CHAPTER 5
THEME OF RECONSTRUCTION AND REDEMPTION

What dominates Patchett’s fictional work is the theme of reconstruction and redemption. It is the most occurring aspect in her novels. She has widely discussed how relations among family members as well as among the entirely unknown people develop, break, and then get reconstructed with the passage of time. The persons Patchett has made her protagonists are somewhat of dual nature. They start their journey by breaking relationships and keep on doing so until they get these relationships renovated. Though chance plays a big role in the reconstruction process; the role played by some towering figures cannot be ignored. For example, Rose, the protagonist in The Patron Saint of Liars, takes a decision that shakes her whole family. Having discovered her pregnancy she decides to leave everything and everyone that belongs to her family. Her wish to join a home for unwed women draws her towards a new way of life. The responsibilities she has already shirked from are not at all over. She rather has something
greater to do now. This place, situated on a deserted land, instills fresh confidence in Rose to restructure her social as well as family life.

Rose is a character having plenty of things to hide. This complexity in her character is the result of her being liar to all the people in her contact. She keeps a lot of things hidden about her past life and tells lies at almost every juncture of her life. The author beautifully delineates the fluctuating nature of this character through different stages in her life. First, she is a wife and a daughter in California, then a refugee at the Elizabeth’s Home, then a mother to a beautiful girl child and finally, again, a wife to another man in her life. Rose drives away from her past with a promise in her mind that she will never come back to California; and, perhaps, will never remember her past life and relations. But as the novel progresses, it is known that in spite of new relations in her life, she is unable to forget her past. The sweet memories of the long-gone days always hang around in her mind like anything. The brilliant author has thrown her all powers in the execution of the story by mentioning a lot of events which reflect the main characters’ wish to reconstruct what has already been damaged.

The reconstruction process starts at the very beginning, i.e. in the very prologue of the novel when The Hotel Louisa is revived by its owner. As the
first, out of the three sections of the novel, starts the reader encounters a sorry note left by Rose for her gentle husband:

Dear Thomas,

I am unhappy and it cannot be resolved. Don’t try and find me. I will not come home. I’m sorry about taking the car.

Rose. (7)

Rose’s expression of sadness about her leaving her paternal house in California is indicative of her being emotionally attached to this place and the people living here. Her relations with her husband and her lovely mother have always been marvelous; and there has never been a time when she might have felt any skirmishes with them. Before leaving the place, she thinks a lot about her husband’s care taking attitude and her mother’s sweet nature and unfathomable love for her. But for not having true love for Thomas, she has no option but to leave them. It is perhaps this adamant attitude of the protagonist that has compelled the critics to go against her. Claire Steigner criticizes:

I could find few redeemable qualities in the main character and I did not feel her actions were adequately explained. When the narration shifted, I never got more explanation or learned to like Rose more. If anything, I liked her less. (Amazon)

On her way to Kentucky, she starts to doubt her body. When she gets so tired that the cars in front of her begin to sway on the road, she remembers her mother saying how tired she might have been when she was
pregnant. She thinks of past life but does not stop her journey. It is on this way to Habit that she starts telling lies; and the first one is done to Billy, the boy she gives lift to and who drives for her for some miles. When he asks her name, she tells that her name is Mary. Billy’s house is situated in Crawfordsville and it is the first place where Rose has a night’s stay. This is the first time in the novel that Rose comes to know the importance of living in a family. She also learns about the importance of relations and that of reunion in one’s life. She describes how she feels after seeing Billy’s:

The house wasn’t much, but there was a whole lot of land. I stayed in the car while he went up to see his parents. He would be telling them a lie, some lie about getting out that he would have to keep up with for the rest of his life, if he was never caught. You could see on their faces how glad they were to have him back, how much they’d missed him. (41)

The treatment she receives from Billy’s family enralls her. Particularly the loving and caring attitude of Billy’s father reminds her of a life full of mutual respect. She, hearing Billy’s father, gets caught in the pool of emotions and remembers her own house and family that she left behind just four days ago. She behaves here like a person who has no hope in life. She without caring about anything leaves Billy’s house as early in the morning that nobody gets up. Author’s cast of this fluctuating character resembles a common human being who takes firm decision without thinking of the implications. She reaches the Saint Elizabeth’s Home and gets a lot of
care and love from the sisters working there, and especially from Evangeline. She also finds a beautiful sister in Angie who offers her the true love of a sister. After the prophecy by Sister Evangeline of Rose having a girl baby in her belly, Rose starts thinking about the name of that child. In her dream she names the baby- Rose of Sharon. Sister Evangeline’s forecast about Rose’s to be born child encourages Rose to take the buoyant decision of keeping the child with her. It is this foretelling that helps Rose reconstruct her family. Sister Evangeline is the only character in the novel that does a lot to bring the characters in harmony with one another. Patricia Caiozzo has rightly praised her for her quality of redemption:

Rose continues to abandon those who love her right to the very end of the novel, so there is no growth or redemption there. What truly makes sense in this novel is that Sister Evangeline, who plays good nun to Sister Corinne's bad one, is the novel's patron saint of liars. It seems everyone who comes to St. Elizabeth's has secrets. *(Amazon)*

At this house, almost everybody is taking care of everybody. It is not only Sister Evangeline and Angie who are worried about Rose; but Son is also interested in talking to her. He tells her his story since the day he came to this place. Hearing son’s story, Rose feels something in her heart. It may be that she has started liking this man; or she has just got carried away by his moving story of wandering here and there in search of a job. Son gets much
relief after meeting Rose because none at the Elizabeth’s has ever treated him so nicely. Rose asks him for breakfast and he responds positively:

   SON. That would be nice if you’ve got the time. You’re not from around here.
   ROSE. No, I’m from out west, California.
   SON. I could tell from the way you talk.
   ROSE. We’re all pretty much alike. (64)

Through this conversation between Rose and Son, the author, has paved a way to their unity in future. Son is alone and wants somebody with whom he can share his life. He is gentle enough to keep rose and her child happy. Rose’s interest in Son reflects the power of Catholicism and the healing touch of the spring that flows nearby. This is the same Rose who left her former husband and family with a resolution not to ever tie another knot in future. But circumstances are always more powerful than what we think. It is time’s magic that brings Son in Rose’s life. The love that has been coiling somewhere in the depth of their hearts comes to surface when Rose is caught in the snow and is rescued by Son. He offers her his shirt and coat in order to keep her warm. The treatment Rose receives from Son is amazingly positive. His sweet gestures compel her to fall in love with this little known person. She shows her heart-felt gratitude for this man:

   We went to Son’s house because it was closer than the hotel. Son laid me down on his bed and took of my shoes. He rubbed my feet in his hands, my hand in his hands. He pulled off his sweater and unbuttoned his shirt
and put my feet against his warm chest. He rubbed my legs and covered me in blankets. He was full of motion, never stopped moving. (113)

This is the moment when things reach the climax as Son offers Rose for marriage. Rose agrees to do so for the sake of her to-be-born child. They can hope a family of their own now and they can lead a life of respect and joy. Rose comes back to the sanctuary of the Elizabeth’s as a second time married woman. Rose has no true love for Son too as she did not have for her first husband Thomas. It is all done on the spur of the moment in order to lead a better life now onwards. The conversation between Rose and Angie is interesting:

ROSE. I’m married now. I got married tonight.
ANGIE. Go on.
ROSE. No, I did. I married Son.
ANGIE. You’re not joking, are you?
ROSE. No.
ANGIE. Why, Rose?
ROSE. I’m going to keep the baby and I just didn’t see how I could do it alone. If I married Son then I can stay here. This wouldn’t be such a bad place to raise a baby.
ANGIE. I’m happy for you, but I wish it was me. (120)

The author maintains the sanctity and importance of the institution of marriage. It is not done only to have sex with another man but something else more important, and that is the pleasure and responsibility of raising children. A child needs not only motherly affection but also the strictness of
a father. Son sincerely performs his duty as a father of a child he has not
fathered. It is Son’s love for Cecilia that is used as redeeming factor in the
novel. Somebody has rightly written on his blog:

Son’s story was mentioned too and he is a weak character in spite of his
height and weight. The only redeeming factor I can see in him is that he
loves Cecilia whom he raised as his own child but isn't. He was the one
who took care of Cecilia when she cried or needed a hug. Helplessly in
love with Rose, he took care of her daughter. Though he betrayed Cecilia
at the end and ensnared her with lies to keep her close.

In the third and last section of this novel we meet a young character,
Cecilia, Rose’s daughter. Like other characters she, too, craves for a family
life. When Thomas Clinton, the real father of Cecilia reaches St. Elizabeth’s
Home, Cecilia shows a lot of love for him. She, through Thomas, comes to
know the reality everybody has kept hidden from her for so long. She desires
to live with him. The emotions pour out when the two talk. “You’re my
girl,” he says. “You bet,” Cecilia supports him (33). The night falls and they
go to sleep but Cecilia finds it difficult to have a proper sleep and sees a
horrible dream that her father has again left her without even saying bye-
bye. She jumps out of her bed very early in the morning and runs towards
her mother’s house where Thomas is staying. They share their love for each
other:

CECILIA. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be here so early. I don’t even know what
time it is. It is early?
THOMAS. Not really.
CECILIA. I just woke up and I thought you’d be gone and I wanted to tell you, you know, good-bye and everything.
THOMAS. I was sitting at the table. That’s why I saw you. Why don’t you come in?
CECILIA. Sure.
THOMAS. I found some coffee in the cupboard. Would you like some coffee?
CECILIA. Okay. (332)

The lives of Cecilia and Thomas get refilled with fervour and gaiety. They can now enjoy together the major events in their lives. Though Thomas will not stay with Cecilia, she has his phone numbers and address for future talk and meeting. The author’s handling of a complex story of three complicated characters is amazing. She keeps all the three characters on the same line, thus by maintaining unity and coherence. The passion for family relations and surviving together gets fulfilled at the end.

Patchett’s another novel that has reconstruction and redemption as its major theme is *Taft*. In this novel it is seen how a man’s earnest efforts can help in the reconstruction of the traumatized lives of people. The action rotates around the black, middle-aged bartender, Nickel, who narrates the story. He becomes imaginatively and practically entangled in the life of a white working-class teenager, Fay Taft, and that of her family. He is a protective man by nature, and sympathizes with Carl and Fay Taft, a young
white brother and sister who seek work at his bleus bar. Despite the trouble they cause him, the pity they induce in him helps him a lot to define his morals. Focusing on their relationship, Patchett weaves a multilayered narrative about unconventional kinds of love and improvisational familial ties.

The entry of Fay and Carl into Nickel’s life only expedites the problems he is already suffering from. Nickel sees the girl standing at the door of the bar, pale and average-looking with a big puffy winter jacket on over her dress. As he starts talking to the girl, Cyndi, the girl-in-charge of the bar kitchen, walks out of the kitchen and asks the visiting girl for some drink. Nickel, considering the girl underage, asks Cyndi to bring a coke in place of wine. After a bit of conversation about personal things, Fay requests Nickel for a job at the bar. Having enquired about Fay’s experience and whereabouts, Nickel appoints her as a waitress causing difficulty to Cyndi who likes to be the only waitress at the bar taking tips from all the people whosoever come to the bar. She expresses her sadness by taking up a couple of clean glasses and going back to the kitchen to wash them again. Nickel is not deterred by her misbehavior and shows his authority to appoint new people without taking anybody else’s permission. He is a person who is extremely fond of telling stories about the people he comes in contact with.
After we have come to know about the arrival of Fay as the messenger of reconstruction in Nickel’s broken family, he highlights the story of Wallace, a bouncer used as the guard at his bar in order to throw the drunkards out of the bar when they create noise and disturbance.

Nickel, after meeting Fay, recollects the days he enjoyed with Marion, his ex-girlfriend. At this moment he is completely lost in the memory of his faithful wife. He recollects the rosy time he used to share with her. He describes her quality one by one. He says that Marion did not say one word to him about anything before she knew for sure. She was a brave lady and deserved credit for a lot of things. Her face was always very pretty when she was happy. She had a high forehead slopping back. She had big eyes and wide flat cheeks and a mouth that always looked like it was about a second from telling you everything, but it did not have to since it were all right there. He also remembers the time they were sitting on the back steps of her parents’ house, splitting a coke because there was only one left. She was wearing cutoffs and a yellow halter top; and she looked as good as any girl he had ever seen. There was nothing to be ashamed about Marion’s face. The slight worry on her lovely face seemed to be saying- “I love you and you love me and all of this is going to be fine” (9).
That was the thing that made Nickel turn on her. It was not the news itself; it was something about the way she looked at him. She knew he would never disappoint her and it was of course the reason that made Nickel disappoint her badly. This is called being stupid and cruel. This is being twenty-five and a drummer in a band when there are plenty of pretty girls who are not pregnant asking for your time. Nickel was faithful to Marion because she was right. Though he loved her, he did not need her. It was her need of him that made him turn cruel. As Nickel has become a bit anxious and overprotective because of losing his family; dirty descriptions of events come to his mind. His confession of love continues. He becomes a bit rhetoric and says what would have happened if he had acted like the people on Television. What if he had picked Marion up and kissed her. Set her down in an old lawn chair all nervous and put a pillow up under her feet. What if he had rested the side of his face against the yellow halter top that barely covered her stomach and just held it there for a minute? He assures the reader that Marion and he kept no secret store of love for each other. Everything that was kind between them they killed with years of dedication and hard work. He finds himself thinking that they must have been drunk of stoned during any minute they were happy together.
Now Marion is pregnant and comes to Nickel to tell him that she is going to have his child. Nickel promises to call her later. But when his boy Franklin comes, he becomes crazy for him and wants to marry Marion a million times over just to keep them close to him. The second he tells her so, everything changes. Now he wants her. She can relax, collect herself and take a look around. It is now that Marion has the luxury of discovering just how completely she hates Nickel. Marion takes the boy and goes to live with her parents after she has left the hospital. Right away Nickel begins his campaign to bring them back and live with them, accept them forever. But Marion’s parents do not allow that to happen. They strongly oppose any kind of reunion of the two families.

Nickel is busy in his work and pretends that he is working only for money, money and money. He says that Marion was soaking him. When Marion goes to Miami, she decides to have a set amount every month, an amount that she figures up to cover things. It makes Nickel uncomfortable to talk about money. Up until Miami they have no problem with this. He gives her what she needs. Nickel takes Franklin out for clothes and in the fall they go to Woolworth’s for school supplies. He brings him binders and pencils and other things, things he may be does not need but just wants like twelve packs of Magic Markers that smell like different kinds of fruit. Nickel likes
it this way. He likes to spend his money on Franklin and never feels 
hesitated in doing so. If someone comes around to the bar telling Nickel 
about a good deal on hams, he would go out and buy one for Marion. He 
ever goes to her place in the summer without peaches and a basket of sugar 
beets. He keeps on writing out the checks for the visits to the dentist. He 
brings shoes, which are not cheap and gets them tossed aside six months 
later when they are outgrown. Franklin is also aware of the fact that Nickel 
is the real care taker of him.

Nickel is not ignorant of the fact that Marion can find her way without 
him; and without the money he has adorned for so long. H. Lasseter has 
rightly described that: “the little details in the relationships between these 
two characters, their idiosyncrasies and habits, are intriguing. But theme of 
loyalty and love surrounding Nickel’s longing for his son is equally 
compelling.” The fatherhood in him calls out strongly when he hears on 
phone about Franklin’s falling down:

 NICKEL. Franklin? Tell me.
 MARION. He is okay.
 NICKEL. Marion, why are you crying? Settle down; tell me what you are 
cyng about.
 MARION. He fell.
 NICKEL. Where were you till three O’clock? I’ve been trying all night. 
He fell how? (20)
He expresses his worry about the health of Franklin and tells Marion that there was no spit in his mouth and that he sat down on the edge of the bed, which he had not made once since Marion left. Nickel’s fatherly passion keeps on crying until Marion tells him the whole story of Franklin’s getting injured. Nickel keeps on asking a lot of questions about Franklin’s health and whereabouts which results into an argumentative exchange of dialogues between the two. Marion becomes a bit nervous and scolds Nickel for becoming over caring and too conscious. She assures him of Franklin being in good health and enjoying a sound sleep. Too much questioning from Nickel irritates Marion thus forcing her to hang up. He sits there with the phone in his hands, not able to put it down in case he thinks of another question. He does not know what things are coming to; how things have gotten so far away from him. He lies back on the bed and closes his eyes thinking that a cut near the eye was neither a lost eye nor something terrible.

Patchett’s hero is totally consumed to the love of family and whenever he finds a chance to bring people close, he does not miss it. He is sitting at the bar alone; having nobody around him. He compares the bar to sleeping babies and orders his drink with water on account of the hour. He again imagines himself to be with Marion and becomes extremely passionate when she tells him that the picture she is holding is that of his own son, Franklin.
He takes the picture out of her hand and looks at it for a minute, trying to see if what she says is true. He puts the picture back on the little strip of TV that is not dusty and kisses it. Though he does not feel like talking, especially about Franklin, he wants to make Marion feel as he himself does. He is too overwhelmed with her to say anything. This imaginative confrontation of a father with his son compels both Nickel and Marion to accept their love for each other: “I like you,” Marion says. “Yeah?” Nickel surprisingly replies. “I’ve always liked you,” he confirms (32). Marion is good about getting dressed. She understands he has to get back to work and clearly she has someplace to be herself. Nickel drives her back into town. She tells him about the location of her car and he manages to get a spot right next to it. When he starts to get out penning her door, she puts her hand on his sleeve and he gets soothed.

At this juncture Nickel gives her a kiss by calling her a nice woman. He keeps her head together by keeping the things straight. This time fate plays its role in Nickel’s life. Marion opens the door and leaves the room, but suddenly she turns around and looks at him. Marion’s looking back at Nickel results into more kissing. But the kissing does not help as Marion gets inside her car and drives away spoiling all love-making moments. Just a minute after the departure of Marion, Nickel finds Fay sitting inside his bar
and starts talking to her. He gets lost in showing her everything around. This nature of Nickel shows his intense desire towards reconstruction of his otherwise shattered life. Fay is not alone but with his brother Carl who being a boy evokes feelings of fatherhood in his heart.

The constructive ideas always keep on running through Nickel’s mind. Surprisingly, he starts imagining about the family of Fay and Carl. He imagines the life of Taft, father of Fay and Carl, before his (Taft’s) death. He brings the whole story to the present and thinks that Taft is worried about what kind of husband Fay will have. She has so many boyfriends and everybody likes her. He hopes that she should wait at least until she is twenty. He views that girls fall in love, and they do not see all this time they have got ahead of them. He thinks about Carl and his wrestling. He sees him winning the state championship next year, going onto the nationals. He is pinning boys from Texas and California, the referee circling them and counting. He wonders if Carl could get a wrestling scholarship and go to Iowa and work with Dan Gable. He has no idea what kinds of grades a boy would have to have to get a wrestling scholarship. Fay acts miserably about it the whole time. When Taft goes home, it is still dark. He does not know if he should eat something or go right to bed. Everything in the house is quiet. He puts his shoes and socks underneath the chair and lays his pants and shirt
on top. He walks down the hallway, past the rooms of Carl and Fay. Seeing Taft home, his wife gets a bit surprised and asks him how he is back. Taft requests her to be quiet and go back to sleep. But she continues asking about his night:

TAFT’S WIFE. Was your night okay?
TAFT. Sleep.
TAFT’S WIFE. I’m up. It was fine. Quiet. Nothing happened. Don’t worry. You’re going to have to talk to Fay. (89)

Taft assures his wife that he would talk to Fay. When she reaches down to the foot of the bed for her robe in order to fix some eggs for him, his intention changes and he wants from her more than he wants the eggs. He wraps an arm around her waist and holds her there, next to him. When she starts to pull away, again he puts his other arm around her and smells her hair. He kisses her neck at the top of her nightgown. Then she understands what he is talking about, and she rolls over to face him.

After this day dreaming sequence the story again shifts to the present and Nickel, after saying good night to Fay, Carl, and Wallace, thinks about calling Marion. Though it is late, he knows she works all sorts of crazy shifts. He calls her and asks whether she was sleeping. She replies in yes. She also tells him that Franklin is also asleep. After hi, hello, Nickel again embarks on the process of reconstruction and redemption by expressing his
desire of meeting Marion in Memphis. He requests her time and promises to keep her and Franklin happy. She asks him whether he has seen the pictures sent to him by her. He says that he saw them when he was at her parents’ house for dinner. Marion shows her inability to understand why her parents like him so much all of the sudden. “What?” says Marion in a surprising way. Nickel tries his level best to assure Marion about his immense love for both Franklin and her. He becomes emotional and expresses his feelings in a way that evokes positive response in Marion’s heart:

NICKEL. We’ve known each other a long time. If you came back we could manage fine; better than we used to. We wouldn’t have to be fighting about things. We’d take care of Franklin. You don’t have to worry that I’m going to make any sort of trouble for you. If I’m the reason you’re thinking about not coming back, I’m just telling you, don’t worry about it.

MARION. No. You’re not keeping me away. (110)

Here comes the long awaited opportunity to be reunited when Marion promises to bring Franklin up for his vacation. This agreement on phone is followed by a passionate meeting between Nickel and Marion. He closes his eyes and puts his hand behind her neck bringing her to him. There is not a lot of time. Not while everything is still clear in his mind. He kisses her there at the door-her neck and her ears. He kisses her hard on the mouth and she kisses him back, pulling her dry arms around him. He can feel the pressure
of her against his chest. He can smell her and see the people in the sugar egg. He pulls her down to him the way he wants. Thus they make love.

This episode helps them to reconstruct their otherwise divided family. Now Nickel, Marion and Franklin are living together. They visit Mrs. Woodmoore, Marion’s mother, who feels very happy seeing them together and says, “What a sight,” “The three of you walking together, just like a family” (148). Nickel is glad to see her so pleased. When Franklin calls Woodmoore, Aunt Ruth, she becomes happy and comes to him and says that her house is everybody’s house. She kisses Marion on the cheek and picks Franklin up. As we turn the last pages of the novel we come to see the real feel of reconstruction and redemption when Marion is attending Nickel because of his getting injured in the neck. She tells him that he has got a hole in his neck and crumples up the old bandages and puts them in the bag. Nickel can feel her swabbing at him. She tries her best not to let the wound hurt him. She taps on a new set of pads and tells Nickel that he looks real sporty now. She picks up the trash and puts it all back inside the bag. To make Nickel feel good she makes the environment light by saying that she would have shot him herself years ago if she knew that is what it would take to get him to listen to her. Nickel feels laughing, but finds it unable to do so
because of feeling hurt. She asks him to calm down or she will get him a bigger pill.

Thus, the novel ends on a happy note and the family that was by this way or that in shatters is now well reconstructed. The differences between the family members have now been sorted out. Nickel, Marion and the beautiful child Franklin all are together now enjoying the pleasures of a reconstructed life. The damaged father is again a proud man who has a lot to be protective about. His cosmopolitan thinking has brought him a lot of happiness. Since it is in his nature to sympathize with all human beings, God has blessed him with a lovely child. Gregory M. Wasson is of the view, “the book is well-plotted, with enough suspense to keep the reader turning the pages, as Patchett performs her own magic, showing us that nothing, and no one, is simple.” The compelling story of a broken father has been written in a beautiful way. It is fully evocative and a wakeful opiate.

Another important novel which has reconstruction and redemption as its main theme is Bel Canto. In this novel Patchett has shown how we can remain hopeful about positive results even when caught in the most unpleasant situation. The focus in this PEN/Faulkner Award winner is on how we can live merrily even in unfavorable conditions; and how we can redo what has already been damaged. The novel is abounding in themes like
human relationships, terrorism and hostage crisis; but one theme that permeates the novel is the theme of deliverance and rebuilding. The book that starts with a beautiful kiss embodies a lot of commotion occurring in the lives of almost all the major characters in the novel. The first-rate writer gives her major characters a lot of space to develop and grow despite the uncalled for circumstances. The eventual purpose of the author in this novel seems to bridge the gap among the people who speak different languages and have diverse nationalities. She proves that even the merciless killers may become protectors if they are given a chance to understand one another.

The first incident in the novel that the author uses as a medium of recuperation from the menace of terrorism is when Hosokawa and Gen talk in Japanese about the money from their company, Nansei in Japan. They both are worried about the health of Raxane’s accompanist who has become ill because of fear and hunger.

Hosokawa regrets a lot; and thinks that all this has come on all the hostages because of him, and him only. He repents his decision of accepting the invitation to attend the party. But his translator gen consoles him because it is not he who is holding the gun. The worry of both Hosokawa and Gen Watanabe about themselves as well as other hostages reflects Patchett’s intention of rebuilding the broken hearts. Though Hosokawa may be a bit
self-centered here in caring about Roxane’s accompanist, Gen is absolutely a messenger of reconstruction of relationships with the help of his linguistic authority. For instance, at the time when Roxane’s accompanist, Christopf is unwell, it is Gen who is called to translate him into the desired language. “Translator!” General Alfredo calls out (60). Ruben Iglesias means to stand his hand to Gen, but Gen, younger, makes it to his feet more quickly and reaches down to help the Vice President. He takes Ruben’s arm, as if the Vice President was struck suddenly blind, and leads him forward through the room. Such is the quality of this modern author that she puts her characters into hard circumstances and asks them to do the reverse. Gen’s benevolence makes Ruben wonder if all hostages, all over the world, feel more or less the same way. “Gen” Messner says, and shakes his hand somberly, as if offering condolences. “The Vice President should have medicine.” (60) He says this in French for Gen to translate. Gen has been made the medium of understanding of all kinds of things taking place in the novel. His power of translation brings a lot of hope for survival of both the hostages and the terrorists. Symbolically, the accompanist’s illness serves as the foundation brick of the restoration of the otherwise shaken belief of the victims.

The series of events in this novel have been sequenced in a fine-looking way. The scene of the Vice President Iglasias’s study room shows
both the hostages and the terrorists enjoying together the watching of a television. There are some boys amongst the terrorists who have only heard about a television; but have never seen exactly what it looks like and what it is meant for. The boy named Cesar, for example, puts his face close to the screen and enjoys the picture. He rolls back his eyes and shakes his tongue. Then he takes his fingers out of his mouth, crosses his hands over his chest, and begins to mimic a song he remembers Roxane singing that first night they were waiting in the air-conditioning vents. It is nothing but the power of music that makes him understand all by understanding nothing. Along with Cesar, there are several persons in the room from both the hostages and the terrorists. All begin to enjoy the moment. They scream. They howl like dogs. They cry out the names of their compatriots, “Gilbert! Francisco! Jesus!” in a voice that would indicate fire, murder, the coming of police. They bring the great metal snap of safeties being removed from guns and the rushing in of the other soldiers and the three Generals who in extreme anxiety throw Simon Thibault against the wall and cut his hip. Initially, the Generals show their anger for Thibault’s stupidity of turning on a television; but after seeing the program of an attractive woman with dark hair holding up articles of soiled clothing to the camera with both the hands, shaking her head in placid disgust before shoving them into the washing machine; they,
too, get interested in it. One of the Generals named General Alfredo picks the remote up and begins pushing the buttons to take them through the channels: soccer game; a man in a coat and tie sitting at a desk reading; a girl in silver pants singing; a dozen puppies in a basket. There is a fresh burst of excitement, a collective *ah*, at every new picture. This platform of reciprocated thinking serves as a solid channel of talk and entertainment sharing between the oppressors and the oppressed.

The author has made music a source of perpetual pleasure and ecstasy for all the people converged here from different corners of the word. Music has actually become the common language of all. The strongest healing power of it is seen when Tetsuya Kato, a vice president at Nansei, plays a beautiful song. The felt-covered hammers tape the strings gently at first, and the music, even for those who have never heard the piece before, is like a sweet memory. From all over the house, terrorists and hostages turn and listen and feel a great easing in their chests. There is delicacy about Tetsuya Kato’s hands, as if they simply resting in one place on the keyboard and then in another. It is the love and loneliness that each of them feels, that no one has brought himself to speak of. The people in the living room of the Vice Presidential mansion listen to Kato with hunger and nothing in their lives has ever fed them so well.
The fragrance of this lovely music is so soothing that all are at the piano, Roxane and Hosokawa and Gen and Simon Thibault and the priest and the Vice President and Oscar Mendoza and little Ishmael and Beatriz and Carmen, who leaves her gun in the kitchen and comes and stands with the rest. All of the Russians are there and the Germans who have spoken of a revolt, and the Italians, who are weeping, and the two Greeks who are older than the rest of them. The boys are there, Paco and Ranato and Humberto and Bernardo and all the rest, the great and menacing hulk of boy flesh that seems to soften with every note. Even the Generals come. Every last one of them comes, until there are fifty eight people in the room, and when he finishes Kato bows his head while they applaud. “Fine, fine,” General Benjamin says, feeling good to think the accompanist that has been lost is now replaced. “Very well done,” Mr. Hosokawa says, so proud that it is a Nansei man stepping up for the job. For a moment the room is very quiet and then Carmen, who has so recently become a girl to them, says something in a language that not even Gen is sure of. “Encore,” the priest says to her. “Encore,” Carmen says (128).

Kato bows his head to Carmen, who smiles. Even beneath her cap she is wholly lovely. She knows that people are looking at her and she closes her eyes, unable to go back to the kitchen the ways she wants to, unable to leave
to the nesting curve of the piano’s side. When he plays she can feel the vibrations of the strings as she leans one hip against the wood. No one has ever bowed his head to her before. No one has listened to her request certainly; no one has ever played a piece of music for her before. Kato plays another and another and then another until everyone in the room forgets that they badly want to be someplace else. When he is finally finished and cannot meet the request of another encore because his hands are trembling with exhaustion, Roxane shakes his hand and bows her head which establishes a pact that in the future she will sing and he will play. The title of the novel, Bel Canto meaning ‘a beautiful song’ is justified here by the author by using music and singing as a cord between the attackers and the attacked ones.

It is not only music that has been used as a tool of expression and reciprocated understanding, but cooking and games also serve the same purpose. For example, the scene when General Benjamin asks Gen whether he knows how to play chess infuses a lot of hope in the hearts of the hostages. It gives them at least a chance to get relaxed and talk the heads of the terrorists face to face. For this they need a common language so that they can play in a right way. The conversation that takes place between Gen and Benjamin is healthy enough:

BENJAMIN. Tell me something, Gen. Do you play chess?
GEN. Chess, sir? I know how to play. I wouldn’t say I was very good.
BENJAMIN, I’ll send you the girls to help in the kitchen.

GEN. If we could have one more. Maybe Ishmael. He’s a very good boy.

BENJAMIN. Two is enough.

GEN. Mr. Hosokawa plays chess.

BENJAMIN. I found a set in the little boy’s room. It’s good to think that they would teach the game of chess to so young a boy. I think it is a remarkable tool for character. I taught all of my children to play chess.

(183-184)

Benjamin’s request to Gen to ask Mr. Hosokawa to come and play chess with them further strengthens the possibility of settlement between the two parties. He also asks him to translate check and checkmate into Japanese. Gen bows his head. Perhaps it is more respect than deserved by the General; but there is no one there to see him do it. Ted Gioia’s review is very significant:

The reader soon learns that the “good guys” aren’t quite so good as one would like. And the “bad guys” aren’t so bad. And before *Bel Canto* concludes, the roles have become entirely reversed, with the traditional heroes falling short of the villains. This goes beyond the famous Stockholm syndrome, in which hostages begin to sympathize. (*Thenewcannon*)

To the reader’s surprise, Mr. Hosokawa and General Benjamin play chess on a regular basis in the guest room where the Generals generally hold their meetings to chart out the future course of action. Everything that Mr. Hosokawa has ever known or suspected about the way life works has been proven to him to be incorrect these past months. Where before there have
been endless hours of work, negotiations and compromises, there are now chess games with a terrorist for whom he feels an unaccountable fondness. Where there has been a respectable family that functions in the highest order, there are now people he loves and cannot speak to. Where there have been a few minutes of opera on a stereo at bedtime, there are now hours of music every day, the living warmth of voice in all its perfection and fallibility, a woman in possession of that voice, who sits beside him laughing, holding his hand. The rest of the world believes that Mr. Hosokawa suffers and he will never be able to explain to them how that is not the case. He can never push it completely from his mind. His understanding that he will eventually lose all sweetness that has come to him only makes him hold those very things closer to his chest. Hosokawa, though the biggest and the tallest figure amongst the hostages, is the most vulnerable. For some time, he feels that this place is better than even his own family.

The efforts for reconstruction and redemption are voluntarily made by both the terrorists and the hostages. It happens sometimes with the help of cooking food together in the kitchen, sometimes by doing religious activities. Towards the end of the novel, it is rituals and weakened prayers that are observed to redeem the otherwise lost souls of the captors as well as
the captives. It is Saturday, but since all the days are essentially the same, the only two people who give this any thought at all are Father Arguedas, who hears confession on Saturday and plans for his Sunday mass, and Beatriz, who finds the weekends to be an unbearable wasteland because the programme she likes, *The Story of Maria*, is only on Monday through Friday. It is Oscar Mendoza whose turn it is today to confess. He sits in front of Father Arguedas and asks for his blessings:

Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. It’s been three weeks since my last confession. At home I go every week, I promise you that. But there isn’t a great deal of opportunity to sin in our present circumstances. (243-244)

Beatriz also gets interested into it and leans her head into the doorway; but Father Arguedas asks her to go and play with the promise of seeing her next. Oscar Mendoza continues, “It is more or less the same dream every night. Dreams of terrible violence.” “Against our captors?” the priest says quietly. “Oh no, nothing like that,” says Mendoza (243-244). Father Arguedas is a person who has passion even in the face of death. He feels blessed to be in activity and believes that if one has trust in God; even the most unfavorable circumstances are overcome with great ease. Being held hostage by terrorists strikes Arguedas as a disaster at first; but after a while, he finds blessings in the situation. Captivity means he can fulfill his vows as a priest by ministering to people who are in great need. The process
of re-enactment of damaged relationships between the captors and the captives does not stop here. General Benjamin shows sympathy with all the hostages and orders to take all of them outside in open. For this, the General faces opposition from his own camp, but he is firm in his decision and does it with great conviction:

BENJAMIN. The weather is good now. Take them all outside. Tell Hector and Alfredo. Put some soldiers along the wall. We need some air in here, don’t you think. Get some sun on them.
CARMEN. Everyone, sir? Do you mean Miss Coss and the translator?
BENJAMIN. I mean all of them. Get them out of here.
GENERAL ALFREDO. Outside! Insanity! How are we supposed to control them outside? (278-79)

The life has really improved not just for those who are in love but for all the hostages. Once the front door has been opened, it opens regularly. Every day they go outside and stand in the hot sun. The time of suffering and torture is almost over. Thus the author’s purpose of a beautiful ending after so many hiccups is achieved. David Kipen rightly judges: ‘what actually redeems it is the hushed care Patchett brings to writing about love, coupled with a wit that flickers under every line like some goofball vibrato.’

Patchett’s another novel that extensively discusses the theme of reconstruction and redemption is *Run*. This story is about family, the ebb and flow of familial relationships and how we do the right thing and even though we know it is the right thing the result can haunt us for decades. It is
also about reconciliation, how even though brothers and parents can drift apart, there are still ties binding them tighter than they realize that can bring them back together in an instant. It is particularly reflected in Bernard Doyle, the chief protagonist’s indomitable love for his adopted sons. The author shows here how quarrels can been settled by lessening haughtiness.

The character of Uncle Father John Sullivan becomes an epitome of peace and harmony. It is this man who settles the quarrel between the Doyles and the Mosers. The intelligent move taken by John Sullivan stops the occurrence of a breach between the Mosers and the Doyles. This reconstructive measure reflects Patchett’s mastery over creating bonds among the characters of different attitudes. This amazing quality of creating reunion between the characters of unlike natures and backgrounds has been well praised by Roger Brunyate:

> It also demonstrates the power of storytelling, to reveal things in one light and then to illuminate them from the other side, making them seem entirely different. The whole book will be about families and their stories, the stresses that pull families apart, and the miracles that knit them together again in unexpected ways. (Amazon)

The author very intelligently paints the character of Tennessee as a bridge between Doyles and the Mosers. Kenya, the silent watcher in the novel, becomes the medium of reconstruction of the otherwise broken relations. Mr. Doyle, Tip and Teddy, all start caring Tennessee in the
hospital and decide to take Kenya with them to their house. The affection
and care Teddy shows here for his real mother is well expressed by the
author:

And then Teddy, whom she had always especially liked, left his brother
and came and crouched down right beside her. He put his arm around her
like she was someone he knew and for a second he held her tight so that
her shoulder pushed against his ribs. Then he let it go and took off his own
hand beneath her mother’s head to keep it from being too cold. (47)

Teddy has always been Tennessee’s favourite of the two boys. He has
a softer face. Several times in her life he has smiled at her when their eyes
met in a crowd. For Tennessee, it is a great moment that she is sitting beside
her own son. This incident is the first brick in the rebuilding of relationships
in the novel. Not only Teddy but Kenya also responds positively to all what
the Doyles say. For instance, when on the way to the hospital, she turns
around to look at Tip over the backseat. She seems to be having something
to say with her little and charming eyes. Doyle rightly anticipates by seeing
into her curious eyes, “I think she wants to know how you are,” Doyle says.
Tip smiles at her and says, “I think my ankle’s broken but it can’t be too
bad. I can still move my toes” (59).

Not only Tennessee but Teddy and Kenya as well help a lot in the
reconstruction and redemption of broken relationships in the novel. It is
Teddy who wants to give shelter to Kenya in his house and Kenya too likes
him a lot. Both of them go together to see Tennessee at the hospital. After seeing Kenya striking her mother’s foot beneath the white sheet and calling her pretty, Teddy thinks of the picture of his own mother that he carries in his wallet, how he would take it out to show people when he was younger and how he would ask them whether the picture was beautiful. Teddy’s love for Kenya and Kenya’s affection for Teddy help in bringing the two families together on the same platform of unified life. In spite of fear of charges and resistance from Doyle, the two talk about a lot of things. “How long have you known?” Teddy finally asks. “About you?” Kenya shrugs. “I don’t know. A long time.” Sullivan, the eldest and real son of Doyle, too, comes back from Africa to further increase the number of members in the family. He supports Teddy’s intention of including Kenya in their family. Ultimately Doyle becomes ready to accept Kenya until her mother gets well. She is provided Tip and Teddy’s room to sleep in.

The scene of train to Boston College is a burning example of the author’s technique of bringing the split family together. Tip gets on the train and without even giving it a thought Tennessee follows him up the steps and into the car and sits down across from him. All the people and all the trains and all the cars on the trains and seats on the cars and yet there he is right in front of her. It is dark now and she can see him and his reflection in the glass
behind his head. She keeps her eyes out the window but it does not even matter. After a concerted effort she sees that he is reading a book called Inland Fishes of Massachusetts. Tennessee’s love for her son compels her to purchase the same book and go through it while travelling with Kenya.


But, this is not the reason why she is reading a book on fishes. It is not her interest in the fishes that has induced her to purchase the book on fishes. The only reason behind her purchasing this book is that Tip, her elder son, is interested in ichthyology. Tennessee’s desire to get reunited with her long separated sons draws her towards adapting herself to their interests and priorities. It is not only Tennessee who craves for reunion, Teddy, her younger son also tries his level best to bring the scattered people together. Perceiving some good results he offers his sincere services to Father Sullivan when the latter gets hospitalized for having some serious disease. This great nature of Teddy paves an easy way for reconstruction of relations and redemption of parted characters. While being attended by Teddy at the hospital Father Sullivan asks about Sullivan, the eldest son of the Doyle family. Teddy tells him that Sullivan is back from Africa; but because of
tiredness he could not come to see him. It makes Father Sullivan uncomfortable but Teddy pacifies him by his kind nature and valuable services. The author herself states Teddy’s goodness:

Everyone changed, the church changes and the city changed, God changed, but Teddy was constant. Sometimes, Father Sullivan would think, I could have adopted this boy. Had I found him first he could have been my son. “Help me back to bed,” he says to Teddy. (155-156)

Teddy’s selfless services to Father Sullivan have made the latter fond of the former. Teddy leans forward and Father Sullivan puts his hands around Teddy’s neck and Teddy puts his hands beneath his arms. He lifts him up so that his feet barely brush the floor. As soon as he is standing straight Father Sullivan feels the air pouring back into his lungs and he yawns trying to pull it in faster. The new person who receives a lot of thanks from the Doyle family is Dr. Ball who takes a lot of care of Tip during his hospitalization. Doyle puts his hand on his son’s forehead the way he had when Tip was a boy, a little wild boy who could not be comforted. What actually helps the most in the reconstruction of this broken family is Sullivan’s consent to the inclusion of Kenya in their family. Charles Ashbacher has taken it to be the strong move in the novel from the prospective of a united family:

There is a family reunion and reconciliation of sorts as the boy Sullivan proves to be the one with the most empathy for Kenya and her situation.
The end result is that Teddy and Tip change their lives, revisiting the memories of their mothers. (Amazon)

*Run* has a large cast of main characters, all vying for the lead role. These characters have significant economic, racial, and personal differences. They are interesting people, and the reader learns to care about them. There are no villains in this book. Everyone is redeemable. But these characters are not very different from the everyday people that most of us know in real life.

To bring this chapter to a close it can be said that Patchett has dealt with the theme of reconstruction and redemption in the manner of an uncompromising worker. Her deliberations about her major characters’ actions are admirable. Though some of these characters suffer a lot at the initial stage of their lives, they recover from all kinds of predicament as they move ahead. What gets broken because of misunderstanding and chauvinism is reconstructed again by time, the greatest healer.

**Works Cited**


Lasseter, H. “pheonix900.” A beautiful voice, but the story doesn't gel.


