The thesis entitled **FLUIDITY OF IDENTITY IN JOHN BARTH AND THOMAS PYNCHON** attempts to study the concept of fluidity of identity in the works of two representative Postmodern American writers, namely, John Barth and Thomas Pynchon. A close study of these writers reveals that the idea of dissolution of identity is a common preoccupation for both, and hence, the choice is not arbitrary. Further both Barth and Pynchon react analogously to the impact of the postmodern happening more pronounced in the American culture and literature. The culture that is dominated by the electronic media has not only contracted the world into a ‘global village’ but also diminished the contours of identity in the mental map of the postmodern man. Barth and Pynchon designate the fragmentation of identity in terms of anonymity, pathology, control systems, deflated myths and decentred texts.

**Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION: FLUIDITY OF IDENTITY/I-DE-ENTITY** serves as an introduction to an identity that is polymorphously fluid in a Postmodern world. In the process of explicating the fluid predicament of identity, through the idea posited by Erik Erikson and Norman Holland, it deconstructs the received notions of identity markers like ego, self and character. Further, this chapter while accounting for the intangibility of the postmodern abstraction, through a brief critical survey, arrives at an eclectic mode of perceiving it. Subsequently, it envisions the fabricated versions/subversions of Barth and Pynchon as represented in the following chapters.
Chapter II: THE PROTEAN WO/MAN: IDENTITY AND ANONYMITY deals with the anomalous nature of the fragmented Postmodern personalities. Anomaly of identity is the resultant of the dysfunctional identity of the external accouterments like parents, names and roles in tension with an internally jellied perception of the self. A unifying image cluster in Barth and Pynchon as jelly, amoeba, blot, blob suggesting utter formlessness is traced out. Like the shapeshifter Proteus, the Protean Wo/Men of Barth and Pynchon embody people of many disguises. The characteristic features of these people are studied in Pynchon's *V, The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow* and Barth's *The Floating Opera, The End of the Road, Giles Goat-Boy, The Sot-Weed Factor, Lost in the Funhouse, Sabbatical, Tide Water Tales* and *The Last Voyage of Somebody the Sailor.*

Chapter III COSMOPSIS/ENTROPY: THE PATHOLOGICAL IDENTITY presents the Protean Wo/Man's futile struggle to catch on with the dynamism and rapidity to constitute identity that winds up in pathology. The Chapter analyses the characteristic sickness of Barth's Todd Andrews, Captain Osborn Jones, Harrison Mack and others in *The Floating Opera, Jacob Horner in The End of the Road, Ebenezer Cooke and Joan Toast in The Sot-Weed Factor* and Pynchon's Sidney Stencil, Benny Profane and others in *V, Oedipa Maas in The Crying of Lot 49* and Tyrone Slothrop in *Gravity's Rainbow* and reveals them to be symptomatic of the strange maladies namely, 'Cosmopsis' (Barth) and 'Entropy' (Pynchon). Entropy informs a slow process of decay, while Cosmopsis, owing to an all pervasive cosmic awareness, results in the paralysis of the mind and the body.
The chapter also applies the scientific and philosophical implications of these maladies in the works mentioned.

Chapter IV: MYTHOTHERAPY/CYBERNETICS: THE CONTROLLED IDENTITY deals with the remedies offered by Barth (Mythotherapy) and Pynchon (Cybernetics) through a control system for the maladies discussed in the previous chapter. Mythotherapy gives the cosmoptic individual a sense of drama, in which the individual is like the dramatist, assigning roles or myths to himself and others. Cybernetics refers to the control of animals, humans, machines and organisations through behaviour modification.

In this respect, the Chapter throws light on the strange Doctor-Patient relationships in the ties between Barth’s Jacob Horner-The Doctor in The End of the Road; George-Dr. Max Spielman in Giles Goat-Boy, Pynchon’s Oedipa-Dr. Hilarius in The Crying of Lot 49. Further it focuses on the failure of Mythotherapeutic control as a result of its human touch and juxtaposes it with the deceptive victory of the mechanically controlled Cybernetic therapies. Oedipa’s analogous functioning with Maxwell’s Demon in Pynchon’s novel, The Crying of Lot 49. Barth’s idea of using a Super Computer for control in the story of WESCAC in his Giles Goat-Boy and the predominant role that Television plays in shaping and controlling human relationships and identities in Pynchon’s Vineland are studied to show how these formidable tools of control have substituted the very role of God.

Chapter V: MYTH: THE DEMYSTIFIED IDENTITY subverts the conventional notion that myth primarily played a significant role in organising the patterns of all forms of identities. The Chapter briefly consolidates the modernist and postmodernist positions in the use/abuse of myth and henceforth explicates the way Barth deflates myth by
referring to it realistically in his *Chimera*, and Pynchon's style of attributing mythical dimensions to contemporary tele-serial characters in *Vineland* which is contrasted with Barth's use of his own characters to the same effect in *LETTERS*. Further, the Chapter traces out the distortion of the Classical myths as those of Oedipus, Orpheus and Narcissus in relation to Slothrop, Todd, George, and Oedipa. In addition to this, the 'hierophanic' use of Biblical myths is exemplified in Pynchon's images of rats as objects of carnality to subvert the spiritual hierarchy posed by the Christian religion in *V*, the deceptive use of rainbow symbol and holy grail in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and Barth's revision of the Christian hero in the characterisation of George in *Giles Goat-Boy*.

Chapter VI: TEXTUAL FLUIDITY: THE DE-TELEOLOGICAL TEXT

locates the theme of fluidity of identity in its textual context. It finds similitude between the weaving process of the Text and the searching for identity by the Self. Thus it perceives Stencil's quest for *V*, Oedipa's quest for Trystero and Todd's "Inquiry" into the reasons for his father's suicide, basically as textual quests. It points out that Pynchon's characters act or are acted upon according to the scripts written for them, whereas, Barth's characters write their own scripts. This aspect is exposed in the narrativity of Todd, the story of the narrative voices of *Lost in the Funhouse*, the computer-text of *Giles Goat-Boy* versus the rocket-text in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and finally, the meta-text of *LETTERS*. However, the indeterminacy of the textual quests with their randomness of associative meanings only subvert these quests which result in the ultimate assertion of the inherent fluidity of the protean self and the text.
Chapter VII: CONCLUSION recapitulates the versions/subversions created by Barth and Pynchon in expressing their concern for the concept of fluidity of identity in the pluriuniverse of Postmodernism. Through a brief survey of the existing critical works and their limitations in relation to the fluidity theme in Barth and Pynchon, the chapter justifies the subject selected for study. While pointing out the lacunae in the present work, it discusses the difficulties encountered and faces the very problem of conclusion--in its conventional sense of offering solutions to the thematic problems--as the chosen theme of fluidity cannot afford to conclude in the word's dreadful implication of fixity.