Chapter Six

Conclusion
This chapter is the conclusion of the issues discussed in the preceding chapters. A number of novels have been written on the First World War. Almost all the writers dealt with themes of battlefield, soldiers’ suffering, physical destruction, economical destruction, environmental destruction etc. but no writer has dealt with the theme of psychological destruction of human beings in detail. Pat Barker is the only writer who has dealt with such a theme. She could do it because of her thorough study and research in the field of war. The study is informed by war writing. It focuses on the manner in which Pat Barker is a war writer.

Chapter first has dealt with the changing concept of war and war novels. Existence of war is very old. It is as old as human beings. It is mentioned in the holy books like *Bible*, *Quran* etc. Every religion has something to do with the eternal war between good and evil. It exists in both the worlds -- this world and the other one -- heavenly world. Some people think war as a noble art while others hate it. War is an organized violence between two or more social entities. Its basic objective is to disrupt human life, to create chaos and disorder, to aggrandize, appropriate and exploit the innocent, to exercise power, literally and metaphorically. There are two types of war. One is offensive warfare and the other defensive warfare. Today, many see ‘war’, as undesirable and morally problematic.

Literature portraits life of man. War, as a part of life is represented in the literature. Ever since man began telling stories, war has been a prominent subject. From biblical saga to Nordic folk tales, Greek epic poems and legends of King Arthur, the world’s tales are full of bloody battles and that tradition has continued through history. War has been recorded from very old age. One of the earliest war poems is *The Iliad*, which is fraught with the terrors of war. The words of war are
riveting and hard to forge whether recorded by Homer, Virgil, Leo Tolstoy or Ernest Hemingway.

War novels are those novels which deal with the theme of war and its consequences in which primary action takes place in the battlefield or in home front i.e. in a domestic setting where characters are preoccupied with the preparations for or recovery from war. The main root of war novels lies in the epic poetry of the classical and medieval periods, though it got popularity in nineteenth and twentieth century. Twentieth century was full of wars such as the First World War, the Second World War, Korean War, Vietnam War, Gulf War, and now War on Terrorism. Due to these wars ample number of war literature was produced especially war novels. Earlier wars were fought with the sword, bayonet and other traditional weapons but in the nineteenth and twentieth century with the inventions of new weaponry, war has become more deadly. The use of gunpowder, nuclear bomb and chemicals made the war worst, that human being had ever experienced. The loss of lives, property and nature are un-recordable.

As the means of war changed in the same way, the literature produced about war also changed. In the earlier war literature, war was glorified and generally war literature was written by the victors. Therefore, there was glory, heroism and sense of sacrifice but with the invention of photography, the real picture of war came before the people. Their illusion about glory, heroism, masculinity and sacrifices shattered. Their basic concept about war was shaken from the root. Modern war novels depicted the anti-war feelings of people. Earlier war novels generally glorified war whereas modern war novels condemned war. In modern war novels, there is a sense of protest against authority. These novels depicted very minutely degeneration of human beings. Earlier war novels were defined as the novels dealing with the glory of war, heroism and masculinity. However, these modern
wars have changed the very definition of war novel. Now these war novels deal with the destruction, suffering and trauma of war.

The First World War novels of Hemingway, Dos Passos, Remarque and West all portray fundamentally idealized pastoral elements which recur randomly throughout the text but these elements are absent in the novels of Pat Barker. She describes the horrors of war at the battlefield as other war writers do, but in addition to this she also portrays the restless life, corruption, immorality and oppression of working class people in wartime domestic setting. In the Trilogy, Barker explores the myth of a classless society and pastoral England that was nostalgically evoked and celebrated in prewar Georgian poetry. Barker re-imagines the First World War from a contemporary perspective. With her psychological and anthropological approach, she has redefined the war novel and used a modern approach to the historical material.

Pat Barker is one of the major novelists. She incorporates many features of war novel in her fiction. She got Booker Prize for her outstanding war novel, The Ghost Road in 1995. Barker borrowed many ideas and themes from war literature, especially from Owen’s and Sassoon’s poems but gave it a different treatment. She takes the issue and sees it from different angles, but the most prominent angle she follows throughout her work is psychological. In her important novels like Regeneration, The Eye in the Door, The Ghost Road, Another World, and Border Crossing the protagonists are psychologists who are actively engaged in treating the patients and getting healed themselves.

Barker’s novels are about psychological and physical conflicts. Barker explores communities and individuals under stress, whether in the trenches as in Regeneration Trilogy and Life Class or in late 20th century urban landscapes, as in
Another World, Border Crossing and Double Vision. Barker’s novels are witty and unsentimental. She depicts contemporary debates on the social construction of gender and sexuality and the effects of violence. In a brief review of Barker’s novels in Commonweal (June 20, 1997), Molly Finn comments:

Complex, subtle, shocking, Barker’s novels portray this hideous war through the effects it had on a set of fascinating characters, some actual historic people, some fictional …. The books are written with an almost magical simplicity that manages to be more expressive than any gnashing of teeth or tearing of hair. (Finn, 2008)

Psychological chaos of war interests Barker in Regeneration Trilogy. Psychology is a science of imagination. Barker probes psychological realism with her skilled dialogue, which is witnessed in the novels. She is interested in what fiction can uncover about the kinds of analytical problems that psychologists try to solve. Barker is deeply humanitarian and political writer; she writes novels of ideas that are burning issues in contemporary society. Violence, patriotism and moral surety each undergo a vigorous shaking across Barker’s oeuvre, as does society’s typically flustered response to evil. Barker is courageous, wry, and never less than interrogative about each idea she places before us. She can be iconoclastic, breaking open taboo topics and opening out debates. Her novels have touched emotional chords of many readers from school age to old age.

Barker’s novels interrogate the possibilities of ‘regeneration’. She was involved in an intensive program of reading and research; she sought to ‘regenerate’ the past by a concentrated effort of will. Barker researches for the novels coincided with the Gulf war; the television reportage portrayed soldiers in training, attacking from a trench with fixed bayonets. The media coverage was continually focused on the threat of gas attacks. The traumatic past compulsively returned to haunt the present in an unanticipated collision of temporalities as
depicted in Another World. Barker’s text leaves us finally in an uneasy ‘no-man’s-land’ between past and present; although the past cannot be ‘regenerated’ or brought again into existence, its specters compulsively haunt the present. Barker’s almost all the novels end with the hope of regeneration and redemption.

The most obvious and persistent theme in her novels is one of dereliction – physical, economic, social, emotional and psychological. She uses the word ‘derelict’ frequently, to refer not just to the ubiquitous derelict settings and landscapes of her novels, but also to some of the people who inhabit her often decimated, demoralized communities. Gender and class are also equally prevalent themes in her novels. Barker returns consistently to the unspeakable traumatic experiences of those living close to the margins of physical and economic survival. Barker’s aesthetics is driven by this ethical commitment to fictionalizing the story of victims, victims of war, poverty and oppression, while never allowing her characters to be defined or objectified solely as victims. Her art functions in part by re-visioning the formal characteristics of post-war social realism to accommodate the unrepresentable trauma of twentieth-century mass warfare or post-industrial urban dereliction. Barker’s achievements in the Regeneration Trilogy in re-examining the social and psychological undercurrents of the First World War earned her widespread recognition.

Many of Barker’s contemporaries, such as Kazuo Ishiguro, Salman Rushdie, Caryl Phillips and Hanif Kureishi, have explored the historical and contemporary legacies of empire and global migration patterns in Britain. Other contemporaries such as Peter Ackroyd, A. S. Byatt, Graham Swift and Iain Sinclair have been closer to Barker’s own concerns, with more local meanings of history and historical geography, and the spectral filtration of the past into the present. Like these contemporaries, Barker’s fictional explorations of history have never engaged in
nostalgia, but as Wendy Wheeler recently argued about Graham Swift, Barker’s novels have constituted an attempt to imagine forms of social solidarity through the work of mourning. (Wheeler, 1999:62-87) Barker’s novels can be situated comfortably within general trends in contemporary British fiction; her oeuvre is obviously distinctive in a number of ways. Barker has developed signature themes and figures throughout her fiction, which do not occur in the novels of other war writers. Image of fragility recur across all her novels; one of the themes, which runs throughout Barker’s oeuvre, is the vulnerability of human society, and the vulnerability of human life. Violence, either on the massive scale of the First World War as in the Regeneration Trilogy, or as random, isolated act in a country house in Double Vision exposes the death of safety. The recurrent images of ghosts and specters occupy a curious place in Barker’s fiction, because her characters are frequently keen to dismiss them, and to find rational explanations for what are presented as instances of haunting. Yet the rational explanations never manage to work fully. There is a Gothic theme running through many of Barker’s novels such as Regeneration Trilogy, Another World, and Double Vision.

Barker’s work has become renowned formally for her use of dialogue and, more generally, her use of dialogic techniques. Every ‘authority’ figure has an answering figure, every possible explanation has disturbing counter-explanation, and every utterance from an individual contains the language of community. There is paradox in her work that silence constitutes as more meaningful response than speech that absence is more powerful than what is remembered.

Works of art have become increasingly significant points of reference in her recent novels, as the artistic process and the role of artists have become equally important as themes, which are represented very well in Double Vision and Life Class. Sociological and psychological case studies of post-traumatic stress and
borderline personality disorders play a significant part in Barker’s research for her recent novels too. Her work seems to follow no one’s footsteps, and she has accomplished a technical mastery and a unique vision, which is all her own making. She has clearly gained much from her wide reading and careful research, and she frequently incorporates what she has learned from others into her work. However, the artistic achievements of her novels, the vision of the world, which unfolds in her fiction from *Union Street* to *Life Class*, are difficult to locate within any one tradition. She has her own dominant place among the most popular contemporary British novelists.

This thesis has examined and analyzed the novels of Pat Barker focusing on the theme of war. It has approached Barker’s works from psychological point of view. This thesis has attempted to meet the task of responding to and assessing Barker’s achievements from the psychological perspectives. Barker has achieved a distinctive vision in modern literature, and has gained widespread popularity with readers and critics.

Barker in her first four novels focuses on working-class women, victims of poverty and violence, factory workers and prostitutes. However, her great success has to a large extend been associated with a move away from feminism to male protagonist, a favoring of the masculinised spheres of pub, battlefield, hospital or government. It is the *Regeneration Trilogy*; however, that marks Barker’s arrival as a writer of significant critical interest. Barker moves to explore in detail the devastation of war: the ultimate male experience of violence and evil. *Regeneration Trilogy* is a brilliant, moving and often terrifying evacuation of life in the First World War. Barker depicts the emotional, psychological and moral conflicts brought by the Great War.
The first volume, *Regeneration*, focuses on the work of W.H.R. Rivers at the Craiglockhart War Hospital near Edinburgh and his attempts to restore or ‘regenerate’ officers enough to return them to the front. The novel is multi-layered. The novel’s themes therefore range across many areas of society, highlighting cultural tensions brought to the surface by the war. First, it is about regeneration of traumatic soldiers and regeneration of the view of Dr. Rivers who in the beginning of the novel seems to support the war but by the end of the novel, he entertains anti-war feelings. Second, it is about the psychological treatment. It is concerned with the healing of psychologically damaged soldiers. Third, this novel is about antiwar feelings and protest of the soldiers through their body. Soldiers and civilians were not allowed to protest openly against war so they protested through their bodies in the form of different illness. Fourth, it deals with duty versus morality. The morality never allows any human being to kill other human being but the duty of the soldier is to kill or be killed. It is the duty of the nation to fight, even when there is no end or gain in sight. This paradoxical situation caused even the strongest person to breakdown. Fifth, it is about supporter versus pacifist. At the time of the First World War, there were two groups of people; one, who supported war wholeheartedly and second group was pacifist, who opposed war openly and indirectly as the patients of Dr. Rivers and Dr. Yealand. Sixth major theme of the novel deals with the issue of feminization of men and masculinity of female. Great numbers of male soldiers were required at front to face the enemy while at home front female played the role of male and enjoyed the full freedom whereas male took part in the war as glory and honor, and were compelled to be passive in the trenches waiting to be killed. Seventh important theme of *Regeneration* deals with class system. It was considered that there is no class system at the front but the important character, Billy Prior discloses that there was also class system at the front even at the time of war. It shows how deep rooted is the class system in the heart of men. Eighth
important theme deals with love between men, i.e. homosexuality. It was still a taboo during the First World War. Sassoon even in real life was described as latent homosexual. Initially, he thought that he only cared for his subordinates but later he developed deeper relationship. Ninth theme of the novel is about old versus new generation and father son-relationship. The old generation started the war and sent the young men to fight. The young generation has to suffer for the folly of the old generation. Lastly, it is about imagination: constructive versus destructive. Imagination has power to create and destroy. All the above-mentioned themes are explored and critically and clinically analyzed in the chapter two one by one.

Chapter three focuses on Barker’s next two novels of Trilogy, The Eye in the Door (1993) and The Ghost Road (1995). Barker blends real characters, Sassoon, Owen, Grave and Rivers with the fictitious character Billy Prior. The Eye in the Door, the second novel in the Trilogy, looks at some of the problems of non-combatants such as pacifists, particularly when their anti-war sentiments were pursued actively and thus appeared as a threat to the country. Most of the principal characters from the previous novel are re-introduced to create proper link but now both, the setting and the context are different. This novel depicts the pathetic condition of women at home front, as how they suffered when the war was going on. There has been a shift in the predominant themes; the concentration is no longer on the war in France but rather on the effects of trench warfare upon those who have returned wounded in mind or body; the exploitation of women for sex helps to highlight the problems of women in the society of that time. Barker digs deep into the themes, which she explored in Regeneration. Psychological treatment continues in the second novel of Trilogy for suffering patients. The theme of class system also dominates the novel. Prior brings into limelight the class system at home front. Other important themes like homosexuality, condition of women,
supporter versus pacifist, old generation versus new generation, role of imagination, anti-war protest etc. are explored in more detail. At the end of the novel, way is prepared for the third volume of the Trilogy.

In *The Ghost Road*, Barker blends Rivers’s earlier anthropological experience with psychological treatment. This novel is the most complex of the three novels; several levels of plot are in progress simultaneously. First, it depicts the continuation of war. Second, it deals with the Psychological treatment where Dr. Rivers gets more critical cases as war proceeds. Third, it shows that Rivers’s mind returns through flashbacks to his troubled childhood. Fourth, it deals with Rivers’s reminiscences, which takes him back to a period of his life, spent among the Melanesian tribes. Fifth, it describes the direct battlefield where Wilfred Owen, Billy Prior and most of their battalion from the Manchester Regiment die helplessly. Barker makes wonderful comparison between Melanesian tribe where head hunting is common practice with the civilized European culture, which is doomed to war. Both the cultures are engaged in killing and destruction but the ways are different. *The Ghost Road* is the book where Barker blends psychology with anthropology to sever her attack on war and other notorious cultural practices.

Chapter four traces post war experience of soldiers and civilians. Barker’s novels *Another World* (1998) and *Border Crossing* (2001) have been analyzed in this chapter. *Another World* may be described as supplement to the *Regeneration Trilogy*. It continues to explore the trauma and effects of disturbing memory of the First World War on one of its survivors, Geordie. It represents the trauma of war and burden of past in present and how still the First World War has strong hold on present and how the veteran suffers mentally even after 80 years. In this novel Barker produces complex picture of class, gender, and family relationships. Trauma lies at the core of this text. It also explores contemporary fear and random
violence. Primarily, it is the story of three generations (Geordie, Nick’s grandfather, Nick and his son, Gareth) who suffer from past guilt of crime and present fear of trauma and try to come out of this trauma and rehabilitate themselves. Child violence and sibling rivalry is depicted in the novel through the character of Gareth.

*Border Crossing* also focuses on post war period in which Barker continues her exploration of the analytical process through Rivers and Prior, Helen and Geordie and in this novel Tom and Danny. Barker is interested in ‘talking cure’ therapy. *Border Crossing* is a story of Danny (who in his childhood murdered an old woman) and a psychologist, Tom. Barker unsettles the reader, allowing the causes and cures to remain ambivalent, while perusing the way in which they affect each of us.

Chapter five analyses Barker’s next two novels i.e. *Double vision* (2003) and *Life Class* (2007). In these novels, Barker shows how atrocities of war overshadow the lives of civilians. *Double Vision* is set in the aftermath of 9/11. Two of its central characters Kate Frobisher and Stephen Sharkey are grieving, one for the loss of her husband and another for the loss of his colleague who is killed on assignment as a war photographer in Afghanistan. Stephan, a war correspondent, and Ben, a war photographer, give raw material about war and leave on the reader to decide and interpret particular situation, ideas regarding violence and war, good versus evil, justice and so on. All of them capture the atrocities of war through art. Ben captures the horrors of the war through photography, Stephan through his writing and Kate through her sculpture. Barker uses art to represent the horrors and destruction of war in this novel. It deals with violence, rehabilitation, child crime and power of memory.
Her latest novel, *Life Class* portraits the picture of destruction through art. Barker is concerned with how one gives voice to trauma that extends its battlefield into the individual and collective psyche, across divisions of public and private. This novel revolves around a group of students at London’s Slade School of Art in the months just before and after the outbreak of war. The young men and women whom Barker follows through school and into the horrors of battles must somehow figure out how to live amid the incongruity of beauty and carnage, art and destruction. It is a challenge for them for which none of them is prepared. Barker records their struggles with such discerning insight that the dimensions of that challenge seem a little clearer for us in the time of war. Here also Barker brings together art and war. The characters try to represent the picture of war through their art. They think, war is horrible, destructive, and unspeakable which can be best captured in the art. In both the novels Barker represents war’s destruction, horror and effects on human life through different arts such as photography, writing and sculpture in *Double Vision*, and painting and writing in *Life Class*.

Barker has deliberately avoided physical description of battlefield, which is a common theme. She has chosen new perspectives to write about. She has visualized the First World War using the psychological approach. She reconstructs war novel from modern perspective. She rewrites the past in the new context. It gains its meaning purely from its’ texts written about the First World War like Sassoon’s declaration statements letter, Owen’s poems, Dr. Rivers’s book *Conflict and Dream* etc. and references to historical figures like Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Robert Grave and William River a Psychologist and an Anthropologist. It is a rewriting and re-cycling of other’s texts.

Locating Barker’s works in historical time, however, does not prevent her works from providing a basis for understanding traumas in the present, and
wishing to prevent traumas in the future. Barker, through her deep insight into both working-class life as depicted in her first four novels and the ideological workings of patriarchal society as depicted in *Regeneration Trilogy*, has succeeded in bridging the aesthetic gap between literature and the politics of gender and class by portraying the experience of men at war in a radically innovatory way. From critical point of view *Regeneration Trilogy, Another World, Double Vision*, and *Life Class* not only represent artistic achievement but also stand out as one of the finest works of antiwar fiction the twentieth century has produced. It is Barker’s ability to ground her fictions in a recognizable, material reality, past or present, while using the aesthetic form of the novel in innovative and exciting ways, which has secured her reputation as one of most important writers in modern English literary history.

Barker’s novels are about the effects of war. She portrays a culture, which denies the consequences of the war, using violent suppression, accusation and surveillance to quash traumatic symptoms and the growing awareness of the senselessness of war. Barker has brought such consequences of war, which even the most intelligent thinker will miss. Barker focuses on the people and soldiers who come back from war all right physically but suffer from psychological problems, they suffer from death in life. They come back with guilty memories. They suffer from psychological consequences of war like nightmare, hallucination, sleepwalk, violent nature etc. If they are not healed properly, these kinds of traumas will be inherited and perpetuated in succeeding generations. As the lives of Barker’s own father and grandfather were ruined and ended by war, she recognizes that even the lives of those who have survived will be thoroughly devastated by abandonment and failed emotional connections through many
generations. This makes Barker an important chronicler and analyst of how people live through trauma and try to recover.

Authorities create the code of conduct like honor, sacrifice, glory etc. in the community to fulfill their own selfish ends. These codes attempt to deny an individual’s traumatic experience, hiding the destructive effects of violence and perpetuate helplessness and misery. Public recognition of these consequences might undermine powerful social interests that sanction or create the traumatic scenarios that devastate the lives of the less powerful, for example, the rich and powerful benefit from poor workers and arm manufacturers from the military and war. Barker deconstructs this process for readers; she encourages us to interrogate the reality created by authorities and dominant cultures in the world. She prompts the readers to question the costs of war and other forms of dominance and power that shape society. Barker is a significant figure who examines the effects of historical and social traumas, particularly on those marginalized by class, race, gender, sexuality, and age. Barker uses the novel as an instrument of social criticism, fashioning a literature that has something to say about the world we have created, occupy, and may well destroy. Barker asks us to think about the complex questions of human reality and the fictions on which such a reality is based; her novels ask the thorny questions, knowing that the responses may be difficult or impossible to find – still, such questions must be asked if social progress is to be made.