocities and violence. This film documents the brutal police firing that killed 10 Dalits in Ramabai Colony in Mumbai. Though the film was about Maharasthra it was true of many other states. He opens to the audience “the unjust
world of caste atrocities, violence and discrimination in 21st century India”. There is a shocking statistics he provides in his film which are testimony to the fact that “Every day two Dalits are raped and three killed”

Education alone can not solve the problem of caste system. It is educated students who are up against meritocracy. To this problem Patwardhan replied:

We live in a system that is [unequal and creates] inequality. Reservation is only a minor sop to assuage our conscience. There is this popular argument of meritocracy, but [you] forget that we have not been a meritocracy for centuries… we’ve oppressed and suppressed all along!

It talks about Dalit politics and how Dalit parties have evolved.

Revisiting Ramabai Colony in 2010, Patwardhan shows how those who had fought for Dalit rights 14 years ago are now helping the BJP and Shiv Sena (the parties in power when the killing took place) blatantly misleading people into believing that they represent their cause, even as revealing posters show these same parties promoting the concept of Brahmin or Maratha supremacy.

On this, Patwardhan explained that this had happened world over with radical movements. “Like the Black Panthers, for instance. Some the system killed, others were bought over. But there is hope. When I screened my film in slums in Mumbai, I realised that the rank and file are not going to go along with their leaders who are joining hands with the perpetrators.”
The Dalits ill-treatment does not stop with the villages; their expectation for a better future in the city is sabotaged and buried deep down with the Emergency. They are marginalized socially, economically and politically and are exploited by the upper caste people. Margin is a place where a person ceases to thrive; which implies that if a person is in the margin he is unable to evolve whether being economically backward, destitute of basic needs or suppressed by psyche. In India we find the Dalits are the most marginalized in the society and their everyday life is a struggle towards survival. In *The Chamcha Age* the Dalit leader Kanshi Ram used strong words:

> The sufferings and humiliations of the slaves, the Negroes and the Jews are nothing as compared to the untouchable of India… Everywhere in the world democracy means rule of the majority. But in India 85% of people are ruled by 10 to 15% Higher Castes… Brahminism had such poisonous germs in it, that it effectively killed the desire to revolt against the worst form of injustice (French 264)

Making Life Livable in Adverse Circumstances:

The Hindus, Omprakash and Ishvar Darji, occupy prominent positions in *A Fine Balance* insofar as both are crucial in illustrating the novel’s central concern of how to make life livable under unfavourable conditions and adverse circumstances. India’s caste system is of the utmost importance in this context. Any discussion of the effects of caste on Ishvar and Om must necessarily include their family background. It starts from Dukhi Mochi, Ishvar’s father and Omprakash’s grandfather. Dukhi Mochi belongs to the Chamaar caste of tanners and leather
workers. This is significant because as VS Naipaul points out, “... the worker in leather is among the lowest of the low, the most tainted of the tainted.” (Genetsch 162) Together with the other chamaars in the village, Dukhi lives on the carcasses of dead animals. Untouchability is a stigma; other castes avoid contact with Dukhi because he is deemed impure.

Hinduism explains caste by recourse to the concept of karma, which can be understood as a natural law that determines the quality of a person’s rebirth on the basis of his deeds in his/her present incarnation. In general one can say that confirming to caste rules increases the chances of a better reincarnation. Moreover, caste is such a powerful instrument for structuring a society not only because it is resistant to change, but also because it provides psychological relief for those who are better off.

The Hindi poet Omprakash Valmiki, a Dalit, stated that ‘If the people who call the caste system an ideal social arrangement, had to live in this environment for a day or two, they would change their mind’ (French 265).

It is crucial to realize that Mistry’s portrayal of Hindu culture is not an impartial ethnographic account of Indian society but a deeply pessimistic analysis of what it means to live in India and not be in the fortunate circles. He suggests that stark injustices are inherent in the practice of caste, and it is the inhumanity of the untouchability that is severely criticized as a contributing factor to an erosion of meaning in the lives of Dukhi, Narayan, Ishvar and Om. An example of the cruelty and the arbitrariness that characterizes their treatment by their betters is illustrated by the following quote:
For walking on the upper-caste side of the street, Sita was stoned, though not to death- the stones had ceased at first blood. Gambir was less fortunate; he had molten lead poured into his ears because he ventured within hearing range of the temple while prayers were in progress. Dayaram, reneging on an agreement to plough a landlord’s field, had been forced to eat the landlord’s excrement in the village square. Dhiraj tried to negotiate in advance with Pandit Ghanshvam the wages for chopping the day; the Pandit got upset, accused Dhiraj of poisoning his cows, and had him hanged (Mistry 108-9).

D. Karthikeyan article titled “Rescued bonded labourers yet to be rehabilitated: NCPCR demands state intervention to put children back to schools under the Right to Education Act” states:

Bonded labourers, including children, who were rescued from ‘murukku’ making units in Maharashtra, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh and psychologically affected due to mental and physical torture in cramped working spots, are yearning for rehabilitation.

The Madurai district police, on March 24, brought home 42 bonded labourers who were rescued from three States. Fifteen among the 42 labourers were children and 21 among them were Dalits. The few lucky ones have been taken back to their homes by their parents but many are still at homes for runaway children in Madurai.
The article titled “Wall of untouchability demolished: It prevented 300 Arundathiar families from using a road laid by Corporation” states:

A team of officials from Salem Corporation led by Executive Engineer A. Asokan pasted a warning notice on the wall at 11 am on Thursday telling those who erected the wall to demolish it before 4 p.m. “Otherwise, the Corporation will demolish it and collect demolition charge from the persons concerned,” it warned.

But till 4 p.m., nobody had turned up to demolish the wall. Therefore, the civic body under Section 256 of the Salem Municipal Corporation Act 1994 pulled it down with the help of earthmover.

There are a few initiatives like this taken by the government but if untouchability needs to be abolished both the government and the people have to work hand in hand.

The marginalized condition of the Dalits appear once again in *A Fine Balance* when Ishvar and Om enter the village school and according to the teacher, pollutes the class and the tools of learning by their very presence and touch. The centre of learning which is supposed to eradicate such evil practice and teach students about unity is actually fostering the difference and implicating such ideas in young hearts. How will education abolish untouchability if it strongly believes in these social evils and even recommends it? Mere theories cannot change the mentality of the people. For implementing those theories in practical life, one has to have a change of heart and a change of mentality.
When tormented by the school master, the children appeal to their father who in turn appeals to Pandit Laluram who is respected by his peers

... for his age, his sense of fairness, and for the Sacred Knowledge locked inside his large, shiny cranium.

Thanks to his impeccable credentials, everyone always went away satisfied: the victim obtained the illusion of justice; the wrongdoers were free to continue in their old ways... (Mistry 111).

He had a legendary reputation for justice where it was said even an untouchable could get justice at his hands. Relying on this legend Dukhi made his appeal for justice, but instead he received a hypocritical answer to his question from Pandit Laluram who remarks- “You understand there are four Varnas in society: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Each of us belongs to one of these four varnas, and they can not mix” (Mistry 113).

Dissatisfied Dukhi finds himself subdued before the upper caste and his voice remains marginalized and unheard. Disgusted by the treatment of his sons by members of the more privileged caste, Dukhi sends his sons Ishvar and Narayan to be apprenticed as tailors in a nearby town. They are placed under the loving care of Ashraf, a Muslim who is Dukhi’s friend. In the village they were treated as untouchables by their own religious group. Here in the town Ashraf takes them under his wing without showing any religious disparities. Human bonding of friendship plays a vital role than the religious dictates of caste and creed.
The Courage to Challenge a Conservative Society:

The revolution of Dukhi to bring his family out of the caste restriction shows his courage to challenge a conservative religious society in which the fortune of a person is decided by his caste instead of his capability and caliber. The raising of his voice shows “surprising courage in a man who has been socialized into accepting his position in the caste hierarchy unquestioningly” (Randhawa 143).

Dukhi’s individual revolution is an infringement of the social norms which are inculcated into a person when he enters his teen and acquires the knowledge of invisible line of casteism he could never cross, and within which he has to survive in the village, like his ancestors, with humiliation and suffering as his best companions. That is why when Dukhi sends his sons Ishvar and Narayan to have apprentice as tailors with Ashraf, his own occupation is affected as he is stepping out of his society’s decided social norms:

In the old days, punishment for stepping out side one’s caste would have been death. Dukhi was spared his life, but it became a very hard life. He was allowed no more carcasses, and had to travel long distances to find work. Sometimes he obtained a hide secretly from fellow Chamaars; it would have been difficult for them if they were found out. The items he fashioned from this illicit leather had to be sold in far-off places where they had not heard about him and his sons (Mistry 118-119).
In order to give a better future for his sons Dukhi sends them to the city to become tailors and thereby change them from Chammars to Darji’s. Narayan, Ishvar and Om are displaced. Ishvar and Narayan migrate to the city where they are apprenticed as tailors. In contrast to his brother, Narayan returns to the village and becomes a radical political activist.

Political Participation of Untouchables in the Election Process:

Once when Narayan voices his right of voting and tries to throw out the traditional pattern and exercise his vote, he and his two supporters were ill-treated in an inhumane way before they were all hanged. The vengeance of the upper caste did not stop at that; it took another leap where the entire family of Dukhi was burnt alive with the exception of Ishvar and Om as they were in the city. This was considered to be a punishment that they rightly deserved as Thakur Dharamsi says, “His [Dukhi’s] arrogance went against everything we hold sacred. . . . he had turned cobblers into tailors, distorting society’s timeless balance” (Mistry 147). According to him crossing the line of caste, wherein forgetting where they belong in the hierarchical order is an unforgivable crime and it must be put down with utmost severity as a lesson to others.

The article reported by Shoumojit Banerjee under the title “All accused in 1996 Bihar Dalit carnage acquitted: Sessions court in Ara district had sentenced them in May 2010” states:
The Patna High Court has acquitted all the 23 persons accused of perpetrating the massacre of 21 Dalits at Bathani Tola in Bhojpur in 1996. A Division Bench of judges Navneeti Prasad Singh and Ashwani Kumar Singh cited “defective evidence” to acquit all of them.

The carnage took place on the afternoon of July 11, 1996. Upper caste (Rajput and Bhumihar) landowners of the Ranvir Sena, a private militia of the landlords, stormed Bathani Tola in Bhojpur district's Sahar block in Central Bihar and ruthlessly hacked the Dalits, among them were women, teenage girls and babies less than 10 months old.

“I am shocked by the High Court verdict,” said Anand Vatsyayan, counsel for the witnesses in the Bathani Tola case. “The evidence at hand was more than sufficient to uphold the judgement passed by the Ara sessions court. . . In July last year, the supremo of the Ranvir Sena, Brahmeshwar Singh “Mukhiya,” known as the ‘Butcher of Bathani Tola,’ walked out of Ara Jail.

There was another article reported by Shoumojit Banerjee under the title “For residents of Bathani, it is a horror they can not forget: Court verdict rekindles memories of a dark day in 1996” which states:

Bathani Tola was not the first, and would not be the last, in a series of atrocities committed through the 1980s and 1990s by the Sena, a powerful caste army of Bhumihars and Rajputs. Its victims were always landless labourers (Dalits in most cases), who, though poor and
impoverished, had begun to get radicalised in the backdrop of the Naxal movement taking root in the State.

Among those named was Brahmeshwar Singh - the infamous Mukhiya and founder of the Ranbir Sena - who is said to have overseen the Bathani killings as well as the caste massacres that followed in Laxmanpur Bathe and Shankarbhiga (81 Dalits were killed in the two villages). Fourteen years after the bloodbath in Bathani, the Ara sessions court sentenced three persons to death and awarded life sentence to another 20. This government [the Nitish Kumar-led NDA] has sold out to the rich and influential. It is now up to the Party [the Communist Party of India (Marxist -Leninist)] to decide the next course of action,” says Mr. Chaudhary, fatigued and bitter from years of fighting the case.

A Sena sympathiser, who spoke to this correspondent, justified the “reactionary mobilisation” of the upper castes against “those Naxals.” “The land is ours. The crops belong to us. They [the labourers] did not want to work, and moreover, hampered our efforts by burning our machines and imposing economic blockades. So, they had it coming.”

Naimuddin and others have one question for visitors: if those named in the FIR are not the killers, who killed the 21 residents of Bathani Tola?

A case which has prolonged for more than 14 years denies justice to the Dalits. Even though the law has been passed for the empowerment of the Dalits the situation has not improved for them. When the law is not enforced it becomes a myth. Dalits still remain among the voiceless and now their plight has gone from bad to worse as they
stepped out of their closure and made a protest. They whole heartedly believed in the justice that was promised to them but failed to see it was just an illusion.

Narayan in *A Fine Balance* fights against the constitutionally guaranteed political participation of untouchables in the election process. By taking on the fight against the corruption and nepotism of the parliamentary elections, he takes on the fight against an existence deprived of dignity. When Narayan and Ishvar try to emulate the upper caste people, it is not accepted by them as they do not want the Dalits to voice out against any disparities. Change is a social phenomenon which is not welcomed by the ‘haves’ as it brings down their power.

*A Fine Balance* demonstrates three things with respect to caste: First of all, the novel explores the effects of untouchability on individuals. It explores the injustice of caste, and probes the implications of defying it. While Narayan opts for political resistance, Om and Ishvar suffer from escape and exile. Secondly, *A Fine Balance* makes clear that while loyalty and trust in the socio-cultural system of religion are undermined, Hinduism is not necessarily affected by this. Thirdly, the gruesome practice of caste as a cultural system is more prevalent in a rural context than in an urban one (Genetsch 165).

Penalty of Death to those who defy the Caste System:

The young apprentices soon grow into skillful tailors and seem to move up higher on the ladder of class, from a Chamaar (cobbler) to a Darji (tailor). This boldness of Dukhi and his sons creates unhappiness among the upper castes. Waiting to strike
Thakur Dharamsi a man of high social standing uses Narayan’s defiance on the voting poll against him and kills everyone in his family including Narayan in a most inhuman way as a lesson to others who dare to defy the caste system, and challenges the supremacy of the upper castes. Only Ishvar and Om are spared of this massacre as they are away from home at that time. Fortunate to have a loyal ally in Ashraf, they remain in his home until a combination of surrounding religious intolerance and competition from a newly established ready-made clothing shop convinces them to move to a larger city where they hope greater prospects await.

‘We have also come for a short time only’, said Ishvar. ‘To earn some money, then go back to our village. What is the use of such a big city? Noise and crowds, no place to live, water scarce, garbage everywhere. Terrible.’

‘Our village is far from here,’ said Omprakash. ‘Takes a whole day by train- morning till night- to reach it.’

‘And reach it, we will,’ said Ishvar. ‘Nothing is as fine as one’s native place.’ (Mistry 7)

Moving beyond Difficult Circumstances:

Ishvar and Om in A Fine Balance belonging to the lower rung of the Hindu society come with new hopes and dreams of a better future to the city. They soon meet Dina, the third tailor, and Maneck, her paying guest. As a Parsi, Dina lives outside the caste system and is raised in a upper middle- class family. At the age of forty two,
having been a widow for sixteen years, Dina is struggling to survive on her own. Unlike Ishvar and Om, Dina experiences struggle that are gender-based, rather than class-based.

Mistry’s three tailors come from different places and occupy different social stations, at the same time as they share struggles against discrimination and inequality within their original communities. Their stories remind us that community is not always supportive. As we meet them, they are committed to moving beyond the difficult circumstances determined by their communities and their community institutions. Globalization initially appear to offer them a way forward, an opportunity that they dare to take as they work together to prosper and reinvent their community (Anjali 187).

Mistry deftly handles the growing intimacy between Dina Dalal, Maneck and the chamaar-turned tailors, Ishvar and Om. When the tailors and Maneck arrive together at Dina’s “dingy little flat,” she is relieved since “her fragile independence was preserved.” She is initially quite appalled by their sloppy work and tardiness. The various stages in their relationship, from her initial resistance to any kind of intimacy with the tailors to the longing for their company, given her own loneliness, and the rapid growth of concern for them once she learns of the enormity of their suffering, are described in painstaking detail by the novelist. This transformation of such a relationship, as the one between Parsis and Chamaars is an exceptional event in Indian English fiction. Mistry does not resort to any romantic simplification. It is the mutual dependence between them
that finally forces Dina Dalal to agree to let the tailors sleep in her veranda, for she could not afford to lose their services. Note her reflection:

But how firm to stand, how much to bend? Where was the line between compassion and foolishness, kindness and weakness? And that was from her position. From theirs, it might be a line between mercy and cruelty, consideration and callousness. She could draw it on this side, but they might see it on that side. (Mistry 469)

As the quilt is in the process of being pieced together and stitched, the lives of Dina and the three men from different background become more and more intertwined. The quilt develops into a story of their past, present, and future. As the novel progresses and the lives of these three characters are increasingly intertwined, the promise of a better future crumbles down in horrid ways. Irrespective of their struggle against traditional norms and demarcations in the name of caste and gender, all the three characters succumb to the very demarcations they boldly fought against.

The representation of Dalits in A Fine Balance brings a sensible and sensitive understanding of social exploitation inherent in the class structure of India and points out how a marginalized person loses his individual identity. As a humanist and social novelist, it becomes easier for Mistry to describe the dignity, value and freedom of the individual human being with their identity. The reasons being the search for the individual and social identities, is palpable in Mistry’s works. As Narayan states: “Life without dignity is worthless” (Mistry 144).
Freedom is not free at all. Sometimes it comes at a very high price. What is the cost of such freedom? Is it really worth it? It is the question to be raised. In spite of all their toils they are finally left with their bare survival. In some ways, this metaphor of the quilt can be taken a step further in that both Dina and the quilt can be associated with India in its state of independence. Mistry writes in regard to Dina:

Independence came at a high price: a debt with a payment schedule of hurt and regret. But the other option- under Nusswan’s thumb- was inconceivable.

As always, on looking back, Dina was convinced she was better off on her own. (473)

As Dina struggles to deal with her own independence, India also deals with its own self-rule since its independence in 1947. Despite “stories of misery, caste violence, government callousness, official arrogance, [and] police brutality” (Mistry 227), there is still the belief that India is better off in the self rule. Yet there is only a dismal hope for major changes. Ishvar says to Dina, “But before there can be home or shops for people like us, politicians will have to become honest” (455). He holds up his index finger, bends it, then straightens it, and says, “The bent stick may straighten, but not the government” (455). This type of life is still preferable to living under British rule, just as Dina’s fragile independence is preferred to living under Nusswan.
Voicing together, Joining Hands firmly:

The search for dignity comes with a cost. The cost that Narayan had to pay was his life, along with his families, as it was the cost which Dukhi had to pay. Ishvar was maimed for life, while Om was castrated. The characters face the consequences of their beliefs in the end which is brutal and tragic. The voice of a few like Dukhi’s family was easily suppressed as they were fighting against a much larger force with power and money. Their efforts did not bring the change they expected but it was definitely a start for the change. When voices could get together and hands could join firmly against such social evils, change could be seen. An illustration of this is found during the religious riots which saved Ashraf and his family. As Patrick French points out: “... like African Americans in the United States, it was only when Dalits organized themselves rather than being helped by external well-wishers that things really began to change”(278).

The Historical Context:

The role of history in Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* needs to be examined to some extent. The contemporary Indian novelists in English are preoccupied with history along with magical realism. There is a view like Shashi Despande’s who thinks that contemporary Indian English novelists are overburdened with history and “they end up sagging under its weight”(Roy, Pillai 204 ). Mistrys novels however do not suffer from such excess. *A Fine Balance* attempts to locate the lives of its characters in a historical context. In other words, the readers see the personal in relation to the general.
This fusion between the general and the personal is seen at its best in the realistic representation of the Emergency in India during Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s reign. Coming to the big city of Mumbai their struggle to fulfill their basic necessities is keenly described. With dreams and aspirations for a better future away from the shackles of caste prejudice they secure a job under Dina who is in turn working for the Au Revoir exports. Thereby a steady income is arranged. Then their search for shelter turns out to be temporarily substituted by a shack in the jhopadpatti. A jhopadpatti is actually an illegal procurement of government land by the influential or people who have contacts with the creamy layer of the society. These so called house brokers put up shacks with just basic facilities and rent out for meagre amount to people like Ishvar and Om who are struggling to make a living in the big city by the sea (i.e. Mumbai).

The life in the jhopadpatti is vividly described by Mistry, which is something of a novelty in Indian English fiction. “Their daily life is picturised with a Dickensian eye for detail” (Roy, Pillai 205). One such memorable account is when the inhabitants of the jhopadpatti are taken to a village to be part of the audience who has been gathered around to listen to the Prime Minister’s speech on the numerous benefits of Emergency to the poor. Mistry calls this performance of hers, rather satirically, as “a day in the circus” (Roy, Pillai 205). Though Ishvar and Om are not able to intellectually comprehend the factors that lead to the imposition of the emergency, they do feel its repercussions purely at the personal level when their jhopadpatti is demolished as a part of the city beautification programme. It is ironic as beauty comes at the sacrifice of poor people’s homes.
While exploration and colonization have brought distant communities together for centuries and changed them forever more, the trends and projects of late twentieth century globalization have resulted in new forms and sources of community (Roy, Pillai 182).

Difficult and Good Times pieced together:

In Mistry’s novel, as the quilt is observed and touched, memory is triggered, and the various pieces of fabric bring to mind specific occasions. However, not all of the memories are pleasant or happy. Ishvar points out one particular square and says, “See this? Our house was destroyed by the government, the day we started on this cloth. Makes me feel sad whenever I look at it” (490). Dina in her jovial response adds that she could cut that square out of the quilt, but Ishvar tells her to let it be, because it looks good where it is. He strokes the texture of that particular block, “recapturing the times” (490), and points out that one “sad” fragment is in the midst of other “happy” pieces:

Calling one piece sad is meaningless. See, it is connected to a happy piece- sleeping on the verandah. And the next square- chapatis. Then that violet tussar, when we made masala wada and started cooking together. And don’t forget this georgette pitch, where Beggarmaster saved us from the landlord’s goondas.

. . . . ‘So that’s the rule to remember, the whole quilt is much more important than any single square.’ (Mistry 490)
In this textile record, difficult and good times are portrayed and accepted. Eleanor Munro writes that she has heard it said: “There is a world of suffering in that quilt” (Roy, Pillai 219). This anguish of life is often juxtaposed with the better times. In Dina’s quilt, both sad and happy experiences are included in the fabric document that can be connected to four integrated lives.

Now the homeless Ishvar and Om end up as pavement dwellers, but even there no solace is available to them. They are forcefully taken away to the nearby irrigation project site where they go through the hard grind of manual labour. Their labour is exchanged for a mere semblance of shelter and food. They are eventually rescued by the Beggarmaster and are back in Dinas flat.

The intellectual response to the emergency is dramatized in a long conversation between Maneck and Avinash. It is further seen in the manner in which the student’s unions are split and in the submissive support of the college teachers for the declaration of the emergency. “Mrs Gupta and Nusswan, both representing the vested interests hail the emergency as ‘a true spirit of renaissance’ and regard the Prime Minister as ‘our true visionary leader’ ” (Roy, Pillai 205)

Though Dina is free from the constraints of the caste, she is obligated to fulfill the constraints of the society based on her gender. While caste system is confined to restrict people of South Asia gender is a universal factor of discrimination. The quilt is not only elegant and functional but it also serves as a metaphor for various aspects of Dina’s life. It consists of three portraits says Deborah Weagel:
A self portrait of Dina and her desire for independence, a portrait of the nation India which also attains independence, and a group portrait of a student boarder and two tailors who become a part of Dina’s life. Her quilt is a visual text which tells the story of her existence and interactions with people from different castes and backgrounds (Roy, Pillai 212).

Caste System – A Hinderance to Modern India:

In *The Nation and Its Fragments*, Chatterjee also discusses the caste system in his chapter “The Nation and Its Outcasts”. He says that from the point of view of the colonist, the one social institution that distinguished Indian society from Western society is “the institution of caste” (173). It was asserted by some that caste system was considered to be a hindrance in the way of India becoming a modern society. Indian nationalist responded to this argument in two ways. One was “to deny the suggestion that caste is essential to the characterization of Indian society” (173). Caste was considered a precapitalist formation that needed to be suppressed and ignored in order to be eliminated. The second approach was to accept the caste hierarchy as an important and necessary element of Indian social structure. Chatterjee explains:

The former could be said to represent the pure theory of universal modernity”, and that “the latter, its genealogy running deep into the tradition of Orientalism scholarship, upholds a theory of Oriental exceptionalism (175).
Mistry’s Desire to Integrate People despite their Caste:

After Dukhi is hit with a stick and then cheated out of his wages by Thakur Premji, the untouchable says to his wife, “They treat us like animals” (Mistry 105). Dukhi later arranges a slightly better life for his sons by breaking with tradition and sending them to be apprentices with his friend Ashraf, who is a tailor. The fragments of the quilt tell the story about the difficulties in caste system. But a desire to integrate people despite their caste is seen through connecting the pieces through Dina’s stitches. Describing the discrimination based on casteism as inhuman treatment, Mistry shows his consciousness towards the social change. He reveals the problems faced by the marginalized and the downtrodden by the upper caste and the people in the main stream. Thereby he makes the clear distinction between the condition of the ‘haves’ and the ‘have not’s’ in India.

Mistry’s Consciousness towards Social Change:

Presenting the Dalit existence in A Fine Balance Mistry raises the marginalized voice of the Dalits which has been restrained far too long within the caste boundaries of the traditional system of varnas in India. He has widened his scope of writing from the initial Parsi narration, to including the Dalit’s narrative with his lower class elements. In his narrative, he has added the basic structure of Indian society. In this novel his writing has reached a wider audience.

The considerable heartrending conditions of the Dalits highlighted in A Fine Balance are actually raising the voice of the marginalized people in India. Through his vivid and picturesque descriptions of the conditions of the untouchables, he illustrates
how mainstream literature has gone to merge untouchability in its content. The incidents occurring to Dalits in *A Fine Balance* appears very grim and bleak to the untouchables, yet the emergence of the Dalit aesthetics and the awakening of Dalit consciousness visible in the family of the Dalit, epitomizes the evolution of Dalit existence in English and Indian literature.

Mistry uses literature as a mirror to reflect society. He advocates humanism and takes a firm stand against the illtreatment of the untouchables. He describes that the degradation of the untouchables is due to their economic dependence on the upper caste people. He shows in the novel that human beings who want to make a difference and change the age old traditional norms of the society succumb to the socio-economic cultural pressures. Generally writing on the Parsi margin, Mistry narrates the social realities, particularly related to the Dalits. He brings a social consciousness against the caste system by making bold and dauntless statements in the novel.

Feminist sociologist Saskia Sassen’s analysis of contemporary urban environments makes a unique contribution to the debate on globalization’s impacts, particularly on the people who, like Mistry’s three tailors, inhabit emerging global cities like Mumbai. As Sassen describes:

The downtowns of cities and metropolitan business centers receive massive investments in real estate and telecommunications while low-income city areas are starved of resources. Highly educated workers see their incomes rise to unusually high levels while low or medium-skilled workers see theirs sink. Financial services produce super profits while
industrial services barely survive. These trends are evident, with different levels of intensity, in growing number of major cities in the developed world and increasingly in some of the developing countries that have been integrated into the global financial markets.

In his decision to take work abroad, Maneck becomes one of globalization’s migrant workers. “These individuals move from their home countries, often to escape persecution or poverty but sometimes, as Maneck does, for greater financial or career opportunities” (Roy, Pillai 190). Statistics indicates that 175 million people have moved from their counties of birth (Taylor 2003). According to Hirst and Thompson (1999), their primary destinations have been North America, Western Europe and, until the Gulf War in 1991, the Gulf states. While skilled and professional migrant workers have fared relatively well, entry restrictions in many states often lead to mistreatment, deception and sometimes, illegal treatment of poor, unskilled workers (Hirst and Thompson 1999, Taylor 2003).

Double Victimization:

This describes the situation of the anonymous maid whom Maneck encounters in Dubai. Nameless, she represents the many poor migrants who are victimized by their employers. While globalization might offer these people an opportunity to earn sufficient funds for themselves and, often, remittances to family at home, it also removes them from community. These individuals are doubly victimized by globalization: the burdens of poverty and discrimination that they face in their homes, societies and communities are compounded by social isolation, and emotional and physical
vulnerability. Her presence in the novel reminds us that, despite rhetoric about breaking down cultural and physical boundaries between people, globalization’s most meaningful effect for at least some people is to break down whatever community has been constructed precisely because physical borders have been crossed.

An article written by Staff Reporter states that: The Panjagutta police on Thursday detained three persons who sexually assaulted a Dalit woman after taking her to an isolated place, offering a job, and murdered her five days ago. Globalization becomes a snare to trap the downtrodden victims. It gives hope only to curtail it with such atrocities. Any Dalit reading this will not dare to come out of her caste system as it puts a mental block on the readers especially a Dalit.

Multi-community Individuals:

Maneck in his relationship to other individual and to community in *A Fine Balance*, is an example of what Anderson terms ‘multi-community individuals’

People whose personal issues have to do not so much with the “loss of community” that is a staple concern of many commentators, but rather with a surfeit of community, they must often choose priorities among their various community affiliations, . . . [and] occasionally struggle with conflicting ethical and moral values that are held by different groups.

Maneck’s communities include his village of birth and family, his fellow Parsis in India, his school mates, Indians working in the Middle East and, of course, his friends and housemates, the tailors. “Anderson’s distinction between lack of and surfeit of community is interesting in an academic way; however, as Maneck’s story reminds us,
the point of community is to provide a source of identity, purpose and belonging” (Roy, Pillai 193). In the end, whether we are engaged in competing communities or disengaged from all community, for a growing number of people, globalization is creating a world in which individuals no longer have a clear attachment to meaningful, core community.

In the writings of the geographer David Harvey, we find another way of describing this type of globalization-induced alienation. According to Harvey:

We have recently been going through a stronger phase of what I call ‘time-space compression’: the world suddenly feels much smaller, and the time-horizons over which we can think about social action become much shorter. Our sense of who we are, where we belong and what our obligations encompass – in short, our identity – is profoundly affected by our sense of location in space and time. In other words, we broadly locate our identity in terms of space (I belong here) and time (this is my biography, my history). Crisis of identity (Where is my place in this world? What future can I have?) arise out of strong phases of time-space compression (294).

This, too, depicts Maneck’s situation, and he, in turn, represents a more common human situation. Harvey is especially concerned with capitalism and a source of insecurity: “It is always unstable and crisis prone. The history of capitalist crisis formation and resolution is, I maintain, fundamental to understanding our history. Understanding the rules of capital accumulation helps us understand why our history and geography take the form they do” (293). Particularly for individuals whose lives become
mobile as they follow capitalism’s money trail, Harvey’s explanation of the impact of globalization reigns true. Maneck and Harvey have the similar question, as they ask where is the sense of belonging when the roots which have always defined a persons identity no longer exists.

“In stressing the importance of brain over brawn, globalization has given rise to an entire jargon: lifelong learning, knowledge of the society, and human and social capital” (Roy, Pillai 194). While Mistry’s focus is not education, he seems to acknowledge the value of life-long learning by centering some pivotal events on the human impulse and ability to learn. Ishvar and his brother, two bright, curious children, are taken by their father to learn tailoring from Ashraf shortly after they are punished and humiliated for sneaking into the school house of upper caste children. As an adult Ishvar and his nephew Om meet Maneck as the three of them arrive by train in the big city- Ishvar and Om to seek tailoring work, and Maneck to begin his college education that he hopes will free him from the confines of his village. Dina strengthens her sewing skills after the death of her husband, with the help of a sympathetic aunt, and develops business skills with the support of a friend. The presence and importance of lifelong learning in the lives of these characters sets portions of their stories in motion.

The lives of Mistry’s four characters illustrate how globalization and casteism has affected the lives of ordinary people. And how the degeneration of community and social capital hinders people from moving forward from facing life’s harshness and are left merely with their bare survival. “Learning is sought and knowledge is created, but their potential is all but lost” (Roy, Pillai 196).
The Larger Picture of War in *The English Patient*:

All the four characters in the *The English Patient* are from different nationalities, a Hungarian known as the English patient, his Canadian nurse, a Canadian thief, and an Indian Sikh working as a British army sapper. They try to make them useful during the war and the British acknowledge their services as long as they are useful and later they are caught and destroyed because they belong to a different nation.

The setting is the ruined Villa San Girolamo at the end of Second World War in Italy where the major narrative takes place in *The English Patient*. “The English patient, whose enigmatic identity the novel is chiefly devoted to unraveling, is its severely burned prone center” (Thorpe 609). He is tended by Hana, a Canadian nurse, "twenty years old and mad and unconcerned with safety during this time,”(Ondaatje 15) who has insisted he cannot be moved; he will soon die. Hana is joined by one Caravaggio, whom she knew as a professional thief back in Toronto and also a friend of her father; now an allied special agent, he has suffered torture when caught by the Germans and lost his nerve. “These two characters appeared in Michael Ondaatje ’s previous novel, *In the Skin of the Lion*, knowledge of which would deepen the significance of their relationship here; Hana's father Patrick, a major character from that novel, dies in the margin of this one” (Thorpe 609). The fourth member who joins them is a young Sikh sapper “who will spend intense, seemingly nerveless days defusing German mines; though his nights will soon be spent in Hana's arms, he remains to the end "some kind of loose star on the edge of their system”(609). Hana, however, loves her patient, her "despairing saint" or, in Caravaggio's disapproving eyes, "corpse." “All have suffered, but her patient, "a man
with no face," mostly for him, Hana breaks her code of sought detachment in ministering to atrocious agonies” (609).

The past and the present are continually intertwined in The English Patient to produce a larger picture of war. The narrative structure intersperses descriptions of present action with thoughts and conversations that offer glimpses of past events and occurrences. The narrative shifts from the third person narrative to the English patient and the other characters each revealing bits of their own past. Love being one of the major themes in the novel shows the different cultures of people of different countries who have come to a mutual understanding in an Italian villa during the Second World War. Each one has their own influences from war and the love that emerges is one of mutual needs and the search for fulfilment of those needs during the stress of wartime.

The inner lives and pasts of this quartet, the events and choices that have led them to this place, are developed in flashbacks that gradually deepen our sense of the pressure of their past upon their present lives. The most fully realized consciousness is Hana's; the patient's emerges rather as an intellectual history whose “cul de sacs" are found in his gnomic commonplace book, The Histories of Herodotus, interleaved with a personal paper trail of clippings and fragmentary memoirs. The linking narrator, generally unobtrusive, observes how "novels commenced with hesitation or chaos"; this one does and goes on to enact in structure and individual histories the disruptions of love and war. For the patient, as his burnt life is uncovered, love is the worse destroyer, "a consuming of
oneself and the past." Out of physical fire, passion's fire, a "shedding skins," Caravaggio reflects, "there was no defense but to look for the truth in others." Only the narrator gives access to the patient's deepest truth, including his fatal love affair: this is the novel's weakest part, akin to Durrell's overwritten Alexandria Quartet ("I want you to ravish me. ... It was as if she had handed me a knife," et cetera). (Thorpe 609)

More convincing and original is the narrative of Kip the Sikh's entry into the British army and his outsider's intense focus upon sharpening his sapper's skill, “only finding the control and detachment he needs in the peacefulness of his own strict talent” (Thorpe 610). In August 1945 bombs he cannot defuse fall on Japan: “This tremor of Western wisdom” (Ondaatje 302) unbalances Kip's careful devotion to the "precise behaviour" he has learned from the English. “Condemning all, he sheds his uniform and motorcycles off, almost killing himself” (Thorpe 610), but we glimpse him in the novel's end at home in India, among his family, "where all the hands are brown"(Ondaatje 320). “To the end, he is finely credible; of Hana, perhaps hurt incurably by her failure to defeat death,” (Thorpe 610). The narrator concludes, "She is a woman I don't know well enough" (Ondaatje 320). The patient becomes a charred avatar of that outlaw figure Ondaatje has repeatedly romanticized, a meticulously constructed figment of the author's imagination rather than a convincing character (Thorpe 610).
Love transcends all:

One recurring theme that emerges in the novel is that love, if it is truly heartfelt, transcends place and time. Hana feels love and connection to her father even though he has died alone, far from her in another theatre of war. Almasy desperately maintains his love for Katherine even though he is unable to see her or reach her in the cave. Likewise, Kip, despite leaving Italy to marry in India, never loses his connection to Hana, whom he imagines thirteen years later and halfway across the globe. Such love transcends even death, as the characters hold onto their emotions even past the grave but definitely has its impact from cultural differences. This idea implies a larger message- that time and place themselves are irrelevant to human connection but culture and identity intervenes to change life’s. We see this especially in Almasy’s connection to Herodotus The Histories, whose writings he follows across time through the desert. Maps and geography become details, mere artificial lines that man imposes on the landscape. It is only the truth in the soul, which transcends time that matters in the novel.

Rewriting History:

The Herodotus book highlights the possibility of multiple realities existing simultaneously. The geographical and cultural descriptions Almásy records in the book belie the existence of his affair and obsession with Katharine (Marie). Writing over the words of Herodotus, Almásy is literally rewriting history, choosing his perception of reality over that of his historian predecessor. By connecting them to the present moment, relating them to their own lives, they change the history, introducing a new dimension into it, thereby giving a new identity.
In the second chapter ‘Near ruins’ more light is shed on the lives of Hana and Caravaggio. Both of them had the scars of war embedded in them. Caravaggio was her father’s friend back in Toronto before the war where he was a “. . . thief, a married man, slipped through his chosen world with a lazy confidence, brilliant in deceit against the rich, or charm towards his wife Giannetta or with this young daughter of his friend” (Ondaatje 42).

Hana had marvelled at this uncle of hers who was her centre of learning. When he was in the military hospital in Rome he hears of her and the patient living in a villa so he comes all the way to this hill town north of Florence to meet her.

The Effect of War on Carravagio’s Life:

Caravaggio reveals to Hana whom he knew as a child the effect of war in his life. Knowing his past skills of a thief Hana tells him they must get some chicken when he says he lost his nerve to steal when he was caught and they almost cut off his hands. He does not associate him as a spy, he says, “At times we were sent in to steal. Here I was an Italian and a thief” (Ondaatje 37). The British considered him to be best suited for the job as he already had practice in it. There were four or five of them whose skills were legitimized by war and Caravaggio was doing quite well until he was accidently photographed. Anna, one of the mistresses of the officers had clicked Caravaggio in mid-step along with the other officers. During war all the photographs were processed officially in government labs. This meant he had to retrieve the film. But was caught jumping out of a woman’s window when he was returning back with the camera. They had cut his thumbs with the help of a nurse, but he says both the women were innocent
the one who photographed and the one who cut out his thumb, the real one in charge was Ranuccio Tommasoni. He had to make a deal for what was left of him and then they let him go suddenly.

For months afterwards he found himself looking at only the thumbs of people, as if the incident had changed him by producing envy. But the incident had produced age, though he never had thought of himself to be a man with a sense of age and wisdom. When he was tracing his steps back to a person whom he knew would take care of him, suddenly he realized that was why they had let him go so he would led them directly to his companions. Thereby he turned away, but Hana told him they left him because the allies were coming and the Germans were retreating, but however he could hardly believe her. He feels the end of war is a strange time, he agrees when Hana states it is ‘a period of adjustment’ (Ondaatje 57). Now Caravaggio was a Canadian thief who was legitimized during the war by the British. His life from then had been altered, he was not the man Hana knew. His identity of being a spy or rather a thief for the allies had led to the loss of his thumbs. He was also one of the victims of national identity, though he had gone there to steal, it was not for his own personal gain, he was doing it for the allies during the time of war. He never seems whole again.

Love can Surface in the Middle of War:

Then there is Hana the Canadian nurse. Nothing in her past had trained her to be a nurse, she was twenty and completely thoughtless of her own safety by choosing to live with a burned patient about whom she does not know anything in a mined villa. In Chapter III, Ondaatje explores the nature of love and shows how it can surface even in
the middle of war. Caravaggio charges that Hana is in love with the English patient, reasoning that she is drawn to the patient because he is so smart and mysterious. What Caravaggio does not see is that Hana needs the patient as much as he needs her. Nurses too become shell shocked after witnessing all the death around them during the war. She tells Caravaggio that she courted one man and she had to lose her child as the father was already dead and there was a war. After that she moved so far back that no one could get close to her. Hana breaks down completely after she hears about her father’s death, which she has feared ever since becoming a nurse. Thereby “she grew harsh with herself and the patients. Reason was the only thing that could save them, and there was no reason. The thermometer of blood moved up the country” (Ondaatje 52). She was sick of Europe and wanted to go home but there was no one at home. She finds rest as opposed to sleep the truly pleasurable state. “To rest was to receive all aspects of the world without judgement . . . . Tenderness towards the unknown and anonymous was tenderness to the self” (Ondaatje 51). She was sent overseas during the Sicilian invasion in 1943 and The First Canadian Infantry Division worked its way up Italy. After three full days without rest, caring for the wounded, she slept for twelve hours beside a mattress where someone lay dead, closing her eyes against the world around her. She had cut her hair as she did not want anything to lock her to death. She had not looked into a mirror for more than a year after that.

The villa and its surrounding have been described by others as the one carrying the last vices of war completely unsafe. But Hana and the English patient had refused to come out of this place. They had concluded that their war was over and Hana was
determined that she would stay here carrying for this one patient of hers until the nuns claimed back their place “Her hammock and her shoes and her frock. She was secure in the miniature world she had built; the two other men seemed distant planets, each in his own sphere of memory and solitude” (Ondaatje 49). She had met him at a hospital in Pisa for the first time, as the narrator states, “There was something about him she wanted to learn, grow into, and hide in, where she could turn away from being an adult” (54). She becomes suddenly claustrophobic, untried, and moved to the terrace of the villa, “then looked up, as if trying to discern the figure of the girl she had stepped away from” (66). Hana had to lose herself inorder to survive from the horrors of the war. She has to stay away from her human side and become a distant person even to herself. Thereby, in the villa she catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror, and peered into her look trying to recognize herself. Although it seems the patient ties Hana to an unsafe place, she sees him as freeing her from the awful horrors of war (Marie). She feels she can once again become emotionally attached to someone, and that she can finally let down her guard.

The Effect of War on Kip’s Life:

Miss Morden was the first English woman with whom Kip had spoken. He was the second son. The oldest son would go into the army, the second would be a doctor and the son after that would be a businessman. It was an old family tradition but all that had changed with war. He joined the Sikh regiment and was shipped to England. After the first months in London he had volunteered himself as a sapper. It was not until 1940 that the War office took over bomb defusing. Twenty five bomb disposal units were set up but they lacked technical equipment. Lord Suffolk was Kips mentor and the best of the
English, he later told Hana. He was introducing the customs of the England to Kip as if it was a recently discovered culture. He was an autodidact, and he believed his mind could read the motives and spirit behind any invention.

Kip’s real name Kirpal Singh had been forgotten for his nickname. He got this name when the officer had exclaimed, ‘What’s this? Kipper grease?’ (Ondaatje 93) when his first bomb disposal report in England was marked with some butter. Having no idea what it meant the young Sikh had been thereby translated into a salty English fish. Suddenly even your name is unfamiliar. Thereby the first transition is losing one’s name which is close to transforming into another person by losing his identity.

Kip was twenty-one years old when he arrived in England knowing no one, distanced from his family in Punjab. He had applied to be in the experimental bomb squad under Lord Suffolk. When he went to attend the interview, they were asked to wait in the library and Kip was looking around and moving about the books when he found the keen eyes of a middle-aged secretary on him. He thought “The English! They expect you to fight for them but won’t talk to you. Singh. And the ambiguities.” (Ondaatje 200)

In the afternoon they met a very hearty Lord Suffolk, and were given a strange test where they had to reassemble the parts of the machine without any prior information of what it was used for. They were given two hours and Kip was the first to finish. “He sensed he would be admitted easily if it were not for his race. He had come from a country where mathematics and mechanics were natural traits” (Ondaatje 200). He was one of the three applicants selected by Lord Suffolk. “’Miss Morden is a splendid judge
of character. She has a nose for brilliance and character. . . . We are very much a family here.’’(Ondaatje 201) says Lord Suffolk and informs him that she had already selected Kip even before lunch. Kip stepped into a family, after a year abroad as if he were the prodigal returned. Lord Suffolk and Miss Morden had offered to take him to see Peter Pan. Apart from the trinity of Suffolk, Miss Morden the secretary and Harts the driver, there were six sappers who made up the unit. Kip had been in Suffolk’s unit for a year. He was working in London with Lieutenant Blacker, clearing the Satan bomb when he heard about the explosion in Erith which had taken the lives of Suffolk, Miss Morden and Harts along with four other sappers in his team. The most important lesson that Lord Suffolk had taught Kip about bombs was,

Bridge depends on character. Your character and the character of your opponents. You must consider the character of your enemy. This is true of bomb disposal. It is two-handed bridge. You have one enemy. You have no partner. Sometimes for my exam I make them play bridge. People think that bomb is a mechanical object, a mechanical enemy. But you have to consider that somebody made it (Ondaatje 205).

Now Kip was summoned to clear another bomb which was similar to the one Lord Suffolk was trying to defuse. There was a new trick to be unearthed and Kip knew he was for now a king. He could order anything and the rest of them who would not cross an uncrowded bar to speak with him when they were off duty would do anything he asked for now. But he did not like that he was accustomed to his invisibility. “The self-sufficiency and privacy Hana saw in him later were caused not just by his being a
sapper in the Italian campaign. It was much a result of being the anonymous member of another race, a part of the invisible world” (Ondaatje 209).

The trick in this bomb was that it had a second hidden gaine, which was set to explode sixty minutes later when a sapper would have normally assumed that the bomb was safely defused. From now on the bombs had to be neutralized with the fuze intact. He had survived only with luck.

He worked flat-out, crazily, after Suffolk’s death. Bombs were altering fast, with new techniques and devices. He was barracked in Regent’s Park with Lieutenant Blackler and three other specialists, working on solutions, blueprinting each new bomb as it came in (Ondaatje 211).

Kip is further revealed as he is introduced as a Sikh, halfway up a sapper’s ladder, erecting a Bailey bridge for the army behind him. The young soldier has a strong will of survival, this is seen when he does not feed the dog though he plays with it as he feels it should survive on its own. He is a survivor of his fears, he turns around suddenly acknowledging Hana’s watchful eyes on him and moves around anything that seems suspicious. He never speaks about the danger that comes along with his kind of searching. He had approached the villa on that night of the storm with his colleague Hardy when he heard the music from the piano. The retreating army left pencil mines with musical instruments, he came there to rescue the piano player. He was unable to look at his surrounding without the possibility of weapons there.
Kip needed the distraction of music while defusing a bomb as it helped him towards clear thinking. He had to keep in mind the personality that had created the bomb to find out the new trick in it. Once when he was clearing a new mine he had been tricked into holding two live wires and did not know how to defuse it, when Hana came to his aid. Hana was the only one who could link him to humanity but he refused to feel obligated to her. After defusing the bomb the narrator expresses Kip’s feeling,

He was still annoyed the girl had stayed with him when he defused the bomb, as if by that she had made him owe her something. Making him feel in retrospect responsible for her, though there was no thought of that at that time. As if that could usefully influence what he choose to do with a mine (Ondaatje 111).

The love Hana feels for Kip is of a different kind. Kip becomes her protector, a strong, healthy male figure to save her from dangers. Ondaatje writes that when Hana is with Kip, she feels “her tongue instead of a swab, her tooth instead of a needle, her mouth instead of a mask with the codeine drops to make him sleep.”(Ondaatje 133). To Kip, Hana is not a nurse, but a woman, and this withdrawal from her professional duty is refreshing to her. Kip on the other hand, finds in Hana a link to sanity, someone who is young and alive. Facing death every day, Kip is forced to come to grips with his own mortality, yet Hana links him to life.
Even after defusing the bomb he could not sleep.

But as even she had said, he was the brownness of a rock, the brownness of a muddy storm-fed river. And something in him made him step back from even the naïve innocence of such a remark . . . . But he was a professional. And he remained the foreigner, the Sikh (Ondaatje 111).

The sappers were an odd group of people as far as character was considered. They have hardness and clarity within them, their decisions frightening even to others in the same trade. They never became familiar with each other they merely pass on information strictly professional. Kip turned away from mystery books with irritation as he could find out the suspense earlier with much ease. “He was most comfortable with men who had the abstract madness of autodidacts, like his mentor, Lord Suffolk, like the English patient” (Ondaatje 117).

Kip was someone who felt uncomfortable in celebrations, in victories. Probably as he did not give himself credit for it, it was just one lucky day of his survival there are many more to go. So he did not let himself believe and enjoy the fleeting moments of temporary victory. “When he worked, clarity and music filled him, the human world extinguished” (Ondaatje 120). He did not want comfort from Hana but wanted to surround her with it. “He refused to believe in his own weakness to fit himself against. Neither of them was willing to reveal such a possibility to the other” (Ondaatje 121). Kips eyes are only on what is dangerous, apart from danger everything else is periphery. How much Hana and Kip are in love with each other or how much it is a game of secrets is not known. She is unable to sleep most of the night nostalgic about her native place
and he asks her why she can not sleep. “She lies there irritated at his self-sufficiency, his ability to turn so easily away from the world” (Ondaatje 135).

The major characters are analyzed based on their cultural differences made evident in their love relationship and how incidents are interpreted differently based on their culture. Kip is an Indian Sikh who works as a British sapper. Much of Kip's goodwill toward the English emerges from his experience with Lord Suffolk and his staff. Kip is touched by the fact that this true English gentleman would look past his race and take him under his wing. It becomes evident that Kip feels closer to his English family than to his Indian one. Though he talks sadly about his mentor Lord Suffolk and his premature demise, he seems relatively nonchalant about the fate of his Indian family. When Hana asks if Kip's father is still alive, he replies as if it is not much concern to him: "Oh, yes. I think. I've not had letters for some time. And it is likely that my brother is still in jail." (Ondaatje 120)

Through Kip's growing awareness, Ondaatje dares to re-examine colonial history from the viewpoint of post-colonial surroundings. Unconventional perceptions in conventional history are introduced to subvert it and to turn it inside out. Ondaatje's text amplifies the newly awakened, awkward voice that has been left out of the dominant inscriptions of history. His unconventional history frames and highlights the roles of the colonized world. The lives of these four characters, isolated and away from real action, reflect the tragedy, horror, terror, and brutalization carried out during the Second World War "for this cause or that greed" (Ondaatje 18). Often, confused minds ask telling
questions: "but who was the enemy? Who were the allies?" (Ondaatje 19). The blurring of boundaries and causes underlines the futility of wars.

Almasy, another victim of War:

Michael Ondaatje recreates a historical character in his Count Ladislaus de Almasy (historically known as Laszlo Ede Almasy, a Hungarian aristocrat). The chronicle of the Second World War written from the colonial viewpoint alters dramatically when the narration is carried out through the subaltern's voice in *The English Patient*: the perception is through the victim of those events. In the general tumult and fury of the war, the identity of individuals is the first casualty. The themes of political insanity, futility, sterility, and the demolition of values bring in the stark realities. And yet the positive context of goodness, beauty, truthfulness, selflessness, and fearlessness also blossoms like a flower (Adhikari 47)

The novel opens in the present scenario of the Italian villa where one of the main characters Hana is introduced as she stands up in the garden. Then there is the English patient who is burned beyond recognition and is nursed by Hana for months in the Villa San Girolamo in Italy. During the few months before the English patient died he keeps plunging into that well of memory, his past is revealed eventually but not in a linear order. His past starts with how the Bedouin tribes rescued the burned man with a copy of *The Histories* by Herodotus from the wreckage of a plane. The Bedouin had kept him alive for a reason as they found his skill of recognizing unnamed town by its skeletal
shape on the map and knowledge about the guns useful. “This was payment with his skill for the men who had saved him for such a purpose” (Ondaatje 23). “During this time with these people, he could not remember where he was from” (6), later he meets Hana in the hospital in Pisa. The villa was the last stronghold of the Germans and they had mined many of the houses they retreated from. “Doors opened into landscapes. Some rooms had become an open aviary” (14). For Hana “this was the time in her life that she fell upon books as the only door out of her cell” (7). She was twenty years old and mad and unconcerned with the danger of living in a possibly mined villa or the thunder that startled her at night. “She was living like a vagrant, while elsewhere the English patient reposed in his bed like a king” (15). They were protected from the enemies like the brigands who annihilated everything they came across, by the simple fact that the villa seemed ruined. The English patient wanted to loose his identity in the desert and be known for what he is, as it is easy to lose a sense of demarcation in the desert. The narrator tells us, “Here in the desert, which had been an old sea where nothing was strapped down or permanent, everything drifted. . .” (24).

The war having moved elsewhere the nunneries and churches which were temporary shelters was now cut off in the hills. “They hold the remnants of war societies, small moraines left by a vast glacier” (Ondaatje 98). The English patient was brought into the British base in Siwa in 1944 by the Bedouin tribes. He was moved from there into Tunis and then shipped to Italy. “Those who were uncertain of their nationalities were housed in compounds in Tirrenia, where the sea hospital was. The burned pilot was one more enigma, with no identification, unrecognizable” (101). When
he met Hana in the hospital he knew she was more of a patient than nurse. Thereby he
spoke only to her when he needed something.

At the center of the novel lies the "English" patient, burned beyond recognition
and without any memory of who he is or where he is from. His single most prominent
trait is this resistance to being properly identified. Hana, the Canadian nurse who ends
up taking care of him, thinks him to be "the English patient," because of his vaguely
European accent and all his talk about "flower beds in Gloucestershire" (Ondaatje 163).
Yet what's most remarkable to all who meet him is the lack of any distinguishing marks;
anything that would make him recognizable has been burned away:
In the Pisa hospital she had seen the English patient for the first time.

A man with no face. An ebony pool. All identification consumed in a fire.
Parts of his burned body and face had been sprayed with tannic acid that
hardened into a protective shell over his raw skin. The area around his
eyes was coated with a thick layer of gentian violet. There was nothing to
recognize in him. (Ondaatje 50)

When he was found, the only distinctive thing about this otherwise completely
unknowable man is the fact that he was in possession of a copy of Herodotus, into which
he has pasted maps and sketches and in which he has written notes on his journeys
through the desert.

*The Histories* has been made into his commonplace book, but one that lacks an
owner's name:
And in his commonplace book, his 1890 edition of Herodotus' *The Histories*, are other fragments—maps, diary entries, writings in many languages, paragraphs cut out of other books. All that is missing is his own name. There is still no clue to who he actually is, nameless, without rank or battalion or squadron (Ondaatje 102-103).

*The Histories* becomes the palimpsest on which he joins his voice to that of Herodotus, and then, after his accident, the only mark by which he is at all identifiable. His identity has become a riddle to which the only clue is *The Histories*. We gradually discover that Almasy's erased identity after he is burned serves as a fitting emblem for his identity even before the crash when he was obsessed with the purifying space of the desert and the power it had to erase national boundaries and identities:

By 1932, Bagnold was finished and Madox and the rest of us were everywhere. Looking for the lost army of Cambyses. Looking for Zerzura. 1932 and 1933 and 1934. Not seeing each other for months. Just the Bedouin and us, crisscrossing the forty days road. There were rivers of desert tribes, the most beautiful humans I've met in my life. We were German, English, Hungarian, African— all of us insignificant to them. Gradually we became nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation-states. Madox died because of nations.

The desert could not be claimed or owned— it was a piece of cloth carried by winds, never held down by stones, and given a hundred shifting names long before Canterbury existed, long before battles and
treaties quilted Europe and the East. . . . All of us, even those with European homes and children in the distance, wished to remove the clothing of our countries. It was a place of faith. We disappeared into landscape. Fire and sand. . . . Erase the family name! Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert.

But I wanted to erase my name and the place I had come from. By the time war arrived, after ten years in the desert, it was easy for me to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation. (Ondaatje 147-148)

It is a place, as he will say later, where he and his companions had come "to be their best selves, to be unconscious of ancestry" (Ondaatje 246). For this post-nationalist figure, the desert comes to replace the ancestral homeland as the centering space: "Show me a desert, as you would show another man a river or another man the metropolis of his childhood" (Ondaatje 240).

The desert is the space without boundaries, nations, or cities. It is a space that resists being divided up artificially and resists being tied down by the points on a map. This is the only space in which Almasy feels comfortable, truly himself, truly "at home," and so he comes to embody the striving for a new model of identity. (Friedman 57)

It is because he finds in Herodotus a man who loves the desert that the English patient is so taken with The Histories: "There is, after Herodotus, little interest by the Western world towards the desert for hundreds of years. From 425 B. C. to the
beginning of the twentieth century there is an averting of eyes” (Ondaatje 141). He is so identified with Herodotus that he “comes to see himself almost as his posthumous editor; he is not only super-inscribing his own story onto Herodotus', but also supplementing the original narrative as he finds more corroborating evidence” (Friedman 57). His journeys through the desert help him to prove those pieces of the histories that have been maligned as lies: His only connection to the world of cities was Herodotus, his guidebook, ancient and modern, of supposed lies. “When he discovered the truth to what had seemed a lie, he brought out his glue pot and pasted in a map or news clipping or used a blank space in the book to sketch men in skirts with faded unknown animals” (Ondaatje 246).

After his accident, when he lies in the villa under Hana's care and repeatedly insists that she read to him from The Histories, he describes to her how he imagines Herodotus. It is an imagining that speaks also to the ways that he has tried to remake himself through his desert expeditions:

I have seen editions of the Histories with a sculpted portrait on the cover. Some statue found in a French museum. But I never imagine Herodotus this way. I see him more as one of those spare men in the desert who travel from oasis to oasis, trading legends as if it is the exchange of seeds, consuming everything without suspicion, piecing together a mirage.

(Ondaatje 118-19)
Crucial to the description are the various angles from which the English patient views Herodotus. He cannot be fixed in stone, pinned down in statuary. Instead, his Herodotus is a desert man, like himself, unencumbered, "consuming everything without suspicion," open to the multiple stories and multiple perspectives that he encounters. His Herodotus is someone interested in telling the "other story." Almasy's attachment to the placelessness of the desert becomes, then, correlated with a certain kind of authorial stance. He quotes a passage from *The Histories* where he sees Herodotus describing his receptivity to the marginalized story:

‘This history of mine’ Herodotus says, ‘has from the beginning sought out the supplementary to the main argument.’ What you find in him are cul-de-sacs within the sweep of history—how people betray each other for the sake of nations, how people fall in love . . . (Ondaatje 126).

What appeals to the English patient about Herodotus is that he lives and writes about "nations" from the outside. He's an outsider in precisely the way that Almasy wants to think of himself. Almasy's interest in Herodotus provocatively assigns to the "Father of History" in the West a historiographical method that opposes a hegemonic Western narrative.

Much of post colonial critique centers on the question of history and the writing of history in the West; it interrogates a place-based on imperialist narrative and seeks to give voice to the perspectives that have been suppressed or co-opted by it. Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, for example, foundational figures in the articulation of this critique and in the
attempt to develop alternative models for the writing and thinking about
history, lament the fact that "history is always written from the sedentary
point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a
possible one," and suggest that "what is lacking is a Nomadology, the
opposite of a history." Almasy's Herodotus is precisely the author of such
a Nomadology, and this Herodotus is the model for the kind of
cosmopolitan traveler and explorer that Almasy wants to be. (Friedman
60)

Herodotus: *The Histories* is the one belonging carried by Almasy even through
the burning plane when he is reduced to the static role of a patient burned beyond
recognition. Just as Herodotus wove together a melange of ancient stories, gossip, battle
plans, body counts, geography, and astronomy, so has Almasy overlaid the pages of
Herodotus with his own drawings, letters, maps, and notes. His book contained
references that are all pre-war, July 1936 he had written, “There are betrayals in war that
are childlike compared with our human betrayals during peace” (Ondaatje 103).

Herodotus knows what war does to human bodies. Similarly, Ondaatje
powerfully shows us the sufferings of the English patient, the torture of
Caravaggio, the dying soldiers tended by the nurse Hana, and the ultimate
rupture between the two young lovers as a final casualty of this anti-war
novel. *The English Patient* is a profound statement of the essential
commonality of human dreams and aspirations, as expressed in art,
adventure, and, unfortunately, in war (Lund 101).
Erasing nations and the past was easier in the desert. The English patient wanted to erase his name and the place he came from. After ten years in the desert when the war came it was easy for him to slip across borders not belonging to any nation. Before the war they were on the quest of finding Zerzura the lost oasis in the Libyan desert. On May 5th 1933 or 1934 he tells he had found it.

When we are young we do not look into mirrors. It is when we are old, concerned with our name, our legend, what our lives will mean to the future. We become vain with the names we own, our claims to have been the first eyes, the strongest army, the cleverest merchant. It is when he is old that Narcissus wants a graven image of himself.

But we were interested in how our lives could mean something to the past. We sailed into the past. We were young. We knew power and great finance were temporary things. We all slept with Herodotus. ‘For those cities that were great in earlier times must have now become small, and those that were great in my time were small in the time before . . . man’s good fortune never abides in the same place’ (Ondaatje 151).

“We seemed to be interested only in things that could not be bought or sold, of no interest to the outside world” (Ondaatje 152). Chapter V is like the other chapters in that it is not chronological, but is unlike some of the others in that it has a unifying theme: the English patient’s passion for Katharine. Their love, which begins as purely physical, quickly progresses to something much deeper. The conflation of the physical body with the emotional existence is a recurring idea in the novel. As The English
patient writes in his book, “A love story is not about those who lose their heart but about those who find that sullen inhabitant, who, when it is stumbled upon, means the body can fool no one, can fool nothing- not the wisdom of sleep or the habit of social graces. It is a consuming of oneself and the past” (Ondaatje 104). Her emotional and psychological presence becomes so foremost in his mind that he is shocked to be brought back to reality with a reminder of physicality- a vaccination scar on her arm. Ondaatje perhaps mentions the otherwise insignificant scar to highlight the physical and emotional depth of Katharine’s relationship with the English patient. He had fallen in love with a married woman; he says “I am a man who fasts until I see what I want” (Ondaatje 249). Katherine and her husband Geoffery Clifton had come to the desert. “He was their pilot, messenger, reconnaissance” (243). When Geoffery Clifton found out about his wife’s affair he planned a suicidal-murder with a plane crash. However he missed Almasy and died leaving Katherine severely injured and Almasy broke without a transport. However Almasy reaches El Taj to get some help and is thrown into the prison as a spy just because his name sounds foreign. He says no one listened to him because ‘I didn’t give them a right name’ . . . . They were just pulling spies in out of the desert. Everyone with a foreign name who drifted in these small oasis towns was suspect. . . . ‘They hauled me up into the truck again. I was just another possible second-rate spy. Just another international bastard’ (Ondaatje 266-267).
Then he comes to the “Cave of Swimmers” after three years where he had left Katherine. He had to make a deal with the Germans to make it there. Now however nothing mattered to him except getting back to Katherine.

As the characters find it is so necessary to protect them emotionally, they find it easy to sacrifice humanity. Kip sections off his humanity, saving it until the war by placing a wall between himself and everyone else. The English patient also does this throughout the 1930s, refusing to let anyone get close to him in his travels, his affairs, and his friendships. He shares little about his private life, choosing to stick only to the descriptive facts when he writes about the landscape and the geography. This detachment is what makes Katherine’s entrance into his life so disruptive to him. She forces humanity and fallibility into his life. In the end, Ondaatje offers no judgment on the characters varying approaches to the question of humanity, as both Kip and Almasy are left with only the consequences of their decisions.

The predicament of the four characters is revealed by the narrator, “A book, a map of knots, a fuze board, a room of four people in an abandoned villa lit only by candlelight and now and then light from a storm, now and then the possible light from an explosion” (Ondaatje 118).

The four characters were surrounded by the light only from a candle which in itself is diminishing. A candle is a metaphor for the lives of these characters who are sacrificing themselves to make them useful in the war, like a candle which burns itself to give light. The only other possible lights are from the storm or a bomb explosion, this reveals the dangers they are surrounded by.
Building Bridges:

The four shell-shocked humans begin to gather the broken pieces of their lives; the process of reconstruction begins after devastation. The bridges between the countries that had collapsed due to political or national reasons are rebuilt. Kindness, forgiveness, and selflessness the inherent qualities of civilized humans-surface to rebuild the world. Except for the English patient who is likely to die, the others return to their respective worlds, scarred, broken, but not dead. While it is true that Hana, Kip, and Carravaggio will be deprived of a fully normal life, time will cement some of the fractured sections. If Kip has been a witness to the death of his friends and comrades, it is also true of many others who have lived beyond the enemy line. Kip's and Hana's love life is shattered by the dropping of the bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and yet his return to India and bringing up a family reveals a remarkable ability to mend and to reconnect with others.

And so Hana moves and her face turns and in regret she lowers her hair. Her shoulder touches the edge of a cupboard and a glass dislodges. Kirpal's left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from the floor and gently passes it into the fingers of his daughter, a wrinkle at the end of his eyes behind his spectacles. (Ondaatje 300-301)