Chapter V

Summation

Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* and Rohinton Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* are analysed based on the thematic similarities. It critically assesses the concept of survival amidst casteism and racism. Suppression and survival are the recurrent issues of the social system of any nation. These problems do not belong to the world of the past; their significance in the present scenario is still relevant in the present context as portrayed in the selected novels. The present parallel study reveals that the characters of Michael Ondaatje and Rohinton Mistry have shown ‘bare’ survival attitude amidst socio-cultural problems.

The symbolism of the unfinished patch work quilt in Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* and the Italian villa in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* talk about the art of survival amidst crisis. The representation of quilt in Mistry’s *A Fine Balance* has a structural parallel to the narrative, much like the quilt. The atomic bomb in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* denotes the western aggression and reawakens the characters to reality. The Italian villa represents the spiritual death and rebirth of the inhabitants. Even though war destroyed the villa, nature replaced the void with new life. This mirrors the way the characters learn to live again after the emotional destruction caused by war. Specific social themes like displacement and dislocation, love, victimhood, survival and identity are explored extensively in the present study.
The immigrant experience and the expatriate sensibility are presented through the characters like Maneck and the maid in *A Fine Balance* and Kip in *The English Patient*. These characters feel alienated and long to get back to their native place as they belong to a different race. The struggle for a sense of rootedness amidst cross-culturalism, where the entire world is considered to be a global village, is prominent in the works of the writers chosen for study. There is a description of the anonymous maid whom Maneck encounters in Dubai. Nameless, she represents the many poor migrants who are victimized by their employers. While globalization might offer these people an opportunity to earn sufficient funds for themselves and, often, remittances to family at home, it also isolates them from community. These individuals are doubly victimized by globalization: the burdens of poverty and discrimination they face in their homes, societies and communities which are further compounded by social isolation, emotional rejection and physical vulnerability. Her presence in the novel reminds us that, despite rhetoric about breaking down cultural and physical boundaries between people, globalization’s most meaningful effect for at least some people is to break down whatever community that has been constructed precisely because physical borders have been crossed.

The setting of World War II in *The English Patient* and Internal Emergency of India in *A Fine Balance* sheds new light on the social system when it is viewed in the present context. History of the past does not remain static within that period of time; new perspectives are added with changing times and situations. The characters from the
selected novels for study depict the art of survival amidst such problems wherein they maintain a fine balance between hope and despair.

Margaret Atwood’s concept of victimhood and survival are applied to categorize the characters in *The English Patient* and *A Fine Balance*. Her four basic victim positions are:

Position 1: to deny the fact that you are victim

Position 2: to acknowledge yourself as a victim but to explain it as an act of fate

Position 3: to acknowledge yourself as a victim but does not believe that this role is inevitable.

Position 4: to be a creative non-victim

These four positions are analysed with the characters in the novels taken for study. Most often the characters are not static they keep moving from one position to another. Their transitory position are given as follows:
Basic Victim Positions

Position 1                  Position 2                       Position 3              Position 4

Almasy- *The English Patient*

Maneck- *A Fine Balance*

Shankar- *A Fine Balance*

The characters in
*A Fine Balance*

The characters in
*The English Patient*

Nusswan
Mrs Gupta

Kip, Hana, Geofferey
Cliffton, Madox, Katherine,
Caravaggio

Ishvar, Om,
Dina
Ondaatje’s narrative style:

The characteristic features of Ondaatje’s narrative are “slippages, ruptures, discontinuities, retelling, and retracing as the writer composes in a postmodern style and pays close attention to language and narrative structure” (South Asian Literature in English 238-239). 

*The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, for instance, deconstruct the popular portrait of the American outlaw and it is a mixture of prose, poetry, and illustrations. *Coming Through Slaughter*; is a poetic narrative in prose that the author says wrestles against what would be a documentary portrayal of Buddy Bolden, the legendary American jazz musician. “Ondaatje often presents his reader with a metanarrative that critiques processes of representation and narration. His works dispute the kinds of representation that revolve around principles of sameness and linearity, and also problematize the idea that there is a fixed authorial voice providing unity” (South Asian Literature in English 238-239).

*The English Patient* is a postcolonial novel written by Ondaatje in a postmodernist style. The central themes are supported by a number of intertextual references and allusions. The themes such as religion, relationship, identity and history were interpreted based on the intertextual references. The character constructions within the narrative are influenced by these allusions and provide the background and clarity to each character. The various print, visual and audio texts alluded to in *The English Patient* shape its reading and support its narrative structure, core ideas, themes and issues. According to Guru Charan Behera,
Almasy, the English patient, acts as an intertextual writer who receives and reconstructs texts according to his own sense of himself and the world. Second, the books with missing pages have gaps of plots, missing incidents like landscape ravaged by storms and bombs. Third, they provide tales and situations parallel to the occurrences of the novel. Fourth, they represent the discontinuous writing in differing modes like the novel itself (8).

The novel focuses on the post modern self reflexive narrative and post colonial diasporic writings. For the English patient, the beauty of Herodotus lies in its mingling of vast scope and small stories, in its lack of discrimination between truth and fiction, in its all consuming generosity. But that accounts only for Herodotus book as an idea in the novel. Almasy is a desert explorer who explores an Oasis called Zerzura like Herodotus. Almasy’s relationship with Katherine is brought out through the Candealus episode. In the novel Cliffton, the officer thinks he is incompatible and confirms his wife’s beauty with other officers. In history Gyges kills to marry the queen but in the novel Katherine falls in love with Almasy. He simply loves her and does not wish to possess her.

The novel is full of technical details drawn from non literary texts projecting a war time atmosphere. “It is replete with desert winds, dust storms, and methods of archaeology, cartography and bomb dissolving techniques” (Bhera 8). The villa was a nunnery before the Germans conquered it this shows certain religious contexts. Hana who has lost her father and unborn child in war finds fulfillment by nursing the English patient. These literary and non literary texts form the sub texts to the novel. History and fiction,
archaeology and myth are combined to form a kind of metafiction. As Julia Kristeva says a text becomes “polyphonic” with a mixture of voices within and outside the texts. They are dialogically and intertextually arranged and the novel approximates what Almasy calls “We are communal histories, communal books” (261).

The perpetually fluid or, rather, nomadic motion of memory in The English Patient springs from an aesthetic that infuses the written word with oral/aural qualities and therein highlights the profound sensuality of language, the latter being, as Johannes Fabian has emphasized, "an activity of concrete organisms and the embodiment of consciousness in a material medium sound" (Ondaatje 163). An emphasis on the orality/aurality of language gains particular significance in light of a cultural, predominantly Western bias toward visual perception as the favored mode of organizing and communicating knowledge; both modern evolutionary views of language, presupposing a gradual shift from orality to literacy, and the practices of colonial rule point to the primacy historically given to the written or printed word (Bhera 73).

The novel gives prominence in its attention to “voice and auditory perception to the temporal dimension of human experience and, by implication, notions such as process and transformation” (Bhera 73). This was largely ignored and marginalized from a Western historical perspective and it comes in handy given the author’s multicultural origin. The transmission of the past in Ondaatje's novel follows precisely the latter's orally informed narrative pattern. “Far from being a stable presence, the past emerges as
something perpetually reactivated and unfolding its dialogic force within the novel's constantly shifting cultural, historical, and geographical landscape”(97). Thereby the author draws from the remnants of the past, like the ruins and paintings over books and reinscribes them with personal memories within various contexts. Like the desert where, as Almasy claims, “to repeat something would be to fling more water into the earth”, The English Patient, too, given a continuum of oral and textual performance, evokes a space where “nuance took you a hundred miles” (Ondaatje 231). In its refusal to offer a coherent, unified picture of the past, the novel silently remembers the past's various possible versions by inscribing them structurally into its intricate narrative fabric.

Precisely the undecidability of meaning the novel thus yields guarantees the remembrance of the past in all its unique, often contradictory facets and complexity. An undecidability of this kind in fact distinguishes the text's oral qualities from the fragmentation and indeterminacy largely characterizing so-called post modern writing; far from calling meaning as such into question, it invites a creative, at times sensual engagement with past events and circumstances.

According to Guru Charan Behera, true memory in The English Patient constitutes a “figural constellation” based on mere textual rather than referential connections among elements. “The novel yet succeeds in capturing and stabilizing the fleeting impressions of the past in an image, that is, a material gesture both phonetically/graphically and in reference to a concrete act of writing . . .”(9) The novel's deep concern with historical revision finally betrays an unmistakably postcolonial sensibility that closely attends to voices silenced and unheard. The central
role the author accords to Herodotus's work is indicative of this particular approach to the past. Described by Almasy as someone “[travelling] from oasis to oasis, trading legends as if it is the exchange of seeds, consuming everything without suspicion” (Ondaatje 118-119), Herodotus, too, strove to reveal a multifaceted, heterogeneous reality that lurked just beneath the smooth and orderly surface of conventional historiographies. The idea of “trading legends as if it is the exchange of seeds” acutely captures the materiality of spoken words as well as their continuous growth and transformation. The parallel thus drawn between seeds and stories significantly points to the mere potential or promise that stories hold. “Their vigor and endurance always depends on nourishing and nurturing influences. Only those falling on fertile, receptive ground will ultimately sprout and flourish” (102-103).

Mistry’s narrative style:

Mistry’s style resembles Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1980), with its use of the grotesque, the shocking, and the ironic. As a historical novel he adheres to stricter use of history and makes the events the dominate character, “to merge function with form and content, to take to heart, as Mistry does, the confluence of “spirit and form” in his fiction”. The minor characters and sub-plots are also well-developed and integrated into main storylines. This novel creates the “visible post” so admired by Henry James through which they created “fictional histories” which give to fiction the power of, a language to describe the past.
“Mistry’s technique of weaving the private dimension of his characters into the macrocosmic political canvas is at its best in his second novel, *A Fine Balance* (1996)” (Jaina C. Sanga 213). While chronicling the state of emergency declared in 1975 by the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi, until her assassination in 1984, Mistry does not spare his characters any of the atrocities that were inflicted upon the common Indian citizen in that period. His depiction of the dismal quality of life is rendered with exceptional realism. Jennifer Takhar remarks, “Mistry emphasizes pure veracity, as he sees it, underlining the most unsightly and hideous aspects of life: its poverty, despair and violence.”(Jaina C. Sanga 213-214). Mistry’s choice of protagonists reveals a deliberate attempt to privilege the marginalized sections of Indian society. Dina Dalal is an admirably strong Parsi widow, who struggles to make ends meet in a hostile city, Mumbai. In a desperate attempt to preserve her “fragile independence” (Mistry 13), she takes in a paying guest, Maneck Kohlah, a Parsi student, and hires two tailors, Ishvar and Om. The lives of the tailors bear testimony to the irrevocable damage for which the MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act) with its forced sterilizations was responsible. Loss and the inevitability of death loom at large in the lives of the protagonists. The solace and warmth that they find, as their lives intersect, is only fleeting. Suffering is like the eternal sky for them where moments of happiness are like the temporary clouds.
Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* is analyzed from a postcolonial perspective through the concept of nationalism and national identity, emphasizing cultural, psychological and physical displacement due to colonization, travelling, exploration and space/place (cartography), referring to the theories and views of Benedict Anderson, Homi Bhabha, Franz Fanon, Edward Said, and so on. It will mainly focus on the erasure of the national identities and selves of a group of European explorers, scientists and spies, including the colonized Kip, an Indian, serving as a bomb defuser in the British Army. Even though these scientists’ mission is to map the desert, they can hardly achieve it. The desert is uncontrollable and unreliable because of sand storms. Its surface changes rapidly and one can be lost forever. In other words, the desert is the metaphor of their unreliable national identities that are fragmented and varied because of their traumatic personal experiences in this alien landscape and culture. The fragility of identities and selves are even for those who represent European civilization and Imperial Rule as hegemonic powers together with the colonized Kip who is shaped by these powers as a hybrid identity.

*The English Patient* is a novel that seeks to explore the problem of identity and displacement, experienced both by colonizer and colonized. As known, identity is a social construct and largely determined by the relationship between self and other. It is through our sense of identity that we identify ourselves as members of various ethnic groups or nations as well as social classes which provide us with a sense of belonging. Likewise, nations are communities which provide a sense of belonging through the individual’s feeling of connectedness to his or her fellow men. In other words,
individuals think that they are a part of one collective body, namely, a community known as nation, which is in fact an idea, defined by Benedict Anderson as “an imagined political community”. The survival of nations depend upon invention and performance of traditions, histories, symbols which help people sustain their identity. However, it mostly depends on traditions and narration of history, which are central elements. Therefore, national history is important in the sense that it narrates the past as a common experience that belongs to a community. It creates one particular version of the past and identity to constitute a common past and a collective identity of any given community. In other words, nations are “imaginary communities,” to use Benedict Anderson’s phrase, and nationalism is based on the very concept of a unified imaginary community. Furthermore, nations also provide people with a sense of belonging, connectedness and identity through a shared territory which they believe they own and therefore have the right to separate from other peoples’ land by means of borders.

As an idea, scholars usually agree that it is Western in origin - that it came into existence with the development of Western capitalism, industrialization and colonial expansion, which paved the way for imperialism. However, starting with the 90s, nationalism, nation and national identity began to lose their significance as the world was becoming increasingly international, particularly after the period of decolonization. The concept of nation / nationalism and national identity as Western ideas stimulated colonized peoples to develop their own sense of nationalism and national identity against the colonial, national identity of the West. However, this anti-colonial nationalism could not provide the colonized peoples with a sense of homogeneous national unity due to the
diversity of ethnic groups within them, particularly because the elite nationalist rule neglected the subaltern masses and privileged the elite over the subaltern, which turned nationalism into a rule of elite dominations, as argued by Frantz Fanon in his The Wretched of the Earth. Hence, there emerged from Western capitalism and colonization the concepts of nation and nationalism as indispensable components of imperialist expansion, but failing to bring national liberation to the heterogeneous groups of people in the former colonies despite their opposition to imperialist domination as anticolonial nationalism. Be it colonial or anti-colonial, both are essentialist and racist in the sense that they supported the ruling elite while ignoring the less privileged ethnic groups.

*The English Patient* is a novel that questions the nation and nationalism that shape identities through colonial and anti-colonial nationalisms. The characters are all exiles from their homeland who have gathered together at the Villa San Girolamo at the end of World War II. Hana is a Canadian nurse, who volunteered for war service and who has to have an abortion because the father of her unborn child has been killed. Furthermore, she is on the verge of a nervous breakdown because of the news of her father’s death by burns and her continuous dealing with the wounded and the dying. As the Canadian Infantry Division continues to advance in Italy, she stays behind at the villa to nurse a dying burnt man who is called the ‘English patient’. The third member of the villa other than these two is Kip, a Sikh, who is a sapper in the British army and finally, Caravaggio, the thief, an Italian-Canadian who was a friend of Hana’s father. The novel’s central figure is the English patient whose identity is already erased as he is burnt beyond recognition. In fact, he is the Hungarian Court Ladislaus de Almasy, a
desert explorer who helped the Germans navigate the deserts. Although his duty is to delineate, name and in a sense possess the unmapped desert, which is a vast territory, in the end his own identity, which is the map of his own features, has been erased and he is known only as the ‘English patient’.

In fact, the inhabitants of the Villa are all displaced because they are exiles who have found new identities in a place other than their homeland. In a sense, they formed a new community in the Villa, which is like Eden, isolated from the outside world of war and violence. Since the novel questions colonial and anti-colonial nationalism, which shape their identities, it frequently breaks down colonial hierarchies, particularly the imperial conception of space/place through the mapping of the desert, which is an instrument of colonial domination, and the desert’s elusiveness because of its vastness and uncontrollable sand storms. In fact, mapping a space means to name it and possess it as it becomes a place as seized territory, which will help invaders, explorers and traders to realize their plans and aspirations. Almasy is aware of the fact that mapping is a form of knowledge for power and domination:

The ends of the earth are never the points on a map that colonists push against, enlarging their sphere of influence. On one side servants and slaves and tides of power and correspondence with the Geographical Society. On the other the first step by a white man across a great river, the first sight (by a white eye) of a mountain that has been there forever. (141)
Obviously, colonial powers constitute oppressive social classes and organizations like the Geographical Society to explore new lands for colonial domination. Almasy also adds that colonial identity is narcissistic, ready to project its own identity onto anything it possesses as if it were a full, unified self:

When we are young we do not look into mirrors. It is when we are old, concerned with our name, our legend, what our lives will mean to the future. We become vain with the names we own, our claims to have been the first eyes, the strongest army, the cleverst merchant. It is when he is old that Narcissus wants a graven image of himself. (141-42)

However, Almasy is aware of the fact that colonial imposition of fixed meanings on space is meaningless because space is a socio-political construction and named by particular people in relation to their experiences and aspirations throughout history:

So history enters us. I knew maps of the sea floor, maps that depict weaknesses in the shield of the earth, charts painted on skin that contain the various routes of the Crusades. So I knew their place before I crashed among them, knew when Alexander had traversed it in an earlier age for his cause or that greed. I knew the customs of nomads besoted by silk or wells. (18)

The quotation above reflects the transience of empires, nations and civilizations which constitute history. Likewise, identities are also transient and elusive for Almasy:

There were rivers of desert tribes, the most beautiful humans I’ve met in my life. We were German, English, Hungarian, African, - all of us insignificant to them. Gradually we become nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by
nation-states. Madox died because of nations. The desert could not be claimed or owned—it was a piece of cloth carried by the winds, never held down by stones, and given a hundred shifting names long before Canterbury existed, long before battles and treatises quilted Europe and East. Its caravans, those strange rambling feasts and cultures left nothing behind, not an amber. All of us, even those with European homes and children in the distance, wished to remove the clothing of our countries. It was a place of faith. We disappeared into landscape…Erase the family name. Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert. (138-9)

As seen, the desert is used as a metaphor that represents transience. It cannot be claimed, owned or defined. Therefore, mapping it, which means ownership and possession as colonial notions, is meaningless. The desert refuses anything artificial such as borders or names as a landscape which is changed continuously by sand storms. Hence, it is a place of freedom where national identities disappear. What Almasy criticizes here is Western nationalism or rather colonial nationalism which imposes artificial borders through mapping and wars simply for money and political power. Therefore, he wants to erase all national identities, constructed by Western nationalism as stable and fixed collective identities, limited to a single, domineering nationality that is responsible for creating artificial borders that divide people. For Almasy, his close friend Madox has died because of nations. In fact, Madox commits suicide after his return to England during the congregation when the priest gives a sermon in honour of war. Being a member of the Geographic Society, Madox obviously believes in Western nationalism with its jingoistic rhetoric of saving the world for civilization and human progress.
However, like Almasy, his national identity has been erased during the desert explorations and he kills himself because he feels betrayed by Western nationalism and national identity which honour war instead of civilization.

Like Madox, Almasy also hates his own social identity on which Western nationalism is founded. He is already made up of diverse cultural influences which resist any final definition as he says: “Kip and I are both international bastards-born in one place and choosing to live elsewhere.”(176)

Homi Bhabha, in his influential essay, “DissemiNation: time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation,” argues that nationalist representations are unstable and fragile constructions, for they cannot produce the sense of national unity to forge a collective national consciousness due to the ambivalence of national discourse. They are ambivalent because nationalism as a “pedagogic discourse” claims a shared, continuous history which links past and present as a linear sequence of time. However, nationalist discourses are also “performative” because they are “repetitious” and “recursive” in the sense that they are open to subtle alterations in the course of time. Nations are constructed continuously by national subjects through new ideas that change their institutions as well. In other words, the nation is never fixed, it is split within itself: We are confronted with nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population. The barred Nation It/Self, alienated from its eternal self-generation, becomes a liminal signifying space that is internally marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference. In this respect, the priest’s sermon which legitimizes war
and violence as a nationalist discourse at the expense of human life is disrupted by Madox’s suicide which is a reaction as well as a message, depicting the emergence of counter discourses within the nation which may turn into counter narratives.

Kip, the sapper, is another character with an elusive identity in the novel. He is a young Sikh, a bomb defuser who seems assimilated into English culture. As a colonized, he has a double perspective because of his hybrid, in-between identity which disturbs the binary oppositions of racist and colonial discourses. Kip, who admires his commanding officer Lord Suffolk, seems assimilated into English culture as he is re-named Kip although his real name is Kirpal Singh. His singing of the song: “They’re changing guard at Buckingham Palace/ Christopher Robin went down with Alice” (211) is a song his friend Hardy used to sing while he is defusing a bomb, which indicates his mimicry of English culture. However, Kip is a hybrid, an in-between identity even though he seems assimilated into English culture. He experiences disappointments with English culture and finally reverts to his traditional culture as an anti-western Sikh nationalist like his brother.

Unlike his brother, however, Kip joins the British army willingly. Yet, he is treated with reservations by his white colleagues. The only place in England where he is unreservedly accepted is Lord Suffolk’s household. Lord Suffolk, who becomes Kip’s mentor, trainer and surrogate father, is also a bomb defuser. When he and his team are killed while dismantling a new type of bomb, Kip is utterly disappointed with Western civilization and he becomes emotionally withdrawn. He leaves England and goes to Italy to work as a sapper, where he meets Hana, the nurse, and the two become lovers. The
Villa is a place, once again, where Kip is unreservedly accepted. He is welcomed by the Western residents in the Villa, namely, Hana, the English patient /Almasy, Caravaggio, the Canadian thief. They even celebrated Hana’s 21st birth day, a symbol of their friendship as they all seem to disregard their national and racial origins. The Villa, like the desert, is a place of refuge almost like Eden, where nations, races, anything artificial that divides human beings is meaningless. However, when August comes and Kip hears the news of atomic bomb dropped on Japan, he becomes enraged, believing that a Western country would never commit such an atrocity against another Western country. Kip also threatens to kill the English Patient, whom he regards as a symbol of the West because he believes he is English. Unfortunately, Kip’s generalization against the West, particularly, against the English is racial and aggressive, which is a contrast with the Edenic and peaceful atmosphere of the Villa where racial boundaries do not exist. Kip’s anti-Western outburst and his readiness to abandon his Western friends is once again due to his sense of cultural displacement as a consequence of his disappointment with Western culture. As a hybrid identity with a double perspective, he gazes at the photograph of his family as he questions himself: “His name is Kirpal Singh and he does not know what he is doing here” (287). Even though his friends call him “Kip,” he is no longer Kip, but Kirpal Singh or the sapper till the end of the novel. As a medical doctor and a married man with two children in the last chapter, he is “Kirpal.” However, he often remembers Hana and thinks of her and seems to regret his decision to leave her without a word:
It seems every month he witnesses her this way, as if these moments of revelation are a continuation of the letters she wrote to him every year, getting no reply, until she stopped sending them, turned away by his silence. His character, he supposed. Now there are these urges to talk with her during a meal and return to that stage they were most intimate at in the tent or in the English patient’s room, both of which contained the turbulent river of space between them. (301-2)

As seen, neither the English Patient as a Westerner nor Kip as a colonized native has a unified, homogenous and stable identity. In fact, the residents of the Villa as displaced individuals far away from their homeland have endured physical and psychological wounds in different ways during the war both as Westerner and colonized native. They try to heal themselves through their friendship while their old identities have dissolved even though Kip reverts back to his traditional national identity. However, as a colonized and hybrid identity, Kip is already an ambivalent character. He is like a mimic man who is “almost the same but not quite” in Bhabha’s words (86), for “mimicry is at once resemblance and menace”(86). The menace of mimicry for Bhabba is its double vision (88) which betrays the ambivalence of the colonized subject who can menace the colonizer simply by using the discourse of colonialism as a means of resistance or disobedience. Likewise, Kip who is trained and disciplined in the British Army and who seems to have adopted English customs, suddenly rebels against the West and abandons his Western friends because of his racially based generalization against the West. In other words, he categorizes his friends as colonizers just as all
natives are categorized as inferior stereotypes by colonizers, namely, “wild” or “barbaric savages”:

    My brother told me. Never turn your back on Europe. The deal makers. The contract makers. The map drawers. Never trust Europeans, he said. Never shake hands with them. But we, oh, we were easily impressed—by speeches and medals and your ceremonies. What have I been doing these last few years? Cutting away, defusing, limbs of evil. For what? For his to happen? (284-85)

Frantz Fanon, who refuses the complete, romantic glorification of native traditions and cultures of the past, namely, pre-colonial period, advocates the reform of traditional culture through a modification and reinterpretation of it in order to forge a national consciousness for the indigenous peoples in the present era. He also argues in his The Wretched of the Earth that the cultural evolution of the Western-educated native or rather the native, intellectual writer, to constitute an anti-colonial consciousness has three stages: The first one is the assimilation stage in which the native identifies with the colonizing power and its culture more than his own native culture as in the case of Kip, though he is not a writer. The second stage in which the native intellectual remembers his authentic identity, refuses any attempt to assimilate (158-9), as Kip has refused. And finally, in the third stage which is the “combat stage” for Fanon, the intellectual native who is the colonized writer and who is directly involved in the struggle against colonialism together with his fellowmen and “combat literature, revolutionary literature, national literature emerges” (159). In Kip’s case, he no longer serves in the British Army but works as a medical doctor in his own country. He is married and has two children
whose brown skin is emphasized together with their customs and habits in the novel. It is clear that he loves his family and is particularly proud of his son’s wit in the house.

However, even though Fanon suggests the awakening of national consciousness and self-awareness through national liberation against the colonial rule, his concept of national consciousness is not essentialist or racist. On the contrary, it has an international dimension like his concept of a “new humanism”:

Self-awareness does not mean closing doors on communication. Philosophy teaches us on the contrary that it is its guarantee. National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is alone capable of giving us an international dimension (179). Likewise, Edward Said in his Culture and Imperialism, writes from a similar perspective, citing Fanon as well:

In any case nativism is not the only alternative. There is the possibility of a more generous and pluralistic vision of the world, in which imperialism courses on,… but the opportunities for liberation are open….In this phase liberation, and not nationalist independence is the new alternative, liberation which by its very nature involves, in Fanon’s words, a transformation of social consciousness beyond national consciousness (277-78).

Hence, even though Kip’s uncontrollable rage, racially based generalizations, and his reverting to anti-Western national identity seem essentialist and racist, they do not undermine the novel’s postnational approach that emphasizes “the mutual transformation of colonizer and colonized” as the fundamental principle of “postnational/postcolonial ethics of hybridity” (Gandhi 140). Kip, both colonized and hybrid, is already an
ambivalent character who fluctuates between two opposing cultures. In fact, the end of
the novel is devoted to Kip’s thoughts of Hana and his family in India. Despite his love
and affection for his family, particularly for his children, Kip longs to see her, even
though he has not replied to any of her letters for a year. He thinks of Hana very often
and even wants to communicate with her, which can be regarded as the early signs of his
transformation to forge a new “social consciousness beyond national consciousness,” in
anon’s words, implying the emergence of his postnational identity with a more pluralistic
vision of the world in the course of time.

_The English Patient_ is a historiographic metafiction which rejects the concept of
history as a single linear authoritative version of the past so as to have a record of
multiple voices which constitute an oral record. As a historiographic metafiction, the
novel blurs the line between fact and fiction to question the conflict between history’s
authoritative versions of the past and oral records based on myths, legends even rumours
owing to the difficulty of distinguishing between fact and fiction. Therefore, Herodotus
is called both the “father of history” and “father of lies,” because his book is based on
oral sources such as the Gyges and Candules episode. Herodotus’s book is about the
resistance of the Greek city states to the Persian Empire, which is an allusion to the
resistance to the imperial powers that ruled India and Africa such as the British, or to the
Germans and the allies who invaded the African territory during the second World War
as narrated in the novel.
Since Herodotus’s history is based on oral records rather than factual, written records, it is being referred to as an inter-text to show how the authoritative version of the past is controlled by imperial powers just as the mapping of African deserts in the twentieth century by the colonial cartographers betrays the fact that these maps are instruments of colonial expansion and domination and therefore they can never be objective as it is claimed to be. To conclude, the novel questions nationalism and nations as colonial components and concepts both in the form of colonial and anti-colonial nationalism, which are imaginary, essentialist and racist, causing the destruction of civilizations and suffering to both westerners and colonized subjects such as Almasy, Caravaggio, Hana and Kip. Likewise, the theme of national identity and narration of history are also explored as components of colonial nationalism revealing the fact that neither history nor national or cultural identities are neutral and objective because they cannot provide access to objective truth. Therefore, they are not stable or fixed, but elusive. The novel offers a postnational/postcolonial reading of colonial encounters which puts “emphasis on the mutual transformation of colonizer and colonized,” as in the case of Almasy and Kip, who have experienced a process of identity transformation.

Education: an agent of social change:

Until recently caste Hindus were not prepared to allow the Scheduled Caste children to sit along with their children in schools. The progress of education among the Scheduled Castes was painfully slow. Education is a dynamic agent of social change and social mobility. It paves the way for social status. Awareness is a must for untouchables. This is possible only when educational opportunities are provided to them. Mumtaz Ali
Khan quotes Lannoy’s observation, “the greatest source of hope to the Harijans is modern education which acts as a solvent of caste barriers”. Education whether formal or informal, is particularly required by the Scheduled Castes for various reasons. “It enables innovation in agricultural technology and political participation. It also reduces social distances between the Scheduled Castes and the caste Hindus”. (Bheemaiah 60)

Education is a powerful medium which can be used to bridge the gap between the higher and lower castes but if casteism and racism needs to be abolished the change in the mentality of the people is vital. The change of mentality of the people takes time and initiative by each and every individual. It is the socio-responsibility of every individual to retrospect and see as to why untouchability has still not been abolished even after 65 years of independence. Within their own work place or home they would be practicing some form of caste or racial demarcation or would be a witness to them. Then they must voice out against such atrocities and not just be a passive witness. Even if a few raise their voice it will be a beginning for a change.

Attitudinal change:

The educated Kip’s colleagues in *The English Patient* and the village school master in *A Fine Balance* show marked racial and caste demarcation. Education along with the change in the attitude of the people is vital inorder to abolish casteism and racism. Most of the characters in *The English Patient* are educated and Kip and his colleagues work in the British army as sappers. They avoid Kip as he belongs to a different nationality. In *A Fine Balance* there is the village school master who punishes Ishvar and Om severely for entering into the school premises and polluting the learning
environment of higher caste children by their very presence and touch. It is the educated people like the village school master who deny access to classrooms for Ishvar and Om as they belong to the untouchables.

Education can not eradicate the caste and racial prejudice if it in turn propagates it very strongly. A divided house will not stand in the same way, if education on the one hand propagates the evils of caste system and racial prejudice and on the other hand emphasizes on the difference it will not lead to the desired result. The change in the mentality of the people can be brought out by analyzing the roots of casteism and racism. The roots of both these problems state the fact that we have always had a cultural mix-up either through invasion or through trade with different cultures and races. Therefore the notion of a pure caste or race is a myth which does not exist in today’s society, down the pages of history they have already intermingled and now what is existent is a cross-cultural society. Once this understanding is brought out the atrocities which take place in the name of caste and race seems pointless. The very idea of purity does not exist in reality and therefore they have no basis for demarcation in the name of caste and race. The ultimate truth is that humanity is gradually fading by stringently holding onto meaningless traditions. What is the use of education if the theory learnt is not practically applicable? As educated people they have to improve and enhance themselves in knowledge and thereby use it for the greater good of the society by applying them practically to abolish such social evils. Education does not stop with academic excellence the fruit of it is cherished only when it is practically applied contributing to the growth of the society.
Activity based learning:

The system of education has to keep updating itself and grow with the current trend and cater to the needs of the society. Thereby the old system of giving essays on Dalit Literature and racial prejudice will not produce the desired results. Activity based learning is the current trend where the classes are student centered and not just mark oriented. Thereby the students have to be allowed to actively participate in debates and come out with possible solutions to abolish this social evil and they have to be implemented. Everyday scenario must be taken into consideration and the progress made by the student bodies to abolish the social evils such as caste and racial prejudice both within their educational institution and in the society has to be noted and further practical suggestions has to be made. For example a class can be divided into groups depending on the strength of the class. Initially students would be asked to do a background study on caste and race. Next field study can be assigned to the groups, wherein each student has to collect case studies of atleast one person affected by caste and racial discrimination. Then debates can be organized by the groups for caste and race issues. The solutions given can be consolidated and implemented in actual cases by organizing a visit to the areas wherein a large number of Dalits and people belonging to other caste and race live. The progress made has to be noted periodically and improvements have to be added for further development.
Unity amidst diversity:

Education has indeed taken a new version to support these causes instead of eradicating them. Recent evidences taken from the leading newspapers such as “The Hindu” and “Guardian” representing both India and Canada on caste and racial issues respectively support the above statement. The problem therefore is not the lack of laws to abolish casteism and racism but the enforcement of these laws. When basic survival is threatened margins are drawn, there are the oppressors and the oppressed. The victims are divided in their struggle for survival and furthers lines are drawn to show the demarcation. An end has to come for these atrocities, one day someone has to stand up and say it is enough. As illustrated by the novels taken for study the voices of a few can be easily buried but the voices of many will make a stand to be heard and pave the way for change into a better future. The world is considered to be one round table where all the hands though coloured are joined together, there are no demarcations of high and low everyone are equal.

Ondaatje and Mistry communicate the message of unity amidst diversity through their novels The English Patient and A Fine Balance respectively. Mistry’s A Fine Balance concludes by revealing that there is hope even after despair through his characters. On one hand there are Ishvar, Om and Dina who have endured all their obstacles with a spirit of oneness, on the other there is Maneck who commits suicide by losing his hope in life and gives into the belief that everything ends badly. The lives of these characters as portrayed by the writers give credence to the belief that even when everything else crumbles love still sustains. In Ondaatje’s The English Patient the writer
concludes with Kip thinking of Hana in India who is halfway across the globe. Time heals all wounds and love surpasses time, place, caste and race. For these characters survival does not mean having victory over their obstacles but it means learning to live in spite of sheer despair and distress. Learning is sought and knowledge is created, but their potential is all but lost. Giving hope to one another and overcoming life’s obstacles by mutual love and understanding becomes the key focus for the art of survival amidst socio-cultural problems such as racism and casteism in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* and Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*.

The further scope of study are given as follows:

- The researchers can include other works of Ondaatje and Mistry and do an individual study on each of these writers. The latest works of these two writers namely *Cat’s Table* and *Scream* can be included.
- The effect of Globalization in Mistry *A Fine Balance*.
- The role of family in Mistry *A Family Matters* and Ondaatjes *Divisidaero*.
- Displacement and dislocation in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* and Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*.
- Facets of love in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* and Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*.
- Poetry of suffering in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* and Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*. 
• Regional and National identities in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* and Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*

• Expatriate sensibility in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* and Mistry’s *A Fine Balance*

• Multiculturalism and its Discontent in the selected novels of Ondaatje and Mistry