

Chapter V

CONCLUSIONS

Pat Barker is a leading novelist of the post-modern period. Her contribution to the English novel is noteworthy. Though her first attempts were failures, her later creations gained her name and fame. At first, she was labeled as the feminist writer not because of her female gender but her female attitude depicted in her novels such as *Union Street* (1982), *Blow Your House Down* (1984), *The Century's Daughter* (later, *Liza's England*) (1986). But in her later works she leaves her earlier trend and portrays the male attitudes, for instance, *The Man Who Was Not There* (1989), *Regeneration* (1991), *The Eye in the Door* (1993), *The Ghost Road* (1995), *Another World* (1998), *Border Crossing* (2001), *Double Vision* (2003) and *Life Class* (2007). All these revolve around the males who were connected to battles and masculine activities. Angela Cater encouraged Barker. She created so powerful novels that she became the recipient of many honours and awards. In 1995, she was awarded with England's most prestigious Booker Prize for her novel *The Ghost Road*, the last volume in her trilogy.

Depiction of social factors, highlighting the problems with vividness, effective diction, simple narration are some of the attributes of Barker's writing. Her literary career begins with *Union Street* which won the Fawcett Prize for fiction in 1983. Her *Regeneration* Trilogy is a masterpiece which includes *Regeneration* which was short-listed for Booker, *The Eye in the Door*, winner of 1993 Guardian Fiction Prize and *The Ghost Road*, winner of Booker Prize in 1995.

The *Regeneration* Trilogy is a set of three novels based on the First World War. All three novels depict the physical and mental losses of soldiers due to the war. All three novels in trilogy are anti-war novels denouncing the warfare and the mental breakdown of soldiers.

The first novel in the trilogy, *Regeneration* opens with the Declaration of Siegfried Sassoon, a war poet and soldier, denouncing the adversity of the First World War. In this first novel, Pat Barker introduces the story and characters of trilogy having the background of the Great War. Instead of court-marrying, Sassoon is declared mentally disturbed and sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital in Scotland under the treatment of Dr. W. H. R. Rivers, an anthropologist and psychiatrist. Barker, very keenly describes the mental sicknesses of soldiers kept in the war hospital. The horror, threat and hidden fear of war are described through the experiences of soldiers. The first volume highlights the relationship between the doctor and patient.

The second volume, *The Eye in the Door*, is set in London. It continues the thread of the war story of the first volume. The novel presents historical events remaining consistently within the realm of fiction. At the centre of this novel there stands Prior's intense and indiscriminate bisexuality. The novel presents some contradictions of war that brings forth, such as the immoral acts normally becoming moral, the sane treated as mad, and a fight waged for 'freedom' results into injustice and prejudice. The emergent conflicts shared by the main characters make for intrigue that is of incompleteness seems to presuppose a third volume in the series. The 'poison plot', 'cult of clitoris' are the anecdotes in the novel.

The last novel, *The Ghost Road* contains two plots. The major plot is based on war and treatment of Dr. Rivers to his patients. The cured soldiers go on the frontline to fight. The sub-plot is Dr. Rivers expedition to the Melanesian island, Eddystone and the anthropological experiment he did with the tribal people of Melanesia. Among all the three novels, *The Ghost Road* directly describes actual warfare in France. Another feature of the novel is variation in narrative. Miss Barker, like earlier two volumes, uses the third person narration throughout the novel but in some parts of the novel she uses first person narration where the protagonist, Billy Prior, writes his diary describing his war experiences in his fourth trip to the front. This variation is one of the important aspects of Barker's writing. Another aspect of *The Ghost Road* is the blending of past into present. In fact, the book is the anti-war novel in which Barker mixes the past experiences of Dr. Rivers with the present. This blending of past into present, using two different narratives in a book may have caused Barker to achieve Booker Prize for this novel, *The Ghost Road*.

As far as the themes of the novels in the *Regeneration* trilogy are concerned, the common theme in all the novels is war. The background of the *Regeneration* trilogy is the First World War, and the adverse effects of war on the soldiers. Though war is the common theme in three novels, each novel deals with the theme differently. *Regeneration* is a moving drama of 'madness' of the First World War. Love and intimate friendship between men during war-time is a continual theme in the novel. Parenthood and homosexuality are also the themes in *Regeneration*. But in the second volume, *The Eye in the Door*, with war, the major theme, the novel revolves around the theme of Prior's intense and indiscriminate bisexuality. Also the second novel consists the story of a generation

condemned to the unending slaughter of the trenches and all the charged agony of class and gender.

The Ghost Road, the final volume, consists the themes like war, sex, exploitation, marginalization and the past memories. Through this novel, the novelist presents the contemporary social condition in England. Through the comparison between two societies namely British and Melanesian, Barker wishes to highlight the wartime situation and its effect on English society.

In her literary career at first Pat Barker took working-class people as her characters, especially working-class women. But later on in *Regeneration* trilogy, she portrayed mainly male characters. The *Regeneration* trilogy is a set of three novels based on the First World War experiences.

In the trilogy, the protagonists appear in each volume with more or less space. In the first volume, the protagonist is Siegfried Sassoon, a soldier-poet, admitted in the war hospital because of his anti-war speech. He is the major character in *Regeneration*, but he is given lesser space in other two parts of the trilogy.

Dr. W. H. R. Rivers is the main thread among all three novels. In fact he can be regarded as the protagonist of the *Regeneration* trilogy. He is the omnipresent character in the trilogy. He is a psychiatrist. His duty is to cure mentally disturbed soldiers and send them back to the front. Dr. Rivers is the historical character like Sassoon. In *The Ghost Road*, he plays a dual role : as a doctor, and also a memory-stricken patient. Much of this character is based on the real experiences of the historical psychiatrist, Dr. W. H. R. Rivers.

The *Regeneration* trilogy is a combination of history and fiction. Pat Barker is successful in combining history with fiction in her work. As she uses the real historical people engaged in the First World War like Dr. W. H. R. Rivers, Wilfred Owen, Sassoon, Robert Graves, she also creates imaginative characters, like Billy Prior, a working-class representative raised up to the post of an officer. His bisexuality occupies major part of the discussion in the entire trilogy. In *Regeneration*, he is portrayed as a haunted patient. In *The Eye in the Door*, he joins the Ministry of Munitions. In this novel he speaks about his childhood. As a child he was seduced and the result of that he suffers in his whole life. In *The Ghost Road*, he rejoins the army for the fourth time. He writes diaries and depicts the war events and his own experiences of war.

There are many other characters like Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves, Robert Ross, etc. who are historical characters. Through the portrayal of the Melanesian people, Pat Barker comparatively describes the differences between two societies, their culture, custom, life-style, and social conditions.

In the entire trilogy female characters are marginalized. Barker concentrates mainly on the portrayal of male characters. Rarely female characters appear in minor roles in the trilogy. Sarah Lumb, Ada, her mother, her sister, Prior's mother, and Dr. Rivers's sister are some of the women appearing in the trilogy. Beattie Roper is the important character. Beattie Roper, the character is based on real Alice Wheeldon who was accused and convicted of having conspired to murder Lloyd George and other persons by poisoning.

In the trilogy there are more characters like Harold Spencer, Manning, Spragge, Hallet, Mac, Hettie Roper and so on. When asked about the marginalization of female characters in her trilogy, Barker states, "There is a woman on every page – me". (Maya Jaggi, *Dispatches from the Front*, Aug. 16, 2003, The Guardian) [<http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/story/0,,1019520,00.html>](http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/story/0,,1019520,00.html)

The novels in the *Regeneration* trilogy are full of symbols and imagery. In *Regeneration* and *The Ghost Road* trench imagery is significant. Individually the novels contain different symbols and imagery, such as in *Regeneration* mutism is a symbol that functions as the manifestation of the disempowerment and helplessness the men feel. Moreover, *The Eye in the Door* has the central image of the 'eye in the door' – the eyehole in a prison door, where the prisoner is kept. Here the 'eye in the door' becomes the symbol of the paranoia that threatens to destroy the very fabric of British society.

Except the trench imagery as being common, *The Ghost Road* presents some allusions. One of them is Lewis Carroli's Alice books which blur the distinction between dream and reality. It underscores the significance of dreams in the novel. Again Barker invokes the Abraham and Isaac story of sacrifice to foreground Rivers's emerging consciousness of his complicity in the slaughter of the First World War. Dr. Rivers dreams of his Melanesian tour. He comparatively depicts the act of sacrifice in Melanesian tribal community. He connects that act to his own of curing his patients at the war hospital and sends them one by one to the trenches to be killed.

Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy throws light on the sexuality among the soldiers. In all three novels in the sequel, there is the description of sexuality. In the late 19th century, according to the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, homosexuality was something to be ridiculed and scorned. Among the characters in the trilogy, Siegfried Sassoon is portrayed as homosexual, while Billy Prior is a bisexual; on the contrary, Dr. Rivers is neutral, asexual character. The trenches provided an all-male environment, encouraging intimate friendship between men – the expression of male emotion.

The Eye in the Door explains the bisexual nature of the fictional character, Billy Prior. In fact, in his childhood he had been seduced by the church priest. That incident affected the mind and throughout his life he remains behind in search of the physical requirement in men and women also. He uses Sarah, Manning, etc. for his purpose. In *The Ghost Road*, there are also some incidents depicting his sexuality. Dr. Rivers is against such practice of both Prior and Sassoon. Even Barker's first two novels, *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* depict the low-living standards of working-class women. Especially *Blow Your House Down*, describes how the women are forced into prostitution to overcome the poverty-stricken life. In her depiction of Melanesian culture, she compares the sex attitude of both societies i.e. Melanesian and British.

Barker discusses 'sex' openly and frankly in the trilogy. She doesn't look at 'sex' as a taboo issue. Perhaps the roots of her boldness are found in her own childhood. Pat Barker didn't know who her father was. Later on she realized the truth that her mother was raped.

Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy is an exploration of psycho-analysis, war-neurosis, hysteria, shell-shock and madness caused by the First World War. The trilogy opens, in *Regeneration*, in the Craiglockhart War Hospital, in Scotland where soldiers are kept to be cured. Dr. Rivers is in-charge of the hospital and his duty is to cure soldiers and send them back to fight. Because of the continuous warfare the soldiers are mentally disturbed. At the hospital they behave abnormally. Some of them see corpses around them, some see dead bodies hung to the trees. It is necessary, as a psychiatrist, to Dr. Rivers to know the reason of each soldier's abnormality. So he uses the technique of hypnotism.

In *Regeneration* Dr. Rivers does the experiment of hypnosis on Billy Prior. The alteration of masculine gender roles allows men to embrace their emotions, which can be seen through hypnosis. The novel also explains Dr. Rivers as a psychoanalyst who must encounter and make sense of the horrific experiences of his patients.

The Ghost Road explains Dr. Rivers, the psychiatrist, as his own patient. He is suffering from influenza, and in dream he goes ten years back and recalls his visit he made to the Melanesian island, Eddystone, in Pacific, in 1908. Barker has used Dr. Rivers's Melanesian visit to explain the contemporary brutal condition in British society.

Apparently the *Regeneration* trilogy is based on memory and remembering. Dr. Rivers, the psychiatrist, remembers not only his Melanesian trip but also his childhood experiences. Likewise, Billy Prior also remembers his childhood days and tells how those days affected his whole life. He is a split personality. The soldiers get one or another

break-down due to the Great War. To restore the soldiers, Dr. Rivers tries his therapy of regenerating nerves.

The *Regeneration* trilogy is the combination of history and fiction. Pat Barker is successful in presenting the historical events/elements in a fictional way. The background of the trilogy is the First World War which is historical. The novelist highlights the horror of the war and intensifies the warfare situation. The characters she uses are both historical figures as well as fictional one. Among all characters, Dr. Rivers, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves, etc. are historical figures involved in the warfare of the Great War. The character of Billy Prior is Barker's fictional creation. He is presented throughout the three novels as a bisexual, working-class origin raised to the post of an officer. In *Regeneration*, most of the people and events are based on historical one. The experiment of 'regenerating nerves' is the historical experiment Dr. Rivers had made on his friend, Henry Head.

In *The Eye in the Door*, the 'Cult of Clitoris', the 'poison plot' are historical events. In case of the 'poison plot', Barker has used fictitious names and made historical event fictional. In *The Ghost Road*, the description of the tribal community on Melanesian island contains history. Once Dr. Rivers had made a trip to Melanesia with Arthur Hocart to study anthropology. There he notes the difference between the islanders and the British people. The places depicted in the trilogy are historical like Craiglockhart War Hospital, Somme, the battlefield.

Pat Barker has immortalized her trilogy by focusing on various aspects of warfare. Through varied situations and through varied characters she has become successful in depicting the horrifying effects

of war on the actual participants and also on the citizens. She probes deep into the minds of her characters to point out the abnormalities. She is very bold and frank in discussing various attitudes to sex. Though war functions as a backdrop in her trilogy, Barker seems more interested in human encounters. Her minute observation, her frankness and her blending of fiction with history makes her one of the notable novelists of the post-modern era.
