CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: FLUIDITY OF IDENTITY/I-ENTITY

A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island,
each exists in a fabric of relations
that is now more complex and mobile than before.

JEAN-FRANCOIS LYOTARD. THE POSTMODERN CONDITION

1.1.0 Postmodernism, that happened as a post-war phenomenon in Europe and America, and that has been spreading its tentacles throughout, is basically an outcome of the abrasive environment effected by the rapid advancements in the fields of Science and Technology. The inevitable influence of Media, especially the Television, the Video and the Computer, has narrowed down, not merely the geographical but also the physical and mental edges of living. Ensnared and crippled by the sway of technology, Man loses his individuality, and subsequently, identity. John Barth (1930- ) and Thomas Pynchon (1937- ), two representative Postmodern American writers, depict the plight of contemporary humanity caught in, rather than sustained by, a culture that celebrates technology, dissolution of identity and death rather than humanity and life.

1.1.1 The theme of the dissolution of identity is as old as the Socratic pronouncement: “Know thyself.” Yet, from Oedipus Rex to Oedipa Maas, this has been the undercurrent that enables the literary/critical text afloat, whirl or sink. However, the search for the self/identity, has basically, remained a monolithic phenomenon and narcissistic in its frame work from the Traditionalists and even to the Modernists. Although the Modernists were bewildered by the divided/disintegrated self, they still held firm conviction that the self can be integrated through an inner sense of unity.
1.1.2 It is the Postmodernists who ruled out even this meagre contingency given to self. 'Identity,' 'self' and 'ego' in a Postmodern slippery ground have multi-dimensions. Ego, in its original sense, is seen as a mask. The self is not seen as a separate entity that the individual can afford to be narcissistic about anymore. The boundary of the self is made visible only in contra-distinction with the other. Semantically speaking, the self is not to be found in itself but in the other. It is always in relation and among. The conventional markers of these aspects are blurred. Hence 'identity' has become a fluid concept.

1.1.3 Nevertheless, Robert Langbaum's thoughtful and demystifying study: The Mysteries of Identity: A Theme in Modern Literature ends in a doubtful and regretful note that the Postmodern writers may not conceive 'the self' and 'identity' in a proper shape as the moderns dreamt of them to be. He says:

The fact that young writers from Beckett to Pynchon are still toying with the husks of our dead selves, are still deploring our deficiencies of being, shows that our sense of self has still not taken the positive shape augured by Yeats and Lawrence and leaves us wondering whether any positive shape will emerge (1977, 352).

This provides an appropriate grounding for a probe into the shape(lessness) of identity apprehended by the Postmoderns, and specifically two of its zealous advocates--Barth and Pynchon. Before one attempts a description of this phenomenon in a Barthian/Pynchonesque sensibility, it is useful to perceive how the meaning of the term, 'identity' indicating fixity has expended to fluidity in a postmodern context in detail.
1.2.0 Certain terms/concepts/ideas as ‘individuality,’ ‘self,’ ‘character,’ ‘singularity’ and ‘uniqueness’ have yielded to what is normally labelled as ‘identity.’ ‘Identity’ takes its root from the Latin *idem* meaning ‘same,’ which implies the state of being or remaining the same under varying aspects or conditions—the condition of being oneself or itself and not another. However, the self cannot be defined within a vacuum and sometimes can only be defined in its opposition to the other. The self is that which is not the other. But the converse is also true; what is self is determined by only that which is the other. Erik Erikson, in this way, conceptualises the formation of identity as a kind of “psychosocial relativity” existing in “a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity.” He says that “we cannot separate personal growth and communal change, nor can we separate the identity crisis in individual life and contemporary crisis in historical development because the two help to define each other” (1968, 33).

1.2.1 In relation to ‘the identity crisis in individual life,’ Norman Holland, in a crucial essay entitled “Post-modern Psychoanalysis,” presents a deconstructed version of mother-child relationship, where the self is seen in conflict right from the moment of its birth. According to him, the infant is born innocent of the boundaries between self and other, but by the eighth month of life, it loses that innocence. Because an infant depends so totally on an other (mother or “primary caretaker”), it must sometimes wait to be fed because that other is simply not there. Out of that waiting, the child begins to realise the existence of another which must be separate from its self, because that other does not coincide with the infant’s inner needs and wishes, and cannot do so. The first other is frustration. By so
painfully learning that its mother is not self, the infant learns there is a self and learns to
differentiate the two.

1.2.2 Holland further uses two terms, which he has borrowed from the French
Psychoanalysts, to describe this relative discrepancy between the self and the other, they
are: “transitional object” and “potential space” (1983, 301). Originally, the “transitional
object” was the teddy bear or security cloth, a fond real object—an other—endowed with
the symbolic value of the union of the baby and mother: an object with which the child can
ease, symbolise and act out the separation of self from other. But the realisation that the
boundary is provisional makes it clear that for adults many objects can be transitional: a
treasured possession, a lover, an ideology, a hobby, or a psychoanalyst.

1.2.3 Similarly, “potential space” is the space between the infant and mother, a space
which is neither subjective nor objective, neither inside nor outside always both. It is the
space occupied by the mother when she is in transition between being merged with the
infant and being perceived as a separate object. This potential space is continued in the
child’s experience of play (neither wholly “in here” nor wholly “out there”) and, still more
important, in the “cultural experience” of the adult: religion, art and all creative living.

1.2.4 Holland goes on to say that we could reread Erikson as part of the same trend
and that we could also look at Jacques Lacan from the same point of view. For Erikson,
we are born in a community which gives us identity as we give the community identity.
Holland shows how we could view Lacan in a similar way:

Where Erikson talks about the society than an anthropologist or a sociologist
would talk about, Lacan renders it in linguistic terms. The child must enter a
linguistic network of signifiers and signifieds, shaping that network to his own individual style with gaps, short circuits, and all kinds of sudden turns, leaps and cavortings. Where the English theorists see human relations as motivation, Lacan substitutes chains of language (1983, 302).

1.2.5 Identity, thus established, signifies the unity of the self in its relation to various other aspects. The other aspects may be represented by the society, community and history. Linguistically, it may be the signifiers/signifieds. This self is also seen as a mediator between God and Reality. As felt by poets like Wordsworth and W. B. Yeats, man perceives Nature/Reality through his self and understands the inherent design of God. This understanding/realisation enables the union of his self with that of God which in turn gives him the ultimate identity. Langbaum echoes Yeatsian conception of identity while he makes an analysis of the poet’s self: “God (a Krishna, a Christ, a Dionysus) is the ultimate phase in this unification of identity, the one self of which all other selves are aspects” (1977, 187). Based on these views of identity, we can arrive at a tentative equation as follows:

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\text{IDENTITY} = \frac{\text{GOD}}{\text{SELF}} = \frac{\text{SIGNIFIER}}{\text{SIGNIFIER}}
\]

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\text{UNITY} \quad \text{in} \quad \text{relation} \quad \text{to} \quad \text{Society} \quad \text{History} \\
\text{GOD} \quad \text{SELF} \quad \text{SIGNIFIER}
\]
1.3.0 But showing obsequious subscription to the Nietzschean proclamation that “God is dead,” Barth and Pynchon doubt identity having such a fixed circle of existence. Especially, after the disappearance of God; the absence of an Absolute Father in Heaven in the sense of a Transcendental signified, any definition on identity/self/personality that suggests fixity and permanence is considered partial and incomplete. The concept of identity as posited by the Postmodern critics has been among other things, an effort to get away from this principle of fixity of inner stability and sameness. Since those factors which establish the stability have been blurred, identity is perceived as a tentative and illusory image constructed by the self involved in a continuous process of making/fabricating it.

1.3.1 In this process of fabrication in a disintegrated milieu, Barth and Pynchon concur with the view that the human becomes a dismembered figure. Concurrent with the breakdown of the firm outlines of his physiological and genetic shape in an indeterminate world, the contemporary characters face a redefinition of their own psychic conditions as well. Masud Zavarzadeh opines:

In place of a durable selfhood, with its internal continuity, contemporary man is not only splintered into ‘serial selves’ but also question such basic concepts as ‘sanity’ and ‘madness’ which had served him as a rough-and-ready rule for ordering the internal life of himself and others. R. D. Laing’s proposition that schizophrenia is not only a breakdown but also a breakthrough shatters many of the protective distinctions, such as rational/irrational; appearance/reality;
interior/exterior; fact/fiction, by which the boundaries of the self and the non-self have been traditionally defined (1976, 17).

While Zavarzadeh succeeds in pointing out the dissolution of conventional borders, Jean-Francois Lyotard assures the mobility between. He says, “A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island, each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than before” (1984, 15).

To show that identity is only a fluid construct, Holland further defines identity as having three simultaneous meanings, as (i) an agency, (ii) a consequence, and (iii) a representation (1985, 33). The “I” represented by ‘an identity’ is the I that is the subject of sentences like “I see,” “I remember,” or “I repress”--the agent initiating the actions that systematically create identity. But identity is not only the active, agentic principle of such a system but also a passive self which that system creates as it interacts with the world. Hence, identity is also ‘a consequence.’ Identity in this second sense is the “I” that results because “I see,” “I remember” or “I repress.” Finally, identity in its third sense as ‘representation’ means the history of a person looked at a theme and variations. Holland explains, “Identity is a way of putting into words the dialectic of sameness and difference that is a human life. I am constantly doing new things, Yet I bring to each new thing my characteristic way of doing. I understand that sameness in what someone else does by seeing it persist through change. Conversely, I understand change by seeing it against what has not changed” (1985, 34). Identity is a ‘representation’ in the sense that a history requires a historian. ‘Identity,’ thus has the same ambiguity as ‘history.’ It claims to say
how things actually were, but it is necessarily some one's account of how things actually were.

1.3.3 The conclusion of Holland's analysis is that, 'identity,' like any other postmodern concept, at its best, is only a 'construct.' He says:

Identity is not found but made--ficted. It is I who create the fiction of someone's identity by looking at that person as a theme and variations. If you were looking at that person you would inevitably create another identity, because your interpretation would be a function to your identity . . . . In other words, this theme-and-variations concept of identity decenters the individual in a distinctly postmodern, metafictional way. You are ficted, and I am ficted like characters in a postmodern novel. The most personal, central thing I have, my identity, is not in one but in an interaction with me or in a divided me. We are always in relation. We are among (1983, 304-305).

1.3.4 Subsequently, anything and everything related to identity is rooted in a deep sense of plurality. Hence, identity in the postmodern climate of Barth and Pynchon, is essentially fluid. A situation, arrangement, idea, etc., that is 'fluid' does not have any fixed pattern or structure and is likely to change often. 'Fluidity' connotes an ability to move and change shape on the slightest pressure. In fact, the word 'fluid' takes its root from the Latin fluidus and/or fluo meaning 'to flow.' Thus fluidity of something is that which is unfixed, fluctuating, varying, variable, unsettled, changeable, alterable, versatile, adaptable, flexible and elastic. In this manner, the earlier equation of identity presented
before (vide 1.2.5) can be re-presented in terms of 'fluidity of identity/\-de-entity' as
below:

1.4.0 In this regard, the label—"the Protean Man"—provided by critics like Erikson
and Robert Jay Lifton helps to identify the fluid personality silhouetted in a fragmented
backdrop. Lifton's Protean Man embodies tangibility and multiplicity of identities like
Proteus. Proteus in Greek Mythology knows the past, the present, and the future of all
things. In order to avoid having to tell the truth, he used his ability to change his shape
with relative ease and assumed the pseudoidentities of animals; from wild boar to lion to
dragon and elements of nature; to tree, to fire and to flood. But what he did find difficult
and would not do unless seized and chained, was to commit himself to a single form, the
form most of his own, and carry out his function of prophecy. In Lifton's opinion:

we can say the same of protean man, but we must keep in mind his possibilities
as well as his difficulties. The protean style of self-process, then, is
characterised by an interminable series of experiments and explorations—some
shallow, some profound--each of which may be readily abandoned in favour of still new psychological quests (1968, 17).

1.4.1 Erikson gives a comprehensive definition of this polymorphously versatile personality. According to him: “It can and does denote a many-sided man of universal stature, a man of many gifts, competent in each; a man of many appearances, yet centred in a true identity. But it can also mean a man of many disguises; a man of chameleon like adaptation to passing scenes; a man of essential elusiveness” (1975, 51). However, in Barth and Pynchon it is not just men who possess these attributes; equally competent are their women, and hence, it accounts for the alteration of the term as “the Protean Wo/man”.

1.5.0 But, while defining ‘identity’ and ‘self,’ the term ‘Postmodernism’ and some of its related concepts are indiscriminately used. Since Barth and Pynchon exemplify these concepts in their works, it is pertinent to attempt a proper definition of them. The term, ‘Postmodernism,’ for the past two or three decades has enjoyed/suffered much critical acclamations/condemnations and achieved a significant stature in the Fine Arts and Mass Media; in Literature and Criticism; in Philosophy and Psychoanalysis and even in Architecture and Cybernetics. More than ever this illustrates the growing interdisciplinary nature of contemporary literary writings.

1.5.1 The postmodern tendency conjures up a galaxy of writers and critics; to name only a few dominant ones: Writers (other than Barth and Pynchon): Vladimir Nabokov, Italo Calvino, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jerzy Kosinski, Umberto Eco, William Burroughs, Donald Barthelme, Raymond Federman, John Hawkes, William Gass, E. L. Doctorow,
Robert Coover, D. M. Thomas, J. M. Coetzee and Salman Rushdie; Critics: Jacques
Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Susan
Sontag, Leslie Fiedler, Ihab Hassan, Paul de Man, Harold Bloom, J. Hillis Miller, Gerald
Hoffman and Geoffrey Hartman. As David Lodge comments, “Postmodernism has
established itself as a *écriture*, in Barthes’s sense of the word—a mode of writing shared by
a significant number of writers in a given period...” (1988, 221).

1.5.2 Yet the term Postmodernism, Proteus-like, is evasive when grappled assuming
all possible varying forms so as to avoid one fixed form (of definition) that would display
its proper identity. Perhaps because, as Ihab Hassan contends, “Postmodernism suffers
from a certain semantic instability; that is, no clear consensus about its meaning exists
among scholars” (1986, 14). The general difficulty is being compounded by the “brash
adolescence” of the term and “its semantic kinship to more current terms, themselves
equally unstable.” “Thus some critics mean by postmodernism what others call avant-
gardism or neo-avant-gardism, while still others would call the same phenomenon simply
modernism” (14).

1.5.3 Hassan also talks about its “historical instability.” By this he means that the
‘Postmodern period’ must be perceived in terms both of continuity and discontinuity, the
two perspectives being complementary and partial. Hence the Postmodern phenomenon
ought to be viewed in terms of both continuity and discontinuity from Modernism. In the
former case, it is from Modernism that Postmodernism has spread its tentacles and it is
Modernism that which it tries to intensify, extend and revise. In the latter case,
Postmodernism considers Modernism an anti-model whose versions it frustratingly seeks
to subvert/convert/pervert so as to keep its version incomplete. A related difficulty is that one could not successfully or completely define the term, ‘Modernism’ and learn to demarcate it from ‘Postmodernism.’ Hassan observes:

Modernism and Postmodernism are not separated by an Iron Curtain or Chinese Wall; for history is a palimpsest, and culture is permeable to time past, time present, and time future. We are all, I suspect a little Victorian, Modern, and Postmodern at once. And an author may, in his or her own life time, easily write both a modernist and postmodernist work (17).

1.5.4 The author who writes a postmodernist work, like fish in the water, may not be (need not be) aware of the categories his world encompasses. In Jean-Francois Lyotard’s words, “A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for” (1984, 81).

1.5.5 However, critics, especially postmodern, could not be content with this observation since ‘those rules and categories’ are what they themselves are looking for. Thus Hassan considers the postmodern phenomenon an interplay of two ambilectic tendencies: “Indeterminacy” and “Immanence.” Both tendencies are compounded by subtendencies; ‘indeterminacy’ by words like: “openness, heterodoxy, pluralism, eclecticism, randomness, revolt, deformation” and ‘immanence’ by words as: “dispersal,
Undoubtedly, the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist ideology offered a pivotal influence on the intellectual background of postmodern tendency. Derrida construed that the meaning of any phenomenon is elusive because speech does not have an absolute foundation. The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. In a dictionary the entry under one word refers the reader to another which refers him to another then back to the first word again, in an endless circling. Hence, meaning does not exist outside language. The significance of a particular sign can be derived from the other signs that comprise a linguistic system. The text has no context outside of it. In fact, the text is only a pretext. Thus Derrida (in his *Grammatology*) denies the Structuralist view of language as a system of signifiers/concepts attached to signifieds/referents. Rather, he approaches language as a system of *differance* without any positive terms:

*Differance* expresses the notion that every act of signification relies on differences, yet at the same time these differences are themselves products of significations. In other words, we can establish a term's meaning only by differentiating it from what it is not, but in trying to point to the difference we are constantly deferred because we again rely on significations to point to this movement of difference. *Differance*, Derrida concludes, is unnameable. All one finds are chains of signifiers; there is nothing out side the text. The chain of signifiers, in turn, is described as constituting a text's *trace*, the
manifetstion of the movement of differentiation (Lang 1990, 87).

1.5.7 By and large, Derrida decentred all hierarchies or binary oppositions as he did not find them contradictory but only complementary and partial terms involved in the endless chains of substitutions. He ruled out the possibility of any final authority or a Transcendental Signified. “Dissemination” as he called it is “that which does not return to the father” (cited in Atkins 1983, 60). One must accept the absence of a single father and should abandon “all hope of returning to the father by imitating a word that was ‘in the beginning,’” for texts “are so separated from a direct logo-imitative intention by deconstructive readings that they cannot be returned to the father: their author, or their author in heaven” (cited in Atkins 1983, 60).

1.5.8 Although Derrida denies the presence of a centre as illusory, he does not fail to acknowledge the function of its absence. He comments, “I didn’t say there was no centre, that we could get along without the centre. I believe that the centre is a function, not a being—a reality, but function. And this function is absolutely indispensable” (cited in Hutcheon 1988, 60). If the function of a centre without its ‘being’ sounds paradoxical, a poem by Lao Tzu would help the paradox intensely meaningful:

We put thirty spokes together and call it a wheel,
But it is on the space where there is nothing
that the utility of the wheel depends.

We turn clay to make a vessel;
But it is on the space where there is nothing
that the utility of the vessel depends.
We pierce door and windows to make a house;
And it is on these spaces where there is nothing
that the utility of the house depends.
Therefore, just as we take advantage of what is,
We should recognise the utility of what is not.

1.5.9 Just as the postmodernist takes advantage of what is, he recognises more the utility of what is not. Umberto Eco has suggested that Postmodernism is born at the moment when we discover that the world has no fixed centre and that, as Foucault taught, power is not something unitary that exists outside of us (cited in Hutcheon 1988, 86). Burdened with the overwhelming fatherhood of Modernism, Postmodernism sees the centre as a construct, a fiction and not a fixed and unchangeable reality. The old ‘either-or’ breaks down and the new ‘both/and-also’ of multiplicity and difference opens up new possibilities. The ‘mythical method’ (of Pound, Eliot and Joyce) of ordering or giving shape and meaning to a fragmented world gets displaced by a growing insistence that there is no order, no shape or significance to be found anywhere. In Todd Gitlin’s words:

In the postmodernist sensibility, the search for unity has apparently been abandoned altogether. Instead, we have textuality, a cultivation of surfaces endlessly referring to, ricocheting from, reverberating onto other surfaces. Instead of a single centre, there is pastiche, cultural recombination. Any thing can be juxtaposed to anything else. Everything takes place in the present, “here,” that is, nowhere in particular. Not only has the master voice dissolved,
but any sense of loss is rendered deadpan. The work labors under no illusions: we are all deliberately playing, pretending here--. . . . There is a premium of copies; every thing has been done. Shock, now routine, is greeted with the glazed stare of the total ironist. The implied subject is fragmented, unstable, even decomposed, it is finally nothing more than a crosshatch of discourses.

Where there was passion, or ambivalence, there is now a collapse of feeling, a blankness (1990, 15-16).

1.5.10 The types, rather species, of narcissistic narrative which mushroomed in this condition are labelled “Metafiction,” “Historiographic Metafiction,” “Parafiction” and “Surfiction.” Since all the possibilities of the fiction are used up, abused and exhausted, fiction in its conventional sense becomes impossible. Hence the Postmodern fiction tries to explore the possibilities of fiction as a ‘fictional construct’ than as a mimetic representation of reality. The Postmodern fiction does not aim to hold the mirror unto nature but simply to be true unto its self reflective nature. According to Raymond Federman, it is

the kind of fiction that constantly renews our faith in man’s imagination and not in man’s distorted vision of reality--that reveals man’s irrationality rather than man’s rationality. This I call SURFICTION. However, not because it exposes the fictionality of reality. Just as Surrealists called that level of man’s experience that functions in the subconscious SURREALITY, I call that level of man’s activity that reveals life as a fiction SURFICTION. Therefore, there is some truth in that cliché which says that “life is fiction,” but not because it
happens in the streets, but because reality as such does not exist, or rather exists only in fictionalized version (1975, 7-8).

1.5.11 The traditional set of borders will blur and all distinctions between the real and the imaginary; between the conscious and the subconscious; between history and fictionality; between space and time will be abolished in the Postmodern fiction. Its only value is its performance as an autonomous art form in its own right.

It is from itself, from its own substance that the fictitious discourse will proliferate--imitating, repeating, parodying, retracing what it says. Thus fiction will become the metaphor of its own narrative progress, and will establish itself as it writes itself. This does not mean, however, that the future novel will be only “a novel of the novel,” but rather it will create a kind of writing, a kind of discourse whose shape will be an interrogation, an endless interrogation of what it is doing while doing it, an endless denunciation of its fraudulence, of what it really is: an illusion (a fiction), just as life is an illusion (a fiction) (Federman, 11).

1.5.12 Having defined life as a fiction and reality as its fictionalised version, one needs to know what the word ‘version’ means in a postmodern condition. Literally, version means ‘an account of an event, etc., from the point of view of one person.’ It implies an honest recording of the original, although, ironically, it will be from the recorder’s point of view, that is, ‘his-story.’ In this sense it would evoke a string of words as: rendition, translation, depiction, construction, opinion, estimate, assessment, imitation, substitution, repetition, reproduction, reflection, revision and rotation. Version also
means ‘special variant form of something made; special adaptation of a book, piece of music, etc.’ In this sense, it suggests a variation according to one’s whims and fancies. Seen through the postmodern lens, the ‘trace’ of what the word ‘version’ signifies is differed and deferred through words like: inversion, reversion/re-version, subversion/subversion, aversion, revulsion, revolution, revision, conversion, alteration, transformation, transmutation, transfiguration, transmogrification, perversion, derision, deviation, refraction, aberration, degeneration, corruption, vitiation, reformation, affectation and pretension.

1.5.13 The chief phenomenon of the postmodern temperament is its aberration with these versions. While Postmodernism is considered a ‘version,’ in the way defined above, of Modernism, Postmodernism itself creates various versions of its own. But it sets them against one another, without dominance of a single version, constantly implying that every version of perfection is really an image of void. Every Postmodern artist/writer/critic creates his/her version of Postmodernism’s. Brain McHale points out that every critic ‘constructs’ postmodernism in his/her own way from different perspectives, none more right or wrong than the others. The point is that all are ‘finally fictions.’ McHale comments:

Thus, there is John Barth’s postmodernism, the literature of replenishment; Charles Newman’s postmodernism, the literature of an inflationary economy; Jean-Francois Lyotard’s postmodernism, a general condition of knowledge in the contemporary informational regime; Ihab Hassan’s postmodernism, a stage on the road to the spiritual unification of human kind, and so on. There is even
Kermode’s construction of postmodernism, which in effect constructs it right out of existence (cited in Hutcheon 1989, 11).

1.6.0 Among the polyversions of postmodernism, the versions of Barth and Pynchon are selected for this study because of the congruity in their representations which converge on the theme of fluidity of identity. This project reflects on the Barthian/Pynchonesque dissemination of identity in terms of anonymity, pathology, control systems, deflated myths and deteleological texts. Each of the following chapters deals with these fragmented aspects of identity respectively.

1.6.1 The second chapter, that follows this immediately, analyses how the tension between the external pressurised social order and the precarious inner psychic structure results in the anonymity of an individual. It shows that characters are interchangeable typecasts; as in the case of Proteus, ‘character’ is only an armour to defend the self in a mercurial shape shifting process. And when the defence mechanism becomes dysfunctional, there is rupture in the protean wo/man’s historical/psychological location resulting in: a) spiritual/symbolic fatherlessness  b) loss of values for institutions like family and marriage  c) assumption of masks and playing of roles  d) plurality of names/namelessness  e) futile quests, followed by f) self-doubt  g) isolation and paranoia. In addition to this, the chapter scrutinises a cluster of jelly-images like amoeba, blot, stain, blob used by Barth and Pynchon to typify the indeterminate nature of the their protean wo/men’s identities. These images are linked in their watery nature with another cluster of sea-animal images as sponge, crab, oyster, nautilus, mollusc and tortoise. And the implication of the authors through these uncanny images, that no
other images can succinctly bring out the deteriorated selves of the protean wo/men, paves ground for the study of their diseased personalities in the ensuing chapter.

1.6.2 The third chapter explicates the Protean Wo/Man’s frail struggle to constitute identity resulting in pathology. Most of the characters of Pynchon and Barth suffer from peculiar afflictions which can be categorised under the labels ‘Cosmopsis’ (Barth) and ‘Entropy’ (Pynchon). Cosmopsis intimates a cosmic mindfulness in extremity that as a result numbs the mind and the body. Entropy indicates the declivity of energy or the measure of disorder actualised by it. The chapter attempts a scientific clarification of these terms in order to apply them to the study of the demented personalities of these novelists. The chapter concludes with the observation that entropy/cosmopsis above all elucidate the tension between order and disorder in reality and that the approach of both Barth and Pynchon to this problem is dualistic. That to retain an identity by sustaining the tension in an ambilectic world of order/disorder, the entropic/cosmoptic protean wo/men need control.

1.6.3 The fourth chapter posits to explore and explain the remedies offered through a control mechanism for cosmopsis and entropy by these novelists, namely, ‘Mythotherapy’ (Barth) and ‘Cybernetics’ (Pynchon). Barth and Pynchon epitomise a postmodern situation where human identity is conditioned and controlled by the enveloping Media. The chapter places Barth and Pynchon in their intellectual background suffused with the Behaviourist and Cybernetic theories. Under their influence these novelists present human beings as conditioned robots. Hence, the cosmoptic/entropic wo/men act, but in determinate conditions which are not their own making. S/he makes choices, which are not of her/his
choosing, but of her/his controllers. An analysis of the controllers—in the form of Doctors, and the controlled victims—in the form of Patients, is carried out. Further, the chapter points out the failure of the human-controlled Mythotherapy and the illusory victory of the machine-controlled cybernetic therapy. The chapter also analyses the fondness for Barth and Pynchon to refer to computer and television in their works because they happen to be the principal tools of control.

1.6.4 The fourth chapter hints in the end that in a deconstructed postmodern world of dissolved Absolute Signifier, the authority figures such as Doctor, God and Author have no 

mythical background either to hold themselves together or to give order to their creations. The fifth chapter works on this hint. It presents a demystified view of identity that was originally believed to gain control through myth. The use/abuse of myth by Barth and Pynchon mirrors the postmodern sensibility. Where a modernist would try to wrest a meaning from the world through myth, the postmodernist greets the chaotic contemporary existence with a flippant indifference. Because for them, with a fractured sense of personality, there is rarely any hope of significant change in society or reality. Thus the chapter brings out the difference between modernists and postmodernists in terms of the functional/dysfunctional use of myth and views the works of Barth and Pynchon in that light.

1.6.5 The penultimate chapter studies the theme of fluidity of identity in its textual context. It elucidates the idea that the process in which a person constructs his self to create identity is the same as an author’s weaving of his text. And in a de-teleologically textualised world, the process becomes increasingly complex and fluid. Unlike the
traditional text, the postmodern de-teleological text does not progress according to a pre-
determined purpose or design. They only mirror the fabricative function of the self in
reality which is fundamentally a falsification of experience. Integrity of the self lies in
being faithful to the text that it has written for its creation of identity. In this light, the
cosmoptic/entropic questors start their search with texts. The chapter studies this line of
thought in the protean questors of Pynchon and Barth. Owing to the indeterminacy and
randomness in the accounts of the questors, the fragmented narratives give subversive or
reversal twists to their quests. Since these textual-quests are also considered as attempts
to negate entropy, and as entropy cannot be negated in an overall, universal sense, the
texts finally amount to deterioration resorting to the fluidity of the questors’ identities.

1.6.6 The final chapter consolidates the versions/subversions created by Barth and
Pynchon in their concern for the concept of fluidity of identity among the multiversions
of Postmodernism. The chapter briefly sums up the arguments of the preceding
chapters. Through a short survey of the existing critical works on the fluidity theme in
Barth and Pynchon, the chapter validates and justifies the subject selected for study.
Also, concisely, it points out the limitations in this work that could be overcome in
future studies. Finally, it confronts with the very problem of conclusion; in its
conventional sense of offering solutions to the thematic problems, as the chosen theme
of fluidity cannot have a virtual conclusion apprehensive of the fixity the word implies,
which Postmodernism consciously thwarts and this thesis attempts to deconstruct.