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## **Fragmented Humanity -Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* through the Lens of Postmodernism**

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### **Abstract**

Michael Ondaatje, through his well acclaimed novel *The English Patient* reads the pulse of the postmodern era. Fragmentation in the postmodern scenario offers a mixture of styles, discourses ranging from the realistic to puzzled descriptions. The writing of Ondaatje explores the human psyche to the maximum extent. Fragmentation occupies the fort of celebration through belongingness. The present paper unveils the postmodern ideology of fragmentation over the split humanity.

### **Keywords**

Fragmented Humanity; Celebration; Belongingness; Globalization.

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Fragmentation is the major tool of Postmodernism. The concept of fragmented identity has its due importance. The humanity was in a great

search for identity after the World War II. Michael Ondaatje's novel *The English Patient* reads the pulse of the postmodern era. The idea of fragmentation is dealt exclusively in the novel. The ideology of postmodernism seems very much like modernism. But with the case of fragmentation, the dividing line occurs. In modernism, fragmentation is mourned and is lamented over. Postmodernism, in contrast, celebrates fragmentation.

The concept of fragmentation is justified to the highest extent. The storyline by itself is presented in a fragmented format. For instance, the novel is indeed a linguistic puzzle. This unique creative approach has led Ondaatje to win The Booker Prize for the novel. The story is encircled around the four occupants of the villa. Hana is the twenty years old nurse who is unable to accept the death of her father, Carrivagio, the former spy-thief, who was caught by the enemies and was physically maimed; Kip, the young Indian sapper who was trained in bomb disposal techniques at England.

The English Patient- the protagonist is a nameless person who is burned beyond recognition. The identity of the patient is never disclosed throughout the novel. The people who treat the patient fix his identity. This state reveals the true colour of postmodernism. The kind hearted Hana refuses to leave her 'patient' in spite of the hospital being shifted to Pisa. Carrivagio, hears about Hana's stay in the villa and becomes a resident. Kip, the young Indian sapper arrives to the villa in search of mines and continues his stay to render his service in the surrounding areas of the villa. The concept of fragmentation begins with the crises of identity. The concept of identity, in particular, focused through the lens of postmodernism promises the fact of freedom and the joy of writing. The conventional methodology of presenting idea is broken down. The problem of identity stands as the root cause of "fragmented humanity".

There is no demarcation between good and bad. There exists multiplicity of challenges made by the given epoch. Fragmentation is the evident tool which

enables the characters to tackle the challenges. Postmodernism presents the world, not the unity but multiple options.

In such case, fragmentation of structures helps the characters in finding a sense of fulfillment. Identity, according to postmodernism is not some solid or identifiable thing; rather “the self” is the mosaic of different contexts, roles and experiences the individual encounters. One way of looking at this is to say that individual is not simply an individual, but defined by countless experiences and influences as the humanity moves through the world.

The characters are from various parts of the world. Their meaning of existence is shattered by war. ‘The fragmented humanity’ is unified under the roof of the villa. The fragmented state becomes a blessing in disguise. It’s the sense of belongingness which makes the fragmentation to take the positive side. The occupants were ready to shed their nationalities, thus fragmented characters create a miniature world inside the villa. This unification under a single roof, amidst all differences is the strength of postmodern world.

The postmodern ideology is summed up well by Walter Truett Anderson as follows: “All ideas of human reality are social constructions. The division of a nation by itself is a social construction”. The geographical borders are the root cause of wars. The spatial borders ruin the peace of humanity. The atrocity of war mutilates the mind, body and the soul of the humanity. Ondaatje has skilfully painted the fragmented map in the minds of the characters too. The geography of the mind is fragmented by the borders of past, present and future. Memory is the thread which connects the above three zone’s. Belongingness stitches the fragmented hearts of the humanity and memory stitches the minds together.

The author's resource as an expatriate, is exemplified through his sense of identifying the art with modern tradition. The theme, meeting of cultures takes fragmentation to the state of celebration. *The English Patient* brings in the essence of foreign cultures and the shifting of cross perspectives of the

Indian upon the British, the British about the Indian, and the Canadian on the Indian.

The fragmented state of Ondaatje's writing setup currents of uncertainties around the narrator and his relationship with the reader. Thus the fragmentation of uncertainty is solved by leaving the interpretation to the readers. The novelist used the fragmentation technique, even through the disruption of time. The psychological time is more valued than the chronological time. The stories of the *English Patient* do not come in a chronological order. The Patient's mind flashes backward and forward under the influence of morphine. Thus the text exhibit fragments of mini-narratives. This style of postmodern writing reminds one of a mosaic.

The literary piece, encapsulates fractured and fragmented structures as well as identities. The work seamlessly conveys, the nature of postmodern approach by unifying the split humanity: The fragmented humanity adopts fragmentation as part of their liberation. Many postmodern thinkers stress their idea of fragmentation through change, irony towards life and free floating approaches to the work, ideas, attitudes and feelings. The celebration of the idea of fragmentation enters with the feeling of globalization. Though the term evolved only in the recent times, the characters of the novel adopted it without their knowledge. Thus it becomes the channel for them to accept fragmentation.

Michael Ondaatje is a brilliant craftsman who has presented a portrait of the postmodern epoch to the contemporary world. He has successfully attempted to influence the society by the unification process through fragmentation. Thus the novel, *The English Patient* celebrates the "fragmented humanity". The novel is woven around the fragmented humanity, thus mirroring post modernity in every angle.

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